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Milanesio, Natalia. (2021). *El Destape. La cultura sexual en la Argentina después de la dictadura*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, pp. 256.

In comparison to the many academic studies about the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983), the period that followed it has not received as much attention. The available academic studies on the democratic transition are from the fields of sociology and political science, and center on the mechanisms of political participation, elections, and the vote.

Nevertheless, recent historical studies are beginning to catch up as they seek to enrich and expand the terrain of the “political” and of “politics.” The publication in Spanish of *Destape: Sex, Democracy, and Freedom in Postdictatorial Argentina*, originally published in English in 2019, makes progress in this direction through an analysis of the *destape* (literally, “uncovering”), a process of (hetero)sexual liberation that positions sex and sexuality as the focal points of change in post-dictatorship Argentina. In a society beset by violence and censorship, the sudden proliferation of products with explicit sexual content, the discussion of sexual pleasure, the battle for sexual and reproductive rights, and homosexual activism accompanied and energized the budding democracy.

The author’s main purpose is to inquire into the transformation of the meanings, norms, and practices related to sexuality that took place during the new political regime starting in 1983. She argues in this book that the *destape* implied a cleavage in the ways in which notions about sex are perceived, participated in, and articulated, leading to the development of a more open sexual culture and a new way of understanding citizenship. At the same time, she argues that this process had limitations and contradictions that were related to vestiges of repression and censorship, as well as to tensions regarding whether the heterosexual conventions that governed the family, morality, and citizen participation should be reinforced or flexibilized.

The author, Natalia Milanesio, an Argentine historian who lives in the United States, dialogues with a wide spectrum of studies produced during the last military dictatorship and the democratic transition, including historical works related to gender studies and the counterculture of the 1960s. The main contribution of Milanesio’s study lies not only in investigating a rarely explored phenomenon, but also in elucidating how democracy, politics, and sexuality were intertwined as a way of processing the extent of the repression, the silence, and the censorship in social, political, and cultural life in Argentina.

For Milanesio, the *destape* was a polysemic phenomenon that had commercial, mass, and media facets and was an arena for disputes about the status of sexuality and democracy. This displacement fostered a renegotiation of the erotic within various space: the home, the bedroom, and the streets, as well as within social institutions such as medicine, the family, and the marriage.

In order to back up these hypotheses, the author turns to vast and varied sources, among which print documents predominate: the press, erotic magazines, pamphlets, posters, notices, and institutional archives. At the same time, she also employs oral testimonies from journalists, sexologists, doctors, and educators, and reviews audiovisual materials: feature length films, short films, and publicity. The mosaic of sources makes it possible to propose an approach to sexuality based on all its variations and connotations.

The book is organized into five chapters, each of which deals with different concepts. One focus are the effects of changes and continuities in the object of study during 1960s and 1970s. The author demonstrates the way that the *destape* broke down and pierced the previous meanings and veilings of sex and sexuality. On the other hand, she shows that the *destape* was not a corollary of the social slackening that started with the sexual revolution of the 1960s but a process of modernization and democratization in terms of customs, perceptions, and social conventions.

The first chapter deals with the reconstruction and tracking of the *destape* during the decline of the military government after the Malvinas War (April–June 1982). To this end, the focus is on the obturation and cultural censorship imposed in the 1970s, highlighting the glimpses of change in the status of sexuality at the beginning of the 1980s. The chapter then goes on to explore the multifaceted character of the *destape*: the awakening of desires for change also produced conflicts and resistances, both socially and politically.

The second chapter analyzes the erotic publications that appeared during the first years after the return to democracy. In this context, sex, explicit female nudity, and the exhibition of latent sexual desire took over the media agenda, playing an important role in creating the meaning and action of *destape*.

At the same time, the author draws attention to two levels in the discourse of the *destape*: while women experienced an acceleration in the sexualization of their bodies and subjectivities, the other side of the coin was the greater visibilization of violence against women and the reinforcement of heterosexuality as a criterion of social organization.

The third chapter looks at the development and dissemination of sexology, sexual therapies, and advice on sex in the mass media. In contrast to

the settings of the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter recounts the obstacles and stimuli that traversed the development of sexology in Argentina in the 1980s.

Emphasizing the place that sex occupied within and outside the bedroom, the author recovers the trajectories of professionals from the field of sexology in Argentina. At the same time, the creation of entities and organizations, together with the propagation of workshops on sexual pleasure, promoted a climate of ideas where sex and knowledge molded the meanings and scope of democracy.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Family planning, sex education, and the reconstruction of democracy,” examines the initiatives, activities, as well as the public and private policies related to the regulation of reproductive health, sex education, and their repercussions on the creation of meanings and practices for the democracy of the 1980s.

Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to the *destape* promoted by dissident sexualities. The creation of women’s, gay, and lesbian groups and movements, together with greater visibility—in the streets, in publications, and on television—are interpreted as indices of a greater openness to homosexuality in Argentina and its increasing legitimization. Thus, the *destape* contributed to the expansion of citizenship in sexual terms, and was instrumental in redefining the characteristics and profiles of democracy; it also played a role in problematizing the subject of this process.

In this period, organizations such as the Argentine Homosexual Community (Comunidad Homosexual Argentina, CHA) as well as newly created women’s groups, feminist organizations and magazines, emerged as counterpoints to the commercial aspects of the *destape*. Sexuality became a point of contact for creating an activist agenda centered on denouncing the discrimination of male homosexuality as well as subordination and inequality between men and women.

Overall, Milanese’s book focuses on asking **who was/were** the subject(s) of the *destape*, what constraints and framework affected its development, and how notions and perceptions about the political and the democratic were consolidated in a context marked by the uncertainty of a future under construction. By highlighting the roles and actions of activists, doctors, educators, and various forms of media, the book promotes a line of research that decenters the state as the axis and the organizing agent of social, cultural, and political life.

On the other hand, the book contributes to reflection about changes and continuities and about the strands and particularities that mark sexuality as an object of academic research. Indeed, *El Destape* introduces novel questions about periodicity in the construction of sexual identities

and the place that sexuality has in sociocultural processes marked by political tensions.

In sum, this work is an important contribution to the study of the historical evolution of sexuality and its consolidation as a field dealing with legitimate problems and concerns. It establishes the 1980s as a period worthy of reflection and urges us to consider the disputes and the forces that weighed upon the scales and levels in the relationship between politics, sex, and sexuality.

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