

**The Disappearance of the Neighborhood Assembly Movement in Buenos Aires,**

**Argentina 2001-2004: A Phase of Demobilization?**

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## I. Introduction

Since the 1960's social movements have become an important part of the international political landscape.<sup>1</sup> In some advanced industrialized societies, social movements have become so commonplace that it has been suggested that they are now part of the conventional repertoire of political participation<sup>2</sup>. Many social movements have attempted to influence traditional political institutions, and in some cases they have successfully led to drastic restructuring of the political sphere or even to revolutions. In other cases, movements that seemed promising at first quickly lost strength and disappeared. Why? Much has been written on why social movements appear, but less information is available on why movements fade away. In order to better understand how some movements can be sustained, we must also study why others have declined.

An interesting opportunity to probe the question of “why do some seemingly powerful social movements suddenly decline?” can be found in the Neighborhood Assembly movement that erupted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the early twenty-first century and then vanished almost as rapidly as it arose. This nation-wide movement of autonomous, democratically-controlled neighborhood councils and community centers appeared along with several other social movements during a cycle of protest that began in Argentina in the late 1990s. The movement appeared in 2001 at the peak of the cycle, during a political and economic crisis of monumental proportions.

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<sup>1</sup> McAdam, Doug, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, eds. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds. 1998. *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

The assemblies were immensely popular and the movement swelled in size and reputation throughout early 2002. At their peak popularity, a poll by a local paper showed that one of every three citizens in Buenos Aires had participated in either a meeting or one of the movement's activities.<sup>3</sup> The assemblies gained international recognition for their consensus-based decision-making structure, high levels of citizen involvement, and community-building activities. However, within only two years they had all but disappeared. Today only a handful continue to operate in the capital.

The assemblies had many roles in Argentine society. They sprang up following an economic crisis that shattered the daily lives of families and individuals, crashed many parts of the middle class into poverty, and made most citizens of Buenos Aires experience a sensation of vulnerability that they had not felt since democracy had been consolidated in the country at the end of the twentieth century, following years of dictatorial rule. Citizen trust in the governmental power-holders gradually evaporated before turning, almost overnight, into a complete rejection of any claims that the budding democratic institutions were operating with the good of the people in mind. In the streets, and without work or any sense of stability, citizens were feeling betrayed and disempowered. The assemblies worked to take the power out of the hands of the corrupt government official and put it back in the hands of the citizens. They offered a way for disenfranchised individuals to connect across class or party lines and help each other in a time of need. They gave the citizens of each neighborhood a place to speak, be heard, and

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<sup>3</sup> Triguboff, Matias. *Cuando Buenos Aires Parecía una gran asamblea: procesos sociales y prácticas políticas tras la crisis de 2001*. Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Buenos Aires 2008.

have a concrete impact on the ways that the future of their neighborhood would unfold, without the interference or assistance of governmental organizations.

The disappearance of the assemblies is fascinating because it occurred so rapidly despite the high levels of popularity and citizen participation. It is also interesting because it had been promoted by both the Argentine community and international spectators as an important new form of truly democratic politics that could serve as a replacement to the traditional methods of political participation in Argentina, which had previously been limited to unions and political parties. For the movement to end abruptly demonstrates that the high expectations for this vision of politics were misplaced, that the movement itself was not strong enough to resist the forces that eventually led to its dissipation, or some combination of these factors.

Disappearance of social movements has been discussed by many theorists. This work will examine the disappearance of the assembly movement through the theories of Sydney Tarrow, while also serving to evaluate the usefulness of his theories for explaining this case. As previously mentioned, the assembly movement appeared at the peak of a cycle of contention in Argentina. According to Tarrow, a leading proponent of protest cycle theory, these cycles occur in two parts: a Mobilization Phase and a Phase of Demobilization. In his famous work *Power in Movement (2003)*, Tarrow asserts that the end of a movement is marked by three sets of causal factors. These include 1) exhaustion of movement members, leading to member withdrawal and subsequent internal polarization 2) disputes within the movement over the use of violence, paired with the institutionalization of more moderate sectors, and, 3) repression of the movement by the

State along with State facilitation of some movement demands.<sup>4</sup> Together, these factors contribute to the fragmentation, weakening, and eventual decline of a social movement. If Tarrow's theory is correct, it can help explain the reasons that the assembly movement disappeared.

This work will serve three overarching tasks: First, it will explore the circumstances that led to the disappearance of the assembly movement to help explain how the movement could lose significance so rapidly. It will also test the strength of Tarrow's theory. To do this accurately, Tarrow's overarching theory of a Phase of Demobilization is broken down into three smaller theories and each piece is tested on its own by comparing the predictions of the theory with the actual circumstances that impacted the assemblies. For reasons of simplicity, in this work the three theories are given the same titles given to them by Tarrow in *Power and Movement*. They are "Exhaustion and Polarization", "Violence and Institutionalization", and "Facilitation and Repression". Each theory is described in detail and outlined at the start of each section of analysis.

Lastly, steps will be taken to address any discrepancies in Tarrow's model as applied to the assembly movement, and refinement will be made to the theory to better represent the reasons for the movement's decline. The goal of these refinements is to create a more specific theory that students of political science can use when analyzing movements with characteristics similar to the assemblies to predict and understand what factors contribute to their decline.

This investigation uncovered sufficient evidence to support the argument that the decline of the assembly movement was representative of a cycle of contention coming to

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<sup>4</sup> Tarrow 48

an end. Exhaustion of some assembly members led to withdrawal, and moderate members pulled out of the movement sooner, returned to traditional politics, and were co-opted by state agencies. This caused radicalization in some assemblies and made them less likely to interact with other moderate social movement organizations, which alienated them and further undermined the movement.

Additionally, internal polarization of the assemblies based on a variety of factors meant that they could not continue over time as a single functioning movement. Even though the assemblies originally seemed united under their rejection of traditional methods of politics, the concept of the anti-political was not actually a unifying aspect of the movement and quickly dissipated once traditional political institutions had met some of the movement's immediate demands.

The factionalization over ideological stances was furthered by successful partial institutionalization of the movement, as many members reneged on their anti-institutional stance and were co-opted by the political parties, such as the Workers Party and the Communist Party, who saw the assembly movement as an untapped resource of potential activists, and also by the participation of assembly members in the 2003 presidential election. While additional attempts by the state to institutionalize the movement through a decentralization program aimed at drawing assembly members into local government planning offices, called *Centros de Gestión y Participación*, were unsuccessful, these attempts added to pre-existing disputes within some assemblies, further weakening the cohesiveness of the movement.

State facilitation of movement demands, such as calls to unfreeze savings accounts of the middle class, was also one of the leading causes for movement decline.

After taking office, President Kirchner also followed through on campaign promises to clean up the judiciary and armed forces, work with human rights organizations, and lower the unemployment rate, all of which were important to the middle-class members of the assemblies. This helped him to re-legitimize the traditional political institutions and made the assembly movement largely irrelevant in the political sphere.

Two of Tarrow's theories, 'Exhaustion and Polarization', and 'Facilitation and Repression', were accurate for predicting how the actions of the state and the internal dynamics of the movement would lead to its decline. However, his theory of 'Violence and Institutionalization' has several weaknesses in this case. First, it is overly deterministic in that it assumes that all movements contain at least one sector predisposed to violence. Secondly, it assumes that institutionalization of a movement and the use of radical action is always separate, which does not allow for situations where confrontational methods are used by institutionalized sectors. While most of the causal factors outlined by Tarrow were found during the decline of the movement, internal disputes over the use of violence were barely present at all and were not sufficient to have serious consequences. Confrontational actions took place in the form of building occupations and, contrary to Tarrow's predictions; these tactics were employed by institutionalized sectors of the movement as well as autonomous ones.

Modification of this theory makes it more specific so that it better explains the situation in Argentina during the decline for the assembly movement. A new theory is proposed which states that the use of violence is unlikely in movements with a homogenous constituency of middle-class members. The theory also states that the use of confrontational tactics is not limited to autonomous sectors of a movement. This new

theory more accurately explains the way that the assembly movement declined and can be applied to other middle-class social movements with homogenous constituencies.

### **a. Methodology**

Owing to the historical character of this work-which seeks to explain the reasons for the decline of a movement that is nearly non-existent today- the majority of the investigation relied on articles and historical accounts. Case studies performed by other social scientists and anthropologists while the assemblies were still a strong presence in Buenos Aires were also used. In addition to the historical and academic investigation of the assemblies, field research was done in Buenos Aires between September and December, 2009. The author visited two assemblies that still function in the capital and interviewed some of their members. One member of the assembly movement that withdrew as the movement began to decline was also interviewed to help provide insight into why some members decided to leave their assemblies.

There were some shortcomings of the investigation process that should be mentioned. Primarily, it was difficult to find direct contacts with ex-assembly members during the field-research portion of this investigation. Also, because of the brevity of the field-research, it was difficult to interview as many people as would have been ideal for getting a holistic understanding of why some people chose to leave while a few decided to continue participating in the movement.

## **b. Layout of the Work**

This study is broken into eight sections. In the first section, a brief history of Argentina will be given. After a description of the country and population, a short explanation of important political moments in the mid to late twentieth century will help provide context for the reader to better understand the case. It will also describe the crisis in 2001 that led to the massive mobilizations on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001 from which the assembly movement was born.

In the second section, cycles of protest will be discussed. First, an explanation of the components of a protest cycle will be offered, drawing from the theory presented by Sidney Tarrow in *Power and Movement* (2003). This is followed by an illustration of cycles of protest in Argentina in the late 1990s, including the last cycle that brought forth the assembly movement. The third section will describe the assembly movement. This will give a brief description of how the movement first came together following the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001. It will also outline the main characteristics of the assemblies as well as their main mobilization tactics and activities. The next three sections are an examination of the decline of the assembly movement and an analysis of Tarrow's theory of the Phase of Demobilization. Each section deals with one part of Tarrow's three part general theory. Section four is an examination of 'Exhaustion and Polarization' within the movement. Section five is an analysis of 'Violence and Institutionalization'. Finally, section six is an assessment of 'State Repression and Facilitation'. Each section begins with a description of Tarrow's theory and what we should expect to find if that theory is accurate. Then, evidence from the assembly movement is scrutinized to either support Tarrow's claims or highlight areas that need further refinement.

Section seven is dedicated to refinement of Tarrow's theory on Violence and Institutionalization. The theory is found to have several areas in need of refinement. Specifically is too deterministic and does not account for institutionalized sectors of the movement resorting to confrontational protest tactics. A new theory is proposed that offers a class-based explanation for the actions of the assembly movement and allows for the use of confrontational tactics by institutionalized sectors. Section eight provides a short conclusion, and section nine explains what lessons have been learned through this investigation and what areas still require more future research. Lastly, section ten is a short reflection by the author on the significance of the assembly movement for its members and for Argentine society at large.

## **Section II. History of Argentina**

### **A. Overview and Dictatorship**

Argentina is a large Latin American country located in the southernmost region of South America. It has a population of nearly forty-one million people, the majority of whom are descendents from European immigrants, particularly from Italy and Spain. Though it is one of the more industrialized countries in the southern hemisphere, owing to wealth it received from its abundance of natural resources, it has also been wrought with economic and social problems throughout the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most distinguishing events of twentieth-century for Argentina was the military dictatorship that ruled the country with an iron fist between 1976 and 1983. The dictatorship came to power following an economic crisis and the fall from grace of

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<sup>5</sup> CIA *World Factbook* 2010

President Isabel Peron, the wife of Argentina's beloved populist leader of the 1940s and 50s. After taking power in the midst of political calamity, the military undertook a program to eradicate any dissenting members of the populace and tighten state control over all aspects of society. Many members of the opposition, mainly leftist students and known progressives, were abducted, tortured, and never seen again. The victims were known as the "desaparacidos," ("the disappeared") because their bodies were never found.

With time, the military government began to lose power and legitimacy despite the culture of fear spread throughout society. This was expedited by the loss of the Malvinas-Falkland islands war and the inability of the government to solve large scale economic problems despite the implementation of strict neoliberal reforms. At this time social movements focusing on the human rights abuses began to appear, mobilize against the government, and gain popularity. By 1983 the military had lost its hold on power and was forced to hold elections. From this dark time in Argentine history came the strong presence of human rights organizations which continue to push for justice and have played an important part in other movements throughout the country, including the assembly movement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marco, Graciela, et al. *Movimientos Sociales en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Jorge Baudino Ediciones, 2003.

## **B. Reforms of the 1990s and the Crisis of 2001**

The crisis in 2001 that led to the formation of the assembly movement was preceded by many years of economic insecurity and structural reform. Following his election in 1989, President Carlos Menem implemented a plan of economic stabilization based on the Washington Consensus<sup>7</sup> with the intent of solving problems of rampant hyperinflation. In 1991 the Argentine peso was pegged to the US dollar at a rate of 1 to 1 in an attempt to encourage international investment and modernize productive sectors to make the country more competitive on the global market.<sup>8</sup>

Strong state intervention through the implementation of structural reforms such as reform of the welfare system and opening the domestic market up for foreign investment was able to temporarily control hyperinflation. Argentina briefly experienced economic growth, increased rates of foreign investment and stabilization of the market. At the same time, the quest for economic prosperity also led to the increased levels of corruption at the state level despite official rhetoric that the reforms would reduce corruption. As Roberta Villalón explains

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<sup>7</sup> The Washington Consensus is a term used to describe a prescription for economic reform based on the ideas of John Williamson. Williamson argued the developing countries that needed to stabilize and grow their economies should, among other things, privatize state-owned industries, encourage economic investment, practice fiscal policy discipline and reduce barriers to market-entry.

<sup>8</sup> , Ana. "¡Que se Vayan Todos! Popular Insurrection and the Asambleas Barriales in Argentina." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 22.2 (2003):88. Ana Dinerstein provides an in-depth explanation of the financial situation that led up to the crisis and the popular insurrection in December of 2001. She specifically focuses on the negative impacts of the neoliberal reforms implemented by the Menem administration. Her study also analyzes the neighborhood assemblies as a representation of a new form of politics, one which she refers to as "negative-politics". See: Dinerstein and Dinerstein, Ana. "Here Is The Rose, Dance Here! A Riposte to the Debate on the Argentina Crisis." *Historical Materialism* 16 (2008): 101-14.

“while government officials, international financial institutions ,and multilateral lending agencies stressed the relevance of ending corrupt practices, state negotiations with foreign investors during the privatization process and day-to-day political activities at every level of government were blatantly based on illegal deals, corruption, favoritism and clientelism.”<sup>9</sup>

Sweeping policies of reform were carried out using “emergency legislation” that gave the government far-reaching powers outside the realm of the normal democratic process. These reforms included “the privatization of the 93 state-owned enterprises, industrial subsidies, the deregulation of financial and labour markets, the flexibilization of productivity, the reduction of employers’ contributions to union welfare funds and social security, the marketization of health, social security and work accidents insurance.”<sup>10</sup>

Though the reforms were successful in the interim at increasing foreign investment and economic growth, over time these reforms led to increased levels of unemployment, poverty, uneven development between regions, and recession. In less than a decade, a growing number of people were left unemployed and without any type of protection from the state or other organizations.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the 1990s, Argentina’s had incurred a huge debt through its new focus on international trade. As Ana Dinerstein explains,

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<sup>9</sup>Villalón, Roberta. "Neoliberalism, Corruption and Legacies of Contention: Argentina's Social movements, 1993-2000." *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (2007): 141 Roberta Villalón is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Texas and has undertaken a well-researched and very interesting study of social movements in Argentina from 1993-2006. Villalón specifically focuses on neighborhood assemblies, graffiti protests, road-blocks, town revolts, pot-banging as a protest strategy and barter clubs, which were informal alternative networks of trade that arose following the crisis.

<sup>10</sup> Dinerstein 189

<sup>11</sup> Villalón 147

“. . . The private sector produced a deficit in the generation of foreign currency for the country . . . with their commercial and financial transactions with the world. The negative balance was covered by the public sector which indebted itself to cover the difference and thus accumulate reserves to expand domestic credit. This indicates that the state, following the advice of the IMF, financed the flight of capital abroad. . . only 30 cents of every dollar that entered the country constituted direct investment, and only 10 cents out of the 30 served to increase the productive capacity of the Argentine economy.”<sup>12</sup>

Not only was the country still unstable, it was also bankrupt and paying the bill with public funds. The supposed ‘stability’ that the economic reforms should have promoted was not visible to the general public, and the increased levels of corruption that accompanied these reforms demonstrated the Argentine populace “the progressive abandonment of democracy and politics as a means of social improvement towards a form of politics which reified capital and the market at the expenses of democracy, leading to the legalization of instability, uncertainty and fear.”<sup>13</sup> By 1999, when the de la Rúa administration stepped into office, this unstable economic situation meant that unsatisfied and increasingly unemployed Argentine citizens were becoming more emboldened, and willing to express their discontent against the system that was failing them.

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<sup>12</sup> Dinerstein 190

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

## The Crisis of 2001

The unstable economic and political situation reached its peak in 2001 in the second year in the De La Rúa administration, when a flight of foreign capital left the country all but bankrupt. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, Argentines responded to the crisis by pulling almost 4 billion pesos (\$1.3 billion US) from their bank accounts in an attempt to salvage their savings while the economy crashed.<sup>14</sup> The government responded by freezing all savings accounts in an action known as “*el corralito*” (literally “*the little corral.*”) This meant that each citizen could not withdraw more than the equivalent of \$250 US per week from accounts. The middle class was strongly affected and, for the first time in recent Argentine history, joined the working class citizens and the poor in the streets to express their discontent.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001 were marked by massive anti-state mobilizations in the streets of the capital, Buenos Aires. The weeks prior to the protests were marked by widespread lootings in supermarkets and businesses as well as roadblocks on major transport routes all around the country. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, tens of thousands of citizens marched to the center of the city, chanting and banging on pots and pans.<sup>15</sup> Within forty-eight hours, 30 people had been killed during violent confrontations between the police and protestors.<sup>16</sup> In the midst of the chaos, President

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<sup>14</sup> "The events that triggered Argentina's crisis." *BBC News* [London] 21 Dec. 2001.

<sup>15</sup> These marches from various neighborhoods to the center of the city ( called the Plaza de Mayo) while banging on pots were later named “carcerolazos” and were a hallmark of the social movements that arose after the crisis.

<sup>16</sup> During these two days, fights between police and protestors led to the death of six civilians and produced a strong confrontation force (Dinerstein 192). Extremists confronted the police “waiting in certain streets, creating barricades, while they threw Molotov cocktails at banks.” (Rossi 2005: 78) This was seen as part of a grander anti-systemic fight by radicals who saw the crisis of 2001 as a pre-revolutionary situation. This

De La Rúa resigned and during the following two weeks, three other presidents had been sworn in and replaced in rapid succession.<sup>17</sup> The traditional political institutions had lost all legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the power vacuum that was created in the wake of the protests created the space for the assemblies and other social movements to form.

### **Section III. Appearance and Characteristics of the Assembly Movement**

#### **A. Appearance of the Assembly Movement**

The assemblies appeared following the outpouring of social unrest of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December as members of various communities realized the need for some type of organization amidst the chaos in the city.<sup>18</sup> Within a few days, citizens of each neighborhood began to gather frequently- sometimes daily- in public places such as parks and street corners calling their meetings *asambleas*, or assemblies.<sup>19</sup> The assemblies were

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small sect of radicals, espousing Marxist ideology, believed that they could organize an anti-government force throughout the country through the use of violence and extreme tactics. However, this revolution never materialized and soon afterward the revolutionary sects ceased the use of extremism.

<sup>17</sup> Triguboff, Matias. Cuando Buenos Aires Parecía una gran asamblea: procesos sociales y prácticas políticas tras la crisis de 2001. Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Buenos Aires 2008.

Matías Triguboff is a professor at the University of Buenos Aires who spent several years studying the assembly movement between 2001-2004. He has written numerous articles on the assemblies in his anthropological work and wrote his doctoral thesis on them as well.

<sup>18</sup> Rossi, Federico. "Aparición, auge y declinación de un movimiento social: Las asambleas vecinales y populares de Buenos Aires, 2001-2003." *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 78 (2005): 76

<sup>19</sup> Triguboff 2008

most prominent in the capital of Buenos Aires, but also could be found in other parts of the country, such as in the cities Cordoba and Santa Fe.

The number of participants in the initial meetings ranged from 50 to 100 per assembly, but over the following weeks the average number per assembly increased to 200 - 300 people were attending weekly gatherings. Some neighborhoods were forced to break their assemblies up into several, smaller gatherings in order to better function. Ignacio Ivancich, long-time member of the Plaza Dorrego assembly explained that the neighborhood of San Telmo saw such an interest after the first few meetings that hundred of individuals were coming together every week in the large public square in the middle of the neighborhood. Shortly thereafter, the large meeting broke into three separate assemblies, which all operated in the area. The assemblies broke up according to location but also in accordance with the ideological values of the members- those that wanted to be completely independent of the parties joined one assembly, while party loyalists joined another.<sup>20</sup> By March of 2002, when more than 120 assemblies were meeting each week in Buenos Aires, the average number of attendants at each gathering was closer to 50 people.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ivancich, Ignacio. Personal Interview. 19 Nov. 2009. Ignacio Ivancich is a member of the Plaza Dorrego assembly, one of the few assemblies that continues to operate today in the capital of Buenos Aires. Ivancich was active in the movement since the very start, and watched the formation of several different assemblies within his neighborhood of San Telmo. Information from Ivancich was taken from a personal interview performed by the author in Buenos Aires during October of 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Triguboff 2008

## B. Activities and Characteristics of the Assemblies

It is difficult to speak about the assemblies as a homogenous group, since each assembly had its own distinct composition and activities, but there are some common characteristics that were present in the majority of cases. These included their status as active participants in their communities, their socioeconomic composition and their method for decision-making.<sup>22</sup>

The assemblies were active in the development of their communities. Members met daily or weekly to discuss the economic crisis and the *corralito* (literally “the little corral”) and to plan weekly mobilizations against the State. After realizing the negative impacts that the crisis was having on their neighborhoods, they began to organize free community kitchens, classes, nurseries and other needs-based services in their communities. The assemblies also participated in the protest actions of other social movements such as participation in the human rights movement, the factory takeover movement and the unemployed workers movement.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, some assemblies began to establish their own spaces within buildings, some of which were taken through illegal occupation of vacated spaces. With this, the assemblies took on more ambitious projects including productive enterprises such as community bakeries.

The middle-class composition of the assemblies is also one of their defining characteristics of this movement; it has been recognized that assemblies did not appear in

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<sup>22</sup> Dinerstein 194

<sup>23</sup> Marco, Graciela, et al. *Movimientos Sociales en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Jorge Baudino Ediciones, 2003.

the poorest neighborhoods of the city.<sup>24</sup> The participation of the middle class in this movement is important to note, as members of middle and upper sectors of Argentine society have traditionally restricted political involvement to conventional methods of public participation while working classes have been more prone to take to the street. However, while the assembly movement was primarily a middle-class movement, there were some members of other social classes present. Furthermore, for much of their existence the assemblies worked in solidarity with movements of the lower classes, and the ability of the assemblies to bring together individuals of different social classes was considered by some observers to be one of their most revolutionary characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

The political composition of the assemblies was originally quite heterogeneous. It included individuals without any previous political experience outside of mandatory voting, as well as independents, revolutionaries and weathered veterans of the traditional political parties.<sup>26</sup> The assemblies also had a strong presence of women's voices, which was unusual in a culture where women are traditionally marginalized into more conventional gender roles.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the democratic process used by of the assemblies has been spoken of as one of their most notable traits of this movement. Each assembly used methods of direct democracy to make decisions about actions and objectives. The non-hierarchical and

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<sup>24</sup> Villalón 146

<sup>25</sup> Dinerstein 194

<sup>26</sup> Triguboff 2008

<sup>27</sup> The assemblies were actually a very empowering place for women. Argentina is known for its male-dominant culture, and men are still the main decision-makers in the private sphere. The consensus-based decision-making model used by the assemblies, and the general sense of equality and equal participation meant that for many women it was a comfortable place to speak out, be heard, and get respect. Some women also felt that the assembly movement was a safe way to enter into a political activity even without previous experience in the political realm. For more information on the inclusion of women in the assemblies see: Briones, Claudia, and Marcela Mendoza. *Urban Middle-Class Women's Responses to Political Crisis in Buenos Aires*. University of Memphis Center for Research on Women, 2003. y Marco, Graciela, et al. *Movimientos Sociales en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Jorge Baudino Ediciones, 2003. Pg 55

consensus-based decision-making model was known as *horizontalidad*, or “horizontalism”, with each assembly member holding the same amount of power as every other.<sup>28</sup> This theme of egalitarian participation was one of the characteristics that established a distinction between the assemblies and the traditional methods of political and social participation that were dominant in Buenos Aires prior to the crisis.

### **C. The Interbarrial Assembly**

The assemblies used the same norms of democratic participation in the formation of the Asamblea Interbarrial (Inter-neighborhood Assembly) in March of 2002. The Interbarrial brought all the assemblies of Buenos Aires together in one place- Centenario Park- in an attempt to organize the assemblies into a single, cohesive movement.<sup>29</sup> In their monthly meetings between 1500 and 3500 people debated over the objectives of the movement, its identity, and their mobilization strategies.

Decision making followed the same democratic model used in the assemblies, and shortly after its formation the Interbarrial had agreed on four concrete demands for the state: “resignation of the members of the supreme court, the end of the *corralito*, new presidential elections and non-payment of the external debt.”<sup>30</sup> As we will see shortly, the Interbarrial experienced many problems soon after its formation and will serve as a good focal point to demonstrate some of the largest problems within the movement.

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<sup>28</sup> Sitrin, Marina. *Horizontalidad*. Buenos Aires: Chilavert, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Rossi 2005: 208

<sup>30</sup> Thieberger, Mariano. "Asambleas barriales: del furor por la militancia a la dispersión." *Clarín* [Buenos Aires] 15 Dec. 2002.

## **Section IV. Cycles of Protest**

Several authors and analysts have successfully argued that Argentina began a cycle of protest in the 1990s that led to the birth of various new social movements, including the assemblies.<sup>31</sup> In this section, the characteristics of cycles of protest will be explained so that the reader may better understand this social movement theory, and how it relates to the Argentine case.

Sidney Tarrow, one of the leading experts on protest cycle theory, describes protest cycles, or 'cycles of contention' in his newest work *Power and Movement* as "a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system."<sup>32</sup> A cycle contains five distinct characteristics that can be seen from its birth to its fruition. These are: 1) a rapid diffusion of protest from active to less active sectors (such as from cities to the countryside), 2) new forms of contention developing at a rapid pace, 3) new or changing frames for collective action, 4) participation through both organized and unorganized outlets, and, 5) a heightened level of interaction and conflict between mobilized sectors and the authorities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This stance has been taken by Marco and Graciela in their book *Movimientos Sociales en la Argentina* (2003) as well as by Roberta Villalón in her work on the assemblies. It has also been argued that Argentina actually experienced two different cycles of protest in the 1990s. Marco, et al explain that the first cycle began in the early 1990s as a response to the neoliberal economic reforms undertaken by the Menem administration. Another work by Maria Rose Herrera is very comprehensive in demonstrating this first cycle. She performs an analysis of Argentina protest occurring outside of traditional methods of participation at the end of the century and provides a more detailed description of how the cycle occurred. However, neither set of authors explains the end of this cycle, and they note that the second cycle (which led to the assembly movement) was built off the first. For more on the first cycle of contention, see : Marco, Graciela, et al. *Movimientos Sociales en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Jorge Baudino Ediciones, 2003. pg 14-17 and Rose Herrera, María. "La Contienda Política en Argentina 1997-2002: Un Ciclo de Protesta." *América Latina Hoy* 48 (2008): 165-89.

<sup>32</sup> Tarrow 142

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

In his most recent work, *Power and Movement (2003)*, Tarrow asserts that a cycle of contention contains two distinct phases: A mobilization phase, and a phase of demobilization. The mobilization phase, which gives rise to the cycle and leads to its peak, begins when political opportunities are opened for “early risers”.<sup>34</sup> Coalitions are formed around issues and together these coalitions act to delegitimize authoritative powers. The process will be furthered if the state rejects the early risers’ initial demands, and this can create new opportunities for yet more dissatisfied actors to be drawn into the movement, sparking the spread of protest and the growth of the cycle.

According to Tarrow’s theory, the end of a cycle is caused by a combination of the three factors that will typically arise. Examining these factors as an explanation of the decline of the assembly movement will be the subject of analysis in this work: 1) exhaustion of members and polarization within the movement, 2) internal conflicts over violence paired with institutionalization of moderate sectors, and, 3) selective facilitation of movement demands paired with selective repression by the State.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to note that the explanation of the three causal factors is a recent addition to Tarrow’s theory on protest cycles. Prior to his most recent work, Tarrow did not explicitly outline in detail the way in which a cycle comes to a close. Earlier work theorized that internal disputes over violence, paired with institutionalization, cause movement decline, with little attention given to how state reaction can impact the end of a movement. His current theory still focuses heavily on the internal divisions that can undermine a movement, but the role of the state is now also considered.

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<sup>34</sup> Tarrow 144

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

A different theory on protest cycles comes from Kardstedt-Henke, who argues that protest cycles go through four distinct phases.<sup>36</sup> Kardstedt-Henke, in contrast to Tarrow, promotes the idea that the reaction of the state is the primary cause for the decline of a protest cycle. According to Kardstedt-Henke, in the first stage of the cycle, authorities are caught off guard by the initial protests and respond by overreacting through the use of unpredictable and sporadic repression that only further angers the protestors. In the second stage, authorities begin a strategy of select repression while also attempting to facilitate the demands of some sectors. This is ultimately unsuccessful because it has not yet become clear as to which sectors of the movement are most cooperative and which require, from the state perspective, repressive action.

The third stage occurs after the movement has sufficiently polarized into moderates and radicals, and the state can successfully integrate the moderates into the political system while applying full-scale repression on the remaining radical areas. The fourth stage is marked by continued and escalating violence on part of the radical sectors, which are often forced underground by state action, which then produces a period of latency in protests.<sup>37</sup>

The Kardstedt-Henke model does not successfully explain the disappearance of the assembly movement in Argentina, and it does not take into consideration the types of internal movement dynamics that this study will focus on. However, it provides an

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<sup>36</sup> Regrettably, all of Kardstedt-Henke's work is in German, and no translation could be found. Therefore, this short description is based on the presentation of this theory by Ruud Koopmans in his analysis of the West Germany protest waves of 1965-1989. See: Koopmans, Ruud. "The dynamics of Protest Waves: West Germany, 1965-1989." *American Sociological Review* 58.5 (1993)

<sup>37</sup> Koopmans, Ruud. "The dynamics of Protest Waves: West Germany, 1965-1989." *American Sociological Review* 58.5 (1993): 641

illuminating counter-argument to Tarrow's work, which until recently has not underscored the importance of state reaction as a contributing factor of movement decline. A further discussion of the Kardstedt-Henke's model and its relation to Tarrow's work will be briefly discussed again at the end of this study.

### **A. The Cycle of Protest in Argentina and the Birth of the Assemblies**

The cycle of protest that led to the creation of the assemblies entered its mobilization phase in Argentina in the late 1990s<sup>38</sup> as it became clear that the increasing disparity of income and heightened unemployment caused by the economic reforms of the 1990s were entrenched in the system instead of merely transitory.<sup>39</sup> As the negative effects of the reforms devastated the lower classes, it became necessary for those impacted to seek alternative forms of work and subsistence outside the authorized job market.<sup>40</sup> In this context, new social movements began to form, many based around this quest for survival. These included the unemployed workers movement and a movement of the very poor that collected trash and recyclables to sell.

Also important was the resurgence of other social movements with a long history in Argentina, particularly the human rights movement that had been steadily growing since the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s. Through their joined mobilizations against the state, and alliance-building, these movements began to further delegitimize the already fumbling state apparatus which was brought to its knees in 2001 at what can be seen as the peak of the cycle.

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<sup>39</sup> Marco 18

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

The economic crisis, and the events that provoked it, sealed the loss of legitimacy for the principle institutions of power; the State, the armed forces and the Supreme Court.<sup>41</sup> The chosen slogan of the mobilizations of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> of December, “Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo” (“They all must go, not even one may stay”) represented a dissatisfaction with the policies implemented by the Menem administration -and continued by De la Rúa- and with the free-market ideals that they embodied. The dismissal of the State was paired with a rejection of the traditional the unions, which had always played an important role in Argentine politics. The anti-political sentiment came from a general public belief that the political parties and the fledgling democracy had not adequately represented the needs of the population.<sup>42</sup>

The rejection of the unions was due to an overwhelming decrease in the number of workers in the formal labor market as a result of the increased levels of unemployment, which meant that fewer people had access to and were supported by the unions. Additionally, many workers were turned off by the close relationship that the largest unions had formed with the Menem administration during the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

Given this environment of changed political and social norms it is not surprising that new social movements, such as the assemblies, formed and flourished as citizens looked for new methods of organization and ways to participate in the public sphere. The cycle peaked following the economic crisis in 2001, and Argentina saw an explosion of

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<sup>41</sup> Petras, James. "Argentina: From Popular Rebellion to "Normal Capitalism."" *Social Movements and State Power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador*. London: Pluto Press, 2005. 28

<sup>42</sup> Dinerstein 108

<sup>43</sup> Villalón, Roberta. "Neoliberalism, Corruption and Legacies of Contention: Argentina's Social movements, 1993-2000." *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (2007): 139-56. pg 14 Also, María Herrera has done a fantastic analysis of the social movements that occurred during the 1990s that were centered outside of the traditional union-sphere. For more on this, see: Herrera, Maria. "La Contienda política en Argentina 1997-2002: Un Ciclo de Protesta." *América Latina Hoy* 48 (2008): 165-89.

new movements, including the Neighborhood Assemblies, the movement of occupied factories, and the unemployed workers movement (MTD). However, despite the rapid growth and expansion of these movements following the crisis, they began to rapidly decline in the years that followed. This brings us to the focus of our study: the Phase of Demobilization.

## **Section V, VI and VII: The Decline of the Assembly Movement:**

### **Testing Tarrow's Theory**

The following three sections will explain the disappearance of the assembly movement and test the strength of Tarrow's theory. In order to accurately judge Tarrow's overarching theory about a Phase of Demobilization, the theory must first be broken down into smaller pieces and each piece tested on its own. Tarrow's theory is in fact a conglomeration of three separate theories which represent three sets of causal factors. Each one of these theories will be presented in the pages that follow, along with evidence from the assembly movement that either supports or contradicts the theory. If the theory requires modification or contains fallacies, this too will be explained, though modification of the theories will not be presented until later in the work.

### **Section V: Exhaustion and Polarization**

According to Tarrow, the most basic reason that a movement disappears is due to exhaustion of its members. While demonstrations and participation are exhilarating at first, eventually the costs of participation outweigh the benefits, and members begin to withdraw. It is important to note that this withdrawal is not equal, and that those

participants on the periphery, who have less at stake in the movement and also tend to be moderates, are the first to retire. The withdrawal of moderates leads to the use of extreme tactics as “unequal rates of defection. . . shift the balance from moderate to radical claims and from peaceful to violent protest.”<sup>44</sup> and creates polarization within the movement between remaining moderate and radical sectors. The polarization is furthered by any other forms of fractionalization that have occurred within the movement, weakening movement unity and leading to movement decline.<sup>45</sup>

For Tarrow’s theory to be correct, members of the assemblies must have left the movement because of feelings of exhaustion or frustration with the movement. Members with less at stake-which in the case of the assembly movement were members from the upper middle class- will have left the movement earlier than those from the lower middle class who were more heavily impacted by the crisis. This should cause polarization within the movement between radical and more moderate actors. Additionally, other forms of factionalization may be present for a variety of reasons, but a lack of other forms of factionalization will not disprove the theory.

### **A. Exhaustion**

Exhaustion did cause members of the assembly movement to withdraw, but the exhaustion was caused by loss of patience rather than a cost benefit analysis of continued participation. In her detailed account of the assembly movement, Graciela Di Marco found that as the presence of formal political parties at assembly meetings increased throughout 2002, independent members quickly grew tired of their influence and stopped

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<sup>44</sup> Tarrow 146

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

coming to weekly meetings and activities.<sup>46</sup> While this was the case with many assemblies, there was at least one exception. In a personal interview, Ignacio Ivancich stated that the assembly where he had been a founding member, Plaza Dorrego, continued to be independent and have many independent members.<sup>47</sup> However, Ivancich did not state if members had been lost because of party influence, and most other interviewees expressed frustration and disillusionment with influence from the parties. Other impacts of party influence in the assemblies will be discussed later in the work.

The politicization of the assemblies also led to disillusionment on the part of individuals who had joined the assemblies in a hope that it represented a truly new form of public participation distant from that traditional political realm. This disillusionment caused all but those highly committed to the movement to pull out, which meant that as the movement declined it also became more ideological. A good example of this unequal rate of withdrawal was demonstrated best by Maristella Svampa and Damián Corral, who performed case studies on several assemblies in the capital Buenos Aires. Svampa and Corral present the case of the Villa Crespo assembly. This assembly began with close to 150 members including many moderates and individuals unaffiliated with political organizations or parties. However, after only several months, the rapid influx of party members and the pressure for the assembly to align itself with party interests had driven most of the moderates and independents away, until the ones that remained were the most party-affiliated and the most radical. The assembly of Villa Crespo went on to be one of

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<sup>46</sup> Marco 69

<sup>47</sup> Ivancich

the most radical assemblies, and, as we will see later, also the target of government repression.<sup>48</sup>

Moderates did not merely withdraw from individual assemblies, but in fact entire moderate assemblies were quick to return to politics as usual. A good example can be found in the assembly of Palermo, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, which was one of the first to return to traditional methods of participation. The assembly- which was composed of upper middle class moderates and business people- did not hesitate to accept support and services (such as the use of meeting spaces) from the state through the use of government offices and was quick to establish relationships with other social movement organizations.<sup>49</sup> The forging of these contacts permitted members to quickly leave the movement and channel energy and time into more conventional methods of citizen participation such as local NGOs.

## **B. Polarization**

The assemblies were also wrought with internal divisions, in addition to unequal member withdrawal, which undermined the strength of the movement. One of the best explanations of these divisions is presented by Federico Rossi. In his works, Rossi

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<sup>48</sup> Svampa, Maristella, and Damian Corral. "Political Mobilization in Neighborhood Assemblies: The Cases of Villa Crespo and Palermo." *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. 117-39. Maristella Svampa has written extensively on the assembly movement and has been published in many journals and books. Her most significant works on the assemblies are written in Spanish, and are: Svampa, Maristella, and Pablo Bergel. *Nuevos Movimientos Sociales y ONGs en la Argentina de la Crisis*. Comp. Inés Bombal. Buenos Aires: CEDES, 2003 and Svampa, Maristella. "Politica y Movilizacion:el analisis de la dinamica asamblearia." *Cambio de Epoca: Movimientos Sociales y Poder Politico*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2008. She has recently reworked her case studies into an English version, which can be found in *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Svampa 2007, 117

explains that by January of 2002 the assemblies were already plagued by debates over their ideological values and mobilization strategies. By April, the disputes caused the movement to fracture into two sects: neighborhood assemblies and popular assemblies. The difference between the two types of assemblies came from their political and ideological positions, with the neighborhood assemblies representing the moderates and the popular assemblies taking a more radical stance.<sup>50</sup> Members of the neighborhood assemblies saw the crisis of 2001 as the result of corrupt politicians and a political system that needed modification. The popular assemblies, on the other hand, rejected the entire corrupt political system and all that it represented. Unlike the neighborhood assemblies, they did not identify with the state or even with their own neighborhoods, but rather saw themselves as part of a much larger anti-capitalist movement taking place in the country and the world. The different values associated with each type of assembly also meant that they could not easily agree on what forms of mobilization to take, or on concrete goals of the movement. The neighborhood assemblies concentrated on meeting the immediate needs of their communities, and were willing to work with other social movement organizations while the popular assemblies preferred only to work with anti-capitalist organizations such as the MTD in an attempt to form a larger anti-state force (Svampa 2006).

The fracture within the movement prevented it from continuing as a cohesive entity, which could be observed with the dissolution of the Asamblea Interbarrial towards the end of 2002. Immediately following its creation, the Interbarrial was fraught with debates over the future of the movement as the popular assemblies and the neighborhood assemblies disagreed on both goals and strategies. An overarching vision for the future of

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<sup>50</sup> Rossi "Aparacion" 2005

the movement could not be reached. This lack of unity made the Interbarrial weak and susceptible to the influence of party interests, eventually leading to its paralysis and dissolution.<sup>51</sup>

This evidence supports Tarrow's theory that exhaustion and polarization are significant contributing factors to the end of a protest cycle. Unequal withdrawal of members could be seen both within individual assemblies and also in the movement at large, with moderate assemblies being the first to return to conventional methods of public participation and to integrate with other social movement organizations. Divisions over goals and ideals weakened the movement and made it susceptible to other divisions, which eventually led to its decline.

## **Section VI: Violence and Institutionalization**

According to Tarrow, internal divisions in movement often center on violence and are the result of the institutionalization of some sectors. "When moderate leaders institutionalize their tactics to retain mass support, radical competitors employ confrontational tactics to gain the support of the militants and prevent backsliding."<sup>52</sup> When radical sectors begin to employ the use of violence, it contributes to instability and can lead to the movement's collapse. Groups that do not support the use of violence are in conflict with those that believe it will further advance the movement, and these internal divisions prevent the movement from continuing as one cohesive organization.

To validate this theory evidence of institutionalization of moderate actors must be found. According to Ruud Koospman, institutionalization first occurs when established

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<sup>51</sup> Triguboff 4

<sup>52</sup> Tarrow 148

allies and traditional social movement organizations increase their involvement in the unconventional forms of protest used by the new movement. These unconventional types of protest diminish as institutionalization proceeds and members leave the protest scene and return to more conventional forms of participation.<sup>53</sup> Using this as a starting definition, institutionalization of the assembly movement may occur with heightened involvement of other social movement organizations in the Assemblies meetings or activities or at the Interbarrial assembly. With time this participation should decrease and members of the movement should become inactive as they are pulled into the traditional political sphere.

This institutionalization should also be paired with an increase in the number of violent protest tactics occurring by non-institutionalized radical sectors. In earlier works, Tarrow distinguishes between tactics that are “violent” and those that are “confrontational,” which is an important distinction to keep in mind. Violent tactics include “attacks on property, on antagonists and on authorities, and clashes with police” while confrontation includes “occupations, obstructions, forced entries and radical strikes.”<sup>54</sup> However, in the work that is being analyzed, *Power in Movement*, this distinction is not made, and Tarrow emphasizes the presence of violence, not merely confrontation. Therefore, the test of this theory’s validity will rest on the presence of violence, not merely confrontation. If institutionalization of the movement takes place without violence, or violence takes place without institutionalization, the theory must be modified to reflect this reality.

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<sup>53</sup> Koopsman 644

<sup>54</sup> Traugott, Mark “*Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*” Durham: Duke 1995, 98

## **A. Institutionalization**

Two types of institutionalization impacted the assembly movement and will be explored in this section. They are: state-sponsored offices called Centros de Gestión y Participación, and the impacts of the political parties. Attempts by the state to co-opt assembly members were ineffective overall, while the political parties had a fair amount of success in their efforts. This is demonstrated by the heavy involvement of assembly members in the election of 2003. Disputes that occurred over the attempted institutionalization were more influential to the decline of the movement than the institutionalization itself, another representation that the movement was unable to forge a strong unifying set of objectives and strategies.

### **1. State-Sponsored Institutionalization: The “Centros de Gestión y Participación”**

One attempt at institutionalization came directly from the state in the form of Centros de Gestión y Participación (Centers of Management and Participation).<sup>55</sup> These offices were located in every neighborhood in the capital of Buenos Aires and represented an attempt by the government to decentralize power and return some legitimacy to state power through public participation while also removing any threat posed by the assemblies.<sup>56</sup> The centers encouraged citizen participation and offered services such as food and meeting spaces to the assemblies. They were also the main

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<sup>55</sup> In his analysis of the assembly movement, Harnán Ouviaña points out that none of the assemblies were ever completely separate from the state, despite the anti-state rhetoric touted by many in the movement. Ouviaña details three types of “links” that the assemblies had with the state: re-appropriation of state-controlled space for public use, co-optation by the state in the form of the CGP and manifest repression (Ouviaña 2002). This is a contrast to other social movement actors that were active at the same time and retained their complete autonomy from the state, such as the MTD.

<sup>56</sup> Ivanchich 2009. It is very interesting here to note the slogan used by the CGP offices following the crisis. “Que se Vengan Todos... Los Vecinos!” (They all must come, all the neighbors!) is an obvious attempt to co-opt the movement’s anti-state slogan of “Que se Vayan Todos.. Que no quedo ni un solo!” (They all must go! Not even one may stay!) (Ouviaña 2002)

method through which government- subsidized work plans, which were handed out in an attempt to quiet discontent, were distributed to the movement. Most assemblies recognized the CGP as attempts to co-opt the movement and took steps to reduce their power in the neighborhoods. One of the first resolutions passed by the Asamblea Interbarrial in March of 2002 demanded “the dissolution of the CGP and that all of their goods become under the control of the neighborhood assemblies.”<sup>57</sup>

Other assemblies formed relationships with the CGP despite the initial resistance. According to Ignacio Ivancich, member of the Plaza Dorrego assembly, there were three types of relationships between the assemblies and the CGP: 1) a complete rejection of all involvement, 2) a strategic relationship, and, 3) complete dependence. The first group was composed of assemblies from the previously-identified popular assemblies, which refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the state structure or maintain any relationship with it. The second group occasionally took offers from the CGP for food, work plans or services but was very selective about which offers were accepted. Pains were taken to maintain a distant, non-dependent relationship despite the use of state services. While most assemblies initially opposed any relationship with the state, over time they switched their position and the majority could be classified within this second group. The third group was completely dependent on the CGP for meeting spaces and other services and was quickly co-opted by state and other social movement organizations.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ouvia, Hernan. *Las Asambleas Barriales y la Construcción de lo "Público no Estatal": La Experiencia en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Informe final de concurso: Movimientos Sociales y Nuevos Conflictos en América Latina y el Caribe. Programa Regional de Becas CLASCO. 2002. 32*

<sup>58</sup> Ivancich

Debates concerning what type of relationship to have with the CGP became central for many assemblies and led to divisions in individual assemblies and also within the movement.<sup>59</sup> In January of 2003 many of the assemblies that had rejected any relationship with the state came together to form the *Encuentro de Asambleas Autónomas* (Meeting of Autonomous Assemblies). The group met for some time in a manner similar to the failed Asamblea Interbarrial but it too dissolved as the movement died out.<sup>60</sup>

While the division within the movement over the role the state should play in their development further weakened them, the attempt by the state to institutionalize the movement through the CGP was unsuccessful overall, and most assemblies were able to maintain their autonomy despite their use of state resources.

## **2. Institutionalization by the Political Parties**

Institutionalization of a movement is not limited to the state apparatus but also occurs within the party system “either in the emergence of new parties or in increased support for established parties.”<sup>61</sup> Emergence of new parties did not occur as a result of the assembly movement, but parties did seek and gain support from the assembly ranks. Some assemblies formed with an overtly political agenda when party loyalists capitalized on citizens’ desire for organized action and successfully channeled their energy into party-affiliated assemblies. In both the neighborhoods of San Telmo and Villa Crespo,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Ouviaña

<sup>61</sup> Koopmans 644

what began as one large assembly of several hundred neighbors quickly split into three separate assemblies, each with a different level of party affiliation.<sup>62</sup>

This meant that some of the energy that could have been aimed against the state institutions was redirected into reform politics as these assemblies pushed for the election of particular parties instead of a whole new political system. Their party-oriented status also proved to be beneficial for the assemblies' long term survival and permitted them to continue even after the movement died out, since they were able to continue providing opportunities for the members in the form of electoral politics. The assemblies that are party-affiliated are some of the only ones that continue to operate today.<sup>63</sup>

Individual assemblies also were weakened when some individual members left to return to conventional party politics. Tamara Rosenberg, founding member of the La Alameda assembly, explained that her independent and staunchly anti-political assembly lost at least three members that had left the assembly to participate in the activities and gatherings of party-affiliated organizations.<sup>64</sup> Ignacio Ivancich of the Plaza Dorrego assembly reported a similar situation, citing the loss of members to political parties prior to the 2003 presidential elections.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Svampa, Maristella. "Politica y Movilizacion:el analisis de la dinamica asamblearia." *Cambio de Epoca: Movimientos Sociales y Poder Politico*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2008. 117-50.

<sup>63</sup> Vignolo, Gabriel Edgardo. Personal Interview. 23 Nov. 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenburg, Tamara. Personal Interview. 21 Nov. 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Ivancich

### **a. The Influence of the Political Parties in the Asamblea Interbarrial**

The political parties did not just try to institutionalize individual assemblies but rather attempted to co-opt the entire movement through the Interbarrial assembly. This occurred soon after the creation of the Interbarrial, with local newspapers noting the heightened presence of parties at the Interbarrial only one month after its creation.<sup>66</sup>

The parties saw the assemblies as a blossoming middle class movement of high potential and each of the left wing parties had their own vision of how the energy of the assemblies could be used most effectively. The Workers Party (OP) believed that the Interbarrial was a manifestation against the state and wanted to “multiply the assemblies as organs of resistance.” For the Socialist Workers Party (PTS)- who held the assemblies in high regard for their practice of direct democracy (which was similar to the Soviets during the Russian revolution) the assemblies and the Interbarrial were a method of entering into the “scene of the principle battalions of the working class” and gaining the “support of the proletariat.” Meanwhile, the Socialist Movement of Workers (MST) strongly believed that the actions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December represented a pre-revolutionary situation and that the assemblies could be recruited to support the revolutionary movement. The Communist Party (PC) believed that an alternative, revolutionary, and popular power must be strengthened with the help of the assemblies.<sup>67</sup>

The assemblies did their best to resist the influence of the political parties. In May of 2002, after the party presence became overwhelming at Interbarrial meetings, pressure from independents to fight back led to a change in voting rules from one vote per-person

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<sup>66</sup> "Las Asambleas Barriales Se Politizan." *La Nacion* [Buenos Aires] 24 Feb. 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Triguboff 2003:5

to one-vote-per-assembly. This was an attempt to avoid the co-option of the democratic process by the political parties, which had been arriving at meetings with large numbers of supporters and had a disproportionate amount of voting power under the original system.<sup>68</sup>

The parties were successful despite this resistance and had strong influence on the movement as a whole. The same month that independents successfully changed voting rules at the Interbarrial, left-wing parties pressured the movement to create a new coordinating body at a level higher than the Interbarrial. Openly partisan, this organization, known as the Colombres Group, was an attempt “to create a supreme decision making body for the entire assembly movement, despite the complaint of other groups and of independents.”<sup>69</sup>

The influence of the parties eventually undermined the movement. Three months after the creation of the Interbarrial, members of the Workers Party and MST broke the peace when talks over mobilization strategies for an upcoming May Day ended in physical violence. It was following this dispute and the internal chaos it caused that the Interbarrial gradually fell apart. With the increasing intervention of party hardliners in the Interbarrial “many independent [assembly members] felt infiltrated and decided to leave... some assemblies ended up dividing themselves over it.”<sup>70</sup> Eventually, the assemblies could not even come to agreement over collective action plans or the movement’s objectives, and by the end of 2002 the Interbarrial ceased functioning.

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<sup>68</sup> Villalón 146

<sup>69</sup> Svampa and Coral 120

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### **C. Return to Traditional Politics: The Presidential Elections of 2003**

The institutionalization of the movement and the re-legitimization of state power that came along with it were evident in the participation of the assemblies in the 2003 Presidential election. Less than two years after the mobilizations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2001, when it seemed as if the entire population of Buenos Aires was in the streets yelling “They all must go!” as an unprecedented rejection of the established authorities, close to 80% of the population participated in the presidential elections. Ironically, the two most popular candidates came from the Justicia Party- the party of President Menem, who was responsible for the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s.<sup>71</sup> The election went through two rounds, with Menem himself winning the first. In the second round Menem withdrew when it became obvious he would not win. The presidency went to Néstor Kirchner- who had campaigned on a platform of reform and who had won 21% of the votes in the first round.<sup>72</sup>

The elections came when the movement was in rapid decline, and the internal disagreements only hastened its dissolution. Moderates that threw their support and energy behind leftist parties were in conflict with those who continued to reject the legitimacy of the State. The assembly of Colegiales, for example, suffered an irreparable fracture in the lead up to the elections. Party-affiliated members organized a street festival in support of various leftist political parties while the independent members, as a protest, coordinated their own festival to denounce “the farce of the elections.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Petras 28

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Krymkiewicz, Martin. Personal Interview. 21 Nov. 2009.

Most assembly members were involved in the elections in some way, but their reasons for participation were varied. According to Martín Krymkirwicz, long-time member of the Colombres assembly, participation in the elections was not a representation of hope but rather an action motivated by fear of what could happen if the extreme right took power once again. Krymkiriwicz explained “we were against the elections, but if Menem won it could have been much worse for all of the social movements.”<sup>74</sup> The same sentiment was expressed by Ignacio Ivanchich of the Plaza Dorrego assembly. He explained, “I’m an independent, but I am also an opportunist.”<sup>75</sup> For Ivanchich, the threat that a neoliberal president could win and continue the policies that led to the crisis was reason enough to not only to participate in the elections, but also to campaign and organize for political parties. However, for many more members the decision to return to traditional politics came from their support for Kirchner, who had promised to facilitate the most important demands of the movement. Both Ivanchich and Krymkiriwicz agreed during their interviews that Kirchner was able to reinvigorate hope in the electorate. The final analytical section of this work will further explain how this process proceeded and will explore the efforts of facilitation by the government.

## **B. Violence**

Contrary to Tarrow’s assertion, institutionalization of some sectors of the movement did not lead to increased levels of violent behavior. In fact, the assembly movement did not use violent action in their mobilizations at all. However, some of the

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<sup>74</sup> Krymkiewicz

<sup>75</sup> Ivanchich

more radical assemblies did employ confrontational tactics by occupying vacant buildings located within Buenos Aires. Most building occupations were for use as community centers, though some far-left groups used occupations to demonstrate a rejection of the value given to private property by capitalism, and also to reclaim spaces that had been privatized by the state during the economic reforms of the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> Even though these confrontational methods were used by some assemblies, disputes over their use did not polarize or weaken the movement. Disputes over the use of occupations were limited to debates within assemblies and did not have significant impact on the movement as a whole.<sup>77</sup>

## **Section VII. Facilitation and Repression**

The final theory presented by Tarrow relates to repression of a movement paired with facilitation. According to Tarrow, while the internal atmosphere of a movement will lead to factionalization, these internal problems are either accelerated or decelerated by the actions of the state. The movement can become empowered if the state facilitates too many of its demands, and if the state uses too much repression it can create backlash and eventually lead to revolution. To maintain its position of power, the state will most commonly choose not to use blanket repression nor blanket facilitation, but a combination of both. The state will facilitate enough demands to satisfy moderates while repressing more radical sectors of the movement.<sup>78</sup> This serves to resolve the most immediate movement demands at least superficially, thus quelling opposition from the majority while silencing radical voices to prevent further outbursts.

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<sup>76</sup> Rossi 210

<sup>77</sup> Heman 17

<sup>78</sup> Tarrow 147

If Tarrow's theory is correct, cases of state-sponsored repression will have taken place against the most radical aspects of the assembly movement. This would include groups that used more confrontational tactics, such as assemblies that illegally occupied vacant buildings. This repression may take any number of forms but should include harassment by state security forces and attempts to punish or otherwise frighten members. Repression should be paired with attempts by the state to facilitate some of the more moderate demands of the movement, which could include such things as a release of frozen savings accounts and attempts to fix corruption at the national level. If both of these factors are not found to have occurred at the same time, Tarrow's theory must be modified to better explain the case.

### **A. Repression**

State repression can be understood as "any actions taken by [government] authorities to impede mobilization, harass and intimidate activists, divide organizations, and physically assault, arrest, imprison, and/or kill movement participants."<sup>79</sup> Repression of social movements following the crisis was not systematic but it was also not uncommon. The most notable repressive event occurred on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 2002, during the Duhalde administration, when two unarmed members of the MTD were murdered by police in the midst of two days of marches, protests, and roadblocks in the south periphery of the Capital. In addition to the two deaths there were 90 injured and 60

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<sup>79</sup> Stockdill, Brett C. 1996. "Multiple Oppressions and Their Influence on Collective Action: The Case of the AIDS Movement." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

detained.<sup>80</sup> The public response to the murders was monumental. Participants from many different movements and social movement organizations held large protests against the state. True to Tarrow's theory, this backlash was the final straw that brought down the President Duhalde, who had already been rapidly losing public support. He responded with increased distribution of government-sponsored work plans, but the damage to his credibility was irreversible. According to James Petras, "In the course of his year in power(2002) Duhalde used up all his political credibility as the socio-economic crisis with over 53% under the poverty line, continued," and "in a shrewd move to seek to re-legitimate the political system, he called for new Presidential and congressional election for May 2003."<sup>81</sup> It was these elections that Duhalde would lose to Kirchner.

It was prior to these elections that the assembly movement began to experience repression by the Duhalde regime. In February of 2003, the government instituted a campaign against various social movements in Buenos Aires with the intent of clearing out occupied buildings and factories.<sup>82</sup> The police began a series of forced evictions of the assemblies which often turned violent. In the Parque Avellaneda neighborhood, for example, the La Alameda assembly experienced a violent eviction on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 2004, after two years of occupying an empty bar.<sup>83</sup> Three people were hurt in the eviction

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<sup>80</sup> Vales, Laura. "Del Carcerolazo a la Interbarrial." *Pagina 12* [Buenos Aires] 21 Jan. 2002.

<sup>81</sup> Petras 21

<sup>82</sup> Svampa 2005: 136

<sup>83</sup> "Violento esalojo de un comedor comunitario en Parque Avellaneda." *Clarín* [Buenos Aires] 16 Jan. 2004.

and 14 were detained. Other assemblies faced similar evictions. According to Maristella Svampa, an expert on the assembly movement, “these repressive acts were meant to establish the idea that the elections would bring to an end a socio-political cycle as well as seek to erase the visible signs of self-organization and self-management from society.”<sup>84</sup>

The presence of violent action against the assembly movement is not surprising considering the history of violence against opposition movements in Argentina. State sponsored violence, abductions, torture and assassinations of dissidents have been present throughout twentieth-century Argentina, and were not limited to years under dictator rule. From the 1930s-1970s, the charge for this repression fell to the Argentine State Security Forces- a combination of military and police- but following the collapse of the dictatorship in 1983 the civilian police have taken over the role, with the military staying largely out of the picture. Despite the transition to democracy, suppression still occurred and in 1991 a joint report from international and domestic human rights organizations found that the use of torture by police was still wide-spread, and that human rights were still violated on a regular basis.<sup>85</sup>

## **B. Facilitation**

State-sponsored repression of the assemblies was paired with attempts to satisfy the most moderate demands of the movement, which led to the re-legitimization of

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<sup>84</sup> Svampa 2006: 135

<sup>85</sup> Carlson, Eric’s article on state repression in *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006. pg 185

traditional political institutions and the end of the movement. The re-legitimization process began during the Duhalde administration. Following the large anti-state mobilizations that occurred after the deaths of the two MTD activists, the government began handing out six-month work plans to leaders in the MTD movement, and also to the assemblies. The plans were superficial and inadequate to resolve the high level of poverty and unemployment affecting the country. They were initially seen as a quick fix by movement activists, but eventually the work plans themselves became an objective of most of the protests and the decision to pursue the plans instead of pushing for real governmental change divided the MTD movement. Even more influential in quieting anti-state sentiment was the process of partial unfreezing and repayment of middle-class bank accounts. This strategy helped to begin the process of power consolidation at the national level and drove a wedge between the assemblies (which were receiving some of their main demands through the end of the *corralito*) and the MTD and Piquetero movements (which were still disenfranchised and begging for concessions in the form of work plans).<sup>86</sup>

The process of reconsolidation continued with the election of Kirchner, who campaigned as a reformist and promised to purge corruption from the national Congress and Supreme Court (two of the assembly movements' key demands). According to one assembly member, "Kirchner represented the hope of the re-institutionalization of politics in Argentina... he was an expression of the new form of politics."<sup>87</sup> Kirchner promised to purge the most corrupt elements of the state in order to regain public faith in the system.

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<sup>86</sup> Petras 48

<sup>87</sup> Krymkiwicz 2009

When the day of elections arrived, more than 70% participated,<sup>88</sup> signaling that the majority of the country was ready to return to politics as usual.<sup>89</sup>

Kirchner followed through with enough of his promises to retain mass support. According to James Petras, Kirchner “re-legitimized the public institutions, at least giving the appearance of honesty, responsibility and receptivity to human rights matters.”<sup>90</sup> He replaced the corrupt judges of the Menem administration with respectable ones, forced many of the military authorities suspected of human rights violations to resign, and abolished the amnesty law that had prevented them from being prosecuted for their crimes. Lastly, Kirchner reduced unemployment and continued with the social plans started by Duhalde.

Kirchner’s policies successfully tranquilized the majority of protests and recuperated state legitimacy in the eyes of the middle-class. As the assembly members slowly gained access to their savings and were able to return to a lifestyle more similar to that which with they were accustomed, the reasons to continue resistance to the state declined. As one assembly member explained, “The assemblies existed to confront the politicians, but also to act as a response to basic needs, like the community kitchens...the things that people didn’t have.. to provide a response with basic solidarity and to look for solutions to concrete problems. This was the motive of the assemblies.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, while the assemblies emerged with an anti-political message, the state was capable of changing the minds of the middle-class with the strategic implementation of key reforms. Despite having only received about one quarter of the vote during elections, after two

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<sup>88</sup> Voting is mandatory in Argentina, but when the populace does not agree with any candidate or wants to abstain, they vote a blank ballot. In this case the 70% does not include the blank ballots.

<sup>89</sup> Petras 29

<sup>90</sup> Ibid 30

<sup>91</sup> Ivanchich

years Kirchner's approval rating was close to seventy percent. As basic needs were met once again, the reasons to continue participation in the assemblies declined until the movement lost its pertinence as a relevant societal and political actor.

Very few assemblies remain in Buenos Aires today, and those that do are either focused on non-political campaigns and actions, such as the La Alameda assembly which has become a regional leader in the fight for workers rights and fair labor practices, or they are aligned with particular political parties and have a membership of staunch party-supporters who focus their actions on party politics. The movement's original message of "They All Must Go!" disappeared along with the majority of the assemblies until, as one ex-activist remarked, "nothing at all remains of the original movement...nothing at all."<sup>92</sup>

## **Section VIII. Analysis and Revision of Tarrow's Theory**

The past several sections have focused on explaining the reasons that the assembly movement disappeared and evaluating how well these reasons conformed to the theories presented by Tarrow in *Power and Movement* (2003). Much of the evidence has been in line with Tarrow's assertions. A thorough investigation of the decline has affirmed that the end of the movement was a result of a phase of demobilization beginning in late 2002, and ending after the presidential elections of 2003 with the implementation of many key reforms by the Kirchner regime. Two of Tarrow's three theories, the theory of 'Exhaustion and Polarization', and the theory of 'Repression and Facilitation' were supported by the evidence and need no modification.

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<sup>92</sup> Krymkiwicz

However, an analysis of Tarrow's theory of 'Violence and Institutionalization' has several weak points. First, the theory comes off as deterministic in that it assumes that all movements contain at least one sector predisposed to violence that will resort to extremism once some parts of the movement are institutionalized, and that this will lead to polarization of the movement. While the institutionalization of some sectors of the assembly movement did lead to some internal divisions, it did not lead to polarization between groups that used confrontational tactics and groups that did not. And, while confrontational tactics were employed by some assemblies, outright violence never took place.

Secondly, Tarrow's view neglects the possibility that parts of a movement that have been institutionalized may employ confrontational tactics. Some studies have shown that movements predisposed to confrontational tactics will still use them despite institutionalization of the movement and heavy involvement of social movement organizations.<sup>93</sup> In Buenos Aires, at least one of the assemblies that occupied a vacant building-considered by Tarrow as a confrontational act- was comprised primarily of militant members and organizers for left-wing political parties that often tried to use their occupied space for party recruitment.<sup>94</sup> Tarrow's theory should be modified to recognize that it is possible that institutionalization and the use of confrontational tactics by institutionalized groups can occur simultaneously.

The level of violence used by a movement is influenced by the socio-economic status of its constituents, and middle-class members will rarely resort to violence. According to Fred Rose, the forms of action taken by a social movement are heavily

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<sup>93</sup> Taylor 275

<sup>94</sup> Svampa 2005 133

dependent on the class status of the movement. Rose finds that middle-class social movements pursue change not through violence but “through raising consciousness and affecting lifestyles, because the middle class defines its own activities by its ideas and beliefs.”<sup>95</sup> Several studies have shown that groups from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have access to institutions of representation and are also more likely to use violent tactics.<sup>96</sup> An expression of the way class impacts movement repertoires can be seen in the waves of middle-class movements, such as the mainstream environmental movement, that arose in the late twentieth century in advanced industrial societies and have a low incidence of violent protest if any at all.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, the degree of polarization of a movement because of disputes over violence is dependent on the level of heterogeneity within the movement constituency. If a movement is very heterogeneous (i.e. there are radicals and moderates, poor and rich, young and old) then it is more likely that polarization will occur, as there will be a wider variety of viewpoints on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable protest tactics. For example, Tarrow cites splits over violence within the relatively peaceful civil rights movement as an example that most movements will face this division. But Tarrow also points out that there was a generation gap between the older activists that were institutionalized, and the younger generation disposed to violence, demonstrating heterogeneity in the movement. The assembly movement was relatively homogenous in

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<sup>95</sup> Rose 177

<sup>96</sup> Taylor 177

<sup>97</sup> Jenkins, J. Craig; Wallace, Michael. 1996. The Generalized Action Potential of Protest Movements: The New Class, Social Trends, and Political Exclusion Explanations. *Sociological Forum*. Fall. 11, No. 2:183-207.

its make-up, and extremists that pursued violence, if present at all, did not cause significant disruption or lead to polarization of the movement.

Based on this evidence, two refinements may be proposed:

*a) The use of confrontational tactics is not limited to autonomous groups; members that have been institutionalized may also use confrontational tactics.*

*b) Social movements with a homogenous constituency of professional-class individuals operating in a democracy are not prone to violence. The more homogenous that these groups are, the easier it is to facilitate their demands and institutionalize large parts of the movement without a marked increase in violence by other sectors of the movement.*

The first theory is important because it allows for circumstances where confrontational tactics are used but violence does not take place. The new theory is not as deterministic as Tarrow's, which had implied that violence will always occur. The distinction between violence and confrontation may seem slight at first, but the types of actions used (attacking police officers versus occupying a building) are actually quite significant and leaving room within the theory for the use of confrontation without violence is important. In the second theory, the words "in a democracy" are particularly

paramount because the opportunities proffered by democratic societies to be involved in the political realm, via voting and party affiliation, are what provide an outlet for the demands of the middle-class constituency and allows it to participate without the need for violence.

The distinction between movements that will use violence and those that will not is essential because the lack of violence may be a signal that democracy is working correctly. When the main demands of a movement are met through state facilitation or through institutionalization, and without the use of violence, it may suggest that the majority of the movement is satisfied with the outcome and that the democracy is functioning in a healthy manner. Violence is mostly used in circumstances where key demands are not met, and some sectors of the movement continue to reject state policies and act out against them. When a movement is capable of changing state policy without resorting to violence, or when institutionalization of the movement leads to the implementation of key reforms so that movement demands are met, the movement, and the democracy it is functioning within, can be considered a success.

However, the lack of violence does not always represent such ideal circumstances. Institutionalization without violence may also suggest that a movement is easy to appease or that the state has successfully generated enough fear of repression that violent tactics are not risked. In these situations the lack of violence may be a sign that the state knows how to give a few token compromises, and that this is enough to satisfy movement demands. This suggests that the demands may not have been highly taxing on the state to begin with, or that movement members did not have the courage to fight for further concessions.

Whether the lack of violence is representative of a healthily functioning democracy or is because members lacked audacity must be determined on a case by case basis. Overall, these two theories will be helpful for future researchers and analysts interested in identifying the underlying factors that contribute to the presence of violence (or lack thereof) and institutionalization. It will be particularly useful in the study of how homogenous and/or primarily middle-class social movements interact with the state during their decline. This will be especially important in the future, as some of the middle-class social movements that appeared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States and Western Europe begin to decline.

## **Section IX. Conclusions**

This work has explained the causal factors that led to the appearance and decline of the movement of neighborhood assemblies in Buenos Aires, Argentina between the years 2001 and 2003. In the process it has also scrutinized Sidney Tarrow's theory on the Phase of Demobilization that occurs at the end of a Cycle of Protest as presented in his 2003 work *Power and Movement*. Lastly, it has created two new theories to better explain the relationship between a homogenous middle-class movement and the State.

The assembly movement was born in the power vacuum that occurred following the nation-wide economic crisis that struck Argentina in 2001. Following days of protest, members of the middle class that had lost their savings, jobs, and livelihoods came together in an attempt to organize a movement out of the chaos in the streets. The neighborhood assembly movement was their attempt to meet the immediate needs in their

communities, while also forming an alternative method of public participation that was truly democratic and responsive to the people.

The decline of the movement came almost as quickly as it had appeared, owing to internal divisions over goals and ideologies. The politicization of the assemblies led to the disillusionment of those who had joined in hopes of creating an anti-political movement, and they were some of the first to withdraw. An internal split occurred rapidly after the movement's appearance that created a division between assemblies focused on systematic reform and concrete actions in their neighborhoods, and those that took a more ideological rejectionist stance on politics. Soon after, some parts of the movement were institutionalized, and debates over the influence of the political parties further divided the already strained movement. The larger organizing structures put in place to bring all the assemblies together, such as the Interbarrial assembly, broke down as debates over mobilization strategies, and the presence of party militants prevented the assemblies from working together as one cohesive movement.

This breakdown was furthered by the facilitation of key movement demands, first by the Duhalde administration and later by Nestor Kirchner, who had won the 2003 presidential election with the participation of many assembly members. The end of the *corrallito* and the gradual redistribution of the savings of the middle class caused a breakdown of the alliance between the assemblies and some of the other movements taking place at the same time, such as the unemployed workers movement, and began the process of relegitimization of power at the national level. At the same time, a government campaign to clean up occupied buildings and weed out radical sectors was designed to instill fear into assembly members and disempower the grass-root movement centers. The

consolidation of state power was furthered once Kirchner took office and instituted key reforms in the judiciary and military, and carried through on campaign promises to rid the main government branches of their high levels of corruption.

The circumstances that led to the decline of the movement support many of the theories proposed by Tarrow in *Power and Movement*. As Tarrow asserted, exhaustion of members did lead to withdrawal and also to polarization of the movement. Independent members grew tired of the influence of political parties and withdrew, and a division occurred within the movement between assemblies that were focused on reform, and those that were more idealistic and wanted a systematic change with a completely new form of politics. Also in accordance with Tarrow's theory was selective repression of some parts of the movement by the state, paired with selective facilitation of more moderate demands.

However, Tarrow's theory failed to accurately predict the end result of the institutionalization of some factors of the movement. Several flaws were found in the theory. It implies that all movements contain at least one sector that will resort to violent tactics and does not differentiate between the use of violent tactics and those that are merely confrontational. It also presupposes that those groups that do resort to violent or confrontational methods will be autonomous, which was contradicted by evidence from the assembly movements and outside studies that showed institutionalized sectors of some movements are also likely to engage in confrontational behavior.

These flaws indicate either a misunderstanding of the behavior of middle-class social movements or simply an oversight by Tarrow on how they will function at the end of a cycle of protest. These movements are less likely to engage in violent behavior when

they have a more homogenous constituency, they are easier to institutionalize without an increase in violent actions by other sectors of the movement. This was the case in the assembly movement, where most members were from the professional class. Movement demands were relatively easy for the state to facilitate and institutionalization of some groups led to frustration on the part of some members but did not lead to violent action.

Two modifications for the theory have been proposed that will better explain the behavior of homogenous professional-class social movements and also allows for the use of confrontational tactics by institutionalized sectors of social movements. These two theories, rather than disprove Tarrow, have been crafted as a supplement and refinement to his more general theory. They will be useful in understanding situations where institutionalization without violence occurs, whether it is under ideal democratic conditions or in situations where the movement is afraid to employ extreme tactics. In both situations, these two hypotheses can help explain the actions of the movement and its relationship with the State.

## **A. Lessons Learned and Future Research**

This investigation has demonstrated several things. Primarily, it has demonstrated that it is rare for a single causal factor to bring about the decline of a prominent movement. The assembly movement did not fade away only because of the changing beliefs and values of individual members, or because of internal divisions over ideals and objectives. Nor did the interaction with other movements or the state single-handedly contribute to its dissolution. Rather it was a combination of all these factors, and most

likely others that are not measurable by the tools of social science, that caused the movement to dissolve.

This multi-dimensional explanation for the end of a protest cycle is further evidence that the approach taken by Kardstedt-Henke, which was touched on at the beginning of this work, is incorrect in its assertion the relationship between the state and the movement determines its decline. Granted, the facilitation of key movement demands by the Kirchner regime did heavily impact the end of the movement, and it could be argued that it was the most decisive factor leading to the dissolution of the assemblies. Nevertheless, if the movement had not been so destabilized by the time the Presidential Elections of 2003 took place, the return to traditional politics may not have been as tempting for those who pulled their faith from the grass-roots alternative and put it back into the conventional outlets of civic participation. The fact that both internal and external forces were to blame for the cycle's decline in Argentina is evidence that a strictly state-based approach is not sufficient.

The way that the middle-class status of the movement contributed to its decline has also reaffirmed what has been spoken of for almost the entire history of the study of social movements. The importance of socioeconomic class in explaining the actions and demands of movements has been long recognized, most famously by Marxist theories of state/public relations. Despite the growing focus on New Social Movements- a sector of social movement theory that analyzes the rising trend in advanced industrialized societies of identity-based movements that supersede class divisions, the old lesson (that class matters), has proven yet again to be a valuable tool in explaining social dynamics.

Secondly, and equally important, the study has also shown the importance of good theories. It has shown that a good general theory can be applied to a wide variety of different settings. In this case, Tarrow's general theory on the Phase of Demobilization served quite well to explain the movement decline and provided an excellent set of criteria to reference when trying to understand the forces that impact the lasting-power of a social movement. Furthermore, it has shown that a good theory lends well to modification. Tarrow's theory was rather easy to modify into a new theory that explains the declination of the assemblies and other homogenous middle-class movements.

Lastly, this study has also illustrated how unique each social movement is. While political scientists spend much of their time devising theories to explain very broad trends in social movement activity, each movement will have its own particularities that may require adaptations to these theories or the creation of new ones. With that in mind, it is important to note that the theory presented in this work is preliminary and by no means absolute. More research will be necessary on the patterns of middle-class social movements to test the theory across a broad spectrum of cases and determine if any areas need further polishing or modification. As noted early, the surge in new social movements comprised of middle class participants that occurred in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first may provide the necessary cases to do this research on in the future and will prove for an interesting topic to explore.

## Section X. Author's Note

The study of social movements for students of Political Science is a fascinating way to understand the reasons that individuals band together for a common cause, often risking state-sponsored repression, to work towards a shared goal. However, the approach used by the social sciences to explore trends in the appearance, actions and disappearance of these movements often requires the investigator to be distant and calculating about a movement, and to focus on things that are quantifiable: the numbers of protests, goals reached, and the number of activists hurt, arrested, and detained in the process. This study has examined the assembly movement by applying a general theory of explanation to the actions of large groups of people to better comprehend and predict how they would behave and why.

Unfortunately, while this approach is successful at generating theories on human and state behavior, it often neglects the more personal aspects of a social movement that are equally important in understanding why people do what they do. Throughout the investigation for this work, the author spent many hours talking with groups of people and individuals about why they took to the streets on December 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of 2001, the reasons they came forth to form the assemblies, and the dreams that they had in doing so. Because of the intimacy of some of the conversations that were had during the investigation, it seems only right to take a brief moment to explain what the assemblies *meant* to the people of Argentina and the purpose that they served.

The assemblies were not just a movement against the state or a rejection of the traditional forms of political participation. They also embodied a hope by the Argentine populace that after years of corrupt democracy-which came on the tail end of many bitter

years of brutal, crushing dictatorship- they might finally have the option to create their own form of governance that listened to the individuals needs of each part of the city and responded to the wishes of those who lived in each neighborhood. They were a way of bringing previously alienated people together and teaching them that they were capable, outside the state structure, of serving their community and each other. Overall the assemblies were an extremely hopeful, empowering place for those that were involved.

Many who still are part of the assemblies lament the loss of their comrades as they returned to the traditional political outlets, and also the loss of the sense of independence and perseverance that the movement provided to them. The feelings of solidarity, camaraderie, and self-determination that the movement embodied for its short life are not measurable, but they may be the most important and longest lasting contributions that the assemblies made to Argentine society and the lives of those involved.

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