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The Student Movement at the University of Buenos Aires during the Last Military Dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983)

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The Student Movement at the University of Buenos Aires during the Last Military Dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983)[1]

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Abstract. – In this article, I analyze the reorganization of the student movement during the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983). In the context of the Latin American Cold War, university youth engaged in political activism became a specific target of the systematic repressive plan perpetrated by the armed forces after the 1976 coup d'état. I describe how and why students managed to carry on with or began their educational and political activism despite universities being subject to state terrorism. Based on an empirical reconstruction from documentary sources and testimonies of former student activists at the University of Buenos Aires, I present a three-stage reorganization process with continuities and changes. I describe the kinds of actions (recreational, cultural, or political), revindications, and organizational methods based on the heritage of the 1918 Reforma Universitaria (University Reform) that activists relied on to build an agenda of their own to contest higher education policies. I argue that the university student movement survived the dictatorship with notable changes but also continuities, becoming a respectable and notorious political actor during the transition to democracy in Argentina.

Keywords: Latin American Cold War, Argentina, University, Student Activism, Student Politics.

[1] An early version of this text was discussed at the British Academy Workshop for writing papers in English (Buenos Aires, September 2022) and at the LSE-Sciences Po Seminar in Contemporary International History (October 2022). I am especially grateful to Sian Lazar, Gabriela González Vaillant, César Guzmán-Concha, Indira Palacios-Valladares, Lorenzo Cini, and Luca Provenzano for their generous readings and comments. I would also like to express my gratitude to María Belén Riveiro, whose collaboration was truly vital to writing this article, and to Luigi Celentano (www.undergroundletters.com), who copyedited and proofread the final version of this article.

Resumen. – En el presente artículo analizo la reorganización del movimiento estudiantil universitario argentino durante la última dictadura militar (1976–1983). En el marco de la Guerra Fría en Latinoamérica, la juventud universitaria con militancia política fue un blanco predilecto del plan represivo sistemático perpetrado por las Fuerzas Armadas luego del golpe de Estado de 1976. Aquí describo cómo y por qué los y las estudiantes procuraron continuar o comenzar con una militancia universitaria a pesar del terrorismo de Estado desplegado sobre las universidades. A partir de la reconstrucción empírica mediante fuentes documentales primarias y secundarias, así como testimonios de activistas estudiantiles en la Universidad de Buenos Aires durante el período seleccionado, presentamos tres subetapas en el proceso de reorganización estudiantil con sus particularidades y continuidades. Explicamos cómo las y los activistas recurrieron a diferentes tipos de convocatorias (recreativas, culturales y políticas), así como a reivindicaciones y formas de organización históricas del movimiento estudiantil argentino ancladas en la herencia de la Reforma Universitaria de 1918, para construir e instalar en la arena pública una agenda propia contra la política universitaria vigente. El movimiento estudiantil universitario sobrevivió a la última dictadura con cambios notables, pero también continuidades, y se constituyó como un actor político respetable y de notoriedad pública en el marco de la transición democrática.

Palabras clave: Guerra Fría Latinoamericana, Argentina, universidad, activismo estudiantil, política estudiantil.

Introduction

In March 1976, the Argentine armed forces staged a coup d'état, which disrupted the government of María Estela Martínez de Perón, the former president Juan Domingo Perón's widow. The military dictatorship that ensued put forth a "*proceso de reorganización nacional"*, or "national reorganization process". This was a regime of state terror that sought to eliminate "subversive organizations"; discipline workers, students, political/social organizations, and civil society; and make profound transformations in the national economic system in accordance with neoliberal principles.[2] The so-called

[2] For the dictatorship in Argentina, see Paula Canelo, El proceso en su laberinto: la interna militar de Videla a Bignone, Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2009; Marcos

"national reorganization process" also intervened public universities, banning political activism, and outlawing most student organizations and left-wing political parties. This regime was inspired by the national security doctrine, installed in the 1970s by the military and its conservative allies.[3]

During the 1980s and 1990s, scholars reported the decline of Latin American student movements of the late 1970s. Daniel Levy explained that authoritarian regimes and the growth of private higher education undermined student political activism. Dictatorships "did not permit meaningful student participation in university governance, much less highly politicized activities beyond the campuses."[4] In that vein, Joaquín Brunner suggested that transformations of the university system in South America had caused the student movement's "death," arguing that student identity, whose origins date back to the legacy of the 1918 Reforma Universitaria (University Reform), weakened because of the fragmentation of the student experience.[5] However, recent research on Latin American student movements underscores the key role students played in resisting military regimes in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.[6]

Novaro / Vicente Palermo, La dictadura militar (1976–1983): del golpe de Estado a la restauración democrática, Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2003; Gabriela Águila, Historia de la última dictadura militar: Argentina, 1976–1983, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2023.

[3] Thomas C. Field, Jr. / Stella Krepp / Vanni Pettinà, Latin America and the Global Cold War, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020; Vanni Pettinà, Historia mínima de la Guerra Fría en América Latina, Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2018, pp. 129-182; Hal Brands, Latin America's Cold War, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

[4] Daniel Levy, "Student Politics in Contemporary Latin America": Canadian Journal of Political Science, 14:2 (1981), p. 375; Daniel Levy, "The Decline of Latin American Student Activism": Higher Education, 22:2 (1991), p. 154.

[5] Joaquín Brunner, El movimiento estudiantil ha muerto: nacen los movimientos estudiantiles, Santiago de Chile: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1985.

[6] Angélica Müller, O movimiento estudiantil na Resistencia á ditadura militar (1969–1979), Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2016; Diego García Monge / José Isla Madariaga / Pablo Toro Blanco, Los muchachos de antes: historias de la FECH, 1973–1988, Santiago, Chile: Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2006; Vania Markarian / María Eugenia Jung / Isabel Wschebor, 1983: la generación de la primavera democrática, Montevideo: Archivo General–Universidad de la República, 2008.

The Reforma Universitaria student movement emerged at the University of Córdoba (Argentina), and it shaped and set the ground for the tradition of student organization and activism in the country and Latin America. Students created the Federación Universitaria Argentina (FUA—Argentine University Federation) to bring together student federations from each university across the country. Local federations, such as the Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires (FUBA—University Federation of Buenos Aires), gathered student centers belonging to different schools or faculties. The Reforma Universitaria movement reclaimed university autonomy from the national government and established a democratic governing body shared by faculty, students, and alumni. Shared governance included participation in decision-making at the university council and the election of the university dean. Autonomy and internal democracy became some of the main student banners, together with free access (no fees, no restrictions) to higher education.[7]

This paper seeks to contribute to the scholarly debate about the role of the student movement in the fight against authoritarian regimes during Latin America's Cold War and particularly in the Argentine higher education system, epitomized in the Universidad de Buenos Aires (University of Buenos Aires), between 1976 and 1983. It is also a contribution to the field of student activism studies, both at the national and Latin American levels. Nevertheless, the scope of analysis is limited to the case study of the University of Buenos Aires,[8] that was established

[7] Pablo Buchbinder, Historia de las Universidades Argentinas, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2005; Natalia Bustelo, Inventar a la juventud universitaria. Una historia político-cultural del movimiento argentino de la Reforma Universitaria (1900–1930), Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 2021; Pablo Requena, La larga vida de la Reforma Universitaria: Mujeres, estudiantes e intelectuales en el siglo reformista, Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba–Centro de Estudios Avanzados, 2021.

[8] For student everyday life and activism in other Argentine universities during the last military dictatorship, see Marta Philp, "La Universidad Nacional de Córdoba y la 'formación de las almas': la dictadura de 1976": Daniel Saur / Alicia Servetto (eds.), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba: cuatrocientos años de historia, Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba–Los libros, 2013 (vol. II), pp. 275-296; Cristina Vera de Flachs, "Escareos estudiantiles en época de dictadura, Argentina (1976–1981)": Renate Marsiske (ed.), Movimientos estudiantiles en la historia de América Latina, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015, pp.

in 1821 and is currently the largest and second oldest institution of higher education in Argentina. In 1976, this university comprised eleven faculties: dentistry, law, education, architecture, philosophy, medicine, agriculture, natural sciences, engineering, pharmacy, and veterinary sciences. Two undergraduate degrees—psychology and sociology—were administered directly by the university rectorate. During the dictatorship, as part of a coordinated national and clandestine plan of repression,[9] military forces kidnapped and murdered 907 people who studied or worked at this institution.[10]

By student activism, or student movement, I understand a relatively organized collective effort by undergraduate college students to prevent or achieve changes in policies, personnel, institutions, or cultural aspects of society involving either institutionalized or noninstitutionalized action, or both.[11] Therefore, I argue that, at the University of Buenos Aires, students continued to pursue collective organization and action despite the dictatorship's repression and terror. Student politics, organizational structures, collective action repertoires, and master frames used by students to promote their

223-253; Micaela Belén González Valdés, "Unidad, solidaridad y estrategia: la Federación Universitaria de Córdoba entre la reactivación estudiantil y la normalización universitaria (1981–1986)": REVUELTAS, Revista Chilena de Historia Social Popular, 6 (2022), pp. 122-138; Sabrina Grimi, 'Reordenamiento' académico, represión y vida estudiantil en el espacio universitario rosarino (1975–1981), Rosario: Universidad Nacional de Rosario, 2021 (master's thesis); Laura Luciani, "El movimiento estudiantil en la Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina) entre finales de la dictadura y la primera gestión normalizadora": PolHis, 15:30 (2022), pp. 16-47.

[9] During the dictatorship, the armed forces developed a systematic and nationwide repression plan against left-wing political activists, workers, students, and civil society in the framework of the Cold War's anti-communist struggle. One of the most frequent techniques consisted in kidnapping and disappearing people. Most of them have never been found. For an account of the disappeared, see Emilio Ariel Crenzel, "The Ghostly Presence of the Disappeared in Argentina": Memory Studies, 13:3 (2020), pp. 253-266.

[10] Registro Unificado de Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (RUVTE), special list request by the author.

[11] Jungyun Gill / James DeFronzo, "A Comparative Framework for the Analysis of International Student Movements": Social Movement Studies, 8:3 (2009), pp. 203-224, at 208.

claims[12] were key elements for the student reorganization process in Buenos Aires.

Taking into account this theoretical framework and these analytical dimensions, I identify three different stages of student organization and mobilization. The first stage took place between 1976 and 1978, when repression was harsh and most of the disappearances and murders of students took place. Activists, however, continued to gather around traditional student politics (existing organizations, university issues, and the 1918 Reforma Universitaria heritage), as well as cultural and social activities. The second period developed from 1979 to 1981, when activists began conducting public campaigns against key aspects of university policy, such us admission restrictions, fees, etc. New student organizations emerged at this stage. During 1982 and 1983, the student movement confronted both the dictatorship and its university model: small, depoliticized, oppressive, and selective. Student activism put forward a contrasting view of the higher education model established by the dictatorship.

I present a historical diachronic analysis based on a mixed methodological framework, triangulating empirical data collected from different archival sources[13] such as the national press, left-wing periodicals, student magazines, left-wing parties' reports, military intelligence files, university legislation, regulations, and statistics, human rights reports, and other official publications. Most of these sources have seldom been analyzed by Latin American scholarship, specifically because left-wing youth publications and student magazines have not been considered reliable sources representing the voice of university activism during the last dictatorship in Argentina. To complement these sources, in-depth interviews were conducted with

[12] Donatella Della Porta / Lorenzo Cini / César Guzmán-Concha, Contesting Higher Education: Student Movements against Neoliberal Universities, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020, pp. 9-16.

[13] For example, the University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive; Centro de Documentación "Universidad y Dictadura"; Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas (CEDINCI), Biblioteca Nacional del Maestro; archives of the Communist Party of Argentina; and Trotskyist and Maoist archives (Fundación Pluma, Archivos de Izquierda Rosario). I would like to acknowledge contributions from former activists and, especially, from the personal archives of Pablo Buchbinder, Yann Cristal, and Mariano Corbacho.

women and men who used to be student activists at the University of Buenos Aires between 1973 and 1983.[14]

University and Students during the Latin American Cold War in Argentina

Argentine historian Valeria Manzano shows that, during the 1960s, challenges to the social order acquired manifold meanings expressed in a multilayered youth culture of contestation, articulated through notions of "liberation" and "revolution." The Cold War was also reflected across Latin America, and a broad conservative bloc built up the figure of the "enemy within," represented through gendered, sexual, and generational dimensions. The so-called "enemy within" was considered a threat to the political, socioeconomic, cultural, and sexual orders alike. According to Manzano, that process had significant political, educational, and cultural effects and conditioned the ways in which political repression was perpetrated in the context of state terrorism in Argentina during the second half of the 1970s.[15]

The rise and spread of student movements across the world characterized the "global sixties."[16] Latin America witnessed massive student street protests in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, and Uruguay. Students took an active part in university reform processes in Chile and Colombia, for

[14] I used the snowball sampling technique to find interviewees, carrying out 42 in-depth interviews between 2015 and 2018 in Buenos Aires and La Plata (Argentina) and building a purposive nonprobabilistic sample based on the interviewees' political affiliation.

[15] Valeria Manzano, "Sex, Gender, and the Making of the 'Enemy Within' in Cold War Argentina": Journal of Latin American Studies, 47:1 (2014), pp. 1-29.

[16] Colin Barker, "Some Reflections on Student Movements of the 1960s and Early 1970s": Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais, 81 (2008), pp. 43-91; Victoria Langland, Speaking of Flowers: Student Movements and the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013; Eric Zolov, "Introduction: Latin America in the Global Sixties": The Americas, 70:3 (2014), pp. 349-362; Vania Markarian, "Uruguay, 1968. Algunas líneas de análisis derivadas del estudio de la protesta estudiantil en un país periférico": Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, 6:1 (2019), pp. 129-143.

example.[17] Thus, the feared "enemy within" emerged as a real threat. The conservative bloc believed that universities were hubs of "communist conspiracy";[18] as a result, politicized and radicalized students, together with guerrilla organizations, were seen as jeopardizing the national and Christian order.[19]

If 1968 represented a high point of the student protest wave, the years 1974–1976 marked that cycle's finale, with the ruling classes reasserting their hegemony. Colin Barker, however, argues that these transformations did not mean an end to all student movements, at least in Europe. Student movements changed: new kinds of issues mobilized student activists when the growing world economic crisis induced cutbacks in spending on higher education.[20] In Latin America, the military, along with the conservative bloc, installed dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. The "national security doctrine" was the driver behind those regimes and the so-called "decade of terror."[21] As a result, universities were intervened, left-wing professors fired, and student activists targeted or even killed.

The military junta in Argentina believed that universities had been "infiltrated by communism" since the early decades of the twentieth century as a direct consequence of the 1918 university reform.[22] Right-wing and nationalist groups (the armed forces, the Catholic Church,

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17 Pablo Bonavena / Mariano Millán, Los '68 latinoamericanos: movimientos estudiantiles, política y cultura en México, Brasil, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina y Colombia, Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2018.

18 For an account of the cultural Cold War in Latin America, see Calandra Benedetta / Marina Franco, La guerra fría cultural en América Latina. Desafíos y límites para una nueva mirada de las relaciones interamericanas, Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2012. On Argentine university policy during the 1960s and 1970s, see Mariana Mendonça, "Educational Reform Policies in Argentina in the 1970s: The Beginning of a Differentiation Process among National Universities?": Espacio, Tiempo y Educación, 8:2 (2021), pp. 171-187; Laura Rodríguez, Universidad, peronismo y dictadura. 1973–1983, Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2015.

19 See Registro Unificado de Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado (RUVTE), Fuerzas Armadas, El Terrorismo en Argentina, Buenos Aires: RUVTE, 1979, p. 522.

20 Barker, "Some Reflections on Student Movements", pp. 81-83.

21 Pettinà, Historia mínima de la Guerra Fría, pp. 129-182.

22 Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Subversión en el ámbito educativo (Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo), Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos del Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1977 (Biblioteca Nacional del Maestro), pp. 61-62.

politicians, and intellectuals), as well as the military junta, had always linked the Reforma Universitaria movement with communism and, in the backdrop of the Cold War, this ideological association was reinforced.[23] To them, student participation entailed the "subversion of hierarchies," sparking political radicalization and the "communist spread."[24]

Previous democratic and dictatorial governments persecuted, detained, and even murdered students in Argentina even before the "national reorganization process" began.[25] The 1966–1973 dictatorship saw police and military forces, as well as paramilitary groups, kill several student activists in persecutions and street protests. This practice became commonplace and even harsher during the democratically elected government of Juan Domingo Perón. After his death, during María Estela Martínez de Perón's administration, armed groups such as the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Argentine Anti-communist Alliance) and Concentración Nacional Universitaria (CNU—University National Concentration) abducted and murdered political and student activists.[26]

Between 1970 and 1976, 80 people were killed, among them students and faculty members at the University of Buenos Aires, 64 of them between 1974 and March 1976, at the outset of the military coup. Former student activists assert that the 1976 coup did not entail a radical change to everyday university life because repression had already been deployed against the student movement:

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[23] Servicio Histórico del Ejército Argentino–Archivo, Azules y Colorados folder, "El Comunismo en la Universidad de Buenos Aires y otras áreas culturales," 1962, p. 3.

[24] Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Subversión en el ámbito educativo, pp. 65-66; Estado Mayor General del Ejército, Marxismo y Subversión. Ámbito educacional, Buenos Aires, 1980 (Biblioteca Nacional del Maestro), p. 24.

[25] Juan Califa / Mariano Millán, "La represión a las universidades y al movimiento estudiantil argentino entre los golpes de Estado de 1966 y 1976": HIb, Revista de Historia Iberoamericana, 9: 2 (2016), pp. 10-38.

[26] Marina Franco, Un enemigo para la nación: orden interno, violencia y "subversión," 1973–1976, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012, pp. 37-185; Juan Califa / Mariano Millán, Resistencia, rebelión y contrarrevolución: el movimiento estudiantil de la UBA, 1966–1976, Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2023.

> "In a certain way, the dictatorship had already arrived at the university […] because student murders began in 1974, especially of those who were part of the student movement."[27]

In addition, University Act No. 20654, passed in January 1974, banned political activity on campus. As these repressive measures could not put a halt to student radicalization, the dictatorship attempted to erase the Reforma Universitaria heritage by redefining the university structure and eliminating autonomy, co-governance, and student organization.[28] Eduardo Ventura, secretary of Education at the time, stated in 1979 that "We want a university and not a tumultuous soviet of professors, students, and graduates."[29]

Repression and Clandestine Activism (1976–1978)

After the 1976 coup, the repression process changed quantitatively and qualitatively. Kidnappings and enforced disappearances became the most frequent repressive techniques used by the armed forces and the paramilitary.[30] Human rights organizations state that over 30,000 people disappeared during the dictatorship. The Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP—National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) registered that 21 percent of the total "disappeared" were students and estimated that 69 percent of them were between 16 and 30 years old.[31] According to the Registro Unificado de Víctimas de Terrorismo de Estado (National Register of Victims of State Terrorism), 97.5 percent of the 907 people who studied or worked at the University of Buenos Aires were disappeared or murdered between 1976 and 1978. As Manzano observes, the dictatorship deemed young people involved in left-wing political activism part of the "enemy within" and targets to be eliminated.[32]

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[27] Male communist activist, interviewed by the author, La Plata, 2015.

[28] Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Subversión en el ámbito educativo, p. 69.

[29] "La pelea por la nueva Universidad": Confirmado (July 1979), (Pablo Buchbinder Archive), pp. 14-18.

[30] Águila, Historia de la última dictadura, pp. 65-108.

[31] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), Nunca Más, Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1984, p. 120.

[32] Manzano, "Sex, Gender, and the Making of the 'Enemy Within,'" pp. 13-14.

The above figures help explain the changes in everyday life at the University of Buenos Aires after 1976. The military junta extended the prohibition on political activity at universities and banned most student organizations, including student federations and centers.[33] Edmundo Said, a navy captain, became dean of the University of Buenos Aires in 1976. He established a new disciplinary statute enforced by police surveillance.[34] With these measures in place, the regime hoped to "purge communism" and "reimpose order" at universities. Likewise, it expected to suppress the 1918 university reform legacy of student organization: younger generations of students should only attend university courses, avoid political commitment, and refrain from participation in university governance. An official television propaganda spot showed a young man in a suit and tie entering the Faculty of Law while rejecting a pamphlet, declaring, "I only come to university to study."[35]

Student activists sought to protect themselves from surveillance and repression but would not cease political activity. Like most student organizations, communist organizations were banned, but the Federación Juvenil Comunista (Young Communist Federation) and the Communist Party of Argentina were able to maintain their legal status.[36] Another exception was Franja Morada (Purple Strip), a student organization linked with the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union). Peronist students suffered repression both before and after the coup.[37] As a result, the Juventud Universitaria Peronista (Peronist University Youth) was practically disbanded by 1977. Other left-wing, Trotskyist,

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[33] Act No. 21276, "Prioridad para la normalización de las universidades nacionales", 1976 (Biblioteca Nacional del Maestro).

[34] University of Buenos Aires, Dean Resolution, May 15, 1976 (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

[35] "Yo vengo a estudiar": Opción, 7 (September 1978), p. 6. (Youth clandestine magazine published by the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores [Workers' Socialist Party]), (CEDINCI).

[36] For the activity and position of the Communist Party during the military dictatorship in Argentina, see Natalia Casola, El PC argentino y la dictadura militar: militancia, estrategia política y represión estatal, Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2015.

[37] During the 1970s, the right wing of the Peronist Party argued that the movement should be "cleansed" of Marxism and Communism. For more on this process, see Franco, Un enemigo para la nación, pp. 45-57.

and Maoist organizations attempted to remain active underground while protecting their members.

Activists challenged the prohibition of student centers and tried hard to keep them active. They held political meetings and agreed to accept the results of the last democratic student elections of 1975 at the faculties of medicine, pharmacy, natural sciences, engineering, architecture, and economics.[38] This agreement led to the reorganization of the FUBA, which replaced the Federación Universitaria por la Liberación Nacional (FULNBA—Buenos Aires's University Federation for National Liberation), headed by Juventud Universitaria Peronista since 1973. Meanwhile, student organizations formed the Comisiones por la Reorganización de los Centros de Estudiantes (Commissions for the Reorganization of Student Centers) in those faculties that did not hold student elections in 1975.[39] According to the Communist Party of Argentina, by 1977 there were sixty student centers and commissions across the country.[40]

Both organizations called for clandestine recreational activities (picnics, sports tournaments, or traditional folklore gatherings known as *peñas*) held at different locations outside the campuses of the University of Buenos Aires. They also offered services within the university, such as photocopies or reading materials. Student organizations set up recreational activities as well. They invited their classmates to clandestine cultural events—study groups, reading workshops, or film discussions. For activists, these kinds of events meant an alternative—albeit not openly political—way to gather students with no previous activism experience, who were afraid of the police presence at the University, and bring them under their wing and into the fold. According to the Socialist Youth of the Workers' Socialist Party, those activities encouraged the "exchange of ideas and

[38] "Vuelve la FUBA": Opción, 4 (June 1978), p. 5.

[39] "¿Qué hacen los estudiantes?": Imagen, 6 (August 1977), p. 8; "La universidad en el segundo cuatrimestre": Imagen, 8 (October 1977), p. 9. (Youth magazine published by the Federación Juvenil Comunista [Communist Youth Federation]). (CEDINCI and archives of the Communist Party of Argentina).

[40] "En una universidad en crisis, ¿qué hacen los estudiantes": Imagen, 3 (March 1977), pp. 5-6.

experiences, leaving fear behind, and enabling us to reflect together how we could make things change."[41]

Student magazines were another important initiative developed by activists to bring their classmates together, defying the intervention of the university. After the 1976 coup, those publications, as was the case under other authoritarian regimes,[42] became essential for the reorganization of the student movement. Communists and Peronists were the first to publish magazines, but later Trotskyists, Franja Morada members, and other independent groups got involved as well. Periodicals enabled political organizations "to engage with students who were afraid of surveillance and to talk about university life."[43]

During the early years of the dictatorship, magazines mainly addressed specific aspects of each faculty without explicitly mentioning the authoritarian context or the intervention of the university. With time, student journals expanded and became more critical. Some of the student periodicals published between 1977 and 1982 were *Interacción*, *Enlaces*, *Doble hélice*, *Arquitectura contra la dictadura*, *Rafacles*, *Azul*, *Fuste*, *Fragüe*, *El Látigo*, *Conciencia*, *Sopapa*, *En marcha*, *Encuentro*, *Filo*, *Espejos*, *Unirse*, *Hoja Estudiantil*, *Boletín universitario*, and *Base cero*. In 1982, the editorial teams of twelve periodicals of the University of Buenos Aires formed a committee to coordinate activities.[44]

Communists presented a moderate position, however, because they expected to maintain a dialogue with the military and the university authorities. But, together with the rest of the student organizations, they denounced specific student issues in the early years of the

[41] "Lo que perdimos, lo que debemos ganar": Opción, 16 (November 1979), pp. 14-15.

[42] Víctor Muñoz Tamayo, ACU: Rescatando el asombro. Historia de la Agrupación Cultural Universitaria, Santiago de Chile: Calabaza del Diablo, 2006; Müller, O movimiento estudiantil, 2016; Gabriela González Vaillant, "Entre los intersticios de la democracia: las revistas estudiantiles, la universidad uruguaya en transición y las pujas políticas por los significados de la democracia": Dixit, 33 (2020), pp. 41-60.

[43] Interview with a male communist activist conducted by Gabriel Rocca: NEXCiencia, 2007, https://exactas.uba.ar/institucional/memoria-derechos-humanos/ (last accessed April 25, 2023).

[44] En Marcha, 2 (1982), (Student periodical published by students of the Faculty of Philosophy), (Centro de Documentación "Universidad y Dictadura").

dictatorship, such as exam dates and unfair or bad professors. The FUA—reorganized in 1978 by virtue of an agreement between the Federación Juvenil Comunista (Youth Communist Federation), the Movimiento Nacional Reformista (National Reformist Movement),[45] and Franja Morada—now demanded a larger educational budget and the end of admission quotas.[46] Moreover, Federación Juvenil Comunista denounced the disappearance and detention of several students, but also condemned "the left's and the right's use of violence and terrorism," an ideological position later known as the "theory of the two demons."[47] Neither student organizations nor the FUA called for protests or any other kind of public collective action against the intervention of the university. Student complaints were only expressed through left-wing periodicals and pamphlets that circulated underground inside and outside their faculties.

During the initial years of the dictatorship, students continued to engage in activism despite high levels of repression and continuous surveillance. Student organizations active before 1976 attempted to continue their militant activity. They searched for alternative means to enable student participation and preclude a complete isolation and a subsequent depoliticization. Traditional student political organizations—i.e., student centers and federations—were still the preferred means to channel students' demands. In 1978, for example, on the sixtieth anniversary of the 1918 university reform, left-wing student organizations upheld its banners and heritage, such as university autonomy, internal democracy, and co-governance.[48]

Student politics and traditions based on the 1918 Reforma Universitaria experience became fundamental for the reorganization process of the student movement in Buenos Aires during the dictatorship. Nevertheless, as Alf Nilsen and Laurence Cox state, in highly repressive contexts, local demands existed as "hidden

[45] Student organization identified with a faction of the Partido Socialista Popular, or Popular Socialist Party.

[46] "Los olvidos del ministro", "La opinión estudiantil": Imagen, 14 (May 1978), p. 4; "Catalán: el Martínez de Hoz de la enseñanza": Opción, 3 (May 1978), p. 6.

[47] "Dos 'casos' que preocupan": Imagen, 20 (July 1978), p. 4; "Denunció la FUA": Imagen, 50 (October 1979), p. 2.

[48] "Crónica y vigencia de la Reforma Universitaria": Imagen 22 (June 1978), p. 5; "Haciendo pito catalán": Opción, 5 (June 1978), p. 7.

transcripts," critiques behind the back of the ruler, expressed through "cultural resistance"—e.g., recreational activities and student journals.[49] Following Imanol Ordorika, the student movement in Buenos Aires began to rebuild its own collective identity along with its organizations, demands, strategies, and actions grounded on historical traditions and political conditions of that era.[50]

Contesting University Policy (1979–1981)

Levy has described higher education policy in Argentina during the dictatorship as heavily rationalized, exclusionary, and coercive.[51] As Dante Salto remarks, through rationalization, the government sought to reduce funding for higher education.[52] The armed forces and education officials were particularly concerned about the "massive student enrollment" at the University of Buenos Aires—that is, a considerable public spending and an environment conducive to "communist infiltration" and "subversive co-optation" of young minds.[53] Therefore, authorities set entrance exams and admission quotas to "resize" (reduce) the student population.[54]

[49] Alf Gunvald Nilsen / Laurence Cox, "What Would a Marxist Theory of Social Movements Look Like?": Colin Barker / Laurence Cox / John Krinsky / Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds.), Marxism and Social Movements, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 63-81, at 75.

[50] Imanol Ordorika, "Student Movements and Politics in Latin America: A Historical Reconceptualization": Higher Education, 83:2 (2022), p. 297-315.

[51] Daniel Levy, "Comparing Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America: Insights from Higher Education Policy": Comparative Politics, 14:1 (1981), pp. 31-52.

[52] Dante J. Salto, "Comparative Higher Education Policy under Nondemocratic Regimes in Argentina and Chile: Similar Paths, Different Policy Choices": Higher Education Policy, 35:1 (2022), pp. 63-80.

[53] Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Subversión en el ámbito educativo, p. 26.

[54] University of Buenos Aires, Dean Resolutions 377 (December 16, 1976), 825 (November 28, 1977), 159 (April 18, 1978), 618 (September 28, 1978), 593 (October 1, 1979), 411 (August 8, 1980). (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

Table 1. Enrollment, New Students, Quotas, and Applicants at the University of Buenos Aires (1973–1984)

Year	Enrollment	Freshmen	Entrance Quotas	Applicants
1973	133,272	36,239	---	----
1974	166,215	40,535	---	----
1975	152,863	30,028	29,000	33,456
1976	146,909	20,789	10,500	27,869
1977	134,224	11,647	13,845	24,983
1978	117,360	11,956	12,380	40,075
1979	114,550	11,163	11,050	46,312
1980	108,387	10,866	9,830	38,473
1981	110,286	11,422	9,830	39,473
1982	102,766	14,526	10,145	41,065
1983	106,793	15,815	9,780	44,884
1984	150,938	40,096	---	---

Source: Author's chart from data collected from the Ministry of Education (2018) and the University of Buenos Aires (2018),[55] published by La Nación newspaper between 1973 and 1983.

Every year, in Buenos Aires alone, over 30,000 people were excluded from public university education. As shown in table 1, in 1976, the quota was 10,500. By 1979, the quota was 11,050, and in 1981, the quota was reduced even further to 9,830. Communists depicted that reality with the metaphor of "a musical chairs game" that cut young people out from the education system.[56] Access to higher education became a serious issue. Student organizations, federations, and centers deemed it a fundamental demand and criticized "*limitacionismo"* (restriction policies) as "academic, economic, political, and repressive constraints that had frustrated the aspirations of thousands of young men and

[55] University of Buenos Aires, "Cuadro 5—Total de ingresantes a las unidades académicas por año según unidad académica [Carreras con C.B.C.]," Series Estadísiticas, N.° 5, https://www.uba.ar/institucional/censos/series/cuadro5.html, (last accessed August 15, 2023).

[56] "Cinco por uno": Aquí y Ahora, 3 (March 1981), p. 10. (Youth magazine published by the Communist Youth Federation), (CEDINCI and archives of the Communist Party of Argentina).

women."[57] Left-wing organizations claimed that the systematic reduction of tuition sought to diminish the "social and political significance of public universities." They called for students to "raise their voices" and "conquer the right to education."[58]

In April 1980, the military junta imposed new university legislation. The Ley Orgánica de Universidades Nacionales (National Universities Organic Law) No. 22207 intended to permanently erase all university reform heritage; that is, university autonomy and student participation in university governance. In addition, it allowed universities to charge tuition fees, undermining the principle of free access to higher education established in 1949 and upheld by the first Peronist government.[59] For their part, student organizations, federations, and centers argued that the law violated a constitutional right.[60] They also contended that the principle of "state subsidiarity" underpinned the measure.[61] In July, the FUA put forward a national plan to collect signatures to support a petition against entrance fees and quotas for higher education. According to left-wing periodicals, activists gathered between 10,000 and 20,000 signatures nationwide. In Buenos Aires, almost 4000 people signed.[62] They also prompted the emergence of grassroots committees. In October, student activists counted 70

[57] "Democracia en la Universidad": Aquí y Ahora, 12 (August 1981), p. 2.

[58] "Ingreso: prohibido estudiar": Boletín Universitario, 2 (March 1980), (Fundación Pluma archives) pp. 10-11; "Esto es elitismo": Imagen, 56 (March 1980), pp. 4-5; "Las mentiras de Llerena sobre el ingreso": Nueva Generación, 6 (June 1980), p. 9. (Youth periodical published by the Unión de Juventudes por el Socialismo [Youth Union for Socialism]), (CEDINCI).

[59] Mauro Benente (ed.), Donde antes estaba solamente admitido el oligarca: la gratuidad de la educación superior a 70 años, José C. Paz: EDUNPAZ, 2019.

[60] "La educación ¿es un privilegio?," flyer by Centro de Estudiantes de Arquitectura (Faculty of Architecture student center) (March 1981), (Mariano Corbacho Archive).

[61] Similarities with Pinochet's university law in Chile are palpable. See Salto, "Comparative Higher Education Policy," pp. 1-18.

[62] "Balance estudiantil," student report by Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (December 1980), (Fundación Pluma archives); "El plan de lucha va": Imagen, 77 (December 1981); "Alguien se está haciendo el oso": Imagen, 79 (January 1981); student reports by the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (November and December 1981), (Yann Cristal Archive).

committees at the national level, 36 of them in Buenos Aires.[63] Also, roundtables and meetings with political parties took place. Yet, despite the nationwide campaign, student demands failed to prompt any official response.

In 1981, tuition fees at the University of Buenos Aires helped fuel student protests. Student activism developed different strategies to resist paying the fees. One of them was to demand exceptions or scholarships granted by the legislation.[64] That way, students could legally refuse to pay the fee. For example, activists encouraged students to submit exemption applications at the same day and time to provoke a student demonstration at the Faculty of Psychology. A Trotskyist activist remembers that

> "more than 800 or 900 people participated. […] Demonstrations remained banned, so what we did was to get together at the same time and request a scholarship. […] There was a long queue of people."[65]

According to a Trotskyist group, students at the University of Buenos Aires submitted around 1500 requests for fee payment exemptions.[66]

On October 22, the FUBA called for a public demonstration outside the Ministry of Education to support the submission of another petition against tuition fees. This was the first public student demonstration since 1976, five years after the coup. Between 200 and 300 students walked from Houssay Square, where most of the faculties are located, to the park across the Ministry of Education building in downtown Buenos Aires. They held signs bearing their demands— "We want democracy at the university," "No tuition fees"—while chanting slogans—"Student centers, together and forward!," "Tuition fees are going to be abolished," "Attention, the only way is to demonstrate," "FUA, the fight continues." Police detained several students, beat

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[63] "La FUA en acción": Imagen, 74 (October 1980); "Ingresos 81: organicemos la lucha": Nueva Generación, 8 (December 1980), p. 7; "El anti-ingreso a la universidad": Opción, 26 (March 1981), p. 8; "Por la derogación de los cupos. ¡Por el ingreso irrestricto!": Nueva Generación, 11 (November 1981).

[64] "Presentar las exenciones, un primer paso para no pagar el arancel": Hoja Estudiantil, 1 (April 1981), (Fundación Pluma archives). The flyer included a sample of the note to apply for the exemption. (Student magazine published by university activists from Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores).

[65] Trotskyist female activist interviewed by the author, Buenos Aires, 2015.

[66] "Un comienzo de clases agitado": Hoja Estudiantil, 1 (April 1981).

journalists, and arrested more activists at the university campus. In the following days, student organizations, centers, and the FUBA held a press conference to condemn the repression.[67]

That first collective public action against tuition fees was very significant for the process of student organization and the reemergence of the student movement in the public arena and university life. One of the arrested students stated,

> "When I returned to the faculty, the café was a buzz. Classmates asked questions and took part in the debates during courses. The demonstration showed that we can make a difference. Franja Morada, communists, Peronists, and other political tendencies came together, and people embraced us with solidarity."[68]

At the Faculty of Philosophy, "thanks to the old and effective method of organized action," student activism achieved some breakthroughs. First, students who had not paid their tuition fees could sit for their exams. Second, the 900 candidates who had passed their exams were allowed to enroll despite the quota of 700. Finally, even those who had not passed their exams could attend classes informally.[69]

Student organizations agreed that the political situation at the university was changing. Maoists from the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Communist Party) observed that "throughout 1981, the student movement fully entered a new phase of resistance against the dictatorship's plans for the university,"[70] while Trotskyists from the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Workers' Socialist Party) claimed that

> "the student movement's resistance has grown, but it is still clearly defensive. […] It has achieved national coverage. There are new activists, actions, and more political discussions all around the universities across the country."[71]

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[67] "La movilización del 22 en Capital": Nueva Generación, 11 (November 1981), p. 3; "Grave incidente en un acto estudiantil": La Nación, (October 23, 1981).

[68] "Habla el estudiante de la foto": Aquí y Ahora, 19 (November 1981).

[69] "Se rompieron los cupos!! Rompamos el arancel!!!": Flyer by the Commission against the Fee, Faculty of Philosophy (1981), (Centro de Documentación "Universidad y Dictadura").

[70] Internal report by the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Communist Party) (December 1981), (Yann Cristal Archive), p.10.

[71] "Apuntes sobre Educación Superior": student report by the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (September 1981), (Fundación Pluma archives), p. 6.

In fact, many students began their activism during the 1980–1982 period. Student organizations, however, remained cautious because student activism was still a fringe tendency within the student body in Buenos Aires and Argentina.[72]

The growing student protests against university policy need to be understood within a broader political context, one that Marina Franco described as the "beginning of the opposition's turn." This was a process of social, cultural, and political activation on the verge of a political opening fostered by the then president, Gen. Roberto Viola, Gen. Videlas's successor.[73] Thus, political parties formed a common front called Multipartidaria Nacional (National Multiparty Organization) advocating a democratic restoration and the legalization of political and trade union activities.[74] Trade unions contested the difficult economic situation, and other forms of social discontent arose. Unlike the relationship between students and workers forged during the 1960s,[75] the student movement in Buenos Aires did not build an alliance with the labor movement during the dictatorship. Student organizations and federations prioritized meetings with political leaders and the Multipartidaria, seeking support for their agenda.

University of Buenos Aires authorities now promoted participation spaces for students and a very light kind of "liberalization" of student activism. Still, student organizations, centers, and federations remained banned, and security forces continued to repress student protests and activism. Nevertheless, in some faculties, deans helped students publish periodicals and establish new groups, self-identified as "apolitical," "independent" from political parties. It is interesting to note that some of these groups upheld and shared ideas on higher education similar to

72 "Apuntes sobre Educación Superior," p. 8.

73 Marina Franco, El final del silencio: dictadura, sociedad y derechos humanos en la transición (Argentina, 1979-1983), Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018, pp. 92-126; Canelo, El proceso en su laberinto, pp. 161-177.

74 Novaro / Palermo, La dictadura militar, p. 177.

75 Juan Califa, "Obreros y estudiantes. ¿Unidos y adelante? Los estudiantes de la Universidad de Buenos Aires frente al movimiento obrero bajo la 'Revolución Argentina,' 1966–1973": Archivos de historia del movimiento obrero y la izquierda, 8 (2016), pp. 141-160.

those of the dictatorship. Left-wing groups labelled these groups as the "offspring of the dictatorship."[76]

Between 1979 and 1981, as repression decreased and university authorities promoted a controlled political opening, the student movement reemerged publicly, leaving clandestine activism in Buenos Aires behind. Those activists who had carried out clandestine activities during the early years of the dictatorship now participated openly in committees, rallies, and street demonstrations to question university intervention by the military. University access and the abolition of tuition fees became the main demands on the student agenda. As Claudia Rueda suggests, educational activism grew and reinforced collective organization, helping develop a critical view of the dictatorship.[77] Those issues were not new to the Argentine student movement. Yet left-wing and student magazines made no reference to previous protest experiences. For young activists, it was important that their militancy had no connections with the radical student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which had been demonized by the dictatorship. During the early 1980s, previous student organizations expanded, and new ones appeared. While some of them did not oppose university intervention, most of the student organizations that gave life to the student movement sprung up from specific demands at each faculty, acknowledging shared problems and mobilizing against university policy.

The Student Movement against the Dictatorship (1982–1983)

Unlike previous stages, the student movement in Buenos Aires during the last two years of the dictatorship has been a focus of scholarly literature.[78] These analyses emphasize the impact of the democratic

[76] Valeria Manzano, "Por una universidad agradable y eficiente: las agrupaciones estudiantiles liberales en la década de 1980": Diego Mauro / José A. Zanca (eds.), La Reforma Universitaria cuestionada, Rosario: Humanidades y Artes Ediciones, 2018, pp. 173-199.

[77] Claudia Rueda, "¡A LA HUELGA! Secondary Students, School Strikes, and the Power of Educational Activism in 1970s Nicaragua": The Americas, 77:4 (2020), pp. 601-631, at 620.

[78] Yann Cristal, "El movimiento estudiantil de la Universidad de Buenos Aires en el final de la última dictadura (1982–83)": Sociohistórica, 40: e031 (2017).

transition at a national level after the military defeat during the Malvinas War in June 1982; however, they do not delve into the question of how prior student activism influenced the reorganization of the student movement during the final years of the dictatorship.

By March 1982, student organizing at the University of Buenos Aires was on the rise. The student movement had built its agenda of demands with a critical perspective on university problems. On March 30, student activists attended a massive rally against the regime called for by the Confederación General del Trabajo (General Labor Confederation) under the banner "Peace, Bread, and Work." As a security measure, students did not attend together as groups, centers, or federations but rather as couples, attempting to stay together throughout the event despite repression. Police arrested more than 2000 people during the protest.[79]

The Argentine declaration of war against the British over Islas Malvinas, an archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean currently known as Falkland Islands, changed political and social life in Buenos Aires.[80] When the military incursion began in April 1982, student activists found a gap in which they could perform public "patriotic ceremonies" inside university buildings, such as singing the national anthem. Student centers and federations organized anti-imperialist and solidarity committees, concerts, rallies, and demonstrations. Activists occupied university public space, setting up tables in the hallways to collect donations (cigarettes, money, food, blood) and signatures to support Argentine soldiers. As Laura Polak and Juan Gorbier note, the war was a trigger for public activism at the university.[81] Hallways and cafés at the faculties witnessed meetings and public debates. Although student activities were "patriotic" in nature, communists even met with the armed forces to express the solidarity of the student movement and invite them to a ceremony at the Faculty of Medicine.[82] Activism was still illegal according to university rules, so the police disrupted some of

[79] Aquí y Ahora, 28 (April 1982), p. 7.

[80] Federico Lorenz, Malvinas: una guerra argentina, Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009.

[81] Laura Polak / Juan Gorbier, El movimiento estudiantil argentino (Franja Morada, 1976–1986), Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1994.

[82] "En las Facultades": Aquí y Ahora La Juventud, 30 (May 1982), p. 8.

the events and arrested students.[83] While the Malvinas War clearly changed the shape of student activism, tainting its demands, appealing to nationalist pride, and shifting the focus to patriotic demonstrations against British imperialism, student organizations remained unwavering in their stance against the dictatorship, looking forward to a revitalized anti-imperialist struggle.[84]

After the Argentine surrender to Great Britain in June, the dictatorship began a new stage of institutional transition marked by a multilevel crisis and rising social discontent, which expanded the possibilities of opposition groups.[85] This situation sparked an interest in public life and eventually in politics in many young people, who were not previously involved in student organizations or politicized. A young student mentioned to a communist magazine that "I want to take part. I do not know how. I was not politically active before. I feel I must do it after so many dead and injured soldiers."[86] Activists were concerned about how to channel their outrage:

> "Today's students are not the same as those in 1976 or 1981. The Malvinas War awakened thousands of young people to politics and helped students further their organizing and mobilization efforts. Now, the war is over. How should we continue fighting?"[87]

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[83] "Los estudiantes con los soldados: la policía contra los estudiantes": flyer by Socialist Youth of Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (June 7, 1982); "Psicología: los estudiantes rechazan la conciliación con el enemigo," ''Filosofía y Letras: un camino de movilización": Nueva Generación, 13 (May 1982); "Estamos con ustedes": Aquí y Ahora La Juventud, 31 (May 1982); "Bandera donada por los estudiantes": Nueva Juventud, 54 (June 1982). (Youth magazine published by the youth section of the Partido Comunista Revolucionario). (Archivos de Izquierda Rosario).

[84] For anti-imperialist student protests, see Juan Califa, Reforma y Revolución: la radicalización política del movimiento estudiantil de la UBA, 1943–1966, Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 2014; Nayla Pis Diez, El movimiento estudiantil de La Plata en los tempranos sesenta (1955–1966): o la historia de una guerra fría también propia, La Plata-Los Polvorines: UNLP-UNaM-UNGS, 2022.

[85] Gabriela Águila, Dictadura, represión y sociedad en Rosario, 1976/1983: un estudio sobre la represión y los comportamientos y actitudes sociales en dictadura, Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2009, pp. 291-335.

[86] "Universidad: no va más": Aquí y Ahora La Juventud, 33 (July 1982), pp. 9-10.

[87] "Reconstruir los centros de estudiantes": Palabra Socialista, 41 (July 1982). (Journal by Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores), (CEDINCI), p. 7.

They were also concerned about all the fear and apoliticism the dictatorship had spread around the university.[88] An article published in the newspaper *Clarín* highlighted students' distrust of university politics: "I'd rather not get involved in politics. I do not want to take unnecessary risks," "University is an educational institution, not a committee," or 'I'm also terrified of getting involved."[89]

University life between 1982 and 1983 was complex and heterogeneous. On the one hand, students were quite anxious and thrilled about the near end of the dictatorship and the progressive legalization of political activity. On the other, they were scared and insecure because the regime had demonized and repressed political activism. An account of a protest against university fees fairly depicts those mixed feelings. In September 1983, most student centers organized a demonstration that involved the burning of tuition fees receipts. About a thousand people took part in the event on Córdoba Avenue in front of the Faculty of Economics.[90] Nevertheless, most students and some activists were reluctant to give away and burn their receipts for fear of having inconveniences when sitting for exams without those documents. Although many students were against the fees, they were not willing to defy university rules completely. The solution to this dilemma was a creative one: students handcrafted some giant tuition fees receipts and set them on fire.[91] Facing student pressure, the authorities agreed not to demand the payment of the fee.[92]

Between August 1982 and August 1983, the press covered 73 different student protests in Buenos Aires against the dictatorship's university intervention and university model. The student movement accused the military junta of building an elitist, nondemocratic

[88] "Ante la crisis del país y la universidad": statement by Juventud Socialista (Socialist Youth) (July 12, 1982), (CEDINCI).

[89] "La política en la universidad: ¿ese infierno tan temido?": Clarín (November 28, 1982), p. 6.

[90] "Los universitarios dan el presente": Aquí y Ahora La Juventud, 23 (September 1983).

[91] Interview by the author with seven male student activists from different student organizations, Buenos Aires, 2015–2017.

[92] "No será exigida para rendir en Medicina, la chequera de pagos": La Razón (August 4, 1983).

university, isolated from the people,[93] claiming that the "university of democracy" should be public, free, and autonomous. The FUA organized new demonstrations in front of the Ministry of Education. Two thousand students marched on October 22, 1982. The banner of the demonstration was "Education is a right, not a privilege," because students continued to demand free access to university.[94] The following year, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo—the mothers of the disappeared—joined the student protests, and together they demanded the appearance of the students kidnapped by the dictatorship.[95] Students chanted against the regime and university policies: "The admission exam is in line with the dictatorship," "Come on over, dance with me, thanks to the people the dictatorship is finished."[96]

At this stage, the student movement began articulating educational activism with the antidictatorial struggle by supporting workers' strikes and attending rallies called for by human rights organizations. Trade unions, the Multipartidaria, professional associations, and even religious leaders supported student protests. Student centers and federations participated in the "Marcha por la Vida" ("March for Life") and the "Marcha del Pueblo por la Democracia y la Reconstrucción Nacional" ("People's March for Democracy and National Reconstruction") in 1982.[97] In 1983, the student movement would

[93] Yann Cristal, "El movimiento estudiantil de la UBA en los '80. De la 'primavera' al desencanto (1982–1987)": Pablo Buchbinder (ed.), Juventudes universitarias en América Latina, Rosario: Humanidades y Artes Ediciones, 2018, pp. 447-474.

[94] Consejo de Rectores de Universidades Nacionales, "Exposición de la Asesoría de Comunicación Social acerca del accionar de la oposición política y del oponente subversivo sobre el sector estratégico educativo", 1982; Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Parte de Inteligencia 20/82, "Activismo en el ámbito educativo" (October 15, 1982), (Archivos Abiertos, Dirección Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario); "Entusiasta marcha de estudiantes universitarios": La Nación (October 23, 1982), (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

[95] Student organizations such as FUA and FUBA denounced human rights violations by the dictatorship before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) during the 1979 mission in Argentina.

[96] "Se cumplió la marcha de protesta estudiantil": Tiempo Argentino (March 11, 1983), (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive), p. 5.

[97] "La policía federal tiene que retirarse de las facultades": La Voz (January 7, 1983), (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

protest against the *Final Document of the Military Junta on the War against Subversion and Terrorism* and the "self-amnesty" law the armed forces enacted before leaving office in order to justify and guarantee the nonprosecution for the kidnappings, disappearances, tortures, and murders they systematically perpetrated between 1976 and 1983.[98] Ten years after the last presidential elections, political parties would carry out a nationwide political campaign to elect legislators, governors, mayors, and president.[99]

Student activists devoted themselves to conquering their right to protest, assembly, and be part of the university's governance body. During the second semester of 1982, for the first time since 1976, students held assemblies inside and outside faculties. Activists were extremely cautious about the presence of people outside the student body in the assemblies, even asking for student credentials to authorize access to the venue where the meeting was going to take place. One activist remembers they were so nervous that "we saw spies all over the room," while at the same time they were enthusiastic because "we were openly discussing politics, talking about the dictatorship and student organizing, overcoming our own fears."[100] Almost 500 students from each faculty gathered and agreed on petitions to be submitted to university authorities. They demanded the end of the prohibition on student centers and political activity, the free circulation of magazines, and denounced police presence at university premises.[101] The intelligence services of the armed forces, unrelenting in their beliefs, alerted university authorities about a revival of "student subversion."[102]

Students also agreed on holding elections for new authorities at all student centers. It is worth noting that, even after years of prohibition and repression, students continued to advocate and choose politics and ideas linked with the 1918 university reform. However, activists

98 Franco, El final del silencio, pp. 234-257 and 265-318.

99 On the crack of the military power and the end of the dictatorship after the Malvinas War, see Águila, Historia de la última dictadura, pp. 202-218, and Franco, El final del silencio, pp. 319-368.

100 Female activist interviewed by the author, 2015.

101 "Solicitan que reintegren un centro estudiantil": La Voz (October 3, 1982).

102 Fuerza Aérea Argentina, "Informe periódico: activismo estudiantil en las universidades", (September 30, 1982), (Archivos Abiertos, Dirección Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario).

insisted on differentiating their militancy from the student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s:

> "Until 1974, leftist groups entered university [and turned it into] a hub for ideological recruitment, disrupting the true functions of the student centers […]. Then a right-wing reaction emerged and denied students the possibility to participate. This is why we believe that a serious and responsible organization is currently necessary, a leadership that represents the average student […] to work according to [their] specific demands."[103]

> "[We want to build] a massive and mature movement. A movement that does not repeat the errors of the 1973–1975 period, reclaiming its best experiences. […] We want legalized student federations and centers, which carry out sports activities, [hold] research and study groups, camping activities, [and publish] magazines, and periodic meetings."[104]

Student elections developed peacefully with a remarkable level of participation. The press highlighted how tidy the electoral process was, as well as the enthusiasm and atmosphere of "celebration" that prevailed among activists and the student body, who massively took part in an election for the first time in their lives. Activists also informed that there had been no incidents, and that elections did not affect academic life.[105] Students of natural sciences, psychology, and engineering were the first to elect a new president and council for their student centers in 1982. Franja Morada, the group linked with the Unión Cívica Radical, won all three elections. It is important to observe that this group had won the presidency of three student centers in 1975 and was never outlawed by the dictatorship. These facts enabled activists to play a leading role at the FUBA and the FUA.

Election outcomes revealed some features of the student movement during the dictatorship and the forthcoming democratic transition. In 1983, Franja Morada was elected in eight of the thirteen student centers, gathering 17,892 of 44,392 votes. The "independent" right-wing groups managed to collect 13,661 votes, obtaining the presidency of three student centers in the faculties of dentistry, agriculture, and

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[103] Franja Morada male activist, interview by Clarín (November 28, 1982), (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

[104] "Movimiento estudiantil: que todos participen": Aquí y Ahora, 36 (August 1982), p. 9.

[105] "Las elecciones en Ciencias Exactas a través de la opinión de sus alumnos": Convicción (November 9, 1982), (University of Buenos Aires Historical Archive).

pharmacy. Finally, Juventud Universitaria Intransigente (Intransigent University Youth) won the presidency at the student centers of psychology and sociology. This was a brand-new organization that presented itself as part of the "democratic left." These figures illustrate how, after years of repression and terror, most students preferred moderate options and did not support left-wing or Peronist groups. On November 5, Andrés Delich, a Franja Morada activist, became president of the FUBA after a broad "democratic" agreement between communist, Peronist, "intransigent," socialist, and "independent" groups along with Franja Morada.

The massive support for Franja Morada must be understood in the context of Raúl Alfonsín's successful presidential campaign during the second semester of 1983. Gen. Bignone, the last of the de facto presidents, put an end to political prohibition in June 1983, repealed the law that suspended political party activity, and set the date for the transfer of power to a civil government for early 1984, paving the way to democratic elections.[106] Alfonsín, the Unión Cívica Radical candidate, proposed that "democracy was going to enable people to eat, heal, and educate themselves."[107] Franja Morada activists at the university saw themselves as a new "democratic," "mature," and "nonviolent" youth. Throughout the dictatorship, they had condemned the radicalized student movement from the 1960s and 1970s. To differentiate themselves from that experience as a new generation, they upheld the banners of the 1918 university reform as the democratic (nonradical) way to build a new university based on autonomy, co-governance, and student participation, because there had been

> "a smear campaign against youth participation in politics. […] We are the first to point out that we never want violence in university again. We want a better university, at the service of a great country."[108]

Between 1976 and 1983, the student movement demanded open access and free higher education as the only way to ensure the constitutional

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[106] Águila, Historia de la última dictadura, p. 204.

[107] Gerardo Aboy Carlés, Las dos fronteras de la democracia argentina: la reformulación de las identidades políticas de Alfonsín a Menem, Rosario: Homo Sapiens, 2001; Claudia Feld / Marina Franco (eds.), Democracia hora cero: actores, políticas y debates en los inicios de la posdictadura, Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015.

[108] Franja Morada male activist, interview by La Nación (November 8, 1982).

right to education. In 1983, despite the dictatorship's efforts, students demonstrated they were more than willing to fight against exclusionary higher education policies. Student activism demanded to be part of the university's governance body, upholding Reforma Universitaria banners. This educational activism was articulated with opposition to the dictatorship and propositions of a "university of democracy." After years of repression and censorship, the student movement was active and became a key, respected, and moderated actor in the democratization process of the university. As such, it brought university demands back into the public arena, influencing higher education policy during the transition to democracy.

In December 1983, the newly-elected President Raúl Alfonsín declared the end of the intervention of universities and the beginning of the "normalization" of the University of Buenos Aires, in accordance with Act No. 14297 of 1958. Later on, in 1984, Alfonsín would abolish admission exams and tuition fees and, in 1985, students would vote for representatives of the Council of the University of Buenos Aires, the university's governance body.

Conclusions

In this article, I have argued that the student movement at the University of Buenos Aires was not cancelled, nor did it disappear, after the 1976 coup d'état. I examined a student reorganization process, divided into three different stages. These phases were not isolated pieces of history but rather intertwined and interrelated. Previous situations conditioned and remained in place during subsequent experiences. As is the case with most social processes, it is very difficult to determine an exact date when each stage begins and ends. The proposed theoretical framework and empirical analysis shed light on aspects such as student everyday life and politics, higher education policy, and the effects of repression within the University of Buenos Aires, which allowed me to apprehend continuities and novelties during the period examined. As a social movement, organized students developed a collective project to change university policy, from local university demands and collective opposition actions to a broader and openly antidictatorial social movement.

Even during the most repressive years of the dictatorship (1976–1978), when almost a thousand students and teachers were kidnapped and murdered, students developed a clandestine activism and denounced everyday university issues.

Educational activism was a key aspect of the politicization of the student movement. This kind of agenda became fundamental for the student reorganization after the 1976 coup. When the new university law was passed in 1980, educational militancy strengthened, and national campaigns against tuition fees and entrance quotas were promoted. I point out that, early in the 1980s, the student movement returned to the public arena to criticize the higher education policy. After the military defeat in the Malvinas War, the student movement articulated its educational agenda together with a more open opposition to the dictatorship.

Student collective action repertoires changed throughout history. In Buenos Aires, during the 1976–1983 dictatorship, educational activism carried out by student organizations became crucial for bringing about wider political awareness and fostering an opposition to the dictatorship. National politics is not enough to explain student political activity, though. An analysis of the student movement in Argentina and Latin America needs to consider everyday university life, its political traditions, higher education, and student politics. In that vein, I assert that the student movement in Buenos Aires did not abandon the 1918 university reform political heritage. Activists kept student federations and centers active. These organizations, inspired by the university reform movement, were vital for coordinating educational activism at the local and national levels. Students underscored 1918 university reform as their major inspiration for contesting university intervention and putting forth a new democratic university model with autonomy, co-governance, and student participation as its central tenets.

The 1918 university reform became a synonym of democracy in higher education, in opposition to the university model of the dictatorship. In addition, student activism presented the university reform movement as a means to differentiate the "new student movement" from the ideas and practices of the 1960s—that is, separating the events of 1918 form their radical political experiences of the then recent past.