Learning to Rebel: Socialist Youth Activism in Contemporary Buenos Aires

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From February 1986- August 1987 I conducted fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina. My research technique followed the common anthropological model of participant-observation. I worked with a youth group from the *Partido Socialista Democrático* (*PSD*), or the *JPSD* (*Juventud Partido Socialista Democrático*).[1] I participated in their meetings, activities, planning sessions, social events, etc. I also became close friends with several of them. They readily accepted me, in fact they were amused with having a socialist *Yanqui* among them. They thought that my analyzation of them could help them work better, and were cooperative in answering my questions and explaining much of the history of the party and their group.

My research questions are primarily concerned with social identity formation, particularly the formation of political ideology. I am looking to better understand how social and historical factors help influence one's development of his or her sense of self, where one positions oneself *vis-à-vis* one's society, and what actions one takes in response to these decisions.

This paper is based on a chapter from my dissertation, and thus assumes a thread of background that is not presented here. In previous parts of the dissertation I look at the history of Argentina and how different sectors interpret the past in different ways, focusing on the *Proceso*, the military government from 1976-83. During this seven-year rule, the military systematically kidnaped, tortured, and killed some 30,000 Argentine citizens. The two largest groups affected were blue-collar workers and university students (*Nunca Mas* 448:1986). Thousands, it was shown, had no links to any political organization, but simply opposed the military rule (Ibid.:448). I show the close relation between social identity and one's interpretation of history. I also discuss social- memory, its interrelationship with history, how history is a contested story, and how the accepted version of history has major political ramifications (Baumann, 1982, Brow 1990, Connerton 1989, Halbwachs 1980). Today in Argentina there is a fight over whose version of the *Proceso* will be remembered and taught in the schools. The version that triumphs will then be a part of society's collective memory. This collective memory is a large part of what is often referred to as "ideology." The struggle is a part of what Gramsci calls the "war of position" which, in turn, is part of the battle for hegemony (1971:120). It is possible that neither side will be completely victorious.

I also look at the category of "youth" and how this, in some societies, has become a rather liminal period, between adolescence and full adult membership within society (Wulff 1995, Keniston 1968, Reynolds 1995). In Argentina today, due to economic factors, nearly all of my friends, from late teens to late twenties, are living with their parents and working full time (if they can find work) for $400-600/month. This salary, in a city as expensive as any in the U.S. (and in some aspects, more expensive), is not enough for these youths to be independent members of their society. Many are also full time students at the University of Buenos Aires. This situation is very frustrating for them. While most youths spend their scarce free time playing *futbol* or in other, more social activities, these youths have decided to spend their time trying to change the structures of society which are responsible for their situation. I then move to the more ethnographic part of the thesis, beginning with a little history of the current youth group, before

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[1]The Argentine Socialist Party is the oldest Socialist Party in Latin America, founded by Juan B. Justo in 1896.

looking at the political development and actions of specific individuals, which I present here in this paper.

Through a discussion on social identity, the personal narratives of several activists will be constructed. I will show how these personal narratives work dialectically within, and with or against, the larger social and historical settings (as discussed in my dissertation). According to Richard Jenkins (1996), to understand the make-up of social identity one must see it as a process, a relationship between the individual subject and society. For Jenkins, it is the nature of this relationship that is the most important element in understanding social identity (1996:19). Using my field data to explore this dialectical relationship will be my method for coming to a deeper understanding of the processes of social identity formation. Adding to Jenkins, I see history and social memory as an important part of this relationship. They act as a kind of pool of information which individuals draw from to better understand the circumstances in which they find themselves. Where citizens are positioned in society partly shapes the manner in which they will interpret the information in their specific pool. The history I described earlier can be seen as the broad contents of this pool for many Argentine citizens. As shown, this same contents can be interpreted in multiple ways. The position of these youths is the vantage point from where they interpret the contents of the "pool".

Drawing from my ethnographic fieldwork data, I will explore, on a more personal, micro, level how these variables (i.e. history, social memory, family, etc.) influence one's political identity development and help determine what actions one may take. As I get to the discussions with *JPSD* members and their families, looking at their specific circumstances and experiences, we will be better able to understand the complex processes involved in shaping their political identities. All ethnographic material presented will draw from my fieldwork which includes formal interviews, less formal conversations, and general observations and experiences I had while participating with the young activists in the *JPSD*.

Rebels in Waiting?

> In 1994 I began to be an activist. [It was] in the University during *CBC* [the mandatory year of entry level classes]. I had a strong desire to become active. I began to walk past the tables during the student elections and, well obviously I had leftist tendencies, and, well, I encountered a *compañera*, all the *compañeros*, of the youth group and they told me of *la Chispa*, that they work in the slums... and from there, they got me, no? At first I began to participate in *la Chispa* and after a few months in *la Chispa*, I affiliated with the Party.
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> Really I felt much disgust, I don't remember the exact moment, but the whole situation of how we were living gave me much disgust, no? You see it on television, one after the other. It disgusted me, I felt great impotence that all of this is happening, no? That the people are fighting among themselves, and to see so much desperation, misery... and everyone sits in front of their televisions... It gave me the desire, well, to do something to change it. But... well, I believe it was

> all this, more than anything else. The desire to change everything, everything that I didn't like (Mariela, a 21 year old *JPSD* member)[2].

In this quote from an interview with Mariela, she expresses her awareness of her country's disastrous social condition. She also mentions her desire "to do something to change it [the social situation]." The questions for the social scientist are: why she feels a desire to do something, what sparked her initial entry into political activism, and what kind of actions did she finally take?

We must start by understanding the relationship between the individual and society. This is the core to understanding identity formation. We cannot focus solely on only one side of this relationship, but must look at both sides. As Jenkins reminds us, meaningful self-identity cannot exist isolated from the social world of other people (1996:20). Mariela did not act on her internal interests, nor did she consider herself an activist, until she found a group within society with which to share this identity. Her activistic leanings needed a social outlet in which to manifest themselves. Once part of a group, her identity became stronger and more clearly articulated. As we will shortly see, this is not a unique occurrence. This is why it is so important to look at "the *internal-external dialectic of identification* as the process whereby all identities- individual and collective- are constituted" (Jenkins 1996:20).

Jenkins is not the first to point out this dialectic. Marx, over 100 years ago, had stated that, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted in the past" (1978[1852]:595). Here, Marx reminds us that people react to present day circumstances based in part to their relationship with society. Marx includes history as a part of the circumstances upon which the wider relationship the individual has with society is built. Before an individual, such as Mariela, reacts to present day circumstances, he or she has already been reacting to situations outside of the individual-internal/(present day) social-external relationship. This history is part of the social memory which fills the "pool" I referred to earlier. We must understand how Mariela's pool got filled up the way it has, and what, in her present day circumstances, causes her to interpret events the way she does.

I will begin this investigation with a look at several individual accounts of *JPSD* members and how they got involved in political activism, moving outward from the individual to see if there is influence from the family, and if so, to what extent. After having recorded numerous formal interviews, and participating in even more informal conversations with members of the *JPSD*, several similar accounts were repeated by them as to how they personally came to be involved with politics in general, and with this group in particular. A few members wanted to get involved with a political organization, and because of personal connections (i.e. a friend or family member), went directly to the *JPSD*. Some slowly evolved into their roles as activists, finding a match between their views on society and the messages of the Socialist Party. A popular path is through volunteering as a community worker in *la Chispa*, and from there being drawn into full

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[2]All ages given are the youths' ages at the time of the interviews in 1997.

participation within the *JPSD*.[3] Finally, others started as participants in the various workshops (i.e. Tango or guitar lessons) offered at the Cultural Center opened by a group of *JPSD* activists, enjoyed the atmosphere and what the youths there were trying to accomplish, joined in the planning of the Center, and eventually participated in more political events.[4]

I discussed elsewhere in the thesis how Rafa (24 years old) and his younger brother Lucho (20 years old) got involved with the Party. Neither of their parents were active in the Socialist Party. In fact, their father was active in the Radical Party.[5] Rafa got started in a neighborhood social club, writing a newsletter. There were prejudices in the club against the poorer residents in their *barrio* that Rafa and several of his friends could not tolerate. They formed their own neighborhood club. The father of one of these friends was affiliated with the Socialist Party, and they were offered a place to meet at the local Party center. Rafa eventually began to get interested in the ideas of the Party. Finally, against the objections of friends and family, he joined the Party. Lucho tagged along with his brother until he was old enough to understand what the Party meant and decided to officially join at the age of 14. As he puts it,

> In this moment Rafa joined the Party (I am sure he mentioned that it was against the objections of his family and of some of his friends). I was 12 and was not yet able to make a decision to join a Party. I did not know what I wanted to say [politically]. But, during those years I was forming [my ideas] with books, writings, texts, and these kind of things. And, well, one day I went to a Party meeting on Austria street in 1991, and from then on I have been an activist everyday.[6]

Also mentioned in the thesis was the story of Carolina. Carolina (25 years old) started high school in 1985, soon after the transition to democracy in 1983. It was there, with the

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[3]*La Chispa* is an organization started by members of the *JPSD* to work with children in the slums (*villas*) in and around Buenos Aires.

[4]I wish to point out that there are different degrees of participation and that not all of those active are card-carrying members of the Party. Also, there is not always a correlation between dedication and Party membership.

[5]The Radical Party is one of the two major political parties in Argentina (along with the Peronists). Their ideology is roughly that of conservative Democrats in the U.S. In 1998 they formed an alliance with Frente Grande, a new party, which itself is a coalition of center and left parties, including the *PSD*. They are hoping to defeat the Peronists in the Presidential elections in 1999. Many of my friends could not stomach an alliance with the Radicals, and have left, for now at least, their roles as political activists, or have made new alliances.

[6]The term "active" and "activist" (*militante* in Spanish) is used here in a very broad sense: to work towards social change, whether through a political party, a social movement, community work, or other similar types of involvement.

encouragement of several of her teachers, that she started her militancy. She joined *Franja Morada*, the youth group of the Radical Party. Eventually her political opinions developed and became critical of what the Radical party stood for and she realized that she no longer shared their views on society and politics. When she began studying at the University she met others who shared her new outlook on society. They formed *la Chispa*, an organization through which they could work with children living in the *villas* (slums). They eventually asked for structural support from the Socialist Party, and soon after, Carolina herself affiliated. Of this original group Hernan was already a member of the Party, which helps explain the group's seeking out the Party's help.

Like Carolina, Hernan (30 years old) also started as an activist in high school with *Franja Morada*. This was around 1981 to 1984, during the transition back to democracy. Alfonsin, the Radical Party candidate who won the 1983 presidential election, ran his campaign on human rights issues, and was seen by many youths as someone who was "going to change the country" (Hernan, personal interview). When this did not happen, due to causes and policies discussed earlier, these youths, and several others I talked to in the group who were also supporters of Alfonsin during these years (when they too were in high school), were attracted to a party that was speaking out against the status quo.

These youths, although still teenagers, already had political experience and were beginning to analyze their nation's state of political-economy for themselves. As the economy began to unravel around Alfonsin, his control of the military became dangerously weak. This was followed by the election of Menem in 1989 and the onslaught of corruption charges and allegations which have followed him from the first days of his administration. It was under this political climate, at a time when many of these youths were beginning to analyze their country's situation, that they came to realize that Alfonsin the politician was not the problem. It was the system. Once in office, Menem pardoned the military leaders convicted for their crimes committed during the *proceso* and embraced I.M.F. dictated economic policies. Thanks to these actions, Menem has come to be a symbol of this system and its evils.

As these youths entered the University of Buenos Aires and were exposed to a greater number of differing political organizations, they were, not surprisingly, attracted to the left.[7] Several already had some connection to the Socialist Party. Carolina through Hernan. Hernan through his older brother. Rafa through one of his friends in their neighborhood club (through his father). And Lucho, through Rafa. Another very important issue is that at the time these youths were becoming politically aware, starting the university, they were also starting to work. This made many things about the economy and unemployment that they had previously heard through the media, family, and friends, suddenly very real. They also had to declare their career majors before the start of their entry level year at the University of Buenos Aires, this also forced them to confront the state of their nation's economy in a very immediate way.

During the years of the Dirty War, there were no openly active political groups. As the older members of the *JPSD* (now in their late twenties and early thirties) entered high school at the outset of democratic reforms, generally only the mainstream parties were represented in

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[7]There are very few in the *JPSD* who go to private universities where such political activism is generally not permitted. One member, Marcelo, went to a private Jewish academy. He got involved with the *JPSD* thanks to his high school friendship with Rafa.

student politics (the Peronists and the Radicals). Given the choice, the Radicals were the only ones who offered hope for change. As these *JPSD* "founders" began to organize their groups, whether around *la Chispa*, through neighborhood clubs, or through maintaining high school friendships. They found each other at the university and at Party functions, and began to form the current incarnation of the *JPSD* from scratch. Once the group was established, others who entered the University after them encountered this already-formed nucleus of a group, making it easier for them to join. The earlier quote by Mariela is a good example of how, *la Chispa* was, for many, a stepping stone into the *JPSD* and the Party.

Mariela joined *la Chispa* when she was 18 years old. Today, at 21 years of age, she studies political science at the University of Buenos Aires and works as a receptionist for a marketing firm. She works six hours a day, five days a week earning $380.00 a month. I asked if she thought this a fair wage. "Fair? No, it is very little, but at least I am working *en blanco* [in white, above the table], and I receive health benefits... which I do not have with my parents." Here we can already see what will become a common pattern in the lives of these youths; as they start the University and look for work, they are confronted directly with the Argentine economy, which, in their cases, reinforces the radical political ideas they are developing.

Another case is that of Mariana (23 years old), who also got involved with the *JPSD* through *la Chispa*. By the time she became involved, some in the *JPSD* had opened a cultural center on Vera street which became the center of activities for various fronts in the greater *JPSD* organization as well as for neighborhood activities. Unlike Mariela, Mariana states that she was not looking for a group through which to participate in politics. However, like Mariela, she was not content with the political direction nor the economic climate in Argentina. In her own words:

> In the university I knew this girl [Marciela] who studied in my major [social education], and her boyfriend was in both *la Chispa* and the *JPSD*... She got me started in *la Chispa*. I was working for six months in *la Chispa* and little by little... Well... they had begun to work on Vera, and I began to go.[8] Some of the meetings for *la Chispa* were held there... and Luis, Rafa and Julio... they asked me to help them clean up a little... and I began to be active and help out [at Vera] [and] in the University [with the *JPSD* front there]. And, it went like this for two years, until I finally affiliated with the Party, and I am presently active in the Party. What happened is... I worked for six months until they finally hooked me with the way they worked, I began to have confidence in how they worked, and I am still with them.
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> I wasn't looking for an activity... Marciela studied with me at my house... I was never an activist, but I wasn't comfortable with what was going on. I had an idea to do something, but I didn't know what. When Marciela told me that she was giving classes to help children in the slums with their school work I thought, this is it. It all came together at the right time for me...

[8] "Vera" is the name of the street the Cultural Center opened by members of the *JPSD* was on. The center is referred to by various names, *el centro*, is one, and simply "Vera" is another.

We have now heard from several *JPSD* members and how they got started with their political activism and the formation of their political beliefs. What is clear is the need to find a social outlet in which to put into practice personal beliefs. Both Mariela and Mariana encountered the *JPSD* roughly at the same time. Although Mariela stated she was directly looking for a group in which to participate, unlike Mariana, we can see that both of them came with an internal belief, or opinion, of the need for social change. This view came from, as will become more apparent, their personal interactions with their communities, families, and the socio-political structures of the country. In neither case did their personal critique of society and desire to take action manifest itself publicly until they came in contact with a group whose members shared their views. As Jenkins clearly believes, both the internal and external components of identity are social; "If identity is a necessary prerequisite for social life, the reverse is also true. Individual identity- embodied in selfhood- is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people" (1996:20).

This internal-external process will be even more apparent in the next section when we look at the siblings of several *JPSD* members. We can then begin to see that one's beliefs and actions are, indeed, part of a process, an interaction between one's habitus (cf. Bourdieu 1972) and one's internal analytical processes. Yet, in my view, the individual has more agentive powers, and an ability to critically analyze one's habitus, than Bourdieu acknowledges. As he sees it, "It is only when the dominated have the material *and* symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them through logical structures reproducing social structures... that the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such..." (1972:169, emphasis added). Clearly the youths in the *JPSD*, while possessing the symbolic means of exposing the arbitrariness of their habitus, do not have the material means of rejecting the system, as Bourdieu insists is a necessity. The dialectics of social identity, as I am defining it, allows far more freedom and creativity for the individual to see through the doxa, and act to try and change things.

Another path that brings new blood to the *JPSD*, completely outside of any academic institution, is through the work some members are doing in neighborhood cultural centers, such as the one opened on Vera street. Mariela, who began in *la Chispa*, lives in the same municipal district as the Cultural Center, Villa Crespo. Once involved with *la Chispa*, she was introduced to the center and the activities being carried out there. She began to be active in running the Center, eventually leaving *la Chispa* to put all her energies there.[9]

Alicia, a 21 year-old I met through the activities at the Center, told me how she was passing by the Center one afternoon (she lives only blocks away) and saw the poster advertising the workshop on Tango. She inquired within about the lessons and, learning that the cost was only $5.00 a month for four lessons, enrolled.[10] Little by little she came to know those who were

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[9]During my time in Argentina, other members (with everyone's help) opened a second cultural center in the *barrio* of San Telmo, a much poorer area of Buenos Aires than Villa Crespo. The main activists there are *JPSD* members from that neighborhood.

[10]Most of the activities at the Center are free, but to find two qualified Tango instructors they had to allow them to charge a nominal fee as their payment for giving the lessons. Normally these instructors charge closer to $20.00 per lesson per person.

running the Center, and began to get more involved with the other activities at the Center. Besides her continuing participation in the center, she now also participates in some of the political activities of the *JPSD* although, to this day, she has not affiliated with the Party.

María-José is 20 years old and also lives in Villa Crespo. She works in the mornings in an accounting office, in the afternoons in a law office, and in the evenings she studies literature at the University of Buenos Aires. She works ten hours a day, five days a week and earns $640.00 a month. And like much non-professional work in Argentina, especially among the youths, it is *en negro* or, in black, under the table. She gets no health benefits, sick days, nor vacation days. Does she find this situation just? "No, obviously it isn't just... but given the circumstances, I think I am pretty lucky." How she became involved with the *JPSD* is a similar story to that of Alicia's, although she has become much more politically involved.

> María-José: .... In high school, the political movements were, well, not very strong. They were a little stupid because they had no theory.... I began as an activist... well, one day I said, ok, I want to learn to dance Tango, and I started at the Cultural Center... One day Alejandro asked if I wished to participate in the organization of the Center, and I said, sure. And, after a short time, I joined *la Chispa*... then, after about a year, I affiliated with the Party, more or less around December 1995.
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> RF: So, the fact that you joined this Party was a kind of coincidence, no? That is, you went to the Cultural Center, and this was the group you encountered.
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> María-José: Well, the thing is, I believe I always had political inclinations leaning to the left. It was always like this. The thing with the *PSD* was that at this moment I said to myself, ok, this is my space where I wish to participate...[11] So many things one has in one's head without finding a place to... Well, more than... for me, more than the Party was the youth group... First, I didn't know much about the history of the Party, nor of the youth group... but it wasn't the history... but for the concrete actions [they took]. This, I did not see in other groups... they were doing serious work, not just talk, like others...

María-José does credit her mother with some influence on her political identity development. She notes that her mother worked for some big unions, and when she was around 12 years old went with her to various meetings and functions. She learned that her father was active in the Workers Party (*el Partido Obrero*), and was thus, she stated, familiar with, or heard, the word "worker" used in a political context in the house, even if she was not really aware of it.[12]

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[11]The *PSD* (*Partido Socialista Democratica*) is the Socialist Party to which the youth group belongs. The "*J*" in *JPSD* stands for *juventud* or, in English, youth.

[12]Her father died six years ago, but her parents were divorced for many years before his death.

One morning her father spoke to her about politics, but still, she insists that, "... the education that most influenced my leftist ideology was, more than anything, from my mother."

In both these examples, to different degrees, it was concrete activity which attracted these new members to the group. Alicia told me that she was interested in doing social work, but had no intentions, yet, to act on this. Yet, she was seduced by the atmosphere of the cultural center. María-José, on the other hand, had a higher level of development of a political awareness, but still did not approach the cultural center as a prospective place to become politically active. Both were eventually drawn to the way the youths running the center were merging their theory with their praxis, as was Mariana. They were not just a group who "talk," as María-José credits other organizations with doing, they were taking concrete actions to help bring about social change. Alicia and María-José can be seen as examples of two youths who rather stumbled upon their activism. That is, activism found them. Once introduced to the Cultural Center, both were drawn by the activities, the individuals, and the solidarity among the groups that were running and using the Cultural Center.[13]

To take the analysis one step further, we can look at the structures that permitted a place such as the Center to open. A center such as this one would not have been allowed to exist fifteen years earlier, during the *proceso*. Yet, Argentine democracy in and of itself did not open the Center either. The window of opportunity was created by the new structures under democracy and, I would argue, by the current economic situation that opened up this category of "youth" discussed earlier (thus making good use of a bad situation). As we will soon see, these youths are coming to assess their futures as not very bright and see that the best way to correct the situation is not to work for their own specific economic betterment, as the capitalist system encourages. But, instead, they are trying to change the very system which creates individual competition with a system of solidarity, where people are encouraged to work towards the betterment of society, and not strictly for themselves. Creating a new group of militants requires time (over an extended period) and dedication. Both of these are readily available to youths today in Argentina, though clearly not all use this space to try to bring about social change.

Where Jenkins rightly points our attention to the dialectical relationship between the "internal-external" (individual/community) as the key to understanding the process of identity formation, I would add that we must understand local group or community structures as also being in a dialectical relationship the with larger external structures on a national level (and from there, we can look to global structures, etc.). We can begin to understand the relationship by starting either with the individual, moving out towards the larger structures, or begin with the structures, moving inwards to the individual. The structures in place determine both the freedom of movement they allow the individual as well as the constraints placed upon the same individual. The individual can take advantage of the freedoms, working creatively around the constraints, to construct a community of like minded people. This community, then, built around a common identity or interpellation will have more strength than does the individual to fight against the structural constraints. By starting with the individual, we can look at how one can act on one's internal beliefs. It is possible, through the power and agency available to the individual, to take

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[13]More of the center's activities and philosophy behind running it will be looked at in chapter Five.

advantage of the social structures in which individuals find themselves and consciously work to change those structures. They are not completely trapped in an "iron cage," that suffocating cloak of our "technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all individuals who are born into this mechanism," that humankind has constructed around itself, as Weber might have it (Webber: 1992:181). Nor are they helplessly subservient to the doxas and orthodoxies of their habitus as Bourdieu sees it. As one acts to externalize, or socialize, one's beliefs and finds a community, the individual becomes stronger, there is power in numbers. With this new strength coming out of the sense of community, these individuals can begin to confront ever larger structures. We can now begin to see and understand the importance of social identity on the processes involved in struggles against seemingly untouchable enemies.

But, we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now, we can begin to see that these youths had come to an awareness of the social conditions in their country, and were not at all content. This outlook is not at all difficult to understand given the history of their nation, the corruption of current government, and what they see and read in the media. Also, these youths are now themselves entering the job market, and have experienced first hand the seriousness of the economic situation. These young adults from Argentina's middle classes are struggling to earn pocket money. They are not even thinking of becoming independent from their families. As Mariela and Mariana commented, they just wanted to do something! The next step was in finding that "something." They were rebels without a cause, or maybe "rebels in waiting."

Others, not looking to get involved, found the *JPSD* and were attracted to their way of working together, their ideals, and the general sense of community. They found a cause that needed more rebels. It is precisely here that we can see a dialectical relationship happening between the individual and community. And, as is the nature of dialectics, change, in some fashion, is inevitable (either to the individual the society, or both). Since self-identity cannot exist in isolation from the social world or, as Jenkins puts it, "... isolated identity is meaningless" (1996:20), there seems to be a "need" to join a community, or start one where none existed. This again brings us back to Marx and his emphasis on humanity as inherently social in nature. We have seen the social context, both historical and contemporary circumstances, that would lead these youths to be critical of their society. Now we will look closer at how they arrived at their decision "to do something." A logical place to start, I believe, is from within the family.

Family

Above, we investigated how members came to be activists in the *JPSD*. We heard their own testimonies of how and why they became involved. We looked at the relationship between the individual and the organization or group. In this section I wish to deepen our exploration of some of these same individuals and others, and look into the family setting. While many spoke of the political activities (or lack of them) of their parents and other family members, none but María-José put much emphasis on the influence this may have had in guiding them towards the activistic stances they currently hold.

The relationship between the individual and one's family can be seen in a similar vein as the dialectical relationship discussed above between individual and group or community. A difference, however, exists in how the family as a group is defined in Western society compared to how other groups, such as political groups, are defined. The Western concept of "family" as a

relatively isolated or autonomous nuclear unit is one that is generally adhered to in Argentina, at least in the cities. It is easy enough to see how a political organization such as the *JPSD* can be seen, in a Marxist sense, as an organization *for* itself. That is they consciously joined this political group, and identify themselves as a political entity. Marx comments on the necessity of bringing the working classes from a class *of* itself-- that is as a class identified as such by others, to a class *for* itself -- that is, when those within the working classes can identify themselves as such, and work together to improve their conditions. This distinction is important when trying to get members of a group to act on their own behalf. The *JPSD* members certainly identify themselves as a body *for* itself. Families in the West, however, do not often see themselves as families *for* themselves. There are exceptions, to be sure, such as the British Royal Family, and one could argue the case for families in the U.S. such as the Kennedy family or the Rockefellers.

In non-Western cultures, anthropologists have shown how the family, or the lineage, is often the most basic and resilient organization *for* itself within society. Because of this distinction, it is easier to analyze the family as an organization with its own dialectical relationship between the group (family) and its members, and the group to the larger community. By understanding this, and noting that most Western families do not see themselves as families *for* themselves, we can better understand why it is hard for the members of the *JPSD* and others in society to distance themselves enough to see the impact their family has had on their identity formation.[14]

Of course, it is possible that the lack of family influence reported by those I talked to may, indeed, be because there was very little family influence on their decisions. As an ethnographer, however, I am not yet ready to take this at face value. It could be that their relationships within their families are so intertwined, almost as if they embodied the dialectical relationship between their own individual identity formation and their relationship with their families, here seen as an external influence, to be too close to step away and reflect on it more objectively. This may be due to their relatively young age and to the social circumstances which have them still living with their families. These circumstances must also be seen as a part of their "identity formation-in-progress," perhaps making it difficult for them to step back and evaluate their situations more objectively. It can also be seen as what Brett Williams (citing Levine 1972) refers to as "sacred inarticulateness," which she defines as people's difficulty in explaining to outsiders ideas and beliefs which they hold dear (Williams 1988:194). I will add here, that the problem of "sacred inarticulateness" may also be caused by the fact that those interviewed had not consciously thought about these questions before, and were not able to immediately (during an interview) find the words to explain it.

This lack of distance between the individual and family is not the case between the *JPSD* members and the organization. Since they consciously joined the *JPSD*, it is easy for them to

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[14]An exception can be seen in the realm of psychoanalysis. The weakness of psychoanalysis for my investigation, however, at least as used by Keniston (1968), is that it concentrates almost solely on the individual/parent relationship. According to Jenkins' thesis, and the one I am developing here, we must also recognize the relationship between the individual to the community when analyzing identity formation.

reflect on the group, even though they are a part of it, as a group *for* itself. In the family setting, they lose that analytical distance. They do not think of the family as a collective *for* itself. Ethnography, however, involves a little bit of detective work, and thus I have talked to others involved, or "witnesses" to the identity formation processes of these youths within their respective families. Although the same problem of distance to the family is there, there is more of a distance when speaking about another member of the family than when reflecting on one's own position. When interviewing parents about their children there is also the generational difference and the fact that the interviewed subjects had themselves often gone through similar periods.

Rafa mentioned to me that in the last year or so of his mother's life (she died of cancer while I was in Buenos Aires), she began to be interested in the socialist ideals that he, his sister, and his brother Lucho, carried. He likened the scenario to that of the novel "Gorky Park." This, however, is the exception. In all the other stories I have heard, the influence, if admitted to at all, flowed in the other direction, from the parents to the child. The example of Mariela is more typical of these experiences.

When discussing with me how she got started in political activism, Mariela never mentioned any influence upon her by her family. When asked directly, she mentioned that her parents were never activists in any party. She considers their politics to be "progressive" on the center-left. But she never spoke of the family as a place where her political identity was shaped, partially or otherwise. Mariela's mother, Beatriz, told me in our interview that, indeed, she herself is not interested in party politics.

Beatriz works out of the house as an independent consultant in marketing and investments. Her parents, Spanish immigrants who left during the reign of Franco, never spoke much of politics. She attributed this attitude to having left Spain under Franco, and having survived the Spanish civil war.[15] As for family influence on Mariela's politics Beatriz had this to say:

> Look, I believe that the household always has influence, that she [Mariela] received messages from [us] her parents, and they were always socialistic in nature. Neither [of us] were active, but we always had a tendency towards socialism. A socialism [standing for] a little more justice, more opportunities, not so much power. And, I believe that the discussions we had, the authors we read and listened to, all this was when she was forming something... I think there, there was some influence. And later, well, independently, in the university, with friends, she began to associate with people in the Party, and from there she began to be active.

Mariela's father, Alberto, is a 45 year old salesman who has been working for an x-ray technology company for the last nine years. Both of his parents came from Spanish descendants. They are supporters of the Radical Party, but are not active within it. However, his uncles are

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[15]My interpretation of this is that after the horrors Beatriz's parents went through in Spain, they wanted to stay out of politics in their new country, and concentrate on making it a home.

active in the Radical Party, and this activism included the years under Peron (1946-1955).[16] Alberto also feels that the influence they have had on Mariela is indirect, but is there. Being an influence on how your child comes to see the world is, as he put it, "a little of the idea of being parents, no?" He acknowledges the influence of the activities of the household; they had friends over, sociologists, lawyers, and the like, people more or less of the left. "But look," he continued,

> If you were twenty years old, witnessing the injustices going on [in Argentina], it is not hard to come to think of the country as not very fair, no? Where only a percentage of the people live well and the rest [live] very badly. I support, strongly, the ideas of Mariela... I do not believe so much in the organizations of political parties, no?"

Although he does not put much faith in party politics, he often helps Mariela and her companions at the cultural center when asked and, he adds, enjoys it. When I was there we organized a neighborhood soccer tournament and asked Alberto to help with the officiating and with locating a place to play. Alberto also expressed some regret for not having been more active in his youth, "the times were more violent then... But I would have liked, perhaps, to have been more active..."

Alberto, like Beatriz, put a lot of emphasis on Mariela's experience when she started her university studies to help explain her turn towards political activism. As we will see, Mariela, when talking about her younger sister, also acknowledges the influence of the university environment. Alberto mentions the fact that she spent four of her five years of secondary school at a private Catholic school, being taught by nuns. This was not an atmosphere conducive to radical political identity formation.[17] Yet even under these circumstances Mariela admitted, when I prodded her, that she did rebel a little against the nuns. As her younger sister Lucia commented to me, Mariela was always one to stick up for her beliefs. It seems the ingredients for an activist have always been within her.

Laura, another youth group member, has a different story. Four years earlier, when she was 18, her parents joined the Socialist Party, and have been very active members since. Laura is 22 years old, studies communications at the University of Buenos Aires, and helps out her parents with their small fumigation company. Laura was active in student government in high school. I asked her why she became an activist in high school:

> Because... one can't help being an activist. It's like this. I don't know, I get bored doing other things. Never did I tell myself, "this is what I have to do"...

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[16]During this time, the Radical Party was once again seen as the "oppositional" party. In this case, opposing the perceived fascism of Peron (previously they were the only major party opposing elite rule in the first multi-party elections from 1916 until 1930, when the military through them out).

[17]The Catholic Church in Argentina is generally very conservative. In fact, in 1997 the Madres de Plaza de Mayo sent documents to the Vatican which they say prove that the Bishop of Argentina was aiding the generals during their Dirty War.

> and my parents, never influenced me in this way. Never did they say, "No, you must be a socialist!" Never. Always they showed me everything, everything they did... And, what happens is that in life, one is not a socialist from the door of one's house to outside. It is a form of life which begins... To be one way one cannot be any other... They [my parents] showed me and told me what possibilities there were to select, and it appeared to me that there was no choice. I could not see myself being anything else. This is how I started...

Once her parents affiliated with the *PSD* they led a workshop at the cultural center on Vera. Laura was introduced to the youths there and began to work on their neighborhood newsletter;

> My parents began to have more contact with the "kids" than with the older people in the Party. I started with a relationship with the "kids" who thought, more or less the same as me. There were some who were children of disappeared, they lived a terrible history during the *proceso*. Luckily, this was not my case... And, well, we began from there. But the interest was always there. The interest to do something...

Laura's father, Antonio, owns and runs a small fumigation company. His wife Cristina works with him, and Laura helps out as well. Besides the family there are two or three other employees. His parents were Italian immigrants, arriving in Argentina in 1921. His father fought in a battalion on the front during the First World War, and came to Argentina with his wife and their daughter after the war (Antonio was born in Argentina). They were eventually a family of two boys and two girls. Antonio's father rented a room of their house to a man, a French immigrant, who eventually came to be like part of the family. In fact, he was Antonio's godfather. I asked if his parents were activists:

> Yes, yes, mostly my godfather. My father was a socialist in Italy. He came here because of the persecution which was starting in Italy by the fascists. But when he came here... with his work... he did not participate much in politics. But he always had his socialist conception of the world. Not like my mother, who was more Catholic, but she also felt some solidarity with my father's outlook... Where we lived, all the neighbors were friends.... Together we resolved problems in the neighborhood... It was in this atmosphere which I grew up. My Godfather was an activist, but not in any union nor in politics. He was an anarchist... So, in this atmosphere, the possibilities to not be a socialist were slim. The bourgoise didn't convince me. And, here I am. I am 56 years old and have participated in all the struggles in my country since I was 15, and always from a socialist perspective. And, well, it has been good.

As to how his daughter Laura got involved, he mentions how first he affiliated with the Party, then his wife, Cristina, "more to be my *compañera* [comrade] than anything else." And soon after, Laura. "But my daughter affiliated because of her relationship with the members of

the youth group." He believes that as parents they did have some influence on the education of their daughter.

> But not by what we say, but more by what we do, no?... We live modestly, we do not lack anything, but we are workers... And I think that all these things shape the youth, no? The atmosphere of where one lives. I think we tried to give her as much freedom as possible, for her to make... to come to her own realizations... never did we pressure her to be something, everything that she did, she did voluntarily...

Laura's mother, Cristina, besides working with Antonio, is a counselor of social psychology. However, she prefers working with community organizations, or within the Party, and for this work she does not charge the organizations. "I have had contracts with businesses; for this I charge. But it is not the same when the work is related with one's activism or with local community centers." Cristina's parents, aunts, and uncles worked in Peronist unions under Peron in the 1940s through the 1950s. She was born in 1943, the year the military took control of the government and Peron was appointed to the newly created position of secretary of labor and social welfare (from where he built his own unions which became the backbone of his political strength). She was raised under Peronism. When she was around 13, she broke with the Catholic Church, and began to look at other things.

> ...very alone, very personal, very individual, it was a search very individual. I looked at various lectures and texts which began to open my head [mind]... Curiously the first things that moved me about other perspectives, other outlooks on society was poetry. I read distinct poets, Miguel Hernande, Rafael Alberti, Orca, Previr... They moved me, and showed me that there were other ways to see the world... All my childhood was under Peron. And, I come from a proletariat family. By definition, for sure, being the working class they were absolutely Peronist... I arrived at socialism when I was 18 years old, when I realized that socialism was what I believed, there is no Christianity. What interested me were socialist ideas...

Several times I asked Cristina her opinion on how Laura came to be in the *JPSD* but she never directly addressed the question. She only mentioned that Laura got involved with student government in high school in the time of post-*proceso* democracy and that the list (ticket) she was working for had won the student elections. She spoke more generally about how one cannot teach youngsters ethics, but had to set an example through actions. She stated that she never forced her opinions on Laura, and that children are individuals and are free to make their own decisions and not necessarily follow the same path as their parents.

A final parental interview I did was with Silvia, the mother of María-José. María-José's parents had been divorced for many years and six years ago her father passed away. Silvia is 44 years old and a professional masseuse. Her parents were both born in Argentina. Neither of them are very active in politics, but her father supports the Peronists and her mother, the Radicals.

Silvia was formerly working in *frente Grande* (the center-left coalition which the Socialist Party joined), but is not presently. Generally, she says, she was never very active in party politics, but she was active within the unions. She used to work in the office of a large union. María-José used to accompany her sometimes to various meetings, and some of this had to have made an impression on her. This may be where she got her interest in politics, but it was not until after high school, Silvia adds, when she started her entrance year at the university, that she became politically active.

Paul Willis (1977), in his classic account of how working class culture gets reproduced, shows the power that ideology has on material circumstances. Unlike Jenkins, however, and unlike what I am trying to do here, Willis gives a very static analysis (especially for a Marxist scholar) of how working class youths continue to maintain their working class identity. Their are a great number of truths and insights given in this research, but like Bourdieu's *habitus*, people seem to be stuck continuing, and reproducing, the circumstances in which they happen to be born. Now twentieth century Argentina is not twentieth century England, to be sure, but we can begin to see how research focusing on the dialectics of identity formation will lead to a deeper understanding of human nature than has Willis' work.

By not looking at the relationship between the British working class kids, the greater British society, and their families as a dialectical one, Willis has shown us how things are, without helping to understand more profoundly why, and how to bring about change. In the stories of my friends given above, we have examples of someone raised in a strong Peronist and Catholic environment rejecting both, and on her own determination, returning to high school (when she was 18), becoming a socialist, and eventually graduating from college (Cristina). We also have a middle class liberal household producing a socialist militant (Mariela). These are not atypical stories.

Another case is that of my friend Daniel (Dani), a student of anthropology at the University of Buenos Aires. He is really not that interested in anthropology. Some semesters he is not even enrolled in classes, but he is a major catalyst for the *JPSD* within the college of Philosophy and Letters (which is the home of the Anthropology Department). His father is a wealthy businessman, a shop owner, and is not a socialist. Dani once apologized for never inviting me to his house, but says that he feels very uncomfortable there. Unfortunately, he does not have the economic independence to move out. Yet, ironically, it is his father's wealth that allows him to be a full time socialist activist. Dani complains that all his father can discuss is business, twenty-four hours a day. I met his father once. I ran into him with Dani and his brother during the 3 year anniversary march of the bombing of the Israeli-Argentine cultural center. There were approximately 30,000 people there. As I marched with Dani and his family, his father was talking on his cellular phone nearly the entire march. Dani commented to me, "See, constantly he is doing business! Not for a minute can he do anything else. He cannot just leave his store for this [the march], and put his attention to other, more important matters."

Certainly, a psychologist can read this as Dani rebelling against his father and his ideals, and I would probably not disagree. But this does not address why a particular identity is embraced, given the number of equally rebellious stances one can take. As with Paul Willis' analysis, it does not go far enough. If everyone rebelled against their parents, that would be different. If everyone seemed to be ideologically trapped into reproducing the same roles they

were born into, ok. But neither of these cases are universal, thus we can see the need to look deeper into these relationships. We also have cases of siblings holding different views, which reveals potential problems for more essentialistic interpretations of identity formations.

María-José has an older sister, Carolina. Carolina is 22 years old, and is in her qualifying year at the University of Buenos Aires. She plans on majoring in anthropology. She works for an agency that sells lottery tickets. The work is "part time": five and a half hours a day, six days a week. For this she gets $300.00 a month. "It is very bad" she acknowledges, "but, well, it is all I have at the moment, and it allows me to both work [in the afternoons] and go to the university in the mornings." Carolina is not affiliated with any party, nor does she have any interest in doing so. She has, however, done some community work in poorer areas of the city. She saw María-José's activism start when she began going to the Cultural Center on Vera. Although she places herself on the left of the political spectrum, she has problems with the leftist parties in Argentina. They are "too closed, too prejudiced, too dogmatic" in their ways.

Mariela has a younger sister, Lucia, 16 years old. On politics she has this to say:

> ...No, nothing at all, I am totally different from my sister. I don't like politics. The less I know of politics, the better. Very few things do I ask because it doesn't interest me to know, although I talk to my sister, because she is so interested in politics... but we are like black and white. No, I do not like politics.

Lucia says her sister always had a strong personality and would fight for her beliefs. When she started at the university she got involved with other activists, "and, well, [it] started from there..." I asked Lucia what her own political tendencies are, who she will vote for when she turns 18. "...Look, in this country everything keeps changing, one day there is one proposal, and the next there are five new parties. But the ideas of the socialists interest me. The *JPSD*... my sister... My interest is... well, my family, my dad and sister, think in this way." Lucia goes to the same Catholic high school Mariela went to, although, unlike Mariela, she plans to finish there. She defines herself as a religious person. However, she realizes that the history she gets at the Catholic school is rather one sided, and she does ask Mariela about Cuba, Che Guevara, the *montoneros*, and other issues which are only briefly mentioned in her history classes at school. Given her circumstances, she is not introduced to a very radical political agenda in high school and for now, the political ideas of her family are her main source of non-mainstream opinions. No one can predict what will happen when she enters the university, but at least she will not be afraid to listen to the leftist groups. For someone who states that she has no interest in politics, she seems both curious and well informed.

Mariela and Lucia's mother, Beatriz, believe that at 16 years of age Lucia does not really understand that much. Beatriz acknowledges, however, that Mariela changed greatly from the age of 16 to 20. And, yes, Lucia may change also. "Maybe she won't affiliate with the same party as her sister, but better formed ideas, she will have... But today, no, she has other interests, she is totally into other things." And on Mariela at the same age, "She didn't have many ideas either..." Their father, Alberto, has this to say:

> [Lucia] no, she does not participate [in politics]--she is far from it at this moment, no? At 16, Mariela also wasn't very involved... like all adolescenes, no? She doesn't see too clearly. They are very distinct people [Mariela and Lucia]... I see Lucia on a different path, Richard, if... hypothetically I would tell you no [Lucia will not be very politically active in the future]. At least, I do not see any inclinations on her part... but, who knows?[18]

Mariela had trouble putting into words what she felt at age 16. She says she felt she was more of a humanist, but nothing at the political level. I asked if she felt her sister may yet change.

> I don't know, maybe, not from what I see today, but maybe when she gets to the university... The university greatly changes your head [mind]. When I entered the college and *la Chispa*, at the same time... well it wasn't that after years of studying at the university I began to be active, but surely, at least, it was the atmosphere... One has to see what will happen.[19]

María-José sees her sister Carolina as interested in political issues, but outside of party politics. She does things independently. "But my sister, I think, in general, is a Peronist. She became one a little while ago. A Peronist for Peron, not for Menem." Silvia, their mother, had this to say when I asked if Carolina was politically active, "No, politically, no. Carolina is not in agreement with anything." Silvia believes that Carolina does have political beliefs and convictions but, unlike María-José, has never found an organization with which she felt comfortable with; she sees the structures of the parties as very closed. Here we see an individual who professes an interest in politics, but is not seen as "political" because she has not projected her interests in a social way, that is she is not involved with a group.

> Finally, we have Laura's little sister, Gaby, 9 years old, and in the fourth grade:
> RF: Your family is very active, no?
> Gabby: Yes.
> RF: Do you know with which Party?
> G: Yes.
> RF: Which?

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[18]It is interesting to recall how much more influenced Lucho was by his older brother Rafa, then is Lucia by Mariela (both pairs of siblings are roughly 4 years apart). Lucho joined the *PSD* when he was only 14. Then again, the influence may be partly understood by the fact that their father had died, and Rafa became the eldest male presence in the immediate household.

[19]I think Mariela is saying that since she got involved with her activism almost immediately upon entering the university, it was not necessarily something specific she learned there, but as she stated, it was the atmosphere. As I have tried to point out, she was developing ideas, an identity, but this identity needed the social catalyst found within the university environment for it to manifest itself.

G: The Socialist.
RF: Do you understand what socialism is?
G: Something, not much. Something that, I don't know, helps the children, I don't know, that tries... to help the people, I don't know, this is all I understand.
RF: Do you think that the ideas your parents and sister talk about are good?
G: I don't know, yeah, I guess. Really I don't yet understand.
RF: Do you think that you will be a socialist or an activist?
G: I don't know. When I am older will I be a socialist? I don't know.
RF: Do you think you will be active in something?
G: Yes, yeah, but I don't know now, when I am older then I will be able to have these ideas, when I study and work in other things, one can't make these decisions when one is a kid.

It is interesting to see the formation of a political awareness in different stages of development between Gabby, age 9, and Lucia, age 16. Gabby appears to have more data, or ideas, stored than she is capable of processing. She does, however, understand that her family is socialist and that socialism stands for helping children and people. While it is not possible to state from this that she will indeed embrace socialism later in life, she does seem to have a head start. And Lucia, who states a disinterest in politics in general, is also aware that her sister, and to a lesser extent her parents, are concerned with politics, and hold specific (socialist) ideas.

Lucia, at age 16, is vague and unsure of her beliefs, yet she articulates certain interests and disinterests, even if she contradictorily shows an interest in those same ideas she claims do not interest her. Also, she is the only one in her family who identifies herself as religious. She is thinking independently, if not yet completely clear on all the issues. From what Mariela has told me about her own political awareness when she was 16, it seems that Lucia, her disinterest not withstanding, is more aware of political issues than her sister was, and will be that much better informed when she begins studying at the university.

Although not always identified by my friends, family does seem to have an influence. Even in the case of Dani who consciously rejects his father's beliefs. The rejection of ideals must be seen as an influence as much as acceptance. While the majority of my friends had picked up on their parents' liberal ideals, and perhaps took them further (as they saw as necessary in today's Argentina), Dani found socialism through exposure to an ideology he rejects. In his case, free-market capitalism. Though a negative influence, growing up in the household of his father had, in some ways, a more direct impact on his political identity formation than did that of his *compañeros*. Dani has become one of the most ardent activists within the College of Philosophy and Letters (home to roughly 30,000 students).

Before we can continue with our narrative of the members of the *JPSD* (chapter five), it is important to look at another component of the internal-external relationship upon which social identity is formed. We have seen the young members carrying ideas which publicly manifested themselves only when they met other youths holding the same beliefs. We looked at how the family guided (or misguided) the development of the specific ideals they have come to carry, we have looked at the growth of identity formation-in-progress not only of current *JPSD* members, but of their siblings as well. What I will turn to now is how the development of their ideals just

discussed is influenced by the history and social context of Argentina, specifically the *proceso*. Having already discussed from a macro view this history, we can add a micro view to our discussion on social identity formation, adding to it the importance of history and social memory. To return to the analogy of a "pool" where personal and social memories are stored, I see events happening before a person is born as filling the deep end of the pool, while more current events fill up the shallow end. The shallow end can be accessed much quicker, thus having a greater impact on the individual's identity formation.

The state of "The State"

Alberto, Mariela's father, sees the situation in Argentina today this way:

> Argentina was a country that had fought (for better or for worse) in the 1940s for social rights, which they have [since then] lost. I believe [this loss] began effectively with the military [the 1955 overthrow of Peron]. I tell you, I grew up with the military governments, in a permanent state of siege... I believe that the opposition that was most serious, the strongest, or at least the most combative... many people have died.... They have stopped the opposition. We have lost many brave people and I believe we live in a system of fear. I believe it is a system of fear... One had hopes to regain some freedom during '83 in the time of Alfonsin, and at least there was an explosion of freedoms and democracy, but I think we have a democracy very conditional, very conditional.
>
> With respect to the youth today, they are the children of these parents, no? It is these parents that have inculcated them... I tell you Richard, I recognize that I am afraid for Mariela when she participates in these things. Because I know that at these demonstrations they [the government] is filming, that they know of your participation, that they practically have your affiliation card and that really one is never far, or at least one is always under the ghost of... well, for now it won't happen (another military coup). I believe this is all influenced by the *proceso*.
>
> Now, with what has happened, I believe that with the state of Argentina today, to speak of the youth is very difficult, no? Because, there are those sectors who actively participate, and I believe those sectors which have totally left politics, they are not interested, they don't participate, they believe in absolutely nothing. I believe that this is also a part of the *proceso* and what parents had experienced, no? Without a doubt.

This assessment is from the head of a middle class liberal household (in the U.S.'s use of the term liberal). Although Alberto mentioned he is sympathetic to some of the socialist ideals such as justice and equality, he has never advocated for the overthrow of the capitalist system.[20]

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[20]The ideas of socialism are not looked upon with the explosive ideological baggage with which they are in the U.S. It is a more acceptable ideal (if no less hated by some). As I mentioned, the Socialist Party has traditionally held elected positions in the local and national government. It is much more similar to the outlook in many European countries such as France,

From his statement, it is not hard to see why those youths who have chosen to participate in politics may choose a party which strongly voices and advocates for radical change. In Argentina, one can interpret "business as usual" to be the greatest obstacle in reaching a more just society. Holding a "humanist" political position is, in Argentina, to take an oppositional stance.

Yet, most youths do not participate, nor take such a radical stance. *Franja Morada*, the youth group of the Radical Party, came in third in the student elections in the college of Philosophy and Letters, second in the College of Social Sciences, and has been in power for many years in the College of Law and other of the traditionally more conservative programs. I find it easier to understand youths who see the political situation as hopeless, and put their energies to other past-times, and even young ultra-conservative youths from the wealthier families, than I do in understanding why those of the middle classes who are taking a political stance would support a party which represents the status-quo. As mentioned earlier, the position of the middle class gets more and more precarious every day. Perhaps they do not mind more of the same, if they believe that by supporting the governing party they will, at least, reap some of the benefits personally.[21]

It is important to understand the profound impact of the *proceso* on the youth which has grown up after it, differentiating it from previous generations. Mariela's mother, Beatriz, believes that before the *proceso* the youth had many more ideals, more hopes, and were more optimistic. On the impact of the *proceso* on today's generation of youth, who came of age after the *proceso*, she believes that, "yes, the relations today [are] due mostly to the military. What I see is that today they don't have... many examples nor much hope like... like everything is this way and there is a great frustration." Even among the radical youth, Beatriz does not see within them, and within Mariela, the idealism that existed in the youth earlier. This frustration, continues Beatriz, comes close to turning into despair when they must choose a major upon entering the university:

> Today they study, but they ask, 'for what?' Because to study or not to study is to stay the same. 'I receive [my diploma] and after, what?' It's the same to receive it or not... to finish... and drive a taxi or sell vegetables or work in a supermarket, or, well, I don't know where... They cut all of their hopes, no? They cut all of their projects, all of them. This did not happen to me, we had hopes, projects, there was a future... Well, look at the *proceso*, the future of this generation has been demolished, directly.

It is a profoundly different outlook than that of her generation.

Antonio has this to add on the theme of the generation born in the 1970s, which is when most of the current *JPSD* members were born;

England, and Italy, where some form of Leftist political parties also have various degrees of influence.

[21]There is a very large Peronist youth which covers the political spectrum from fascistic tendencies to a more radical socialism. As has been alluded to in this thesis, Peronism is a thesis in itself (cf. Freeman 1992, Martínez 1988).

> This [the *proceso*] was their reality, and their form of life... They did not have the possibilities that earlier generations had. And, there was a generation in which 30,000 leaders and the most conscientious were assassinated and disappeared by the military dictators.[22] I participated in all of the struggles and I am lucky to be living... The military took away all the things that are important to be human, [like] solidarity, and the freedom to express yourself.
>
> And what concerns me the most for the youth today is work... Today, the majority of the youth have no concept of "work." Here there is no opportunity for concrete work, the *proceso* destroyed all of the productive apparatuses of the country... And the young are the most prosecuted, with the least access to production...

Cristina mentions, building on Antonio's point that humans need social contact, that during the *proceso* more than three people congregating in public was considered a mob, and could be arrested. She also sees the state of the youth today as very different from the earlier times. "The youth today cannot project 2-3 years into the future. Everything is precarious. Work is by contract, there is no security... Parents are the ones sustaining them, and we are finishing adolescence at 25 years, 20 years, living in our [parents] house... The 'family' is changing too." This precisely identifies and defines, without giving it a label, the new category of "youth" which was discussed in chapter three.

I asked Mariela why more youths do not participate in political and social struggles today. In my question, I did not mention the *proceso*. Even so, she responded:

> I believe that the whole epoch of the *proceso* and the seventies in Argentina has a great influence today. Where, well... our parents are those who lived in this moment, no? And there is still much fear with respect to being politically active... to participate in politics. Also, we have become a very superficial society... today, fashion is important for the youth, not for everyone, but for many, and pop music... They do not worry so much... It has a lot to do with the messages coming from above [those in power] that discourage any participation.

Lucho sees the *proceso* as just another step to keep the economy serving the wealthy and the interests of global capitalism. He saw this in earlier military governments, and observed how, today, Menem is serving those same interests. And tomorrow, well, "It is... not important what form [of government], but the economic plan must be implemented. Social relations are conditioned by the economic plan..." His older brother Rafa, on the other hand, looks more closely at the impact of the specific actions, and the extreme nature of them, that were taken during this past military rule,

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[22]Approximately 2 million, out of a population of 33 million, fled into exile.

> The *proceso* has a great influence [on the social and political situation today]. The figure of the "disappeared" is one of a person who doesn't exist, anywhere. It's like they snared you, sucked you up, you are a person that is neither alive nor dead, you are in "nowhere." This is the figure of the "disappeared." Sadly, they use this word internationally now, but it came from Argentina, it is a very sophisticated technique, like those of the Nazis in Germany, which cut the relations.... the social life.
>
> To have a child disappeared, or a cousin disappeared, or a friend disappeared is to influence one's fear, and it instills fear in others, because everyone in society feels it, it is not isolated. These fears went... I don't know if they ended the day of... with the return of legal forms of democracy in '83. They continue today in our parents, in the youth who don't get involved in politics for fear that [these conditions] will return. New generations, kids of 15, 16 years who might be interested in politics are warned by their parents to stay away. Or those who leave when they turn 18 [and can be punished as adults].

Rafa articulates, clearly and directly, what many with whom I have spoken to feel. The fear parents have for their children wishing to participate today in politics. The ghost image of the "disappeared" figure whose apparition is still noted today. Also, he notes how the Catholic Church still wields state power, and how many schools are run by generals' wives. Given other favorable variables within the immediate social world of a young Argentine, this may be a deciding factor in thwarting the desire in many to participate in politics. This can be seen in the difference in the numbers of active youths today as compared to the numbers before the *proceso*. Sylvia recalls that in the 1970s, in the universities,

> ...we can speak of maybe 75-80% were active in a political organization. And the workers too were more [active]. And this, now, we do not have. No, in the universities, maybe 20%. And the workers nothing because they have lost all faith in the unions. So, I think that all this corruption has worsened with the years. Also, I believe that the fear which we have transmitted to our children, because I still have fear for the activities of María-José, because my generation was hit hard...

Sylvia also believes that things have worsened since 1983. She feels that the explosion of freedom and democracy which opened up at the end of the *proceso* has closed off considerably. This coincides with Alberto's statement that their democracy is "very conditional." Every parent I spoke with said they were afraid for their child and his or her political participation. As mentioned by Rafa, this fear often prevents a child from participating in politics. Both Rafa, and his brother Lucho, mentioned that Rafa joined the Socialist Party against the wishes of friends and family. Alberto and Cristina, despite their fears, voiced their feelings through their continued activism throughout the military rule. Still, there are parents like Alberto, who did not actively participate in demonstrations during the *proceso* who, however, feel strongly that, "Regardless, if

I had to choose, I prefer a person concerned with the things that are happening in the country, as opposed to someone with deaf ears [and] who does not want to see what is going on."

Not all parents are permissive when it comes to allowing their children to participate in politics. Others, despite their fears, allow their children to decide for themselves. Whatever the circumstances, each individual must figure out what they believe is responsible for the present day situation, weigh this with the desires, hopes, and fears of their parents, and decide for themselves what is the right thing to do.

(Socialist) Identity

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.
>
> Karl Marx

To identify oneself as a socialist puts one in opposition to both major political parties in Argentina-- the Peronists and the Radicals, the newly rising Frente Grande (now in an alliance with the Radicals), as well as against the conservative elites and the military. All of these groups support the principles of free market capitalism. The youths in the *JPSD* have come to assess the political and economic situation of their country (and of the world in general) in such a way as to see that the current economic system is an unjust way to run a society. And, they are trying to do something about it. How did the relationship between their views and socialism develop? One strong attraction the *JPSD* has for many of the youth is the feeling of solidarity and commitment held by those in the group, something which was destroyed by the generals during the *proceso*. Mariana and María-José stated that they were impressed with what the youths were doing. They were impressed by their seriousness and dedication, and how they worked. This eventually drew them into the fold. One can say the same for Alicia, who came to the Cultural Center to dance Tango and ended by dancing to the tune of the Socialist International. She was impressed by the activities at the Cultural Center, by those who were running it, and felt comfortable among a group of young socialists even though she did not identify herself as a socialist. She was attracted to their "humanist" outlook and their practical approach in addressing social issues.

Yet it wasn't just that they wanted new friends. Within each of these youths was a sense that things were not quite right in their country, that things should be better. They grew up learning and hearing about Peron and understanding how the current state of some of their institutions are a result of the military regime during the *proceso*, which was, in many ways, a reaction to Peronism. Peron, they hear, depending on who is telling the story, was the working classes' savior, a revolutionary, or a fascist. For all the horrors that they have heard and read about the *proceso*, there are still people and news sources who think that what went on was a necessity for Argentina. As shown earlier, despite all the evidence, and even confessions from several military officers, some still deny that these atrocities ever happened. Menem has been twice elected by "the people" yet nearly everyday in the news is another scandal involving those closest to him politically, socially, and familially. Everyone in society hears this, and many, as stated by Mariela, Mariana, and Laura, may want to work towards change. But only a minority do, and only a minority of them become socialists.

We have seen young activists coming out of both activist households and very conservative households. We have also heard from siblings who hold quite distinct perspectives on politics, although they all seem to lean towards the left of the political spectrum (although this is not the case with Dani's brother). In very few cases have I come across a pair of siblings who are both politically active, whether in the same organization or otherwise. It is not enough to look at any one aspect of their lives to say "this," "this" is what turned them into young socialist activists. We truly have to look at the complex web of social relations as a whole, and place this web within the socio-economic context of both Argentina and of global capitalism.

Alberto, Mariela's father, asked how one could grow up in Argentina today and not see society as unjust. Yet my friend Lorenzo (25 years old) growing up in Argentina today, in a very posh neighborhood, sees the injustices but does not concern himself with them. That is, he feels no need to expend any energy participating in activities aimed at bringing about solutions to social problems, which he has acknowledged do exist. The three major problems he sees in his society are unemployment, politics, and education. Several months previous to our interview, there was a national march for education, protesting Menem's policies and his cutting back funds for education. I asked him if he felt they were necessary, if they were doing any good. To this he responded "They show or present the situation, this is good. But I do not think that they will change too much. But I think that yes, we must have them." The day of this march teachers and students from nearly every public educational institution, including the University of Buenos Aires, where Lorenzo studies, boycotted classes and attended the march (also, for the first time, it was noted in the press, the majority of private schools also participated). I asked him if he went; "No. No. I participate in few marches." Unlike Dani.

There is something more. Two important issues which, added on to the histories given (both personal and national), must are important strands of the web. One is the youths' perception of their future. As Cristina (Laura's mother) put it, "The youth cannot project 2-3 years into the future... There is no work, there is no future, everything is precarious." Many of my friends chuckled sadly when I asked them where they see themselves ten years from now, shaking their heads and saying "working, I hope." So they study, with no sense of urgency to finish. Rafa had this to say: "Mmmmm, in ten years where do I see myself? I don't know, in ten years... In less then this I cannot tell you. I see me without work, not able to rent an apartment... In Argentina it is very difficult to plan for ten years from now. We live more in the present." Interestingly, Lorenzo hopes to be practicing his profession (anthropology), and living moderately comfortable. He implies that this may be impossible in Argentina, and he may not be in the country in ten years. Very few of my friends saw much of a connection between their university studies and the work they will one day be doing.

The second issue is even more immediate, and gets back to the new category of "youth." Carolina works six days, 33 hours a week, for $300.00 a month ($2.27/hour), with no benefits of any kind. María-José works 50 hours a week for $640.00 a month ($3.20/hour) and Mariela works 30 hours a week for $380.00 a month ($3.17/hour), but at least, she dubiously points out, they give her health insurance. To put this in perspective, I was sharing a small two bedroom apartment which, including utilities and phone, ran around $600.00 a month (this was split two ways). Groceries cost roughly the same as they do in the U.S. but clothes are more expensive in Argentina than in the U.S., and electronic goods are double the prices found in the U.S. These

are the circumstances that are forcing youths, well into their mid, and even late, twenties to continue living with their parents and in many cases that I know of, sharing a bedroom with a sibling.

I had two students of English, Santiago and Guadalupe whom would be more or less considered "yuppies" (a category they did not fully deny). They are both 24 years old and graduated in business from one of the many private universities in Buenos Aires. They have no interest in politics at all. They both work for the Bank of Boston, sort of. They identify themselves as employees of this bank, yet they work on six-month contracts. They do get benefits and paid vacation, but every six-months the Bank has the prerogative to not renew their contracts. They earn about $800.00/month. Both of them (and most of their friends) live with their parents.

The majority of the youths in the *JPSD*, and as I have showed, those with no interest in politics, belong to a very precarious middle class whose stability and standard of living has been falling since before the *proceso*. The gap between the middle classes and the wealthy are widening, as the standard of living and job security for the middle classes, along with the working classes, are plunging. The government is attempting to meet I.M.F. demands in order to procure more loans to pay the interest on the loans already acquired (and fall further in debt).[23] A Chicago Tribune article states,

> Free-market reforms are sculpting Latin America's economy into world competitors but have done little to cut poverty or the income disparities that continue to handicap the region, according to a new United Nations social survey of the region.
>
> Since 1995, rising unemployment brought on in part by privatization and corporate downsizing has halted gains against poverty in many Latin American nations...Most Latin American nations including Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, and Bolivia saw rises in unemployment from 1995 to 1997... (June 8, 1998, Section 1:6).

This can be seen in the fact that four out of the five parents I spoke with are self-employed. And the fifth, Alberto, who has been working for the same company for nine years, is working *en negro*, no health benefits, no paid vacations, etc.[24] Carolina (not María-José's sister, but the *JPSD* activist) works for an elected national deputy from the *PSD*. It is a full time job for $700/month ($4.37/hour). She is, however, also working *en negro* and gets no benefits.

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[23]Most of this debt, as I mentioned before, was inherited from the military. From 1979 to the end of 1982 the debt went from $8.5 billion to $43 billion (Rock 1987:374, 391). The I.M.F. and the World Bank, it appears, are not too particular as to whom they loan money, nor what is done with it. That is, until there is trouble paying it back.

[24]As I write this, over a year after conducting the interviews, I have learned that Alberto has lost his job, and is presently unemployed. Mariela also lost her job, and was unemployed for several months. The financial situation of the family was reaching a critical point.

All the major political parties are in agreement that these free-market economic reforms should continue. When one takes this economic situation and puts it into the greater social context looked at in this thesis, it is not hard to understand the desire of many youths today to try and bring about a change. But once a decision has been made, one must still decide on what type of action should be taken. Why socialism (especially given the common discourse that this ideology is a modernist dinosaur that has no place in the "postmodern" world)? If identity is to be understood as a process of dialectical relationships between individuals *vis-à-vis* their society, we must see that the various ideologies accepted are a part of that society, and look at the relationship between the individual and the ideology one chooses to adopt.[25] Once one adopts an ideology it puts one in a particular relationship *vis-à-vis* society and accounts for some of the actions one takes. But this is another discussion.

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[25]Here I am giving the individual the agency to choose.

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