

Argentina: Cyclical Setbacks in a Movementist Society

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This text was originally published as one of the chapters of the book: “América del Sur en el Mundo de las Democracias de Mercado”, CADAL-Homo Sapiens, 2008. The time that has passed since we wrote this article does not make this topic any less current – quite the contrary. Our goal at the time was to write a text informing the reader about the most relevant details of the country’s political situation of the past two decades, but that could also specifically explain deeper structural factors that determine and explain the political dynamics of the cycle that began in the ‘40s. Unfortunately we do not have even a comma to delete or add to the text or to the performance of Kirchners in the past. Today, just as in the past, the country is subject to the same continuous perverse logic that exposes it to successive states of euphoria and depression, almost without interruption. The international situation may change – as it did in 2008 – the names of some of the actors in domestic politics may also change, be they from the ruling party or the opposition, but the nature of politics remains the same. The economic or political progress that was made by the K governments in some areas failed to inspire society as a whole to move in the direction of a common destiny of greatness. All stages of Argentina’s policy in the past seven decades, whether in peak or decline, have been guided by the severe division and confrontation of the political community. We hope that at some point the cycle will close, but nothing as yet announced it to be over. That is why we consider that this text’s vitality has remained intact.

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1. Introduction

When it comes to explaining Argentina's historic failure, the greater part of the literature appeals to one of two modes of explanation, both of a structural nature. One gives more emphasis to economic structure, and the other to political-institutional structure. Obviously, the authors that defend each perspective present the reader with good arguments, and the intention here is not to argue the premises of either broad line of argument. The mere fact that at the start of the 20th century Argentina enjoyed the sixth largest GDP per capita in the world (Clark, 1940) and is currently behind more than forty countries suggests its model of economic development has a lot to explain in terms of this decline.

Likewise, in a country with one of the highest degrees of political instability in the region, political scientists have much to say regarding the problems with state institutions and the system of party politics in general. In the period between 1943 and 2003, Terragno (2005) identifies ten elected governments, of which only three completed the constitutional duration of their mandates. In Mainwaring and Hagopian's table (2005), which analyses the sequence of the distinct types of regimes (democratic, semi-democratic and authoritarian) that have held power in Latin American countries, the Argentine anomaly is clear. During this period, Argentina displays a sequence of eleven changes in regime type, while neighboring countries like Chile and Uruguay have three and Brazil four. Within Latin America Argentina loses only to Peru, which experienced thirteen shifts.

Nevertheless, and unperceived by the analysts, the persuasive capacity of this "bipolar" analysis, split between economic and political factors, complicates the emergence of alternative structural explanations based in the very nature of Argentine politics, a mode of thought pioneered in the 19th century by Domingo Sarmiento (1997) in his work *Facundo – Civilization and Barbarism*. Bonvecchi (n.d.) presents several lines of analysis of the Argentine crises rooted in the nature of the actors, although none of them can be considered sufficiently structural in the perspective of what is intended here. An attempted structural analysis of the nature of Argentine politics should not be understood here as metaphysical, but rather as sociological, approximating the sense given by Elias (1980) to the *habitus*. An example of the difficulties mentioned can be found in the acclaimed work by Levitsky (2005). Even though the author notes the instability of the rules of the Argentine political game and, for this reason, concludes with an appeal for institutions to be strengthened, he is convinced that, considering the severity of the economic crises experienced, Argentine democracy was fairly robust in the period between 1983 and the present. From the perspective of our analysis it is difficult to agree with any hypothesized "robust" or strengthening democracy in the past two decades. Even if involuntary, this would suggest the existence of a cluster of

"democratic energy" in the country, whereas Argentina's problem is that nothing is linear. What is accumulated in one period is spent in the next until the country winds up in the red (and this is valid as much for democratic accumulation as economic). In other words, if there is something dreadfully evident in the history of the last sixty years in Argentina it is that it has taken place within a regressive cycle. The small cycles of democratic and economic accumulation are framed, in reality, within a larger cycle of dissipation. In this context it seems opportune to investigate the nature of Argentine politics as a structural source of the behavior of its principle actors (Botana, 2002; Merquior, 1986; Novaro & Palermo, 2004; Quiroga, 2006; Leis, 2006).

2. General Historical Perspective

The path taken by Argentina over the last sixty decades cannot be understood without considering the country's prior history. The present is inserted in a cycle of decline that follows a previous cycle of nine decades of notable economic, political, social and cultural progress. This is the first key point in the study of Argentine history: it is a history made up of various cycles with characteristics that are almost diametrically opposed. Decades ago an observer may have been able to doubt the existence of these cycles, back when it was still possible to think Argentina had simply paused in the evolutionary process. But the density and long duration of the current cycle of decline does not permit the maintenance of such doubts. Ever since its independence from the Spanish Crown, Argentina has constructed its history across three great cycles: the first, from 1810 to 1852; the second, from 1852 to 1943; and the third, from 1943 until today (Lagos, 2003). The intention here is not to argue the role of cycles in history, but to call attention to their centrality in the Argentine case¹. In the first four decades of its history, Argentina displayed an extremely poor rate of political and social development. This trend was completely inverted in the following nine decades, and the country made notable progress (even by international standards of the time). Similarly, when the last six decades are compared with those of the previous cycle, the pattern has again been inverted and the deterioration is evident. Certainly, it is much easier to explain a country with a linear history than one with a cyclical history. For this reason, the search for consensus in explanations for the pronounced advances and retreats of Argentine history continues to be a puzzle for political scientists. Nevertheless, just as in Edgar Allen Poe's famous "Purloined Letter", the keys to decryption may be hidden in plain sight.

During the first cycle, in spite of some initial attempts to found republican institutions, there is no doubt that the populist and xenophobic autocracy of Rosas and other *caudillos* placed the country firmly outside the progressive trajectory of the developed world of that time. With the

defeat of Rosas in the mid-19th century, Argentina dedicated itself to the construction of institutions capable of guaranteeing basic republican principles. Naturally, this was a process with many contradictions and a few reverses, but for nine decades these institutions never strayed from the path they had set out on. According to Lagos (2003), some relevant examples of this were the country's continual maintenance of: limits to state interference in the economy; the Nation's credit rating; a legal framework favorable to enforcement of contracts and economic opening; division of powers; an independent judiciary; the rotation of heads of government (no president tried to remain in power for longer than the six years established by the Constitution); and strong links to the developed world in trade, migration and the flow of ideas. Helped by the loss of democracy's growing legitimacy in the final decade of the second cycle, the frustrated republicanism of the first four decades of Argentina's political life would be repeated, starting in the 1940s. Events would veer heavily towards the institutional anachronism of the Rosas era (explained away profusely by the revisionist authors of the time, who identified Perón with Rosas). Argentina became populist and nationalist once again, unmaking the institutions of the Republic. Argentina became, once again, statist, leading to monetary inflation and the closure of the economy. In 1947 the country's first mass dismissal of members of the Supreme Court by a government of the Republic came to pass, and would sadly become a habit for many later governments. Likewise, in 1949 Perón reformed the Constitution to allow his own re-election and turned practices in support of re-election into a tradition still alive today. Military regimes were not scarce during this cycle (indeed, the triumph of Perón in the 1946 elections would have been impossible without the military coup of 1943), but the democratically elected governments during the last two decades also made significant attempts against the republican spirit, although they were less severe. It was the Cámpora administration that decreed a total and unrestricted amnesty, including in the list many who had been sentenced only after receiving due process in trials that were blameless from a republican perspective. The elected governments of Juan Perón and Isabel Perón (which followed that of Cámpora) first organized the illegal repression of the *guerrilla*. It was the government of Menem that altered the number of members of the Supreme Court in his own favor and reformed the Constitution to permit his reelection. Elected governments (those of Alfonsín, Menem and De la Rúa) also raised public spending and the national and provincial public debt to unsustainable levels (in Menem's case, with the intention of favoring a third reelection). Nor were military governments responsible for making the country's recent default on its public debt inevitable, turning it into a near pariah internationally (and equaling, in terms of damage to reputation, the *tour de force* achieved twenty

years earlier with the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas by a military government).

3. The post-1943 cycle

It may be useful to point out to the reader that, due to the fact that Peronism having been a part of Argentine history for the last sixty years, no Argentine alive today has experienced adulthood in an Argentina free of the mark of Peronism. During this period, the country lurched through a vertiginous succession of traumatic episodes of every kind: a clear indication of the erratic and anomalous state of the citizens' political preferences and the centrality of the Peronist phenomenon. The current cycle began in 1943 with a coup carried out by the nationalist and pro-fascist military, creating the conditions for the 1946 arrival of Perón to the government in an election that divided Argentines into two groups: Peronists and anti-Peronists. This was a split more intense than any that had been experienced in the previous liberal cycle: the closest antecedent was the division between unionists and federalists in the first cycle of the country's life. The establishment of a profoundly anti-American regime with fascist intentions was brought to an end in 1955 by another military coup, which led to the vengeful prohibition of peronism and a conflict between Peronists and anti-Peronists that at times threatened to lead to civil war.

After a succession of interspersed military and democratic governments, Perón returned to power in 1973, helped in significant measure by the work of Peronist guerrilla groups, hugely popular among the masses despite their clearly totalitarian intentions. This time, however, the Peronists were inspired by the extreme opposite end of the ideological arc, compared to the generation of the 1950s (Viola, 1982). Later, after a brief "democratic" interval full of dramatic goings-on (increased terrorist activity by revolutionary groups, state-sponsored terrorism, the death of Perón and the rise to the presidency of his incompetent widow, hyperinflation, etc.), the military returned to government in 1976, setting up a regime inspired by liberal economics but with clearly totalitarian characteristics. This regime would be responsible for a wave of repression and state-sponsored terrorism, the death or "disappearance" of tens of thousands of people (to be added to the hundreds of deaths caused by the guerrilla groups), and a war against Great Britain for possession of the Falkland Islands (which received rapid and widespread popular support and led six hundred Argentines to their death).

The horrifying scene seemed to improve, in some measure, with the arrival of Alfonsín to the presidency in 1983, and his policies in clear favor of human rights would lead to the trial and conviction of the leaders of the preceding military dictatorship. Having experienced the fascist corporatism of the Peronism of the 1950s and the revolutionary terrorism of the Peronism of the 1970s, the triumph of Alfonsín seemed

to announce at last the end of the cycles of “eternal return” of Peronism. Nevertheless, taking advantage of the opportunity generated by economic crisis and hyperinflation during the 1990s, Peronism would be reinvented once more. Now it would return with an unexpected purpose, demonstrating that Peronism can follow every course and none. In cycles that renew and repeat themselves to the rhythm of passing generations, Peronism has demonstrated a capacity to position itself in the center of the political scene as strong as its capacity to degrade the Republic’s institutions. In other words, this cyclical reinvention of Peronism will in every case be led by an instrumental radicalism, taking one of the contemporary age’s own imperatives and carrying it to its limits, without any concern for coherence with the principles of its own history.

These cyclical shifts in purpose do not destroy Peronism – on the contrary – because its essential character resides in its capacity for movement, regardless of where it is going. It is the very radicalism of the direction taken, not the direction itself, that reinvigorates Peronism as a movement. With Menem’s strong preference for economic liberalism and a policy of “carnal relations” with the United States, the Peronism of the ‘90s was diametrically opposed to its prior incarnations and once more managed to mark a new path for the country’s politics. Despite the fact that in 1999 Peronism lost the election to De la Rúa, the new government continued the macroeconomic plans of the Menem administration, including the exponential increase of public debt. The recession experienced during the final year of Menem’s government continued during De la Rúa’s administration and the country quickly deteriorated into social chaos, forced exit from peso-dollar convertibility and the cessation of payments. De la Rúa resigned in December 2001 and after a brief succession of temporary Peronist presidents selected by Parliament an election was held, in which the majority voted against Menem. Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003 with scarcely more than 1/5 of the vote, thanks to Menem’s withdrawal from the second round. The spirit of 1970s Peronism, which was obviously neither neoliberal nor pro-American, seemed to have returned with him. Despite this, and as will be seen later, the Kirchners would govern with a somewhat chaotic mix of the Peronist legacies of previous cycles. Under them, Peronism seemed to enter a phase in which, without changing the nature of its politics, it would shelter within more bureaucratic, opportunistic rituals than the charismatic, programmatic rituals that had characterized it in the past.

4. The concepts of movement and resentment

This study is based on three theoretical-methodological assumptions. The first (already outlined) is that the history of Argentina has played out over three conflicting, long-lasting cycles. The other two assumptions refer to the factors

that structure those cycles (especially the two most recent ones), marking both the points of rupture and the continuity between them. A central assumption is that in the historic cycle of 1852-1942 Argentina displayed evolutionary development with relation to the process of capital accumulation and the construction of state institutions, a trend that was reversed in the following (and current) cycle.

Unlike many other Latin American countries that never managed to find sufficient time and wisdom to lay the foundations of a modern State, part of Argentina’s current misfortune can be found in the (paradoxical) fact that it previously managed to do so. Argentina’s current frustration is proportional to its past happiness. The third assumption is derived from this: considering that indigenous resentment is absent in Argentina (the country was scarcely populated at the time of the colonization and marginal to the more advanced Andean cultures), it can be concluded that the elevated level of resentment that has marked its politics in the most recent cycle is fruit of a political dynamic that sacrificed the country’s institutions in the name of the “movement”. In the best sense of the word, this is a “civilizing” resentment.

The comparison of Argentina with Brazil is illustrative. The reader should compare, for example, the events and results of the populist moments and military dictatorships relatively common to both countries; a reference to Fausto and Devoto’s book (2004) is again demanded. An assessment of the evolutionary dynamic of both countries demonstrates, without shadow of a doubt, that points of institutional and juridical rupture have a lesser impact in Brazil. In Argentina, the cuts are always much more brutal, and this is easily verified by observing the implications of war in each country. Argentina radically shifted its international alliances in the Second World War while Brazil reaffirmed them; Argentina constructed an almost totalitarian state to confront the terrorism of the ‘60s and ‘70s, while, in Brazil, that struggle only affected reduced sectors of the Armed Forces and the State itself; and finally, Argentina started a war that would have been unthinkable for the Brazilian elite – the war of the Malvinas/Falklands – when it chose as its enemy no less than one of the oldest of the modern Western democracies! In the middle of the 20th century Argentina was structured, historically, around the idea of movement². Giorgio Agamben (2005) comments that the term “movement” has a long and persistent political and social history; nevertheless, it is a term everyone believes they understand but which they fail to define. Even though the concept of movement has had a solid tradition in the sciences and in philosophy, it didn’t acquire a relevant technical meaning in politics until the 19th century (one of its first appearances was in the July Revolution in France in 1830, during which the proponents of change called themselves the “Party of Movement”, while their adversaries called themselves the “Party of Order”). Agamben reminds us that Lorenz von Stein (an author that

influenced both Marx and Carl Schmitt) thinks about movement in dialectical comparison to the notion of State. The State is a static, legal element, while the movement is the expression of the dynamic forces of the society. In this manner, the movement is always antagonistic to the State, seeking to express a societal dynamic that is primary to and above juridical and state institutions. Other interesting indications on the history of movements can be found in Hannah Arendt's (1973) book on totalitarianism. Arendt shows that around the First World War – a little before and immediately after – European movements acquired an extraordinary development in strategic counter-position to parties. Thus an explosion of movements is seen, with the term being used by the right as much as the left (fascism and Nazism defined themselves as movements, and only secondarily as parties). According to Agamben, the only person to try to define the term in both a political and juridical sense was Carl Schmitt, in a 1993 essay titled "State, Movement, People". According to Schmitt, the politics of the Nazi Reich can be understood via the distinction between and examination of these three elements. The first element is State, defined as the static political part. The people form the non-political element, growing beneath the protection of the movement. The movement, for its part, is the truly dynamic political element, and takes its specific form from its leadership. For Schmitt, the Führer is the personification of the movement.

For Agamben, an extremely relevant consequence of Schmitt's analysis is that the primacy of the "movement" is given in function of the neutralization of the people. Thus, the movement becomes the decisive political concept only when a democratic understanding of the people as a political body has become obsolete. In a way, it could be said that democracy decays as movements advance. If we understand democracy as a tradition that sees the people, an aggregate of individuals with the capacity to act together through institutions, as its constitutive political element, then in a fundamental sense there are no democratic movements. The assumption that movements establish the end of the people as a democratic political body is shared as much by the revolutionary tradition of the left as it is by fascism and Nazism.

The history of the 20th century demonstrated, in Hitler's Germany and the Russia of Lenin and Stalin, that the suppression of democracy by social movements is of no small consequence. Nevertheless, little was done in the field of political science to understand the historic role of movements, in their relationship with democracy. In this sense, it seems more than reasonable to study the hypothesis that movements contaminate and degrade democratic institutions until these institutions are exhausted and that, in the absence of sufficient antibodies, they carry society towards authoritarianism, totalitarianism or simple chaos. In

a sense, they are the flipside of the civilizing process that led to the construction of modern Western democracy. The concept of movement, strictly speaking, covers everything from Islamic fundamentalism to organizations "above all suspicion", such as environmentalists or feminists, by way of the various Latin America populisms with their fissures between rich and poor, elites and the masses, indigenous and whites, etc. Obviously, no comparison is intended between the perverse dialectic of Nazism or Communism and the dialectic of environmentalism or feminism, in which virtuous elements appear that link these actors to the processes of recognition and social inclusion. Nevertheless, without denying this civilizing condition of some practices of social movements, it can be affirmed without a doubt that this condition is never exclusive.

The question of movement leads to the question of resentment. In a succinct equation, it could be affirmed that the greater the movement, the greater the societal fissure and, in consequence, the greater the resentment of citizens and the weaker the capacity of the institutions of the State. The difficulty in understanding the sense of the movement reappears in full when we are trying to understand the causes of resentment and its complex dialectic with the State. The frequent complaints laid against the State in peripheral countries is partly based in ignorance about the civilizing potential of liberal democratic institutions, but it is rarely perceived that the complaints are frequently channeled by the very same actors responsible for the damage. In his book, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche (1978) consistently introduces elements to explain social life by means of an analysis of feelings. In principal, Nietzsche concerns himself with hate and the set of its derivatives (jealousy, vengeance, envy, etc.). But it is not just any hate that interests him, but rather the self-hate of inferior beings that is transformed into resentment through a suggestive operation, first of denial and then of transformation into a "positive" value. In the post-Nietzsche literature, the concept of resentment is amplified, adopting a greater diversity of focus. While for Nietzsche the decay of the West is based in the growing resentment of the weak and defeated, germinated and circulated via various movements, for Norbert Elias (1997) resentment is also linked to other civilizations and to dominant social sectors. But the common denominator of all these cases is that the actors always identify themselves as victims, without assuming any responsibility. Resentment may possibly be symptomatic of a problem of which the victim is completely innocent; nevertheless, it does not seem necessary to demonstrate that the analysis of one's own responsibility ought always to be in first place. Unconditional defense of the victims (be it to create a socialist revolution or an agrarian reform) always leads to resentment, dividing society into "good" and "bad" sectors, excusing the first and blaming the second. As such, many movements of

contemporary society exist in the limbo of paradox: the more they assert their defense of democracy, the greater may be the quantum of resentment they introduce into the social fabric and, in consequence, the lesser becomes the society's capacity to construct universally valid mechanisms of State. When the actions of the movement begin to divide society and generate frustration, resentment and desire for revenge, irrespective of the merits of its objectives, these actions become incompatible with the democratic ambition that members of a society be able to act in concert to face their problems. At some point, the political struggle demands a choice among the different arguments in play, but this choice requires the existence of a political community capable of forgiveness (a faculty opposed to resentment and revenge³) so that the decisions made receive legitimacy and may truly have some expectation of success.

Resentment operates in a form more or less inverse to that of recognition⁴. Success and failure, like recognition and resentment, are basic processes of social life that span all spheres in a complex dialectic. The paths that make possible the success of one or another experience vary according to circumstances, individuals, and cultures, but each is as much a part of the human condition as the other. Despite the fact that recognition and resentment emerge in the same social context, the weight that each one has in the overall dynamic of each society is different. A society that produces more recognition than resentment guarantees its progress, just as the reverse will condemn it to decay. Despite the intimate links between them, the literature generally treats these aspects separately. It is not difficult to demonstrate the historic result of Latin American populism, in terms of the production of recognition and resentment. Independent of their intentions, populist strategies designed to mobilize wills via promises as utopian as they are paternalistic, strongly project hate in all directions of the social and political fabric, incentivizing old resentments and creating new ones (thus creating a vicious cycle of substitution of recognition by resentment)⁵.

Discussing the German case, Elias points out that some countries seem more predisposed to resentment than others (Elias, 1997; see also: Caroché, 2001). As though he were speaking of Argentina, Elias comments that a society that has passed very quickly from one extreme to another, where individuals oscillate between exaggerated humiliation and fabulous grandeur, living in the shade of a glorious past with the feeling that nobody in the world wishes to recognize the nation's worth, is exposed to resentment⁶. According to Elias, the process of resentment is developed from a frustration that always demands the decrease of the individual's worth. This is the central question, as it allows Elias to converge with Nietzsche on a fundamental aspect of the analysis of the phenomenon of resentment. The differences about the direction of resentment (up or down the social scale) are

presented as secondary in relation to the mythification of the "collective", carried out by the movement. Collective rather than individual feelings become the sources of the disease of resentment. Or better expressed, the emotions and feelings associated with a collective memory will today ennoble the individual ego and tomorrow frustrate it. It is not individual idealism that is at the base of resentment, but rather a movement associated with a utopian belief in a nation's magnificent destiny. In other words, behind resentment one can always find a mythical memory of deeds, values and suffering that is imposed on individuals as truth. Resentment dwells on a painful past that cannot be overcome nor forgotten (Deleuze, 1971). That the resentful man should be given to meditate on memory has enormous consequences for the social sciences. In the last decades, the social sciences have restored the value of memory as an essential part of the human condition. Even when it is difficult to deny the value of memory, there is an abundant literature that suggests that an excess of memory may be closer to death than to life (Zawadzki, 2001). The freezing of collective emotion or, in other words, the freezing of a *memory* of a feeling that is placed outside of public scrutiny, threatens the health of a nation. The forgetting of feelings associated with historic deeds is as desirable for public life as the forgetting of one's own deeds would be undesirable. From this perspective, the Nietzschean sensibility in favor of a liberating forgetfulness is presented not only as an aristocratizing prejudice, but also as a demand of reality to avoid resentment.

5. The cycles and actors of Argentine populism

5.1. *The degradation of the state*

Contradicting the anguished nostalgia of those who blame neoliberalism for Argentina's decline, it is more correctly asserted that a large movement led to the degradation of the country's institutions and to the ruin of its economy (Germani, 1962). In the early years of the 20th century more than a few obstacles began to appear in the path of those who, in the tradition of the generations of 1837 and 1880, tried to construct a modern country. As has been mentioned, Argentina's political institutions began to lose legitimacy at the beginning of the 20th century, and this was made clear by the military coup of 1930, when conservative and liberal sectors gained and held power – through fraud – for more than a decade. In the same line as Raymond Aron, Natalio Botana comments that the canonic argument of 19th century French thought applies perfectly to Argentina: "the blindness of the elites, their concurrent stupidity and lack of foresight, engender a populist situation that breaks with the established rules; once this new orientation in popular custom and expectation is installed, it is impossible to turn back time" (Botana, 1998).

Huntington's (1970) classic work identifies Argentina as entering the first wave of democratization in 1912, which is

correct from the point of view of inclusivity and strictly political competition. Despite this, the universal suffrage of 1912 allowed the ascent of Hipólito Yrigoyen's populist leadership. The end of the first wave of democratization in Argentina, in 1930, had as a fundamental causal factor the accentuated populism of the second Yrigoyen presidency. But it was after the military coup of 1943 that Argentina began to reverse the process of liberal modernization begun in the 19th century.

Peronism can be held responsible for Latin America's most successful substitution of a liberally oriented evolutionary dynamic by a populist one. In the 1940s, Argentina did not simply experience yet another shift of political regime and the arrival to power of yet another dictator. Taking advantage of the enormous economic and financial resources available to the State at that moment, Peronism managed to finance the social ascent of the masses, blaming economic oligarchs and imperialism for all evils and not concerning itself with the development of the country's productive forces. While the economy stagnated, the masses exponentially increased their desires and the State transformed those desires into rights. Faced with the posterior, inevitable economic and political collapse of this model, both Peronists and anti-Peronists would be driven towards resentment.

Resentment incentivizes the movement, just as the movement incentivizes resentment. Escaping from this vicious dialectic is an almost impossible task. Peronism whipped up a frenzy of resentment amongst the popular classes, directed against the liberal project the country was constructing. In no other Latin American country was there such a deep reversal as in Argentina (a country which at the time had the greatest proportion of European-descendent population and the most solid economy of the region). The cycle marked by Peronism would once again carry Argentina to the levels of resentment existent at the time of the civil war of the first half of the 19th century, with the added insult that while that earlier phase of resentment destroyed practically nothing, as everything was still to be done, 20th century resentment would destroy a great work in progress. There is a common point in the different comparisons made between Argentina and Brazil: Argentines like to live in the past, while the Brazilians like to live in the future. This comparison implicitly suggest that the Argentines prefer to remember, instead of forgetting, and vice-versa, that Brazilians like to forget more than they do remember. Obviously, a simple comparison of economic and political facts could not explain why neighboring countries are so different when it comes to their public emotions. The hypothesis that the Argentines live more in the past than the people of Brazil supposes that, among other things, an important difference exists in the levels of resentment in the social and political behavior of each country, and that this circumstance is strongly influenced by the processes of liberal modernization and the populist phenomenon in each country.

It is not difficult to perceive that, despite the profound (and traditionally greater) social inequalities that exist in Brazil, the history of Argentina is marked by a much higher quantum of resentment. This paradox can be explained in terms of a Brazilian dynamic of slow and continued liberal modernization, while in Argentina the same dynamic developed much more rapidly and was then catastrophically interrupted. Strictly speaking, in the Brazilian case the process of modernization was not only much more moderated, but there has also not been, to this day, an important populist reaction to liberal modernization.

After the economic failure of the Perón regime in the '50s and its subsequent violent interruption in 1955 by a civilian-military coup, resentment would increasingly take hold of Argentine society, appealing to mythic memory and destabilizing the trajectory of the country and its politics. The Argentine drama is derived from the fact that the greater the resentment, the greater the necessity to resort to the movement in order to overcome impasses. From the outside, it is difficult to understand how the Argentine people have been unable to perceive that the Peronist movement renovates (and legitimates) itself by (cyclically) saving the country from the very same problems the movement itself had caused (also cyclically). Within the solution of each cycle is found the problem of the next, to the extent that, although of different character, the solutions always derive from the same type of activity: the strengthening of the movement and never of the institutions of the State. Without reference to this perverse dialectic of failure and success, resentment and euphoria, one cannot understand how Peronism could change its "personality" over and over again, from the right to the left, and from the left to center, identifying first with fascism, then socialism and, finally, liberalism. It is unsurprising that, Peronism having been present as a political phenomenon for more than six decades, the last decades have seen Argentine resentment reach a crescendo, spanning both Peronism and the entire society throughout the most varied circumstances. The hundreds of deaths produced as a result of the extreme violence of the battles fought within peronism itself, and especially between its youthful guerrillas and the unionist sector in the 1960s and '70s⁷, are a demonstration of the resentment that devours Peronism from within (and that the latter cannot attribute to anything but itself). A demonstration of the expansion of resentment, even among actors that should have been immune by definition, can be found in the human rights movements, particularly the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo", who wasted little time in transforming a legitimate demand for justice on behalf of the victims of the dictatorship into a vindication of the armed struggle advocated by the majority of these victims (Leis, 1989).

The effects of resentment on memory can be perfectly verified with reference to the *guerrilla*. In the '70s,

Argentina's various guerrilla groups killed approximately one thousand people, civilians and military (members of the Armed and security forces). There were attacks of a clearly terrorist nature, carried out in the name of a socialist revolution that promised, in the event of its triumph, a much greater number of deaths. An interesting detail here is that the greatest number of guerrilla attacks took place not during the military dictatorship during which the groups emerged, but afterwards. That is, the peak of terrorism was reached in the years 1973 to 1976, during the administration of a government elected by popular vote, in clearly democratic elections. In the short three years of democratic government the guerrilla groups killed more people than during the preceding military dictatorship. It is therefore clear that the Argentine guerrillas, rather than attacking the military regime, were attacking the Argentine State itself. But what is the common perception today? The revolutionary intent of the guerrilla groups has been almost forgotten, their victims and the circumstances of their deaths almost forgotten, and the only ones remembered are the victims of the military dictatorship produced in 1976 (which, on the other hand, only continued actions already begun during the anterior, democratically elected government of Perón and Isabel Perón). Obviously, our intent is not to compare or give equal weight to the behavior of the guerrilla groups and that of the Armed Forces, who marched in a terrifyingly totalitarian direction that made evident the failure of their institutions. However, what public opinion, colonized by the movement, fails to perceive is that without the terrorist action against republican institutions the response of the Argentine Armed Forces would have been unthinkable. Such that, instead of a reconciliatory forgetting of shared political blame (despite the different grades of criminal responsibility in the participants on each side), the "Mothers" offered a mythic memory that would produce new resentments. As early as the 1980s, the War of the Malvinas/Falklands would also receive its mythic memory. Even when those that provoked the war were members of the same dictatorship that had assassinated thousands of Argentines, the people rapidly embarked, together with the military, on a new adventure full of resentment in defense of an desolate and irredentist territory, which would in short order leave a long list of dead and add another milestone to the Argentine odyssey.

Escudé (2005) describes today's Argentina as a "parasite State", comparing its situation with that of those countries customarily denominated as delinquent or failed States. According to the author, the institutions of the country have degraded to such a point that the systematic violation of the law by protest organizations, also known as "*piqueteros*", has become legitimate⁸. Escudé defines Argentina's parasitism by the fact of its being a country that, even while possessing enormous natural resources per capita, submerges the majority of its population in misery and lives at the expense

of the rest of the world. One of Escudé's assertions on the anomalous condition of Argentina resides in the irrefutable fact that if all countries acted the same way the global financial order would not exist. The most recent demonstration of this parasitic condition was the default on bonds held by 450,000 small Italian savers and 350,000 of their Japanese peers during the negotiation of the sovereign debt. Escudé gives us elements to think about Argentine parasitism in a wider perspective. He remembers, for example, that in the last three decades the State, resorted to unconstitutional measures in times of crisis in order to make massive income transfers from the poorest to the richest with the aim of stabilizing the economy and saving businesses. An interesting fact is that such redistribution happened in 1975, 1982, 1989, 2001-2 and 2005; that is, it occurred as much during democratic governments as during military regimes. That which public opinion rejects and attributes exclusively to military dictatorships – the "economic plans" – did not cease to be practiced in democratic periods. Escudé correctly observes that this cyclical emptying of internal savings is directly subordinated to the corrupt and degraded nature of the state. For this reason, this mechanism continues to operate, independently of the regime in power. The asymmetric "pesification" of president Duhalde – which made the exit from convertibility possible – produced a transfer of incomes upwards, with very similar results to the nationalization of private debt carried out by Cavallo while he was a civil servant in the military regime (a measure that was, for its part, continued and completed by the Alfonsín government). Menem did something fairly similar in the early days of his administration, freezing fixed-term deposits in order to ensure the state's solvency (Isabel Perón also produced similar results, although by a different method). But the corruption of the Argentine state is not only economic in nature. Democracy did not, in the '80s and '90s, bring any substantial change to the role of the state in the area of security. The terrorist attacks against the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA, for its initials in Spanish) in 1994, that left more than one hundred dead, counted on the clear complicity of the State. Not only were the members of the Federal Police that guarded the buildings pulled out shortly before the explosions (a clear sign of prior knowledge of the attacks on the part of the authorities), but afterwards there were visible and repeated efforts on the part of Menem's government (continued during the administration of De la Rúa and even, in a way, that of Duhalde) to complicate or destroy evidence, even going so far as to remove public officials that intended to take the investigations seriously⁹. An extremely aberrant event, from the point of view of the rule of law, also took place during the Menem administration and involved the Armed Forces and the president himself. Via decrees signed in 1991 and 1995, Menem's government authorized the sale

of arms to Panama and Venezuela, which were, however, sent to Croatia and Ecuador, countries under wartime embargo. In this manner, for example, the 75 tons of arms and munitions that were carried to Ecuador by the Armed Forces of Argentina landed in that country while it was in conflict with Peru (to add insult to injury, Argentina was one of the countries arbitrating this conflict). As if this were not enough, and to leave even more evident the presence of corrupted factions in the State, in 1995 the arms factory involved in these incidents “accidentally” exploded, thus impeding the effort to account for the contraband stock. This was not the only example of the dangerous links of the Armed Forces with criminal activities during democracy (among others, in early 2005 the leadership of the Armed Forces was clearly implicated in a gigantic cocaine smuggling operation to Europe, via the Ezeiza International Airport).

5.2. *The degradation of the actors*

Argentina in the ‘70s had one of the most politically significant guerrilla movements of that era. The literature on terrorism (for example: Laqueur, 1979) places the Argentine terror groups second only to the Palestinians and the Irish. The Argentine revolutionaries would like it if that circumstance was explained by the country’s great revolutionary conscience, but that is far from true: the exaggerated growth of terrorism in the ‘70s had more to do with resentment than conscience. The same happened in the ‘90s with the *piquetero* protest phenomenon. Taking into account the social inequalities of other Latin American countries, if the emerging social phenomena in Argentina were proportionate to the size and characteristics of its social problems (just as orthodox Marxists would desire), the country should have had smaller guerrilla groups, and today ought to have fewer groups of social protest. Although the protest groups are infiltrated by revolutionary militants, unionists and delinquents, as a whole they are none of those things. They are simply a mass of unemployed people who receive State assistance almost for life, and who manipulate and are manipulated by local and national political leadership. Escudé (2005) refers to the phenomenon as proletariat parasitism. Cheresky (2005) points out that none of the leaders who have emerged directly from the *piqueteros* had any real electoral resonance. They can, through their actions, have a considerable impact in the public space, in the same way as other protest movements, but their internal cohesion is not consistent with the rules of democracy.

The *piquetero* phenomenon of the ‘90s had a legitimate origin, as did the unionism of the ‘50s and the Peronist youth of the ‘70s. The important fact here is that all of these movements rapidly degraded, losing their original sense. In every case they were born as a vindication of recognition and citizenship before rapidly transforming into demands of movement. The unionists were formed out of the demands

for organization on the part of the working class, developed in a context of manipulation on Perón part, and later become grand manipulators of the State’s resources. In the same way, the activists of the Peronist youth were a reaction to the proscription of Peronism’s political rights, were also manipulated by Perón and later began use the resources of the State (many elected officials of the Cámpora government were allies and subordinates of the Peronist Youth and Montoneros) to strengthen their revolutionary campaign against the institutions of that same state. The *piqueteros*, too, were born out of legitimate social protest against unemployment and hyperinflation, later manipulated by peronist leaders and, finally, became manipulators of the state with great powers of political negotiation.

According to Escudé, in 2004 approximately 200,000 welfare plans were administered by the *piquetero* associations themselves. As the State administers somewhat less than 2,000,000 individual plans, almost 10% of these are paid to protestors. Administering these plans, the organizations ensure the commitment to protest of those who receive them: that is, their commitment to “work” as a protestor. Argentina is a country that “employs” people (and 200,000 is no small number) to become professional protestors and disrupt its own institutions. It is a country of records: in the ‘50s it was one of the countries with the greatest number of unionized workers per capita; in the ‘70s it was one of the countries with the greatest number of guerrilla fighters per capita; and now it is one of the countries with the greatest number of professional protestors per capita. In spite of the notable differences between the movements that have emerged from the shadow of Peronism in its various cycles, they share something in common: all emerged with a certain legitimacy of origin but ended up using the resources of the state against the state itself. Thus, they demoralize and exhaust the energies of the nation, distract attention from the real problems and impede the accumulation of political forces around a truly democratic, modernizing project. The balance they leave, after finishing their life cycles, is nothing more than a greater quantum of resentment for society at large.

5.3. *From pragmatism to the “malvanization” of foreign policy*

Kirchner declared in April 2005 that “in the War of the Malvinas we find the values that must be recovered, in order to advance with our head high”. In Argentina the matter of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands is much more than a symbol: it is an indication of the country’s anti-establishment approach to foreign policy; indeed, the democratic governments that came after the military dictatorship that declared the war never managed to “de-malvanize” the country. Palermo (2007) recovers the historic importance of the Malvinas phenomenon from as early as the ‘40s, from the rise of

Peronism onwards and observes that Argentine politics is being strongly “malvanized” during the Kirchner government. During the Menem administration the aspiration to regain the islands was always in the forefront of the public agenda, despite that government’s realism on the international stage. But the Kirchner government finds itself in direct confrontation with the international consensus when, for example, it does not allow Lan Chile to operate flights to the islands, obliging the islanders to fly via Argentine territory; or when it refuses to negotiate a cooperative agreement on moderated exploitation of fishing resources only to authorize third-party fishing close to the islands, which is detrimental to the interests of the islanders (Palermo, 2007). In sum, the Kirchner government continues to act, if not against international law, at least contradictory to common sense, which would suggest the best “weapon” to be the development of generous policies of rapprochement with the islanders. Nevertheless, Kirchner is not acting extemporaneously: the Argentine people support this type of policy in relation with the Malvinas. Here, resentment also speaks more loudly than sense.

Be it a result of opportunism or conviction, the foreign policy of the Menem government was based on greater pragmatism and realism. Examples of this are the country’s withdrawal from the Non-Aligned Movement; re-establishment of diplomatic relations with England; ratification of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America; joining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; deactivating the Condor Project of missile fabrication; the country’s recognition by NATO as a strategic ally; etc. In a way, what is happening under the Kirchner government is a return to “normality”. Perón guided Argentine foreign policy in an anti-American direction characterized by a lack of respect for international agreements. Even though the Kirchner government showed a certain dose of pragmatism when negotiating the default, the general trend in foreign policy does not seem to express a balanced and realistic understanding of the country’s foreign policy under current circumstances. Argentine policy with regards to the Free Trade Area of the Americas seems to have been subordinated to Mercosur, which suggest difficulties in assuming a proactive pragmatism (and not only defensive, as was the case of the default). The dangerously warm relationship with Venezuela under Chávez is explained, partly, by the same motives. The tough treatment given by Kirchner to the private companies that took on the previously state-owned utilities, obliging them to practically freezing rates, increases suspicions of a possible swing in favor of nationalization that, obviously, generates fear and lack of confidence in the future of the country among foreign investors¹⁰. This turn to nationalization, which would entail serious negative consequences in terms of foreign policy, is nevertheless more determined by internal than external

conditions. The capture of foreign policy by the needs of domestic policy has been an inexhaustible source of frustrations for Argentina from the foundational moment of the peronist cycle when Perón, in 1946, called on the masses to choose between Braden (then US Ambassador to Argentina) and himself. As Escudé (2005) points out, when the mob can unseat a president (as happened to De la Rúa), the state is captive to domestic policy. In such a situation, the resentment of the masses becomes a determining factor of foreign policy, impeding its rational projection irrespective of short-term needs.

5.4 From Menem to Kirchner

They may be historically at odds and from different generations, but Menem and Kirchner have more in common than they would, perhaps, desire. Naturally, they are both Peronists (despite their distinct ideological and generational backgrounds) and both have personalist styles of political management. This comparison will be revisited towards the end, but let it be said for now that both began their first terms in situations of economic and social chaos: Menem during seemingly unstoppable hyperinflation and the looting of supermarkets; Kirchner in the middle of a default, the complaints of those whose savings had been partially confiscated under pesification, and the disruption of public order by the *piquetero* protestors. They are similar in that both managed, in short order, to turn the tables and bring optimism to Argentine society once again. Once he had negotiated the public debt and returned economic growth to the country, the people and public opinion in general enthusiastically supported Kirchner (which was made clear in little time, in the elections for Deputies and Senators of October 23, 2005).

But is everything that glitters gold? The law of convertibility also seemed a grand idea in its time: so good, that when convertibility stopped working, the Argentine people discovered there was no Plan B.

Scibona (2005) comments that Kirchner is not managing to make the reforms that the country needs. Rather than liberating market forces, Kirchner seems to want to politicize the economy. A small but very illustrative example was the boycott of certain Shell petrol stations by protestors allied with the government, pressuring the company to change its pricing policies. Another example, perhaps more symptomatic, can be found in the energy sector, which MAY present a crisis for lack of investment resulting from state-imposed price controls. More recently, in 2006, Kirchner tried to contain increases in the price of meat (derived from increasing demand and scarce supply) by placing strong pressure on producers. Argentina seems to treat international economic agents with the same arrogance and cynicism it does the holders of public debt. The process of debt negotiation was not carried out honorably and will not

advantage Argentina in the long term. Terragno (2005) understands the negotiation with the IMF as a simulation, because the Argentine people ended up believing that for the first time the country had faced up to the IMF and, in a demonstration of sovereignty, reduced the debt held by the Fund. In reality, the Argentine debt held by the Fund was 20% of the total debt, and its payments were made religiously. What doesn't register with public opinion is that the real restructuring carried out by the government corresponded to the 48% held by the Argentines themselves. That is, when Kirchner, to the joy of the majority of Argentines, "terrified" the Fund and the international creditors in the tribunal, telling them they would be paid less because they did not deserve to receive more, in reality the Fund continued to receive and the Argentines themselves were the damaged party.

Argentine history over the last decades has taught not only public men to be above the law, but citizens to mistrust justice. In a public opinion poll carried out using an extensive sample of citizens and practicing lawyers, 83% of the population was shown to believe that justice is not independent of political power, while 88% of lawyers believe the same (that is, lawyers have even less faith in justice than the common citizen)¹¹. In Argentina, not only is the law not obeyed but, at times, laws are created to deceive those who *do* believe in them. This was the purpose of the "Intangibility of Deposits" law, approved in 2001 to convince savers (who would later have their savings confiscated) that they need not worry or remove their deposits in US dollars from the banks, because these deposits would be guaranteed by law. This judicial insecurity was not reversed under the Kirchner government. The examples from this administration go beyond the economic realm (where at least a government may have the excuse of unforeseeable circumstances) and invade realms of almost symbolic value, guided by the simple desire to subject the law to one's own will. Speaking for the first time before the Assembly of the United Nations, Kirchner linked the Malvinas islands with the concept of human rights, affirming that: "We are children of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo... We are fervent supporters of a peaceful solution to international disputes"¹². Palermo (n.d.) correctly reminds us that the concept of human rights belongs to the ethics of conviction, where principles cannot be negotiated. When a concept from this sphere is placed on equal footing with one that belongs to the ethics of responsibility (where the consequences of acts are what matters), it is the state of law that loses out. The predominance of a movementist logic was made clear when Kirchner asked Congress to annul the laws of Due Obedience and Full Stop, sanctioned by Alfonsín to prevent further prosecution of members of the Armed Forces. For Kirchner, repealing the laws was not enough: he had to annul them, creating "judicial violence" in which one law was

retroactively valid over others that had been dictated by a parliament with equal constitutional sovereignty. As in the case of Menem when he imposed reelection in 1994, Kirchner identifies his own will with the public spirit. Nobody pressured him to carry out this judicial violence, as had been the case for Alfonsín, whose laws were passed in a climate of military uprisings. Even when conciliation between law and will could have been achieved, by asking Congress to simply repeal the laws of Due Obedience and Full Stop, Kirchner preferred to announce to everyone that what he wants, he gets. Kirchner's speech in the inauguration of the Museum of Memory, in the former detention and concentration camp of the Mechanical School of the Armada (EMSA, for its initials in Spanish) also made evident the movementist character of his will, affirming that his government was the first to tackle matters of human rights in Argentina and thus denying the decisive work carried out by the Alfonsín government in that area. This style of government obviously fails to contribute to the strengthening of institutions, but Argentine politics over the last few decades has created a citizenry addicted to "will" and "desire".

Both Quiroga (2005) and Palermo (n.d.) draw attention to the decisionism (just as it was defined by Carl Schmitt, 1992) that is shown in Kirchner's political behavior. The title of Quiroga's book speaks for itself: *Argentina in Permanent Emergence*. Although the author's analysis is not centered on the concept of movement (as it is here), but rather on decisionism, the concepts are complementary and deeply convergent from the point of view of their damaging consequences for market democracy. The tradition inherited from Perón establishes that, even in democracy, the president himself is the principal source of power. This is the essence of the movement, as has been seen above. In this context, the Kirchner government invades and reduces the field of action of the parliament and the judiciary, driven by the necessity of constructing his base of power. In other words, the decisionism and personalism adopted by Kirchner are part of the system.

6. Argentina in 2007

"Out with them all!" was the cry of protest of hundreds of thousands of citizens against the Argentine political class in December 2001, in response to the seizure arising from the bankruptcy of the State. However, as pointed out by Cheresky (2004 and 2005), the public continues to wait their turn. Meanwhile, the old politicians remain. The elections of 2005 and 2007 showed that the vast majority of those who were elected have been exercising power, directly or indirectly, for a long time. What changed was the magnetic current for defining in which direction the votes go.

As with Menem, who did not take long to magnetize the electorate in his favor, Kirchner (who called the 2005 election

a “plebiscite” of his administration) did the same, advancing from 22% in 2003 to double in 2005. The last election of 2007 fully confirms the movementist nature of politics in Argentina. Kirchner smoothly passed the presidential baton to his wife, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. The symbol of his political strength is the party Frente para la Victoria (Front for Victory), where besides Peronists, there had also been members of other parties. Conversely, there were also Peronists in other political groupings. If the strength of the movement lies in the weakness of parties, then never before has the movement been stronger than it is now. The two leading candidates in 2007 led movements: first, Cristina Kirchner of the Frente para la Victoria, with 44% of the vote and second, the Elisa Carrió’s Coalición Cívica, with 22%. To find “pure” votes, belonging to one of Argentina’s two historically important political parties, the Peronist Party and the Radical Civil Movement (UCR, for its initials in Spanish), one has to search with a magnifying glass (as such, the Peronist Party had no candidate for President in the last election, by example). This fact is very important when you consider that until 1999 these two parties totaled 80% of the vote, leaving the rest of the parties to obtain practically the same number of votes the former now receive. This means that, once again, the Peronist movement was reinvented.

The results of the electoral victories of 2005 and 2007 were increased presidential centralism: intensification of price controls to curb inflation; greater control over the judiciary and legislative branches and the provincial governments; discretionary control of the budget; and increasing interference with government advertising and some threats to journalists. An extreme example of President Kirchner’s intentions came with the nationalization of the election campaign in Misiones (plebiscite on the possibility of an indefinite reelection of the governor), in October 2006. The national government used ample financial resources (in amounts proportionally unparalleled in electoral history since 1955) as well as human resources to support the passing of the reelection clause. Already having adopted this clause in his province of Santa Cruz at the end of the ‘80s (which allowed him to be elected four consecutive times), Kirchner intended to create an precedent in Misiones that would later support a change in the reelection clause in the national Constitution. Despite the resources used and the low level of income and education of the population, Kirchner was defeated by a broad political alliance which included the Catholic Church. This limited Kirchner’s personal aspirations, leading him to cancel similar plans in other provinces.

Another movementist example is the emergence and development of the conflict with Uruguay. Although this country is linked to Argentina by deep historical and diplomatic ties, Kirchner inflated local radical movements of an environmentalist nature against the construction of two

paper mills on the Uruguay River border, due to alleged water pollution potential. There being no evidence of significant contamination (as confirmed by the World Bank), together with the fact that future production of the businesses represented about 5% of the Uruguayan economy, the confrontational and extreme nationalist line used against Uruguay is incomprehensible, if not for Kirchner’s use of movementism as an instrument in all conflicts.

The anomaly of Argentina’s continued economic growth between 2003 and 2006 of 8% per year (with an IMF forecast of growth of 6% for 2007 and 5% in 2008), is something that draws much attention. In 2006, Argentina had a population of 39 million people, a GDP of 220 billion dollars (540 billion in PPP) and GDP per capita of \$ 5,500 (16,000 at PPP). The growth that occurred between 2003 and 2005 can be considered a recovery from the dramatic drop in GDP of 1999-2002. However, when we consider the growth of 2006 and the forecasts for subsequent years an explanation is more difficult: this is a protectionist economy, with high levels of political interference in the market and high inflation by twentieth century standards (9% over the period 2004-2006). In addition, in February 2007 it became clear that the government was manipulating official inflation indices. Two factors explain the anomaly of high Argentine growth: the importance of Argentine capital abroad (equivalent to GDP), which enters and leaves as short-term opportunities arise, and the high price of commodities exported by the country. These two factors have, for now, managed to offset the blocking of long-term private investment (infrastructure, energy, etc.).

In terms of foreign policy, in the beginning of 2007 a closer relationship with Chávez developed as a result of a classical state dynamic to counterbalance the centrality of Brazil in the region. There was also an increase in energy interdependence with Bolivia, despite the instability of that country as a supplier of natural gas. Nationalism has been the dominant paradigm of the Argentine elites since 2002, in contrast to the liberal dominance of the 1990’s. In fact, nationalism has increased since late 2006, showing a greater distancing from the United States. However, there is a strikingly unique aspect of Argentina’s foreign policy linked to human rights: a strong alignment with U.S. policy in the fight against Islamic terrorism, manifested in the Argentine justice department’s incentive to judge Iran’s government leadership at the time of the attacks against the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA.

Argentina lives Kirchnerism in much the same manner as it lived Menemism in the past. From now on, the movement will have to start managing the growth and conflicts of its internal factions (as is characteristic of the peak times of the Peronist movement). Kirchner’s plans to remain in government for an extended period of time are well known. The election of Cristina Kirchner may express the common

political commitments of the Kirchner couple, but objectively reflects their intention of continuing to govern. As if it was not enough for Cristina Kirchner to tell the country in her first message as president that “one’s husband’s convictions are also one’s own,” she practically maintained the same group of administration officials as her husband, barely making even cosmetic changes to the cabinet. Furthermore, the same anti-republican spirit reflected by a president that passes the mandate to his wife (albeit holding elections) is also expressed in Nestor Kirchner’s decision to “get away” from the presidency in order to “permanently” re-organize the Peronist movement.

In this sense, the political capacity shown by ex-President Kirchner in quickly placing former opponent Lavagna in his network (as his right hand man in the restructuring of the Peronist Party), may demonstrate the Kirchner dominance of the Argentine political system more than in any other historical moment. Not even Peron, the undisputed founder of the movement, could ever enjoy such hegemony. If Kirchner were to be able to regularize the Peronist Party under his control, Kirchnerism would almost turn into a movement without opposition. The existence of the “enemy” constitutes the movement; if, by excess of “bureaucratic-administrative” efficiency, Kirchnerism came to absorb and dominate the political structures of Peronism and radicalism (from which it has already co-opted a fairly significant number of mayors and governors), doing the same with the union structures, the following would create results uncommon in

the country’s history. In the absence of military or leftist insurgent groups capable of even minimal disturbance, Kirchnerism could dominate the entire national political system. In fact, the passion of the Kirchnerists cannot be compared to that of previous movements. Kirchner’s domination is far more bureaucratic than it is charismatic, if compared to Perón and even Menem. This would explain why, although marked by the experience of the ‘70s, Kirchnerism does not yet have a distinct identity, freely mixing various strands of the Peronist legacy. But in the context of the Peronist movement, this is not necessarily a problem. The paradigm of the Peronist discourse remains the same as when it was described twenty years ago by Sigal and Verón (1986): something in which everything fits. Throughout his life, Perón asserted contradictory “certainties” without definitively taking sides. His best disciples remain true to this teaching.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain: after liberal Menemism, Peronism no longer has a line of flight forward because it has already invented everything possible within Argentina’s existing ideological spectrum. Thus, Peronism no longer has the conditions to differ from its own past, which also means that the distance between Peronists and anti-Peronists has been shortened to a minimum (in a way, all are Peronists, even the anti-Peronists). For now, Argentina’s future seems to be the “eternal return” of the movement and the continued decline of the country in cycles of euphoria and depression.

Notes

¹ To strengthen the argument for the importance of cycles in the case of Argentina, it is suggestive to compare with the Brazilian case, where there are virtually no major breaks in their historical evolution. For a thorough comparison of the history of Brazil and Argentina, see: Fausto & Devoto, 2004.

² According to Sebrelí (2000) the history of movementism in Argentina began during Yrigoyen’s presidency; Yrigoyen won the presidential election of 1916.

³ Hannah Arendt reminds us in *The Human Condition* that forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance (Arendt, 1959).

⁴ Schematically, recognition is understood here as individual or group with their own identity and performance in various spheres of life, accompanied by the adoption of the social group in which one lives. For a more conceptual definition, see: Honneth, 1996.

⁵ In this sense, it is good to remember that conservative strategies (which should never be confused with the right) are, on the contrary, presented as moderating forces of the effects of resentment on society, either through greater recognition of inequalities and differences, or through a more robust defense of legal continuity of the institutions.

⁶ Here, once more, are arguments already made in: Leis, 2002.

⁷ Massacres that are, in a way, comparable to the ones inflicted by the Nazis and the Communists in their own ranks in the early years of their respective arrivals to power.

⁸ The *piqueteros* is a protest movement whose history goes back to the looting of supermarkets and popular restaurants in 1989, the last year of the Alfonsín government, expanded in the second half of the ‘90s during the Menem administration, and reached its peak during the crisis in the De la Rúa government. In a way, these protesters are the alter ego of the Menem Peronism (in the same way that the Peronist Youth and the Montoneros were, for the previous generation, the alter ego of Peron Peronism in the ‘70s).

⁹ Escudé (2005) gives nine circumstantial pieces of evidence that the Argentine government acted as a complice in these attacks. The judge in the AMIA case who deliberately destroyed vital evidence of the attack was impeached in 2005 during the Kirchner government.

¹⁰ See remarks to this effect by John Murphy, vice-president of Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (*Diario La Nación*, 11/10/2005).

¹¹ Study requested by the *Federación Argentina de Colegios de Abogados* and conducted by the prestigious research analyst Rosendo Fraga (see data in: *La Nación* 21/10/2005).

¹² See the reference to this speech in Palermo, (n.d.).

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About CADAL

Institutional Profile

The Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL), is a non-profit, non-partisan, private foundation that works in the defense and promotion of democratic values; the monitoring and analysis of political, economic and institutional performance; and the formulation of public policies that contribute to good governance and the wellbeing of people.

Among its objectives and programs, CADAL underlines the importance of rule of law, merit and active transparency in the public sector, the contribution of private initiative in the achievement of economic growth and the subsidiary role of the government to guaranty social cohesion and inclusion, and the commitment with the international defense of human rights.

CADAL's activities are implemented by its team from its headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and from a satellite branch in Montevideo, Uruguay. In addition, CADAL relies on a group of academics, independent analysts, businessmen, and collaborators in various Latin American countries.

CADAL is a member of the Network of Democracy Research Institutes (NDRI), is an Associated Institute of Proyecto Plataforma Democrática, and is registered as a Civil Society Organization at the Organization of American States (OAS).

Mission

To promote the strengthening of democracy, economic growth with social inclusion and international solidarity in the defense of fundamental liberties.

Activities

To accomplish its mission, CADAL combines the following activities: Seminars, conferences, and forums to share ideas on a national and international level; analysis, research, advocacy and papers of public policies; training young university students and recent graduates; and publications for the promotion of ideas. This activities are implemented through three Programs and its respective projects.

History

The creation of CADAL in February 2003 took into account the political, institutional and economical crises in Latin America, their regional impact, and the future challenges regarding civic, political and economic liberties. In this way, CADAL emerged to fill a void in Latin America, simultaneously promoting the different facets of development through political, economic and institutional initiatives.

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