

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Family Canon: The Politics of Family during the Last Civic-Military Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976–83

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(Received 18 February 2020; revised 14 July 2021; accepted 12 August 2021;
first published online 15 November 2021)

Abstract

On 24 March 1976 a military junta deposed President María Estela Martínez de Perón and assumed power in Argentina. From the first days of the takeover, the authorities worked vigorously to restore what they defined as legitimate Argentine values. This article shows how the family became a focal point of the government's efforts because of its double function as an agent of and a target for renovation. A microcosm of the Argentine nation, the family was considered the basic building block of society, a guarantor of the civic well-being of the nation and, as such, an important ally of the authoritarian state in the fight to restore Argentina's 'traditional' values. The analysis focuses on the civic-military regime's efforts to fashion a family canon, which would become the only legitimate version of the Argentine family, and the broad repertoire of strategies used to impose it on the Argentine population.

Keywords: military government Argentina – El Proceso; educational policies; school curriculum; Revista *Billiken*; Ramón 'Palito' Ortega; family policies

Introduction

On 24 March 1976 a military junta overthrew President María Estela Martínez de Perón and assumed power in Argentina.¹ The military coup initiated a new political era known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganisation Process, hereafter 'El Proceso'). Large sectors of society welcomed the military takeover, hoping that the new regime would restore law and order in a country experiencing a crisis of political legitimacy, rising inflation and increasing popular unrest. Shortly after the coup, the regime dismantled most democratic institutions and introduced a series of economic policies that encouraged foreign investments while reducing the economic power of the state. However, besides political and

¹ President Perón was removed from office and replaced by a military junta consisting of representatives from the three armed forces. The first junta consisted of General Videla (Army), Admiral Massera (Navy) and Brigadier Agosti (Air Force).

economic reforms, the authoritarian government that took over in 1976 had a much more ambitious agenda. The junta indicated that one important goal of El Proceso was to radically transform Argentine society. The 'Bases para la intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas en el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional [Fundamentals for the Intervention of the Armed Forces in the National Reorganisation Process]', which articulated the objectives of the government, pledged to eliminate all threats to 'Argentina's traditional values' and promised to provide the 'people in the nation and its institutions with a new shared ideological framework that they all recognise as the authentic ARGENTINE IDENTITY'.²

From the first days of the military takeover, the authorities worked to establish a new order by imprisoning and disappearing those individuals perceived as a danger to the nation while ensuring the restoration of what, according to the junta, represented the true essence of the Argentine identity. To achieve these goals, the government operated on two distinct and complementary levels that targeted different sectors in society. One level, covert and clandestine, aimed to eliminate groups characterised as subversives. Annihilation was the objective, so the military launched a brutal attack on the population that took the lives of almost 9,000 people.³ The other level, overt and public, attempted to forge a new social order along the regime's unilateral definition of 'traditional Argentine values'.

The existing literature on El Proceso is vast. A large body of the scholarship focuses on state terrorism and human-rights abuses.⁴ More recently, scholars have shifted their attention to the aftermath of the military takeover with emphasis on issues of memory and responses to trauma.⁵ In stark contrast, fewer studies have

²Estado Mayor General del Ejército (Army General Staff, hereafter EMGE), *Compendio de documentos del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Agencia Periodística CID, 1976), p. 12. Emphasis used in the original document.

³The number of people disappeared during El Proceso remains controversial and figures oscillate between 8,000 and 30,000 people. In 1984, President Alfonsín appointed a blue-ribbon commission to investigate the human-rights violations committed during the military regime. The Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, CONADEP) reported 8,960 cases of missing individuals. Human-rights organisations in Argentina contested this figure and argued that the numbers reached 30,000 people. Scholars and human-rights organisations have written about the politics of counting and the difficulties involved in establishing a clear estimate on the numbers of people disappeared during Argentina's last military dictatorship. See, for example, Alison Brysk, 'The Politics of Measurement: The Contested Count of the Disappeared in Argentina', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 16: 4 (1994), pp. 676–92.

⁴See, for example, Martin Andersen, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the 'Dirty War'* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); James P. Brennan, *Argentina's Missing Bones: Revising the History of the Dirty War* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018); Iain Guest, *Behind the Disappearances: Argentina's Dirty War against Human Rights and the United Nations* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Patricia Marchak, *God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); and Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *La dictadura militar, 1976–1983: Del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2003).

⁵See, for example, Munú Actis, Cristina Aldini, Liliana Gardella, Miriam Lewin and Elisa Tokar, *That Inferno: Conversations of Five Women Survivors of an Argentine Torture Camp* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006); Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Hugo Quiroga and César Tcach, *A veinte años del golpe: Con memoria democrática* (Rosario: Homos Sapiens, 1996); Antonius C. G. M. Robben,

examined the non-violent strategies employed by the civic-military authorities to impose their ideas. For example, the development of an official discourse that aimed to force acquiescence among the population and, perhaps most importantly, to permanently change the social fabric of Argentina has not received as much attention. This article attempts to fill part of this gap by focusing on the junta's discourse and its policies related to the family.

The article argues that the government, seeking to establish new social norms, formulated a family canon which became the official and only accepted definition of the family. This carefully crafted definition incorporated selected values and strictly prescribed behaviours. Any deviation was perceived with suspicion, and thus rejected. The family canon, devised during the first two years of military control and disseminated through different means, accepted no historical or cultural variations, became the only legitimate version of the Argentine family and remained unaltered until the end of the military dictatorship. During El Proceso, the physical disappearance of thousands of individuals labelled 'enemies of the state' came in conjunction with a rigid discourse that attempted to symbolically disappear family arrangements perceived as a danger to the 'authentic Argentine identity'.

The military regime considered the family as both an agent of and a target for renovation. On the one hand, the authorities identified the family as a partner in the process to 'restore' Argentina's national identity. On the other hand, families, as a primary social unit, became objects of the government's renovating efforts.⁶ However, the authorities did not consider all the families as suitable candidates for their renovating efforts and systematically destroyed the ones they defined as 'subversive'. As well as disappearances of anyone seen as an enemy of the state, babies, infants and small children were removed from these political captives. The adoption of those children by members of the armed forces or civilian collaborators constituted a deliberate policy of the military regime to disrupt and destroy not just the 'subversive' family itself but the values that it taught. The

Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente: Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002).

⁶The role attributed to the family during El Proceso bears some similarities with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy as both regimes exalted the role of the family in the construction of the new order. Families became targets of policies that intended to transform them into institutions that served the state and provided a tool for state intervention into the private sphere. Both regimes set themselves to expunge the elements that were perceived as legacies from the past while at the same time forging a new public-minded family that accepted its patriotic duty and the authority of the Nazi and fascist states. However, whereas in Argentina the authorities identified the family as an equal partner to restore the traditional order, Nazi and fascist policies subordinated the family to the state and transformed it into a vehicle of state policy. In contrast to Argentina, both regimes prioritised the reproductive rather than the educational role of the family. The promotion of large families in Germany and Italy became not only an instrument to increase the population but also an important eugenic tool. The strong linkage between the idea of family and the idea of race in both regimes represents an important difference with the Argentine case. See Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); and Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933–1945* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997).

authorities justified these illegal procedures on the grounds that the legitimate families were unfit to raise their children.⁷

In examining the civic-military government's efforts to create and impose a homogeneous definition of the Argentine family, this analysis brings to light the different instruments deployed to fashion and disseminate the family canon among the Argentine population, such as the educational system and mass means of communication.⁸ In this context, the analysis complements Judith Filc's work, which has emphasised the role of the family but as a space of resistance. By relying on a thorough examination of literary sources and oral testimonies, her work addressed the alternative family arrangements that emerged among those directly affected by the government's repression, such as human-rights groups or political prisoners.⁹

This article contributes to the literature on the cultural agenda of the last military dictatorship in Argentina as well. The analysis adds to the scholarship on educational policies that has focused on the changes implemented in the classroom to reinforce authoritarianism and erase past teaching practices.¹⁰ Studies of curriculum reform have focused on the history curriculum and the government's manipulation of historical narratives to promote the official version of the past.¹¹

⁷Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma*, p. 296.

⁸A feature peculiar to many twentieth-century dictatorships was the concern with moulding the minds of the younger generations and their reliance on a number of different tools. Similar to Argentina, Germany and Italy were engaged in the project of creating a new man and sought to reform their respective educational systems for the political indoctrination of the youth. However, in Italy and Germany indoctrination was reinforced with mobilisation through youth movements. These state-sponsored organisations were seen as superior instruments to indoctrinate the youth in the values, beliefs and attitudes considered essential for the future existence of the nation. The educational system was not the only instrument used to infiltrate social spaces. As was the case in Argentina, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy relied on mass means of communication to extend their grip into the private sphere. Scholars have pointed out how Hitler and Mussolini used radio to disseminate their messages to the larger population through periodic broadcasts that reiterated the most important elements of Nazi and fascist ideology. For more on these topics, see Eden McLean, *Mussolini's Children: Race and Elementary Education in Fascist Italy* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); and Alessio Ponzio, *Shaping the New Man: Youth Training Regimes in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Wisconsin, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

⁹Judith Filc, *Entre el parentesco y la política: Familia y dictadura, 1976–1983* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2014).

¹⁰The military authorities were aware of the important role that schools played as socialising agents in both formal (curriculum, rules of behaviour, appearance) and informal settings (peer-to-peer communication, teacher–student relations, clubs and associations). For studies that have focused specifically on educational policy during El Proceso, see Daniel Filmus and Graciela Frigerio, *Educación, autoritarismo y democracia* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 1988); Hernán Invernizzi and Judith Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros: Represión y cultura durante la última dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2002); Pablo Pineau, Marcelo Mariño, Nicolás Arata and Belén Mercado, *El principio del fin: Políticas y memorias de la educación en la última dictadura militar (1976–1983)* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2006); Adriana Puiggrós, *Qué pasó en la educación argentina: Breve historia desde la conquistista hasta el presente* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2009); and Juan Carlos Tedesco, Cecilia Braslavsky and Ricardo Carciofi, *El proyecto educativo autoritario: Argentina, 1976–1982* (Buenos Aires: FLACSO, 1983).

¹¹For studies that have focused on the history curriculum during El Proceso, see Laura Rodríguez, 'La historia que debía enseñarse durante la última dictadura militar', *Antítesis*, 2: 3 (2009); Luis Alberto Romero, *La Argentina en la escuela: La idea de nación en los textos escolares* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI,

There has been less analysis of other subjects but one such study, María Vergara's analysis of the civics curriculum,¹² has shown that the authorities relied on an authoritarian discourse in their attempts to create a disciplined and obedient society based on Catholic and nationalist values. This article builds on her work by probing deeper into the importance attributed to civics by the civic-military authorities but, most importantly, by offering a case study that focuses specifically on the treatment of the family as a content unit in the school curriculum.

In addition, the article adds to the existing literature on printed media and cinematography during El Proceso. Scholars have paid significant attention to the publishing house Editorial Atlántida's complicit role in the dictatorship.¹³ Atlántida's children's magazine *Billiken* has not received as much attention as publications aimed at adults. Paula Guitelman's work on *Billiken* has defined the magazine's discourse as both modernising and reactionary with its emphasis on technological advances within a society governed by 'traditional' values.¹⁴ By focusing specifically on the magazine's role in the construction and dissemination of the family canon, this article uncovers *Billiken*'s fundamental role in the consolidation of rigid social norms and the promotion of the official authoritarian discourse. Likewise, studies on the cinematography of this period have focused mostly on censorship and the government's tight control over film production.¹⁵ The examination here of a subsection of family-oriented films produced with official support sheds light on the government's use of films in its attempts to restore what the military considered as traditional Argentine values.

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different institutions and groups involved in the construction and dissemination of the family canon, this article relies on a wide array of sources. Official documents such as public speeches, decrees and school legislation reveal ideas about the family and the pre-eminent role the authorities attributed to the educational system in disseminating the family canon. Careful analysis of curriculum materials such as lesson plans, best-practices teaching guides, and textbooks for primary- and secondary-school levels uncovers the content that was prioritised and how teachers and parents were asked to participate in the renovation of the Argentine family. Printed media and family-oriented films contribute additional insights by underscoring the vital role played by groups in civil society in the construction and propagation of the official

2004); and Nadia Zysman, 'La militarización del ámbito educativo: La última dictadura militar argentina y su vínculo con la historia escolar, 1976–1983', *Latin American Research Review*, 51: 3 (2016), pp. 47–63.

¹²María Vergara, *Silence, Order, Obedience and Discipline: The Educational Discourse of the Argentinean Military Regime (1976–1983)* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1997).

¹³For studies on the role played by Editorial Atlántida during El Proceso, see Marcelo Borrelli and María Paula Gago, 'Prepararse para un nuevo ciclo histórico: La revista *Somos* durante los primeros años de la dictadura militar (1976–1978)', *Rihumso*, 2: 5 (2014), pp. 15–38; Eduardo Blaustein and Martín Zubieta, *Decíamos ayer: La prensa argentina bajo el Proceso* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1998); and Eduardo Varela Cid (ed.), *Los sofistas y la prensa canalla* (Córdoba: El Cid, 1984).

¹⁴Paula Guitelman, *La infancia en dictadura: Modernidad y conservadurismo en el mundo de Billiken* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006).

¹⁵For studies on Argentine cinematography during El Proceso, see Judith Gociol and Hernán Invernizzi, *Cine y dictadura: La censura al desnudo* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2006); Fernando Varela, *El cine argentino durante la última dictadura militar* (Rosario: Editorial Municipal, 2006); and Sergio Wolf (ed.), *Cine argentino, la otra historia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Letra Buena, 1994).

script. Ultimately, the analysis highlights the role of different agencies and groups in their attempts to impose new social norms during the last civic-military dictatorship in Argentina.

This article is divided into six sections. The first section outlines the ideological goals of El Proceso and the role attributed to the school system in the restoration of 'traditional' Argentine values. The military government identified teachers and parents as agents of change and crucial participants in this process, which is the focus of the second section. Since the regime fashioned the family canon and used the school curriculum to impose it on the population, the subsequent two sections focus on the civics curriculum and ideas of family. Besides relying on the school system, the government used mass means of communication to reinforce and disseminate the official discourse. The last two sections of this article analyse how children's magazine *Billiken* and popular filmmaker Ramón 'Palito' Ortega's films assisted in the regime's goal to reach the larger Argentine population.

El Proceso and the Educational System in the Restoration of Argentine Values

The junta that deposed President María Estela Martínez de Perón justified the military takeover as a way to rectify the institutional chaos, corruption and violence that had characterised the previous administration. The authoritarian government associated Peronismo with groups who supported a 'corroded' set of ideas that threatened Argentina's national identity.¹⁶ According to the military leaders, the years of Peronist administration had resulted in social disorder led by the younger generations and manifested not only by the rise of guerrilla activity but, most importantly, by the erosion of the essential Argentine values of social order, discipline and respect for tradition and authority.¹⁷ To confront an internal enemy that needed to be expunged from society, the authorities provided an alternative set of values based on a rigid code of behaviours that did not allow for deviations. In this context, the new family canon could restore what the junta perceived as the lost Argentine identity.

Shortly after the coup, the authorities issued a large corpus of legislation that established the new institutional foundations and the goals for the regime.¹⁸ These documents not only attempted to fashion some illusory sense of legitimacy

¹⁶The military authorities focused on specific groups that were perceived as the most dangerous to Argentina's national traditions, such as trade unions, youth and student organisations, intellectuals and avant-garde artists.

¹⁷Although the junta blamed the last Peronist government as the origin of the challenges to 'traditional Argentine values', Valeria Manzano's work has demonstrated that challenges to traditional social structures had started in the mid-1950s. The analysis places the youth as the most dynamic actor of the two decades that followed the *Revolución Libertadora* (1955). Their political radicalisation and cultural rebellion challenged authority and attempted to bring radical changes to Argentine society. Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁸The four foundational documents of El Proceso were issued on 24 March 1976, and consist of the 'Acta para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional [Act for the National Reorganisation Process]', the 'Bases para la intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas en el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional [Fundamentals for the Intervention of the Armed Forces in the National Reorganisation Process]', the 'Proclama de los

for a highly illegitimate takeover but also indicated the ideological objectives of El Proceso. In the 'Bases para la intervención de las Fuerzas Armadas en el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional', the government stated its intent was to 'correct excesses, impede deviations, and redirect national life'.¹⁹ According to the authorities, the propagation of foreign ideologies, defined as anything that deviated from the traditional Western Christian canon and traceable back to the values of the colonial period, challenged the nation not only at the material level but also at the moral level.²⁰ Acting from their hiding places in schools, workplaces and homes, the so-called enemies had attempted to modify Argentine habits in accordance with their 'subversive materialistic and atheist conceptions of the world'.²¹ In this war of principles and ideas, Argentina had lost its 'true national identity' and 'essential values'.²² For the military authorities, the highest expression of the true Argentine essence was embodied by those who upheld the moral values of Catholic faith and Hispanic culture, expressed true love for the fatherland and believed in an orderly and hierarchical society – all attributes perceived as adequate protection from the dangers of Marxism.

The junta sought to reshape Argentine society along a set of foundations it characterised as the true pillars of Argentine identity. The task ahead was defined as a double process of eradication and creation that had no limits, only expected outcomes. It involved recovering spaces that had been co-opted by 'subversive ideologies', such as schools and workplaces, while at the same time restoring the lost 'traditional values'. The regime issued a detailed plan of action, which was laid out in the communications circulated shortly after the coup and later expanded through public speeches, decrees and brochures distributed widely among the population. The perceived assault of alien ideologies was not only on the nation's institutions but also on its identity. Therefore, as well as the physical extermination of the enemy, the government sought to protect Argentine society from the dangers of 'foreign' ideas through their annihilation.

The authorities urged all of society to partake in the regenerative process and pledged to reform the educational system to serve the needs, values and cultural aspirations of the nation. The civic-military authorities understood education as a powerful tool of social control and schools as controlled spaces suitable for disseminating the regime's values and norms. The government paid particular attention to school-aged children, both at the primary- and secondary-school levels, as

Comandantes [Commanders' Proclamation]', and the 'Estatuto para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional [Statute for the National Reorganisation Process]'.
¹⁹EMGE, *Compendio de documentos*, p. 5.

²⁰The 'war against subversion', a priority in the military agenda, was understood as the eradication of a wide range of 'internal enemies' who threatened Argentine traditions and institutions. The military authorities defined 'subversive' in very broad terms as anybody who harboured ideas against the nation. The vagueness of the definition allowed the regime to persecute not only those who took up arms against the nation but also anybody who manifested any dissent. As Invernizzi and Gociol have pointedly argued, 'everything that was Marxist was subversive, but not everything that was subversive was necessarily Marxist'. Invernizzi and Gociol, *Un golpe a los libros*, p. 50.

²¹EMGE, *Marxismo y subversión: Ámbito educativo* (Buenos Aires: EMGE, 1976), p. 7.

²²EMGE, *Compendio de documentos*, p. 4.

the nation's future.²³ The authorities described schools as environments that had provided an 'apt medium to prepare the masses for insurrection', so changes to the educational system became a priority in the fight to restore the legitimate Argentine values.²⁴

From 1976 to 1978, the government issued a series of informational brochures intended to alert primary- and secondary-school teachers and administrators to the dangers posed by Marxism. A first brochure, *Marxismo y subversión: Ámbito educativo* [*Marxism and Subversion: Education Sector*] provided an analysis of Marxism, an overview of Marxist organisations and a description of 'subversive tactics'.²⁵ It argued that educational institutions had offered fertile grounds for indoctrination and outlined the strategies allegedly used by Marxists to recruit and prepare teachers and pupils for active insurrection. Besides schools, the brochure identified the family as a target of subversion and called on parents to fight against it. *Marxismo y subversión* revealed the valuable role that the authorities assigned to institutions such as schools and families in the battle to protect 'traditional Argentine values'.²⁶

The junta reiterated the vital role attributed to the educational system in a well-orchestrated campaign that relied on public appearances widely covered by the media. As was the case with most official communications, the authorities relied on a martial tone to diagnose the state of the educational system in Argentina and emphasise teachers' roles in the construction of the new Argentina. Educational problems were defined as a matter of national security and schools as strategic places for the eradication of old habits and the dissemination of the ideology of El Proceso. Less than a month after the coup, Minister of Education Ricardo Bruera offered the initial official assessment of the educational system and highlighted the regime's goals.²⁷ Argentina was undergoing a profound educational crisis with a system that was in disarray and completely disengaged from the true national identity. It was the government's priority to restore the 'traditional national values' of order, discipline, hard labour and hierarchy through clear educational policies.²⁸ According to the minister, it was important to start over, transforming children's education and creating new Argentines. The educational system, and by extension teachers, occupied a central role in defending, promoting and restoring what the regime defined as Argentina's true national identity. In this war against 'foreign' influences, teachers occupied a strategic position as the first

²³The military government targeted all three levels of education, imposing significant curricular and administrative reforms on the university system as well.

²⁴EMGE, *Marxismo y subversión*, p. 18.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶A similar brochure was also distributed to managers and employers that included the same content with minor adaptations made for the workplace. EMGE, *Marxismo y subversión: Ámbito laboral* (Buenos Aires: EMGE, 1976).

²⁷Ricardo Bruera was the military regime's first minister of education. A teacher and expert in pedagogy, he served from March 1976 to May 1977.

²⁸Ricardo Bruera, 'Discurso pronunciado por S.E. el señor Ministro por cadena nacional de radio y TV', 13 April 1976, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, document EL001719, Centro Nacional de Documentación e Información Educativa (National Centre for Educational Documentation and Information, CeNIDE), Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestras (National Teachers' Library, BNM), available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/documentos/EL001719.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

line of defence, performing a patriotic and corrective mission as part of the military government's restoration of 'traditional values'.²⁹

Agents of Change: Teachers, Schools, Parents and Families

During El Proceso, the teaching profession was redefined as a political actor with the moral responsibility to impart fundamental national values and principles to young minds.³⁰ The regime understood values and principles as guidelines of behaviour that could be taught as any other pedagogical content. In his speech during the inauguration of the 1977 academic year, Minister Bruera proposed changes to the educational system with a focus on new pedagogical principles that he identified as 'pedagogy of responsibility', 'pedagogy of values' and 'pedagogy of effort'. These ideas were reiterated on numerous occasions by the educational authorities during the military regime, in particular when referring to the civics curriculum. Although the minister never mentioned Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in his speech he appropriated Freire's terminology in order to promote pedagogical practices that represented the opposite of Freire's approach. Ultimately, the promotion of a pedagogy of values was intended to purge the educational system of any 'foreign' influences and fashion a new Argentine citizen.³¹

The role of teachers as fundamental agents of change and promoters of values was reiterated in a brochure published in 1977 during Minister of Education Juan José Catalán's term.³² *Subversión en el ámbito educativo (Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo)* [*Subversion in the Education Sector (Let Us Know Our Enemy)*] postulated teachers' vital role in the war to eradicate subversion and Marxism. Conceived as a guide with a clear didactic purpose, the authorities offered these materials to raise awareness and to help educators 'learn about our enemy', but most importantly to prescribe strategies to confront the enemy.³³ The authorities repeated the information presented in *Marxismo y subversión* but also introduced new content to assist teachers, who were defined as 'guardians of our ideological sovereignty'.³⁴

The brochure included definitions of concepts such as communism, war, Marxist aggression and subversion to support teachers but, above all, to

²⁹Ricardo Bruera, 'Mensaje del Ministro de Cultura y Educación Prof. Ricardo P. Bruera con motivo del Día del Maestro', 11 Sept. 1976, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, document EL000034, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/documentos/EL000034.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

³⁰Ricardo Bruera, 'Formación Cívica. Finalidad. Exposición del señor Ministro de Cultura y Educación Prof. Ricardo Pedro Bruera', 9 Sept. 1976, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, document EL000100, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/documentos/EL000100.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

³¹Ricardo Bruera, 'Iniciación del curso lectivo 1977. Mensaje del Sr. Ministro de Cultura y Educación Prof. Ricardo Pedro Bruera', 7 March 1977, document EL000019, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/documentos/EL000019.pdf, last access 6 Oct 2021.

³²Juan José Catalán was the military regime's second minister of education. A lawyer and politician, he served from June 1977 to Aug. 1978.

³³Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Subversión en el ámbito educativo (Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo)* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos del Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1977), p. 6. The document has no author so it was likely the result of a collaboration among different ideologues of the regime. According to Resolution 538, the contents of the brochure were to be presented to all pupils at the secondary-school level.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 60.

homogenise language and avoid any dissent or challenge to the official script. According to the brochure, not only the school system but other cultural and social institutions such as the family had experienced Marxist infiltration. The brochure warned that, to be successful, Marxism needed to destroy the traditional family and replace it with an alternative model that would suit its own 'subversive' needs. Therefore, *Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo* not only restated the official ideas about Marxism but also served as a blueprint for the regime's plans on how to fight back. It identified schools and families as threatened institutions and defined parents and teachers as partners in the efforts to restore Argentine values.³⁵

Minister of Education Juan Llerena Amadeo encouraged families to participate in their children's education.³⁶ In 1977, he observed that the government 'was to collaborate in all that is related to education as a complement to the family'.³⁷ At home, parents were to become actively involved in their children's education. To assist them, the government issued guidelines presented in brochures distributed to the parents.³⁸ These guides designated the home as a primary site of education and reiterated families' vital role in the transmission of 'traditional Argentine values'. They offered practical advice to parents on how to help children with their studies as well as on how to identify psychological problems that could ultimately lead to learning difficulties. The government used these documents to reinforce the idea that only a combined effort between schools and parents could lead to successful learning, and to encourage the development of clear channels of communication.³⁹

Besides practical advice on learning habits and pedagogical practices, the brochures illustrated the government's ideas about the nature of the collaboration between family and state. Families and schools were to become partners, with the government setting the school curriculum and the parents reinforcing these ideas at home. Asked to participate in the education of their children to reinforce the values and behaviours transmitted at school, parents became agents of change. The military regime understood the significance of the educational system as a powerful mechanism of social control designed to promote specific political goals. In the mission to create the ideal Argentine citizen, the authorities were not willing to leave anything to improvisation. In this context, curriculum reform became a priority as it allowed the government to dictate the values that parents and teachers were expected to reinforce at home and in the classroom.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 12–18.

³⁶Juan Rafael Llerena Amadeo was the military regime's third minister of education. A lawyer and professor of law, he served from Nov. 1978 to March 1981.

³⁷Juan Rafael Llerena Amadeo, 'Respuestas del Ministro de Cultura y Educación a las preguntas de la Cámara Argentina de Anunciantes', 10 May 1979, document EL000024, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/documentos/EL000024.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

³⁸Ministerio de Cultura y Educación – Secretaría de Estado de Educación, *Documentos de apoyo para padres: Hábitos de estudio, ciclo básico, 1979* (Buenos Aires: CeNIDE, 1979), p. 1.

³⁹Ministerio de Cultura y Educación – Secretaría de Estado de Educación, *Documento de apoyo para padres: Clima afectivo y aprendizaje* (Buenos Aires: CeNIDE, 1980).

The School Curriculum and Civics Instruction

The civic-military authorities made important revisions to the school curriculum in order to shape and disseminate the official script. Teenagers were identified as a vital group to target because they were perceived as one of the most vulnerable groups who could fall under the influence of 'subversive' ideas. Therefore one particular secondary-school subject, civics, acquired pre-eminence in the educational agenda.⁴⁰ Estudios de la Realidad Social Argentina (Argentine Social Reality Studies, ERSA), a programme that had been created during the previous administration to teach the civics curriculum, became the first target of the military regime's educational policies. A week after the coup, an official resolution laid out procedures to fully revise the contents of the programme. In line with the official discourse, the resolution stipulated that the updated contents were to highlight those values that the authorities perceived to be consistent with Argentine identity and national traditions.⁴¹ To avoid delays with implementation, history and geography teachers, under close supervision of school authorities, were ordered to develop provisional contents for the first half of the academic year while the educational authorities worked on a final programme scheduled to be implemented during the remainder of the year.⁴² By mid-1976, the government had issued a new programme, Formación Cívica [Civic Training], which replaced the defunct ERSA for the first three years in the secondary-school curriculum.

The authorities believed that through civics instruction young people would internalise 'traditional values' without the influence of 'foreign' ideologies. The new programme was a means to produce conscious citizens aware of Argentina's 'true' identity.⁴³ The new title underscored the main goal of the programme, which was to form new civic habits among the Argentine youth. The government expected Formación Cívica to restore the values threatened during the previous administration. Furthermore, the programme was oriented towards the future as it was conceived as an instrument for the training of young citizens. Finally, the regime gave it a foundational purpose as it contributed to create a new society based on the values that the junta designated as legitimate Argentine values. The urgency to purge ERSA, only seven days after the coup, not only indicated the power that the civic-military authorities attributed to the educational system in

⁴⁰The civics curriculum became a contested space in the Argentine educational system during the second half of the twentieth century. The programme was created in the late nineteenth century and was incorporated to the secondary-school curriculum as 'Instrucción Cívica'. During the administration of Juan Domingo Perón it was renamed 'Doctrina Nacional y Cultura Ciudadana'. The 1955 military coup changed the content and renamed the subject 'Doctrina Nacional y Educación Democrática'. In 1973, the democratic government created a new subject and named it 'Estudios de la Realidad Social Argentina (ERSA)'. For more on changes to the school curriculum, see Romero, *La Argentina en la escuela*.

⁴¹Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 'Aprobar las pautas para la fijación de contenidos de ERSA', 31 March 1976, document RM 3-76, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/normas/RM_3-76.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

⁴²The academic year in Argentina extends from March to December. The coup took place a few weeks after the school year had started so changes to the curriculum were to take place fast and in conjunction with the school year.

⁴³Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 'Formación Cívica. Decreto 1.259/76', 8 July 1976, document EL004038, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/gigal/documentos/EL004038.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

the fight to restore 'traditional national values' but also revealed the government's intentions to control and rely heavily on that system for the dissemination of the official ideology. In any case, the creation of the new subject was a reactive move, a response to the perceived urgent need to replace a subject that the junta defined as one of the most dangerous legacies of the past administration.

During the following two years, the authorities continued revising the civics curriculum to fully reflect the regime's values. The new programme they created, *Formación Moral y Cívica* [Moral and Civic Training], had a stronger emphasis on those moral values that the government defined as part of Argentina's identity. Since the authorities understood Catholicism as a foundational Argentine value, the programme had significant religious undertones such as allusions to the Catholic roots of the Argentine nation, the role of Christianity as an organising principle of modern societies, and the importance of God in people's lives.⁴⁴ The authorities believed that the transformative nature of education involved not only the development of intellectual abilities and skills but also the internalisation of values, morals and behaviours. The adjustments made to the curriculum as well as the addition of the word 'moral' to the programme's title clearly indicated the role attributed to the educational system in the government's efforts to restore the 'authentic Argentine identity'. By late 1978, the contents of the civics curriculum had acquired the final form that would remain unaltered until the end of the military regime.

The authorities understood the importance of providing clear programme content but also of determining the correct way to present it in the classroom. Nothing was left to teachers' initiative. The government developed the curriculum, mandated teachers to attend professional development seminars, and issued guides that included scripted lesson plans, pedagogical best practices and assessment tools that were distributed all over the nation.⁴⁵ The class guides followed a similar structure that included a first section with a brief explanation of the topic, a second section with a list of subthemes, a third section with scripted lesson plans including primary sources and readings, and a fourth section with a suggested timeline to present the content. An appendix offered an assessment survey that teachers were expected to fill in and submit at the end of the year. These materials allowed the government to standardise content and maintain full control over the learning process.⁴⁶ The highly regimented and carefully planned curriculum sought to eliminate any possibility of dissent as it barred teachers' opportunities to create, modify or adjust contents. Schools and teachers were required to propagate the official script without deviation in order to train the young to fulfil their civic duties, as defined by the civic-military authorities.

⁴⁴The religious undertones of the revamped curriculum (in addition to Minister Llerena Amadeo's devout Catholic beliefs) created significant distress among evangelical groups who suspected the authorities were moving towards the incorporation of mandatory Catholic instruction in the public school system. The minister met with these groups on several occasions to reaffirm that the government had no intentions to incorporate religious instruction into the public school curriculum.

⁴⁵Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Guías para la enseñanza de Formación Cívica en el ciclo básico* (Buenos Aires: CeNIDE, 1976).

⁴⁶The guides were intended to provide classroom content until updated textbooks could be published. By 1978, publishers had caught up and new civics textbooks were available to the public.

Formación Moral y Cívica was conceived as a powerful tool of social control that aimed to transform pupils into functional members of society according to the guidelines of El Proceso. Nobody presented this idea more clearly than Minister Llerena Amadeo when, during his address to the Christian evangelical schools, he articulated the authorities' role in developing curriculum content on the grounds that '[t]he government has the obligation to safeguard the moral and civic development of the population' and added that in this process 'the authorities decide, the teachers teach'.⁴⁷ In the cultural war to restore 'Argentine national identity', values and morals were at stake, schools became battlegrounds, teachers and parents became soldiers, and subjects such as civics were transformed into weapons.

The Family as a Content Unit in the School Curriculum

In their self-appointed role as guardians of the true Argentine identity, the civic-military authorities assumed the right to determine content and, by extension, to outline expected behaviours. Civics had a fundamental role in shaping pupils' actions as it disseminated official values thus encouraging socialisation along the lines defined by the government. The authorities used the school subject to present their definition of the ideal family to the Argentine population. Therefore, the family itself became a content unit in the civics curriculum. The family canon, which was based exclusively on the values promoted by the regime, was introduced as a code of moral virtues with significant religious undertones to which every family member was expected to adhere.

In the early days of El Proceso, the government commented with concern that the family constituted a 'primordial target of subversion and it was its [subversion's] goal to destroy and replace it'.⁴⁸ The authorities highlighted features in modern families that they perceived as serious threats to the traditional family structure. For example, *Marxismo y subversión* observed that disorder and the dissolution of hierarchies existed when parents became 'friends' with their children; husbands and wives became 'buddies'; spouses were considered 'partners'; and children challenged their 'parents'.⁴⁹ Public speeches throughout 1976 and 1977 told the Argentine people that traditional family values such as love, paternal respect, responsibility and order were all under attack.⁵⁰ According to the regime, since those values also constituted essential national values, the traditional family had to be restored in order

⁴⁷Juan Rafael Llerena Amadeo, 'Discurso pronunciado en el Acto de las Escuelas Cristianas Evangélicas', 11 Aug. 1979, document EL000136, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, CeNIDE, BNM, available at www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/documentos/EL000139.pdf, last access 6 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁸EMGE, *Marxismo y subversión*, p. 19.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* Although it is translated as 'parents', in the original document the term used is '*viejos*', which was an informal term used to address parents that became popular in the late 1960s. Quotation marks used in original document.

⁵⁰In his 1976 speech to commemorate Argentine independence, General Videla commented on the role of subversive ideologies in the promotion of what he defined as 'anti-values', such as betrayal, crime, cruelty and family disruption. Along the same lines, the brochure *Marxismo y subversión* identified the family as a 'primordial target of "subversive" forces' that penetrated the home and 'derided fundamental [family] values such as honour, loyalty, love, heroism, and abnegation'. Educational authorities added their voices to the military anxieties over lost family values. In 1977, during the inauguration of the academic year, Minister Bruera expressed concern over the erosion of paternal authority and the disruption of family

to save the nation. To the government, the family became a priority target, a contested space that needed to be rescued if the war against 'foreign' ideologies was to be won. Full control over the school curriculum allowed the authorities to promote their ideal family while excluding anything perceived as alien to Argentine national identity. The civics curriculum became the mouthpiece of the regime and the instrument to develop an acceptable and uniform version of the Argentine family.

Both programmes, Formación Cívica and Formación Moral y Cívica, included content devoted to the study of the family, which was always presented at the beginning of the school year, indicating the pre-eminent role the authorities assigned to the topic. The secondary-school curriculum from the first to third year introduced the nuclear family throughout history, from antiquity to modern times, and defined it as a foundational building block of society, an 'irreplaceable agent in the transmission of religious, moral, and civic values'.⁵¹ The third year was devoted solely to the Argentine family, presented in its historical context from colonial to contemporary times and with an emphasis on its Catholic and patriarchal nature. Grounded in the past and extending into the present, lessons sought to present the evolution of the Argentine family in a linear continuum that highlighted desirable features in both past and modern families and accepted no historical or cultural variations. The revamped civics curriculum reinforced the family's place as a basic social unit within the larger community with roles that aligned with the patriarchal structure endorsed by the family canon.⁵²

Modern families received particular attention and emphasis was placed on their pedagogical function, which was to reinforce those fundamental values that would guarantee the success of the larger community.⁵³ Marriage, defined both as a civil and religious institution, was the foundation of each family and the family was depicted as married parents with children. References to extended family were few and in most cases appeared in content targeting younger children.⁵⁴ For the two-generation family, love, harmony, cooperation and open communication sustained marriages and guaranteed family success. Discipline, hierarchy and order, overseen by the father, appeared as desirable features of the modern family. In contrast, sexual self-indulgence, adultery, divorce, contraception and abortion threatened the family. References to any sexual activity and sexual education were almost absent from the school curriculum. In those instances in which the authorities referred to sexual activity, it was always with a negative connotation and in association with drugs and promiscuity.⁵⁵

life, and stressed the need for the school system to remedy the situation. EMGE, *Compendio de documentos*, p. 54; EMGE, *Marxismo y subversión*, p. 19; and Ricardo Bruera, 'Iniciación del curso lectivo 1977'.

⁵¹Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Estrategias para la enseñanza de Formación Cívica* (Buenos Aires: CeNIDE, 1976), p. 9.

⁵²Textbooks also highlighted the role of other institutions, such as the church and the army, which collaborated with the family in their pedagogical mission.

⁵³César Reinaldo García and Apolinar Edgardo García, *Formación Cívica: Segundo curso* (Buenos Aires: Sainte Claire Editora, 1979), pp. 27–41.

⁵⁴For example, in a piece about immigration, *Billiken* encouraged children to talk to their grandparents about their family histories. *Billiken*, 2 Oct. 1979, p. 14.

⁵⁵Emilio Massera, *El camino a la democracia* (Barcelona: El Cid, 1979), pp. 88–90; and 'Carta abierta a los padres argentinos', *Gente*, Buenos Aires, 16 Dec. 1976, p. 34.

The family had the inalienable right to educate children and the responsibility to exercise this right with love and authority. Textbooks' lessons reiterated parents' responsibility towards society and encouraged them to become involved in the education of their children and the transmission of fundamental Argentine values.⁵⁶ Textbooks published from 1978 until the end of the dictatorship included carefully selected primary sources and suggested activities which sought to engage pupils with what was likely perceived as the most relevant content of the curriculum. For example, in the 1979 text *Formación Cívica*, the pedagogical role of the family was emphasised with a number of activities that included several documents for classroom analysis, many of them of a religious nature. An excerpt from Vatican II, *Gravissimum Educationis*, discussed both the educational role of parents and the assistance provided by civil institutions to that task.⁵⁷ A short excerpt from Pope Juan XIII noted the primary role of the family as an educator.⁵⁸

Secular sources were used as class materials as well. An excerpt from Guatemalan pedagogue Luis Arturo Lemus discussed in detail the educational role of families and the importance of the collaboration between public and private institutions in the education of children.⁵⁹ Pedagogical activities also incorporated images. For example, one textbook included a photograph of a teacher and a pupil with a short caption that stated: 'Partner needed. School teacher with 35 children needs 70 parents to assist him. Your home: School #1.'⁶⁰ Textbooks and class activities expressed a recurrent and consistent message within strict parameters set by the authorities to be discussed under the supervision of the teacher. They reinforced the official script and limited the possibility of teacher autonomy.

Although the educational authorities placed more emphasis on the secondary-school curriculum, primary-school materials promoted conformity and acceptance of the family canon as well. The social studies curriculum for first, second and third years included content on basic aspects of the Argentine family such as the constitution of the 'traditional' family, its members, their roles and the religious beliefs that should sustain it.⁶¹ For example, a second-year reading textbook published in 1978 presented the family through the narration of a seven-year-old boy. In his family, described in traditional ways with two parents and two children, everybody had a prescribed role that followed patriarchal gender responsibilities: the father was the breadwinner and the mother in charge of domestic chores. Values such as order, cooperation, responsibility and hierarchy were emphasised through examples such as how to behave in the park or how to take care of toys. The religious foundations of the Argentine family were also highlighted, although adapted for a younger audience, through the description of celebrations such as Christmas and First Communion.⁶²

⁵⁶Angela Luchenio, *Formación Moral y Cívica 2* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kapelusz, 1981), pp. 35–57.

⁵⁷García and García, *Formación Cívica*, p. 31.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁹Luchenio, *Formación Moral*, p. 46.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶¹Ministerio de Cultura y Educación – Consejo Federal de Educación, *Informe final* (Buenos Aires: CeNIDE, 1976), pp. 52–3.

⁶²Equipo Didáctico de Editorial Kapelusz, *Escuela Abierta 2: Estudios Sociales y Ciencias* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kapelusz, 1978), pp. 6–8.

Printed Media and the Family Canon

While El Proceso gave the educational system a fundamental role in the efforts to restore 'Argentina's national identity', the authorities understood that the impact of the school curriculum was limited unless it was reiterated by other institutions besides the family, so they relied on mass means of communication as allies in their mission to restore Argentina's 'true' national identity. The government was fully aware of the mass media's importance to both inform and form the public, so it became an additional instrument used to reinforce the family canon.⁶³ Printed media and films bridged the public and private spheres, thus providing another path for the official discourse to fully penetrate the private sphere and, by extension, promote conformity and acceptance of the official discourse.⁶⁴ Magazines, television and radio were invited to partake in the process to educate the public, not only by creating specific educational programmes but also by including educational content that reinforced 'true Argentine values' in all television programmes. Minister Llerena Amadeo became a strong advocate for the use of mass media as an educational tool. As he pondered to an audience of advertisers in 1979, 'What is the point of having two hours of educational programming if the remaining fifty hours lack any attention to educational or cultural aspects?'⁶⁵ The second-year curriculum of Formación Moral y Cívica included a unit on the positive and negative aspects of mass media and its effects on society. Television, radio and print press were defined as 'formidable agents to penetrate [the home]'.⁶⁶ Textbooks warned readers about the risks of external agents infringing upon the privacy of the home through programming that included disruptive ideas that threatened the family and the entire community.

The call to participate in the process to restore 'Argentina's traditional values' was accepted by a large sector of the printed media. One group in particular, Editorial Atlántida, became an active promoter of the military government and the family canon. Founded in 1918 by Constancio C. Vigil, Editorial Atlántida became a staunch supporter of the military government. The publishing company housed some of the most popular magazines in Argentina such as *Gente*, *Para Ti*, *Billiken*, *Somos* and *El Gráfico*. The magazines targeted different audiences: *Gente* was an entertainment magazine intended for the family, *Para Ti* was a magazine directed at women, *Billiken* was a children's magazine, *Somos* was devoted to political themes, and *El Gráfico* was a sports magazine. The publishing house's broad

⁶³*Conozcamos a nuestro enemigo* recognised the role played by the media to assist Marxist penetration into the educational system.

⁶⁴The regime relied on a number of agencies to control the media, such as the Secretaría de Información Pública [Secretariat of Public Information, SIP], the Secretaría de Prensa y Difusión [Secretariat of Press], the Secretaría de Comunicaciones [Federal Communication Commission, SECOM], the Agencia Nacional de Noticias [Federal News Bureau, TELAM], the Comité Federal de Radiodifusión [Federal Bureau of Radio Broadcasting, COMFER], the Dirección General de Radio y Televisión [General Bureau of Radio and Television], the Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía [National Institute of Cinematography, INC], the Ente de Calificación Cinematográfica [Classification and Rating Bureau], and the list goes on. The individuals in charge of these agencies were members of the armed forces and they were tasked with regulating content, preventing dissent and reinforcing the military cultural and social agendas.

⁶⁵Llerena Amadeo, 'Discurso pronunciado en el Acto de las Escuelas Cristianas Evangélicas'.

⁶⁶Luchenio, *Formación Moral*, p. 49

reach enabled it to target a wide audience, thus making its publications useful tools to disseminate the regime's ideas.

In December 1976, to mark the end of the academic year, *Gente* published a letter to Argentine parents urging them to become actively involved in the education of their children. The letter reinforced the family canon by advocating for parents' active participation in their children's education:

Today your children's education is not only an obligation but also a responsibility. The school is an arena used by subversion to win what they could not achieve through violent means. This is a call to attention. A call to caution and reflection. It is a concrete appeal to your responsibility as a mother and a father. Read the letter. Meditate. And then, without fear but with responsibility, act upon it. It is for your own good.⁶⁷

Throughout the letter, the language shifted between authoritarian and personable tones, providing examples and commanding behaviours. Echoing the ideas of the government, the magazine described the situation as a cultural war in which children's minds had been hijacked by the enemy. After discussing the 'subversive' nature of ERSA and its role as a tool of indoctrination, the magazine warned parents of the dangers of not engaging in their children's education. Furthering the authorities' ideas on the pedagogy of values, the piece openly condemned Freire's pedagogical methods because they had served as an inspiration to Chile's late president Salvador Allende and thus were likely to promote a path to anarchy if applied in Argentina. The anonymous author offered a list of writers who, during the previous administration, had replaced Miguel de Cervantes as required school readings, and whose works were to be considered dangerous, such as Gabriel García Márquez, Eduardo Galeano, Ernesto Cardenal, Pablo Neruda and Jorge Amado. The piece encouraged parents to be vigilant about their children's education and ended with a direct warning that urged them to become fully engaged in their children's lives to protect them from 'subversive ideas', or to risk receiving 'a call from the morgue'. It was signed 'A friend'.⁶⁸

Other publications from Editorial Atlántida such as *Billiken* helped disseminate the family canon. The magazine, dedicated to children of primary-school age, assumed an active role in the promotion of the values of El Proceso. Relying on the same language as that utilised by the authorities and through carefully selected content, visuals and crafting projects, the magazine became an invaluable ally in the

⁶⁷'Carta abierta a los padres argentinos', *Gente*, Buenos Aires, 16 Dec. 1976, p. 34.

⁶⁸This was not the only piece in the magazine calling on the authorities to revise the curriculum. In 1978 *Gente* published a letter to the minister of education titled: 'Dr. Catalán, this should worry you'. The letter expressed relief about the successful end of the war against 'subversion' but warned the educational authorities about the other war, the one waged at the ideological level. The author presented two history textbooks that 'used language and presented ideas that were too similar to the ideologies of Marxist subversion'. To support the claim, the article quoted phrases that were considered as dangerous to students' minds. For example, 'Economic liberalism and the Industrial Revolution created a new social structure in which the worker became a slave who was expected to passively accept the situation' or 'The new urban proletariat, facing inequality and low salaries, can barely survive'. The author urged the authorities to act quickly to control and correct the situation. Varela Cid, *Los sofistas*, p. 76.

government's fight to restore the 'traditional values of Argentine national identity'. In a similar fashion to the regime, *Billiken* understood the double importance of the family as an agent of reform and a target for renovation. In a significant number of pieces published from 1977 to 1979, the magazine promoted specific family behaviours that reinforced the family canon as presented in the school curriculum. Its content reiterated the government's ideas about the place of schools and teachers in the fight to defend Argentine values. Although children were the main audience, the role of parents as co-educators was also stressed by inviting them to read with their children and encouraging children to get families involved through different means, such as helping with the magazine's craft and educational projects.⁶⁹

The call for parents' engagement in children's education was not the only way the magazine endorsed the regime's ideas. *Billiken* examined different aspects of the Argentine family in the magazine's social studies section with content that reinforced different aspects of the family canon. The ideal family was defined as the basic social unit in the community with the responsibility to protect and transmit the 'traditional Argentine values' that mattered to the larger society. Descriptions of families adhered to the traditional patriarchal structure with the father as the main provider and the mother as the one in charge of domestic tasks, although in some cases she was described as holding a part-time job as well.

Similar to school textbooks, the magazine listed a narrow set of principles upholding the family. Cooperation, dialogue, respect, love, unity, harmony, order and hierarchy were presented as the fundamental values safeguarding Argentine families. A piece called 'My family. I want to grow up' offered the point of view of a child and presented the members of the family with emphasis on each member's role. The magazine presented this uniform family structure as the child narrator's dream of grown-up life.⁷⁰ *Billiken* not only explicitly mentioned specific values but also reinforced them through visuals, thus aiming for children who were not literate yet. For example, children from a private primary school were invited to draw the meaning of family life. All the images selected for the piece emphasised unity, cooperation and harmony, and were reinforced with short essays signed by the young authors.⁷¹

Besides the voices of the children, the magazine also offered its own opinion to describe the family. A graphic piece that was intended for an older audience titled 'A Day in Mum's Life' described all the domestic tasks assigned to the mother and also stressed values such as harmony, dialogue and unity with powerful language: 'Dinnertime is the moment for a family reunion. There is no rush. Everybody talks about their day. There are problems. There is help. There are plans. There is a father. There is a mother. There are children. There is a family.'⁷² The magazine not only presented a 'model family' but also offered insights into the ideal setting in which the family could thrive. In all cases, the depictions only presented middle-class families, clearly revealing the regime's disregard for the popular classes that

⁶⁹*Billiken*, 27 Nov. 1979, p. 35.

⁷⁰*Billiken*, 6 May 1980, p. 43.

⁷¹*Billiken*, 6 March 1979, p. 12. The school chosen to contribute to this piece was Colegio Numen. Located in the city of Buenos Aires, the institution was founded in 1970 and since its early days it supported the values of discipline, hard work, order and hygiene.

⁷²*Billiken*, 13 March 1979, p. 23.

were identified with the previous administration. The images of families were always accompanied by clear descriptions of the physical spaces they inhabited. The perfect home was not necessarily big but it was organised and clean, with clearly demarcated spaces for the different family members to fulfil their roles. In a piece titled 'The Home from Day to Night' the magazine offered a blueprint of the family spaces as well as of the activities performed by different family members from day to night. The day was carefully planned around rigidly structured activities in defined spaces, leaving no opportunity for disruptions from the official script on family life.⁷³

Billiken became an important aid in Argentine children's learning process, especially because it adopted the regime's ideas and decoded them into a language that was more accessible for a younger audience. By reiterating the main tenets of the family canon, the magazine attempted to contribute to the elimination of dissent and the construction of a homogeneous discourse about the family that was in line with the junta's values. However, besides printed media, the junta also relied on other important allies to deliver its message into the domestic sphere. Visual media, in particular films conceived for the family and about the family, played a fundamental role in the consolidation of the family canon and the dissemination of the junta's values to an even larger public.

Films and the Family Canon

During El Proceso, the Argentine film industry produced scores of long feature films that reinforced many of the regime's values. On 30 April 1976, the head of the National Institute of Cinematography, Navy Captain Jorge Bitleston, issued directives setting parameters for film production that specified the government would support only those films that 'endorsed spiritual, moral, Catholic, and traditional national values, or that promoted the values of family, order, respect, and hard work'. The bureau also made funding decisions and allocated subsidies to those filmmakers whose work was agreeable to the regime's ideas.⁷⁴

One filmmaker who benefited from the regime's policies was Ramón 'Palito' Ortega. A popular singer and actor who had started his career in the early 1960s, Ortega became a supporter and advocate of the junta's values and devoted many of his works to promote the family canon. In 1976 he founded a production company, Chango, and produced and directed seven films in four years. Ortega's films dealt with a number of different topics and targeted different audiences but they all addressed important aspects of the family canon. Some of his filmography included plots that revolved around the family exclusively, for example *¡Qué linda es mi familia!*, *Vivir con alegría* or *El tío disparate*. These films offered clear guidelines on the ideal family life while prescribing acceptable behaviours for each family member. While other films such as *Dos locos en el aire*, *Brigada en acción* and *Las locuras del profesor* explored different themes, they still incorporated subplots that made important references to the family canon.

⁷³*Billiken*, 29 May 1979, p. 17.

⁷⁴Gociol and Invernizzi, *Cine y dictadura*, p. 43.

Ortega's work reveals straightforward storytelling with simple plots and stereotypical characters facing conflicts that were always resolved by the main characters behaving in line with the family canon. He relied on a steady cast of well-known Argentine actors that he alternated depending on the targeted audience. Carlos Balá, a children's comedian, played the main role in films aimed at children whereas Luis Sandrini, a very popular dramatic actor, was the main character in features targeting teenagers and adults. Similarly, the tone of the films was adapted to the intended audience. In children's films, the director addressed issues that spoke directly to children using a comedic tone. For example in *Las locuras del profesor*, Balá played an unorthodox teacher who understood his pupils' needs and promoted a caring and loving, albeit structured, learning environment.⁷⁵ In *Vivir con alegría*, a film oriented for an older audience, Sandrini played a widower who devoted his life to care for his children after the loss of his wife.⁷⁶ Both films presented parents as loving but also engaged in conflictive relationships with their sons. In one, an absent father failed to realise his young son needed him to be more present in his life, and in the other a widower failed to understand his son due to the generational gap. In both cases love, communication and respect, all important values of the family canon as described by the school curriculum, restored family harmony.

Besides the emphasis on communication and harmony, the films also addressed other important aspects of the family canon. The ideal family was always presented as a traditional patriarchal family with a father, a mother and children, all living under the same roof in a very orderly and neat environment. In all cases males were the main providers, women were in charge of household chores, and children contributed to the family in different ways, depending on their age and gender. Even in those films such as *El tío disparate* and *Vivir con alegría* that lacked one parent due to death, plots still managed to reinforce prescribed gender roles with alternative characters such as an uncle as the main family provider or a female neighbour helping with domestic tasks.⁷⁷

Ortega's films included prescriptions for ideal female behaviour that followed traditional gender roles. In those films that revolved around the family, women were always wives, daughters and sisters, dependent on the support of the male head of the family and never presenting as having conflictive relationships with the male characters. Their most important role was that of family caretaker and they rarely appeared as professionals or qualified workers. In those films in which women had a career, they achieved their goals with the help of the main male character, as in *El tío disparate* in which the uncle interceded on his nieces' behalf so they could pursue a professional singing career. The foundation of a family was marriage, so all of Ortega's films presented marriage as the ultimate goal and highest achievement for every woman, even those with plots not focused around family-related themes. For example, *Dos locos en el aire* and *Brigada en acción*, action films that emphasised the role of the armed forces in protecting

⁷⁵Ramón 'Palito' Ortega, *Las locuras del profesor*, 1979, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBvdqIZYATQ, last access 21 Sept. 2021.

⁷⁶Ramón 'Palito' Ortega, *Vivir con alegría*, 1979, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZ1Vo8OjcUo, last access 21 Sept. 2021.

⁷⁷Ramón 'Palito' Ortega, *El tío disparate*, 1978, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5d_BWHC3Mg, last access 21 Sept. 2021.

Argentine society, reinforced prescribed gender norms with the inclusion of a successful female police officer who was commended for quitting her job in order to marry, and a submissive girlfriend who waited patiently for her boyfriend to return from a mission protecting the frontier in Antarctica.⁷⁸

As was the case with *Billiken* and school textbooks, all the films relied on powerful visuals that reinforced the family canon. All middle-class settings, houses presented a very similar layout with small and clearly demarcated spaces that were always clean, nicely decorated and comfortable, due to the diligence of the women in charge. Ortega's films incorporated reminders of the Catholic values sustaining these Argentine families with the inclusion of religious decorations placed prominently and scenes taking place in churches. In some cases, plots and visuals promoting the official family canon were reinforced with clear and powerful messages through music lyrics, dialogue or superimposed text. In the closing scene of *¡Qué linda es mi familia!* the director presented the family gathered around the table and a sign that stated: 'Many suns could be born or could die but as long as our light is still alive only in the family will we find the happiness and beauty of an eternal dawn.'⁷⁹

Through visuals and plots, Ortega's films reinforced other attributes of the ideal family such as the importance of parents' involvement in children's education as well as the need for active collaboration between school and home. In *Brigada en acción*, two police officers acting as surrogate parents for an orphan child participated in school events which, according to the school authorities, were possible only because of the active help of the parents. The main plot of *Las locuras del profesor* revolved around a secondary-school teacher who attempted to convince a father to become more engaged in the education of his child. In a speech celebrating the anniversary of the school, the school principal stated: 'Order, discipline and work. These are not only the teachers' jobs. The school and the home. Let's hope we can achieve it together.'⁸⁰

Ortega's filmography became an important instrument in the junta's attempts to restore 'Argentine traditional values'. The artist's popularity made him an invaluable ally in the government's efforts to penetrate the private sphere and disseminate the family canon. His films had the double purpose of educating and entertaining as they provided the perfect setting to present the audience with the official script in an amusing and, apparently, innocent way. During these years, his work reinforced the ideas articulated in the civic-military authorities' speeches and imparted by the school curriculum and printed media. In a similar fashion to the government, Ortega recognised the strategic role of the family and used his films to disseminate the official discourse and to strengthen the family canon.

⁷⁸Ramón 'Palito' Ortega, *Dos locos en el aire*, 1976, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kqLRcu1XfI, last access 21 Sept. 2021; and *Brigada en acción*, 1977, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOtZaU6fv_4, last access 21 Sept. 2021.

⁷⁹Ramón 'Palito' Ortega, *¡Qué linda es mi familia!*, 1980, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un9rcacGQP8, last access 21 Sept. 2021.

⁸⁰Ortega, *Las locuras del profesor*.

Conclusion

The military dictatorship that took over in 1976 wanted to impose its monolithic and authoritarian view of society to fully transform Argentina. Besides violently imprisoning, disappearing and murdering those individuals considered as enemies of the state, the civic-military authorities articulated their own ideas of what they defined as the legitimate Argentine national identity. The ideological apparatus of El Proceso sought to impose a new national consciousness and the fashioning of the family canon was an important part of this plan. The physical disappearance of the bodies came in conjunction with an official discourse that created a rigid and narrow definition of the family, in an attempt to symbolically disappear family arrangements that did not conform to the official ideal.

The family canon was just one piece of the official discourse created during El Proceso. Patriotism and unconditional love for the fatherland, the celebration of the Christian and Western way of life, the justification of the use of violence for the 'greater good', and the normalisation of the armed forces' invasion of civil society's spaces became equally important elements of the official script imposed on the Argentine population throughout the dictatorship. Although not as studied as the violent strategies used during this period, the official discourse created by the civic-military authorities constituted an important part of the political repertoire of El Proceso. It was an experiment of social engineering that, masked as a justification to safeguard 'Argentine traditional values', revealed another aspect of the authoritarian state's quest to reach ideological unification, generate effective compliance and exercise full control over the minds and bodies of the Argentine people.

As this article has demonstrated, the junta's efforts to impose the family canon were sweeping and systematic and revealed a high level of coordination between military and civil sectors in society. To achieve their goals, the authorities relied on different social and cultural institutions and involved a wide array of strategies that extended into both public and private spheres. Nevertheless, despite the civic-military government's efforts, the family canon did not go unchallenged. From the networks of solidarity created by political prisoners to the politicised maternity of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, many groups in Argentina responded to El Proceso's ideal 'family' with their own definitions of 'families', challenging the official discourse and creating alternative family arrangements, and values, that persisted throughout the years of the military dictatorship.⁸¹ These families successfully defended their own version of what constituted the Argentine family, anticipating the more inclusive policies and broader family discourse that have characterised post-dictatorial Argentina.⁸²

⁸¹Filc, *Entre el parentesco*; Santiago Garaño and Werner Pertot, *Detenidos-Aparecidos: Presas y presos políticos desde Trelew a la dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2007); Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994); Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Elizabeth Jelin, 'The Family in Argentina: Modernity, Economic Crisis, and Politics', in Bert N. Adams and Jan Trost (eds.), *Handbook of World Families* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), pp. 391–413.

⁸²The return to a democratic government opened a new chapter in family discourses and policies in Argentina. Since the 1980s, the government has introduced changes to family law that regulated the rights of minors, adoption, domestic violence and civil unions. A major change to marriage legislation took place

Acknowledgements. I am deeply grateful to Christian Pipo Wintter for his insightful suggestions and his encouragement throughout the writing of this article. I would also like to thank the editors at *JLAS* and the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of the article.

Spanish abstract

El 24 de marzo de 1976 una junta militar derrocó a la presidenta María Estela Martínez de Perón y asumió el poder en Argentina. Desde los primeros días de la deposición, las autoridades trabajaron vigorosamente para restaurar lo que consideraban eran los auténticos valores del ser nacional argentino. Este artículo demuestra como la familia se convirtió en un blanco de estos esfuerzos debido a su doble función como sujeto y objeto de dicha renovación. Un microcosmos de la nación argentina, la familia era percibida como la base fundamental de la sociedad, garante del bienestar civil de la nación y, como tal, fue concebida como una aliada importante del Estado autoritario en su lucha por la restauración de los valores ‘tradicionales’ de Argentina. El análisis se enfoca en los esfuerzos del régimen cívico-militar para crear un modelo normativo de familia, que se convertiría en la única versión legítima de la familia argentina, así como en el extenso repertorio de estrategias utilizadas para imponerlo a la población argentina.

Spanish keywords: gobierno militar en Argentina – El Proceso; políticas educativas; currículo escolar; Revista *Billiken*; Ramón ‘Palito’ Ortega; políticas familiares

Portuguese abstract

Em 24 de março de 1976, uma junta militar depôs a presidente María Estela Martínez de Perón e assumiu o poder na Argentina. Desde os primeiros dias após a deposição, as autoridades trabalharam vigorosamente para restaurar o que consideravam como legítimos valores argentinos. Este artigo demonstra como a família se tornou um ponto focal dos esforços do governo por causa de sua dupla função como agente e alvo de renovação. Microcosmo da nação argentina, a família era considerada o alicerce básico da sociedade, garantidora do bem-estar cívico da nação e, como tal, importante aliada do Estado autoritário na luta pela restauração dos valores argentinos ‘tradicionais’. A análise se concentra nos esforços do regime cívico-militar para criar um cânone familiar, que se tornaria a única versão legítima da família argentina, e no amplo repertório de estratégias utilizadas para impô-lo à população argentina.

Portuguese keywords: governo militar Argentina – El Proceso; políticas educacionais; currículo escolar; Revista *Billiken*; Ramón ‘Palito’ Ortega; políticas familiares

in 1987 with the legalisation of divorce. Another major milestone in family policies was achieved in 2010 with the legalisation of same-sex marriage, making Argentina the first nation in Latin America to do so.

Cite this article: Juárez-Dappe P (2022). Family Canon: The Politics of Family during the Last Civic-Military Dictatorship in Argentina, 1976–83. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54, 79–101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X21000778>