



The Creation of a Social Problem: Youth Culture, Drugs, and Politics in Cold War Argentina

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Abstract This essay explores how a drug problem was manufactured in Cold War Argentina. Unlike in some of its South American neighbors, in Argentina most authorities until the late 1960s did not believe that the country had a serious drug problem, though previous episodes regarding drug usage in the interwar period, explored here, had defined the medical contours of *toxicomanía* (addiction). But as the 1970s progressed, new legislation framed the drug problem as one of national security, proscribing illicit drug distribution, penalizing consumers, and authorizing federal police to closely monitor areas of youth sociability. Promoted by a diverse team of new experts and in cooperation with US antidrug agencies, the campaign helped create a link between youth, deviance, and subversion, which supposedly corroded the national body. Drugs were defined in repressive terms before the military imposed its dramatic dictatorship in 1976, making drugs a lasting issue in modern Argentine politics.

I n 1970, one of the few drug experts with the Argentine Federal Police announced that there were no more than 700 “addicts” of cocaine and marijuana in Argentina, a country that lagged “luckily behind” a tide of drug use that, in his view, was sweeping the globe.¹ Within a decade of this optimistic interpretation, however, the chief of that force’s Narcotics Division described drug consumption as one of the nation’s “major evils.”² Created in 1971, the Narcotics Division became a crucial actor in the making of a drug problem in Argentina. Although local concerns about drugs first emerged in the 1920s, it was only during the 1970s that the supposed problem became a staple of Argentina’s politics and culture. That problem consisted fundamentally of

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1. “Drogas, un fantasma sobre Buenos Aires,” *Panorama* (Buenos Aires), 5 May 1970, p. 29.

2. “El caso Christian Torres,” *Somos* (Buenos Aires), 10 Apr. 1981, p. 9.

consumers of drugs, who were presumed generally to be young people. Promoted by a motley team of new experts—medical doctors, psychiatrists, judges, police, and military officers—the drug problem created a visible link between youth, deviance, and subversion. In the process of manufacturing the problem, politicians as well as medical and legal experts framed it as one of national security, in which presumed and potential addicts corroded the fabric of the nation much like the youth associated with radical political projects. In carving out legislation and institutions aimed at containing drugs, these experts expanded the scope of national security in relation to young people, whatever their political activities.

As in other Latin American countries, in Argentina the manufacturing of a drug problem was entwined with the political imperatives of the Cold War. In 1971, the authoritarian government of General Alejandro Lanusse (1971–1973) decided to actively cooperate with the US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD). Well before the BNDD and its successor, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA, created in 1973), had set up offices in Colombia and Peru, they had established an advance outpost in Argentina.³ The BNDD identified Argentina as a transshipment site for heroin and, to a lesser degree, cocaine, with the United States as the final destination. The Argentine government benefited from that rising interest in various ways, including antidrug funds and police training. This cooperation expanded during the 1970s as part of the broader alignment of the Argentine government with the United States in a multilayered Cold War.

At home, both Argentine authorities and the new experts read the drug problem as a serious matter of national security. Anti-Communist to the core, national security ideologies justified and oriented repressive political projects aimed at popular demobilization, fostering development while preserving Western values from the threats posed by perceived enemies.⁴ Though the meanings of “subversion” and “enemy within” remained purposely vague, influential figures in 1970s Argentina—as happened in Brazil during the same era—endorsed the belief that drug consumption weakened the internal front by fueling hedonistic ideas and lifestyles among young people, thus paving the way for undermining the hierarchies and traditional mores deemed crucial to security.⁵ This article thus offers a case study for rethinking the scholarly consensus

3. On Peru and Colombia during the 1970s, see Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*; Britto, “Trafficker’s Paradise.”

4. On ideologies of national security, see especially García, *El drama*, 39–40; Pion-Berlin, “Latin American National Security.”

5. Cowan, “Sex,” 459–61.

about the periodization of national security regimes. Focused largely on the interconnections between the US and Latin American military establishments, most scholars tend to emphasize a first step of counterinsurgency doctrine—whose targets were the revolutionary movements across the region—and then a second step around the war on drugs, openly waged by the 1980s.⁶ In early 1970s Argentina, however, the motley civilian and military actors who contributed to the creation of a drug problem combined it with the expansion of the security state, especially in relation to the surveillance and repression of young people.

Social and cultural historians of North America and Western Europe have amply shown how during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the figure of the addict was constructed out of anxieties surrounding race, class, ethnicity, and gender. This process helped reconfigure stereotypes of the Other while shaping state responses to nonwhite populations and to disorderly cities.⁷ Building from that scholarship, this essay shows that in mid-twentieth-century Argentina, the *toxicómano* (addict) was less associated with ethnic or sexual minorities than with the broader category of youth, a category that in the 1960s and 1970s evoked open challenges to the cultural, sexual, and political order. As happened in other major Latin American cities, in Buenos Aires young women and men—largely, but not exclusively, middle-class students—engaged in new forms of social interaction, leisure, and consumption that were helping to alter gender relations and sexual mores. Some youth also joined in on radical as well as countercultural practices. As highly visible embodiments of youthful political and cultural challenges, Argentina's revolutionary militants and the hippies became targets of harassment and repression.⁸ This article adds to the burgeoning literature on youth, culture, and politics in Latin America by showing that in Argentina the creation of a drug problem worked to blur the divide between cultural and other politics and between representations of revolutionary militants and the hippies. From the 1960s well into the 1980s, a broad spectrum of civilian and political actors projected onto the *toxicómano* the traits of the sociocultural and political enemy within, just as they pursued other policies that set limits to the social lives and political activities of young people generally. In contrast to studies that see the drug problem as mainly a legacy of

6. The studies that uphold that periodization include, from different perspectives, Gill, *School of the Americas*; Hopenhayn, *La grieta*; Olmo, *¿Prohibir o domesticar?*

7. Musto, *American Disease*; Acker, *Creating*; Zieger, "How Far"; Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession*; Kohn, *Dope Girls*.

8. Among such studies demonstrating this for Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, see Zolov, *Refried Elvis*; Langland, "Birth Control Pills"; Barr-Melej, "Hippismo"; Dunn, "Desbunde"; Manzano, *Age of Youth*.

Argentina's final dictatorship of 1976, this essay shows that the making of this problem not only preceded the dictatorship but also helped build consensus for imposing such authoritarian projects.⁹

The Making of a Drug Problem

Argentina experienced two significant drugs panics during the twentieth century. As in many parts of Europe, the first occurred during the interwar period. The second, the focus of this essay, started in the late 1960s, but unlike the 1920s and 1930s, its problematization of drugs endured. During the first episode, the interest of Argentine police officers and medical authorities in generating a regulatory framework to deal with the newly perceived problem grew in tandem with developments in international drug control. Argentina sent the renowned specialist in legal medicine Francisco de Veyga as an observer to the First International Opium Conference at The Hague in 1911–1912. This act showed some level of governmental concern, though Argentina did not sign the International Opium Convention until 1919, when it was incorporated as a mandatory element of the Treaty of Versailles. As the 1920s progressed, however, doctors, police, and the media insistently complained that the country lacked adequate legal tools to struggle against what was being increasingly depicted as an epidemic. In this context, Leopoldo Bard, a doctor, public health professional, and congressman, introduced a bill to penalize with prison sentences those authorized to sell narcotics for medical reasons who did so without proper prescriptions.¹⁰ Passed in 1924, it was complemented in 1926 by another act that criminalized those who sold narcotics without any authorization.¹¹ These first pieces of legislation focused on curbing distribution, but Dr. Bard and some of his colleagues also advocated penalizing consumption.¹² However, they failed, and until the 1970s Argentine authorities interpreted drug use as falling under Article 19 of the constitution, which withheld from the state any authority over “private actions that in no way offend public morals and order and that do not damage a third person.”¹³

9. Among the studies that see the drug problem as a legacy of Argentina's last dictatorship, see Aureano, “La construcción política.” See also Epele, *Sujetar*.

10. Bard, *Los peligros*, 3–6.

11. *Código Penal* 1926, x–xii.

12. See, for example, the bills introduced by representatives Juan Cafferata and Nerio Rojas, *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, vol. 1, 1936, pp. 56–58; *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, vol. 4, 1942, pp. 2591–98.

13. *Constitución*, 17.

Nonetheless, in the 1920s and 1930s, police officials, medical experts, and the media still worked to prove that the toxicómano offended public morals and threatened the future of the nation. In doing so, they helped shape three kinds of spreading representations of *toxicomanía* (addiction) and users. First, all these actors conceived of addiction as a disease affecting willpower, an idea that became embedded into a globally dominant toxicological discourse. Dr. Bard said as much when he introduced his bill to Congress, adding that addiction resulted in “moral bankruptcy.”¹⁴ The press illustrated this by publishing stories of young women and men who, in the common journalistic lexicon, had “fallen” into the consumption of morphine, cocaine, and opium. Part of a journalistic campaign of 1922–1923, these stories made toxicomanía a key element in a general cosmopolitan “environment” that celebrated hedonism and individualism and that ultimately harmed the fabric of the nation.¹⁵ Second, these representations depicted toxicomanía as a virus that attacked the individual and social body, leading to social degeneration. As in Mexico and Egypt during this era, formal theories of degeneration permeated medical and popular understandings of toxicomanía in Argentina.¹⁶ Dr. Bard and other experts drew on the work of the Belgian criminologist Louis Vervaeck, who saw addiction as one of the gravest dangers for the “race,” since it “shuts off youth energies and multiplies degeneration.” To Vervaeck, addicts would never totally recover from their disease because drug consumption produced a “superior degenerate” whom it proved impossible to cure.¹⁷ Such understandings reinforced the role of medical doctors in dealing with toxicomanía as working partners of the police. As the police chief Jacinto Fernández argued in 1923, the state should promote a “social defense” including the “removal of elements touched by the virus of toxicomanía,” since they “conspired against social stability and order.”¹⁸

In addition to being depicted as a destabilizing disease that affected both the individual and social body, toxicomanía had a third element in this contemporary discourse: the representation of the toxicómano as young. In the media campaign of 1922–1923, newspapers focused primarily on two groups:

14. Bard, *Los peligros*, 9. On toxicological ideas, see Weissmann, *Toxicomanías*.

15. See, for example, “Los paraísos artificiales,” *La Argentina* (Buenos Aires), 26 Aug. 1922, p. 6; “Los alcaloides,” *El Diario del Plata* (Buenos Aires), 27 Dec. 1922, p. 6; “Cocainómanos y viciosos,” *El Diario del Plata* (Buenos Aires), 22 Feb. 1923, p. 2.

16. Campos, “Degeneration”; Kozma, “White Drugs.”

17. Vervaeck, *Le peril toxique*, 8.

18. “Nota del jefe de policía Jacinto Fernández a los Diputados de la Nación,” *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, vol. 1, 1923, p. 889.

upper-class young men, *niños bien* who spent their nights of leisure in cabarets and, in the 1920s, tango dancing; and young women of “dissipated life,” a euphemism for the sex workers who in some accounts had “fallen into prostitution” because of their addiction to drugs.¹⁹ Since drug consumption by *niños bien* and sex workers was expected, journalists were able to work up a more serious drug problem when linking other groups of youth to drugs as well. Although short on details and figures, reports focused on the spread of cocaine and morphine use among middle-class high school and college boys in Buenos Aires and Córdoba.²⁰ Journalists especially warned readers about the spread of morphine among young women, some of whom, as one such writer claimed, had allegedly “crossed the line” after using the medically prescribed drug to “cure feminine illnesses.”²¹ As part of its 1933 campaign for legislation to penalize drug consumption, the Alkaloids Brigade stressed three cases of young women who died from morphine overdoses in Buenos Aires.²² These gendered representations of morphine consumption in 1920s and 1930s Argentina served as the rhetorical sign of the problem’s severity: “The future of the Argentine nation is in jeopardy,” one editorialist concluded, “as the future mothers are annihilating themselves with morphine every day.”²³

Despite campaigning for harsher laws on consumption and distribution, 30 years passed without significant legislative results. Eventually, as a signatory to the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, Argentina, like most Latin American states, did commit itself to prohibiting the production and supply of recreational drugs. The convention consolidated the prohibition of opium, coca and its derivatives, and a whole list of synthetic opioids as well as cannabis. However, even in the late 1960s these international commitments did not result in new local legislation. Moreover, in 1968 a reform of the penal code,

19. On drugs in cabarets, see “Venta de alcaloides,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 17 July 1922, p. 7. On drugs among sex workers, see “Distribución de alcaloides,” *Crítica* (Buenos Aires), 19 June 1922, p. 7; “Alcaloides y drogas nocivas,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 17 Apr. 1923, p. 9. On drug consumption among sex workers, see Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 105–40.

20. “La venta de alcaloides,” *Nueva Época* (Santa Fe), 15 May 1922, p. 4; “La persecución de los alcaloides,” *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), 8 May 1923, p. 6.

21. “El mal de los alcaloides,” *Crítica* (Buenos Aires), 3 Jan. 1923, p. 3. On young women as morphine users, see also “Reflexiones de actualidad,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 24 Apr. 1923, p. 8.

22. *Memoria de investigaciones*, 212–16. This, unfortunately, is one of the few preserved memoirs of the brigade’s yearly activities.

23. “Las morfinómanas,” *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 6 Apr. 1923, p. 6. For similar perspectives, see “La morfina,” *Nueva Época* (Santa Fe), 25 Nov. 1922, p. 4. On associations of women with morphine use, see Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*, 35–60; Keire, “Dope Fiends.”

undertaken by the so-called Revolución Argentina (1966–1970), did not touch on drug issues. Led by General Juan Carlos Onganía, the Revolución Argentina epitomized what Guillermo O'Donnell has termed a “bureaucratic-authoritarian” regime, which worked to deactivate popular mobilization under the banner of national security ideologies.²⁴ For drug legislation, the code passed during that regime preserved a liberal ethos, limiting drug-related crimes to illegal production and trafficking but still not penalizing personal consumption.²⁵ This fact should militate against assuming a direct causal link between authoritarian regimes and repressive drug legislation, and it also indicates that, as of 1968, illicit drug consumption was not yet perceived as a significant problem in Argentina.

In the second half of the 1960s, the media and police officials alike agreed that Argentina did not have a drug problem. As also in Mexico and Brazil, that belief became a source of chauvinistic pride that was contrasted with sensationalized news of exploding drug consumption in the United States and Europe and that thereby served as a warning that drugs could eventually become still another foreign threat to the nation's youth.²⁶ In fact, media reports on drugs in Argentina during the mid-1960s mostly focused on the use of LSD as a tool of psychoanalysis (an Argentine obsession) for revealing the “workings of the unconscious,” as Dr. Alberto Fontana and other colleagues put it.²⁷ Fontana ran a clinic where he administered LSD to his patients, a practice that became legendary partly because it involved actors, filmmakers, and some left-wing intellectuals—though, as one report noted, by 1967 it had become difficult to obtain the drug from laboratories.²⁸ In 1967, stories also began to surface about marijuana. Besides explaining to readers the characteristics of cannabis, imported from Brazil and Paraguay, the weekly *Primera Plana* arranged an actual “smoking session.” The organizers concluded that “it does not generate addiction” and reminded readers that it was neither “an alkaloid (it does not produce secondary effects)” nor “a narcotic (it does not induce a habit).”²⁹ That last point was significant: marijuana did not match the two kinds

24. O'Donnell, *Bureaucratic Authoritarianism*.

25. *Código Penal* 1968, 201; López Bolado, *Drogas*, 70–85.

26. See Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 145–50; Cowan, “Why Hasn't This Teacher?”

27. Alvarez de Toledo, Fontana, and Toledo, “Psicoanálisis y dielitamida,” 29.

28. “Hacia la terapia surrealista,” *Confirmado* (Buenos Aires), 4 June 1965, pp. 38–39; “Paraisos artificiales,” *Panorama* (Buenos Aires), Mar. 1967, pp. 35–39. On that experiment, see Plotkin, *Freud*, 172–75.

29. “¿Hacia la generación de la marihuana?,” *Primera Plana* (Buenos Aires), 7 Nov. 1967, pp. 46–49.

of drugs that the penal code identified as illegal to produce or distribute for nonmedical reasons.³⁰

Marijuana consumption was spreading among youths. While recognizing that this consumption did not constitute a “public problem,” *Siete Días* in early 1968 informed readers that in the “hippie enclaves” of Buenos Aires such as Plaza Francia and Florida Street it was possible to “smell marijuana every night.”³¹ Those areas of downtown Buenos Aires represented cosmopolitan territories where the unconventional prevailed, chiefly in relation to artistic experimentation, fashion, and music. For example, the first miniskirts were sold there, as well as the first records by Jefferson Airplane and Jimi Hendrix. Epitomizing late 1960s hippie culture, youths attracted to rock music—musicians, poets, and fans—colonized these districts. One former participant in that cultural scene recalls that many consumed marijuana, which was cheap but erratically available because it was imported. Moreover, belying the emerging police and media narrative, he points out that he (and his friends) consumed marijuana at home and “almost never in a public space.”³² Perhaps this helps explain why in August and September 1970, in a series of antimarijuana raids in those areas of downtown Buenos Aires, federal police managed to confiscate only a couple of joints a night.³³

In contrast to countercultural experiences in other countries, the unfolding scene in Argentina was less tied to the use of LSD and other hallucinogens. As the historian David Farber has shown, in the United States LSD consumption was essential to how some 1960s countercultural groups created a “purposeful exit from the rules and regulations that made up the culture they had been poised to inhabit.”³⁴ After the criminalization of LSD by the US government in 1966, at least a few American hippies crossed the border and helped stir counterculture scenes in Mexico as well. Local and foreign hippies, as Eric Zolov has argued, took literal psychedelic trips, searching throughout Mexico for enlightenment through hallucinogenic plants such as peyote.³⁵ Many of their Argentine counterparts likely shared the same dreams, but neither peyote nor other hallucinogenic drugs were readily available at home.

30. Fontán Balestra and Millan, *Las reformas*, 205–10, 266–74.

31. “Vivir en el cielo,” *Siete Días* (Buenos Aires), 23 Jan. 1968, p. 50.

32. Mario Rabey (former rock producer), interview by author, Buenos Aires, 22 July 2008.

33. See, for example, “En busca de drogas,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 13 Aug. 1970, p. 8; “Espectacular operativo nocturno,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 21 Aug. 1970, p. 9.

34. Farber, “Intoxicated State,” 18.

35. Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 136, 150–54.

Some young people, like the would-be countercultural organizer Enrique Symns, migrated to Rio de Janeiro and experimented with communal living while they opened “the doors of perception” through the use of acid.³⁶ For those stuck in Argentina, reality was different. For example, in one of the few published memoirs by a rocker, Miguel Cantilo points out that among even those who, like himself, were eager to try LSD, its supply depended on risk-taking travelers abroad or on the creativity of “characters who tried, usually unsuccessfully, to produce acid in artisan fashion.”³⁷ Similarly, Meneca Hiquis, a former participant in one of the longest-running communal living experiences in Argentina (La Cofradía de la Flor Solar), clarified that the group only occasionally used “some acid,” while marijuana use was far more common.³⁸

Marijuana consumption went beyond countercultural experiences or rock-related sociability. Although reliable figures are missing, psychoanalyst Mauricio Knobel produced what was perhaps the most serious study of drug consumption patterns among university students. His findings indicate that by 1972, 6 percent had smoked marijuana, compared with only 2 percent who declared having tried either LSD or cocaine. Yet both Knobel and others from a team of toxicologists in 1971, who also focused on university students, found significant use of amphetamines, a “habit” seen among 25 percent of students in their final years of college, allegedly an aid for long nights of study.³⁹ Diverse forms of speed flooded the Argentine market, with its use reportedly spiking in the 1960s. Left-wing psychological professionals ominously suggested that American laboratories had unleashed a lucrative worldwide “amphetamine boom,” with the ulterior motive or effect of paralyzing political mobilization in the periphery.⁴⁰ As discussed below, former guerrillas claimed to have taken amphetamines to become more politically energized. Some rockers might have expected to expand their artistic prowess as well, as did José Alberto Iglesias (a.k.a. Tanguito, 1945–1972). A founding father of Argentinean rock culture, Tanguito participated in the so-called *naufragios* (shipwrecking)—the collective practice of hanging around Buenos Aires all night long, singing and playing

36. Symns, *El señor*, 63–92.

37. Cantilo, *¡Chau loco!*, 51–56, 90–92, quote on 55.

38. Meneca Hiquis’s testimony, quoted in Castrillón, “Hippies a la criolla,” 59–60.

39. Knobel and Scheuer, “Adicción a las drogas”; Astolfi, Maccagno, and Kiss, “Uso, abuso y dependencia.”

40. On the expression “amphetamine boom,” see Hernán Kesselman, “Las drogas: Un purgatorio artificial,” *Nuevo Hombre* (Buenos Aires), 21 July 1971, p. 1. See also Hugo M. Vezzetti, “Anfetaminas y derivados: Uso y producción,” *Los Libros* (Buenos Aires), Feb. 1975, pp. 19–24.

guitars. Beginning in 1971, the press ran reports on his frequent detentions, and the police regularly referred him to the new pavilion for addicts at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital José T. Borda.⁴¹

All the actors involved in the unfolding of Tanguito's case played key roles in the abrupt shift in public perceptions of a drug problem. Between 1971 and 1972, the police, medical doctors, and psychiatrists converged to pass new repressive legislation and to create new antidrug institutions. The changing climate is perhaps most clearly perceived in the evolving drug-fighting role of the federal police. Between 1920 and 1970, the federal police relied on a modest Alkaloids Brigade of no more than five agents to deal with all its drug cases. As its former chief Jorge Manassero recalled, the brigade's files for all the toxicómanos whom they had identified over those decades "easily fit into a shoe box." In his opinion, "everything started to change in the late 1960s."⁴² In late 1970, the Alkaloids Brigade, until then dependent on the Personal Security Division, gained the elevated title of Narcotics Division. According to police statistics, as soon as the division was born, drug-related detentions multiplied, notably among the malleable category of "detainees in prevention"—those in the company of traffickers—which rose from 1,410 in 1970 to 2,610 in 1971, including 619 underage boys and 405 underage girls. Police data also suggested that trafficking of marijuana had skyrocketed over a two-year period: while 9 kilos had been seized in all the raids of 1969, 57 kilos were seized in the first six months of 1971 alone.⁴³ Publicizing such dubious figures was fundamental in legitimating the division, which was also actively lobbying for expanded drug legislation, a demand that soon found support among editorialists and legal specialists.⁴⁴ Most importantly, such legislation was supported by Argentinean toxicology experts, who in mid-1971 pushed for passage of Law 19.301, which would criminalize marijuana and prohibit the sale of amphetamines without a prescription.

The Narcotics Division worked closely with physicians and psychiatrists specializing in toxicology, who had become the foremost authorities on the

41. For press reports, see, for example, "Hippies y drogas," *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 21 Aug. 1970, p. 11; "Muerte blanca," *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 19 Mar. 1971, p. 7; "Muerte blanca en Buenos Aires," *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 17 Apr. 1971, p. 5.

42. Fondo de Ayuda Toxicológica, "Entrevista con Jorge Manassero," 16–17.

43. Policía Federal Argentina, *Superintendencia técnica*, 83, 85. The only copy of this source that I know of is held at the Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Policía Federal (hereafter cited as CEHPF).

44. "Marihuana, el revés de la trama," *Mundo Policial* (Buenos Aires), July 1970, p. 62; "Código y drogas," *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 7 Mar. 1971, p. 12; López Bolado, *Drogas*, 84–92.

drug problem. Medical schools in Argentina had long fostered teams of toxicologists, and research about the mind-altering effects of drug use had for some time attracted the attention of prestigious psychiatrists such as Dr. Gregorio Bermann. During the 1960s, toxicologists at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) focused their teaching, training, and research on the multiple causes and effects of drug use and abuse. In 1966, some of UBA's toxicology faculty started the Foundation of Toxicological Assistance (FAT, Fondo de Ayuda Toxicológica) with the aim of offering users and their families free treatment. The professional and personal competence of UBA's two leading toxicologists, Alberto Calabrese and Emilio Astolfi, ensured their influence. In 1968 they created the Center for Toxicological Research and Assistance as well as the Center for Preventing Drug Addiction.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, another prominent toxicologist, Horacio San Martín, led an interdisciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and social workers in the first wing for addicts at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital José T. Borda—the one to which Tanguito, the controversial rocker, was usually referred.

Tanguito epitomized the figure of the toxicómano as it consolidated at the start of the 1970s, and the interdisciplinary team at the psychiatric hospital paved the way for delineating that social type. Between 1970 and its dissolution in 1974, the team conducted treatment experiments influenced by contemporaneous developments in group therapy, family therapy, and psychodrama. Moreover, possibly inspired by the British and US antipsychiatry movement, the team proposed to create horizontal bonds between doctors and patients. In practice, however, life in the ward strayed from these theoretical aims. Like Tanguito, most of the patients undergoing treatment were remanded to the hospital by the police. Their willingness to undergo treatment was dubious, to say the least. In the second semester of 1971, all 47 patients were male, between 16 and 26 years old; they all lived in Buenos Aires and came from the lower-middle and working classes. Born to a working-class family from the suburb of Caseros, Tanguito fit the typical demographic. He was also part of the 60 percent of patients from “disaggregated”—that is, separated—families.⁴⁶ Equally important, Tanguito met the cultural requirements for such patients. In contrast to the toxicómanos of the 1920s and 1930s, who were depicted as both young men and women, Dr. San Martín's patients, as he described them, were young men only, who rebelled against family and social norms, something visible in their attire (“jeans, colored shirts, and sandals”) as well as in other

45. Weissmann, *Toxicomanías*, 78–91.

46. Equipo Profesional, “Investigaciones.”

symptoms, including, of course, “playing rock music.”⁴⁷ Echoed by all the major toxicologists, this depiction blended generational, generic, and cultural components into a figure sculpted by experts, publicized by the media, and—most seriously—persecuted by the Narcotics Division. Some in fact blame the division for Tanguito’s death (immediately upon his escape from the hospital, he was run over by a train). Some fault the doctors for his failed detoxification, while others believe that, after finding him, members of the Narcotics Division beat him unconscious, which led to his death.⁴⁸

Toxicologists and police agents joined ranks with some conservative politicians who were trying to draw broader constituencies, especially after elections were called for March 1973. The popular revolts that hit Corrientes, Santa Fe, and Córdoba provinces in May 1969 marked the political finale of Onganía’s regime and the beginning of a far-reaching social and political mobilization in which young people became key protagonists. In this context, President Alejandro Lanusse (1971–1973) negotiated with the exiled Juan Perón a possible opening in the democratic process, beginning with a call for new elections. Lanusse and some members of his cabinet expected to participate and used governmental resources to inaugurate their candidacies. One such actor was Captain Francisco Manrique, the minister of social welfare, who raised his political profile by deftly exploiting drug issues. In early 1972, while federal police conducted marijuana raids against famous rock musicians such as Luis Alberto Spinetta, Manrique announced the creation of the Comisión Nacional de Toxicomanía y Narcóticos (CONATON, National Commission of Toxicology and Narcotics). Chaired by the minister and composed of delegates from the Narcotics Division and prominent toxicologists, CONATON was intended to coordinate all policies against drug consumption and trafficking.⁴⁹

The creation of CONATON was largely fueled by the arrival of representatives from the government of Richard M. Nixon. As historians have shown, the Nixon administration played a crucial role in recasting hemispheric relations in terms of the drug problem, with the formation of various ad hoc committees and agencies as well as the more durable and aggressive DEA in

47. San Martín, “Servicio 30 bis,” 4–5. Dr. Astolfi and Dr. Calabrese publicized similar depictions. See “Debate sobre toxicomanía,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 2 May 1971, p. 8; “Aumentarán los toxicómanos,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 18 Oct. 1971, p. 8.

48. Pintos, *Tanguito*, esp. 193–201, 289–90.

49. See “Redada anti-droga,” *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 16 Feb. 1972, p. 11; “Asombra el grupo de drogadictos encabezado por un conjunto beat,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 21 Feb. 1972, p. 6; “Otro golpe a las drogas,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 22 Feb. 1972, p. 4.

1973.⁵⁰ US narcotics agents had correctly identified Argentina as a transshipment country and had pointed to the activities of several organized groups, including elements of the Corsican mafia. Reportedly responsible for most of the heroin that entered the United States during the 1960s, the French Connection, as it was called, had a branch in Buenos Aires, formed by a dozen middle-aged men with obscure roots as paramilitary officers during the Algerian War. They arrived in Argentina in the late 1950s and allegedly inserted the country into a circuit of heroin distribution that included Istanbul, Marseille, and Buenos Aires, with New York as its final node.⁵¹ Beginning in 1968, several seizures of heroin in New York on flights arriving from Argentina alerted US narcotics agents to the movements of the Corsicans. The “new” drug cocaine (its earlier local recreational history mostly forgotten), sourced now in lowland Bolivia, was also beginning to pass through airports. Those findings served to justify the opening in Buenos Aires of the first South American office of the BNDD. This was one more sign of Argentina’s willingness to cooperate. For the US representatives who toured Latin America to track governmental responses to the narcotics problem, Argentina ranked well. It was at the time the only South American country to have signed a bilateral treaty of drug enforcement cooperation. Under its terms, the minister of social welfare and the US ambassador presided over a newly formed binational committee against the drug problem. In exchange, the United States committed itself to providing training, equipment, and other “material and human resources.”⁵²

Both the treaty and the creation of CONATON signaled the disposition of the Argentine government to confront its drug problem, though as it was crafted in the early 1970s, the problem had become more associated with consumption and consumers than with trafficking. In the inaugural meeting of CONATON, for example, both Manrique and a representative of the federal police indicated that “drug consumption diminishes morally the individual and makes him follow groups that attempt to subvert the social order,” concluding that “drug consumption and trafficking are health and security problems.”⁵³ Like their predecessors of the 1920s and 1930s, they also employed a rationale blending health and politics to produce a vision of toxicomanía as an individual and social disease that both affected willpower and jeopardized the social order.

50. Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 308–9; Epstein, *Agency of Fear*.

51. See Aguirre, *La conexión latina*.

52. United States Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *World Narcotics Problem*, 35–38.

53. “El tráfico de drogas,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 18 Feb. 1972, p. 8.

Narcotics, in this view, paved the way for subversion. The meanings of subversion were as diverse, however, as the political and cultural challenges to the status quo in early 1970s Argentina.

Drugs and National Security

Just as Minister Manrique started to publicize the growth of the drug problem, Argentines faced a high tide of politicization, with young people becoming protagonists in student, party, and guerrilla groups. These groups aimed to forge a socialist future—either in its classless Marxist or national Peronist versions—as street mobilizations began to peak between 1972 and 1974. In the midst of such ferment, the elections of March 1973 resulted in the victory of Perón's delegate, Héctor Cámpora. Perón thus soon returned to Argentina and in October 1973 became president, which he remained until his death in July 1974. During those two years, revolutionary groups acted boldly in the political and cultural arena, and many Argentines felt that social and national liberation were within reach.⁵⁴ It was not long, however, before right-wing Peronist groups gained key positions of power in government and unleashed a backlash against their leftist opponents, whom they often derided as young *faloperos* (drug addicts).

Ironically, the youth attracted to revolutionary groups opposed drug consumption in terms strikingly similar to the right-wing sector. Most of the young people who participated in radical politics in early 1970s Argentina rejected the consumption of drugs tout court, although there were of course exceptions to the rule. As with most Latin American revolutionary projects tied to guerrilla movements, in Argentina these groups set rules for militants' behavior, usually championing self-control in the name of collective ends. In the two largest revolutionary groups, the Montoneros and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores–Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP, Workers' Revolutionary Party–Revolutionary People's Army), amphetamines, usually known as *pastillitas* (little pills), were the only authorized drugs, likely because they were not yet identified as drugs in public culture. One former militant with the PRT-ERP recalls that he had medical prescriptions provided by a party doctor for *pastillitas* to sustain special tasks such as “monitoring a battalion all night long.”⁵⁵ Meanwhile, when recalling his experiences with the Montoneros, Luis Salinas commented that he took “lots of *pastillitas*” for

54. For vivid depictions, see Anguita and Caparrós, *La voluntad*.

55. Gabriel (born in Buenos Aires in 1952), interview by author, Buenos Aires, 18 Oct.

enduring “nights of not sleeping, and going here and there all day.”⁵⁶ The use of speed was conceived of as one more tool for enhancing militants’ commitment to political work, since the pastillitas kept them energized. The Montoneros and the PRT-ERP, however, strongly opposed the use of other drugs, notably marijuana, a position shared not only by most leftist groups in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil but also, as the 1970s wore on, by the former counterculture-oriented Left in Germany and Italy.⁵⁷

Among revolutionary militants in Argentina, the rejection of drug use was based upon political, cultural, and ideological premises. First, revolutionary groups forbade the use of illegal drugs for security reasons: they could not afford militants going to jail for drug-related issues. Memoirs indicate both the difficulty of, and the zeal for, complying with that rule. A former militant of the secondary school students affiliated with the Juventud Peronista (Peronist Youth) recalls that the group expelled a boy who was reputed to smoke marijuana because he put “all of us in jeopardy.”⁵⁸ Second, many militants opposed drug consumption as part of a larger stance against what they dubbed neocolonialism. In a 1972 roundtable with secondary school students, for example, one 18-year-old woman affiliated with a Peronist group explained that the local hippies were “all snobs, individualistic, the product of the *cipayá* [pro-imperialist] propaganda.” A 16-year-old boy linked to a Trotskyist group, for his part, argued that the hippies represented “a way through which the *yanquis* colonized youth and made them drowsy.”⁵⁹ The passive stoner values attached to the marijuana hippie were the opposite of those associated with the active revolutionary. Articulated in the ideological writings of some left-wing intellectuals, the narrative tying imperialism, debilitation via drugs, and youth swept across most of the self-styled revolutionary political groups.⁶⁰

Right-wing actors, chiefly the security forces, had long forwarded arguments about the supposed demoralization of youth by drugs. For example, in

56. Luis Salinas, interview, Memoria Abierta, archive of the Acción Coordinada de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos Asamblea, Argentina, file 0260.

57. See Barr-Melej, “Hippismo”; Markarian, “To the Beat”; Green, “‘Who Is the Macho.’” On Western Europe, see Weinbauer, “End of Certainties”; Giachetti, *Anni sessanta*, 320.

58. Robles, *Perejiles*, 40. There is also a similar story in the testimony of a PRT-ERP female militant, Lili, in Diana, *Mujeres guerrilleras*, 108–9.

59. “Hablan los jóvenes: Lecciones para adultos,” *Panorama* (Buenos Aires), 1 Feb. 1972, p. 36. Similar opinions were voiced in “Los hijos del siglo,” *Análisis* (Buenos Aires), 16 June 1970, p. 38.

60. See González Trejo, *Formas de alienación*, 57; Graciela Clemente, “Los argentinos y la droga,” *Redacción* (Buenos Aires), July 1974, pp. 78–80.

1961 Colonel Rómulo Menéndez, trained in counterinsurgency, argued that Communism sought to discredit all established ideas and institutions, from Christianity and the family to authority and capital, leaving people “anguished, confused, and in need of something to believe in.” Young people, “whose character is still in formation,” were especially susceptible to demoralization by drugs. In his view, which appropriated ideas that circulated transnationally since the 1920s, Communist co-optation would follow demoralization.⁶¹ On the eve of the 1970s, members of the armed forces insisted on emphasizing how these twin “foreign evils,” Communism and drugs, had started to spread among Argentine youth, and they called for the close monitoring of not only emerging “guerrilla foci” but also “hippie groups.”⁶² That became a commonsense litany for conservative forces and helped forge an active link between youth, drugs, and subversion, a link found in rightist responses to radical activism in Brazil and Mexico as well.⁶³

As the 1970s progressed and youths engaged en masse with revolutionary projects, conservatives strove to find more proof of the connection between drugs, youth, and subversion. For example, the media committed itself to the idea of an enemy within, associating radical political militants, notably guerrillas, with drug trafficking or consumption. As early as 1970, the daily *La Razón* insisted (without evidence) that Montonero leader Mario Firmenich exploited drug trafficking networks to obtain funds and weapons.⁶⁴ References to drugs popped up in some depictions of spectacular actions carried out by guerrillas. In January 1974, for example, the PRT-ERP attacked an army battalion in Azul, Buenos Aires; several soldiers and a dozen guerrillas died. In its coverage of the episode, the press emphasized the conclusions of a supposed psychiatric report on the “70 young guerrillas,” which stipulated that the ERP had planned the attack by timing the effects of “unidentified drugs” that the fighters “were given to take.” Due to some “miscalculation,” the psychiatrists went on, the guerrillas ended up in the firefight “depressed and feeling all possible side effects of the

61. Rómulo Menéndez, “Las fuerzas armadas y la defensa nacional,” *Revista Militar* (Buenos Aires), Apr.–June 1961, pp. 13–17, quotes on pp. 14–15. Demoralization was linked to the Red menace in the 1920s and 1930s as well: see Speaker, “Struggle of Mankind.”

62. On the “foreign evils” and the need for monitoring all aspects of youth politics and culture, see Carlos Landaburu, “Reflexiones sobre la situación argentina,” *Revista de la Escuela Superior de Guerra* (Buenos Aires), July–Oct. 1970; and also Marini, *Estrategia*. I thank Esteban Pontoriero for sharing these references with me.

63. Cowan, “Sex”; Pensado, “To Assault.”

64. “Extremistas y traficantes,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 27 Sept. 1970, p. 6; “Las drogas y la política,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 23 Aug. 1971, p. 6.

drugs: they became their own worst enemies.”⁶⁵ Radical political groups soon publicized their aversion to drug use and made efforts to contest what they dubbed a “propaganda operation orchestrated by the CIA and right-wing Peronism.”⁶⁶

Although exaggerated, the latter reference reflected to some degree the new official treaty regarding drugs between the Ministry of Social Welfare and the US embassy. After the elections of March 1973, José López Rega, the former policeman, ultrarightist, and private secretary to Juan Perón, was appointed minister of social welfare. Soon thereafter, he became the most prominent example of the right-wing turn taken by the Peronist government. In August 1973, he expanded the bilateral agreements on drug enforcement by signing a new accord with the recently appointed US ambassador, Robert C. Hill. Hill agreed to facilitate Argentina’s access to financial resources and technical support in order to expand “aspects of intelligence aimed at stopping the internal and external drug trade.” At a press conference, however, López Rega made public what was to remain mostly in the shadows: “Our mutual commitment,” he said, “is to struggle against the drug evil and subversion alike.”⁶⁷ He reinforced the politics of drugs via the terms of national security.

López Rega’s direct involvement in the drug problem had two major consequences. First, the Ministry of Social Welfare began to receive funds other than those assigned in annual congressional budgets. The ministry did not have to account for these extra funds, neither in Argentina nor to US authorities.⁶⁸ Some rumors suggested that at least some of the US antidrug intelligence aid funds were funneled into the creation of the notorious Argentine Anticommunist Alliance (Triple A).⁶⁹ Second, the bilateral agreements with the United States allowed López Rega to create a legal body for drug repression. In 1975, the Narcotics Division expanded to encompass six brigades; by then, it trained most of its members in the United States.⁷⁰ Moreover, the increased funding the ministry received allowed for the creation of the

65. “Procedimientos antisubversivos: Informe psiquiátrico,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 30 Jan. 1974, p. 1.

66. “La propaganda contrarrevolucionaria,” *El Combatiente* (Buenos Aires), 6 Feb. 1974, p. 10. See also “La CIA y las drogas,” *Liberación* (Córdoba), 15 May 1974, p. 32.

67. “Se firmó un tratado bilateral de lucha contra la droga,” *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 20 Aug. 1973, p. 12.

68. Dirección Nacional de Programación Presupuestaria, *Presupuestos provinciales*, 14–15.

69. Verbitsky, *Ezeiza*, 42–43.

70. Policía Federal, “Memoria, 1975,” CEHPF, pp. 221–22, 268–69.

Centro Nacional de Reeducación Social (CENARESO, National Center of Social Reeducation). Interestingly, López Rega did not turn to Argentina's top toxicologists—Doctors Calabrese, Astolfi, and San Martín—to fill leadership positions at CENARESO, though it was to become the central state-run institution dedicated to drug research and treatment. Instead, the minister picked an obscure psychiatrist, Carlos Cagliotti, who participated in the making of the repressive Law 20771 and who benefited from one of the law's novelties, the mandatory referral of addicts to rehabilitation.⁷¹

In the larger antidrug history of Argentina, Law 20771 represents the first piece of legislation fully dedicated to narcotics. However, when situated in the era's political and cultural history, Law 20771 entails one more link in a chain of legislative developments that delineated the figure of the enemy within. Those developments unfolded throughout 1974 and marked the start of a repressive project aimed at restoring state authority at all levels of social and cultural life. Allegedly in response to a PRT-ERP attack on an army battalion, Congress passed a reform of the penal code that increased penalties for joining guerrilla groups, paving the way for open military involvement in internal repression. It then went further and passed legislation regulating union activity, as well as a university law that, in essence, prohibited student politics.⁷² Meanwhile, the minister of education banned student politics at secondary schools and empowered principals to denounce any "illegal activity" to the police.⁷³ Covering sexuality along with culture, a decree signed by Minister López Rega and President Juan Perón restricted the distribution of birth control pills and prohibited the dissemination of information regarding contraception, a move to help moralize youth.⁷⁴ Later, Minister López Rega and President Isabel Martínez de Perón, Juan Perón's widow, sent a bill to Congress to open discussions on narcotics legislation, one more link in the repressive policies enacted by the still-civilian government of 1974. Law 20771 thus forms part of a general narrowing of the political and cultural scene in Argentina at this time.

Congress passed Law 20771 in September 1974. Strongly influenced by CENARESO's proposals and information, López Rega and President Martínez de Perón, as representatives of the executive power, urged Congress to pass the new regulation to "stop a wave of drug addiction" that had "increased 500 percent in the past two years." By focusing on the age of presumed addicts, they

71. The experts in toxicology sensed that Cagliotti was a "CIA agent." Weissmann, *Toxicomanías*, 90–91.

72. Franco, *Un enemigo*.

73. Manzano, *Age of Youth*, 230.

74. *Ibid.*, 221–47.

went on to claim that the “future of the fatherland” was in jeopardy and reminded representatives that “each drug addict is a potential trafficker.”⁷⁵ Besides hiking penalties for the production and distribution of all “narcotics and psychotropic drugs,” the law categorized as “aggravated offenses” those committed by individuals who distributed drugs to underage youths “at school entrances, social clubs, plazas, and other public or private areas.” The law was novel in three ways. First, it deemed all drug-related offenses as federal justice cases—that is, as consigned to the country’s highest judicial system. Second, the law stipulated that the possession of narcotics and psychotropic drugs, “even if for personal consumption,” was to be penalized by one to six years in prison. Finally, the law specified that all offenders, if proven to have a “physical or psychological addiction to drugs,” undergo mandatory rehabilitation.⁷⁶ Interestingly, in all three aspects, Law 20771 mirrored the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act, passed in 1970 as a key tool in Nixon’s domestic war on drugs. Although not recognized as such in Argentinean congressional debates, the passing of Law 20771 might have been part of the bilateral agreements with the United States, as was the strikingly similar Brazilian Law 6,368, passed in 1976.⁷⁷

In Argentina, Law 20771 established strong correlations between youth, drugs, and subversion, which carried major consequences in the years between the passing of the law and the country’s last military coup d’état in 1976. The law formally declared the drug problem one of national security. Both during the congressional debate and in the months that followed the law’s passage, the most debated issue among lawyers and judges was moving drug-related offenses into federal jurisdiction. While some believed that provincial justices were incapable of dealing with drug offenses, the majority agreed that the severity of the problem made use of the highest judicial system necessary.⁷⁸ In contrast to Colombia, where at this time mainly drug trafficking was rapidly framed as a problem of national security, in Argentina it was consumption and chiefly consumers who posed the alleged threat.⁷⁹ As conservative politicians and intellectuals had done from the early 1960s onward, Argentina’s law built on and endorsed the supposed connection between drug consumption and

75. *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, vol. 2, 19 Sept. 1974, p. 2856.

76. *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, vol. 2, 19 Sept. 1974, pp. 2856–68, quotes on pp. 2860–61.

77. Ferraiolo, “From Killer Weed.” For Brazil, see Karam, “A lei 11.343/06.”

78. *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, vol. 4, 27 Sept. 1974, pp. 2437–43. For further discussions among judges, see Moras Mom, *Toxicomanía y delito*, 149–58.

79. Britto, “Trafficker’s Paradise.”

subversion that had come to dominate public discourse. For example, during a well-attended 1974 conference called First National Meeting of the Family, held in Buenos Aires, López Rega pointed out that “guns, drugs, and pornography are annihilating our nationhood.”⁸⁰ In late 1975, the ultraconservative archbishop of Rosario, for his part, widely circulated a letter stating that “our families are losing their youth to political violence, promiscuity, and drug addiction.”⁸¹ References to the putative connection between youth, drugs, and politico-sexual subversion were as ubiquitous as those to the institutions menaced by it, namely, family and nation. The addict was one of the many faces of the enemy within. Just as political enemies became subjected to increasingly deadly violence in the biennium 1974–1976, the toxicómano also required specific treatment.

By mandating rehabilitation, Law 20771 also represented a real strategy for medical surveillance and imprisonment of the toxicómano. As Guillermo Aureano notes, the figure of the toxicómano was not pre-given but was rather built up through a series of legal and medical interventions that defined its characteristics. Moreover, he persuasively shows that the police, rather than being passive agents, also actively defined addicts via surveillance and detention. He argues that toxicómanos became second-rate citizens, chiefly because their rights over their own bodies were continuously violated. Aureano situates the rise of this figure in the aftermath of the last military dictatorship. During the 1980s transition to a democratic regime, he shows, the toxicómano gained visibility, a sign of persisting authoritarianism in Argentinean institutions and society.⁸² Yet Law 20771, crucial for the creation of the toxicómano, actually had originated under previous civilian rule. Equally significant, the law handed authority to toxicologists to define when a presumed toxicómano should be subject to medical and psychiatric treatment or when he or she might be criminalized. After the law’s passage, only the doctors led by Dr. Cagliotti held such authority, and CENARESO was their official referral site. Cagliotti proudly announced that in the first six months of 1975, CENARESO had received “1,425 youths, most of them boys between 16 and 21, prone to ‘rebel’ in some way or another.”⁸³

80. “El Primer Encuentro Nacional de la Familia,” *La Razón* (Buenos Aires), 26 Nov. 1974, p. 1.

81. “Peligro de dominación marxista,” *Boletín AICA* (Buenos Aires), 16 Oct. 1975, pp. 140–46, quote on p. 144.

82. Aureano, “La construcción politique.”

83. “Adolescencia y drogas,” *Actualidad Psicológica* (Buenos Aires), July 1975, pp. 1–3, quote on p. 3.

In making all consumption illegal and in reinforcing police monitoring over sites of youth social life, Law 20771 blurred the line between potential and “real” toxicómanos. In the summer of 1975, for example, the organization of owners of entertainment locales—concert stadiums and night clubs—wrote to the minister of the interior and the presidents of both chambers of Congress to complain about the Narcotics Division’s visits to their establishments. They pointed out that the police carried weapons when checking IDs and “frisked men and women alike” during drug searches. As a result, the businessmen concluded, their youth clientele now refrained from going out at night. The minister chastised the businessmen: “You may not give preference to your particular interests over the ones of the nation,” he wrote, since the “fight against drugs is one for the fatherland.”⁸⁴ Backed by political authorities and the new legislation, the Narcotics Division and, of course, any police officer had the power to monitor, harass, and imprison, especially in places frequented by young people.⁸⁵ Such was the experience of Emilio and Julián, two friends from the Greater Buenos Aires area who used to spend their evenings at a corner café. Although both occasionally smoked marijuana, neither had any when the police entered the café in late October 1975. “Long-haired and young, we were suspicious,” Julián recalled. They were taken to the police station along with another five young men, accused of violating both Article 6 of Law 20771 (drug possession) and the prohibition of public assembly (an offense associated with political militants after Martínez de Perón’s government decreed the state of siege in late 1974). Both spent only a night in prison, but they experienced significant physical mistreatment. “For us, young people with certain sensibility,” Emilio concludes, “the night had started to fall before the dictators came in.”⁸⁶

The articulation of the drug problem as one of national security was critical in the everyday lives of young people. By the mid-1970s, youth in Argentina epitomized cultural and political rebellion, and drug-related legislation and

84. “Cámara de empresarios de locales de expansión nocturna al Ministro del Interior,” Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Expedientes Generales, box 15, file 16610; “Ministro del Interior a la cámara de empresarios de locales de expansión nocturna,” Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires, Expedientes Generales, box 15, file 16204.

85. See, for example, “Redadas en Plaza Irlanda,” *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 15 Mar. 1975, p. 22; and, especially, “Drogas, los tentáculos de la corrupción,” *Siete Días* (Buenos Aires), 12 Dec. 1975, pp. 90–95, for an annual overview of police raids.

86. Emilio and Julián (born in 1956 and 1957, respectively, in Valentín Alsina, Lanús), interview by author, Buenos Aires, 23 Oct. 2013.

policies became one of the instruments for containing what conservative actors identified as chaos. Alongside legal changes, the repressive policies initiated in 1974 took on ever bloodier forms. Between 1974 and 1976, parapolice groups such as the Comando Libertadores de América and the Triple A intensified their activities. In a sort of division of labor, the regular security forces—the police and, from 1975 on, the military—led the assault against guerrilla groups, while parapolice forces focused on political militants. Parapolice organizations assassinated an estimated 900 people between late 1973 and early 1976, half the victims members of Peronist youth groups.⁸⁷ Young people, chiefly those whose political and cultural choices were at odds with the status quo, embodied the enemy within that the military dictatorship of March 1976 endeavored to crush.

Order and Security Start at Home

On March 24, 1976, in a climate the media dubbed chaotic, Argentina's long-predicted military coup d'état occurred. Many civilian institutions (the Catholic Church hierarchy, mainstream media, and business groups) openly endorsed the new regime, and broad segments of Argentinean society exhibited what scholars call "reactive consensus," a silent but real *carte blanche* for the military to do whatever was deemed necessary to "restore order" and guarantee national security.⁸⁸ In two related ways, order and national security were meant to start at home. First, transnational national security doctrines acquired distinct meanings when discussed and applied domestically. In Argentina, these ideologies gained their intelligibility and acceptance when they intersected with anxieties about specific groups of people, notably youth. In a widely known litany that won credibility during the 1970s, youth represented the weakest link of the national body, as they had been exposed to the dual forces of liberalism—in sexual and cultural mores—and Communism. To the motley team of experts, drugs were a conduit between cultural liberality and Communism. Second, as did many Argentines, such experts explained the roots of the social and political disorder they saw in terms of the dissolution of home life. They blamed the family as an institution for abandoning its duty to socialize the younger generation and for thus paving the way for the spread of subversion. A week after the coup d'état, new president General Jorge R. Videla (1976–1981) defined what the junta took for subversion: "It is not only planting bombs in the streets"

87. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Perón*, 216; García, *El drama*, 65.

88. On "reactive consensus," see Novaro and Palermo, *La dictadura militar*, 24–25.

but also “all social conflict, the struggle between parents and children.”⁸⁹ They deemed the restoration of principles of hierarchy and discipline crucial to defeating Argentina’s ubiquitous subversion, a project requiring the work of all who held positions of authority, including parents. Yet in the eyes of the new authorities, parents were failing; the state needed to step in as a surrogate father for youth.

CENARESO was one of the institutions that the state promoted as a surrogate father for youth tagged as toxicómanos. Ironically, in the second half of the 1970s, the team of psychologists at CENARESO heavily relied on one of the techniques most deprecated by conservatives, namely, psychoanalysis. Like most of their Argentine colleagues in private practice, these professionals conducted psychotherapy and used psychoanalysis as their interpretive lens. Doctors posited that addiction was symptomatic of a perversion of the desire for the mother, which prevented resolution of the Oedipal bond.⁹⁰ Psychologists and social workers alike systematized information on their patients’ family histories using a psychoanalytical framework rooted in patriarchal ideals of power. For example, a CENARESO team surveyed clinical histories to shed light on the family constellation of their patients. They detected a greater likelihood of addiction in families in which adults used legal drugs such as alcohol. Fifty percent of the young men who underwent treatment grew up in “poorly integrated families” in which “either literally or figuratively there is no paternal authority and few limits.”⁹¹ The CENARESO team took weakened patriarchal authority as key to explaining both the individual and collective attraction of young people to drugs, an assumption that replicated discourses about the restoration of order and discipline circulating in pro-regime circles. This might help explain the strange tolerance for psychoanalysis in a state institution. As Dr. Cagliotti even asserted in public lectures, CENARESO represented itself as a “father” for the young men, who he claimed were reborn under its treatment.⁹² By 1981 a total of 4,481 young men had undergone a full

89. “El primer mano a mano con el presidente,” *Gente* (Buenos Aires), 15 Apr. 1976, p. 4.
90. Bulacio, Cevasco, and Maeso, *De la drogadicción*, 67–70.

91. Equipo CENARESO, “Cuadernos del CENARESO no. 15: Familia y drogas,” 1976, Centro Nacional de Reeducción Social, Buenos Aires (hereafter cited as CENARESO); Licenciado Juan Luis González y Asistente Social Graciela Furia, “Cuadernos del CENARESO no. 21: Aspectos familiares y sociales del uso indebido de drogas en la Argentina,” 1977, CENARESO.

92. On the representations of CENARESO as a “father,” see “Sálvese quien quiera,” *Somos* (Buenos Aires), 1 Oct. 1976, p. 32; also Carlos Cagliotti, “Cuadernos del CENARESO no. 30: A quiénes y por qué tratamos,” 1978, CENARESO.

year of detoxification and therapy and had begun to leave the “surrogate father” who “reeducated” them in the principles of order and discipline.⁹³

The Narcotics Division conceived of youth in general as potential victims of toxicomanía and tried to project discipline in all spheres of youth life. This is well represented in the 1979 *Manual policial de la toxicomanía*, which was addressed not only to members of the division but also to police officers, so that they might “update their outlooks to face the new enemies.”⁹⁴ In interpreting an ever-growing evil, the *Manual* also pointed to sociocultural changes, particularly in the family. Though rejecting the Oedipal components of psychoanalytical explanations, the *Manual* blamed decreasing patriarchal authority for setting the cultural conditions for the younger generation’s “curiosity and experimentation” with drugs.⁹⁵ Since it linked toxicomanía to youth and positioned the police as “keeper of public morality and customs,” the *Manual* insisted on carrying out preventive tasks like surveillance of youth activities and bodies. The *Manual* devoted pages to the workings of different illegal substances and to ways of uncovering such substances in houses, plazas, and rock concert venues, as well as on young people and in their attire. It mandated that police officers meticulously investigate, search, and report every case without “losing sight that the young addict is a sick person rather than a criminal,” a rarely implemented ideal.⁹⁶

After the passage of Law 20771, police officers gained a legal weapon to imprison real or potential toxicómanos after finding—or planting—prohibited substances, even if these were for personal use. Incarceration statistics for the 1970s are lacking, and the few studies on the conditions in the penal system have focused on political rather than common prisoners. Studies agree, however, that military control of the penal system implied the reinforcement of psychological and physical torture and mistreatment for political and common prisoners alike.⁹⁷ Highlighting an extreme example of that violence, a recent study has reconstructed a dreadful event that took place in the seventh pavilion of Penal Unit 2, in Buenos Aires. On the morning of March 14, 1978, after an apparent minor scuffle between a prisoner and a prison guard, the authorities carried out a massive and particularly violent raid in the pavilion that included tear gas and gunfire. Yet the prisoners collectively expelled the guards and set mattresses on fire to prevent their reentry. From the outside, the guards locked the doors and

93. Equipo CENARESO, “Cuadernos del CENARESO no. 52: Actualización de las tendencias del uso indebido de drogas,” 1982, CENARESO, pp. 17–19.

94. *Manual policial*, ix.

95. *Ibid.*, 27–31, quote on 30.

96. *Ibid.*, 260–74, quote on 269.

97. Barberis, “Testimonios”; D’Antonio and Eidelman, “El sistema penitenciario.”

continued shooting at prisoners. Sixty-four common prisoners died, at least seven of whom were sentenced for drug-related offenses. They included Ariel Colavini (aged 22), detained in late 1977 for possessing two joints of marijuana; Horacio Santonin and Pablo Menta (aged 19 and 26, respectively), imprisoned for falsifying a medical prescription for amphetamines; and Luis María Canosa, Germán Jascalevich, and Gian Piero Gambarella (aged 23, 24, and 25, respectively), detained in March 1978 for smoking marijuana.⁹⁸ These types of youth offenses illustrate the sort of drug war carried out by Argentine authorities. The tragic end of these young people illustrates one possible fate for the real or presumed toxicómanos in times of state terrorism.

In testimony from 1984, one self-identified drug addict recalled that he was detained several times during the previous decade for drug-related offenses and that he was “treated as a criminal, beaten, and tortured.”⁹⁹ The words used in his testimony resonate with the findings of the National Commission on Disappeared People, which after the transition to democratic rule in 1983 investigated the functioning of the 340 clandestine detention centers established by the security forces throughout the country during the military regime. The commission’s famous 1984 report, *Nunca Más*, clearly established, whatever controversies ensued about numbers, that kidnapping, detention, torture, and assassination were the key mechanisms of state terror. The report also found that whatever their occupation, 69 percent of the disappeared were between 16 and 30 years old at the time they were kidnapped.¹⁰⁰ That same year, Dr. Elías Neuman, a lawyer who defended drug offenders and subsequently gathered the testimonies of former drug addicts, was among the first professionals to note that the youth identified as addicts suffered similar mistreatment at the hands of state institutions supposedly dedicated to reconstituting order.

By the mid-1980s, however, wide segments of Argentines thought that it was possible and desirable to rethink the drug problem, thanks in part to its association with authoritarian projects. During the short political democratic spring that followed the election of Raúl Alfonsín as president in 1983, a range of cultural and political actors as well as known medical experts applied the terms of democracy to the discussion of the drug problem. As part of a broader opening of Argentina’s culture after years of repression and censorship, some voices openly called for legalizing marijuana. The countercultural magazine *Cerdos y Peces*, for example, campaigned for the legalization of

98. Cesaroni, *Masacre*, 190–92, 228, 300.

99. “Pablo,” in Neuman, *Diálogos*, 189–90.

100. Argentina, National Commission on Disappeared People, *Nunca Más*, 285. For new estimates, see García, *El drama*, 500, 504.

marijuana.¹⁰¹ Unlike their leftist predecessors from a decade earlier, the youth branches of several Trotskyist parties in the 1980s also promoted marijuana legalization.¹⁰² Equally important, the press registered the changing perceptions of toxicological experts, who had become more aware of the political manipulation of the figure of the toxicómano. Drs. Santiago Calabrese, from FAT, and Carlos Cagliotti, from CENARESO, advocated combining the health and educational systems to prevent adolescents from engaging in drug use. Both advised parents and teachers on the need of “reading signs” in adolescents’ behaviors to detect potential addictions, but Calabrese emphasized that the “sign reading” should not impose a “repressive solution” that ended by “cutting off all creativity and imposing homogeneity under the banner of the ‘don’t get involved’ [*no te metas*] slogan.”¹⁰³ That slogan was a catchphrase for rising criticism of the complicity between broad segments of civil society and the former military regime. In this way, Dr. Calabrese tried to dissociate his preventive medicine from authoritarianism.

The debates around authoritarianism and democracy filtered into legal decisions about drugs as well. As Elías Neuman recognized, between 1974 and 1984 there were some judges who consistently questioned in practice Article 6 of Law 20771, which mandated imprisonment and/or rehabilitation for personal-use drug possession.¹⁰⁴ These judges updated an old ideological and political debate on the role of the state as arbiter of individual actions and decisions, a debate that came center stage in 1986 during the Bazterrica case. Gustavo Bazterrica was the guitarist of one of the most important rock bands of the 1980s, Los Abuelos de la Nada. Detained for violating Article 6, Bazterrica was condemned by a judge to a year in prison. His lawyer tried to politicize the case and petitioned to have Article 6 declared unconstitutional. In 1986 the Supreme Court struck down the law. In a contentious verdict, Dr. Enrique Petracchi of the majority argued that “in our society where, as a consequence of the recent past, habits of conduct, ways of thinking, and authoritarian cultural forms have been enthroned . . . no less essential than struggling against the proliferation of drugs is asserting the conception, written in our Constitution, by which the State cannot and should not impose life ideals onto the individuals,

101. Enrique Symns, “Despenalizar la marihuana,” *Cerdos y Peces* (Buenos Aires), Aug. 1983, p. 2 (supplement, *El Porteño*).

102. “Fumo sí, narcos no,” *El Porteño* (Buenos Aires), May 1988, pp. 14–15.

103. Dionisia Fontán, “Juventud y droga: Mirar sin prejuicios,” *El Periodista de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires), 17 Nov. 1984, pp. 48–49. See also “El tabú de la droga,” *Cerdos y Peces* (Buenos Aires), Sept. 1983, p. 4.

104. “La droga López Rega,” *El Periodista de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires), 18 Jan. 1985, p. 48.

but offer the framework of liberties for them to choose.”¹⁰⁵ The 1986 *Bazterrica* case, as it came to be known, illustrated a commitment to revamping Argentine society along democratic, liberal lines and against remnants of political and cultural authoritarianism.

However, like the postdictatorial spring, the drive to frame drug policy and legislation into a liberal democratic mindset was fleeting. The authoritarian bloc regained momentum in connection with the changing economic and political imperatives of Alfonsín’s presidency. In late 1985, during his first encounter with Ronald Reagan, Alfonsín stated his disapproval of US involvement in Nicaragua but, ironically, his approval of the escalating war on drugs. According to Jaime Malamud-Goti, Alfonsín’s former foreign policy aide, the endorsement of Reagan’s drug war, including intervention against Bolivian coca fields, was tied to the approval of a US economic aid package to pay off Argentina’s external debt. Economic aid, Malamud-Goti wrote, was linked to the implementation of specific drug policies. He also noted that, given the other problems facing Alfonsín’s administration (rising inflation, the external debt, and the political trials of military leaders, to mention a few), it hardly considered drug issues a top priority.¹⁰⁶ However, Alfonsín’s formal subscription to a militant drug policy encouraged others in his political party to promote even harsher legislation. Representative Lorenzo Cortese led the vanguard. Hoping to stem trafficking by deterring personal use, Dr. Cortese crafted new narcotics legislation to again increase penalties for consumption. As the media again indulged in a campaign that linked youth, crime, and drugs, he gained the support of a wing of the Peronist party.¹⁰⁷ That campaign was still one more sign of the swift rightward shift of Alfonsín’s presidency.

Conclusion

The creation of a drug problem in Cold War Argentina intersected with a broader authoritarian project that targeted youth as the epitome of cultural and

105. Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación, “Bazterrica Gustavo Mario / Sobre tenencia de estupefacientes,” *Boletín de Fallos* (Buenos Aires), 29 Aug. 1986, p. 1392. The court’s position has been reaffirmed in August 2009, when it again voided drug possession laws. See Transnational Institute, “Argentina’s Supreme Court ‘Arriola’ Ruling on the Possession of Drugs for Personal Consumption,” *Drugs and Democracy* (blog), 1 Sept. 2009, <http://www.tni.org/article/argentinas-supreme-court-arriola-ruling-possession-drugs-personal-consumption>.

106. Malamud-Goti, *Humo y espejos*.

107. “Drogas, se viene la noche,” *El Porteño* (Buenos Aires), Sept. 1988, pp. 48–49.

political disorder. Unlike other countries where, in the first half of the twentieth century, the construction of the addict was interwoven with the governance of sexual and gendered disorders, and unlike 1920s and 1930s Argentina, where upper-class young men and female sex workers became identified as toxicómanos, in Cold War Argentina the main targets were middle- and, to a lesser extent, working-class young men. In the prohibitionist wave of the 1970s, new antidrug legislation and institutions were geared to contain seemingly unruly youth and were tied into a broader conservative project of building a security state. In this respect, the Argentine version of the war on drugs was from the onset part of a larger process of implementing national security doctrines. That project arose before the Videla military dictatorship and persisted beyond the transition to formal democratic rule. From different institutional quarters, doctors, police officers, military think tanks, and politicians across the ideological spectrum appropriated the transnational discourse of drug war to confront specifically the users of illicit drugs. One former DEA agent stationed in Buenos Aires in the late 1970s recalled that he could barely get local police help for his main mission of stopping trafficking on the Bolivian border. Instead, Argentine police forces seemed more intent on harassing minor offenders, such as the seven youths who died in the 1978 penal massacre.¹⁰⁸ Unlike antidrug policy in other South American countries such as Peru, Bolivia, or Colombia, the Argentine version of the war on drugs was peculiar in its target—youth, whose lifestyle choices had a visible impact on family, cultural politics, and political culture. The war on drugs served a broad politico-cultural authoritarian project whose goal was to restore the principles of order and discipline to Argentine society at large. While that overarching goal largely failed, the authoritarian project succeeded in turning drugs into a lasting issue in Argentine politics.

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108. Levine, *Big White Lie*.

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