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## Imaginaries of Urban Threat:
## Perceptions of Collective Protest and Violence
## in the USA and in Argentina during the 20th Century

### Abstract

This article studies 1960/70s imaginaries of urban social and cultural threat in their historical roots, and sees imaginaries as an important part of the social order and interprets violence as a pattern of communication. It focuses on imaginaries that state officials in the US and in Argentina formulated when confronted with collective protest and violence. Communism, mass consumer society and its inherent cultural changes (incl. gender relations), and fears of crowds were key imaginaries - in Argentina also among Catholic elites. These quite similar imaginaries did not change significantly during the 1960/70s. What was special in the US was the racialization of imaginaries of urban disorder. The melting together of European and US influences in the imaginaries of subversion and of crowds was a special Argentinean feature. Subversion was instrumental for justifying the military regimes' enforcement of a total monopoly of violence in a cultural counterrevolution. US and French counterinsurgency policies helped to shape this imaginary. The strong presence of the imaginary of historically rooted, threatening urban crowds was an Argentinean legacy of the entanglement with European history, especially with crowd psychology. Finally, the wide scope of crisis that shaped the imaginaries of threat in Argentina stands out. While in the US law and order was mostly only threatened locally, and could thus be restored locally, in Argentina the whole nation seemed to be in decline and substantially endangered, which called for radical and far-reaching countermeasures.

**Keywords:** cultural counterrevolution, crowds, entanglements, urban disorder, subversion

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© Forum for Inter-American Research
ISSN: 1867-1519

## Introduction

Urban life (and thus urban order) is shaped not only by structures like buildings, roads, and places. Imaginaries [1] also play a highly important role in this context. Following Cornelius Castoriadis and others, imaginaries are much more than just imaginations. They actively influence social life – not only in urban settings (see Castoriadis 2012; Huffschmid/Wildner 2013; García Canclini 2013; Burchard/Kaltmeier/Öhlschläger 2014). As these authors demonstrate, imaginaries do not stand in opposition to a somewhat immutable urban truth. They are an integral part of social order. Imaginaries express something like a "collective subjectivity" (García Canclini, "Zur Metamorphose" 40).The analysis of "imaginarios urbanos" is a vital product of Latin American urban studies (Huffschmid/Wildner 2013; Silva 2013 and 2007; Lindón 2007 and 2013; García Canclini 1997 and 2013). They can bridge the gap between cultural aspects of and the social organization of urban life. They produce and are in turn also a product of urban realities (see Huffschmid 2014; Huffschmid/Wildner, *Stadtforschung* 21; García Canclini, "Zur Metamorphose" 38-41).

19th-century urban imaginaries are often about political and moral decay, although progress and other positive utopias are co-present. The labor movement (mainly its left factions of socialists, communists, or anarchists), youth and related fears of violence but also consumption-induced dangers of cities like movie theatres, fairs, sport events, and drug consumption contributed to these imaginaries of urban social and cultural threats. In the USA, since the Bolsheviki had come to power in Russia in 1917, but especially after the First World War when the radical syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) gained strength and labor strikes intensified, a massive "Red Scare" surfaced, mainly in urban settings. Denunciation became widespread, leftists were politically persecuted or even deported, strikes were violently shattered, and immigration policy became more restrictive (see Gage 2009; Flores 2015). In these years, Latin American countries also saw many strikes, violent upheavals and massive repression against anarchists and syndicalist trade unions (De Laforcade/Shaffer 2014; Rinke 2014 and 2015; Deutsch 1986). During the Cold War struggles of decolonization and the Cuban Revolution imaginaries of threat of communism intensified (Crandall 2014). The same was true for imaginaries related to the morally and socially destructive potentials of (urban) mass consumer societies. The turbulent protest- and violence-ridden 1960s, which were in the eyes of many contemporaries associated with massive social and cultural changes or even far-reaching crises, are a perfect setting to study these imaginaries of threat potentials of communism and of mass consumer society. It also is worthwhile to ask how these imaginaries of threat interacted and have even changed.

In scholarly research collective protest as well as violence have long been understood as exceptional processes indicating that a society is in a somewhat disintegrated or even in a state of emergency. Research on social movements and on social protests is still influenced by these

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conceptions of a somewhat static social order thus struggling with the analytical problem of how to relate collective action to this kind of social order (see as overviews Della Porta/Diani 2011; Fuchs 2003). Recent research on violence, however, has broken new ground. The main intellectual breakthrough in violence research was achieved by studies on political violence and left-wing terrorism. Focusing on physical violence these authors have interpreted violence not as a social or individual pathology but as a pattern of communication (see Schraut/Weinhauer 2014; Weinhauer/Ellerbrock 2013; Weinhauer/Requate 2012). As they put it, violence does not occur out of the blue. Rather, it is connected to previous social actions and to imaginaries (of order and disorder). Violence can create order and it communicates its message not only to victims and their social surroundings but also to third parties (bystanders, media etc.) which are not directly involved. Especially since the breakthrough of media societies in the 19th century, the communicative potentials of violence have become even more obvious.

Imaginaries can easily be integrated in such an analytical setting where violence and protest are demystified and seen primarily as communicative strategies. Thus we can ask how imaginaries of threat become part of this process of communication. In this narrative setting imaginaries lose their touch of irrationality which was often ascribed to them. Moreover, the focus on violence as communication connects violence research to Urban Studies (especially in Latin America) which underline that "communication and the city has been a solid and institutionalized area of study in Latin America since the early 1990s" (García Vargas/Román Velázquez 141).

Globally, the 1960s have become a focus of rich historical research. Student protests, countercultures and alternative milieus have been meticulously studied. Interestingly, these publications mostly were focused on Europe and on the US. Only recently have the "global sixties" in Latin America come under scrutiny (The Americas 2014). Though in this time phase many state institutions were challenged, the imaginaries of threat (as well as the concrete actions) of politicians and especially the uniformed forces have been a neglected field of historical study. Mostly the actions of students, social movements etc. have been analyzed. This neglect might be influenced by the idea that in a time of the Cold War and its dominant anti-communist impulses, the imaginaries of threat derived from these street protests might have been identical globally. In this brief article, I would like to demonstrate that this is only partly true. Although there was a set of shared imaginaries, national peculiarities can be discerned.

This paper is predominantly based on the existing literature and analyzes urban imaginaries of threat among US and Argentinean state officials (politicians, police, military) when they referred to urban collective street protests and street violence. Already a rough summary shows that these imaginaries were about the decline of order (political, family, moral, sexual), the political definition of protestors (communists, insurgents), about uncontrollable crowds, about anti-communism, about

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ISSN: 1867-1519

the threat of a spread of violence, about youth in general, and about the role of drugs. The paper also briefly discusses which actions officials practiced and/or proposed to counter these threats.

The focus this paper puts on Latin America, first, mirrors a lack of such studies, as most authors compare the protests in the US with European developments (e.g., Klimke 2010). Second, it also reflects the fact that since the Cuban Revolution, the US government was gravely concerned about political developments in Latin America, especially in its urban regions. During the Cold War years the repressive domestic policies in Latin American countries were influenced by more or less direct US interventions and intellectual transfers. Cases like the CIA driven coup d'état in Chile that started on September 11, 1973 surely support this. The same is true for the close cooperation of Argentine and US militaries, which started in the early sixties at the latest, and, for the interest articulated by the Pentagon in its "Project Camelot", to generate social science information on revolutionary potentials in Latin American cities and societies in the mid-1960s (Crandall 2014; Pereira 2005; Rohde 2014). It must be warned, however, to ignore continuities in imaginaries related to collective action dating back to the 19th century or to other national influences (Osiel 2001: 132). Third, the main reason for studying Argentina was that it is the Latin American country where during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983) between c. 20,000 and 30,000 people were killed or disappeared (Pereira 21; on the history of *desaparecidos*, see Elsemann 34-88). It is challenging to analyze the imaginaries of social and cultural threat which were instrumental in influencing this violent and bloody repression even when these imaginaries cannot fully explain these actions. Finally, what makes Argentina an interesting case is that it was intellectually influenced not only by the US but for many decades had developed strong and vital mental connections to Europe. This point deserves special attention as many studies only look at US influences in Latin America and forget the links to other world regions.


**Imaginaries of Urban Threat in the United States of America**

In the US in the mid and late 1960s law and order had become the dominant topic of domestic politics (Flamm 2005). Thus imaginaries about crime, violence (mainly committed by youth gangs), drug use, and collective street protests were discursively nearly omnipresent. Taking Chicago as a case study can help to demonstrate this. On the one hand, some very good studies exist on whose findings I can draw. On the other hand, Chicago saw two famous confrontations in 1968: the urban riots in April and the protests against the convention of the Democratic Party in August. Moreover, Chicago is not only the birthplace of US sociology (at least of its urban research branch) but it also had in the early 20th century already developed a fairly rough reputation. Above other US cities, it fueled imaginaries of being "First in Violence, Deepest in Dirt" (Adler 2006).

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During the early/mid 1960s the wave of urban unrest [2] shook US cities (Abu-Lughod 2007). As a consequence of these riots, President Lyndon B. Johnson in July 1967 put together a *National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* which in March 1968 published its results and came to be known as the *Kerner Report* (named after its chairman the Governor of Illinois Otto Kerner). Its basic findings cumulated in the famous phrase: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal" (*Report* 1) [3].

Chicago was massively affected by the consequences of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on 3 April 1968. Protests started at public schools and quickly changed their location to the West Side districts of the city. Mostly "black" people lived here, while the local political leadership was dominantly white and only a few civil society organizations existed (see as summary Seligman 2005; Farber 1988; Warren 1968/69). From April 7-11, 1968 some 16,000 police officers, National Guard and army troops were present in Chicago. At the end of the riots, 11 rioters were dead and 48 people had been shot by the police. 90 police officers were injured, and 3,350 people, among them 1200 juveniles (males under 17 and females under 18) had been arrested (Warren 473, 477). In the early phases of the unrest, policemen were paralyzed in their actions as their tactics could not successfully benefit from the established interpretation of street crowds. In general, they perceived crowds as a single irrational entity, which was potentially dangerous to the established order especially when these crowds were stirred up by politically-oriented ringleaders (mostly communists) (Leach 1993; Warren 481). The West Side riots, however, in the beginning mixed political aims with actions that can be interpreted as expressions of a wish to extend the participation in mass consumer society. White clothing shops were looted, the clothes freely distributed among those who were present on the streets. Sometimes the goods were also sold for a cheap price. After these shops were emptied, they were often burned. Later even residential houses were torched with Molotov cocktails.

The Chicago police did not know how to act against the street protests. One the one hand policemen had to realize that ringleaders could hardly be found; instead a carnival-esque atmosphere turned these collective actions into spontaneous street happenings with looting and burning as central events. Or, as one policeman put it, "people were everywhere" and it was not discernible who was a looter and who not, thus no symbolic arrests were possible. On the other hand, as the policy of symbolically arresting ringleaders failed, some police officers formulated what was in their view a more efficient measure for sweeping the streets: "I believe one good crack on the head does more good. If you give them a headache they go home and usually stay there" (Warren 481). With such individualized actions, however, these protests could not be handled. In this regard, the use of violence by the Chicago police can be interpreted as a failed communication attempt (by the means of brute force) with the people on the street.

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After the urban riots of April 1968, it became obvious that the established imaginaries of threat resurfaced and new ones were spread. Policemen were still sure to know that the situation in the "black ghettos" had "gotten completely out of hand" (Warren 1968/69: 481). In their racialization of these urban spaces, many Chicago policemen returned to the established wisdom: Civil Rights leaders, most of them deemed to be communists, together with white liberals and the press, had done everything in their power to make a policemen's normal job in these "ghetto" areas impossible to perform. As I have indicated above, in policing the "ghetto" they often were prone to abandon any soft intervention tactics. Another imaginary, mainly among conservative politicians, was that the riots were planned in advance and orchestrated by communist leaders. For the conservative *Chicago Tribune* riots that involved "blacks" were part of a plot of international communism (Farber 138). But even the official riot report underlined that "there was no conspiracy" (Abu-Lughod 100).

After the riots a set of countermeasures were immediately put into practice. New federal laws were created (conspiracy to cause a riot), each police car became equipped with a shotgun, riot helmets, and improved tear gas aerosol dispensers were ordered. The notoriously anti-communist intelligence unit (named Red Squad) of the Chicago Police was congratulated for their effective search for the ringleaders of the riots (Farber 147, 159). Black political leaders were openly surveilled by the Red Squad [4]. Moreover, federal money was spent to support local housing initiatives and social welfare measures in "black" neighborhoods were intensified.

The main reason protestors came to Chicago in August 1968 was to articulate their anti-Vietnam war protests at a time when the national convention of the Democratic Party convened to nominate the candidate for the next US presidential elections. This event would also grant their collective actions good media coverage as the protestors aimed at creating a "visual image of the state in action" (Farber 250). It came to violent confrontations between the predominantly white middle class protestors and the police. In essence the mass media were part of these actions, with NBC Morning News cutting "back and forth, back and forth, from the terror in the streets to the festivities that followed Hubert Humphrey's victory" (Farber 251). This underscores the latest findings in research on political violence (see above) which sees media society as an integral part of this process of communication with and about violence. In the end, and when compared to the April riots, during the August protests, which were dominated by members of the white middle class elite, no one was killed. 192 policemen were injured, c. 700 protestors arrested and some 100 injured (Abu-Lughod 107f.).

When the *Kerner Report* published its findings about the role of white racism, it met strong opposition both in the political establishment and in the police of Chicago. They wanted local issues to remain on the local level, and insisted they did not mirror any global problems or deserve

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international attention. Chicago policemen like their comrades in other cities mostly had a working-class background. They followed conservative political and social norms. In the Chicago police department, there was even an active cell of the Ku Klux Clan, which was discovered in late 1967 (Farber 130). Riots—police and local politicians were sure to know—were planned in advance by communist agitators whose aim it was to turn the protestors into followers. These 'communists' not only disturbed public order but could in the future also organize the masses of Chicago's "black" ghetto dwellers. As in April, the conservative *Chicago Tribune* spread news about communist conspiracies going on inside the Civil Rights movement (*Chicago Tribune*, 1 April 1968). For state officials it was clear: if local turbulences occurred, they came from the outside not from Chicago citizens. All in all, as David Farber has put in: "Nobody in Chicago wanted any advice from national commissions or liberal university professors" (Farber 136).

During the protests policemen saw the student protestors and the press as visible signs of what was wrong in their small world. To them "all the demonstrators, short-haired and long-haired, were dumb, un-American hippies who didn't respect the way real people lived their daily lives." While policemen played out "their well-developed anger and bitterness" against unruly hippie youth, they still kept a localized perspective on the protests. For the protestors, however, in their efforts for political change (for some this meant revolution), Chicago was a next step to take back democracy in a direct confrontation with the "war makers" (Farber xiv f., all quotes). These clashes between localized and global perspectives not only added a special tension to the confrontations in Chicago, it also impeded a meaningful communication between the opponents.

In Chicago local problems had to be solved locally. Following this line of reasoning the imaginaries of threat formulated in Chicago in 1968 were not primarily about the decay of the whole nation. These local problems were motivated mainly, especially in the eyes of conservative politicians, by the inability and incompetence of the (liberal democratic) federal government to stop all this. Although conservative politicians who in the mid-1960s helped shape a new political agenda in the US, "in which nightmares of criminal chaos replaced dreams of a Great Society" (Flamm 180), their critique was mainly directed towards a remote central bureaucracy of the federal state. As in other US-American cities, the conservatives put their hopes on the local community with its tight social networks and their local security forces which should successfully handle crime and other social problems. In these local spaces, however, and here they were very close to local democratic politicians like the Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley, only (mostly white) local residents had the right to get active, but not the activists of the (trans)national social movements. For Daley, the mainly non-local student protestors of August 1968, whom he named terrorists, were "pushing their bodies into spaces in which they did not belong" (Farber 250).

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Moreover, the Vietnam War left its traces in urban imaginaries of threat. On the one hand in the police and military reports of the urban unrests of 1967/68 (also in Chicago) the central imaginaries of threat (communism and mass consumer society) became interwoven with a sniper narrative. This new narrative postulated that snipers were massively present thus making it nearly impossible for the fire brigade to quell the flames and for policemen to quickly restore order (Warren 470). In Chicago, however, there was only one incident in which a fireman was shot in the legs by an unknown person. But this single event was retold again and again. In the end the official Chicago reports stated, this case was "grossly overstated" (Warren 470). Rumors about snipers, racialization of protestors and other actions contributed strongly to the construction of urban imaginaries of threat. It did not matter whether such rumors were 'true' nor 'not true' (see Young/Pinkerton/Dodds 2014).

On the other hand Vietnam was not only present through sniper narratives. The US urban riots of the 1960s had also ignited a debate about the relationship between the jungle aspect of the war in Vietnam and the war in "figurative 'jungles'" (Flamm 105) in US cities. In these debates many US citizens came to realize that law and order at home and abroad were closely connected. This led to a militarization of riot control, training, and intelligence. The military had in Virginia in early 1968 not only convened a series of conferences to discuss the coordination of anti-riot actions in the biggest US cities (Flamm 120). The military also borrowed heavily from its Vietnam experience and worked hard to establish – legally not unproblematic - close ties to local urban law enforcement. Some commanders even claimed that US cities were about to face "years of guerilla warfare" (Flamm 115f.).

As we have seen, the communication with violence on the side of the protestors was completely different to the localized imaginaries politicians, police, and militaries articulated about these collective actions. It was as if walls separated these parties. One communicated about better housing, extended participation in mass consumer society and political change, while the other was busy searching for ringleaders and criminals and talking about crowds and communism which threatened local order. Only when they talked about revolution could the protestors be sure that state officials would use the same word, which had for them, however, a completely different meaning.

**Imaginaries of Urban Threat in Argentina**

Similar to the US 1960s, Latin America (and with it Argentina) saw multifold expressions of change. While mass consumer society was expanding, hedonistic youth cultures emerged, often combined with new musical expressions (like rock music) and drug use. Established social, family, and

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sexual norms were questioned, and transnationally connected protest movements and guerilla organizations spread. At the same time, however, military dictatorships emerged which tried to fight these social and cultural changes (see as overview Pereira 2005).

Argentina was the Latin American country which already since the 1940s, during the rule of Juan Domingo Peron (1946-1955, 1973/4), had seen many urban mass mobilizations and collective actions, especially in Buenos Aires and in other urban centers. In the following Buenos Aires will be the main focus of analysis, mainly because it is, similar to Chicago, a relatively well-studied setting. Moreover, it is the nation's capital, and in the long run the center of protest actions and of imaginaries of threat. In the wake of the military coup against the rule of Juan Domingo Peron in 1955, many hopes were projected on the youth that was expected build a new country. This was markedly different to the situation in the US, where during the 1950s youth culture became a challenge to society and its norms and values. As a recent book on youth in Argentina puts it, this phase "was marked by longing for, and fears of, the new" (Manzano, *The Age* 4).

When Lieutenant-General Juan Carlos Onganía came to power in 1966, this military coup not only ended some short-lived reform efforts but also signaled the intention of the military "to remain in power indefinitely" (Pereira 56). Since the early 1960s, peaking in the phase from c. 1969-1972, student protests and strikes evolved in Argentina with university activists often seeking alliances with the working classes. The military regimes tried to stop student political activism by closing some universities and with intensified police repression (Robben, *Political Violence* 39). Even when compared to earlier phases of military rule since the mid-1960s, in Argentina domestic security issues became increasingly militarized and reaching any political consensus was impossible. As was the case in other countries, these police actions, however, played an important role in radicalizing political activists. In May 1969, militant labor protests especially in Cordoba, the second biggest city of the country, mobilized the hopes of protestors while fueling fears of revolution in the middle classes, of conservative politicians, of the church, and especially in the military (see Brennan 1994; Brennan/Gordillo 1994). For the latter, the massive collective protest in Cordoba, the *Cordobazo*, was "military doctrine come true" (Robben, *Political Violence* 51), since it concurred with their assessments [5].

In Argentina, 1969 marked a double caesura. On the one hand, it intensified the imaginary of threat among state officials and members of the armed forces. On the other hand, the activities of guerilla organizations grew and massive strikes and decentralized street protests occurred. Moreover, a "subculture of violence" (Waldmann 338f.) in urban milieus became established. This violence, to a great extent sparked by the repressive actions and killings committed by the military and its paramilitary supporters, in turn intensified the imaginaries of social and cultural threat. By 1975,

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many guerilla forces and the military were sure that the whole country was "on the brink of civil war" (Robben, "Combat Motivation" 360).

In March 1976 a military junta, headed by General Jorge Rafael Videla, overthrew government and remained in power until December 1983. In these years, the military embarked on a massive campaign to kill, torture, and intimidate "subversives" of which thousands were disappeared in mass graves, were thrown into the ocean, or dropped from helicopters. Three interrelated imaginaries of social and cultural threat guided the actions of Argentinean militaries: subversion, mass consumer society and crowds.

The military summarized all contemporary evils under the key term "subversion" (Elsemann 47-64). Eradicating "subversion", often seen as a disease or a cancer of society that could be lurking anywhere, was instrumental for the Argentine military. Virtually everybody could be a subversive. When compared with other Latin American countries this term played a much more crucial role in Argentina as a guideline for massive repression against a vaguely defined other. Against the background of a strong influence of European crowd psychology (more details below), the training by US and French militaries and also the influence of regional exchanges, led Argentinean armed forces to turn subversion into a universal imaginary of social and cultural threat (Elsemann 61f.). The influences of these European and US-American colonial counterinsurgency strategies contributed strongly to fortifying the pre-existing anti-communism of the Argentinean militaries. All this made subversion a category which "was as broad as it was blurry." It was not only used against members of militant left-wing organizations. A person was a "subversive criminal" because "he or she was 'active' in student centers, in neighborhoods, or in the internal commissions of labor unions, or because he or she was found to participate in what the intelligence services called 'insurgent activities,' political acts such as painting slogans, [or] throwing leaflets" (Aguila 172; how far the middle class was affected is discussed in Carassai 2014; see also Sheinin 2013).

Already in 1975, the military had started to re-map the whole country. Five zones were created, each subdivided into several sub-zones (Robben, *Political Violence* 193f., 396; Osiel 2001), where local commanders were granted complete freedom to fulfill their tasks [6]. The c. 350 detention centers, many of them in the heart of the urban centers, were also measures to reclaim urban territories. Religion played a much greater role in the anti-subversive actions in Argentina than in other Latin American countries (Osiel 119, 128, 158). Transcendental Catholic culture in Argentina promoted by militaries and the church in the mid-1960s was opposed to consumerism and its democratic potentialities (Podalsky 207). These ultra conservative members of the Catholic Church greatly helped to broaden the military's concept of the enemy. The imaginary of a threat of subversion was not only related to the working-class but also (sometimes even predominantly) to universities, culture industry (consumption), mass media, and liberals (Osiel 128). In the early

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1970s, the conservative and military leaders began to finally associate youth with drugs, sex orgies, and subversive action. Moreover, the "overtly oppositional questioning of the hegemonic construction of masculinity" (Manzano, "'Rock Nacional'" 251), widespread among 1960/70s youth, incited an intense homophobic reaction, which was exploited by the military. A thorough reconstitution of society was pressing before the nation finally dissolved (Manzano, "'Rock Nacional'" 221).

Mercilessly the new rulers fought what they thought would be a massive spread of 'factory soviets' in the companies all over the country but they also raided nightclubs in order to fight consumption driven moral decay (Aguila 178, footnotes 20, 23). In this setting, however, the fight against international communism was less motivated by the strength of the communist party in Argentina, all the more, as the Soviet Union was an important trading partner of Argentina during some parts of the 1970s (Osiel 131). Rather, the military saw itself at the forefront of a historic, final struggle against communism. In their understanding of history, communism advanced "through the cunning of history, behind the backs of those who unwittingly contribute to its triumph" (Osiel 134f.). This important reference to history can also be seen in the 1970s the military named their own project the "Process of National Reorganization" (short: El *Proceso*), thus referring to the 19th-century National Organization, the foundational phase of the country.

As it has already become obvious, besides fighting subversives the military also aimed at eradicating the detrimental effects of consumer society. The breakthrough of mass consumer society in Argentina was strongly influenced by Peron's social political improvements for the working-class (Milanesio 2013). Moreover, young people, often also from working-class backgrounds, had been the vanguard in wearing US-produced jeans since the late 1950s (Manzano, "The Blue" 660). In Buenos Aires such women and men and others, who through their clothing were deemed to represent modernity, stood at the center of public actions that attempted to prevent Buenos Aires society from sliding into communism and immorality (Manzano, "Sexualizing Youth" 455). At the end of the 1960s, for the militaries, conservatives and radical rightwing Catholics it had become obvious that this danger of sliding over to communism was not only true for working class juveniles as they also saw the youth of the middle classes affected (458). In these years, the nightmare of conservative elites had in their view come true: Not only in Buenos Aires, but seemingly everywhere communism and political radicalization had taken hold among the majority of middle class youth. Where drugs were consumed, bombs would also be produced (Manzano, "'Rock Nacional'" 420f.). Hand in hand with this went imaginaries of threatened gender relations implying an erosion of the ideal of domesticity with the inherent male breadwinner model, spreading homosexuality and the redefinition of dominant models of masculinity. Other issues of youth culture such as rock music, liberal sexual norms, and drug use

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had since the mid-1960s been instrumental in raising conservative fears of a society in turmoil and decline.

Fighting crowds was also an important task for the conservative and military state authorities in Argentina. Collective mass action performed by 'crowds' (a term which was often used in a derogatory sense) in public spaces were a feature of Argentinean history. Thus in fighting crowds the military aimed at eradicating a central democratic element of Argentinean political culture. In mid-19th-century Buenos Aires, the public sphere had become a place of mediation between political machines and civil society for some years. It was here where competing groups raised their claims driven by a "culture of mobilization" (Sábato 168). Between the 1860s and 1880s collective actions on the streets and plazas served to unite an otherwise heterogeneous civil society. This tradition, which was destroyed by political changes in the late 19th century, could be taken up under the first Peronist rule (1946-1955) for employing strategies of mass mobilization. When analyzing collective street actions and related imaginaries of threat during the 1960/70s in Buenos Aires, for example, the improved transportation system during the Peronist rule (1946-55) was used for mobilizing for demonstrations (Podalsky 3). This extended mobility fed feelings of anxiety and estrangement among the middle classes since workers could now easily reach all city regions including the wealthier quarters. One author concluded that Peronism "had indelibly changed the city by exercising control over the visual imaginary against which many sectors would struggle in subsequent years" (Podalsky 47).

In general, Argentine military and police perceived crowds similarly to the way armed forces in other countries did ( 53f, 83; Weinhauer 2008). Crowds were irrational and potentially dangerous to the established order. Argentine military field manuals described crowds as a collective entity orchestrated by revolutionary leaders. Among the armed military and paramilitary forces in Argentina, however, some special features of these crowd-related imaginaries of threat can be discerned. First, the phase of democratic street actions of the 1860/70s given, it cannot come as a surprise that in Argentina crowd psychology had gained a strong and lasting influence on intellectuals, elites, politicians, and militaries. Since the late 19th century, Buenos Aires for many years was named the world capital of psychoanalysis (Riekenberg 205). The most relevant feature of this legacy was, as the anthropologist Antonius Robben has put it, that the militaries believed the Argentine people had an "inbred tendency toward crowd mobilization" (Robben, *Political Violence* 43). Especially after 1945, street crowds became deeply rooted in Argentine political imaginaries. They seemed all the more threatening to the ruling elites when rapprochements of young working-class activists, Peronists, and university students intensified starting in the late 1950s. Second, and related to the former at least theoretically, Argentina's elites were also extremely fascinated by crowds and their cohesion. The militaries and police were keen to ride this tiger (85). Based on a

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central aspect of the dominant militarist masculinity, these crowds had at same time to be given the opportunity to act, which in turn would give the militaries an opportunity to dominate these collective entities. Third, the fierce fight Argentinean state actors fought against crowds can be better explained when crowds are understood as situational forms of civil society organizations. As organization of civil society were strongly repressed by the military regimes, in Argentina crowds acted as a substitute for this lack of civil organization. Their fluidity made crowds all the more suspicious to the state authorities [7].

Overall, the military in Argentina believed that social order was an expression of a divine will (Robben, *Political Violence* 84) and thus did not need any additional civil organizations. Moreover, mass consumption, crowds, communists, and other subversives subverted this order. Thus their power had to be broken for the good of the nation, and the military had to uphold authority and reproduce the hierarchical values of this natural divine society. They profoundly believed themselves genuine patriots who had to save their country from "imminent destruction at the hands of the Antichrist" (Osiel 144).

Taken together, these factors (subversion, mass consumer society, and crowds) motivated the military to embark on an all-encompassing campaign of social engineering. This violence ridden process was not merely an act of state terror (Riekenberg 204-208) [8] or a Dirty War: Wars have a beginning and an end. Wars also involve more or less clearly recognizable war parties. What was executed in Argentina, starting in the early 1970s, was a "cultural counterrevolution" (Osiel 139) aimed at fighting (and winning) the final fight between good and evil. In this cultural counterrevolution the military aimed at altering people´s sociality away from a "unifying gregariousness towards obedience, discipline, respect for God, and awe of the nation`s military leaders who had saved the country from a communist revolution and the loss of its Western, Christian civilization" (Robben, *Political Violence* 85). The preservation of Argentina's cultural heritage was at stake: paternal authority, private property, catholic values and traditions, and the nuclear family. The military imagined a future where authority "at the state and at the family levels would reinforce each other" (Manzano, *The Age of Youth* 235).

In order to achieve this, the militaries aimed at the physical, psychological, and social destruction of subversives. With their violence-laden cultural counterrevolution, they communicated that torture and other forms of violence had to be brought to the enemies' minds, selves, bodies, and families. As it was not sufficient to kill the subversives, torture became an integral part of this strategy: "Torture was to complete the victory on the ground into the minds and selves of the defeated" (Robben, *Political Violence* 212). Although the strategy of forced disappearances (desaparición forzada) was not unique to Argentinean militaries, they used this strategy intensively. As long as there were officially no dead people, nobody (families, media) could ask questions. For families of

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the victims this strategy made it much harder to formulate their claims against the military. It must be mentioned that these tactics, however, in 1977 also gave rise to a very important family-based protest movement in Buenos Aires, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, who mostly silently but effectively protested against the disappearance of family members (see Elsemann 60ff.).

In the eyes of the Argentine military, French and US-American counterinsurgency practices had been too strongly focused on military actions at the neglect of social, political, psychological, and cultural aspects (for details see Elsemann 45f). As a consequence, both colonial powers had given too little attention to the decisive actions of subversives - defined in the broadest sense. In the 1970s, the Argentine military was so desirous of victory that they crossed moral borders other had hesitated to cross. It is still discussed whether the massive violence of the cultural counterrevolution practiced by the Argentinean military regimes can also be termed 'genocide' (Feierstein 2006 and 2014).

## Conclusion

In this paper urban imaginaries of social and cultural threats have been analyzed in a conceptual setting which merges two innovative strands of thought. First, imaginaries are seen as an important part of social order, which could help bridge the gap between street action and countermeasures of the forces of order. Second, seeing violence as a pattern of communication contributes to understanding the violence state officials have used to restore order.

When it comes to imaginaries of social and cultural threats, US and Argentinean state officials (politicians, policemen, militaries) identified similar threats in the 1960/70s: communism, mass consumer society and its inherent cultural changes, and fears of crowds that were omnipresent. In Argentina, this was also true for the powerful Catholic elites. These imaginaries were not only quite similar in both countries they also did not change significantly during the time period considered here. These stable imaginaries of threat through communism and mass consumer society even served as nuclei around which new narratives (about snipers and urban jungle wars) could be constructed.

What is special in the US case was the racialization of imaginaries of urban social disorder. While in North America the military was only temporarily able to gain ground in public order issues, the military in Argentina defined the profile of and countermeasures against social and cultural threats for decades. This continuity of military rule made Argentinean anticommunism much more radical and also immune to any changes in the perception of its enemies. The melting together of European and US influences in the imaginaries of subversion and of crowds is a feature special to Argentinean case. Against the background of a strong commitment to anticommunism, subversion

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was instrumental for justifying the military regimes' merciless cultural counterrevolution. The reception of US and French counterinsurgency policies not only fortified the anticommunism of the Argentinean military, it also helped to shape their imaginary of the decisive role of broadly defined subversives.

Against the background of this fortified anticommunism, the strong presence of the imaginary of threatening urban crowds was infused by a double legacy. First, there were lasting memories of mid-19th-century collective street actions. These actions had not only played an important role in Argentina's early democracy but had also shaped fears of underclass street actions. Second, the fears of crowds were also an underestimated legacy of the entanglement with European history, especially with crowd psychology (see Borch 2012; Robben 2005 and 2012). Crowd psychological interpretations, mainly formulated in France and Italy, had made their way to Argentina via intellectual and personal transfers since the last third of the 19th century.

Finally, the wide scope of crisis that shaped the imaginaries of threat in Argentina stands out. While in the US law and order was only threatened locally and could thus be restored locally, in Argentina the whole nation seemed to be in decline and substantially endangered. Although the imaginaries of crisis were similar (perils of mass consumer society like crime, rock music, drug use, promiscuity, and communist inspired political radicalization), the envisaged solutions were extremely different. In the US the social movements, protests, and violence of the mid-1960s were also countered violently but also with counter insurgency programs and disinformation campaigns. Moreover, police forces were reinforced, better trained, and the cooperation between army, police and the National Guard intensified. There were also urban renewal projects and decentralized funding of citizens' initiatives.

As the threat was deemed to be of national (not only local) scope, in Argentina much more radical options were chosen for social engineering. A cultural counterrevolution was launched aiming at rebuilding a divine family based on Christian ideals. In doing this, the Argentinean militaries were willing to impose a total monopoly of violence on the minds, the bodies, and the social relations (esp. the family) of all those subversives who had already contributed to social and cultural destruction of the national order or on those who were suspected to do this in the future.

## Endnotes

[1] In this article I will use the term imaginaries instead of imaginations. The differences between imaginations and imaginaries are a bit similar to those between the emotions "fear" and "anxiety". Imagination is more an individual expression where often the object to imagine (holiday at the beach) is more or less clearly identifiable, while imaginary is more a collective pattern related to abstract social and cultural entities (international communism). Both processes are, however, not forever fixed. They are influenced by and are part of power relations and labeling processes. Thus they could also change over time (see on fear/anxiety: Bourke 2003). It is debatable whether urban imaginaries could be added or how they are related to the three "modern social imaginaries" described by Charles Taylor (2004): economy, public sphere, self-governance.

[2] It is not the space here to discuss the interesting question of how to best name these collective actions: Civil unrests, riots, protests, upheavals? Such typologies should be seen as efforts to gain control over the interpretation of violence. See on this problem Brass 1996.

[3] The Chicago riot of 5-7 April 1968 was not included but is analyzed in: *Report of the Chicago Riot Study Commission to the Hon. Richard J. Daley* (1 August 1968), Daley Library, Chicago.

[4] In the meantime, the files of the Red Squad have been transferred to the Chicago History Museum.

[5] From 30 June 1969 to 26 May 1973 the state of siege was declared (Robben, *Political Violence* 559).

[6] See for details http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_001.htm

(10 Mar 2015).

[7] The differentiation made by Riekenberg (205) is interesting: between state terror directed against indigenous population in Central America (Guatemala) and state terror directed against urban militants (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay) from working-class and trade union background.

[8] Further studies should test this hypothesis whether crowds in Argentina acted as a fluid substitute for organizations of civil society.

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