Origins and Applications of Political Policing in Argentina

by
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The military coup that ousted President Hipólito Yrigoyen from power in September 1930 had profound implications for Argentine society and politics. After 1930, military power was consolidated and used in a more overt and violent fashion and political initiatives came to count on the armed forces to provide with force what was lacking in majoritarian support. Repressive politics were institutionalized, enshrining the armed forces as the final arbiter of the nation's political destiny (Halperín Donghi, 1961; White, 1991).

The period of reaction that followed the 1930 military coup has been dubbed "the infamous decade" (Rock, 1993: 173). Oligarchic dominance in the political system went hand in hand with what many observers and social scientists characterized as a conspicuous dependence on Britain epitomized by the Roca-Runciman pact of 1933 (Rock, 1987: 214-223; Pla, 1969: 105; Galasso, 1969).[1] Curiously, analysts who reject the indictment of this decade and view Argentina as successful in overcoming the crisis of the 1930s draw more attention to another aspect of this period: the systematization of a surveillance machine. Fraga (1991) and Aguinaga and Azaretto (1991) convey respect rather than criticism when they point to the extensive information service established after 1932 by President Agustín P. Justo to monitor the military, political parties, and society.[2] The military coup that deposed the middle-class Unión Cívica Radical party government of Hipólito Yrigoyen and established General José Félix Uriburu as president was profoundly repressive, and censorship, tortures, and purges within the army and the police became rampant. But after a major setback in the April 1931 elections, in which the Radicals succeeded despite the revolutionaries' aim of eradicating Yrigoyenism from politics, Uriburu had to withdraw from power. In

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contrast to Uriburu's dream of order and discipline in social and political life, the government of Agustín P. Justo that followed seemed utterly moderate and "civilian." Under his tenure as minister of war during the Alvear presidency (1922-1928), a major professionalization and modernization of the army had taken place. His being an engineer no doubt enhanced his civilian image, together with initial measures that included the release of political prisoners and the restoration of freedom of the press. His slogan was "national conciliation" (Wesson, 1986: 199; Goldwert, 1972: 43; Rock, 1987: 218).

Still, 1930 marked a qualitative change in the use of the coercive power of the state against opposition movements and one that had long-lasting effects. Detailed examination of what happened after the 1930 military coup and a reevaluation of the Justo administration reveals the establishment of the means of repression, extraction, coordination, and information-gathering and their diversion to extralegal action against putative enemies of the regime.

The new perspective on this decade that I want to provide shifts the emphasis from its economic and exclusionary aspects to the creation of a surveillance apparatus that had not previously existed and that survives to this day. The cynical reader can reject the detailed narrative that follows by asserting that an Argentine does not need much common sense to be aware of conspicuous state repression and surveillance in the country after 1930. In my view, this analysis allows us to go beyond the casual references to repression found in most historiographic accounts to demonstrate the construction of a police and military apparatus that has remained conspicuously immune to any form of accountability and democratic control. This process lacked binding consultation between the agents of government and the people, inhibiting a crucial aspect of democracy: the protection of citizens from an arbitrary state (Tilly, 1997; Norden, 1996a; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, 1992; McSherry, 1997b).

State coercion had of course been used before 1930 against workers, socialists, anarchists, and the political opposition (Rock, 1975; Waisman, 1989; Walter, 1977). When the police were unable to contain strikes, the government called in the army and the navy. Furthermore, it was the democratically elected Radical government that responded to labor unrest with large-scale repression. Bloody repression was epitomized by the events of the Tragic Week of 1919, in which the army and the police crushed striking workers, and by the army's massacre of rural workers in 1921-1922. Likewise, the management of elections by the Interior Ministry granted the police full control over fraud and coercion.

After 1930, however, something different was created. The government of Uriburu acted against those it viewed as a threat "with a harshness that surpassed anything Argentina had yet seen" (Horowitz, 1990: 13). Deportations of foreigners and torture of anarchists and communists became widespread, and at least five people were executed (Horowitz, 1990; Bayer, 1989). Members of the Radical party were purged from the administration. Their leaders throughout the nation were beaten in police stations. Torture was also used against Radical army officers who supported the ousted government.[3] In addition, the assault against society had a hidden and proactive underpinning. A broad network of espionage and surveillance was established, and police repression was extended to new targets. Those labeled as posing a threat to the security of the state now included communists and Radicals who had been expelled from power.

In spite of his liberal appearance, Justo upheld and systematized torture and surveillance and made them more efficient. He did not consider these tactics a perverted deviation inherited from the former integralist, nationalist regime. His "benign demeanor obscured great ambition, and potent political skills in support of it, not excluding a talent for devious manipulation" (Crassweller, 1987: 72). Borrowing an expression used by Waisman (1989: 70) to describe this period, it might be said that the Justo faction that followed the "nationalist" Uriburu faction and inaugurated proscriptive democracy can be termed "liberal" only in the Orwellian political discourse of Argentina.

SOLDIERS, COPS, AND VIGILANTES

Studies of the police in Argentina fall into two categories. In one view, the police are nothing but attenuated extensions of the military, hence unworthy of attention. Indeed, academic research in Latin America in general has neglected the study of the police as an independent institution because the ubiquity of the military has obscured their true character as distinct political and social actors. Military interventionism since 1930 has been seen as responsible for Argentina's troubled path to democratization (Rouquié, 1986; Fontana, 1984; Norden, 1996a). It has been suggested that controlling the military and its autonomous power would put an end to military rule and arbitrary state violence (Stepan, 1988; Rouquié, 1986) and that the development of political engineering skills would help civilians to do this (Pion-Berlin, 1991).

The election of President Carlos Menem in 1989 following the previous democratically elected government of the opposition party reflected the consolidation of democracy in Argentina. However, recent descriptions of Argentine "thin democracy" (Munck, 1997) raise questions as to whether the military, security, and intelligence forces have abandoned their roles as guardians of democracies. Indeed, as McSherry (1997b) has shown, even though Menem has reduced the military budget and the size of the armed forces, an internal security mission is still the mainstay of the military-security forces (but cf. Norden, 1996b). Besides, analysts preoccupied with the civilianization of the armed forces assume that the military is the only agent of sanctioned violence, neglecting the role of the police. I believe that the police have a political role and that the degree to which they adopt military organization and aims can tell us a great deal about national politics.

A second view considers the police separate actors but simply as specialists in the control of crime and public space (Johnson, 1990; Socolow, 1990; Slatta and Robinson, 1990). This view is similarly simplistic. The police have repeatedly played major parts in repressive policies and in struggles for power. When they are venal or brutal they contribute to the erosion of the government's political legitimacy. The involvement of the federal police and the Buenos Aires police forces in the terrorist attack on the Jewish headquarters in 1994, the killing of the journalist José Cabezas in 1997, and other criminal acts lead us into a dizzying labyrinth of victims and perpetrators involving policemen and military men, right-wing extremists and racketeers, thieves and thugs, bandits and rogues (McSherry, 1997a; Fleischman, 1999).

Through recent journalistic accounts we are introduced into the dark world of the Patas Negras (as the Buenos Aires provincial police are called), former members of the Triple A (Alianza Argentina Anticomunista), which functioned as an unofficial extension of the repressive forces of the state, former members of the "task forces" that perpetrated torture and disappearances during the "dirty war," and members of the provincial and federal police forces, the State Intelligence Secretariat, and the intelligence networks of the army and the navy, among others. Drug traffickers, provincial and federal police, private security agencies, and military personnel coexist in organizations such as Arcángeles, and Prolatin[4] without civilian control.

The mere attempt to answer questions such as "On whose payroll are they? the army's? the police's?" opens up a Pandora's box in which no one in the police force or the government is above suspicion. Then-Radical Senator (now President) Fernando de la Rua stated bluntly, "Nobody knows whom they [the intelligence services] are working for" (quoted by McSherry,

1997a: 162). Unfortunately, in Argentina it seems easy to cross the boundaries between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" violence, as it is not always possible to distinguish between soldiers, police, and common criminals (Chevigny, 1995; Kalmanowiecki, 1991).

An analysis of the role of military and police organizations that is not restricted to a civil-military focus could prove useful. In Argentina it is difficult to distinguish the military from the police, as the former participates in domestic policing through the patrol of public spaces, the control of collective action, and the apprehension of real or imaginary law-breakers. Should some organizations be characterized as half-police, half-army? It is difficult to distinguish the police from the armed forces when one defines the role of each as the protection of the state against internal or external threats (Bayley, 1975: 329). This functional distinction becomes blurred when their tasks overlap, as in the military's counterinsurgency role (Kalmanowiecki, 1998; Mazower, 1997). Suggesting instead a continuum from military to police, I would look beyond the military institution as a referent for state violence and call for an examination of the police that acknowledges the shifting, porous, and overlapping borders within the coercive apparatus of the state. It has been said that "after 1930 civilians could not control the armed forces" (Col. Gustavo Cáceres, quoted by McSherry, 1997b: 27). One should wonder whether civilians could control the police.

Rather than assuming the existence of a continuous thread of authoritarianism, I will explore the brutal underside of Argentine history in one often ignored locus of violence: the police and the building of a repressive repertoire after 1930.[5] The transition to a militarized state resulted in a repressive police apparatus unlike anything that had previously existed. A secret state within the state moved forward to occupy a space about which questions were not to be asked. As before, it moved in obscurity in search of enemies of the incumbent regime, but now it became a reserved domain of policy (see O' Donnell, 1992) in the interstices of state and society, completely closed to external control and accountability. Arrogance and contempt became ingrained in an expanded secret apparatus of the state that systematized its repressive repertoire to include surveillance, instigation, espionage, blackmail, and vetting. In their struggle against "subversion," represented by communism and Radicalism, the military and the police became intermingled, each perfecting its grasp of domestic political policing. Decades before the national security doctrines were consolidated in the 1960s, the Argentine army was involved in civilian politics and had created intelligence and security structures to monitor the internal realm (see McSherry, 1997a). How did Justo succeed in creating an apparatus that would survive later regime changes?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARGENTINE POLICE: AN OVERVIEW

After the federalization of the city of Buenos Aires in 1880, its police became the police of the federal capital, directly subordinate to the president through the minister of the interior, and the range of policing activities was narrowed. The capital police gave up areas of influence, not without resistance (see Gayol, 1996; Kalmanowiecki, 2000). By then Argentina had become a dynamic capitalist society organized around a dependent export sector. In spite of several attempts to provide the police with an organic code of rules and obligations, they continued to be ruled by ad hoc presidential decrees, laws, edicts, and ordinances (Mejías, 1913: 32-38; Carracedo Nuñez, 1928). According to the Reglamento General, issued in 1885, the capital police served a dual purpose: the protection of law and order and the security of the state (Rodríguez, 1981: 63).[6]

It was Col. Ramón L. Falcón, appointed chief of police in 1906, who laid the foundations (Fentanes, 1955: 166). He divided the main activities of the police following a principle of hierarchical functional differentiation, reorganizing the preexisting sections and assigning them to divisions. The main component was the Security Division, the uniformed police on street patrol distributed among the different police precincts of the capital, in charge of public order broadly defined. The Investigative Division consisted chiefly of the political police and the criminal police (also called the judicial police or detective force), operating in plain clothes. The police also included the Administrative Division and the Judicial Division (Rodríguez, 1975; López, 1911: 238-241).

Political conflict—including the murder of Falcón and his aide by an anarchist in 1909—and the celebrations of the centenary stimulated the reinforcement of the police and a major increase in police personnel. Thus, police personnel were increased from 4,170 in 1907 to 5,372 in 1911.[7] (No further increase in manpower occurred in the following decades.) By 1914 the Buenos Aires police department had already developed modern crime-fighting functions, including mobile patrols, crime labs, a detective branch, and new recruiting and training practices (Johnson, 1990: 125; Rodríguez, 1975). Likewise, expenditures on policing and the share of allocations assigned to the police by the minister of the interior did not change significantly until 1941 (*Resumen general de la cuenta de inversión en curso legal*, Memoria de Hacienda, 1900-1941). Most of the money that was assigned to policing and security was spent to cover the salaries of personnel. This was a top priority compared with other expenses such as technological improvements. The bulk of policing expenses went to the Security Division (between

60 and 70 percent). For example, out of the total expenditures of the police in 1928 ($307,711.93), 8 percent went to the Investigative Division and 69 percent to the Security Division. In 1912 the claims of the Investigative Division peaked at 9 percent.

Industrial conflict, the expansion of anarchism, and the middle-class struggle for incorporation into the political arena spurred police expansion. The police system was centered around the state rather than developing more contractually in the Anglo-American tradition (see Emsley and Weinberger, 1991; Bayley, 1977).[8] In the following decades the basic structure of the police forces varied little until the creation of the federal police in 1943-1944. A major police restructuring was undertaken following the 1930 military coup, and although the division into prefectures that followed was of short duration, the procedures initiated, especially by Chief of Police Luis J. García after Agustín Justo was elected president, left a lasting imprint on the organization of the police force and its practices. Through public fund raising coordinated by the police precincts, funds from prestigious citizens were procured to modernize the institution. The acquisition of new weapons, modern vehicles, an up-to-date communications system, and a police broadcasting network meant that Buenos Aires became more heavily policed. But there were other features that led Buenos Aires to be more policed than ever before and that were connected to the assault on the public and private spheres by a state whose capabilities of intervention had been greatly extended.

POLITICAL POLICING DURING THE JUSTO ADMINISTRATION

As I have pointed out, after 1930 political policing became the proper business of the police, and practices that became routine parts of the secret police repertoire, such as monitoring, surveillance, infiltration, shadowing, vetting, and covert operations, strongly affected the capacity for contestation and resistance of various actors. Two important changes occurred under Justo. First, surveillance, control, and repression were further bureaucratized and routinized; reporting to central authorities became customary. Second, anticipatory surveillance increased greatly; the authorities watched groups carefully and were ready to quell any attempt at collective action.

I should locate the beginning of this story in the threat, real or imagined, posed by the Radical party's tactical decision to resort to armed insurrection and abstention from participation in fraudulent elections as it had done before 1916 (Rouquié, 1982: 266). The consequences of the participation of pro-

Radical groups within the army ("Legalists") as key actors in this insurrectionary strategy are usually underemphasized in the literature on the 1930s.

Conspiratorial activity against the government began soon after Yrigoyen was ousted in 1930 and increased after the Radicals' triumph in the election of April 1931 was nullified (Goldwert, 1972: 40-48). The Legalist insurrections of February 1931 (headed by Severo Toranzo), July 1931 (led by Gregorio Pomar), January 1932 (headed by Pomar, Atilio Cattáneo, and Benjamín Abalos), December 1932 (directed by Cattáneo), and December 1933 (conducted by Pomar and Roberto Bosch) were successively crushed. Cattáneo has claimed that Justo acted with duplicity and initially participated in the 1931 conspiracy in his power struggle against Uriburu. According to Orona (1971: 139-162), however, Justo was not involved in the conspiracy, although he benefited from its repercussions (Luna, 1972: 90; Cattáneo, 1959: 84-144). Elections were set for November 8, 1931, and the Radicals were excluded through proscription and the arrest and deportation of their leaders.

The crucial reason for the failure of these rebellions was the efficient network of surveillance and infiltration that was inaugurated to confront the threat of Radical insurrection. Although conspiracy leaders suspected its existence, they did not know that their struggle was doomed from its inception.[9] From as early as April 1931 the Political Order Branch of the police had information about the conspiracies under way. Conspirators were followed and their telephones tapped (police dossiers of Juan Carlos Vasquez, Col. Francisco Bosch, and Roberto Bosch). The secretary of the presidency also sent regular reports with copies and transcriptions of intercepted letters from the conspirators, their secret codes broken (Archivo Justo, Box 98, Document 146).

Fetishism for collecting information for its own sake was under way. The maritime police, the navy, and the army developed their own network for reporting on the activities of the conspirators and collaborated with the local police and the Investigative Division.[10] Military intelligence operations and collaboration with the police continued thereafter until the end of Justo's presidency. Conditions in the provinces and national territories that were seen as contributing to the spread of communism or a return of Radicalism prompted intelligence operations by the armed forces. The scope of internal policing by the army was still, however, a contentious issue, as the following example illustrates.

Before the elections for membership in the Chamber of Deputies and some legislatures in March 1934, President Justo appointed Brig. Gen. Julio Costa of the 3d Division military observer of the elections in the province of Santa Fe.[11] Police agents from the Investigative Division of the capital police

were subordinated to the chief of the 11th Regiment in Rosario, the integral nationalist Col. Emilio Faccione. In a confidential memorandum dated March 1, 1934, Faccione reported local police support of Radicals, presenting an intercepted telephone conversation as evidence (Archivo Justo, Box 46, Document 28). Disturbed by this memorandum, Minister of War Gen. Manuel Rodríguez noted in an urgent telegram to Costa that since the province had not been taken over by the federal government the duty of the officers sent to supervise elections was limited to the indispensable so as not to jeopardize the prestige of the army (Archivo Justo, Box 46, Document 29).[12]

On February 28, 1934, Rodríguez gave further instructions to the Secret Service officers in the provinces of Santa Fe and Tucumán. These officers were to be instruments of information for their respective division commanders. Whereas their mission was to learn everything about developments before and during the elections, "their status as officers of the army endowed them with the authority to pacify the spirits" and they were expected to be the "eyes and ears of their commanders." In sum, their mandate was ambiguous enough to allow for collateral actions (Archivo Justo, Box 46, Documents 29 and 30).

Faccione persisted in enlarging the scope of his mandate. In collaboration with the Investigative Division he reported on the local situation. He personally interrogated a "Radical pimp." On March 13, 1934, at the request of Rodríguez, he wrote a six-page report that emphasized communist activity within the university. In his view, Santa Fe's Governor Luciano Molinas and the local police were responsible for the spread of communism, anarchism, Radicalism, and revolution and it was necessary to take action. Santa Fe was taken over by the national government the following year.[13]

These reports indicate (1) the collaboration of the military and the police in domestic surveillance, (2) the top-down knowledge and control of the military's actions (from Justo to the minister of war to Costa), and (3) the expansion of military monitoring and criminalization of "extremists" (as Faccione labeled anarchists and communists). It might be suggested that Faccione's report was simply an exaggeration associated with the electoral situation, but this was not the case. A similar situation was encountered by the Yrigoyenista Governor Amadeo Sabattini, who had won the elections in the province of Córdoba in 1935 (Luna, 1972: 148-149). During his tenure as governor, and especially in 1937, Sabatini was burdened with deceitful informants and army reports portraying a situation of total anarchy and pushing for federal intervention. In fact, well before Sabattini was elected governor he had been a target of both police and army surveillance.[14]

Finally, Radical politicians were linked to conspiracies and arrested by the hundreds, and the Argentine army was purged of active Legalist officers. Although after the 1935 National Convention the Radical party decided to abandon its abstentionism and participate in elections, surveillance of omnipresent conspiracies persisted. Secret services used covert and deceptive tactics to gather information about their suspects. Facilitative operations were implemented in which the undercover work promoted the conspiracy by playing the willing partner in the plot (Marx, 1988: 65). These secret services appear to have been an outgrowth of the Political Order Branch of the capital police, but it seems that they often exchanged information with the army intelligence services. The resources, geographical coverage, and capabilities of these secret services are striking.[15] Undercover operations carried out by secret services shared an obscure trait of political policing with their European counterparts: political police often helped their adversaries "by giving importance, means, attention and troops to groups that otherwise would have disappeared" (Berlière, 1997: 47).

The infiltration of Jorge Aníbal Genzano epitomizes the effectiveness and range of the intelligence network. A former member of the Security Squadron of the capital police, Genzano became a passionate Yrigoyenista Radical—accused by other Yrigoyenistas of being too exalted—and a friend of Arturo Jauretche, a prominent Radical intellectual. He collaborated in Jauretche's newspaper, *La Víspera*, where he met other members of FORJA, the dissident Radical nationalist youth group that Jauretche headed (the services referred to FORJA as the "Jacobins"). Genzano's revolutionary image was even reinforced by a long imprisonment on Martín García—"planned according to the instruction of this S.S. and . . . aimed at strengthening his revolutionary standing" (Archivo Justo, Boxes 100, 97, Documents 15, 50).

Infiltration by this agent encountered an obstacle: How could Genzano gain the trust of Pomar, the leader of the conspiracy? The secret services already knew that Pomar was very curious about other insurrectionary activities taking place in the navy (Archivo Justo, Box 100, Document 7: 49). Thanks to Jauretche, a meeting was arranged in Montevideo between Pomar and Genzano (Agent S.0.1), who handed him a list of navy men. Genzano described his meeting with Pomar, who promised to use him as a liaison officer between civilians and the military: "[He] looked intensely into my eyes, embraced me, and told me 'Ahora, a cumplir' [Now, do your duty]. So, in compliance with this command, I report to you the following." Genzano also reported on the activities of Radical retired army officers. No wonder Radical insurrections were a complete disaster!

The state's expanded policing capacities were also used against the other main political targets, communists. Whether the communist movement was actually growing within the labor movement was of far less importance than the belief that it was.[16] Social Order was soon entrusted with the repression of communism, but the agency became overwhelmed by this expansion of the scope of its activities. The police structure was therefore refurbished to accomplish new tasks, and a new police section, the Special Branch, was created (Memorias de la Policía Federal, 1931; 1932; Silveyra, 1936).

Secrecy and impunity have been major features of the infamous Special Branch from its inception. The practices inaugurated by it can be traced through subsequent decades. The agents Cusell, Lombilla, and Amoresano were known for the ferocity of the torture they inflicted on their victims and for their expertise in racketeering and instigating actions that would end in police intervention. Some of them continued to ply their "trade" and train new recruits during Perón's presidency in the 1940s and 1950s. They had license to act with complete impunity. The frequent confusion about the origins of the Political Order and the Special Branch (see, e.g., Rouquié, 1982; Rodríguez Molas, 1987: 94-100) is a telling example of the routine police practice of renaming branches without public notice and the extent to which secrecy is characteristic of secret police forces (see Emsley, 1997).

The first steps toward the surveillance of communism were taken in 1931 by Col. Carlos Rodríguez, security subprefect, who created a Secret Office with 16 foreign employees whose sole task was translating and classifying mail in collaboration with the Postal and Custom Bureaus. This office was closed in December 1931 but re-created on the initiative of Chief of Police García in 1932 as the Special Branch, first under Federico Donadio and then, from the beginning of 1933, under Joaquín Cusell. Information previously produced by Social Order was transferred to the new section, which was promptly put to work (Bertollo, 1950: 9).

As Table 1 suggests, the Special Branch evolved at a formidable pace. As soon as it was set up, information about communists was detached from 2,851 dossiers already available at Social Order. Between 1932 and 1935 the numbers of dossiers created almost tripled. The number of articles translated jumped from 636 in 1932 to 1,159 in 1933 and 3,264 in 1934, and reviews of journals and newspapers jumped from 193 in 1932 to 3,356 and 2,298 in 1933 and 1934, respectively. This may reflect both the growth in the branch's capabilities for learning about its newly defined target and the attention paid by the organizers to finding out about communism and becoming able to detect it. New recruits were hired with special attention to skill in foreign languages—French, Italian, and Yiddish (Libro Copiador de Notas, Sección Especial,

TABLE 1
Special Branch Activities from 1932 to 1945

	1932	*1933*	*1934*	*1935*	*1945*
Existing dossiers	2,851	5,200	6,063	6,529	12,271
Dossiers produced	2,851	2,349	863	476	—
Arrested under investigation	1,416	2,282	1,109	458	—
Arrested for misdemeanors	135	108	188	322	—
Proceedings instituted	9	6	5	4	—
Surveillance in public areas	311	574	405	390	1,471
Surveillance in union shops	388	586	710	901	312
Articles translated	636	1,159	3,246	1,370	2,741
Review of journals/newspapers	193	3,356	2,298	2,201	2,926
Raids	50	736	427	64	373
Cooperation with military authorities	12	9	11	—	—

Source: Police memoirs and memoirs of the Investigative Division between 1931 and 1945.

1933-1934: 151, 231, 457). The 1945 figures confirm that the Special Branch was active throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.

Practices that would become routine in the Special Branch included the gathering of ideological information about public employees, students, and army draftees, international collaboration in the repression of communist suspects (Libro Copiador de Notas, Sección Especial, 1933-1934: 295-447), and the monitoring of areas defined as trouble-prone, including the use of torture and illegal raids.

As I have stated, surveillance increased the state's capacity to act at the national level. Through agencies like the Special Branch the capital police would act directly and/or collaborate in the development of local policing in areas that were predisposed to communism because of structural conditions—Cusell became an expert in Marxian analysis. For instance, in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Córdoba, local police forces were subordinated to the Special Branch and collaborated in the expansion of "national archives" resulting from these missions.[17]

The army also participated in this enterprise. In October 1933, in the province of Córdoba, the chief of the Information Section of the military command, Maj. Rodolfo Luque, introduced Cusell to archives containing abundant documentation of communists, classified in terms of militants and organizations.[18] Cusell credited Luque with deep understanding of the "Bolshevik problem and the local situation" (Archivo Justo, Box 54, Document 12: 6). In fact, as I have suggested, in the national territories and in provinces like Córdoba and Santa Fe the army provided a parallel information service to the national authorities.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the myth of a consensual heyday of policing, its origins are to be explained as a response more to pressing political and social challenges than to long-standing problems of daily criminality (Palmer, 1988; Bayley, 1975; 1990). The threat, real or imagined, confronted by successive governments had a major impact on the style of policing adopted. Threats to established states and the fear of communism after the Bolshevik Revolution led to the expansion of political policing in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. In Argentina, political policing came to dominate police and military activities. The need for it was believed to stem from the country's contentious nature, rooted in the foreign origins of its population. Social mobilization in Argentina was triggered before the new political institutions could attain a high level of legitimacy, aggravating the elite perception of civil strife as threatening the social order (Waisman, 1987). The absence of a directly threatening external enemy and the limited character of wars may have coalesced to draw the army into the civilian realm (McSherry, 1997a: 37; Centeno, 1994). It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into other factors that led the armed forces to expand their role, such as the military mentality, authoritarian ideology, and fear of the popular classes (Nunn, 1983; Potash, 1981; McSherry, 1997a). Certainly, its physical presence throughout the country and its involvement in the development of the economy and infrastructure gave it broader national scope than the police.

In any event, the form of policing and police organization varied as a function of the place of the military in Argentina's history of contentious politics. As I have shown, the 1930 coup increased the repressiveness of the regime and spurred military intervention in policing. That is reflected in the recruitment pattern of the chiefs of police and ideological definitions of the enemy. From 1880, when the capital police was created, until September 1955, when Perón was ousted, 30 of 47 chiefs of police had been military men, most of them in active service. (Most civilian chiefs of police had been nominated by Radical presidents.)

A distinction should be made between an institutional capture of the organization by the military and more capillary influences at the level of attitudes and worldviews. In this regard, the organization of the police institution along military lines was not unique to Argentina. According to Skolnick and Fyfe, "the organization of the police along military lines was a historical accident" (1993: 178); had other efficient models been available, police forces might well have been organized differently. Thus, the military provided an organizational model for large organizations, which were designed in the same hierarchical fashion.

At the same time, the police mentality was grounded in the belief in the contentious nature of the Argentine population due to its Creole and immigrant composition. In this view, shared by reformist police officers, it was ingenuous to think that the police could maintain public order without a militarized police (Romay, 1909-1912; Kalmanowiecki, 2000). A "siege mentality" can be traced to the justifications provided by Chief Falcón for crushing anarchists: police civil tasks were associated with a state of internal war against any sign of rebellion or dissension, invariably identified as "foreign" (cf. Ludtke, 1989). "Foreignness" was attributable not only to foreign immigrants but to anyone who introduced the germ of dissent and dissolution, including policemen who demanded higher salaries (Archivo Ministerio del Interior, 1908, Legajo 6096). The myth of an internal war was further elaborated after Falcon was murdered, allegedly by a "terrorist nucleus," a myth that is still strong at police training institutions.

Long before the doctrine of national security became dominant, there was a belief that dissident groups constituted "dangerous pollutants, capable of debilitating, contaminating, and potentially destroying the entire society" (Norden, 1996a: 243; Cantón, 1971: 147-161). In the police construction of the enemy within, "subversive" or "seditious" activities included any challenge to order and morality (Guy, 1991).[19] This was a Manichean world of internal enemies and epidemics reminiscent of medieval times.[20]

The transition of 1930 set up a militarized repressive police apparatus that had not previously existed. The police were placed at the service of the new regime and became a highly politicized force. Police and military forces became political instruments of incumbent governments and were diverted to extralegal action against putative enemies of the regime. In the context of the Peronist state, the need for repression would ideally disappear, since the police were to serve social justice, the people, and the Argentine worker (Kalmanowiecki, 2000). In fact, the Peronista police became a mainstay of the government and were used against the political opposition and any attempt at pursuing labor autonomy. The police were endowed with a status that removed them from civilian jurisdiction. When Perón was ousted from power in 1955, there was a military takeover of the upper echelons of the police hierarchy, conceived as the only means to purge the institutions of Peronism. The police were already an autonomous agency with a strong corporate identity that could be put to work for any government. After the 1976 military coup they became an integral part of the terrorist state, and its chief, Ramón Camps, granted them complete impunity. Recent attempts by democratic governments such as that of Raúl Alfonsín to reform the police and the military and subject them to civilian control have proved troublesome (Brysk, 1994; Maier, Abregú, and Tiscornia, 1996). This leads to the disturbing

notion that the initial form, style, and organizational schemes adopted by policing regimes, once institutionalized, are quite resistant to change.

The expansion of policing and its Janus-faced, ambiguous role in securing order amid dissent raises troubling issues regarding the compatibility of political policing and democratic governments (Mazower, 1997). The widespread use of state-sponsored violence in Argentina seems to cast doubt on the notion that policing is responsible for pacification.

NOTES

1. This pact provided a guaranteed market for Argentine meat on terms favorable to Britain.

2. Potash (1981: 135-136) alludes to the creation of this intelligence network, founded on the basis of information gathered by intelligence military personnel and the capital police. Justo's former private secretary, Miguel Rojas, told Potash that the information collected by Justo was kept in his personal archive and destroyed after his death in 1943. In fact, not all of these documents were destroyed, although Rojas had eliminated some that he thought revealed events that he preferred to conceal regarding the secret services (Fraga, 1993: 372, 396). The recently released Justo Archive and secret police dossiers confirm the existence of such an intelligence service (Potash, personal communication, 1993).

3. These included Brig. Gen. Ernesto Baldasarre, Miguel Cardalda, Pastor Toranzo, and others. Present during the torture of Baldasarre were the chief of police, Col. Enrique Pilotto, Col. Juan Bautista Molina, and the director of the penitentiary, Ismael Viñas. Rejecting the accusations of torture, Pilotto defensively asserted that if Baldasarre had really been tortured he would have confided that to Pilotto in the long chat they had had in the cellar of the penitentiary (Archivo Uriburu, Legajo 20, Document 240). For a detailed description of the victims, see Boffi (1933: 233-243).

4. Mopol, a clandestine organization that seeks to end crime with death squads, emerged after the collapse of the military regime (Salinas, 1997: 280-281). Some of its members had belonged to "task forces" during the military regime and by 1994 occupied important positions in the Buenos Aires provincial police. They also had connections with similar organizations in the federal police. Prolatin was a clandestine militarized group that profited from raids on discos with the alleged purpose of combating drug trafficking. The Arcángeles were another right-wing civil-military group aimed at defending the interests of former repressors within the federal police (Salinas, 1997: 226-229; see also Dutil and Ragendorfer, 1997; Fernandez Llorente and Balmaceda, 1997; McSherry, 1997a; 1997b).

5. In his analysis of state-sponsored violence in Central America, Robert Holden (1996: 435-459) calls for a focus on nonmilitary agents of the state and within civil society itself. On the need to modify the historical image on which Argentina has been built, see Halperín Donghi (1988).

6. Although a federal police force was not formally created until 1943-1944, the capital police had the capacity and the technical means to carry out certain intelligence-gathering activities throughout the nation. These provisions were delineated in Article 3 of the 1885 Reglamento, which included "guarding against and repressing any plot, conspiracy, or subversive movement" (Fentanes, 1979: 45).

7. At the same time, the Investigative Division was reorganized to include the following sections: Public Order, entrusted with political affairs; Social Order, in charge of anarchists, communists, socialists, and mob and labor activities; and Personal Custody of the President. Public Order would later become Political Order (Rodríguez, 1975: 358-359; 1981: 184; Blackwelder, 1990: 80).

8. According to the constitutional scholar Jose Nicolás Matienzo (1926: 453), the national executive power in Argentina sought to preserve its political power in the capital rather than relinquish it to local powers or the municipality. As a means to that end, the police force was put in the hands of the national government under the minister of the interior.

9. As Goldstraj (1957: 275) notes, the plotters of the 1930s were not particularly careful themselves, and they were also divided (Cattáneo, 1959: 84-87; Villalba, 1994).

10. For example, in 1934 the army complained that it lacked the resources to infiltrate the activities of the exiles in Uruguay and suggested involvement through agents of the Investigative Division (Archivo Justo, Box 98, Document 33).

11. In 1921 Costa had been a member of the Logia San Martín that conspired against a return of Yrigoyen to power (Orona, 1965: 105).

12. Rodríguez sought to promote the depoliticization of the army and was until his death in February 1936 the only officer fully trusted by Justo (Potash, 1981: 124-135; White, 1991: 63).

13. Letter from Col. Faccione to Brig. Gen. Rodríguez, March 13, 1934 (Archivo Justo, Box 46, Document 50). Luna (1972: 137-155) argues that the Progressive Democratic governor was ousted because of Justo's need to prepare for the upcoming presidential elections. In his view, the Santa Fe intervention was one of the Justo government's most arbitrary and unjustifiable acts. Army suspicions may have been rooted in the previous Yrigoyen administration and the pro-labor policies of former Santa Fe Chief of Police Ricardo Caballero (see Korzeniewicz, 1993: 1-31).

14. The chief of the 3d Division had received information through an informant that Alvear, Sabattini, and others were plotting a movement with army officers (Archivo Justo, Box 99, Document 9, May 12, 1934).

15. For instance, when Pomar suspected that 1st Sgt. Jesús Bugallo and Cpl. Clemente Pérez might be informers and suspended them, the secret service promptly went to work to replace them. When Bugallo and Pérez were finally expelled, the secret services already had in place another informant, the former corporal Ayala, "who will now be controlled by C.1, designation adopted for a new element of information that is incorporated in this S.S." (Archivo Justo, Box 99, Documents 48 and 50).

16. Although communism and labor militancy had risen in the 1930s, the labor movement had not become a political actor until Perón's seizure of power (Collier and Collier, 1991: 333).

17. Sometimes these missions could prove discouraging. Of one such mission in the industrial city of Zárate, a crucial target for communist infiltration because of its naval arsenal, it is reported: "That there were no traces of the existence of cells in the arsenal, meatpacking establishment, or paper factory leads one to presume that these were in another zone" (Archivo Justo, Box 45, Document 70, March 20, 1933; see also Document 72, March 23, 1933).

18. Police and military reports overstated the situation in Córdoba and created the impression of a province under siege by anarcho-communism (Archivo Justo, Box 54, Documents 26, 38, 45, 51, 128, 253, Year 1937).

19. In 1909 the police had already established four categories of subversion: "sectarianism" (anarchism, social agitation), "partyism" (political disorder, "foreigners seeking revolt," and the "criminally insane" striving for collective crime), "dissolute journalism," and "socialists" (Memorias de la Policía Federal, 1909).

20. On the Manichean worldview of the executioners of the "dirty war," see Graziano (1992).

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