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Piquetes, Cacerolazos y Asambleas Vecinales:
Social Protests in Argentina, 1993-2002

by

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Prologue

It is not my intention to re-tell the events, predict the future or compete with other analyses. My wish is to help in the understanding of the causes, dynamics and potentialities of a current and long-lasting process of contention, which certainly reflects critical aspects about Argentine reality. This thesis is the product of a personal commitment, persistent academic research, field observations and interactions with an array of different people (involved or not) in the mobilizations. The conclusions are open, since I am looking at an ongoing process, and personal, because I could not entirely deny my subjectivity. My main goal is to generate curiosity in the reader, and modify the perception of those who have been “bothered” by the protests, but have not even wondered why all those people were out there in the streets, making their demands and risking their lives.

Introduction

During the 1990s, Argentina went through a process of structural changes, which included economic liberalization and deregulation, a fixed monetary policy, decentralization and state apparatus shrinkage through privatizations and reduction of public employment and services. These policies had certain positive macroeconomic results, such as economic growth, increasing investment and price stability. However, they also had negative results, like increased unemployment, underemployment, poverty and inequality. Moreover, key perverse power structures and political behaviors of the old order were protected and reproduced in the new scheme. Powerful domestic and foreign groups continued to have a privileged position in the governmental decision-making process and political practices such as clientelism, corruption and friendship networks remained central to policy making and state-civil society relationships.

In this contradictory context of large reforms that seemed to bring advantages to certain economic and social groups, but disadvantages to growing segments of the population, while preserving inequitable political practices, a wave of political contention gradually developed throughout the country.¹ In 1993, the first *pueblada* (town revolt) in the province of Santiago del Estero

¹ The term contention is commonly used in social movement theory referring to dispute, contestation or challenge. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) define political contention as collective action directed against certain groups or state of affairs. I present a more detail explanation in Chapter 2.

showed that the structural socioeconomic changes could produce active popular resistance. After that episode, several towns in various provinces of Argentina that had been negatively affected by the reforms witnessed intense social protests in which groups of disadvantaged people were the participants. Cutral Co, a town in the province of Neuquén that was built around the traditionally state-owned oil company (YPF), was the scene of the first *cortes de ruta* (roadblocks) in 1995. The effects of the privatization of the company and the reform of the provincial government resulted in a steep increase in unemployment and reduction in welfare protection. This type of protest would eventually become the most popular means of raising labor and social welfare demands throughout Argentina. Indeed, in 1997 there was a total of 140 roadblock protests, steadily expanding their popularity to the extent that in the first six months of 2002, the number rose to 1609, or 268 roadblocks per month.²

Nevertheless, the most interesting phenomenon of this wave of protests was not its extension, but its innovative character in terms of the history of Argentine political contention. First of all, the fact that labor unions were not the promoters or organizers of these social and labor protests definitely represented a change, since unions had been the dominant institution in charge of channeling labor and welfare demands. Moreover, the other traditional institution that failed to represent societal interests and demands were the political parties, which neither promoted nor organized the roadblocks. The novel character of the wave

² According to statistics presented by Nueva Mayoría (1997-2002), which are elaborated from the revision of federal and provincial police reports and mass media data (Burdman: 05/29/2002).

of protests was later reinforced with the emergence and expansion of other new means of protest since late 2001. The *cacerolazos* (pot-banging), neighborhood assemblies, *escraches* (graffiti protests) and barter clubs were also born outside the traditional channels of representation and used new organizational tactics.

The objective of my thesis is to study this unique wave of political contention in order to identify its roots beginning in 1993, and to understand its dynamics and characteristics, particularly since 1997 until June 2002. I base my study on primary and secondary sources such as statistical data, official reports, surveys, personal interviews, field observations, newspaper articles and the existing literature on the topic. In theoretical terms, I use some tools provided by social movement theory - mainly McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) - to analyze the characteristics and dynamics of the protests. In order to explore the phenomena that I consider to have contributed to the emergence of the movement, I recur to Argentine labor politics literature (such as Torre: 1980, 1989, 1995; Murillo: 1997; Etchemendy and Palermo: 1998, and Etchemendy: 2001a) and to political economy analyses of the structural reform process in the country during the 1990s (such as Torre: 1997, Acuña: 1994, Gerchunoff and Torre: 1996, Palermo and Novaro: 1996).

As expected, there has been growing media coverage of the events due to the unprecedented nature and magnitude of the protests. However, after reviewing the academic literature, I only found few studies of this particular case

of popular mobilization (Auyero (2001a,b); Farinetti (1999); Scribano (1999); Laufer and Spiguel (1999)).³ These five studies relate the occurrence of the social protests in Argentina to the adverse effects of the new economic conditions and the problems of corruption and legitimacy of the political class. According to these analyses, the shift to a market-led economic scheme, the shrinking of the state in certain areas and a massive dissatisfaction with corrupt politicians brought forth the voice of disadvantaged groups in hopes to regain their political and economic rights as citizens that had been ignored.

Although I agree with this argument in general terms, it does not go far enough in its analysis.⁴ In my opinion, structural changes of the 1990s, such as

³ Besides these studies, one finds a recent book called “The social protest in Argentina. Economic transformation and social crisis in the interior” (Giarraca and collaborators: 2001) that looks at the changes of social protests since the democratization in the 1980s. Within the different articles of this book, Schuster and Pereyra observe that since 1983 there was a disarticulation of the union matrix as dominant protest institution and a progressive fragmentation in the protest organizations, identities and demands. Then Barbetta and Lapegna study the wave of roadblocks in the province of Salta, following a similar line of argument to the cited authors. Moreover, it is important to note that lately, several academics began to develop research on the new means of protest; one should expect new publications in the near future. Among these new studies, there is a research on elaboration by CELS (forthcoming), in which Capurro Robles and Itchart focus in the criminalization and repression of the protests, stressing the dilemma of what is to be prioritized: the right to protest against situations that attempt basic rights or the right to free circulation that is affected with the mobilizations in public roads, streets and plazas. Finally, after the events of December 2001, there have been a few short books published in Argentina (Cafassi: 2002, Fontana et. al.: 2002, Oviedo: 2001) on the pickets, *cacerolazos* and neighborhood assemblies. These books are mainly testimonial and generally politically biased. However, it is worthy acknowledging that the inflow of publications reflects the high level of mobilization and increasing public interest on the topic.

⁴ In a similar line of thought, Lodola (2002) is developing a project in which he tests the causal relationship between structural reforms (deregulation, privatizations, liberalization –industrial restructuring- and decentralization policies) and low-income population unrest by studying the cases of the provinces of Neuquén, Salta and Jujuy. He claims that four factors account for the emergence of picketers’ protests: the restructuring of industrial sectors, the presence of active grassroots networks, an expansive local political context, and the process of diffusion and adaptation led by Neuquén’s forerunner case.

the liberalization of the economy, the privatization of state-owned companies, the welfare system shrinkage and the process of political decentralization, all brought dramatic consequences in terms of employment and state provision of social services. These changes definitely had a strong influence in the eventual development of the wave of social protests by generating a growing heterogeneous mass of unemployed and underemployed people without institutional protection, be it from the state, the unions or other organizations. However, these socioeconomic contextual characteristics were not enough to mobilize the disadvantaged people to the streets and organize alternative ways of contention. The combination of three other phenomena contributed to the development of the wave of protests: (1) the preservation and reproduction of certain political practices from the traditional power system in the new market-led economic growth model, (2) a long-standing crisis of legitimacy and efficiency of the conventional societal channels of representation, and (3) a long tradition of political participation and activism, or in social movement theory terms, an existing rich repertoire of contention.

Regarding the characteristics and development of the wave of social protests, or as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) call it, the process of transgressive political contention, an innovative and heterogeneous grassroots movement produced a rupture with the traditional channels of representation by creating new means of protest and organizations, and the persistent demand to change the existing political and economic structure in favor of disadvantaged

segments of the population. Despite these novel and radical aspects, the potentialities of the movement to subvert the existing state of affairs are restricted because of two main factors. First, the (inevitable) adoption and reproduction of certain traditional organizational and political patterns, such as discretionary politics, clientelism, corruption, and organizational competition and fragmentation, all went against the movement's original character to defend and represent the rights and demands of the growing mass of deprived citizens. Second, the fact that none of the protesters' organizations has played the role of an alternative cohesive, powerful political group, and that none has elaborated feasible political proposals or allied with a political party willing and able to include their demands as policy priorities, limit the movement's capacity to force or introduce fundamental policy changes. However, since the contentious process has not reached an end yet, it is still possible for that to happen.

I identify four distinct phases in terms of the emergence of new means of contention, the role of protesters' organizations, the socioeconomic origin of the participants and the occurrence of certain mechanisms defined by Mc Adam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), including identity and category formation, brokerage, diffusion, scale shift, certification and radicalization. The four phases are (1) Emergence of Contention, 1993 – 1996, (2) Decentralized Roadblocks, 1997- mid 2001, (3) National Pickets, July– November 2001, and (4) Expanded Contention, December 2001 – present (June 2002).

I organize this study in six chapters. First, I review the existing literature on this particular case of popular contention. Second, I go through the social movement theoretical framework to identify different schools of thought and concepts I use for my analysis. Third, I set up the background in which the wave of protests came to pass, emphasizing those structural factors that contributed to the emergence of the movement. Then, I explore the contentious process, analyzing the characteristics of the means of protest and the dynamics of each phase of contention. I divide this analysis in two parts. In Chapter 4, I look at the protests from 1993 until November 2001, which mainly consisted in *puebladas* and *piquetes*. In Chapter 5, I examine the protests from December 2001 until June 2002, which comprised an expanded array of means of protests and participants. Finally, I present my conclusions and pose some questions for further research.

1: State of the Art: “Have you heard about the protests?”

As I mentioned in the introduction, after reviewing the academic literature, I found few studies on the recent wave of protests in Argentina. In general, these works associate the emergence of the protests with the changes in the political and economic structure of Argentina in the 1990s and use the social movement theoretical framework to analyze its characteristics. In this chapter, I will only go through the most relevant studies in order to identify the main arguments and raise new questions that need to be addressed.

The first two studies were written by Auyero, who developed a solid analysis of the protests of some Argentine provinces, focusing on the study of political and anthropological variables rather than economic ones. In his work, “Glocal Riots” (2001a), he argued against Walton and Ragin’s (1990) and Walton and Shefner’s (1994) analyses on the occurrence of social protests in different countries that went through the 1980s international debt crisis and later implemented neoliberal policies. These authors claimed that the “austerity protests” were caused by and related to the implementation of “structural adjustment policies, economic hardship, external adjustment demands, hyperurbanization and local traditions of political mobilization” (Auyero 2001a: 2). Although Auyero recognized the relationship of these structural factors with the emergence of protests, in order to fully understand the origins of particular

cases of contention it was necessary to look closer at “the local mediations through which adjustment was implemented and out of which protests developed” (Auyero 2001a: 3). Accordingly, he focused his analysis on two episodes of popular protest (the so-called *puebladas* or *estallidos sociales* –urban revolts or social explosions- of Santiago del Estero, 1993 and Corrientes, 1999), studying the processes and mechanisms of contention from the social movement theoretical perspective. In short, he found that not only economic, but also political issues (i.e., governmental corruption) helped to precipitate the riots.

Auyero later reinforced this conclusion with further research on Argentina’s protests, “Life on the Picket Line. Biography and Protest in the Global South” (2001b), where he emphasized the ethnographic aspects of his research. He claimed that to understand the underlying reasons of the pickets, it was necessary to look into the protester’s biographies, experience and interpretation of their contentious actions. Basing his analysis on the collective mobilization literature that stresses the “structuring of particular kinds of subjectivities in the origins and course of contention” (Auyero 2001b: 6), he explored the life of a group of picketers in Cutral Co, Neuquén. He observed that the protest was “as much about the material living conditions as an individual and collective quest for recognition and respect” as human beings and citizens (Auyero 2001b: 7). In other words, he claimed that dissatisfaction with poor economic conditions and a corrupt political class produced individual as well as collective action to gain voice and dignity.

The third relevant piece written on Argentina's mobilization phenomenon in the 1990s was Farinetti's "¿Qué queda del movimiento obrero?" (1999). Farinetti explored the characteristics of the labor protests since the reestablishment of democracy in 1983 and the implementation of market and state reforms during the 1990s. Even if she recognized the weight of the economic variables in the development of these new kinds of protests, she focused her research on the political aspects of the process, where the interests, identity and resources articulate and guide collective action. Farinetti based most of her analysis in social movement theory, particularly in the works of Tilly (1986), Tarrow (1994) and Thompson (1995). Her main argument was that the repertoire of labor protests changed in the period 1983-1997. Since the mid 1940s until 1983, labor contention was based on strikes and mobilizations in the workplace and plazas, respectively, in which the unions, mainly politically and ideologically affiliated with the Peronist party, played the most important role as promoters, organizers and unifiers. In other words, the previous repertoire was characterized by a high degree of institutionalization, politicization and centralization. Contrary to this tradition, she argued that with the emergence of roadblocks and *puebladas* (urban revolts), the repertoire of contention became more fragmented, where politics was rejected rather than used as an instrument to build collective identity and institutional support, and the level of organization was diminished. Finally, she noted that the unions decreased the use of strikes and ceased to play their traditional coordinating and unifying role in labor protests and mobilizations.

Scribano's "Argentina 'cortada': cortes de ruta y visibilidad social en el contexto del ajuste" (1999), studied the roadblocks during the 1990s in the context of the macroeconomic adjustment process and state reform. Using some analytical tools from social movement theory, particularly Melucci's (1984, 1989) work on collective action and identity, he saw the roadblocks as a manifestation of the conflicts originated by the new structural conditions (i.e., liberalization and deregulation of the economy and retrenchment of the state). Accordingly, he noted that the areas with more roadblocks were those with poor economic structural conditions, privatized enterprises, higher income inequality, higher unemployment and reduced electoral participation. Finally, he observed the necessity of the protesters to regain their voice and recognition as citizens (also Auyero's conclusion).

The last piece relevant to the study of the Argentine contentious phenomenon was Laufer and Spiguel's "Las 'puebladas' argentinas a partir del 'santiaguëño' de 1993. Tradición histórica y nuevas formas de lucha" (1999). This study dealt with the *puebladas*, which included roadblocks among other contentious expressions. The authors claimed that this movement was caused by and created against the new adverse economic and political structural conditions. They emphasized that these protests acted as a focal point for diverse sectors to act against the government and that these manifestations represented an alternative way to promote deep changes in the whole country.

In brief, these five studies relate social protest in Argentina to the adverse effects of new economic conditions and the problems of corruption and legitimacy of the political class. According to these studies, one would be able to claim that in general terms, the shift to a market-led economic scheme, the shrinking of the state in certain areas and a massive dissatisfaction with corrupt politicians raised the voice of disadvantaged groups in search of the recuperation of their ignored political and economic rights as citizens. Although I agree with this argument, it does not go far enough in its analysis of causes, dynamics and characteristics. For instance, it would be useful to evaluate how those structural factors came to be perceived as a permanent threat to the protesters, triggering their decision to organize and collectively demand change. It would also be relevant to see if the argument that the protesters are demanding their ignored economic and political rights is an academic interpretation rather than a conceptualization of the protesters themselves. In addition, it would be important to see if the protesters changed their original demands (be they material or abstract concerns) or their priorities throughout the process of contention. Finally, it would be relevant to review the dynamics and characteristics of the movement to evaluate the organizations' innovative and traditional aspects in order to evaluate their strength, potentialities and role as new representatives and defenders of disadvantaged segments of the population.

2: Social Movement Theory: Schools, Debate and Concepts

In my research I use some theoretical tools from the body of literature on social movements. After reviewing the diverse approaches of this theoretical framework, I faced two main dilemmas: choosing between different approaches (resource mobilization, identity approaches or new social movements) and evaluating the applicability of these theoretical arguments to the study of Latin American cases in general and, in particular, the Argentine case. I resolved this quandary by adopting an eclectic perspective, critically combining tools from diverse schools and taking into account certain aspects of Latin America and Argentina. The adoption of this kind of approach was suggested in the literature by authors like Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Roberts (1997), Leite Cardoso (1992) and Canel (1992), who focused their studies in the Latin American region. Moreover, three of the most important authors in the social movement theory (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001)) recently developed a theoretical framework that combines previously opposed perspectives and develops new concepts to study contentious politics around the world. In the study of Argentina's latest wave of political contention, I look for contextual factors to reach a better understanding of the causes behind the social unrest, and try to understand the dynamics of the movement, identifying the occurrence of certain mechanisms defined by these three authors.

This chapter presents a brief review of the theoretical literature on social movements. First, I review the origins of the social movement theory, highlighting the first influential authors and the birth of different approaches. Then, I address the so-called new social movement (NSM) perspective and the theoretical debate around it, by examining its applicability to the Latin American context. Finally, and in more detail, I study the recent development of eclectic approaches, from which I take most of the analytical tools for my research on Argentine social protests.

2.A: THE ORIGINS & FIRST SCHOOLS IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Based on Tilly's work "From Mobilization to Revolution" (1978), one finds four main authors that addressed issues of social movements and collective action and then acquired eloquent advocates: Marx (1935, 1951), Durkheim (1933, 1951, 1961), Mill (1950) and Weber (1972). All of them studied the phenomenon of social organizations within the historical context of capitalism and industrialization. I will briefly review their main contributions in terms of the development of social movement theories throughout the twentieth century.

Marx divided the entire population into social classes based on their relationships with the means of production, identifying their "basic interests, conscious aspirations, articulated grievances and collective readiness for action" (Tilly: 1978, 13). He argued that "individuals and institutions act on behalf of

particular social classes” and that when they acted collectively, they did so out of “common interests, mutual awareness and internal organization” (Tilly: 1978, 13). Marx stressed the rationality of collective political action and had a positive vision on the organization of the working class against the elite in order to change the unfair power structure behind the capitalist mode of accumulation. Although revised, the Marxist approach has been widely applied to the study of social movements in the twentieth century. Indeed, the NSM paradigm was originated by some Marxist academics, who reformulated some concepts in function to the new realities faced in the developed countries, especially in Europe.⁵

Durkheim studied the effects of industrialization on society and focused on the problem of the integration of social systems. He believed that the increasing division of labor threatened the “shared conscious based on the essential similarity of individuals, and thereby threaten[ed] the primacy of the needs and demands of the society as a whole over the impulses and interests of the individuals” (Tilly: 1978, 17). Durkheim argued that this gap between collective social unity (reflected in the institutions and regulations that bound people together) and labor differentiation would bring about several undesired results: individual disorientation, destructive social life and extensive conflict.⁶ Therefore, Durkheim saw a constant tension between forces of integration and disintegration among society. This conflict would lead to three types of collective action: first, a positive or desirable one, unifying and leading to social stability

⁵ I address this approach in the following section, 2.b.

⁶ Durkheim defined this phenomenon as “anomie.”

(routine collective action: social practices that integrate society); second, a negative or undesirable one, disintegrating and destabilizing society (anomic collective action); and third, another desirable one, bringing the disintegrated society back towards integration (restorative collective action).

Clearly, Durkheim's stamp can be recognized in modernization theories and their behaviorist assumptions about industrialization, urbanization, deviance, social control, social disorganization and collective behavior (Eckstein: 1989). A prime example is Huntington's "Political Order in Changing Societies" (1968), in which he established a relationship between rapid urbanization rates, high levels of social mobilization and increasing rates of political participation with low levels of political organization and institutionalization. Huntington claimed that the result of this conflictive process was political instability and disorder. In order to avoid conflict or revolution, governments were expected to create institutions allowing for an orderly adaptation of society to the new modern structural conditions.

Mill and the Utilitarians developed a third influential perspective in the study of social movements. These authors saw collective action as a means to achieve individual (not intrinsically collective) interests. They claimed that individual decisions were based on a set of rules that determined the benefits and costs of choosing between different courses of action. They expected collective action to fluctuate as a result of changing decision-making rules and the changing

costs of accomplishing various individual interests. Regarding the revolutionary potential of collective action, it was “natural and inevitable that a class given an opportunity to act on a particular narrow interest would do so” (Tilly: 1978, 25). In order to avoid conflict and nullify social threats to change the power structure, the government was supposed to “forestall that opportunity and make likely action on the common interest of the entire population” (Tilly: 1978, 25).

The Utilitarian school found its best advocates in the models of collective choice developed by a number of academics from different disciplines (such as economics, psychology and political science between others) since the 1960s. These models analyzed “the determinants of alternative outcomes in situations in which two or more parties made choices affecting the outcomes” (Tilly: 1978, 25). Perhaps the most relevant and influential theory was Olson’s (1965) “Logic of Collective Action.” Taking into account the individualist nature of collective action, he focused on the efforts to produce collective goods and the problem of “free riding,” defined as getting profits from collective goods without actually participating in their production. He studied the rules of the organizations and how those influenced the individuals’ decisions to engage into collective activities in order to pursue common goods. He claimed that in order to avoid the problem of free riding, the organizations should create the necessary incentives to increase both the individual benefits of participating in collective action and the costs of not doing so. Olson’s work became very important as it explicitly incorporated into the analysis of social movements the articulation of different political,

economic and social organizations apart from the state. He studied the interaction of the state with institutions such as labor unions, interest groups and associations. The “Logic of Collective Action” inspired many authors, who revised and improved Olson’s assertions and created a new paradigm in the study of social movements later called “Resource Mobilization” approach. In general, the latter highlighted questions of strategy, participation, organization, rationality, expectations, interests and the like. It took into account variables such as political opportunity space, ideological and organizational resources, mobilization networks and leadership in order to explain movement emergence and development while paying little attention to the discursive practices and political identities forged by social movements (aspects that were going to be deeply addressed by the NSM theorists, as I explain below). Some of the main authors from this approach have been Morris and Herring (1987), Tarrow (1988) and Foweraker and Craig (1990).

Apart from the collective choice theories, another theoretical path derived from the Millian and Utilitarian approach is game theory. Authors like Boulding (1962), Kramer and Hertzberg (1975) and Ashenfelter and Johnson (1969) studied the strategic interaction between different actors, taking their interests and organization as a given, and focusing on “tactics and strategy as functions of varying opportunities and of varying information about those opportunities” (Tilly: 1978, 29). Game theorists hoped to predict the possible outcomes in certain modeled situations. Their models helped to understand the strategic

problems of collective actors and see how the available information and means of interaction limit the possibilities of realizing the best interests of any particular actor or of all actors together.

The fourth influential contribution to the study of social movements was the one made by Weber (1972). The key feature of his work was his analysis of the power of authorities over the groups and their collective definition of the world and themselves. Weber argued that the constituted authorities would act on behalf of the group on the basis of their traditional roles, their rational-legal designation as agents of the groups and/or their extraordinary personal character (their charisma). He claimed that the way in which these processes took place strongly affected the group organization and its structure, action and fate. The relevance of Weber's theory resides in its predictions about the strength, stability and duration of the organizations. For example, a group can be supposed to be very powerful while its leader's capacities to keep the group bounded and negotiate with other groups remains high. In contrast, if the leader loses his power, the organization can be expected to face a severe problem of succession. If it solves this problem, its strength and durability prove to be independent of their charismatic leader (Tilly: 1978).

In sum, the four main original approaches that influenced the development of social movement theory emphasized diverse aspects of collective organization and came to different conclusions. Certainly, none of the schools gave a

conclusive answer to the vast phenomenon of social movements. Instead, each of them provided some helpful tools to understand the complex dynamics underlying collective organizations and mobilizations. The field of research was still wide open, which resulted in the development of divergent analysis of the emergence of the so-called “New Social Movements.”

2.B: THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS PARADIGM AND THE CRITIQUES

As I mentioned before, the concept of “New Social Movements” (NSM) was formulated as a reaction to the “predicted Marxist revolution not in sight, the shift of protest away from the working class and the changing shape and form of protest in contemporary times” by some Marxist scholars such as Cohen (1985), Melucci (1980, 1985), Offe (1985), Castells (1983) and Touraine (1977, 1981). Although there are differing perspectives on NSM, a set of core concepts and beliefs can be said to comprise this new paradigm. The central claims are, first, that the NSM are a product of the shift to a postindustrial economy and, second, that NSM are unique and, as such, different from the social movements of the industrial age. The NSM are believed to question the wealth-oriented materialistic goals of industrial societies. They also call into question the structures of representative democracies that limit citizen input and participation in governance, advocating direct democracy, self-help groups, and cooperative styles of social organization. The values of NSM center on autonomy and identity. In terms of their tactics, NSM are supposed to prefer to remain outside

of normal political channels, employing disruptive tactics and mobilizing public opinion to gain political leverage. Another distinction of the NSM is to be found in their structure, as they attempt to replicate in their own structures the type of representative government they desire. This means that they intend to avoid rigid vertical organizations and bureaucratic systems and instead rotate leadership and vote communally on all issues.

Regarding the NSM participants, there are three versions. Some authors such as Cotgrove and Duff (1983), Lowe and Goyder (1983) and Rudig (1988) identify the “new” middle class - “a recently emerged social stratum employed in the nonproductive sectors of the economy” (Pichardo: 1997, 5) - as the characteristic members. Others like Arato and Cohen (1984) argue that they are not defined by class boundaries but are marked by a common concern over social issues. Finally, some scholars like Offe (1985) claim that the NSM members are drawn from three sectors: the new middle class, elements from the old middle class (farmers, shop owners and artisans-producers) and a “peripheral” population consisting of persons not heavily engaged in the labor market (students, housewives and retired persons). Similarly, Castells (1983) argues that they are multi-class struggles formed by different urban groups affected by structural conditions that exclude them from the private housing or services markets (Pichardo: 1997).

Naturally, the NSM paradigm received several critiques mainly based on its two main proposals: the unique characteristics that made the contemporary (after-1965) mobilizations a new type of social movement, and their relationship with the shift to a postindustrial economy. Firstly, the problem with the unique characteristics of the NSM is that as soon as one looks closely at different contemporary social movements, one finds more exceptions than consistencies with the NSM categories. For instance, according to the NSM paradigm, these organizations espouse open, democratic and nonhierarchical structures, yet there are many of them that are not so characterized. Moreover, despite the fact that NSM disdain institutional politics, many organizations are regularly consulted by governmental bodies and others have even formed political parties. Supposedly, NSM tend to draw from the new middle class. Nevertheless, many community-based (but not class-based) mobilizations have developed. Furthermore, while NSM are assumed not to employ traditional tactics, they actually use those commonly applied by social movements of the past (lobbying, getting out the vote, court cases, etc.). On the whole, all these exceptions lead one to the conclusion that there are plenty of similarities between NSM and previous movements (Eckstein: 1989). In other words, the newness of the contemporary social movements seems to be a dubious argument; a theoretical construction that fits reality in only a few particular cases (Pichardo: 1997).

Secondly, regarding whether NSM are a product of the shift to a postindustrial economy, there are two schools of thought. One stresses the social

structural factors that formed “new” social classes as oppositional groups. In a service/technical economy with its emphasis on growth and informational management, capital accumulation necessitates social as well as economic domination. Social domination involves controlling dissent and knowledge (ensuring conformity) and therefore requires an expansion of the state’s coercive mechanisms into the civic sphere.⁷ Accordingly, NSM are concerned with the “self-defense of society against the state and the market economy” (Cohen: 1985, 664). In sum, the new forms of subordination of the postindustrial era are responsible for the rise of NSM. The second school of thought highlights the subjective consciousness of the NSM actors.⁸ Some authors argue that the participants of these movements have reached a point of economic and political security in the modern age that drives them to struggle for more sophisticated issues such as identity, participation and quality of life rather than economic matters (Pichardo: 1997).

Without entering into the debate over whether one can consider whether or not a postindustrial era has arrived, or if these societal changes have occurred at all, the main critiques to these arguments are that these sort of ambitious hypotheses have yet to be supported by sufficient evidence in order to be proved, and that their definitions are too ambiguous or preliminary (the concept of “new middle class” is the most critiqued) (Pichardo: 1997). As I mentioned before,

⁷ Some authors of this school are Habermas (1987), Melucci (1984) and Touraine (1971).

⁸ Among the authors of this other school of thought one finds Falik (1983) and Inglehart (1977, 1981).

although these perspectives can be applied to certain very specific cases (such as a pro-life feminist group from France), it is not the case when looking at a wide range of contemporary social movements (from European environmentalist groups to Latin American human rights movements).

2.C: THE APPLICATION OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS PARADIGM TO LATIN AMERICA

In the 1980s, a wave of social movements spread throughout Latin America, dedicated to issues other than the classic economic ones, such as human and minority groups' rights and democratization. Several authors like Mainwaring and Viola (1984), Slater (1985) and Fals Borda (1986) interpreted these movements within the NSM paradigm. They became optimistic about this phenomenon, and claimed that they represented a turning point in the history of collective organization, reflecting the intensification of the pluralist character of society in Latin America. Accordingly, they considered that the traditional division between social classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat) that had been supposed to bring the oppressed together in order to change the unfair sociopolitical-economic structure was finally left behind. They argued that in the new fragmented social and political space, a multiplicity of social actors built new collective organizations on the basis of aspects as gender, human rights, religion or ecology, with the purpose of establishing their own sphere of autonomy. These NSM were supposed to be challenging the prevailing "premise that a unified subject could 'represent' (both depict and speak for) heterogeneous identities and

social processes” (Hale: 1997, 577). They argued that in more pluralist social structures, the multiple lines of social division were reflected and reinforced with this diversification of collective organizations struggling for a “radically egalitarian and participatory sociopolitical order” (Roberts: 1997, 138). The NSM were believed to “give expression to ‘new popular interests’, to practice ‘new ways of doing politics’ and even to embody the possibility of creating a ‘new hegemony of the masses’.” (Escobar and Alvarez: 1992, 2)

Although some concepts and tools from the NSM paradigm were helpful in understanding the complexities of more pluralistic social structures, this first enthusiastic application on the Latin American social movements was soon revised and moderated by various authors for three main reasons. First, were the problems of the paradigm in itself, a point that I have already addressed in the previous section. Second, was its dubious applicability to the Latin American reality. Could it truly be that the basic economic and political rights were already acquired and that people were finally fighting for more “advanced” issues? Or could it be that although new forms of defiance appeared on the scene, old forms have persisted with the same or even more strength and relevance than before (Eckstein: 1989)? Third, was the actual decline and/or failure of many of these new movements. In general, they did not lead to a radical transformation of society. Likewise, their abstraction from the political arena proved to be more a utopian principle than a real practice, as in order to achieve their goals, these organizations were forced to negotiate and get involved in the political and

economic realms. As long as the NSM were organized groups trying to build new spaces of power, their activity was inevitably a political one (Roberts: 1997).

Authors such as Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Roberts (1997), Leite Cardoso (1992), and Canel (1992), revised the first applications of the NSM model. They looked at continuities with the old means of collective mobilization and highlighted the importance of taking into account the organizational aspects and the ways in which the groups build relationships with other actors. They argued that in order to understand better the contemporary social movements in Latin America, researchers should “consider the interaction of structure and agency, identity and strategy in shaping the dynamics of the collective struggles in Latin America today” (Escobar and Alvarez: 1992, 318). Such scholars hoped to incorporate into their analysis concepts and tools provided by both the NSM and the “resource mobilization” theories. For instance, to explore the process by which social actors constitute collective identities as a means to create democratic spaces for more autonomous action, they used tools from the NSM paradigm. But, to study the articulation of the groups with other actors in the sociopolitical-economic arena, they applied methods from the “Resource Mobilization” approach.

A good example of this blend approach can be found in Escobar and Alvarez (1992). In their research on the wave of social movements that took place in Latin America in the 1980s, they used elements from the NSM and

resource mobilization theories, looking at both the reasons why these movements emerged and the ways in which these groups organized and acted. Their main argument was that contextual forces and systematic changes at work since the late 1960s – such as the exhaustion of development, the crisis of the developmentalist/populist state and the weakening of party systems and populist and corporatists mechanisms of representation – gave rise to new contradictions and created new potential fields of action for social movements in the region. At the same time, the authors studied the means by which the different groups organized and related with other actors, considering some ideological, organizational and institutional developments that facilitated the rise of particular forms of SM in the 1970s and 1980s. They identified new interactional networks among urban and rural residents from different social sectors or the massive expansion of the developmentalist state itself and the role of state agents in encouraging their clients to demand social services.

In sum, when studying the contemporary social movements of the Latin American countries, many studies have fortunately gone beyond the critiques of the different theoretical approaches and have tried to apply their most helpful concepts, models and analytical methods in order to get a complete picture of the phenomenon. For the most part, one finds several excellent case studies and a prudent attitude from the authors towards making misleading generalizations on Latin American social movements.⁹ But, the vast and diverse field of research is

⁹ Many of these works can be found in the books edited by Escobar and Alvarez (1992) and by Eckstein (1989), which include many different mobilizations, such as the peasant struggles in

far from being completely explored. In this respect, I hope that my research on the recent wave of protests in Argentina might contribute toward the understanding of the emergence and development of social movements under new structural conditions in the Latin American region. As I stated in the beginning of this section, I follow the suggestion of authors like Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Roberts (1997), Leite Cardoso (1992) and Canel (1992), in terms of critically adopting a combination of approaches in the study of Latin American social movements. Accordingly, I use the latest work by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), who constructed a new theoretical framework to analyze contentious politics throughout the world, taking into account the particularities of the Argentinean realm.

2.D: THE NEW CONCILIATORY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DYNAMICS OF CONTENTION

Some of the most relevant authors of the social movement field have recognized the need to incorporate new variables to the analysis, moving from rigid approaches towards mixed schemes. The recent work of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, “Dynamics of Contention” (2001), is a paradigmatic example of this new trend. These authors claim that it was necessary to move away from the classic social movement agenda, which they considered a static analysis, towards a dynamic one. Their attempt to systematize this new approach basically consists

Colombia, the popular movements in the Chilean, Argentine and Brazilian military regimes or the feminist organizations in Latin America.

of identifying and defining certain relational mechanisms common to diverse episodes of contention throughout history.

First of all, the authors broaden the unit of analysis from social movements to “contentious politics,” which they defined as “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.” Then, they distinguish between two types of contention: contained and transgressive. In contained contention “all parties are previously established actors employing well established means of claim making.” But, in transgressive contention “at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors, and/or at least some parties employ innovative collective action” (McAdam et. al.: 2001, 7-8). The authors specifically focus their attention on transgressive episodes of contentious politics in order to identify a series of significant recurrent mechanisms and processes common to various cases of struggle.¹⁰

In their design of the dynamic mobilization model, the authors identify the dynamic mechanisms that bring the agenda variables of the resource mobilization

¹⁰ It is relevant to take into account the following definitions: mechanisms, “limited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations”; processes, “regular sequences of such mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements”; and episodes, “continuous streams of contention including collective claims making that bears on other parties’ interests” (Tilly et. al.: 2001, 24).

approach (social change, political opportunities, mobilizing structures, frames and transgressive forms of action) into relation with one another and with other significant actors (McAdam et.al.: 2001, 43). They look at the development of contention through social interaction, considering mobilization as a function of the interaction of different mechanisms and studying the relational and dynamic aspects in the formation and transformation of actors, actions and identities.

In the table below, I outline the mechanisms that the authors define, and indicate their tendency to contribute to different aspects of the political contention process: (1) activation, (2) expansion, (3) institutionalization and (4) conflict development. These tendencies are neither absolute nor exclusive. For example, the mechanism of “collective attribution of threat and opportunity” generally contributes to the activation of a process of political contention and to its reactivation or reinforcement; the mechanisms of “identity and category formation,” which are understood as a relational outcome, tend to affect the initial phase of contention, but also its expansion and institutionalization; the mechanism of “suddenly imposed grievances” contributes to the expansion of contention and shapes the dispute between challengers and objects of claim, while the mechanism of “framing” plays a role in shaping the conflict between challengers and objects of claim. However, it is also probable to find any of these mechanisms affecting other aspects of contention, whether directly or indirectly.

Mechanism	Observations*	1	2	3	4
Collective attribution of threat and opportunity	"Activating mechanism responsible in part for the mobilization of previously inert populations" (p. 43)	X	X		
Identity formation	"Identities in general consist of social relations and their representations, as seen from the perspective of one actor or another." <i>Political identities</i> are distinguished "when people make public claims on the basis of those identities, claims to which governments are either objects or third parties." There are <i>embedded identities</i> (routine social relations) and <i>detached identities</i> (narrow, specialized range of intermittent social relations) (pp. 133-5)	X	X	X	
Category formation	"Creates identities. A social category consists of a set of sites that share a boundary distinguishing all of them from and relating all of them to at least one set of sites visibly excluded by the boundary." Category formation occurs by means of three other sub-mechanisms: <i>invention</i> ("authoritative drawing of a boundary and prescription of relations across that boundary"), <i>borrowing</i> ("importation of a boundary-cum-relations package already existing elsewhere and its installation in the local setting") and <i>encounter</i> ("initial contact between previously separate –but internally well connected- networks in the course of which members of one network begin competing for resources with members of the other, interactively generating definitions of the boundary and relations across it.") (p. 143)	X	X	X	
Innovative repertoires of contention	Marginal modifications by small-scale innovations in the repertoires of contention ("limited ensembles of mutual claim-making routines available to particular pairs of identities,") which occur "as one set of participants or another discovers that a new tactic, message or self-presentation brings rewards" to their collective claim making. (p. 138)	X	X		
Appropriation of sites of mobilization	"A mechanism that permits oppressed or resource-poor populations sometimes to overcome their organizational deficits" (p. 44)	X	X		
Certification	"The verification of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities. <i>Decertification</i> , is the withdrawal of such validation by certifying agents" (p. 121)		X	X	X
Framing	"Interactive construction of disputes among challengers, their opponents, elements of state, third parties and the media" (p. 44)				X
Identity shift	"Alteration of shared definitions of a boundary between political actors and of relations across that boundary" (p. 162)		X	X	X

Continued

Mechanism	Observations*	1	2	3	4
Object shift	“Alteration in relations between claimants and objects of claims,” activating “new or different social relations, thereby transforming available information, resources, and interaction transcripts” and generating “distinctive forms of mutual claim making.” (pp. 144-5, 158)			X	X
Brokerage	“The linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites” (p. 102)			X	X
Competition for power	Internal and between different groups involved in contentious politics (p. 67)		X		
Attribution of similarity	“Mutual identification of actors in different sites as being sufficiently similar to justify common action” (p. 334)		X		
Suddenly imposed grievances	“Singular events that dramatize and heighten the political salience of particular issues” (p. 202)		X		X
Scale shift	“Change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (p. 331)		X	X	X
Diffusion	“Transfer in the same or similar shape of forms and claims of contention across space or across sectors and ideological divides” (p. 68)		X		
Repression	“Efforts to suppress either contentious acts or groups and organizations responsible for them” (p. 69)		X	X	X
Radicalization	“The expansion of collective action frames to more extreme agendas and the adoption of more transgressive forms of contention” (p. 69)			X	X
Polarization	“Widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes.” Generally, it is a result of the combination of three previous mechanisms (p. 322)		X		X
Convergence	“Increasing contradictions at one or both extremes of a political continuum drive less extreme political actors into closer alliances” (p. 162)		X	X	X
Infringement of elite interests	Breakdown of coalitions of elite actors (p. 199).				X

* All quotes from McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001).

1: activation,

2: expansion,

3: institutionalization,

4: conflict development

Source: Based on McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001).

It is important to note that McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) claim that not all the mechanisms are followed or even present in every episode of contention. Nor do they explain the causes, but rather the dynamics of contentious politics. Therefore, in my research I intend to identify which of these mechanisms took place during the Argentine process of transgressive political contention to shape its dynamics. For instance, when looking at the activation and reactivation of contentious politics throughout the entire process, I search for protesters' testimonies in newspapers and interviews about their perception of the context in which they decided to mobilize, in order to see if the mechanism of "collective attribution of threat and/or opportunity" took place. Then, I look at the reaction of diverse government authorities to understand the manner in which the dispute between protesters and objects of claim developed ("framing" mechanism). Moreover, I study the institutionalization of the protests taking into account mechanisms such as the certification or de-certification of the protesters' groups by media, government, other organizations and groups of citizens. As I show in Chapters 4 and 5, diverse groups of people perceived increasing unemployment rates and economic recession as a threat (which in turn triggered their decision to act collectively to raise their demands) and the deterioration of traditional institutions as an opportunity to build their own organizations. Then, several dramatic events, such as bloody and discretionary repression of the protests by the government, and new regressive economic measures, helped to the expansion of contention to larger sectors of the population (diffusion). Finally,

these two mechanisms combined with a radicalization of the protesters' demands and methods, which ended with a polarization of the process of contention.

Since the mechanisms present in a process of contentious politics do not explain its causes, in Chapter 3, I look at the structural conditions and the context in which the wave of protests has occurred. I use other theoretical approaches, such as political economy analyses of the structural reform process and labor politics literature, to find the factors that contributed to the emergence and development of contention in Argentina since 1993 until the present.

3: Background: “Reforms, Winners and Losers”

In order to reach a better understanding of the Argentinean process of transgressive political contention in the last ten years, it is crucial to look into the context in which it took place. As I mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, scholars that studied the protests found that the new structural conditions (market-led growth, retrenchment of the state) contributed to their emergence and development. In general terms, I agree with this statement, but it is necessary to go further. The purpose of this chapter is to present the context in which the protests took place in order to identify certain political characteristics and socioeconomic results of the reform process that played a key role in the origin and growth of the latest wave of transgressive contentious politics. Although I use some economic data, I base my conclusions on political economy analyses of the structural reform process and labor politics literature.

Before revising the features and consequences of the structural reform process in the 1990s, I present key institutional and political data and a few economic development antecedents. In Table 3.1, I outline the institutional and political panorama since the mid 1970s, indicating political regime (military or democratic), ruling and principal opposition parties (Unión Cívica Radical, UCR, Partido Justicialista, PJ) and the presidency.

Table 3.1: Institutional and Political Panorama. Argentina (1976-2003)				
Period	Political Regime	Ruling Political Party	President	Opposition Political Party^a
1976-1981	Military	-	Gral. Videla, Jorge	PJ (Peronist)
1981-1981			Gral. Viola, Roberto	UCR (Radical)
1981-1982			Gral. Galtieri, Leopoldo	
1982-1983			Gral. Bignone, Reinaldo	
1983-1989	Democracy	UCR	Alfonsín, Raul	PJ
1989-1995		PJ	Menem, Carlos	UCR
1995-1999 ^b		PJ	Menem, Carlos	UCR
1999-2001		Alianza ^c	De la Rúa, Fernando	PJ
2002-2003 ^d		PJ	Duhalde, Eduardo	UCR

^a Only principal opposition parties

^b After the Constitutional reform of 1994, the presidential periods were reduced from six to four years long, adding the option of re-election of a president for one more term (consecutive or not).

^c Coalition between UCR and FREPASO (minor political party mostly formed by dissident Peronists and left oriented politicians).

^d In December 2001, De la Rúa resigned to his position. Before Duhalde became the interim president until 2003, Rodríguez Saá, Adolfo, occupied that position for a week.

Source: Based on Romero (1994), La Nación (2001-2002), Página 12 (2001-2002).

As Table 3.1 shows, Alfonsín's government of 1983 opened a new democratic phase for Argentina, which turned out to be the longest one in its history. Since the implementation of the democratic electoral system in 1912 (universal, secret and compulsory vote), only a very few democratic administrations managed to complete their terms: Yrigoyen, Hipólito (1916-1922), Alvear, Marcelo T. (1922-1928) Yrigoyen –second term- (1928-1930); Perón, Juan D. (1946-1951) –first term. Indeed, since the coup of 1930, military eruptions became such a common institutional practice that in fifty years there were more military than democratically elected governments. Taking this into account, the succession of four democratic governments without the intervention of the military forces in a period of twenty years represents a novelty in Argentine history. This democratic character seemed to have been reinforced in the crisis of

2001, when De la Rúa brought his term to a premature end, resigning from his position, and was then replaced by an interim administration safeguarding the democratic regime.

Regarding economic development antecedents, in general terms, Argentina moved between periods in which either the state or the market were defined as motors of growth, and accordingly, the economy was closed or opened to foreign influence, be it trade, finance or investment. The figure below summarizes these general trends since the 1880s to the present times.

Figure 3.1: Trends of Economic Growth Models. Argentina (1880s-2000s)		
	Open	Closed
Market	1880s – 1930s 1990s – 2000s	
State	1930s – mid 1940s 1970s – 1980s	mid 1940s – 1970s

Source: Based on Cortés Conde (1998), Gerchunoff and Llach (1998).

First, since the 1880s to the 1930s, the economic growth model followed was predominantly market-oriented with an open economy. During these years, the levels of foreign investment and external trade were very high, especially with Great Britain and later, the United States. Between 1930s and mid 1940s (Second World War period), there was a strong tendency to reduce the central role of the

market, increase the state's role as development motor, and close the economy to external trade and investment. Then, in the following three decades, democratic and military governments generally enforced a state-oriented scheme and a closed economy, with the purpose of developing Argentina's autonomous productive power. In the 1970s and 1980s, certain economic sectors were opened in a regulated manner for trade and investment, but the intervention of the state in the economy was slightly reduced. Finally, since the 1990s, every government enforced a market-oriented scheme, an open economy and significantly reduced the role of the state as motor of development. In the following, I review this last shift of development model.

3.A: STRUCTURAL REFORMS: "FIRST ROUND"

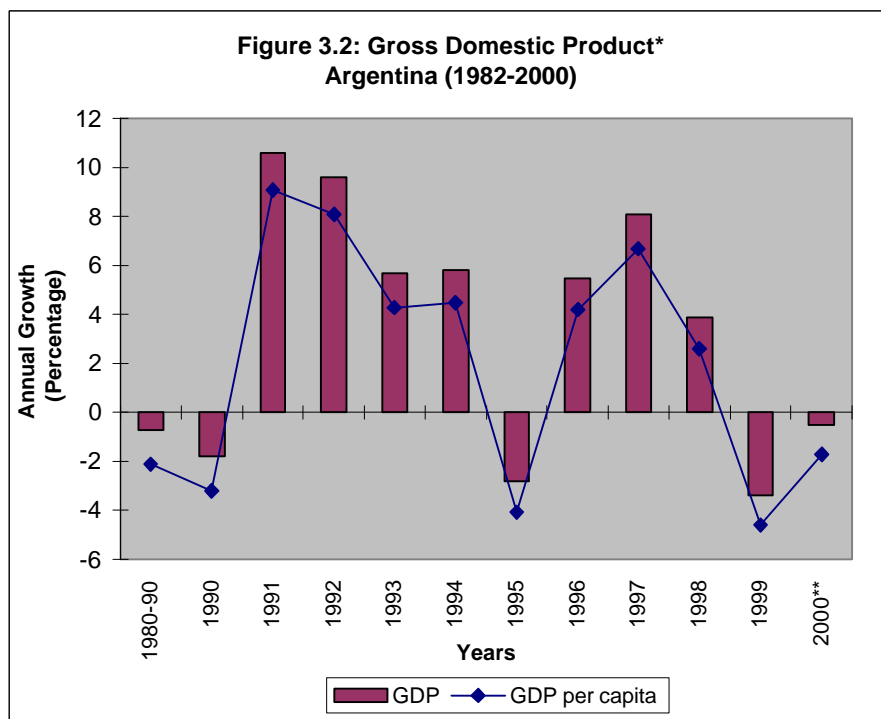
After at least fifty years of a domestic-led growth model based on the development of a national industrial and entrepreneurial sector, with high levels of state intervention in the economic, political and social spheres, Argentina went through significant changes in the 1990s. This decade was characterized by the implementation of a series of structural reform policies, which basically consisted of economic liberalization and deregulation, and state retrenchment through privatization and reduction of public agencies, employees and programs. The basis of the reform policies was the neoliberal ideal of moving towards a minimal state by reducing its size and level of intervention, and increasing the role of the market in economic and social sectors, with the purpose of achieving higher

levels of development and integrating the country into the global economic system.

In short, the first phase of the structural reform program (1989-1994) consisted of the liberalization of the economy (deregulation and suspension of industrial, regional and export promotion regimes), the creation of a new currency board system (intended to avoid the use of monetary strategies like devaluation and inflation during economic downturns), the privatization of state-owned firms and the reduction of the number and size of public agencies.¹¹ In general, the first effects of the reforms were positive since a renovated influx of international funds and investment (mainly due to the opening of the economy and the sale of the public-owned enterprises) triggered a phase of economic growth in the country.

Figure 3.2 shows that the GDP jumped from a decade of negative growth, to an average growth of 6% in the first five years, while Table 3.2 shows increasing levels of trade (see balance of payments), and increasing foreign investment and funds (see external debt and resource flows) throughout the decade.

¹¹ For a detailed review of the policies implemented within the structural reform program see Heymann (2000). See also Gerchunoff and Torre (1996) and Gerchunoff and Llach (1998).



Source: Based on CEPAL (2000b, 2001a), World Bank (2000, 2001) and Heymann (2000).
 * Annual Growth Rate based on pesos in constant prices of 1986.
 ** 2000 data are preliminary estimates.

Table 3.2: Balance of Payments, External Debt and Resource Flows. Argentina (1979-2000)							
BALANCE OF PAYMENTS (in US\$D millions)*							
	1990	1991	1994	1995	1997	1999	2000
Current account	4552	-647	-10949	-4938	-12036	-12444	-9361
Trade balance (goods and services)	7954	2820	-7831	-969	-6301	-4866	-1766
Exports	14800	14386	19451	25016	30940	27764	30828
Imports	6846	11566	27282	25985	37241	32630	32594
Capital and financial accounts**	-5169	-159	11171	2920	15342	14471	8143
Overall balance	-617	-806	222	-2018	3306	2027	-1218
*Source: Based on CEPAL (1999, 2000a, 2001a)							
** capital pending classification, includes banking sector and the non-financial public and private sectors.							
Includes errors and omissions							
EXTERNAL DEBT AND RESOURCE FLOWS (in US\$D millions)***							
	1979	1980	1989	1990	1998	1999	2000
External Debt							
Total debt outstanding and disbursed	20942	27157	65618	62232	140489	145994	146395
Total debt service	2251	4182	4385	6158	19690	27900	26500
Composition of net resource flows							
Official grants	-2	2	54	21	31	6	6
Official creditors	233	58	660	456	2072	1538	1957
Private creditors	4334	6038	-732	-974	9527	3478	-4204
Foreign direct investment	206	678	1028	1836	6150	8236	10696
Portfolio equity	0	0	8	13	50	-112	15
***Source: Based on World Bank (2000, 2001)							

Despite this success, a series of economic, political and social problems soon brought doubt to the initial results. These doubts included:

- high volatility and vulnerability against international crisis¹²
- increasing levels of foreign debt¹³
- reduced state's autonomy in front of multilateral agencies and international investors
- challenges of competing with more efficient markets and producers (in terms of technologic differences, costs and a favorable exchange rate for imports but unfavorable for exports)
- reduction of the most important traditional sources of employment (public sector and national small and medium enterprises)
- changes in the labor market structure (high unemployment rates,¹⁴ heterogeneity, flexibilization and segmentation)
- increasing numbers of households and population under poverty¹⁵
- maintaining a pro-reform coalition¹⁶
- coexistence of “old” and “new” actors, institutions and practices (which eventually collided with each other)¹⁷
- balancing short-term with long-term conditions, expectations and results.¹⁸

¹² The international crises of 1995 (Mexico), 1997 (Asia), 1998 (Russia), 1999 (Brazil), for example, negatively affected the economic growth (you can see these impacts in Figure 3.2) and the level of foreign investment in the country.

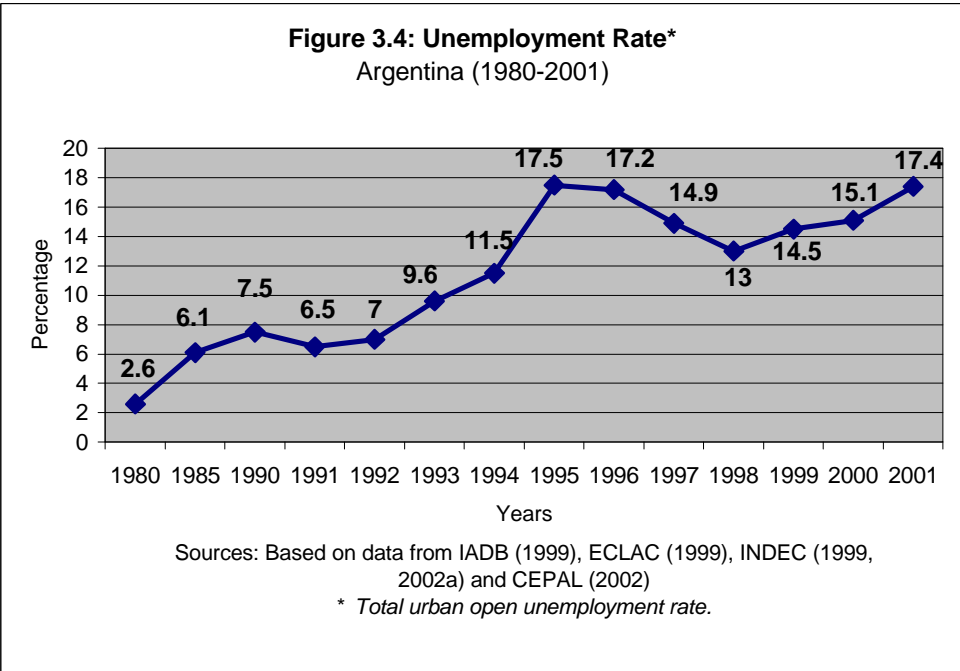
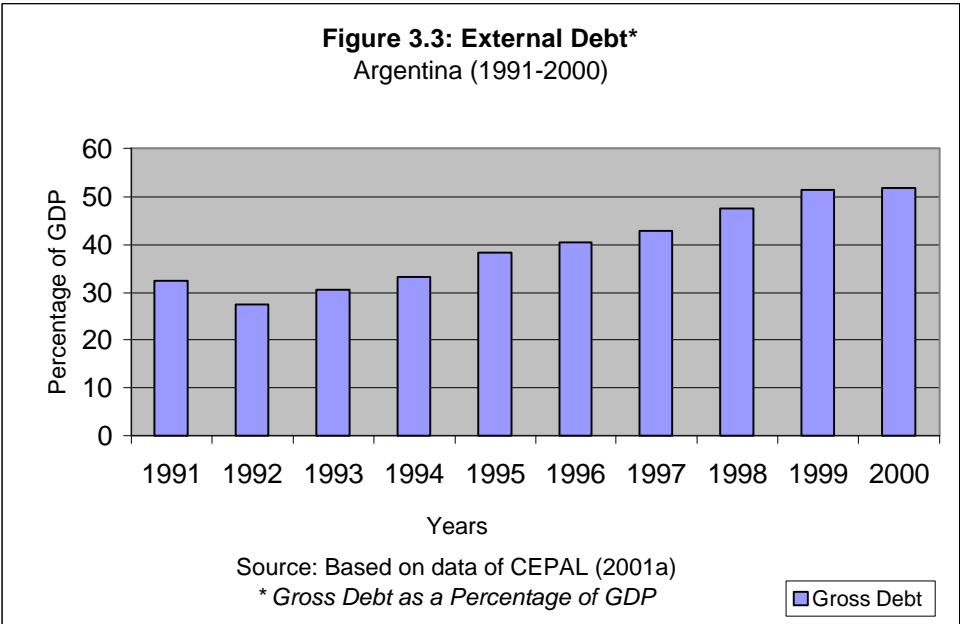
¹³ See Figure 3.3 and Table 3.2 (external debt).

¹⁴ See Figure 3.4.

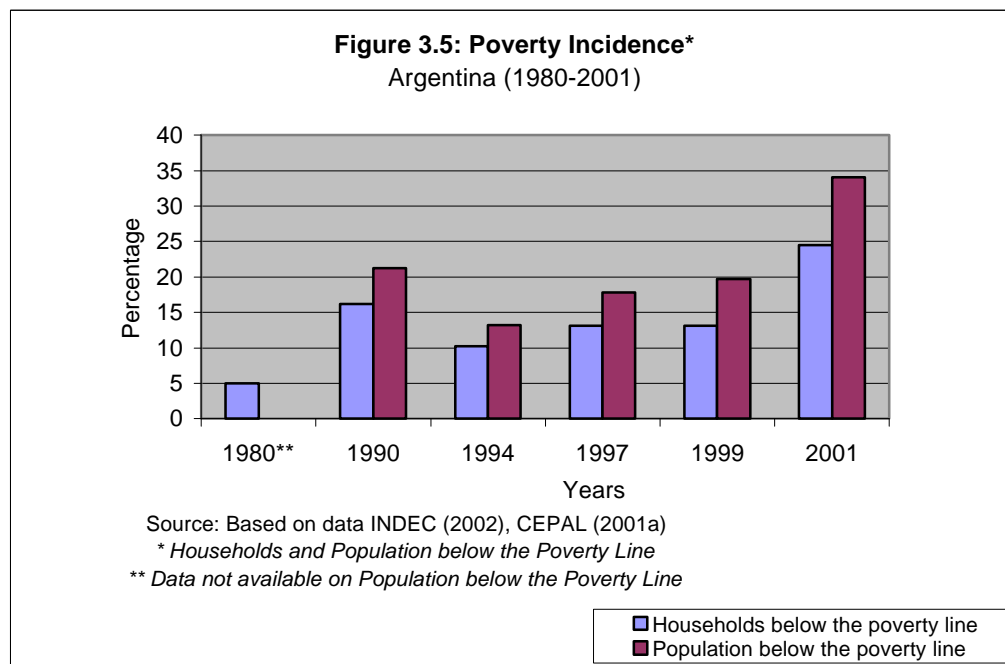
¹⁵ See Figure 3.5.

¹⁶ See Palermo (1999), Palermo and Novaro (1996) and Torre (1997)

¹⁷ For example, traditional political *caudillos* negotiating and implementing structural reform policies resulted in a sort of adaptation of clientelistic and patrimonial practices to the new neoliberal context. I will come back to this issue later in this section.



¹⁸ An example of this dilemma was dealing with the short-term contradictory results of the reforms, such as economic growth with high unemployment rates. While in the long run, the



3.B: STRUCTURAL REFORMS: “SECOND ROUND”

Once these negative and conflictive results proved to be more permanent than temporary, and once they combined with economic recession –triggered by the cycle of international crises since the mid 1990s- the Argentine government embraced the so-called “second generation of reforms.”¹⁹ These targeted social, labor and poverty issues, fiscal efficiency and transparency, decentralization and anti-corruption questions. This second phase (1995-present) tried to restore some

reforms were supposed to stabilize the labor market, the short and medium term pressures of unemployment would threaten the political and social sustainability of reforms.

¹⁹ See Camdessus (1999), Wolfensohn (1999) and Jacobs (1999)

power to the state, given that it was now its turn to solve the difficulties brought on by the new economic structure and improve institutional systems and practices that hindered the advancement toward a modern public sector and economic development.

In contrast to the first reformist stage, in which certain contextual factors facilitated the implementation of new macroeconomic rules, the second stage found various obstacles in its way. As authors such as Torre (1997) and Palermo and Novaro (1996) claim,²⁰ while the economic and political emergency²¹ previous to the implementation of the structural economic reform policies helped the first Menem's administration to build a supporting coalition, the mid-term negative results of these policies weakened this coalition and therefore delayed and complicated the design and implementation of the second set of reforms. To begin with, economic hardship prevented the government to follow its strategy of redistributing the reform costs in a semi populist fashion (Palermo: 1997).²²

²⁰ On the political economy of the structural reform process in Argentina see Torre (1993, 1997), Palermo and Novaro (1996), Acuña (1994), Gerchunoff and Torre (1996), Cavarozzi (1997), Nelson (1990), Smith, et.al. (1994) and Portantiero (1995), Schamis (1999) and Etchemendy (2001b).

²¹ 1989 was a critical year, with economic recession, hyperinflation, high levels of social unrest (protests, strikes, riots and looting) and extreme political weakness. The previously cited authors argue that these drastic conditions helped the new administration to build a pro-reform coalition.

²² On this point, I agree with Palermo (1997), whose analysis of the political economy of the structural reforms in Argentina argued that in the first years of reform, the government carried on an expansive macroeconomic policy that he categorized as "moderate populism." Following his analysis, by semi populist fashion I mean that the government combined populist (distribute benefits without costs) and anti-populist (costs assignment to groups with conflictive interests) strategies to distribute the costs and benefits of the reform policies. That is to say, the government was distributing benefits and costs to groups with conflictive interests in search of building a supporting coalition. In the first phase, the influx of resources allowed the government to redistribute benefits in order to reduce the social costs of reform. However, in the second phase, the economic problems limited the government's capacity to apply the populist strategy.

Moreover, the diverse interest groups did not see the second stage of reforms as a new starting point, but rather as a continuation of a game that had already established rules and consequently, winners and losers. Finally, the issues to be addressed were more sensitive because even if they had economic costs and implications, these were primarily political and social, which in practical terms meant that the government had to deal with a considerably more complex bargaining base with multiple interests and organizations.

One of the most complex areas that was to be negotiated and reformed in the second phase was labor;²³ a key area to take into account when studying the emergence of the massive wave of protests in Argentina since 1997. Labor in itself became a very sensitive issue because of its economic and sociopolitical costs and implications. Moreover, after decades of a closed economy, pro-worker labor laws and strong participation of the unions in the decision making process, it was predictable that changing the labor system was not going to be an easy task. All the actors involved (companies, business associations, unions, workers, politicians and multilateral agencies) were essential in the construction and sustainability of the political coalition supporting Menem's two-term government in its neoliberal campaign. Consequently, the Peronist administration went through a tough negotiation process, balancing its interest in advancing in the economic liberalization and deregulation path, which implied loosening the labor

²³ For analyses of the labor reform taking into account historical, political, economic and social variables see the remarkable works of Etchemendy and Palermo (1998), Murillo (1997), Etchemendy (2001a) and Godio (1998).

market regulations, and its need to keep enough political support to do so. On the one hand, the government dealt with firms, business associations, several public officials and multilateral agencies pushing for a more flexible scheme in order to reduce costs to be able to compete in the new liberalized economy. On the other hand, the government dealt with unions, workers and unemployed people pushing for labor and social protection, and the creation of job opportunities. In the end, the government made a trade-off: even if there were significant advances in the labor reform, it did not go as far as firms, business associations and multilateral agencies wanted.

In general, the new labor regulations resulting from the 1990s' reform involved easing the restrictions and costs of firing and laying-off workers (through more flexible forms of employment contracts) and decentralizing the collective bargaining system (from vertical unions' negotiations by economic sector at the national level, to decentralized unions' negotiations by firm at any level).²⁴ These regulations benefited employers more than employees. However, it is important to note that the participation of the unions in the design of the labor reform was influential since the extent of flexibilization and decentralization of collective bargaining was moderated, and the unionized employees remained a significant level of protection in comparison to recent and new workers (Etchemendy: 2001a).²⁵ This outcome clearly reflected the unions' character in

²⁴ The labor reform was elaborated in parts throughout the entire decade (i.e., new regulations were sanctioned in 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, etc.). See Marshall (1997).

²⁵ The fact that the unions managed to influence the labor reform process puts into question the widespread idea that labor organizations were passive during the reform process and became

the 1990s. The unions wished mainly to survive as organizations in the new economic scheme and to keep their affiliated members protected under the new labor regulations.²⁶ However, those workers who were non-unionized, displaced, underemployed or unemployed remained out of their sphere of interest and action. This attitude broke a historical pattern and ideal: the unions, especially the Peronist ones, were by definition the protectors and representatives of the “working class,” looking after labor and social rights. This rupture later influenced the emergence and development of new organizations, such as the picketers. These would become the new means of raising social and labor demands of the growing mass of displaced, underemployed and unemployed workers, who found themselves without any kind of traditional protection or representation, be it from the state (through welfare services, employment programs or pro-labor regulations) or the unions (through collective mobilizations in their defense or employment training).

Regarding the labor market after the implementation of the structural reform policies, the most striking change was that the unemployment rate

powerless within the liberalized economic structure. Moreover, if one looks closer to the unions’ realm, one finds that while some unions lost political, institutional and economic power, while other organizations managed to keep and even increase their power within the new economic framework (See Murillo: 1997). Finally, the disrupting veto power of the unions revealed not to have seriously weakened or disappeared once the national government changed from a Peronist administration to a Radical one. A key aspect of the traditional relationship between unions and the Peronist party proved to have survived the structural changes: while the Peronist party was in power, the unions tended first to negotiate, and then, if necessary, to veto; on the contrary, while the Radical party was in power, the unions tended first to veto, and eventually to negotiate. Moreover, the unions seemed to have followed the Peronist government new attitude towards the working class: its protection and representation would not be anymore a priority in the agenda.

²⁶ On the different strategies adopted by the unions see Murillo (1997).

drastically increased, from 7.5% in 1990, to 17.4% in 2001.²⁷ Moreover, the labor market became much more heterogeneous, segmented and flexible; the level of employment in the service sector increased, while it declined in the primary and secondary sectors. Three processes occurred. First, when state-owned companies were privatized, the new owners (mostly foreign) applied reengineering programs in which they fired old workers and hired new ones with different skills, in reduced quantities and under more flexible contracts. Second, the state reform brought about a reduction of direct public employment, which was also one of the most important sources of employment in the country. Third, the opening and deregulation of the economy resulted in a highly competitive environment for national enterprises (small, medium and large). Since these firms had been functioning in a protected market with low technological standards compared to the international ones and low levels of market competition, they were not capable of beating the newcomers or competing with the imported products in the market. These resulted in widespread closure of firms, leading to massive numbers of unemployed people.²⁸

3.C: “KNOCK OUT?” A FERTILE GROUND FOR SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

In this new structural context, an increasing mass of unemployed, underemployed, displaced and informal workers found themselves with restricted

²⁷ See Figure 3.4.

²⁸ For a detailed economic analysis of the changes in the labor market see Altimir and Beccaria (1999a), Godio (1998), Weller (1998a,b), Duryea and Szekely (1998) and Katz (2001).

opportunities and without institutional protection and representation, be it from the state, political parties or traditional labor organizations. Certainly, this setting seems to be highly propitious for social upheaval. However, there are still some questions about the manner in which the growing number of disadvantaged people mobilized and raised their demands. To better understand the reasons why the protesters created new means of protest and organizations outside the traditional channels of representation and framed their demands beyond pure labor issues, I look at three phenomena: first, the preservation and reproduction of certain political practices from the traditional power system in the new market-led economic growth model; second, a long-standing crisis of legitimacy and efficiency of the conventional societal channels of representation; and third, a long tradition of political participation and activism, or in social movement theory terms, an existing rich repertoire of contention.

The **first phenomenon** that played a key role in originating the mobilization and later shaping the relationship between protesters' organizations and the state was the preservation and reproduction of a number of political practices including clientelism, patrimonialism, corruption and friendship networks, that derived from the shift in the traditional power system in the new market-led growth model. In my opinion, the conservation of these political practices resulted from the manner in which the structural reforms were designed and implemented. Several authors who have studied the political economy of the structural reform have showed that it was not a linear, homogeneous process, but

rather a multidimensional, heterogeneous one.²⁹ Such heterogeneity was a political outcome, mostly related to political negotiations and agreements of the state with diverse powerful domestic and foreign actors in terms of gaining the necessary political support to implement the reforms. If one views the reform negotiations, metaphorically speaking, in terms of a game, one observes that the players were domestic actors belonging to traditionally important economic and political sectors, foreign actors from diverse strong financial and economic sectors (multilateral agencies, multinational and international firms), and governmental authorities concentrated in the executive branch (mostly the president and the Economic Ministry). Therefore, this game was virtually closed to those groups that did not have enough power, were not extremely relevant to the power coalition, or were poorly organized.

Not surprisingly, these restrictions resulted in a set of institutional outcomes that mainly benefited the participating players serving their own particular interests, which could eventually bring advantages or disadvantages to other groups not directly involved in the negotiations. Although one might expect such particularistic behavior from the private sector, ideally one should expect that the government might act on behalf of the general interest of the citizens. However, and following a long-standing political pattern, partisan, personal and political matters eclipsed general goals of well-being. The new set of rules that resulted from the structural reforms was partial, discretionary, imbalanced and

²⁹ See Torre (1997), Palermo and Novaro (1996) Etchemendy and Palermo (1998) and Etchemendy (2001b).

irregular. For example, in the case of economic liberalization and deregulation, there were economic sectors that were abruptly left without state protection, while others remained protected and even able to design their own regulations, like the automotive industry.³⁰ In the case of privatizations, the national firms were sold to foreign investors under extraordinary circumstances, such as long-term guaranteed monopoly contracts. Moreover, there was a first “pre-determined” array of winners and losers, and consequently, the game was, from the beginning, biased and unfair.

This manner of designing the new structural rules allows me to identify the persistence and reproduction of perverse political practices, which were supposedly targets of the structural reform policies, since the government and the multilateral agencies encouraging these major changes recognized that discretionary politics, corruption, friendship networks, patrimonialism and assistentialism prevented the country from developing and fed inequality. Therefore, while there were several major changes in certain macroeconomic principles (i.e., a shift from state-led to market-led economic growth, from a closed to an open economy, reduced public sector and welfare system), there were strong continuities from the “old” to the “new” model. These continuities mainly consisted of the preservation of a power structure in which the strongest actors managed to maintain entrance to governmental decision-making processes, and to

³⁰ See for example Etchemendy (2001b) and Villalón (1999).

maintain perverse political practices, such as corruption, clientelism, friendship networks and patrimonialism.

These continuities in turn affected the origin and development of the wave of social protests throughout the country. On the one hand, some of the main complaints of the protesters were increasing governmental corruption, unequal distribution of income, decreasing job opportunities and lack of institutional protection to the unemployed and underemployed. The picketers perceived these conditions as a direct result of the implementation of the structural reforms policies, and therefore raised demands against both the economic changes and political continuities. On the other hand, the first response of all levels of government to the protests was to negotiate with, and seek to appease the protestors, by offering social programs in the traditional large welfare state fashion. In particular, the national government launched an employment program, “*Plan Trabajar*,”³¹ which although initially designed to address unemployment issues, was soon converted into a political tool of social control that in turn further promoted clientelistic and corrupt practices on the part of the government and diverse picketers’ organizations. In short, in a context of major macroeconomic changes, there were traditional political structures and behavioral patterns that remained unaffected and had a strong influence in both the origins and the political dynamics of the process of social contention in the late 1990s.

³¹ I give more details on the use of this program in Chapter 4.c.

The **second phenomenon** related to the origins and development of the wave of protests in Argentina came from a long-standing crisis of legitimacy and efficiency of the conventional societal channels of representation. In terms of the emergence of social protests throughout the country, the traditional organizations through which those kind of demands had been normally channeled were not present: unions and political parties were not the originators or organizers of the protests. Moreover, the diverse types of protests - pickets, *cacerolazos* (pot-banging), *escraches* (graffiti protests), neighborhood assemblies and barter clubs - constantly expressed their disagreement with partisanship and unionization, denouncing the high levels of corruption and inadequate representation of those traditional institutions, especially the dominant organizations, such as the largest unions and the principle political parties.

Although in the later development of the new protest organizations one identifies a marginal participation of certain union branches (mostly against the government's structural reform program) and political parties (mainly leftist, communist and Trotskyist parties), the question of why the protesters did not use the traditional channels of representation to raise their demands to the government remains central. In my opinion, structural and ideological matters came into play. On the one hand, the unions lost their strength because the number of people in the labor market and under formal labor contracts reduced dramatically since the implementation of the structural reforms in the beginning of the 1990s. Therefore, the massive numbers of protesters who worked in the informal sector,

were fully unemployed or were working under increasingly unstable conditions did not find organic representation or belonging in the unions. On the other hand, both unions and political parties had gone through a long crisis of legitimacy and representation, reflected in massive societal accusations of their poor political practices, misrepresentation of social interests and misuse of public funds.

The protesters were facing major changes and did not find the dominant institutions to be of any help, be it as protectors or representatives. So, why should they invest time and resources in organizations that neither represented their interests nor fought for their necessities and even appropriated their resources? The increasing level of corruption together with the worsening of the socioeconomic context brought increasing discredit and dissatisfaction on these traditional institutions and their leaders, and finally contributed to the development of alternative organizations in search of better representation and higher collective efficiency. In particular, the protesters created new organizations such as unemployed associations, neighborhood commissions, ex-employees committees and self-managed assemblies, in which they were able to express their demands and interests to be represented and defended, generally by setting up horizontal decision-making structures.

Finally, the **third phenomenon** relevant in the emergence and development of the recent social movement is the existence of a strong tradition of contained and transgressive contentious politics and a rich repertoire of

contention, which provided the protestors with a vast array of experiences, meanings and tools of collective action.³² On the one hand, previous episodes of contentious politics that occupied a crucial position in the historical fabric of the Argentine society played a key role as references to the new contenders. These include the democratic activist civil society organizations in the early 1980s against the military regime, the proliferation of alternative political groups in the late 1960s and 1970s, the popular mobilizations in the mid 1940s in favor of the inclusion of labor rights for the increasing mass of low income workers, and the radical movement in the beginning of the century to expand civil rights beyond the oligarchic elite. These events contributed (at least indirectly) to the picketers' and other protesters' decision to engage in contentious politics to raise their demands, defend their rights and struggle for a change.

On the other hand, these experiences provided a set of contentious tools that were used by the protesters in their innovative means of contention. While the roadblocks, *cacerolazos*, *escraches*, neighborhood assemblies and barter clubs include tactical innovations, I also find elements from previous experiences of contention. For example, road blocking is not entirely a new method of protest: the widely used street mobilizations, which were normally combined with massive strikes, included blocking streets and disturbing the normal rhythm of the town or neighborhood where the mobilization was taking place. However, the

³² McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's (2001, 16) definition of repertoire of contention is "culturally encoded ways [such as strikes, tax rebellions, food riots, street manifestations, etc.] in which people interact in contentious politics," which is divided between contained and transgressive. See Chapter 2.d.

systematic use of road blocking with the purpose of interrupting the regular transportation of people and goods between towns and neighborhoods in order to gain the attention of the government and the mass media was new. Additionally, if one takes into account the protestors, the same phenomenon occurs: there were new actors, like young unemployed people, women and children without previous political experience, and old actors, like ex-employees with a long tradition of union mobilization and ex-militants of the seventies. In the case of the popular assemblies, the use of existing methods and the presence of experienced actors were combined with new elements of contention, such as horizontal decision-making structures, and communication inter-assemblies using new technologies to raise concrete demands in popular initiatives to local governments. In short, if a strong contentious legacy had not existed, it would have been less likely for the wave of protests to emerge and more importantly, develop into new organizations that were not only able to survive and expand for a long period of time, but also to achieve concrete results by innovating and also reproducing traditional behaviors and organizational tactics.

In conclusion, some new conditions after the structural reforms as well as certain elements of their discretionary political design, the deterioration of institutional legitimacy and the existence of a rich repertoire of contention all contributed to the emergence and development of the wave of transgressive political contention in the last ten years. A growing mass of disadvantaged people without institutional protection or representation finally stood up for their rights,

creating alternative ways of contention and their own collective organizations. In Chapters 4 and 5, I explore the process of political contention in more detail.

4: The Contentious Process, 1993-2001: “Or the Game of the Losers”

The process of transgressive political contention that started in 1993 constituted a change in the traditional Argentine repertoire of contention: new forms of contention displaced the main means of labor and social protest. The traditional strikes and mobilizations, which were mostly organized by unions and political parties and counted on unionized workers and political partisans as their main participants, lost their dominance with the emergence and widespread use of other means of protest, which counted on a different array of organizations and participants. A growing mass of disadvantaged people without traditional institutional protection or representation created alternative means of collective action. *Puebladas* or *estallidos sociales* (town revolts or social explosions), *cortes de ruta* or *piquetes* (roadblocks or pickets), *cacerolazos* (pot-banging), *escraches* (graffiti protests), *asambleas vecinales* (neighborhood assemblies) and *clubes de trueque* (barter clubs) became the new protagonists of the contentious scene. In this chapter, I go through this shift, the new means of protest, and the mechanisms that shaped the dynamics of the contentious process.

4.A: UNION PROTEST: “IT IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE”

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, and particularly, since the mid 1940s, the main means of labor and social protest in Argentina were strikes and mobilizations, which were mostly promoted and organized by unions and political parties. These methods of political contention remained strong for five decades, with periods of higher and lower degrees of unrest according to diverse political, institutional and economic matters. In the case of unions, their level of activism and combativeness was generally related to political and institutional factors, rather than strictly economic ones. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the unions’ special relationship with the Peronist party resulted in a higher use of disruptive measures during non-Peronist governments, regardless of economic conditions. Moreover, one finds a greater degree of labor conflicts during periods of economic recession, with growing unemployment rates and deflation, a combination of economic factors that, according to labor economics literature,³³ would deter unions and workers to go on strike. In particular, if one looks at the level of unions’ political contention during the 1980s and 1990s, one observes the relevance of politics over economics for unions and workers engaging in different forms of labor conflicts. As Figure 4.1 shows, the number

³³ In general terms, the labor economic literature states that “it is generally found that strikes are procyclical: in the expansionary phase of the business cycle, strikes increase, and when the economy contracts, strikes decrease” (Kennan: 1986). Moreover, in periods of high unemployment rates, the number of strikes decreases, because the costs of going on strike and getting fired are higher for the worker. Finally, generally, in periods of inflation, the number of strikes rises because the unions push for wage increases. However, the combination of these different economic factors and other political, social, cultural, historical or institutional issues produced diverse outcomes. The Argentine case is a good example of multiple variables intervening in the occurrence of strikes, among which politics had a dominant position.

of labor conflicts³⁴ did not strictly follow the economic logic that claims that in periods of economic growth, high unemployment and deflation, the level of labor conflicts declines.

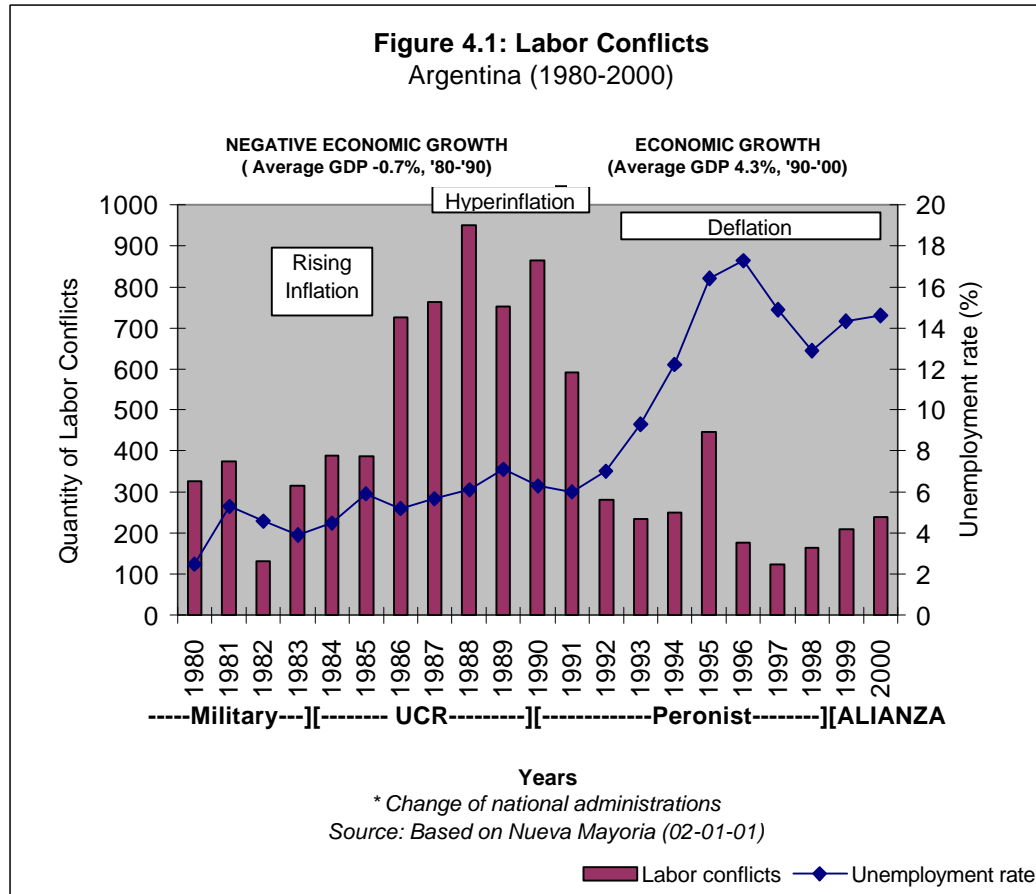


Figure 4.1 shows that in general, during the recession of the 1980s, the quantity of labor conflicts was higher than during the expanding 1990s. There is

³⁴ According to the data source I use, Nueva Mayoria (02-01-01), labor conflicts are defined as measures coordinated by unions or workers federations against employers. Labor conflicts comprise *trabajo a reglamento* (work stoppage), and partial and total strikes by firm or economic sector.

an increase in the number of labor conflicts between 1980 and 1981 (military regime) along with rising unemployment rates, inflation and economic contraction. Then, high levels of labor unrest and increasing unemployment rates occur during the Radical (UCR) administration of President Alfonsín (1983-1989), both in periods of rising inflation (1983-85, 87-89) and decreasing inflation (1986). Moreover, despite the change to a Peronist administration in 1989, the level of labor unrest only began to decrease in 1991, when the Argentine economy began to grow, inflation was drastically reduced, the unemployment rate started to increase steadily and on the political side, President Menem finally reached an agreement with the unions. Furthermore, during the two Peronist administrations (1989-1995-1999), labor conflicts reached their peak in 1995 with the first economic downturn since 1991, very high unemployment and extremely low inflation (3.4%). As many authors claim, other issues besides economics came into play in the decision-making matrix of unions and workers, including partisanship, political bargains, institutional politics and social factors.³⁵ In brief, historically, the level of labor and social mobilization in Argentina was related to a broad scope of issues and dominated by two organizations, unions and political parties.

The 1990s witnessed several changes in the labor and social contention spectrum: the traditional means of protest gradually lost their protagonism with

³⁵ On Argentine labor history see Torre (1980, 1988, 1989), Germani (1966), Murmis y Portantiero (1971), Horowitz (1988), Doyon (1988), Little (1988), Mora y Araujo (1995), James (1999), Palomino (1995) and Godio (1990, 1991).

the massive occurrence of new episodes of contention. The novelty of the phenomenon was not reduced to the use of new methods of protest, but extended to new participants and organizers. *Puebladas* or *estallidos sociales*, roadblocks, *cacerolazos*, *escraches*, neighborhood assemblies and barter clubs displaced the traditional labor conflicts and manifestations from their dominant position. These new means of protest were not originally promoted or organized by unions and political parties, but were made up of heterogeneous participants and organizers beyond unionized workers or political partisans.

Across the process of transgressive political contention, I identify four phases in terms of means of protest, organizations, socio-economic origin of the protesters and the occurrence of certain mechanisms of contention, such as innovations in the repertoire of contention, identity formation, diffusion, brokerage, radicalization, convergence, polarization and scale shift. Table 4.1 presents a synthesis of the characteristics of these phases. The four phases are (1) *emergence of contention*, 1993 – 1996; (2) *decentralized roadblocks*, 1997- mid 2001; (3) *national pickets*, July– November 2001; and (4) *expanded contention*, December 2001 – June 2002.

Table 4.1: PROCESS OF TRANGRESSIVE POLITICAL CONTENTION. ARGENTINA (1993-2002)							
Years	Phase	Mechanisms*	Means**	Event	Actors	Organizations	Unrest
1993 - 1996	I. Emergence of Contention	- Collective Attribution of Threat/Opportunity -Innovation -Grievances -Repression -Identity Formation -Similarities -Category Invention -Certification	<i>Puebladas</i> First <i>Piquetes</i>	'93, <i>Santiagazo</i> '95 <i>Cutral Co's</i> (1 st <i>Piquete</i>)	Ex-public sector employees, displaced workers Low-income Without institutional protection Unemployed Underemployed Informal workers	First local picketer organizations	Medium Concentrated in few towns Sporadic
1997- mid 2001	II. Decentralized Roadblocks	-Grievances - Collective Attribution of Threat/Opportunity -Diffusion -Emulation -Scale Shift -Object Shift -Appropriation -Brokerage -Repression	<i>Piquetes</i> <i>Puebladas</i>	97' Picketer killed (Teresa Rodriguez) Roadblocks in 70% of the Argentine provinces -97 <i>Plan Trabajar</i>	Same as above	Proliferation of picketer organizations	High Dispersed across the country Regular

Continued

Table 4.1: PROCESS OF TRANGRESSIVE POLITICAL CONTENTION. ARGENTINA (1993-2002) (Continuation)							
Years	Phase	Mechanisms*	Means**	Event	Actors	Organizations	Unrest
July 2001 – Nov 2001	III. National Pickets	-Brokerage -Convergence -Diffusion -Emulation -Collective Attribution of Threat/Opportunity -Scale Shift -Competition -Radicalization	<i>Piquetes</i>	Change of <i>Plan Trabajar</i> 24 July '01, First Picketers' National Meeting and coordinated roadblocks	Low income Without institutional protection Unemployed Underemployed Informal and Displaced workers	Emergence of dominant picketer organizations with regional and national scope	Higher In every province of the country Constant
Dec 2001 – Jun 2002	IV. Expanded Contention	- Collective Attribution of Threat/Opportunity -Grievances -Innovation -Diffusion -Similarity -Appropriation -Brokerage -Convergence -Scale Shift -Radicalization -Repression -Polarization	<i>Piquetes</i> <i>Cacerolazo</i> Looting <i>Asambleas vecinales</i> <i>Clubes de trueque</i> <i>Escraches</i> Multi-sector protests	-Withdrawals Restriction -19 & 20 Dec '01, 1 st <i>Cacerolazo</i> -State of Siege -Multi sector mobilization -Lootings -Repression -Fall of National government -26 Jun '02, picketers killed -29 Jun '02, multi-sector repudiation demonstration	Low income Without institutional protection Unemployed Underemployed Informal and Displaced workers AND Middle-class (low, middle and upper middle class)	Picketer organizations Neighborhood assemblies	Very high In every province of the country Constant Low and middle income protesters, multi-sector mobilizations

* In this column I only include the most important mechanisms in terms of defining that particular phase of contention. The name of the mechanisms is shortened because of limited space. Refer to Chapter 2.d. for complete names and concepts.

** In this column I only include the most used and relevant means of protest. For example, the *escraches* appeared and were used before the fourth phase, but they were not widely used until then.

Table 4.1 shows that during the first phase of the process of transgressive political contention, the first innovations to the repertoire of contention appeared with the *puebladas* and *piquetes*. In the former, the main participants were ex-public sector employees. In the latter, low-income people without institutional protection (be it from the state or labor organizations), unemployed, underemployed, informal and displaced workers were the actors participating in pickets. The first picketer organizations were created, institutionalizing the invention of a new category: the picketer. During this phase, the level of unrest was high, but was concentrated in few towns of Argentina. In the third phase, with the occurrence of the First Picketers' National Meeting (*Primera Asamblea Nacional Piquetera*), several organizations coordinated national roadblocks. The mechanisms of diffusion, brokerage, convergence and scale shift gave new characteristics to the contention, which was also radicalized. As a final example, in the fourth phase a new sector of the population became involved in contentious politics by creating new means of protest (i.e., *cacerolazos*, *escraches*, etc.) and organizations (neighborhood assemblies) and participating in picketers' and multi-sector mobilizations. In this Chapter, I go through the first three phases, means of protest and mechanisms of contention in more detail. Then, in Chapter 5, I analyze the fourth phase of contention.

4.B: PUEBLADAS, ESTALLIDOS SOCIALES: “WATCH OUT!”

“Los manifestantes (...) demolieron a su paso todas las sedes de las instituciones del poder político provincial (...) y las mansiones de los corruptos políticos patronales, tanto oficialistas como opositores; (...) los símbolos del poder político.”³⁶ (Oviedo: 2001, 11)

The first phase of the long process of transgressive political contention, Emergence of Contention, started with the *Santiagazo*, an urban revolt in the province of Santiago del Estero, in 1993. Government authorities and media baptized these protests as *puebladas* or *estallidos sociales* (town revolts or social explosions), thereby publicizing the events and emphasizing their violent and chaotic aspects. Indeed, some of the provinces that saw this kind of protest were eventually declared by the national government as “provinces in emergency situation,” which implied direct economic and political assistance from the national to the provincial administrations. After the *Santiagazo*, there were more *puebladas* in other provinces, such as La Rioja (1994), Salta (1994), Chaco (1994), Entre Ríos (1994) Tucumán (1994), Jujuy (1994-5), San Juan (1995), Córdoba (1995), Río Negro (1995) and Corrientes (1999).

According to the studies of Farinetti (1999), Auyero (2001a) and Laufer and Spiguel (1999), the town revolts were mostly a reaction by the public sector workers to the reduction of state employment by provincial and municipal

³⁶ “The protesters destroyed all the buildings of the provincial government and the mansions of the corrupt politicians, both those of the official party and of the opposition; they destroyed the symbols of political power” (*my translation*).

governments under structural reform policies. The protesters were joined by other sectors of the population to various extents; Río Negro and Santiago del Estero were the provinces with the most heterogeneous group of dissenters.

Basically, the protesters demanded unpaid wages, protection of jobs and recreation of employment sources, and also denounced the corrupt political class. The town revolts were directed at the provincial government and the local political class. The site of contention was particularly urban, its extent local, and its duration temporary. The *puebladas* consisted in mobilizations and street concentrations, generally accompanied by violent acts against official buildings and politician's properties (i.e., looting and burning of public offices and attacks and looting to politicians' houses). The police or military force usually repressed these actions.³⁷

In general, the social unrest caused by these revolts, in some cases combined with other kind of protests, was a contributing factor to the fall of several provincial governments (Santiago del Estero, Corrientes and Jujuy, for example), although not necessarily for the better since the new administrations were not able to solve the existing economic, political and social problems.³⁸

³⁷ It is not completely clear if the violence started after or before the repression and if all the protesters supported it. However, it is generally argued that the violent aspect of the *puebladas* was only a reflection of the anger that the adverse economic situation, the corrupt political class and the unequal power structure caused in the protesters.

³⁸ See Farinetti (1999), Auyero (2001a) and Laufer and Spiguel (1999), who study in detail the town revolts in Argentina during the 1990s. Since these town revolts had been widely studied, and they are not the focus of my research, I will not extend my analysis on this particular form of contention.

Finally, it is important to note that traditional institutions such as unions and political parties did not appear to be organizers of the events. This innovative organizational characteristic was to be repeated throughout the entire process of political contention.³⁹

4.C: PIQUETES, CORTES DE RUTA: “WHERE ARE YOU GOING, HOW FAR DO YOU WANT TO GO?”

“Nosotros, agotamos todas las instancias legales y esperamos contestación de los funcionarios. No nos dan soluciones. Estamos cansados de las promesas. Estamos abandonados, nadie se ocupa de nosotros. Sólo nosotros nos podemos ayudar. Tuvimos que salir a luchar. Vamos a seguir cortando rutas para decir que queremos trabajo, por mas que la policía, los tanques y todo el mundo nos venga a sacar. ¡No hay derecho a tanta desigualdad!”⁴⁰

The second innovation in the repertoire of contention during the 1990s were the roadblock protests, which started in the province of Neuquén in 1995 and spread across Argentina to the extent that in 1997, 70 percent of the provinces registered at least one mobilization of this type. These protests were called by

³⁹ It is important to clarify that in certain cases, like Jujuy, there were new union leaders involved in the protests. Despite the participation of certain dissident or new union leaders in some cases, the traditional unions (which had reached an agreement with the national government on structural reform issues) were not the main promoters or organizers of the protests. While Auyero and Farinetti did not emphasize the “unionism elements” in the *puebladas*, Laufer and Spiguel argued that these cases of contention revived the workers movement.

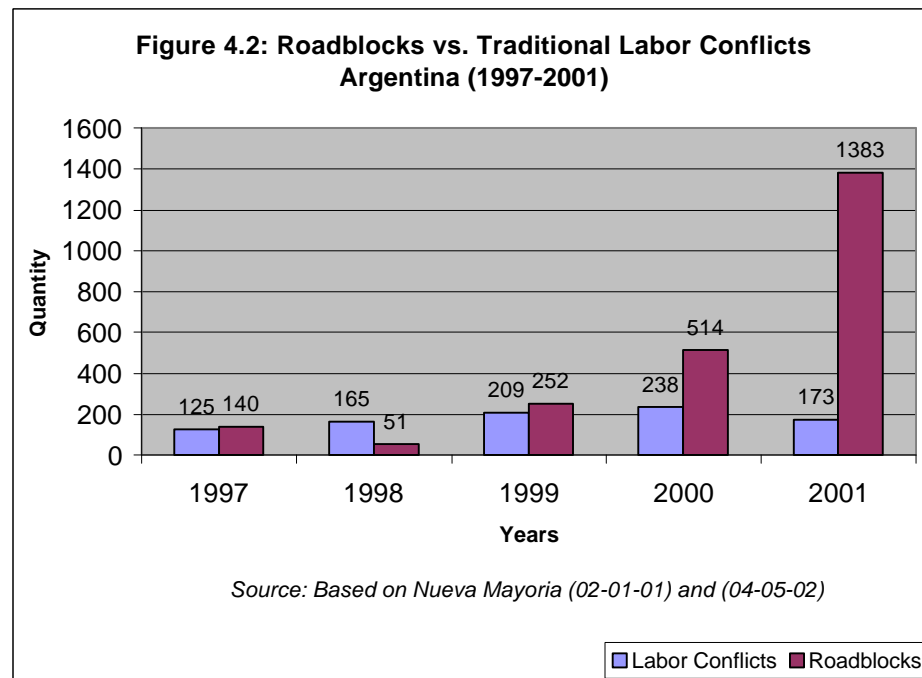
⁴⁰ “We used all the legal methods at our disposal and then waited for the government officials to give us an answer. They did not give us any solution. We are tired of promises. We have been abandoned, nobody takes care of us. We can only help ourselves. We had to go out and fight. We are going to continue blocking roads to say that we want work, even if the police, the tanks or anybody tries to kick us out of here. Such inequality should not exist!” (*my translation*). Picketers’ declarations: Grupo Documental 1° de Mayo, 2001, and 3Puntos 08/09/01.

official authorities and the mass media as “cortes de ruta” or “piquetes” (roadblocks or pickets), certifying their disrupting character. These manifestations basically consisted in blocking the main roads of the cities, generally using as a blockade burning tires and trucks or other motor vehicles. The protesters would complete those barriers with their presence in the road, singing protest chants and holding banners demanding jobs and denouncing corrupt governments and politicians.

The roadblocks were not promoted or organized by the unions or any other traditional organization. Instead, the participants of the protests organized the roadblocks themselves and subsequently created their own organizations. The participants of this particular method of protest were mostly displaced workers, informal laborers, underemployed and unemployed people; that is to say, mostly low-income, non-unionized or non-institutionally protected people. In other words, the participants were those who suffered the outcomes of the structural reform policies and the labor reform. The participants of the roadblocks identified themselves and were certified by the media and governmental authorities as *piqueteros* (picketers).

The dominant demand of the protests were labor and welfare issues: creation of jobs, improvement of poor labor conditions, and implementation of social and labor policies for those outside the labor market and under poverty conditions. These concrete demands were generally accompanied with

accusations against corrupt politicians and government authorities and complaints about the increasingly unequal power structure. In terms of the labor and social welfare demands, the roadblocks and picketer organizations displaced the dominant institutions and means of protest (unions, work stoppages and strikes) to fight for these types of issues. Moreover, regarding the broader issues, the roadblocks and picketers also seemed to have displaced the unions from their role as protectors and representatives of labor and social justice. The mass of disadvantaged people raised their voice for their rights through the new picketer organizations. Figure 4.2 shows the increasing number and relevance of roadblocks in comparison to the traditional labor conflicts (strikes and force measures) since the diffusion of pickets and picketer organizations in 1997.



With the exception of 1998, the quantity of roadblocks was increasingly higher than the number of labor conflicts. The decrease of roadblocks in 1998 was mostly a result of assistance packages from the national government to mobilized provinces as well as labor measures taken by the Menem government, particularly the strategic political use of the *Plan Trabajar*, an employment program targeted to low-income unemployed people. However, such measures taken to stop the increasing level of social mobilization proved to be unsuccessful: less than a year later, the number of roadblocks quintupled and then grew dramatically. Moreover, the strength of this new phenomenon resided in its geographic dispersion: all the provinces of Argentina held roadblocks throughout the whole contentious period (1997 until the present). The geographical dispersion and its organizational characteristics made the roadblocks a difficult target for the government, as long as they were neither concentrated in a few cities nor managed by a few readily identifiable organizations.

Table 4.2 shows the annual number of roadblocks per province, taking into account the provinces share of population and their unemployment rate. 70 percent of the provinces registered at least one roadblock per year, with the exception of 1998 when only 41 percent did. Moreover, the provinces with the highest levels of social unrest were not necessarily those with the highest unemployment rate.

Province/District	Share Total Population (%)	Unemp' Rate (%)*	Number of Roadblocks													
			1997		1998		1999		2000		2001		2002**		Total	
			#	%	c	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Buenos Aires	39%	12.3	23	16	9	18	82	33	119	25	452	33	422	26	1107	28%
Buenos Aires City	9%	10.5	11	8	9	18	58	23	51	10	170	12	161	10	460	12%
Jujuy	2%	16.3	37	26	13	25	1	0	79	15	136	10	330	21	596	15%
Tucumán	4%	19.2	7	5	0	0	23	9	48	10	55	4	60	4	193	5%
Neuquén	1%	13.7	10	7	7	14	10	4	52	7	66	5	26	2	171	4%
Salta	3%	14.6	4	3	0	0	2	1	41	9	59	4	149	9	255	6%
Santa Fe	9%	16.9	9	6	4	8	13	5	21	4	39	3	86	5	172	4%
Córdoba	8%	14.2	22	16	1	2	4	2	11	2	34	2	134	8	206	5%
Chaco	3%	9.5	2	1	0	0	4	2	24	4	75	5	44	3	149	4%
Río Negro	2%	7.9	1	1	0	0	21	8	2	0	78	6	10	1	112	3%
Entre Ríos	3%	13.4	3	2	0	0	4	2	16	3	14	1	21	1	58	1%
Corrientes	2%	14	1	1	0	0	18	7	4	1	14	1	3	0	40	1%
Chubut	1%	12.4	5	4	0	0	2	1	6	1	10	1	6	0	29	1%
Mendoza	4%	7.6	0	0	2	4	2	1	8	2	48	3	49	3	109	3%
Santa Cruz	0%	4.3	2	1	1	2	3	1	3	1	5	0	6	0	20	1%
Catamarca	1%	10.7	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	1	40	3	46	3	94	2%
San Juan	2%	8.1	1	1	0	0	0	0	9	1	8	1	22	1	40	1%
Misiones	2%	5.7	1	1	2	4	0	0	3	1	29	2	12	1	47	1%
Tierra del Fuego	0%	15.3	1	1	0	0	1	0	3	1	5	0	3	0	13	0%
La Rioja	1%	8.3	0	0	3	6	0	0	1	0	20	1	5	0	29	1%
Formosa	1%	8.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	13	1	5	0	22	1%
La Pampa	1%	11.6	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	5	0%
San Luis	1%	7.3	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	8	0%
Sgo del Estero	2%	7.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	8	0	14	0%
Total	100%	14.5	140	100	51	100	252	100	514	100	1383	100	1609	100	3949	100%

*Open Unemployment Rate, May 1999 (INDEC: 1999)

** First semester (January - June, 2002)

Source: Based on INDEC (1999) and Nueva Mayoría (1997-2002).

For instance, Santa Fe, with an unemployment rate of 16.9% and 9% share of total population, registered only 4% of the total number of roadblocks in the country. In contrast, Jujuy, with a similar unemployment rate (16.3%) and only 2% share of total population, registered 15% of the total roadblocks. Thus economics was not the only explanatory variable in the emergence and development of roadblocks; political, institutional, organizational and social factors also came into play. Finally, if one looks at the provinces share of population, provinces such as Jujuy, Neuquén, Salta, Tucumán, Corrientes and Río Negro were among the most conflictive ones, surpassing Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires City as the most powerful centers of political and social contention; another innovative characteristic of the roadblocks phenomenon.

Within the process of transgressive political contention, the scale of roadblock protests varied across the four phases. During the first phase (Emergence of Contention, 1993-1996), the first roadblocks occurred in few provinces and started to spread slowly as a new means of protest throughout the country. Then, during the second phase (Decentralized Roadblocks, 1997 – mid 2001), the roadblocks became the most common means of contention in the entire country. Finally, during the third (National Pickets, July 2001 – November 2001) and fourth phase (Expanded Contention, December 2001 – June 2002), the picketer organizations started to coordinate “national roadblocks and pickets” and “multi-sector mobilizations,” together with other protest organizations. In general, in the first two phases, the roadblocks were mostly local and directed at

the municipal and provincial governments. In the last two phases, the roadblocks expanded their scope and demands to the regional and national levels. Each of these phases contains several of the mechanisms defined by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), that helps our understanding of the dynamics of the movement.

In the first period, Emergence of Contention,⁴¹ an initial group collectively perceived their worsening situation both as a threat to their survival and as an opportunity to organize and raise their demands to their previous employers and to the local and provincial government, who were considered to be responsible for and eventual solvers of their poor conditions. These were therefore, objects of claim. These groups later created a new collective identity through their common actions, which resulted in the invention of a new category: being a picketer. The protesters found experiences, interests and objectives in common (mutual identification of similarities), such as being ex-employees and/or unemployed, going through a process of impoverishment, and needing jobs and welfare protection, which led them to believe in the possibility of acting collectively.

Moreover, certain dramatic events, mostly related to bloody governmental repression to picketers, triggered the participation of outsiders in protests. This mechanism (suddenly imposed grievances) eventually assumed more salience and expanded the picketers' movement. These processes, combined with a certifying

⁴¹ Here I am exclusively looking at the emergence of roadblocks and picketer organizations during the first phase. I am not including the *puebladas*.

mechanism from the government, media and other organizations, verified the existence of the picketers as contentious collective actors. The picketers would then be identified as people under increasingly disadvantageous conditions (mostly low-income) who organized collectively outside the traditional institutions to raise their demands to the government or any other entity that they considered to be responsible for their poor and deteriorating situation.

In the second period, Decentralized Roadblocks, the scale of the contentious movement shifted: the diffusion and emulation of the new means of protest to an array of towns and provinces across Argentina resulted in an expansion of the conflict. While in the first phase the conflict was concentrated in few towns of Argentina, in the second phase it was dispersed in 70 percent of the provinces. Although different local groups organized the roadblocks, all of the groups identified themselves as picketers, with the certification of municipal, provincial and national governments, the local and national media and other organizations like the church and unions' delegations. In this phase, the government also used its force (many times in a extreme manner) to repress the protesters.

The emulation of roadblocks throughout the country was based on the fact that the increasingly poor conditions were not a unique but rather common situation everywhere (perception of threat), and therefore it was not difficult for an unemployed or underemployed person to identify with the picketer category.

Moreover, a widening perception of opportunity also took place, since diverse groups of picketers achieved, in one way or another, certain goals, such as obtaining employment benefits or subsidies, or forcing the local or provincial government authorities to resign to office. The perception of successful action and the feeling of belonging to a massive segment of the population under similar poor conditions were factors that helped the new means of protest to expand. More and more groups appropriated this innovative site of mobilization so that the number of roadblocks increased steeply from 1999 until the present.

During this second phase, several picketer organizations that originated in different locations started to link up with each other (brokerage mechanism). These institutions had some ideological and strategic differences, which led to a long debate that extended the decentralized condition of the movement until mid 2001. Some organizations were more radical. They did not want to accept any governmental offer that did not entirely cover their demands. Others had a more moderate position and were ready to negotiate with the government. Moreover, the organizations did not agree on their concrete demands: some asked for a subsidy for unemployed people and the sharing of jobs over shifts without altering wages, while others asked for the provision of food and the creation of new jobs, along with the reactivation of the industrial sector and the re-expansion of the state welfare system. These differences would finally be overlooked (although not forgotten) in the third period, when certain picketer groups agreed to organize the movement nationally, in order to increase its strength against the state.

In the third phase, National Pickets, besides the brokerage and convergence of certain picketer groups, which organized several national picketers meetings and demonstrations in Buenos Aires City with the participation of groups from all over the country, a growing number of new and existing civil associations appropriated this site of mobilization. Although with different ideological backgrounds and concrete demands, a vast diversity of organizations identified themselves as picketers. The diffusion of this form of behavior and of claims of contention across the country and sectors converged in collective demands for jobs, unemployment subsidies and food, housing and health policies. From different positions, picketers denounced governmental corruption, impunity and inefficiency and asked for governmental action to reactivate the country in a scheme that would foster equality by reducing the growing gap between rich and poor, or in their terms, reinserting the excluded mass of people into the production and welfare systems.

From the first to the third period, the scale of the contentious mobilization shifted from being dispersed and sporadic to being national and continuous. However, this expansion did not imply an organic unification or homogenization of picketer organizations. It is important to note that even if there were several national picketer mobilizations, the local organizations did not lose their autonomy and continued to organize their own protests raising concrete demands to their particular object of claim, be it the municipal government, the National

Ministry of Labor or some other agency. Moreover, diverse picketers' groups had strategic, political and ideological differences, which sometimes led to competition and fragmentation.

At the moment there are three large coordinating organizations within the picketers' movement:

- CTA's picketers (*Central de Trabajadores Argentinos*), with the FTV (*Federación Tierra y Vivienda*) and the *Movimiento Barrios de Pie*.⁴²
- CCC's picketers (*Corriente Clasista y Combativa*)⁴³ that has been working together with FTV.
- *Bloque Piquetero* (Picketer Block) that includes several organizations, such as *Polo Obrero* (that is affiliated with the Workers Party),⁴⁴ *Movimiento Teresa Rodriguez*, *Frente Unico de Trabajadores Desocupados*, *Movimiento Territorial de Liberación*, *Movimiento Independiente de Jubilados y Pensionados*,

⁴² The CTA is a workers' organization that broke with the traditional workers' central institution (the CGT, *Central General de Trabajadores*) in 1992. The CTA creators and members adopted a combative attitude against the traditional and major unions associations that supported the Peronist government in the implementation of neoliberal reform policies. In this way, the CTA related with and fostered picketer groups in their fought against the traditional political parties and unions that have been supporting the market-led growth scheme.

⁴³ The CCC is the unionist and picketer branch of the *Partido Comunista Revolucionario*, PCR (Revolutionary Communist Party). As in the case of the CTA, the picketers relation with the CCC reinforces the rupture with the traditional and major unions and political parties, since the PCR has constantly kept a combative attitude against the structural reform program and all of its supporters.

⁴⁴ The Workers Party (which is a very small one) through their picketer branch, the *Polo Obrero*, has been encouraging the picketers' movement because they share the repudiation to the structural reforms and their supporters and they also see in the picketers a new mass of workers to fight against capitalism.

Coordinadora Anibal Veron and Movimiento Sin Trabajo Teresa Vive.

The three coordinating organizations have political, ideological and strategic differences. On the one hand, the CTA and the CCC have a center-left political orientation and tend to be moderate in their relationship with the government officials (they are ready to negotiate) and their mobilizations. On the other hand, the Picketeer Block has a more extreme left political orientation and tends to be more radical and combative in both its protests and its relations with the government representatives. The conflict between these organizations can be traced from the second phase in which the vast diversity of organizations started a debate around which strategy to follow in their relationship with the government, which could be defined as moderate vs. radical.⁴⁵ Although since mid 2001 there have been a number of “multi-organizations” protests, on several occasions the conflict between CTA-CCC and Picketeer Block came to the point that they organized parallel mobilizations. But, beyond the inter-picketers competition for power, fragmentation and radicalization, even if some of the organizations were related to certain minority political parties (like the Communist Party, the Workers Party and the *Frente Nacional contra la Pobreza*, FRENAPO) or

⁴⁵ This conflict is reflected in the following comment written by a Workers Pole member about the future of the picketer movement: “Puppet of the next candidates for the workers exploitation or representative of the oppressed masses against the regime that have them hungry, unemployed, repressed and killed?” (*my translation*) (Oviedo: 2001, 162) The first option reflects the view that some organizations of the Picketeer Block have the moderate attitude of the CTA and CCC’s picketers. The second option, of course, reflects the revolutionary anti-capitalist ideal of the Picketeer Block. See Oviedo: 2001 for a detailed (although sometimes biased) view on the picketers’ movement conflict.

dissident unions organizations (like the CCC), none of these co-opted the picketers movement, which managed to keep its own identity and set of priorities.

However, since picketer organizations related to these traditional institutions and reproduced certain traditional organizational behaviors in their interactions with the government, other picketer organizations and their own members, a key question emerges: did or would the adoption or emulation of previous traditional practices nullify the innovative essence of the picketers movement? If so, would the loss of their originality translate in submerging picketer demands to serve partisan or other interests? At present (mid 2002), I would not say that the innovative character or picketers' demands have been dampened. Nevertheless, since any picketer organization has become a "new" political force capable of changing governmental policy priorities in favor of the interests and demands of disadvantaged sectors, it is not clear if the picketers would give up their autonomy or be co-opted by some political party in order to reach major changes. Although it is not my intention to predict what is going to happen in the future, certain mechanisms can provide some hints about the potentialities of the picketers' movement: framing of the picketers-government dispute, infringement of elite interests, radicalization, diffusion, scale shift, polarization and suddenly imposed grievances.

Framing of the picketers-government dispute. Since the beginning, government authorities reacted to the new protests in a traditional manner: they

tried to control the situation by promising the picketers social and labor policies to address their demands. In particular, starting in 1997, the government implemented an employment program called *Plan Trabajar* (Work Plan) that fostered the creation of new temporary employment opportunities for unemployed, poor citizens. This program was designed in a way that not only the local and provincial governments, but also the picketer organizations were authorized to ask for and manage the resources distributed by the national government to pay to *Plan Trabajar* employees. Although the picketer organizations did not see *Plan Trabajar* as a solution to their demands, they soon took advantage of the program since they represented a clear possibility to improve their conditions: obtaining a *Plan* would help the picketers (although it was a limited amount of money, it was better than not having any kind of income) and their organizations (they represented a gain and encouraged their mobilization to reach other goals).⁴⁶ In this way, the government fulfilled its objective of controlling the social unrest, but only temporarily and partially. But, the government did succeed in shifting picketer organizations away from their original role as defenders of the poor. The picketers' institutional strengthening had paradoxical results. On the one hand, the general level of mobilization and

⁴⁶ Whether to accept the *Planes Trabajar* turned into a debate within the picketer organizations. First, some picketers considered that accepting the *Planes* could translate into ceasing the struggle, and so they wanted to reaffirm that the picketers were not satisfied with that governmental response. Then, some picketers considered that the *Planes* were offensive because they promoted very basic and extremely low-paid jobs. Finally, most of the picketers accepted the *Planes* because even if they were insufficient and insulting, "it was more indignant not to eat." Besides, they reassured their ideas that "unless there was a change in the economic and political structure, they were not going to be able to get their jobs back. Therefore, they were accepting the *Planes* and asking for more" (*my translation*) (testimonies of picketers in Grupo Documental 1° de Mayo: 2001).

disruption expanded. On the other hand, several organizations adopted behaviors that had originally been targets of their protests, such as corruption and clientelism.⁴⁷ How did this happen?

Since the quantity of *Planes Trabajar* was scarce, their distribution triggered political behaviors that only benefited certain picketer organizations and their members, while damaging the original principle of representing and working for the poor disadvantaged population. First, providing funds to provincial and municipal governments and to NGOs (among which the picketer organizations were included) activated processes of political negotiations in which socioeconomic variables (such as poverty or unemployment) were generally overlooked, while political variables (such as level of mobilization or political ties of picketer organizations) were taken into consideration. Then, in the distribution of *Planes* by the local government or the picketer organizations, variables such as assigning the programs to the most vulnerable, were relegated to a secondary position: to obtain a *Plan Trabajar*, it was not enough to complete the profile of being poor and unemployed. In the case of local governments, the traditional *punteros políticos* (neighborhood political organizers) gave *Planes* and other resources in exchange for a commitment not to participate in the pickets.⁴⁸ In the

⁴⁷ Evidence on this sort of behavior can be found in several evaluations of the Plan Trabajar done by government agencies, NGOs and the World Bank (SIEMPRO: 1997, 1998, Estebanez and Feliu: 1997, CELS: 2000, Jalan and Ravallion: 1998), in which one finds comments about informality in the selection of beneficiaries, related with their association with political parties and local organizations. Also in testimonies of picketers (Grupo Documental 1° de Mayo: 2001) and newspapers articles (for example, La Nación: 08/21/01 on misappropriation of *Plan Trabajar* funds). For an extended revision of the *Plan Trabajar*, see Villalón (2002).

⁴⁸ The clientelistic practices of the political organizers are not specifically identified in the media. However, in my personal interviews, several journalists and scholars specialized in the topic

case of the picketer organizations, the picketer leaders gave *Planes Trabajar* in exchange for a commitment to participate and collaborate in the promotion of roadblocks and other manifestations.⁴⁹ Therefore, several picketer organizations failed in their struggle against corruption and discretionary politics or in becoming new organizations to represent the poor. Although some picketers would interpret these as a means to reach the original goals in the future, these behaviors and outcomes limit the potential of the picketers movement to bring about a major change in favor of the increasing mass of disadvantaged people in the market-led growth scheme present in Argentina.

Moreover, since no picketer organization has turned into a new political force and the level of mobilization continues to increase, sooner or later, either one of the major political parties will take into account the demands of the picketers in order to get votes, or one or more picketer organizations will make an alliance with established political parties. In such cases, it is not clear if the original demands of the picketers (disadvantaged sectors) would still be priorities or if they would be overlooked to serve other political interests. In sum, the

argued that both politicians and picketers used the *Planes* in this manner (Fraga: 05/27/2002; Burdman: 05/29/2002; Brienza: 05/23/2002; Gruss: 05/29/2002). Moreover, they agreed in emphasizing that the ALIANZA government even tried to reduce the increasing power of certain picketer organizations, such as FTV and the CCC, by taking the distribution of *Plan Trabajar* away from them and giving it to the municipalities, which increased the power of the political organizers against the picketers. This argument is also supported by Oviedo: 2001, 133-5.

⁴⁹ A comment of a picketer of La Matanza (Buenos Aires) reflects this kind of behavior: “the distribution of plans was first based on necessity, but soon we realized that the participation of the people in the roadblocks was so important to get more plans, that we decided that we will give the plans only to those who collaborated with the mobilizations and assemblies” (*my translation*) (Grupo Documental 1° de Mayo: 2001). In several of my personal interviews with picketers I found the same kind of comments, but for privacy and security issues, the respondents preferred not to be quoted as a source.

traditional manner in which the dispute was framed reduced the innovative character of the picketer movement and its potential to bring about radical change.

Infringement of elite interests. Another mechanism that helps to explain the character and potential of the picketers movement resides in its strength to affect the interests of the most powerful groups or, in other words, to threaten the status quo. If they manage to do so, the possibilities to have their demands included as a priority in the government agenda increase. Such an alteration of the power structure could be triggered by a combination of the following mechanisms:

- *Radicalization;* creation of a more extreme agenda and use of more transgressive forms of contention.
- *Scale shift and diffusion;* increase of protesters and activation of other sectors of the population (in this case, sectors of the middle class, for example).
- *Polarization of the dispute;* addition of new participants (either moderate or previously uncommitted) to extreme positions in the dispute.
- *Suddenly imposed grievances;* the occurrence of certain events that heighten the political salience of picketers' issues, particularly when combined with extreme *repression*.

If one observes the process of contention, especially the fourth phase, Expanded Contention (December 2001-June 2002), all of these mechanisms seemed to have occurred. However, the picketer demands were not included as a priority in the governmental agenda, nor had the picketer organizations entered the government system. But the process of transgressive political contention had not ended. In Chapter 5, I examine the most recent phase of contention, looking at changes in the means of protest, the engagement of other segments of the population in contentious actions, the relationship between diverse protest groups, and the occurrence of these mechanisms.

5: Expanded Contention, December 2001-June 2002: “Not only *piquetes*...”

In December 2001, President De la Rúa’s administration enforced an economic measure that restricted the amount of money that people were able to take out from their own savings account, a measure that the mass media baptized as *corralito* (corral). This measure affected primarily middle-income people, who had been mostly outside the picketers’ contention. The government appeared to be abruptly losing its power and the level of social unrest increased dramatically. The increasingly unstable political and economic context was perceived as a threat that, together with the existing level of social unrest, helped newly affected people back the picketers’ demands, particularly the general accusations of governmental corruption and inefficiency, and identify themselves with the “disadvantaged” character involved in being a picketer. Thus, there was not only an increment in the number, extension and dispersion of the pickets (diffusion, emulation and scale shift), but also an emergence of new means of protest and subsequently, new protesters’ organizations. The innovations to the repertoire of contention were *cacerolazos*, *escraches*, barter clubs and neighborhood assemblies.

The occurrence of certain acts, such as indiscriminate repression against protesters, a declaration of a state of siege, and more restrictive and regressive

economic measures led to a radicalization and polarization of the movement. On the one hand, certain groups adopted more extreme contentious actions such as looting public buildings, banks and stores. On the other hand, previously uncommitted citizens or moderate protesters adopted a strongly contentious position repudiating governmental repression and arbitrary violence. The organization of massive multi-sector demonstrations against the national government, the political class in general and the economic structure contributed to the fall of the De la Rúa government and the following interim governments in late December 2001 and January 2002. Protesters and organizations' leaders perceived these results as a success, which was indeed certified by the mass media, certain minor opposition parties and the Catholic Church, encouraging the protesters to continue with their struggle.

The participation of diverse sectors of the population in the process of transgressive political contention was summarized in a chant that finally became a label of the new phase of contention: "*Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola*" ("pickets and pots, there is only one struggle"). Their common demand was also reflected in a chant: "*¡Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo!*" ("They must all get out, every last one of them!"), expressing their repudiation and claim of a radical change in the power structure (asking for governmental authorities, politicians, technicians and whoever related to the current state of affairs to resign to their positions). Beyond these commonalities, it is worthy to revise the

particularities of each of the new organizations and means of protests that came out in this phase of Expanded Contention, December 2001-present (June 2002).⁵⁰

5.A: *CACEROLAZOS*: “CAN YOU HEAR ME?”

“Estamos viviendo todos los días un sinfín de movilizaciones y protestas en todo el país. Todas y cada uno de ellas, apuntan a distintos reclamos, sin embargo, hay un punto en común que es el hartazgo hacia la dirigencia política y sus consecutivos desgobiernos, el abuso a la confianza que la ciudadanía le a otorgado a través del voto, la Corte Suprema de Injusticia, las políticas económicas, que olvidaron al ciudadano común y apuntalaron a los grandes capitales, en su mayoría extranjeros. Nos debemos un cacerolazo gigantesco en todo el país, que sea imposible de no escuchar.”⁵¹ (El Cacerolazo, 01/23/02)

The *cacerolazos* (pot-banging) were another innovation to the traditional repertoire of contention. They consisted in groups of people banging pots from their houses, streets and plazas, expressing their discontent with and repudiation of certain political and economic conditions. The first *cacerolazo* took place December 19, 2001, with no previous planning or organizing group. It was a spontaneous reaction to a governmental economic policy that continued

⁵⁰ See Table 4.1 (page 66).

⁵¹ “Every day we are living through an infinite number of protests and mobilizations across the entire country. Each of them raises different demands. However, there is a point in common: we are fed up with the political class and their consecutive *dis*-governments, their abuse of the trust the citizens that voted for them, the Supreme Court of *In*-justice, the economic policies that ignored the regular citizen and supported big capital, most of it foreign. We owe ourselves a gigantic *cacerolazo* in the entire country, a *cacerolazo* that it would be impossible not to hear.” (*my translation*) This is a part of a message sent via email by an individual who identified himself as an “Argentine tired of being abused,” posted in El Cacerolazo, <http://www.elcacerolazo.org/article.php?sid=437>.

restrictions on withdrawals and new regressive policies. In this first episode, the mass media, particularly radio and television, helped its diffusion. However, the protesters then started to organize collectively. Indeed, the innovative character of this type of protest resided in the fact that none of the traditional organizations (such as unions and political parties) were engaged. On the contrary, the *caceroleros* (pot-banging protesters) created their own organizations, which also, in an innovative manner, used the Internet as their main means of communication and organization.⁵²

The non-use of the traditional channels of representation was also stressed in the spirits of the protest against the political class and the most powerful economic groups of Argentina. The *caceroleros*' asked for the dismissal of all politicians and a rupture in the political alliances with powerful economic groups. They repudiated governmental inefficiency, political class corruption, impunity and increasing inequality. Moreover, they organized *cacerolazos* to express their disagreement with particular governmental decisions (asking for changes of government authorities and economic policies), banks (demanding the return of their deposits) and private enterprises (complaining against price increases).

The *caceroleros* were mostly middle-class and included a heterogeneous array of people, from impoverished unemployed small business managers, to

⁵² The *caceroleros* organized and promoted their activities by Internet (email and web pages), neighborhood newspapers, pamphlets and friendship networks. At the moment, there are several web pages on *cacerolazos*, where one can find protest schedules, general information and forums of discussion (www.argentina.indymedia.org and www.caceroleando.8m.com/).

working professionals. In general, all of them had recently been affected by the withdrawal restriction measure (*corralito*) and also by the economic recession of the country. Their participation in the *cacerolazos* helped them recognize commonalities, build a collective identity beyond their particularities, and identify the potentialities of acting together.

The combination of certain events such as changes in the monetary system (devaluation of the currency), sudden inflation process, changes in the presidency, and the declaration of policies and counter-policies, helped produce a rapid diffusion and emulation of *cacerolazos* throughout the country. Although the center of this type of protest was Buenos Aires City (9% of the total population held 26% of the *cacerolazos* in the period December 19, 2001 – March 2002), there were *cacerolazos* in every province of the country (see Table 5.1). Despite the rapid diffusion, there has been a decline in the number of *cacerolazos*. Table 5.1 shows that in the last thirteen days of December 2001, there were 859 *cacerolazos*, but in January 2002, 706, in February 310 and in March, only 139. However, this decrease did not mean that their participants ended their contentious actions. A very interesting process took place: the *caceroleros* developed their organization further, and began to meet regularly in neighborhood assemblies.

Table 5.1: Cacero/azos. Argentina (December 19, 2001-March 2002)

Province	Pop. Share	Dec-01	Jan-02	Feb-02	Mar-02	Total	%
Bs.As. City	9%	175	246	75	33	529	26%
Buenos Aires	39%	144	112	52	21	329	16%
Santa Fe	9%	122	95	33	11	261	13%
Córdoba	8%	98	49	28	12	187	9%
Mendoza	4%	75	35	12	7	129	6%
Tucumán	4%	21	17	15	5	58	3%
Salta	3%	19	14	13	4	50	2%
Entre Ríos	3%	19	16	5	2	42	2%
San Juan	2%	15	14	10	3	42	2%
Jujuy	2%	18	12	4	4	38	2%
Río Negro	2%	17	13	5	3	38	2%
La Rioja	1%	15	9	6	4	34	2%
Chaco	3%	13	11	6	2	32	2%
Santa Cruz	0%	10	8	6	4	28	1%
Corrientes	2%	9	8	7	2	26	1%
Catamarca	1%	10	8	5	2	25	1%
Tierra del Fuego	0%	9	7	5	4	25	1%
Formosa	1%	12	6	4	2	24	1%
Neuquén	1%	10	6	4	3	23	1%
Misiones	2%	11	5	4	3	23	1%
San Luis	1%	11	5	4	2	22	1%
La Pampa	1%	8	5	3	2	18	1%
Sgo del Estero	2%	11	1	2	2	16	1%
Chubut	1%	7	4	2	2	15	1%
Total	100%	859	706	310	139	2014	100%

Source: Based on Nueva Mayoría (25-04-02) and INDEC (1999).

5.B: ASAMBLEAS VECINALES: “NO, WE ARE NOT GOING HOME YET”

“Somos tus vecinos. Hemos golpeado cacerolas, casi sin parar, desde aquel histórico 19 de diciembre en que salimos a la calle sin que nadie nos llamara. ¿Para que lo hicimos? Para que se vayan todos. ¿Todos? Sí. Menos la democracia bien entendida. Decimos que se vayan todos para que, al mismo tiempo, llegue la justicia. Y para construir juntos, en este país saqueado y humillado, una vida que merezca ser vivida” (Almagro en Asamblea: 2002, 1).⁵³

The *asambleas vecinales* (neighborhood assemblies) derived from the *cacerolazos* and replicated their geographical distribution: very strong in Buenos Aires City (41%), followed by the Province of Buenos Aires (39%) and the rest of the provinces (20%).⁵⁴ The assemblies also kept their innovative organizational character since they were not organized by any traditional institution and maintained a non-partisan spirit.⁵⁵ Indeed, even if some minority leftist parties became involved in the meetings (like the *Partido Obrero*), the participants resisted the partisan intromission and managed to keep the political groups in a marginal position, particularly with the implementation of a voting system that

⁵³ “We are your neighbors. We have been banging pots almost without a pause since that historical 19th of December, when we went out to the streets even though nobody had called for us. Why did we do it? To make all of them get out. All of them? Yes. But not our democracy. We say that they must all get out, so that justice can return. And to be able to build together a life with dignity in this country that has been looted and abused” (*my translation*). This is from a letter to the neighbors of Almagro, Buenos Aires City, published in their assembly’s newsletter (Almagro en Asamblea: 2002, 1).

⁵⁴ These figures correspond to March 2002, according to Nueva Mayoría (21-03-02).

⁵⁵ In several interviews with assemblies’ participants, I found a very strong repudiation to traditional political parties and partisan behaviors. For example, a resident of San Isidro told me “we do not want the pure spirits of our assemblies to be distorted and corrupted with perverse politics, parties and partisans” (Chochi: 05/25/2002).

avoided group overrepresentation.⁵⁶ The assemblies did not affiliate to any political party or other institution. Nevertheless, they interacted with other organizations, especially with picketer groups in coordinating their participation in multi-sector mobilizations.

The *asambleistas* o *vecinos* (assembly participants or residents) generally belonged to different sectors of the middle class: low, middle and upper middle class, which resulted in a heterogeneous group of people: impoverished, unemployed, underemployed, working professionals, artists, students; female, male, old and young. The assemblies' middle-income character was reflected in the neighborhoods where they were organized. For instance, poor neighborhoods in Buenos Aires City tended not to have assemblies, while higher income neighborhoods did.⁵⁷ For some *vecinos*, the assemblies were their first direct political experience, but for others that was not the case. Political party members, ex-militants of the 1970s, and active picketers were found among the participants of this new means of protest.

The assemblies were organized on a neighborhood scale and as with the cases of the pickets and *cacerolazos*, participation was open to everybody.

⁵⁶ This change in the vote system was read as “a revolution inside the revolution,” since the residents not only managed to avoid the cooptation of their own movement by traditional political parties, but also designed the new voting rules respecting the system of open deliberation, participation and horizontality (Personal interview with Almagro’s resident and journalist, Gruss: 05/29/2002).

⁵⁷ Newspapers such as La Nación, Clarín, Página 12 and the magazine 3 Puntos supported this argument, which I observed in my field trip to Argentina.

Generally, the assemblies were held in plazas, street corners, and neighborhood clubs. The decision-making system was consensual and the *vecinos* followed the principle of deliberation. The assemblies were divided into different commissions, such as unemployment, solidarity, health, education, culture, press and participatory budgeting, which held meetings separately and then brought the results to a general meeting. Following the *cacerolazos*, the assemblies used the Internet (email lists and web pages) as their main means of coordination and communication. Several assemblies also printed newsletters that contained assemblies' outcomes, information about coming protests, diverse *vecinos'* opinions and general information.

At the same time, the neighborhood assemblies interacted with each other through their participation in regular *asambleas interbarriales* (inter-neighborhood assemblies). In the *interbarriales*, each assembly presented their own ideas and proposals, and afterwards, the issues were voted on. In the beginning, the *vecinos* used a "one vote per person" system, but finally in May, they implemented a "one vote per assembly" system, in order to prevent the political parties from taking over by bringing people to vote for their proposals. The issues varied from presenting a popular initiative to the national government demanding a change in the management of the external debt, to participating in multi-sector mobilizations. The decisions were not binding, but rather served to promote and coordinate activities.

In general, the more successful actions were those related to assemblies' participation in multi-sector protests and especially, to particular issues at the neighborhood level. For example, the Almagro neighborhood assembly (Buenos Aires City) presented a petition to a supermarket to offer a basic combination of food and goods at low prices. The supermarket accepted. Another successful action occurred when one of San Isidro's neighborhood assemblies in Buenos Aires Province presented a petition to a hospital to change their schedule in order to allow patients to see doctors on weekends (outside normal working hours). Then, several assemblies in Flores, Almagro and Colegiales neighborhoods (Buenos Aires City) and Mar del Plata City (Buenos Aires Province), organized popular trade fairs, cooperative farms and communal shopping (to reduce costs). Finally, some assemblies, such as San Isidro and Almagro, created solidarity dining rooms serving food, which they managed to collect from people, businesses and official institutions.

But, actions directed to broader issues at a municipal, provincial or national level were not so successful. One reason is related to the method they used, popular initiatives,⁵⁸ which not only require a high number of supporters,

⁵⁸ A popular initiative consists in a citizens' proposal to the government on a particular issue to be considered in the National or Provincial Congress or the Municipal Deliberative Council. The popular initiative needs a certain number of adhesions in terms of the district population. These initiatives became a citizen's right since the Constitutional reform in 1994. The main objective of the popular initiatives is to provide a means for society to have their original demands considered by the government. Despite the good intentions, it is important to note that the consideration of a popular initiative issue by the Congress does not imply its approval since it has to pass through the regular deliberative process. Moreover, the Congress is not forced to take care of the initiative right away, but within one year of its presentation. Finally, if the initiative is not approved, the process is over, that is to say, there is not any other mechanism for the people to push for the consideration of their initiative once again. Taking this into account, one should not assume that if

but also clarity and feasibility of the demands. The paradigmatic cases present in every assembly were gathering signatures to present popular initiatives to the national government not to pay the external debt, to re-nationalize privatized enterprises and to remove Supreme Court members. In addition to the problematic character of those issues, the initiatives lacked feasible and realistic goals. However, the existence of those types of petitions reflected the general spirits of the assemblies: discontent and dissatisfaction with the corrupt political class and opposition to the market-led economic development model implemented since the 1990s.

Certainly, these spirits comprised a commonality with the picketers, which undoubtedly fostered common actions. Diverse neighborhood assemblies participated in protests promoted by picketer organizations, eventually turning those into multi-sector demonstrations. It is interesting to note that the relationship of the assemblies with the picketers varied; there were *vecinos* who insisted on identifying themselves as autonomous neighborhoods assemblies supporting the picketers, while others directly identified with the picketer organizations. These diversities showed that the convergence of different groups in several manifestations did not imply a homogenization of the movement. One of the most salient characteristic of the fourth phase of contention, December 2001 – present (June 2002), was its heterogeneity in terms of participants (lower

the initiative is very consistent, well prepared, widely supported and “fair,” there are better chances to have it approved by the Congress and turned into a law.

and middle class) and means of protest (*piquetes*, *cacerolazos*, assemblies, *escraches*, barter clubs and multi-sector mobilizations).

5.C: *ESCRACHES*: “HEY YOU, WE ARE THE REAL UMPIRES!”

¡Corrupto! ¡Ladrón! ¡Asesino! ¡Basta de impunidad! ¡Queremos Justicia!
(*Escraches*' graffiti and chants) ⁵⁹

The *escraches* (“graffiti protests”) consisted in making public accusations and making evident a person that the protesters considered to have committed serious faults but that has not been punished for them. For example, groups of people went to the office or home of politicians and began chanting against them, generally denouncing corruption or impunity. The protesters painted graffiti, held banners and attached fliers with the name of that person (the *escrachado*) and the accusation (corrupt, thief, hypocrite, etc.).

This kind of demonstration was used in the 1970s and 1980s, especially against the military dictatorship. The innovative character was its use against politicians and businessmen in general since the late 1990s. There were *escraches* against politicians and members of the government (such as the president and Secretaries of Economics, Labor, Health and Domestic Security), judges (accused of being partisans and not impartial), policemen (usually related

⁵⁹ Corrupt! Thief! Assassin! Enough impunity! We want Justice! (*Escraches*' Graffiti and chants).

with arbitrary protests' repression), businessmen (generally national and international big firms involved in corruption cases or massive lay-offs), and multilateral agencies representatives (for example, against an IMF delegation).

Since 2001, the *escraches* has become increasingly popular and has been used in larger protests, like pickets and multi-sector mobilizations. The *escraches*' strength resided in its combined use and meaning. On the one hand, the performance of *escraches* in large multi-sector mobilizations helped to point out those identified as responsible for the contested situation. On the other hand, the *escraches* stressed the general spirit of contention against impunity, corrupt and inefficient politicians regardless of political party affiliation, and the inequalities related to the market-led development model. Finally, certain *escraches* became more radical since some protesters not only performed verbal accusations, but also physical aggressions to the *escrachado*. The violent aspect of the *escraches* resulted in a debate about their origin and condemnation. As a lawyer claimed, "the *escrache* is a criminal behavior, but it is a result of another erroneous behavior: impunity and institutional malfunctioning. The *escraches* are an unwanted product of impunity"⁶⁰ (La Nación, 03/14/02). In short, it is not clear who is to be blamed: the protester, the *escrachado*, the system...?

⁶⁰ *My translation.* (Sabsay in La Nación, 03/14/02).

5.D: CLUBES DE TRUEQUE: “WE HAVE OUR OWN MARKET NOW”

“Durante las jornadas de intercambio en la plaza, los vecinos aportan de acuerdo a sus disponibilidades, en una atmósfera cordial y solidaria. Algunas personas aportan elementos para la colecta sin requerir nada a cambio. Otras aportan los elementos requeridos (generalmente alimentos) y eligen algo a cambio (ropa, por ejemplo). También hay casos de concurrentes con una necesidad absoluta, sin posibilidad de entregar contrapartida alguna de pago”⁶¹ (Almagro en Asamblea: 2002, 2-3).

The *clubes de trueque* (barter clubs) began to develop in 1995, but it was not until late December 2001 that they were certified as a means of protest, that is to say, media, politicians and government authorities noticed them as another facet of contention in the context of high levels of social mobilization, deep economic recession, devaluation, increasing unemployment and poverty. The barter clubs consist of associations where people are able to exchange goods and services (from food and clothes, physicians and dental check-ups to training courses). Some clubs even created their own currency, so-called *creditos* (credits), to facilitate the exchange over time; one *credito* was equivalent to one Argentine peso. There are two networks of barter clubs (the *Red Global del Trueque* – Global Barter Network - and the *Red del Trueque Solidario* – Solidarity Barter Network), but not every club participates in them.

⁶¹ “During the exchange fairs in the plaza, the residents offered goods and services according to their possibilities in a spirit of solidarity. Some people offered things without asking for anything in exchange. Other people offered the required elements for the collection (usually food) and chose something in exchange (clothes, for example). There were also cases of residents with extreme necessities that could not give anything at all” (*my translation*). Neighbor comments on the barter fair in his area, Almagro, Buenos Aires City (Almagro en Asamblea: 2002, 2-3).

In general, low-income people, unemployed or underemployed, use these clubs. However, since December 2001, there has been a growing participation of middle-income people, who have been recently affected by the governmental policy of savings withdrawal restrictions (*corralito*), devaluation and inflation. According to some statistics, the number of clubs increased steeply since 2001: since their creation in 1995 until 2000, there was a total of 741 clubs; but in May 2002, there were 6800 clubs. The quantity of participants followed a similar pattern, increasing six times in 2001-mid 2002.⁶² The provinces of Santa Fe and Buenos Aires have the higher number of barter clubs, but there are clubs all over the country.

Although the barter clubs seemed to have been born and developed out of necessity, the character of the clubs varies. One group of clubs emphasizes the economic role, while another, the social role. Based on newspaper articles, research and interviews, the “economic” barter clubs tended to reproduce the defects of a market with scarce resources: people started trading credits to make a profit. In contrast, the “social” barter clubs tended to protect the good intentions of their communal association by enforcing certain rules in order to become and remain a club member.⁶³ In this line, several neighborhood assemblies organized barter fairs or associated with “social” barter clubs.

⁶² Nueva Mayoria (08-05-02). According to their research, three million and a half of people participated in the barter clubs, from which three million and one hundred got involved during 2002.

⁶³ Personal interview with Rosenberg (05/23/2002). See 3 Puntos (03/16/020), Los Angeles Times (05/06/02), Nueva Mayoria (08-05-02).

5.E: PROTESTS ALL OVER: “WE ARE STILL OUT HERE”

The fourth phase of contention reveals impressive innovations in the repertoire of contention, with the creation of new collective organizations and the engagement of larger segments of the population in political contention. The world of protesters kept growing and became increasingly heterogeneous. Socioeconomic, occupational, ideological and political differences gave rise to the coexistence of diverse autonomous organizations. Despite a certain degree of competition among some groups, there was a strong tendency to cooperate with each other and to coordinate multi-sector mobilizations to express their discontent with and repudiation of the existing economic and political structures. Since recession, unemployment, inflation, corruption, impunity, governmental inefficiency and irresponsibility remained to define the state of affairs, the protesters insisted on raising their demands. Nothing seemed to stop them. Indeed, the arbitrary and bloody repression in several mobilizations only resulted in the unity of protesters repudiating the events.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ For instance, the pacific picket of June 26, 2002, in the surroundings of Buenos Aires City resulted in the assassination of two young men, ninety injured and one hundred and fifty detained because of brutal under-covered police repression. The following day, picketers, assemblies and independents organized and participated in a multi-sector mobilization repudiating the official repression. Each week after, new multi-sector mobilizations were organized. With or without identifiers banners, thousands of people participated in these repudiation protests across Argentina. See the edition of *Página 12* (06-27/30-02, 07/02-10/02). Also in *La Nación* and *Clarín* editions of those days.

As of mid-2002, the contentious process has not reached an end. Everything indicates that there is a strong tendency to its further diffusion, radicalization and polarization. On the one hand, are an increasing number of protesters against an unequal power structure and a deteriorating economic situation, with understandable demands, but without concrete and feasible proposals. On the other hand, are government authorities, politicians, businessmen and multilateral agency representatives debating about possible actions and watching over their own interests. While popular mobilization pushes for a radical change, the decision-makers immobility and selfish attitudes reduce expectations and romanticism about the contentious process' potential. It is not my intention to predict the future, but without political articulation, the contentious movement will not manage to subvert the status quo. However, it is still too soon to tell.

Conclusions

The purpose of my thesis is to reach a better understanding of the causes and dynamics of the process of transgressive political contention in Argentina since 1993 until the present, mid-2002. The analysis presented here is only a complement of other research done on the topic. Since it is an ongoing process, any conclusions are open-ended and my intention is to do further research. In this final section I go through the main ideas and findings of the thesis, review the theoretical framework that I used, identify the limits and gaps of my investigation, and raise new questions for future research.

Since the early 1990s, new forms of contention emerged and developed across Argentina. *Puebladas*, *piquetes*, *cacerolazos*, *asambleas vecinales*, *escraches* and *clubes de trueque* became popular means of protest. They comprised a rupture with the traditional channels of societal representation: the dominant unions and political parties were not only passed over but also contested by the new array of protesters' organizations. This novel and radical character itself reflected the conflictive ground from which these protests emerged: a context in which certain economic and sociopolitical conditions became increasingly disadvantageous to large segments of the population. It was not only a matter of labor market shrinkage or economic recession, but also changes in certain institutional pillars that left a vast number of people with limited or no

protection or representation. This highly adverse arena had opportunities that seemed to multiply only for a selected group, while governmental legitimacy gradually faded away in the eyes of those who found themselves unprotected from worsening conditions. The context was unsuitable enough that eventually, the “losers” of the new scheme decided to raise their voices and demands on their own. They created new organizations and forms of protest, using at the same time several elements and behaviors of an existing rich legacy of contention. The heterogeneous mass of contenders, low and middle-income citizens, unemployed, underemployed, informal workers, professionals, artists, students, male, female, young, old and middle age, gave a strong meaning and a very high value to their activism. They were able to attain diverse goals that fluctuated between employment programs to politicians resigning from their positions. Moreover, they recreated their role as citizens demanding that their rights be respected and taken into account. Despite these achievements, the radical character and potentialities of the movement seemed to have moderated. On the one hand, many protest groups adopted and reproduced certain traditional organizational and political patterns that took them away from their original role as representatives and defenders of the most vulnerable. On the other hand, none of the protesters organizations has yet managed to become or ally with a political force in order to introduce their demands as policy priorities. However, since the process of contention is still open, there are still possibilities for the protesters’ interests to be considered or for a radical change to take place.

In short, structural changes in the 1990s, such as the liberalization of the economy, the privatization of state-owned companies, the reduction of the welfare system and the process of political decentralization, which resulted in an extraordinary increase of unemployment, had a strong influence in the development of the wave of social protests since 1993. An increasing number of unemployed and underemployed people left without institutional protection, be it from the state, the unions or other organizations, eventually became the protagonists of the ongoing process of political contention. However, the decision of this heterogeneous mass of people to engage in contentious politics and to use alternative means of protest was related to other factors beyond economics. First, despite the adoption of a new market-led economic growth model, certain political practices and behaviors from the traditional power system were preserved and reproduced. For instance, increasing levels of corruption, discretionary politics, abuses of power and clientelism not only fostered popular resistance but also became objects of contention. Indeed, one of the central demands of the new protesters was to bring to an end to the political practices that repressed them. In the eyes of the protesters, both formal institutional protection and informal political favors were no longer helpful in overcoming their increasingly deteriorating conditions.

Second, the contenders brought to the forefront a long-standing crisis of legitimacy and efficiency of the conventional societal channels of representation. The traditional institutions that used to serve some of their interests did not play

that role anymore. Unions and political parties were no longer useful institutions to channel the protesters' demands or bring solutions to their problems. In a critical sociopolitical and economic situation, those who recognized that something had to be done to change the highly adverse state of affairs created new means of collective action. The crisis of traditional institutions was a contributing factor to the emergence and development of the wave of protests and later became an object of contention as well. Another fundamental demand of the protesters was to recover the social *raison d'être* of those organizations: if they only served the interests of the most powerful groups, new institutions needed to be created to defend the interests of the rest of the citizens. Finally, the intuition of building new organizations to represent and fight for their needs was based on an existing rich repertoire of contention and a long tradition of political participation and activism. That is to say, the new means of collective action were not born out of nothing, but built upon organizational elements of previous experiences.

Despite the innovative character of the new organizations, they adopted and reproduced patterns and behaviors from the existing and contested institutions. This phenomenon eventually had a counter-effect in the radical potential of the new protesters' organizations, since the repetition of organizational characteristics, such as clientelism, discretionary politics and competition, jeopardized their original role as defenders of the rights of the most vulnerable population and opponents of the ill-functioning traditional institutions. In short, I have examined economic, social, political and institutional reasons in

order to have a richer understanding of the causes behind the emergence and development of the wave of protests in the 1990s.

Furthermore, in studying the dynamics of the process of political contention, I identified four different phases in terms of the means of protests, the socioeconomic background of the contenders, the organizations, the occurrence of certain mechanisms and the level of social unrest. First, the Emergence of Contention (1993-1996) was characterized by the appearance of new methods of protest, the *puebladas* and *piquetes*, mostly organized by groups of ex-employees and displaced workers, and unemployed and underemployed low-income people, respectively. During this phase, the first picketer organizations were created in some towns of Argentina. The level of unrest was high in those cities that registered protests, but the mobilization was still sporadic and confined to a few areas and groups. In the following phase, Decentralized Roadblocks (1997-mid 2001), there was a proliferation of picketer organizations throughout the country, raising the level of unrest and number of participants. During this period, the use of pickets as a means of protest became increasingly regular and popular among displaced workers and unemployed or underemployed low-income people. By the end of this phase, every province of Argentina witnessed the occurrence of at least a few roadblock protests. In the third phase, National Pickets (July-November 2001), the level of social unrest was definitely higher and constant. This stage's distinction was that certain picketer organizations became dominant at the regional and national level and organized coordinated pickets across the

entire country through national meetings of picketers' groups, which changed the decentralized character of the movement, but did not create homogenization or total verticalization. Finally, the fourth phase, Expanded Contention (December 2001-June 2002), was characterized by the appearance of different innovations in the repertoire of contention and the engagement of other sectors of the population to the process of political contention. *Cacerolazos*, *asambleas vecinales*, *clubes de trueque* and *escraches* combined with *piquetes* and multi-sector mobilizations, generating a very high level of social unrest across the entire country.

In brief, I followed the development of the contentious process since the first innovative episodes until the present (mid-2002) in terms of tactics, participants and demands, and found that it tended to generate institutionalization, diffusion, heterogenization, radicalization and polarization. The governmental responses to the protests generally have been deficient palliatives (such as minor unsustainable social or labor programs) or repressive measures, none of which appeased or solved the conflict but rather reinforced it. The high level of social unrest, the proliferation of diverse new groups and means of protests, and the strengthening of certain organizations brought about concrete, but limited achievements that benefited, to some extent, the contenders and encouraged their activism. However, it is still uncertain if the process of mobilization can translate into radical changes in the contested structural conditions or contribute to slight modifications in the state of affairs. Until now (mid 2002), neither the government nor the mobilized groups seem to have a clear or feasible path to

include the protesters' demands as a policy priority. Indeed, even if there is a common spirit of contention and general demands that unifies the diverse groups in certain episodes, there are also concrete differences that go against their common actions as a movement. While the quantitative expansion of contenders and their increasing heterogenization seem to fortify the mobilization, it is uncertain if the socioeconomic and ideological differences among contenders will finally prevail over their common demands and coordination, reinforcing the fragmentation of the movement. In other words, these observations leads one not to have a romantic view on the process of contention, but rather to be aware of its limitations. The fact that the level of mobilization increased dramatically does not necessarily mean that a multi-class revolutionary event is to come. The different groups will naturally tend to fight for their own interests, which could or could not bring about benefits to the whole array of protesters. The process of contention is still open, and therefore only time will tell.

In theoretical terms, I overcame certain limitations of the classic social movement framework by the adoption of a relational or blend approach, which I found to be useful in looking at the characteristics, dynamics and potentialities of the contentious process. However, in order to find and comprehend the mobilization's roots or origins, I had to adopt other theoretical instruments. According to the context in which the protests emerged and developed, I found political economy analysis to be extremely helpful, particularly when combined with historical and sociological approaches. In short, when looking at such a

complex phenomenon like the Argentine process of political contention in the 1990s, I had to be flexible in theoretical terms and also willing to see that my analysis was bounded by a considerable degree of subjectivity and uncertainty due to the proximity of the events and the consequent data limitations. In that sense, I chose to prioritize my intentions of clarifying the course of the events and restrict my conclusions to observations and personal thoughts. It was not my aim to offer categorical answers on a current process or to predict the future. My goal was to contribute to the current state of art on the latest wave of protests in Argentina and to take a step forward in its comprehension.

The relevance of the Argentine process of contention and the limitations of my research have only encouraged me to persist in the investigation. I already have new questions and ideas for further research. First, to test quantitatively certain factors that I propose have contributed to the emergence and development of the wave of protests. For instance, it would be useful to test the relationship between level of unrest in certain cities and provinces (in terms of number of protests, organizations and participants) and changes in the labor market (unemployment rate, employment variations of public and private sectors, labor demand per age and sex), variations in the budget assigned to welfare, labor and social programs, and alterations in poverty, inequality and general economic growth indexes. Second, to expand the qualitative aspects of the research through more comprehensive and systematic fieldwork. For example, it would be interesting to compare various towns and protest groups' experiences throughout

the entire process of contention, and to take into account the views of government officials, actors of traditional organizations and other people not directly involved in the protests as well. Finally, to study the manner in which the process terminates in order to evaluate general and particular outcomes in the eyes of the protesters and other actors, looking for the similarities and differences in their interpretations of the contentious experience. In brief, I will attempt to fill the gaps of my present research by testing my observations and conclusions with the final resolution of the process of contention and the expansion of the investigation in quantitative and qualitative terms.

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