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# Civic Education and public opinion in Argentina during the transition to democracy (1982-1983)\*

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**ABSTRACT:** In mid-1982, after several years of military dictatorship, Argentina began the transition to democracy, leading to the return of constitutional and parliamentary normality, and bringing also substantial changes in every sphere of life. Education was not spared such considerations; on the contrary, it appeared as one of the key parts of the process, both medium and long term, so that very soon, the democratization process, the standardization and modernization of educational institutions were undertaken, from primary schools to universities, not forgetting popular education and other means of training and care towards the most vulnerable and disadvantaged population. Part of public

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opinion echoed the most urgent challenges in education and contributed significantly to configuring the pedagogical imaginary interiorized by the common citizen, ideas that lasted during the period of consolidation of democracy, and the governments of Raúl Alfonsín. The study presented here aims to deepen the analysis about the representations of collective imaginations about civic education in Argentina, the idea of citizenship and democracy and the role school could play in strengthening and sustaining it. The basic sources for the research consist of editorials, opinion articles, interviews and reports on civic education published in Argentina in major national newspapers – such as «Clarín», «La Nación» and «La Prensa» – during the period of transition.

EET-TEE KEYWORDS: Education; newspaper;s Public opinion; Argentina; Democracy; School.

### 1. *Sketch of education in Argentina during the Transition to democracy*

The coup d'état carried out by the Argentine Armed Forces on 24 March 1976 terminated the constitutional government and established a military dictatorship of centralized power held by a Junta of Commanders representing the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. The military junta initiated what was called the National Reorganization Process (NRP), which supposedly aimed to reinstate *normality* and *order*, and to end the *populist* and *subversive* practices that had supposedly characterized Argentina's development, and the redress of which was to require profound changes to the country's political, social, economic and cultural structures. In this way, the new regime adopted, from the start, measures that were designed to limit, reduce, and even eliminate, public liberties and civil rights. To this end, it imposed an aggressive and effective system of control of public spaces – and many private spaces as well – and severely repressed any opposition to the NRP. This took the shape of a series of mechanisms of administrative purge, detentions, forced *disappearances* and internal and external exiles of people deemed *subversive*, as well as different modes of intervention into and censure of mediums of cultural diffusion, in particular mass communication – press, radio and television –, which were to play a crucial role in legitimizing the military coup. In addition to this, a number of economic adjustments were imposed during the first years of the dictatorship. These were characterized by technological stagnation, the start of a process of deindustrialization, a decrease in productivity and competitiveness, and the capitalization of wealth in just a few oligarchies, which did nothing but worsen existing social inequalities<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> M. Borrelli, *Voces y silencios: la prensa argentina durante la dictadura militar (1976-1983)*, «Perspectivas de la Comunicación», vol. 4, n. 1, 2011, pp. 24-41; G. O'Donnell, *Transiciones, continuidades y algunas paradojas*, «Cuadernos Políticos», vol. 56, 1989, pp. 19-36; R. Patiño, *Intelectuales en transición. Las revistas culturales argentinas (1981-1987)*, São Paulo, Universidade

Education was not to be spared the attention of the new government. On the contrary, controlling the national education system was made a priority—something, indeed, upon which the very survival of the regime was possibly to rest. On one hand, the system of educational governance was dismantled, public funds for education were reduced, and an elitist and authoritarian educational model was adopted. This meant, to a large degree, a break with the educational priorities of the democratic government, which had considered schooling as a means of integration and social advancement. On the other hand, the new regime introduced, in all spheres and at all levels of education, mechanisms of repression and ideological control, such as the administrative purge of teachers and educators, censorship of authors and didactic materials, and the adoption of content aimed at spreading Christian values of the Catholic Church and strengthening national identity both of which were merged into the compulsory subject *Moral and Civic Education* [*Formación Moral y Cívica*]. The consequences of these developments were particularly harsh for universities: some closed and those which remained open did so under strict political and ideological surveillance, a policy of quotas and entry examinations was reinstated, curriculums and course contents were redefined and some docents were subject to administrative review processes and dismissed. All these measures were ultimately aimed at reducing the size of universities' structural framework, redistributing enrolment, redirecting research and scientific innovation away from university settings, and neutralizing any trace of dissent or opposition at the core of what was understood to be a pressure group with great potential for political, social and cultural rallying<sup>2</sup>.

By 1981 it was clear that the economic plan put in place by the regime was failing: recession was intensifying, external debt had increased, and both unemployment and inflation rose at a rapid speed. It was also readily apparent that the military core was being plagued by internal cohesion issues as well as by constant external challenges to social control, in particular those posed by dissident groups defending human rights and freedom of the press and who were becoming increasingly critical of its economic policy and *anti-subversive measures* (read «state terrorism»). These were all symptoms of some measure of fragility and instability of the regime, fissures that anticipated its disintegration.

de São Paulo-Departamento de Letras Modernas, 1997; S.E. Visacovsky, R. Guber, *¿Crisis o transición? Caracterizaciones intelectuales. Del dualismo argentino en la apertura democrática*, «Anuario de Estudios Americanos», vol. 62, n. 1, 2005, pp. 55-85.

<sup>2</sup> P. Buchbinder, *Historia de las Universidades Argentinas*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 2005; R. De Luca, *La educación secundaria en Argentina durante la última dictadura militar (1976-1983). Currículum, educación para el trabajo, disciplina y evaluación*, «Revista Educação e Cultura Contemporânea», vol. 9, n. 19, 2012, pp. 53-77; Id., *La educación argentina en épocas de la última dictadura militar: regionalización y descentralización del nivel primario de educación (1976-1983)*, «Contextos Educativos», vol. 16, n. 1, 2013, pp. 73-88; P. Pineau, M. Mariño, N. Arata, B. Mercado, *El principio del fin. Políticas y memorias de la educación en la última dictadura militar (1973-1983)*, Buenos Aires, Colihue, 2006.

This was to be precipitated by the political and economic wear of the Falklands War: the Argentine defeat by the United Kingdom in June 1982 was a crippling blow to the government's credibility, which was to be subject to increasingly intense critique in the daily press<sup>3</sup>.

In this way, in mid 1982, Argentina joined the «third wave» of democratization of Western societies and began, after several years of dictatorship, its transition to democracy. The process was initiated abruptly by the collapse of the military regime and was therefore characterized, amongst other things, by the absence of an institutional agreement that would define with some precision the «rules of the game» for the democratic reconstruction that was to culminate in the electoral victory of Raúl Alfonsín in December 1983. And yet the country had expected from the heralded democracy something more than a mere return to constitutional and parliamentary normality and the changes that were to naturally ensue from it – namely, the political and organizational State transformations, respect for Human Rights, and acknowledgement and safeguard of public liberties and social rights. It had been assumed that the idea of democracy implicitly carried within it a number of other principles, such as social equality and justice, solidarity with and respect for minorities, direct participation in governance, and an increase of production of material goods and expansion of social services, as well as an equitable redistribution of them<sup>4</sup>.

Education was not exempt from these considerations. It figured as one of the key aspects of the process, both mid and long term. Therefore the aim was, from early on, to democratize, normalize and modernize educational institutions, from primary to university education, including popular education and other training media that specifically attended to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the population. In addition to this profound ideological transformation, the new government also set out and implemented the first strategies designed to face Argentina's most pressing cultural and educational problems – namely, illiteracy, repetition and disengagement rates in schools, descending quality of education levels, centralization and excessive bureaucratization of state school structures, inadequate funding and exiguous teacher pay<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Borrelli, *Voces y silencios: la prensa argentina durante la dictadura militar (1976-1983)*, cit.; O'Donnell, *Transiciones, continuidades y algunas paradojas*, cit.; Patiño, *Intelectuales en transición. Las revistas culturales argentinas (1981-1987)*, cit.

<sup>4</sup> C. Braslavsky, L.A. Cunha, C. Filgueira, R. Léméz, *La educación en la transición a la democracia. Casos de Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay*, Santiago de Chile, UNESCO/OREALC, 1989; M. Kers, S. Leiras, *Veinte años de democracia en la Argentina ¿Qué democracia?*, «Revista Venezolana de Ciencia Política», vol. 25, n. 1, 2004, pp. 76-90; G. O'Donnell, P. Schmitter, L. Whitehead, *Los procesos de transición y consolidación democrática en América Latina. Transiciones desde un gobierno autoritario*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1988; J. Russo, *Tipos de oposición y consolidación democrática: Argentina y Brasil*, «Papers», vol. 35, 1990, pp. 61-93.

<sup>5</sup> Braslavsky, Cunha, Filgueira, Léméz, *La educación en la transición a la democracia. Casos de Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay*, cit.; A. Rivas, *Radiografía de la educación argentina*, Buenos

The case of the University is particularly noteworthy for it figured in public consciousness as the great issue in education. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, in a certain way, there remained echoes of the ideals of the Enlightenment, which understood, among other things, that Higher Education institutions could – and should – play a central role in social, political and economic regeneration, as well as help broaden the country's horizons of freedom, justice and progress. Scientific research was slowly being reintroduced as an essential function of university institutions, the reinstatement of open lectureship competitions enabled highly qualified researchers and academics who had been dismissed during the dictatorship to return to their posts (in many cases this also meant a return from exile), student societies began to regroup and reorganize, unrestricted admission to state universities was established, and a normalizing process was put in place to ensure that educational institutions functioned in accordance with their statutes<sup>6</sup>.

Such were the priorities that determined the main political activities regarding education in Alfonsín's government. In addition to normative reforms aimed at democratizing all aspects of Argentina's educational system, however, it also initiated two particularly ambitious projects. The first of these was the National Literacy Campaign, launched in 1984, which aimed to create, in just two years, more than seventeen and a half thousand adult education centres that would provide for the cultural needs of more than two hundred and sixty-two thousand people. The second great initiative was the II National Pedagogical Congress of October 1984 (the first had taken place in 1982). The congress, which remained active until 1988, had a clear international projection and aimed to raise public awareness of the importance of education in a nation's future, gather ideas and perspectives from the different agents involved in education, analyze the problems, difficulties, limitations and defects of the educational system, suggest alternatives and solutions for them, provide advice to legislators concerning pedagogy, and establish communication and collaboration networks among educators in different regions of Latin America<sup>7</sup>.

Aires, Fundación CIPPEC-Fundación Arcor- Fundación Roberto Noble, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> L. Arriondo, *Universidad y Política: el movimiento estudiantil en los 80*, «La revista del CCC», vol. 11, 2011, pp. 1-12; Buchbinder, *Historia de las Universidades Argentinas*, cit.; G. Ruiz, N. Cardinaux, *La Autonomía Universitaria: definiciones normativas y jurisprudenciales en clave histórica y actual*, Buenos Aires, La Ley. Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2010; A. Servetto, V. Chabrando, *Participación estudiantil en la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba durante la transición democrática: legados y desafíos*, «Cuestiones de sociología», vol. 8, n. 1, 2012, pp. 1-10; M. Toer, J.C. Gorlier, *O Movimento Estudantil na Transição à Democracia na Argentina: Estudo de Uma Organização na Universidade de Buenos Aires*, «Revista de Ciências Humanas», vol. 8, n. 11, 1992, pp. 71-94.

<sup>7</sup> Braslavsky, Cunha, Filgueira, Léméz, *La educación en la transición a la democracia. Casos de Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay*, cit.; M. Southwell, «Con la democracia se come, se cura y se educa...» *Disputas en torno a la transición y las posibilidades de una educación democrática*, in A. Camou, M.C. Tortti, A. Viguera (edd.), *La Argentina democrática: los años y los libros*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo Libros Editorial, 2007, pp. 307-334.

All such developments were closely followed by part of Argentina's media, which took on board the most urgent educational challenges. It thus significantly contributed to shaping the pedagogical imaginaries of the average citizen, which were to take hold at least from Alfonsín's government, when the process of consolidation of democracy was initiated.

## 2. *Public opinion and civic education in Argentina (1982-1983). Methodological notes*

This research is framed within a broader project that seeks to analyse public opinion in Spain and Argentina in relation to education during their respective transitions to democracy at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. To this aim, the project considers items of the national daily press, a repository of fresh and rich material with notable explicative and interpretative potential. Such archive makes it possible, among other things, to explore the prevailing mentalities, ideologies and collective pedagogical imaginaries that both condition and are conditioned by a particular time and space, to explore spheres of the history of education that are not contained in nor exhausted by official registers, to reconstruct part of quotidian educational occurrences, to bring into relief the interest focus and priorities of the media, and to clarify, delimit and analyse currents of public opinion.

In the case of Argentina the daily press is a field of research that has scarcely been addressed by historians of education, and is therefore a novel and original material, the precise scope, importance and value of which is yet to be determined. At the time of writing, a number of relevant works that draw on the daily press as main research source have been identified. These include projects by V. Álvarez Aragón, F. Gustavo Boccardi, L. Bracamontes, J.S. Califa, S.A. Robert, N. Diaz y C. Kaufmann y J.L. Hernández Huerta y S. González Gómez<sup>8</sup>. The latter is particularly relevant to the present study

<sup>8</sup> V.Á. Aragón, *Educación y prensa en el contexto electoral: un estudio comparado Argentina, Brasil y México*, «Educação & Sociedade», vol. 18, n. 58, 1997, pp. 84-122; F.G. Boccardi, *La sexualidad en la red de los discursos mediáticos: Una lectura de la construcción de la educación sexual en la prensa argentina*, «F@ro: revista teórica del Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación», n. 12, 2010, pp. 1-6; L. Bracamontes, *Derroteros feministas en la Argentina a principios del siglo XX: Una aproximación desde la prensa de Bahía Blanca*, «Mora», vol. 15, n. 1, 2009, pp. 34-52; L. Bracamontes, *Mujeres, trabajo y educación a principios del siglo XX: las maestras en la prensa católica del sudoeste bonaerense argentino*, «Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia», vol. 12, n. 1, 2011, pp. 101-127; J.S. Califa, *El movimiento estudiantil reformista frente al primer episodio de la 'laica o libre' (mayo de 1956)*, «Sociohistórica. Cuadernos del CISH», vol. 26, n. 1, 2009, pp. 51-79; Diaz, Kaufmann, *El II Congreso Pedagógico Nacional (1984-88) a través de los diarios regionales El Litoral y El Diario*, cit.; Hernández Huerta, González Gómez, *Opinión pública y educación durante la transición a la democracia en Argentina. Primeras consideraciones*



insofar as it traces, delimits and describes the documental sources for the study of representations of education in Argentinean public opinion during the period of transition to democracy, as well as offering a profile of editorial writers, and an overview of the main education-related issues that captured the attention of the daily press and upon which public debate was focused at the time.

The fundamental aim of this work is, specifically, to explore and elaborate upon the collective pedagogical imaginaries in Argentina during its transition to democracy in the 1980s. It also seeks to interrogate the social representations of civic education during the period, and to consider the figure of the citizen and the role that schooling was seen to play in strengthening and sustaining a democratic future.

The body of writings considered in this study is composed of articles and editorial pieces published in the newspapers «Clarín», «La Nación» and «La Prensa» that, in one way or another, address issues related to civic training during the Argentinean transition to democracy (1982-1983)<sup>9</sup>. This includes, first, texts that specifically addressed the taught subjects «Moral and Civic Training» and «Civic Education». Second, and given that the subject was intimately linked to national history, it covers texts that addressed the kind of history that was being taught by educational institutions in Argentina. Finally, it is also encompasses opinion pieces and editorials that focused on the role that educational institutions played – or were seen to have to play – in the construction of a more «civilized» society.

It should be noted that the body of texts considered here exceeds, *stricto sensu*, the period of Argentina's most recent political transition to democracy, namely the period between June-July 1982 – the moment in which the NRP started to crumble – and October 1983 – date of the victory of Raúl Alfonsín in the elections that formally put an end to the military dictatorship. The reason for this is twofold. First, it makes it possible to trace the currents of public opinion on the subject of «civic education» during the last phase of the dictatorship and, through this, observe the shifts effected in such matters as the democratizing process gained strength. Secondly, it makes it possible to further

*y guía de fuentes documentales*, cit.; S.A. Robert, *(En)gendering responsibility: A critical news analysis of Argentina's education reform, 2001-2002*, «Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education», vol. 33, n. 4, 2012, pp. 485-498. It should be noted that some of these references are not, strictly speaking, circumscribed to the objectives of the research outlined here. What is intended is to highlight the fact that the Argentinean daily press is a source concerning the history of education that is yet to be examined in detail.

<sup>9</sup> The following newspapers have been excluded from the present research: the «Crónica», the «Buenos Aires Herald» and the «Argentinisches Tageblatt». The first has not been considered due to the fact that, given its self-definition as a paper that offered only so-called objective information, it did not include any editorial or opinion sections and therefore falls outside of the framework set out for this study. The last two have been omitted due to the fact that, while influential, they had only limited impact upon the mostly Spanish-speaking Argentinean population.



observe these shifts during the first stages of the consolidation of the young democracy.

A total of forty-five relevant texts have been identified: twenty editorial pieces and twenty-five opinion articles<sup>10</sup>. The data registered in Table 1 reveals interesting information. On one hand, it highlights the fact that not all newspapers awarded the same importance to issues related to «civic education». For example «La Prensa» alone published twenty-four – namely 56% – of the texts considered here. On the other hand, it reveals that it was during the period between July 1982 and December 1982 that the greatest number of editorials and opinion pieces were published.

Table 1. *Primary sources, arranged by time, media and publication period*

	<i>La Prensa</i>	<i>La Prensa</i>	<i>La Nación</i>	<i>La Nación</i>	<i>Clarín</i>	<i>Clarín</i>
	January- June 1982	July 1982 / December 1983	January- June 1982	July 1982 / December 1983	January- June 1982	July 1982 / December 1983
<i>Editorials</i>	-	5	5	9	1	-
<i>Opinion pieces</i>	8	11	-	2	2	2

The three newspapers considered here share a number of common traits. Firstly, «La Prensa», «La Nación» and «Clarín» were all established by individuals who had personal links to Argentinean general politics and who therefore carried a certain weight within the society of the time. Secondly, the daily papers were, from the start, managed by the direct heirs of their founders, making the Paz, Mitre and Noble families some of the most powerful and influential of the country, responsible, in great measure, for the collective imaginaries and the currents of Argentinean public opinion. Finally, sales of all three papers decreased considerably during the period considered here. This was due, on the one hand, to the growing inflation and the economic crisis; and, on the other, due to the relative uniformity of content brought about by both official censorship and preventive self-censorship, which discouraged many readers from purchasing second newspapers with which to contrast information and opinions. It should be noted that the number of inhabitants of Buenos Aires who purchased newspapers went from close to two million in 1970 to around one million in 1980<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> A full list of primary sources can be found in the Annex.

<sup>11</sup> O. Getino, *Las industrias culturales en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Colihue, 1995; Hernández Huerta, González Gómez, *Opinión pública y educación durante la transición a la*

Despite the limits placed upon freedom of expression and information during Argentina's most recent dictatorship, which were accompanied by intense repression campaigns – *disappearances*, assassinations and imprisonment of journalists, *black lists*, interference with and closure of newspapers –, daily journals tried, in their output, to make the most of the limited (albeit progressively broader as the NRP lost its political capital) ideological and rhetorical margins available to them. Initially all three newspapers legitimized the coup of 24 March 1976: they readily accepted the *anti-populist* and *anti-subversive* policies aimed at re-establishing *normality* and *order* and went along with the views and statements issued by the Armed Forces, denouncing, for example, the *anti-Argentine* campaign during the 1978 World Cup or, later, the *external interference* by the International Human Rights Commission, or during the Falklands Conflict. However, little by little, as the repressive state apparatus yielded and the political and social hold of the regime crumbled, newspapers started, albeit timidly, to voice criticism against some aspects of the NRP, in particular in regards to the *anti-subversive struggle* and its practices, which became the subject of increasingly detailed reporting in ever more high-profile pieces. For example, «La Nación», a paper of traditional liberalist leanings and with close ties to the Catholic Church and the *neo-developmental* sections of the Armed Forces, expressed its disagreement with the economic policies and, on occasion, condemned the excessive censorship and internecine battles within the inner circles of the regime. «Clarín», on the other hand, also highlighted the economic politics, defending foundational developmentalism ideals that drew it close to the *neo-developmental* faction. Finally, «La Prensa», a conservative, anti-peronist and anticommunist newspaper also delved into economic policy but differed from the other two journals in that it adopted a particularly critical stance against the *anti-subversive struggle* and the issue of Human Rights<sup>12</sup>. In this way, it is possible to establish two phases in the analysis of the Argentine daily press during the dictatorship:

A first phase that could be summarized as one of repression, persecution and censorship/self-censorship (1976-1980) [...]; and a second phase, from the 1980s on, that is characterized by a breakdown of the discourse of the dictatorship and the progressive weakening of its repressive apparatus in such a way that it made possible instances of criticism that were to become even more explicit after the Argentine defeat in the Falklands conflict, on June 1982<sup>13</sup>.

*democracia en Argentina. Primeras consideraciones y guía de fuentes documentales*, cit.; H. Muraro, *La comunicación masiva durante la dictadura militar y la transición democrática en la Argentina 1973-1986*, in O. Landi, *Medios, transformación cultural y política*, Buenos Aires, Legasa, 1987, pp. 3-58.

<sup>12</sup> Borrelli, *Voces y silencios: la prensa argentina durante la dictadura militar (1976-1983)*, cit.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

From then on, and once the process of return to institutional normality was underway, the cultural and political life of Argentina entered a new stage, one increasingly adapted to the «rules of the game» proper to liberal democracies. Within them, the «fourth power» plays a central role, and the freedom of thought, expression and the press are both a sovereign right and also a guarantee of the endurance and balance of democratic political systems. During this time, therefore, «La Prensa», «La Nación» and «Clarín» backed the political developments and strengthened the collective affects and voices that were calling for the *transition*.

### 3. *Argentina faces Education for Citizenship (1982-1983)*<sup>14</sup>

Education for citizenship has, under a number of names, and according to the preferences and objectives of different governments, at all times been present in the Argentinean educational system. The subject that explicitly addressed issues concerning society, politics and culture at the time of the coup by the Armed Forces in March 1976 was the *Study of Social Reality and Argentina* [*Estudio de la Sociedad Social y Argentina*]. The subject was strongly influenced by dependency theory and liberation pedagogy, and conceived a social model that was clearly opposed to the principles that lead to the NRP<sup>15</sup>, which meant that it was promptly and radically altered by the new government to suit the requirements of its new order. In this way, on 08 July 1976, the Ministry of Culture and Education published Decree number 1259, which incorporated the subject of Civic Education to the middle level basic curriculum (*Ciclo Básico del Nivel Medio*) in secondary education schools. According to the document, «true civility» was to be understood as the «expression of that which is proper to the nation», which meant that schooling was to be a decisive tool in raising the «Argentinean man» – namely a man characterized by his beliefs and by having developed, in a «free and creative» manner and relieved from all «ideological sectarianism», a «full consciousness of his nationality» and a «clear understanding of his nation's values» and «traditional culture».

The subject underwent changes shortly after, in July 1978, through *Recommendation number 7*, issued by the VII Extraordinary Assembly of the

<sup>14</sup> So as not to overcrowd the text with citations, only direct quotes have been noted. A full list of sources can be found in the Annex.

<sup>15</sup> G.D. Cora, M. Rodríguez, *Construyendo la «Nueva Argentina». Cultura Ciudadana y la consolidación de la política educativa del peronismo (1952-1955)*, «Espacio, Tiempo y Educación», vol. 2, n. 1, 2015, pp. 187-205; I. Porro, M. Ippolito, *Educación política y régimen político. Un recorrido por la enseñanza de lo político en la escuela media argentina (1953-2003)*, in *Sexto Congreso Nacional de Ciencia Política de la Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político*, Rosario (Argentina), Universidad de Buenos Aires - Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, 2003.

Education Federal Council. This not only changed the name of the subject – thereafter «Moral and Civic Education» – but also charged it with a strong religious character, in clear alignment with the Catholic Church. These changes were effected in the curriculums approved in 1979, 1980 and 1981, which established new objectives for the subject: in addition to those concerning the strengthening of national spirit, they also emphasized aims such as «perfecting the development of ethic and religious attitudes [...] internalizing ethical principles and applying them to personal life [...] Appreciating and respecting the values of Western and Christian life». A second important development that was to contribute to the progressive disassembly of the social, cultural and political fabric in favour of the idea of social harmony was introduced – namely the substitution of a thematic block that focused on the idea of community for another that instead emphasized the human being as an individual, the family as the primordial nucleus of socialization and a gendered division of social roles. The area of influence of the subject was to be broadened further when, in July 1981, Ruling no. 497 of the Ministry of Culture and Education determined its compulsory inclusion into adult education programs.

The patriotic and religious values espoused by the NRP permeated all aspects of education and its institutions, and came to figure prominently in the symbolic, material and intellectual spaces of the whole education system. In this way, for example, textbooks – one of the main and most efficient areas of diffusion for official ideas – were a clear expression of the purposeful coupling of nationalism and Catholicism:

The aim of cohesion that such religious education – covered up by official voices and crystallized without pretence in the *Manuals of Moral and Civic Formation* – took on a many-sided front: among other things, it aimed to uphold the power of the clergy upon the *public* education sector thus leading to ideological hegemony of the Catholic Church; to aid the fight against materialism, «the international Marxist aggression», by establishing in the «Argentinean school» a morally defensive barrier against such aggression; to reinforce the idea of an «Argentinean identity» by redefining national identity in denominational terms; to strengthen the «Catholic Argentina», appealing to an essentialist discourse that aimed to legitimate it against the threat of ideological foreignness; to monopolize the educational practices, which were themselves already penetrated and regulated by unifying and standardizing religious practices; to «moralize» [...] through [...] Christian beliefs and values, dogmas of faith and revealed truth; to establish the «moral traditions» [...]; to introduce Christian social thought through the guidelines provided by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church; to introduce «docility», «submissiveness», «vigilance», «hierarchical obedience», «compliance» [...]; to avoid the emergence of conflict and dissent. [...] Religion and the Nation are not distinguished, for the order must be re-established: «in accordance with the values of Christian morality, national tradition and the dignity of being Argentinean»<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> C. Kaufmann, *La enseñanza encubierta de la religión: la Formación Moral y Cívica*, in Id., *Dictadura y Educación. Tomo 3. Los textos escolares en la historia argentina reciente*, Buenos Aires, Miño y Dávila, 2006, pp. 203-223.

During the first semester of 1982 the daily press addressed, from different perspectives and in accordance with each paper's particular editorial projects, issues related to the role that schooling was to play in the process of «regeneration» of Argentinean society and the creation of a «new Argentinean man». Editorials and opinion pieces published in «La Prensa», «La Nación» and «Clarín» shared some common characteristics in regards to their style and argument. Firstly, it was habitual in all three to refer to official statements and addresses, adopting and reinforcing their ideas and slogans. Similarly, the overarching narrative followed a dual discourse in which the disaster that previous regimes' educational policies had entailed for the Argentinean nation was set over and against the *new order*. The latter was then presented as an efficient solution to past problems, with the power to create and sustain a democratic and free republic – which itself implied that the current political system indeed democratic and free. Finally, in some occasions, the texts backed their arguments with sources of authority, drawing on historical figures or contemporary intellectual experts close to the NRP.

«La Prensa» was the paper that devoted the most space to civil education in a broad sense, and that addressed education-related issues with the most depth, elaborating refined, careful and extensive arguments, almost always by external collaborators. The paper attributed the educational system – which was deemed to be paradigm of civilization – with aims and responsibilities such as raising the cultural level of the population, the social promotion of some sectors and minorities, and progress, which was broadly understood as an extension of schooling to all sectors and pursue of economic development within a liberal model. But the driving force of the education for citizenship discourse in «La Prensa» was freedom. This was taken to be a genuine human trait, something that cannot be extricated from man, and that distinguishes him from other species, given that, unlike other members of the animal kingdom, man does not possess a sufficiently broad repertory of phylogenetically programmed conducts to resolve all the challenges of existence. On the contrary, life, for man, needs to be made; he must choose, at every moment, what to do and how to do it – and this in turn is only possible if the being lives in and embodies his own freedom. And yet still, given that not all individuals are aware of their condition of freedom and the possibilities that this entails, it is necessary to guide and educate them. José Antonio Abuín put it thus in his article *Lets dare to be patriots*, published on January 24, 1982:

In the speech given on occasion of his inauguration as rector of the National University of Buenos Aires, Dr Alberto Rodríguez Varela noted: «The University should educate free men, capable of living in peace and harmony, tolerant and respectful of their adversaries, willing to search for commonalities is higher values and to disagree without grievances on matters of opinion» [...] Indeed, very much so. The first priority is to educate free men; after that, the rest follows: scientists, professionals, researchers, educators. But there seems to be an extreme necessity, an agonizing need to educate free men. Why? Simply because without

them there can be no freedom. [...] This is *the* question of questions – that which demands of us the greatest clarity. If it cannot be understood well, cannot be correctly approached, then we are to fail in whatever else we attempt. Every man is free. But not all know that they are free. In order for them to know and, consequently, for them to act as such, they must be educated. And yet what we are witnessing is quite the opposite: men are being *miseducated* in such a way that many believe that their purpose is merely to follow whatever orders this or that person may care to issue, to follow rulings that they do not understand, and, in sum, to get used to not living their own lives, but rather the lives that this or that person might instruct them to live. We find ourselves today returned to the Middle Ages, where there were no citizens, but instead lords and serfs. There is only one path out of this situation: to educate citizens – that is, free men. They will be capable of overthrowing the oppressive corporativism that surrounds us. They will make us see that each self-enclosed group is but an oligarchy – or seeks to be so. And they will show us that it is impossible, not only to live as a society, but also to have order, peace, freedom, justice or prosperity, so long as such myriad of oligarchies continue to operate. Here, today, amongst us, it is difficult to institute order for, as soon as something reasonable is attempted, immediately some group or another rises in protest against the perceived impingement to its privileges and «social conquests», often masking the claims with calls for a «defence of sovereignty»<sup>17</sup>.

Freedom, therefore, figured as the driving principle, the means and the aim of all education, the indispensable ingredient for a democratic society, the *conditio sine qua non* for individuals to reject their subjection and adopt the condition of citizens with duties and responsibilities; to be a citizen, therefore, was to be free, and vice versa. But freedom was also understood as responsibility, order, discipline, rigour, capacity and possibility of choice, ideological neutralization and dismantling of the social fabric – and in this task educators of all levels and grades of education were especially important. Such was the unequivocal position of Arístides Alejandro Incarnato in his article *Only through education will we be free*, published on April 8, 1982:

[...] it is important to highlight [...] that such exercise of revitalization of education will only be achievable by educators who not only exhibit an undisputed republican spirit, but also find the externalization and transmission of such spirit to their students to be permitted, facilitated and stimulated. Educators, that is, that encounter no obstacles as they instil in their students the love of truth, the compliance with discipline, the horror of subversion, the scorn of insolence, the excellence of knowledge, the irrationality of fanaticism, the humiliation of obsequiousness, the respect for hierarchies based exclusively upon capacity and conduct – all the resources, in sum, that when deployed negatively, made it possible for the Argentinean people to have accepted, twice in three decades, a regime of shame and dishonour. Such is the simple strategy that we propose in order to train, through true high quality education, the multitude of free citizens that the Republic calls for – a strategy that, obviously, cannot consist merely in teaching to read and write. [...] needless to say, in order for the strategy to be effective, it will be necessary to reinstate the climate of calm, respect and justice in which educators carried out their task during the best times of the Republic. So long as our teachers and professors continue to live in a state of permanent upheaval; so long as they are unable to trust in their own merits to progress in their careers; so long

<sup>17</sup> J.A. Abuín, *Atrevámonos a ser patriotas*, Opinión, «La Prensa», 24 de enero 1982.



as they are forced to abdicate their freedom and make it subservient to others, or need to alienate it and renounce agency over their own destiny – so long as this is the case, they will hardly be able to educate for freedom, for no one can offer others what he has not already himself conquered<sup>18</sup>.

The contributors who addressed issues related to education for citizenship did so through a dual language that established a broad and confused category of the enemy that was to be fought and guarded against in all spheres, even within schools. Communism and the extreme left stood out as the principal threats to liberalism. These were argued to have infiltrated the educational system and destabilized its order and, against them, it was the role of education to exalt and promote patriotic and Western values and educate for freedom. Carlos Ernesto Viana put it thus:

The latest assault against the liberal education tradition in Argentina has left public schools and universities vulnerable to leftist penetration – even more so than it was, for the same reasons, in 1969, on the eve of the armed subversion. The current predominant tendency in faculty meetings at all levels – save the honourable exceptions of a few universities and educators – is predominantly «revisionist», as is the historiographical bibliography. The purpose of this «revisionism» continues to be doctrinarian and unscientific, and it is not limited to Argentinean History, but is also spreading towards the whole of Western history [...]. To the «de-nationalizing» process that is being inflicted upon the «psyche» of our youth, has now also been added the attack against the most glorious tradition of Western culture: freedom. [...] It is necessary to educate for freedom again. [...] It would not be consistent with the democratic aims outlined by the government, nor with its proposed liberal economy politics, nor with its alleged pro-Western orientation in international relations, that tyrannical and authoritarian figures were idolatrized within important sectors of public education<sup>19</sup>.

The paper «La Nación» also addressed these issues, though less profusely and always in pieces penned by its Director, Bartolomé Mitre. In general terms, these endorsed the official discourse on education, highlighting its most vital points, such as the patriotic spirit, the «divine values» and the family, and Catholic religion as the cornerstone of social dynamics. It also reinforced the call for «order» that had been initiated in 1976 «following long, arduous and pitiful years of student disruption, movements of so-called liberation against every rule and authority, and ideological infiltration in universities»<sup>20</sup>. It offered public opinion the idea that culture and education, in addition to being the mark of civilization, were also the basis of a democratic society, and that, therefore, the expansion of schooling and the broadening of the range of compulsory education were particularly important issues for the country's development. But this task was not the sole responsibility of the State and public

<sup>18</sup> A.A. Incarnato, *Sólo por la educación seremos libres*, Opinión, «La Prensa», 8 de abril 1982.

<sup>19</sup> E. Viana, *Educación para la libertad*, Opinión, «La Prensa», 24 de febrero 1982.

<sup>20</sup> B. Mitre, *Objetivos esenciales en Educación*, Editorial, «La Nación», 26 de enero 1982.



administration. Rather, it was to be the result of the joint efforts and activities of public powers, private initiatives and families, who had the duty to safeguard the proper development of all dimensions of the human being. Among these, two were highlighted. On the one hand, emotional education, which was understood as a love of knowledge, the link that is developed between student and teacher, and the conjunction of feeling and reason that gives meaning to ethical norms:

The different cycles of education must be devoted to developing a rounded man whose feelings are modulated by reason – a reason, in turn, not too far removed from feelings. In this way, it will be possible to reach the ethical values that translate into behaviour. In short, each man's behaviour is both the cornerstone and the touchstone of his intelligence and of his contribution to the common good<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, freedom figured as the ultimate aim of education. It was not only considered something intrinsic to human beings, but was also, by extension, that which was to distinguish education from training, domestication, or routine and habit-formation, and was, ultimately, to allow individuals to free themselves from impulses and instinctive reactions. But this freedom was understood in a very narrow and precise way – namely as responsibility, order and some measure of capacity and possibility of choice. The editorial piece published on January 3, 1982 is particularly illustrative in this respect for, in addition to putting forward an «authentic», genuine and profound idea of education for freedom, it also lamented the fact that the Argentinean education system, far from achieving this aim, was actually fostering its opposite:

In his recent address, the president of the Nation included a brief passage regarding the educational system. Within it, we noted a phrase: General Galtieri affirmed that what is being attempted is to shape an environment that will make it possible to «educate for freedom». There is in truth, however, no education that is not education for freedom, for it is only insofar as the student is free that the educational labour can help him mature him a free man, or, what is ultimately the same, a man. [...] Middle school is the schooling level proper to adolescence. Adolescence is the stage of life in which the human being ceases to be a child and becomes a man. In this challenging and complex transition he discovers freedom, and he must learn to live with it and with its counterpart – namely responsibility. And yet the traditional organization of Argentinean middle school, both in regards to its contents and to its comprehensive organizational regime, is characterized precisely by the absolute denial of liberty. [...] the student [...] has no chance of choosing any of his tasks, of making any of his own choices [...] Of this same student is later demanded that, once he has completed his studies, and while he is still treading the edge of maturity, barely having become a rightful citizen, he be able to intelligently make important decisions concerning work, higher education, family and civic and personal life. Middle school trains a man for dependence and pretends that upon his graduation society gain a free man and a responsible citizen. A dramatic contradiction, if ever there was one<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> B. Mitre, *La educación sentimental*, Editorial, «La Nación», 4 de marzo 1982.

<sup>22</sup> Id., *Educar para la libertad*, Editorial, «La Nación», 3 de enero 1982.

«Clarín» was the newspaper that devoted the least attention to the education for citizenship provided by formal education. It only published two articles, in which, furthermore, it maintained an ambivalent position. In the first place, it offered a fine and clear critique of the educational and cultural politics of the regime, in particular within universities, where interventionism, censorship and the lack of scientific freedom were intensely felt. The poet, essayist and professor of Philosophy and Literature Santiago Kovadloff published, on March 8, 1982, the article *A culture of catacombs*, the title of which was a reference to a group of people who were attempting to find the means and the mode of preventing that the difficult moment might «in some time irrevocably discourage [...] thinking altogether». Such individuals shared a number of traits: almost all of them were ex-university professors who were earning a living through private education and who believed that they were duty-bound to continue their labour of resistance against subjugation, because «it not only combated discouragement and loss of heart, but was also a way to preserve the critical spirit and the gift of cohabitation/coexistence»<sup>23</sup>. The wagered, ultimately, on a return to constitutional normality, a process in which the University was to play a crucial role, provided that it regained its place in society as one of the focal points of culture, knowledge production, technological advancement, regeneration of the socio-political fabric, and enriching of civic participation, given that it was precisely in University that young people, among other things, sharpen their critical reason, mature their spirit of vindication and develop the most intimate sense of what it means to be a citizen. They warned, furthermore, that the worrying condition of the civil life of the country, which was characterized by a dismantled society, culture and politics, was progressively crystallizing in the conduct of adolescents and young adults who were embarking upon their university education:

In the current state of the county, the education that is being imparted in its catacombs is hardly indicative of our fortitude. It is more so of our precarity. Those of us who are within them know all too well the gravity of the obstacles placed upon education, not only by those who challenge us, but also – to their own regret, to be sure – by students. Youth lack, almost entirely, any civic experience. The degree of political misinformation is alarming; the level of comprehension of our national history, virtually nonexistent in almost all youngsters. Such hardships, as well as others, cause intellectual vocation to emerge as a necessity in order to counter the atmosphere of extreme individualism and a temperament entirely unaware of its own social alienation. A disorientation proper to a citizen sensibility that fails to find its path to maturity is everywhere felt amongst the majority of students. [...] If national university were still what it once was – and should yet be – the centres of intellectual labour that today give rise to a culture of catacombs would be its modest complement, never its replacement. [...] The centres of expression and reflection that, separate to universities, are proliferating in Argentina during the 1970s and are likely to continue to multiply in the 1980s, will only properly accomplish their mission if they encourage a return to a democratic community.

<sup>23</sup> S. Kovadloff, *Una cultura de catacumbas*, Opinión, «Clarín», 8 de marzo 1982.

Otherwise, they will but absorb for a while longer the heat of a sun that is no longer shining but will be incapable of perpetuating its warmth. [...] If it is to have a revitalizing effect, the teaching carried out in the catacombs of national education will need to lead to a fully reinstated university activity. And this can only be possible through a normalization of constitutional life. So long as the university is determined to forget the country, we shall, from the catacombs, devote ourselves to keeping is memory. But this memory will only have the life that is conferred to it from the outside. If such vitality ceases, then so too will the life of the culture of catacombs: we will stagnate and our teachings will atrophy. We will cease to be the space that preserves the seed of future development, and will become instead the sepulchre where the seed finally perished<sup>24</sup>.

Later, on May 29, 1982, in the midst of Argentina's dispute with Great Britain, «Clarín» applauded and supported the government's proposal for a so-called «intermediate level», which was to be introduced, starting in the academic year 1982-1983, between primary and secondary levels, with the aim of «strengthening the moral and republican education of children in such a way that they are better prepared, once they enter productive life, to uphold, from within their own convictions, the pillars of national life»<sup>25</sup>.

At the start of the transition, following the Argentinean defeat in the Falklands' conflict, the progressive breakdown of the military regime started to reveal itself in public opinion. New currents animated periodicals, which responded to a society which was now beginning to demand a return to democracy and civil guarantees. The education question, once more, was not immune to such effects. Progressively, pedagogical discourses were modified – timidly first, through linguistic and conceptual turns; later more openly, firmly supporting a return to constitutional normality and, with it, a democratization of education and its principles, means and aims. Such change, however, took place differently and at different paces in the three papers considered in the present research.

«La Prensa» was, once again, the newspaper that devoted the most attention to education for citizenship. The aim that was attributed to the educational system continued to be education for freedom, which in turn continued to be understood as democracy – though now in a truer and more genuine sense, and married to a more virtuous style of life. The prototype of the «good Argentinean citizen» that schools were to promote was republican, respectful towards institutional organization, rights and legal guarantees, dignity of all persons merely by virtue of their being and, particularly, towards the National Constitution, the supreme law that condensed freedom, justice and solidarity. And it was thought that the educational system was the best tool to elevate civil culture in children and youth insofar as it provided an experience of coexistence based on respect, which was different from the experience of community provided by the family, peer groups and other extra-curricular socialization

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> E. Herrera De Noble, *El nivel intermedio*, Editorial, «Clarín», 29 de mayo 1982.

institutions, which were seen to be based on feeling. Furthermore, it offered a revised idea of education, namely the sense that education was not only a vehicle for transmission and repetition of knowledge and a series of technical and scientific principles, that indeed this was only a small part of education, and that in its most basic and precious sense its function was to teach how to think, how to learn to grow and face life's challenges. This meant that the role of educators also had to be revised, and should focus on accompanying and guiding students through their various stages of development<sup>26</sup>.

In a first instance, despite the fact that the paper yielded to the information restrictions and requirements of the regime, it also did not miss any opportunities to introduce in its discourses elements that anticipated the imminent process of transition to democracy. Thus, barely a few weeks after the Falklands conflict, «La Prensa» reported on a meeting of educators that had aimed to discuss the matter of teaching the history of Argentina, in particular in relation to the austral archipelago. It was apparently agreed that it was necessary, given the circumstances, to intensify and change the lens through which the subject was taught. On the one hand, the possibility of increasing the number of teaching hours devoted to the Falklands and, even, of setting up a single-topic subject on the archipelago problem, was discussed. On the other, it was suggested that a historiographical shift that would revise national history in light of recent occurrences was necessary. It was thought that such a shift would give rise to a new reading of the past that would locate Argentina within a Latin-American perspective, which in turn would impact upon the identity and citizen consciousness of present and future generations. For this, however, democracy was deemed essential:

Indeed; but it is only possible within a truly democratic regime, where the majority and minorities respect each other, discuss publically, and admit their defeats without excessively acclaiming their successes. The triumphalism is the psychological weapon most proper to autocracies<sup>27</sup>.

In the initial moments of the transition, «La Prensa» expressed some concerns regarding the Argentinean population, who, given its lack of citizen maturity and training, could endanger the impending delicate process of constitutional normalization. This situation was nothing other than a reflection of what Máximo Gainza called, on 2 August 1982, the «absolute failure of the education for citizenship curriculum». If such curriculum was deemed insufficient to

<sup>26</sup> Despite the winds of renewal, reactionary opinion pieces, still firmly anchored in the discourses of the dictatorship, continued to appear. Such was the case with Arístides Alejandro Incarnato, whose article *Anti-school*, published on November 25, 1982, reproduced the words of an earlier one – *Only through education will we be free* – which had been published in April of that same year.

<sup>27</sup> Observador, *Consideraciones historiográficas a propósito de las Malvinas*, Panorama educacional, «La Prensa», 23 de junio 1982.

train responsible and mature citizens, it seemed therefore reasonable to seek the collaboration of other educational agents who were operating beyond the official educational system. Thus, for example, a more casual and broad-reaching political education was suggested, one that would complement that of formal education and that might take the shape of open talks or the dissemination of leaflets and documents explaining constitutional order. Television too figured as a powerful tool for civic education. Owing to its growing impact as a means to configure and communicate collective imaginaries and to generate currents of public opinion, it was seen as capable of opening an educational space within which experts might clarify the constitutional text. The immense potential that television was deemed to hold in regards to education, training and socialization of people – possibly greater in its influence than school or the family – is clear in a text of November 3, 1982:

Human culture had fundamentally been based on the use of its two most important senses: sight and hearing, through which the environment had imprinted itself upon man's psyche. [...] The two senses were combined in Television's mechanism. Furthermore, while one could imagine the audience of the radio carrying out other tasks while listening to it, it seemed almost impossible to imagine an individual who, while watching television and fully attending to its sounds, might, at the same time, carry out any work other than a purely mechanical task. To affirm this was, in other words, to consider television as encompassing the broadest radius of mental influence, which meant, further, that through it the greatest pressures, both productive and detrimental, might be applied. What made matters worse [...] was that television exercised its dominion throughout all stages of man, from childhood to old age. [...] it could come to have a greater influence [upon him] than school or the family itself<sup>28</sup>.

Such worry concerning the limited civic maturity of the average Argentinean was the subject of an editorial piece of 19 August 1982 that addressed the measures taken by the Ministry of Education in order to strengthen the study of the national Constitution and Government – that is, civic education – at all levels and grades of the educational system. The text noted that, in recent times and for «reasons of which all were aware», many adult citizens did not know what it meant to exercise the right to vote and young people had been expelled from political life and had undergone a poor and defective political education, trammelled by ideological interferences, and that therefore the need for a citizen education particular to democracy and expressive of popular will was entirely justified:

Whichever pedagogical technique is applied in order to promote the training of future citizens, it is imperative to recognize the necessity that such task be carried out. The generations that pass through public schools must be prepared to face the delicate responsibilities entailed in

<sup>28</sup> Diótima, *La televisión y la formación del individuo*, Opinión, «La Prensa», 3 de noviembre 1982.

civic action within a democracy, as well as those derived from the exercise of government. From elementary school to its higher levels, education must be geared towards instilling the fundamental principles of our political organization, being as it is representative of a popular will that holds no similarity to despotic and authoritarian regimes<sup>29</sup>.

Civic education was to be education for freedom and democracy, and this was understood as more than just a form of government or political participation through vote. Democracy was deemed to be «a way of life based on virtue» that had to be developed through schooling, where classrooms were «irreplaceable instruments for education for citizenship» and vehicles for the «fulfilment of democratic institutions». The task of educating for citizenship was not only understood to be an imperative of the Argentinean educational system, whose democratic and republican spirit had been present from the dawn of national independence, but was also deemed to be a historical and circumstantial need brought about by the political occurrences, which required the joint efforts of all agents involved in education and without whom the very future of the Republic would be unviable. Alberto Rodríguez Varela wrote to this effect in his article of 24 November 1982, *Lets create citizens. Civic Education*, in which he also called for concord, forgiveness and national reconciliation:

And in these crucial moments that Argentina is living through, when poles reveal the shortage or absence of civic education in vast sectors, we should all commit to promoting, like in the past century, a true crusade to regenerate the Republic, overcoming animosities and disagreements, and swearing not to repeat the grave errors that have so harmed the Nation. [...] *It is not a matter of learning the Constitution, but of learning to live the Constitution.* [...] We must return to the path of civic education initiated at the dawn of our independent life. It is a task that concerns fathers, pedagogues, politicians and, above all, those who hold a modern seat of incalculable projection and the exercise of which carries great responsibility.

Several months went by before «La Prensa» reengaged education for citizenship – or, more broadly, the aims of education – in its pages. The articles published in 1983 on these themes betrayed a freer and pedagogically more modern tone. On the one hand, the paper adopted an ideological position in relation to the programs proposed by the political parties in view of the upcoming presidential elections. The editorial piece of May 15 is worth highlighting in this regard. The editorial is noteworthy, not due to its definition of what ought to be the aims of the national education system, and of civic education in particular, but rather because it clearly spelled out what might be a disastrous cultural and educational politics for the Republic. The object of its critique was a Peronist-inspired program put forward by the *Partido Justicialista* which suggested that the main task of school was to generate future citizens and to inculcate in them

<sup>29</sup> M. Gainza, *Educación cívica*, Editorial, «La Prensa», 19 de agosto 1982.



a solid national and Latin-American consciousness driven by freedom, human dignity and the liberation of Argentina:

It is incomprehensible how the «liberty and dignity of man» can be outlined as the «primordial objectives» of a project that has actually been conceived to mould the intelligence of children, youth and adults and submit it to the different modalities of a violating and selective «doctrine» [...] registered in [...] the quotidian practice of the most diverse modes of indoctrination. In what concerns the educational activity, no one will have forgotten that the school was not used to promote in children the love of culture, nor to inspire in them the spirit of creation, but rather to gain followers for a so-called liberatory cause. Schools were made factories of premature peronists. The technique, applied in the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany under totalitarianism, was imposed in Argentinean schools [...]. It was not, by the way, as it is now claimed, in order to free children or adolescents' minds of prejudices, plagiarism or servitudes, that tons of books, procured with public funds, were distributed to educational establishments, exacerbating hatred and resentments against people, ideas and historical facts. [...] The «Second Five-Year Plan» was revealed in 1953. Through it, schoolteachers were forced to incorporate the principles of the «doctrine» into each of the subjects taught, with no exception [...]. That document also established the idea that universities «must serve the people by complying with the objectives of the government». None of these antecedents speak favourably of the «political project» nor of the «national project» that Juan Peron «set out» at the time and that have now been exhumed and exhibited as models of the *Partido Justicialista*'s cultural action<sup>30</sup>.

On the other hand, it was agreed that the ultimate aim of education was to teach to think, and to be a man, a task to which the Humanities, insofar as they offered testimony to the paths that human beings had followed in order to become so, were to be central. Education was portrayed, furthermore, as a craft, a careful labour aimed at developing responsible individuals. The role of the educator was therefore not limited to providing students with the knowledge deemed socially necessary, but also to guide them in their development, teaching them to be and to be in the word in such a way that was attentive to the particular interests, skills and qualities of each individual student:

Education must give only two things: a reasonable amount of basic knowledge and the method to continue learning by oneself, including knowing who and how to ask for assistance when deemed necessary. To think and to reason is to know how to find solutions, understand facts and to be capable of distinguishing the true from the false. The labour of educating requires time, patience, dedication and effort. But above all, it requires grasping the fact that the most educated is not he who knows the most, but he who understands and thinks better<sup>31</sup>.

«La Nación», on the other hand, devoted several editorials and an extended opinion piece to the issue of education for citizenship, which continued to be presented to the public as one of the priorities of the national education system.

<sup>30</sup> Id., *La educación que nos proponen*, Editorial, «La Prensa», 15 de mayo 1983.

<sup>31</sup> M. Barón, *Enseñar a pensar*, Opinión, «La Prensa», 28 de noviembre 1983.



«Plural» democracy now appeared as the only system of government capable of guaranteeing public and private liberties, maintaining peace and establishing justice. And equal education across all strata of society was essential in order to be able to count upon a critical mass of free, responsible and well-educated citizens, capable of managing the legitimate paths of expression of popular will for the benefit of collective progress and wellbeing. In consequence, the prototype of the Argentinean citizen envisioned by school also had to mutate and adapt to the new political, social and cultural requirements. Like «La Prensa», «La Nación» supported a model of the «good» Argentinean as the bearer of the most genuine Argentinean republicanism, which implied a series of high values, such as the defence of equality before the law, alternation of political parties, tolerance towards the «other», and love, above all other ideologies, of the nation and the traditional values that defined it.

In this regard, it is worth noting the words of Carlos Flora, published in the article *Political Education*, which appeared on 28 July 1982, a few weeks after the Falklands disaster. In the article, the author expressed his concern for the lack of democratic experience and training of Argentinean society, especially in the youth, who had been brought up and educated within scepticism, authority, fear of dissent and habits of corruption. Furthermore, he defended the idea that, ultimately, civic training should focus on knowledge of the National Constitution, the close and critical study of contemporary history, and the understanding of the relationships between right and morals, in particular regarding the traits proper to Argentinean society:

One of the fundamental intuitions of Greek philosophers was that education must be related to the desired kind of political regime. Certainly, it is not the same to educate a citizen to live in a pluralist democracy as to train him to live in a dictatorship or totalitarian regime, for the styles, dominant mentalities, beliefs and practices within the two forms of government and society differ greatly between them. [...] Education brings into relief part of the «cultural politics» of a society. It is, in a way, its systematic expression. It is linked to the type of desired political regime, to the public behaviour that is expected of citizens, to the preferred type of society and to the behaviour of those in power. It is intimately related to the disposition of individuals to be good realists while not for this reason falling into cynicism, but rather grasping the reality of what is happening while intuiting what should happen in one's country for the benefit of concrete individuals and for the common good. [...] Political education consists not only on a thorough examination of the assumptions of the political phenomenon and its historical manifestations. This is of course necessary in order to explain politics and the political, but it is not sufficient in educational terms. Political education must propose ideals and offer guidance regarding the means to approach them; it must justify and not merely examine. [...] A sceptical approach to political education, one that «does not justify any desirable claim, indirectly fosters the adhesion to political irrationality, simplistic solutions and, eventually, the recourse to violence». [...] We must know why a pluralist, democratic, constitutional republic is preferable to any other political regime, despite it not being a perfect formula – which, in any case, does not exist in politics, for in politics perfectionist capriciousness ends up oppressing man. As Montesquieu desired, a democratic republic has an interior logic, corresponds to a kind of society, entails virtuous behaviour

in both the ruling and the ruled. [...] there will not be a consolidated republic without the knowledge, habits and abilities cultivated from primary school, and which include both the examination of reality and the political horizon that is to guide the behaviour of the citizen. [...]. To learn, that is, that the Argentinean society is plural, but that the desired pluralism among Argentineans, depends not only upon the acceptance of such reality, but also in the psychological disposition that gives a positive meaning to the tolerance of the other. [...] This must be taught in schools, social institutions and universities, through thought and quotidian action<sup>32</sup>.

The tone of the editorials about education for citizenship published by Bartolomé Mitre changed progressively, from a tepid critique of the regime to the more decisive and committed support for a return to constitutional normality. Like «La Prensa», «La Nación» favourably valued the NRP initiative to address History in a different manner following the end of the Falklands conflict. Such initiative consisted on a reorganization of the History curriculum, introducing new areas and themes of study and approaching the subject from a Latin American – and therefore non-Eurocentric – perspective such that enabled students to gain a certain Argentinean and Latin American historical consciousness. In general terms, and given the importance of the subject for the construction of an Argentinean national identity, the paper reviewed the educational measures favourably, but in the editorial of 13 July 1982 it offered two observations that were intended to curb the ideological enthusiasm of the dictatorship:

The changes that are to be proposed, however, will need to maintain the necessary equilibrium in order not to fall pray to the excesses inspired by primary or unbridled emotions. In the first place, it would be absurd to approach universal history studies through a Manichean vision, proper only to ideologues that divide the development of human actions between good and bad like an adventure movie. This would only lead to the intellectual cheapening of students' education and would not, incidentally, serve the high objectives pursued by the ministerial decision, with the spirit of which, we repeat, one cannot but agree. It must also not be forgotten that, whichever the attitude of governments or European nations in regards to Argentina, the civilization with whose essence we identify is that of Latinity, whose principles originated in the Judaic-Hellenic-Roman civilization, developed as Medieval Christianity and flourished during the Renaissance as prelude to the great social, scientific and technological achievements of modern times [...]<sup>33</sup>.

Education for citizenship was considered to be more complex than the mere instruction of knowledge regarding the political organization and the characteristic traits of liberal democracies, given that these are not only a desirable form of government, but also a whole way of life that requires individuals who are thoroughly trained and who have a well-educated political character. Therefore, while the task was to be a priority of the educational

<sup>32</sup> C. Floria, *La educación política*, Opinión, «La Nación», 28 de julio 1982.

<sup>33</sup> B. Mitre, *La enseñanza de la historia*, Editorial, «La Nación», 13 de julio 1982.

system, the responsibility of executing it could not rest solely upon it. The aims required the joint action of all agents involved in socialization and education, the means of communication, political powers and, especially, the family, which, by example, contributed to making of democracy something educational in itself. Such was the view noted in the editorial of September 11, 1982, the national «Teachers Day» and 94<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Sarmiento:

The education of the sovereign individual must therefore today be, as Sarmiento proclaimed and put into practice, the essential task of the Republic. Let us not, however, diminish the nobility of the task by reducing it to just school education. To be sure, schools are the main and irreplaceable part of the great mission, but it must not be forgotten that, from the most humble administrative clerk or law enforcement agent, to the highest magistrate or civil servants, all share fundamental responsibility over this common task that commences when each inhabitant awakens to civil life and extends until the very end of his existence<sup>34</sup>.

Indeed, the family appeared as a basic pillar in the education for citizenship of children and youth. It was considered to be the other school of civility, an educational agent of the first order, the first laboratory for citizenship that every human being encountered in his or her socializing process, in which children acquire basic notions of freedom, respect for the rights of others and the rules of coexistence within a civilized community. Women were seen as a crucial element in this task, since they were, within the home, in charge of receiving and channelling among the members of the family the general aspects of quotidian domestic life that went on to manifest in a broader community – a community in which they, therefore, both directly and indirectly participated. The family a laboratory for citizenship of the first order, and democracy was the most desirable social and political order:

If one takes into account the apothegm that considers the child as the father of man, it is not difficult to discover in the education received within the family the most profound root of the democratic consciousness of the individual. This, in time, adds itself to the invisible though indestructible weave – made up of similar consciousness – of the only system of government that is capable of preserving individual and public liberties in an atmosphere of peace and justice that fosters productive work and creative effort. It has been rightly said that the well-educated individual is easy to guide but difficult to manage; easy to govern but impossible to enslave<sup>35</sup>.

Bar a few fleeting allusions on the eve of the presidential elections «La Nación» kept silent regarding the issue of the civic aims of Argentinean education during almost a year. It was only on 28 November 1983 that the paper reengaged the issue in a clear way. Merely weeks after the victory of Raúl Alfonsín and shortly prior to him entering office as the president of the nation, an article revisited the topic of education, this time in a serious and

<sup>34</sup> B. Mitre, *Educación al soberano*, Editorial, «La Nación», 11 de septiembre 1982.

<sup>35</sup> B. Mitre, *Primeros pasos del civismo*, Editorial, «La Nación», 6 de septiembre 1982.

rigorous tone. In the piece, Bartolomé Mitre asked what the role of the school was going to be in the delicate enterprise of reassembling the social fabric and securing a long-lasting democratic and republican system of government. He supported a form of civic education based on the values of the Republic, but also argued that it should transcend mere knowledge and that it should make of democracy a whole style of life in which freedom, justice, responsibility and respect, together with patriotic love, austerity and renunciation determined the mode of being. Such were the proposed aims of education for citizenship – a task in which school teachers were to play a central role:

During this time in which the country is moving towards the reconstruction of its fundamental institutions, it is important to pause and consider the decisive role that education is being called to play [...]. Educators at all levels have, in this sense, a great responsibility. Educating is not only the transmission of knowledge; it means not only to plant in a student the seed of scientific knowledge. It also shapes full human beings and, above all, conscious and responsible citizens [...] Educational establishments must be schools of civility. [...] Neither curriculums, nor programs, nor texts should be vehicles of any kind of partisan expression or slogan, and only the sounds of the National Hymn should preside school ceremonies and activities, as has invariably been the legitimate tradition of the Argentinean school. Educators must teach the principles of republicanism: equality of all men before the law, respect for public opinion, the firm supremacy of the law above the whims and discretion of those in power, responsibility of civil servants before the sovereign people, the periodic renewal of government posts. But it is not enough that educators outline these principles. It is necessary that they illustrate them through the live example of their own behaviours. [...] Life in the classroom must transform the virtues of republicanism into quotidian habits of conduct so that Argentinean children and youth get used to living equality, justice and the exercise of responsibility<sup>36</sup>.

«Clarín» was, once more, the paper that least attention devoted to the aims of the national education system and, in particular, those regarding education for citizenship. On the one hand, it defended a more active and modern pedagogical model in which the idea of instruction lost ground against a broader understanding of education, which focused on instilling in pupils powers of reasoning, comprehension and experimentation, and not only mere reproduction. These ideals were, of necessity, to have an impact upon the manner in which the different aspects of civic education were to be approached, for these were now also inextricably linked to ideas of participation, cohabitation and community, as well as individual responsibility. If the aim was for civic education to become social conduct it was necessary that students had the opportunity to directly experience what it meant to be a citizen. Such was the argument put forward by Natalio Isaías Schmucler, the Rector of the Scholem Aleijem Secondary School and professor of Social History of Education in the

<sup>36</sup> B. Mitre, *Educación para la República*, Editorial, «La Nación», 3 de noviembre 1983.

Instituto Nacional del Profesorado, in an article published on August 11, 1982, titled *Teaching or educating?*

Education entails, basically, the capacity to respond to imperatives of conscience on the basis of socially-oriented knowledge. One can only speak of education, for example, when a pupil is incapable of unruliness, not because of external pressures, but due to his own inner sense of responsibility. This model of education, this «unbridled force», is founded upon a logic altogether removed from that which rules teaching: it responds to the progressive internalization of rules of cohabitation that is cultivated by being fully participant in the moral duties and codes that guide communal life [...] For this, it is of course necessary to redefine that objectives of schooling – in particular middle school – by considering it in light of the current discursive opposition: “to teach or to educate?” [...] it will be necessary to give greater berth to the opening of the present moment [...] renovating currents – interdisciplinary and actualized! – may definitively sweep some of the stagnant waters of its institutionalization. Note for example the regime of disciplinary warnings, that can never inspire in pupils the notion of discipline as a gradual process of mutual tolerance and shared respect, but rather fosters in them the hypocritical leanings of mere orthopedic adjustments to threats and sanctions – and this so when the misbehaviour of students is caused by the un-exciting teaching format of lectures and keynotes and the mind-numbing backwardness of their content in the first place!... Certainly, powers of diverse design – in all orders – that strive to find a true path; that want – concerning public education – to found a new educational system: may they become destiny<sup>37</sup>.

On the other hand, the paper scorned the principles that had guided the national education system between 1976 and 1982, namely authoritarianism, individualism and reproduction of knowledge. It also defended that civic education, which now seemed to be accompanied by other principles expressive of the changes taking place within society at that time, such as social change and participation, was to be an urgent and critical task of schools. It was understood, furthermore, that it would take time for the democratic message to truly permeate the educational system. It was necessary, first, to remove the educational cultures instituted during the dictatorship; and, second, that the public administration backed such democratizing measures. Noteworthy in this regard is the article *Education and Democracy*, published on March 2, 1983 by Lucio Cerdá, a retired psychologist and university and secondary education professor who participated as researcher in the American States Organization of Comparative Education:

The result of decades of stagnation and, in particular, of the ruthless neglect it suffered in the last few years, Argentina’s education poses an unspeakably complex problem [...] For this reason, I dare to suggest the need for two types of change in educational institutions. One change that is global, progressive and laborious, and that will depend upon the democratic life of the country as a whole – that is to say, the democratization of education. The second type of change is made up of an ensemble of practical measures, guided by central powers, that back and actualize the first aim. After these merciless years the school is due a more

<sup>37</sup> N.I. Schmueller, *¿Enseñar o educar?*, Opinión, «Clarín», 11 de agosto 1982.

defined and transcendent role that one might think. In the same way that after a storm it is necessary to remove the dust off of old and loved objects, so too school will be one of the places that will need to be ruled by the most profound meaning of the word democracy. The sense of possible social cohabitation, the matrix from within which respect for disagreement might again flourish, the practice of tolerance will need to be sustained every day in every classroom. In order to offer children and youth a more civilized vision of social and political life, it will not suffice to merely change the content of some subjects – be this democratic education, civic instruction, or any other preferred name. [...] It is crucial to accentuate the education of social responsibility, entirely banishing those schooling and/or pedagogical practices that privilege individualism, authoritarianism and competitiveness. In this sense, the role allocated to teachers by the management strata of education will need to be reversed. Educators will need to be real agents of social change and definitively reject their prototype as objects of unconscious reproduction of dates and information. [...] The current delicate moment of Argentinean social life is witnessing, with good reason, an inescapable urgency in social practice: participation. This precious civic conduct cannot be learnt solely from books; it must be practiced daily through actions<sup>38</sup>.

The intention of Alfonsín's government to actualize, modernize and democratize the national education system soon translated into concrete measures that gathered a large portion of the ideas expressed by public opinion in regards to education for citizenship, which would continue to be one of the principal objectives of the Argentine education system. Ruling 536 of 8 March 1984, issued by the Ministry of Education and Justice, substantially changed part of the official curriculum, substituting part of the «Moral and Civic Training» subject with that of «Civic Education», the latter of which adopted a political and pedagogical orientation diametrically opposed to that of the former. The aims were now for young generations to value and adopt democracy as a way of life – which in turn required that they understood and became aware of the reality and values of the local, national and international communities of which they were part –, that they respected ideological and religious plurality, and that they internalized the principles, beliefs and collective representations recorded in the National Constitution. The contents that were included in the subject were aligned with such aims and did nothing other than attempt to strengthen the newly rescued democratic culture, sustained by dialogue and consensus, by the inclusion of all public agents and by broadening civic participation. Among the content covered by the subject, a number of concepts and ideas that had disappeared during the dictatorship and that were now to become pillars of the education for citizenship, are worth highlighting:

the concept of *community* as the sphere in which man's different expressions are socialized, of the *State* and its democratic political organization, of the *deformities of democracy*: anti-democracy, totalitarianism and the dictatorship. [...] In this regard it is worth highlighting

<sup>38</sup> L. Cerdá, *Educación y democracia*, Opinión, «Clarín», 2 de marzo 1983.



the inclusion in school curriculum of a number of themes and topics that were vital for democratic recovery [...]: the defence of human rights, the modes of violation of human rights, and explicit mention of those that had been perpetrated during the years of the Dictatorship – namely, terrorism, censorship and repression<sup>39</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

A number of final remarks are worth highlighting. Education was presented as a key factor in sustaining and strengthening all regimes of government, but particularly so within democracies, insofar as, given their very nature, these require a critical mass of well-educated citizens operating within a firmly-established and operative civic culture.

There was, it appears, a certain consensus within public opinion in regards to the idea that education for citizenship should be a crucial objective of the national educational system, both during the period of dictatorship and during the transition to democracy. In both cases, the aim was to educate for liberty, democracy and the values of the nation in order to create good Argentinean subjects.

While the formal expressions hardly varied, their content, sense, meaning and ideological weight did change substantially, in a process that was similar to that described by Orwell in 1984. During the first phase of the dictatorship, the model of the «good citizen» to be cultivated through education was that of a disciplined individual, committed to social order, capable of *choice*, ideologically neutral, fearful of public demonstrations of popular will and with a strong and firmly established national spirit – all of which in turn required setting in motion a schooling culture that would uphold such principles. Discourses regarding this question were, in general terms, mobilized through the following narrative: the regimes prior to the NRP had corrupted the grandiosity of Argentina and had utilized education in order to do so. The new government, however, was to defend true democracy and freedom and safeguard them against the so-called «leftist factions», the tenuous name adopted for the enemy and which was to prove broad and vague enough for anything and anyone to be potentially included.

Conversely, later, as the process of constitutional normalization gained shape, the prototype of the Argentinean subject that the educational system was to foster became the «good» Republican, guarantor of the National Constitution, tolerant of the «other», respectful towards dissent, promoter of freedom, justice and solidarity, with a clear sense of the Argentine nation, as

<sup>39</sup> D. Doval, C. Kaufmann, M.I. Monzón, *El trabajo como contenido de enseñanza en los manuales de Civismo (Argentina 1976-1989)*, «Ciencia, Docencia y Tecnología», vol. 43, 2011, pp. 55-96.



well as a solidly developed Argentinean and Latin American consciousness. Such objectives entailed and required more dynamic and modern styles and techniques of education that enabled young people to experience themselves as citizens. In the case of «La Nación», these messages were articulated within its broader editorial project, which meant that the family figured as central within its discussions of pedagogy and education for citizenship.

Political uncertainty also filtered through to discussions about education in the media. Both «La Prensa» and «La Nación» lamented the absence of civic culture in the average Argentinean. The papers also expressed the concern that such immaturity and lack of civic maturity might jeopardise the newly-initiated return to constitutional normality. The situation was blamed for the most part on the deficient education for citizenship that the Argentinean population had long since received, saturated as it had been with dogmatism and authoritarianism, and which had done nothing other than contribute to the dismantlement of the social, political and cultural fabric of the country. This meant that, in that particular moment of Argentina's history, the responsibility borne by the educational system in regards to education for citizenship took on a new and crucially important dimension.

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