Reclaiming the Past: the search for the kidnapped children of Argentina's disappeared

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January 2008

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

During the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983, an estimated 30,000 civilians disappeared. Most of these individuals were kidnapped by the military and taken to clandestine prisons where they were tortured and killed. The children of these victims were also seized, and pregnant women were kept alive long enough to give birth. An estimated 500 infants and young children of the disappeared were given for adoption to families with close ties to the military. *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo) were formed to discover the fate of their grandchildren. This thesis examines the key role that the search for the kidnapped children of the disappeared has played in Argentina's post-dictatorship human rights struggle. As an ethnography of human rights, I analyze how human rights struggles are waged over competing empathetic appeals. The thesis focuses on public debates and legal contents. It is divided into three interrelated sections: the first focuses on the disappeared, the second on the search for and recovery of the children of the disappeared and the third on family member organizations. In debates about the disappeared, I trace the shifting view of the disappeared within human rights discourse from innocent victims in the aftermath of the dictatorship to political activists in the present. I then examine how this view has also been called into question. I also analyze the place of survivors, including accusations of treachery made against them. Part 2 discusses the search for and recovery of the kidnapped children of the disappeared. In particular, I examine legal cases both in the early years and after the kidnapped children became adults. I analyze the *Grandmothers'* public campaigns and discuss the challenges of restitution. The final part of this thesis examines the larger political context of the *Grandmothers'* search. In particular, I examine debates between reformist and radical sectors of the human rights struggle in Argentina and the election of Néstor Kirchner as President in 2003 and his subsequent embrace of the human rights movement. The thesis concludes by examining the consequences of the human rights' movement from opposition force to part of the political establishment.

Résumé

Durant la dictature argentine, qui dura de 1976 à 1983, environ 30 000 civils ont disparu. La majorité de ces individus ont été kidnappés par l'armée argentine et jetés dans des prisons clandestines où on les tortura avant de les tuer. Les enfants des victimes ont également été saisis, et les femmes enceintes gardées en vie juste le temps de donner naissance. Un estimé de cinq cents bébés et enfants en bas âge de personnes disparues ont été donnés en adoption à des familles liées à l'armée. *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Les grands-mères de la Plaza de Mayo) fut formé pour découvrir le sort de leurs petits-enfants. Cette thèse examine le rôle central que la recherche des enfants kidnappés a pris dans la lutte de droits de la personne en Argentine post-dictatoriale. En tant qu'ethnographie des droits de la personne, j'analyse comment les luttes des droits de la personne sont en concurrence avec d'autres demandes empathiques. La thèse met l'emphase sur les débats publics et contenus légaux. Elle est divisée en trois sections inter reliées : la première met l'accent sur les personnes disparues, la deuxième sur la recherche et la récupération des enfants des disparus et la troisième sur les organismes des membres de la famille. Dans les débats concernant les disparus, je trace les changements d'opinions sur les personnes disparues dans le discours des droits de la personne de victimes innocentes à la suite de la dictature à activistes politiques dans le présent. Par la suite, j'examine comment ce point de vue a également été remis en question. J'analyse aussi la place des survivants, incluant les accusations de trahison faites contre eux. La partie 2 discute la recherche et la récupération des enfants kidnappés. En particulier, j'examine des cas légaux autant dans les jeunes années que plus tard lorsque les enfants ont atteint la majorité. J'analyse les campagnes publiques des *Abuelas* et discute des difficultés de la restitution des enfants à leurs vraies familles. Dans la dernière partie de cette thèse, j'examine le contexte politique plus large de la recherche des *Abuelas.* Notamment, j'examine les débats entre les secteurs réformistes et radicaux de la lutte pour les droits de la personne en Argentine, et l'élection de Néstor Kirchner comme président en 2003 et son adoption subséquente du mouvement pour les droits de la personne. Cette thèse conclut en examinant les conséquences du mouvement pour les droits de la personne de force d'opposition à part entière de l'institution politique.

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Acknowledgements

What leads a person to their research topic? A temptation exists for vulgar Freudian insights, an effort to find autobiographical relevance. Shortly after my arrival in Buenos Aires, I met one of my father's oldest childhood friends for the first time. We met in a café overlooking the Plaza de Mayo. He went into hiding during the dictatorship because, in his own description, he had "three strikes against him": He was bearded, Jewish, and a sociologist. The discussion quickly turned to what brought me to Argentina. I explained my topic. When I mentioned the term "identity" in relation to the work of the *Grandmothers*, he began laughing. I was confused. Perhaps I misspoke. I continued speaking. He continued laughing. I looked at him quizzically. "It's funny to me that you've come to Argentina to search for identity. When your father left Argentina in '68, he never looked back. He was searching for his identity elsewhere. So you can imagine my surprise when out of nowhere his son returns 35 years later searching for his. It's funny."

He made this observation after I told him how the *Grandmothers'* public campaigns attempt to draw young people who have doubts about their identity to contact the organization. He decided that to choose such a research topic in the country where my father grew up was revealing. Personally, I did not like the analogy he was making but perhaps he had a point. Much like the process of recovered grandchildren getting to know their biological families, I had a similar experience during fieldwork meeting a large family that I did not know. In the process, I was getting to know my father better by seeing where he grew up,

meeting his friends and family. In the end, I was welcomed as part of a new family - going to birthday parties, children's dance recitals, family dinners. Since I grew up distanced from my extended family, this was a novel experience.

"Welcome Home." These were the first words spoken to me by my cousin upon my arrival in Buenos Aires. It was intended facetiously, since he knew that it was no homecoming. This was my first time in the country. He said it because my father grew up in Argentina. Yet Argentina was not an ancestral home - it was one more stop on a diasporic journey. For receiving a long-lost relative so warmly, I would like to thank the entire Stecher clan in Argentina. In particular, I would like to thank Gustavo Stecher who helped me in immeasurable ways: from introducing me to Buenos Aires, letting me stay with him when I first arrived, helping me find an apartment, and always being there when I needed any help. I would also like to single out Cynthia, Isa, and Susana for their generosity and kindness. César Orda, although not a family member, treated me as if I were. I would also like to thank Marcelo, Hernán, Emiliana, Carlos, Deborah among others who made my stay memorable. Thanks are also due to Raul Feldman and Judith Brandwaiman. Natasha Zaretsky provided me with valuable advice when I arrived.

Without the kind cooperation of *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, this dissertation would have not been possible. I would like to thank everyone in the organization that took the time to help me. In particular, I thank Alba Lanzillotto who helped me coordinate interviews and gave me access to their archives. I would also like to thank Clarisa Veiga, Alcira Ríos, Alicia Lo Giúdice, Ana Zabala, and Abel Madariaga for their time and assistance. I would like to thank all of the family members who agreed to interviews. Argentina Rojo was kind and gracious

during our interview and her death in 2005 was a loss. It was nice to have been able to interview her.

At *Memoria Abierta,* Silvina Segundo, the coordinator of the Oral Archive, never lost her patience as I kept returning to request to see more interviews. Thanks to everyone else at *Memoria Abierta* as well. Jaime Gluzmann of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in La Plata was extremely gracious and helpful. He warmly welcomed me to his home, introduced me to numerous people, and gave me access to valuable information. His death last year was a great loss for the Argentine human rights movement. He was a wonderful person. I would also like to thank Daniel Tarnopolsky, Emiliano Hueravilo, Chicha Mariani, Elsa Pavón, Clara Petrakos, Juan Carlos Volnovich, Eva Giberti, Ruth Teubal, Bettina Stein, the Mental Health Team from CELS and EATIP, and the archivists from CELS and MEDH for their time and assistance. I am indebted to Rosana Guber who provided invaluable advice and introduced me to Argentine social scientists. Sigifredo Leal was a diligent and creative research assistant who tracked down numerous sources that I could not locate. He also helped me clarify my own ideas in the process.

Research was funded through an Individual Research Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Additional funding came from a SSHRC McGill Internal Research grant. McGill Majors helped to support me from the beginning of my dissertation studies. Rose Marie Stano, Cynthia Romanyk, and Diane Mann in the anthropology department and Adele Tarantino and Heike Faerber in the Department of Social Studies of Medicine helped me navigate through the bureaucracy. Rose Marie has been a constant support throughout my time at McGill and her resilient spirit is inspiring. I have benefited

greatly from being in the Department of Social Studies of Medicine. I thank STANDD for giving me the opportunity to present several times in their speaker series during the writing of this dissertation. I would like to thank my officemates in the SSoM basement: currently, Raul Necochea, Loes Knaapen, Wilson Will, Jennifer Cuffe, Annalisa Salonius, Janet Childerhose, and, previously, Hanna Kienzler, Hannah Gilbert, Cristiano Martello, Kelly McKinney, Carol Kidron, and Stephanie Lloyd. Stephanie has been a close colleague who was there from the beginning of my graduate studies (even if she finished before me).

My greatest intellectual debt is to my dissertation supervisor, Allan Young. Allan is not only an impeccable scholar but also a *mensch.* He has tempered my tendency towards laborious sentence constructions, awkward phrasings, arcane word choices, and general exegetic excess (it is quite evident that he has not edited these acknowledgements). Needless to say, all lapses in logic or diction are entirely my own. My other committee members, Ellen Corin and John Galaty, have helped in numerous ways. I thank Ellen for both her critical insight and empathy. Kristin Norget, always a patient and willing listener, has provided invaluable help and assistance ever since I first arrived at McGill. Sandra Hyde has given me extremely helpful critical commentary and practical advice. Taking courses with Margaret Lock during the early part of my studies helped me immeasurably.

McGill has provided a lively and stimulating environment throughout my graduate studies. Other graduate students and friends that I would like to thank are Mary K. Smith, Julia Freeman, Gillian Chilibeck, Remy Rouillard, Allan Dawson, Sean Brotherton, Emilio Dirlikov, Paula Godoy-Paiz, Scott Matter, Cameron Welch, Tak Uesugi, Yasir Khan, Sebastien Normandin, and Petur

Waldorff. I would also like to thank Matt Reichl, Elena Goldstein, Eugene Raikhel, and Ajay Gandhi for their friendship and support over the years. My family has been a constant source of encouragement. I thank my mother and father who are always there when I need them. Thanks also to Dana, David, and Lily, Arnold Herman, Andrea Gordon, Robert Loveless and Elisabeth Mueller. And, finally, thanks to Sibylle Berger for her endless support and for putting up with me during these last months of writing.

Introduction

Countless academic and journalistic accounts of contemporary Argentina open with what is variably termed the Argentine "paradox" (see Erro 1993; di Tella & Vogel 2003), "enigma" (Armony 2004; Taylor 1992), or "puzzle" (della Paolera & Taylor 2003). "How did a country that was one of the world's richest in the first decades of the 20th century end up in such economic disorder?"(Yergin & Stanislaw 2002:240) "Why did the hugely prosperous and increasingly democratic nation of the 1910s and 1920s go so badly off the rails in the decades after 1930?"(Collier 1990: 646)

At the dawn of World War I, Argentina was one of the wealthiest countries in the world with a small population and vast natural resources. Considered a "land of opportunity" in South America, the country drew masses of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Buenos Aires was hailed as the "Paris of South America," renowned for its imposing boulevards and Beaux-Arts architecture. Argentina had an educated and literate urban population with a burgeoning middle class. It seemed that the country's manifest destiny was to become a global power. The consensus today is that Argentina is "a utopian dream that went awry," (Nouzeilles & Montaldo 2002), a country mired in the "third world." It has followed a "reversal of development" (Waisman 1987) that saw its status downgraded from categories of developed to underdeveloped. The once seventh-richest country in the world (with a per-capita income ahead of countries like Canada, France, Spain, Japan and Italy) descended into

widespread poverty and an economic crisis that caused the world's largest debt default in December 2001.

What went wrong? Observers repeatedly ask this question. It is the title of a book by historian Colin M. MacLachlan (2006). In its forward, popular historian Douglas Brinkley poses Argentina's downward spiral as follows: "Argentina – at one time believed to be a new-world cornucopia – went from a grand illusion to a basket case within a tumultuous century" (2006:viii). The dominant consensus is that Argentina had great potential but failed remarkably. Explaining Argentina's failure is a cottage industry for economists and political scientists. Entire edited volumes are devoted to this kind of speculation (della Paolera & Taylor 2003).

While commentators concur that Argentina failed, they disagree on the causes of its catastrophe. Some blame Argentina's failure on its national character (see Aguinis 2001; Grondona 1995). They describe the country like an errant, ne'er-do-well child whose potential was undermined by a tendency towards indolence and narcissistic self-regard (read: too much psychoanalysis). At the height of the country's economic crisis in 2001, *New York Times* correspondent Larry Rother accused Argentines of "paying heavily for squandering blessings."[1] Several months earlier, US Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill told *The Economist*, "They don't have any export industry to speak of at all. And they like it that way. Nobody forced them to be what they are."[2] According to these critics, Argentina suffers from a lack of discipline, endemic pessimism, and longstanding feelings of victimization and resentment in which the country scapegoats others for its own failings. Argentine national self-image

[1] New York Times, February 8, 2002.
[2] New York Times, December 25, 2001.

is often drawn in sharp contrast with their 'happier' neighbors to the north, Brazil. The differences are even seen in their respective national music. The mournful melancholy and pervasive nostalgia of the tango is juxtaposed against the light and festive samba.

Others blame Argentina's woes on individuals. Many single out Juan Domingo Perón as key culprit, the country's populist president in the mid-20th century. They blame him either for his paternalistic nationalism or his economic centralization and protectionism. Others point the finger at an entrenched oligarchy, a culture of *caudillos* (a Latin American "strongman"), an antidemocratic military, a reactionary Catholic Church, and, more recently, Carlos Menem and the neoliberal economic policies that he implemented in the 1990s (i.e. deregulation, privatization, etc.). While foreigners frequently blame government corruption and local mismanagement for the country's financial downfall, Argentines tend to hold foreign entities responsible, namely Great Britain, the United States, multinational corporations, the IMF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Bank (Svampa 2005; Sevares 2002; Rapoport 2004). These latter organizations demanded the stringent neoliberal economic policies that Menem imposed and that local commentators describe as a "looting" (*saqueo*).[3] Others, like *Washington Post* financial journalist Paul Blustein (2005) and former IMF Chief Economist Michael Mussa (2002), allocate responsibility both locally and internationally.

To paraphrase a quote attributed to Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina will always have a bright future. When I arrived for my fieldwork in November 2003,

[3] *Memoria del saqueo* (Memory of a Looting) (2004) directed by Fernando "Pino" Solanas recounts this. (Its English language title is *A Social Genocide)*

the country was slowly emerging from its worst economic crisis. Its effects, however, were still omnipresent. “So, you’ve come here to make fun of us,” a friend of my cousin jokingly accused me the day after my arrival. I was taken aback but later realized the remark was typical of the middle class’s wounded pride and insecurity, a thinly veiled demand to be treated on equal terms. “Many don’t even consider us part of Latin America,” I was told on numerous occasions. This self-assessment was due not only to a predominantly European population but also a continuing sense of identification with their ancestors’ country of origin. During the last economic crisis, many Argentines reclaimed their grandparents’ citizenships in order to leave to Europe in search of employment. Commentators pointed out the tragic irony. The grandchildren of those who fled Europe to Argentina to escape poverty and pursue economic opportunities were now heading back for the same reasons.

***El Proceso*: From “Counter-Terrorism” to State Terrorism**

A connection exists between the country’s perpetual economic crises and cycles of authoritarian rule (Pion-Berlin 1989; Smith 1989). When the military dictatorship took power on March 24, 1976, it was the latest in a long line of coups that went back to 1930 when the country’s first democratically elected President was removed from power. During the interim, there was an average of one military coup per decade. From the 1950s onwards, Argentina was said to be in a perpetual state of crisis (Scobie 1971; Romero 2003). According to political scientist Guillermo O’Donnell (1986,1988,1997), the dictatorship of 1966 inaugurated a new and more interventionist style of military rule that he labeled

"bureaucratic authoritarianism." A close relationship existed between military dictatorships and economic power (Pucciarelli 2004). Goaded by local and international economic interests, the military acted to quell instability and curtail popular mobilizations. After the coup in 1966, the crisis only worsened.

When the *Junta* of General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera of the Navy and Air Force Brigadier Orlando Agosti took power in 1976, many Argentines were relieved. The coup was considered inevitable. Cycles of political and economic instability had taken a toll.[4] At the time, right-wing Peronist groups were assassinating left-wing Peronists.[5] The President of the country, Perón's widow, Isabel, was widely reviled for her mismanagement and incompetence. The military took power promising to restore order to the country. They launched what they called *El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Process of National Reorganization). Political activities were prohibited, censorship was widespread, and labor unions and universities were placed under government control (Invernizzi & Gociol 2003).

The goal of the military's actions was to root out a communist threat. Its justification was so-called national security doctrine. The doctrine originated from the United States during the Cold War and refers to counterinsurgency strategies against an internal enemy. In Argentina, the enemy was conceived of as a "subversive": "anyone who opposes the Argentine way of life" (Pion-Berlin 1989:4). In order to eliminate subversives, the military secretly organized over 300 clandestine detention centers throughout the country. Small units of armed

[4] See Robben (2004) for an account of the violence leading up to the coup and after it. He argues that what took place between 1976-1983 was the product of a cycle of violence causing trauma and trauma resulting in violence.
[5] What Peronism means politically will be explained in the next two Chapters.

men in civilian dress (known as *grupos de tarea* or "work groups") kidnapped targets from their homes, their places of work, or off of the streets. They were beaten, hooded, and put into unmarked vehicles and taken to one of the clandestine centers. There, they would be repeatedly tortured, usually with an electric *picana* (a cattle prod).[6] Most were eventually "transferred." This was the military's euphemism for being killed. Victims were either executed and then incinerated or buried in unmarked graves or drugged and thrown alive from airplanes into the River Plate ("fish food" the military called them). In total, an estimated 30,000 people disappeared.[7] The dictatorship's actions were intricately coordinated using various branches of the armed forces and the police (D'Andrea Mohr 1999). They also made a covert agreement with other dictatorships in the region in what was termed Operation Condor (Dinges 2003; Bixen 1998). An Argentine dissident could be abducted or killed in Brazil, Chile or Uruguay and vice versa.

Once aware of the disappearance of their children, despondent parents attempted to verify their whereabouts. The military and police characteristically denied involvement. Filing *habeas corpus* petitions was difficult. Lawyers who filed them could themselves be victims of disappearances. In April 1977, a group of mothers searching for their children joined together in silent protest. They congregated in the Plaza de Mayo, the plaza overlooking the seat of presidential power, wearing white handkerchiefs over their heads and carrying photographs

[6] For more specific accounts of the dictatorship's actions, see CONADEP (1984), Novaro & Palermo (2003), Duhalde (1999), and Paoletti (2002)
[7] This is the number that human rights groups use as an estimation. Other estimates include 9,000, 12,000 and 18,000. For an analysis of the "contested count of the disappeared," see Brysk (1994).

of their children. Since public gatherings were prohibited, they were forced to walk silently in circles. They eventually became known as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo).[8] They were the only visible manifestation of protest during the dictatorship.

Among the mothers searching for their children, a small group of women were also searching for their grandchildren. During military operations, infants and small children were kidnapped alongside their parents. An estimated 30% of the disappeared were women (CONADEP 1984). Some were pregnant at the time of their disappearance. These women were held as prisoners until they gave birth and were then killed. The newborns and young children were either given to military families who registered them as their biological children, sold to other families, or left anonymously in orphanages. In October 1977, a group of 12 women searching for their disappeared children and grandchildren began meeting. They initially called themselves *Abuelas Argentinas con Nietitos Desaparecidos* (Argentine Grandmothers with Disappeared Grandchildren). They eventually became *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo).[9] The *Grandmothers* are a non-govermental organization (NGO) dedicated to the task of searching for and recovering an estimated 500 kidnapped children of the disappeared.

The Aftermath of Violence and the Reclaiming of Bodies

[8] For the sake of brevity, I will refer to them in the thesis as the *Mothers.*
[9] I will refer to them as the *Grandmothers.*

In September 1979, the military government passed a law permitting the declaration of presumption of death for anyone reported disappeared between 1974 and 1979. With the fall of the dictatorship in 1983, the new democratic government also pressured family members to accept that the disappeared were dead. The *Mothers* refused. Their slogan at the time was "*Aparición con vida*" (Appearance with life). They maintained that they would not accept the deaths of their children until they found out what happened to them and their murderers were held responsible.

The policy of forced disappearances had a practical intent.[10] It was an effort to kill political enemies without leaving evidence. There would be no crime without a body. The policy originated in part as a response to the rise of international human rights. Disappearances were a means of avoiding scrutiny from the United Nations and emerging human rights watchdog organizations. The military decided it was politically more expedient to act clandestinely and deny their actions.

The disappearances also had another explanation. In Argentina, there have been repeated struggles over the dead bodies of the country's heroes. In the words of historian Donna Guy, "The cult of dead bodies has always played a factor in Argentine political and religious life" (2004:256). In a similar vein, anthropologist Antonius Robben argues for the "central importance of human remains and their reburial in Argentine political culture" (2005:135). Robben examines how political struggles in Argentina have been historically tied to the

[10] According to the United Nations, forced disappearances are characterized by the abduction and detention of individuals by security forces (either with direct of indirect involvement). These abductions are followed by a refusal to acknowledge the detention.

treatment of dead bodies. In Robben's assessment, the cemetery is a primary site for political battles in Argentina. Repatriations of Argentine leaders serve as metaphors not for settling the past but rather for ongoing political struggle.

These political struggles over dead bodies shaped the military's policy of forced disappearances. In an interview from 1983, Ramón Camps, the military general known as the "butcher of Buenos Aires," took personal responsibility for 5,000 disappearances. When asked where the bodies were buried, he responded, "I prefer not to tell you so as not to create new heroes for subversive youth."[11] In the military's mindset, the recovery of the bodies of the disappeared was linked to the creation of new national icons. Eliminating their bodies was seen as a means of preventing their veneration.

According to historian Lyman Johnson, there is "political meaning associated with bodies, or body parts, of martyred heroes in Latin America" (2004:3).[12] The posthumous treatment of Eva Perón's body is a noteworthy example of this political meaning.[13] Eva died in 1952 at the age of 33 from uterine cancer. Her corpse was embalmed at great expense so that her beauty could be preserved for posterity. Juan Perón's plan to put her corpse on public display in a mausoleum was curtailed by the military coup that deposed him from power in 1955. Dead, Evita was as powerful as she was when alive. Some argue that her death contributed to her enduring mystique (Taylor 1981; Sarlo 2003).

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[11] *Tiempo,* January 27, 1983.
[12] In his edited volume, *Death, Dismemberment and Memory,* historians examine the "processes through which these bodies are selected as political vessels."(Ibid)
[13] Tomás Eloy Martínez wrote a fictionalized account of this in *Santa Evita*.

The military opposed burying her corpse because they believed a gravesite would embolden the Peronist cause. At the time, all images and references to Perón were banned. Instead, they hid her body. Her corpse was transferred between the homes and offices of military officers for safekeeping. The military also reportedly made at least two wax copies of her corpse to create uncertainty as to who was in possession of the real corpse. Military officers who possessed her corpse proudly displayed it to their colleagues. Meanwhile, Peronists demanded the return of her corpse. The whereabouts of her body was of such great interest (as dramatized in Rodolfo Walsh's 1967 short story *Esa Mujer* [That Woman]) that the military eventually transferred her body to Italy in secret and interred it under a false name. In 1970, the Montoneros, a revolutionary Peronist group, kidnapped and executed retired military General Aramburu, the man who had deposed Perón from power in 1955. They offered to exchange his corpse for Eva Perón's. When that failed, they attempted to dispose of the corpse by burying it in limestone. Instead, the limestone preserved the remains and his body was eventually discovered.

In 1971, Eva's corpse was finally returned to Juan Perón in Spain where it remained in his residence on display in an open casket on a dining room table covered with a blue and white silk shroud.[14] According to rumors, Juan instructed his then-wife Isabel to lie on the coffin to absorb Eva's mystical energy. When Perón returned to Argentina from exile, he left her body in Spain. In 1974, the Montoneros stole Aramburu's corpse from the Recoleta cemetery and again attempted to ransom it for the return of Eva Perón's corpse. Eva Perón's body

[14] The shroud was sold in 2004 at an auction for 130,000 euros.

was finally repatriated in 1976 after Juan Perón's death and is now the biggest tourist attraction of the Recoleta cemetery. When I visited her gravesite, an Argentine friend told me of rumors that her vault was fortified to withstand a nuclear attack. When the disappearances began, the posthumous struggle over Eva Perón's body was still going on.

Although not as well traveled, the corpse of Juan Perón also had a notable life after death. In 1987, grave robbers cut off and stole his hands (Guy 2004; Guber 1996). The hands never reappeared. One rumor circulated that his hands were taken in order to use the fingerprints to gain access to hidden Swiss bank accounts where he had stashed money he received from fleeing Nazi war criminals. The most popular theory is that the mutilation was the work of military intelligence agents. The topic is still discussed in Argentina. In recent years, it has been both the subject of a book (del Busto 2003) and a television documentary.

There are other instances of necropolitics in Argentina.[15] In 1989, Argentine president Carlos Menem repatriated the body of 19th century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. Rosas ruled the country from 1829 to 1852 until he was deposed from power and exiled to the United Kingdom where he was buried. Rosas is one of the most controversial figures in Argentine history. In the decades after his removal from power, he was seen as a bloody tyrant. This image persists among the left who still consider him a brutal and despotic *caudillo* (strongman). However, in the 1930s a wave of historical revisionism

[15] I am using this term in its more literal meaning and not in the sense of Achille Mbembe's (2003) reinterpretation of Agamben's reinterpretation of Foucault's notion of biopolitics.

reclaimed him as a favored figure of conservative nationalists who at the time demanded the return of his remains (Shumway 2004a). Debates are still waged over Rosas's legacy. While Menem fashioned his political image after Rosas as a *caudillo* populist, the specific intent of the repatriation was not only to address debates about the 19th century. The repatriation addressed debates in the more recent past. Menem attempted to use the reburial as an effort to unify all Argentines and framed it as an act of national reconciliation. Shortly after, he issued pardons for military leaders convicted of crimes during the dictatorship (Shumway 2004b; Robben 2005). The repatriation of Rosas's body was politically linked to the pardons.

Similar struggles have taken place over the dead bodies of national icons throughout Latin America, from the execution and dismemberment of indigenous leader Túpac Amaru II in the 18th century to the search for and exhumation of Che Guevara's remains in Bolivia by the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team in 1997. Guevara's corpse had been buried in a secret location by the Bolivian military. When his corpse was recovered, his hands were missing. They had been amputated after his execution. The whereabouts of his hands is still a subject of speculation although Argentine police traveled to Bolivia to verify his identity using his fingerprints.[16] Guevara's remains were repatriated to Cuba and buried in a mausoleum at the site of his decisive victory against Battista underneath a status in his likeness.[17] The reburial of Guevara's remains in Cuba

[16] Guevara's hands are the subject of the 2005 documentary film *The Hands of Che Guevara.*

[17] In 2004, a group of Argentine legislators requested that his remains be repatriated back to his native country, a request that was not taken seriously since his sons who reside in Cuba have no desire to move him.

on the thirtieth anniversary of his death marked an important moment in his iconization.

The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team that located Guevara's corpse was formed in the aftermath of the Argentine military dictatorship. After the return to democracy, family members knew that the disappeared were dead but demanded to know who killed them, where, and how. U.S. forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow attempted to provide answers to these questions through the excavation of mass graves. He also helped train and coordinate the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team. The exhumations provided proof of the military dictatorship's atrocities. This was one of the earliest applications of forensic science to the investigation and documentation of human rights abuses (Cohen Salama 1992; Joyce & Stover 1991). The Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team subsequently exported the expertise they gained in Argentina and have worked in over thirty countries throughout Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Recovering bodies helped provide closure for grieving family members. However, in Argentina, the vast majority of bodies of the disappeared are unrecoverable. Some were incinerated while those dropped in the river are irretrievable.

In her analysis of exhumations and reburials during the postsocialist transition in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Katherine Verdery asked the question: "Why has the postsocialist period been accompanied by so much activity around dead bodies, and what does the politics concerning them signify?" (2000:3) She argues that the materiality of bodies makes abstract political processes appear tangible and real. Dead bodies become important symbolic reference points during political transitions. Reburying dead bodies forms part of

what Verdery terms the "reordering of meaningful worlds" (2000:36). In a similar vein, many anthropologists analyzing exhumations argue for their symbolic importance, not only for family members but for the entire nation. As Antonius Robben argues, "The torn fabric of society is restored by funerary rituals" (2005:145).[18]

In post-dictatorship Argentina, political struggles over the disappeared have not revolved around recovering their bodies. Instead of reclaiming their bodies, the efforts of human rights activists have revolved around reclaiming their politics. The lack of a body that characterizes forced disappearances, the source of great anguish for family members, was transformed into a powerful mobilizing force for human rights groups. The disappeared are venerated as a collective and idealized abstraction.

However, other bodies have been major sites of political struggle in the post-dictatorship years. Argentina presents a rare context in which human rights groups have attempted to locate and recover living bodies. Locating children of the disappeared who have been kidnapped by the military and reuniting them with their biological families has played an important symbolic role in the "reordering of meaningful worlds" in post-dictatorship Argentina. Far greater conflict and political struggles has been waged over the identification and recovery of the kidnapped children of the disappeared than over exhumations. The *Grandmothers,* the organization occupied with that task, emerged as one of

[18] A large social science literature exists devoted to analyzing the symbolic significance of excavations and reburials (Rév [1995] on Hungary, Sant Cassia [2005] on Cyprus, Ferrándiz [2006] on Spain, Luzzatto (2005) on the reburials of Mussolini.).

the country's leading human rights groups. Their national and international influence now extends beyond their specific cause.

After the fall of the dictatorship, the *Grandmothers* began to locate children who they believed were their grandchildren as a result of anonymous tips and their own investigations. However, before they could reunite them with their biological families, they needed to be able to verify their biological identities. The *Grandmothers* contacted scientists in the United States about using incipient genetic technologies. A group of geneticists, including Mary-Claire King[19], adapted existing paternity tests and developed an "index of grandpaternity" in 1984. It could confirm the affinity between child and grandparents with an accuracy rate of 99.95% through blood analysis (King 1992; Penchaszadeh 1992). The index relied mainly on the clinical typing of HLA (human leukocyte antigens) genes. The appearance of the same alleles of HLA genes in a child and two grandparents signified a probable family belonging (Abuelas 1995). Developments in genetic technologies (including the advent of DNA fingerprinting and PCR (polymerase chain reaction) later allowed for more accurate identification techniques to supplant HLA in the 1990s (Owens, Harvey-Blankenship, & King 2002). In 1987, a National Genetic Data Bank was created in the Durand Hospital in Buenos Aires to store DNA samples from family members. Samples are compared with those from potential children of the disappeared in order to match them with their biological families.

Being able to identify the children of the disappeared was only the first step. Unlike the recovery of dead bodies, these are struggles over "lived bodies"

[19] King is probably best known for her 1990 discovery of the BRCA1 gene linked to hereditary breast cancer.

(Lock & Farquhar 2007) endowed with consciousness and intentionality but unaware of their history. The *Grandmothers* use the concept of *restitution* to describe the process by which they are reunified with their biological families. Restitution is considered both a legal and a psychological process. Initial struggles over the children of the disappeared were custody battles. As the children aged, restitutions became more complicated. As of the present date, the *Grandmothers* have located 88 grandchildren. The restitution of kidnapped children of the disappeared to their biological families has helped define the post-dictatorship human rights struggle in Argentina. The kidnapped children of the disappeared have become potent symbols for how Argentina addresses the legacy of the recent past.

After the military relinquished power in 1983, the democratically elected government of Raúl Alfonsín established the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) to investigate the military dictatorship's crimes. Their findings (CONDADEP 1984) led to the *Trial of the Juntas* in 1985 in which top military leaders were put on trial for human rights abuses (Ciancaglini & Granovsky 1995). Called the "Argentine Nuremberg," it was the first trial of its kind in Latin America. The leaders were convicted and sentenced to prison. However, President Alfonsín passed the amnesty laws of *Punto Final* (Final Point)[20] in 1986 and *Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience)[21] in 1987 to curtail further prosecutions. After Alfonsín resigned due to economic chaos caused by hyperinflation, Carlos Menem was elected and subsequently pardoned all of

[20] *Punto Final* set a date to end investigations and prosecutions of military officials.
[21] *Obidencia Debida* exempted lower ranking military personnel from prosecutions with the justification that they were following orders.

those who had been convicted. Within this context, cases of kidnapped children of the disappeared became one of the only legal means to pursue justice for the crimes of the dictatorship.[22] This context of impunity[23] remained the same until the election of Néstor Kirchner in 2003. His government repealed the amnesty laws and overturned the pardons. Trials against military perpetrators restarted in 2006. When I arrived to Argentina for my fieldwork in November 2003, it was an auspicious moment for the human rights movement. As *Grandmothers* President Estela Carlotto told me, it was a "springtime for human rights."

While human rights groups were united during the dictatorship, schisms marked the post-dictatorship period. The growing fault lines became visible when the *Mothers* rejected the National Commission of the Disappeared because it was not comprised of legislators and lacked ample investigative powers. The most notable split occurred in 1986 when the *Mothers* divided into two groups, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Linea Fundadora* (*Founding Line Mothers*) and *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (*Mothers*). The *Founding Line Mothers* splintered off for two primary reasons: they accused *Mothers* President Hebe de Bonafini of a dictatorial leadership style and rejected her growing political radicalism. This included opposition to exhumations. The *Founding Line Mothers* aligned with the *Grandmothers* and the *Family Members* organization. Together, they represent the reformist wing of the human rights movement. Bonafini's group represents the more radical faction.

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[22] The charge of kidnapping babies was exempted from the amnesty laws and pardons. In the late 1990s, numerous military leaders, including Massera and Videla, were arrested for their role in the "systematic theft of minors."
[23] Impunity in international human rights law refers to a state's failure to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable for their actions.

Methodological Considerations

At the annual March of Resistance[24] of the *Mothers,* the organization sets up a merchandise table alongside the Plaza de Mayo. It features selections from their bookstore. Among the titles are works by Bourdieu, Gramsci, and Foucault; in other words, some of the most admired and oft-cited sources of my graduate student cohort. The titles selected for prominent display are often striking in the bookstores lining *Avenida Corrientes* in downtown Buenos Aires. Lying side by side with the recent translation of *The Da Vinci Code* are the latest philosophical tracts by academic heavyweights like Toni Negri, Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek (whose arrival in town during my stay was met with the fanfare generally reserved for Hollywood celebrities). The vibrant intellectual culture of Buenos Aires is often compared to that of Paris. Middle-class, educated Argentines are proud of keeping up with philosophical currents, especially those emanating from Continental Europe. Interviews with prominent philosophers and social scientists grace the front page of major newspapers.

Human rights organizations have longstanding collaborations with social scientists. The *Grandmothers,* in particular, have created networks across numerous disciplines, including genetics, law, psychoanalysis and the social sciences (as discussed in Chapter 6). In Argentina, a synergy exists between the social sciences and human rights culture. Analogous to anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes's notions of the "violence of everyday life" (1992) or a

[24] A yearly commemorative event held in December.

"genocidal continuum," (2002), human rights activists in Argentina (like documentary filmmaker Fernando "Pino" Solanas) speak of a "social genocide" occurring in the country. They use the concept to refer to the consequences of endemic poverty. The poverty is considered a product of the military dictatorship's economic policies. Arguments and concepts confined to academia in North America circulate in mainstream political discourse in Argentina.

A major part of the *Grandmothers'* institutional activities is the production of knowledge about their experience. Such knowledge is necessary to diffuse information and to garner economic support for their cause. When I was in Argentina, one of their dominant sources of funding was the European Union. The reason that the European Union funds the *Grandmothers* is that they have made their cause visible. They produce films and radio programs, publish books and a monthly newsletter, have a frequently updated website, and sponsor numerous public events. They even have their own biographical archive in collaboration with social scientists from the University of Buenos Aires. The biographical archive collects testimonies from family members and friends of the disappeared. The results are presented to children of the disappeared after they are located. The purpose of the testimonies is to construct a life history of disappeared individuals (Eric Stener Carlson's *I Remember Julia* (1996) pioneered the composite account in Argentina).

The earliest accounts of the dictatorship were mainly compilations of victim testimonies (CONADEP 1984; Gabetta 1983; Nosiglia 1985; Fisher 1989). Ex-Disappeared have also written about their experiences in memoirs (Timerman 1981; Portnoy 1986; Tamburrini 2002) or fictionalized accounts (Kozameh 1987). In recent years, testimonies have been collected and published on many

aspects of the dictatorship from the experience of ex-political prisoners (Obra Colectiva Testimonial 2003) to students at the University of Buenos Aires (FUBA 2000). Several edited volumes have also been published compiling testimonies of children of the disappeared (Gelman & La Madrid 1997; Jaroslavsky 2004) Children of the disappeared have also made documentary films about their parents and their own lives (Albertina Carri's *Los Rubios* (2003)*,* María Inés Roqué's *Papá Iván* (2004)*,* Andrés Habegger's *(h) Historias cotidianas* (2001), & Laura Bondarevsky's *Che vo cachai* (2003) to name four that I have seen)

There are also organizations whose work includes collecting testimonial accounts of victims. *Memoria Abierta* (Open Memory) is an organization supported by several prominent Argentine human rights groups. Their primary function is to collect, organize, and disseminate information about the dictatorship. Part of this work has involved amassing an Oral Archive. The Oral Archive is an audiovisual collection of over four hundred videotaped interviews conducted with family members and other human rights activists. The archive is intended for public consultation by researchers like me. For six months, I went to the offices of *Memoria Abierta* once or twice weekly to transcribe pertinent interviews from their collection. I transcribed fifty interviews in total. This made me, according to the coordinator of the archive, the researcher who had consulted it the most up to that time.

I also interviewed many of the same people. When I began visiting the archives of *Memoria Abierta*, I had already begun my interviews. After watching and transcribing several interviews at *Memoria Abierta*, I made comparisons between theirs and mine. Initially, I was struck by how similar some were. Interviewees recounted the same key events. Even more surprising, they often

used the exact same descriptions, even the same words, phrases and sentences verbatim. Later, when I scheduled interviews with individuals whose interviews were in the archive, I made certain to watch that interview first. During the subsequent interviews, I realized how difficult it was to deviate from the pre-existing narrative account of their experience. This was because the interviews were formalized encounters with people who had already spoken about their experience on numerous occasions.[25] Some were happy that I had already seen their *Memoria Abierta* account. "Fantastic. I don't have to tell it all again," one family member responded when I told her that I had watched her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

While I found substantial overlap between many of my interviews and those of *Memoria Abierta*, I also noted that some interviews in their archive were more comprehensive than my own. The explicit aim of *Memoria Abierta's* interviews was to document and preserve a testimonial account for future generations. This provided a motivation for family members to make that interview definitive. Some of the interviews were conducted over several days lasted up to seven hours. Therefore, I have not given preferential treatment to my own interviews for this dissertation. The accounts featured in this dissertation are from a mix of sources, including my own interviews, published transcripts, public statements, media interviews, and *Memoria Abierta's* Oral Archive.

Since the production of testimonies formed part of my research context, fieldwork organized around individual interviews would amount to "reinventing the wheel." Instead, I shifted focus to what was taking place in public – human rights

[25] Several individuals even told me to "watch the video" in lieu of doing another interview.

activities, open debates, and legal battles. In part, this thesis is an effort to examine the larger political and cultural context around which life history narratives are produced and shaped. In the end, my fieldwork consisted of three main components. First, I conducted 37 interviews during the course of my research. Interviews were with family members, human rights group workers, mental health teams, and jurists.

Second, I attended various human rights events and activities. The majority of these events were public. In total, I attended 42 events that were sponsored by the *Grandmothers*. These included conferences, talks, music concerts, theater events, school presentations, and other activities. I also attended numerous other human rights related events sponsored by other organizations. For example, I went numerous times to the weekly *Juicio por la Verdad* (Truth Trial) held in La Plata and sponsored by the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights that was organized around collecting testimonies.[26] I also attended two legal trials against military perpetrators. Human rights activities were a constant during my stay. Shortly after I arrived to the field, numerous public activities were held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of democracy. Plans to create a Museum of Memory resulted in numerous public events including roundtable talks and workshops.

The third component of my fieldwork was gathering already available information. Considering the large body of literature that exists on the topic, this

[26] Because overturning the pardon and amnesty laws was still in process at the time, these trials had no legal value beyond gathering information with the hope that they could later be used to prosecute military perpetrators. Besides family members and ex-disappeared, neighbors who witnessed disappearances and accused military and police personnel were also called to testify.

proved to be a formidable task. I consulted the archives and libraries of numerous human rights organizations, including *Grandmothers,* CELS, *Mothers,* The Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights, and the Provincial Commission for Memory. I also gathered research materials from several university and professional libraries, the National Library of Buenos Aires, new and used bookstores, and at various newspaper archives. Among media archives, the most important site was the archives of Página/12, a left-leaning daily newspaper founded in 1987 that has been the publication of record of the human rights movement. There, I had to flip through newspapers armed with a number of key dates in order to locate pertinent articles.

An Ethnography of Human Rights

Since human rights are public, an ethnography of human rights should be an analysis of public events rather than inner experience.[27] Forced disappearances were an attempt by the military to make its human rights violations invisible. To make the violations visible, the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* were required to make their suffering over the disappearance of their children and grandchildren visible. In such a way, this thesis examines suffering that has already been made visible, not suffering made visible by me (i.e. an activist approach). I will not make my own empathetic appeals on behalf of my informants but examine how they are made ethnographically. Other

[27] On the individual experience of family member victims of the military dictatorship, Ludmila da Silva Catela (2001) has written the definitive ethnographic account.

anthropologists have also examined how human rights organizations make their appeals public. For example, Slyomovics' (2005) ethnography uses performance theory in her analysis of human rights in Morocco to analyze the ways in which human rights activists creatively draw attention to their plight.[28]

This ethnographic focus has two primary consequences. First, it leads to an emphasis on public figures; the human rights leaders who are the "public faces" of the organizations. In Argentina, human rights groups are structured around charismatic leaders. Currently, the two main "public faces" of human rights are Hebe de Bonafini from the *Mothers* and Estela Carlotto, the President of the *Grandmothers.* A second consequence of this emphasis is a focus on public events. As such, this thesis is a work of contemporary history. It addresses events in the recent past that are still in the process of unfolding. While this thesis includes events that took place during my fieldwork (the Blumberg mobilization in Chapter 12, the announcement of the creation of a Museum of Memory in the conclusion), I also refer to events that took place both before and after the fourteen months I spent in Argentina.

Discussions of human rights often refer to a public sphere (e.g. Over 1999). The public sphere was originally defined by Jürgen Habermas (1991) as a societal space for public interaction. He cites the salons of France and the coffee houses of London as the paradigmatic sites for the emergence of the public sphere. The advent of the printing press was also important in its development. The public sphere is seen as a space for people to exercise their rights as citizens. The notion of a public sphere has been criticized for its race and class

[28] In Argentina, Taylor (1997) has also analyzed the *Mothers* using performance theory.

bias as well as its gender dichotomy (male – public/female – private). In fact, the *Mothers* are often cited as key examples of a group that has challenged this dichotomy (Franco 1999). The initial choice of the Plaza de Mayo by the *Mothers* for their protest was related to its proximity to the seat of presidential power. However, as Setha Low argues, plazas in Latin America have historically occupied a central role both in political struggles and in the circulation of public discourse (2000).

Organization of Thesis

This public sphere is a space of political contestation. Struggles over human rights are waged over competing empathetic appeals accompanied by political claims. This thesis will examine Argentina's human rights struggle in three parts: public debates about the disappeared, public debates over the children of the disappeared, and public debates between family member human rights organizations.

Chapter 1 examines shifting images of the disappeared within the human rights movement. During the dictatorship and in the years after the return to democracy, the dominant view of the disappeared was that they were innocent victims. This view was necessary to counter the military's view of the disappeared as subversive terrorists. The dominant view of the disappeared today among human rights groups is that they were committed political activists who died for a better world. As this view became more entrenched, some progressive commentators called this account into question. Chapter 2 addresses debates over the political activities of the disappeared. In particular, I

address accusations that have been made against the Montoneros, the largest revolutionary group during the 1970s in Argentina, including criticisms directed against the group's leadership. Within these debates about the disappeared, questions are raised about the place of those who disappeared but survived. Chapter 3 turns to the question of survivors and addresses why they have a marginal position among family member groups in the human rights struggle in Argentina. In particular, I examine accusations of "treason" that have been made against survivors.

Part Two turns to cases of kidnapped children of the disappeared. I proceed historically from the earliest cases to the present. Chapter 4 examines the arguments that the *Grandmothers* made when they first located their grandchildren in the hands of military perpetrators. In order to make appeals for custody of their grandchildren, they argued for the need for restitution in biological terms. I analyze how these claims are based on a historical predisposition in Argentina to conceptualize identity in biological terms. Chapter 5 discusses two major court cases involving children of the disappeared that took place in the late 1980s that became public controversies. A turning point in the *Grandmothers'* search came in the 1990s when the grandchildren became legally adults. Custody was no longer the issue so the *Grandmothers* were compelled to develop a new strategy. They developed public campaigns centered around the topic of identity that attempted to direct those with "doubts about their identity" to contact the organization. Chapter 6 analyzes these public campaigns.

Although these public campaigns lured many young people who thought they could be children of the disappeared to contact the organization, cases also existed in which the *Grandmothers* believed they located one of their

grandchildren but the individual refused to have their identity genetically verified. In such cases, the *Grandmothers* demanded compulsory extractions of blood. Chapter 7 presents a legal case that resulted when a putative child of the disappeared refused a judge's order of a compulsory extraction. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court. The majority of grandchildren who have been located in the last decade have willingly come forth on their own accord. Chapter 8 addresses the difficulties involved in some of these recent restitutions, in particular the close ties that the grandchildren often have to the military families that raised them.

Part Three turns to the larger context of human rights in Argentina. It examines divisions between the radical and reformist sectors. Chapter 9 opens with the controversy unleashed by Hebe de Bonafini's celebration of the September 11, 2001 attacks. In examining debate between the radical and the reformist sectors of human rights, I address questions about the responsibility of the United States for the dictatorship and the role of US-based philanthropic organizations in international human rights. As Hebe de Bonafini becomes a more controversial and polarizing figure, the President of the *Grandmothers,* Estela Carlotto, emerges as her reformist counterfigure. Chapter 10 analyzes the "dueling matriarchies" of Carlotto and Bonafini, comparing and contrasting their life histories, their styles, and their rhetoric. I show how these individual differences manifest themselves in their respective organizations. After Néstor Kirchner is elected in 2003, a surprising development takes place as he embraces and is embraced by much of the human rights movement. Not only the *Grandmothers* but Hebe de Bonafini's *Mothers* become prominent supporters of the government. Chapter 11 turns to Kirchner's "passive revolution" and the

movement of human rights organizations from symbols of resistance to part of the political establishment. As Kirchner accumulates political power, a rightwing backlash occurred in 2004 when a father whose son was murdered after being kidnapped mobilizes a “Crusade” against crime. This movement is seen as a direct challenge to Kirchner’s power. Chapter 12 analyzes this “Crusade.” In particular, I address how a movement mobilized around parental suffering over the loss of the child came into direct conflict with the human rights movement, who are also mobilized around the same kind of grief. In addition, I examine issues relating to the fear of crime and the privatization of security.

In the conclusion, I address the emergence of the recovered children of the disappeared, the *Nietos* (the *Grandchild*), as political actors. I argue that their appearance represents an important symbolic triumph for the human rights movement that signals the continuity of the *Grandmothers’* search into the future. I also address the plans to transfer the most notorious concentration camp from the dictatorship into a Museum of Memory as a parallel development. The Museum of Memory signifies the institutionalization of the human rights movement. Once forming part of the political resistance in Argentina, the *Grandmothers* have now become part of the political establishment.

Chapter 1: From "Names in a Phonebook" to "Best of Youth"

"You know, Argentina wouldn't be in this mess if the disappeared were here. They took the best of a generation." A family member tells me this shortly after my arrival in Buenos Aires as he drives us through one of the city's poorer neighborhoods. His hands momentarily depart the steering wheel as he gestures to a *cartonero* outside on the street. Hauling a wheelbarrow overloaded with cardboard to the recycling plant, he will earn what generally amounted to three or four dollars per day. The disappeared have become a popular explanation to account for the country's economic, social, and political woes. The explanation originates out of human rights discourse but gained wider cultural currency in the wake of Argentina's 2001 economic implosion.

The argument is as follows: the dictatorship disappeared politically active young people who would have become Argentina's future leaders. They would have been the primary opposition to the neoliberal reforms imposed upon the country during and after the dictatorship. These reforms are widely considered to be the source of the country's recent economic woes. A popular functionalist interpretation of the dictatorship is that the disappeared were eliminated precisely so that the military's "economic plan" could be implemented. Without them - the "best of their generation" - the country was left with a corrupt and subservient political leadership that triggered the country's economic downfall. In 2004, as Kirchner was renegotiating payment on the external debt that the country had

defaulted on in 2001, a popular graffiti throughout Buenos Aires declared that the disappearances were “30,000 reasons not to pay the debt.”

Arguments such as these indicate the important place that the disappeared occupy in political discussions in contemporary Argentina. As a collective entity, the disappeared are a key reference point for Argentine progressive politics. An understanding of who the disappeared were, what they represent, and how these representations have changed over time is integral to understanding human rights discussions in Argentina. However, in looking at collective representations of the disappeared, distinct and contradictory images emerge. The “best of their generation” view described above was not always the dominant one.

In the press or the social science and human rights literature, the disappeared are alternately described as *guerrilleros*, political dissidents, activists, leftist intellectuals, students, innocent bystanders, Peronists, union delegates, and/or revolutionary socialists. These groupings can comprise anyone and everyone from armed revolutionaries, their sympathizers, the political left, to just about everyone else. For the military and their supporters, the disappeared are uniformly described as terrorists and combatants in an open war. At the same time, their accounts grudgingly admit the possibility of “collateral damage” involving “innocent” civilians.

Debate also exists over the number of the disappeared. Human rights groups estimate 30,000, while other organizations and academics put the number closer to 10,000. The military and its supporters argue for no more than

a few thousand. Additional questions surround who counts as disappeared. Disappearances involved the distinctive application of state terror. However, not everyone disappeared during the dictatorship. Some were executed on the spot and their bodies were recovered. Others were disappeared but family members were able to recover their bodies. Some argue that the individual ceases to be disappeared with the recovery of the body. Also, although the vast majority of disappearances occurred during the dictatorship, numerous assassinations and disappearances perpetrated by state-sanctioned paramilitary groups took place before the dictatorship during the pre-dictatorship regime of Isabel Perón.

A Clash of Generations

As the use of the word "generation" in "best of a generation" signifies, the disappeared are collectively identified as born during the same historical epoch. As a generation, they were born in the 1950s and came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They are defined by their youth. Statistics support this characterization. The military largely targeted young people for disappearance. The vast majority of the disappeared were younger than 35. According to CONADEP's numbers, only 17% were over 35 while just 30% were over 30 (1984:285). Collectively representing the disappeared as a generation elides the older minority.

They are not only defined by their youth but their political activism is also seen as a *product* of their youth. In the words of Berta, a member of the *Grandmothers*: "All children want to change the world with a purity and

enthusiasm."[29] Referring to her disappeared son and daughter-in-law and their friends, she proceeds to link this sentiment to her grandson who also desires to make the world a better place. Berta's son became politically active at a young age. At 16 years old, he was already going to Peronist demonstrations.

Like Berta's son, a substantial number of the disappeared belonged to left-wing Peronist organizations. Although in Berta's case, her ex-husband, widely considered to be Argentina's greatest living poet, was active in the same organization as her son, this was anomalous. More often than not, the politics of the disappeared were in sharp conflict with their parents' politics. A recurring thread in family member narratives is one of parents who were hostile to Perón coming into conflict with their children who adulated him. Middle-class parents of disappeared children frequently describe themselves as anti-Peronists, often sympathetic to the Radical Party, Argentina's other major party.[30] For example, *Grandmother* Elsa speaks of her daughter who was studying agronomy at the university. "One day she tells me that she's active in Peronist Youth. I was always anti-Peronist. He was terrible. I grew up with people who weren't Peronist." In the words of a father whose son disappeared, "We were not a family that was sympathetic to Perón. We weren't but they [the children] were." Others recount household arguments over Perón between her conservative husband and her son. Her son was "very much in agreement with Peronism. He argued with his father because he was anti-Peronist. We both were." In the late 1960s and 1970s, large numbers of middle-class students joined University Peronist Youth groups, breaking with the political tradition of their parents.

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[29] Interview from *Memoria Abierta*

[30] Its name is a misnomer: it is the traditional party of the middle-class.

Perón's traditional base of support was from the working classes. According to Gillespie (1982), the emergence of a Peronist left did not occur until after the coup that forced Perón from power in 1955. Revolutionary Peronism emerged later in the mid-1960s. It was seen as a fusion between Perón and Che Guevara. Many revolutionary socialists believed that since Perón was the de facto representative of the working classes, a socialist revolution in Argentina had to be Peronist. Young people who joined these groups were either too young to remember Perón when he was in power or had yet to be born while their parents who opposed him did. In the words of Rosa, vice president of the *Grandmothers,* "I have never been a Peronist. I am still not a Peronist. I always repeat this sentence: I didn't read in Perón what the generations after me read in Perón. I lived through Peronism. So these are my conclusions about Peronism even if my disappeared daughter was inclined towards a Revolutionary Peronism."

The generational divide went beyond supporting Perón. Support for Perón was symptomatic of a larger generational rupture. It was an Argentine manifestation of politically radical youth counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s that occurred in various contexts throughout the world (e.g. May '68).[31] Its icons were not only Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara but also the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and *Bonnie and Clyde.*[32] Like other parallel counter-cultural movements, it constituted a rejection of their parents' middle-class, bourgeois values and political complacency.

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[31] See Terán (1993) and Sigal (2002) for an intellectual history of the emergence of the Argentine new left in the 1960s and Pujol (2002)

[32] See Pujol (2002) on Argentine culture in the 1960s and Dunn (2000) for a discussion of the emergence of the 1960s Brazilian "Tropicália" counterculture.

Some parents recount family conflict resulting from their children's rejection of their consumerist lifestyles. For example, one mother speaks of her hurt feelings after buying her son new sweaters as gifts only to find out later that he had given them away to the poor. He also later gave away their refrigerator and car. Reina, who in her own description "liked to live well," recounts the following story of a friend of her son who briefly stayed with the family. One evening, some of Reina's friends were over for dinner when her son's friend returned to the home. Reina invited him to eat with them. He declined saying that he had to study and needed to go to sleep early. When the guests left hours later, Reina noticed that he was still awake. Engaging him in conversation, she asked him why he had told her he was going to sleep. He responded that it was a pretext: "I got up from the table because I can't see so much food when people are dying of hunger." Reina, upset by his comment, accused him of being an ungracious guest. "Look, you don't have the right to say that. I invited you to stay here. I received you with open arms…" In a similar vein, Reina recounts a dispute with her son that resulted in their estrangement before his disappearance. He noticed that she had changed the tapestry on an armchair and asked how much it had cost. When she responded, "100 pesos," he reacted angrily: "*La puta madre*, do you know how many children can eat for 100 pesos?" After the subsequent argument, according to Reina, "I didn't see him so much after."[33]

This alienation between parents and children was at times profound. Another mother whose pregnant daughter disappeared found a tape recording

[33] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

after her disappearance in which she discusses her plans for her unborn child with friends. On the tape, she says that if she and her partner were unable to raise their child, she wanted them and not her parents to raise their child. She reasoned that her friends would be able "to take care of them and educate them the way we want." Her parents, on the other hand, would not.

In the conventional narrative of counterculture youth groups, radical youth ultimately becomes assimilated into the political mainstream.[34] Akin to Marx's observation that "the traditions of the dead generation weigh like a nightmare on the living," rebellious youth ultimately collapses under responsibility's weight as children succumb to their parents' fate. In this trajectory, the ideals of youth are compromised by the contingencies and economic necessities that come with age. This narrative is commonly observed in North America and Europe as hippie counter-culture matured into the "me generation," a yippie-to-yuppie transformation typified by the 1983 film *The Big Chill* or Jerry Rubin's journey from 1960s anti-establishment icon into 1980s Wall Street venture capitalist.

Revolutionary idealism transformed into cynical disillusionment is also a recurring motif of Latin American fiction. Carlos Fuentes' *The Death of Artemios Cruz* (1962), considered a landmark work in Latin American fiction, traces the titular protagonist's life course from idealistic hero of the Mexican revolution into a ruthless and corrupt landowner. He ultimately becomes what he was once fighting against. In a more recent representation, the final triptych of Alexandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* (2000) depicts a former revolutionary turned

[34] For example, Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business, Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997) discusses how 1960's counterculture images and slogans became co-opted by marketing and advertising campaigns of 1990's capitalism.

bedraggled hired gun. In his pre-revolutionary life, he was a university professor who abandoned his family to take up the revolutionary cause only to later lose his ideals. The line between someone who will kill for a political cause and someone who kills for money, the film suggests, is a slippery slope. The character has been seen as inspired less by Marcos and the Zapatistas than by Abimael Guzmán, the philosophy professor who became head of Peru's Shining Path.

The disappeared (by virtue of their disappearance) did not live long enough to be forced to make any of life's concessions. They are frozen in time at the moment of their disappearance, remaining outside of the aging process with its responsibilities and wrinkles. They never get old. Their youth is preserved in the photographs that accompany the tributes, commemorations, and publications of family member human rights organizations. Human rights commemorations are mainly structured around the display of photographic images of the disappeared.[35] The photographs are headshots that resemble school photographs. When I first saw the images grouped together, my initial impression was how young they looked. The eternal youth preserved in their photographs comes to represent their ideals pure of compromise.

Another key site where images of the disappeared are disseminated are the captioned photographs that commemorate the date of their disappearance published in the progressive daily newspaper *Página/12.* In general, poems or messages from friends and family accompany the image. In this way, the anniversary of their disappearance becomes their new birth date. Although the

[35] For example, Bonafini's *Mothers* construct a pyramid of photographs of the disappeared around the monument of the Plaza de Mayo, the center of their march. *The Grandmothers, the Mothers* and *Family Members* carry a banner of photographs on their procession down the Avenida de Mayo to the Plaza.

captions sometimes assert, “it’s been 27-years since your disappearance,” they never state, “you would be 52-years-old today.” In fact, in an entire year of following and clipping these notices in the newspaper, I only once came across one of these tributes where their age was given in the present. It was for a *Mother* who died. The caption, written by the *Founding Line Mothers*, stated, “You would be 90 today.” That she was allowed to age while the disappeared are not is no accident. After the disappearance, a new protagonist emerged: family members joining together in search for their loved ones. They age, even after their death, while their children remain frozen in time at the moment of their disappearance.

One of the most abhorrent aspects about disappearances as a means of eliminating political opponents is the disappeared’s distinctive ontological status as neither alive nor dead. In a widely circulated quote that appears in many academic and journalistic treatments of the topic, General Videla defined the disappeared (in his words, “an unknown quantity”) as “neither alive nor dead. They are disappeared.” Although the uncertainty of not knowing whether their disappeared child was alive or dead was a source of great distress for family members, human rights groups now use this same definition in speaking about them. Even human rights groups that support excavations refuse to use the term deceased or dead to describe the disappeared. Like their youth, the temporal status of the disappeared is fixed and unchanging. Someone *was* not disappeared. Their disappearance becomes a permanent state. Even if the disappearance occurred thirty years ago, someone *is* disappeared. They are disappeared in the present. In the words of Hebe de Bonafini, “the disappeared

are disappeared forever."[36] One of the most frequently repeated chants at human rights rallies in Argentina states: ¡Los 30 mil desaparecidos: presentes, ahora y siempre! ("The thirty thousand disappeared: present, now and forever!"). I remember being surprised when I encountered a reference to the children of the disappeared as "war orphans" in an article from *The New York Times* from the late 1980s. Even more problematic than their use of the term "war" is their use of the term "orphans." Being an orphan requires acceptance of the child's parents' death. In Argentina, this is not the case. The children of the disappeared are never referred to as *huerfanos* (orphans) in Argentina.

This atemporal permanence leads to the view of the disappeared as spectral presences. In the words of historian Osvaldo Bayer, "the dead are not buried. The disappeared reappear. They come and go. They return in reality, in jurisprudence, in classrooms, in politics, in religion. They have become the original sin of Argentina."(1999:14). He continues, evoking Videla's definition: "they are neither alive nor dead. They are among us. They follow us every day and every night."(1999:15) Although the disappeared are not explicitly referred to as "ghosts", the use of this kind of imagery conjures images of ghosts whose lives were prematurely cut short who now haunt the living and will not rest until justice is done. As ghosts, the 30,000 disappeared represent the failure of a socialist revolution, not only in Argentina but also throughout Latin America. A parallel can be drawn here with Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, his 1994 work that looked at the state of Marxist critique after the fall of the Soviet Union in which many were proclaiming the "Death of Marx" and, in Francis Fukuyama's

[36] She uttered this exact phrase at several events that I saw her speak.

words, the end of history. As a ghost, Marx is transformed into a spirit of radical critique, what British literary critic Terry Eagleton called a *Marx without Marxism* (Sprinker 1999) or in the words of another philosopher, a *Marx after Marxism* (Rockmore 2002).

In the case of the disappeared, rather than haunt the people responsible for their deaths, they possess their family members. At Bonafini's *Mothers* annual mental health conference, she gave a speech in which she mocked mental health practitioners who wanted to "get inside of their heads:" "Psychologists always want to know what's inside of us. It's simple. Our children are inside of us."[37] Kordon and Edelman report a similar phenomenon in their study of children of the disappeared. A child of the disappeared told them: "A short time ago, I discovered where the disappeared were. It was after seeing that film *Being John Malkovich* in which people occupy the body of the actor. So we children are like John Malkovich and the disappeared are living together inside of us, imposing their personalities, tastes, and desires upon us."[38]

As family members are transformed into activists in the wake of their children's disappearance, the generational divide between parents and children is bridged. However, it is bridged in reverse. Instead of the conventional narrative of children becoming their parents, parents become their children. Parents who initially went out to publicly demand the return of their children eventually take up their disappeared child's politics when it became clear that their children were not

[37] Statement made at the *III Congreso Internacional Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos* held between November 11 and 14th at the Universidad Popular de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo.
[38] Página/12, November 20, 2004. I also saw them quote the same statement in a talk they gave.

going to return. Instead of youthful rebellion transformed into adult responsibility, adults are transformed into political activists. In the end, the generational rapprochement takes place only after parents embrace the political ideals of their children.

Within this reversal, family members who once disagreed with their children's politics now embrace them. In doing so, family member groups become one of the key sites in which the collective representation of the disappeared as the "best of the generation" is articulated. They make these claims frequently both in individual narratives and in their organizational discourse. According to one *Grandmother*: "The 30,000 acted in the same way. They really wanted to change society so that children live in a better world without hunger." She describes her son, a sociology student, as "a good student, read incessantly, volunteered in shanty towns. He wanted a better world. He suffered for all the children who were dying young. He was modest, firm and serene. And affectionate." In the words of another *Grandmother*, "If they were alive, it would be an incredible generation. The country has a void because of all of the disappeared. They were the most sensitive and capable youth in the country. They were conscious of the responsibilities of their citizenship to make the country better. What was left has been opportunism."[39]

The defining characteristic of this generation of young people is not simply

[39] Although in the same account, she extends her argument not only to the disappeared but to those who were exiled during the dictatorship for political reasons and those who have left the country for economic reasons in recent years. "Valuable people have been expelled. The country is still doing it. People are trying to leave because they don't have the possibilities of making a living here. This is something that I don't understand."

their political beliefs but their solidarity, their ability to join together in groups and participate together for the common good. In this sense, the disappeared are characterized not so much by their political ideas as their capacity to mobilize and organize so as to put those ideas into practice. For example, a friend of my father, a physicist and outspoken socialist, saw numerous of his co-workers disappear during the dictatorship yet he never felt directly at risk. He was safe not because of his political beliefs but because he was of what one can call the Groucho Marx persuasion; he would never join a group that would accept him as a member. Membership in groups – whether revolutionary groups, student organizations, unions or neighborhood associations – put a person at a far greater risk for disappearance than abstract political beliefs. To say, as it is often said, that "they died for their beliefs" elides this.

In this way, as a generation, they collectively stand in direct contrast with both those that came before and after them. More explicitly, the disappeared are considered the antithesis of the individualism that reigned during the late 1980s and 1990s under the period of Carlos Menem's rule. This is perhaps not dissimilar to a parallel argument that exists in the United States that contrasts the idealism and selflessness that characterizes the 1960s youth movements with the greed and individualism of the Reagan era. In the words of *Grandmother* Nelida: "It was a very logical struggle for ideals. I think these young people were extraordinary. They had everything much clearer and much more logical than us. There was no fanaticism." Elsa O, who lost her three daughters and her husband during the dictatorship, extends this sentiment to all the young people of that period. According to her, the disappeared did not represent "the best of a generation;" rather, their generation was the best one. "This whole generation

was exceptional. It was a generation that participated in everything. It was a generation that dreamed and had ideals. I never saw that in my generation… Our ideals were set forth more philosophically. It was never something where people wanted to participate."[40]

This use of generational rhetoric is heard frequently and is not unlike the "Greatest Generation" rhetoric coined by Tom Brokaw in the United States in the late 1990s to describe the generation who fought in WWII and sired the baby boomers. An alternate formulation of "they killed the best of a generation" is "they wiped out an entire generation." The generation was not only wiped out by the disappearances, but also by the thousands who were forced into exile or those who disavowed political activities during and after the dictatorship after seeing what happened.

There is an accusation, mainly unspoken but sometimes verbalized, that the collective exaltation of the disappeared is a product of the adulation of their mothers in the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers*. Veneration of the disappeared is seen as stemming from the collective representation of family members. *Founding Line Mother* Matilde Mellibovsky recounts an editor's rejection of a collection of *Mothers'* testimonies. In refusing to publish her book, he tells her: "All the *Mothers* say the same thing. They nostalgically exalt their children because they are no longer here" (Mellibovsky 1997:1). In an interior dialogue with the editor, she responds: "They took the best of a generation…" If it is true that the *Mothers* all say similar things about their disappeared children, she concludes, it was because they were so similar. Their mutual characteristics

[40] From her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

include “their interests, their generosity, solidarity, [and] altruism”(1997:2). The implication of the editor’s accusation is that the saintly view of the disappeared is a product of a mother’s tendency to exalt their children, a tendency exacerbated by premature death. *Grandmother* Rosa acknowledges this: “For all mothers, their child is the most brilliant, the greatest, the most beautiful, the most intelligent… but that’s how it was.”

Several children of the disappeared raised by their biological families say that they had difficulties coming to terms with their parents as human beings because they were raised to view them from a pedestal. They often have, at best, hazy recollections of them form when they were alive, and most of their knowledge of them comes from what their family members have told them. In the words of one daughter of the disappeared: “The idea I had of them before was an idealized image. What I had heard of my parents was that they were the best. So I couldn’t see them as human beings with imperfections and mistakes. It was very hard for me to see them as human beings.” Mariana, granddaughter of Rosa, voices a similar sentiment. She speaks of how, growing up, her grandparents always “said how intelligent they were, with such good grades, that they were great artists and musicians, and won awards. They were like models. It was a heavy weight. They never said you had to be like your father or mother but, without saying it, they said it.”

On the other hand, many children of the disappeared embrace this generational rhetoric and negatively compare their generation to their parents’. They contrast the political activism of the disappeared with the apathy and ignorance of their peers. For example, Cristian, a member of H.I.J.O.S., in a 2001 interview, speaks of a large group of neighborhood friends he has from

childhood. He describes them as neither understanding anything about politics nor wanting to get involved. “What they like is to play football, drink beer on the weekends, and go to a River-Boca match.” He then extends his observation about his friends to classify his entire generation: “There is great ignorance. Today, the youth prefer to drink beer, go to dance, and have some money in their pocket on the weekends so they can have some fun.”(Fernandez 2001:129) Unlike their parents’ generation, who were involved at a young age in politics, their generation has no such interests. For them, the political apathy and cynicism was another consequence of the dictatorship. As Ernesto, another member of H.I.J.O.S. states, this apathy fulfilled the dictatorship’s objective which was “basically to destroy society’s capacity to organize” (Fernández 2001:128).

For human rights groups like H.I.J.O.S. and progressive and radical political organizations, the disappeared are uniformly referred to as “reference points.” In the words of Gregorio Levenson and Ernesto Jauretche’s *Heroes: Stories of Revolutionary Argentina*, the disappeared are “ethical reference points” (1998:7). Their work describes the activities of more than 150 revolutionaries, members of various political organizations. Beginning with Che Guevara and the Peronist supporters (both military and civilian) murdered a year after Aramburu’s coup against Perón, it groups together individuals who were killed by paramilitary groups before the coup, disappeared by the military during the dictatorship, and those who were also killed during it. The book also links those involved in general political activities with those who took part in *la lucha armada* (armed struggle). In their willingness to die for a cause, they are viewed as martyrs who “preferred to continue their struggle until the end, being consistent with the ideals that they took up on their own free will and offering up the most valuable thing the human

species has: life" (Ibid). The book describes what each person did, their political activities, and how they died or disappeared.

The Theory of the *Dos Demonios*

In the next chapter, I will return to this view of the disappeared. What I want to address now is how representations of the disappeared have changed over time. The current view has not always been the dominant one. In the 1980s, the political activities of the disappeared were generally not referred to in describing what took place in Argentina during the 1970s. The dominant response of Argentines during the dictatorship to the disappearances was "por algo será" ("it must've been for something"). If a neighbor or a friend's child disappeared, they rationalized that it must have occurred for a reason. Family members were subsequently compelled to argue that no possible reason existed for the disappearance. Their defensive response was that their disappeared child was not involved in anything at all. This "anything at all" encompassed all political activities. In such a way, innocence referred to not only being innocent of involvement in violent revolutionary actions (planting bombs or kidnapping people) but also all ties to political organizations. Family members said this to counter the majority of Argentine's silent assent to the disappearances. Many also said this because they were unaware or ashamed of their children's political activities. Some children hid their political activities from them. They kept it from them because it was a source of disagreement. Family members only learned about it gradually.

Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer was one of the few vocal critics who remained in

Argentina during the dictatorship (he was protected because he was a US citizen). He met frequently with family members of the disappeared of all religious beliefs (Jacobo Timerman's 1981 memoir his dedicated to him). He spoke out to his congregation against their belief that the disappeared 'must have done something wrong.'

> I can hear ringing in my ears and reverberating in my being the words I said as I stood in the pulpit in Buenos Aires in my synagogue in 1976-78, pleading with the congregants to realize that those who disappeared weren't simply disappearing. They were *being made* to disappear. They were perfectly innocent youngsters, or young parents who were taken because they were lawyers or doctors (Meyer 151:2004).

In response to his congregants' assertion that "there must be some reason" for the disappearances, Meyer answered them, "there was no reason. They didn't do anything wrong."(Meyer 151:2004)

Meyer's position that they were "perfectly innocent youngsters" was the dominant position after the return to democracy in the 1980s. The predominant image of the disappeared was one of innocent victims trapped between left- and right-wing violence. This view was disseminated most widely through CONADEP (the National Commission on the Disappeared), the Argentine commission appointed by President Alfonsín after the return to democracy. Meyer was the only non-Argentine to be part of the commission. This position was epitomized in novelist Ernesto Sábato's opening line to the prologue of *Nunca Más* (1984), CONADEP's published report that became a bestseller in Argentina. Sábato

wrote, “During the 1970s, Argentina was torn by terror from both the extreme right and the far left”(1984:1). The commission compiled and analyzed testimonies from family members and survivors. Their published report was important in bringing to light the extent of the dictatorship’s atrocities to Argentines. The influence and success of the book helped create this default view of the disappeared. *Nunca Más* was not only influential in Argentina but in the international community as well. It was translated into numerous languages including an English edition introduced by legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin.

Sábato, who was also the head of CONADEP, consequently argued that the terror unleashed by the far left and perpetrated by the military dictatorship led to a situation in which “anyone was at risk.” “The vast majority of [the disappeared] were innocent not only of any acts of terrorism, but even of belonging to the fighting units of the guerrilla organizations”(1986:4). This position eventually became known as the “theory of the two demons.” The term is used exclusively as a pejorative (Vezzetti 2002; Calveiro 2005). It is a criticism made against those perceived to advocate it. Critics point out that it makes a false equivalence between state terrorism and the actions of the *lucha armada* (armed struggle) and that it pushes an agenda of reconciliation in which “both sides” are compelled to admit their respective mistakes and regrets.

Sábato, in particular, has been disparaged in progressive circles as an opportunist who only became active in human rights when it became politically expedient. “Sábato never risked anything,” accused historian Osvaldo Bayer.[41] What Bayer means is that Sábato only publicly condemned the dictatorship after

[41] El País, October 7, 2004.

the military terror had largely ebbed and it had become safe to do so. Critics of Sábato recall that two months after the coup in May of 1976, he had lunch with General Videla, together with Jorge Luis Borges, whose support of the dictatorship throughout the 1970s is locally thought to have cost him a Nobel Prize in literature.[42] After the lunch, Sábato echoed Borges' assessment that Videla was a gentleman, telling reporters that the dictator was "a modest, intelligent, and honest man." Historically, Sábato and Borges were both outspoken anti-Peronists. In the 1940s, Borges's criticism of Péron led to him being removed from his post as a librarian and offered a position as a chicken inspector. Their support of the dictatorship could be seen as a product of their hostility to Péron since the dictatorship had toppled a Peronist government.

The premise of the "the two demons" is that the far left unleashed military terror leaving innocent victims trapped in between. This argument can be found in other Latin American contexts. David Stoll offers a variant of this thesis in his controversial work *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (1993). In it, Stoll claims that the Mayan victims of the military's genocide in the 1980s were similarly trapped between the two demons of the guerilla army and the Guatemalan military. In reality, he argues, their support for the guerillas was not derived from any ideological commitment to their cause. It was due to joint coercive pressure resulting from the actions of guerilla groups and the consequential military repression.

[42] His change of heart did not come until 1980 when he began receiving family members of the disappeared and signing petitions requesting information about the disappeared. Borges, blind at the time, said that he had not been aware of what was going on in the country at the time.

The larger intent of Stoll's thesis is to undermine the idea that guerilla warfare in Guatemala was the last recourse of marginalized peoples who had no other options. Stoll refutes this notion with two controversial arguments: that warfare was not necessary because social, economic, and political conditions for Mayans were gradually improving before the civil war and, second, that Mayan peasants did not support the guerilla cause out of any ideological motivations but because of coercive pressure. Stoll's subsequent attack on Rigoberta Menchú (1998) is based on his perception of a vindication of the guerilla cause, a position he sees filtering down to human rights organizations and academics who "project their fantasies of rebellion" at a comfortable distance (see Arias (2001) for a range of opinions on this controversy). For Stoll, the guerillas triggered the military's violent response. Sábato and other proponents of the *dos demonios* make a similar argument.

Debunking the "Dirty War"

What took place in Argentina cannot be compared straightforwardly to what occurred in Guatemala. Even at the height of their power, several years before the 1976 coup, revolutionary organizations like the Montoneros and ERP were no real military threat to toppling the government. Sporadic bombings, several high profile assassinations and kidnappings, and a number of armed attacks do not constitute a war. For that reason, human rights groups object to

the use of this term to describe what took place.[43] It was not a war, they maintain, but a massacre. In the same way, many reject the use of the term *guerilleros,* preferring to use *militantes* (activists) to describe the wide-range of activities that many of the disappeared engaged in. Although still known primarily in the English language as the "Dirty War," *la guerra sucia,* the military's description for what took place, is used infrequently in Argentina in the present. I personally did not encounter the term used at all in Argentina, neither in private talks, public speeches nor in the media. The more common terms are *la represión* (the repression), *el proceso* (a term also used by the military to describe their actions), or the military genocide. Any reference to war invariably meets with immediate censure from human rights groups.

The idea of a "dirty war" was debunked shortly after the fall of the dictatorship. According to Frontalini and Caiati's investigation for the human rights group CELS (1984), the two armed wings of the two largest revolutionary organizations in Argentina numbered no more than 400 armed members at any time and group membership was only as high as 2000 at the start of the dictatorship. Their investigation concluded that the "dirty war" was a myth. North American journalist Martin Andersen (1990) uses the same term to debunk the military's version of events that held that their actions were necessary to combat a viable threat to the state. The AAA (The Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance), a right-wing paramilitary group had assassinated over a thousand leftists in the years prior to the coup. By that point, ERP had been effectively dismantled and

[43] Some Marxist interpretations of the dictatorship will use the term war to describe what happened. They argue that what happened was a manifestation of class warfare (Izaguirre 1994,1995; Marín 2002).

the armed actions of the Montoneros had dramatically decreased from prior years.

In setting forth the relative non-threat of the Montoneros and ERP, a question is raised: would it have justified the military's actions if such groups were an actual threat to take power? Would that have justified their kidnapping, torture, and murder of numerous individuals? Many individuals only advocate and support torture when they perceive a viable threat (e.g. Alan Dershowitz's (2002) post 9/11 defense of torture). When governments or individuals defend the need for torture, they invoke a "ticking time-bomb." A bomb is about to go off. A suspect has been captured and knows where it is but refuses to tell. Torture is the only possible means to obtain that information and save lives.[44] The Argentine military used a variation of this argument. To say that the Argentine military imagined a non-existent threat begs the question: what if it was real? In the absence of a "real" threat, these arguments become largely irrelevant and limited to after-the-fact speculation over whether the threat that justified torture was real or imagined.

In downgrading the "threat" of the Montoneros and ERP, the image that emerges is one of disorganized, middle-class college students playing at being revolutionaries and inadvertently finding themselves in a situation they could have never envisioned. Many former activists object to this view. As a former leader of ERP remarked as far back as the late 1980s, "we weren't wandering adventurers." Although their campaign for socialist revolution ended in a massacre, their intent was serious.

[44] For critiques of this scenario, see Luban (2005) and Bufacci and Arrigo (2006).

The disappeared can potentially be divided into four categories. First, there was the small minority who took up arms. Second, there were those who were uninvolved in armed struggle but belonged to organizations like the Montoneros and ERP that had both political and military wings and advocated armed insurrection. Third, there were those who had nothing to do with these groups but had other political activities and, finally, those with no political activities whatsoever. However, family member organizations and human rights groups refuse to break down the disappeared into these categories. In fact, they criticize them for being predicated on a distinction between "good" and "bad" disappeared, as if it implies a sliding scale of culpability. This refusal is tied to their rejection of the theory of the *dos demonios.* They refuse to distinguish between those in the minority who took up arms and those who did not. To do so would require accepting the military's framing of the events as a war with armed combatants on each side and innocent victims in between. They also refuse to distinguish between those who had political affiliations and those who did not.

Instead, human rights organizations maintain that, regardless of the actions of certain individuals, the state had an obligation to act within the law. Even if some individuals acted outside of the law, the state is not justified in doing the same. The state's responsibility was to arrest them and charge them with a crime. The military's conscious choice to act outside of the law through disappearances, torture, and executions, subsequently makes the actions of a minority of the disappeared irrelevant. In other words, even if some individuals had taken up arms against the state, had kidnapped people, or planted bombs, it would not have justified their disappearance, torture, illicit detention for a prolonged but undetermined period of time, and eventual murder. Whatever was

done in the name of revolution, individual *guerilleros* as non-state actors could not be subject to the same legal and ethical obligations as the Argentine state. References to the actions of the Montoneros and ERP is seen as an effort to relativize military responsibility. This would become the common *dos demonios* defense for the military and its apologists. In the words of Ricardo Bussi, a right-wing politician whose father Antonio Domingo Bussi is an ex-military general and politician implicated in numerous crimes against humanity: "The violence of some begat the violence of others."[45]

Names in the Phonebook

The "theory of the *dos demonios"* hinges on a collective view of the disappeared as innocent victims. Argentine human rights groups currently reject this view of the disappeared. The dominant collective representation of the disappeared as political activists has helped human rights groups not only forge demands of accountability but also to make broader political claims. An apolitical view of them does not allow for this. At the same time, the 1980s focus on the disappeared as innocent victims had an important effect in the context of the post-dictatorship transition. The view of the disappeared as "innocent victims" can retrospectively be seen as a pragmatic necessity. Human rights groups were still in the minority then. They were struggling to make Argentines aware of the extent of the atrocities committed by the military.

[45] Inter Press Service News Agency, "Detención de ex montoneros agita demonios enterrados," http://ipsnoticias.net/nota.asp?idnews=23005 (August 14, 2003).

An emphasis on the innocence of the disappeared explicitly challenged the military's justification of the coup to combat a "subversive threat." The view of the disappeared as "innocent victims" meant that anyone could have been a victim. This view posited the existence of a generalized culture of fear and terror during the dictatorship and was an important step in rewriting the collective narrative about what took place. Rather than seeing themselves as complicit with or even explicitly approving the dictatorship's actions, bystanders could retroactively see themselves as potential victims. This allowed for their identification with the disappeared and was an important step in re-conceptualizing the dictatorship's actions as perpetrated against all Argentina (rather than at the bequest and in service of numerous Argentines). The notion that all Argentines were victims of the dictatorship engendered wider popular support for human rights. Just as the *dos demonios* allowed for a view of the disappeared as innocents trapped between two forces, a view of all Argentines as potential victims removed their culpability for what occurred. For this reason, many human rights activists criticize this view now (Calveiro 2004).

For example, exiled Argentine journalist Carlos Gabetta's early account of the dictatorship was entitled *Todos Somos Subversivos* (We Were All Subversives). Originally published in France in 1979, it was published in Argentina after the fall of the dictatorship in November 1983, making it one of the earliest published accounts of the atrocities committed by the dictatorship published in Argentina. It is organized around the testimonies of family members and survivors. The title's use of the first-person plural to refer to the dictatorship's policy of forced disappearances was inclusive enough to also extend to its readers. Anyone could be defined as a subversive. Novelist Osvaldo Soriano

made this explicit in the book's introduction when he concluded by remarking that, "the enemy of the dictatorship is hidden in the innocent faces that you saw shouting during World Cup goals. That is to say, almost all Argentines."(1983:8)

One of the most popularly cited examples of the collective innocence of the disappeared is the "names in a phonebook." What this means is that one could disappear solely by virtue of knowing another person who disappeared. When the military kidnapped people, they ransacked their homes in order to find information about their links with other people. The military could then potentially kidnap the people listed among their contacts. As the story goes, simply being found in the phonebook of someone who disappeared was sufficient cause for disappearance. During the 1980s, the individual who disappeared because they were a "name in the phonebook" emerged as the paradigmatic innocent victim of the dictatorship. "Names in a phonebook" posits the dictatorship spiraling out of control from its original intention of eliminating political dissidents and eventually unleashing a generalized chain of terror in which acquaintances of acquaintances of acquaintances could all be targets. "The names in the phonebook" came to epitomize the arbitrariness of state terror.

Having encountered this idea in disparate sources, I had assumed it to be an undisputed fact. So during the course of my fieldwork I was surprised to find the "names in a phonebook" disputed and debunked by various social scientists and human rights activists both in public talks and in private conversations. They all argued that it was an inaccurate representation of the disappeared. One social scientist collaborating with the *Grandmothers* bluntly termed it "the myth of the names in the phonebook" at one of the *Grandmothers*' conferences. According to her, the "myth" emerged as part of a general effort to hide the political identity of

the disappeared. As a social scientist and activist, she felt she had an obligation to debunk this myth in order to restore their political identity. Furthermore, “the names in the phonebook” is seen as forming an integral part of the *dos demonios* view since it requires innocent victims. Argentine human rights activists and academics object to this idea because it depoliticizes the disappeared and turns them into passive victims.

Despite social scientists and human rights organization’s repudiation, the “names in the phonebook” remains a popular explanation for disappearances. At a family gathering to celebrate a birthday, I meet a cousin I have never met before. He asks me why I am in Argentina and I tell him. In response, he tells me that his wife’s brother is disappeared. We talk about him. He was a student at the time of his disappearance. At one moment in our conversation, I asked if he was a political activist or belonged to some organization. He furrowed his brow in disapproval. “No, no. You don’t understand.” He then explained matter-of-factly that one did not have to be a political activist to be disappeared in those years because “it could have happened to anyone.” “You just had to be a name in a phonebook,” he explained.

By this point, I had already encountered the aforementioned critiques of this view but propriety dictated that I did not challenge his statement. I relented with a nod and did not speak more about the political beliefs of his disappeared brother-in-law although, in the vast majority of accounts, students who disappeared were generally linked to some kind of political activism. Perhaps his wife’s family was ashamed of the political activity of their son or perhaps they did not know about it. On the other hand, perhaps he was right. Perhaps his brother-in-law was merely a “name in the phonebook”

In fact, numerous cases exist of family members who are only able to account for why their family member disappeared by attributing it to a random occurrence or a mistake. For example, Delia, one of the founders of the *Grandmothers*, has struggled to rationalize the disappearance of her son and pregnant daughter-in-law. "They never cleared it up. We never knew why. This 'it must've been for something' in my case wasn't a 'for something.' There was no anything." Delia would prefer to ascribe the disappearance to political activity "because it would have justified their disappearance." By "justified", she means that it would have provided a coherent means of explaining the disappearance (as opposed to its legitimation) by recourse to their political activities or beliefs. Her son and his wife would be, in the language of human rights groups, heroes who risked their life for the ideal of a more just society. Deprived of this reason, the apparent randomness of their disappearance makes it even more painful for her. In her words, "I would have liked them to have had a political ideology. I would have liked them to have been involved in something because it would have justified their disappearance… But not in their case…. I don't know why they took them."[46]

As a member of a human rights organization, Delia is aware that the overwhelming majority of the disappeared were engaged in political activities. Although she could view her son and daughter-in-law's disappearance as part of the gradual extension of state terror to those uninvolved in politics, she would rather have a more precise reason for their disappearance. Her only theory is that since their neighbors, who were political activists, also disappeared, her son

[46] Taken from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

and daughter-in-law might have been taken because they witnessed something or that the military thought that they were together.

Other cases exist in which the military disappeared people who were not the intended target. One of the most prominent cases of disappearances that garnered international attention both during and after the dictatorship is that of Dagmar Hagelin. Dagmar's disappearance can only be explained as a case of mistaken identity. She was a 17-year old Swedish-Argentine who met the wife of a prominent Montonero on the beach while on vacation and struck up a friendship with her. Dagmar subsequently went to visit her at her house. Unbeknown to her, the woman had disappeared the day before and the Navy were waiting in the house with information that a *Montonera* was going to be visiting that day. As Dagmar approached the house, a group of unidentified men came rushing at her with their guns drawn ordering her to stop. Scared, she attempted to run away but was shot in the back of the head by a man later identified as Alfredo Astiz.[47] The men then stopped a taxi that had stumbled upon the scene, commandeered the car at gunpoint, and shoved Dagmar in the trunk. They took her to the ESMA. According to a suvivor's testimony, Dagmar survived the shooting. Once they brought her to the ESMA, the Navy realized their error. The *Montonera* they were looking for looked like Dagmar. In the meantime, the case became an international incident since Dagmar's father was also a Swedish citizen. Sweden began pressuring the dictatorship on the case. The Navy decided that they did not want to set the precedent of bowing to international

[47] Known as the "blond angel of death," Astiz is one of the most notorious military officers who was involved in several military actions that will be described later in this thesis. (see journalist Tina Rosenberg (1992) for an account of Astiz)

pressure with a case that had already attracted so much attention. They also did not want her to be able to report back what she witnessed taking place inside the ESMA. Acknowledging their mistake, they decided it was better to execute her than to release her (Hagelin 1984).

Dagmar Hagelin is one of the dictatorship's paradigmatic victims. Her case moved both international opinion and she remains one of the best known disappeared. Other high profile cases of disappearances include journalist Jacobo Timerman (1981), two French nuns who helped the *Mothers*, Alice Domon and Léonie Duquet (Wornat 2002) and three of the founders of the *Mothers*. These disappearances were all anomalous. Jacobo Timerman, a journalist and editor, was as critical of left-wing Peronist groups as he was to the military. He was hated by both. He was disappeared after his newspaper continued to publish articles denouncing the military dictatorship's abuses. His disappearance was heavily covered and he was released after an international campaign. He subsequently wrote *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (1981) that documented his imprisonment. It remains one of the most important accounts of the dictatorship and was notable for exposing the rampant antisemitism of military leaders. The book was a bestseller translated into numerous languages and even made into a TV movie-of-the-week starring Roy Scheider in the United States. Although an important journalist, Timerman remains a controversial figure among human rights activists in Argentina, in particular for his own criticisms of left-wing violence in the 1970s (Mochkofsky 2003). Today, his name is rarely mentioned in human rights. "*Hijo de puta*," one person responded after I asked about him. In the 1980s, cases such as his and

Dagmar Hagelin's received the most attention.[48] This may have been the case precisely because they did not involve the prototypical disappeared who were engaged in left-wing political activities.

Disappearances such as Dagmar Hagelin that were based on mistaken identity were not representative of the military terror. How random was the terror? Were mistakes made based on the military's own criteria of who was the intended target? The military admits to making some mistakes but then argue that such mistakes occur in any war. Innocent civilians invariably get killed in all wars. Dagmar Hagelin was in the wrong place at the wrong time (although, at the same time, certain apologists for the military even deny this and accuse her of being a terrorist.). Alfredo Astiz, known for openly taking responsibility for his actions including the infiltration of the *Mothers* that led to the disappearance of the founder of the group, denies he shot Dagmar. His denial may be because it would require acknowledgement of his error but he has maintained that it was "some other guy with blonde hair and brown eyes."[49] General Ramón Camps, in a widely publicized interview with a Spanish magazine after the dictatorship in which he claimed personal responsibility for 5,000 disappearances, stated: "Okay, among those 5,000 disappeared there could have been errors. I admit it. In wars, the bombing of cities is allowed in which thousands of people not in the

[48] Another frequent example is the "Night of the Pencils" (Noche de los lápices) in which 7 high school students between the ages of 16-18 were disappeared for demanding a reduced student bus ticket (Seoane & Ruiz Núñez 1985). The story was made into an important Argentine film in 1986. There was one survivor. The students were also seen as paradigmatic innocent victims because of their age. However, in recent years, the survivor, Pablo Díaz, has called this account "mythological" and criticized the way it made their political activism appear innocuous.

[49] *Tres Puntos*, January 1998.

military die."[50] In a follow-up interview, he clarified by attempting to draw a parallel with the Second World War in order to justify the military's actions. "In a war how many innocent people die? Remember Nagasaki? Remember Hiroshima? Remember the bombings of London? Remember the bombings of Germany?"[51] Camps' comparison hinges on his belief that what took place in Argentina was nothing less than WWIII, the war against communism.[52] For Camps, the ends justified the means.

In fact, during the dictatorship, military leaders encouraged the view that their targets were not simply terrorists or armed revolutionaries. Key statements made by military officials during the dictatorship offer a view of the "subversive enemy" as elastic enough to include people who were innocent of all actions. Such quotes also encourage a view of the disappeared as innocent victims. They deliberately blur the line between the prototypical "terrorist with a bomb" and "anyone who thinks differently." In their formulation, "subversion" was defined not simply in terms of deeds but in terms of ideas. For example, when asked by foreign journalists about a physically disabled woman who disappeared, Videla responded, "a terrorist is not just someone with a gun or bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization."[53] When asked how he defined a subversive, Videla responded, "Anyone who opposes the Argentine way of life." Both of these quotes figure in most treatments of the disappeared and are used to represent not only how the enemy

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[50] *Tiempo*, January 27, 1983.
[51] *Crónica,* November 15, 1983.
[52] This is still a popular view among the military's defenders. See Rojas (2003) for a more recent version of this argument.
[53] *The Times*, January 4 1978.

was defined but also who ended up disappeared. Another widely circulated quotes that figures in many accounts is from the acting governor of Buenos Aires province during the dictatorship, General Ibérico Saint-Jean who said in May 1976, “First, we will kill all the subversives, then we will kill their collaborators, then their sympathizers, then those who remain indifferent, and finally, we will kill the timid.” Such statements, especially the final one, may be the dramatic hyperbole of individuals intoxicated by their own omnipotence. However, in journalistic and academic accounts, these quotations are used to show how the military terror spread from a precisely defined target (e.g. armed insurgents) to encompass a large sector of society.

The military’s actions during the dictatorship also helped to blur the line between who was an armed insurgence and who was an “innocent victim.” During the dictatorship, the military routinely staged “shootouts” between military forces and unarmed individuals (many of whom had been disappeared months earlier and were in captivity at the time) who had been executed. None of the reports from this period are credible. For that reason, the military’s actions make it difficult or even impossible to differentiate between the disappeared who were active in the armed struggle and those who were not. For this reason, it is also difficult to determine who was actually killed in an armed confrontation and who was not.

The military also used family members as hostages. It was dangerous to have a family member who was being searched for by the military. For example, *Nunca Más* describes the case of the Kreplak family. In 1977, the military were looking for 19-year old Gabriel Eduardo Kreplak, who had been active in Peronist Youth two years earlier. The military had gone to his house and kidnapped his

roommate but Gabriel had managed to escape. When the military searched their house they found his identity papers. These papers listed his family home as his address. The military went there and kidnapped his father, Pedro, and his youngest brother Ernesto Carlos. They tortured Pedro in front of his son in order to make them denounce Gabriel's location. Neither knew where he was. The military then forced the father give up the whereabouts of his other son, 16-year old José Ariel. They proceeded to kidnapped him and then released the father and his other son, telling them that José Ariel would only be released if Gabriel turned himself in to the police. José Ariel was never seen alive again.

Human rights groups and progressive intellectuals in Argentina do not dispute that some of the disappeared were, like Dagmar or José Ariel, innocent in every possible sense of the term. What they vigorously object to is that this should be the dominant representation of the disappeared. Some go so far as to liken ignoring their political identity to the act of disappearance itself. Considering them innocent victims makes their overarching collective identity as political activists vanish. For example, in the words of ex-disappeared Mario Villani.

> The majority of the disappeared were not "innocents" uninvolved in anything. To say this is a lack of respect to them and their commitments. It is to make them disappeared again. Student, union and neighborhood activists, *guerilleros*, revolutionaries, all a range of commitments with which one can agree with or not, but that involve risking one's life for the

ideal of a more just society.[54]

The Innocence of Children

Villani's statement represents the dominant contemporary image of the disappeared: individuals who risked their lives for a more just society. Such an understanding required a rejection of the view that they were innocent victims. This is not to say that one replaced the other. However, while the view of the disappeared as innocent victims predominated in the 1980s, today, the predominant view of the disappeared is one of political activists. While human rights groups in the present have moved beyond the view of the disappeared as innocent victims, this notion has played an important historical role in attracting public and international support. At the end of the dictatorship the view of the disappeared as largely innocent victims was necessary in order to make demands of justice.

Why is this? In posing the question why the "issue of missing children resonated so strongly," political scientist Alison Brysk writes that although "the ethical basis of human rights insists that the status and behavior of victims is irrelevant", "political analysis demands that we recognize that missing children were politically privileged in Argentina because they were unequivocally *innocent* victims (emphasis in original 1994:189) In other words, according to Brysk, the reason the *Grandmothers*' cause has been able to attract what she implies is a "disproportionate" amount of attention is precisely because of their

[54] Taken from the "Memoria gráfica del Club Atlético" exposition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, March 5, 2004.

grandchildren's status of unequivocal innocence. Brysk's conclusion is problematic since she fails to consider that much of the considerable attention given to the *Grandmothers'* cause results from the dramatic resonance of cases of children being raised by the murderer of their parents.

The *Grandmothers* have benefited from this perception. In particular, this view played an instrumental role in the early years of the organization. Children who disappeared alongside their parents were considered the ultimate defenseless innocents. The existence of children among the disappeared was indisputable evidence that the disappeared were innocent victims. Who could be more innocent than a recently born baby or small child? Although the children of the disappeared comprise only a tiny percentage of the total number of disappeared, their existence provided a means to view all of the disappeared as likewise "innocents." Drawing attention to the disappeared children proved to be a powerful rhetorical device. Children are the ultimate symbols of innocence.

The disappeared children as "absolute innocents," incapable of being guilty of anything formed a key support for the "theory of the *dos demonios*." Ernesto Sábato, who I cited above as one of the intellectual authors of that theory, used the children as examples to support that premise several years before making a similar statement in his introduction to *Nunca Más.* In 1981, "The Movement for the Disappeared Children" was created during the late stages of the dictatorship as a means of publicly supporting the *Grandmothers*' cause. The group was comprised of notable Argentine intellectuals, religious figures, and human rights defenders. Among them were Sábato and Rabbi Marshall Meyer, both of whom would go on to form part of CONADEP, and Nobel Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel, an important ally of the *Grandmothers* in future

years. In the press conference announcing the formation of the group made alongside the *Grandmothers*, Sábato voiced what would become the *dos demonios* theory with the accusation that the military "responded to the crimes of the terrorists with the crimes of the repression." Among the disappeared, he continued, "there were an immense majority of innocents, whose only crime was to be friends or fellow students of probable criminals." He then called attention to the existence of disappeared children, pointing to the *Grandmothers* besides him searching for them, and asked, "Where are these absolute innocents? What could these babies be guilty of?"[55]

Others referred to the children of the disappeared for a similar rhetorical purpose. Julio Cortázar, whose literary prestige in Argentina rivals only that of Borges but who, unlike Borges, was a politically committed public intellectual who used his prestige to speak out about what was happening in Argentina, made a similar point about the innocence of the children in a speech given in November 1983 at the United Nations in New York before the Independent Commission about International Humanitarian Issues. In the speech, Cortázar said:

> But forced disappearances were not simply limited to a mechanism of repression directed at eliminating those who were considered enemies. In Argentina, to cite the country where this technology of death and fear has exceeded all imaginable limits, the disappearances have not only occurred with the adults but they have also extended to children, often kidnapped at the same moment as their parents or close relatives and about whom

[55] Crónica, December 12, 1981.

> nothing is known. The kidnapping of children ranging from the recently born up to those who have already entered school age cannot be justified beyond the sadism of the kidnappers or of an almost inconceivable refinement of their technology of intimidation. *These children, could they be considered subversives just as the military described the adult disappeared? Were these children enemies of what they call the patria, filled with all the filthy spit of a word that means so much for Latin American people?* (Cortázar 1984:140)

For Cortázar, the disappeared children provided an example of how the military terror took on a life of its own. Once unleashed, it extended beyond its initial intent of disappearing political dissidents and put anyone at risk, eventually even targeting children. The existence of disappeared children thus explicitly served to challenge the military's assertion that the disappeared were terrorists. To cite a third example of this, during journalist and CONADEP member Magdalena Ruiz Guiñazú's testimony in the trial against the military commander in 1985, she was asked by one of Massera's lawyers whether she thought the "subversives" were innocent. She responded with the question: "Were the 127 disappeared children terrorists?"[56] According to a journalist present, her question had a dramatic effect on the audience: "the sentence echoed through the hall. A dense, almost dark, silence spread. Many cleared their throats, including one of the judges. Others looked at each other and even smiled."

[56] *El Diario del Juicio*, June 11, 1985. 127 was based on the number of children who disappeared with their parents or relatives and did not include women who were pregnant at the time of their disappearance.

The children of the disappeared provided a lens through which all of the disappeared could be viewed as innocents. Although rhetorically persuasive, the logic behind this argument is open to criticism. The reasoning rests on a syllogistic fallacy that resembles the old Woody Allen joke, “All men are mortal. Socrates was a man. Therefore, all men are Socrates.” In other words, all children are innocent. Some of the disappeared were children. Therefore, all of the disappeared were innocent. In the present, the need to view the disappeared as innocent victims no longer exists. In the next chapter, I will turn to current debates in Argentina over the view of the disappeared as heroic figures who gave up their lives for a better world.

Chapter 2: On Heroes and Tombs: debating the disappeared

The previous chapter addressed an underlying tension between opposing conceptions of the disappeared as innocent victims and political activists. The latter view became more prevalent in the last decade. This indicates the success of the human rights movement in Argentina in changing public discourse. “The 30,000 disappeared are heroes. They died for their beliefs.” I cannot count how many times I heard variations of this statement during my stay in Argentina whether in private conversations or public events. It now comprises one of the dominant beliefs about the disappeared and not only within human rights circles.

The speaker on this occasion was an acquaintance named Carlos. I met Carlos through a cousin who took me to a tango class at a neighborhood social club. Carlos was the instructor. He was eager to learn English to enhance his chances of giving costly private lessons to well-heeled tourists armed with *dolares*. So, after the class, he offered me what appeared to be a good exchange - an hour of English classes for one hour of private tango instruction. Unfortunately, I proved to be as rhythmically challenged as he was linguistically challenged so we ended up spending most of the time talking about Argentine history and politics before giving up altogether. That Carlos would voice such an opinion about the disappeared took me by surprise because in previous conversations he defended former President Menem as misunderstood. According to Carlos, Menem’s neoliberal economic policies had saved the country. I pointed out the apparent contradiction. “Yes, the disappeared are heroes. I was a Marxist back then too. I was active in a group. Many of my friends are disappeared” By the time of right-wing paramilitary group violence in

the early 1970s, he became afraid and recalls burning books he owned by Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky and leaving all political activity behind. “I was more interested in making money. I wanted children, a house, and economic security. I did not want to be a hero.”

Several months later, I am even more surprised when Carlos told me that his father was disappeared. He brought it up casually, as if in passing. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?” “Because he was an *hijo de puta,*” he answered. His parents separated shortly after Carlos’ birth and he never knew his father. He did not even know the circumstances of his disappearance. He only mentioned the relationship because he was filing papers to receive economic compensation for his disappearance from the state. Filling out the forms compelled him to acknowledge a kinship that he otherwise disavowed. The curious disconnect between the disappeared as heroes in the abstract and his disappeared father as an *hijo de puta* was striking to me.

A Hero Must Die

“A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.” – Joseph Campbell

Although the 30,000 disappeared are grouped as a collective whole in the human rights imaginary, many individuals are singled out from that period for their heroism. One of the most cherished heroes is Rodolfo Walsh. Walsh is considered the “dean of investigative journalism in Argentina.”(Moyano 1995:1) and is an important writer who pioneered a fiction-reportage hybrid. His work can be seen as a contemporary Latin American version of the New Journalism of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* or Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead.*

He is also an important person in Latin American socialist politics, noted as one of the founders of *Prensa Latina*, Cuba's press agency, and for deciphering a CIA message detailing the Bay of Pigs invasion plans (McCaughan 2002). In 1973, Walsh joined the left-wing Peronist revolutionary group the Montoneros and worked as an intelligence officer for them. By 1976 and 1977, witnessing the massacre occurring around him, he came out against *la lucha armada* (armed struggle). This occurred after the death of his daughter Vicky, also a prominent Montonera, in September 1976. On the first anniversary of the coup in March of 1977, he wrote an open letter to the ruling *junta* denouncing not only its human rights abuses and disappearances but also its economic policies. He sent it to newspapers and magazines that all refused to publish it.

The next day, the military, having extracted through torture the location of a meeting that Walsh was attending, ambushed him in broad daylight in downtown Buenos Aires with orders to take him alive to the ESMA. When they tried to take him, Walsh resisted with a .22 revolver and was shot dead. Walsh's public denunciation of the crimes of the dictatorship and his resistance against the death squad attempting to disappear him are seen as examples of his heroism. Walsh was atypical of political activists from that period because he was substantially older than the majority of the disappeared. Also, whether Rodolfo Walsh qualifies as being disappeared or not is disputed. He died with a gun in his hand resisting the dictatorship. Had he not been armed, he would have been kidnapped, disappeared and executed. Did his death count as an "armed confrontation"? Moreover, the military did not acknowledge his death. After they shot him, they took him to the ESMA. When he arrived, he was already dead. Like the vast majority of the disappeared, his body was never recovered.

To see the disappeared, like Walsh, as heroes is to see them as courageously risking their lives and dying for their beliefs. They are tragic figures because they were defeated and murdered and the economic system they struggled against prevailed. That they were heroes presupposes that, like Walsh, they were aware of the risks they were taking yet acted with full knowledge of those risks. This conception can only fit those involved in political activities. At the same time, a contradiction exists in many accounts. Even those who were involved in revolutionary political activities did not foresee the magnitude of the atrocities that were going to take place. They saw the coup as one more in a long line and most did not think it would be any worse than the others. As one survivor said, “We had some notion of it but I never knew that what could happen to us was going to be so unbelievably horrible.”

During the dictatorship, thousands were forced into exile to Mexico (Mercado 2001;Yankelevich 2007), Europe (Oliveira-Cézar 2000; Franco 2007), North America, and Israel (Sznajder & Roniger 2005). Many who eventually disappeared refused to leave the country. Instead of going into exile, they chose to stay in the country, even after becoming aware of the disappearances. Many parents of disappeared children recount that their children were aware of the risks but refused to leave the country or stop their activities. One mother was told by her daughter, “If something happens to us, don’t cry.” According to her mother, “they told me this because they already knew what was going to happen.” Many of the disappeared affiliated with the Montoneros or other banned political organizations lived in clandestinity at the time of their disappearance. One ex-disappeared recounts that she and her partner did not get married so as not to be legally linked if something happened to one of them. On the other hand,

some family members say that their children did not think the military would come after them if they were not directly involved in armed struggle. For example, Laura, the daughter of *Grandmothers'* president Estela Carlotto was in the Montoneros press division. According to Estela, she refused to believe the military would kidnap her because, in her words, she was "unimportant."

A recurring narrative in family member narratives is of parents' unsuccessful efforts to convince their children to leave the country before their disappearance. The disappeared and their family members were generally aware of what was happening in Argentina. Many of them had friends who disappeared before they did. Their parents would plead with them to leave the country but they refused to leave. In the words of one *Mother*: "We were afraid. We thought something would happen. They had their way of thinking and weren't interested in what we were saying…We went to talk to them after the coup so that they would leave the country. We heard news of the disappearances." Berta tells of the time her son and his wife came to her house after his closest friends had disappeared. She tried to convince them to leave the country. "I can't go," he told her. According to Berta, "they knew what was going to happen."[57] Chicha repeatedly tried to convince her son Daniel to leave the country. On one such occasion, he responded curtly with the question, "did you give life to me or did you just lend it to me?" She had no right to make such requests of him, he told her. After his wife was killed and their daughter disappeared, he secretly met with Chicha. He was in hiding and knew that the military was looking for him. Chicha pleaded with him once more to leave the country. Once again, he refused. "I am

[57] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

not going to leave. If you keep insisting, I won't see you anymore. It hurts me greatly but I cannot leave." He had a *compromiso* (commitment) to his compañeros.

Vilma recounts a story of day in which her son came home worried. One of his friends had disappeared and she had an appointment book with his name in it. Vilma's husband told him: "Don't worry. I'll take you to Bolivia. I'll drive you up to the border and leave you there." He refused because he did not want to leave his *compañeros*. "It's not so easy," he insisted. This sparked an argument but he remained adamant in his refusal to abandon his political commitments.[58] Many other family members recount similar events in which they attempted to convince their family member to leave the country only to encounter their obstinate refusal, even in the face of mortal danger.

After the disappearance, many family members who took up the politics of their relatives retroactively reinterpreted their refusal to leave the country as part of their heroic self-sacrifice. In the words of one mother, "they saw what was coming and we didn't. At the time, it seemed like they were risking their lives needlessly but later we realized that they had a calling of solidarity and of mutual assistance. So they were respecting that and we began to realize that our children who wanted to make this change were blessed." That they refused to leave the country even when they still could is seen as both a sign of their commitment and their solidarity. However, beneath the official rhetoric that the disappeared were heroes who risked and gave up their lives for their beliefs, other interpretations also exist.

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[58] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview

“My brother committed suicide”

“My brother committed suicide. Is that clear? I believe that my brother killed himself. Do you understand what I’m saying to you, anthropologically speaking?” Daniel says this to me in a forceful tone. I nod. “Yes, I understand.” Anthropologically speaking, he is breaking a cultural taboo. Family members are not supposed to say such things about their disappeared relatives. His comment is a conscious rejection of the discourse of progressive political organizations and the human rights movement that venerate the disappeared as selfless heroes who gave up their lives for a better world.

A month earlier, I witnessed a similar statement spark a heated exchange at a conference sponsored by the *Grandmothers* in the city of Paraná. During the question-and-answer period after a presentation, a woman in the audience talked about her disappeared brother. In speaking of him, she said that “what he did was suicide” because he acted with the knowledge that his political activism would lead to his death. On stage, a social scientist and a daughter of the disappeared who worked with the *Grandmothers* both simultaneously interrupted her mid-sentence: “No, no, no. He didn’t kill himself.” Not knowing the circumstances of his disappearance, they categorically rejected her use of the term suicide to describe the actions of any individual who was disappeared. They wanted to live, they explained. They were willing to give up their lives for their beliefs but this should not be confused with suicide. That so many young activists had children or were pregnant proved that they were consciously planning for the future.

When many refer to suicide, they single out the fact that members of the Montoneros were given cyanide pills by the leadership and had instructions to take them to avoid being captured alive. It is unknown how many people died by taking a cyanide pill. Some estimates say that up to one thousand Montoneros killed themselves in such a way although others argue that the number is far fewer. The military had orders to take prisoners alive and, in several survivor testimonies, they were able to wrestle the pill out of the mouths of their targets before they could swallow it. While the cyanide pill has been used as evidence to suggest a cult of death and fanaticism around the group, a more sympathetic interpretation also exists. Many activists knew that they faced a fate worse than death if captured: that they would be tortured, held for a prolonged period of time, and eventually executed. A painless death from a cyanide pill would be better than prolonged torture and inevitable death at the hands of the military.

I comment to Daniel that family members were not supposed to say such things about their disappeared family members. “Well, I do,” he retorts. We were meeting in Daniel’s sparsely decorated office in an old building in the *Barrio Norte* neighborhood of Buenos Aires. He is in his late forties but retains a youthful demeanor and appearance. Several months earlier, I saw him speak at the weekly protest held by *Memoria Activa*, the group demanding justice for the 1995 AMIA bombing and was impressed by the forceful tone and content of his speech. He participates in some human rights activities and is a member of one organization but he does not feel like an activist deep down (*un militante de alma).* Currently, he works in the chemical business that his father had founded years earlier with partners. Prior to that, he worked twenty years as a psychotherapist. He works in the family business because no one else in his

family is left to work there. His father, his mother, his brother, his sister-in-law, and his sister are all disappeared.

Daniel had, at the time of our interview, recently received damages from a lawsuit against Admiral Massera for the disappearance of his entire family, a lawsuit that he had filed in 1987. Justice had been slow. He won the lawsuit in 1994. Damages were eventually divided between Massera and the Argentina state. Massera was ordered to pay $120,000 in damages while the Argentina state was ordered to pay $1.25 million. This was the first time that a member of the military had been forced to pay compensation for their role in a disappearance. While the state eventually settled in 1999, Massera refused to pay until 2004 after the court ordered that his apartment be seized. Finally, he was compelled to hand over the money. In a press conference the previous month, Daniel announced that he would give the money to the *Grandmothers.*

The story of the disappearance of Daniel's family is anomalous. His brother Sergio was a conscript in the army doing mandatory military service. He was stationed in the ESMA and ended up as assistant to "El Tigre" Acosta, one of the most notorious military perpetrators. He was also a student activist in Peronist Youth. He gave them information about what was taking place inside the ESMA. He then received orders from Peronist Youth and the Montoneros to set off a bomb inside the complex. Daniel did not find out about this until 1982 in France when he met people who had been disappeared in the ESMA and had been freed. The bomb was discovered before it exploded. When Acosta found out, he kidnapped all six of the conscripts who had been in that area and tortured them. Daniel's brother eventually confessed. The military even made a videotape of Sergio's confession that was used for torturing other prisoners. After his

confession, Acosta reportedly told him, “You betrayed me and now all of your family are going to fly with you.”[59] That night, they kidnapped Sergio’s wife, parents, and his 15-year old sister. Daniel was at a friend’s house that night so he managed to escape and eventually escaped to Israel.

In explaining the disappearances of his parents and his teenage sister, Daniel believes that it was a combination of personal vengeance and antisemitism. Acosta exacted additional vengeance not simply because he felt he had been betrayed by Sergio but because he had been betrayed by a Jew. At the time of our interview, Daniel was planning a lawsuit against Acosta. He felt that Kirchner’s effort to overturn the amnesty laws and the pardons against military officers would not succeed. Daniel’s pursuit of justice for the disappearance of his family required him to do what no family member group did: differentiate between his brother and sister-in-law and the rest of his family. In other words, he was compelled to differentiate between those who could be considered “innocent victims” and those who could not. According to Daniel, the kidnapping, torture, and murder of his brother and sister-in-law (who was also in Peronist Youth) could be explained within the logic of the military dictatorship’s “anti-subversive war.” It fit “”the madness of that period.” However, the disappearances of his parents and sister did not. His mother was a “bourgeois intellectual,” his father was an industrialist, and his sister was only 15-years old. As an act of personal vengeance, he was prepared to argue that their disappearances did not fit under the amnesty laws that immunized military officers from persecution based on the argument that they were following orders.

[59] Fly was the military’s euphemism for throwing drugged disappeared alive into the sea from planes.

He was compelled to separate his brother from his lawsuit because Acosta's lawyers would use the fact that his brother had tried to explode a bomb in the ESMA as part of his defense.

Daniel did not have the same political transformation many other family members had in which they came to see that their disappeared family member had been right in what they were doing. In Daniel's case, it was the exact opposite. His brother's disappearance and the subsequent retaliation against his entire family proved that Daniel had been right all along. Although three years younger than his brother, they had argued over his political activities before his disappearance. Daniel had even warned him that he was not only putting his life in danger but also the entire family. His brother responded, "that's how it is but it's the price to pay for freedom." He claims that his father also warned his brother and his daughter-in-law that they were in danger and asked them to leave the country or go into hiding. They refused. For Daniel, "my brother was active in Peronist Youth and a conscript in the military. It is aberrant. It was suicide." His brother knew what was going on because he was inside of the ESMA. "If you see that they are kidnapping, torturing and killing people, and you are going to put a bomb in this place, logically, you know that if they catch you, they are going to kill you."

At the time of our interview, I had encountered references to Daniel's brother as a hero in various publications. He was a hero who had risked his life not only in bringing to light the atrocities taking place in the ESMA but he even tried to put an end to them. I ask Daniel what he thinks of the view of the disappeared as heroes who died for their ideals. His response is equally harsh.

> It is one thing to have ideals and it's another to be brainwashed. And many were brainwashed. My brother didn't even think about trying to safeguard his fifteen-year old sister or his parents. He could have told them, "I'm not leaving because I am a *militante*. I have my political thinking and my way of acting. I'm going to continue doing what I think is right but I'm going to end up doing dangerous things. But you should protect yourselves."

At the same time, Daniel readily admits that his brother could not have predicted what the military would do to his family. At worst, he thought that he and his wife would be killed. In other words, although Daniel holds his brother responsible for the disappearance of his parents and sister, he also recognizes that he cannot hold his brother responsible for what he could have only known in hindsight. To mitigate his brother's responsibility, Daniel uses terms such as "unconscious actions." Although he could not have been aware of what was going to happen, he should have still tried to protect his family. Daniel also argues that if he had been aware of the risks of what his brother was doing then his brother should have been as well. "So I don't forgive him," he tells me. Even if the consequences of his actions were unintended and unimaginable, he blames his brother for prioritizing his political activities over the protection of his family. "I have my position. The military killed him but my brother killed himself. And my brother is responsible for the death of my parents. This is my way of thinking. As much as Acosta killed my parents, it was my brother's responsibility."

Towards the end of our interview, Daniel realizes that I could misinterpret him. Each time he recounted what happened to his family to journalists and

academics, he told it differently and this time his account had come out with more anger towards his brother than it normally did. “I am slightly annoyed today,” he smiles wearily. “But I want to make it clear. The murderers of my parents are Acosta and Massera. The rest is a subjective struggle I have with my brother. Is that clear? It comes out of a fight we had then.” He then clarified his position by making a division between public declarations and our interview.

> The reason why this debate over the responsibility of the armed organizations goes on internally and not publicly is because the military perpetrators are still free. And they continue evading responsibility for their actions. So until that moment when we can judge all of them and put them in prison for kidnapping, torture, murder and theft, we can’t go out and openly denounce ourselves. You can write about this in a thesis but it can’t be done in public. I can’t go out and talk about what my brother thought. It’s impossible. Not until Acosta is in prison and in prison for this, not for stealing babies.[60] Only after Acosta is arrested and condemned for this, I can go out and publicly say what I thought of the Montoneros. But now I can’t.

In other words, debating the actions of revolutionary organizations of the 1970s could take place but only within a delimited area. These were not private debates – so hence why he would talk to me about them and not want a pseudonym – but they were confined to a narrow audience. As a family member who was pursuing

[60] At this point, Acosta had already been arrested for his role in kidnapping children of the disappeared.

justice against the military, it was more difficult for him to make such statements in public. To do so would put one of the victims on trial. It would be the moral equivalent of debating a woman's history of sexual promiscuity in a case of rape. For Daniel, the actions of victims like his brother could only be questioned after those responsible for their disappearances, torture, and murder were judged, sentenced, and put in prison.

Debating the Montoneros

As I discovered, others had already publicly voiced many of Daniel's accusations. These were debates that sporadically erupted within progressive circles over the actions of revolutionary groups from the 1970s, in particular over the actions of the Montoneros. One of the earliest of these debates took place in 1996. As I argued in the previous chapter, the first decade of democracy in Argentina saw a struggle within human rights discourse between two opposing views of the disappeared: as innocent victims and heroes. The theory of the *dos demonios* represented the paradigmatic view of the disappeared as innocent victims. The shift took place in the 1990s, in particular between 1996 and 1997 when there is renewed attention on the political activism of the disappeared. Two best-selling books and a documentary film both mark and are representative of this shift. Miguel Bonasso's *El Presidente que no fue* is an account of the brief Cámpora presidency of 1973, a presidency that marked the return of Péron from exile. Bonasso was Héctor Cámpora's press secretary and his book was an effort to enhance understanding of the 1970s by reviving the then largely forgotten figure of Cámpora and rehabilitating leftwing Peronism at a time when debate

was being waged over whether Menemism was the legitimate heir to Peronism. The 600 plus page book became a surprise best seller when published in 1997.

Another lengthy account of revolutionary organizations in Argentina found on bestseller lists between 1997 and 1998 was Eduardo Anguita and Martín Caparrós's three volume La *Voluntad* (The Will). Their work recounts the history of revolutionary activism in Argentina between the years 1966 to 1978 told from the perspective of protagonists from that era. Like Bonasso's, theirs was an insiders' account. Anguita was an active member of ERP who was imprisoned for almost 11 years while Caparrós was a journalist active in the Montoneros who was, like Bonasso, exiled during the dictatorship.

A year earlier, in 1996, David Blaustein's documentary *Cazadores de Utopías* (Hunters of Utopia) was released on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the coup. This anniversary is considered a key moment and even a "turning point" in Argentine human rights history as 100,000 people turn out in the streets for the commemorative protest. The large numbers heralded a renewed vigilance and relevance of human rights (including the new emergence of the H.I.J.O.S. organization comprised of children of the disappeared) after a lengthy period of perceived indifference following the amnesty laws and the pardons of the late 1980s. Blaustein's film is a lengthy reconstruction of the history of the Montoneros, using archival footage and the testimonies of 34 former members of the organization. It is a sympathetic account of the group that deals quite explicitly with *la lucha armada* (armed struggle) as well as the organization's other activities. Like the authors of the works already cited, the film was made by protagonists from that period. Blaustein was politically active during the 1970s and the film's screenwriter, Ernesto Jauretche, was a Montonero. Blaustein is a

filmmaker with close ties to human rights organizations. His follow-up to *Cazadores de Utopías* in 2000 was a documentary about the *Grandmothers,* another important film for the human rights movement. Blaustein's impetus for making *Cazadores de Utopías,* the same impetus for most of the work from this period, was a repudiation of the *dos demonios.* Balustein saw the film as a deliberate response to the silence surrounding the political activism of the 1970s. He called the film his reaction against "the feeling that we hadn't done what we had done. That history, everything that had happened to me and that had happened to us was a dream, a delirium, an invention, a lie."[61]

The documentary was conceived as a direct response to the prevailing attitude about the disappeared at the time as innocent victims and marked the transition to view of the disappeared as national heroes. Its release provoked a debate about the Montoneros within human rights and progressive political circles. Two weeks after the film's release, on April 7, Página/12 opened a debate on the film by publishing dueling editorial responses to it by Miguel Bonasso and Gabriela Cerruti.[62] The debate was positioned as one between generations. The former Montonero Bonasso was a protagonist from that era while Cerruti was a young star of Argentine journalism. Scarcely over thirty, she had already been a columnist for Página/12 for almost a decade and had written two books, including *El Jefe*, a best-selling critical biography of Carlos Menem.

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[61] "Reportaje a David Blaustein." En San Telmo y sus alrededores, No. 38, June 2001, http://www.ensantelmo.com/Cultura/Artistas/blaustein.htm
[62] Página/12, April 7, 1996 p. 14-15.

Two weeks later, one editorialist encapsulated the debate as "the children of the 1990s questioning the children of the 1970s."[63]

Bonasso celebrated Blaustein's film as a "victory of memory," praising it for heralding a period of newfound historical interest in revolutionary groups of the 1960s and 70s. The same interest greeted the publication of his *El Presidente que no fue* a year later. On the other hand, Cerruti saw the film as part of a "mythologization of the 1970s." For Cerruti, rather than an uncritical celebration, the documentary should have presented a more honest self-assessment of the group. She accused the film of serious omissions and historical revisionism by deliberately avoiding a discussion of the Montoneros' numerous mistakes and errors. Taking an ironic tone, she attempted to demystify the left's romanticization of revolutionary organizations with its implicit belief that "the glorious years of the 70's" was "the karma of later generations." She contested the idealized view of the disappeared with its assumption that "they were much better than those that came afterwards."

> They lived – they created! – such a marvelous period. This was a generation ready to give their lives for their ideals. They were one the verge of changing history. They took advantage of the streets, enjoyed politics, and benefited from a solidarity never seen before or hence. Alas, how we venerate and envy that history.[64]

[63] Página/12, April 21, 1996 p. 29.
[64] Página/12, April 7, 1996 p. 14-15.

Cerruti's critique is notable because it marked one of the first times that such a debate occurred so openly in a progressive political publication. Página/12 called it a "debate twenty years in the waiting" and over the next two weeks the newspaper featured responses and reactions from other progressive intellectuals, human rights activists, and protagonists from that period. Whatever their respective positions, commentators agreed that after twenty years of silence, open debate on revolutionary groups was a positive sign. Many of the issues raised in the debate then are still being raised in the present. Many of Daniel's comments to me in our interview are variations of those voiced by Cerruti and others.

One of Cerruti's main criticisms was how a documentary of almost two and a half hours long about the Montoneros could fail to mention any of the organization's leaders, in particular the head of the organization Mario Firmenich. The leadership of the Montoneros has been uniformly condemned and criticized. One of the main criticisms is the group's rigid militaristic and authoritarian command structure. I will return to this later but a dominant response to the uniform condemnation of the leaders was to distinguish between the "grassroots activists" (*militantes de base*) at the bottom (many of whom disappeared) from the leadership (many of whom survived) on the top. Those members at the bottom of the organization are known as the "parsley" (*perejiles*). The view of the disappeared as heroes is predicated on this divide. For example, Nora Cortiñas, a prominent member of the *Founding Line Mothers* responded to Cerruti's criticism by divorcing "the honest *militantes* with ideals who chose to go out in the streets to wage a struggle that they thought was just…who put aside individual interests for a collective objective to construct a world they thought would be

better even at the risk of their own lives" from the "traitors."[65] The traitors were the leaders of the group. Their omission from the film was easy to explain. They did not merit inclusion.

This schism has become the standard position of human rights and progressive politics: to praise those at the bottom while ignoring or scorning the leaders. Family members will routinely distinguish between the two in their narratives. For example, in the words of Elsa O., "I think the leadership was tremendously irresponsible and, I repeat once again, not the young people at that time. They had ideals and believed they could make the country a better place. Firmenich and the others were incredibly irresponsible. I accuse them of also being responsible for the disappearances of so many young people."[66]

During my fieldwork, I did not encounter a single person who had a positive thing to say about the Montonero leadership. For example, in the same interview where a daughter of the disappeared told me she disliked Mario Firmenich, she said, "the best Montoneros were known as the *perejiles.*" In a public speech from 2001, playwright Roberto Cossa paid tribute to the "parsley" (*un elogio del perejil*) while questioning why "organizations that struggle for equality fall into the same vices of privileged hierarchies?"[67]

Around this time, the *perejil* becomes synonymous with the "idealist and heroic youth." Two books published while I was in Argentina exemplify this. Marisa Sadi's *Montoneros: la resitencia después del final* (Montoneros: the resistance before the end) (2004) is a "vindication" of the role of the lowly *perejil*

[65] Página/12, April 21, 1996.
[66] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.
[67] Página/12, April 1, 2001.

by someone who had been one of them. Sadi joined Peronist Youth shortly before the 1976 coup and in 1978 went into hiding with a small group. By this point, according to Sadi, they had completely lost contact with the leaders who were all in exile. Stranded by their leaders, they conducted their own resistance against the dictatorship outside of the rigid constraints of the leadership. The same year, Adriana Robles publishes *Perejiles, los otros Montoneros* (2004), which also recounts the author's experience as a *perejil.* In its self-description, it is "the story of a resolute and enthusiastic generation of young people that turned to 1970s activism."

Despite the emergence of the *perejil* as the real hero*,* not everyone shares this interpretation. Daniel, for example, interprets the sacrifice that the *perejiles* made as a sign that they were brainwashed and unable to think for themselves. They willingly followed the orders of a delusional leadership who led them to their deaths. "It's hard but I have my position. I'm not going to continue defending the stupidities of what the Montoneros did, all the *perejiles* that followed the orders of Firmenich and the *hijos de puta* that are all free and alive while the rest are dead." In a similar way, journalist Claudio Uriarte questions the assumption that the "passion" and "enthusiasm" with which the young people who gravitated to the Montoneros are frequently credited with are necessarily positive.

> They speak of "the passion" but it is difficult to understand what positive role it can have in politics when the future of millions of people are at

stake An irrational, passionate, and violent mass movement: it's hard to imagine a better formula for catastrophe.[68]

The brunt of Uriarte's and other commentators' criticisms fall on the Montonero leadership. The group not only made numerous outright mistakes but they made decisions that were so flawed that many concluded that the leadership colluded with the military. One major criticism of the group was based on their actions before the 1976 coup. The Montoneros, who had been underground, had become a legal political group with the return of Péron in 1973. They were engaged in democratic activities. However, when it became clear that Péron had sided with right-wing Peronist factions, the group decided to return to clandestinity. This move was disastrous. Many of its activists had been out in the open and their identities were already known. This made them far easier to locate and assassinate.

Another major criticism of the group is that once it became clear that their members were being wiped out, the leaders should have told them to leave the country. Instead of telling them to flee, the leaders ordered them to stay and many more were killed. In the words of Chicha, "This is what I can't forgive about the Montonero leaders. They saw that everyone was dying - my son was one of the last – and they didn't give them orders to leave and save themselves."

If some of the disappeared, motivated by their solidarity and commitment, refused to leave the country even when their parents pleaded with them, one reason why was because the Montonero leadership who were mainly safe in

[68] Página/12, April 21, 1996, pg. 28.

exile ordered them to stay. Why did the Montonero leadership fail to protect its *militantes de base,* its *perejiles*? The answer is twofold. First, the leadership completely miscalculated its support to the point that suggests a complete divorce from empirical reality, especially after the 1976 coup. Second, and perhaps more troubling, the leadership was not only prepared but willing to sacrifice as many of its members necessary to achieve its goals of taking power. That they never came close to their goals of seizing power merely indicates how badly the group blundered.

Interviews with Mario Firmenich during the dictatorship suggest a leader who was by turns oblivious and delusional. For example, novelist Gabriel García Márquez accidentally ran into Mario Firmenich on a transatlantic flight at the end of 1976, months after the dictatorship had come to power. García Márquez, surprised at bumping into one of the world's most wanted men by chance on a commercial airline, took the opportunity to interview him. According to Firmenich, the military coup had created the conditions for an immanent victory. He was in the midst of preparing a new front by uniting with other left-wing organizations. He was also convinced that the petit bourgeoisie supported the Montoneros because their new government would respect private property for small business and only expropriate foreign monopolies while compensating the appropriation of national monopolies.

Firmenich argued that victory was imminent but more sacrifices were necessary. García Márquez argued with him over armed resistance. In speaking of the sacrifices that were needed for victory, Firmenich told García Márquez that the group had made "war calculations" and were "prepared to suffer 1500 losses in the first year."(2000:112) These losses were both necessary and important for

Firmenich because they would enhance the group's prestige among the masses. This would invariably lead to the dictatorship's downfall.

Firmenich both perpetuated the idea that a war was taking place and was deluded into believing that the Montoneros were winning it. According to García Márquez, he was most passionate when discussing urban warfare and military tactics. When García Márquez questions whether he was risking dehumanization, Firmenich responded with his conviction that "Nobody is dehumanized in a humanistic *lucha.* (2000:109) One could argue that it is unfair to judge Firmenich's comments in 1976 so harshly with knowledge that he would only possess in hindsight. But what is remarkable is that he maintained the exact same position as late as 1981 when the extent of the military's atrocities was already widely known. In an interview from that year, he made a very similar comment about the values of the Montoneros' sacrifice while still believing that he would "win the war."

> Our organization is a means, merely a means, and therefore we have been prepared to sacrifice the organization in combat in return for political prestige. We have lost five thousand cadres, but how much more mass support have we won? That is the real point." (Gillespie 1982:227)

Gillespie, in his history of the Montoneros published before the end of the dictatorship, juxtaposed Firmenich's quote with one by another prominent revolutionary figure in Latin America, Régis Debray: "Sacrifice is not a political argument and martyrdom does not constitute proof. When the list of martyrs

grows long, when every act of courage is converted into martyrdom, it is because something is wrong."(ibid)

By that point, the Montoneros had already reached the point of their dissolution. In 1978, Firmenich was still convinced of their impending success and of their support from the Argentine people. Many members of the group were disappeared or dead while the group fell into the hands of its more militaristic members comprised of people later criticized as armchair generals who sent other people to die from the safety of exile. Other members became aware of this and parted with the group. In 1979, the poet Juan Gelman and Rodolfo Galimberti broke with the group, criticizing its militarism and anti-democratic posture. A short time later, Miguel Bonasso and Jaime Dri issued what they called the "*Documento de Madrid"* criticizing the group's view that the loss of human life was the "cost of war." The Montonero leadership responded to these "betrayals" with death threats.

At this time, Firmenich still believed the Montoneros were poised to seize power but needed to make one more great sacrifice as a means of winning more support among the people. The "Montonero Counteroffensive" of 1979-1980 was organized as a means to do this. The Counteroffensive involved exiled Montoneros reentering Argentina to wage a "final battle" that would leave the group on the cusp of taking control. The Counteroffensive has been a major source of controversy in debates about the group. The folly of its planning and execution led to the massacre of the Montoneros who returned. In fact, it is often singled out as a primary example of the leadership's lack of common sense. The number of Montoneros taking part in the Counteroffensive has been estimated between fifteen to eighty. The armed forces were waiting for them. In what they

termed *Operación Murciélago* (Operation Bat), they picked off numerous members as they attempted to enter the country from the northeast and others while they were still in Brazil. In the description of all observers, the Counteroffensive was a suicide mission. Everyone disappeared and only one survived.

What many commentators question is why individuals who had made it safely into exile would have returned to Argentina for the Counteroffensive. They knew what was taking place in Argentina and chose to head back to a certain death. Daniel was in France at the time with other Argentine exiles and knew some who returned. It was a suicide mission that, in Daniel's belief, many of them willingly embraced.

> I lived with exiled Argentines in France. And many left France to return to Argentina to be killed because they continued obeying the orders of the party. I remember discussions in France with people who returned to Argentina. Why are you going to return to Argentina? We must *luchar por la patria* (fight for the country). They are going to have you killed, I said. They continued saying the same thing as my brother before. One must *luchar por la patria*. And they massacred them like rats… They did not understand the logic of what was going on around them. They did not understand what the military was doing. Or, perhaps, they understood it and preferred to die rather than to live under such conditions. There were many *militantes* who couldn't stand being alive when all of their friends had died, including their family members. Many escaped but returned because living under such circumstances was intolerable. I think the only

reason I didn't return to be killed was because of this internal war with my brother. I defended myself in life by fighting with someone who gave himself up for dead and whose actions resulted in the deaths of others.

For some observers, the Montoneros' careless incompetence was more malicious than naïve. The Counteroffensive was so illogical that one plausible explanation for it that has been advanced is that Firmenich was a double agent working with the Armed Forces. The Counteroffensive was part of a deal he made with the dictatorship to hand over many of its key members to the military to be executed.

Human rights organizations have been loath to believe such allegations and generally reject them outright. However, allegations of a pact between Navy Admiral Emilio Massera and the Montoneros have circulated since the early 1980s. At this time, several Argentine magazines printed articles speculating about secret meetings Massera had with Mario Firmenich in Europe in 1978. In one account, Massera gave Firmenich one million dollars to cease all operations during the 1978 World Cup. They were allegedly seen eating together in Madrid. The brother of a cultural attaché who disappeared in the ESMA under the orders of Massera also accused the Montoneros with being complicit with the Armed Forces. "Finally and curiously, terrorists and antiterrorists ended up being the same evil mafia"[69]

Many reject such comments because they suggest a *dos demonios* interpretation of events in which revolutionary organizations and the military were

[69] *La Semana,* June 12, 1982.

two sides of the same coin. North American journalist Martin Andersen revived these accusations in a 1989 article in *The Nation* and in a subsequent book called *Dossier Secreto*. Using an unnamed CIA source, Andersen argued that the group had been infiltrated and that Firmenich was actively working with the military. While Andersen's account remains one of the most widely cited accounts of this period in the English language, the book's Argentine edition was not successful and his argument has been widely dismissed by both the left and the right.

In Argentina, the Montonero Counteroffensive has only recently become open to debate. Cristina Zuker's *El Tren de la Victoria*, published in 2003, is an account by the sister of a young man who disappeared in the Counteroffensive. On the eve of the book's publication, Zuker conducted an interview with a defiant Firmenich. A more recent account is journalist Marcelo Larraquy's *Fuimos Soldados* (We Were Soldiers) (2006), which offers the "secret history" of the Montonero counter-offensive.

Firmemich vehemently denies accusations that he was a double agent. He defends himself even when he admits mistakes resulting from the organization's youth and inexperience. "We did it with the greatest seriousness that we could with all the inexperience and ignorance that we were burdened with." Firmenich was just 28-years-old in 1976 and had already been a leader of the Montoneros for several years. Much of the leadership was around his age. The divorce between the leadership and the young idealistic disappeared elides the fact that most in the leadership were also young. He said that the group ran many risks but they made the decision to run these risks collectively. The leadership did not send them to die. They went willingly. Judging them after the

fact was equally unfair. He criticizes the view that many have of him and the other leaders.

> The tricks consists in saying that the Montoneros are a shit, that those that died are poor little good ones (*unos pobrecitos buenos*), that those who remained alive are all a bunch of *hijos de puta*, and that those in the leadership were all intelligence agents.[70]

In the next chapter, I will return to "those who remained alive" - the survivors of Argentina's concentration camps. Firmenich is not a survivor since he was never disappeared. However, his trajectory after the dictatorship ended is worth noting. He was imprisoned after the fall of the dictatorship but subsequently granted a pardon by Menem along with the military generals. Judging and then pardoning the leaders of revolutionary organizations alongside military perpetrators formed part of the *dos demonios* view that attempted to allocate responsibility equally between guerilla groups and the military. After his pardon, he went to Spain and ended up completing a PhD in economics while teaching at a university in Barcelona. His interview with Zuker was conducted when he was on a tour publicizing his recently published book *Eutopia: Una Propuesta Alternativa Al Modelo Neoliberal* (Eutopia: An Alternative Proposal to the Neoliberal Model) (2004). In it, he takes a non-violent critical perspective on globalization that has been compared with the work of Joseph Stiglitz, the repentant ex-economist of the World Bank turned globalization critic who has surprisingly become a mentor

[70] Página/12, August 17, 2003.

to Firmenich. In Argentina, Firmenich is viewed with suspicion and his book disinterest. He is a thoroughly discredited figure, a *persona non grata* who periodically reappears in the press every few years giving interviews, mainly unapologetic about his past. Human rights groups are equally dismissive of Firmenich. Addressing the theory that he was a double agent, one *Grandmother* told me, “It does not interest me to know if he was part of the intelligence services.” She was not interested in whether Firmenich was a double agent because Firmenich was no longer relevant.

Other former leaders of the Montoneros are equally reviled. For example, the trajectory of Rodolfo Galimberti after his departure from the Montoneros is often cited as an example of the character of the leadership. Galimberti was a leading Montonero exiled in Paris. He eventually renounced the group in 1979 with Juan Gelman. They responded by denouncing him as a traitor and issued a death sentence against him. After the fall of the dictatorship, Galimberti embraced the *dos demonios* view and ended up business partners with a man he had kidnapped in the 1970s. He later became partners with Susana Giménez, a flamboyant Argentine television personality known for her extensive plastic surgery and popular variety show. Even more noteworthy, Galimberti became an adviser to the Argentine secret service SIDE during the Menem years and became an associate and friend of torturers from the ESMA (even an acquaintance of Alfredo Astiz). There are also rumors that he was a CIA agent as well (Larraquy & Caballero 2000). Galimberti is often treated as a paradigmatic case used to make disparate conclusions. He either illustrates the kind of intrinsically unscrupulous and amoral person active in revolutionary groups or is

an exemplar of the narrative I discussed in the last chapter of revolutionary idealism transformed into cynical opportunism.

Another ex-Montonero leader of ill repute is Roberto Perdía, the organization's second in command during the dictatorship. In his introduction to Zuker's book, journalist Horacio Verbitsky disputes the idea that the Montonero leaders were collaborating with the military but argues that they were guilty of a profound cynicism and used "moral extorsion" (Zuker 2003:8) to get young people to die for their cause. Verbitsky cites Perdía as a key culprit of this kind of behavior. According to Verbitsky, after the dictatorship he became wealthy as a cabinet adviser in ecclesiastical matters, a position he achieved based on his relationship with Menem's ex-ambassador to the Vatican (Zuker 2003:8).

Montoneros: Between Fascism and Marxism

In this context, *Cazadores de Utopías* failure to name the leadership of the Montoneros makes sense. The success of reframing the disappeared who were Montoneros as national heroes was accomplished by divorcing the *perejiles* from leaders. The *perejiles* are praised while the leaders are uniformly condemned. Critics of the organization focus on the leadership.[71] When Cerruti was attacking the film and the organization, she asked readers to imagine what Argentina would have been like with Firmenich as president and Galimberti as the head of the intelligence services. This is a common rhetorical device of critics of the group. Daniel asked me the same. "Can you imagine what Argentina

[71] For example, Luis Bruchstein in a 1989 article refers to surviving Montonero leaders as "the return of the living dead."

would have been like if the Montoneros had won their war? It wouldn't be a democracy. My brother wanted a better world, yes. But my brother wouldn't have been governor or president. He was a *perejil*. They made him kill because, like so many others, he did not think. None of them thought. The ones who thought are free now." Such questions are obviously more rhetorical than answerable although one is left to speculate that a group willing to sacrifice so many of their own in order to create a new society would likely be willing to sacrifice many others in order to achieve the same goal. Towards the end of our interview, Daniel is even more outright in his criticism and called the Montoneros a fascist organization. He asked me if I was familiar with the history of the Montoneros. "You know the history of the Montoneros, right?"

The Montoneros were the largest revolutionary group in Argentina. They were formed after the 1966 military coup but leaped to national prominence on May 1970 when they kidnapped General Aramburu, the general who had led the coup deposing Perón from power and who was also responsible for the executions of a number of Peronist military officers and civilians a year later (as depicted in Rodolfo Walsh's *Operation Massacre* [1957]). The Montoneros organized a revolutionary court to try Aramburu, found him guilty of his crimes and subsequently executed him. By the early 1970s, they had incorporated two other armed Peronist groups, Las Fuerzas Armadas Perónistas (FAP) (Armed Peronist Forces) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Armed Revolutionary Forces), to create a united revolutionary Peronist front. The other major revolutionary organization was the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) (The People's Revolutionary Army) which was the armed wing of the

Trotskyite party, the PRT. The Montoneros were Catholic socialists opposed to communism.

The origins of the Montoneros reveal the ideological contradictions and tensions inherent in Peronism. The organization emerged, in part, from right-wing Catholicism. More precisely, two of its founders were members of the Tacuara youth movement in the early 1960s. The Tacuara were a Falange-inspired, Catholic fascist nationalist group that valued "courage, sacrifice, violence and struggle, and went in for direct action, uniforms, and ceremonies in a big way."(Gillespie 1982:49) They are perhaps best known for their antisemitic attacks on Jewish students, in particular their 1962 kidnapping of a young Jewish girl who they beat, burned with cigarettes and carved a swastika on her chest with a knife, and the 1964 murder of Raúl Alterman, a young Jewish communist (Gutman 2003). Journalist Daniel Gutman calls Tacuara "the first Urban Guerilla group in Argentina" in his history of the organization (2003) and many others see their imprint in the Montoneros, not only in their militarism and methods but also in their ideology.[72] Members of Tacuara graduated to both extremes of Peronism, the AAA paramilitary organization and the Montoneros. Prior to the military coup in the 1970s, former members were killing each other. Tacuara embraced an anti-imperialist nationalism that blurred the lines between the revolutionary left and the reactionary right.

Their impact can be seen not only in the Montoneros but also in other revolutionary groups. José Luis "Joe" Baxter was a prominent member of Tacuara who had a political transformation in the 1960s. He began in Tacuara as

[72] See Goebel (2007) for a discussion about debates of fascist influence in Argentine revolutionary groups.

a Nazi-influenced antisemite in his youth. His anti-imperialism caused him to switch allegiances after witnessing the success of the Cuban revolution and he graduated from fascism to Marxism. He trained in Vietnam and China and ended up as one of the founders of ERP with Mario Roberto Santucho. Baxter eventually left the group after deciding that they were not Trotskyist enough. He formed his own splinter organizations before dying in a plane crash.

Historian David Rock has argued that the Argentine nationalist right left a profound mark on the revolutionary left, in particular in its anti-imperialism and its authoritarianism. According to Rock:

> The Nationalists had a major influence on the Argentine revolutionary Left; its myths and icons, its ideological outlook, and its propaganda techniques. The New Left of the 1970s inherited the cult of authoritarian leadership from the Nationalists and copied their attempt to create a radical counterculture that used historical invention, xenophobia, and conspiracy theories. The Left's brand of anti-imperialism that denounced the antinational machinations of international monopoly capitalism had some of its roots in the onslaughts of the Nationalists against what they termed Jewish or Masonic conspiracies inspired from abroad."(1993:xv)

Some saw these same anti-imperialist conspiracies in Peronism as well. Although Perón's relationship to the Nazis has been highly debated, in particular for how he turned Argentina into a safe haven for fleeing Nazi War Criminals (see Uki Goni 2002), he frequently referred to a "synarchy": "an ill-defined supranational entity supposedly governing the world, which Perón himself

described as an alliance of capitalism, communism, Catholicism, and Zionism." (Moyano 1995:76) The conspiracy theories of the Peronist paramilitary right were more purely antisemitic.

Debates about the Montoneros invariably turn to debates about Peronism. Was Perón left or right? The answer is not clear. A large literature exists devoted to the analysis of Peronism. Political theorist Ernesto Laclau has argued that once Perón was in exile, he became an "empty signifier" that could take on multiple meanings (2005:216). In the 1960s, Peronism splintered between two primary factions: the youth movements on the left and the trade unionists on the right. He famously referred to them as his "left" and "right" hands. This dichotomy could only be maintained while Perón was in exile. Once he returned from exile, Perón was compelled to choose sides. When he did, he sided with the right.[73]

According to Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin, "the analysis and interpretation of Peronism" constitutes a foundation of modern Argentine sociology (Jelin 1997). Academic accounts of Peronism have traditionally focused on explaining Perón's appeal among the working classes (in particular its populism and clientilism) and the political meaning of the movement. If Peronism is largely incoherent to many observers, Perón encouraged the confusion. During his regime, he argued that Peronism was a "third position" that was neither capitalist nor communist. One of the primary characteristics of Peronism is its variability. Its ability to resist definitions and shift meanings

[73] Terragno (2005) for an analysis of Peronism after Perón's return from exile in the 1970s.

(Beasley –Murray 1998) is what has allowed it to inspire both the extreme right and the revolutionary left.

This ideological inconsistency becomes a point of contention in debates about revolutionary Peronism. How could revolutionary Peronism still exist when Perón, once he returned to power in 1973 and rejected the Monternos? For some commentators, this indicates the group's intrinsic confusion. Others had been debating the possibility of a Peronism without Perón since his exile in 1955. In the Cerruti-Bonasso debate about the Montoneros, journalist Claudio Uriarte defended Cerruti by arguing that, "the Montoneros were a beleaguered movement that had its destruction built into its ideological machinery."[74] A group organized around Perón could not maintain itself once rejected by him. Defenders of revolutionary Peronism were subsequently forced to invent excuses for their leader. Many postulated a "before and after" Perón that attempts to explain his ideological mutation via old age and the nefarious influence of his then wife, former nightclub dancer Isabel and their personal secretary, the former astrologer José López Rega, aka *El Brujo* (The Warlock). The earlier Perón's politics were linked to his second wife Eva and a common refrain of 1970s revolutionary Peronism was that Evita "would have been a *Montonera*" if she were alive.

Violence and Historical Relativism

[74] Página/12, April 21, 1996, pg. 28.

This chapter has done a disservice to my readers if they come away from it with a view of the disappeared as armed Montoneros. Montoneros were the largest revolutionary organization and made up a significant number of the disappeared. However, most of the disappeared were not Montoneros and most Montoneros did not take part in armed struggle. To be in the Montoneros did not automatically mean taking up arms. The group had both an armed and a political wing and were active on a variety of fronts, including community development in poor neighborhoods. The "soldiers" were only a minority. In interviews discussing his account of the Montonero Counteroffensive, Marcelo Larraquy (2006) acknowledges that his work makes human rights groups uncomfortable because he chooses to focus on the small minority who took up arms. However, he defends attempting to open up debate on this issue. He argues for a need to discuss what the Montoneros did, even if it does not conform to an idealized view of the disappeared. "These are the histories of soldiers who decided to take up arms and that the *setentista* memory, always ready to idealize the will and the *compromiso* of this generation, preferred to discard, strategically or out of ignorance."(Larraquy 2006)

However, the debate extends beyond those who carried arms and those who did not. During the 1970s, many believed that a socialist revolution was both inevitable and immanent and that violence was the only means to achieve it. They did not have to personally carry arms to believe that violence was a viable and necessary means to transform political reality. Advocacy of *La Lucha Armada* (armed struggle) in the 1970s is another key point of contention in debates about revolutionary groups. These debates take place not only among progressive commentators but also in family member narratives.

Elsa, for example, has difficulty understanding how her husband came to embrace violence as a means of achieving political change. Her husband, Héctor Oesterheld, was one of Argentina's most important graphic novelists, known for his classic *El Eternauta* published in 1957. According to Elsa, he was an anti-Peronist social democrat although he had been branded a communist after writing a screenplay about the death of Che Guevara. Their four daughters gravitated toward revolutionary Peronism of the 1970s and joined the Montoneros. Héctor, swept up in their fervor, joined the group after them. Elsa had numerous arguments with him over his embrace of violence. Although Héctor was never involved in an act of violence himself, she argued with him over his membership in an organization that advocated and participated in violent resistance. She had trouble reconciling this with his peaceful temperament. "I never knew a man who was more anti-violence than him. He was respectful of all life, even insects. He was very calm and philosophical." In the end, she attributes his taking part in the Montoneros to not wanting "to be outside of what was happening in the world." He believed that "a new world was coming" and he came to embrace the group's methods for achieving this new world even if it went against his pacifistic disposition. The inexorable socialist revolution demanded such a position. Elsa sees this as "the most serious mistake Héctor made." Not only did Héctor disappear on April 27, 1977, but all four of their daughters (two of whom were pregnant at the time) and two of their son-in-laws.[75]

[75] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

The image of educated and middle-class young Argentines turning into radical revolutionaries willing to take up arms and not only die but also kill for a cause has been difficult for many to reconcile. Marta Diana's *Mujeres Guerilleras* (1996) is an account of the many young women who did precisely this, published at the exact moment when the new image of the disappeared emerged as the dominant one. Diana, a journalist, was inspired to write the book by a close friend of hers from childhood, Adriana Lesgart. Adriana later joined the Montoneros and became a high-ranking member of the organization before eventually disappearing in 1979 as part of the Montonero Counteroffensive. Diana recounts memories of a placid middle-class childhood in which Adriana played oboe while her sister, another prominent Montonera killed in 1972, played the harp.

Many family members also struggle with the image of their family members taking up arms against the state. Mariana Eva Pérez, a child of the disappeared who works in the *Grandmothers* and is daughter of the vice president, says "I share their ideals and I respect that of risking one's life to defend an ideal. The subject of the armed struggle in the 1960s and 1970s, at best, did not seem crazy because it happened in many parts of Latin America. Seen from today, it seems crazy." She then adds that she would "never use a FAL gun to try to change things, but I think it was different in that era. I think that one has to be a bit more understanding with that generation. Today, the voice of that generation is absent."[76]

That things were "different in that era' is one of the most common refrains in terms of understanding how a generation of educated middle-class young

[76] Interview from La Nación, September 12, 1998.

people came to believe in armed struggle. They argue for a kind of historical relativism in which their actions cannot be judged by contemporary standards and need to be situated in the context of that period. Some reject this historical relativism. Claudio Uriarte, in his defense of Cerruti's attack on the Blaustein's documentary, argues, "Montonero nostalgists tells us that we cannot be so severe with them because one has to understand them in the context of that period. With the same reasoning, one can justify the military dictatorship, cannibalism or whatever barbarity." Uriarte disputes Blaustein's title "hunters of utopia" to describe the group. Instead, he calls them "a group of violent and irresponsible people."[77]

In these debates, revolutionary groups are frequently accused of not supporting democracy. Their rejection of democracy can be explained by the historical context. A succession of military coups and institutional instability led many to conclude that democracy was simply not a viable option. The military would not permit a socialist revolution through the ballot box. If these groups embraced armed struggle, it was because they were "driven to violence" as a means of resisting the constant succession of dictatorships that ruled Argentina throughout the 20th century. Since the military coup in 1930, no elected leader was able to finish a full term in office. Laclau traces the precise moment in which revolutionary violence became embraced to the 1966 coup that deposed the democratically elected President Illia in place of the repressive rule of General Onganía. Onganía proceeded to dissolve political parties and, in his most notorious moment, ordered *La Noche de los Bastones Largos* ("The Night of the

[77] Página/12, April 21, 1996, pg 28.

Long Police Sticks") in which policemen stormed the University of Buenos Aires and attacked and arrested numerous students and professors (Pigna & Seoane 2006). "After a few months in office, it was clear to everybody that no institutional channels for the expression of social demands existed any longer, and that some kind of violent reaction entirely outside the institutional order would be the only possible response to this political blind alley."(Laclau 2005:219)

Democracy was not considered viable. The Montoneros even opposed violence in other contexts where they saw the possibility of democratic means of change. They criticized several European revolutionary groups for embracing violence and they publicly opposed the 1978 assassination of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in Italy precisely because the Red Brigades had a legitimate means via a democratic state to pursue political goals. They, on the other hand, had no alternative but violence. Violence was not desired but necessary.

The larger global political context also bolstered this view. CIA involvement in the military coup against Salvador Allende supported the perception that the United States would not allow for a democratically elected socialist regime. The Cuban revolution was also an inspiration. Globally, violence was seen as a means of achieving national liberation whether in the anti-colonial wars in Algeria and throughout Africa or in Vietnam. Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial manifesto, *The Wretched of the Earth,* is frequently cited as a major influence for a generation of young Argentines. During the 1960s and 1970s, Argentine revolutionaries could be found in Mozambique and Tanzania in Africa, with the PLO in Beirut, and later with the Sandanistas in Nicaragua (a former ERP member was involved in the 1980 assassination of Nicaraguan dictator Somoza). *La Lucha Armada* (armed struggle) was seen as the only means to achieve

political change. Power could only be taken by force. Even Daniel, a person completely unsympathetic towards the Montoneros, acknowledges this. “I have my contradictions. I do not agree with armed struggle but at the same time I saw that democracy in Argentina could not be sustained. There was one military coup after another. I did not agree with armed struggle but I realized that there was no other way because democracy could not be maintained.”

Julio Santucho (2004), brother of the founder of ERP (People’s Revolutionary Army) and an active member of the organization, defends the logic of armed struggle. While acknowledging some “unjustifiable murders,” he argued that their organization was fighting for wider democratic participation. “Revolutionary violence did not pursue any other objective but to remove the obstacles that stopped popular participation (2004:97).” Although this statement is more disputable with the Montoneros, Santucho argues that because ERP was the military wing of the PRT (A Trotskyist Workers’ Political Party), it had a “democratic culture” and was “capable of playing a positive role in the process of the construction of the new protagonism of the masses that took place in ’74 and ’75.”(2004:175) Although acknowledging the group overestimated the role of armed struggle, he maintains that the period offered no alternatives. Santucho’s conflation of “popular participation” and democratic culture” can be criticized. The two are not always commensurate.

In his introduction to Santucho’s work, historian Osvaldo Bayer poses similar questions about the conditions in which the use of violence is justified: “Does the common citizen have the right to raise their voice and to use arms of resistance against all systems that humiliate them? If they go out to the street to protest against an oppressive system that even denies them the right to work and

are attacked with weapons of violent repression, don't they have the right to counter-attack with the same violence? (Sanutcho 2004:16). Not everyone from that period, however, embraced the idea of violence. Carlos Mugica was an Argentine Jesuit priest who was part of the Third World Priest Movement (an Argentine variant of Liberation Theology) (Dodson 1974). He was an extremely importance influence on the founders of the Montoneros (Lanusse 2005). Yet he refused to condone the use of violence and, in the end, distanced himself from the group. "I am ready to die but not to kill," he famously said. However, his rejection of violence did not dissuade a right-wing death squad from assassinating him in 1974.

Mugica, however, was in the minority. If political activists from the 1960s and 1970s largely embraced the need for violence to change society, the post-dictatorship era has been characterized by the rejection of violence as a legitimate means. Human rights organizations like the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* are seen as exemplars of non-violent resistance. In the post-dictatorship period, violence was rejected out of hand by left-wing organizations in Argentina. Only two cases exist of left-wing groups employing violent means, and one of them is questionable. In 1989, *Movimiento Todos por la Patria* (MTP), a group led by a former leader of ERP, attacked an army barracks. The MTP claimed the assault was an effort to prevent another military coup (there had been three military uprisings in the previous two years). The army responded by using a chemical weapon forbidden by international law. There were subsequent accusations that at least two members of MTP were executed after surrendering.

In 1992, a group called *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo* (The People's Revolutionary Organization) announced itself by setting off two

homemade explosive devices in downtown Argentina. They followed these with a dozen attacks on automated bank machines. In the next few years, the group also robbed an armored car and extorted the head of a supermarket chain. For this reason, many suspected that the group was a front for common criminals motivated by economic ends who disguised themselves in radical political ideology.

The group's most notorious exploit was their attempted assassination of Jorge Bergés, "the Argentine Mengele," a police doctor who took part in torture in the concentration camps and supervised the births of numerous children of the disappeared. In March of 1996, he was shot 20 times but survived. The left uniformly condemned the attack. Even the radical left rejected the action as "out of place madness," "counterproductive," and "a dangerous step backward."[78] Everyone was baffled by the motivations. Family member organizations had always rejected the idea of vengeance and of taking justice into their own hands.[79] In fact, many accused the group of being a front for intelligence services. This is still a common belief. When I asked about the attack, human rights activists told me the attack on Bergés was part of an internal fight between factions of the armed forces. It was also an effort to delegitimize the human rights movement. At the time, the official response from most progressive leaders was to condemn the attack and question the political orientation of the organization.

The ORP eventually made declarations from Uruguay stating that it was

[78] Página/12, April 7, 1996, pg. 5.
[79] The topic is so taboo that given everything that has been written on the dictatorship, only one fictional representation addresses the subject, Silvia Silberstein's *Bajo el mismo cielo* (2002)

"only the beginning."[80] Their declarations enhanced the perception that the organization was actually a front for intelligence agency since their press conference played like a bad parody of 1970s radical political groups. In their video transmission, Andean music played over a darkly lit backdrop featuring images of indigenous instruments alongside the organization's insignia featuring a red star with five points and the image of Che Guevara, as two hooded individuals claimed responsibility for the attack. In their statement, they spoke of the inevitability of revolution, an immanent US invasion, and threatened Menem with "revolutionary justice." They stated that they had executed a death sentence against Bergés. Journalist Luis Bruschtein called it a "comedy of errors."[81] Many concluded that the whole thing was some kind of inexplicable prank or hoax.

What is notable in reactions against the ORP was that it was widely seen as inconceivable that any group on the radical left would commit an act of violence. Members of the group were later apprehended and sent to prison. One of the leaders of the group who was sentenced to prison would later claim full responsibility for the actions of the group in an interview in 2002. In the interview, he claimed to have been a human rights activist who worked in the investigative team of the *Grandmothers* in the 1980s as a teenager. He also claimed that the group never intended to kill Bergés but wanted to kidnap him on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the coup so that they could compel him to give information about the whereabouts of kidnapped children of the disappeared.[82] . Many still believe in the existence of two ORPs, the real one and a paramilitary one led by

[80] Ibid.
[81] Página/12, April 26, 1996, pg. 2.
[82] Página/12, September 1, 2002.

federal police or intelligence operatives that acted in its name. The group was eventually linked to intelligence agents who infiltrated the group. The ORP's assassination of Bergés occurred at the same moment *Cazadores de Utopías* had provoked discussion of the role of armed struggle in the 1970s. If the role of armed struggle in the 1970s could still debated in the 1990s, everyone concurred that it had no place in the present.

The Population Politics of the Montoneros

Of all the criticisms of the Montoneros, there was one voiced in my interview with Daniel that I never found in public debates. I will include it here because of its bearing on my research topic.

"The Montoneros had orders for young couples to get married and have children" My facial expression betrays my surprise. "You hadn't heard this? I'm sick of hiding truths." "Did you ever wonder why so many children were born in captivity whose parents were 18 or 20 years old?" I nod my head. I have wondered this and could not come up with a satisfying explanation other than that it appeared that many middle-class Argentines have children far younger than their North American counterparts. The fashion trend that summer is for pregnant middle-class women to wear regular T-shirts in lieu of maternity clothes, leaving their pregnant bellies exposed. As I begin to recount this, I realize that I should stay quiet and listen.

> They had orders from above to get married and have children so they could populate Argentina with healthy people and in case of death leave an inheritance. In some way, it was the same way of thinking of the

> military. The military said you had to kidnap these babies because they were the descendents of *guerilleros.* They used the same logic.

As proof, he pointed to one of the last children that that the *Grandmothers* had found. His mother was just 16-years old when she was abducted five-months pregnant and taken to the ESMA, his father only 19. I could understand why I had not heard of this before. This was a sensitive topic that would not be discussed openly by human rights groups. At worst, it could be misused to suggest a moral equivalence between the military and the Montoneros and support the military's assertion that the parents of the children that they kidnapped were unfit parents who recklessly endangered the lives of their children.

I later asked around to try to find more information on the topic but nobody appeared willing or able to disclose anything. If anything, I found contradictory accounts. In the words of one former Montonera, being active in the group did not allow for her to be pregnant. "But to "be active" in the way that I was active, I had to have a very tough notion and that was to not have children. This meant seven abortions for me."(Diana 1996:50) When she finally decided to have a child, she gave up her activism. However, I also find a reference to this subject in Gabriel García Márquez interview with Mario Firmenich that confirms Daniel's statement. During the course of their interview, Firmenich innocuously tells García Márquez how much he enjoys playing with his children. García Márquez is not surprised. He writes:

> Something new and different that I have seen in the Montoneros is that when one of them travels the world on difficult and even risky missions,

> they carry their children on their backs. I have seen them in temporary hideouts changing diapers, giving them the feeding bottle while they are busy with some important political matter (García Márquez 2000:110-111).

When García Márquez questions him about this, Firmenich responds: "It's natural. The time of believing that revolutionaries were forbidden to have children has passed." (García Márquez 2000:111) Firmenich's logic is disquieting. He explains the need to have children in militaristic terms. "Children are our rearguard." He embraces the popular idea that Argentina was a vast yet under-populated country in need of the right kind of people to populate it. This discourse emerged in the 19th century as the indigenous populations were being massacred to make way for European immigration. Juan B. Alberdi, one of Argentina's most influential 19th century political liberals, famous declared *gobernar es poblar* (to govern is to populate) (Castro 1991). For Firmenich, cultivating the right kind of people and expanding the population was necessary for Argentina's future and therefore formed an integral part in their plans for national liberation. "Our typical family today is three children. It should be five. Two to cover the demographic quota and the rest to double the population."(García Márquez 2000:111) For critics of the organization like Daniel, that the Montoneros believed this showed that "they had the same way of thinking as the military. The Military said you had to kidnap these babies because they were descendents of *guerilleros*. It was the same logic."

The Distance of Time

If criticisms of revolutionary organizations of the 1970s have been made in the last decade, this is because the passage of time has allowed this to occur. If the view of the disappeared as absolute innocents is obsolete, the view of the disappeared as absolute heroes is as well. In 1996, Gabriela Cerruti argued for the need to dispassionately take distance from these groups in order to evaluate them. Many responded that such distance was neither desirable nor necessary. Those who were part of that generation commented that it was difficult or even impossible to speak dispassionately or objectively about that period. As one commentator observed, "It ends up being difficult to speak (or write) about something that is so close." However, in the ten years that passed since that debate, many now see that the moment has arrived for a real self-assessment of both the errors and mistakes of revolutionary groups. The new position, as stated by Miguel Bonasso in an interview from 2006, is that "we were neither angels nor demons."[83] Bonasso argues that the *dos demonios* view impeded debate about revolutionary organizations. Only once that view was vanquished could there be a more honest self-evaluation.

In such a way, these debates are less controversial now than they were in 1996. For example, at the end of 2004, a magazine called *Lucha Armada en la Argentina* (Armed Struggle in Argentina) was launched to renew debates about revolutionary organizations. In their inaugural issue, the editors argue that the passage of time allowed for a more critical discussion of armed revolutionary groups from the 1960s and 1970s. "We ask ourselves if it is possible to take a

[83] Página/12, November 5, 2006.

certain distance after so many years: historians with the knowledge of their academic training and survivors with a perspective that comes with time that also brings wisdom." (Bufano & Rot 2004:1) This time the response is less controversial than a decade earlier. The time had finally arrived.

Conclusion

During the dictatorship, a new protagonist emerged: the family member contesting the dictatorship over the disappearance of their child. After the fall of the dictatorship, Firmenich and the rest of the leaders of revolutionary groups, the protagonists of the 1970s, were no longer considered relevant figures. Keeping human rights issues separate from debates about the 1970s was an important initial step. Debating the value of *la lucha armada* is not an issue that one finds in human rights discussions. In fact, if one writes about human rights in Argentina, a tacit directive is that one does not write about the armed groups of the 1970s. And if one writes about the armed groups of the 1970s, the reverse holds true.[84] This has created a curious divide over time that is only now being reconciled. The disappeared should not be considered synonymous with armed struggle. They came from a variety of backgrounds and participated in a number of different activities. Even to see them as student youth elides this since according to the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), a larger percentage of the disappeared were classified as working class (30.2%) than as students (21%)(1984:368). I once had a discussion with an historian who works

[84] Antonius Robben's work (2005) is an exception.

in Argentina who was unaware of the large numbers of disappeared who came from the working class. When I told him they were the largest single category, he grudgingly acknowledged that this could be true but then argued that they were most likely privileged trade unionists rather than poor workers.

The dominant view of the disappeared is one of college students engaged in political activism. They are the foundation for the view of the disappeared as a generation of young idealists who gave their lives for a better world. Regardless of these representational issues, human rights now mobilize around a uniform image of the disappeared as national heroes. This is the view that others now criticize. Human rights groups do not debate this image. They uniformly subscribe to a view of the disappeared as national heroes. At the same time, different human rights groups employ contrasting views of the disappeared. Their view of the disappeared is directly related to the politics of the organization.

Some family members maintain that the disappeared died only for their beliefs. For example, Elias defends the view that his son disappeared for – and *only* for his beliefs. His son was a university student at the time of his disappearance.

> He had a group of friends. They were a bit free. These were normal and very civilized *luchas* with words and without violent actions. Without hurting anyone. Without killing anyone. It was like a normal thing. At no point did he take part in anything dangerous. During that period, young people had an idea of *lucha* (struggle) but nothing more than that. A *lucha*

of words.[85]

The interviewer confronts him on this position. “Well, you know that not everybody did…” Elias reacts defensively, “Well, *he* never took part in anything. No, it was just words. He never took part in anything involving more than words. In short, I have faith that he was incapable of anything more. At no time was he involved in anything that was illegal.” Although acknowledging that it was a “revolutionary period,” it was only the idea of revolution that enthralled his son.

For Elias, the collective youth of the disappeared excluded them from being involved in anything more. “They were just 19-years old. They didn’t have time to participate in politics.” The image of his son as non-violent is the dominant one that Elias wants to present of his son. When asked what image of his son he wants to transmit to future generations, this becomes Elias’ final emphasis. “There is nothing hidden…He never took part in any violence. He didn’t have a police record.” Elias’s moderate position is also tied to his view of human rights. ‘People should read the historical record so that they don’t forget the memory of what happened. What happened wasn’t right and it shouldn’t happen again. That’s the only thing that we can ask for. What else can we ask for?” The legacy of the disappeared and the struggle for human rights in Argentina for Elias is to ensure that what happened does not happen to others. This is similar to the view of human rights of the 1980s. There is no vindication of the politics of the disappeared. They believed what they may have believed and they should have been entitled to those beliefs. The purpose of human rights

[85] Drawn from his *Memoria Abierta* interview.

from this perspective is not to reclaim those beliefs but to create a society in which people can have those beliefs without being murdered by the state. Within this perspective, the goal of human rights is to prevent such events from ever occurring again. This is the most moderate human rights position.

Other positions struggle not only to prevent what happened to the disappeared but to take on their political activism. Yet family members can take on their activism in different ways. For example, Nelida, a member of the *Grandmothers* whose daughter was married to the brother of the leader of ERP, acknowledges their error in attempting a radical transformation rather than pursuing gradual change. “They made mistakes. You can’t changes things one day to the next and especially not with violence. Change occurs through a long struggle and with great perseverance because if not, one loses an extraordinary generation.”

Her belief that the disappeared should have been engaged in a long and gradual struggle fits her status as one of the core leaders of the *Grandmothers.* One can also see this in Estela Carlotto’s view of her daughter not engaged in violent struggle even if she belonged to an organization that did.

For Bonafini’s *Mothers*, the defining characteristic of the disappeared was their revolutionary aspirations, aspirations that included guerilla warfare and advocating political transformation through violence.

> At first some said, ‘my son didn’t do anything. He was a psychologist or a doctor or a lawyer, and he worked in a neighborhood with poor people.” So I started to explain to them that revolutionaries need educated and trained people and that they took our children essentially because they

were revolutionaries and that they wanted to transform everything. I explained to them that when they worked in a poor neighborhood it was to instruct people so that they knew how to defend themselves and that if they were doctors it was because they wanted people to be healthy so that could confront a ton of things and if they worked in universities, they were committed in everything they did, because even their theatrical works had revolutionary content and so on. And I kept talking with the *Mothers* so that we recognized these things and each time we were prouder of our children but for many it wasn't easy to recognize that their children were revolutionaries or that, at the very least, they shared the revolutionary politics that drove others."(Bauducco 2004:177)

Chapter 3: The Ex-Disappeared: Survivors at the Margins

Jorge Luis Borges's "Theme of the Traitor and the Hero" is a short story about a man researching a biography of his famous great-grandfather, a national hero of 19th century Ireland. During the course of his research, he finds out that his great-grandfather was not a hero but a traitor. He decides not to publish this information in the book he eventually writes. The story served as the inspiration for Bernardo Bertolucci's 1970 film, *The Spider's Stratagem*. The film transfers the story to post-World War II Italy and shifted perspectives to a son who returned to his natal village where his father is venerated as an anti-fascist martyr, the village hero for being killed while attempting to assassinate Mussolini. As he finds out more about his father, he discovers his hidden secret. Rather than a hero, he had betrayed his cause. As one last piece of goodwill towards their traitorous friend, his companions disguise his execution so that people will think that fascists murdered him during a foiled assassination attempt. Not only will it rescue the father as a hero in historical memory but it galvanizes support for the anti-fascist cause. The heroic myth is a lie in service of the truth (i.e. anti-fascism).

Both the short story and film point to the indeterminacy of heroism, dissolving platonic ideals of the hero and its counterpart, the traitor. That Borges, distrustful of ideologies and cynical of politics, would write such a story is not surprising. Lurking beneath the surface of a hero lies a traitor. Borges is, I think, less interested in debunking the idea of heroism but in calling attention to the cultural production of historical truths, a critical examination of how national heroes are created. The last chapter examined debates about representations of

the disappeared as national heroes within progressive political circles. This chapter will examine the ambivalent role of the survivor. Their survival precluded them from being heroes. In the post-dictatorship period, survivors lack the prominence they have in other post-violence contexts. Instead, family members have the symbolic importance that survivors have in other contexts.

It is April 2004 and I am in a meeting with the communications director of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in La Plata. He tells me of a woman named Adriana who was disappeared while pregnant. Unlike the majority of pregnant women who disappeared, Adriana was released with her baby after giving birth. “Why did they let them go?” I ask. “She asks herself the same thing,” he responded. I vow not to ask any more “why” questions in interviews from that point. To try to explain why the military did what they did seemed to invite baseless speculation. Several months later, I am interviewing Adriana. She has an answer to every one of these “why” questions. She can explain why the military did what it did. She can even explain why the military disappeared people with no political activities. It all formed part of their methodology of terror.

> If they took someone active in an armed organization, it may spread fear but not that much since most people had nothing to do with those organizations. If they took someone who was active in a political organization that was not armed, then people would be even more afraid. But when they took someone who was not involved in anything, it was even worse. It was all part of their strategy. It was all planned and thought out. It’s not like they were crazy. To call them crazy is a means of justifying them. It takes away their responsibility for what they did.

Disappearances formed an integral part of their strategy of spreading terror. If family members knew that their family member had been killed, they may be spurred into taking action. But not knowing whether their family member was alive or dead caused a kind of paralysis. They were told to wait quietly for their return. Taking any action could be seen as jeopardizing their family member's safe return. When the topic arises as to why she survived when so many others died, Adriana has an explanation. Survivors were released in order to speak about what was taking place inside of the concentration camps. Survivors thereby would serve as a vehicle for disseminating state terror. They would be compelled to tell family members of the disappeared that their loved ones were still alive and in captivity. They would also speak of the torture and the executions. If not for survivors, nobody would have known. The military needed people to know what was taking place inside so they needed to leave survivors. Adriana was "fortunate" to be arbitrarily chosen to survive.

Since her release, she had testified about her experience on numerous occasions. Her testimony contributed to sending military perpetrators to prison and, at the time of our interview, she had testified on approximately twenty occasions before various legal bodies both in Argentina and abroad. For example, she testified at the trial against the Junta in the 1980s (she was even chosen as one of the "representative" accounts in the book that compiled witness testimonies). She was still testifying in the present. Months before our interview, her testimony had contributed to sending a military doctor to prison for kidnapping a child of the disappeared and for falsifying her birth certificate.

I am baffled by her explanation. “The military released you so you would speak about what happened, but, because you have been speaking about what happened, they have gone to prison.” My confusion had unwittingly given voice to the survivor’s paradox. To speak about the terror was to fulfill the military’s plan for survivors. Each time they spoke about what happened, they were playing the role the military wanted them to play. However, the military did not anticipate that they would be held responsible for their actions and thus failed to foresee the role survivors’ testimony would play in trials that would send them to prison. Acknowledging this paradox, Adriana explains:

> It was the giant leap we had to take. In some ways, we carried out the military’s orders to tell what happened. But we told it from the opposite standpoint – not out of fear but in order to demand justice. They thought that we were going to be terrorized for the rest of our lives and that we would only be transmitters of horror rather than motors for demanding justice.

This was a difficult process for Adriana. Initially, she did not speak at all about her experience. Her family prevented her from speaking as a means of protecting her. With the arrival of democracy, however, she felt a need to speak. However, Adriana acknowledges the double bind of surviving each time she talks out about what happened to her and others. She felt this especially when speaking to family member organizations. “It was hard to speak to the *Mothers.* We had to fulfill the role that the military wanted and to tell them of all the suffering that their children went through.”

The Marginalization of The Disappeared

By speaking out about what the military did, survivors play an essential but intrinsically ambivalent role. This ambivalence can be seen in their position within the human rights movement in Argentina. Adriana met other survivors during the trial against the Junta. They exchanged telephone numbers and eventually began meeting together as a group. Their first meetings were spent discussing their experience in the concentration camps. At this point, seven years had gone by in which she did not speak about what she went through. The meetings were therapeutic for her. Others had gone through the exact same experience as her after their release from the camps. In 1984, they formally organized the Association of Ex-Detainees and Disappeared (*The Ex-Disappeared*).

Survivors like Adriana play a central role in human rights in Argentina by providing information about what took place in the clandestine concentration camps. Their testimonies have been essential in providing family members with information about what happened to their family member after their disappearance and in identifying military perpetrators. They have been integral in the construction of knowledge about the dictatorship.

Yet despite this key role, it is a largely pragmatic one. They are supporting actors in the human rights struggle. They are not its leaders. In the narrative of human rights, family members emerge as the principle protagonists. Survivors lack the influence, political power, and moral capital of family member groups. Survivors are often not even included as one of the “affected” groups. Human

rights groups are divided in Argentine between "directly affected" and "non-affected groups." The term "affected group" is used to describe those organizations that are comprised of individuals who were direct victims of the dictatorship. This label is used to describe family member organizations - the *Mothers*, the *Grandmothers*, and H.I.J.O.S. I was surprised that the *Ex-Disappeared* are generally not included when "directly affected" groups are listed. For example, sociologist Elizabeth Jelin writes of the privileged role of the directly affected victim and refers to family members of the disappeared without mentioning survivors (2003:34). These kinds of omissions are frequent.

The question as to why the *Ex-Disappeared* are so frequently left out of human rights accounts should be posed. Several explanations exist. Both family member organizations and the ex-disappeared claim to be the voices of the disappeared. Take, for example, the following two quotes.

> For children, mothers never die. And for mothers, neither do their children. I tell you that every Thursday a miracle of resurrection takes place in the Plaza [de Mayo]. Our children are resuscitated every Thursday because we speak with their voice, we see through their eyes, and at times, we walk with their steps. (Hebe de Bonafini, speech in the Plaza de Mayo)

> I feel that through the mouths of the survivors, through our mouths, the 30,000 speak. We are the voice of the disappeared." (Mario Villani[86])

[86] Taken from the "Memoria gráfica del Club Atlético" exposition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, March 5, 2004.

Although other family member groups do not share Bonafini's vision of a weekly resurrection, a struggle exists between family members and survivors over who is the voice of the disappeared. Their quotes reveal an underlying tension.

When Bonafini claims the disappeared "speak through" her, she is referring to their politics. When the ex-disappeared claim to be the voices of the disappeared they are referring both to their pre-disappearance political activities and what happened to them once they were disappeared. Both claims are based on a relationship. Family members make this claim this based on their biological relationship. Survivors base theirs on their relationship as friends and companions of the disappeared who were often involved in the same political activities. However, foremost they base their claims on their experience of having been disappeared. They speak for the disappeared because they are witnesses: witnesses to what happened to their comrades after their disappearance. In the role of witness, they are integral to the pursuit of justice against military perpetrators. Very few members of the military have provided accounts of what took place in the concentration camp. Notably, Raúl Vilariño gave media interviews shortly after the fall of the dictatorship and spoke of the torture in the ESMA, Alfredo Scilingo gave accounts of the death flights in *El Vuelo* (Verbitsky 1995), and Víctor Ibañez followed Scilingo's confessions with his account of the Campo de Mayo concentration camp (Almiron 1999). Although the mainstream media terms them *arrepentidos* (regretful or remorseful), many have contested this designation (Feld 2001). Human rights groups do not trust them. In the words

of survivor Miguel D'Agostino, "I only have confidence in the testimony of the victims. I don't consider anything (the *arrepentidos*) contribute to be valid."[87]

While survivor testimony is necessary to reconstruct what happened in the concentration camps, a paradox exists. Witnesses who have been key figures to understanding what happened in Argentina during the dictatorship are also marginal figures. In 2003, Hebe de Bonafini attacked governors from the ruling Peronist party, the *Partido Justiliacista.* She said that the best Peronists had disappeared during the dictatorship. Within the schism between leftwing and rightwing Peronism, only the Peronist right remained. If the disappeared represented the "best of the generation," as I argued in the previous chapter, what does this imply for those who survived? Such rhetoric often ignores the fact that survivors exist at all. In other contexts, the survivor of a mass atrocity emerges as the most visible reference point to the atrocity. In Argentina, it is the family member who occupies that role. No survivor has the same renown of Hebe de Bonafini or Estela Carlotto and the *Ex-Disappeared* lack the national and international stature of the *Mothers* or the *Grandmothers*.

The *Ex-Disappeared* organization is frequently left out from memorials, tributes and commemorative events. Not only are they often not included as an "affected" organization, they are often not even mentioned in lists of Argentine human rights organizations. To cite one example, in commemorating the 30th anniversary of the dictatorship in 2006, the Board of Directors of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires planned a public tribute to ten human rights organizations. The Association of the Ex-Disappeared was not

[87] Taken from the "Memoria gráfica del Club Atlético" exposition at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, March 5, 2004.

among them. Their omission was only acknowledged after the Argentine League of Human Rights drew attention to it and lobbied for their inclusion.[88]

This is not an isolated incident. Another example can be seen in a project by Diana Kordon and Lucila Edelman from the Argentine Team of Psycho-Social Work and Research (EATIP) who received a Guggenheim fellowship in 2004 to study the "multigenerational psychological effects of dictatorial repression." Kordon and Edelman formed one of the earliest human rights mental health teams for the *Mothers* in 1979. They have written extensively on the psychological effects of the dictatorship (Kordon and Edelman 1986; 1992) and their work is frequently cited in accounts of the dictatorship. That they are now receiving international funding to research the multigenerational legacies of trauma in Argentina is not remarkable. The "intergenerational transmission of trauma" is currently a popular research topic in traumatology (Danieli 1998). An extensive literature already exists around this issue in relation to the Holocaust and it is the model for Kordon and Edelman's work. While work on the intergenerational effects of the Holocaust examines the transmission of trauma from concentration camps survivors to their children and even to their children's children, Kordon and Edelman's study focuses on family members. They are not studying the transmission of trauma from survivors (the ex-disappeared) to their children but rather modifying the established model to fit the Argentine context in which family members are viewed as the primary victims.

Although family members could have been direct witnesses to the disappeared and even victims of violence during the kidnapping, the traumatic

[88] Liga Argentina por los derechos del hombre, http://www.pca.org.ar/Numerosanteriores/770/PAG4-5D.htm

experience that Kordon and Edelman are analyzing is the effects of loss: the traumatic effects of the disappearance on family members. In taking a model that was used for survivors of Nazi concentration camps and applying it to the Argentine context, a parallel would be with the ex-disappeared and their children. That this work is not being done is part of the larger marginalization of the ex-disappeared. The meaningful generational link is between mothers who lost their children and children who lost their parents.

Graciela Daleo is one of the founders of the Ex-Disappeared Association. In an interview from the late 1990s, she spoke explicitly about the marginalization of the "reappeared." "Our organization has been in existence for fourteen years of existence yet it still does not register." She speaks of a seminar the group organized which posed the question "if the place of the survivor was a non-place." They came to the conclusion that the ex-disappeared have never been fully allowed to reappear (Fernández 2001:106).

She points to the group's isolation from the other human rights groups. "There are very few people connected to the field of human rights organizations that includes [the *Ex-Disappeared*] as one." As an example, she cites a seminar the group organization in 1996 at the time of the 20th anniversary of the coup. Although they publicized the seminar within the human rights movement, the same day, the Faculty of Law of the University of Buenos Aires organized an activity around the consequences of the dictatorship. The *Ex-Disappeared* were not even invited. According to Daleo,

> We said, 'there are no survivors there. How can you work on this topic with professionals, scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists,

human rights specialists, *Mothers*, *Grandmothers*, *H.I.J.O.S*. and not call our organization?' (Ibid)

For Daleo, the explanation is that the disappeared are seen to stand in for the entire generation, including the survivors. "So this is a generational hole. We are disappeared en masse" (Ibid). This view is evident when a child of the disappeared stated, "the voice of that generation is absent" in reference to the disappeared.[89] Such a statement denies the voice of survivors.

In 2006, after the repeal of the pardons and amnesty laws was upheld, trials restarted against military officers charged with crimes against humanity. Miguel Etchecolatz was the second to be prosecuted. Etchecolatz was Commissioner General of the Buenos Aires provincial police during the dictatorship and the "right-hand" of military general Ramón Camps. Camps died of cancer in 1994 so Etchecolatz, responsible for 21 clandestine concentration camps, was a logical choice for one of the first prosecutions. He had been sentenced to a 23-year term in prison in 1986 but was a beneficiary of Menem's pardon several years later. He was also an unapologetic and vocal supporter of the actions of the dictatorship who published his own riposte to *Nunca Más* entitled *La otra campana del Nunca Más* (The Other Campaign of *Nunca Más*). In 2004, at a trial I attended in La Plata, he was sentenced to prison for his role in the appropriation of a minor but was then remanded to house arrest only to be sent to prison once more after a gun was discovered in his home.

[89] Such statements also eliminate the brothers and sisters of the disappeared, another group that is largely absent from the human rights movement (Teubal, Veiga & Bettani 2005, Teubal, Giménez, Bessio 2005)

In his 2006 trial, one of the key witnesses against Etchecolatz was Jorge Julio López, a 76-year old construction worker who had been disappeared and tortured. His testimony described his experience and detailed the participation of Etchecolatz in the murders of two individuals. On September 19, Etchecolatz was found guilty for his role in the murders of six individuals as well as the disappearance and torture of López and one other witness, Nilda Eloy. López and Eloy, together with the *Ex-Disappeared*, were the principle plaintiffs. Two days before the verdict was announced, López mysteriously vanished. Various theories were initially postulated. One theory was post-traumatic shock combined with López's Parkinson's disease caused a temporary amnesia and induced a fugue-like state. Other theories speculated that López's fear of retribution following his testimony prompted him to go into hiding. When López had not reappeared after several days, many people concluded that he had been kidnapped. They called it his "second disappearance," an effort to intimidate other witnesses from testifying in future cases.

Amidst this climate of uncertainty, accusations circulated. The dominant belief was that López had been kidnapped and that the Buenos Aires provincial police were involved. Some accused the provincial governor. Others accused President Kirchner. A week after his disappearance, Hebe de Bonafini and a group of *Mothers* met with Kirchner after their Thursday march. During the meeting, Bonafini cast doubts about López. She attributed the disappearance to "a large operation that they are trying to carry out against Kirchner because of his human rights policy" and accused the "mafia" in the Buenos Aires provincial government. Turning to López, she said, "we don't think he is a typical disappearance like before" and then implied that López was somehow involved in

the conspiracy. She implicated him in his own disappearance. “The disappearance of Jorge Julio López is an action against Nestor Kirchner. Both the right and the left are using it. For us, he is not a typical disappeared. López was not an activist, and one should investigate his trajectory.”[90] Her doubts about López were not only over his lack of political activism but also because, according to Bonafini, he “lives in a police neighborhood, he has a brother who is a policeman and his family doesn’t say that he is disappeared, which is strange.” She also stated that he was not “as key a witness as people think.”[91]

In follow-up statements to a radio station, she further questioned López and raised doubts about his disappearance. “He was imprisoned in Prison 9 and he was a guy nobody liked. He was in isolation because his father was police commissioner and so he had a lot of privileges in prison.” She then speculated that his second disappearance “could be a *maniobra* (scheme). He is a very intelligent guy. Turning up to testify could be part of the plan. These *maniobras* can be very well prepared and well organized.”[92]

Bonafini’s statements met with uniform condemnation from human rights groups. López’s lawyer attacked her for “questioning the victim.” He called this “a practice that is inconceivable for a human rights organization.” An ex-government minister accused her of using “the same logic of the dictatorship.” The *Ex-Disappeared* stated: “We regret that Bonafini continues following the orders of those who committed genocide: ‘Don’t trust the survivors.’”[93]

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[90] Página/12, September 29, 2006.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Clarín, September 29, 2006.
[93] All quotes in this paragraph from Página/12, September 30, 2006.

The Grey Zones of Survival

Why have survivors not been trusted? Bonafini's accusation against López was not an isolated incident. From their first re-appearance, survivors have been treated with suspicion. "Never ask a survivor how they survived." A human rights worker gave me this advice when we were speaking about the ex-disappeared. I was initially uncertain as to what he meant. I soon found out that survivors have been perpetually questioned about their survival. When the ex-disappeared first emerged to speak about what was taking place in the concentration camps, they were performing an essential task in bringing to light everything that the military had kept shrouded in secrecy. However, I was told that a common question posed by some family members was, "how did you survive?" or, "why are you alive?" Parents who asked such questions were asking out of their suffering. It was painful for them to discover what their children had gone through. They wanted to know why certain people survived while others did not. In the words of one survivor:

> When survivors of the camps began to speak, accepting that their children were dead was beyond difficult, it was impossible. It created an atmosphere of rejection. We were pointed at, left to the side, treated like traitors and ghosts. There was no solidarity for us. Our lists were not touched; our testimonies ended up at the bottom of a box (Diana 1996:52).

In this environment, many survivors speak about the mistrust that greeted them when they initially began speaking about what happened to them. Just as many Argentines believed that many of those who disappeared during the dictatorship, disappeared for a "reason," the same was true for survivors. If they re-appeared, it must have been for a reason. The implication is that survivors only survived because they collaborated with the armed forces.

Primo Levi's much used (and abused) concept of a "grey zone" was coined to describe the murky area between privilege and collaboration. In *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989), Levi discusses "privileged" witnesses who "could avail themselves of a certainly better observatory." Acknowledging it to be a "delicate" subject, Levi points out that "those who acquired privilege for themselves by becoming subservient to the camp authority…did not bear witness at all, for obvious reasons, or left incomplete or distorted or totally false testimony."(1989:18) For Levi, the best witnesses were "the very few who had the ability and the luck to attain a privileged observatory without bowing to compromises." Levi identifies political prisoners as having a better chance of achieving this than Jews or criminals. (Levi 1989:18)

In Argentina, one former disappeared who fits Levi's description of a "privileged observer" is Mario Villani. Villani spent four years in the concentration camps and spent time in almost every major camp in Buenos Aires (five in total). His survival was a consequence of his utility. A physicist, he acted, according to his own account, as a *bricoleur*. He repaired things for them. Alluding to Primo Levi's concept, Villani states of his experience:

> It is a very unclear zone. There are no blacks and whites. They are all greys, different shades of grey. I was always very worried about what kind of grey area I was in. I am certain I did not take part in some things. I never participated in torture. I never interrogated anyone. I never collaborated in intelligence. There were kidnapped people who ended up kidnapping other kidnapped people. But what does collaboration or non-collaboration mean? Because if I am working to fix things, with this activity what I was doing was solving problems, or, rather, helping the camp to function. In some way, I was collaborating. On the other hand, I was collaborating to keep myself alive (Feitlowitz 1998:82).

By being useful to the military, he received "privileges" that most of the disappeared did not have. He was not forced to stay blindfolded in solitary confinement in a small cell all day without talking or moving. By being able to move freely, he was able to better observe what was taking place. This made him an important witness after his release. He identified many disappeared and military perpetrators. However, his service to the military made him feel like a collaborator. By fixing things, he was helping the camps function. He was faced with one of his most difficult decisions when a torturer asked him to fix a broken *picana,* the electric cattle prod that they used to torture prisoners. At great personal risk, Villani refused. Instead of retaliating against him, they decided to use an electric transformer instead. The transformer was far worse than the *picana*. When he saw this, he fixed the *picana,* but also adjusted its current to be weaker (Feitlowitz 1998:84).

The real and alleged collaboration of certain survivors with the military is a taboo topic, foremost because of the reticence of reputed collaborators to speak openly. One of the more controversial cases of reputed collaboration is that of Miguel Ángel Lauletta. He was a member of the Montoneros kidnapped in October 1976 and taken to the ESMA concentration camp. He was held in the ESMA until March 1979, released, then kidnapped again for fifteen days, and finally given a provisional release that lasted until January 1984. He did not testify before the National Commission on the Disappeared nor at the trial of the *juntas*. His survival had been unknown: his name was on CONADEP's initial list of the disappeared (as one who remained disappeared). In his account, he was treated like other prisoners in the ESMA, tortured and confined, bound and hooded in a cell. At the time of his disappearance, he had a wife and a young child. Faced with death, he chose to collaborate with the military in order to save himself and his family. He also claims that his cooperation was triggered by torture. "I am a broken man. They broke me under torture."[94]

Some of Lauletta's collaboration was relatively benign. He had falsified documents for the Montoneros. The military used him for the same skill. However, he also gave the military information that led to the disappearance and eventual deaths of five of his fellow Montoneros. He says that he was faced with a choice between them and his family. "I chose between my wife and three-month-old daughter and those *compañeros*. It was my only option." Survivors accuse him of betraying many more. According to some versions, his betrayal led

[94] This account is drawn from the lengthy interview he gave to David Cox of the Buenos Aires Herald that appeared in the weekly magazine *La Maga,* May 3, 1995.

to the deaths of more than seventy people. Lauletta claims it was not him. Rather, a young woman who had been tortured for three days when he first arrived at the ESMA gave the military the key to decipher a Montonero secret code that led to the deaths of seventy people.

Survivors do not merely accuse him of collaboration, they accuse him of collaborating "in excess." While Lauletta admits to having broken under torture and betraying people in an effort to save his family, others accuse him of abandoning all principles to save himself. In the words of one survivor, "He was a guy who didn't have any qualms about bringing others down." He is also accused by survivors of collaborating with the military outside of the ESMA as a *marcador* (marker). This refers to someone who went out on the streets with "work teams" to identify individuals who were later disappeared. He is accused of acting more like a member of the military than a prisoner. His actions blurred the line between victim and victimizer. "When they brought in a *chupado* (kidnapped person), he entered like a military official," one survivor recalls. Lauletta defends his actions by saying others did the same. "I was in the same situation as all of the survivors of the ESMA. I performed a task that was forced by circumstances."

Lauletta's complicity with the military was most widely disseminated by ex-Montonero Miguel Bonasso's fictionalized account of one individual's survival of the ESMA, *Recuerdo de la Muerte*, published in 1984, a work that remains one of the most important and frequently cited accounts of a prisoner's experience inside the concentration camps told from the perspective of a man who escaped. In Bonasso's account, Lauletta is an overzealous collaborator who gained numerous privileges in the camps. He is even allowed weekly home visits. He tells other prisoners such as "I'd even hand over my best friend" and "I'm not

going to rest until the last Montonero falls." He even toasts the death of a Montonero who he had identified to the military for execution. Lauletta strongly denies Bonasso's account. He was even interviewed by the daughter of the Montonero whose death he is said to have toasted for a documentary she made about her father's life in which he flatly rejected these claims.[95]

Lauletta's notoriety resulting from Bonasso's book made him a pariah figure. Told his "presence causes unease," he was fired from one job. He also stopped taking classes at the University of Buenos Aires after students discovered he was studying there. These events sparked his first public statements in an interview given to David Cox of the Buenos Aires Herald. He spoke in order to gain public sympathy. Lauletta admits feeling guilty that his collaboration led to the deaths of several people. Although he claims he collaborated in order to survive, he also acknowledges the paradox of survival in the death camps. "There are people that didn't break and they are alive. There are people that broke and they are dead." After the interview, Cox accused Lauletta of not being completely forthright and pointed to numerous contradictions in his account. Lauletta responded by telling him that it was easy for him to judge when he had not been there. Cox observed: "I don't know if surviving under those circumstances is the most important thing for a human being."[96]

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[95] The film is Papá Iván (2004) directed by María Inés Roqué. In interviews, Roqué says she believes Lauletta was not involved in her father's disappearance.

[96] *La Maga,* May 3, 1995

Another noted collaborator is Máximo Nicoletti. Nicoletti was a Montonero who, once captured, turned into an open collaborator with the military. He identified places and people and even went out with work groups as a *marcador* to identify people. Unlike Lauletta, Nicoletti remained unrepentant when he gave one of his only interviews in 1994.

> Guilt? What guilt? I didn't have any options. I had no way out. When I fell in the ESMA, I negotiated for my life, for my wife's life and for my children's lives. But this was a business and, like in all businesses, one has to give something in exchange. And I always knew it was going to be this way. So I offered up people.[97]

Nicoletti's collaboration eventually led him to become an intelligence agent for the Navy and a close associate of Massera's. Nicoletti defends himself by arguing that once he decided to collaborate with the Navy, he respected their agreement and never betrayed them. He taught in the *Albatros,* a special operations school that handles counter-terrorism. After being released from the ESMA in 1979, he did intelligence work for the Navy in Venezuela. In 1982, he was arrested in Spain. It is alleged that he was commissioned by the Argentine Navy to blow up a British warship in Gibraltar during the Falkland Islands War. In the 1990s, he became head of a *superbanda* (criminal gang), comprised of former police, army, intelligence agents as well as Humberto Fratella, an ex-*guerillero* from ERP who also chose to collaborate with the military after being

[97] *Gente*, June 9, 1994

captured. The group was eventually captured after robbing an armored car of US$800,000 and Nicoletti went to prison.

Nicoletti argued that the only way to survive in the ESMA was open collaboration. Some victims of torture and disappearance were forced to apply the *picana* (electric prod) to other prisoners. This was a deliberate strategy by the military to force complicity among victims. In the words of one survivor, the military “loved it when someone ‘broke.’ They used it to frighten, taunt, and divide us even more.”(di Tella 1999:66)

The Case of Silvia Tolchinsky

Nicoletti is one of the most pernicious and unapologetic collaborators. Other stories of collaboration are far more contentious. Silvia Tolchinsky is the sole survivor of the Montonero Counteroffensive discussed in the last chapter. Tolchinsky was a high-ranking Montonero who was personal secretary to Mario Firmenich. During the Counteroffensive, she was one of the last to be captured. She was disappeared September 1980 and spent almost two years in captivity. Her first husband, Miguel Villarreal had been murdered in 1978. Her brother and his wife were also disappeared during the Counteroffensive. Two more of her family members were also disappeared. After Tolchinsky’s disappearance, she was taken to the Argentine-Brazilian border by one of the most infamous Argentine torturers, Julio Simón (aka "El Turco Julián” or Julian the Turk), to act as a *marcadora,* with the purpose of identifying any Montoneros that were attempting to clandestinely enter the country. She maintains that she went but did not identify anyone. After a year and a half in captivity, she met a civilian

intelligence agent who worked for the Army, Claudio Gustavo Scagliusi[98], the son of an Argentine general. The two fell in love. In a 1994 televised interview, El Turco Julián claimed that Tolchinsky only survived because of her relationship with "the son of a big military boss." Scagliusi saved her and Tolchinsky was granted a conditional release. After her release, she spoke with Rabbi Marshall Meyer, who took declarations from many victims of the dictatorship. In 1983, she escaped to Israel with the help of the Israeli embassy and Scagliusi. A month later, Scagliusi quit his post with the army and joined her there. They eventually moved to Barcelona where they married and had children.

Unlike other accused collaborators, Tolchinsky pursued justice against those responsible for her disappearance. She was the key witness and a plaintiff in the case of disappearances that occurred during the Counteroffensive. In 2002, Judge Bonadío became the second judge to challenge the amnesty laws by nullifying Full Stop and Due Obedience. He ordered Leopold Galtieri, the military dictator during the period of the Counteroffensive, to be placed in preventive custody along with 26 other military officers, including Scagliusi.[99] His extradition was petitioned to Spain and a warrant was put out for his capture by Interpol to extradite him back to Argentina. Scagliusi denied participating in torture or disappearances during the dictatorship. His most ardent defender was his wife, the primary witness in the case that led to his arrest. Scagliusi faced several charges. He was accused of accompanying his father, a military general, on visits to concentration camps throughout Argentina. He was also accused of

[98] His name is also spelled Scagliuzzi in some media sources.
[99] More controversially, he also issued arrest warrants for Montonero leaders. This sparked the objection of human rights leaders who believed it was embracing the *dos demonios*.

being a spy in charge of the operation in which Tolchinsky disappeared. Even the mainstream media referred to him as a "torturer."[100]

The charges against him were eventually dropped after the judge met with the couple in Spain. In court, however, lawyers for the accused military officials cited Tolchinksy's relationship with Scagliusi and her supposed collaboration with the military as a means of questioning her credibility as a witness. Florencio Varela, a prominent lawyer who represented thirty Argentine military and police charged with crimes against humanity until his death in 2006, argued that Tolchinsky could not be considered "disappeared" because she was "an active and interested collaborator for more than three years in the system to repress terrorism."[101] According to Varela, her disappearance had to be "simulated" so that "she wouldn't be discovered by her companions and so as to escape their vengeance." Varela claimed that she only came forward to give an official account of her disappearance in 1994 in order to receive economic reparations from the state. In order to receive the money, she had to come up with an account of her disappearance. This explained the motivation behind her testimony.

In a press conference he gave on September 30, 2003, Varela elaborated on this and called Tolchinsky "the most active collaborator of the army leading to one of the greatest successes of the counterintelligence work in the war."[102] He accused her of giving 90 pages worth of logistical information about the group

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[100] Clarín, January 31, 2003.
[101] Taken from legal document entitled "Incidente de apelación en autos Scagliusi, Claudio Gustavo por privación ilegal libertad personal" - CNCRIM Y CORREC FED - SALA II - 30/01/2003."
[102] Seprin, "Texto desgrabado de la conferencia del Dr. Florencio Varela en AUNAR el 30 de Septiembre," http://www.seprin.com/menu/notas6243.htm

including their political and union connections and internal structure. He said that she met her future husband because they needed someone to draw maps of all the places she described and that Scagliusi was an architecture student. One of the accused military officers likewise called her a "snitch."[103]

At the same time, family members also made the same accusation against Tolchinsky. Among them were Claudia Alegrini, the wife of Lorenzo Ismael Viñas, one of the disappeared Tolchinsky identified as seeing in captivity.[104] Alegrini also pushed for the charges to be filed against Scagliusi. The mother of Tolchinsky's disappeared sister-in-law also accused Tolchinsky of betrayal in a personal communication to me.

Tolchinsky represents, albeit in an extreme version, an example of the ambivalent position of survivors. She is accused of collaboration both by the military and by family members of the victims. It is her relationship with a man who worked for the military and whom she met while disappeared that makes her account difficult to believe. According to those who have interviewed her, she maintains close ties to the human rights movement. A poster of the *Mothers* hangs in the entrance of their house and her three children from her first marriage are founders of H.I.J.O.S. in Barcelona. Scagliusi, meanwhile, has never appeared on a list of active repressors according to CELS, the human rights organization that compiles such information. In interviews, Silvia acknowledges that many cannot understand her relationship with Scagliusi but she defends it. "Even in the deepest hell there are certain spaces of life that

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[103] Página 12, November 17, 2002.
[104] Inter Press Service News Agency, September 26, 2005. http://www.ipslatam.net/print.asp?idnews=35259 Alegrini also identifies one other Montonero who was a *marcadora.*

somehow come to the surface… Gustavo, from the first moment, in that context of torture, rebelled to relieve my suffering."[105] The idea that he "rebelled" to help "relieve her suffering" is repeated in almost every interview she has given on the subject. She said that he was shocked by what he saw and this shock is what drove him to help her. Unlike military officers with real power, he had none but still did everything he could to protect her. Tolchinsky also claims that Scagliusi is "in some ways as much a victim as myself."[106]

Tolchinsky, now a psychologist, has been accused of being a victim of Stockholm syndrome, in which hostages sympathize with their captors. One commentator likened her relationship with Scagliusi to *The Night Porter,* the controversial 1974 Liliana Cavani film in which a concentration camp survivor, a decade after liberation, resumes her relationship with the S.S. officer who had tortured and raped her.[107] When asked if she is a victim of "Stockholm syndrome," she rejects this interpretation and argues the reverse took place (what has been termed "Lima syndrome"[108]): Gustavo was the one who crossed over to her side. "He identified with me rather than me with him."[109] She claims to believe him when he says that he was not involved in any disappearances or torture.

According to Tolchinsky, his transformation continued after she was released. When he left the country to be with her, he did so at his own personal risk. It also required him to break completely with his former life.

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[105] Página 12, November 17, 2002.
[106] La Capital, September 4, 2001
[107] El Mundo, September 8, 2001
[108] Named after the Japanese Embassy hostage takeover in Peru in which the Shining Path guerillas' sympathy for their hostages grew during the standoff.
[109] Página 12, November 17, 2002.

> During these 18 years, he has dedicated himself to trying to repair the devastating effects the dictatorship had on my family. He identifies with our suffering and our way of seeing the world. I think that being with us was a conscious and voluntary choice, a difficult one that changed his place in the world. [110]

As a key witness, Tolchinsky says that accusations of collaboration are deliberate attempts to discredit her testimony. Calling her a traitor or a snitch is to use the military's language against her. "We didn't choose it. They didn't let me choose. It transfers blame to the victim for their actions."[111] In her words, her story is the "product of Argentina's evil history." Numerous survivors have faced similar allegations. Their survival is called into question by the military and attributed to their status as "double agents." Tolchinsky's relationship with Scagliusi merely serves to call her account into question even more. Lawyers for the military have attempted to discredit other survivors in the exact same way. They use the perception and assumption of collaboration as a means of disqualifying their testimonies. For example, in a statement from 2006, lawyer Florencio Varela speaks of the numerous "falsifications" and "manipulations" of survivor testimonies while uniformly describing them as "repentant ex-terrorists who were collaborators with the legal forces."[112]

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Página/12, September 30, 2005.
[112] *La botalla al mar*, September 5, 2006. http://www.labotellaalmar.com/vercorreo_lector.php?id=1784

Military officials accused of crimes against humanity make the same arguments. In a 1998 interview Gabriela Cerruti conducted with Navy officer Alfredo Astiz, Astiz stated:

> If the majority of the survivors of the ESMA don't speak, it's because the majority of them were collaborators. We even considered ourselves sympathetic to each other. Because you end up taking a liking to people with whom you live together with for many days. I personally respect some of the Montoneros. I ended up taking a liking to some of them.[113]

Astiz's comment may be in reference to his "friends" like ex-Montoneros Galimberti and Nicoletti. At the same time, his comment is also the product of military ideology that argues what took place to be an honorable war between equal sides. A division of labor existed in the military during the dictatorship. The Navy, anti-Peronist and anti-Catholic, saw itself at war with the Montoneros, who were Peronist and Catholic. The more traditional and conservative Army saw itself at war with ERP, who were radical atheists. In 1978, after the vast majority of the disappearances had already taken place, the Navy had more free time. Admiral Massera and "Tigre" Acosta devised a new strategy, a "plan of recuperation" in which ex-Montoneros served Massera's larger political ambitions to become President.[114] Massera's political ambitions were part of a power struggle within the armed forces and his feud with Roberto Viola (who eventually became head of the state in 1981). In what was called the "fishtank" of the

[113] *Tres Puntos*, January 11, 1998.
[114] *La Semana*, June 5, 1982

ESMA, a group of ex-Montoneros worked for Massera. Some provided menial tasks like secretarial work or acted as librarians. Others worked as journalists, wrote reports and speeches, or performed other functions. Most who managed to survive a prolonged period of time in the ESMA performed a “useful” function for the Navy.

Perverse intimacies

Most accounts of collaboration center on the ESMA. The ESMA was the most notorious concentration camp in Argentina. More than 5,000 people disappeared there with only a small minority coming out alive. Massera’s “plan of recuperation” and the long periods of time in which perpetrators and victims co-existed in the same space resulted in the creation of perverse intimacies. This is evident in Astiz’s comment, “I ended up taking a liking to” the people that he had kidnapped, tortured, and killed, but also in Tolchinsky’s relationship with a man she met while in captivity.

Not all of these intimacies were sexual. Mario Villani recounts the disturbing relationships that emerged between the disappeared and military torturers, a product of close quarters and shared daily life. “I have found myself at times speaking with a torturer, the same person who tortured me, not about torture but about his family, about his son’s problems in school, that his son was getting bad grades and he didn’t know what to do.”(di Tella 1999:85) Villani also speaks of a torturer nicknamed *Sangre* (Blood) who played chess with the disappeared. Villani believed he was more comfortable among the disappeared than with his colleagues. *Sangre* even brought his young daughter to the camp

one day and introduced her to one of the disappeared. He opened the cell where the prisoner was tied and blindfolded and then introduced his daughter to him, telling her, “This is Guillermo, whom you’ve heard me speak so much about.”(di Tella 1999:86)

The perverse intimacies that were created by the close co-existence of military torturers with their victims is a recurring motif in Argentine representations of the concentration camps. One of Argentina’s theatrical hits in 1990 was Eduardo Pavlovsky’s *Paso de dos* (pas de deux). Pavlovsky, a noted playwright and medical psychoanalyst who has pioneered psychodrama therapy in Argentina, describes the work as a “love story” between a torturer and his female victim (Feitlowitz 1991). The play ends with the torturer strangling his victim to death. The title *Paso de dos* evokes her complicity in what takes place. Marguerite Feitlowitz has called it a “dance of death,” an interpretation that is supported by the play’s dialogue. Although the play was largely lauded as an incisive critique of the ideology of the dictatorship, its eroticized violence was a source of controversy and debate. Pavlovsky has been accused of both voyeurism and sadomasochism (not least of all because Pavlovsky played the part of the torturer in the play’s initial run). Pavlovsky’s supporters point to his credentials as a committed leftwing intellectual who was forced to flee the country during the dictatorship. Performance theorist Diana Taylor (1994) criticizes the play as a misogynistic reenactment of the construction of national identity through the destruction of women’s bodies. While in Argentina, when she voiced her reaction to the play, she was denounced as a *yanqui* feminist. She was also reminded that a woman actually did fall in love with her torturer.

Defenders of Pavlovsky's play will point to this fact. The play was inspired by real events. There are numerous stories of torturers who ended up with women they tortured. Silvia Tolchinsky rejects the idea that this occurred in her case. However, there are others that leave no room for doubt. When I first heard that *Paso de dos* was based on a real event, I attempted to search out other accounts. Despite numerous references to such relationships, I could not find corroboration of a specific account. I initially concluded that these rumors were unsubstantiated. I later found out that I was wrong.

Marta Bazán, was a Montonera who had been disappeared in the ESMA. It is alleged that she betrayed the location of her husband under torture. He was subsequently disappeared and executed. She is accused of acting as a *marcadora* (marker) to identify other Montoneros. While in the ESMA, she reputedly fell in love with Ruben Chamorro, a Navy Vice Admiral. They eventually married and she went with him to South Africa, where he advised the apartheid government in counterinsurgency methods.

Before marrying Bazán, Chamorro had a close relationship with one of his other prisoners. Norma Arrostito was one of the highest-ranking Montoneros when she was kidnapped by the Navy (who claimed she had been killed in an armed confrontation) and taken to the ESMA. There, she was brutally tortured and beaten to the point of being disfigured. She was put on display as a means of intimidating other prisoners and shown off to other branches of the armed forces. The Navy kept her alive for a year and a half before finally executing her in 1978. Although she is noted for her ferocious resistance under torture (she famously declared "I don't collaborate, I don't surrender") various accounts also circulated that towards the end of her captivity she collaborated with the Navy to

capture other Montoneros. After months of torture, she turned from atheism to Christian mysticism and tarot cards and became close with Chamorro. Chamorro was frequently seen in her cell and even brought her make-up. He eventually asked "El Tigre" Acosta to remove the binds around her feet so she would not have circulation problems in her legs. Acosta refused and threatened to quit. Chamorro brought her an exercise bike so she could exercise her legs while still shackled and promised her that he would personally take charge of her execution. He even succeeded in convincing the military to keep her alive when Massera ordered her to be killed. Survivors reported that Chamorro cried after her death. He went to a cell with other prisoners who were her friends and asked them to tell him more about her (di Tella 1999:100).

What was the attraction that these military men felt for their enemies? Starting after the "plan of recuperation," Navy officers in the ESMA started to take out disappeared *Montoneras* to expensive restaurants in Buenos Aires. They cleaned them up, dressed them, took them out to eat and then brought them back to the ESMA later in the night. Munú Actis, a survivor of the ESMA recounts the following story about "El Tigre" Acosta.[115] Dining at a fancy restaurant one night, she asked Acosta why he chose to stay at the ESMA every night instead of going home to his family. He reacted furiously to her question and shouted in response: "Don't you realize that it's your fault that we don't want to go home?" He continued, "yelling like a wild man" in the restaurant:

[115] Acosta is also noted for another bizarre occurrence involving his prisoners. After Argentina won the 1978 World Cup, Acosta chose a number of the disappeared from the ESMA to go out and celebrate with him in the streets of the city.

> With you, we can talk about movies, the theater, about anything. We can talk about politics. You know about raising children; you can play the guitar; you know how to handle a weapon! You know how to do everything! You are the women that we thought existed only in novels and movies, and it has destroyed our families! Because what are we going to do now with the women we have at home? (Actis et all. 2006:163)

Acosta then proceeded to complain about the monotony of domestic life, recounting his boredom with his wife. Military culture in Argentina was traditionally hermetic. Many military men married women who were the daughters of other military men. Military wives were raised to be obedient and submissive to their husbands. In this case, men like Acosta were fascinated when confronted with women who had broken out of traditional gender roles. He continued: "What can I share with my wife? I go home on Saturday, and we talk about whether or not we'll go to the club on Sunday, whether to take the picnic basket or not take the picnic basket… That's what I share with my wife" (Ibid).

Another military officer from the ESMA, Jorge Radice, aka Ruger, voiced a similar remark about the appeal of "subversive" women. Ruger married his prisoner, Montonera Anita Dvantman, aka Barbarella and had three children with her. He was heard to have remarked on one occasion: "She was a transgressor and I was aroused by her attitude. I had never met a woman like her. She knew about cinema, painting, politics, even tools."(di Tella 1999:95) Radice is also an unrepentant torturer. The testimony he gave at the trial against the *Juntas* was notorious. When asked what he did in the military, he stated with bravado that his

superiors pointed to a target and he pulled the trigger. (El Libro Del Juicio 1985) When Radice was called to testify in 1997 in an open case about the final destination of the disappeared, he only acknowledged participating in one instance of torture; his wife. He subsequently argued that it should be expunged from the record for reasons of privacy (D'Antonio 2004). His wife, Dvantman, has been criticized for petitioning for economic compensation from the state as a victim of disappearance, money she would ostensibly share with her husband.

Such accounts not only highlight the perverse intimacies created out of the concentration camps but also illuminate the environment that produced the plan to systematically kidnap the children of their captives. Such relationships have also served as inspiration for several major literary representations of the dictatorship era, not only Pavlovsky's elliptical and symbolic treatment of the topic.[116] Liliana Heker's 1996 novel *El Fin de La Historia* (a title which refers alternately to the end - in the Fukuyama or Hegelian sense - or to the purpose of history) recounts the story of a student leader of the Communist Party who becomes a high-ranking Montonera. She is kidnapped and tortured and ends up collaborating with the Armed Forces. In the process, she falls in love with her torturer, the same man who killed her husband. In the end, she survives the ESMA and the two end up together. Like Pavlovsky's work, Heker's novel was controversial because of its topic. Specifically, it incurred the criticism of ESMA survivor Graciela Daleo who responded to it with the question: "Why do those

[116] See also Marco Bechis' film *Garage Olimpo* (1999), one of the most powerful films made about the dictatorship. Patricia Sagastizábal's novel *A Secret for Julia* (2001) recounts the story of a woman who had a child after being raped in a concentration camp and encounters her rapist two decades later in England. Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* (1994) also deals with this topic but sets it in an unnamed South American country.

who speak of the 1970s – except for a few exceptions – dedicate their pen to those the terror broke? Is that not so out of place with the view of the *dos demonios* that includes 'if you are alive, it was for some reason?'"[117]

Despite Daleo's criticism, Heker's work was based on a real occurrence. The novel, told from the perspective of the protgaonist's old friend who is also a novelist, is largely autobiographical. Heker's friend is Mercedes Carazo, a former Montonera. According to survivor accounts, she had resisted inside the ESMA until her husband Marcelo Kurlat was killed. The military took her to see him while he was dying. According to survivors, this event profoundly changed her and she ended up falling in love with a Navy officer named Antonio Pernías. That she ended up with Pernías is even more troubling since he was in command of the group that killed her husband. According to Daleo, "You always hope that she did not know that he was at the head of that operation. If not, you can't explain how she could love him. She said that she was in love with him. Not, you know, that she slept with him to save her life. No, she said she was in love with him."[118] Heker concurs with Daleo but argues that her feelings towards Pernías were influenced by the gratitude she felt toward him after he gave her back her infant child. "For her, it was a great love story, in which the two were repentant for what they did, she of her activism and he of his torture. I think that today she continues being grateful because they gave her back her daughter."[119]

Carazo eventually broke off her relationship with Pernías although the date this occurred is disputed. Breaking her silence in 1998 from her new home

[117] Página/12, September 8, 1996.
[118] Página/12, November 16, 1998.
[119] Ibid.

in Peru, she says it was during the dictatorship. Others maintain it occurred ten years later. According to Daleo, the last time they met, Carazo told her they were having problems. Pernías did not want to act as a father for her daughter and was angered she wanted to keep a photo of her biological father above the night table (di Tella 1999:95).

Daleo's criticism of Heker's novel is not over whether the events depicted in it took place or not.[120] She knows that they did. Instead, she questions how representative her account is. Treason, betrayal, and collaboration have been extremely prominent motifs in fictional representations of what went on in the camps.[121] The point of Daleo's criticism is that the focus on themes of treason and betrayals is part of a larger context in which survivors have been questioned for surviving. Not everyone collaborated. And not everyone who collaborated survived. Daleo says she prefers to call attention to the "small resistances" that took place in the camps. In survivors' accounts, one's survival was largely arbitrary yet stories of betrayal and treason suggest otherwise.

What does collaboration even mean when it was prompted by prolonged torture and the threat of death? Should it even be called collaboration? The Montoneros accused anyone who broke under torture of treason. They ordered people to resist until death or to take cyanide pills before they were captured. They assumed that anyone who disappeared who was not killed collaborated. Rodolfo Walsh argued with the group over this matter. For him, collaboration

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[120] Daleo has criticized Carazo for "knowing more than she has told" and of not being completely forthright with investigations into the disappearances. (Ibid)
[121] Rolo Diez's Los compañeros (2000) also addresses this subject. The topic of betrayal in representations of the dictatorship is the subject of a recent full-length literary analysis, Ana Longoni's *Traiciones* (Betrayals) (2007).

under torture was not treason (McCaughan 2000). The general impression is that most people did not withstand the cruelty of the military's tortures. These included the *picana* (electric cattle prod) but also sexual torture, suffocation, dismembering prisoners with attack dogs, etc.[122]

Some people withstood torture and did not give information. As one survivor said, "I know that in my case I beat them because I didn't give them any information and nothing happened to me"(Diana 1996:51). But it is likely that most could not resist. Miguel Bonasso's autobiographical novel, *La memoria en donde ardía* (1990) ("Memory where it was burning") tells the story of an exiled Argentine journalist who returns to his native country from Mexico. Like Bonasso, the fictional protagonist lived in Mexico in exile for 11 years. The protagonist is obsessed with finding out whether his disappeared compañera Susana revealed the location of the house where they were living after she was kidnapped by the military. When asked in an interview why the character was so obsessed with the subject of "betrayal," Bonasso answered, "because he wanted to know if he could keep loving her or not, in accordance with a terrible, absolutist and, in a certain sense, romantic logic of the 1970s."[123] Bonasso, while acknowledging this "terrible logic," predicates his enduring love for his disappeared companion on this. What does it mean to hold to the ideal of a person who is tortured but refuses to give up information? That it should remain a topic at all (as if one could judge people for speaking under the most inhumane forms of torture) forms part of the context in which survivors are questioned for having survived.

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[122] CONADEP (1984) and Feitlowitz (1998) offers complete descriptions of military torture.
[123] Página/12, November 5, 2006

The Prioritization of Blood Ties

This chapter has attempted to explain why the ex-disappeared are marginalized from human rights discourse. It began with a paradox: why a group that occupies a central role in the Argentine human rights movement are relegated to a supporting role. I have argued that a reason why ex-disappeared are marginalized is because of accusations of collaboration. An additional reason should be raised. Family member groups are organized around blood ties. Is it possible that family member groups are more prominent because of them? In fact, not only are the ex-disappeared marginalized with human rights, but also wives and partners of the disappeared as well. While family member groups comprise the primary site for remembering the disappeared, there are no widow organizations like there are in other contexts (Guatemala, Rwanda, etc.). When I mentioned this in discussion to an Argentine social scientist, he sardonically remarked, “It’s the revenge of the mother-in-law.”

Though numerous women also disappeared, the majority of the disappeared were men. In 1999, *Pajaros sin Luz* (Birds Without Light) was published, a compilation of the testimonies of wives and partners of the disappeared. The editor, Noemí Ciollaro, whose husband was disappeared, felt compelled to write the book “by the strange void” in which “the voices of the mothers, the children, and the grandchildren have all been heard but the wives have been silenced.” Ciollaro writes that the project was a result of her unrecognized suffering. In the language typical of human rights, she argued it was “a recourse or a strategy that human beings sometimes employ to transform

suffering into something productive and capable of being shared by others" (1999:339). In her appeal for public recognition, she criticizes how their suffering has been ignored. Ciollaro blames the absence on a prioritization of biological relationships "as if only the blood link legitimized the suffering or the recognition of the disappeared." Ciollaro also questions why widows had been excluded from the category of "directly affected" victim. In a similar vein, in the introduction to the book, historian Osvaldo Bayer asks "Why Mothers, Grandmothers, Children and never the Wives of the disappeared?" (1999: 11)

As an example, Ciollaro cites a psychologist who worked with human rights groups and treated victims of state terror. When she told him she was working on a book that compiled testimonies of wives of the disappeared, he responded dismissively: "Yes, but the companions of the disappeared is another kind of link. They remade their lives. They formed other couples. It's very different" (1999:342).

The question of why blood ties have been prioritized in Argentina's human rights movement is a central one in this thesis. The next chapter will turn to this issue via an analysis of the *Grandmothers'* early cases of restitution.

Chapter 4: The early cases and the biologization of the *Grandmothers'* claims

In their early campaigns in the 1980s, the *Grandmothers* called attention to their cause through public appeals to a "universal conscience": "the problem of children disappeared for political reasons is of such seriousness that it affects the universal conscience and should be resolved in its totality and in such a way that never again should the same thing occur in our country nor in any place in the world."[124] Resolving the situation "in its totality" required the following measures: restoring the child's biological identity, reuniting the child with their biological family and severing relations with the people who were found raising the children if they were aware of their origins. The most challenging problem they faced is when they located grandchildren in the hands of military officers. The children had already been living years with their kidnappers. Judges were reluctant to reunite them with their biological families because they felt that the children were too old to switch homes. They argued that their emotional bond with the people who raised them was too strong to break. Even if these individuals were not their biological parents, the time that they already spent together made them their "real parents."

The situation of disappeared children in the hands of military families was considered, in the words of one commentator, "one of the most anguishing problems" resulting from the military dictatorship.[125] When the *Grandmothers* initially located grandchildren, the easiest cases to resolve were those in which they found the child to be in the custody of "good faith" adoptive parents, i.e.

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[124] Taken from their early promotional materials.
[125] La Razón, Monday, September 2, 1985.

those without knowledge of the origins of the child. In these cases, they came to agreements with the adoptive family that generally resulted in the child staying with the adopted parents with full visitation rights for the biological family. Not surprisingly, the earliest restitutions carried out were these cases. The earliest restitutions took place during the dictatorship. In the *Grandmothers'* description, they were carried out "haphazard" (*al tun tun).* They followed their "motherly and grandmotherly intuition," while many in the organization claim that they were initially carried out with "great fear." "The kids had grown. We feared causing them harm." Others however claim that they never had any doubts. Because of the love that they felt for their children and grandchildren, they intuitively knew that the restitutions were necessary even if they were unable to explain why. Faced with difficult legal cases, the *Grandmothers* had to prove why restitution was necessary. They needed professional expertise. During the early 1980s, they gradually assembled a team of psychologists, lawyers and doctors to assist them in their legal claims and to aid recovered grandchildren and families in the process of "restitution."

When the *Grandmothers* were forced to make their search and pursue their claims through government bodies, they faced severe institutional hurdles. Their claims were often met with outright hostility by judges who had been in power during the dictatorship and, in some cases, had even been involved in the initial decisions over the children. For example, Sebastián Ariel Juárez was kidnapped on May 13, 1977 alongside his mother and three other adults. Those responsible for the kidnapping left Sebastián with a neighbor who subsequently handed him over to a family court. The presiding judge, Martha Delia Pons, despite full knowledge of what had taken place, made no effort to locate the

biological family and placed the child in an orphanage under another identity. Not until seven years passed were the *Grandmothers* able to reunite him to his biological family. They accused Judge Pons of deliberately concealing his identity in order to prevent him from being located by the biological family (and also ignoring the customary practice of publishing the child's photograph)[126]

Pons had also been involved in another case of a disappeared child, that of Emiliano Ginés. Ginés was 11 months old when his parents were killed by the military. He was left at neighbors who brought him to the same family court under the charge of Judge Pons. The child had Down's syndrome but was in good health at the time of his kidnapping. Once again, Pons made no effort to locate the biological family and placed him in an orphanage as a N.N. (*ningun nombre* = John Doe). Emiliano died ten months later because of, according to the *Grandmothers,* a lack of adequate treatment and care.

The *Grandmothers* first encountered Pons during the dictatorship. In 1978, she told them, in a quote that figures in numerous accounts of the *Grandmothers* to represent the dictatorship's response to the organization's claims*:*

> I am convinced that your children were terrorists and terrorist is synonymous with murderer. I would never consider giving back children to murderers because it would not be fair to do so. They don't have the right to raise them. Neither am I going to rule in favor of giving the children back to you. It is illogical to bother these children. They are in the hands of

[126] Clarín, May 25, 1984.

> decent families that will know how to educate them like you didn't know how to do with your children. Over my dead body are you going to obtain custody of them. (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:19)

Other judges were less openly hostile but were hesitant because of uncertainty that the grandchildren the *Grandmothers* were claiming as their own were really theirs and concerns about whether it was in the child's interest to separate them from the people raising them. "I prefer to leave a child in an institution rather than give him to the wrong person," one judge told them. The *Grandmothers'* initial priority, therefore, was to prove that the grandchildren in question were really theirs. However, proving that their grandchildren were in fact theirs was insufficient to pursue their custody claims. Faced with judges who were suspicious or dubious of their claims, the *Grandmothers* were compelled to carve arguments that framed restitution less as an ethical choice than as a medical need. They were forced to prove that after seven or eight years with another family, a change of custody was in the best interest of the child's mental and physical health.

In the end, the answers to both questions (how to prove their identity and how to prove the necessity of restitution) were found in the realm of biology. Incipient technologies that could ascertain the biological relatedness between grandparent and grandchild with up to 99.9% certainty proved the child's identity to the satisfaction of the courts. At the same time, the biological link would also provide the basis for the *Grandmothers'* arguments in favor of restitution. The *Grandmothers* argued for the need of restitution by privileging a biological relationship and taking advantage of a cultural tendency to see "blood is thicker

than water" when it comes to kin relations (for an account of how this concept has historically influenced anthropological thinking on kinship, see Schneider 1984). According to David Schneider, the belief that "blood is thicker than water" is based on the view that since kinship is based on the natural fact of biological reproduction, the bonds entailed by kinship are unlike any other social relationship. They are seen as constituting a higher order relationship. This cultural belief is evident in the *Grandmothers'* cases. For example, Judge Juan María Ramos Padilla, who was active in several restitutions in the 1980s, including one that will be discussed in the next chapter, made recourse to such arguments in his decisions. He argued that the adoptive family was a "second order family" because the biological family was the "fundamental base" of all societies. (e.g. Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:136)

The *Grandmothers'* privileging of biological relatedness counters what many expect a progressive human rights organization to believe. I observed individuals grappling with this difficulty firsthand. While in Buenos Aires, I was invited to a seminar at a local university given by a Brazilian-American anthropologist who was working on how genetic technologies were being used to resolve contested cases of paternity in the Brazilian courts. She critiqued the use of these technologies for what can be seen as the conventional anthropological argument: that the use of such technologies to verify biological identities resulted in a biologization of kin relations. Conceptualizing kinship solely in terms of blood ties served to undermine a complex social and psychological relationship. The crowd of fellow social scientists in attendance at the talk visibly concurred with her argument.

The post-talk discussion drifted towards the *Grandmothers*. One social scientist in attendance raised the possibility that the *Grandmothers* were doing the same thing. He pointed out how only several months earlier, the Supreme Court of Argentina had ruled against the *Grandmothers'* petition for a compulsory extraction of blood of a young woman to prove she was a child of the disappeared and not the child of the military family who raised her (a topic I will return to in a future chapter). However, the consensus in the room was that the *Grandmothers'* situation was distinct. The logic was twofold. First, the *Grandmothers* were not held to be responsible for this because the compulsory measure originated from the courts. Those who felt uncomfortable with such actions argued that the judiciary and not the *Grandmothers* were to blame. The second was that the *Grandmothers'* use of genetic technologies was different since it involved events originating out of the atrocities of the dictatorship. I had two (unvoiced) responses to this. First, though the judges had been the ones ordering the compulsory extraction of blood, the *Grandmothers* actively lobbied for it. Second, the *Grandmothers* dispute the distinctiveness of their situation and encourage links between, for example, the situation of their grandchildren kidnapped during the dictatorship and illicit child trafficking.

The *Grandmothers* are a highly respected and influential human rights group known throughout the world. This would explain the reluctance of sympathetic social scientists to see what they were doing in terms that they disagree with and thus why they served to exculpate them from claims that they were biologizing kin relations. However, other Argentine human rights groups were less hesitant in voicing such criticisms. Twice during my fieldwork, the *Grandmothers*' "biologization" of kinship was explicitly pointed out to me by those

working for other human rights organizations as a point of criticism against the *Grandmothers*. The first time was by a psychologist who formed part of a mental health team of another human rights group. "The *Grandmothers* speak of a 'call of the blood.' This is nonsense. Kinship is not in the blood; it's up here," he said, his hand gesturing to his head. The other remark came from a member of another human rights group whose archives I had been searching. As I poured through documents and old news clippings, the archivist advised me, "Pay attention to what the *Grandmothers* have to say about blood. It's troubling."

I had already noticed as it would have been difficult to miss. A typical example is a statement by one grandmother, who said the following in an interview.

> Sometimes I wish my grandchild would appear. I know he was born, but sometimes one loses hope. I imagine that he looks like his father and is intelligent like him too. Some don't want to know anything about their family. They want to stay with those who adopted them. When you grow up with someone, it's difficult. But to deny the biological family is like denying the identity of a person. Because not only did they steal them but *there is something that is the law of the blood*.

Sonia Torres, a *Grandmother* from Córdoba, explains the origins of her political activism by recourse to a biological explanation.

> In the Plaza de Mayo, they set horses on us. They wanted to scare us into stopping. But they could not achieve this. And it was not because we were

heroic or brave women. Rather, it was because *this is the command of the blood* (*el mandato de la sangre*). If they take away a child and steal a grandchild, the least we can do is to go out and find them.[127]

Recovered grandchildren also embrace such explanations. Juan Cabandié is one of the more recent children of the disappeared to be recovered. He was located in 2004. When discussing how he came to the conclusion that he was a child of the disappeared before he had the genetic results, he appealed to an innate, biological knowledge. For example, in his first public interview after his restitution, he explained how he had been raised to be politically conservative in the mold of his father, a police officer. Yet he had undergone "a change of paradigm, a complete turnaround." "I went crazy to go see Fidel Castro at the Law School. Where did I get all of this?" The reporter asked: "And do you think this is in the blood?"[128] "Yes, yes. It has no psychological explanation. In fact, it creates a great conflict in me. What is innate? What is acquired? But it was inside of me. I was raised to be a cog in the system; to be as rigid as the Armed Forces. In fact, I was that way." To support his claim, Juan pointed out that before he recovered his identity and discovered his mother had named him Juan after she gave birth, he had always wanted to be called Juan. He had even told his girlfriend that he intended to name his son that. His conclusion leaves no room for doubt: "This is in the blood."

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[127] Hoy La Universidad Periódico Digital, July 21, 2005, http://www.hoylauniversidad.unc.edu.ar/portada/notas/archivo/050720entrevistasoniatorr.html

[128] Interview from Página/12, March 28, 2004.

As an institution, the *Grandmothers* also publicly argue for the restitution of their grandchildren in terms of the primacy of blood ties. Estela Carlotto, stated in an interview from 2001:

> Blood is not water. I believe that profoundly. I believe in heredity as a bond. So many things are inherited; not only eye color and hair but also what goes on inside, gestures, vocations. There were children who couldn't explain why they liked to paint in a family where nobody did, and when they discovered their history, the pieces fit together like a perfect puzzle. This is part of identity, a good and a right that one can neither refuse nor turn down.[129]

This rhetoric of blood and heredity also encompasses genetics. The *Grandmothers* are frequently cited as a paradigmatic example of how genetic technologies can be used in the service of human rights. In November of 2004, one of the cultural centers in Buenos Aires sponsored a talk called "DNA, my friend?" in which "specialists in molecular technology and users of genetic technology discuss the importance of this development in relation to the possibility of the identification of persons in our society." The speakers were two geneticists and Estela Carlotto. She opened her talk with the curious phrase "we *Grandmothers* are friends of DNA" before discussing how genetic technologies helped to identify their grandchildren.[130]

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[129] Página/12, January 5, 2001.
[130] "El ADN ¿mi amigo?" Centro Cultural General San Martín, November 3, 2004.

This discourse is not only reproduced by family members but by individuals outside of the organization. For example, the *Grandmothers* sponsored a literary contest in the 1990s. The purpose of such contests is, as I will discuss in a later chapter, to reproduce the organization's institutional discourse. The winners, judged by both *Grandmothers* and literary experts, were eventually published in an edited volume. The first prize in poetry went to Karina Ángela Macció's *Lestrygonia*. The poem, a first person account of a child of the disappeared, is replete with blood imagery: "Blood calls out to Blood/Mom! /Dad! /That is in the blood, you cannot erase it, it runs in your veins/… Blood is the only thing you can trust/you will never betray it and it will never betray you."(Abuelas 1998:19) Other verses proclaim, "Blood never dies" and "Blood demands blood." The poem's use of bloodstain imagery refers to that which cannot be erased, the permanent traces of what occurred in the past that are found in the present.

"The law of the blood," "the call of the blood," and "the command of the blood": the use of this rhetoric by the *Grandmothers* can be traced back to the early years of the organization in the 1980s. In particular, it can be seen in how the *Grandmothers* seized upon the conventional understanding of kinship that entails "blood is thicker than water" (or, in its Spanish idiomatic, *la sangre tira,* literally "blood pulls") to pursue their claims.

Blood and genetics are only two of the biological markers that the organization has used in its search. Prior to their use of biomedical technologies to prove their grandchild's identity, physical resemblances and family likenesses were the most important means of identifying them. The first President of the *Grandmothers,* Chicha Mariani learned that blood could be used to prove family ties in 1979. She then contacted international human rights organizations to find

scientists who would be able to come up with a means of verifying a grandparent-grandchild link. She recounts the gradual evolution of this process during the organization's early years:

> In the beginning, we had to learn scientific concepts. We knew certain things were transmitted. Some children walked or had the same posture or carried themselves the same way as their parents. Abilities are also transmitted: the ability to paint, or play music or soccer. We blew up photographs. We began to find out if a birthmark persisted through time, if scars disappeared, and how long vaccine marks lasted. There had to be elements of proof that would determine a child's belonging with a family without leaving any room for doubt.

In their institutional literature and individual narratives, family likenesses and identifiable marks or features were as important as genetics in tracking down and locating the missing grandchildren. For example, in 1980, the *Grandmothers* received a photograph of a girl with an anonymous note claiming she was a child of the disappeared. The President of the *Grandmothers'* Chicha Mariani identified the girl as Paula Logares, who was two years old when she was kidnapped with her parents in Uruguay. She showed the photograph to Paula's grandmother, Elsa. Elsa told her she did not think it was Paula. They argued about this. Chicha was an art teacher and told Elsa that certain features on a person did not change through time – eyes, ears and lips. She identified the consistency of these features by comparing them on the two photographs. In doing this, she was able to convince Elsa that the girl in the photograph was the granddaughter she was

searching for. After three years of investigations, they were finally able to locate Paula in the hands of a former chief of police named Ruben Lavallén and, after the return to democracy, they petitioned the courts for her return and for Lavallén's arrested.

Paula Eva Logares was the first restitution of a grandchild found to be raised by someone directly involved in the dictatorship. Her restitution was also the first that occurred through the courts and she was the first grandchild whose identity was proven through biological markers, As such, her restitution is of great importance to the history of the organization. Lavallén was an active participant in the military dictatorship, noted for his direct involvement in the torture and disappearance of 13 union members of a Mercedes Benz factory. Only weeks after kidnapping Paula in 1978, he left the force and immediately obtained a lucrative new post as Head of Security at the same Mercedes Benz plant. He was still in the same position when Paula was located in his custody five years later. After his arrest, he insisted that he and his wife were Paula's parents even though there were no witnesses to his wife's pregnancy and no medical documentation of it.

Paula was almost two when she disappeared with her parents. The *Grandmothers* believed the girl in Lavallén's custody who was still called by the same first name was Paula based on her physical resemblance to her younger self.[131] They were surprised when they found out that Paula, although 7 years old, was registered in a kindergarten. According to the birth certificate listing her as Lavallén's daughter, she was only five years old. To resolve the issue, the

[131] Lavallén had tried to change her name when he first received her but Paula, only two years old, refused.

judge subsequently ordered an HLA typing. HLA typing was a histocompatability study that was at the time used for organ transplantation. While awaiting the results of the study, the judge ordered a medical examination as well. Doctors gave her a radiography that yielded an odd result. From an analysis of her bones, the results were inconclusive. Paula was said to be a younger age than seven. The *Grandmothers* were baffled. In the end, HLA typing confirmed Paula's biological identity with a probability of 99.8%. These results were considered definitive and Lavallén eventually changed his story. He admitted that Paula was not his child but now argued that the years he and his wife had her in his care should be considered when awarding custody.

The judge was conflicted and hesitated in making a decision. The *Grandmothers* denounced the delay and framed their argument for restitution in terms of the imminent danger the delay had for Paula's mental health. Paula had been "exposed to a serious mental illness that originates in the identity disorder that she was exposed to after her kidnapping" by remaining in the hands of her kidnapper. They framed the need for the restitution around this "serious risk." Restitution, which entailed Paula's custody being transferred to her grandmother, was considered the only viable option for safeguarding her future mental health: "only the restitution to her legitimate family guarantees to avoid the risk of serious mental damage and will provide the recovery of her real identity."[132]

The judge finally decided to award custody to her grandmother on December 13, 1984, one year after the initial claim had been filed. The organization later voiced their initial apprehension when faced with the restitution.

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[132] *La Voz del Mundo de Buenos Aires*, August 8, 1984.

According to Estela Carlotto, “That day tears were falling thinking about what Paula could suffer. But we couldn’t leave her in the hands of a repressor.… That was the day when I had the greatest doubts about our work and whether we were doing it for us, for the children, or, if it was our need, whether we were causing them any harm. (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:73)

According to the *Grandmothers* and their professional teams, their theories about restitution were devised after the initial restitutions took place. The professionals who assisted them saw their role as complimentary to the *Grandmothers*. Their political solidarity came prior to their theories about restitution. Even the *Grandmothers’* psychological team were uncertain about the potential negative consequences of restitution. They feared the child’s suffering could be so great that it could induce a temporary psychotic episode. They aimed to be proactive and were in crisis intervention mode for the first week after the restitution. No crisis occurred. They were astonished to see how rapidly Paula was able to reintegrate herself into her family. The *Grandmothers’* intuitive claim for the need for restitutions would subsequently be confirmed by professional expertise. More importantly, the need would be confirmed by Paula’s and other recovered grandchildren’s experiences. In the words of Estela Carlotto, “The theories were made after. In the beginning, it was all intuition and fundamentally questions. The answers were given by the recovered grandchildren themselves.”(Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:73)

The restitution of Paula Eva Logares was important precisely because it provided the answer to the question of whether restitution was in the best interest of the grandchild. Paula became the paradigmatic early case of restitution. The relative ease and surprising speed with which she was able to reintegrate into

her biological family bolstered the *Grandmothers'* claims. The psychological team saw it as evidence of children's "enormous capacity of recovery, emotional as well as physical. Now we know that after three days of the hypercritical phase, children who go through the process of restitution reacquire this vital glow that we are accustomed to children having. Appearing in them is the wonder of wanting to know, above all, about their existence."(Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:165)

Although the process of restitution was seen as a gradual and incremental development, they identified moments such as these in which the child's identity "clicked." According to the psychological team, this moment invariably occurred in which a family connection was made through an object, a word, or an action. It could be a "gesture, a particular piece of information, or an object" that "constitutes the specific stimulus to reactivate a memory that corresponds at times to only the first hours or days that the appropriated child was with their reality family. But it always occurs" (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:162). This connection with "something" is "capable of reconnecting her with the recognition of fundamental parts of her identity."(Ibid)

In Paula's case, when the judge decided to change custody and communicated this to Paula, she began crying and reacted angrily. Elsa realized later that she was only repeating back to her what her kidnappers had told her to say. Elsa then showed her a photograph of her mother, her father and when she was little. She then explained how she played with her father and that she called him Calio because she could not pronounce his name Claudio. When she said the word Calio, Paula began repeating his name. The third time she repeated it, it was in a baby's voice. According to Elsa, her voice changed, she started crying

and she fell asleep. This would later be framed as the moment in which Paula was “reborn.”

Psychologists who have worked with the *Grandmothers* have identified similar moments in many other cases. After this change takes place, the children become inquisitive about her parents. They will ask for photographs of the parents. The desire to see photographs is considered the most important first step in the process. They would be curious about their past. In the case of Paula, she eventually stopped crying and became curious to know more. “It marked a new stage. Instead of crying she was asking questions,” describes Elsa. These questions include what her parents were like, what their tastes were, and what they did. The psychological team noted that recovered grandchildren became curious about their origins and their family within hours of the restitution. Shortly after her restitution, Paula asked her grandmother to see her baby clothing. She told her that when she had previously asked her ex-mother to see what she wore as a baby, she hit her.

The key moment in the restitution occurs when the child accepts his or her birth name and begins to call their biological parents “mom and dad.” Paula initially wanted to continue calling her kidnappers by these names but quickly stopped. This process culminates when the child is able to take on their biological name legally and the papers are issues through the courts attesting to their biological identity. For example, Paula finally received her identity documents with her biological identity on March 30, 1988. Elsa sees this as a crucial moment, most of all for its recognition of the existence of her parents. “Now, before her, before me and before everyone, it was recognized that she was Paula, the daughter of Monica and Claudio, the daughter of my daughter

who they wanted to erase completely but they couldn't. They were there in the love that had crystallized in their daughter."(Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:57). From that day, Elsa noted a profound change in Paula. Obtaining her real ID papers gave her "inner peace."

The psychological team encouraged family members to create an environment in which the recovered children would be able to speak openly. In the words of one aunt who recovered her niece: "This space and of liberty, of respect, where she could say everything that worried her about the matter, led to the strengthening our relationship and the reaffirmation of her identity" (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:153-154). The situation of children who remained with people who hid and lied about their identity was considered constricting and limiting for their development. The process of restitution marked their freedom. The *Grandmothers* will frequently liken the state of appropriation to slavery and argue that restitution is a liberating process that allowed for their full development. In the case of Carla Artés, another child of the disappeared who was located in the custody of an active participant in the dictatorship, the *Grandmothers* announced shortly after the restitution, "she is not prohibited from speaking about absolutely anything. She can talk about, remember, and ask for whatever she wants. She can call whomever she wants." The recovered grandchildren eventually embraced the notion that restitution signaled their liberation. Several years later, Carla wrote a letter thanking all of the *Grandmothers* after her restitution stating, "freedom is a beautiful thing." (Artés 1997)

The construction of family resemblances is also an important part of that process. Children will search for physical similarities between themselves and their parents or themselves and other family members. The construction of family

resemblances helps to reinforce the restitution by making the abstract medical results concrete. For example, Carla was said to bear an “astonishing” resemblance to her mother. According to her grandmother, she thought an old photograph of her mother taken when she was her age was a photograph of herself. Later, she would go in front of a mirror with the photograph and look back and forth between comparing herself to her mother. Later she told her grandmother, “Look at me, grandmother, I am combing my hair like my mother in this photograph. We look the same” (Martínez 1996:28). In fact, according to her *Grandmother,* the physical resemblance between Carla and her mother was more important than the genetic results that confirmed her family belonging with a 99.93% certainty. The likeness “was the most convincing proof of her identity” (Ibid). María was restored to her biological family around the same time as Carla. In the judge’s chambers, she met her older biological sister. After their first meeting, the sisters went to the judge and showed him that they both had the same beauty mark on the same spot on their arm. This was considered extremely important. “The bond between the two was immediate. It was as if they knew each other their entire life” (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:135).

The *Grandmothers* also linked restitution to physical changes in the child. Over time, Elsa noted a transformation in Paula’s demeanor and appearance. Paula had worn her hair tight before. After the restitution, she let her hair down. Elsa observed the same transformation in everything from how she made her bed to how she wore her clothing. For her, this showed how Paula was able to live in freedom and was able to think for and be herself. Elsa let her make her own choices and say whatever she wanted to say.

The *Grandmothers’* interdisciplinary team argued that this process of

liberation had meaningful consequences for the child's mental and physical development. According to Norberto Liwski, the pediatrician who coordinated the psychological team for the *Grandmothers* during this period, the children's condition of appropriation hindered their physical and mental development. For example, in Paula's case the fact that the radiography showed slower bone development than could be expected for a girl of her age was later seen to be a product of "war stress" or trauma resulting from her forced separation from her parents. The psychological team of the *Grandmothers* saw a parallel between Paula's situation and British children who went through the Blitz during WWII and whose development was stunted by their experience. Several years after her restitution, Paula underwent another radiography. This time her physical development corresponded to her actual age.

Other physical ailments disappeared after the restitution. According to her grandmother, Paula had respiratory and sleeping problems at the time of her restitution. After she was restored to her grandmother's custody, the problems disappeared rapidly and without treatment. Most of the recovered children are said to have some psychosomatic symptoms ranging from sleep disorders, dermatological problems, respiratory problems, digestive problems, phobias, urinary problems and even "trouble with sphincter control." The vast majority of these problems cleared up spontaneously without medication after the restitution. Even children who were obese returned to a normal weight after the restitution.

These physical indicators would serve as important evidence bolstering the *Grandmothers'* claims that restitution was psychologically healthy. Faced with more legal battles, the *Grandmothers* needed to counter arguments from lawyers for the adoptive families who argued that a change in custody would constitute a

"second trauma" comparable to the initial separation between the disappeared child and their biological parents. The psychological team working with the *Grandmothers* countered that keeping the children in the hands of their kidnappers only served to perpetuate the psychological trauma that the child had already undergone. Public controversy erupted when noted French psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto, after being asked about the situation of the disappeared children in an interview, argued that restitution could constitute a "second trauma" (Dolto 1998). Dolto had come to Buenos Aires after the fall of the dictatorship in the mid-1980s. At the time, she was considered one of the world's most preeminent psychoanalysts, second only to Jacques Lacan in terms of importance and influence. Her visit was considered a major coup for Argentine psychoanalysis. Dolto compared the situation of children of the disappeared to Jewish children who were raised by non-Jewish French families during WWII. She argued based on her own clinical experience with these children that many who were separated from their adoptive families either regressed or became sick and eventually rejected their biological families.

After the mental health team of the *Grandmothers* responded to her in print, Dolto retracted her statement and acknowledged her mistake in judgment. To have someone of her stature admit error was viewed as a major triumph of Argentine psychoanalysis which, at least in the words of psychoanalysts that I interviewed, had a sense of inferiority and marginalization that came from its peripheral status far from the psychoanalytic centers of Paris, London and New York. A pediatrician likewise singled out the importance of her retraction and called it "perhaps the one and only time in her long and illustrious career that she was mistaken." Some Argentine psychoanalysts would later argue that the

distinctive contribution of Argentine psychoanalysis to the discipline would be their work in relation to human rights. The idea that restitution could constitute a "second trauma", however, did not die with Dolto's recantation. Psychological experts and lawyers representing military families argued exactly in those terms in subsequent court cases.

In the end, the recovered grandchildren served as the best evidence to counter these claims. For example, after one restitution, Estela Carlotto declared, "this case confirms once again the need that these children be restored to their real families because it produces no trauma."[133] Psychologists working with the *Grandmothers* were surprised by the rapidity with which the children readapted to their biological families. Two different explanations can be found in the institutional discourse to explain the positive effects of restitution. On one hand, the appropriators' lies were seen to be impeding the child's development. In the words of Norberto Liwski, the lies acted as "a ceiling limiting full growth."(167) The violence that occurred during the kidnapping continues as a prolonged state of stress throughout the child's life. They termed this "forced abandonment syndrome" and identified it in both children of the disappeared who grew up with their biological families and those who had been kidnapped and were living under false identities. Even if the children did not know that their kidnappers were not really their parents, on an unconscious level, the *Grandmothers'* psychological team claimed, they would know. The truth "inevitably filtered down", as one psychoanalyst who worked with the *Grandmothers* told me.

For Elsa, the most important part in the process was being honest about

[133] La Voz del Mundo, August 27, 1985.

what occurred. “I always told her the truth,” she told me. This created difficulties when Paula asked her to explain the disappearance of her biological parents. Elsa voiced the difficulty of conveying this information to Paula but felt that she could not lie to her or hide the truth from her. If the damage was a product of the children “living in a lie,” the truth was seen as liberating and healthy. With a realization of the truth comes a rejection of the kidnappers. After Elsa gained custody over Paula, Lavallén fought for visitation rights. He argued that the time they had spent together constituted an emotional bond that should be respected. The court was initially sympathetic to their arguments despite the protests of the *Grandmothers* and their psychological experts who argued that it would confuse her and be detrimental to her mental health. Paula was summoned by the judge with her grandmother and Lavallén. She asked the couple, “Why did you lie to me?” They refused to answer. She started crying and asked: “What did you do to my parents?” He answered that he did not know what she was talking about and repeated that he and his wife were her parents. She became angry and told the judge she did not want to see them again.

The *Grandmothers’* psychological team thus offered an account of the healthiness of restitution that was not in biological terms. However, a biological explanation was also simultaneously embraced. The natural fact of kinship provided the explanation for how the children were able to adapt to their new homes so easily. If the children thrived after they were recovered, the reason was that the child could only thrive in their presence. In the words of Paula’s grandmother, Elsa: “The majority have some problems of these two types – allergies or respiratory/bronchial problems. They clear up their own without medicine only with the return to the nest (*nido*)…”

The argument was that the 'natural place' (i.e. the "nest") for the children to be raised was the biological family and that this "nest" was necessary for the child's healthy and natural development. In 1986, Oscar Anzorena, a pediatrician and father of a disappeared child, spoke of the harm done to grandchildren who remained in the hands of their captors by referring to the loss of an "ecological nest" (*nido ecológico*).[134] This concept is not commonly used in English or Spanish. It overlaps with the concept more commonly known as an "ecological niche" but it is used distinctly in this case to refer to the specific environment in which individual offspring are raised. Comparing being uprooted from an ecological nest to a ripped out placenta, Anzorena argued that the child's physical and mental development would be impeded if the child grew up outside of it.

The idea that the health problems of recovered grandchildren spontaneously cleared up when they were reunited with their biological families reinforced this idea. Though Anzorena admitted that children could adapt to new "nests," he pointed to the rapid reintegration of the grandchild into their biological family as proof that this was the most natural and thus the best place for the child to grow up. The implicit assumption of the concept of an "ecological nest" is that it is fundamentally healthier for children to be raised by their biological families. The rapid reintegration of recovered children was a result of the perceived naturalness of the biological relationship. During this period, the Grandmother's

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[134] El Periodista de Buenos Aires, May 16 - May 23, 1986.

used the concept of an “ecological niche” frequently in their institutional discourse.

Biologically deterministic arguments of an “ecological nest” served a particular role. They persuaded often-reluctant judges to rule in the *Grandmothers’* favor. During the period in which the grandchildren were minors and custody was still the main issue, the *Grandmothers* were able to locate a total of over 50 grandchildren and reunite them with their families. Why did they use a biological explanation? A compelling case could be made in ethical and not biological terms. The *Grandmothers* argued in terms of both. The *Grandmothers*’ use of biologically deterministic arguments helped to validate and support their claims for their grandchildren. They also played on a predisposition to see identity in biological terms. There is obviously nothing distinct to Argentina about this as it is part of a global phenomenon. Nevertheless, I will argue that such thinking has a particular prevalence in Argentina that can be explained historically.

In Argentina, there is a long tradition of viewing identity in biological terms. This was a slow realization that came to me as my fieldwork progressed. It began, innocently enough, with several print advertisements. One day, while waiting for a bus, I spot a billboard for Camel cigarettes. It is a fingerprint shaped into the outline of its camel mascot. Its catchphrase is “Genuine Identity.” Some weeks later, I see another print advertisement as part of the popular Absolut Vodka series. “Absolut Identity,” it declares, depicting a fingerprint in the shape of a vodka bottle. I begin to notice that fingerprints are frequently linked to identity in Argentine popular culture. A nightly news show that is called “*Huella Digital*” (Fingerprint) advertises itself as “journalism with identity.” This relationship

between fingerprints and identity extends to genetics and identity. When Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, died in July of 2004, the progressive newspaper declared, “identity is sad” on its cover page. In October 2004, a best-selling book on Argentina called *DNA: A Genetic Map of Argentine Defects* is published by progressive journalist Jorge Lanata. The book’s jacket features a DNA spiral while the back cover asks, “Is there a ‘genetic code’, a DNA, that makes us Argentine?” As it turns out, “genetic code” is used as a synonym for “national character;” the book is a compendium of the country’s vast failings.

This discourse on identity has its origins in the 19th century. I will single out an 1892 murder case in Argentina as a starting point. Two children were brutally murdered, stabbed in their beds. There were no witnesses, but a bloody fingerprint was found at the scene of the crime. A match was made with the fingerprints of the children’s mother. Faced with the evidence, she confessed. The case was viewed as a triumph of the emerging discipline of criminology and forensic science. It marked the first time in the world that fingerprint evidence was used to solve a criminal case.

Juan Vucetich, an Argentine policeman who emigrated from Croatia, developed the system of classification that was used to solve the case. He called his new system “Dactiloscopy” and claimed that it was more useful than the Bertillonage system of biometrics developed by the French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon. Vucetich argued that his system was more reliable, less costly and less time intensive than Bertillon’s anthropometry. Moreover, Bertillon’s system could only describe and classify but not confirm identity. Vucetich was inspired by Francis Galton’s work on fingerprints, and he dedicated his system to him. Galton had developed his own organization system but

Vucetich created the first universal classification scheme that allowed fingerprints to be organized in a way that would allow for later identification. Galton reacted to it with condescension. (His response: “It affords another instance of that statistical zeal for which Buenos Ayres(sic) is so justly reknowned.”[Rodriguez 2001])

Although initially considered complementary to Bertillon’s system, Dactiloscopy eventually replaced Bertillonage in Argentina. It also spread throughout Latin America and even to Europe. By the beginning of the 20th century the Paris police were teaching Vucetich’s system. In the words of historian Kristin Ruggiero, Argentina was “in the vanguard in identification techniques and philosophy.”(2001:185)

Why was Argentina “in the vanguard?” At the end of 19th century, Argentina was experiencing a massive wave of immigration and urbanization. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was estimated that more than 60% of the residents of Buenos Aires were foreign born. With mass immigration came a common concern of fin-de-siècle Europe: degeneracy. In Argentina, a pervasive fear existed that Europe was sending its professional criminals to Argentina. These European “degenerates” were bringing crime and disorder with them. The problem they faced was how to monitor and control immigrants. Fingerprinting was seen as not only as a solution but a savior. Fingerprinting’s ability to identify and potentially track individuals was considered a means of imposing order on a heterogeneous and mobile population

Vucetich’s system was initially implemented to register prostitutes and track immigrants and criminals. Along with his colleague and successor Luis Reyna Almandos, Vucetich wanted to make fingerprinting universal and

attempted to create a national register of fingerprints. An estimated 40% of the city's inhabitants were fingerprinted as of 1916. In the 1930's Reyna Almandos proposed a "national book of personality" which would be a centralized, constantly updated database containing the fingerprints of all Argentines. However, identification of the entire population (i.e. law-abiding citizens) was still viewed with suspicion. Their plan was deemed unconstitutional after collection already began and their records were subsequently destroyed (a distraught Vucetich compared the loss to the destruction of the Library of Alexandria).

Vucetich saw fingerprinting as the beginning of a new world order. He believed that the implementation of a universal worldwide system of identification would not only solve the problems of crime but heralded a new era of civilization that would bring progress and democratic values. Among Vucetich's numerous achievements is his work in introducing Argentina's National Identity Card (DNI) which includes an impression of the right thumbprint along with a national identity number. Reyna Almandos would eventually propose these numbers to be tattooed on all citizens in the 1930's. In Argentina, this DNI number is required for almost all transactions and, unlike a social security number, is made public (even letters to the editor in newspapers are accompanied by the individual's DNI). When I was asked for my DNI for numerous daily transactions, such as entering a public library or paying with a credit card, I invariably used the first number that came to mind, my student ID number.

For Vucetich and Reyna Almandos, identification was considered in a positive sense, not as the right of the state against its citizens but as an individual's right to have their identity documented. In the 1930s, Reyna Almandos introduced the "right to identity" as a natural right and referred to it as

a “new juridical concept.”. Identity was more than just a biological identity for Vucetich and Reyna Almandos; it was imbued with a kind of truth. To quote Ruggiero again, “To Vucetich, fingerprints were as sublime as something like moral ‘truth’” (2001:193). A fingerprint was “his own interior mark, his unalterable trait, his own essence that was permanent from birth to death…” It is this idea of a biological identity that can be made visible and that it contains an individual’s unalterable trait that is evident in the *Grandmothers’* conception of a right to identity.

The idea of a “right to identity” linked to universal fingerprinting continued after Reyna Almandos and Vuceitch. One of their successors, Sislan Rodriguez, the director of the Vucetich Museum and the Institute of Identity of the National University of La Plata wrote in 1944:

> The State recognizes in the individual the right to life, to freedom, to work, to all those things, very sacred rights that are the consequence of what is most important and yet the State does not guarantee to the individual himself the right that his real and authentic personality is recognized….(1944:19)

Like Reyna Almandos, Rodriguez argued for the existence of a “right of identity:” “Among the inalienable rights of human beings that the State institutes and guarantees… is the right of identity (*derecho de identidad*) of each one of us….(1944:436)

This brings us to the present. One of the *Grandmothers’* most frequently cited achievements is their role in the creation of exactly what Vucetich and

Reyna Almandos were calling for: the right to identity. As a result of their work with the Argentine government and several international human rights organizations, they were responsible for Argentina's sponsorship of Article 8 ("Preservation of Identity") of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The text of the article is as follows:

> States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

Only once during the course of my fieldwork did I hear any of my informants make a link between mandatory fingerprinting and the case of the kidnapped children of the disappeared. The subject came up during an interview with the psychoanalyst who currently heads the *Grandmothers'* mental health team. I had asked her about the Supreme Court's decision to refuse the *Grandmothers'* request of a compulsory extraction of blood. She disputed their endorsement of a "right to privacy" in refusing the measure: "The other [argument of the court] that isn't of value is that of privacy. The fingerprint that the state requires for identification documents violates privacy but, yes, it's part of the apparatus of the state that allows people to have identity papers." That such practices are controversial elsewhere in the world went unremarked. A tacit

acceptance existed that states have the right to fingerprint its citizens. It was surprising for me to hear this view come from someone linked to a progressive political movement. I heard this from others in the organization who advocated a mandatory national genetic data bank that included samples from the entire Argentine population.

Although the link is unacknowledged in the *Grandmothers'* or human rights literature, the "Right to Identity" that the *Grandmothers* are credited with developing originates out of the experience of the late 19th century. Amid fears of uncontrolled immigration and criminality, the response was a panopticon fantasy of universal surveillance. The "Right to Identity" as an actual (universally recognized) juridical right did not come to fruition until the late 20th century as a result of the atrocities committed by the military dictatorship. Both Vucetich's Dactiloscopy and the *Grandmothers'* "Index of Grandpaternity" are both frequently (yet separately) cited as one of Argentina's contributions to science. Though the circumstances are strikingly different, the same underlying premise lies in the background. In both cases, this new right and the science that allows it (fingerprinting in the first case; genetics in the latter) are viewed as a progressive means to promote democracy, protect citizens, and ensure order.

The Limitations of Biology

The *Grandmothers'* emphasis on biology can be understood in reference to this larger historical context. It provided a means by which judges and the public could understand and support the restitution of their children. In the conventional Euro-American understanding that extends to Argentina, cultural

identities are mapped over biological identities. Biology is prior to culture. However, the *Grandmothers* do not prioritize a biological relationship in and of itself. They seize upon this understanding in order to emphasize their claims for their grandchildren. Biological identities are valued foremost for revealing a prior or hidden relationship. It is the prior relationship (a social one as much as a biological one) that can be traced through genes and by blood that the *Grandmothers* are trying to restore.

A psychologist who works with the *Grandmothers* about these issues made this issue explicit to me during an interview. She asked me to imagine the case of a family member whose pregnant daughter was kidnapped except in this case the disappeared daughter had been adopted. The grandparent would wish to locate her grandchild as much as any other family member but this would be impossible because of the lack of a biological link that could substantiate the relationship. Pragmatically, the biological link was the only way a child can be located.

As I already argued, the *Grandmothers'* psychological team offers alternate explanations for the success of restitutions rather than recourse to biological explanations. They argue for the pernicious consequences of the kidnappers' withholding of the truth. They also argue for the primacy of the relationship in non-biological terms. Taking a psychoanalytic position, they emphasize the time (however brief) that the child spent with their parents. This includes cases of children who were born in captivity who only spent hours or days with the mother before being forcibly separated. That initial moment marked them in a formative - albeit unconscious – way. In the words of psychologist Laura Conte, "Every person has a uniqueness, a uniqueness that their origin

gives to them. There are the registers of the baby in their first months of life. They are the pivot of identity; the origin and the first link, before anything else, with their mother. Upon this pivot, other identifications are later made. But a child does not lose their identity because pseudo-parents come and take care of them."[135] The formative time spent between mother and child was one alternative to a biological explanation. When the psychological team and the other psychological experts who assist the organization speak of the relationship between the disappeared parent and the child, they explain it in Freudian terms. Before birth, children are the desire of their parents, a psychoanalyst who assisted the *Grandmothers* in the 1980s told me in an interview. This is often repeated in the organization's institutional. This allowed the psychological team to differentiate between the situation of children of the disappeared and the situation of adopted children who had been abandoned by their parents. The biological link was less important than the desire of parents to have children. When they privilege the relationship, they privilege this desire of the parents to have children.

At the same time, the *Grandmothers'* empirical experience with restitutions highlights the fact that a biological link alone is insufficient for finding and recovering children and does not automatically ensure the child's wellbeing. Two early cases exemplify this. Esteban and Paula Bell were the children of Maria Elena Acosta de Velazco, a medical student, and a police officer, Esteban Bell, who both disappeared. Authorities later claimed that Bell hung himself. His brother Julio was also kidnapped and was likewise claimed to have committed

[135] El Periodista de Buenos Aires, December 20-26, 1985.

suicide. The two young children were raised by one of Bell's sisters, whose husband was a police officer. Although the case did not technically involve kidnapped children, the maternal grandparents fought to gain custody of the grandchildren. When the children were 18 and 16 they finally went to live with their grandparents after rebelling against their uncle's abusive treatment. Paula had numerous scars from the abuse. Although not an official restitution, the *Grandmothers* described the use using the language of restitution, calling it a "return to life" for the children.[136]

Other cases also existed in which children were located but they were unable to be reintegrated into their biological family. For example, Diego Mendizabal Zermoglio was kidnapped together with his mother in September of 1979. The child was turned over to his paternal grandfather. He was unable to take care of the child and gave him to some family members who, in turn, gave him to another family. Meanwhile, the maternal grandmother had been searching for him and had contacted the *Grandmothers* to assist in the effort. They were only able to locate him in 1984 under a different name. The maternal grandmother asked for restitution of the child but the adoptive family was granted an adoption in 1986. In the end, Diego continued living with the adopted family but in contact with his maternal family.[137]

In both of these cases, the bare fact of being a biological relative was irrelevant. In one case, the biological relative acted as an appropriator. In the other, the biological relative was unable to care for the child and gave the child away. The biological relationship only matters as long as the biological relative

[136] Clarín Thursday, January 30, 1986.
[137] *La Voz de Buenos Aires,* December 23 1983.

actively searches for the child. Two *Grandmothers* told me of how after the disappearances, they went to the parents of their children's spouses. In both cases, the in-laws wanted nothing to do with the search and refused to give them any assistance. María, a child of the disappeared, was recovered in 1987 through a judicial ruling. Presently, she works in the genetics area of the *Grandmothers*. Her specific job involves tracking down and convincing family members to give blood to the National Genetic Data Bank so that they can be identified in the case that they appear. She says that they can often be very reluctant to do so. "After all this time, many do not want to anymore. They think that the child is too old or that they will never reappear." She uses her own experience as a child of the disappeared to attempt to persuade them to give a blood sample to the Genetic Bank. Her experience is made to serve as an example for other grandchildren who have yet to be recovered. At the same time, some relatives, albeit a very small minority, still refuse. Even the *Grandmothers'* estimates of five hundred disappeared grandchildren allow for the fact that many family members never came forward to make a demand for their child or their grandchild. If they did not come forward to make a demand, the grandchild can never be found.

There are other cases in which family members give blood samples but do not actively participate with the *Grandmothers* in the search for their relative. Families that did not participate in the search and were suddenly informed by the *Grandmothers* that their missing relative was located were often less willing to put in the time necessary to create a close relationship with the child. Actively searching for the children was a sign of desire to build a relationship with them when and if they were found. Norberto Liwski told me that the more difficult

restitutions were those in which “the family members did not feel like they were part of the investigation.” For example, after one child of the disappeared was identified in the year 2000, it took a year before she could meet her biological family because they were a poor family who had been uninvolved in the search and had been difficult to locate. When she finally met them, she asked them why they had not been more active in searching for her.

Conclusion

Between the years 1983 and 1987, according to Norberto Liwski:

> There was a joining together of many forces to locate the children and a great assemblage of technical resources so that the work of searching for the children would be met with concrete successes not only in terms of establishing the (biological) relationship in the absence of the parents but to create mechanisms so that the process of restitution would be the least traumatic possible. Not only would it not be traumatic but it would be reparatory for the children.

The case of Laura Ernestina Scaccheri represents the apogee of these efforts. She was the first successful legal restitution in which the appropriators of a disappeared child were not direct participants in the military dictatorship. In her case, neighbors took her in after the family was kidnapped and raised her as their own. When the biological family finally located her, a custody battle broke out. The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court. In October 1987, they argued in favor of the biological family and set forth four basic premises for

restitution. First, they argued that the fundamental objective for judges in these cases should be the "integral protection of the psychological health" of the child. Second, the judges should treat the minor "in so much subjects and never as objects of the rights of third parties." Third, they acknowledge these situations posed risks to the child's psychological health stemming from "the tragic kidnapping of their parents, of the hiding of their origin and of the sharp irruption of truth in the horizon of their life." The final point was that reuniting the minor and the biological family was considered "a true therapeutic action" that can repair "a serious injury in the foundational origins of their identity."[138] After Laura found out about the court's decision, she reportedly said, "What luck! I am me once again." The case represented a great triumph of the *Grandmothers* during the initial period of early restitutions. However, it did not resolve the issue definitively and more contentious legal cases followed. The next chapter will address two of them.

Not only had the *Grandmothers* succeeded in convincing the Supreme Court of the need for restitutions but they had also convinced members of the international community about the need for restitutions. In 1988, Theo Van Boven, then Director of Human Rights of the United Nations, came to Argentina to investigate the situation of children of the disappeared. He issued an official report that concluded, "almost without exception the return of the child to their legitimate family is in the greater interest of the child" (Herrera & Tenembaum 2001:82). The back cover of one of the *Grandmothers'* books from that period features a quote from Van Boven attesting to the role of the *Grandmothers* and

[138] Taken from a copy of the legal ruling.

their interdisciplinary teams in convincing him of this. “Long and intense conversations with doctors, psychologists, judges and relatives of the disappeared children convinced me that almost without exception the restitution of these children has not only an ethical basis in the demand for justice but is also the healthiest possible future that society can offer them.”

Chapter 5: Two Custody Battles: the children of the disappeared and the legacy of the past in the present.

Between 1988 and 1989, two controversial cases of children restored to their biological families became major media events. The children were Juliana Treviño and Ximena Vicario. Both cases involved adopted parents who had no direct ties to the military. In the case of Juliana Treviño, the adoptive parents acted in good faith. They did not lie to their adopted daughter and had no ties to the military. Ximena's case differed from Juliana's because the adoptive mother concealed Ximena's origins. Juliana's case was a major setback for the organization. On the other hand, Ximena's restitution was an important step forward. Though they are both atypical, they invite a careful analysis as the cases represent a key transitional period for the *Grandmothers.*

In May 1978, as Argentina was in the midst of preparing to host the soccer World Cup, a recently born baby girl was found abandoned in the hallway of an office building in a middle class neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Left without identity papers, she was placed in an orphanage. A doctor subsequently estimated her to be ten-days old at the time she was found. Days after being placed in the orphanage, a judge named Gustavo Mitchell awarded guardianship of the infant to his cousin, Carmen Rivarola, and her husband Jose Treviño. Jose Treviño was a journalist and press adviser for the head of a bloc of parliament members. The Treviños named her Juliana Ines. Her newly drawn papers registered her date of birth as May 20, 1978. A year and a half later, on October 24th, 1979, the Treviños were granted a full adoption by a civil judge.

The Treviños never concealed Juliana's adopted status from her. In 1982, as the dictatorship was on the verge of collapsing, Carmen attended a press conference that discussed the disappearances. The conference referred to the situation of missing children of the disappeared who were born in captivity. Realizing that her adopted daughter could be one of them, she contacted the *Grandmothers*. At the time, there was no way to confirm this. Five years later, in December of 1987, the National Genetic Data Bank was functioning in the Durand Hospital with enough blood samples from different family member groups to make possible matches. Carmen brought 10-year old Juliana to the hospital to draw blood. On June 23rd 1988, the Treviños were informed that Juliana was the biological child of Liliana Clelia Fontana and Pedro Fabian Sandoval. The histocompatibility results assigned a 99.92% probability of inclusion with the Sandoval and Fontana families.[139]

Liliana Clelia Fontana, a twenty-year old studying to be a hairdresser, was two and a half months pregnant when she was kidnapped on July 1st, 1977 along with her partner, 33-year-old construction worker Pedro Fabian Sandoval. They were taken from the family home of Caseros, a working class neighborhood in Buenos Aires province. Through survivor testimonies, it later emerged that Pedro and a still pregnant Liliana were eventually transferred to the *Club Atletico* concentration camp. It was their last known destination. From the moment of their disappearances, both families had been actively searching for them. The Sandoval family had been particularly affected by the dictatorship. In total, three of their ten children were disappeared. In addition, Pedro's first wife was also

[139] Some media sources reported the probability of inclusion to be lower at 98.91%.

disappeared, taken in front of their two children. The announcement of Juliana's restitution renewed focus on the disappearance of her parents. Typical of the press coverage in the late 1980s, no mention was made of the political activities of either parent. Their story is told only through their family life and their disappearance.

The Restitution of Juliana Sandoval Fontana

The match between Juliana and the Sandoval-Fontana families required the case to be turned over to federal judge Juan Ramos Padilla. Ramos Padilla was considered one of the only judges supportive of the *Grandmothers'* cause. He had presided over four restitutions in the preceding years. On June 24, a day after the case was turned over to him, Ramos Padilla summoned both parties to his chambers. What transpired there would later form a central part of the dispute. Ramos Padilla believed he had reached a mutual agreement in which Juliana would be immediately transferred to the custody of the Fontanas. She would then be given an unspecified period of time with her biological family to "reconstruct her identity." The transfer was provisional. Final custody and visitation schedules would be decided at a future date.

Ramos Padilla based his decision to turn custody of Juliana over to the biological family on the opinion of psychological experts. They advised an uninterrupted period of time with the biological family as the best means for recovered disappeared children to reconstruct their identity. The court psychologist's report argued, "She needs separation from her adoptive family to be able to start the process of recovering what is her own, time to strengthen

bonds with her relatives, and time to become a part of the family. Meetings with the Treviños during this period can cause a harmful retrogression to Juliana's psycho-social health."[140]

This was not a typical arrangement. In twelve earlier cases of children of the disappeared found with "good faith" parents, i.e. those without ties to the military or knowledge of the child's origins, shared custody agreements had been reached. In the majority of these cases, the children stayed with the adoptive parents while the biological family maintained visitation rights. None of them resulted in conflict.

A month after the judge's decision, the Treviños called a press conference to demand the return of their adopted daughter. Although Ramos Padilla, the biological family, and the *Grandmothers* denied it was a compulsory separation, the Treviños alleged that they were pressured into the arrangement. They also maintained they had repeatedly petitioned him to reconsider. After exhausting all other possibilities, they decided to "make their suffering public." The mainstream media flocked to their side, denouncing it as a case of human rights gone wrong, one in which "political ideology" trumped the best interests of the child.

The Fight Over Juliana

Their supporters portrayed the Treviños as loving parents who lost their only child after a reckless judge motivated by politics rather than precedent forcibly separated them. Overriding the adoption of parents who were not

[140] Página/12, August 3, 1988.

accused of committing any crime was seen as an irresponsible decision of a judge who had overreached his power. The separation was even compared with the forced disappearance of Juliana's biological parents. Mariano Grondona, an influential figure in Argentine conservative politics, declared: "The girl first lost her parents outside of the law. She has now lost them again, but this time within the law, which is even worse."[141]

Both sides argued in terms of Juliana's psychological wellbeing. While supporters of the Treviños stressed the trauma of a girl forcibly separated from her parents, supporters of the biological family described a girl adapting quickly to her biological family. Articles describe her in the typical language of restitution. She was happy to get to know a large extended family that included over 30 cousins and two older half-brothers. She was curious to know more about her parents and formed a close bond with her 28-year old aunt Silvia. Use of terms like reintegration or reinsertion (as opposed to integration and insertion) underscored the *Grandmothers'* fundamental belief that, although Juliana never met her biological family, a pre-existing bond was still present. Within days, she was using her real name. She resembled her father and mother and half-brothers. Even the family dog was said to have recognized her.

Faced with a public outcry against the restitution, the *Grandmothers* held a press conference with Juliana's biological family to ask that Juliana's privacy be respected. They cited their experience with previous restitutions. They argued that Juliana needed to be given more time to "re-accommodate this full truth that she is living." They reiterated that the end goal of the process was for Juliana be

[141] Página/12, August 7, 1988.

with both families. While acknowledging the suffering of the adoptive parents, they emphasized the suffering of the biological family who had searched for Juliana for ten years. The *Grandmothers* and their supporters also attempted to draw attention to Juliana's biological parents. They criticized the media for ignoring the larger historical context. Juliana's situation was a product of the dictatorship's crimes. In Página/12, ex-disappeared who spent time in captivity with Juliana's biological mother recounted their memories of her. Journalist Jorge Lanata argued that the case forced Argentina to "look under the carpet" and confront the dictatorship.[142]

Many criticized how the Treviños were exclusively viewed as victims while the *Grandmothers,* the biological family and the democratic judicial system were portrayed as victimizers. Yet it was equally difficult to see the Treviños as victimizers. What made the case so complicated was that the Treviños could not be subsumed into the category of appropriators, the term the *Grandmothers* used for military perpetrators who kidnapped children of the disappeared. They had no ties to the dictatorship. No one suggested they had knowledge of Juliana's origins when they adopted her. Neither did they did attempt to hide her adopted status from her. They even initiated the search that led to her restitution.

The legal debate revolved around whether a full adoption could be abrogated. Ramos Padilla argued that one had to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate adoptions. Ramos Padilla argued that although legitimate adoptions were irrevocable, this one was not because it was the consequence of a crime and because the requisite protocol had not been followed before it had

[142] Ibid.

been granted. He argued that without a voluntary abandonment, a legitimate adoption was impossible. A full adoption required the relinquishment of *patria potestad* (the rights of parents over their children). Although Juliana was found in an apparent state of abandonment, no adoption should have been given without an investigation first. The judge made no effort to investigate the child's origins and transferred custody quickly. In doing so, he failed to meet the requirements for adoption. Although the doctor who examined Juliana when she arrived at the orphanage could not remember her specific case, he recalled that, "in those years, we had to hand over children rapidly."[143] Orphanages were one of the first places family members went when they searched for a disappeared grandchild. The speed of the transfer ensured that by the time family members went to the institution, the child would already be gone.

At the same time, the judge argued that the rights of biological families were superior to the rights of adoptive ones. In his words, "Without a doubt, the premise of adoption has to do with a substitute family, a second order family."[144] Those who championed the Treviños' cause argued that the case represented an assault on the entire institution of adoption. They played on the fears of adopted parents that their children could be arbitrarily taken away from them. If a full adoption granted ten years earlier to people could be challenged, then all adoptions were at risk.

The most vocal defenders of the Treviños all had antecedents as equally vocal apologists for the dictatorship's atrocities. The primary medium through which the Treviños launched their public campaign was the popular television

[143] Página/12, September 2, 1988.
[144] Página/12, August 23, 1988.

news and radio programs hosted by conservative journalists Bernardo Neustadt and Mariano Grondona. Juliana was, according to Neustadt's own description, "the principle subject" of his nightly news show *Tiempo Nuevo* during the entire month of August in 1988.[145] Neustadt would later choose the case as one of the major highlights of his more than sixty-year career in journalism. It was an example of his "service to the people." In the words of journalist Horacio Verbitsky[146], "Neustadt and Grondona are activists who defend a style of life in a fitting way. For a decade, they produced the ideological justification for the atrocities suffered by Juliana's parents. They now take advantage of the tragedy's last byproduct and egg people on against the timid steps of reparation that have been taken."[147] One of their frequent guests to argue in support of the Treviños during this period was Florencio Varela, the lawyer described in Chapter 3 as defending military perpetrators.[148]

On the other side, human rights groups, labor unions, and progressive politicians and journalists united behind the *Grandmothers* and the biological

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[145] From taped videos of *Tiempo Nuevo* I watched. Neustadt described himself "profoundly moved" by the press conference when he first saw it. Immediately contacting Carmen Rivarola, he recounts their encounter: "During our conversation, her voice broke and I perceived then the drastic suffering the mother was bearing. Suddenly, some images came to my mind of my childhood and I convinced myself that I had to do something so that this girl wouldn't be torn away from those who have given to her so much love during ten years. Of course, the only thing that was on my side was to publicly expose my opinion and to open the doors of radio and television to the Treviño so that they could ask for justice."

[146] Verbitsky is an important figure in human rights in Argentina and will turn up in subsequent chapters.

[147] Página/12, August 11, 1988.

[148] Ramos Padilla also accused Varela of threatening him as they argued the case on television, telling him he would "soon have news" from Aldo Rico, the military officer who had recently attempted a coup. Varela's son was also the adviser to Judge Sañudo, who, consequently, revised Ramos Padilla's decision.

family. Jose Treviño eventually wrote to *Página/12* to complain about the newspaper's coverage of the case. He accused them of treating his wife and himself like "repressors." He made the accusation as an aggrieved and betrayed *compañero* who had previously admired the publication that was now attacking him: "This makes us very sad in the middle of the pain we already suffered in this case." He was, in his own words, "an old socialist journalist" who shared the politics of those now attacking him.[149] While acknowledging that military apologists were using the case, he defended his decision to seek the return of his adopted daughter.

Though the Treviños were not initially likened to perpetrators, they were caught in a paradoxical situation. They claimed their actions were motivated out of love for their adopted daughter. However, critics pointed to their actions as proof of the opposite. If they really loved her, they said, the couple would be more willing to give Juliana time with her biological family. Their desire to get their daughter back was seen as a sign of possessiveness. They were accused of treating her like an object and not a person. As one critic charged, "Solomonic law does not favor them."[150] Others suggested whether they loved their daughter or not was irrelevant. Noberto Bianco, a notorious military doctor who worked in the concentration camps, was singled out as someone who ostensibly loved the children he kidnapped so much that he fled the country with them to Paraguay. As the case became increasingly divisive, human rights activists increasingly likened the Treviños' behavior to military perpetrators. Even if the Treviños were not considered to be the authors of the crime, they were still its beneficiaries. A

[149] Ibid.
[150] *El Nuevo Periodista,* August 12 – 18, 1988.

sympathetic assessment of their behavior by critics was that "the possibility of losing Juliana drove them to despair." Or, in an alternate formulation, "Suffering played a dirty trick on the Treviños."[151]

The dispute over Juliana intensified under the media scrutiny. The resulting soap opera atmosphere of high intrigue and careening plot twists peaked on August 24th when Carmen Rivarola made a startling allegation on Neustadt and Grondona's *Tiempo Nuevo* program. She announced: "Juliana is not the daughter of Pedro Sandoval and Liliana Fontana."[152] A perceptive reader may have already noticed a minor yet significant discrepancy. Six pediatricians estimated Juliana's approximate birthdate as between May 18-20, 1978. Yet Juliana's mother was described as two-and-a-half months pregnant when she was kidnapped in July 1977. She would have been due in December or January. The five-month difference was a biological impossibility.

Prior to the televised revelation, the discrepancy had been acknowledged and explained. Rivarola first noticed the incongruity after the initial results in January 1988. According to the *Grandmothers'* official information, the child was described as born in January 1978. By the time the results were confirmed six months later the *Grandmothers* found an explanation. They reasoned that Liliana possibly miscarried and then became pregnant again in August when the couple shared a prison cell together after their disappearance. The couple accepted the explanation. In Jose Treviño's declaration in Ramos Padilla's on June 29 he referred to "a confusion of five months that they couldn't biologically explain" but disregarded it:

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Página/12, August 25, 1988.

> It doesn't matter how this biological unknown is explained. We are convinced that Juliana has finally found her family… Such conviction begins with the hemogenetic tests but we place equal or even greater value in the evidence we found. Family photographs perfectly match Juliana's physical features and habits. As a simple indication, I can point to her thin bones or some of her gestures that are reflected like an exact copy in family photographs of her kidnapped mother. Above all, Juliana's legs are so thin and of such a particular shape that we always say she has two toothpicks for legs in the same way that the Fontana said their daughter Liliana had bird legs.[153]

As the dispute became more embittered, the couple rejected their earlier conviction. While the media battle took place, a behind the scenes struggle over judicial jurisdiction was also taking place. Following his decision, Ramos Padilla had resigned his judgeship. An interim judge, Alejandro Sañudo had been appointed. The Supreme Court finally decided to remand the case back to Sañudo for review. On August 28, Sañudo announced his decision to transfer Juliana back to her adoptive parents. His decision was perplexing. He sanctioned Juliana's biological identity at the same time as he returned her to her adoptive parents. No biological doubt existed over her biological identity, he argued, because it had been accredited by a legitimate scientific service. Yet Sañudo decided the full adoption was "irrevocable."

[153] Declaration from June 29, 1988. Printed in Página/12, August 25, 1988.

A full adoption could only be annulled "due to moral or material neglect, moral danger, or some type of psychological risk." Since neglect was not alleged, Sañudo focused on possible psychological risks of returning her to the Treviño. Official court psychologists argued that a return to the adoptive parents could cause irreparable psychic damage. Another warned of a possible psychotic episode. Sañudo decided there was no risk. He also cited "the ten years of love" that the Treviños had given to Juliana as another reason for his decision. The affective ties concretized by an already established relationship trumped the rights of the biological family who had spent ten years actively searching for her. For Sañudo, the case involved "suffering" on both sides. This led to "a very uncomfortable situation" in which "one of the two families was going to end up suffering (*dolorida*)."[154]

The legal basis for Sañudo's finding was the Argentine law of *patria potestad* (parental authority) dating from 1903. Human rights groups criticized its application in this case. In the words of Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the law was based on an outdated understanding in which "one doesn't have to think of the child as a *person* but an *object* to be moved from one place to another." Children by default had no "rights" under such a law since it preexisted the child rights movement. For that reason, Norberto Liwski framed the decision as not only a rejection of the biological rights of the family members but also the rights of the child.

The Aftermath of the Decision

[154] Página/12, September 2, 1988.

While human rights groups considered the transfer of custody detrimental to Juliana's welfare, activists also considered it an attack against the *Grandmothers* and the entire human rights movement. Unions, professional associations, and political groups all rejected the decision. Sañudo's decision was widely described as Juliana's "third kidnapping." As the head of a labor union declared, "this is a campaign to discredit the work done by the *Grandmothers* in the restitution of their family members of the children of disappeared *compañeros*."[155] In a press conference, the *Grandmothers'* echoed this, arguing the decision was an attempt to prevent them from finding more disappeared children. Their conclusion was that the judge "wants to erase the connecting thread (*el hilo conductor)* of historical memory: the disappeared with life, our little ones."

"Historical memory," as conceived here, was passed down through generations. If the disappeared grandchildren were prevented from recovering their biological identities, historical memory's "connecting thread" would be cut. The memory of what occurred in the past could no longer be reproduced in the future. The disappeared grandchildren were the medium through which historical memory was transmitted. Other commentators framed the decision as a "denial" of memory. To take Juliana away from her biological family was to deny her biological identity. Denying her identity was a denial of what happened to her biological parents. To deny this was to forget about the disappearances.

[155] Página/12, August 31, 1988.

In an official statement, the *Ex-Disappeared* emphasized that the judge's decision would have contravened the desire of Juliana's biological mother. Another letter, by a group of six ex-disappeared women who had been held in the ESMA similarly emphasized the "desire of the mothers."[156] They based this on their own experience with women who had given birth in the ESMA. They pointed out that the women were deceived about the fates of their children because the military told them after their birth that they were going to be given to their grandparents.

The response of human rights activists to the ruling was framed by larger setbacks during this period. Frequent comparisons were made with the recently amnesty laws that ended the prosecution of military personnel for their crimes during the dictatorship. The Jewish Movement for Human Rights likened the decision to "a new '*punto final*' to prevent the *Grandmothers* from continuing their search." In such a way, the decision was seen, unavoidably, as a victory for the military dictatorship. In the words of journalist Herman Schiller, "the fascism that justifies Videla is rejoicing today."[157] That the Treviños's victory was considered inseparable from a victory for the military dictatorship in the minds of both those who supported and opposed them was, as psychoanalyst-playwright Eduardo Pavlovsky wrote, their "tragic destiny."[158] Emboldened by the decision, several military couples that had kidnapped children of the disappeared requested visits from the biological families who had recovered them. Whether they wanted to be or not, the Treviños were seen as the "battering ram that attempts to force itself

[156] Página/12, September 1, 1988.
[157] Página/12, August 29, 1988.
[158] Página/12, September 1, 1988.

in the public consciousness in an effort to destroy everything" that human rights groups had achieved up to that moment.[159] If this may seem like rhetorical overkill in retrospect, at this time each tenuous human rights accomplishment had been matched by a setback.

Horacio Verbitsky attacked "navel gazing" liberals from the upper and middle classes who supported the adoptive parents. They were only concerned with the adoptive parents' suffering in the present and not the disappearances in the past. The Treviños were seen as the privileged sector of Argentine society that had never fully come to terms with the events of the dictatorship. He lamented that they were not present when Sañudo transferred custody. He argued that they lacked "authority" to make judgments because they were "never present at a kidnapping" because they "are not police or they were in exile or they were busy with other things."[160] Verbitsky's implied criticism of those who were in exile sparked the objection of noted literary critic Beatriz Sarlo. She found it divisive to distinguish between Argentines who left the country during the dictatorship from those, like herself, who remained in the country. Juliana was another case in which "the consequences of the repression weight heavily upon us."[161]

The poet Juan Gelman, who had only recently returned from a decade in exile and whose son, daughter-in-law and grandchild were all disappeared, defended Verbitsky. He argued that the transfer of custody constituted a "kidnapping by civil decree of the daughter of parents kidnapped by military

[159] Página/12, August 28, 1988
[160] Página/12, August 28, 1988.
[161] Página/12, September 2, 1988.

decree."[162] Based on his experience of witnessing Juliana's return to the adoptive parents, he said he could now understand better the different forms of resistance, indifference, and complicities during the dictatorship. The people who agreed with the decision were likened to those during the dictatorship who acquiesced to the disappearances. Sarlo responded by arguing that calling Juliana's transfer a "third kidnapping" was an "abuse" of the term because it was carried out by judicial ruling, not by members of the military. She criticized the use of these "easy metaphors" and "slogans."[163] The controversy revealed two different ways of viewing societal complicity with the dictatorship. Gelman and Verbitksy's view was far more damning than Sarlo's more ameliorative position.

A custody battle between two families over a ten-year old girl became emblematic of a much larger issue. The struggle over Juliana was a struggle over how Argentina dealt with the past. In the words of Horacio Verbitsky, "The identity of Juliana is symbolic of the identity of this society."[164] To leave Juliana with the adoptive parents was to embrace the military position of leaving the past alone. According to political scientist Oscar Landi, Argentina differed from its Latin American neighbors and Spain because human rights comprised an integral aspect of its post-dictatorship transition into democracy. The amnesty laws and pardons represented a "tear" in the foundations of the state's legitimacy. Juliana's situation was seen as a microcosm of Argentina's. Just as the pardons and amnesty laws were tears in the democratic foundations of the Argentine state, sending her back to the adoptive family was argued to be a tear

[162] Página/12, September 4, 1988.
[163] Página/12, September 6, 1988.
[164] Página/12, August 31, 1988.

in her foundation as a person. “The restitution of Juliana in her own history is the decisive step for her to have a future. She is who she is and this cannot be ignored; to help her put her past in its place, first she needs to recover it.”[165]

Some commentators voiced mixed feelings about using Juliana’s case as a metaphor for the entire country. Beatriz Sarlo lamented how a ten-year old girl became a political symbol for the entire country:

> The case of Juliana has turned into a political battle. Perhaps this was inevitable. Her body is a *bandera* [flag but also a slogan] passed from hand to hand… The military dictatorship left a mark on the life of Juliana that is never going to be erased. The history of those years is condensed in Juliana: her grandparents looking for their daughter and then their granddaughter, the Treviños who wanted to know the truth and then could not stand it or its consequences. Many like Neustadt pass judgment over the destiny of the child but forget the origins of the situation. However this limit case is resolved, Juliana has already been mutilated. This ten-year-old girl has been converted into a slogan. This is a heavy weight for a child. Society uses her as a symbol of victory or defeat for positions that, for the moment, appear irreconcilable.[166]

The legal battle continued after she was returned to the Treviños. The adoptive parents rejected visitation rights for the biological family. They also continued to deny a biological link. Denying Juliana’s biological identity was seen

[165] Página/12, September 9, 1988.
[166] Página/12, September 6, 1988.

as a ruse because biological families were legally entitled to visitation rights. The *Grandmothers* insisted that "the judiciary should do all the tests that they need, because the more times they prove Juliana's identity, the better it would be better for her." The biological family unsuccessfully spent the rest of the year trying to regain custody. On the other side of the political spectrum, the Treviños were greeted as heroes. *Gente* magazine's list of the "personalities of the year" included Carmen Rivarola at number 24 ("the adoptive mother of Juliana Treviño: an Argentine woman who always believed in justice."), Judge Alejandro Sañudo at Number 13 ("for his sense of justice in one of the most controversial cases of the year") and Bernardo Neustadt, the journalist who championed the case, at number 20 ("one of the most seen and listened to in the country"). On Neustadt's television show *Tiempo Nuevo,* the last program of 1988 featured Carmen Rivarola. She thanked Neustadt and "the people" for their support.

In the next year, the Treviños continued their effort to disprove the biological link by using private laboratories. The couple had studies carried out in Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires. In May 1989, the Treviños successfully petitioned the Federal Chamber to order a review of the medical expertise. The results were confirmed a year later. Dr. Di Lonardo, the head of the National Genetic Data Bank, personally carried out the analysis in France using newly available PCR (polymerase chain reaction) technologies. Di Lonardo issued a final report in May 1990 confirming that the Treviños were correct. Juliana was definitively excluded from belonging to the Sandoval-Fontana family group. After these results, the Federal Chamber of San Martin quickly resolved the case and restored all rights to the adoptive parents. Sañudo had only resolved custody. Legal guardianship was still in limbo.

In the end, Ramos Padilla was blamed for misinterpreting the genetic results and attributing certainty to a percentage that should have been considered as inconclusive. The US specialists who devised the method mistakenly called it significantly high. After the case, a new standard for restitution was set: 99.99%. Among 10,000 random people, 8 individuals match the results. Given the population genetics in Argentina, this number could be even greater.[167] The conservative press used the case to called into question all of the *Grandmothers'* restitutions up to that moment. In the words of one editorial, the case "allows one to question similar cases in which decisions are based on expertise that today appears insufficient and whose consequences have put adoption law in crisis."[168] However, rather than questioning genetic technologies, their real target was the "environment of political and ideological prejudices linked to our recent painful past." The lesson Neustadt and Grondona drew from the case was similar. It "showed to all of Argentine society that people can be badly hurt in the name of ideology." Ideology, rather than the science, was blamed. Similar arguments are still being made today. During my fieldwork, I attended a trial against a medical doctor charged with kidnapping a child of the disappeared

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[167] The geneticist at the National Genetic Data Bank told me an even more significant problem existed. The "index of grandpaternity" that was being used at the time to verify filiations was discovered to be incorrect. US geneticists had devised the formula. It was adapted from already existing paternity tests. The mistake in adapting the formula came from the fact that in the original formula, the mother was known. Only the father's identity was in question. The geneticists who adapted the formula failed to consider this. In the end, the index of grandpaternity assumed half of the child's genetic information was known when it was not. The 98.91% that should not have been considered high enough to confirm a genetic link was not even that high. As it turned out, once the formula was corrected, the results were closer to 75%, a number that definitively excluded a biological link. I was unable to verify this in other accounts or published sources.

[168] La Nación, May 26, 1990.

who had been located several years earlier. During the defense, the lawyer for the doctor made the same argument. She challenged the reliability of the results because of the presumed ideology of the geneticists working at the National Genetic Data Bank who were assumed to support the *Grandmothers.*

However, rather than undermine the *Grandmothers'* cause, the case did not have any long term negative consequences for the organization. While HLA's reliability could be now called into question as a means of verifying identities, new technologies replaced HLA. In this case, geneticists used the DNA fingerprinting techniques that British geneticist Alec Jeffreys had pioneered in the mid-1980s combined with PCR technology. They would soon be implemented in the Hospital Durand. Geneticists stressed that rather calling into question any future results, Juliana's should strengthen confidence in their reliability.[169]

Juliana's restitution was the first carried out solely based on genetic evidence. In other cases, the evidence corroborated already existing circumstantial evidence: anonymous tips, approximate birth dates, etc. Yet the genetic evidence was necessary for the restitution because it was the only evidence judges considered authoritative and conclusive. At the same time, Juliana's case indicated that the biological evidence was not always reliable. However, it was the only case that resulted in a mistaken identification. It was also the only case in which the results contradicted known information (the state of pregnancy) and required the creation of a new explanation to account for the discrepancy.

[169] Página/12, May 27, 1990.

The case challenged many of the *Grandmothers'* precepts. Prior to the realization of the error, the restitution perfectly fit the pattern of what a restitution entailed. José Treviño stated that he did not need the scientific evidence to know that Juliana belonged to the Sandoval-Fontana family because of her close resemblance to her parents. Similar statements were also made in other cases of restitution. The construction of family resemblances was often considered reliable evidence of family belonging. However, family resemblances are constructed out of an already existing assumption of a relationship. At one point in an interview with two brothers of the disappeared (one who grew up with his biological family, the other who grew up with an adoptive family), I comment on their resemblance. They smiled. The older brother told me, "Yes, people tell us this all the time but I think people see what they want to see." In constructing family resemblances what is more important is prior knowledge of relatedness. Knowing that the two were brothers, I could find likenesses and describe how they looked alike. Knowledge of the biological link directed me to construct a family resemblance that I otherwise would not have noticed.

After the final confirmation of Juliana's identity in 1990, the case disappeared from the public eye. In the present, it is largely forgotten. The case does not appear in the institutional history of the *Grandmothers*. In one of her last interviews, Carmen Rivarola stated, "Juliana says that she does not want [the press] to speak more about her…She is doing well and is very happy but she doesn't want them to bother with her anymore." It was never known whether Juliana was the child of another disappeared couple. Shortly after the fallout of the case, the founder and original president of the *Grandmothers* resigned from the organization. Most of the figures that collaborated with her, including the

head lawyer and psychological team, were replaced. A mere mention of the case evoked bitter memories for many people so I ceased trying to delve any deeper into it. This chapter has been assembled primarily through archival research, including press releases and newspaper archives. Faded memories of the case were revived in 2006 when the restitution of the real child of Pedro and Liliana was announced, a son born in January 1978. However, most major newspaper articles that reported the restitution neglected to mention the case of Juliana.

The case of Ximena Vicario

The public scandal over Ximena Vicario's restitution materialized soon after the media storm surrounding Juliana Treviño's was ebbing. In January 1989, if one read Argentine newspapers one would encounter two distinct yet contradictory realities. The progressive press recounted the plight of Ximena Vicario. Ximena was kidnapped as a baby when she disappeared along with her parents. Left in an orphanage, she was snatched by a woman who worked there who lied to her and hid her from her biological family. In the meantime, Ximena's biological family tirelessly searched for her. When she was finally located, they struggled to reunite with her. If one read about Ximena, one read about the suffering of family members who spent years trying to locate her.

On the other hand, the "yellow press" of tabloids and nightly news shows described the grave injustice committed against Romina Paola Siciliano. Romina was a typical Argentine teenage girl living with a loving adopted mother who was separated from her against her wishes by a cruel and arbitrary judicial measure. She was then forced to live with a woman she did not know. If one read about

Romina, one read about her and her adoptive mother's suffering. Publications striving for a more journalistically 'objective' approach simply neglected to identify the girl's name at all.

The fight over Ximena led to inevitable comparisons with Juliana. Superficially, the resemblance was obvious. It was another case of a loving adoptive parent forcibly separated from her only child. It involved another parent without any direct ties to the military. It was seen as another example of judicial malfeasance, in which a judge abrogated a full adoption and changed custody to compel a teenage girl to live with her biological grandparent. Faced with the decision, the adoptive parent mounted a press campaign to contest it. A legal battle turned into a media scandal and opened a public debate. However, two key differences existed in this case. Initially, the case was more complicated than Juliana's. Juliana's voice was absent from the controversy over her restitution. What she thought was unknown. In this case, Ximena, two years older than Juliana and hence a teenager, vehemently declared her desire to remain with her adoptive mother. A second difference would turn out to be even more significant. Unlike the Treviños, this case involved an adoptive parent who not only knew of her daughter's origins but hid them from her. As a significantly less sympathetic protagonist, Ximena's adoptive mother's public campaign was the second time as farce to the initial case's tragedy.

On September 14, 1988, Aníbal Ibarra and Mariano Ciafardini, two District Attorneys appointed by the Attorney General to take charge of the search for and recovery of disappeared children publicly demanded the arrest of an unidentified adoptive mother of an unidentified daughter of the disappeared. The announcement was two weeks after Juliana Treviño's transfer back to her

adoptive parents. The bitter public battle over Juliana explained their effort to maintain anonymity. Only the federal judge in charge of the case, Juan Fegoli, was identified. Before his court was a petition from the biological grandmother demanding custody of a girl identified only as “Girl X”. The adoptive mother was charged with kidnapping and remanded into protective custody as she awaited trial.

Three and a half-months later, Judge Fegoli decided to transfer custody from the adoptive mother to the biological grandparent. The adoptive mother, in turn, fled to the press in an effort to stop another “kidnapping.” Ximena Vicario, the “Girl X” in question, was born May 12, 1976 to Stella Maris Gallicchio and Juan Carlos Vicario in the city of Rosario. On February 5, 1977, her mother brought her to Buenos Aires to the Federal Police Headquarters to pick up passports in order to leave to Spain. They were both kidnapped on the spot. Juan Carlos disappeared that same day from the family home in the city of Rosario. At the time of the scandal surrounding Ximena, they were described as not having any present political activities. Hours after the disappearance, the nine-month old baby girl was left in the staircase of an orphanage. She not only still had her identity papers with her but also a sign was draped around her declaring: “My name is Ximena Vicario and I am the daughter of guerillas.”

Susana Siciliano was a blood transfusion technician working in the orphanage. Single and childless, she decided to take Ximena as her own. She rechristened her Romina Paola Siciliano and received a full adoption later that year. She concocted a story of a maid working for her brother who abandoned her newborn. Meanwhile, her biological family was searching for her. They finally locate her in 1984 based on testimony given to CONADEP. The testimony

described Ximena's arrival at the orphanage and even identified her from a photograph the *Grandmothers* had been using for posters to diffuse information about the plight of their disappeared grandchildren. They subsequently traced Ximena to Sicilano. Before bringing a formal complaint to the judge, *the Grandmothers* approached her to see about the possibility of shared custody. Siciliano refused. The case was eventually turned over to Judge Fegoli. He ordered Ximena to do an HLA match with the presumed biological family. In March 1985, the results yielded a 99.82% inclusion.

After the HLA results in 1985, the judge granted visitation rights to the biological family but Siciliano was loath to fulfill them. Finally, almost four years later, on January 3, 1989, the judge decided to turn over custody of Ximena to her biological grandmother. The basis for his decision to take custody away from Susana was her fraudulent adoption. Unfortunately, an employee in the courthouse leaked a copy of the judge's decision to Siciliano the day before. Siciliano had planned to orchestrate a scandal in case this occurred. On the night of January 2, she called a press conference together to recount her plight and announced her refusal to comply with the judicial decision. Ximena appeared at her side during the conference and tearfully expressed her desire to stay with Siciliano. In front of the camera, Ximena stated Siciliano was her only mother. In a subsequent interview with a newspaper, she threatened to kill herself if the judge forced her to live with her biological grandmother.

The next morning, a police car showed up at Siciliano's home to compel Susana and Ximena to come to court. When they arrived, the media along with a crowd of supporters was gathered. The crowd surrounded Susana and Ximena as they refused to enter the courthouse. Siciliano hugged Ximena while

clenching a white rosary in her hands as they held on to a metal fence. Ximena sobbed and professed that she did not want to go to live with her grandmother. The tense and dramatic scene, captured in front of television cameras, led to a brief confrontation. After more than an hour, a group of national guardsmen forced them into the judge's chambers.

The judge explained to them the inevitability of the restitution and Sciliano left. Meanwhile, court doctors and psychologists spoke with Ximena about her refusal to go with her grandmother. Ximena was crying implacably but eventually was exhausted and, according to the psychologists's evaluation, accepted the situation. Both Siciliano and the media were blamed for provoking the situation. The media defended themselves by invoking the right to free expression. Siciliano argued she only turned to the media as a last recourse in order to mobilize public opinion. The *Grandmothers* denounced the "journalistic campaign" attempting to influence the case and criticized "the old manipulators of public opinion." The "old manipulators" were the same as in the Juliana case, Bernardo Neustadt and Mariano Grondona. Like Carmen Rivarola, Siciliano appeared repeatedly on the show during the month of January. She even followed a similar strategy of denying Ximena's biological identity.

Although drawing parallels with Juliana's case was a key tactic of their campaign, Juliana's adoptive parents rejected the comparisons. Carmen Rivarola, in turning down an invitation to appear on Grondona's show, differentiated her case with Siciliano's: "I disagree with what Susana Siciliano did. She knew that she was a daughter of the disappeared. The grandmother has all

the legal rights. Siciliano has none."[170] At the same time, she also acknowledged the difficulty and delicacy of the situation: "A 'package' was stolen. Now it should be given back. But the 'package' is a 13 year old girl." Despite Rivarola's rejection of the comparison, the mainstream media still treated the case as Juliana redux. Their dominant focus was on the adoptive parent's suffering over losing custody of her child and Ximena's suffering over losing her parent.

Unlike Juliana, Ximena had manifested a public desire to remain with her adoptive mother. She was a teenage girl forced to change residence against her will. As Siciliano's cousin told reporters, "The girl is in despair. Imagine, how after almost 13 years, they separated her from her mother…One has to keep in mind what the girl wants. They have no right to inflict so much damage upon her."[171] Ximena, was a teenage girl capable of making her own decisions. If she wanted to stay with her adoptive mother, her wishes should be respected. Siciliano's supporters pointed out that, like Juliana, she always knew she was adopted. That she knew she was adopted was considered sufficient. As another of Siciliano's cousins said, "She was never hidden the truth that she was adopted. My aunt told her that she wasn't her *madre de panza* (womb mother) but, yes, her *madre de corazon* (heart mother)."[172] Opposition to the restitution was thus framed around respecting her right to make her own decision and on the bond she already formed with her adoptive mother. This emphasis on individual choice deemphasized the importance of biological ties.

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[170] Página/12, January 10, 1989.
[171] La Nación, January 4, 1989.
[172] Ibid.

Already a teenager, the time Ximena spent with Siciliano could neither be erased nor easily assimilated. For this reason, human rights groups acknowledged the "complicated characteristics" of the case. Although still legally a minor, she was endowed with volition. Nevertheless, her will to stay with Siciliano was not considered to be genuinely her own. It was a product of Siciliano's influence and upbringing. The dilemma the *Grandmothers* faced was how to treat Ximena like an autonomous individual when she had been shaped by the woman who raised her. Those supporting her restitution grappled with this predicament.

> At 12(sic)-years old, a child has opinions and deserves to be heard. But it is also true that a child is brought up the way their parents raise them. At 12-years old, one has incorporated more than just a name and religion. At 12-years old, one is, in a certain way, the expression of one's elders; in this case, an appropriator.[173]

In the same way, Ximena's threat of suicide was considered not a product of her own volition. Chicha Mariani, the President of the *Grandmothers,* argued that children "do not have a suicide instinct" and blamed Siciliano for putting "the idea into her mind."[174] Having her say it on camera was an effort to provoke a scandal and sway public opinion. Ximena "has been used by those who say they love her," accused Mariani. Although Siciliano was the primary culprit, the lethargic pace of the justice system was also blamed. If the judge had immediately

[173] Página/12, January 9, 1989.
[174] Página/12, January 5, 1989.

restored her to her biological family when Ximena was first located four years earlier, none of this would have occurred. The intervening four years were sufficient time for Siciliano to influence Ximena while doing everything she could to prevent Ximena from forming a relationship with her biological family. Critics attacked Siciliano as a lonely spinster, a devoutly religious "old maid". Her upbringing of Ximena was correspondingly rigid and strict.

Siciliano's influence impeded Ximena from having the proper perspective required to make a choice of where she wanted to be. Only after her biological identity was restored to her could she be in any position to make that choice. As Horacio Verbitsky argued:

> Now Ximena is with her family. She is beginning to know who she is … She asks questions, she listens, she reasons. If, at a later time, she decides to return to Susana Siciliano, the family and the judges would approve. In that case, Ximena would be a whole person…[175]

Verbitsky's use of the concept of a "whole person" is striking here. What constitutes a "whole person" in the sense that he is using the term? With Siciliano, Ximena could not be a "whole person" since her life was predicated on lies and deceit. Within the existential psychological literature, wholeness is considered the foundations upon which an individual can be free to explore their personhood (Ewing 1990). It is a consideration of non-reductionistic aspects of personhood. Calls to recognize the "whole person" are often criticisms against

[175] Página/12, January 8, 1989.

medicine ignoring the "subjective" experience of illness and ignoring the spiritual or existential dimensions of personhood (Stewart 2003). Verbitsky was arguing that Ximena could not be a "whole person" without knowledge of her past. In this context, the argument was similar to those made by adoptees searching for their origins. In the influential words of adoption rights activist Betty Jean Lifton, the "journey of the adopted self" was a "quest for wholeness" (1994). In a similar sense, the *Grandmothers* described Ximena's restitution as a "return to life." It was the return of Ximena Vicario. However, the return of Ximena Vicario required the death of Romina Paula Siciliano. Ximena tacitly acknowledged this when she told interviews on the eve of the restitution: "They want to kill me."

The *Grandmothers'* psychological team closely monitored Ximena's restitution. After the initial turmoil, she had calmed down. In their press conference, the *Grandmothers'* described Ximena's psychological state in a positive light. "The girl feels well and has a desire to know the real history of her parents." In such a way, Ximena followed the pattern set by earlier cases. In subsequent weeks, Ximena rapidly adjusted to her new situation. By the second day, Ximena was already calling her grandmother "Granny" (*abue*) and began using her biological name shortly after. Within just a few weeks later, Ximena's restitution was declared a success. In the words of her grandmother, "Ximena is reconstructing her history and happily and peacefully adapting to her family."[176]

The *Grandmothers* considered the speed that Ximena adapted to her biological family remarkable given her initial resistance. Fernando Ulloa, a psychoanalyst who collaborated with the group, argued that the case and others

[176] Página/12, January 27, 1989.

like it had larger repercussions. Restitution imposed the truth of what happened during the dictatorship not only upon the children in question but also on all of Argentine society.[177] The cases of Juliana and Ximena marked the period in which debates over custody of the kidnapped children of the disappeared became a primary vehicle to address larger questions about the consequences of the dictatorship.

Siciliano continued her campaign to have Ximena returned to her. She even petitioned to have Ximena sent to a third party foster care rather than remain with the biological family. For her efforts, Susana Siciliano, like Carmen Rivarola the year before, was named a "person of the year" by *Gente* magazine. A minor media celebrity, she was photographed alongside President Carlos Menem and Military General Antonio Bussi, a military general responsible for disappearances in the northern province of Tucuman who eventually won an election to become governor there. The case worked its way through the Supreme Court until September when the Supreme Court resolved to leave permanent guardianship in limbo. According to Argentine law, grandparents could not be a party to "tutelary matters" (*incidentes tutelares*). It raised the possibility that Ximena could go back to Siciliano but, this time, Ximena refused. She wrote the judge a letter with a list of twelve reasons why she no longer wanted to see Siciliano.

At the time, Ximena's custody had still not been resolved. In January 1990, the judge who restored Ximena to her grandmother forced Ximena to spend a month-long vacation with Siciliano against her will. The *Grandmothers*

[177] Página/12, January 8, 1989.

lobbied legislators to reform the Law of *Patronato* to include grandparents among possible guardians of children when their parents were not present. After the forced vacation, Darwinia filed a complaint on behalf of Ximena to allow her to use her biological name and to award final guardianship so she would not be forced to spend more time with Siciliano. The case eventually went to the United Nations. On August 9, 1991 a judge ruled that the original adoption and her false birth certificate were invalid. Siciliano's visitation rights were also terminated that year at Ximena's request. It was not until 1993 that a federal court issued Ximena identity papers in her real name.

Siciliano appealed and, on February 3, 1995 Supreme Court of the Province of Buenos Aires declared the adoption invalid. It was the first time in Argentine history that an adoption was annulled. By this time, legal guardianship was no longer an issue since Ximena had already turned 18. Two months after the Supreme Court ruling, the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations criticized the Argentine legal system for their "unreasonable" delay in resolving the case. They also stated that forced visitations were a violation of Ximena's and her grandmother's rights and constituted a kind of psychological torture, a "psycho-affective involuntary servitude." Finally, the committee encouraged the Argentine state "persevere in its efforts to investigate the disappearance of children, determine their true identity, issue to them identity papers and passports under their real names, and grant appropriate redress to them and their families in an expeditious manner."[178]

[178] International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Communication No 400/1990: Argentina. 27/04/95.CCPR/C/53/D/400/1990. (Jurisprudence)

By the time they issued the ruling, most of the children of the disappeared that the *Grandmothers* were searching for had become adults. However, Ximena's initial public posture against the restitution heralded difficulties to come. One of the last custody battles occurred over the Reggiardo-Tolosa twins. The Reggiardo-Tolosa twins had been located in the hands of Samuel Miara, a notorious military torturer, in 1985. Once discovered, he fled with them to Paraguay. The *Grandmothers* attempted to have him extradited but the justice system was slow in responding. Finally, Miara was sent back to Argentina in 1989 and the twins underwent a genetic confirmation of their identity. They were originally believed to be the children of another disappeared couple and even referred to as the Rossetti-Ross twins before their restitution. They turned out to be the sons of another disappeared family, the Reggiardo-Tolosas. Identification proved to be more difficult because only one grandparent was alive. Geneticists had to carry out the identification in France where they had access to PCR technology.

A lengthy custody battle occurred after their identification. Four years later, in 1993, after briefly being placed in a foster home, the twins were sent to live with their uncle. However, by the time the restitution finally occurred, they were already 16 years old. They rejected their biological family and went on Neustadt and Grondona's television program – the same show that Siciliano and the Treviños went on – to proclaim their desire to go back to their parents. This case resulted in an even larger public outcry than the previous cases. Although the public reaction to the case was hostile at the onset, it eventually turned as human rights groups publicized Miara's atrocities. Eventually, the Reggiardo-Tolosa twins were placed in a foster home. When they turned 18, they went back

to live with Miara and his wife. This case marked the end of the initial stage of the *Grandmothers'* search.

Chapter 6: "Do you know who you are?" Radical existential doubt and scientific certainty

The activities of the *Grandmothers* revolve around the specific goal of locating and recovering their kidnapped grandchildren. As the previous two chapters detailed, in the 1980s this often resulted in legal battles with the families that had the children. By the mid-1990s, custody was no longer an issue since the children in question were legally adults. The *Grandmothers* understood that they needed to change their strategy. Influenced by arguments emerging out of the adoption rights movement, they believed that their missing grandchildren would have a natural, inchoate suspicion that the people who raised them were not their biological parents. Prompted by this suspicion, the grandchildren would search for their origins. This would lead them to contact the organization. However, many may have doubts but not know where to look. The *Grandmothers'* new strategy was to enhance the profile of the organization to help their grandchildren in their search. In order to attract more attention to their cause, they launched public campaigns that attempt to direct their grandchildren to contact the organization. With custody no longer an issue, the restitution that the Grandmothers now argue for is that of the "identity" of the individual. As such, their campaigns are framed around the concept of identity.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the *Grandmothers* expand their public campaigns to include cultural activities. They sponsor artistic competitions and organize festivals, conferences, and other events, inviting collaborations with artists, musicians, actors and social scientists. These collaborations are all organized around the general thematic of identity. They address both the specific situation of kidnapped children of the disappeared but also "identity" as it

is more broadly conceived. I argue that this change in strategy has had significant consequences. While specifically addressed to those with "doubts about their identity" to contact the organization, these public campaigns and events provide a forum for Argentines to question their identity both as individuals and as a nation. Beginning by asking young people to question their biological identities, these public campaigns end up posing larger existential questions to the entire population. In looking at such issues, this chapter will address how an organization that formed out of the dictatorship with the specific goal of locating and recovering their disappeared grandchildren has now become known as a national reference point for issues of identity.

This chapter addresses an apparent paradox in these public campaigns. These campaigns are not only directed at young people who already have "doubts about their identity" but aim to actively generate doubt. The *Grandmothers* promise the resolution of these doubts through the use of genetic technologies of certainty. While the *Grandmothers* promise the resolution of doubt, their campaigns promote forms of existential doubt that cannot be resolved by such technologies. The *Grandmothers'* campaigns are not only targeted at young people who already have doubts about their biologically identity; their campaigns aim to actively generate doubt. I will argue that these campaigns do not simply aim to generate doubt about individual biological identities but raise much larger questions. While specifically addressing those with "doubts about their identity" to contact the organization, these public campaigns and events provide a forum by which all Argentines are directed to question their identity both as individuals and as a nation. In addressing these issues, this chapter will examine how an organization that formed out of the

dictatorship with the specific goal of locating and recovering their disappeared grandchildren has become what is now seen as a national reference point for matters of identity.

"Do you know who you are?"

A young man wakes up, rises out of bed and heads into the bathroom. As he splashes water onto his face from the sink to stir himself out of slumber, he glances up at the mirror and is startled to confront someone else's reflection staring back at him. An off-screen narrator announces: "Mariano doesn't know that Pedro exists. Pedro exists, and his grandmother is searching for him."[179] Using the classic 19th century image of the double, the message is as follows: Mariano is not the person he thinks he is.

This is a television commercial (entitled "The Other Side of the Mirror") that first aired in the year 2000 as part of a publicity campaign launched by the *Grandmothers.* The commercial yielded impressive results. Within five days of first airing, it prompted over 240 people to contact the organization. They all believed they were potential children of the disappeared.

Similar to this commercial, mirror images are also used in an art installation that directly confronts the viewer with the possibility that they could be children of the disappeared. Debuting in 1998 and subsequently exhibited throughout Argentina and Europe, the installation is comprised of 173 photographs of the disappeared parents placed around the exhibit space at eye

[179] Thanks to Claudio Goncalves for a videotape copy of the commercial.

level with mirrors separating each couple. The mirrors allow viewers, as they proceed through the gallery floor, to directly confront themselves as a possible children of the disappeared by literally "reflecting" upon any resemblances that they may have with the people in the photographs. As the curator of the exhibit explained, "One Saturday afternoon, I noticed the Recoleta (the cultural center where the exhibit originally was shown) was filled with young people, and I thought that some of them could be the kids searched for by the *Grandmothers* that are now between 19 and 25 years old. This show is directed at them."[180] The underlying logic of the exhibit is that a child of the disappeared could unwittingly be in the room, stumble upon a photograph, notice a family resemblance between themselves and their parents, and contact the *Grandmothers*.

"Do you know who you are?" This is the question explicitly posed by many of the *Grandmothers*' campaigns. Those with "doubts about their identity" are directed to contact the institution. "Do not remain in doubt", these campaigns exhort young people, asking them to fundamentally question their social reality. They are told that the most-taken-for-granted knowledge they have about themselves – their name, their age, and their parents - may be fraudulent. Not only are their parents not their "real" parents but they have also deliberately hid this secret from them. This secret may directly or indirectly implicate them in the disappearance and murder of their biological parents.

Of the grandchildren who have found their biological identities by coming forward on their own accord (approximately 25 cases in total as of the present time), it would be difficult to single out a paradigmatic case since individual

[180] Clarín, November 19, 1998.

response varies greatly depending on the particular circumstances. But to give an example of what this process can entail, I cite the case of Horacio.[181] "Before coming to the *Grandmothers*, I grew up with a family where I had doubts that they were really my family," he opened our interview. His life story, as he recounts it, is structured by doubt.

> I grew up with them for 23 or 24 years, thinking I was their biological son, because this is what they told me. And, well, from adolescence, I always doubted my parents were really my parents because physically we were not very similar. But it wasn't just height or looks. More than that, it was how I was. I was an extremely sociable person. They were nothing like that. They were very closed off. Very different. Very conservative and provincial people.

According to Horacio, his feeling of doubt was not simply a product of physical difference– a striking disparity in height and a lack of family resemblances. He felt like he did not fit in with his family. His real feeling of doubt was caused by their radically different personalities. Outgoing and garrulous, Horacio could not see himself reflected in the people who raised him. These doubts nagged him over the years and finally culminated in his conviction that the

[181] Most children of the disappeared do not do interviews or only do so through the official channels of the *Grandmothers* organization. During the course of my fieldwork, I had six interviews with children of the disappeared and spoke informally with another five who did not want to be interviewed. In recent years, however, as they become older, they are becoming increasingly public figures (i.e. more likely to give public speeches and talks).

people who claimed to be his parents were not.[182]

When Horacio finally went to have his biological identity genetically confirmed, he was fully convinced that he was a child of the disappeared. He had even correctly surmised the identity of his biological parents by searching a photographic database of disappeared parents on the *Grandmothers'* website. A striking family resemblance led him to that conclusion. Subsequent genetic confirmation of his biological identity required not only taking up a new first and last name, but also a new date of birth as well in which he lost over one year of his life. He discovered his real date of birth was 1976 and not 1977 as his forged birth certificate falsely attested. Unlike some of the more difficult cases, Horacio seized upon his new identity. He made an almost complete break with his past, rupturing contact with almost everyone he knew except his girlfriend. Everyone in his family and in his neighborhood knew of his origins but had kept that information secret from him. Although they were not directly implicated in the actions of the military, the people who raised him had hidden his origins from him. As we spoke, Horacio vacillated between calling them his "parents" and "the people who raised me." He was self-consciously attempting to switch to the latter. Once during our interview, he caught himself saying the word "mother" and instantly corrected himself with "the woman who raised me."

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[182] In a 1909 essay, Sigmund Freud (1959) coined the phrase "family romance" for the phantasy that children have that their parents are not their real parents. According to Freud, this phantasy emerges out of two corresponding developments; the realization that one's parents are imperfect human beings with human failings and the feeling that one's filial affections are not fully reciprocated. The imaginary parents are often aristocrats or important people. With the drama of the children of the disappeared in Argentina, those who fit the profile of the missing grandchildren have a historical reality around which this phantasy can be constructed.

The Adoption Rights Movement and a New Strategy

In the press conference announcing his restitution, Horacio declared: "A real man does not exist without his real identity." A concern for the real is, as literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman has noted, a concern for authenticity (2002). Before Horacio found his biological identity, he was living an inauthentic life: he was not a "real" man. That "people need to know who they are" is an oft-repeated phrase of the organization's official discourse. This also forms one of the guiding assumptions of their campaigns: that an individual not only has a desire but a need to know their biological origins and within these origins, their real (and by "real," biological) identities are entangled. This premise originates out of developments in genetics in the late twentieth century; its more direct influence is the adoption rights movement in North America and Europe in the 1970's that argued for the rights of adopted children to know their biological identities.[183]

A tenet of the adoption rights movement is that in the course of an adopted individual's life, a need to know their biological identity will emerge and that they should be granted the unfettered right to access this information.[184] Even if these movements to recover biological identities are recent, it is argued

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[183] For an early example of this literature, see Triseliotis (1973) which details the early stages of this movement and the emergence of open adoptions. At the time of its publication, those who searching for their origins could be described as a "small and rather unusual group of adopted people"(ix).

[184] For an example of this literature, see Keith Griffith's *The Right to Know Who You Are* (1991). This book uses language extremely similar to the Grandmothers in its advocacy of reformation of adoption law. When he writes, "I believe most difficulties in Western adoption stem from two core issues: Treating children as possessions, and secrecy"(viii), these are both ideas similar to the Grandmothers have picked up upon in their own arguments.

that the need to know one's biological origins has always existed. This need is seen as timeless and universal and consequently is framed as a human rights issue. While these arguments from the adoption rights movement shape the *Grandmothers'* institutional discourse, the relationship in Argentina is reciprocal. As if in direct response to the question posed by the *Grandmothers'* campaigns - "do you know who you are?" - an NGO entitled "Who we are" (*Quienes Somos)* was formed in Argentina in 2002 to help individuals– in their own words – "recover their biological identity."[185] Theirs is a story complimentary to the *Grandmothers*', a story of falsified adoptions, cradle robberies, and black market babies. It forms part of a larger story encompassing international adoptions and illicit child trafficking where babies flow from poor countries with high birthrates to rich ones with low ones.

Once their grandchildren had reached the legal status of adults, the *Grandmothers* saw a parallel to their grandchildren's situation with adopted children who reached 18 years of age and attempted to locate their biological parents. Their assumption was that their kidnapped grandchildren would want to do the same as these adopted children. The difference, however, was that most of their missing grandchildren did not know they were adopted. The majority who had been located in the hands of military officers had been told that they were the biological children of the people who kidnapped them. The purpose of the *Grandmothers'* public campaigns was to make them question what they had taken for granted, to actively promote and generate doubt where it may not have existed. When the *Grandmothers* first met with the actors who went on to begin

[185] "Quienes Somos," http://www.ag-quienessomos.com.ar/index.html

the annual *Teatro X La Identidad* (Theater for Identity) festival, they told them their motivation for the collaboration: "Young people pay more attention to you actors. We need to set up (*instalar)* doubt"[186] The first play written for the *Grandmothers* was called *A Proposito de la Duda* (A Propos of Doubt) (Abuelas 2001). This idea of "setting up" or "installing" the subject is a pervasive one in the *Grandmothers'* discourse, one that was reinforced with my interviews with the individuals responsible for the group's campaigns.

The Marketing of Doubt

The *Grandmothers'* promotion of doubt through their campaigns and their use of genetics to resolve these doubts can be seen as broadly analogous to how genetic technologies are being used globally to resolve doubts about paternity. During my stay in Argentina, a debate erupted in the media over the introduction of "home paternity kits" which allow fathers to verify if their children are really their own without going to a blood center or DNA laboratory. These technologies are considered more controversial than previous ones because their accessibility and ease enable doubting dads to verify their paternity without their partners' consent or even knowledge. All they have to do is pluck a strand of their hair and the child's in question and mail them to the lab and wait for the results. Like in the *Grandmothers*' campaigns, having doubts and uncertainties about the biological identity of one's child is considered a negative state of being. Genetics is viewed as the only means to positively resolve this doubt. As one

[186] *Tercer Sector,* September 2001.

male Argentine writer states in an article on the topic: “To know that your son is yours is the only irrefutable truth that a man needs in life.”[187] Similar to the *Grandmothers*, the paternity testing literature also speaks of doubt via a certain set of markers, in particular questions of physical resemblance of children to their putative parents. So, in that sense, both actively promote doubt by calling such resemblances into question. While the *Grandmothers* ask, “do you know who you are?” paternity tests play on the question, “do you know who your child is?”

The promotion of doubt through the promise of its resolution reflects how technologies of certainty themselves generate conditions of uncertainty[188] (Fonseca 2004). Paternity tests are marketed by encouraging doubts about paternity. The *Grandmothers’* campaigns encourage young people to doubt that their parents are really their parents. However, the *Grandmothers’* public campaigns should be distinguished from the marketing of paternity tests. Paternity testing has been criticized for causing harm by generating unhealthy or negative forms of doubt and for prioritizing genetic over social or psychological relationships (Kaebnick 2004). They create suspicion in couples and encourage men’s fears that their children are not really theirs. On the other hand, I will argue in the following pages that the doubt the *Grandmothers* are promoting is a different kind of doubt. The *Grandmothers* are promoting a positive doubt that generates self-reflection and self-contemplation. This healthy form of doubt is intended to extend beyond the individual cases of the disappeared grandchildren and is meant to encompass all of Argentine society.

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[187] *Veintitres*, June 10.

[188] For example, as Jenkins, Jessen, and Steffen write, “Despite its goals and intentions, western biomedicine cannot help but sow the seeds of new uncertainties.”(2005:25)

Mariana Pérez, a child of the disappeared who grew up with her biological grandmother and who located her brother recently in 2001, wrote a text for *Teatro X La Identidad* (Theater for Identity), the *Grandmothers'* annual theater festival. This text also accompanies many of their events, publications, and publicity materials. It was publicly read during both the theater and music festivals I attended in 2004.

> To be a young disappeared person is to not know who one is. It is to believe that the person one calls mother is mother and the one called father is father. It is to be born between 1975 and 1980...It is to believe that if there are no photographs of your pregnant mother or of yourself when you were a baby, it is simply because they didn't take those photographs. It is to not look much like the rest of your family. Up to this point: couldn't you be a young disappeared person? Couldn't almost all of us?

The question posed by Mariana is puzzling, seemingly paradoxical. How could "almost all of us" be a child of the disappeared if it means fulfilling the criteria she cites above? Born between 1975 and 1980, not seeing baby photographs and looking drastically different than the rest of one's family does not include many Argentines. I argue that this rhetorical sleight of hand is not accidental. The slippage between the specificity of the cases of kidnapped children of the disappeared to the universality of the "all of us" is a deliberate strategy. Two slogans accompany all of the *Grandmothers'* publicity campaigns and promotional materials. The first states straightforwardly "if you have doubts

about your identity *and* think that you are a child of the disappeared, get in touch with the *Grandmothers*" (emphasis added) followed by their email and telephone number. The other declares more ambiguously the following: "If you have doubts about your identity *or* think that you are a child of the disappeared, get in touch with the *Grandmothers*"(emphasis added).

Why the "or"? Having "doubts about one's identity" in the broadest possible sense is generically applicable to everyone. On the other hand, having doubts about one's biological identity and believing one could be a child of the disappeared is demographically confined to a small subset of the population. The "or" implies that the doubt the *Grandmothers* are promoting through their campaigns is something they want to be applicable to everyone. This slippage comprises a major component of the institution's discourse on identity. For example, a social scientist speaking at a conference on identity I attended in April of 2004 sponsored by the *Grandmothers* paraphrased a child of the disappeared saying "our case is not so different as everyone else's. Sure, we went through something messed up (*algo jodido*) but, well, everyone does." The social scientist used the quote as a catalyst to discuss the search for one's identity more generally. The implication is that the kind of existential or identity crisis that children of the disappeared go through when they find out their biological identity is only an extreme version of a process that everyone goes through.

During the course of my fieldwork, I was repeatedly told by family members and human rights organizations that the *Grandmothers* are considered a "reference point" in Argentina. For example, I saw the mayor of Buenos Aires speak at two of the *Grandmothers'* events. Both times, he said: "The *Grandmothers* are an obligatory reference in a society with few reference points."

He then proceeded to speak about their work in developing the "right to identity."

The *Grandmothers'* role in the creation of the "right to identity" is their most oft-cited accomplishment. This right was formally recognized and enshrined in Article 8 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989. The article was, in large part, due to the lobbying of the *Grandmothers*. It obliges states to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity (name, nationality, and family relations) and to provide assistance and protection in re-establishing the right if it is violated. As the *Grandmothers'* promotional literature explains it: "The right to an identity is the right to know who you are. The right to a name, a nationality, a history."

Although the "right to identity," as defined by the United Nations, has a very specific meaning, the *Grandmothers* employ the concept as a multiple signifier. In discussion, they acknowledge identity to be a "broad term" and employ it in distinct ways with often overlapping meanings. The "right to identity" as a narrowly legalistic entity is a juridical identity circumscribed over a biological identity. However, the *Grandmothers* refer to identity and the right to identity in multiple ways. In addition to a juridical and biological identity, I classify their use of identity as follows: a psychological identity, a cultural identity, a national Argentine identity, a political identity (the political beliefs of the disappeared) and a regional Latin American identity (often drawn in sharp contrast to US identity). What is evident in this is the far-reaching meaning identity has in both popular and academic usage.

As I have already discussed, the *Grandmothers*' public campaigns promote doubt through the interpellation of those with "doubts about their identity." At the same time, many of their campaigns are organized around the

production of works of art that relate to identity in these broadly conceived terms. For this reason, I was told numerous times that the *Grandmothers* are "identity promoters" The *Grandmothers'* divide their campaigns into four primary areas, all organized around the thematic of identity: *Sports for Identity, Music for Identity, Theater for Identity* and *Arts & Culture for Identity*. *Sports for Identity* is the only area that functions exclusively for publicity purposes.[189]

The other campaigns not only aim to diffuse information but to produce art and knowledge. As such, the explicit goal is not only the production of doubt but also the production of a discourse around identity. In their words, the aim is "to promote discussion about the problematic of identity in the field of artistic expression." As "promoters of identity", the *Grandmothers* act as patrons of the arts. Festivals provide a performance space for theater and music. Artistic contests framed around broadly defined issues of identity are judged by a jury composed of members of the *Grandmothers* along with professionals in their respective field. These events provide artists with a space to exhibit their work and, in so doing, declare their solidarity and commitment to the *Grandmothers'* cause. Such contests have included everything from photography, choreography, tango lyrics, short films, literary non-fiction, and even architecture and design. The resulting events have no fund-raising purposes since attendance is free. During my fieldwork, these events were extremely well

[189] This campaign revolves around members of the organization posing with athletes during games or practices with a banner declaring the slogan, "don't remain in doubt" along with the *Grandmothers* name and telephone number. Not only at soccer games, but they have posed with athletes from sports as diverse as basketball, woman's hockey, judo, and men's volleyball in addition to the Olympic team. Athletes create a positive association with the organization and are often photographed reading the *Grandmothers'* monthly newsletter.

attended. Almost every single one I attended – from theater to music to photography - was packed to capacity. While many works directly address the issues of the disappeared and the kidnapped grandchildren, this is not necessarily a prerequisite for submissions. For example, the call for submissions for the *Tango por la identidad (*tango for identity) contest described the requirements as follows: “the sole subject for the lyrics is ‘Identity,’ understood in individual or socio-cultural terms (who we are as a people and as a society).”

The *Grandmothers* also actively promote the right to identity through education campaigns. Their educative materials are distributed in Argentine schools through a recently launched initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The objective is to not only educate children about the atrocities of the dictatorship and their own particular plight but more generally to inform children about the “right to identity’ that they have and can exercise. Through my interviews with members of the organization, a recurring pattern was a repeated insistence that the “right to identity” was for everyone – not just for the kidnapped children of the disappeared. In an interview with a local newspaper, the president of the governmental organization officially responsible for handling the processing of cases of disappeared grandchildren and the daughter of the president of the Grandmothers expressed her general annoyance that this right is often only understood in relation to the children of the disappeared: “Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? These three questions will continue being foundational for human beings. If whoever among of us cannot calmly and truthfully respond to them, then it would be impossible for them to

live."[190]

This final assertion is puzzling. Obviously, many people cannot truthfully respond to these questions and find it possible to live. Specific to the *Grandmothers*, there are a handful of cases of presumed children of the disappeared who refuse to have their biological identities verified. They assert their right not to know who they "really" are. Juliana is a child of the disappeared who was raised by her grandparents and is searching for her kidnapped brother with the *Grandmothers*. She works for the organization in the "Area of Spontaneous Presentation." Unlike the majority of cases that have no clear leads as to the grandchild's whereabouts, information exists that suggests the location of her brother. Based on testimonies and circumstantial evidence, a military doctor named Norberto Bianco was believed to have taken her brother whom he named Pablo. Bianco also has a daughter who is believed to be a child of the disappeared. When this was first discovered in the 1980s, he escaped a warrant for his arrest and fled to Paraguay, a country then harboring many fugitives from the Argentine military. A cumbersome legal process ensued. When Bianco was finally extradited to face charges of kidnapping, the children were already too old to be sent back with him. They were given the option of deciding what they wanted to do and both publicly declared that Bianco and his wife were their parents and they did not wish to return to Argentina. Some years later, Juliana journeyed to Paraguay to meet with her possible brother to try to convince him to carry out a genetic confirmation of his identity. She eventually

[190] La Voz del Interior, January 26, 2003.

convinced him to meet. She describes their encounter.[191]

> It was such a strange sensation to open the door and be able to see him. It was so strange. I always tried not to think about it. I knew there was a possibility he was my brother, but I couldn't really think that he was my brother. The only thing that could confirm this was a blood test. My brother was named Ignacio. I was looking for Ignacio. If Pablo was Ignacio, good, but, if not, I'm looking for Ignacio. When I arrived, it was a strange sensation. There was the uncertainty of not knowing if he's my brother or not.

According, to Juliana, the uncertainty of their status framed their interactions. She told him: "If you are my brother, more than anything, I want to hug and kiss you. I need to hug my brother and cover him with kisses. But I don't know if you are. The hug is not the same if you are or not." According to Juliana, he responded as follows:

> He said to me that because he was studying medicine, he considered himself a humane person (*humanitario*) and he was going to help me. He was going to do the test but in time. Not at the present moment, because he had some things to resolve first. But if he did go through with the test, he would do it only as a favor to me because I was the one who had the identity crisis, not him.

[191] This information was drawn through Juliana's interview with *Memoria Abierta* and my own interview with her.

Some time later, she returned to Paraguay for a second meeting. This time, the encounter was more relaxed.

> When we spoke of the matter of the test, he said that he did not have the time to travel to Buenos Aires. I told him it was not necessary. There are two ways of doing the test. One is the legal way for the purposes of the justice system but the other is a counter-proof we do in *Grandmothers*. We can end the doubt between us. I brought everything that's needed." Faced with this, he said no. He said "it is not a matter of time or that I'm scared of a needle prick - that doesn't scare me. My fear is that the day that I have the results that it's going to change me completely." I understood what he was saying but I said, "you can stay here, living here; you don't have to come with me." He said: "I wouldn't, but I'm referring to something else when I say my life would change."

Pablo eventually told Juliana that he had long suspected he was a child of the disappeared. Bianco had informed him at a young age that he was not his real son. Why, then, would Pablo refuse to have confirmation of his identity when he admits tacit knowledge of what the test will confirm. How can he be afraid of a truth he already surmises and admits to? Pablo's predicament baffles many. "How can somebody not want to know who they are?" This is the question posed repeatedly not only by members of the organization but by others as well whenever the topic came up in casual conversation. The problem arises out of the organization's assumption that all people need or want to know "who

they are" biologically and that they will be unable to live in perpetual doubt.

The Moral Authority of Scientific Knowledge

Pablo's refusal to have his identity confirmed genetically does not entail a rejecting the importance of knowing his biological identity. Just the opposite, Pablo's refusal reveals the moral authority and power of scientific knowledge.[192] That genetics is imbued with the power of revealing hidden truths is part of the ideology of contemporary genetics. Even more, the secrets it unlocks and the truths it reveals are instilled with the power of personal transformation. It is a knowledge that is seen to have the power to fundamentally change the way individuals think about themselves. Pablo's statement that he is afraid that his life will change with the genetic results is indicative of this. While Pablo admits to knowing that he is not the biological son of the people who raised him, he will not really and truly "know" this until he has the genetic confirmation attesting to it. Only genetics can provide him with this certainty of who he "is" and, with it, the truth about himself. What is evident in this is the belief that genetics can solve mysteries and unlock secrets – the mysteries and secrets of our origins - and thus provide the truth. This truth it provides is the truth of who we are as human beings. It is a genetic truth, a pure and uncontestable truth held to be of a higher order than other truths.

The idea that genes can provide "the truth of who we are" is part of

[192] Here, at the very least, one can suggest that the fact that he is studying medicine is indicative of how he is not unaware or unfamiliar with this knowledge..

popular understanding of genetics and kinship. A recent cover story in *Newsweek* on "Genes and Family" provides a paradigmatic example of this view in North America. [193] "From health to history, the science of DNA is changing the narratives of people's lives as they discover who they really are and where they really come from. By *unlocking the secrets in our blood,* we are tracing our genuine family roots…"[194] The same is occurring with recovered children of the disappeared. However, in these cases, it is not simply a matter of accepting the popular genetic ideology, the belief that the substance of one's identity is located in the genes. It is accepting the genealogy attached to that identity. To quote again from the *Newsweek* article, "Human history lives in our genes. The DNA in each of our cells not only dictates the color of our eyes, it also contains the footprints of our ancestors"[195]. In this case, the history that is 'living in the genes' is not one of distant ancestry (i.e. whether one descended from Vikings or Visigoths) but of the recent past. For Pablo to accept his genetic identity, he needs to accept the historical events that led him to be raised by the military doctor he considers his father. The crime committed against him and his biological parents would be made explicit by a genetic confirmation of his identity.

While Pablo is left in perpetual doubt,[196] the situation is reversed for others. These are the cases in which genetics resolves doubt but in an undesired way. The *Grandmothers*' literature speaks of a tacit knowledge or

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[193] For social science perspectives on the relationship between genetics and family genealogy, see Nash (2004).
[194] *Newsweek*, February 6, 2006. See also Elliott (2003).
[195] See also Marks (2001) for the relationship between identity, kinship and genetics.
[196] Not anymore. Several years later, Pablo finally accepted to confirm his identity genetically. In February 2007, his restitution is announced. As it turned out, Pablo was not Juliana's brother. He is the son of another disappeared couple.

unspoken suspicion individuals have that they are children of the disappeared. Like Horacio, they speak of a lack of family resemblances, an internal, intuitive feeling or implicit knowledge they have that they are not who they were raised as. When I asked Horacio how I could be certain that my parents were really my parents when I never had biological confirmation of our relationship, he responded with the following tautology: "When you know, you know. You can feel it inside." During the press conference that announced the restitution of his identity, Horacio stated the following,

> A perverse ideology took away our right to identity but I invite all young people who have doubts about their origin to come to the *Grandmothers* because we all have the right to know who we are. I had something inside of me that said to me I should search for something more and I am sure that everyone who has gone through the same thing as me also feels it.

But this "something inside of me" can be deceptive. As we saw in the last chapter, family resemblances can be misleading and this kind of intuitive knowledge can be illusory. In the *Grandmothers'* institutional ideology, only a genetic confirmation can bring certitude and, with it, truth and self-knowledge. For example, Alba is searching for her niece, the daughter of her disappeared sister. She recounts the following story:

> We had hopes that a girl was my sister's daughter. All the information we had [including that her father worked in one of the concentration camps

> around that time] said yes but the test said no. I'm living through a moment of great frustration. It pained us deeply. We were almost convinced. In spite of everything, all signs seemed to say yes. We had already met her and it was like we had already incorporated her into the family. Okay, my son said, she's not Pati's daughter but she's part of the family. Okay, but it's not the same. Many grandmothers have lived this illusion and frustration.[197]

When discussing these similarities, she says they were found in "her physical resemblance, her way of being - how she speaks, the gestures. She looks very similar and she is similar in spirit but, well, the analyses are what tell us the truth. We saw this girl for the first time and it was like we had been together our entire lives, as if we had known her our entire lives."

"All human beings have the right to know who they are." This is the *Grandmothers'* foundational claim. A "Right to Identity" in this sense is a right to self-knowledge, a right to the truth. However, identity is not only held to be a right but also an obligation. The *Grandmothers* have been lobbying to make genetic identification of presumed children of the disappeared compulsory. For Pablo, this is not relevant since he is out of Argentine jurisdiction in Paraguay but there are several cases in which the presumed grandchildren, now adults, have refused to have their identities confirmed. In these cases, the *Grandmothers* have argued for a compulsory extraction of blood to verify who they are. It is their responsibility to know who they are whether they want to or not. The

[197] This account is also drawn from Alba's *Memoria Abierta* interview and my subsequent interview with her.

Grandmothers argue that coercion by the adoptive parents is the only way to explain their possible grandchildren's refusal to find out who they are. It is not possible that they do not want to know the truth because it is assumed to be a truth that everyone needs to know.

Truth and Uncertainty

This conception of truth is a truth that is located in the body. In such a way, it is a truth that can be extracted from it. As Didier Fassin and Estelle D'Halluin write in a recent article on medical certificates for asylum seekers, the body "is the place in which individuals' truth about who they really are is experienced"(2005:597). Although this conception of extractable truth finds its present manifestation in genetics, it is not new. It is a conception of truth that forms part of Western epistemological tradition. In *Torture and Truth* (1991), classicist Page Dubois traces the roots of Western juridical constructions of truth to the widespread use of torture to extract confessions from slaves during the classical Greek period.[198] The idea of truth that is hidden, that is a secret, is historically linked to the practice of torture. Many have commented that the pervasive and horrific torture of the disappeared by the Argentine military can be linked to their construction of an enemy. The truth of an invisible enemy in the body politic could only be found through the torture used to extract information or confessions (Dubois 1990).

Compelling full-grown adults to give blood without their consent allowed right-wing editorialists and television commentators to maliciously point out what

[198] It is also the title of a recent work by Mark Danner (2004) that examines the use of torture by the U.S. military in Iraq.

they saw as an ironic contradiction. They accused the *Grandmothers* of acting like the dictatorship by embracing compulsory tactics. This position is nonsense. The tactics of the *Grandmothers* are not the same as the dictatorship and setting up any kind of moral equivalence between the two is offensive. I only wish to draw out the underlying conception of truth. That the two are similar only signals that both the military dictatorship and the human rights organization are part of the same epistemological tradition.

The military dictatorship's actions resulted in the production of uncertainty. The disappearing of political dissidents was a means of producing radical uncertainty among family members trying to ascertain the whereabouts of their missing family member. An unidentified group of men entered individuals' residence and took them off to an unknown destination at gunpoint. The government and the military denied all involvement. A notorious quote by the military dictator Jorge Videla made to a foreign journalist described the disappeared as being neither "alive nor dead…simply disappeared." The uncertainty of this status was a source of suffering for family members of the disappeared during the dictatorship as they attempted to ascertain their fate. Many family members believe that causing this uncertainty was a deliberate tactic by the military dictatorship. It was aimed at paralyzing family members from taking any kind of action.[199]

Even after the fall of the dictatorship, uncertainty still existed whether they

[199] If the family member was still alive and they took action on their behalf to have them released, the fear was that it could lead to the military executing them. Officials from the dictatorship would frequently tell family members to "go home and wait" or "go to church and pray" when they attempted to find out any information.

were alive or dead. It often was a long process for family members to finally accept that their loved ones they had been searching for had been killed. Some were never able to do so. As one grandmother told me, "[the military] planned for us to suffer eternally until the last day of our lives." For many, this uncertainty was far worse than knowledge that they had been murdered. This is why one of the primary goals of some human rights organizations is to ascertain the whereabouts of the bodies through exhumations, forensic analysis, and genetic identification.

All taken-for-granted aspects of social life were thrown into question by the dictatorship. In suggesting that the *Grandmothers* campaigns are projecting the doubt and uncertainty that they themselves were made to feel, I do not wish to be misunderstood. The doubt that the Grandmothers are promoting through their campaign is not the doubt and uncertainty imposed by state terror. The doubt and uncertainty provoked by the dictatorship was meant to be paralyzing for family members. The *Grandmothers'* doubt is meant to provoke introspection and self-contemplation. In the *Grandmother*'s campaigns, the experience of doubt and uncertainty about oneself is viewed as not only a necessary but also as a positive experience. It is viewed as part of a process that all people should go through. To continue with the text quoted above by Mariana Pérez: "To be a disappeared child is *to not even suspect who you are***.** To suspect, to question, to find out is already to begin to stop being one." Or, as the *Grandmothers*' message from the year 2000 states, "We can doubt many things but no one should be left with the doubt over whether it is good or bad to say to a young person who are their biological parents and grandparents." To understand why they view this existential doubt as a fundamentally positive experience, one

needs to describe the experience of members of the organization after the loss of their children.

All human rights groups appeal to certain universals of human experience. One of the universals that the *Grandmothers* employ is that of the grief of a parent who has lost a child. The loss of a child is considered the most painful experience that any human being can go through. “People who lose their parents are orphans but there is no name for a parent who has lost a child.” This is heard among family member groups in Argentina but is used in other contexts like 9/11 commemorations. In looking at the psychological effects of suffering among family member groups in Argentina, a discourse of trauma is sometimes used but I found that family members are more likely to describe their experience in terms of facing a “limit situation.” A “limit situation” is a concept developed by the existential philosopher Karl Jaspers in the early 20th century. Its usage in Argentina originates out of the work of Victor Frankl.[200] Frankl was a Holocaust survivor who, in his most famous book, the worldwide bestseller *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1997), wrote about how he was able to meaningfully reconstruct his life after his experience in concentration camps. In the classic existential literature, a limit situation refers to a crisis a person faces that is caused by the prospect of one’s own death or mourning the loss of a loved one. Faced with such a situation, they discover that they have been living inauthentic lives and must find the means to live more authentically and discover within themselves the power to do so.

[200] Frankl’s work was extremely popular in Argentina and widely disseminated, including a large Logotherapy Society. Shortly after the fall of the dictatorship, in a brief span between 1985 and 1986, Frankl was conferred 7 honorary doctoral degrees from Argentine universities.

The narratives of many family members follow this exact trajectory. They speak about how one is able to overcome (*superar*) the loss of a child. They are able to do this through a process of self-transformation in which "ordinary" women become public activists fighting not only for their children but also for more general issues of social justice. The life histories of many family members are marked by such a transformation. In the words of one grandmother, "grief or suffering sometimes destroys you but sometimes it creates you. It created me." The search for their children was the only motivation to stay alive after the disappearance. According to Elsa, when she got news of her daughter's disappearance, she became very ill with a fever. She was in bed for fifteen days - "then I realized that if I died, the children would be lost forever." When she made this realization, the fever diminished, she got out of bed and embarked on the search for her daughter and her granddaughter. In the institutional self-representation, the Grandmothers are patient *luchadoras* (strugglers). Most importantly, they never gave up and pursue their search for their missing grandchildren with tenacious persistence. Confronted by an unprecedented situation, they developed new methodologies, scientific advances (the development of the "Index of Grandpaternity" and the National Genetic Data Bank), new ways of thinking, and even a new right. An emphasis is placed on creation. Personal development and self-discovery frames their narratives.

The transformation only occurred after their initial feelings of uncertainty in the aftermath of the disappearance. When the search begins, they speak of confusion and not knowing where to look, of feeling alone in the world and as if what happened only happened to them. A common metaphor is that of putting together the pieces of a puzzle (*rompecabezas*). The search for the missing

family member becomes a kind of existential quest. The initial search is the search for the missing children and grandchildren. This later becomes a search for information about what happened to their children after their disappearance. They wish to locate their bodies so that they can be buried. Ultimately, there is a search for justice and accountability.The result is a personal transformation. The paradigmatic transformation is that of a middle class housewife or teacher uninvolved and uninterested in politics to internationally renowned human rights activist struggling for justice for not only their children but also for more general issues of social justice. This requires a movement from the private domestic sphere to the seizing of public space. The quote above "suffering created me" hints at a born again rhetoric. This is clearly delineated in many of the group members' narratives. In such an account, there is a "before and after," as a "new person" emerges after the disappearance.

This "new person" can also be seen to connect the parent with the political project of their disappeared children. As part of their leftwing utopian revolutionary aspirations, the disappeared were attempting to "create the new man." In that sense, the transformation of parents of the disappeared, as they relate it, is not only a personal one but a political one as well. A mental health team that I spoke to about this told me it was the realization of latent abilities that they were previously unable to develop in a patriarchal country. Most were housewives or schoolteachers.[201] In the process, the classic equation of children learning from their parents is reversed. What counts is what the parents learned from their disappeared children; a lesson only learned after the disappearance.

[201] The two presidents of the Grandmothers through the course of the organization's history were both schoolteachers.

According to one *Grandmother*, “It was difficult for me to understand my son. But he taught me many things. Everything I know now and who I am now, he taught me. I’m another person; I’m not the same as before he disappeared. I’m a different person, and I think in a different way. He taught us - me and my husband - many things.”

Children of the disappeared who were not kidnapped by the military and therefore raised by their biological family have a similar “born again” discourse of self-transformation. They speak of becoming a different person after they find out about their parents. This process begins when they embark on a quest for information about their parents as well as a search for their remains. This involves seeking out companions and old friends of their parents who can provide them with information. Many say that this search is what made them who they are as human beings today - that embarking on the search was part of a transformative experience. This is particularly important for many children of the disappeared who were not informed by their biological relatives about what really happened to their parents. For example, one daughter of the disappeared was told by the relatives who raised her that her parents had died in an accident. When she was a teenager, she found out what really happened to them. Upon finding this out, she says: “It changed everything for me. I don’t feel like I continued being the same person. I was a very limited person. I don’t think I’m the same.” Much like in Christian notions of being “born again”, the idea of rebirth is intimately connected with ideas of finding the truth. Once again, the underlying belief in truth having a transformative power is present.

However, similar to their use of identity, the *Grandmothers* invoke multiple conceptions of truth. First, there is truth as scientific evidence, a truth held to be

objective and independent. This is a biological or genetic truth. But the Grandmothers bridge this notion of truth with another conception of truth. This is the "speaking truth to power" truth of the social sciences. This is not a truth that is "discovered" or buried but, in the parlance of the literature, it is constructed. Meeting with human rights groups in December of 2003 to pass a decree authorizing the creation of a National Archive of Memory, President Kirchner stated that Argentina was "at a turning point – we can continue living with doublespeak and hypocrisy or we continue advancing decisively in the construction of our truth." When I first heard him say this, it struck me as an odd statement. Here was the president of a country speaking of the "construction of truth" as if he were a philosopher of science. But as my fieldwork progressed, I realized that the rhetoric he was employing came directly out of the language of human rights groups. Human rights organizations and theorists in Argentina frequently use a constructivist language in reference to truth and collective memory (Jelin 2003). There are constant appeals to "making memory" in the same sense that the social science literature uses it.[202] Truth is constructed out of the testimonies of family members and survivors. It is notable that while human rights groups talk about memory in terms of its construction, right wing groups and defenders of the military speak in terms of sociological wholes. In doing so, they accuse human rights groups of "partial" memory.

An emphasis on memory, and not history, serves an important role. Memory, as opposed to history, is a means of forming subjects. Memory is held; it is possessed by the individual. A self-identity is predicated on how memory is

[202] For example, a book that addresses how to teach the lessons of the dictatorship to children is called *Making Memory in the Land of "Nunca Mas."*

necessary for an internal continuity between past and present. The frequent invocations of memory by human rights groups in Argentina can be seen as part of a very directed, agency driven process of subject formation. More than slogans, appeals to memory are driven by a desire to shape or create subjects.

These subjects, "people with memory" are people who are interested in "who they are" and "where they came from." Those who do not want to know these things are the ones who do not question who they are. They do not doubt. The process of doubt involved in the kind of identity formation that the Grandmothers are promoting is predicated on a modern conception of identity.[203] In it, identity is conceived of as a kind of quest, as something one must search for or strive for. Zygmunt Bauman (2004) goes even further and calls identity "a task." Identity as a task simultaneously hints at a view of identity as both a duty and an opportunity. As such, identity is conceived of as a process that requires an individual's cultivation. One must work on one's identity. To begin with the question "do you know who you are" almost begs the question of whether anyone really know who they are. What does that even mean? To ask the question "do you know who you are?" presupposes individual autonomy in the sense that the individual has a choice. Identity need not be posed as a question if it did not presuppose multiple and conflicting possible answers. To know who one is implies the achievement of some kind of self-knowledge. The mandate to "know yourself" is not only to know one's biological identity but is one's ability to become a fully self-conscious individual, self-aware and critical. It presupposes a person who is interested in who he or she is, who cares about where he or she

[203] For an historical account of the emergence of this modern conception of identity, see Taylor (1989).

came from. It is both a process and a state. To know oneself is also to be oneself.

In Praise of Doubt

Identity as a task has no end. It is an ongoing process that never reaches certitude. There are limits to how well anyone can "truly" know oneself just as there are limits to truth. Multiple conceptions of truth co-exist side by side. Identity as invoked by the Grandmothers is meant to be a task for everyone. In their words, "a society needs to define its identity. To construct it is everyone's obligation." It is not just for people whose lives were directly affected through the disappearance of their loved ones. A common refrain from the Grandmother's events and publicity materials states unequivocally, "so long as there is only one single person with a stolen and falsified identity, it puts in doubt everyone's identity." Rhetorically, this is an interesting statement because, although unacknowledged, an implication is that this doubt will never be resolved. Of the estimated 500 cases of missing children of the disappeared, only about 270 concrete reports exist. Various reasons explain the discrepancy. One is that the estimate is predicated on cases of families not knowing that their disappeared family member was pregnant at the time of the disappeared. Another explanation is that the disappearance was never reported at all by family members. Even of reported cases, only about three-quarters have enough family members who have donated to the national genetic data bank to create a genetic profile of the missing grandchild that could positively lead to a match. It is not only feasible but highly likely that children of the disappeared have come forward

for a genetic identification who have no family members registered in the Data Bank in order to make a match. Everyone who works in the organization acknowledges this. Without that genetic proof and, thus, "truth", the person cannot be considered a child of the disappeared. The individual must live in a state of limbo. Based on their own figures, it is only possible to locate approximately half of the estimated children. In other words, not all of the children of the disappeared will ever be found. By default, "everyone's identity" will be forever in doubt.

When the *Grandmothers* raise doubt about the identity of everyone, they are not questioning the biological identity of everyone but something much larger. While a doubt about an individual's biological identity can be resolved with certitude through science, larger doubts about one's identity can never be resolved with corresponding exactitude. In such a way, this doubt that the *Grandmothers* are promoting resembles the doubt of radical hermeneutics like that of philosopher John D. Caputo, whose book on the topic is subtitled "on not knowing who we are" (2000). According to that philosophical traditional, we can never know our true essence or nature.In another talk at the *Grandmothers'* conference on identity I attended, a popular political cartoonist declared: "Couldn't we say that Argentina is a yet-to-be recovered grandchild?" The entire hall burst into applause. The analogy clearly resonated with them.

The doubt the *Grandmothers* are promoting is a call for all Argentines to question who they are as both individuals and as a people. A biological identity is often criticized in the anthropological literature for being reductionistic or essentializing, but when the *Grandmothers* invoke identity, they mean it in these non-reductionistic forms. At many of their artistic events, they say explicitly that

while directed at recovering more grandchildren, “We want this to be a mode of self reflection for everybody.” This larger relevance is what gives their campaigns their broad significative power. As one text used in the annual theater festival states: “This cycle of theatrical works tries to give a hand in this search for the truth and, moreover, tries to show that this does not only have to do with 500 individuals. We are all captives of this lie. It is all of society that should be asking itself about its true identity.” Or, in the words of one actor: “The work of the *Grandmothers* has to do with all of us. To know who I am, from where I come from, what is the history of my country, to be able to plan a more just society for my children and my grandchildren, this is a work that is my business.”

The *Grandmothers'* publicity campaigns reveal a larger discourse of self-doubt and identity in Argentina. In Argentina, there is a pervasive belief that Argentines ‘do not know who they are’ as a people. This not only forms part of national discussions, but is also a starting point for many scholarly works written by Argentines and non-Argentines alike. One can argue that this doubt can be attributed to any “imagined community,” but in Argentina such questioning appears particularly endemic. Anthropologist Julie Taylor writes that Argentines have been constantly confronted by “excruciating questions about their own identity” (1998:7). Their history has been a constant struggle to define who they are as a people –whether European or Latin America, “First” or “Third World”.

For theoreticians of modernity, doubt and uncertainty are viewed as one of the key characteristics of the current historical moment. Zygmunt Bauman (1991), Anthony Giddens (1990;1991), and Ulrich Beck (1992) have all written extensively on the topic. Uncertainty is viewed as one of the destabilizing

consequences of globalization and modernity. Both Giddens and Beck define risk as "manufactured uncertainty." In this literature, the very question of identity is a thoroughly modern one. Identity is posed as a question because it has become a problem. References to identity presuppose doubt and uncertainty. "People no longer know who they are," we are told. That we live in "times of uncertainty" is such an oft-repeated phrase it has become utterly banal.

The *Grandmothers'* campaigns are predicated on the pre-existing prevalent belief of Argentines that they do not have a well-defined identity. In confronting the "problematic of identity," the *Grandmothers* address not only their individual search for their grandchildren or the search for a national identity but also the problem of finding meaning in human existence. If the *Grandmothers'* campaigns direct individuals to confront basic existential questions, the events of the dictatorship made them confront their own. It is a reflection of basic existential questions they were forced to face about how to find meaning in life after the loss of a child. In such a way, "questioning one's identity" is not a mere biological question. The *Grandmothers'* creatively emphasize the inherent ambiguity of identity to relate the situation of their kidnapped grandchildren to everyone. Within this dynamic, children of the disappeared who have recovered their biological identities are seen to wrestle with issues that everyone faces but in more fundamental ways.

The literature that examines doubt and uncertainty as a by-product of modernity sees doubt as a negative condition, one that can engender violence.[204]

[204] For the view that doubt can in some circumstances engender violence as a means to its resolution, see Hoffman (1986) and Appadurai (1998). For a popular history of doubt, see Hecht (2003).

On the other hand, another view of doubts exists that sees it as a positive condition. Doubt, in this sense, is the sign of a self-reflexive, moral agent. This can be seen in a wider context. In Western thought, doubt is viewed as both a positive value and a fatal flaw. Too much doubt is considered paralyzing and debilitating. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is routinely termed the "doubting disease." On the other hand, too little doubt is seen to engender fanaticism and fundamentalism. As Bertrand Russell once declared, "the whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts." According to this view, doubt is the engine of scientific inquiry. Descartes famously began his philosophical treatise with the proposition of doubting the entire world around him, while Galileo declared doubt to be the "mother of invention."

Truth, justice, and memory - the three main concepts and consigns of human rights - also demand uncertainty. They are never fixed or unchanging in the sense that we may sometimes wish them to be. Much as the apparent paradox holds that "there can be no faith without doubt," one might add that there can be no certainty without doubt.[205] Justice can be blind, memories can be forgotten, and truth admits its blurred boundaries in between. All of this points to a basic indeterminacy of social life. The dictatorship manipulated this fundamental indeterminacy as a means of instilling fear and terror. The *Grandmothers* employ a discourse of uncertainty in an effort to direct Argentines to confront basic existential questions, both as individuals and as a nation. In some ways, this analysis is paradoxical. What I am arguing is that in campaigns

[205] In *On Certainty* (1972), Wittgenstein concluded the exact reverse also held true. He argued that there could be no doubt without certainty.

that promise to resolve doubt, the *Grandmothers* actively promote it. The doubt they promote is a fundamentally different kind of doubt than that which they promise to resolve. When I speak of the doubt that the *Grandmothers* as promoting as healthy, it lies in this broader sense. People who do not question are people to be frightened of. They are fundamentalists certain that they possess the truth. The *Grandmothers,* on the other hand, offer a healthy balance between truth and indeterminacy, claiming truth while simultaneously acknowledging its incompleteness and indeterminacies.

Truth for the *Grandmothers* is self-knowledge. Identity is a quest or a process. Their campaigns urge people to question the world around them. Since the *Grandmothers* are foremost a human rights organization, the question can be raised: Is that the end goal of human rights? The *Grandmothers* position their work as part of a larger process in the emergence of what gets labeled "civil society," a term frequently used by the organization. This larger project is a process of subject formation linked to the emergence of a "human rights culture." Who is the subject of human rights? The concept of a human rights culture was first popularized in the academic world by the philosopher Richard Rorty (1993). Rorty adopted the concept from Argentine jurist Eduardo Rabossi, who was actively involved in the government during the post-dictatorship democratic transition (Rabossi 1987). That it emerges out of an Argentine context should come as no surprise to those familiar with the country. Argentina is a country where the concept of "culture" is wielded like a weapon – it is a great source of the country's pride. When they speak of culture, they mean Culture, not in the contemporary anthropological sense – something that everyone has – but in the earlier, pre-20th century meaning of the term (Eagleton 2000). This is Culture

found in theater, music, and literature. It should therefore be unsurprising that the *Grandmothers*' campaigns revolve around the production of cultural works.

When Rorty speaks of a human rights culture, he means it in a normative sense. The end goal of a human rights culture, according to Rorty, is to produce 'people like us,' a presumably tolerant and enlightened class of people. This project is evident in the *Grandmothers'* campaigns. The work of the *Grandmothers* is organized around an effort to create an educated and enlightened class of people who question the world around them. When Rorty writes that a human rights culture is diffused through empathetic appeals, what he calls the telling of "sad and sentimental stories," (1993:119), the *Grandmothers* provide an empirical case study of this. The *Grandmothers* are organized around the grief of mothers who lost their children and the appeal of loving grandmothers who only want to find their missing grandchildren.[206] At the same time, the critical self-reflection that their public campaigns attempt to provoke can be seen as part of this more general human rights project that strives to turn individuals into self-conscious subjects. Educators who see the goal of the pedagogical enterprise as teaching critical thinking skills likewise aim to turn their students into people who question the world around them. Anthropology is an academic pursuit that prides itself on this. An anthropologist once defined the discipline as the "questioning of taken-for-granted knowledge." The campaigns of the grandmothers promote precisely that.

[206] In their words, "we only want to hug our grandchildren before we die."

Chapter 7: "A needle prick can do no harm": compulsory extraction of blood

In the previous chapter, I argued that the *Grandmothers'* public campaigns are informed by the belief that their missing grandchildren would have inchoate suspicions that the people who raised them were not their real parents and would be driven by an intrinsic psychological need to know their biological identities. While these campaigns have succeeded in drawing hundreds of young adults with doubts about their biological identities to contact them each year, cases still exist in which the *Grandmothers* believe they have located one of their missing grandchildren yet the presumptive grandchild refuses to submit to the genetic proof that could verify their biological identity. There were approximately eight such cases in 2004. This chapter will focus on the one that attracted the most media attention and legal scrutiny: that of Evelyn Vázquez.

In March of 1999, Policarpo Vázquez was arrested for the kidnapping of his Evelyn. Up until that moment, Evelyn believed Policarpo and his wife Ana María Farrá were her biological parents. In reality, her birth certificate was a forgery. The *Grandmothers* suspected Evelyn was the daughter of Susana Pegoraro and Ruben Bauer, both disappeared. Susana was 21-years old and five-months pregnant when she was kidnapped along with her father Giovani "Juan" Pegoraro in a downtown Buenos Aires railway station on June 18, 1977.[207] Through the testimony of two survivors, it was known that Susana gave

[207] The two were considered Italian citizens based on family ancestry and, along with Angela Maria Aieta, formed the basis of an Italian extradition request made against the military officer believed to be responsible. The Argentine government refused the request in 2001.

birth to a baby girl. They said Susana named her daughter Laura.[208] After giving birth, they were separated and nothing more was known of the whereabouts of either. The *Grandmothers* presumed that Susana had been murdered while her child had been handed over to a military family.

The search for Susana's child made no progress until 1999 when the *Grandmothers* received an anonymous tip that Policarpo, a retired Navy petty officer, was raising a child of the disappeared as his own. Their subsequent investigation resulted in a formal complaint to Judge María Servini de Cubría. The judge issued a warrant for Policarpo's arrest. Once arrested, Policarpo confessed to Evelyn's origins and was indicted on charges of kidnapping, suppression of civil status, and the falsification of public documents.

In his confession, Policarpo claimed to be a low ranking official uninvolved in what he called the military's "fight against subversion," yet he admitted to probable knowledge of Evelyn's origins and to deliberately suppressing these origins from her. He also admitted to procuring a forged birth certificate that identified him and his wife as her biological parents. Policarpo told the judge, "God put a baby into my arms and, from that point on, I believed he left her for

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[208] The testimony of Beatriz Elisa Tokar speaks of seeing Susana with recently born Laura in the "pregnant women's room" of the ESMA concentration camp. "While she had [Laura] in her arms, [ESMA prefect] Hector Febrés appeared with a crib and new baby clothing and said that the mother had to write a letter addressed to the person to whom the baby was to be handed over to along with the name of the baby. A short time later, they transferred Susana Pegoraro and the next day Laurita." (from her testimony before the *Juicio por La Verdad*, Mar del Plata, March 4, 2002) The testimony of Graciela Daleo, who spent time with many of the pregnant women during her detention in the ESMA and has been an invaluable witness, speaks of seeing Susana right at the point of delivery and estimates that she gave birth to the baby girl at the beginning of November of 1977.

me to take care of and raise … I considered it a divine mandate."[209] This statement indicates the religious ideology that led the military to adopt the children of their enemies. In doing so, they believed they were "saving" the children from the "subversion" of their parents.[210]

The "god" that Policarpo was referring to apparently took the form of a Navy Officer known as "*El Turco.*" Vázquez testified that he received Evelyn "recently born" from him after being assigned to Navy headquarters in Buenos Aires. He said he was explicitly instructed not to inquire into her origins. As an example of the kind of "amnesia" characteristic of such cases, Policarpo claimed not to remember "*El Turco*'s real name. Shortly after Policarpo's arrest, a midwife named Justina Cáceres was also arrested. She had signed the false birth certificate claming to have presided over Evelyn's birth. The birth certificate accredited Policarpo's wife, Ana María Farrá, as her biological mother. Cáceres also claimed to not remember anything and was released two days later. Farrá was then arrested. She confessed that Evelyn was not her biological child but that she had never asked her husband about the baby's origins. She was also released but later placed under house arrest due to a heart condition.[211]

Despite the lack of precise details and their protestations of amnesia, Policarpo and his wife's confession that Evelyn was not their biological child without scientific evidence was unprecedented. When children of the disappeared had been previously located in the hands of members of the armed

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[209] Página/12, January 8, 2000.
[210] In a later press conference, the *Grandmothers* identified Policarpo as a deacon of Opus Dei. For more on the religious ideology of the dictatorship, see Graziano (1992)
[211] Clarín, March 18, 1999

forces, the parents invariably insisted they were the biological parents. The genetic proof was needed to substantiate the crime.

This was also the first time that a military officer admitted to receiving a child of the disappeared from another military officer. The case would serve as additional proof of a systematic plan to kidnap children of the disappeared. The *Grandmothers* had been arguing of the existence of such a plan for years. However, despite secondhand accounts of an official protocol for adopting young children of the disappeared and even a "waiting list" of members of the Armed Forces who wanted to adopt them, direct evidence had never been found. The evidence was piecemeal, mainly coming from the testimony of survivors attesting to the existence of clandestine maternity wards. The most important evidence was the location of children of the disappeared in the hands of members of various branches of the military. The location of each additional child of the disappeared produced additional substantiation – direct material proof - of the plan.

Despite his confession, Policarpo's account of how he came to receive Evelyn was dubious. When the Pegoraros were kidnapped, they were initially taken to the Naval Submarine Base in the city of Mar del Plata. In October they were moved to the ESMA where Susana was transferred to the maternity ward to give birth. Through survivors' testimonies, it is known that the majority of the disappeared taken to the Naval Submarine Base in Mar del Plata were detained in the Tactical Divers (*Buzos Tacticos*) building, the division which Policarpo belonged to. Various survivors of the center remember hearing the name Vázquez, and his name is listed on a family member group's list of possible

military perpetrators. The position of the *Grandmothers* was that, despite his assertion of innocence, he was most likely a member of a "work group" actively taking part in the disappearances. They also maintained that his account of receiving a newly born child at Navy Headquarters in Buenos Aires was improbable. He would have gone to the ESMA to pick up the baby in person. Since he had been stationed where the mother was detained, he had presumably seen Susana when she was pregnant and had arranged to be given her child after delivery.

Shortly after Policarpo's arrest, Evelyn met with the judge and a psychologist from the *Grandmothers*. During the meeting, she expressed willingness to have her biological identity confirmed by the National Genetic Data Bank. She even admitted to suspecting she was a child of the disappeared. However, one week later, she decided against it. Instead, she offered to undergo the genetic proof only if the evidence would not be used against the people who raised her. Both the *Grandmothers* and the judge in charge of the case believed that this change of heart was caused by manipulation on the part of her kidnappers and their lawyer. A source close to the judge used the term "brainwashing."

After her refusal, the *Grandmothers* immediately petitioned the judge to order a compulsory extraction of blood. The longer the wait, they argued, the more Evelyn's resistance would grow. In the words of the President of the organization, Estela Carlotto:

> In cases like these, we ask justice to act quickly and decisively because the child cannot be left with the thief. We know because it happened other times. They work on them with guilt, telling them that they saved them from death and that they made sacrifices for them. The reality is that the Navy officer's wife should also be under arrest.[212]

The judge initially declined their request, stating that she wanted to resolve the manner through persuasion rather than force. Compulsory extraction would be a last resort, used only after all other routes were exhausted. The *Grandmothers'* warning turned out to be prescient. Several months passed, and Everlin's refusal became more entrenched, forcing the question of compulsory extraction to be posed anew.

Evelyn's Refusal

In a later interview, Evelyn recounted the day her father was arrested:

> Four or five men in National Guard uniforms were there with two or three more people. They read a warrant to my father. I didn't understand anything, but I was very nervous. The only thing that I remember is the moment I heard them mention my name. I yelled out, "I didn't do anything, Dad. I swear to you that I didn't do anything. I'm not mixed up in anything strange!"[213]

[212] Clarín, April 5, 1999
[213] El País, August 19, 2001

Her description of the arrest of her father is notable in how she immediately protests her innocence. According to the *Grandmothers*, this is the exact response the kidnappers want. The arrow of blame is reversed. Instead of the children blaming their parents for lying to them their entire lives, they blame themselves for their parents' legal situation. The issue becomes framed not around what the people she considers her parents did to her but what she could do to them. This feeling of guilt motivates her refusal to provide her blood. The source of the guilt, the source of her parent's legal problems, is located within her body. The substance of her blood can be used as the evidence that sends them to prison. The Grandmothers argue for the need of judicial intervention in such cases as a way to remove issues of guilt and blame. If the order to undergo the DNA proof comes through a court, it is no longer a matter of individual choice or volition.

The *Grandmothers* reject the idea that Evelyn's refusal was motivated out of her professed love for her apropriators. The grandchildren were made to feel indebted to them. Instead of love, the *Grandmothers'* describe the relationship as a "passing of the bill." This implies a bond of debt rather that of affection. The *Grandmothers* have maintained that the relationship formed between their grandchildren and their kidnappers is inherently "perverse" because of the grandchildren's births in concentration camps and the kidnappers' knowledge of these origins. They argue that the kidnappers cannot love their grandchildren because if they did, they would not have lied or hidden their origins from them. The kidnappers are accused of treating the grandchildren as if they were

possessions or objects. For this reason, the *Grandmothers* do not even use the term “kidnapper;” instead they use the term “appropriator.” The *Grandmothers* compare the military’s distribution of their grandchildren to that of “giving away newly born kittens.” The condition of the grandchildren is likened to that of slavery. They point to cases of grandchildren raised by strict and unloving parents, who treated them like soldiers. The harsh upbringing is considered proof of a lack of real feeling. The *Grandmothers’* psychological team also argues this. Although other psychiatrists and commentators acknowledge that love can exist in such a relationship, the *Grandmothers* are against this view.

The mainstream media saw Evelyn’s refusal as not only an assertion of her love for her parents but also one of loyalty. To willingly submit to the measure would constitute a betrayal of them. Loyalty is a concept firmly entrenched within the military. Perón, who came from the military, appropriated this concept. “Day of Peronist Loyalty,” first celebrated in 1951 during his regime, continues to the present day. Loyalty as a pre-eminent military value can help explain why so few past or present military officers have come forward to publicly discuss what occurred during the dictatorship. This also explains why Policarpo “forgot” the name of his Navy colleague who handed him a recently born baby.

Evelyn’s professed reason for refusing to have her biological identity verified was that she did not want to be the cause of sending her parents to prison. This explanation is perplexing. Policarpo had already confessed to the crime. A sworn confession of guilt by the accused was sufficient for conviction. Additional proof would be extraneous. The logic behind her refusal emerged during negotiations between the *Grandmothers* and Evelyn’s lawyer.

Evelyn's lawyer in the case was Juan Pablo Vigliero, the son of a retired Navy officer. Several years earlier, Vigliero made the news when he was arrested along with his law partner Mariano Cueno Libarona on charges of extortion and conspiracy. The charges stemmed from Cuneo Libarona's representation of Juan Jose Ribelli, a police commissioner charged with involvement in the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires.[214] Vigliero offered the *Grandmothers* a strategic exchange. If they would guarantee impunity in this case and others, he would give them information about other children of the disappeared in the custody of the Armed Forces.

Vigliero's statements about the case made it clear that he was using Evelyn's refusal to make a larger case against the human rights movement:

> If we could turn the page on this painful chapter of Argentine history, many would have to dedicate themselves to something else. It cannot be that, twenty-five years later, we're still here arguing like it's the first day…

[214] At the time of his arrest, Cuneo Libarona was a flamboyant, high profile lawyer to the stars. A media figure, he became famous by successfully defending soccer star Diego Maradona's agent from charges of drugs possession. In the AMIA case, Libarona was in possession of a video tape that was stolen from the judge involved with the investigation. He distributed the tape to the press anad the media, in an effort to besmirch his reputation. Seen as a "smear campaign," Cuneo Libarona, along with Vigliero, under charges of extortion, threats and intimidation, After spending two months in prison and eventually receiving probation, Libarona left the case.

> What do we do with the children of the disappeared? Some type of reconciliation has to be possible; if not, we fail as a society.[215]

For Vigliero, the problem was the *Grandmothers'* intransigence. His argument is the traditional one of the Argentine right. The military and its apologists magnanimously ask "both sides" to forgive each other for what took place during the 1970s in order to "move on." In the case of disappeared children, Vigliero is arguing that the biological and "adoptive" families need to negotiate, make certain concessions and reach a common accord. Evelyn would willingly undergo the genetic proof and acknowledge her biological identity only if the *Grandmothers* would arrange to have all charges dropped against her parents. For Vigliero and other supporters of the military, the children of the disappeared represent the symbolic medium for reconciliation. Human rights groups respond that there is nothing to negotiate with military torturers who committed crimes against humanity. Neither can there be forgiveness nor reconciliation. For that reason, the *Grandmothers* would concur with another one of Vigliero's statements: "It's not just about Evelyn, This could set a precedent for another young person in her position. It goes to the heart of how we deal with our past." For both sides, the case involved more than Evelyn's individual legal predicament. What remained in contention was how "to deal" with the past.

Vigliero pointed out that the goal of the *Grandmothers* was to locate their kidnapped grandchildren. In his words: "If they were established to find

[215] El País, August 19, 2001

grandchildren and I offer them to recover one, what more? What is enough?"[216] However, accountability for those responsible and justice for the disappeared are also the *Grandmothers'* priorities. Human rights groups in Argentina have remained steadfast in these demands. For this reason, Vigliero's offer was unacceptable to the *Grandmothers*. By offering the genetic evidence on the condition that it would not be used against her father - evidence not even required for conviction - Evelyn and her lawyers were seeking a strategic exchange. Making the genetic evidence inadmissible would require impunity. The end goal was reconciliation where the biological family would forgive the chain of events that led their relative to be in the hands of the military. In other countries where mass atrocities occurred, "Truth and Reconciliation" commissions have been formed to investigate and document the human rights abuses of the previous regimes. Members of the military are expected to testify to their actions and are promised amnesty. The premise of such commissions holds that reconciliation is a goal worth striving for. It is viewed as a fundamentally positive means of "moving on with the past." Although it is the desired goal of some global human rights organizations, anthropologists have been critical of national reconciliation processes (Wilson 2001,2003;Borneman 1997). In Argentina, reconciliation is a dirty word for human rights groups. It is exclusively the term of perpetrators and their apologists and embraces a *dos demonios* view of the dictatorship.

Vigliero's offer also needs to be contextualized by what human rights call Argentina's "culture of impunity" (Ageitos 2002). At the time of Policarpo's arrest,

[216] El País, August 19, 2001

the only means to hold military officers accountable for their actions during the dictatorship was through the charge of kidnapping children. Jorge Videla and Emilio Massera, respectively, the head of the Army and Navy during the dictatorship, were both under house arrest for their role in kidnapping children during the dictatorship. In 1985, Argentina became the first country in Latin America where a civil government held military leaders responsible for their criminal actions during a dictatorship. However, the government subsequently passed the laws of End Point and Due Obedience that effectively ended further prosecutions. In 1990, Carlos Menem pardoned the military high commanders convicted five years earlier. The charge of kidnapping babies was not included in the amnesty or pardons and thus military officials could be prosecuted for that crime. Even if individuals like Videla and Massera were not direct authors of the kidnappings, they were considered responsible for it. Evelyn's case was part of a larger investigation into the systematic theft of babies. At the time, this was the only kind of justice that could be pursued in Argentina. Vigliero's offer, if accepted, would have ended such prosecutions.

The response of the *Grandmothers* reflected this. In the words of their lawyer Alcira Ríos, was: "They want impunity in exchange for more grandchildren." Furthermore, Ríos argued that they could not make such a deal even if they wanted to. The state had a responsibility to ascertain who Evelyn was. It would not be known for certain if she were the child of Susana Pegoraro and Ruben Bauer without the genetic confirmation. According to Ríos: "The genetic test doesn't mean anything to the Vázquez case. He already confessed. This has simple to do with registering who Evelyn is… In the end, Evelyn does

not have legal documents."[217] In my interview with Ríos, she emphasized this aspect, saying that Evelyn had a fraudulent identity and that she could not live as a member of Argentine society with an identity that was known to be false. Even if Evelyn did not want to know who she was, the state needed to know who she was.

However, not all family members searching for their missing relatives share this view. Those who are conducting their own searches independent of human rights organizations are more amenable to such deals. A grandmother and a sister I interviewed who were conducting their own independent searches for their missing relatives both disagreed with the *Grandmothers'* position. Their primary concern was to find their missing relative and both said they were willing to make deals with the military if it would mean finding them.

Compulsory Extraction of Blood

In March of 2000, the Federal Chamber ordered Evelyn to undergo a compulsory extraction of blood. Concurring with Ríos' argument, they declared that: "the measure must be carried out with or without consent" because "like all citizens, she has the duty to submit to national laws."[218] National law required the correct documentation of her identity. She was ordered to turn over her identification papers. They were deemed invalid since they were forgeries and would be replaced upon confirmation of her biological identity. Compulsory

[217] El País, August 19, 2001.
[218] Página/12, March 25, 2000

extractions of blood had been previously ordered by judges and carried out in the 1980s. Since the children were minors and not of legal age, the court could override their expressed will. In those cases, the Supreme Court ruled the measure to be constitutional. Since this case was dealing with an individual who was legally an adult, the question of whether her expressed will could be violated was posed anew.

There were several other similar cases pending in the courts at this time. A compulsory extraction of blood had already been ordered for another presumed child of the disappeared, María Natalia Alonso. The case dated from 1986 when charges were brought against Omar Alonso and María Luján Di Mattia for the appropriation of a girl born in a clandestine detention center in August of 1977. The couple were ordered to trial but fled with the child instead. They remained fugitives until they were located in 1993. Omar was arrested and jailed for two years. The mother was arrested in 1997 but freed two months later for “lack of evidence.” “Lack of evidence” was lack of a genetic proof. María Natalia was cited as a material witness in the case and was ordered by the Court of Appeals to undergo a compulsory extraction of blood. She refused.

The case remained stalled until May 2000, when María Natalia was taken into custody. The judge ordered her to immediately undergo a compulsory extraction of blood. She protested by means of a hunger strike. The measure was delayed and she was detained for several days. Faced with her refusal, medical personnel refused to carry out the procedure. She was released. Five months later, in September, she was once again ordered by the court to undergo a compulsory extraction of blood. She threatened to kill herself. “If they draw

blood from me, I'm going to throw myself under a car when I leave," she told the judge.[219] Experts linked to the Durand Hospital and a court psychiatrist concluded that she was not in the "proper psychophysical conditions to face the measure" and that her "mental and physical health" was in jeopardy. She was released once again. After this second attempt failed, no further efforts were made and María Natalia's legal situation presently remains in limbo.

In Evelyn's case, the legal battle went up the judicial ranks through various appeals. All ruled in favor of compulsory extraction until the case finally reached the Supreme Court. In October of 2003, the Supreme Court ruled against a compulsory extraction of blood.

The Court's Ruling

The Supreme Court viewed the case as a conflict between individual rights and collective rights. In the end, they prioritized individual rights to privacy and what they termed physical and psychological integrity over the collective rights of the state to investigate crimes (in this case, crimes against humanity) and the rights of family members who had been searching for Evelyn for twenty-five years to know if she was their relative. Rights to privacy and to physical and psychological integrity were considered complimentary. According to the decision: "The State should sacrifice its interest when there exists the risk of

[219] La Nación, September 16, 2000

damaging a person's sphere of privacy. And nothing is more private than one's own integrity, be it physical or psychological."[220]

A compulsory extraction of blood constituted a violation of these rights for two main reasons. First, they argued that the procedure itself would constitute a violation of her body if it were to be carried out against her will. The basic premise is the cornerstone of individual rights: that a person is owner of their body. In the court's words: "A person doesn't have to supply their body or parts thereof to be used to extract elements of proof." They compared an extraction of blood with a coerced confession. Editorials defending Evelyn's choice supported this view. They argued that a compulsory extraction of blood was equivalent to the use of torture to extract confessions. Although compulsory extractions could be justified with criminal suspects, the court reasoned that since Evelyn was the alleged victim of the crime and not its author, such a measure would amount to a victimization of the victim if taken against her will.

Juan Carlos Marqueda, the only judge who partially dissented with the majority, maintained that a distinction could be made between a proof extracted from the body and a proof that came from an extracted (i.e. forced) confession. According to Marqueda, a compulsory extraction of blood was not protected as a right against self-incrimination. To make this argument, he employed a subject/object dichotomy. He distinguished between the person as a subject of proof and an object of proof. In the case of confessions, a person was a subject of proof. In the case of compulsory extraction, the person was an object of proof.

[220] Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación. "Vázquez Ferrá, Evelin Karina s/incidente de apelación". V. 356. XXXVI. Fallos: 326. (30/9/2003). Note: in the court case, she is referred to as "Evelin" but in the media, the name Evelyn is used. I have chosen the latter.

As an object, the proof could be considered independent of the subject's free will to offer it.

The Supreme Court's second reason for their decision was that the measure would force Evelyn to betray the people that she had emotional and affective ties to. They concluded that Evelyn's relationship with her kidnappers constituted a protected relationship. Just as one could not be forced to testify or provide evidence against an immediate member of the family, they argued that the "affective ties" between Evelyn and the person she considered her father was tantamount to exactly that. In making this link, the Supreme Court ruled that the 22-years that Evelyn had lived with her kidnapper constituted a parent-child relationship. This was Evelyn's explicit reason for not undergoing a genetic proof. In an interview, she stated, "They were asking me to be the instrument to punish and condemn my father -- the man who looked after me for 22 years." By protecting this relationship, the *Grandmothers* accused the Supreme Court of being "accomplices to state terror" in legitimizing a relationship that originated out of the dictatorship's crimes.

Finally, the Court argued that a compulsory extraction was unnecessary for the investigation of the crime that Policarpo was accused of committing because he had already admitted his guilt. With his confession, the genetic evidence was considered redundant and therefore unnecessary. They rejected the argument put forth by the *Grandmothers* that the measure was part of the Argentine state's right and obligation to investigate crimes.

The Right to Physical and Psychological Integrity

The Supreme Court's view of psychological and physical integrity is predicated on the view of the person as an autonomous individual. The right to psychological integrity, in the sense that they upheld it, implies that Evelyn has the right to decide her own identity. To impose another identity upon her other than the one she has chosen for herself would be a violation of this right. Evelyn's denial of her biological identity was also a denial of the history that accompanied it, a denial of the events that led to her being raised by Policarpo. In interviews, Evelyn only recognizes the family she grew up with and claims to not have the "space" to incorporate another.

> I am not a bad person, but I can't have any affection for people I don't know. They think they are my biological family and I have my mom and dad, siblings, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews. I have had this family my entire life. I understand that it may be painful but *this space is already occupied*.[221]

This spatial struggle is one waged over two different persons and their respective biographies. One is Evelyn Karina Vázquez, the person she maintains she has a right to be. The other is Laura Pegoraro Bauer, the daughter of Susana Pegoraro and Ruben Bauer. Laura's story includes the disappearance of her parents and grandfather, her birth in a concentration camp, her parents tortured and killed, and her family's struggle to locate her. Although the

[221] La Nación, October 1, 2003

Grandmothers do not discount the years she lived as Evelyn Vázquez, they argue that such a person does not exist. Evelyn is Laura Pegoraro Bauer living under a fraudulent identity. The two persons are incommensurable. There could only be one or the other.

Both sides implicitly recognized this. As mentioned earlier, the state was not only demanding her blood as evidence, but they were also demanding her documents - her passport, student card, and driver's license - to be turned over. They argued that these documents were no longer valid because Evelyn Vázquez was a fraudulent identity. As a juridical person, she did not exist. New ones would be drafted once her biological identity was confirmed. Evelyn reacted to this by saying: "It feels as though they are trying to erase my whole existence." Her lawyer, echoing her sentiments, argued that forcibly taking away her papers would result in "a civil death."[222] The Supreme Court concurred. In their decision, they wrote that: "For the court to take away her documents would condemn her to a 'kind of civil death' that would take away her right to bureaucratic processes, to work, social security, right to a name, and the exercise of political rights." The Grandmother also used images of death; in their case, the death of Susana Pegoraro and Ruben Bauer's daughter. Before the ruling, they compared a refusal to uphold the extraction of blood with the "placing of a tombstone."[223]

"My Human Rights are Being Violated in the Name of Human Rights"

[222] La Nación, October 1, 2003
[223] Página/12, Septemeber 26, 2003

The Supreme Court's decision and Evelyn's defense rested on the notion of individual choice. Evelyn had the right to choose her identity. It could not be imposed upon her by the state. In public debates, the *Grandmothers'* critics relished at pointing out what they saw as a twisted irony and apparent contradiction. The *Grandmothers* and the human rights groups supporting their position were accused of being totalitarian and embracing dictatorial tactics. The compulsory extraction of blood was viewed as a literal and a symbolic act of violence. They argued that the *Grandmothers* were intolerant, motivated by ideology, and unconcerned with what was really best for Evelyn. One ultra-right wing Catholic magazine known for its fascist leanings exploited the metaphoric dimension of the compulsory extraction of blood. Its cover page asked the question, "Grandmothers or Vampires?" Evelyn would also point out the apparent contradiction: "My human rights are being violated in the name of human rights."[224]

The vast majority of human rights groups in Argentina supported the *Grandmothers'* position. Interestingly enough, the adoption rights organization *Quienes Somos* (Who we are), discussed in the last chapter as being directly inspired by the work of the *Grandmothers,* supported Evelyn's position. They issued a press release stating that Evelyn, "mistaken or not," should be able to "choose her own course because this has to do with identity." They also framed Evelyn's identity as an issue of individual choice that could not be imposed upon her from the outside without her consent.

[224] La Nación, October 1, 2003

> If our society could see shades of grey, if it could see the suffering of others like adults and without Manichean positions, if it would permit adopted children like ourselves to question without blame what for everyone else is a given, perhaps then we could create a more appropriate environment for [Evelyn] to overcome the tearing apart inside of her and unite her sides. She either has a different point of view or her timeframe is not the same and for a fundamental reason that she can only intuit, she is asking for more time.

The group spoke out of their own experience ("in this debate, the voice of those that know about it in their own skin (*carne propia*) is lacking") and pointed to the similarity between Evelyn's situation and their own. "We confront the same ethical dilemma as Evelyn Vázquez. We see that those we love have committed crimes and have looked down on our history. And this tears inside of us." They even pointed out that they use the same language of "appropriation" to describe what happened to them. They concluded that "Evelyn Vázquez should be given time to choose, without assaulting her moral and physical integrity even more."

Despite *Quienes Somos'* position, other major human rights groups and most progressive political parties supported the position of the *Grandmothers* for compulsory extraction with one major exception. The exception was Hebe de Bonafini. She opposed compulsory extraction of blood because, in her words, it "attacks individual liberties." According to Bonafini, "We do not agree with forcing someone to do DNA. I think that at that age the boys and girls are men and women old enough to decide… If [Evelyn] doesn't want to do the test, she

doesn't want to."[225] Perhaps it may strike some people as strange that the individual known to take the most radical position on most issues would be using the exact same arguments as the conservative press that she regularly derides as being fascist. Mariano Grondona, the same conservative commentator we saw opposed to the *Grandmothers* in earlier caess, even used her as an example of the absurdity of the *Grandmothers'* position by pointing out that "even Hebe de Bonafini" supports Evelyn's position.[226] On the other hand, one could also view Bonafini's position as a product of her hostility towards the *Grandmothers* that will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

We are left with a seemingly paradoxical situation in which human rights groups firmly rooted in the progressive politics of the left were arguing for state intervention and the compulsory extraction of blood while the right-wing was arguing in terms of the right to privacy and a right to physical and psychological integrity. Moreover, progressive groups were arguing for the primacy of a biological relationship while right wing apologists for the military regime were arguing for cultural conceptions of kinship.

An even bleaker irony emerges when one considers where the right to physical and psychological integrity cited by the court comes from. It was first adopted by the American Convention on Human Rights of the Organization of American States' pact of San Jose, Costa Rica. The article states: "Every person has the right to have his physical, mental, and moral integrity respected."[227]

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[225] La Capital, October 1, 2003.
[226] La Nación, October 5, 2003.
[227] "Article 5. Right to Humane Treatment," American Convention on Human Rights, "Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica." (Drafted 11/22/1969)

Drafted in 1969, it first entered into effect in 1978 after a majority of member states adopted it. Argentina only incorporated it into the national constitution in 1984, not only after the fall of the dictatorship but in direct response to it. The article was explicitly adopted to protect citizens from disappearance and torture. By invoking this article, the court was implicitly likening a compulsory extraction of blood to an act of torture. It defended Evelyn's position by citing a right that was enacted to prevent what happened to her biological parents from happening to others.

The Right to Identity

How, then, can one understand the position of the *Grandmothers*? The Supreme Court decision was framed as one in which individual rights trumped collective ones. However, the *Grandmothers* and their lawyers did not frame their arguments this way. They argued in defense of Evelyn's rights. Evelyn's rights were being violated even if she was consenting to their violation. In a press conference following the decision, they argued that compulsory extraction was the only means to resolve the case and asked the following question: "Is there anything more *íntima* [which in Spanish means both private and intimate] than one's own origin?" The *Grandmothers* wanted not only to restore her identity, but, with it, her origins. "What the *Grandmothers* desire and demand is precisely that the damage done to our grandchildren be undone and that they be given back the truth and, with it, the full enjoyment of their privacy and true identity."

After the decision, a congresswoman of a left-wing party with close ties to the human rights movement stated, “With this ruling, we cut them [the disappeared children who have not recovered their biological identities] off from their biological family and, in doing so, their right to their identity.” This was the *Grandmothers’* position. They argued that the decision was a violation of Evelyn’s “right to identity.” Evelyn’s “right to know who she was” had been initially violated by Policarpo Vázquez. The court’s decision affirmed the violation by allowing the crime against her to be perpetuated.

One of the *Grandmothers’* driving assumptions, as I stated earlier, is that people want and need to know who they are and that this “who they are” is located in their genes. In the words of Evelyn’s suspected biological grandmother, “I don’t understand how Evelyn doesn’t feel the need to know her family.”[228] In both public statements and discussions I had with the Grandmothers and their supporters about this case, this was a common refrain. “I don’t understand how someone could not want to know,” the secretary of the organization told me when it came up in conversation. At the same time, an expectation still exists that Evelyn will eventually accept and even embrace her biological identity.

In the words of the President of the *Grandmothers*, Estela Carlotto, "It's very traumatic for the grandchildren when they discover the truth. They usually ask for time to know their story, learn who they are. Once they see that their blood is different to that of their supposed families and meet their real grandmothers, they usually come around. I'm sure Evelyn will do the same.”

[228] El País, August 19, 2001

Evelyn, on the other hand, claims, "A desire to get to know [the biological family] did not emerge in me. I only know that [my father] didn't steal me and they are not going to be able to blame him for this." However, at the same time, even Evelyn acknowledges, "I know that in some moment a need is going to be born in me to know my identity" and does not discount the possibility of undergoing a genetic proof at a later date after her father's legal situation is resolved.[229] That Evelyn admits this suggests the normative power of this discourse.

The right to identity, as it is discussed in the *Grandmothers'* organizational literature, assumes a distinctive psychological view of the subject. The right to identity assumes that individuals not only want to know but that they have an intrinsic psychological need to know their biological identities. The kind of personhood that the *Grandmothers* advance when they talk about a "right to identity" is an individual who believes such kind of self-knowledge is necessary to be a "whole person." Even Evelyn acknowledges the existence of such a need although she claims not to feel it in the present moment. However, as any basic civics class teaches, rights entail responsibilities and obligations. This is a case in which the right to identity is an obligation to identity.

The *Grandmothers* see Evelyn's refusal to verify her identity as a continuation of the crime committed against her. It was a product of her victimization by the people who kidnapped her, Policarpo Vázquez and his wife. The *Grandmothers* likened the relationship to "kidnapped hostages" who were "influenced by their kidnappers." Comparisons were made with "Stockholm syndrome." As one editorialist remarked, "Evelyn is as free as an abused wife

[229] La Nación, October 1, 2003.

who does not want to leave her abuser."[230] For this reason, they argued that her decision against the extraction of blood was the product of manipulation by her lawyers and kidnappers. The "influence of her surroundings," they claimed, made her decide not to undergo the proof.

The *Grandmothers* argue that Evelyn's refusal was a symptom of the crime committed against her. Her own declarations of volition could be contradicted because they were predicated on a violation of the basis upon which her volition can be enacted. Evelyn lacks the capacity to make such declarations because she has been robbed and deprived of the basis upon which such decisions can be made. According to the *Grandmothers*, the right to identity is the basis upon which the other rights upheld by the court (that of privacy and physical/psychological integrity) are exercised. The *Grandmothers'* argument revolves around the foundations upon which individual rights are exercised and the basis of individual autonomy.

However, Evelyn's public posture was viewed as a direct challenge to the basic tenets of the organization. From the earliest cases, the *Grandmothers* had argued for the fundamental "unhealthiness" of situations like that of Evelyn's. As CELS, a major Argentine human right organization, stated following the ruling, "To know the truth can be traumatic, but it is more traumatic to live in a false situation." In arguing for the need for restitutions in the earliest court cases in the 1980s, the Grandmothers' mental health team declared that the situation of, as they termed it, forced abandonment constituted a "ticking time bomb in their psyche" "that would explode if they found out at an older age possibly leading to

[230] Página/12, October 1, 2003.

schizophrenia." Evelyn's self-assured posture in the media was seen as a direct refutation of this claim. The conservative newspaper, who defended her decision in editorials throughout the years, referred to such expectations in their interview with her. They presented her as a resolute young woman of unbounded psychological strength motivated out of genuine love for the people she considered her parents and her desire to protect them. "With her unshakeable posture, [Evelyn] broke illusions and severely dented the struggle of human rights organizations."[231]

For the *Grandmothers*, the crime committed against Evelyn will only be resolved when her biological identity is restored. The *Grandmothers* argue that "identity theft" is a crime without statute of limitations. Though the kidnapping itself was a discrete action that took place decades earlier, the crime continues in perpetuity until what was stolen is restored. This is why, although restoring custody only concern minors, restoring identity is independent of the grandchildren's status as minors or adults. In the words of *Grandmothers'* lawyer Alcira Ríos, "The crime that caused this situation doesn't change because the victim is a minor or of legal age." She continues:

> First, they refused to carry out an analysis until the Supreme Court ordered the compulsory analysis in two decisions. Those cases dealt with minors. Then (the kidnappers) emancipated them and married them off young so they would be able to refuse themselves. They argued that, being majority of age, they could refuse. But what happens? The crime

[231] La Nación, October 1, 2003.

> persists and the rights of these children end when those of the family members who have been looking for them for twenty years begin. They have the right to know if their search ends or whether it continues. We cannot forget that the origin of all of this is a crime.[232]

The difficulty of resolving such cases is that identity is not an entity that can be so easily restored. However, the *Grandmothers* and their supporters argue that Evelyn needs to know the truth because her identity, and subsequently her life, is predicated on falsity. As one editorial stated: “This crime will only end with the truth. Evelyn’s truth is a truth that hurts, but whatever real pain is better than deceit.” The *Grandmothers* claim that Evelyn has the freedom to do whatever she wants with her life. They maintain that they are not trying to compel her to break off relations with the Vázquez family. They only want her to “know who she is.” As Angélica, Evelyn’s presumptive grandmother, says: “I don’t want to interfere with her life. I just want to see her, hug her, and give her a kiss. I want the certainty if she is my granddaughter or not.”[233]

The *Grandmothers*’ argue that the Supreme Court’s sanctioning of Evelyn’s forged and falsified identity leaves her in a purgatorial state of perpetual uncertainty. Her civil status is still in question. The *Grandmothers* maintain that it is the responsibility of the Argentine state to correctly register her identity. Evelyn herself acknowledges this to be a problem. "I don't even know when my birthday is any more. Oct. 29, 1977, is the day I was brought home, not my date of birth."

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[232] El País, August 19, 2001
[233] Página/12, September 26, 2003

In an interview in which she narrates the effects of this experience, Evelyn frames her legal situation purely within the familial sphere.

> My mother was destroyed. On top of that, she has heart problems, and my father has high blood pressure… the only thing that I was thinking about is that they were taking my father to Buenos Aires. The two of us stayed behind crying, I went to find my sister, so that she could come and help me calm her down. From there, people imagine that there is a bigger story to tell but there isn't…. I imagine it must have been really difficult for them to keep such a thing a secret for 21 years. I don't know but I imagine if I didn't change now, I would not have changed (if they told me) before. I'm not sorry about it. I don't say: "ouch, I wish they had told me that before." I never reacted against them.[234]

What does Evelyn mean when she claims there is no "bigger story"? Evelyn makes no reference to the larger historical context in her account. The dictatorship is unmentioned. She could argue that she was lucky that her parents "saved" her from the subversion of her parents. She could argue that she was lucky to have been raised by a religious family instead of leftwing terrorists. She does not. In her account of the events, there is only a family drama in which her close-knit family has been torn apart by the arrest of the father. The private domestic sphere from which Evelyn positions her narrative was precisely what the events of the dictatorship ruptured. The actions of the dictatorship collapsed

[234] El País, August 19, 2001.

the distinction between the public and private sphere. As an editorial by Victoria Ginzberg stated, “Evelyn doesn’t deserve to have her life aired out by the media” but then argued that, “Evelyn’s history is part of the history of this country.”[235] The dictatorship collapsed the distinction between the political and the domestic realm. Taking the children of their perceived enemies and giving them to be raised by “proper” military families was just one example of this.

The Normative Power of Human Rights

The idea of human rights is predicated on their violation. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was a direct response to the aftermath of the atrocities committed during WWII, including the Holocaust (Falk 2000). Demands for human rights are voiced only in face of their violation. A “right to identity” was created by the violation of said right. In such a way, the violation of the right paradoxically precedes the right’s existence. However, as a response to human rights violations, human rights are intentionally universalizing, normative and prescriptive. They are universalizing in how they make claims independent of time and place. They are normative and prescriptive in how these universal claims are meant to become institutionalized norms that dictate how persons should be treated. The end goal is for these international norms to be implemented into local practices (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). Human rights have been traditionally criticized for this reason. Critics argue that the subject of human rights is culturally and historically particular (Mutua 2002). In this way,

[235] Página/12, October 1, 2003.

human rights project and enshrine a view of the person that not everyone might share. This was Marx's criticism of the Rights of Man (1977). He argued that the so-called "rights of man" were, in fact, the rights of the bourgeoisie masquerading as universals. A similar accusation was levied after the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The rights protected in the Declaration were seen to be the projection of a Euro-American middle class lifestyle upon the entire world.

Human rights reveal their cultural assumptions in situations where individuals or groups reject them. Conflict emerges when the people who are supposed to be protected by human rights principles willingly consent to have their own rights violated (Asad 1997). The right to identity that the *Grandmothers* advance is predicated on an individual's desire and need to know her biological identity. The conflict in this case stems from an individual's refusal and rejection of her own right; in this case, her right to know "who she is."

Although the issue is framed around individual choice, the *Grandmothers* argue for the rights and obligations entailed by kinship that transcend individual volition. Traditional anthropological perspectives on kinship also focused on the rights and obligations of kinship. It is frequently observed in anthropology that "we moderns" have been moving beyond this view of kinship. Kinship is becoming less organized around rights and obligations and increasingly organized around individual choice (Faubian 2002). We are also told that we live in a world in which kinship is losing its traditional force and that people now have increasing freedom in defining who they are. Paradoxically, with the advancement of modern genetics, we also see the opposite occurring. Kinship is increasingly seen in a more rigid biological form. One options offers choice. The

other is seen to be decided at birth. Those who support Evelyn's decision argue that she should not be compelled to take on an identity that she does not want. In the words of one editorial defending her decision: "Nobody is more an owner of one's identity than oneself. If the individual does not question it, neither can a third party force her to do so against her will."[236] The *Grandmothers* and their supporters argue that Evelyn and others like her are free to choose whatever they want to do with their lives but they cannot choose who they are. In the words of Penal Law and Criminology professor Bernardo Beiderman: "Identity is a non-disposable juridical good. Nobody can validly renounce it, interchange it, change it, cease it, or modify it. Personal identity… cannot be up to the mere will of the individual who asserts it or the one who imposes it on another."[237]

The conflict over Evelyn's identity is framed within and trapped by this dynamic. Marilyn Strathern (1996) has modern conceptions of identity as caught between two discourses: that of cultural enablement (individuals are autonomous and independent and can choose who they want to be) and biological determinism (based on the primacy of genetic relationships). However, the distinctive political context of mass human rights violations differentiates this situation from a straightforward nature/culture dichotomy.

One of the many consequences of state violence is the destruction of kinship ties. (Reynolds 2000; Das 1995). Families separated as a result of violence frequently have no means of knowing whether their missing relatives are alive or dead. In the aftermath of violence, surviving relatives struggle to ascertain the fate of their missing family members. For human rights

[236] La Nación, October 3, 2003
[237] Clarín, May 29, 2000

organizations like the *Grandmothers*, the restoration of broken kinship ties is considered fundamental to the reparation of the social fabric and the constitution of civil society. Forensic anthropologists have been assisting in this effort by exhuming mass graves in order to locate and identify victims, often using genetic technologies to verify their identities. Argentina is a rare case in which these technologies are used to identify not only dead bodies but also lived bodies. The *Grandmothers* are also attempting to restore biological relationships that were ruptured by state violence. Difficult cases like Evelyn's result when biological relationships are disavowed and victims of state violence refuse to acknowledge the crime committed against them.

Postscript

The controversy over obligatory DNA for presumed children of the disappeared continued after the Supreme Court's ruling. The Supreme Court had explicitly stated that their ruling would not set precedent for other cases. A month later, in November 2003, a Federal Judge ordered another compulsory extraction of blood to determine whether another young person was son of the disappeared. He had also refused to have his biological identity confirmed. However, unlike Evelyn's situation, the parents insisted that they were his biological parents. A compulsory extraction of blood was the only way to determine the existence of the crime. The case is currently being appealed. Meanwhile, in 2004, a bill was proposed in the National Congress that would impose obligatory DNA proofs for all presumed children of the disappeared. The

bill was put forward by Secretary of Human Rights Eduardo Luis Duhalde and endorsed by President Kirchner but remains under debate. In February of 2006, the District Attorney finally brought formal charges against Policarpo Vázquez, his wife Ana Maria Ferra, and midwife Justina Cáceres. Characterizing the case as one involving crimes against humanity, they requested 9 ½ years imprisonment for Vázquez, 9 years for Ferra and 6 years for Cáceres.

A recent development may render compulsory extractions obsolete. In June of 2006, the identity of the 83rd missing child of the disappeared was confirmed. Like Evelyn, she had previously refused to undergo an extraction of blood. Instead of pursuing a compulsory extraction, the judge issued a warrant for police to search her residence. From the genetic evidence gathered from towels, a toothbrush, and hairs found on a pillow, they were able to confirm her identity. After twenty years in the courts, the case has finally been resolved. The *Grandmothers* see this as offering a viable alternative to compulsory extractions that could help resolve difficult cases like Evelyn's.

Chapter 8: Ambivalent Encounters and the Politics of Kinship

One day in the late 1990s, an Argentine young man living in Spain named Javier Gonzalo Vildoza Grimaldos typed his father's name, Jorge Raúl Vildoza, onto an internet search engine. He discovered that his father was listed on a human rights website as a former military officer accused of acts of genocide in Argentina. The website also noted that Vildoza was suspected of having abducted a child of the disappeared as his own. Javier realized that the child referred to was him.

The circumstances remain unclear but Javier eventually presented himself in person in front of Judge María Servini de Cubría, the judge in charge of investigating the case. He agreed to undergo a genetic proof of his identity. He told her, "I am ready to do the DNA to get it over with once and for all."[238] While he underwent the genetic verification on his own accord, his appearance in front of the judge was prompted not by his desire to know his biological identity but by his desire to defend his father from the accusations against him. Prior to coming forward, he had sent a letter to Servini de Cubría in which he described his situation: "I have found out through reading news and information about Argentina on the internet that my father is accused of not being my biological family, but rather a military officer action during the 1970s who "robbed" me when I was a baby."[239]

The rest of the letter defended his father from the allegations against him. Javier praised his parents' upbringing, telling her they "raised me with everything

[238] Página/12, November 24, 1998.
[239] Reprinted in *Veintiuno*, November 26, 1998.

a good person can desire and need." He also wrote, "it seems impossible for me to associate my parents with these accusations" and attributed them to "political attacks based on unreal events." At the time, he was on the verge of finishing his university studies and had plans to continue his education. This was only possible due "to the efforts of my parents who have always given me the best." His letter manifested his unwavering loyalty to his parents while rejecting all accusations against them. He only came forward in order to help them.

> At this time, I desire to help my parents as vigorously as I can so we can return to the solid foundations upon which our family was born, and in which I grew up, was educated, and brought up. They would have done anything out of their love for me - abandoned their work, friends, family members – out of their love for me in order to protect me. Now I want to help them.

He eventually told the judge that he had already known his family's "solid foundations." His father, he claimed, had previously informed him that he was adopted. He was the "son of subversives who died in a confrontation."[240] In using the language of the dictatorship to describe how he came to be raised by a military officer, he believed that his kidnappers had saved his life. He also maintained before the judge that, "Vildoza is my father and I am always going to

[240] Some commentators were skeptical of this claim pointing out that this contradicted Javier's statement that he found out about his father through an internet site.

love him."[241] If Vildoza informed Javier that he was not his biological son, he may have done so when he was compelled to flee the country. His "love" for his child prompted him to become a fugitive from justice. Vildoza was a Navy Captain who had served in the ESMA under the nickname Gastón. He had been one of the primary individuals responsible for running the camp and was accused of having supervised the clandestine deliveries that took place in the ESMA as well as the distribution of babies born in captivity. After the fall of the dictatorship, he had been accused of 67 crimes against humanity. He was a beneficiary of the Law of Due Obedience but he had been forced to flee the country when he became suspected of harboring a child of the disappeared. Vildoza had initially been suspected of kidnapping a child of the disappeared in the 1980s when a pediatrician who was treating Javier denounced the case to the *Grandmothers.* The doctor had treated the boy when he was eight years old and was suffering from the flu. He recalls a feeling of suspicious when he saw the boy's clean and orderly room, which he described as "army like." He later saw Vildoza's name published on a list of accused military perpetrators and concluded that the boy was a possible child of the disappeared who had been kidnapped. He reported the case to the *Grandmothers* who asked him to draw a picture of the child from memory (several years later, he abandoned medicine to become a well known cartoonist). They compared the boy to disappeared women who had been pregnant and found an "astonishing" likeness to Cecilia Viñas with the same "sad expression" and eyes. Based on other anonymous reports, the *Grandmothers*

[241] *Veintiuno*, November 26, 1998.

attempted to bring the case to justice. Vildoza was cited but they were unable to locate him. He was declared a fugitive from justice.

After fleeing Argentina, Vildoza was a military attaché in Great Britain until he was identified by an ex-disappeared. Later, he was seen in Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, and South Africa and was believed to be a member of a gang of arm traffickers. At the time that Javier came forward, Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón (the same judge who ordered the arrest of Pinochet) had recently issued an international arrest warrant for 10 ex-officers of the ESMA based on Scilingo's confessions. Vildoza was among them although he was the only one whose whereabouts were unknown. It was believed that he may have secretly reentered Argentina after the warrant. Since Argentina did not extradite its military officials to other countries, it had become a safer country for him. However, he still faced charges of kidnapping in Argentina. Some suspected that Javier's appearance was an effort to resolve Vildoza's legal situation.

Javier's letter of defense of his parents acknowledged that he did not "completely understand" why his parents "have suffered and suffer so much" because of him. If he confessed to not understanding the situation completely while defending the people who kidnapped him, he still came forth on his own accord. Genetic studies revealed that he was, as the *Grandmothers* had long suspected, the son of Hugo Reynaldo Penino and Cecilia Marina Viñas. He eventually met with his biological family. However, Javier was reluctant to take on his biological identity. Required to have new identification papers drawn up, he asked the judge if his new DNI could list his two last names, Penino and Vildoza. The judge told him that this was impossible. Servini de Cubría advised the family: "Don't speak badly of Vildoza and don't ask many questions. Please. It is the only

way of recovering him."[242] Contact with the biological family was predicated on respecting the privacy of the case so little is known about the circumstances of their meeting.

Several months after their initial meeting, Javier's biological grandmother Cecilia Viñas talked about her relationship with her grandson in an interview. She had spoken with Javier by telephone several times and was, at the time, waiting for his next call so they could meet. She did not know much about the circumstances of his life and was even unsure of what he was studying. "I think that it is something like Business Administration." She also confessed to not knowing if he was in a relationship or not. "In truth, I never asked him. I don't ask because I don't want to bother him." She described Javier as "a little secretive in his thoughts."[243] While happy to finally locate Javier after so many years, she also claimed to have mixed feelings because locating Javier made her re-experience the loss of her daughter and son-in-law. She described the difficulty at first seeing him because he looked so much like his parents. "It hurt me everywhere – in the heart and the soul – but there was also the happiness and emotion of seeing him look so much like them… He has his mother's dark eyes and eyebrows, and his father's manner and sweetness."[244] While describing Javier's appearance as a "breath of life," he was also "confirmation of those who aren't there and who aren't going to be there, his parents." The appearance of the grandchild was seen as the final proof (barring finding a corpse) of the parents' murder. She also feared breaking their tenuous connection and argued

[242] Veintiuno, November 26, 1998.
[243] Página/12, November 24, 1998.
[244] Ibid.

that it "will have to be strengthened with much love and all the good will of understanding."[245]

Javier's appearance, as ambivalent and complicated as it was, had important and unintended repercussions for the human rights in struggle Argentina. At the same time he was defending the actions of his father in the ESMA, his father's former commander, Navy head Emilio Massera, was arrested as a result of the confirmation of Javier's identity. Massera was arrested in November of 1998 on the charges of two counts of kidnapping (Javier was one of the two). As commander of the Navy, he was held responsible for the "systematic plan of kidnapping babies" and placed under house arrest.

Duel Identities

When I first encountered ambiguous situations like Javier's, I was surprised. From reading the *Grandmothers'* materials, I had not anticipated cases like these. I had the notion of restitution as an "all or nothing" phenomenon. Once restitution occurred, the ties between the kidnappers and their victim would invariably be broken as years of lies unraveled, crumbling the foundation of their false relationship. I had not anticipated intermediary cases like Javier's in which an individual had been officially restored to his biological family but still maintained close ties with the people who raised him and publicly defended them. There were numerous such cases in the 1990s and 2000s. In these cases, recovered grandchildren celebrate two birthdates (their biological

[245] Veintiuno, November 26, 1998

one and their false one), keep two names, and essentially have two sets of families. The institutional narrative of the *Grandmothers* assumes that these ties with the kidnappers will eventually be broken and this has occurred in several cases. However, there were others in which the recovered grandchildren publicly defended their parents and had strained relationships with their biological families.

Psychologists and family members point out that restitution is not simply a legal moment. More than a change in identity documents, restitution is a lifelong process. Certain individuals like Horacio, already mentioned in a prior chapter, immediately seize upon their new identity and break ties with their past. However, cases like Javier's have largely avoided public scrutiny because the protagonists involved do not speak about them. The *Grandmothers* do not call attention to them either because the complexity of such cases upsets the more straightforward and normative accounts of restitution that exist in their institutional rhetoric.

"How is Rodolfo doing now?" I ask his grandmother, Argentina, after she tells me about their first meeting. She had recognized him immediately when she opened the door to the *Grandmothers'* offices to find him standing in front of her. "He looked exactly the same as my son. I didn't need a test to determine that he was my grandson." The joy of that first meeting had been subsequently tempered by a complicated reality. "He does not want to be called that," she sighs. "He wants to be called Guillermo." Rodolfo is the name I have written down, taken directly from the *Grandmothers'* press release announcing his restitution. Rodolfo is Argentina's grandson. Rodolfo is the name his mother gave her before they were forcibly separated four days after his birth in the ESMA.

Guillermo is what the people who raised him, Rodolfo's appropriators, named him. At the time I am interviewing Argentina, it has been three years since his restitution. Since then, although Argentina describes their relationship as "good," Rodolfo has repeatedly clashed with his maternal grandmother Rosa (vice-president of the organization) and his sister Mariana (who works in the investigation area of the group). According to Argentina, the story "is not yet finished." She explains the difficulty of his restitution by saying "he has his whims." While they get along well, she says that he tells her very little about what is going on in his life and she does not see him frequently. "I don't know what's going through his head. Now I just think we have to leave him a bit." She acknowledges that some cases resolve easily but hers did not. "I wish we were a normal family so we wouldn't be like this with all this struggling and fighting like other cases that resolve well. This case is not yet resolved. Right now, it's not going so well."

Rodolfo is the biological son of José Manuel Pérez Rojo and Patricia Roisinblit. Patricia was 8 months pregnant and finishing a degree in medicine when she was kidnapped the same day as her husband. In 1981, Patricia's mother, Rosa, traveled to Geneva, where ex-disappeared from the ESMA told her that Patricia had given birth to a son on November 15, 1978 who she named Rodolfo. In 2001, Mariana received a phone call at the *Grandmothers'* headquarters. The anonymous caller informed the group about the location of a child of the disappeared. The account was far more precise than the typical ones the group receives. The caller stated that the son of Francisco Gómez and his wife Teodora Jofré was in fact the son of a disappeared medical student who was between 25 and 27 years old when she had been taken by the Air Force to

the ESMA where she had given birth to her child in November of 1978. Mariana immediately recognized that the caller was referring to her mother and brother. The caller also told her where the couple lived and where their son worked. It even specified the color of his work uniform. The call was so precise that the *Grandmothers* surmised the caller had to be close to the family.

Abandoning the *Grandmothers'* normally cautious procedure, Mariana went directly to her potential brother's place of work, accompanied by another daughter of the disappeared. She later claimed that she just wanted to take a look at him but they ended up speaking. As she left, she handed him a letter that stated, "I am Mariana Perez, my parents are disappeared, I am searching for my brother who was born in captivity." The letter explained that the *Grandmothers* had received reports about him. She ended the letter, "If you have doubts about your identity and want to come, I am waiting for you." She also left him with one of the *Grandmothers'* books that included a photograph of his possible biological parents that revealed an uncanny resemblance to his disappeared father. That same day, later in the afternoon, he showed up at the *Grandmothers'* headquarters. He later claimed he only went because he was curious to find out if he had a sister. At the time, he volunteered to do a genetic proof.[246]

Because the case involved prominent members of the organization and had a strong likelihood of family belonging, the *Grandmothers* bypassed standard protocol. This involved turning the case over to CONADI and then to the National Genetic Data Bank, a process that could take months or even longer. They

[246] This account draws from six different interviews that Mariana has given over the years, including our discussion, her *Memoria Abierta* account and previously published interviews.

expedited the process by sending Guillermo's sample to the United States to Mary-Claire King's genetics lab. She was the geneticist who originally helped devise the "index of grandpaternity." She also had a private genetic data bank containing the *Grandmothers'* blood samples. Her lab quickly confirmed that Guillermo was Rodolfo, Mariana's brother and Rosa and Argentina's grandson.

Once the genetic link was verified, the case was turned over to the judiciary. On February 8, 2001, the same day that the *Grandmothers* announced his restitution, Francisco Gómez was called before judge Judge María Servini de Cubría. Francisco admitted that he was not the biological father of Guillermo/Rodolfo and was placed under arrest for kidnapping and falsification of documents. Guillermo/Rodolfo would later call it one of the worst days of his life. Guillermo/Rodolfo was angered by the arrest of Gómez and refused to see his sister of his grandmothers for five months. He had pleaded with the *Grandmothers* not to take the case to the judiciary and blamed them for his father's arrest. The *Grandmothers* argued that the arrest was out of their hands because he had committed a crime.

He went to the press and denounced the *Grandmothers* in the only public statements he has made to this date. "If what they want is a grandson and a brother, I am here," he stated. He also accused them of attempting to bribe him by emphasizing the indemnity he would receive once his identity had been officially registered. "Not all the gold in the world could let me close my eyes in peace when I go to bed knowing that my father and mother would be in prison."[247]

[247] La Nación, February 18, 2001.

The case was important because it was the first time the *Grandmothers* had located a grandchild in the hands of Air Force personnel. A doctor named Jorge Luis Magnacco had presided over the birth and signed the birth certificate. He had long been accused of involvement in clandestine births in the ESMA but this was the proof needed for his arrest. Guillermo/Rodolfo's primary defense of the man who raised him is that he had nothing to do with the disappearances. He argued that he was a civil employee of the Air Force who worked in maintenance as a gardener and a bricklayer. He maintained that nobody ever spoke of the dictatorship when he was growing and that his father was a simple man without much education – "the only thing he knows how to do is write his name." He blamed his legal situation on the Air Force who registered the false birth certificate rather than making him "go through the adoption process." According to Gómez's own testimony, he worked as a personal employee to Roberto Sende, the Air Force commodore who he claimed offered him the child (Sende had already died at this point so could not be charged with a crime or called to testify). Sende told him he only needed to register the child. In court, Gómez stated, "I didn't know anything about the child, how he came into his hands, where he came from" and that "I registered him because I thought it was an abandoned child." He said that Sende came to his house alone with the child in his arms and told him to take him. "I didn't ask where he came from, because, out of my ignorance, I thought that I was doing a good deed and I did it." He also claims that he did not understand the illegality of what he was doing. He claimed he did not understand what he was singing when he signed the birth documents.

He said he thought he was filling out adoption forms.[248]

The *Grandmothers'* position, as in other cases in which such defenses were offered, was that Gómez was lying about his ignorance and lack of involvement in the disappearances. They claimed that, despite being a civilian, he worked in intelligence and actively participated in a work group (*grupo de tareas*). This made him an active participant in the disappearances. In fact, the anonymous call that originally detailed the location of Guillermo also denounced Gómez as participating in both a work group and in death flights (*los vuelos de la muerte*)[249] Considering the evidence, the *Grandmothers'* account is credible. Patricia, Guillermo's mother, was specifically transferred to the ESMA to give birth to her child. After giving birth, she was separated from her baby after four days and subsequent transferred out of the ESMA, the euphemism for being killed. Gómez's account is highly dubious. After all the effort that went into ensuring the safe birth of the child, the baby would not have been randomly given away to a low level employee uninvolved in what transpired. In similar cases, the destination of the child was prearranged before the mother gave birth and the parents were not innocent of the origins. The court did not consider there to be adequate proof of Gómez's involvement in the disappearance of the biological mother but his account of how he received the baby was deemed to lack credibility. The court decided that both he and his wife had full knowledge of the illegality of their actions.

After his father was arrested, a problem emerged because the genetic

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[248] Causa n°17.592 "Gómez Francisco s/prisión preventiva" Juzgado Federal. n°1 - Secretaría n°1Registro n°18.634, Buenos Aires, May 3, 2001
[249] Página/12, August 25, 2004.

verification of Guillermo/Rodolfo's identity could not be officially recognized and legally sanctioned without subsequent verification from the National Genetic Data Bank. In his interview, he stated that he was not planning on doing the genetic proof because "I want to continue being Guillermo Francisco Gómez. I want to continue being the son of my parents, not of two people that I never knew."[250] He voiced anger at the *Grandmothers* and in particular was hostile towards Rosa, holding her directly responsible for the situation in her capacity as vice president of the organization. He accused the *Grandmothers* of refusing to try to reach a compromise with him. The *Grandmothers* reiterated that a compromise could not be reached because the crime had been denounced in 1979 and could not be retracted once it had been lodged. In 1979, Rosa initiated charges of illegitimate deprivation of liberty for her daughter Patricia.

Guillermo maintained that he only went to the *Grandmothers* "to find out if Mariana was my sister." He refused to acknowledge any curiosity about or need to know his biological identity or his parents. He also accused the *Grandmothers* of not really wanting to find grandchildren but of vindictively attempting to "find people that had nothing to do with it so that they could make them responsible for the death of their children." He then advised any young people who doubted their origins not to go to the Grandmothers but to ask their parents first "and if they don't want to tell them anything that they keep it inside if they think they are lying to them."

Guillermo/Rodolfo attempted to maintain his privacy and refused a photograph to accompany the interview ("I don't want the whole world to know

[250] La Nación, February 18, 2001.

who I am"). He also voiced mixed feelings about his relationship with his biological family. "The first impression was difficult because it is complicated to understand that these people can be your grandmothers but I felt more affection from Argentina than from Rosa. Argentina is a bit more understanding. Rosa is cold." In discussing his relationship with his sister, he said that they got along but they had arguments "because she has an ideology that I do not share. I don't have an ideology." In his account, "she grew up knowing that they had separated her from her parents and took away her brother." In making such a statement, does not say "our parents." He does not identify her parents as his. He accused her of misdirecting her resentment for what happened to "her parents" against "his." "I argued a lot with her and with my so-called grandmothers to the point that we didn't speak for five months. Arguing with Mariana, I explained to her why I defend my parents so much: because I had parents. I had someone to fight for, I feel responsible for something. She doesn't."

Mariana's account highlights the responsibility she feels for her and Rodolfo's parents. According to Mariana, Guillermo/Rodolfo can accept certain aspects of his history but not the more difficult parts. "He's happy to have a sister, two grandmothers, and parents who wanted him and did not abandon him. There are other parts that he really cannot accept." However, according to Mariana, "this is a package. One cannot accept one part and not the other. This is all his history." [251] Part of the difficulty was that he has not "finished assimilating (*assimilar*)" who is parents were. What she means by this is that he has not

[251] "Eternal Return of the Past Friday," March 23, 2001, BBC MUNDO.COM, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/specials/newsid_1235000/1235940.stm

accepted that his parents disappeared. They are not the people who raised him. She also implies is that he is unwilling to accept that what the people he calls his parents did was wrong. Rosa, meanwhile, argues that he needs time to "incorporate this new reality." While she realizes that she has to wait and had already waited several years, she knows, at the same time, that she cannot wait much longer. She wants to give him time to accept the situation and understand his difficulty accepting his new reality but, since she is in her 80s, she knows that she may not have that much more time to give. "I don't know how much longer I'm going to live but it's not a lot and I would like to have a strong relationship with him while I can."

Although Rosa says the emotion at finally locating her grandson was "indescribable," she approached him with apprehension, concerned with his wellbeing. "How am I going to face him? I thought about it for a long time. I am going to be discrete, I told myself. I am not going to pester him. I'm not going to make a big scene."(Lipis 2003:135) Perhaps this discretion is what led Guillermo/Rodolfo to the conclusion that Rosa was "cold." Rosa also pointed to the larger difficulty of the situation resulting from Guillermo/Rodolfo's feelings for the people who raised him. Although she acknowledges understanding why he feels the way he does, Rosa refuses to acknowledge that they could have any real feelings for him. In explaining why he requested that his mother not be arrested, she argued in terms of an obligation and debt:

> He felt obliged to her or, better, they themselves passed him the bill for all the years they looked after him. But I wanted him to understand that these people were not his real parents. He has to understand that his parents

were those who conceived him. You cannot choose, “I want this one for a father and not the other.” He says he doesn’t want to be the son of people he doesn’t know. It is a little difficult between us now (Lipis 2003:145).

While Rosa acknowledged that he was a victim of the dictatorship and that the dictatorship was to blame for her situation, she also argued that his parents were the ones who victimized him and she refused responsibility for their arrest. These were “matters of the justice system that I have nothing to do with.” According to Rosa, “I am only responsible for having filed a request to find my daughter and my grandson in 1979. I am guilty for having searched for him, of doing the indescribable to find him and for demanding what is mine. (*reclamar algo que es mio*).” (Lipis 2003:136) She also argues that, despite his wishes, he cannot have the choice of his name because he needs a legitimate birth certificate and identity documents that register his biological name. “So he could call himself Guillermo, maybe, but he is going to call himself Perez Roisinblit, of that I have no doubt, because that is his real name: Perez Roisinblit. He cannot call himself by anything else.” (Lipis 2003:138)

Though Rosa acknowledges it is a traumatic situation for her grandson, “a hard shock” and argues that “one has to depart from the fact that he is a victim of the system, a victim of the dictatorship,” like Mariana, she also believes that he can only cease to be a victim by casting off his bonds with the people who raised him. “That he can throw off (*desprenderse)* the relation that he has with the appropriators which is a perverse and lying relationship, one that only a brutal dictatorship like we had in our country could have created.” According to Argentina, Guillermo/Rodolfo had doubts about his identity prior to Mariana’s

appearance at his place of work. He told her that he once had asked his mother if he was really her son or if he was adopted. She slapped him and he never asked again. For Argentina, it was an example of how hard it was for him to get out of the relationship. At the same time, she says that he "knows perfectly well that he is not the son of those people. The blood showed him." Though he knows that he is not their biological son, he claims that the lack of a biological link is unimportant to him. In the same way, though he knows his name is not the name his biological parents gave him, he argues that he should be able to keep whatever name he wants.

Mariana also speaks of the conflict resulting over his desire to keep the name that his kidnappers gave him. "He thinks he has the choice of being Gómez or being Perez. It doesn't work that way. He is who he is." Conflict over his named led to awkwardness in their relationship: "I can't call him anything else and he doesn't want to be called Rodolfo. I say *che boludo* (literally "you stupid" but often used as a term of endearment in Argentina). It's a very slow process." She takes the *Grandmothers'* position that since he has false papers, he needs to have his correct identity registered. "These kinds of people are *ningun nombres* (John Does) in the Argentine judicial system. They don't exist. They need it to take up normal citizenship. The only thing affected by this is his everyday life. It's not about punishment for the appropriators. What's at stake is his civil status. They don't understand this."

In 2005, Magnacco, the ESMA doctor who signed his false birth certificate, was sentenced to 10 years in prison while Francisco Gómez was given 7 years and his wife Teodora Jofré, 3 and a half. The judge's decision was a victory for the *Grandmothers* because it acknowledged that the kidnapping of children of the

disappeared was part of a “systematic plan of annihilation” where “it was necessary to eradicate those who in the future could harbor the same thoughts.”[252] According to the *Grandmothers’* press release when Rodolfo was initially located in 2001 the case was important because, in locating a child in the hands of personnel from the Air Force, it served as “irrefutable proof of what we had been always saying – that there was a systematic plan to appropriate the child of our children.” The court’s ruling acknowledged this.

Although Mariana acknowledges her at times strained relationship with her brother, she still speaks of the importance of having located him and the happiness of being able to end her search.

> Now, the search is already over, but I’m never going to resign myself to everything I did not share with him. Above all, now that I know him, I see who he is and I think of all that we could have done together. The wound does not close. It is a relief to have found him. More than anything, there is a tranquility in knowing that I did right in some way with my parents and more than anything with him. Because although at times I cannot see him, all of this was for him. All of that which comes now, even if it is tough - for example, when he does not have an urge to speak with us - it is the easy part. The difficult thing was not knowing where he was, and that has ended.

Despite their problems, meeting her brother Rodolfo had profound

[252] Página/12, April 23, 2005.

consequences for Mariana. A year after their first meeting, she published an open letter to her brother in which she stated, “in finding you, I found myself.” In it, she argued that before finding him, his absence “paradoxically, occupied *everything.”* The letter hinted at the difficulty in their relationship at the moment. “I cannot accept you with any other name that isn’t the one that our parents gave you. Because if you are not Rodolfo Fernando, I am not Mariana Eva. Because our names relate us to them and relating us to them relates to each other.”[253] She then tells him, “When we are together, something very much like justice occurs.”

By that point, their relationship had wavered between seeing each other frequently and then going months without seeing each other. Like her grandmothers, Mariana believes that her brother still has not been “recovered.” “So I don’t consider that my brother has recovered his identity. In a strictly legal sense, it’s when he has the documents that state he’s the son of my parents. But in a subjective sense, this will probably take his whole life.” Mariana also says she does not know much about her brother’s life. “I don’t know. I don’t know because he doesn’t tell me the whole truth.” She knows that he did not finish high school and believed the Air Force was financially supporting him. The difficulty between the imagined relationship that she constructed with her brother over the years and the real person is difficult for her to bridge. She also finds the balance difficult between her concerns as a human rights activist and her concerns as a sister. She also sees a lack of reciprocity in their relationship.

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[253] Letter from Mariana Eva Perez to her recovered brother, *Mensuario de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo,* June/July 2001.

> Our relationship isn't linear. I discovered I was more fragile than I thought. I discovered I had limits and at times there are things I can't give in the relationship with him. And in the end, it doesn't make any sense to force myself to give them for any activist consideration. I have to approach him as my brother not as a human rights activist, because if I did, I would be classifying him like the appropriators did. So now I'm in a search to try to get close to him as a person and not like a projection of my search, like my long lost little brother. Like the son of the father and mother who compel me to do something for him. Like the person he is. I try to accept the person he is. We can fight if we have to fight. We can fight because he's a person. My imaginary *Rodolfito* behaves very well. He appears when I want him to and doesn't mess around when I don't want him to.

If family members devoted a large part of their lives to searching for their missing family members, they confront their own vulnerability when the person they find does not reciprocate their feelings. An intrinsic difficulty exists in divorcing oneself from the imaginary person that one had searched for and the real human being that one has found.

While Guillermo/Rodolfo may require years before he is "recovered," Mariana also recognizes that, "There are things that I don't think can be fixed." For the family, finding their missing relative did not end their search either. They continue their activism in the group to help find others find their family members but also their own search continues as well. According to Rosa, "For me, another history has begun now. Because I don't know what happened to my daughter

after the ESMA. And this man (Gómez) has to tell me who gave him the child and what happened to his mother. I have a powerful need to know. I've been working for this for 23 years."[254]

Difficulties in Constructing a Relationship

Rodolfo Pérez eventually came to regret his restitution. He refused to accept his name and claimed to have not fully understood the larger repercussions of the decision. He was not fully aware of its consequences on both a psychological and a legal level and ended up publicly defending his parents and criticizing the *Grandmothers.* If restitution is taken to be a transformative event, one that provokes a profound change in all aspects of a person's life, Guillermo/Rodolfo was resistant and outright unwilling to accept this. Even restitutions that have taken place under less overtly acrimonious circumstances have resulted in similar difficulties at the onset. These difficulties are not only on the part of the individual grandchild who is located but also for their family members. Though family members are invariably happy at the appearance of their grandchild, some also voice ambivalent feelings over the restitution of and initial meeting with their grandchildren. The appearance of their grandchild makes some re-experience the loss of their child.

For example, Berta recounts her first meeting with her granddaughter:

> It was terrible to meet her and to see her. She has the same face of her

[254] Página/12, February 9, 2001.

> father. She looks so much like her father and has the same way of being too. You want to greet her and hold her but it's hard since she just found out she wasn't her parents' daughter.[255]

The encounter between family members is structured by a divergence in time. A temporal gap results from the difference between the time the family member knew of their missing family member's existence and had been searching for them and the individual who just found out that some people she never knew existed are her biological family. Even if the search created a relationship that was largely imaginary, it still concretized it. On the other hand, the grandchild did not know the relationship existed until the moment they were located. This imbalance can cause problems as they create a different and, at times, opposing expectations. This is evident in Rodolfo's relationship with his biological family. For this reason, Mariana differentiates between her brother as the imaginary Rodolfito she had been devoting her life to searching for almost two decades and the real person she met.

Berta's granddaughter appeared in 2000. She was located through the efforts of Berta's ex-husband, poet and journalist Juan Gelman who had launched an international campaign to find her. He conducted the search outside of the *Grandmothers* and used his literary prestige to draw attention to his cause. His petitions for his disappeared granddaughter and daughter-in-law included the signatures of heavyweights of world literature like Norman Mailer and five Nobel Prizes in literature, including Imre Kertész, Gabriel García Márquez, Günter

[255] From her *Memoria Abierta* interview.

Grass, Wole Soyinka and José Saramago. He eventually located his granddaughter in Uruguay. His pregnant daughter-in-law had been taken there as part of Plan Condor, the coordinated actions of the region's military dictatorships. His granddaughter had been raised by an Uruguayan police officer. By the time they located her, he had just died.

Berta remembers her first meeting with her granddaughter as awkward and uncomfortable, in particular due to the presence of the woman who raised her who had accompanied her. The mother introduced herself first. "She kissed me and said how pretty you are. I wanted to tell her 'what an '*hija de puta'* you are,' but I said hello and nothing more. I didn't reject her." When the mother left, she was left alone with her granddaughter. "I looked at her and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't stop looking at her." They went to a café and sat down in front of the river to chat. "I didn't know what to talk about." Her granddaughter was "very sad. It was very hard for her too." Both found it difficult to speak and were uncertain about what to talk about.

On their second meeting, her granddaughter came to her house to have breakfast and they spent the day talking. The awkwardness of the first moment passed but one of the primary difficulties for the relationship was for Berta to overcome the hostility she felt against the people who had raised granddaughter. "Her parents were criminals. I'm not as angry at the mother. The poor wretch (*pobre desgraciada*) didn't know much more than how to clean a house. She doesn't exist to me. She invited me once over. I did not respond and she never asked again." In this case, this difficulty did not result in a legal problem for her mother, as in Guillermo/Rodolfo's case, because she had been located in Uruguay where there such crimes were not being prosecuted. In interviews,

Berta reenacts (possibly imaginary) conversation that she had with her. “Your real name is Gelman. This is not you. This is you when you were stolen. You didn’t know who you were. Now you know.”

Her granddaughter resisted accepting that her parents had any knowledge of the disappearance or anything to do with it. In this case, it was harder to believe because her father was a police commissioner. She had been told that her parents found her outside their home in a basket with a note that stated the baby had been born several months earlier but the mother could not take care of her – “like in a children’s tale,” Berta observes. Since the family had no children of their own, they took the child and registered her as their own. Once again, the story strained credibility. The biological mother had been brought to Montevideo while pregnant and kept alive long enough to have her baby there. She would have been destined for a family that knew of the mother’s circumstance, if they were not directly involved. “They killed the mother after they took the baby. This is what happened,” Berta reiterates. For Berta, the guilt of the people who raised her is self-evident yet her granddaughter was unable or unwilling to admit it. “If you say, they weren’t guilty, why did they hide you? Why did they register you as their own child? That’s another crime.” She acknowledges the difficulty resulted from the fact that they had treated her well. “She didn’t want to or couldn’t admit what happened.” In the end, they reached an entente in which the subject would not be mentioned further: “She did not want to speak about this again.” Like in other cases, her granddaughter was reluctant to speak much about her own life or her upbringing. “I don’t know what happened to her,” Berta says, although at the same time she attributes this characteristic to a family trait: “She’s like my son, she doesn’t speak too much.”

Berta voices the conversations she had with her granddaughter, “This is your life. You do what you can. I will wait until you are okay with what happened. We have an excellent relationship. With time, you will love me.”

In the end of an interview from 2001, Berta argued that “the girl needs to think about this” and their subsequent interactions became more relaxed to the point that, in Berta’s assessment, the two have a very close relationship. Her granddaughter eventually manifested curiosity to know more about her parents, including a desire to see photographs of them and, most importantly, she also began to call her biological father, father and her biological mother, mother. She also noted physical resemblances between herself and her parents and even asked her grandmother what sicknesses ran in the family. She even attributed her poor vision to her father’s side of the family.

In cases of recovered children of the disappeared, the construction of kin ties appears connected to political beliefs. Accepting the human rights account of what occurred in Argentina during the dictatorship is the best indicator of a successful restitution. Private, personal relationships are thus intertwined with public positions. In 2004, four years after she was initially located, Berta’s granddaughter petitioned the Argentine government for documents registering her biological identity. She also requested indemnization from the government for her family’s disappearance and requested Argentine citizenship (since she had been raised in Uruguay, she was Uruguayan).[256]

A year later, in 2005, she made her first public appearance in a tribute to her mother that took place in the Uruguayan legislature. Around the same time,

[256] Clarín, January 30, 2004.

her mother's disappearance is excluded from the country's amnesty laws. This prompts the reopening of the investigation attempting to ascertain the location of her body. These events coincided with the election of that country's center-left president Tabaré Vázquez. By this time, she has taken on her biological identity and has become María Macarena Gelman García Iruretagoyena. She meets with Uruguayan politicians to try to search for her mother's remains and is even taken to a possible location of a clandestine center where her mother was held, killed, and buried. In 2006, she appears at another public event in Buenos Aires, a tribute for disappeared journalists that included her father, After the search for her mother's remains stalled, she filed a complaint with her grandfather against Uruguay with the Inter-American Human Rights Commission.[257]

María Macarena Gelman's appearance in public events for her parents and her taking part in appeals and petitions to locate her mother's remains signal an important transition. Even if she has yet to give interviews about her experience and protects her privacy, the public emergence of children of the disappeared is inextricably linked to interior family dynamics. In some ways, restitution is not only an interior process but it is also a public event. I will turn to this issue in the concluding chapter.

"She's a computer engineer. It's not something that she likes. It's not what she would have wanted to do for herself. But the kidnappers pushed her into it." Buscarita is describing to me her granddaughter Claudia Victoria. She was born March 25, 1978 but was inscribed as Mercedes Beatriz Landa with the birthdate June 13, 1978 by military official Ceferino Landa. She was eventually located by

[257] Daisy Tourné, Mar Prensa, Año I Número 39, Montevideo August 4, 2005, http://www.daisyt.info/mar_prensa.htm.

the *Grandmothers* and cited in a Federal Justice case. The judge asked her to have a genetic proof of her identity carried out. The results returned February 7, 2000. At the time Buscarita had health problems and was out of work so she had gone to live in the United States with her daughter. According to Buscarita, their first meeting was extremeley difficult. The entire family was there, all of Buscarita's children and grandchildren. They were with the judge waiting to see her. Buscarita instantly recognized her when she saw her. "The judge introduced Claudia and me and the first meeting was difficult. I had wanted to hug her but I didn't do it because the poor thing was afraid."

According to Buscarita, the initial days after the restitution were equally difficult:

> The first days were terrible because we didn't know what to say to each other. She found herself with a family that she didn't know, and I found myself with a granddaughter that I hadn't seen since she was a baby. There was nothing to talk about. There were no words. The only thing that we could say to her is, "look, these are the photographs of your family, your parents. Here's you when you were little. Here's your mother feeding you. Here's your father bathing you." What more could we talk about? It was difficult. But little by little, we reconstructed the grandmother-granddaughter relationship.

The tension that Buscarita initially felt made her wonder if the restitution was the right thing to do. "She was so old to be provoking such a change in her life. What if it was damaging for her? What have we done? Is this good or bad? It's terrible

to find out at 22 that her parents weren't her real parents…" She wondered how she was going to tell her friends from school that her real name was not Mercedes but Claudia Victoria. At the same time, Buscarita rationalized the need for her restitution, "But this is who she is. She's not another person. She wasn't the person she was supposed to be."

Although Claudia Victoria only underwent the genetic proof when the judiciary asked her to, she eventually adapted to her new situation. One of the first key events was the celebration of her actual birthday. It took place a little over a month after they found her. The entire family was there. During the early stages, Buscarita tried not to bother her. Claudia Victoria asked for her privacy to be respected and Buscarita complied with her requests. She did not want any photographs of her in the media. The customary practice of the *Grandmothers* is to display photographs of the recovered grandchildren in their office and on their website. Claudia Victoria requested that her photograph not be placed there either. Buscarita tried not to pressure her and said she did not want to bother her about anything. "I want to ask her how she's doing in her daily life but I don't know." A year after her restitution, she was still living with her kidnappers. Buscarita thought she wanted to be independent but could not for economic reasons. When I spoke with Buscarita, she was working in Venezuela at the time. She did not ask her granddaughter so many questions and also claimed not to know too much about her life. When she had asked her how her life was like before, she responded, "don't ask me anything because that is my past life." "It was up to her to reconstruct it for herself," she says. At one point, Buscarita told her that if she did not want to know anymore, she would understand no matter how much it hurt. But Claudia Victoria rejected her request and told her that she

wanted to know more about her biological parents.

Claudia Victoria had been raised by a colonel who took her from a clandestine detention center (*El Olimpo*) in Buenos Aires. The colonel and his wife could not have children so they took her three days after she had been disappeared with her parents and registered her as their own. The mother was told the girl was given to her grandparents. Claudia Victoria had doubts when she was growing up because her supposed parents were old. Her supposed mother was almost 50 when she supposedly gave birth to her.

When the colonel and her wife were put on trial for her kidnapping in 2001, Claudia Victoria testified on their behalf. It was the first time such an event occurred. Her parents' lawyers thought that it would help their defense. On the stand, she only described what happened to her. She did not offer support or a defense for her kidnappers. Notably, when asked her name, she gave her biological identity: Claudia Victoria Poblete Hlaczik. When asked the name of her parents and her date of birth, she also gave the names of her biological parents and her actual date of birth. Although the trial was public, she gave her testimony in private. In Buscarita's opinion, that her so-called parents would make her go through testifying proved that they were not her "real" parents. "I would never have asked her to do such a thing." In the end, her testimony was not perceived as helping her parents and they were both convicted, although, because they were over 70, they were allowed to serve their sentences in their homes. Claudia Victoria's "parents' were both sentenced for their role for theft of identity and falsifying Claudia Victoria's documents. Ceferino Landa received nine years and his wife, 6 and a half.

What became known as the "Poblete case" led to a key moment in the

history of Argentine human rights. The case that originated out of Claudia Victoria's appearance became the basis upon which the amnesty laws – due obedience and *punto final* – were ruled unconstitutional in 2001. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court that finally decided in 2005 to overturn the laws. Prosecutions restarted and the first to be convicted was Julio "*El Turco*" Simon, a former police officer and one of the most notorious torturers from the dictatorship. He was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison on August 4, 2006 for his role in the 1978 disappearance of Claudia Victoria's parents and for kidnapping Claudia Victoria. He still faces 200 other charges of torture and disappearance. After 20 years of impunity resulting from the amnesties and pardons, this was the first sentence passed for disappearances and torture (the second was Miguel Etchecolatz referred to in Chapter 3). This indicates how much is invested in each case beyond the individual repercussions.

After the Supreme Court ruled to overturn the amnesty laws, Claudia Victoria emerged as a more public figure. In 2005, she gave her first media interview. In it, she reversed the typical narrative in which family members know that their grandchild is theirs the moment they first see them. When she was first given a photograph by the judge of her parents, she knew that they were her real parents. She also spoke of the need to pursue justice against military perpetrators. "No sentence is going to take away the pain I had to go through. But it is important that these unjust laws (punto final and due obedience) be annulled. In order for justice to take place, there has to be justice for everyone."

In this case, she was speaking as a family member-activist actively seeking justice. While she still maintained a low profile and requested the article did not include a photograph of her, this marked an important transition. At the

same time, she preferred not to speak publicly about her relationship with her appropriators. She admitted that was in contact with them although implied that they deserved the punishment the received for kidnapping her: ”Everyone is responsible for their actions.” She recounted her initial feelings when she found out her parents were not her real parents: a mix of anger, discomfort, and impotence.

Most importantly, she embraced the grandmothers' institutional discourse to describe her life story. After her initial difficulties with the restitution, she cited the importance that her biological family had searched for her over those years. “Later came the prettiest part, how it is to feel that a family was searching for me for so long. I discovered a new world, the world opened up to me. It is difficult because in the moment that you are supposed to have to begin to separate from your family, you begin to know it.” Moreover, she embraced the idea that restitution was a liberating experience that caused a positive change in her life. “Later, I realized that before, unconsciously, I had a weight that I hadn't noticed, that I didn't say or do certain things. Now I feel more complete, more peaceful and I wouldn't have made these changes without knowing who I was. Now I am not part of a lie.” She even supported compulsory extractions of blood. “There has to be a uniform conduct and the decision should not fall on the kids. To let that decision fall upon them is cruel.”[258]

In 2006, she conducts another interview in which she emerged as one of the few restored grandchildren to speak publicly about their experience. “In my case, this was a victory for my family,” she says. She claims the “shock of truth”

[258] Página/12 , June 15, 2005.

of finding her real family brought her “tranquility.” She says she has finally distanced herself from the people she grew up with, including many friends (some of whom had joined the military) and even her parents. At the same time, she has not broken off contact from her parents entirely, especially her mother, who she claims had not knowledge of her origins. In explaining her situation, she states, “All the memories of my childhood, all the good and bad, all the colors, they are these people, and I can’t ignore that. It’s a horrible story, but it’s our story.” Unlike cases like Evelyn or Rdolofo/Guillermo, Claudia is able to make the leap beyond the limited familiar realm of “our.” The “our (his)story” that she is referring to is not her personal life story or that of her family but the history of Argentina.[259] In this case, she collectivizes her story and see it as part of a larger historical context. The movement of her experience from the sphere of the individual and the familial to the larger collective experience of Argentina represents an essential triumph for the *Grandmothers*. Her public position also heralds the arrival and emergence of the *Nieto* (grandchild) as a political actor. In her case, it is no longer the story of herself and her family as it was in the narrative of Evelyn Vázquez, it is the history of Argentina invested within the life of one individual. I will return to this issue in the final chapter but first I will turn to the larger context of human rights debates in Argentina.

[259] Miami Herald, April 16, 2006.

Chapter 9: Imperialist Agents, Radical Revolutionaries and Mild-Mannered Reformists.

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and the subsequent military response spurred debates across the globe. In Argentina, the debate provoked a controversy in the human rights movement that reveals the divisions between the different groups. I open this chapter with this controversy because it provides an entry point to discuss the politics of human rights in Argentina.

Shortly after the US invasion of Afghanistan, a round table discussion on the "imperialist war" was held at the recently launched Popular University of the *Mothers*. During the seminar, Hebe de Bonafini, head of the group, told the audience that she became happy upon hearing news of the attacks. She had been in Cuba at the time visiting her daughter and she celebrated when she found out. "The blood of many had been avenged," she declared and included her two disappeared sons among them. She claimed to not only speak in the name of the *Mothers* but for all of the disappeared as well.[260]

In her interpretation, the attacks did not result in collateral damage because "poor people did not die." Those who perished in the attacks were not civilians. They were casualties of war because they "decided which of us were going to die, be without work, be massacred, be bombed." She also praised the authors of the attacks as "brave men and women" "who trained and gave their

[260] "El 11 de septiembre sentí que la sangre de tantos caídos era vengada," Hebe de Bonafini, Rebelión, October 7, 2001, http://www.rebelion.org/internacional/hebe071001.htm

lives for us." She compared them to her disappeared children who gave up their lives for a better world. Like the disappeared, the suicide bombers were labeled terrorists but were really revolutionaries. "They declared war with their bodies, piloting the planes to crash and turn to shit the greatest power in the world," she said. She was not only pleased by the attacks but she was also happy that the entire *pueblo norteamericano* (US people[261]) were being made to experience the same fear that they had long inflicted on others, a fear "they made us feel with persecutions, disappearance and torture." US citizens were collectively blamed and could be collectively punished for the actions of their government because they either supported or tacitly assented to their government's imperialist aggression. Bonafini said she was giving voice to what many people were thinking but did not say because of political correctness and self-interest. She, on the other hand, preferred "not to be a hypocrite and say things as they are."

Although several participants voiced less celebratory reactions to the attacks, three other notable speakers made similar remarks. They viewed the 9/11 attacks through the lens of class struggle. Noted novelist and playwright David Viñas, who like Bonafini has two disappeared children, called the attacks "an unprecedented means of class struggle" in a battle between "popular violence and imperialism's institutional violence" or "the violence from below against the violence embedded (*enquistada*) above." For Viñas, the attacks represented a new stage of class struggle in "a world globalized by the imperial

[261] Although Argentines find it arrogant for US citizens to call themselves as "Americans," they refer to U.S. citizens as "*norteamericanos*" rather than *estadounidenses*, often overlooking the fact that Canadians and Mexicans are also North Americans.

terrorism of the Pentagon and Wall Street."[262] The director of the *Mothers'* university, Vicente Zito Lema, pursued this interpretation to its logical extreme by declaring Osama Bin Laden "a revolutionary" who was "part of the class struggle" of "humanity's oppressed against imperialism." He compared him to Argentina's liberators from Spanish colonialism, San Martin and Belgrano, in addition to invoking Che Guevara and "my disappeared *compañeros* who fell in combat."[263] Sergio Schoklender, a lawyer for the *Mothers*[264] who Hebe de Bonafini calls her "adopted son," described the action as a "surgical operation" in a war between "civilization and humanity versus the United States." The attacks were surgical because they struck "the precise centers of power" of "the enemy who is destroying us." While Schoklender lamented individual deaths, he liked what they collectively represented: the United States was "not so invulnerable and that we have the possibility of resisting and confronting them."[265]

These comments might not have circulated beyond the limited sphere of radical political circles had it not been for journalist Horacio Verbitsky's refutation of them. Horacio Verbitsky, son of novelist Bernardo Verbitsky, is one of the leading human rights figures in Argentina. Foremost, he is one of Latin

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[262] "Las acciones violentas en Washington son una forma inédita de lucha de clases," David Viñas, October 7, 2001, http://www.rebelion.org/internacional/vinas071001.htm

[263] "Somos los terroristas de la vida contra los señores de la muerte," Vicente Zito Lema, October 7, 2001, http://www.rebelion.org/internacional/zito071001.htm

[264] Schoklender is a controversial figure. In 1981, he and his brother were convicted and given life sentences for killing their parents. He maintains his innocence (Schoklender 1983). While in prison, he became a lawyer and went to work for the *Mothers* after being released in 1995 (Schoklender 1997). Bonafini's association with him (especially as his "adopted mother") is frequently cited by critics to discredit her group. Two years before this speech, Schoklender had given a speech at one of the *Mothers'* conferences on the "Right to Violence."

[265] Página/12, October 10, 2001.

America's most distinguished investigative journalists; in particular for his exposure of the endemic corruption of flamboyant ex-President Carlos Menem's regime (1992,1993). He has also written extensively on the dictatorship and its aftermath and, in particular, was the interlocutor for ex-Navy officer Adolfo Scilingo's confession about his role in the military's disappearances. Scilingo approached Verbitsky in 1995 to confess his role in the death flights in which the disappeared were drugged, taken on planes and dropped alive into the River Plate. This was the first time a military officer publicly confirmed the death flights that took place during the dictatorship. The revelations, published in a subsequent bestselling book *El Vuelo* (The Flight) (1995) was a watershed moment for human rights. The publication of Scilingo's confession heralded a renewed interest in the dictatorship and invigorated human rights groups after years of stasis, even sparking the formation of the group H.I.J.O.S. For his journalistic work, Verbitsky won the International Press Freedom Award in 2001.

In the late 1990s, Verbitsky became active in CELS (*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*). CELS is a prominent Argentine human rights organization that was founded during the dictatorship in 1979 by Emilio Mignone and three other fathers of disappeared children. CELS is one of the major human rights organizations in Argentina. Verbitsky became its executive director in 2000. His own political trajectory is worth noting, if only because of its role in the subsequent debate. In his youth, he joined the FAP (Armed Peronist Forces) and then the *Montoneros*. He was active in their intelligence services and

collaborated with Rodolfo Walsh. Verbitsky's leftwing political credentials were impeccable.[266]

Verbitsky responded to the *Mothers'* seminar in a radio interview and, shortly after, in an article entitled "The Joy of Death: a refutation of Viñas, Schoklender, Zito Lema, and Pastor de Bonafini."[267] In the article, he cautioned that far from heralding the dawn of a new revolutionary era, the 9/11 attacks were retrogressive for progressive political movements worldwide as the United States and other government would use them as a pretext to curtail civil rights under the guise of security. Turning to their specific statements, Verbitsky's criticized their interpretation of the terrorist attacks as "class struggle" as a misplaced and unjustifiable projection of their own political ideologies onto religious fundamentalist suicidal terrorists. To see Bin Laden and his followers as Marxist revolutionaries was a childish fantasy. Far from representing the proletariat struggling for a socialist revolution, he was the advocate of a retrograde theocratic regime. "Marx would be turning in his grave," he observed.

Verbitsky further pointed out that in a country governed by Bin Laden, someone like David Viñas, "an anti-establishment, socialist and Jewish intellectual," "would be the first to be executed." Viñas's comparison of the disappeared with the suicide pilots was "an unexpected gift Viñas gave to his children's murderers." The disappeared "were not suicidal terrorists like the pilots of Allah but rather militants of an attempted revolution who were defeated and paid for their heroism with their lives." He also found it unconscionable that

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[266] Although Verbitsky has been accused by his political enemies (and an ex-Montonero) of being a "traitor." They use the fact that he was in Argentina throughout the dictatorship and did not disappear as evidence of this.
[267] Página/12, October 10, 2001.

anyone on the left could express pleasure in the "atrocious deaths of other human beings" and pointed to Trotsky's contrast between Marxist methods of revolution and individual acts of terror. Finally, he concluded that one need not be compelled to choose between "Milosevic's ethnic cleansing and NATO's 'collateral damage', between Bin Laden's explosions and Bush's, and between Sharon's fascist settlements and Hamas's serial killers."[268]

In the aftermath of Bonafini's statements, several of her supporters asked her to recant and several teachers at her University resigned their positions in protest. Not known for mincing her words or backing down in the face of controversy, Bonafini refused. Instead of a retraction, in a subsequent interview with the progressive magazine *3Puntos*, she exacerbated the dispute even further with more inflammatory comments. First, she clarified that she did not justify terrorism nor did she support Bin Laden. She also said that she was not happy that people had died but that she had merely expressed her happiness over the attacks' larger significance: "I became happy that, for once, this barrier in the world, this filthy barrier, filled with food, this barrier of gold, of riches, collapsed on top of them." She did not celebrate the deaths of individuals but "was happy and celebrated the fact that this savage capitalism that is destroying us has for once gotten its own." The victims of the attacks were uniformly lumped together as "the powerful:" "In the Towers, the powerful died, and the powerful is my enemy." She then collectively blamed them for being responsible for the disappearance of her children: "Because they are the same who ordered the killing of my children." Although she claimed to oppose the idea of

[268] Ibid.

vengeance, she still saw the attacks as a form of retributive justice. “The North Americans shit on our lives. Well, it was about time they paid for it.” The US population was collectively described as a “cowardly and vengeful people” (only when pressed by the interviewer were Noam Chomsky and James Petras exempted). The business executives and employees of international financial organizations who worked in the Towers were held directly responsible for global poverty and the deaths of 35,000 children per day throughout the world.[269]

More generally, she defended the use of violence as a viable and legitimate means of resisting oppression. “The people have every right to armed revolt against their oppressors.” Revolution was declared “the only way to stop the people (*el pueblo)* from suffering.” In turning towards Verbitsky’s comments, she denounced him as a closeted imperialist. “This country is filled with imperialists who call themselves Marxists, and I say you are either an imperialist or a Marxist.” She attacked the “intellectuals” who criticized her and called the teachers who quit the Mothers’ university “cowards” who were “incapable of maintaining an ideology”. Despite all of this bombastic rhetoric, the most controversial statement in the interview came when she declared: “I think that Verbitsky is a servant of the United States. He receives his salary from the Ford Foundation and, besides being a Jew, he is completely pro-North American.” The contentious interview ended when Bonafini attacked the interviewers for attempting to stoke controversy in order to sell magazines and accused them of

[269] Bonafini would later thus sharply differentiated the March 11, 2004 attacks in a Madrid Train Station because there the victims were according to Bonafini students and the elderly. Her argument is similar to that of Ward Churchill’s, the political activist and former University of Colorado professor, who referred to September 11 victims as “Little Eichmanns”

being indifferent to the attack against her daughter that occurred earlier that year.[270]

Most commentators immediately seized upon Bonafini's use of the term "Jew" as an apparent insult. In addressing her accusations, Verbitsky responded by saying that "the only thing that is true [of what she said] is that I'm a Jew"[271] and said it informed his politics since it entailed his identification with the oppressed. Bonafini initially denied making the comment, saying that she had been deliberately and maliciously misinterpreted. In a letter, she wrote that she was always proud to be called Jewish when anonymous callers would denounce the *Mothers* as "dirty Jews" in the threatening or insulting messages they would leave at their headquarters. Verbitsky responded that he procured a copy of the taped interview and that confirmed that this was what she had said. Bonafini responded by belatedly attempting to clarify her position. The real reason for her comment was because "as a Jew, [Verbitsky] supported the massacres in Palestine." This final remark provoked the intervention of Argentina's Palestinian representative who referred to Verbitsky's longstanding support of the Palestinian cause.[272]

Radical Revolutionaries and Imperialist Agents

In the end, Bonafini denounced the allegations of antisemitism as part of a slanderous campaign against her group. She said that a focus on that comment

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[270] From the *3Puntos* interview by Luis Gruss and Mariana Canavese of Hebe de Bonafini from October 2001.
[271] Pagína/12, October 28, 2001.
[272] Pagína/12, November 4, 2001.

served as a means of obfuscation that diverted attention from the real substance of her accusation that Verbitsky was a "North American agent." What made Verbitsky a "North American agent" or "servant" was the funding CELS, the human rights organization he presided, received from the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation is a philanthropic foundation based in New York that, according to its charter, promotes democratic values, human rights, education, economic development and arts and culture. Verbitsky responded that he received no salary from the Ford Foundation ("not even a pencil") in his position as head of CELS. His income was derived entirely from his journalism and the sale of his books. Although the Ford Foundation gave money to CELS to finance some of its programs, Verbitsky argued that there were no strings attached to the money and they did not direct CELS policy in any way. They simply funded certain programs, most of them relating to their activities in seeking justice for the actions of the dictatorship. However, Verbitsky pointed out that, as a general human rights organization, CELS's mission was not only to seek justice for the dictatorship but also to investigate institutional violence, police brutality, prison conditions as well as to promote economic, social and cultural rights. He considered his position as president of CELS not as a job but as an activist position.[273]

The Verbitsky-Bonafini debate set off a furor among the Argentine left. The dominant response by the radical left was that Verbitsky was orchestrating a deliberate campaign against the *Mothers.* Instead of addressing the substance of Verbitsky's accusation, commentators resorted to *ad hominem* attacks against

[273] Pagína/12, October 30, 2001.

him. Bonafini's reference to Verbitsky as a "North American agent" was reiterated throughout radical political sectors. In their opinion, the whole brouhaha had nothing to do with Bonafini's statements about 9/11 or any offhand reference to Verbitsky's Jewishness that she may or may not have made. Verbitsky was manufacturing the controversy as a pretext. The real reason for his attack could be found in the funding CELS received from the Ford Foundation.

CELS receives funding from a variety of different sources both in the United States and in Europe for its programs so why was the Ford Foundation singled out? For some commentators, the very mention of the Ford name conjured invariable associations with the Ford Motor Company and, with it, the dictatorship.[274] The Ford Motor Company had been directly implicated in the dictatorship's actions. If the disappearances served capitalist economic interests, the Ford Motor Company was one beneficiary. According to former workers, the Ford Motor Company had collaborated with the military in the kidnapping, torture, and disappearance of its own workers.[275] Survivors claim that Ford had a detention center on factory grounds and that management worked together with the military in identifying "troublemaking" workers, mainly union delegates. They also reportedly allowed their vehicles to be used by the military to roundup employees. The car company also had a more generally sinister significance during the dictatorship. Unmarked green Ford Falcons were commonly used by the military as their vehicle of choice for disappearing people. In 2006, criminal

[274] See Mónica Toigo's "Argentina: La Fundación Ford," November 19, 2001. http://www.rebelion.org/ddhh/toigo191101.htm
[275] *The New York Times,* November 27, 2002.

and civil cases were filed against Ford and its management during the dictatorship for their role in the disappearances.

However, while some commentators linked the Ford Foundation to the Ford Motor Company, the relationship is historical and in name only. They have no mutual affiliations and are run entirely independent of each other. The original endowment for the Foundation came from Ford stock given by Henry Ford but the stock had been entirely divested from the Foundation by the mid-1970s. The last member of the Ford family to sit on the board of directors, Henry Ford II, resigned the year of the military coup in 1976, ironically citing the Foundation's "anti-capitalist" positions as cause – in particular for their support of Salvador Allende.

However, more precise explanations linking Verbitsky's Ford Foundation funding and his criticisms of Bonafini were offered. Néstor Kohan, a Marxist scholar who teaches an open course on Che Guevara at the *Mothers'* University, defended Bonafini by pointing to the money CELS received from the Ford Foundation. He casually dismissed Verbitsky's specific criticisms levied at Bonafini (brushing off accusations of antisemitism with "my name is Kohan but why does it matter?"[276]) and focused on the role of United States-based benevolent foundations such as the Ford Foundation in "buying the heart and renting the pen of writers and artists as a means of controlling and co-opting researchers and sociologists."[277] Verbitsky could accurately claim that he did not receive a salary from the Ford Foundation, but this was largely irrelevant. The

[276] Argentina: ¿Por qué Horacio Verbitsky? , Néstor Kohan, Rebelión, September 3, 2002.
[277] Kohan, Nestor. "La pluma y el dólar," April 25, 2002. Revista CASA DE LAS AMÉRICAS.

role of the Ford Foundation in funding CELS was neither incidental nor accidental. Nor was the money disinterested or altruistic. Kohan cites the 1.5 million US dollars CELS had received from the Ford Foundation in the previous two years as evidence of the importance they attached to the organization.[278]

According to Kohan, the importance of CELS to the Ford Foundation was not in the human rights work they were doing but in the reformist politics they embraced. As opposed to revolutionary groups like Bonafini's *Mothers*, CELS was accused of being a reformist organization devoted to "staying the course." This gave the organization strategic importance for US foreign policy. As evidence, Kohan cited the Santa Fe Committee's "Santa Fe II" document entitled "A strategy for Latin American in the 1990s" released in 1988 by members of the Council for Inter-American Security, an organization of Reagan hardliners and Cold War warriors that issued policy recommendations to the next president. In the document, they argued that the US should strengthen human rights groups that supported democracy as opposed to those that supported statism. By statism, they were referring to active state intervention in economic areas. In other words, they wanted to support groups who embraced individual rights instead of groups that opposed neoliberal capitalism.

While Kohan does not accuse Verbitsky of being a CIA double agent, he insinuates that he is an imperial stooge. He cites Frances Stonor Saunders' book *The Cultural Cold War* (2001), which detailed the CIA's use of front groups and phantom benevolent foundations as a concerted effort to subvert radical

[278] CELS also receives funds from UNICEF, the European Human Rights Foundation, and other US based philanthropic organizations like the Kellogg Foundation, the Tinker Foundation, and The John Merck Fund.

political groups during the Cold War era. Supporting center-left and progressive moderate positions that were less combative towards US power served as a means of isolating and neutralizing radical movements. This was part of a larger cultural war that even included the US State Department sponsoring tours of African-American jazz musicians like Louis "Ambassador Satchmo" Armstrong throughout the world as symbols of US freedom (Von Eschen 2004) In particular, the CIA bankrolled philanthropic organizations like the Ford Foundation through grants that came from phantom foundations. Their objective was to secretly funnel its influence through the legitimacy of respected organizations like the Ford Foundations.

The parallel that Kohan is making with Verbitsky and the *Mothers* should be obvious. US imperial power was funding "progressive" human rights organizations like CELS as an ideological decoy, a lure to draw support away from radical revolutionaries like the *Mothers*. Verbitsky's attack on Bonafini, an attack on the revolutionary left made by an erstwhile radical from a position grounded within progressive politics, was more than an expression of his debt to his benefactors. It was exactly what the Ford Foundation had intended when they decided to give money to CELS. The Verbitsky-Bonafini debate was thus a battle site of the ideological warfare emanating from the US. Such accusations have been made by other notable radicals, although not in terms of the CELS. In a widely circulated article written in December 2001, the Marxist sociologist James Petras had already made a link between the Foundation's past funding behavior during the Cold War and its present activities.

> As in the 1950s and 60s, the Ford Foundation today selectively funds anti-leftist human rights groups which focus on attacking human rights violations of U.S. adversaries, and distancing themselves from anti-imperialist human rights organizations and leaders. The FF has developed a sophisticated strategy of funding human rights groups (HRGs) that appeal to Washington to change its *policy* while denouncing U.S. adversaries their "*systematic*" violations. The FF supports HRGs which equate massive state terror by the U.S. with individual excesses of anti-imperialist adversaries. The FF finances HRGs which do not participate in anti-globalization and anti-neoliberal mass actions and which defend the Ford Foundation as a legitimate and generous 'non-governmental organization.'[279]

Petras's claim may be undermined by the acknowledgements he wrote to his early work *Politics and Social Structure in Latin America* that thanked the "generous financial support" of the Ford Foundation (1970:8). That he leaves this unmentioned in his attack on the foundation is perplexing. In any case, other academics have made similar claims, including, more recently, Joan Roelofs' 2003 work *Foundations and Public Policy: the Mask of Pluralism* which argues that these foundations co-opt left-wing voices to refocus on identity politics rather than economic issues.

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[279] "The Ford Foundation and the CIA:A documented case of philanthropic collaborationwith the Secret Police" by James Petras, December 15, 2001, Rebelión, http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/FordFandCIA.html

That there was no evidence that the Ford Foundation was in any way dictating CELS policy was irrelevant. History was clearly repeating itself. The Ford Foundation was funding CELS using its "irresistible dollars" as a means to, in Kohan's words, "domesticate and co-opt intellectual critics and to isolate, discredit, and insult more radical revolutionaries." A respected figure like Verbitsky provided the ideal front man since he had both journalistic integrity and radical political credentials. To explain, his former revolutionary politics, Verbitsky was accused of having undergone a "progressive ideological mutation" from his days in the Montoneros to his current position at CELS.

Kohan would later offer an even more precise explanation for the timing of Verbitsky's "campaign" against Bonafini. During 2001-2002, Argentina was undergoing one of the worst economic crises in its history. The crisis culminated in street protests that brought down the government in December of 2001, forcing the resignation of President Fernando de la Rua. Political radicals saw the revolutionary potential of this moment. The timing of Verbitsky's attacks on Bonafini were synchronized to oppose movements promoting these possibilities. Revolutionaries like Bonafini were offering an exit out of the existing system while, in Kohan's assessment, Horacio Verbitsky "plays a central ideological role in the attempt to legitimize an institutional exit." In such a role, Verbitsky is seen as a key player in the development of a new center-left establishment movement that had been previously launched and failed in the preceding years (FREPASO and La Alianza). A new center-left alliance required attacking the revolutionaries at the precise moment when social and economic conditions were fertile for revolution. Such was the unstated, underlying motivation of Verbitsky's "campaign."

Over the previous years, Bonafini had explicitly cultivated links between the *Mothers* and the new social movements that were emerging as popular contestations against the forces of neoliberalization. These ties was the real target of Verbitsky's attack: those on the left who saw the episodes of December of 2001 as a popular victory that was moving the country towards a pre-revolutionary state. At the end of 2002, Verbitsky and James Petras had a contentious exchange over what these movements represented. Petras, like Bonafini, is a prominent supporter of what is commonly termed "popular struggle" (*luchas populares*). The argument was sparked by an editorial Verbitsky wrote that broadsided Petras for pushing these movements to take more confrontational approaches.[280] Verbitsky attacked Petras from the left. He argued that throughout Latin America, right-wing politicians and military officers were attempting to use these movements as a pretext to push for a remilitarization of the region. The implication was that supporters of so-called "popular struggle" like Petras were feeding into the desires of the reactionary right. He also insinuated that Petras was an outside agitator, a comfortable, salaried professor living in the United States who did not have to deal with the potential consequences of his instigations. Petras responded by referring to Verbitsky as "an enemy of the *Mothers*" and denouncing his association with the Ford Foundation.[281] He described his close and long involvement with popular struggles, citing them as entirely organic movements that did not need his help to guide them. Verbitsky, meanwhile, accused Petras of mistaking these "new

[280] Página/12, December 15, 2002.
[281] James Petras, "A Reply to Horacio Verbitsky, Rebelión, http://www.rebelion.org/petras/english/petras251202.htm

social movements" with Trotskyist political parties and advised him to "make a revolution in your own village. Advise others how to do it in the rest of the world and you will be ridiculous."

Verbitsky can be seen to be speaking out of personal experience. As an individual who previously participated in revolutionary movements, he saw firsthand the catastrophic consequences. In Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s provided the pretext for a violent reaction in the form of unparalleled state terror that few at the time could have anticipated. The lesson that Verbitsky could have learned from his experience is that institutional reform was the only viable political goal and that the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s should not be looked upon with nostalgia. In a similar way, Bonafini is frequently accused of being a *setentista*. Literally "from the 70s", in this case, the epithet is used to refer to those still harboring the revolutionary aspirations of that decade.

In many ways, this debate that positioned reformists against revolutionaries is a local manifestation of a global intellectual debate. In academic circles, many of the radical critiques of human rights have come from individuals connected to revolutionary politics in the 1960s and 1970s. They attack human rights as alternately a new form of imperialism or a soft form of liberalism incapable of presenting a way out of the current global world system. One of the most prominent of such thinkers is the philosopher Toni Negri, the Italian Marxist revolutionary and former advocate of armed insurrection who had been imprisoned for his alleged role of 'intellectually abetting' the Red Brigades, a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group he had no direct contact with, who had kidnapped and assassinated the former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro in 1978.

His two co-authored works with Michael Hardt, *Empire* (2000) and its sequel *Multitude* (2003), have met with enormous success in intellectual circles throughout the globe.[282] Another prominent intellectual in the radical critique of human rights is Alain Badiou. A former Maoist, his influential and popular polemic *Ethics* (2002) attacked the concept of human rights, as well as all systems of ethics built around the concept of otherness. According to Badiou, the dominant conception of human rights leads to political impotence as the subject of human rights is only a suffering victim who is incapable of constructing an emancipatory politics.

Badiou has previously given talks at the Popular University of the *Mothers* and contributed articles to their newspaper. In one speech given in 2000 in Buenos Aires, Badiou criticized the ethics of human rights, while singling out the *Mothers* as an example of ethics he supported. In an interview with a local newspaper, Badiou revealingly defines that being on the left "is to be convinced that one has to create a political and economic road different from the dominant one" irrelevant of how good or bad circumstances are.[283] For Badiou, to truly be on the left, one must endorse revolutionary change. This is why the *Mothers* were a human rights organization he could support.

Badiou's comment can also explain newfound interest in Argentina for like-minded political radicals around the world. Ever reflective of changing fashions in the social sciences, the most popularly studied topic in Argentina by both local and foreign social scientists right now are the new social movements

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[282] Argentine political theorist Atilio A. Borón (2005) wrote a response to Empire, chastising Hardt and Negri for ignoring state power and failing to take in account the Latin American experience.
[283] La Nación, April 26, 2004.

that have emerged in Argentina over the past decade but became globally visible after the 2001 crisis. This interest extends beyond academia to all activist circles. In the words of Marcela López Levy, "Participants of the international movement searching for the possibility of a better world found the novel initiatives taken in Argentina hugely inspiring" (2004:118). Why else did superstar journalist-activist Naomi Klein come to Argentina to make a documentary on the reoccupied factories? According to the self-serving documentary she made with her husband Avi Lewis, *The Take*, she was drawn to Argentina by the emergence of these new social movements.[284] In her post-*No Logo* celebrity that crowned her as one of popular voices of the anti-globalization movement, she found herself continually confronted by interrogators asking her about viable alternatives to the current global order.

Anthropologists are routinely faced with the same kinds of criticisms: they make critiques without offering any other options. These new Argentine social movements were said to be providing alternatives so she set off to document the worker-run factories that emerged in Argentina over the past decade as a response to the devastating economic effects of neoliberalization. Interest in these social movements is widespread. For noted Marxist economist John Holloway who has worked closely with the Zapatista movement in Mexico, "the struggles in Argentina are one of the most important rays of hope in the world in the last years."(2004:9) Holloway cites the movement as important not only for Argentina but for the entire world, an empirical example of his anarchist-

[284] Self-serving because in a documentary that ostensibly celebrates the resistance of these social movements, she simultaneously celebrates her own anti-globalization activism.

autonomist take on Marxism, “a movement that wants to change the world without taking power.” (Holloway 2002) In a similar vein, others have hailed these movements as examples of *horizontalidad,* (horizontalism) a concept coined to describe new Argentine social movements that emphasize direct democratic participation (Sitrin 2005).

With expanding interest in such movements, activist-oriented social scientists who less than a decade earlier would be studying human rights groups and issues of memory resulting from the dictatorship have flocked to the *piquetero* movement (Alcañiz & Scheier 2007, Garay 2007) - the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (the Movement of Unemployed Workers), neighborhood associations (Dinerstein 2003), worker occupied factories (Ranis 2006) and other popular manifestations against neoliberalism (Vilas 2006, Schoijet 2005, Auyero 2006,). The *piqueteros* are a social movement that emerged in Argentina in the mid-1990s but become the visible symbol of the economic crisis in 2001. They are picketers. When workers protest against working conditions they go on strike. Unemployed people cannot go on strike so their protest against being unemployed is a *piquete*. They block roads or bridges demanding employment or social welfare. They are called MTD, the Unemployed Workers Movement.

Presently, to study human rights in Argentina is outmoded. Although an Argentine anthropologist told me about this research trend shortly after my arrival to the field, I came to understand what this meant belatedly after a North American Latin Americanist implicitly criticized me at a conference for addressing the topic of human rights in the present. “You are speaking in a 1990s discourse,” he said, even though my talk was entirely confined to events taking

place in the current decade. An attack on my "obsolescence" masked his real criticism. The human rights movements were largely irrelevant to "what was really going down on the ground" (i.e. contemporary Argentine political struggles). In his formulation, these new social movements have left human rights groups behind.

The "Institutional Exit" and the Response of the Right

Much to the dismay of academics and activists interested in the revolutionary potential of these groups, in the end, the "institutional exit" that Kohan accused Verbitsky of representing was exactly what took place. As James Petras lamented in April of 2004, "popular insurrection" soon reverted back to "normal capitalism."[285] What Petras termed a "bourgeois takeover" took place in 2002 after Néstor Kirchner was unceremoniously elected president after former president Carlos Menem withdrew from a run-off election. A relative unknown, Kirchner surprised many by being far politically savvier than expected and embarked on a center-left course of government that aligned with the human rights movement. While radicals were not happy with this development since Kirchner made no efforts to jettison the capitalist order, the right was absolutely apoplectic, referring to Kirchner's government as a *Montonero* terrorist takeover. Figuring among some of his appointees were several important progressive and human rights figures, including the appointments of human rights lawyer Eduardo Luis Duhalde, who defended political prisoners during the 1970s and wrote a

[285] Argentina: De la insurrección popular al "capitalismo normal" by James Petras, Rebelión, April 2004, http://www.rebelion.org/petras/040618petras.pdf

classic account of the dictatorship (1999), as Secretary of Human Rights and Rafael Bielsa, who had been kidnapped and tortured in the 1970s, as foreign minister. *Página/12*, Verbitsky's newspaper, went from being the dominant opposition voice in the media to an *officialista* supporter of Kirchner's regime.[286]

Rightwing discontent over Kirchner's government led to renewed scrutiny being paid to Verbitsky's relationship with the Ford Foundation. Only this time interest in this relationship came from the extreme right. The leftwing websites that published the amount of money that CELS had received from the Ford Foundation for its various human rights programs were mirrored by rightwing ones that did the same.[287] The difference is the "imperialist agents" of the revolutionary left are "the servants of the New World Order" in the jargon of the conspiratorial right. In 2003, over a year after the Verbitsky-Bonafini battle, journalist and military apologist Carlos Manuel Acuña published a book entitled *Verbitsky: de la Habana a la Fundacion Ford* (Verbitsky: From Havana to the Ford Foundation) that singled out this relationship as representing the new constellation of power in Argentine politics in the post-Kirchner world.

Acuña's argument is drawn from the conspiratorial fringes of the US isolationist right. One of his prominent sources is Alan B. Jones, who he describes as "one of the most outstanding writers of our period,"(2003:9). He cites the influence of his work entitled *How the World Really Works* (1996), which, in Jones's description, denounces the "cabal of international plutocrats

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[286] This came to a fore when a journalist accused the newspaper of not publishing an article that was critical of Kirchner's economic policies.
[287] Compare the charts on the right-wing website Patria Argentina (http://www.patriaargentina.org/Periodico/PA_174-05-2002/FundacionFord-Verbitsky.htm) and the left-wing Rebelión (http://www.rebelion.org/sociales/kilberg090102.htm)

planning to destroy America." Jones's book is the kind, at least according to *Amazon.com* and websites that advertise it, popular among white supremacists and those who believe in the credibility of the Protocols of Zion. Declaring war on the "new world order oligarchy," Jones's larger agenda is dismantling the federal government, removing the US from the UN and other international bodies like the World Bank and IMF, curtailing immigration, abolishing taxes, and abolishing the Federal Reserve System. Like other like-minded conspiracy theorists, the "secret rulers of the world" coalesce around the yearly conferences of the shadowy Bilderberg Group. Acuña represents the Argentine equivalent of this ideology and reproduces this worldview verbatim, even including a chart revealing these ostensible secret networks of power.

In many ways, the extreme right's attack on Verbitsky is the mirror image of Bonafini's and her supporters' criticisms. Like Bonafini, in Acuña's assessment, Verbitsky is also the servant of North American interests. However, he reaches the same conclusion from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. He makes it from the perspective of an anti-imperialist nationalist of the extreme right, a group that is historically as unsympathetic to the United States as Bonafini's is. For example, Aldo Rico, the *carapintada* who led an uprising in the late 1980s and subsequently launched his own ultra-right wing party, reportedly said of the 9/11 attacks, in a pronouncement that echoed Bonafini's, "I don't shed tears for empire."[288] In fact, hatred of the United States in Argentina has a long history and does not have a particular ideology. Carlos, a

[288] Mohammed Alí Seineldín, who led his own coup attempt against Menem in 1990 has also voiced similar opinions against the U.S. Seineldín is also an associate of Lyndon LaRouche.

tango instructor who supported Menem, recounted to me his confusion when he lost a *yanqui* student after commenting the "*hijos de puta* got what was coming to them" in relation to the attacks. I unsuccessfully attempted to explain to him why such a comment could be perceived as insensitive. Taxi drivers, known in Buenos Aires for being mainly political reactionaries, voiced similar opinions as Carlos' on several occasions when the topic of my citizenship came up. In private conversations, numerous US citizens I met while in Argentina complained about what they saw as the rampant anti-Americanism of Argentines.

Acuña, meanwhile, sees no ideological contradiction in citing Petras's criticism of the Ford Foundation and the radical left's attacks on Verbitksy. He even cites a statement by Jean Baudrillard implying human rights were a new form of planetary control (2003:6). However, this is not a case of the contours of left and right meeting at the fringes. Acuña cites Petras without endorsing his conclusion. He does not see Verbitsky's Ford Foundation funding as a concerted effort of imperialism to co-opt revolutionary forces. In fact, he sees it as the exact opposite: the revolutionaries are co-opting imperialism. Acuña argues that Verbitsky represents a new and more insidious tactic of guerilla movements of the 1970s, one that uses new means for the same ends. Acuña's purpose is to expose how old *guerilleros* like Verbitsky who had been vanquished in the 1970s have reformed under a new guise. Their guerilla war to seize power through violence ended in defeat. The Soviet Union collapsed. The "war" now continues under the moniker of human rights. Verbitsky, as a former *Montonero*, is his chief example of this transformation, but he also includes congressman Miguel Bonasso and Eduardo Luis Duhalde. According to Acuña, after losing the war, they read Gramsci and launched in the cloak of human rights a cultural war.

Acuña sees this as the "political continuity of the terrorism defeated at the end of the 1970s." Subscribing to Clausewitz's dictum that "politics is the continuation of war by other means," these former revolutionaries were now trying to subvert the system from within through the deployment of an arsenal of NGO's like CELS.

The agenda of this cultural war includes everything from the promotion of homosexuality, the legalization of abortion, and the undermining of traditional values and Christian authority. The cast of international characters range from a proliferation of human rights NGO's like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, think tanks like Inter-American dialogue, wealthy philanthropists like George Soros, benevolent organizations like the Ford Foundation, multilateral organizations like the Organization of Americans States and the United Nations, as well as the more familiar "new world order" organizations like the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations. Soros, in particular, is singled out as a key power broker as well as one of Verbitsky's chief benefactors. The Argentine cast of characters in this plot are all former terrorists. The same "subversives" who were defeated in the battlefield of the 1970s have now become mainstream and respectable figures acting as judges, ministers, politicians, and human rights activists.

Acuña cannot explain why this is the case. Bonafini, Petras and other Marxist intellectuals can coherently explain why the forces of imperialism would fund Verbitsky's CELS and other like-minded moderate and reformist organizations. Acuña, on the other hand, cannot comprehend Verbitsky's relationship with the Ford Foundation and other "New World Order" organizations. He is incapable of explaining why "known terrorists" like Verbitsky receive money from philanthropic foundations that should recognize him as their

enemy. He is perplexed and baffled by these “inexplicable contradictions”(2003:28) and can only conclude that Argentina is “an inverted country” with “a reign in reverse” and that this is all “a faithful expression of an unbearable process of decadence.”(2003:12)

The United States and Latin American Dictatorships

Acuña is a longstanding military supporter and an apologist for the atrocities they committed during the dictatorship. His previous work *Por Amor Al Odio: La Tragedia de la Subversion en La Argentina* (2000) was a hefty, two volume account documenting the “subversive threat” facing Argentina during the 1960s and the 1970s that originated from Cuba and the Soviet Union. For Acuña, the threat merited the military response it received. His argument is an exact reproduction of the military’s discourse during the dictatorship. In a similar vein, Acuña’s confusion over why the Ford Foundation would fund Verbitsky parallels the military dictatorship’s confusion during the 1970s over US foreign policy.

In a speech given at Johns Hopkins University at the height of the military terror in the late 1970s, Emilio Massera, head of the Navy and part of the ruling *Junta*, voiced his bewilderment and dismay to the audience over US foreign policy in relation to Argentina:

> We need the US to realize that Argentina is of great geopolitical importance for the West and that if the terrorist offensive that we are facing had succeeded, Argentina would have fallen into the hands of the extreme left. If this had occurred, it is likely that Brazil would have also

> fallen and, within a short time, joining with Marxist Africa, all of Latin America would have been ideologically transformed. For the first time, the US would have had to struggle on its own continent and without being able to count on the national sympathies of the countries that would have been the theater of war. So imagine our surprise, our confusion, and our disappointment, when as a consequence of having bravely confronted at great sacrifice the enemy that was presumed in common to the two nations, the government of the US responds by involving us in this human rights campaign that revels in a short-sightedness we can only imagine to be involuntary (Massera 1979:150- 151).

Massera's comments were directed at then President Jimmy Carter and his human rights policy.[289] The military dictatorship reacted with consternation when the Carter administration took office in 1977 and began pressuring the Argentine government on its human rights abuses. They could not understand why the US government did not see that they were allies engaged in the same struggle against the common enemy of international communism. After taking office, Carter reduced foreign aid and placed an arms embargo on the regime. Two of his appointees, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Assistant Secretary of State, Patricia Derian, are both frequently cited as important figures in the emergence of the human rights movement in Argentina.

On November 30, 1977, Vance delivered a list of 7,500 disappeared to Argentina's foreign minister. Derian was one of the few government officials in

[289] Sikkink (2004) analyzes the "mixed signals" of United States human rights policy in the region with particular attention given to the Carter years.

the world to meet with human rights groups during the dictatorship. The US embassy continually received family members of the disappeared. In fact, during the dictatorship, topping the list of those responsible for what the military regime termed the "anti-Argentine campaign" were Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy (Feitlowitz 1999:40) A bleak irony is that although the dictatorship's actions were justified in the name of fighting international communism emanating from the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union was one of Argentina's key allies in the United Nations in hindering human rights investigations into the disappearances (Guest 1990). After Carter began pressuring both regimes through economic sanctions, the USSR for its invasion of Afghanistan and Argentina for the disappearances, the USSR became one of the key importers of Argentine wheat. In Argentina, the leader of the Communist Party supported the dictatorship and was unharmed. Meanwhile, the US was largely responsible for the deployment of the delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that came to Argentina to investigate the disappearances in 1979.

However, when Bonafini claimed she was happy about the events of September 11, 2001, her happiness was derived from the responsibility she places on the United States for "the orders, the money and the weapons for the Argentine military dictatorship. They trained the torturers and rapists there." The complicity of the United States with the military dictatorship is a subject of debate. Institutional resistance impeded much of what Carter attempted to do with human rights and his foreign policy has been criticized for its inconsistency and double standards. Economic interests still dominated and the administration was unable to cut off funds completely while many state department officials openly disagreed with Carter's policies. The Ex-Im Bank, for example, still lent

money to the Argentine dictators, who also received funds from the World Bank. After Reagan defeated Carter, he broke with Carter's approach to the regime, lifting the arms embargo and had a cordial meeting with then dictator Roberto Viola. However, the disappearances had ceased by that point.

The idea that the US government had direct involvement in the disappearances in Argentina has never been substantiated or even alleged. Unlike Chile, Guatemala or other Latin American countries where the CIA worked behind the scenes to help orchestrate military coups, the situation in Argentina was far more indirect. At most, there is evidence that the military junta received approval from Henry Kissinger for their actions. He gave them a "green light" but told them to do what they needed to do as fast as possible and was involved in coordinating Operation Condor (see Andersen 1993 and Hitchens 2002). As is also frequently cited, the US taught counter-insurgency methods in the School of the Americas to many of Latin America's future war criminals and dictators (Gill 2004). At the same time, the idea that the military torturers were trained in the United States, as Bonafini and her cohort frequently argue, is not entirely straightforward. Some were trained in the School of the Americas, but the French also played as key a role in teaching torture and counterinsurgency methods to the Argentine military as the United States.[290] They also helped to provide the ideological basis for the military's actions. Both the idea of subversion and the concept of a "dirty war" were French imports. Beginning in the late 1950's, the

[290] The 2003 documentary by French journalist Marie-Monique Robin entitled *Escuadrones de la muerte: la escuela francesa* (Death Squads: the French school) details the complicity between French secret service agents and the Argentine and Chilean military. See also "Los maestros de la tortura" by Diego Llumá (*Todos es Historia*, September 2002)

Argentine military learned from French military officers the same counter-insurgency techniques that they had used in Algeria, techniques that they themselves had learned from the Nazis.

The United States' primary responsibility for what occurred in Argentina lies in its ideological exportation of Cold War politics and its promotion of a national security doctrine that was used to justify atrocities committed by dictators throughout the continent. However, to provide ideological justification for events is not the same as being the authors of them. In some ways, assigning blame solely to the United States is a politically expedient means of dealing with a more complicated question. But when Bonafini signals the United States as being responsible for the disappearances, she means it in an even more indirect sense. In her view, the United States is the literal physical embodiment of neoliberal capitalism. All human rights groups in Argentina from the reformist to the radical concur that the real underlying purpose of the disappearances was to facilitate the imposition of a neoliberal economic model. Since those that comprised the disappeared were the political opposition to such a system, they had to be eliminated in order to implement it. The United States, as the global representative of that economic system, was therefore responsible for the crimes committed in the name of its system. The World Trade Center as a target did not merely have symbolic value for Bonafini. It represented the physical center of neoliberalism. This was why the people who worked inside of the Towers were not innocent civilians. An ex-professor of the Mothers' University who quit after her comments criticized Bonafini in an editorial for conflating an economic system with an entire country and believing wars could be collectively blamed on entire populations.

The issue of US foreign policy during the Carter administration led to a revival of the conflict between Verbitsky and Bonafini in 2002. Verbitsky, using newly declassified US state department documents, published an article recounting the *Mothers'* extensive contact with US government officials during the dictatorship, even including a warm letter of thanks written by Bonafini to Jimmy Carter as he was leaving office. Bonafini reacted angrily to what she deemed an effort to discredit the group by suggesting they were "accomplices" of the US government. Verbitsky remarked that this was not his intention and argued there was "nothing shameful in turning to the US embassy in their search." He then accused Bonafini of trying to "erase her own history because she considers it beneath the great person she has created."[291]

Verbitsky's larger purpose in publishing the article was to contest Bonafini's attacks on the reformist sectors in human rights who were willing to meet with US government officials to pursue their goals. Verbitsky summarized Bonafini's characterization of his and the other human rights groups.

> On one side, there is Señora de Bonafini and her group who call themselves revolutionaries. They ridicule the rest as reformists, moderates, social democrats, progressives, apologists or defenders of the system. Instead of making a revolution, they occupy themselves with blocking their path, thus serving the bourgeoisie and imperialism.[292]

[291] Página/12, September 1, 2002.
[292] Página/12, September 6, 2002.

Verbitsky then identifies CELS and the other human rights organizations (*Grandmothers, Founding Line Mothers,* etc.) on the other side of the spectrum and lists their practical accomplishments. Verbitsky was pointing to the incremental steps forward and small victories that the human rights movement had achieved. In this case, he was referring to the declassification of 4,677 State Department documents that he had used to write the article. For Verbitsky and the other human rights groups, this was a modest but important triumph. Bonafini, on the other hand, scorned the declassified documents as a "betrayal" of the disappeared. It constituted a betrayal because the declassification was predicated on collaboration with US government officials, something that Bonafini vehemently opposed. The declassification resulted from a meeting that CELS, the *Grandmothers* and the *Founding Line Mothers* had with Madeleine Albright in August 2000 when she was visiting Argentina in her capacity as Secretary of State under the Clinton administration. The request to Albright was made directly by the *Grandmothers* who were searching for more information about their kidnapped grandchildren. The documents were eventually delivered to all of the organizations and also made public. Although the declassified documents did not yield any significant information on that topic, they did offer valuable information to some human rights trials that were in process at the time.[293] In Verbitsky's words, the documents "are going to help have a greater

[293] The documents revealed that although the military denied their actions publicly, they had admitted to them to US state department officials in private. The documents also show that the US embassy had a fairly fluid relationship with Argentine dictatorship officials at the same time that they were also meeting with family members of the disappeared.

understanding of our history and will contribute proof to open court cases and those that will open."[294]

When the *Grandmothers*, *Founding Line Mothers*, and CELS met with Albright, Hebe de Bonafini, in characteristic language, accused Albright of "butchery" for the NATO campaign against Serbia and said "it disgusts me that organizations will line up behind such evil people. Not only will we not go to a single meeting with her, we also repudiate her presence here."[295] In a written statement, she used the meeting as a means of distinguishing her branch of human rights from the other groups. According to Bonafini, the other groups were "a political and ideological line that sets out from the premise that one can achieve something through negotiating and being well behaved with those in power (*haciendo buena letra with el poder*)." She concluded by saying, "it is necessary to understand that this doesn't have to do with small differences or nuances but rather of politics that follow different roads and therefore construct different attitudes and consciences. It would be good if this were understood by organizations and activists of the left that in their own way collaborate or accompany these organizations in their policy of backing down (*claudicación*)."[296]

While Bonafini lumped all US politicians into the same category, Verbitsky offered a more nuanced history than she was willing to concede, one that refused overly rigid and Manichean dichotomies. He differentiated between the policies of Nixon and Kissinger with those of Jimmy Carter and pointed to the declassification as indication that the US government no longer tolerated the

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[294] Página/12, August 18, 2002.
[295] Página/12, August 17, 2000.
[296] "Derechos Humanos y la Allbright (sic)," Hebe de Bonafini, http://www.geocities.com/yefundacion/Derecho.htm

dictatorship's actions. The same year Jimmy Carter won the Nobel Prize. CELS praised the decision, interpreting it as a direct rebuke to George W. Bush and his foreign policy. Estela Carlotto, who had been the subject of a campaign for the prize that year as well, praised Carter while the secretary of the *Grandmothers* acknowledges that he was "closer to human rights" than most other US presidents and "tried to help" during the dictatorship. Bonafini, on the other hand, called the award a "smokescreen" because "the North Americans want to show the world that there are 'good ones' and 'bad ones' when they are all the same."[297]

In essence, both Verbitsky and Bonafini agreed over their differences but disagreed over what these differences meant. Verbitsky signaled all of the accomplishments of his sector of human rights, the investigations "that documents the extent and the means of the terrorist state's actions," "the documents and testimonies from the trial of the military Junta," and the exhumation of bodies from which proofs are obtained. For Bonafini, Verbitsky accused, "none of this is worth anything. It is not revolutionary like Saddam, Milosevic, FARC or ETA."[298] In such statements, Verbitsky is pointing to the more general political stances that her anti-imperialist politics have led her to embrace. Bonafini sees her global position as one that stands in solidarity with victims of US imperialism. This has included going to Yugoslavia during the NATO bombing, going to Iraq between Gulf Wars to protest the economic sanctions against the regime, and going to Palestine. It also includes adamant

[297] Página/12, October 12, 2002.
[298] In 2006, the *Mothers'* editorial releases a compilation of Saddam Hussein's writings entitled *Saddam Hussein: Revolution and Resistance in Iraq*.

support of Fidel Castro and the Zapatistas but also, more controversially, FARC and ETA. Verbitsky had previously clashed with Bonafini over FARC, the Colombian revolutionary group that Verbitsky had accused of numerous human rights abuses and involvement in drug trafficking. In 2000, Bonafini made comments that were interpreted to be in support of the violent Basque separatist group ETA that cost her organization long-standing support in Spain.

These debates are not merely about September 11th or about US foreign policy but represent the two opposing fronts of the human rights movement and the respective positions they take in terms of the politics of human rights more generally and in terms of the dictatorship more specifically. As I will show in the next chapter, these differences reflect not only general political positions but also in how family member organizations go about pursuing justice for the dictatorship. Bonafini's *Mothers* reject the exhumations of mass graves, genetic identification of the disappeared, museums, memorials and all posthumous tributes. She attacked the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team for also being "paid for by imperialists" and denounced family members who accepted economic reparations by the state for the disappearance for taking "blood money" and "prostituting" themselves and the memory of their child. As Bonafini became an increasingly contentious and controversial figure, a new individual emerged among family member groups to contest her authority, Estela Carlotto, the President of the *Grandmothers*.

Chapter 10: Dueling Matriarchs: The Mad Mothers and Kindly Grandmothers of Human Rights

> The Mothers had their critics, even in other human rights movements. They were often regarded as the most excitable and least careful of the groups, rushing in to condemn or defend or take up positions when the other groups devoted more time to considering what to do. The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, by contrast, were usually regarded as being more stable and sensible. But it was the willingness of the Mothers to take action that kept the flame of opposition burning in public view during the worst years; only they had the necessary madness to do it. (Simpson and Bennett 1985:169)

The *Mothers* emerged during the dictatorship as symbols of Argentina's human rights struggle. The white handkerchiefs (*pañuelos*) tied around their necks soon achieved iconic status. By 1985, historian Osvaldo Bayer was already citing the *Mothers* as key signifiers of a global Argentine identity. "Argentina was known to the outside world for football, tango, and meat. Today, it is known for the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.* The women of the white handkerchief are cited in all human rights movements." The *Mothers,* in Bayer's estimation, have become "a symbol of the defense of life in the entire world." As such, the *Mothers* represent "for future generations, the only ethical value, the only exponents of resistance of the entire people that didn't know to oppose the most corrupt and criminal dictatorship of all of its history."[299] That they could be seen as the "only ethical value" and the "only exponents of resistance of the entire people" masks a set of exclusions in which the *Mothers* emerge after the dictatorship as not simply the most visible protagonists of the human rights struggle but rather the sole protagonists. While there were numerous prominent individuals who also bravely confronted the dictatorship at great personal risk (e.g. 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the founders of

[299] Osvaldo Bayer, "Baje a la Plaza de Mayo, senor presidente" *El Periodista de Buenos Aires*, n 29 29th of March to 4th of April of 1985, page 7

CELS, Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer), the human rights movement in Argentina is structured around the *Mothers.*

The *Mothers'* weekly marches on the Plaza de Mayo are listed in all Argentina tourist guides, often featured as one of the country's "top ten" or "must see" attractions. After three decades, tourists now comprise the vast bulk of attendees at the Thursday marches, snapping photographs and even buying merchandise spread out on tables around the plaza (including books, magazines, t-shirts, posters, buttons, CDs, agendas, etc). That the *Mothers* are reference points or universal symbols is asserted by practically everyone who has ever written about them. They have become, as Bayer argues, symbols of resistance against dictatorships and state terror as well as beloved feminist icons that have inspired countless other movements around the world. Mothers, united by the grief over their loss of their children, join together to peacefully protest the government using non-violent means. Many journalistic and academic accounts will even assert that the *Mothers'* protest led to the dictatorship's downfall.[300] The heroic narrative is that of brave women who joined together and brought down one of the cruelest and most violent regimes in Latin American history.

If the *Mothers* have become the embodiment of the human rights struggle in Argentina, then Hebe de Bonafini is the embodiment of the *Mothers.* She remains the most visible and best-known figure in human rights in Argentina. However, as seen in the previous chapter, Bonafini's radical positions and polemical statements over the years have made her a controversial figure among

[300] Others suggest that a primary cause of the dictatorship's fall was the Malvinas/Falkland Islands war.

reformist human rights groups.[301] Other human rights groups are, more often than not, forced to distance themselves from her group. As Bonafini became a more marginalized figure throughout the 1990s and 2000s in human rights circles, a counterfigure emerged to contest her public dominance as the leading representative figure of human rights. This new luminary was Estela Carlotto, the president of the *Grandmothers*. This chapter will examine the dueling matriarchies of Carlotto and Bonafini.

The Basque Controversy

At the time of her 9/11 comments, Bonafini was no stranger to controversy and had been accused on several earlier occasions of supporting or condoning acts of violence. After her 9/11 comments, the accusation became more frequent and indelible. Bonafini had previously been criticized for her vindication of *la lucha armada* (armed struggle) in the 1970s, a conception of the disappeared that the other human rights groups vehemently disagree with. For example, on one occasion, in August 2000, Bonafini was invited to speak to high school students in Patagonia by a local university's Open Department of Human Rights. She addressed the students as "my beloved *guerilleros,"* telling them, "I always

[301] Bonafini will knowingly refer to her group being isolated from the other human rights groups as a point of pride. However, they still get many prominent collaborators in their work. Their Mental Health and Human Rights conference and their University are both cited as important contributions to human rights by people who do not agree with Bonafini's politics. In conversations I had with mental health professionals taking part in the conference, they told me that, although they did not necessarily agree with Bonafini's positions, the *Mothers* did many good things so they still participated in them.

greet students with the word. *Guerillero* is a sweet word that unfortunately has ceased being used. It is a message of hope."[302]

Several months later, in November of 2000, a transatlantic debate erupted after a message posted by the *Mothers* on their website was interpreted as support for the paramilitary Basque separatist group ETA. At the time, the statement unleashed, what one journalist called, "the biggest controversy the association has ever had to face." The statement was a message of support for "Basque mothers" and was fiercely critical of the actions of Spain against ETA. The Spanish state's counterterrorism actions against ETA were denounced as a sign that "the worst Francoism continues today in Spanish lands." The statement also expressed the *Mothers'* solidarity with "the heroic *lucha* and brave resistance of the Basque pueblo, who confront a murderous and criminal state: the Spanish state." Although there was no specific message of support for ETA, many people interpreted such references to struggle and resistance to mean as much. Numerous Spanish politicians reacted in anger and victims of ETA terrorism declared Bonafini a *persona non grata* in Spain.[303]

Similar to her response to the controversy generated by her comments about 9/11, Bonafini denounced criticisms against her as part of a rightwing campaign against the group and argued that her letter of support was deliberately misinterpreted. In a subsequent statement, the *Mothers* clarified that they "never supported ETA crimes" but "we support the family members of Basque prisoners and we defend their right to a just and humane treatment." She argued that the Spanish state's treatment of Basque prisoners constituted

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[302] Clarín, August 26, 2000.
[303] *El Mundo*, October 28, 2000.

"state terrorism" and argued that many prisoners with no ties to ETA violence were being arrested solely for their political activities. Yet, at the same time, Bonafini still vindicated "the sacred right of people to resist oppression" and "the people's right to rebellion to liberate themselves from dictatorships."[304] Even with this clarification, the ambiguity of what a "right to rebellion" entailed led many to the interpretation that her group still condoned, if not supported, ETA violence.

The other major Argentine human rights group all repudiated Bonafini's statement. The *Grandmothers* representative in Spain, Matilde Artes, called Bonafini "crazy and dictatorial." Estela Carlotto called Bonafini "unhinged" and commented: "We can understand the suffering of the Basque mothers but in no way do we justify violence… I don't take part in any public acts with Hebe for two reasons: first, to not have to answer her publicly and to not be a mute witness and end up her accomplice."[305] She then criticized Bonafini's dictatorial style of running her group: "the person that doesn't wash her plates is locked out and the one that doesn't bring in money is expelled." The other groups organized a march in the Plaza de Mayo to protest ETA. The *Founding Line Mothers* were quick to point out their differences with Bonafini's *Mothers*. "We have nothing to do with that woman." "We've been separated from that woman for twelve years because she is very violent and authoritarian and we are here for peace, not for violence." Another member reiterated this point: "We are givers of life and we don't support violence. We are for peace and life." They also emphasized that

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[304] *Calle 22*, November 2000. This connection is seen in a Basque book that juxtaposea an interview with Bonafini with narratives of Basque family members. The title of the book is *Mothers: A Reference point for Latin American revolutionaries.* (Arana & Bonafini 1996)
[305] *Calle 22*, November 2000. http://www.calle22.com/articulos/1645.

they were a more democratic group: “we don’t have any president, we are a horizontal organization.”[306]

Support networks of activists through Europe have long played an important role in Argentine human rights, in particular the radical grassroots groups that supported the *Mothers* during and after the dictatorship. On this occasion, support groups from Barcelona, Madrid, France, Denmark and Sweden issued a joint statement denouncing “the miserable fascist campaign of discreditation and criminalization” against Bonafini’s *Mothers*. In particular, they attacked Artes for criticizing Bonafini and used the fact that she had accepted economic reparations as an indication that she, unlike Bonafini, was ideologically compromised. Artes was, in their harsh assessment, “an old acquaintance of exiled Argentines known for the apartment she bought in Madrid with what the Argentine state paid her in exchange for ‘forgetting’ her daughter’s disappearance.” Others were less supportive of the *Mothers’* statements but maintained their support of the group. For example, one supporter in a message board posting argued that the experience of losing their children gave them a discursive *carte blanche*: “whatever they say, the *Mothers* are untouchable because what they suffered can neither be understood nor analyzed.”[307]

During the controversy, another message board posting on a Spanish news website made what had by then become a common differentiation between the *Grandmothers* and the *Mothers*. “The difference between the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* is that the *Grandmothers* have always maintained themselves outside of political discourse while Bonafini still seems to live in the 1970s. All the

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[306] Ibid.
[307] *Calle 22*, November 2000, http://www.calle22.com/articulos/1645/

same, I respect their *lucha* but they should maintain a low profile like the *Grandmothers*."

Semantic Confusion

At the same time, many other observers were unable to distinguish the groups. During the controversy, *the Grandmothers* received numerous angry emails from Spaniards who confused their group with Bonafini's. This is a common occurrence. Despite the efforts of the *Grandmothers* and the *Founding Line Mothers* to distance themselves from Bonafini's group over the years, this occurs whenever Bonafini makes a controversial statement. Significant semantic confusion exists so that many people both in Argentina and abroad do not understand that the groups are separate organizations.

This semantic confusion between the family member groups is widespread. It was my experience that outside of those who followed such matters – academics, journalists, human rights supporters and those in progressive political circles - most Argentines were unable to distinguish between the groups or unaware that any differences existed. Part of the problem is the history of schisms within human rights groups. "Oh, you know, those groups are always fighting among themselves," a friend who worked for one human rights organization remarked to me. The split between the *Mothers* groups is the most famous but not the only one. There were two Permanent Assembly of Human Rights. The original was based in Buenos Aires. Its La Plata branch split off after a political disagreement and is now run independently. When the original president of the *Grandmothers* left the group in 1991, she considered starting her

own group with several of the members who left with her but then decided against creating more factionalism and decided to run a local foundation organized around the house where her daughter-in-law was killed and where her granddaughter was kidnapped. The house, pock-marked with bullets, preserves all signs of the military's incursion.

Despite all of these differences, they go mainly unnoticed. The confusion is not only over the two *Mothers* branches but the *Grandmothers* as well. For example, I have seen Hebe de Bonafini referred to as the "President of the *Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo*." One child of the disappeared recounted to me how he had initially gone to Bonafini's *Mothers* when he doubted his identity because he did not know of the differences between the organizations at the time. When he went there, Bonafini promptly criticized the *Grandmothers* and sent him away without even giving him their address. She told him she did not like the way that the *Grandmothers* made young people doubt. This may be because she has no doubts at all. Argentine newspapers also occasionally confuse the groups. An article on the *Grandmothers* in one regional newspaper featured a file photograph of Bonafini's *Mothers*. Even the progressive daily paper Página/12, the paper of record for the human rights movement, has erred. A small caption article on the *Founding Line Mothers* protesting Argentina's external debt in 2004 used a file photo of Bonafini's *Mothers* with a banner that declared "no to the external debt."

Outside of Argentina, even less cognizance of the differences exist. When a group of 52 members of the European Parliament proposed the *Mothers* for a Nobel Peace Prize for their "ethical example" in 1999, confusion followed over whose ethical example was being singled out. Both Bonafini's *Mothers* and the

Founding Line Mothers claimed the nomination as their own. A *Founding Line Mother* emphasized their more inclusive status and their close ties with other human rights groups. They said they would share the award with them. "The prize, if it works out, should be given to this front for human rights defense made up of the *Mothers*, *Family Members*, *Grandmothers*, among other organizations, that in the last decades have transformed into a kind of watchdog of Argentine democracy." Bonafini, for her part, noted how her *Mothers* had already received the Sakharov Prize giving by the European Parliament in 1992 and the United Nations Peace Education prize in 1999 and argued the prize should go to her group. An article detailing the controversy noted that, "the differences between this current and that of Bonafini are many and not very well known outside of the country."[308]

The confusion between the groups is such that when mentioning one group, some feel the need to preemptively point out the differences as a means of clarification. For example, when the Simon Wiesenthal Center (a US-based Jewish human rights organization) issued a press release urging investigation into an attack on Estela Carlotto's home in 2002, it pointed out that the *Grandmothers* were a "highly respected organization" with "no connection with Hebe de Bonafini."[309]

The Emergence of Estela Carlotto as the "Anti-Bonafini"

[308] RevistaLUNA, "Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Candidatas al Nobel de la Paz," LUNA.com.ar.
[309] "Wiesenthal Center Demands Immediate Investigation of Attack Against Argentine Human Rights Leaders," September 23, 2002, press release.

The Wiesenthal Center's press release was a response to unknown assailants firing guns into Carlotto's home one night while she was sleeping. She was unharmed in the attack but it attracted local and international attention and concern. The choice of Carlotto as a target was a product of her public prominence and visibility. A year earlier, unidentified men broke into Hebe de Bonafini's home. Bonafini was not present at the time but her daughter was assaulted and tortured.

For the greater part of their history, the *Grandmothers* were less visible than Bonafini's *Mothers*. According to their institutional history, this was deliberate. They worked quietly and patiently behind the scenes and out of the limelight devoting themselves to the specific task of searching for and recovering their missing grandchildren. Because their work was organized around restoring kin ties, journalistic and academic accounts from the 1980s and 1990s frequently refer to them as "apolitical" or the "least political" of the Argentine human rights groups (e.g. Filc 1997) . They were perceived to be outside of politics. Apolitical is a misnomer since the search for the kidnapped grandchildren is an explicitly political act but the perception of being the most apolitical of the family members groups continues to this day. Although the *Grandmothers* participate in many of the commemorative events (like the protests against the coup on its anniversary and in the March of Resistance), they do not take part in the weekly marches and Estela Carlotto rarely wears the *pañuelo* that visually identifies the *Mothers* (although some of the other *Grandmothers* do). This was part of the original division of labor of the groups. The *Grandmothers* were dedicated to searching for their grandchildren so they did not go to the Plaza de Mayo for the weekly marches.

This lack of visibility has changed over the last decade. The *Grandmothers* now rival Bonafini's group as the most publicly visible human rights groups. During 14 months of fieldwork, I attended 64 public events they sponsored, including lectures, school talks, conferences, theater festival, music festival, photography exhibit, tango performance, commemorative events and more (some of them were described in Chapter 6). The range of their activities is impressive. Bonafini's *Mothers* are also active on multiple fronts. They have their own editorial press, a newspaper, a radio show, bookstore, library, community market, annual human rights and mental health congress, and an open university. The *Grandmothers'* rise in public prominence corresponds with Carlotto's leadership of the group. Having served as vice president of the *Grandmothers*, Carlotto became president of the organization in 1991 after the founder and president resigns from the group. Like Bonafini, Carlotto is media savvy and charismatic.

The question of why Carlotto emerged to contest Bonafini's prominence and not one of the *Founding Line Mothers* can be posed. Both the *Founding Line Mothers* and Bonafini's *Mothers* claim founder's status because the original founder of the *Mothers,* Azucena Villaflor, disappeared during the dictatorship. Villaflor organized the group and both groups speak of her as a courageous and unstoppable force (Arrosagaray 1997). When the *Mothers* split, the *Founding Line Mothers* rejected hierarchies and any leadership positions. This was a consequence of their dispute with Bonafini. One of their main complaints against Bonafini was her authoritarian leadership of the group. Lacking a single leader, they have no instantly recognizable figure around which the group coalesces, even though they have several equally prominent individuals. In the last decade,

they have maintained a lower profile than the *Grandmothers* and their activities mainly revolve around their weekly marches in the Plaza de Mayo and other commemorative events. The *Grandmothers* also have tangible successes each time they locate a grandchild. Moreover, the appropriation of children became the only crime that military perpetrators could be charged with after the pardons and amnesties. Beginning in the mid-1990s, ex-military leaders were arrested for their role in the systematic plan of kidnapping children. This substantially heightened the profile of the organization.

An inherent irony still exists that groups structured around a collective claim become embodied by charismatic individual leaders. Why do these movements need to be structured around individuals? Both the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* stress in their institutional history the importance of their moment from making an individual claim to a collective one. At the same time, Bonafini and Carlotto are seen as the public faces of their respective organizations. This need for individual figures is a product of the Argentine political context. Politics in Argentina are not only highly personal but also intensely personalized. Political movements are more often than not named after individuals. Ideological inclinations are subsumed by personal allegiances. The specter of Juan Perón's populism lurks in the background of this but the history of Latin America in the 19th century is a story of *caudillos,* the authoritative political-military leaders who were often large landowners. The political history of Argentina is a history of "big men" like Belgrano, San Martin, Sarmiento and Rosas. The legacy of this is still felt in the present. Though politicians with such disparate ideologies like Menem and Kirchner could both claim to be Peronists, they each have given rise to their own adjectives, *Kirchnerista* or *Menemista*. In fact, all political figures in

Argentina who achieve leadership status of any substantial faction become their own *–ista,* whether *Macristas*, *Duhaldistas*, *Ibarristas*. As a result, political allegiance is more often pledged to individuals than to political parties. Political "clientelism" also remains an important means of consolidating political power in Argentina. For example, sociologist Javier Auyero, in his work on Peronism and the poor describes it as "personalized political mediation"(2001:213)

Since this tendency is so deeply ingrained in Argentine political culture, it is perhaps not surprising that it also extends to human rights groups. Even *piquetero* groups who advocate autonomist economic and political organization structures have prominent leaders. Other human rights groups that reject leadership positions like H.I.J.O.S. tend to be beleaguered by factionalism that frequently render it difficult for them to be as effective as they are often incapable of acting with a single voice.

Estela Carlotto emerged as a prominent media figure beginning in the 1990s. Since then, she has received innumerable honorary degrees, tributes and awards. To list them all would require a full page and include almost every major university in Argentina. In 1995, *Marie Claire* magazine picked her as one of the seven more important women in Latin America. In 2000, Carlotto, along with *Grandmothers'* vice president Rosa Roisinblit, received an honorary degree from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. They were cited as "inspiration to all who hope to contribute to the world around them" and as "passionate leaders in the causes of human rights, social justice, community development and a

healthier environment."[310] In the words of the chancellor, they "exemplify the immense human capacity for resilience, perseverance, tenacity, and resourcefulness." In 2002 alone, Carlotto was given honorary doctorates from Universities in La Plata, Entre Rios, and Salta, and honorary professorships in Mar del Plata and the Faculty of Journalism of La Plata. In 2003, she won one of her most prominent awards to date, the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights. The announcement of the award stated that she "personifies the actions and efforts of the grandmothers." She has also been rumored to be a potential future Nobel Peace Prize winner and was the subject of a campaign to get her the prize in 2001. Also in 2003, Carlotto was chosen as one of Argentina's prominent women of the year while the city of Buenos Aires awarded her a Merit Medal (*Medalla al Merito*) and an honorary degree from the Universidad Nacional de San Martin. There is even a biopic about Carlotto's life that is currently in development that is planned to go into production in the next year.

Carlotto's rise in prominence throughout the 1990s corresponds with Bonafini's increasingly divisiveness. Over the same period, Bonafini attacked the *Grandmothers* with increasing frequency and vitriol. For example, in a speech given September 23, 1995 in the Plaza de Mayo, Bonafini denounced the *Grandmothers* and CELS for meeting with government officials: "It makes us very angry that there are people from the *Grandmothers* and *CELS* who want to sit down at the same chair and at the same table as murderers. We would never sit down with them because we are not the same. They belong to a cursed race."

[310] University of Massachusetts-Boston, Alumni Magazine Commencement 2000 issue.

Four years later, on September 30, 1999, after the *Grandmothers* had met with Hilary Clinton, her rhetoric is even harsher as she dissociated them from the Plaza de Mayo entirely: “I want to talk about the *Grandmothers* of Corrientes Avenue [the street where their offices are located], not of the Plaza de Mayo (Note: the *Mothers’* headquarters is located on Yrigoyen Street just blocks from the Congressional building). They can no longer be called Plaza de Mayo because they suck up to the United States. It is disgusting, an embarrassment. I repudiate and condemn in this plaza the *Grandmothers* who offer themselves up to go to the ballroom dance with North Americans and receive $100,000 dollars from that infernal country who has primary responsibility for the massacre of Latin America.”

Bonafini’s main criticism of the *Grandmothers* is their willingness to meet with politicians. “I went to a few interviews with the *Grandmothers*. They shake hands with everyone. I will never shake hands with a policeman or someone from the military. I wouldn’t shake hands with neither Videla nor Menem.”(Bauducco 2004: 23) She argues that this is part of their conciliatory politics. The *Grandmothers* argue that they have not acted in a conciliatory manner and vehemently reject the accusation that they have backed down by meeting with politicians. They maintain that they would never shake hands with a military perpetrator like Videla, but they will deal with democratically elected leaders like Carlos Menem even if they dislike their politics. In the case of Menem, their meeting with him was crucial for the group since it resulted in funding for the organization and in the formation of CONADI, the official government agency that handles the processing of cases of recovered grandchildren. Since the *Grandmothers* are organized around the location and recovery of their missing

grandchildren, pragmatic considerations drive the group. These are tangible rather than abstract pursuits that require infrastructural support and resources, e.g. the National Genetic Data Bank. Their pursuit of pragmatic goals leads them to meet with politicians and government officials who can offer them assistance, either financial support for the organization, institutional resources, or information that can be used to potentially locate more grandchildren.

Bonafini's *Mothers,* on the other hand, have no pragmatic concerns. A magazine edition that included Bonafini as one of the "ten Argentine women of the 20th century" describes her as having "an intransigence that nests in the remote margins of politics and that is outside of political reason. It is the enraged ethic of victims."[311] Her ethic is described as "messianic" with "the complete absence of pragmatism where nothing is negotiated." If the *Grandmothers* are seen as willing to "shake hands" with anyone, Bonafini proudly recounts stories of her refusal to shake hands with elected officials who attempt to greet her. For example, in a speech from March 30, 2006, she recounts her rejection of the governor of Buenos Aires province Felipe Solá when he approached her. At the same gathering, an admiral from the Navy, Jorge Godoy, the first military official to publicly condemn the human rights abuses committed by the dictatorship outright, also attempted the same but Bonafini rebuffed his advanced and called him a hypocrite. "And I was very happy to have went and told them in the face what the *Mothers* feel," she cheerfully concluded.[312]

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[311] "Las diez argentinas del siglo XX," *Revista Viva*, October 10, 1999.
[312] "Las Madres decimos en la cara lo que sentimos," March 30, 2006, http://www.voltairenet.org/article139713.html

On the other hand, the *Grandmothers* meet with diverse figures across the political, religious, and social spectrum, including Fidel Castro, Hilary Clinton, and Pope John Paul II. For example, Carlotto was invited alongside Bonafini by Fidel Castro to participate in a May 1st act in Cuba in thanks for the support the *Grandmothers* gave during the Elián González affair. When Hilary Clinton came to Argentina in 1997, she met in private with the *Grandmothers* for twenty minutes, the only NGO she chooses for a private meeting. They gave her information about their work and summarized the human rights situation in Argentina. She promised to intervene on behalf of the group with Menem and offered to put them into contact with US humanitarian organizations that could provide them with financial assistance. As Estela Carlotto said about the meeting: "The most important thing in these meetings is that one who is in need can look into the eyes of someone who has power."[313] Bonafini, meanwhile, condemned Clinton coming to the country. "It shames us that Clinton is received in our country. She represents the country that exploits, enslaves and oppresses the Third World to which we belong." Clinton "is of those race of men that trained the Latin American military to torture the pueblos by means of the most ferocious dictatorships and for having sold to our country the weapons to kill our children and to maintain the savage blockade of our beloved Cuba." After the meeting, Carlotto spoke of the importance of such meetings in pragmatic terms: "If we don't have money, we can't work."

Around the same time, the *Grandmothers* also met with Pope John Paul II. Estela Carlotto is identified with someone who is still a practicing and believing

[313] Página/12, October 20, 1997. According to the *Grandmothers,* their stories brought tears to Clinton's eyes.

Catholic. Shortly after the end of the dictatorship, the *Mothers* had also met with Pope John Paul II. Two decades later, when the Pope was on his deathbed, Bonafini said she hoped he would "burn alive in hell". She later clarified that she was only repeating what the church had taught her. The Pope had committed numerous sins, she reasoned, and she had learned that those who committed sins would go to hell.[314] Bonafini had been a Catholic earlier in her life but she renounced her faith after the disappearance of her children and now holds a more existential humanist faith. For supporters of the *Mothers*, this change of heart in regards to the Pope represents part of their gradual political awakening. Meeting with John Paul II was part of the "tremendous naivety" of the organization during the early years, part of a false consciousness that gradually peeled away as the Bonafini and her *Mothers* began to see the revolutionary truth.

Despite Bonafini's attacks and recriminations, Carlotto has usually been mild in responding to them. In an interview from September 1996, when asked what she thought of Bonafini, Carlotto simply calls her a "suffering mother." Although she fails to highlight their discrepancies, her silence speaks volumes. Another member of the *Grandmothers*, says,

> I don't have anything against Hebe de Bonafini. I think she does many good things but also many bad things. It's in her way of thinking. But a week ago, I fought with a person who said her two sons are abroad. I swore they were lying. In a case like that, I'll defend her. She's an

[314] Clarín, April 13, 2005.

> intelligent woman but I think, and it's possible that I'm wrong, that she should have been more civil and then the Founding Line wouldn't have broken off. They should have continued together… Bonafini dominates. She seems like an army general to me.[315]

She proceeds to recount a time when Bonafini was in the Plaza de Mayo and a man approached Bonafini and asked her for the *Grandmother's* address. Instead of giving it to him, she dismissively said, "I don't know them." A relative of Reina's happened to be present there and followed the man as he was leaving and gave him the *Grandmothers'* address. He then came to their office and gave them useful information. "Bonafini's behavior is not merited," she sighed. In another interview where Carlotto is asked about Bonafini's *Mothers*, she remarks that they "have their own dynamic and who are we to judge it" but then adds "we believe that love constructs, that hatred doesn't, even at the risk of seeming stupid or weak."[316] In such a way, the construction of the *Grandmothers'* distinctive institutional identity can be seen in direct response to Bonafini.

As Carlotto rises to rival Bonafini, she also comes to be ubiquitously referred to as a symbol of the human rights struggle in Argentina. But she represents a competing and opposing symbol. The two have come to embody the two antithetical ends of the Argentine human rights movement. They are dueling matriarchs. The choice is between Bonafini or Carlotto. In media interviews, I have seen them juxtaposed against each other as a question: "Hebe Bonafini or Estella Carlotto?" The questions poses a choice between Bonafini's

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[315] Drawn from her *Memoria Abierta* interview.
[316] *El Mensajero*, No. 3, 1999. Interview with Gabriela Castori.

confrontational style and revolutionary politics and Carlotto's mild-mannered reformist approach that shows a pragmatic willingness to work within the system. It is a choice between not only two drastically different approaches to human rights but also two drastically different styles and personalities. The dominant perception of the *Grandmothers* is that they are milder, less radical, and more accommodating.

Bonafini's political radicalism manifests itself in her position against voting. Their political stance is quasi-anarchist and she diminishes the difference between the dictatorship and constitutional governments. "During the dictatorship, people were killed, kids ended up thrown out on the streets, they came to your house and kidnapped you, they stole everything, they took your books, they didn't let you read, they didn't permit anything, they didn't let you think, and they instilled you with a horrifying fear. Now they do the same but with the law"(Bauducco 2004:15). She frequently refers to democracy as "the same shit" as dictatorships. She is hostile to European social democrats and has denounced the World Social Forum as trying to put a "human face" on globalization.[317] In particular, she criticizes it for barring political parties and military organizations from participating, including groups she supports (e.g. FARC, Zapatistas, Cuba).

The political differences between the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* are even evident in the dominant metaphors used to describe the activities of the groups. While the *Grandmothers* are frequently said to "construct bridges," the

[317] Open World Conference of Workers, "Hebe de Bonafini, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Speaks Out on WSF 2," http://www.owcinfo.org/ILC/WSF/Report_WSF2_Brazil.html

Mothers are described as “building new roads.” Constructing bridges is a means of bringing people together. Building new roads suggests the construction of an alternate route or path than the one that has been presently chosen.

The political divisions between the groups are pronounced and, at times, contentious. Even my choice of working on the *Grandmothers* as a dissertation topic was viewed as a projection of my own political predilections. “You know, the *Grandmothers* are considered moderates, right?” an Argentine friend of mine working on a doctorate in comparative literature remarked upon first hearing my dissertation topic. From her slightly dismissive tone, the term “moderates” was clearly intended as an insult. Politically, her position was closer to Bonafini’s since she identified herself as a political radical. I shrugged my shoulders. Was I supposed to share the same politics of the *Grandmothers* just because I was conducting my fieldwork on the search for their disappeared grandchildren? As it turned out, I was. Throughout my fieldwork, during interviews with people who worked with other organizations, I was frequently seen to be a *de facto* spokesperson for the group’s positions, especially by people who disagreed with them. The assumption was that the *Grandmothers’* positions were my own. I was initially baffled by this until I understood how firmly entrenched concepts of *compromiso* (engagement) and *solidaridad* (solidarity) were in Argentine academia. These concepts have their loose North American equivalents in engaged or activist anthropology. The tacit expectation was that anyone conducting research on the dictatorship would gravitate to study the group that most closely conformed to one’s own personal politics. Although what drew me to the *Grandmothers* was not their politics but other issues like their use of genetic technologies, I did not protest. But I always felt vaguely apprehensive each time I

went to Bonafini's *Mothers* complex, either to their talks and conferences or to consult their library. My suspicions were that if I told them my research topic, they would react harshly because of their deeply engrained political differences. In fact, the one time that this occurred, my suspicions were confirmed.

On other occasions, being associated with the *Grandmothers* was more positive. "I don't buy the *Mothers*. I have a mother and they aren't my mothers," a friend of the family told me at a family *parilla* (BBQ) when I tell him my research topic. I asked him what he meant. He told me that he did not agree with Hebe de Bonafini. "Before, the group was pure. They had a real cause - their children - but then, as they became a political movement, I lost interest. Now they are too 'political.'" I clarified that I was not working with Bonafini's *Mothers*. The focus of my research was the *Grandmothers*. He smiled. "Oh, right. The *Grandmothers* are different. I support the *Grandmothers*." The perception of moderation has its benefits.

The Political is Personal

Although Carlotto and Bonafini represent opposing forces within the human rights movement, they come from similar backgrounds. They are both from La Plata, the provincial capital of Buenos Aires province and come from "humble" backgrounds. Carlotto was the daughter of a civil servant. Their lives, by their own description, followed the conventions and gender norms of their era up until the disappearance of their children. They married young (their husbands being the first and only loves of their lives) and devoted themselves to raising

their families. Both Bonafini and Estela Carlotto were, in their own accounts, apolitical before the disappearance of their children.

Bonafini only went to school until she was in the sixth grade and then learned to sew. (Sánchez 1985) Before the disappearance of her children, she made a living by working on a sewing machine. When elections came, she voted although she now refuses to tell interviewers for whom out of embarrassment. Carlotto also voted but that was the extent of her political activities. She was not bothered by successive dictatorships. She had been raised to accept them. She frequently refers to herself as a "bourgeois conformist" before the disappearance of her daughter.

> But the dictatorship came and destroyed everything. And there is nothing more painful for a mother than if they kidnap and kill a son or daughter. From there, there was no option. There was no other route. There was nothing else to do but search for the truth and justice.[318]

Post-disappearance marks a profound transformation in the life history narratives of Carlotto and for Bonafini. Bonafini situates the transformative power of the experience by the gradual coming together of the *Mothers* as a group. "At first you don't realize what you are doing at all. They took my son Jorge on February 8, 1977 and on the 17th of the same month my only brother died. It was a situation in which I experience two deaths, very hard, very difficult. I went out to the street to do things, things, things, to search and search (Bauducco 2004:13)

[318] *La Nación*, October 26, 2003.

What changed was when she met the other *Mothers* and they were able to collectivize the struggle. It was based on their mutual experience. “When you go with another, you feel accompanied, comforted. I think that’s why we remain in the plaza, because it makes us feel the same, because, here, we all went through the same thing.”(Ibid: 14) Carlotto’s personal narrative emphasizes a similar moment when they moved from the singularity of their search to the collectivization of the struggle.

Carlotto’s transformation was less radical than Bonafini’s. Around the time of the 20th anniversary of the coup, on March 27, 1996, *Página/12* publishes a “Life Histories” section featuring Hebe de Bonafini on one side of the page with Estela Carlotto on the other. Bonafini’s life history recounts her radical transformation. Its title “The two lives of Hebe Bonafini” attest to this. The article on Carlotto, emphasizes a continuity with the past rather than a radical break with her former self. “It didn’t take so much for me to go out to the streets,” the title of the article declares. She was able to take on her public role without great difficulties because of her personality and her experience. “It didn’t cost so much for me to go out in the street in this public role as president of the *Grandmothers*. Already, the fact of being a teacher required me to organize courses. I was not a woman exclusively dedicated to the home.”

This changes with Carlotto’s growing popularity. Several years later, however, and Carlotto has seemed to embrace the discourse of a “second life” and interviews speak of the “two lives of Estela Carlotto” – a “before and “after” with the disappearance of her daughter in between. For example, in an interview, she argues “We have opened a road where if today they ask us what is the difference between those women from 25-years ago and us today, we say that

we are others. We have changed in respect to political position, ideologies, and ideas."[319]

This emphasis on radical personal transformation is also linked to their gradual political transformation not only during the dictatorship but also after.

> We have grown and are able to do many things. This is what is interesting. This pain transformed in struggle. It gives one satisfaction that the struggle is for everyone, not only for the search for the grandchild or the disappeared, but to search, in the particular case of the *Grandmothers*, for children's wellbeing so that they don't die of hunger, that their parents have a roof, a job, that they can go to school, get educated, be healthy… The *Grandmothers* are part of the social struggle to repair what is right now a phenomenal crisis in Argentina.

This was part of the *Grandmothers'* movement from the perceived singularity of their cause to more general political activism throughout the 1990s (albeit an activism that often revolves around the subject of children). "We no longer think only about the disappeared children, we think about all Argentine children, the children out on the street, that don't have education, who have fathers who don't work and hit them, the children who are sexually abused. All of this is part of our dynamic. We are not outside of anything." This new politicized image of the *Grandmothers* is in sharp contrast with the perception in earlier decades that they were apolitical. When I attended the *Grandmothers'* 28th anniversary

[319] *La Nación*, October 26, 2003.

celebration, a group of *Grandmothers* onstage jointly shouted Che Guevara's famous slogan, *"hasta la victoria siempre."* A social scientist remarked to me that this would have never happened in the early years of the organization.

This gradual political growth is part of a more general political awakening they see occurring in Argentine society. As opposed to the *Mothers'* speaking for the *pueblo,* the *Grandmothers'* discourse is more willing to acknowledge all of society. "This is a social wound, not an individual one," Carlotto argues. "We have grown as a society. We have learned. We behave differently than we did 25 years ago"(Fernández 2001:92) In an article celebrating 20 years of democracy, Carlotto specifies: "we have grown as a society because we have learned to participate, to demonstrate, to be rebellious (anti-establishment), to provide solidarity…"[320]

Political Transformations

Like other family members, both Carlotto and Bonafini speak of a political transformation that occurred due to their children. As Carlotto recounts, her daughter "educated me in things that I had badly incorporated. To me, to be generous was to go an orphanage to take care of little abandoned or orphaned children. And she said to me that she wanted a country where orphanages didn't exist. The band-aid patch that I tried doesn't work. One has to change the system so that there are no longer any children who have been abandoned because of

[320] *La Nación*, October 26, 2003.

their parents' poverty."[321] At the same time, the reason her children turned out the way they did was because she and her husband raised her children with freedom so that they thought for themselves. "Then they taught us. They brought us up in their philosophy of life."

Bonafini's personal transformation also occurred with the disappearance of her children and the effect of the disappearance on her kinship.

> The disappearance of my children made me know the human being… I think that it was after the disappearance of my children that I began to know people. I knew many in my family who from one day to the next turned away from me and made as if they didn't know me any more and I didn't matter at all to them. I knew many who said they were my friends, very dear friends, who also stopped seeing me. I lost the entire family. Some died. Others were kidnapped and some decided to stop seeing me… With that force that I have to move forward I began to realize that I needed to put together another family (Bauducco 2004:178).

This personal transformation for Bonafini involved "having to change a ton of things inside."

> One has to feel all problems as one's own. Since then, everything that happens in the world makes me suffer more and more…Each time I feel an injustice I feel devastated… and… I think that my children were

[321] Hoy La Universidad, March 4, 2004, "Éramos otra generación de idiotas útiles", Interview by Tomás Barceló Cuesta.

> revolutionaries because they went through the same thing, they suffered all the same things that I began to suffer (Bauducco 2004:171).

For Hebe, this suffering means, "despairing over people's hunger and misery. It means that this won't let you sleep." The suffering is "horrible, profound, and constant." She also recognizes the same suffering in those whose politics she shares. "When I spoke with Subcomandante Marcos, I realized that these things also make him suffer and I had the same feeling with Fidel Castro" (Bauducco 2004:173).

Carlotto speaks of how little she understood of Argentina's political situation before the dictatorship. Her understanding of Argentine history changed after her political transformation.

> I taught what they told me to teach without questioning it. This was because we were brought up that way. What happened in Argentina happened throughout Latin America. It comes from a United States plan with its national security doctrine. They educated the military for the repression of the internal enemy. And the oligarchy handed the country over to them. Our children knew this. We didn't. We were another generation of useful idiots who were raised to accept history without questioning it. We consented to all of the politicians and the successive dictatorships influenced by the United States.[322]

[322] Ibid 23.

Bonafini would likely agree with Carlotto's interpretation of Argentine political history. However, Carlotto and Bonafini differ in their interpretations of the politics of the disappeared. Their own politics can be seen as a product of their view of the disappeared. Bonafini had two sons who disappeared: one was active in a revolutionary group, the other was working with the poor. For her, there was no difference between them. They both believed in revolution. Their revolutionary politics united them. While the *Grandmothers* employ an image of their disappeared grandchildren as "pure innocents," they also have a political conception of the disappeared that diverges with Bonafini's version. For example, Carlotto argues that her daughter, although a member of the Montoneros, did not "carry a gun." She worked in their press division. As a person of moderation, Carlotto insists that her daughter was as well. For example, when questioned by a reporter who tells her that "you are not a person located on the extremes…", Carlotto responds, "I wouldn't call it extremes. My daughter didn't take up arms…Our children were kidnapped while sleeping in their homes. It wasn't in a trench. She didn't have any arms. She thought and she was dangerous for that reason."[323] This argument may not be persuasive. Though her daughter did not directly carry arms against the state, she belonged to an organization that did and one that was committed to revolutionary politics.

However, Carlotto's view of the disappeared is that some may have been involved in revolutionary activities at the time but these activities should now be encapsulated by "social justice," a term that was not in currency during that period. She reasons that the concept unites the underlying core of the divergent

[323] Ibid.

beliefs of those who comprised the disappeared. “The disappeared activists were of different extractions: there were those from the Marxist-Leninist party, the socialist party, the communist party, the workers’ trade unions, the grassroots, the Catholic Church, the Peronist party, all different groups.”[324] For Carlotto, they had a “project for changing the country.” From her perspective, social justice represents the fulfillment of that project. “And what is social justice? That everyone has dignity in living. That there doesn’t exist the extreme rich and so much poverty, that everyone smiles and is happy. Only then are we going to have a democracy. My goal is to oppose fascism and imperialism: social justice.”

Class Consciousness

Bonafini’s supporters emphasize that her radical political positions are more than mere political rhetoric. They point to the coherence and integrity with which she lives her life. Bonafini puts her beliefs into practice in her everyday life. Depending on the interpreter’s political allegiance, accounts of Hebe de Bonafini’s life alternately paint a portrait of uncompromising and uncontaminated ideological purity and loving self-sacrifice or obdurate intransigence. This manifests itself primarily in the *Mothers’* refusal to accept economic reparations for the disappearances. The issue of economic reparations has been particularly controversial for Bonafini since she harshly attacks anyone who takes them.[325]

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[324] Ibid.

[325] It was difficult to find information on what percentage of family members refuse to take reparations. Bonafini, herself, has stated in interviews that she does not want to know. A mental health team that works with family members

She frequently states that they are “prostituting themselves and the memory of their dead children.” This was also attested to by a sign declaring, “taking reparations is prostitution” that was hung in the Plaza de Mayo at their March of Resistance I attended in 2004. Such stances require a self-deprivation that she willingly embraces: “I buy soap to wash clothing but not fabric softener. It doesn’t bother me.”(Bauducco 2004:205) Instead of having a car or a driver, she commutes daily by public transportation from her home in La Plata to the city of Buenos Aires, a journey that takes well over an hour. She walks to and from the bus terminal on foot and alone. When the son of a writer who left the country gave her a car, she sold it and donated the money for all of the *Mothers* to use: “I am not going to go in a car while everyone else goes on foot.”(Bauducco 2004: 204) This preference is part of her larger self-conception and presentation as a “common” woman. In her words, “I am a common woman, like every mother who struggles for her children. Besides cleaning, ironing and cooking, I do what I do.”(Bauducco 2004:22) Having refused economic reparations given by the government, she lives off her and her dead husband’s meager pensions. In her own accounts, she lives frugally on a small income supplemented by the gifts that people give her. Ideological spotlessness transposes all aspects of her life.

As a prominent human rights figure, she travels around the world frequently. However, when traveling, she refuses to go sightseeing or to even “drink a coffee.” Bonafini claims that this distinguishes her *Mothers* from the *Founding Line Mothers* who, according to Bonafini, became upset when she imposed this rule. Of this, Bonafini commented:

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told me that almost all family members do (even those who belong to institutions that criticize them). I have no way of verifying this though.

> They took advantage of trips to Europe to make a little escape to Greece and other things like that. We think that when one leaves the country, one does it in representation of the movement and because they killed your children. It's not for fun or for screwing around. You can't go sightseeing. For example, when we were in Canada, they had prepared a trip for us to Niagara Falls but I didn't go. I know people, not countries. Look, after the 10th time that I went to France a senator said to me 'but how is it possible that you've never been to the Eiffel Tower.' (Bauducco 2004:206)

Implicit within Bonafini's criticism of the *Founding Line Mothers* is her view of working class solidarity. Bonafini grew up in a poor neighborhood in La Plata. Her identity is working class. This gives her a sense of class struggle. She distinguishes between the *Mothers* in the early years who wanted to meet in cafes to drink tea and the ones who did not. According to Bonafini, class struggle manifested itself early in the *Mothers'* history*,* long before the schism although she implies that the division between the *Mothers* occurred on class lines. She also claims that within this split the founder of the *Mothers* would be on her side. "I felt close to Azucena for that reason; the class struggle was felt in the *Mothers*. I remember the first meeting outside of the Plaza, we met in a bar and a *Mother* from the upper-class came."(Arana 1996:8) Bonafini describes how she condescendingly told Azucena that she had a cook with the same name. "From that moment on, Azucena didn't want to see her again."

While Bonafini emphasizes her working class background, Carlotto is seen as prototypically middle class. For example, Tomas Barcelo Cuesta opens his interview with Carlotto with the following assessment:

> There is something in this woman that immediately reveals her middle class origins. One can see it in her hands, where she wears more than one silver ring, in her well-cared for nails, in the simple necklace that hangs from her neck, in her hairstyle and carefully composed appearance. But above all her origins are revealed when she speaks. She speaks in a smooth but firm manner with a careful and balanced language that comes from a good education. When one hears her, one has the impression of being in the presence of a teacher who is giving a lesson.[326]

For Cuesta, Carlotto is a "teacher from the old days that no longer exists," "a faithful and observant executor of pedagogical methods." Carlotto's image of middle-class respectability stands in sharp contrast with Bonafini's less refined self-assessment as being *callejera*, a woman out in the streets. While both frequently identify themselves as "everywoman," the difference is that Carlotto represents a middle-class everywoman while Bonafini is her working class equivalent. Bonafini uses this representational claim for her entire organization. Carlotto argues that the *Grandmothers* are comprised of women from all social sectors. They are more inclusive.

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[326] Hoy La Universidad, March 4, 2004, "Éramos otra generación de idiotas útiles", Interview by Tomás Barceló Cuesta.

Emotional Tone

The contrasting institutional identities of the *Grandmothers* and the *Mothers* are in part projections of the personalities of their respective leaders. Carlotto's middle-class identity stems largely from her pre-*Grandmothers* profession as a schoolteacher and a principal. This background can be seen in how she presents herself, in particular, as noted above, in how she speaks. Carlotto has a calm and restrained pedagogical tone. She is a fluid speaker whose voice never fluctuates in pitch nor wavers with emotion. Bonafini, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. She is a passionate and fiery orator who gives intense speeches that alternate between fury and tenderness. As indicated by some of her polemical comments, Bonafini expresses anger and hatred. She admits to being a person who does not restrain her emotions. In her own self-description,

> I am a person that never represses anything. If I have hatred, I say all that I have to say and if I get upset, I cry when I need to cry. It doesn't matter to me if it's on the radio or on television. What I feel I put on the table and I never repress myself…The human being is this: tears, happiness, suffering, anguish, hatred. I am a mix of all these (Bauducco 2004:17).

On the other hand, Estela Carlotto says she is incapable of feeling hatred. When prodded by one interviewer who says being angry *(indignado)* is understandable in the context of what happened to her, she responds munificently, "Angry (*enojado*, a milder anger than *indignado*) but not with

hatred. This is another trait that I am happy to have but I cannot criticize those who feel and express [their anger]."[327] In differentiating her group with Bonafini's *Mothers*, Carlotto highlights this difference in emotional tone. Carlotto also emphasizes restraint in her other emotions as well. She claims to have never cried in public. Although the *Grandmothers'* appeals are largely empathetic ones, Estela says that she is guided by reason rather than emotion. "Because if I would have let myself be guided by the emotions of pain and anguish resulting from search and failure, I would be completely destroyed now."[328]

Both organizations are driven by the love they feel for their children and, in the *Grandmothers'* case, their grandchildren as well. However, Bonafini expresses both love and hatred. She has love for her disappeared children and their revolutionary ideals but hatred for injustice and imperialism. Although both the appeals of the *Grandmothers* and Bonafini's *Mothers* are structured around emotions, Bonafini's group is epitomized by passion while the Grandmothers' are characterized by restraint. Even the conciliatory image of the *Grandmothers* can be seen as a product of Carlotto's personality. She describes herself as a conciliatory person. This is also a product of her former life as a teacher and school principal and is a characteristic that has also carried through to her present work in the *Grandmothers*. "I was the peace-maker when there were problems between children."[329]

This may be part of the *Grandmothers'* self-identification as grandmothers. As "representative grandmothers," the prototypical grandmother-

[327] Revista Veintitres, October 21, 2004.
[328] Revista Noticias, September 8, 2001.
[329] Revista Veintitres, October 21, 2004.

grandchild relationship defines their institution. For example, a magazine section on “books to read with the kids on the beach” during the summer vacation features recommendations by filmmakers, television hosts, writers, actors and other notable public figures, including Estela Carlotto who recommends *The Little Prince.*[330] Grandmothers indulge their grandchildren without having the responsibilities to be strict rule-makers like parents need to. In an anthology of interviews with grandparents, Carlotto was explicit about this difference between parental love and grandparental love. “We have had children. We lovingly raised them with virtues and flaws in the way that we thought was right. But when we meet the children of our children, we are grandmothers. And this word, this situation, awakens an infinite tenderness. One is transformed into an experienced but permissive mother” (Rottenberg 2000:43) .

Outside of the official discourse, there is some ambivalence about this view. For example, Elsa who is no longer active with the group but maintains links to human rights groups told me in an interview.

> I think I have the right to say it publicly after twenty-six years. Although it sounds appalling, I’m not a sweet little granny of yesteryear. I am still a *Grandmother* in all senses of the term and I keep working in the way I can for the disappeared. My idea for the sentence of these men is not that they should be at home or in a common prison. What could help me sleep a little bit better is if they were kept in the same condition as our people. Not disappeared or tortured but all the rest. How they ate, how they slept,

[330] Revista Veintitres, January 8, 2004.

> how they bathed, how they took them to the bathroom. The exact same treatment. If they think this is how to treat human beings they should go through the exact same thing. Their families should know where they. I don't want them to go through the torture we family members went through. That doesn't seem human me. But the other conditions that they created for other human beings. That's the only thing I want from these men.

Elsa's rejection of being a "sweet little granny" and her desire for a harsh punishment against the men responsible for the disappearance of her daughter runs counter to the organizational image of the group that rejects the idea of vengeance. Elsa tells me, "I don't think that I have any hatred but, if I do, I think I deserve it."

In 2007, *The Grandmothers* launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology an educative program called *Las Abuelas nos cuentan* (Grandmothers tell us), designed to educate primary schools in human rights. The title evokes the image of loving grandmothers telling stories and imparting her wisdom and moral authority to their grandchildren. While the *Grandmothers* present themselves as loving grandmothers, the *Mothers* have embraced a discourse of madness in their institutional rhetoric. "Madness" was a term originally used to discredit the movement during the dictatorship. When faced with their silent protests, the dictatorship called them "mad women." Writers and commentators later seized upon this term as a positive designation. For example, one of the first accounts of the group is called *Las Locas de Plaza de Mayo* (The Mad Women of the Plaza de Mayo), published by a French

journalist (Bousquet 1983). Julio Cortázar used the expression as a term of endearment in a famous newspaper editorial he wrote in 1982 entitled "*Nuevo Elogio de Locura*" (Evoking the famous title by Erasmus, it means "New Praise of Folly/Madness). He contrasted the madness of the *Mothers* with the rational logic of the dictatorship (Cortázar 1994) The *Mothers* later seized upon this same kind of usage. For example, in describing the impetus of the group, Bonafini says: "One draws the force to begin from the complete madness that seizes you when something like this happens you. I don't know where you get it from" (Bauducco 2004:14).

"The voice of madness' is the name of their radio show and they use the term frequently to describe themselves and their activities. In doing so, they have seized upon the use of madness common to the anti-psychiatry camp in which madness is a label used by those in positions of power to denigrate and marginalize those who reject cultural (and ideological) norms. Their closeness to the anti-psychiatry movement can be seen in their 2006 mental health conference that featured a section on schizoanalysis, a concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus.* At the 2002 conference, Bonafini stated in an interview, I don't think madness is a sickness. I think it is a mind-blowing state in which one attempts to break through all the structures that society attempts to impose upon you" (Kazi 2003:13). At the same time, critics of the organization will use the terminology against them. Several editorials in the conservative daily *La Nación* over the years explicitly referred to Bonafini as irrational. One of them contrasted Bonafini's perceived irrationality with Carlotto's perceived reasonableness.

Body Politics

Part of the discourse of madness employed by Bonafini's *Mothers* is framed by an institutional history that marks "three very important steps" taken by the group. The first was when they initially came together, "the collectivization of the struggle." The second step was when they became mothers of all of the disappeared, "the socialization of maternity." In this step, they ceased to see themselves as mothers of individuals who disappeared. They were mothers of all of the disappeared. Their final step was "to find our own children in everyone who struggles" (Madres 2003). This process of abstracting the disappeared has led them to one of their most polemical positions, a rejection of exhumations. In contrasting the pragmatic politics of the *Grandmothers* with the radical politics of the *Mothers,* this is one of the most often cited differences. The *Grandmothers* (and the other human rights groups) support exhumations as a means of gathering proof that can be used in court cases as well as evidence that can be used in documenting and locating their grandchildren.

Bonafini's rejection of exhumation can be seen as a more general rejection for the Argentine cult of the dead with its emphasis on monumental cemeteries and mausoleums. Her rejection of bodies is also part of her idealization of the disappeared. They do not exist in their material form (i.e. corpses); they exist only as the ideas they embraced. "Stop worrying about graves and cemeteries," she exhorts. She extends this rejection of funerals and dead bodies to herself. She has often said that she does not want a funeral and that she does not want people to place flowers on her grave. Her wishes are to

be cremated, her ashes thrown in the Plaza de Mayo. "I'd like to die in the open air, not closed up in a room."[331]

Her rejection of dead bodies is also tied to her view of the body as a source of action and of life. The oft-cited "maternal politics" of the Mothers are tied to their "body politics." When asked about her memories of her children's births by an interviewer, Bonafini recounts a strange story that does not refer to either. "I remember something that was odd. Together with my first son, I also breastfed the daughter of a neighbor because her mother couldn't attend to her. Since I didn't have enough milk for the two, I had to give my son the bottle for a short time. It was to save the life of this child… Later, Raul and Maria Alejandra were born"(Sánchez 57:1985). She embraces the view of the maternal body as a source of life and nurturance, not only for her own biological children but for others. This is an example of Bonafini's solidarity – her collectivization of maternity in which the *Mothers* became mothers of everyone. "Our whole life we struggle for life. For that reason, we don't want the list of the dead. We are struggling for life and for that reason we aren't going to turn over cemeteries or exhume bodies." (Bauducco 2004:22)

The body is not only a source of life but of action. At the same time that Bonafini renounces dead bodies, she praises the living body as a vehicle of action. The *Mothers* are celebrated for their "body politics,' the use of their bodies as the source of their political action. Bonafini has picked up on this notion and frequently uses the term *poner el cuerpo* (literally, to put forth one's body) to describe their style of politics. In one interview, Bonafini even argues this as the

[331] From a 1984 interview reprinted by Ayesha Libros, http://www.ayeshalibros.com.ar/html/reportajes/bonafini2.htm.

group's legacy. "I think that the best message that I can leave to you is that I came and *poner el cuerpo.* The *Mothers* are accustomed to *poner el cuerpo.* We don't like written missives and I think that this is the message: that everyone has to *poner el cuerpo.*"[332] In the same way, the disappeared exist not only in their ideas but in their concrete actions while they were alive.

The use of bodily rhetoric is common to both the *Grandmothers* and the *Mothers.* Both *Grandmothers* and *Mothers* share the rhetoric of having experienced the dictatorship "in one's own flesh." This emphasizes the importance placed on lived, bodily experience. As individuals who "lived the dictatorship in their own flesh," they become literal and physical vessels of remembrance. The *Grandmothers,* however, emphasize a very different kind of body politics than Bonafini. They speak of the materiality of the body but as a source of evidence and proof. The exhumations, the *Grandmothers'* National Genetic Data Bank which stores their blood sample, and the genetic identification of the children disappeared are examples of this. The *Grandmothers* emphasize a biological relationship: the way in which genetic material is passed down from parents to their offspring.

For Bonafini, the biological bond between the mother and the child was the original motivation for the *Mothers* to go out into the streets. However, one of the key movements in their institutional history was when they delegitimized the biological bond and became mothers of all of the disappeared. The disappeared live on in everyone who struggles against oppression and imperialism. Blood ties, the initial motivation for the movement, cease to be relevant. All revolutionaries

[332] Interview with Radio Zapote, Mexico City, June 2001.

around the world are equally their children. The *Mothers* use the slogan "appearance with life" (*aparición con vida*) to refer to the politics of the disappeared.[333] The *Grandmothers* refer to this slogan of the *Mothers'* but then argue that they are the only group that can actually achieve it. One of their early slogans from the 1980s was "restitution is a return to life." Their search is a search for life. Not surprisingly, the title of the oral history of the *Grandmothers* is *Searching for Life.* This is what differentiates them from the other groups according to their institutional account. They can find the "living disappeared." For the *Grandmothers,* the disappeared live in their kidnapped offspring when they are located. It is a concrete and material view of the disappeared that Bonafini rejects.

Public Events

The differences between the groups do not only exist in the diverging personalities of their respective leaders or in their institutional rhetoric. The differences between the groups manifest themselves in their public events. To illustrate the contrast, I will cite two examples from my fieldwork. First, both the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* sponsor music concerts. I attended both during the course of my fieldwork. *The Mothers'* concert series featured a raucous mix

[333] The slogan originally came after the fall of the dictatorship when there was a political push for family members to accept the deaths of their children. They said that they would refuse to accept that they had been killed without first identifying their murderers.

of *rock nacional,* heavy metal, reggae and punk.[334] The choice of musical genres that appeal to a wide audience and a popular crowd is deliberate. The *Mothers'* use youth culture as a mean of attracting younger generations to their movement. The concert I attended took place in a working class neighborhood in an unseated venue. The band was an Argentine punk band that played music derivative of the Ramones. The *Mothers* charge a nominal sum for the concerts. Their concerts are also fundraisers. On the other hand, the *Grandmothers*' music series features generally more "reputable" music genres – a mix of folk, tango, and jazz that appeal to an older, more middle class and more college-educated crowd. The Grandmothers' concerts take place in trendier clubs in more fashionable neighborhoods, where spectators can sit at small tables and order a *picada* of meat and cheese with bottles of wine delivered straight to one's table. The *Grandmothers*' concerts are sponsored in collaboration with the city of Buenos Aires and are free. They have no fundraising significance. Instead, they serve as part of their public campaigns to call attention to the organization as a means of getting young people who doubt their biological identities to contact them.

Another example comes from their competing Marches of Resistance. These events, normally held in December, have taken place since the waning years of the dictatorship and feature a 24-hour long protest. Since the groups split, they began holding separate ones. I attended them in both 2003 and 2004. Bonafini's *Mothers'* March featured a *murga*, a carnivalesque form of musical performance accompanied by dancers. The march began with a procession

[334] *Rock Nacional* in Argentina has long had close ties to the human rights movement (Vila 1989, 1987). The Disappeared are a common theme in songs.

down the *Avenida de Mayo* to the Plaza de Mayo where the groups gathered and marched around the pyramid decorated with photographs of the disappeared. Hebe appeared at the front of the march, holding hands with children. Behind her were *piquetero* groups her organization supports. They launched small noisy firecrackers. In their customary attire, they had cloth covering their faces and carried sticks.

On the other hand, the March of the *Grandmothers*, *Founding Line Mothers* and *Family Members* organization began with a comparatively somber procession down the *Avendia de Mayo.* The *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* were at the front carrying a banner of photographs of the disappeared. The procession ended at the Plaza de Mayo. Once they reached the Plaza, the event began to resemble a family reunion, as family members warmly greet each other and talk as they circles around the Plaza. Bonafini's *Mothers*' March is a festival and a parade. It has the feel of a celebration. The other march feels more like a funeral procession or a memorial. In comparison, it is a solemn and serious event.

The Political Economy of Human Rights Groups

Bonafini and her defenders have a valid point when they accuse the Ford Foundation of self-consciously and deliberately supporting more moderate organizations (Although the expectation that a foundation would support a group that explicitly rejects what it stands for confounds logic). In the case of the *Grandmothers,* this is exactly what occurred. The Ford Foundation played an important role in the early years of the organization by providing economic support. The Ford Foundation provided the Grandmothers with an initial grant in

1985 to help develop a data bank to hold genetic records. The grant was renewed every year through 1990. A law professor writing on the Grandmothers who looked at Ford Foundation inter-office memorandum confirmed that the choice of funding the *Grandmothers* rather than other of the family member human rights groups was political. She writes: “Although there were a number of other human rights organizations that courageously fought the dictatorship and were struggling to reestablish democracy in Argentina, the Ford Foundation seemed to prefer the *Abuelas.* Foundation officials viewed the *Abuelas* as less politicized and more practical and realistic than other groups. A Ford Foundation field representative noted a significant distinction between the *Abuelas* and other human rights organizations such as the *Madres* group from which they sprang: ‘The Abuelas seem far less politicized and more concerned with finding children than seeking retribution.’” (Oren 2001:141-142) The perception of moderation, a perception of not being too involved in politics or even being apolitical is tied to the pragmatic task of trying to locate children. This perception has given the *Grandmothers* the economic means to continue their search and has helped to enhance their public profile.

The same perception of being too moderate that helps to gather funding and support for the *Grandmothers* occasionally create problems for the organization. In January 2001, Carlos Ruckauf, the right-wing governor of the province of Buenos Aires, launched a public campaign to sponsor the Estela Carlotto for a Nobel Peace Prize. In his letter of proposal, he explicitly differentiated the *Grandmothers* from the *Mothers*: “they had to separate themselves from [them] due to political and methodological differences” and highlights them “as an example to all of humanity.” He proposed them with the

ends of "recognizing these *Grandmothers* as grandmothers of all the children of my generation and that, in the end, civilization defeated barbarity in Argentina."[335]

Other human rights activists criticied Ruckauf's public sponsorship of the *Grandmothers*. They attacked it as a blatantly hypocritical, cynical, and opportunistic move. Ruckauf had acted as government minister of Isabel Perón in 1975 and had signed a decree authorizing the "elimination of subversion." Though it was issued before the military coup, this decree is seen as a "starting point" for state terror (López Echagüe 2000). He subsequently had close relations with the military dictatorship when it took power in 1976. That someone who was partly responsible for what took place during the dictatorship would then propose one of its victims for a Nobel Peace Prize was baffling. In interviews, Estela Carlotto responded by saying she had nothing to do with the nomination. When human rights leaders asked Carlotto to distance herself further from the nomination, she responded that she was not searching for prizes but for more grandchildren but a Nobel Peace Prize could provide useful resources for the organization.[336] While she lost to former US president Jimmy Carter in 2001, in July of 2007, a new public campaign was launched in support of Carlotto. The Argentine Minister of Education Daniel Filmus put forth Carlotto as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in France during a joint appearance at a UNESCO event.

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[335] "El Año de Guido. Premio Nobel de la Paz para la Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, January 26, 2001, http://www.laprensasandiego.org/archieve/january26/guido.htm

[336] Carta de Hernán López Echagüe a Estela Carlotto sobre el apoyo prestado por Carlos Ruckauf a su candidatura.

Chapter 11: From *resistencia* to *oficialista:* Kirchner's Passive Revolution

The most radical revolutionary will become a conservative the day after the revolution. – Hannah Arendt[337]

The dichotomy that I set up in the previous chapter between the "dueling matriarchs" of human rights emerged in the 1990s. Recent events, however, have broken it down. After Kirchner became President in 2003, his approach to the dictatorship garnered him the support of much of the human rights movement. Far from a revolution, Kirchner was not attempting to enact radical change. At best, his economic policies were an effort to reform the existing system. At the same time, expectations of Argentine politicians had diminished over the years and he caught many by surprise. Adriana of the *Ex-Disappeared* remained critical of Kirchner while acknowledging the positive measures his government had taken to address issues of impunity. She and other activists had believed that a government that would pursue justice for the human rights abuses committed by the dictatorship would also alter the economic course of the country since it was part of the dictatorship's legacy. "What is curious in the current situation is that Kirchner has taken objective steps towards ending impunity but nevertheless the economic plan continues being the same. That a government could be so contradictory is not something we expected."

It is not a contradiction for a government to address civil and political rights while neglecting economic rights. It is one thing to recognize the legal and political rights that were violated during the dictatorship and to pursue justice against those who committed them. It is another to change the economic system.

[337] *The New Yorker*, 12 September 1970.

Although the two are not necessarily intertwined, for Argentine activists they were. According to Adriana, this has led to "a complicated political situation to analyze because up until now we were accustomed to putting the two things together. Those that wanted impunity for the genocide also wanted the continuity of the economic plan. Now we find ourselves up against a government that is making steps towards ending impunity for the genocide but nevertheless essentially continues its economic plan"

In spite of these criticisms, Kirchner cultivated close ties with the reformist sector of the human rights movement after his arrival in office in 2003. Kirchner was the first president to open up the *Casa Rosada* (the presidential house) to human rights groups and consults with them frequently. Estela Carlotto, in particular, became identified as an *oficialista* (pro-government) supporter of Kirchner's policies. In interviews, she called Kirchner a "revelation" and connected his politics to the disappeared. "We do not forget that he is from our children's generation. Therefore, he and his cabinet have the possibility of creating another socio-political context - what our children wanted - to not be a dependent country."[338]

While Carlotto's support for Kirchner is a logical extension of the pragmatic and moderate politics that historically characterize the *Grandmothers,* the surprising development is that Hebe de Bonafini comes to be seen as a key political ally of Kirchner's as well. Unlike all previous politicians who she uniformly disparaged, she meets frequently with Kirchner and proclaims him to be one of the *Mothers'* children, even presenting him with a *pañuelo* that symbolizes the

[338] *Hoy la Universidad*, No. 237, March 4, 2004.

group. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Mothers* had rejected all political parties and opposed voting. This was part of their institutional ideology. "We are convinced that the only possible democracy is revolutionary," the *Mothers* wrote in their history of the organization published in the same year that Kirchner took power (Madres 2003:169). She originally deemed Kirchner no different from previous presidents, calling him "the same shit" as the others. She later admitted her mistake. He was not "the same shit," she reportedly told him to his face. Bonafini's endorsement for Kirchner is a qualified one and she resists the accusation that she has become *oficialista* (pro-government). While acknowledging that Kirchner "is not the revolution," she says he represents a "new political movement" and "an opportunity that should not be missed." Though she says that she does not support everything the government does and still does not advocate voting, she openly supports some of the government's initiatives.[339]

As Bonafini's support for Kirchner becomes more vocal, she criticizes radical *piquetero* groups. In particular, she criticizes Raúl Castells, head of an influential *piquetero* group comprised of unemployed and retirees, who regularly takes a confrontational stance towards Kirchner's government. She accuses him of being a fascist aligned with the interests of the right.[340] Bonafini also regularly accuses the radical faction of *piqueteros* of complicity with the reactionary right in order to bring down Kirchner's government. Left-wing political parties are "making up their *piqueteros*" so they can use them to attack Kirchner's government.[341]

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[339] Página/12, June 20, 2004.
[340] Página/12, August 25, 2004.
[341] Clarín, March 7, 2004.

Ironically, such comments echo Verbitsky's criticism of her ally Petras about how radicalizing new social movements feeds into the desire of militarists on the reactionary right.

Given her uncompromising reputation, Bonafini's embrace of what can be seen as pragmatic politics is startling. Faced with criticisms from the radical political sector that she used to be the most visible symbol of, she accuses them of "not knowing how to do politics" and claims that her willingness to selectively support some of Kirchner's initiatives indicates the "political maturity" of her *Mothers*. This reference to maturity may self-consciously evoke Lenin's famous criticisms of the "infantile left." The most representational moment of Bonafini's new stance occurs in 2006 when she announced the final March of Resistance of the Mothers (although their weekly marches continue). Declaring that there was "no longer an enemy in the *Casa Rosada*," she called Kirchner a "friend" who had opened his doors to the group. Previously held once a year, "the reason for the March of Resistance was governments that never listened to the *Mothers* and this is not the case with Kirchner."[342] The "historical moment" marked a continental drift to the left that included Kirchner, Bolivia's Evo Morales, Venezuela's Chávez, Brazil's Lula da Silva and Chile's Bachelet among others (Bonafini has particularly close ties with Chávez and Morales who I saw speak at the 2004 March of the Resistance). Bonafini's decision to end the March even provoked Carlotto's criticism. She accused her of trying to "close" memory. Along with the *Founding Line Mothers* and *Family Members,* the *Grandmothers* vowed to carry on their separate March of Resistance, one that Bonafini never

[342] Página/12, January 17, 2006.

recognized as legitimate. Bonafini countered by accusing Carlotto of never going to the Plaza de Mayo.[343]

Bonafini's close relationship with Kirchner has drawn criticism from many of her former allies in radical political circles. They claim her to be a casualty of Kirchner's bourgeois takeover. She has been "seduced" by Kirchner. A British activist who came to Argentina to volunteer with one of the more hardline *piquetero* groups told me flatly: "We all think that Hebe was co-opted." Her previously pristine reputation of uncompromising struggle falls. Someone who had been previously identified with ideological purity was perceived as betraying everything that she once stood for. A typical assessment on the Argentine *Indymedia* website posted by "Anti Hebe" calls her a "traitor and friend of repressors." Another poses the question: "Is this old lady (*vieja)* stupid, selfish or did they pay her off directly?" Because of her support for the government, other posters claim that she "has ceased being an example" and is no longer a friend (*compañera*). Some use her harsh rhetoric against her: "She spits on the blood of the disappeared."[344] James Petras criticized Bonafini for no longer allowing anti-Kirchner *piquetero* groups to meet at the Mothers' *University*.[345] Others still support although are suspicious of her ties to Kirchner: "Of all the process of *lucha* of the *Mothers*, *Grandmothers* and *Family Members*, I think that she's been the most coherent and tenacious." She is "still a *compañera*," they conclude.

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[343] Alterinfos, http://www.alterinfos.org/spip.php?article262
[344] "Hebe traidora y amiga de los represores," December 11, 2003, Argentine indymedia, http://www.argentina.indymedia.org/news/2003/12/157628.php.
[345] "Argentina: from popular rebellion to "normal capitalism," James Petras, June 5, 2004. www.globalresearch.ca.

One of the larger rifts between Bonafini and her former allies occured in February 2007 when Hermann Schiller was fired as a professor in the *Mothers'* University. Schiller is a prominent human rights figure in Argentina. He published *Nueva Presencia*, an important progressive Jewish magazine that openly denounced the crimes of the dictatorship during the dictatorship.[346] He had collaborated closely with the *Mothers* since the beginning of the group. In 1982, he founded the Jewish Movement for Human Rights. In 2000, he began teaching at the *Mothers'* University on the history of the Argentine worker's movement. His public lectures were extremely popular. He also hosted the *Mothers*' national radio show, "The Voice of Madness." After Bonafini became closer to Kirchner, Schiller continued inviting opposition groups onto his radio shows and to the university. In February 2007, Bonafini fired him from the University for "speaking badly" of the *Mothers.*[347] Most believe that the real reason was his criticisms of Kirchner. He is called a "victim of Kirchner-Bonafini." Schiller subsequently stated that Bonafini was compromising her legacy.[348] Her actions spurred a group letter of protest from many of her former supporters, including James Petras who subsequently resigned his position as Honorary President of the University.

Bonafini's close ties with Kirchner eventually occasioned a rapprochement between Bonafini and Carlotto May of 2006, Bonafini and Carlotto were, in the words of one newspaper, "reunited by Kirchner" after "years of confrontations that separated them" when they attend a ceremony together with Kirchner. Both

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[346] It is said that the publication was able to get away with criticizing the dictatorship because the *junta* was already facing charges of antisemitism and were concerned with this perception.
[347] *Nueva Sión*, April 3, 2007, http://www.nuevasion.com.ar/nota.asp?IDNoticia=4411
[348] *Revista Noticias,* March 30, 2007.

present him with embroidered white handkerchiefs (*pañuelos*) of their respective organization's logos.[349] In her June 1, 2006 speech in the Plaza de Mayo, Bonafini criticized journalists who were "concerned about whether Estela and I are making friends with each other."

A Passive Revolution

A popular interpretation by the critical left is that Kirchner cynically appropriated the human rights movement as a means of consolidating power. They accuse him of only being interested in human rights for politically expedient motives. Dealing with issues from the dictatorship are easy measures that required the expenditure of little political or economic capital. It was far easier than confronting the "real" issues in the present. Costing little, it gained him the support of an important political opposition sector. The military had already been significantly weakened over the previous two decade so they could offer little resistance like in the past. It was therefore not difficult for Kirchner to annul the amnesty laws, begin trials, and purge the judiciary and military of lingering figures from the dictatorship.

However, some critics retain their skepticism as to the extent of Kirchner's human rights efforts. They believe that the government only plans to pursue justice against a very small minority of military perpetrators who either have great notoriety (like Alfredo Astiz) or were at the top of the chain of command. Most of these men are now elderly and long retired. To go after, as some human rights

[349] Clarín, May 26, 2006.

groups demand, all military perpetrators from top to bottom would require much more than that. For example, the several human rights groups demand that all of the military who worked in the concentration camps should be tried for crimes against humanity. These numbers range anywhere from two to upwards of five thousand when also including provincial police who were involved in the disappearances. As one activist told me, "we are struggling to punish every last one of them and this is going to eventually cause a confrontation with government policy."

Kirchner has not only been accused of appropriating human rights groups in order to consolidate power but also other sectors of the opposition, including the new social movements identified with the *piqueteros.* While the human rights movement are mostly united in their support of Kirchner's government, the *piquetero* movement have now divided into reformist and revolutionary sectors *vis a vis* the government. While radical *piquetero* movements are seen as taking a confrontational stance towards the government, Kirchner has cultivated close ties with several major *piquetero* groups. Luis D'elía, head of a group with an estimated 100,000 supporters, has been called Kirchner's official *piquetero.* He eventually won a seat in the parliament and was appointed Kirchner's Housing Secretary.[350] Kirchner also formed close ties with progressive intellectuals, another important opposition sector. Shortly after taking office, he met several important intellectuals for lunch, including Beatriz Sarlo, Jose Pablo Feinmann, and Tulio Halperín Donghi (although Sarlo later accuse Kirchner of acting like a

[350] He was eventually fired in November 2006 after he led a protest rally in the Iranian Embassy in Buenos Aires and called the arrest warrants issued in the AMIA bombing of Iranian officials "an American-Israeli military aggression against the Islamic republic." I will return to this later in the chapter.

"sovereign" and others like Donghi eventually become suspicious of Kirchner's increasing accumulation of power). Political scientist and former professor at the University of Toronto, José Nun became secretary of culture and Horacio González, a sociologist, became Director of the National Library. Such associations led the press to identify a group of what they called "*intelectuales K"* (Kirchner intellectuals). What intellectuals think of Kirchner is such a topic of interest that a book published in 2004 is devoted to precisely that topic: *El Presidente Inesperado (el gobierno de Kirchner según los intelectuales argentinos)* (The Unexpected President [Kirchner's government according to Argentine intellectuals) (Natanson 2004).

Antonio Gramsci's concept of a "passive revolution" is useful to describe what took place in Argentina during Kirchner's rapid ascension to and consolidation of power (Forcacs 1988). Gramsci defines it as a revolution without a revolution. Gramsci coined the term to describe the process by which a class maintains hegemony when faced with a threat to its power. Faced with a critical situation in which their grasp on power is in peril, the hegemonic class appropriates popular interests in order to neutralize social forces that constitute the primary opposition to its rule. As a result, the ruling group maintains its hegemony by incorporating the competing forces that threaten it. Faced with an economic crisis that has, in part, its origins with the policies of the dictatorship, and a subsequent popular uprising, the new administration co-opted human rights groups, certain *piquetero* groups, some intellectuals, and other important progressive political sectors. Kirchner achieved this largely by addressing human rights issues and employing traditional populist rhetoric instead of dealing with underlying economic issues. Although he took a harsh public stance against the

IMF and the World Bank, for example, critics point out that he still ended up paying off more of the debt than any previous president. His harsh rhetoric against international monetary organizations was only that, they claim.

Too close to power: the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Military Coup

The growing fault lines between human rights groups aligned with Kirchner and left-wing political opposition groups manifested themselves publicly on the thirtieth anniversary of the military coup on March 24, 2006. Human rights groups together with leftwing and progressive political parties, unions, neighborhood and cultural organizations, and university groups had organized a large protest in the Plaza de Mayo. The organizing group was *Encuentro Memoria Verdad y Justicia* (Memory, Truth and Justice Meeting). The group was comprised of 365 different organizations, including all of the family groups except for Bonafini's *Mothers*. During the event, organizers read a document that attacked Kirchner's government. They delivered a litany of complaints and accusations that included the paying off of the external debt, the repression of social protest and the criminalization of political dissent. The *Grandmothers* and the *Founding Line Mothers* later claimed that that they were not consulted about the document beforehand. While it was being read, Carlotto got out of her seat to speak with the *Founding Line Mothers* who were also on stage. In protest, they decided to leave the event *en masse*. After it was finished, Martha Vázquez from the *Founding Line Mothers* approached the microphone to clarify their opposition to the document and to state that they had not signed it. While she was speaking, the sound went off. This sparked accusations that the microphone had been

deliberately shut off to silence her. Others said that a technical problem had caused an unfortunate coincidence.

The document had been signed by over 300 of the groups that organized the event. Among them were the *Argentine League of Human Rights* (LADH), the *Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights* (MEDH) and the *Ex-Disappeared* association. However, family member groups and several other prominent human rights organizations refused to sign it. These included the *Grandmothers, the Founding Line Mothers, Family Members,* H.I.J.O.S, CELS, SERPAJ (Nobel Prize Winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel's organization) and APDH (*Permanent Assembly of Human Rights*). The groups who signed the document denied allegations that it was a surprise to those who did not. They claimed that they had spent four months debating its contents and that the other groups were consulted in advance. Even if they had not signed it, they were given a copy before the event.

Carlotto accused them of being more interested in confrontation and protest than in democracy. The document was a misuse of a commemorative event in order to make a political statement. "It is a swindle (*estafa)*. They are using grief politically. That they took advantage of the date is both an injustice and a lack of ethics. All the people that came here had to listen to something we did not approve."[351] Government cabinet head Alberto Fernández went even further and called it a "bad" and "appalling" use of collective grief. Another minister blamed the "sinister left." *Founding Line Mother* Nora Cortiñas distanced herself from such statements but also from the opposition groups that signed the

[351] Clarín, March 24, 2006.

document: “we don’t want either the government or any leftwing party to use us.” In the resulting controversy, another *Founding Line Mother* complained, “Our children ended up being totally forgotten about.”[352]

Signers of the document maintained that since the disappeared were political activists, the statement was consistent with their beliefs and would have been what they wanted. Rather than forgetting about them, the document was a means of honoring their memory by engaging in contemporary political reality rather than empty memorialization. If the disappeared were defined by their politics, they were not making an “appalling use of grief” by making a political statement during a commemorative event to them. The criticism that they were politicizing grief was also difficult to reconcile since the human rights movement in Argentina was predicated on such politicization. The E*x-Disappeared* denounced the controversy as part of a “government scheme because for the last month and a half they have been trying to make the act fail in order to make their own.” They also accused the government of trying to pressure the *Grandmothers* and *Mothers* to take part in a separate act. They believed the objection to the reading of the document was an injunction against criticizing the government. [353]

The perception of being too close to the government can create problems for groups that were symbols of political resistance and struggle. For Bonafini, this resulted in losing a former base of support. For the *Grandmothers*, this is less of a problem since they had always been associated with moderation. However, the *Grandmothers’* close ties to the government have resulted in

[352] Clarín, March 25, 2006.
[353] La Fogata, March 25, 2006, http://www.lafogata.org/06arg/arg3/arg_25-18.htm

several controversies.

Carlotto had previously resisted several overtures to run for political office, including an offer to run for senate on the ticket of a progressive party several years before Kirchner came to power. Her close ties to politicians, however, become a source of conflict within the reformist sector of human rights and result in a dispute between the *Grandmothers* and Horacio Verbitsky. Verbitsky's conflict with Bonafini over her 9/11 comments positioned him as the reformist voice against Bonafini's radical politics. In this case, Verbitsky accuses Carlotto of moving too close to political power. In doing so, he believes that she compromised her responsibilities as a human rights leader. The first of these conflicts took place in December of 2003. Carlotto had been acting as co-president of the Provincial Commission of Memory in Buenos Aires with Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. The Commission had been created in Buenos Aires by the provincial legislature in 1999 in order to analyze and digitize the intelligence archives of the Buenos Aires province police. It also included other human rights activities such as producing scholarly work on the subject of collective memory. The attack on Estela Carlotto's home that I mentioned in the last chapter occurred after the Provincial Commission submitted a report denouncing torture and killings by the Buenos Aires police to the provincial Supreme Court. The attack was considered a response to their report. The police were believed to be behind it.

Carlotto quit the commission a little over a year later. In doing so, she made a number of serious allegations. Before her resignation, she had demanded director Gabriela Cerruti's resignation and accused her of misallocating funds and falsifying her signature. Carlotto said she had tried to

resolve the dispute internally but was not listened to so she was forced to resign and publicly denounce the commission in an open letter.[354] Her *compañeros* on the commission, which included prominent members of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights and CELS, all rejected her allegations, with the exception of a *Founding Line Mother* who left with Carlotto. Verbitsky took sides with the others and argued that the real reason Carlotto resigned the Commission was because she had become too close to the provincial Governor of Buenos Aires, Felipe Solá.[355] He pointed out that her son, Remo, had recently been appointed by Solá to be Secretary of Human Rights of the province. Verbitsky and the other members of the Commission claimed that after this appointment, she tried to direct the organization to only scrutinize the past and not the present. The Commission had previously been active in investigating police brutality and exposing torture in Buenos Aires prisons, the same investigations that precipitated the attack on Carlotto's house. They claimed Carlotto was trying to pressure the Commission away from such activities. Reformation of the police and prison system is a major area of CELS' human rights work.[356] Many saw it as an important institutional issue that reflected the continuity between what occurred in the past and what was occurring in the present. Carlotto defended herself and charged that because of the Commission's pursuit of activities (such as publishing a human rights magazine) that were not the reason for its creation, its main directive of digitizing and analyzing police archives was being ignored.

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[354] Página/12, December 2, 2003.
[355] Página/12, December 7, 2003.
[356] For example, their human rights report from 2002-2003 has an entire section devoted to police violence (CELS 2003).

Verbitsky's accusations against Carlotto revolved around her son's political appointment. Other critics pointed out that her daughter was also director of CONADI (the National Commission for the Right to Identity), the governmental organization handled the official processing of cases for the *Grandmothers*. Having two children in government positions was considered the cause of her new allegiances. She was playing a political power game for her children. Carlotto vehemently denied these allegations and defended her children. They had been with her in the human rights struggle since they were young and they had gained the experience necessary to hold those positions. She said she had done nothing to promote them and that her children were free to take whatever positions were offered to them. Carlotto argued for the complete integrity and "irreproachable behavior" of her family's behavior and said that they lived modestly with "nothing more than the pride of being a family that the dictatorship wanted to break and was not able to do so." Two years later, Remo won a seat in the legislature as part of the *Kirchnerista* bloc of the Peronist Justicialist Party.

When a prison fire in a Buenos Aires prison caused the deaths of 33 inmates in October 2005, Verbitsky criticized Estela's son, Remo Carlotto, in his capacity as Provincial Secretary of Human Rights for offering psychological assistance to the victims. He observed that the provincial government was smarter than the military dictatorship. The dictatorship persecuted family members. The provincial government offered them trauma counseling. Remo responded indignantly at being equated with military perpetrators and pointed out that, as Verbitsky knew, his family was persecuted by the military during the dictatorship. Verbitsky responded, "Coming from a persecuted family does not lessen indifference in the face of serious, massive and systematic violations of

the right to life and personal integrity that occur in the prisons of Buenos Aires province. Passed suffering is not a badge of honor that allows one to wash one's hands from similar situations occurring in the present in Felipe Solá's forty ESMAs."[357]

In 2005, the accusation of being too close to political power is made once again against Carlotto. In December 2004, a fire at the República Cromagnon nightclub (*boliche)* claims the lives of 194 young people and injures over 700. The club, in a working-class neighborhood with mostly poor young people in attendance, was not enforcing fire regulations and had squeezed over three thousand spectators for a rock concert when the venue only had a legal capacity of one thousand. A firecracker set off by a spectator during the concert hit the ceiling of the club and set off the blaze. The fire spread fast since the illegal insulation (which included stuffing from stuffed animals) was inflammable. The owner of the club had also wired shut the emergency exit doors to prevent spectators from sneaking in friends. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the family members of the victims demanded justice and organized marches on the Plaza de Mayo. They ultimately placed responsibility for the fire on the mayor of Buenos Aires, Aníbal Ibarra. At the time, Ibarra was a rising political star, a center-left mayor who had been tipped as a possible vice-president for Kirchner in the next election. Ibarra also had a long trajectory with human rights and had close and longstanding ties with the *Grandmothers* in particular. As a public prosecutor, he had been involved in several of their cases in the 1980s and regularly appeared at their events.

[357] Página/12, October 23, 2005.

Supporters of Ibarra argued that it was unfair to hold him responsible him for what was a tragedy and not, as family members called it, a massacre. Inefficiency and neglect marred the inspection system. The club should have been closed but it could not be entirely blamed on Ibarra since it involved larger institutional issues that pre-dated his time in office. They termed the campaign against him an institutional coup and argued that the rightwing was the driving force behind it. As family members continued their campaign against Ibarra, Estela Carlotto came out in support of the mayor. She said that he had been popularly elected and that he should be allowed to fulfill his mandate. In this case, she came into conflict with Verbitsky once again. Verbitsky supported Ibarra's impeachment. Although Verbitsky acknowledged that he was not responsible for the tragedy, he blamed him for his handling of the aftermath. He accused him of acting like he had something to cover up and of shirking responsibility by trying to blame others. Verbitsky then accused Carlotto of being co-opted by the financial assistance the *Grandmothers* received from the city as well as her children's positions in the government.[358] The *Grandmothers* responded by accusing him of defamation and sullying the image of CELS.[359]

The radical left largely supported Ibarra's impeachment. A typical assessment described Ibarra as "a playboy progressive" and singled out Carlotto for her support of him. "The case of Estela de Carlotto is particularly significant (and repulsive). Already for some time a good number of human rights organizations like the *Grandmothers* and the *Founding Line Mothers* serve the forces of imperialism. But on this occasion the use that Carlotto made of the

[358] Página/12, November 15, 2005.
[359] Página/12, November 21, 2005.

memory of the *luchadores* of the 70's in benefit of a ruler guilty of the death of poor kids from outer (*Gran*) Buenos Aires was beyond all limits."[360]

Several months earlier, in August 2005, as family members of the victims of the fire were campaigning against Ibarra, Estela Carlotto was pelted with eggs while exiting a theater after participating in an event with Senator (and First Lady) Cristina Kirchner and Spanish judge Baltazar Garzón. Those responsible were a group of *Cromagnon* victims family members angry at her support for Ibarra. They termed the attack an *escrache*, a term used by H.I.J.O.S. to describe their protests against military perpetrators. Family members were upset that she was "in politics" and not accompanying them in their call for justice. They denounced her as a political operative of the government. One mother whose son perished in the fire stated that, "she should have been by our side and not Ibarra's."[361] Though the family members eventually apologized for the attack, the event marked a complete reversal. Estela Carlotto now represented an establishment figure in a position of political power. In the end, her support did not save Ibarra. He was ultimately removed from office on March 6, 2006.

The reformist sector of the human rights movement was divided over the Cromagnon fire. The *Family Members* organization sided with the *Grandmothers* while the *Founding Line Mothers* marched with the family members of the Cromagnon victims. The *Founding Line Mothers* claimed they did not do party

[360] "La destitucion de Ibarra es un triunfo del campo popular," Izquierda Nacional, March 2006, http://www.izquierdanacional.org/web-anterior/amlat/am0088.html)
[361] Clarín, August 2, 2005.

politics and argue that their role was to always accompany the family member of victims.[362]

Facing the Limits of Human Rights

The mother who was angry with Carlotto for not being on her side was arguing that as an individual who lost a child at the hands of the state, she had a responsibility to accompany other parents who had also lost their children at the hand of the state and were demanding accountability for their deaths. Carlotto was not only rejecting their demands, but, in doing so, she was rejecting their suffering. The two were seen as inextricably intertwined. Human rights appeals work through the mobilization of suffering into concrete demands. Human rights abuses need to be made visible in order to be recognized. In order for this to happen, suffering must be brought to light. The *Mothers* are a world-renowned example of this. They made the dictatorship's human rights abuses visible at a time when the state refused to acknowledge them. Likewise, the *Grandmothers* have historically mobilized around claims of grief and suffering. For example, when the *Grandmothers* met with Madeleine Albright in August 2000 to petition the declassification of documents, Albright said she "shared in the anguish" over the disappeared. Albright proceeded to say that for "humanitarian reasons - remember that I am both mother and grandmother - I understand the cause and I

[362] Página/12, November 15, 2005.

want to resolve it."[363] The *Grandmothers'* empathetic appeals succeeded as the documents were declassified two years later.

In the case of the Cromagnon fire, Carlotto and, by default, the *Grandmothers* were accused of not recognizing the suffering of other parents who lost their children. They are accused of being indifferent to their suffering because they fail to support the demands that are attached to it. Their suffering demanded justice. Their demand for justice called for Ibarra's impeachment. Their grief over losing their children was mobilized into these specific demands. Carlotto empathized with their suffering but opposed their demands. However, for family members, empathizing with their suffering necessitated supporting their demands attached. Otherwise, it was an empty display of empathy. Recognizing suffering without supporting the concrete demands attached to that suffering is considered meaningless.

Human rights groups that attempt a balance between condemning human rights abuses on both sides of any kind of conflict or dispute are accused of political impotence or relativism. In a similar way, human rights groups that emphasize the suffering and trauma of innocent victims are accused of an antipolitics. They depoliticize or medicalize events that have socio-political causes. In its weak form, this vision of human rights offers little more than a view of human beings as powerless victims. The only conception that allows for a universalistic conception of human rights is criticized as inoperable. Hannah Arendt first identified this paradoxical situation in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt pointed to refugees as an example of people who existed outside of the

[363] Página/12, August 17, 2000.

Rights of Man. "The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable – even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them – whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state."(Arendt 1973:293) Only citizens were guaranteed human rights. Groups (like refugees) who fell outside of the margins of citizenship were excluded from those protections. The irony is that these were the people who needed the recognition of their human rights the most.

As she developed this point, she argued that recognition of common humanity was never enough to guarantee the protections that human rights promised. "The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human."(1973:299) Various continental philosophers have developed this observation, most recently (and notably) Giorgio Agamben (1998). As Jean-Francois Lyotard observed, "a human being has rights only if he is other than a human being."(1993:136)

The politics of committed humanitarians that demand innocent victims and "suffering strangers" has been heavily criticized over the past years (Žižek 2005, Butt 2002). The images of suffering that invariably accompany such appeals emphasize the suffering of children or women or the elderly, people considered defenseless and not implicated in the larger political struggles surrounding them (Sontag 2003, Kleinman & Kleinman 1997, Boltanski 1999). In the same way, the *Grandmothers* historically made their claims by emphasizing the innocence of

their disappeared grandchildren. A view of passive victims is the only one that allows for a universalization of the recognition of suffering, the basis upon which human rights claims are deployed. Even this universalization confronts its limits when two sides are making opposing political claims through the deployment of similar images of suffering and victimhood. One's embrace of abstract universals always reaches its limit when confronted with claims of suffering tied to concrete demands that one rejects. Human rights in practice have operational limits. The constructive links they make leads to some human rights abuses being recognized and others that are not. These links are always selective and predicated on a global network of empathy. In the moral economy of suffering, there are limited resources for demands requiring a vast expenditure. Empathetic networks are created by groups of people who see their suffering as having a similar root cause. In practice, the politics of suffering and the politics of human rights result in the formation of empathetic links in which some forms of suffering are recognized and others are not. As such, human rights in practice invariably include moral blind spots - suffering that goes unrecognized.

Human rights function by making suffering visible. International human rights appeals are predicated on making suffering visible to people outside of the state. It creates networks of individuals who are linked by empathetic appeals. Anthropologist Margaret McLagan has used the phrase "circuits of suffering" to describe the public circulation of videos and documentary films used for human rights mobilization (McLagan 2005). I argue that these empathetic circuits are often based on a shared experience of suffering. The shared experience is one that is seen to have the same cause. These causes can be narrowly or broadly defined. For example, in protesting the buildup to the war in Iraq, the *Founding*

Line Mothers organized a large demonstration on February 14, 2003 that also included other mothers of children killed by the police. They jointly declared: "We are Argentine mothers who know the suffering of the loss of our children. We think that it is our duty to avoid by all possible means that millions of mothers share the tragedy of seeing the lives of their children cut off in a war whose objective is, like always, the conquest of power."[364]

The political impetus of their statement can be easily understood since it involves a rejection of imperialistic US foreign policy (whose objective is "the conquest of power"). The *Mothers* can construct meaningful links between themselves and Iraqi mothers who will lose their children in the war because they also view themselves as victims of US foreign policy. Protests such as these and other public events allow for the construction of meaningful links between family members of victims. On the night before the 10th anniversary of the bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in 1994, a group called *Memoria Activa* hold a protest rally that I attend. A more activist and progressive group than the mainstream Jewish organizations that will hold their protest the next day, a *Founding Line Mother*, Horacio Verbitsky, and Estela Carlotto are the special invited guest speakers. *Memoria Activa* meets every Monday outside of the court house to demand justice for the AMIA bombing. Each week they have a different speaker. They frequently have speakers who were victims of the dictatorship, some Jewish, others not. In doing so, they construct meaningful links between the dictatorship and the AMIA bombing. The group's weekly protests are directly modeled on the human rights movement. Their language is similar. Even the

[364] Página/12, February 19, 2003.

name of the organization seizes upon the conception of memory disseminated by human rights groups. They hold Carlos Menem, a corrupt judiciary, and an antisemitic police force responsible for the bombing and its subsequent cover-up. The links they construct between the attack in the AMIA and the dictatorship are explicit. These links are evident both in the choice of speakers but also in the substance of their speeches that night. The impunity for the actions of the dictatorship led to Buenos Aires being chosen as the site of the bombing (that and one of the world's largest Jewish communities). Impunity generates more impunity. Those who planned the bombing believed that they could both execute and get away with it because of Argentina's inoperative justice system.

That night, impunity is held responsible for the bombing. However, this emphasis on accusing impunity can only take into account the initial choice of Argentina as a target site and the subsequent cover-up. Almost entirely absent from their accusations at the protest are the actual material authors of the attacks, widely believed to be carried out by Hezbollah but planned and materially aided by Iran. Addressing impunity allow family members of the disappeared to make a common cause with family members of the AMIA bombing by focusing on a shared concern. Other interpretations and empathetic links are also offered. Many members of the Jewish community make direct links between the AMIA attack and suicide bombings in Israel. In this sense, a shared sense of solidarity is constructed along the lines of Israeli suffering. This would be a less likely empathetic link for progressive critics of Israel to make. Another interpretation was to see the bombing as the first incident in the rise of "global Islamic terror" and make links with 9/11. For example, Marcos Aguinis, a Jewish novelist and columnist for the conservative daily La Nación linked the bombings

in Argentina to the 9/11 attacks. He argued they paved the way for the latter event. "We are living the Third World War," he declared.[365] "What occurred in the Israeli Embassy and in the AMIA was a clear display of how terrorism came to be prepared to carry out the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York." Others chose to link the AMIA bombing to the March 11 bombing of the Atocha Train Station in Spain. In other words, the choice of reference point (dictatorship, Israel, 9/11, or 3/11) was largely predicated on the politics of the interpreter and the larger political point that they were trying to make in constructing the link.

Kirchner's reformation of the justice system in Argentina yielded results. Human rights trials restarted. Perpetrators from the dictatorship were arrested and trials resumed. As trials of military officers restarted, Kirchner also vowed to pursue justice in the AMIA case after a decade of official investigations produced no tangible results. In 2005, Kirchner called the incompetence in the AMIA investigations a "national disgrace" and vowed to push for a more efficient investigation.[366] In November 2006, an Argentine judge orders an international arrest warrant for nine Iranian officials for their role in masterminding the AMIA bombing. Prosecutors argued that Argentina was targeted because they had suspended nuclear technology contracts with Iran. Iran predictably denounces the warrant as an American-Zionist conspiracy that was aimed at undermining Iran's nuclear program and covering up Israel's actions in Lebanon. Argentine radical political groups embrace this interpretation as well. In particular,

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[365] *Día 8,* July 15, 2004.
[366] BBC MUNDO.com, August 24, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/international/newsid_3178000/3178223.stm

Bonafini's *Mothers* comes out in public support of the Iranian position.[367] In inaugurating a new department at their University on "Islam and the Arab World," they invite the Iranian ambassador to give a public lecture while denouncing the indictment as a product of the "powerful world Zionist lobby."[368]

Bonafini's rejection of the demands for justice of the victims of the AMIA bombing is a product of her politics. Bonafini's empathetic links and sense of global solidarity with other victims are constructed solely along the lines of US imperialism. For that reason, the suffering of 9/11 victims can be disregarded. Iran is a victim of US imperialism so they are supported. The sole perpetrators she condemns are the United States and its "accomplices" (whether they be Israel or the Argentine military dictatorship). The empathetic bonds she constructs also presupposes they share a common ideology, so hence Bin Laden is seen as a revolutionary leading the 21st century variety of class warfare or the ambassador of a repressive theocratic regime can be warmly welcomed to her university. The enemy of her enemy is a comrade in arms.

Bonafini's 9/11 comments suggest that she rejects a universal conception of human rights. For this reason, some critics argue that her organization is not a human rights organization. Bonafini also voices skepticism about the concept of human rights. When asked "what are human rights for the *Mothers*?", Bonafini responds that they are "some words that the United Nations invented years ago,

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[367] "We *Mothers* do not accept the investigations of Mossad and North American intelligence agencies." She also reiterated that the "United States is the real enemy to humanity"(November 21, 2006, press release).

[368] Meanwhile, in the United States, right-wing pundits use the AMIA bombing as a sign that Iran is a threat to attack the US and thus use it as evidence of the need for a pre-emptive military strike. See Family Security Matters, Joel Himelfarb, April 16, 2007, http://www.familysecuritymatters.org/challenges.php?id=894099

with a big declaration and that the whole world violates them. We don't need these grandiloquent words." (Kazi 2003:12) Universalism is considered the foundation for human rights. Human rights doctrine holds that all human beings should be equally subject to the same guarantees and protections everywhere (Donnelly 2003). For Bonafini, some human rights abuses can be justified and some suffering is deserved. Her view of human rights only recognizes the suffering of people who are said to be victims of imperialism. This includes the Iraqi people, the Palestinian people, the Serbian people, and so on. Historically, she mentions the Vietnamese people often in her speeches while, just to name one, the Cambodian people are never mentioned. The suffering of people who are not the victims of U.S. imperialism goes largely unnoticed and unrecognized by the Argentine left.

Although Bonafini's September 11 comments were controversial, many people supported them. Other committed political radicals shared in her joy at the collapse of the Twin Towers. For example, one man named Raúl Schnabel published an open letter to Hebe to offer his support of her comments and express his childlike glee at the events. "We were very few – among the many more there should have been – who celebrated that morning like children. The most genocidal state and *pueblo* (people) in history, the authors of almost all the material and moral misery in humanity, the suffocators of dignity, the defilers of dreams, had blown in the air. Asleep and awake, I dreamed so many times that this evil land exploded and disappeared like Atlantis." For Schnabel, all the people who were "filling their mouths with humanistic and pacifistic sentiments

simply choose to take part in global state terrorism."[369] More than callous anti-*Yanqui* bombast, his last statement – that anyone who recognized US suffering was taking part in global state terrorism is revealing. As another supporter who demanded "two, three, many Vietnams" phrased it, anyone who recognized the atrocity as such were "hypocrites" who "dress up as disciples of Mother Teresa of Calcutta or want to give civics classes."[370]

Bonafini and her supporters argue that the global humanitarian ethos of recognizing all suffering is part of the imperialist order. Recognizing all suffering is banal. The world is sharply drawn between victims and victimizers and one must choose a side. While one need not take pleasure in the suffering of the enemy, one can be indifferent to it, especially if they are viewed as getting what they deserved. The *Grandmothers* have a more inclusive picture of human rights, one that will allow them to meet with everyone from Fidel Castro to Hilary Clinton to Pope John Paul II. They meet with Albright and Clinton to tell them their stories so that they can receive their support. Their networks include the World Social Forum, progressive organizations, benevolent humanitarian foundations like the Ford Foundation, progressive or liberal politicians from around the world, singers, as well as the numerous writers, artists, academics and others who accompany their cause, who promote them, etc. While Bonafini challenges the concept of global human rights, the *Grandmothers* reveal the limitations of the concept in practice through selective empathetic links with the demands of some victims and not with others. They will not say that some suffering is deserved, like

[369] Open Letter to Hebe de Bonafini, http://www.redem.buap.mx/eu/iramain.doc
[370] "Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, la violencia de los pueblos y la hora de los hipócritas," Carlos Aznárez, http://www.redem.buap.mx/eu/iramain.doc

Bonafini does, but they will object to the demands of victims they disagree with. The question whether suffering can go unrecognized elides the fact that in practice it is always so.

Bonafini's rejection of human rights universalism manifests itself in her rejection of the grounds upon which universal human rights claims are made. Human rights claims are disseminated through empathetic appeals, the "sad sentimental stories" in which family members speak of the terrible things that happened to them. Bonafini refuses to do this. She rejects the notion of victimhood and despises being seen as a victim or a grieving woman to be pitied. She no longer speaks about her disappeared sons or what happened to them. She refuses to narrativize her life story for journalists or academics. She claims this to be part of the collectivization of the disappeared and the socialization of motherhood in which each *Mother* became the mothers of all the disappeared. Other members of Bonafini's *Mothers* also follow her injunction against speaking about their individual children.[371]

This forms part of a wider rejection of a human rights subject. Bonafini's rejection of universal human rights leads to a rejection of the suffering victim. "The majority of the Mothers never were in therapy, we didn't have any mourning because we never saw our children dead and because death is different for us. The Mothers could socialize maternity" (Kazi 2003:9). Not only for herself, Bonafini explicitly rejects the image of the disappeared as suffering victims of

[371] Activists from other countries often do not understand this position. Their default expectation is that victims want to tell their stories of suffering. For example, in an interview with a *Mother* from *Z Magazine* (July/August 2004, Vol. 17,No. 7/8), the interviewer writes, "When asked about her own dirty war fatalities, Juana is uncharacteristically hesitant. She says they do not usually tell their own stories, referring instead to the collective fight. Finally, she consents."

torture and sees them solely as political revolutionaries. This is why she rejects exhumations. A rejection of exhumations is also tied to her rejection of human rights. Exhumation in the aftermath of collective violence is considered an integral activity of international human rights. In a similar sense, she rejects commemorations, memorials, and museums. In other words, she not only rejects the conventional terms of human rights claims, she rejects its institutional forms and practices as well.

Human rights claims are often made through the discourse of trauma (Herman 1992). For scholars who are critical of how a discourse of trauma has been deployed in the aftermath of state violence, Bonafini is a compelling figure. She rejects the psychological discourse around trauma and PTSD that is tied to human rights discourse in its current form. She refuses to acknowledge the traumatic effects of the loss of her children. The image she presents is the opposite of s traumatized victim. For one, she claims not to feel fear. As one sympathetic commentator observed, “Hebe de Bonafini is human, I think. She gets tired, worn out, her feet hurt her, she gets sick and everything. But she still says she doesn’t fear anything. And all human beings feel fear.”(Bauducco 2004:10) In particular, she claims that she has no fear of death and when asked in interviews if she has ever felt fear, she recounts a story in which several men seized her in front of her house and threatened to kill her and then left. She claims that she felt nothing at all when faced with their threats, except for anger out of the impotence of not being able to do anything. When she gets death threats at her home or at the *Mothers* headquarters, she taunts them by saying, “I would prefer to die for this than to die of cancer.” Bonafini also does not believe in psychological repression. In Argentina rejecting psychoanalytic discourse is

itself a radical act. She claims not to repress anything. An even more curious rejection of post-traumatic response is that Bonafini claims her recurring nightmares ceased *after* her children's disappearances. In a 1984 interview, she claimed:

> When I was young, I always dreamed that I was drowning. It probably had to do with my asthma. Later, I dreamed that my teeth fell out and I would see them in a tray or on the ground…I dreamed it for years and I threw the blame at a dentist who told me when I was pregnant that if I didn't take care of my teeth I was going to be toothless by the age of 30. It was terrible. I dreamed that I awoke and saw all my teeth on the pillow. After they took my children, I never had this dream again.[372]

The disappearance of her children ended her recurring nightmares. She rejects fear, repression, and nightmares, three of the primary manifestations of trauma. Bonafini rejects trauma discourse both in terms of its etiology and its symptomology. The psychological discourse around trauma that Bonafini rejects (consciously or not) is the foundation of the global humanitarian movement that Bonafini also rejects. It is noteworthy that one of the grants that the Ford Foundation provides to CELS is funding for its mental health team that treats family members of the disappeared.

Moral Blind Spots

[372] From a 1984 interview reprinted by Ayeshalibros.com, "Reconstrucciones de Desaparecidos," http://www.ayeshalibros.com.ar/html/reportajes/bonafini2.htm.

The disconnect between universalistic human rights rhetoric and selective human rights practice reveal what can be called moral blind spots. In order to illustrate what this entails, I will give an example of my own moral blind spot, my own apparent indifference when faced with a claim of suffering. Browsing through the line of bookstalls nestled on a pedestrian island between a wide stretch of Santa Fe avenue in the Palermo neighborhood of Buenos Aires, a garrulous bookseller attempts to make a sale as I flip through musty stacks, searching for sources relevant to my research. He initially offers me a collection of Argentine poetry. I politely demur. Finally, I stumble upon a book about the psychoanalytic community's response to the dictatorship. As I look through its contents to see if it is worth purchasing, he asks me if it is a subject that interests me. Yes, I answer. He responds excitedly, I have just the book for you, and digs out a coffee table-sized book from under a large pile. I forget the exact title, perhaps it is *Our Dead* or maybe *In Memorial*, but it was published by the military towards the end of the dictatorship. The book documents the bombings and assassinations carried out by armed left-wing militant groups in the 1970s. Flipping through the pages, it chronologically lists each incident and the name and photograph of each victim accompanied by photographs of bodies mangled by explosions. With its photographs of victims and lists of names, the book resembles, I surmise intentionally so, the literature of human rights groups from the same period. Both the *Mothers'* and the *Grandmothers'* publications from the period listed the names of their children accompanied by their photographs. Making the disappeared visible through the display of photographs was one of their most important early strategies. The Armed Forces appeared to be

attempting to do the same.

I hand him back the book and tell him I am not interested in purchasing it. Visibly disappointed, the determined bookseller appeals to my sense of even-handedness. “Look, there are two sides here. People don’t want to talk so openly about it anymore because of the *Mothers* and Kirchner but look at what these groups did during the 1970s. Sure, the military did some bad things but if it weren’t for them we’d be a communist dictatorship like Cuba right now.” I am not certain if he really believed what he was saying (my cultural prejudice is that booksellers the world over tend to lean towards the left) but I decline his offer, choosing the one on the psychoanalytic community’s response to the dictatorship instead.

The military makes empathetic appeals for the recognition of its losses. Not only do they make appeals for the military “martyrs” who “sacrificed” themselves to save Argentina from communism but they also draw attention to civilians they claim were killed by guerilla groups in the 1970s. But the book leaves me with nothing but a lingering feeling of distaste and disgust. Like the other right-wing tomes I purchased to see what their arguments were, the book strikes me as fundamentally dishonest. It is a transparent ploy to cover for their own atrocities by attempting to strike a balance between a few hundred dead and thirty thousand. The difference is not merely quantitative. Most actions by revolutionary organizations were directed against property or military targets and the majority did not result in the loss of life (Marín 2003). Efforts to evoke sympathy for the military’s losses are contingent on the *dos demonios* narrative.

In this case, I reject their claim of suffering. Restarting the trials against military perpetrators in Argentina in 2006 resurrects pro-dictatorship groups to

organize demonstrations that attempt to divert public memory back to their own losses. Consider María Lilia Genta's appeal for her dead father, Jordán Bruno Genta. Genta was a prominent extreme right-wing, pro-military, antisemitic, anti-communist Catholic nationalist philosopher who, several years before the 1976 dictatorship, called for a military dictatorship to launch a counterrevolutionary war (Rock 1993:223-224). On October 27, 1974, as he was going to church services, an anonymous young man shot him nine times, executing him. ERP later claimed responsibility for the assassination.

As human rights trials are revived, his daughter renews her appeals for her dead father, a civilian who was killed not because of his actions but because of his beliefs. That I find his beliefs repugnant should be irrelevant. He was an unarmed man killed in cold blood on the street. However, consider Genta's political use of the death of her father. She speaks at the same events with figures such as the previously mentioned Carlos Manuel Acuña and other family members, lawyers, and supporters of arrested military personnel awaiting trial. Genta also writes a public appeal that is disseminated on several pro-military websites. She accuses the government of "ripping open our wounds" by restarting human rights trials. She cites the restraint and sobriety of victims who lost family members due to "subversion" and compares it to the unseemly displays of grief of the *Mothers*, *Grandmothers* and H.I.J.O.S. (always using quotation marks around them as a means of delegitimizing their suffering). As opposed to those groups, their suffering had been elaborated in private.

Moreover, she accuses family member groups of seeking vengeance and denying historic truth.[373]

At the same time, military apologists tend to deny or delegitimize the suffering of family members of the disappeared. Abstractly, they recognize the "collateral damage" to innocent civilians who were killed during the 1970s but they deny individual cases. In the same way, they do not recognize the suffering of either Hebe de Bonafini or Estela Carlotto, the two most visible family members. Bonafini, they say, does not have two disappeared children. Her children live in Spain or France (the common accusation during the dictatorship about the disappeared). She has invented their disappearance in order to promulgate subversion. On the other hand, they admit Estela Carlotto's daughter was killed (it would be hard to deny since her body was recovered by the family) but they deny that she was pregnant at the time of her disappeared. Carlotto is not a real *Grandmother* while Bonafini is not a real *Mother,* they argue.

Once again, I am unmoved by María Lilia Genta's appeal. I want to reflect on this feeling I have of indifference when confronted with these appeals of suffering. I do not doubt that María Lilia's pain over the death of her father is genuine. Do I lack compassion in refusing to acknowledge this suffering? Genta is demanding due recognition of her suffering. Faced with such an appeal, I disregard it. Empathetic appeals invariably have politics attached to them, whether explicitly acknowledged or not. A major triumph of the human rights movement was to debunk the *dos demonios* notion of a war "with two sides."

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[373] *Radio Cristiandad* , November 2, 2006, http://radiocristiandad.wordpress.com/2006/11/02/reflexiones-sobre-los-homenajes-a-nuestros-muertos-por-maria-lilia-genta/

They succeeded in refocusing attention from the actions of revolutionary groups of the 1970s to what the Argentine army did not only to them but also to people who had nothing to do with these groups. Military supporters like Genta want to revive the old *dos demonios* narrative that both sides committed "excesses" so that both sides are equally at fault. The mobilization of their images of suffering is a concerted effort to perpetuate this view. María Lilia's suffering can only be publicly recognized through assuming the narrative claim that accompanies it.

A long history exists of these kinds of counter mobilizations that attempt to undermine the efforts of human rights groups. After the fall of the dictatorship, an organization named FAMUS (Family Members and Friends of those Killed by Subversion) emerged, also headed by a Hebe, Hebe de Berdina. In a public letter sent to FAMUS after he had been ordered to trial by the democratic government in April of 1984, ex-dictator Jorge Videla expressed his solidarity with the group and told them that he shared in their grief. In the media, their demands were often side-by-side with human rights groups. For example, a January 2, 1984 edition of the daily newspaper Clarín, features FAMUS's demand for their own CONADEP investigation on the same page next to an article on the *Mothers* and their demands. Mimicking human rights discourse, FAMUS asked to know who was responsible for the deaths of their family members and argued that their "anguish is very much passed over" and focused on civilians who were killed. They later expressed their solidarity with the military leaders who were being put on trial. The group was eventually discredited when newspapers reported that neo-Nazi groups were attending the weekly church masses they held for their victims. FAMUS eventually disappeared from public view and in the present is largely forgotten. I believe the victory of the human

rights movement in Argentina necessitated groups like FAMUS to be vanquished in a struggle for public recognition. In a battle of empathetic appeals, human rights groups won. Argentine military perpetrators readily admit this. In their view, they won on the battlefield but lost the war of public opinion to “subversive” human rights groups. Theirs was a pyrhhic victory.

In the case of Argentina, room existed only for the recognition of one group’s suffering. The success of the human rights movement was in how they were able to reframe the issue around their grieving family members, the suffering resulting from the disappearance with all of its uncertainty and then the grief over having lost a child when they finally had to accept that their child was not going to reappear. In terms of my individual response, not only my political sympathies and allegiances but also my understanding of Argentine history predetermined my empathetic response. Yet in the current global moral order, we want suffering to be broadly inclusive and open to all recognition. We want everyone’s suffering to be represented. Some question whether this is possible.

In this chapter, family members conflicted with other family members around the mobilization of suffering. In Argentina, family member mobilizations around suffering have a particular public prominence. As I show, there is a long history of counter mobilizations organized around familial suffering that are used to attack and discredit human rights groups. Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that the first major contestation to Kirchner’s power comes from a mobilization of suffering of a parent whose child was murdered. The next chapter will turn to this.

Chapter 12: "The Axel Blumberg crusade for the lives of our children" – the moral authority of grief and the politics of fear and mourning

During the dictatorship, the enemy was defined on the basis of ideology. The disappeared were "subversives" attempting to overthrow the government and undermine traditional Christian morality. The military conceptualized its actions as the decisive battle in the greater Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. More specifically, Argentina was the final battleground of WWIII, a clash between Christian civilization and Marxist subversion (Verbitsky 1986). If the earlier cold war was played out as a war of ideologies, in Argentina it had a particularly brutal enactment. With the end of the cold war came what Walter Benn Michaels (2004) has termed posthistoricism. This belief, epitomized by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, posits the end of ideological and national conflict. According to Michaels, if the enemy is no longer defined on the basis of ideology or nationality, "the enemy now must be understood as a kind of criminal, as someone who represents a threat not to a political system or a nation but to the law."(2004:171) Michaels cites the "War on Terror" as a primary example of this new enemy. As opposed to the Cold War conflict that was defined ideologically, what terrorists believe is irrelevant. Since terrorism is a means rather than an end, terrorists are defined by their actions rather than beliefs. However, in the "War on Terror," a terrorist does not have to commit terrorist acts. Once abstracted into an amorphous category, terrorists cease to be even defined by their actions. The issue is not what they believe or what they do but what they are. For this reason, Michaels argues that ontology (a concern with being) has replaced ideology. Michaels sees this as part of the

current historical moment that has emphasized identity over ideology and difference over class.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the United States and most Latin American regimes considered communist guerilla insurgency groups as the key threat to the region. Now, guerilla groups are no longer a threat to taking power. However, a new non-political threat has emerged. Crime is now considered one of the biggest problems in Latin America. Just like the communist guerilla groups of the past, crime is argued to destabilize governments, impede economic development, and create public insecurity. Throughout Latin America, the criminal has replaced the communist as the primary enemy. Marxists argue for a direct correlation between the rise of crime in Latin America and a decline in revolutionary politics. In the words of James Petras,

> As the renovated leftists turn to political pacts with the neoliberal political class, as socialist ideology is emptied of content and practice, as NGOs fragment the social movement and foment depoliticization and individual careerism, the popular classes turn away from collective action and class struggle toward individual violence and personal gain. Crime replaces rebellion (1999:104).

During my fieldwork, a movement organized around the issue of crime emerged to challenge the sitting president. Many saw it as a rightwing backlash against Kirchner and his human rights policy; the campaign was a concerted effort to erode his popularity. Steady economic growth during his administration contributed to approval ratings that have been so consistently high that the

Council on Hemispheric Affairs concluded in January 2006 that he was, despite his relative unknown outside of the region, "probably the most popular leader in all of Latin America." His approval ratings consistently hovered over 70%.[374] His far-reaching popularity was surprising. The most popular motto on the eve of his election was *Que se vayan todos* (Let's get rid of all of them). Kirchner, a relative unknown in national politics, was the fifth president to take office since De La Rua's resignation in December 2001. Expectations were low but, as I have shown, Kirchner turned out to be politically savvier than anyone expected.

Although politically and economically closer to the South American center-left of governments in Brazil, Uruguay and Chile, his populist stances, seen indebted to Juan Domingo Perón, has led many to group him together with Hugo Chávez and Bolivia's Evo Morales. Critics, both nationally and in the anonymous editorials of *The Economist* and *Financial Times,* point to his confrontational style and personalistic political approach.[375] As I have already argued, a key component of Kirchner's broad appeal was his support from human rights groups. His consolidation of their support came when he turned over the ESMA (Mechanics School of the Argentine Navy) to the city of Buenos Aires to be transformed into a museum of memory. (This topic will be discussed in the next chapter.) The official transfer took place on the anniversary of the coup on March 24, 2004. That same day, the media unceremoniously announced the murder of kidnapping victim Axel Blumberg. Unbeknownst at the time, this would become a

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[374] "Argentina's Néstor Kirchner: Peronism Without the Tears," Council on Hemispheric Relations, January 27, 2006, http://www.coha.org/2006/01/27/argentinas-nestor-kirchner-peronism-without-the-tears/

[375] See *The Economist* April 12, 2006 article "Latin America's Return to Populism" for a typical example of their coverage of Kirchner.

key event in the political right's effort to erode Kirchner's support. A new movement was born one week later.

April 1st, 2004. Just after dusk on a warm early fall evening in Buenos Aires and I am engaging in the contemporary evening ritual of many anthropologists in the field; I am typing fieldnotes onto my laptop. My attention is abruptly diverted by the sounds of honking cars on the street below. At first sporadic, the noise is contagious, intensifying as others join. Next, the sound of clanging metal adds to the urban symphony, resulting in complete cacophony. My concentration disrupted and my curiosity piqued, I walk out onto the terrace of the sixth floor apartment building in the middle-class neighborhood where I reside. I discern no visible reason for the noise. Traffic flows as usual. My initial, fleeting impression is that it is an Argentine April Fool's Day tradition. Or perhaps the honking of solidarity, that of sympathetic drivers passing a strike line. But for what? Directly across my apartment on the opposite side of the street, my gaze meets a neighbor who has walked out onto her balcony with a young child sheltered under one arm and a lit candle in the other hand. We make eye contact. She nods solemnly and meaningfully. I nod back, not knowing why. On other balconies, other women (and they are, myself excepted, all women) hold white memorial candles while others bang pots and pans. Some, like me, simply watch. I know the banging of pots and pans is an Argentine form of middle class protest known as the *cacerolazo.* It became emblematic of middle class discontent during the December 2001 protests that precipitated the collapse of the government. In the downtown, small groups still gather daily, clanging their cookware outside multinational banks on the pedestrian strip of Florida Street, still demanding the return of their lost dollars. I am perplexed by what I see on

the balcony. The candles evoke a prayer vigil while the household percussion and honking horns conjures images of middle class discontent.

In search of an explanation, I turn to an omniscient informant, television. The phosphorescent tube greets me with an overhead shot of swarms of people gathered in the downtown. Many hold memorial candles; others wave signs. It appears like an amalgam of a memorial service and an arena rock concert in which spectators wave their lighters in unison during a beloved ballad. The camera cuts to a medium shot of a white-haired man in a business suit, his eyes swollen and red with grief. He is in the midst of an impassioned speech. The man proclaims, his voice firm yet hoarse, “Axel is the son of all of you, because you deserve him.” The crowd bursts with emotion. As the images unfurl comes the dawning realization: this is all for Axel Blumberg, a young man who had been kidnapped and murdered the previous week. The man speaking is Juan Carlos, his father.

I reproach myself for not going to the initial Blumberg demonstration as I watch it live on television that evening. Listening to the grieving parent’s speech, the parallels between Blumberg and my own research topic are striking. The march is the launching point of the “Axel Crusade.” It includes a petition drive, an accompanying slogan, “Everyone for Axel and for the lives of our children,” and leads to the eventual establishment of the Axel Blumberg Foundation. The “Axel Crusade”, like the Mothers and the Grandmothers, is a social movement mobilized around the grief and suffering of a parent who has lost a child. The mobilization becomes the basis for what is considered a populist contestation of the government’s authority. Their discourse is similar, organized around idioms of kinship, suffering and grief, and parental love. However, as the year progresses

and Blumberg emerges as one of the year's major domestic news stories, these movements become positioned in direct opposition to each other. On one side, children kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by the state during a dictatorship. On the other, children kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by criminals during democracy. One movement is associated with the progressive politics of the left. Blumberg comes to be associated with the reactionary sectors of the right who see in him a means of attacking the legitimacy and popularity of the current government.

The Kidnapping and Murder of Axel Blumberg

Axel Damian Blumberg, a 23-year-old engineering student just months shy of graduation was kidnapped on a late summer night on March 17, 2004. That night, he left his family residence in Martínez, an upper-middle class suburb north of the city of Buenos Aires, to pick up his girlfriend to go see a film. When he failed to arrive, she called his home. Upon learning that he should have already arrived, she looked out the window only to find Axel's car parked outside on the street with no signs of Axel.

The kidnappers initially demanded 50,000 pesos (approx. US$17,000) from Axel's parents in exchange for their only child's safe return. The Blumbergs were a fairly typical upper-middle class family; father, Juan Carlos, worked as an engineer and textile businessman who ran two factories and a store; his mother was an accountant who also taught private English classes. Juan Carlos contacted the police to assist him with the tense negotiations over the ransom. When asked for proof that Axel was alive, the kidnappers had offered to send

him three of his fingers as evidence. The Blumbergs were only able to amass 18,000 pesos. The kidnappers accepted this amount and, six days after the kidnapping, payment of the ransom was arranged at a gas station in a poor Buenos Aires suburb. The district attorney in charge of the case arranged for a police force to meet the kidnappers. Unfortunately, the local police who happened upon the scene had not been informed as to what was taking place. The resulting confusion ended in fiasco. After a shootout between police and kidnappers, the kidnappers managed to escape. The next day, Axel's lifeless body turned up in a garbage dump, victim of a mafia-style execution: eyes and mouth taped, a bullet in his temple.

Axel's murder was initially reported in Argentine newspapers on March 24th, 2004. News of the incident is overshadowed by the 28th anniversary of the military coup that occasioned the historic transfer via presidential decree of the most notorious concentration camp of the dictatorship from the Navy to the city of Buenos Aires. Página/12 unceremoniously announces the "execution of a young kidnapped victim" on page 15 along with a quote from the bereaved father, mistakenly identified as Carlos Blumberg: "I have nothing more to live for. They destroyed me. I did everything that the police told me to. I brought the ransom money and now they bring him back to me dead." A radio interview conducted that same day hinted at his future agenda. He states: "They need to harden the laws against criminals" so that "they don't continue killing our children."

Blumberg's march takes place the following week. It surpasses all expectations, drawing upwards of 150,000 (some sources estimate closer to 200,000). The large turnout catapults Blumberg into a political player and instant media celebrity. The march becomes the launching ground for what he terms a

"crusade" against crime. Live television coverage of the march is disseminated on all of the major stations, except for the state operated television channel. Their failure to interrupt their regular broadcasting prompts criticism that they were trying to underplay the significance of the event at the same time when critics were already accusing the channel of being subservient to Kirchner's political agenda.[376] The next day Blumberg makes the headlines every newspaper and is the major story of all radio and television programs. The enduring image from the rally is that of a well-dressed man in a suit with a shock of white hair around his temples and two-day stubble his eyes swollen with grief surrounded by friends and classmates of Axel's who wore t-shirts that depicted the same picture with the motto "for the life of our children."

Blumberg's "Crusade"

If the incipient social movement whose impact came to be known as the "Blumberg effect" initially caught me unawares, my lack of anthropological acuity could perhaps be mitigated by how surprised most observers and pundits were by it. The movement was seen as largely unprecedented. As *Pagina/12*, the progressive daily, declared, "the inaugural mobilization of Juan Carlos Blumberg was a huge surprise, an earthquake that changed the map."[377] The language of natural disasters provided a compelling and prevalent metaphor. Another publication similarly likened Blumberg's appearance to a "political earthquake;" while another compared it to an irruption occurring after the shifting of tectonic

[376] *La Nación*, April 8, 2004.
[377] *Página/12,* August 27, 2004.

plates. Bombastic proclamations were followed by extravagant prognoses. Scarcely days after the march, the conservative daily *La Nación* had the temerity to declare, "Nothing will be the same" as "society has launched another history."[378]

When Axel's death was initially reported, the media was already saturated with sensationalistic reports of such crimes. Extortionary kidnappings had become daily events in Buenos Aires in the last years. The Argentine media covered such kidnappings to every last minute and sensationalistic detail. Fingers were chopped off and sent to the victim's family. One high profile victim vanished completely.[379] However, kidnappings rarely ended with the victim's murder. When they did, the police investigation would last only until media coverage waned and invariably produce little results. The case of Axel Blumberg differed from those that preceded it only in its aftermath. Blumberg provoked a social phenomenon.

After the march, Blumberg is ubiquitous, not only in the media but on the streets. Photographs of Axel accompanied by the "Axel Crusade for the lives of our children" slogan grace every other storefront on the main commercial strip in my neighborhood. The photograph is that of a high school yearbook. Axel appears a handsome and confident young man, a toothy smile with dimples flashing. "Everyone for Axel," it declares; "sign the petition inside." Several days after the launching of the petition, I am purchasing the morning paper at my neighborhood newsstand. A petition lies on the highest pile of newspapers. A

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[378] *La Nación,* April 3, 2004.
[379] This was the case of Cristian Schaerer who was kidnapped September 21, 2003 and, despite the payment of a ransom, never reappeared.

typical middle-aged, middle-class *porteña* (inhabitant of Buenos Aires), fashionably attired and overly made-up, motions to the petition and smiles, "Have you signed it yet?" "I can't," I tell her, "I'm a foreigner." She responds that it does not matter. "The petition is for everyone." I tell her, "I do not have a pen." She rifles through her pocketbook and hands me one. I look down at the petition. It gives no detail as to its content but pages upon pages are already filled with signatures. I ask her what the petition calls for. She tells me that it is to support a grieving father who lost his child. I am suspicious. My understanding of petitions is that they generally call for concrete measures and not a simple display of empathy. "That's all?" I ask. She smiles reassuringly. I am hesitant to sign but refusing would make me appear heartless. Perhaps she is right; the petition may only be to support a father in his grief.

However, in the end, my skepticism reigns. I mutter some words of apology as I hand her back her pen and walk away newspaper in hand. Her reaction of disapproval and thinly disguised contempt makes me feel guilty and ashamed for not signing it. What kind of vile person could fail to sympathize with a grieving father who lost his child? What kind of heartless cynic would refuse to sign a petition expressing support for him out of suspicions of a hidden agenda? But as I walk away, I recall a petition "in favor of world peace" that I refused to sign in New York City before I left to Argentina when I discovered it was sponsored by Reverend Moon. That occasion sparked a brief exchange with the petitioner ("Are you against world peace?" "No, I'm against Reverend Moon"). Within months, almost five million people sign Blumberg's petition. The voluminous number of signatures (collected in three-ring binders emblazoned with Axel's picture with which Blumberg is frequently photographed) will be used

to buttress his assertion of popular support and thus legitimize his demands.

The Culture of Impunity or the Politics of *Mano Dura*

My suspicions about the petition are confirmed. More than simply being a means of declaring one's solidarity (*solidarizarse)* with Blumberg or sharing (*acompañar*, literally accompanying him) in his grief, the petition has a very specific platform calling for the lowering of the age of imputability of minors (the age in which they can be legally charged as adults) from 16 to 14 years of age as well as an increase in the severity of penalties for crimes. Several weeks later, I am discussing the demands of the petition with a cousin who had signed it and gone to the first march. "I signed that petition because of a father's suffering who lost his child, not for his politics. It was a scam (*un trucho*). That petition is a piece of shit." Undoubtedly, many others, like my cousin, signed the petition without knowing what it called for. Blumberg, however, would use the number of signatures as signs of public support for his agenda. For example, several months later, when asked about criticisms of his proposals by human rights organizations, he stated, "But I am not alone. There are more than four million people who already signed the crusade."[380]

Human rights groups' criticisms stemmed from Blumberg's platform of increasing penalties for crimes. This associated Blumberg with *mano dura* policies. Literally a "firm hand", *mano dura* refers to "tough on crime" measures. That Blumberg came to embrace these kinds of measures was not a necessary

[380] *Página/12,* May 19, 2004.

or inevitable consequence of his tragedy. After Axel's murder, two possible paths existed for the grieving father to pursue justice for his dead child. The first was tackling police corruption and a compromised judiciary. The second was to call for *mano dura* measures. The first march embraced a mix of both, attacking institutional issues but also demanding more severe prison sentences for criminals. At the same time as he declared a crusade against crime, some of the statements, slogans, and posters at the first march directly echoed the demands of human rights organizations – "We want justice and an end to impunity" and "I belong to a group of Argentines that have memory".

However, Blumberg quickly focused his campaign on the need for harsher penalties for criminals as a means of preventing crime. In an early interview, he summarized his approach to the problem of crime. "We have perverted people that are killing and murdering. What to do? It's simple: separate them from society and put them aside so that they don't continue committing crimes."[381] When asked where to put all of these people in light of a prison overpopulation problem, Blumberg responded: "prisoners could be made to work eight to ten hours a day building new prisons. It would be good for them." He argued that increasing penalties reduces crime and elliptically cited the city of Atlanta as an example where the crime rate went down "spectacularly" as a direct consequence of such measures. Though his religious beliefs prevented him from supporting the death penalty ("life can only be taken away by God"), he derided life sentences as being "useless", attacked residual offenders, and decried "revolving doors" of prisons. Most controversial was his call for lowering the age

[381] *Gente*, April 6, 2004.

that minors can be tried as adults. Human rights groups recognized in all of his pronouncements the typical language of *mano dura* politicians.

Disappearances in the Past, Kidnappings in the Present

Tackling institutional corruption and inefficiency was far more difficult than launching a broadly defined "war on criminals." However, Axel's kidnapping and murder was more the consequence of endemic police corruption and a compromised and ineffective justice system than a product of residual offenders, light sentences, or child criminals.

The house where Axel was held captive was located in an area called a *zona liberada*. Literally a "liberated zone," in Argentina, the term refers to an active arrangement between corrupt police and criminal gangs. In the Blumberg case, there was evidence that the kidnappers had ties to the police. Neighbors witnessed Axel being beaten after he attempted to escape. They called the police but they never responded.

In addressing police complicity with organized crime networks, a natural ally for Blumberg would be human rights organizations. Since the fall of the dictatorship, human rights groups had argued for police and judicial reform. According to human rights groups, one of the principle legacies of the dictatorship was a "culture of impunity". The failure to hold military perpetrators accountable for their actions led to a society with a compromised judiciary incapable of effective action. This argument is frequently invoked to explain the flamboyant corruption of former president Carlos Menem. It is also employed to create links between the dictatorship and atrocities that occurred in democracy

like the bombing of the AMIA (The Jewish community center) that killed 85 people in 1994.[382] The underlying belief is that impunity generates more impunity. A failure to hold people accountable for past crimes leads to an endless cycle of unpunished crimes. The lesson of the dictatorship was that people could literally get away with murder.

The *modus operandi* of the kidnappings also indicates another continuity between the past and present. Kidnappings mirrored the disappearances. Individual were yanked into a car at gunpoint by unidentified individuals, whisked away to a secret location, sometimes tortured, and held for an indeterminate amount of time. Police were also involved in both disappearances and kidnappings, either directly taking part in them or allowing them to take place. In this case, not only the response (the emergence of a parent who lost his child who forms a social movement to demand justice) but the crime as well forms a link between past and present.[383]

While the vast majority of the disappeared never re-appeared, the majority of kidnapping victims are released after a ransom payment. Although the military had an ideological justification for what they did, the kidnappings have a more straightforward economic rationale. At the same time, disappearances also had a purely criminal element as well. The Armed Forces frequently looted and pillaged the homes of their targets. After the disappearance, they would also extort

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[382] The AMIA bombing is particularly relevant to the Blumberg case since one of the figures named in it was part of an organized crime network linked to an individual named in the AMIA case.

[383] Kalmanowiecki argues that an important continuity between the police during the dictatorship and democracy is the virtual lack of "any type of legal and civil mechanism of control."(2000:195) She argues that this did not originate with the 1976 dictatorship but goes back to the early part of the century.

money and steal property. For example, the military often forced family members to sign over the deeds to their houses or apartments in exchange for the false promise of the safe return of their kidnapped family members.[384]

The gang who kidnapped and murdered Axel were eventually caught and arrested. In the end, over a dozen members of the gang were arrested. They had previously been involved in an auto theft ring and branched out into kidnappings only recently. The car they were driving in the shootout was a Volkswagon that belonged to a businessman who had been kidnapped and freed the day before after paying 80,000 pesos. Many believed that they had ties to the police in the area.

Human rights groups were therefore logical allies for Blumberg in his quest for justice for his son. However, in the end, his crusade took an opposite route. That Blumberg would take sides with advocates of *mano dura* is even more perplexing for one additional reason. In Axel's case, the police acted incompetently but they also acted in tandem with the dictates of *mano dura*. Proponents of *mano dura,* like Jorge Sica, the federal prosecutor in charge of the case, ordered the police intervention that precipitated the tragedy. Sica had taken a hardline position on kidnappings. He not only advocated against paying ransoms but he even wanted to prohibit their payment altogether. In a previous case in which a kidnapped victim was returned alive but minus two amputated

[384] The kidnapping of Ariel Strajman in October of 2002 also reveals continuities between extortionary kidnappings and disappearances. Strajman was the victim of anti-semitic violence during his captivity. "Dirty Jew, you'll see what Holocaust suffering was all about," they said as they beat him, burned him with cigarettes and chopped off his finger before his eventual release. The dictatorship was similarly characterized by anti-semitic violence and a disproportionately large number of Jewish disappeared. (see Timmerman 1982)

fingers, Sica declared that "the number of kidnappings increases because they pay the ransom."[385] Critics of this position argued that ensuring the safe return of the kidnapped victim was of greater importance. They argued that confrontations with kidnappers should only take place after the victim is released. This did not occur in Axel's case. The tragic outcome was a consequence of a *mano dura* approach to crime.

"You can judge a man by the company he keeps": Blumberg and the Dictatorship

If kidnapping resembled the methods of the dictatorship, *mano dura* as an approach to crime was also a descendent of the dictatorship. The years prior to the dictatorship were characterized by chaos and turmoil. The dictatorship was initially embraced by a vast majority of Argentines because the military was seen to be capable of restoring stability and security to the country. The dictatorship was the *mano dura* solution to the problems of that period. During the dictatorship, crime was not a problem since violence was monopolized by the state. Many who were not personally affected by the dictatorship remember that period as a time of safety and security.

Many people however will not publicly admit this today. This is indicative of human rights groups' success in reframing public discourse. Among the middle class, many now say that the dictatorship was a terrible and frightening period for everyone. In the same way, academics will speak of a "culture of terror" (Taussig

[385] Revista Veintitres, April 1, 2004

1984) that reigned during that period. However, this characterization obscures as much as it reveals. Most Argentines were not afraid during the dictatorship. Blumberg's account of his life during that period suggests that he supported the dictatorship. When asked in an interview how he experienced the political climate of the 1970s, he answered:

> Everything was bad at that time. I was working as director of a factory, and everyday the subversives threatened that they were going to kill us. It was terrible… The climate in which we lived was very difficult. With the extremism, we lived under constant threat.[386]

What is revealing in this statement is Blumberg's use of the dictatorship's term "subversive" and his characterization of the political climate of the 1970's solely in terms of left-wing "extremist" violence. When asked about the dictatorship, Blumberg claimed not to know what was going on. Human rights groups saw Blumberg's demand for *mano dura* as an echo of the dictatorship. This is why most human rights groups initially viewed him with suspicion and caution and later outright hostility (except Hebe de Bonafini who was hostile from the onset).

Blumberg's association with the dictatorship became more apparent when, two months after the first march, Blumberg named Roberto Durrieu as his lawyer. During the dictatorship, Durrieu was Undersecretary of Justice. In that capacity, he refused requests of *habeas corpus* from family members of the disappeared. After the dictatorship, he maintained his support of the military. In

[386] Revista TXT, August 27, 2004.

1987 he signed a paid advertisement in support of Videla. In the present, he was a prominent supporter of *mano dura* policies. He called *piqueteros* "criminal organizations." Blumberg's response when he was told of Durrieu's participation in the dictatorship was "I didn't know this but it doesn't seem important to me."[387]

"We are Axel": The Cultural Politics of Fear

One additional similarity exists between Blumberg's rhetoric and the dictatorship's. Blumberg conceptualized his fight against crime as a "Crusade". The religious connotations of a Crusade could find its antecedents in how the military dictatorship conceptualized its own fight in the 1970's as a kind of "holy war" against communism (Graziano 1992). Matching Blumberg's declaration of a "crusade" against crime was a corresponding use of religious imagery in his rhetoric. "God put me in this position for a reason," he claimed. In the first march, described by one editorialist as having "the mysterious force of a religious procession", Juan Carlos Blumberg proclaimed, "Axel is the son of all of you, because you deserve him." Axel could be seen as the son of everyone because they shared in Juan Carlos's parental grief. But by proclaiming him the son of everyone, the deeply religious Blumberg was also invoking connotations of Jesus as the "Son of Man" and images of a father who bestows his only son to his people. Axel Blumberg as the 'son of all' suffered and died for the people's sins. Not enough was done about crime in the past. Politicians were not concerned with security and the people were complicit with them since they did not unite

[387] Revista Veintitres, June 3, 2004.

together to make a collective demand of them. Because of their complacency, Axel died. In that sense, Axel was a martyr who died for their sins. The connection with Christ was made explicit in a political cartoon which showed Jesus in agony on the cross complaining to his father of his failure to organize a petition drive for him.[388]

The response to Blumberg's statement was not "we are all Axel's father." Instead, a popular response, as evinced by numerous signs at the second march, was "we are all Axel." "We are all Axel" evoked their own identification with Axel via their fear of succumbing to the same fate. From his descriptions in the media, Axel, like many Argentine young men, liked 1980s hard rock; his favorite groups were Guns N' Roses and Bon Jovi.[389] He enjoyed going to the movies and enjoyed sports. These generic details served less to personalize or individualize Axel as much as they collectivized him. They made him easier to identify with. He liked the same music they did. He enjoyed the same activities they did. Like them, he was concerned about the future of Argentina, and he was afraid of becoming a victim of crime. According to his girlfriend, "Axel was worried about insecurity. In the last weeks, we had been speaking of taking a postgraduate course outside of the country. He wanted to stay in the country but he thought about having a family and that worried him."[390]

The rich and middle class could see themselves and their concerns

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[388] *Revista Veintitres*, April 8, 2004.
[389] In the same sentence where Axel's girlfriend recounts this, she also reveals his middle class tastes by stating his dislike for cumbia, a Colombian music genre popular among the poor in Argentina in its *cumbia villera* variant. (*Gente*, April 6, 2004
[390] Clarín, April 4, 2004

reflected in Axel; the poor could see in Axel their aspirations of a better life.[391] In the end, Argentines identified with Axel mainly in how they saw themselves as potential victims of violent crimes. Their fear of succumbing to the same fate prompted their adherence to Blumberg's Crusade. This highlights one of the major factors accounting for the success of Blumberg's mobilization – fear of crime. Legal scholar Paul Chevigny has argued (2003) that the fear of crime has become a means of mobilizing popular support in recent years. In particular, he looks at how fear of crime became a major factor in the 1999 Argentine presidential election. The Blumberg movement is part of what Chevigny calls the "populism of fear."

Fear of crime in Argentina is palpable. During the course of my fieldwork, I went to the Blumberg's suburb of Martínez only once. The reason was an interview at the house of a daughter of the disappeared who had been searching for her missing sister. The interview lasted over four hours, far longer than I had anticipated. Coming out into dusk, I wandered back up to the main boulevard to the bus stop. I then realized that I had misplaced the paper where I had written down what bus I had taken. Unsure of what to do, I wandered down the main boulevard looking to find someone to ask. The streets were deserted. Recalling that this seemingly placid middle class residential neighborhood was considered one of the kidnapping 'capitols' of the country, I decided to look for a taxi. Since I was outside of the city, I could not find one. The rapidly waning daylight heightened my feeling of paranoia. Finally, I stumbled upon a car service and went into the dispatch to ask for a car. They asked for my account number. When

[391] For that reason, a response to "We are all Axel" emphasized the fact that Axel represented socio-economically only the top 2% of Argentina

I told them that I did not have one, the response was that without an account they would not take me anywhere. I asked how I could open an account. To open an account, I needed a verified address in the neighborhood with a verified telephone number.

When I asked why, they answered, as if completely self-evident, out of fear of people without accounts calling cabs and then hijacking them. I pulled out my New York driver's license and tried to reassure them that I did not come all this way to hijack a taxi. I understood caution but their suspicion seemed unfounded. The dispatcher said he would leave it up to the driver to decide. To ease his skepticism, I even offered extra money for the ride upfront. After deliberating, he finally shook his head in resignation. "Look, I'm sorry. I'd love to help you but I can't. This is my livelihood." Now feeling vaguely ashamed for being perceived as forcing him to risk his livelihood,, I walked out onto the now dark boulevard but not before asking for directions where to take the bus. I reached the bus stop, and, ten minutes later, the bus arrived. An hour later, I was safely home.

Historically, Argentina is a country with low levels of crime in comparison to the South American continent. Argentines were consequently said to be unaccustomed to crime. Prior to the 1990s, the crime rate in Argentina was frequently compared to "European" cities, evoking safety and security in conjuring images of streets safe to walk at night. This was part of Argentine self-perception. They defined themselves in relation to the rest of South America where people were said to be afraid to go out at night. It is no surprise therefore that the escalating crime rate was perceived as part of the country's process of "Latin Americanization." "We are increasingly like the rest of Latin America when

it comes to crime," wrote newspapers, a sentiment echoed by numerous people during my stay.

The crime rate escalated as part of the economic downturn resulting from Carlos Menem's neoliberal reforms in the 1990's that destroyed the manufacturing base and made the country more dependent on imports. In the words of two Argentine sociologists: "It is impossible to avoid relating the increase in the crime rate to the social consequences of neoliberal reform."(Grimson and Kessler 2005:175) The crime rate rose as economic prospects diminished. Not surprisingly, the crime rate was exacerbated by the economic crisis of 2001.

That Argentines were "unaccustomed" to crime could explain why they feared being a victim of crime proportionally more than the rest of Latin Americans. Studies showed a significant discrepancy between the perception and reality of crime. Even with a rising crime rate, Argentina was still far safer than most Latin American countries and Buenos Aires was said to be the third safest major city on the continent. Yet Argentines were said to be second only to Colombians in fearing crime. Colombia has one of the highest murder and kidnapping rates in the world. In other words, citizens feared falling victim to crime disproportionately more than their neighbors. Critics of the Blumberg phenomenon used these numbers to suggest that people's fears were misplaced. Yet such a discrepancy is neither surprising nor revealing. That people's fear of crime is "disproportionate" is understandable considering fear is not an emotion based on rational calculation as if people should "fear" accordingly and proportionately. Perception and reality are often at a variance when it comes to crime. It is frequently observed that, statistically, elderly women

fear falling victims to crime more than any other demographic group in North America yet they are the least likely group to be a victim of crime. In the midst of public demands for security, Argentina's Ministry of Justice released a Citizen Security Monitor that reported that one in every ten residents of Buenos Aires feared falling victim to a kidnapping. In a region of millions, only several hundred kidnappings were reported per year. Although the official statistics could be questioned because they only counted reported kidnappings, the discrepancy between fear and reality was disproportionately large.

This fear was undoubtedly nourished by sensationalistic media coverage of kidnappings. However, the fear of crime masks other more intangible fears. In Argentina, a previously large middle class had been economically wounded. The 20th century narrative of economic progress and upward mobility no longer holds. This is a commonly held narrative in which penniless immigrants arrive from foreign shores and manage to scrape together a life through hard work and industriousness. Through their sacrifice, their children can get an education and subsequently enter the middle class. The next generation can climb even further up the social and economic ladder. This dominant narrative of upward mobility in Argentina was flawed because of the country's economic instability but it held great sway. The idea that children can economically improve upon or at least maintain the same standard of living as their parents is a fundamental tenet of the middle class. After the economic collapse in 2001 and 2002, the myth imploded.

As a consequence of economic uncertainty, parents fear that they can no longer fulfill their responsibilities of providing for and protecting their children. These are traditional paternal roles. Blumberg was explicit in the guilt he felt for

failing to fulfill this role: “I feel very bad for not having protected Axel.” In another statement, he said: “I didn’t know how to take care of [Axel].” In explaining the wider appeal of Blumberg for the middle class, statements like ‘not knowing how to take care’ of one’s child refers also to providing for one’s child’s wellbeing. A reaction to economic uncertainty is fear and anxiety about the future. This fear and anxiety find its tangible manifestation in the fear of crime. Progressive intellectuals often say that middle-class Argentines hate *piqueteros* because they fear entering the jobless underclass and becoming them. The connection between these fears was made explicit when a headline from the satirical newspaper *Barcelona* (loosely, an Argentine equivalent of *The Onion*) sardonically observed after Blumberg’s appearance, “the middle class are now less afraid of becoming poor than they are afraid of being kidnapped by the poor.”

Blumberg as Will and Representation (of the people)

The second Blumberg march takes place three weeks after the first on April 23, 2004. The location is in front of *Tribunales* instead of *Congreso*, in front of the seat of the judiciary rather than the legislature. I am among the attendees. The media presence is enormous. Blumberg has called for the declaration of a “judicial emergency” and for “civil control of judges and prosecutors” while continuing his demand for harsher penalties for crimes. Much like the first march, estimates over the number of attendees vary widely. Organizers claim 90,000 – federal police calculate 60,000 after a first estimate of 32,000. Other estimates float around 40,000. Wandering through the sea of people, I cannot

gage. A much-remarked difference between this march and the first one is that the crowd composition of this march is even more homogenously middle class. Notable exceptions are the *piqueteros* who attend the march against Blumberg's wishes.

The two *piquetero* groups present are the most radical ones who represent the anti-Kirchner factions of the left. One is led by the flamboyant Raúl Castells, the other is *Polo Obrero*, a group linked to Leninist and Trotskyite political parties. Their presence at the march sparks accusations that the extreme left was conspiring and joining forces with the reactionary right in order to undermine Kirchner's government. The groups claimed that they were attempting to forge a common cause with the middle class whose interests Blumberg is said to represent.

The second march consolidates Blumberg's ability to mobilize vast numbers of people. As he emerges as a political force, questions are raised about the man behind the movement. Descriptions of Blumberg's pre-tragedy family life conjure images of a placid and comfortable upper-middle class suburban existence. Magazines publish pictures of Axel scuba diving, carrying the Argentine flag in his private German school, and a family trip to Disney World. Such images of tranquil domesticity are used to buttress Blumberg's claim that he had no political agenda. Pre-tragedy, he was a man who only lived for his family. He admitted that he did not read the newspapers[392] and did not follow politics. "I didn't have a clue about anything," he admitted in an

[392] In Buenos Aires, newsstands are ubiquitous in middle class neighborhoods. They stand on almost every block of the city.

interview.[393]

His own professed disinterest in politics before Axel's murder was used as evidence of the purity of his intent. The movement's professed lack of a political agenda was a reflection of Blumberg's own pre-tragedy life as a man who claimed to have no politics. Commentators seized upon this. A typical editorial by columnist Mariano Grondona, an important figure in conservative politics in Argentina discussed in earlier chapters, announced that Blumberg's appearance marked the "birth of an involuntary leader."[394] Blumberg was involuntary because his leadership was a product of personal tragedy. Being an involuntary leader made his intentions pure and noble and imbued the movement with unquestionable legitimacy. "His pledge is not, like in the case of other political leaders, to gain influence and power, but only to fulfill the solemn promise he made before the body of his son: to toil without rest so that Argentina, where the sacrifices of Axel and so many others have occurred over the last years, begin to change." His sole motivation was to stop others from undergoing the same tragedy. This made Blumberg an "irresistible moral force." His policies and politics were secondary and unmitigated by ideological concerns. He was a father who suffered the loss of his only son. For this reason, Grondona concludes his editorial by arguing, almost paradoxically, that, even though there were policies attached to it, no politics could be ascribed to it.[395] In such a way, he argued that it would be a mistake to link Blumberg's demand with the specific proposals in his petition. In his words, this would "distort the spirit of the

[393] Revista Veintitres, April 1, 2004
[394] La Nación, April 25, 2004.
[395] Such a difference is even harder to maintain when one keeps in mind that the Spanish word for politics is also the word for policy.

presentation."[396]

Blumberg, disingenuously or not, made the same claim. When asked in August of 2004 in an interview by the same magazine that called him Éone of the most influential political actors in the country," Blumberg balked at the mention of politics. When asked "What do you think when people say that your protest is political?", Blumberg's terse response was, "I am not going to do politics. I am not doing politics now."[397]

Politics are partisan. Blumberg's protest that he was not "doing politics" formed an integral part of his movement's representative claim. By claiming to be a "common citizen" outside of politics, Blumberg could make the claim that his movement was broadly representative of "the people." In the ensuing months, the media would frequently refer to Blumberg as the "voice of the silent majority." The concept of a "silent majority" was particularly salient. The day after his first march, an editorial entitled "The True Voice of the Silent Majority" described the composition of the crowd: "Yesterday's concentration mobilized those who in social and political terms could be called the 'silent majority.' People without political affiliations, without the habit of going to mass demonstrations, did not hesitate in going out on the street."[398] This "silent majority" had an equally apolitical significance. Its members were characterized by independence from "ideological dogma," i.e. politics. The crowd was described as "unseen these days" because it was "silent, orderly, peaceful, and without any other sign of protest than the light of their candles."

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[396] Ibid.
[397] Revista Poder, August 24, 2004.
[398] La Nación, April 2, 2004

Blumberg explicitly cultivated this identification. The Axel Crusade manifesto stated: “We are not from the left nor the right. We do not have political stripes or party loyalty because we are the silent majority of Argentines that want a different Argentina.” A “silent majority” is an implicitly ideological concept that is invoked solely for political purposes. The phrase was first used in Richard Nixon’s November 3, 1969 speech (a speech that became known as the “silent majority speech”) in reference to domestic support for the Vietnam War (King & Andrews 1971). According to Nixon, the “silent majority” were those who stayed at home in quiet support of the war while a ‘noisy’ minority of protestors demonstrated in the streets. In the exact same way, the editorial cited above characterizes the “silent majority” as those who did not demonstrate in the streets. The problem with using the concept of a “silent majority” in Argentina is that it is imbued with images of a complacent middle class that does not represent the majority of Argentines who were now living in poverty.

This image of Blumberg as representative of the people’s will was reinforced by frequent references to Blumberg as being “plain spoken” and as someone who used “common sense.” A typical characterization describes Blumberg as speaking “with sensible words, with common sense, without hatred and without the desire for vengeance.” Blumberg’s “common sense” approach to crime can be summarized as follows. Crime is a problem because of the existence of a category of people who are criminals who commit crimes. If you get rid of these people – arrest them, remove them from the rest of society, lock them in prisons and throw away the key - then they will not commit crimes. Blumberg offered the promise of simple solutions. It was a discourse that stemmed from his background as a small businessman and is the typical rhetoric

of a political "outsider" not beholden to any political orthodoxy or establishment by virtue of unaffiliated independence. That Blumberg was part of the economic establishment was ignored. His "common sense" was backed up by his own practical experience as an engineer and businessman. He was someone who was not interested in politics. He was a technician who knew how to get things done. In Argentina, people wear their titles conspicuously, not only "doctors" but university graduates, aka "*licenciados*". Blumberg, on the other hand, is referred to as "El Señor Blumberg." This idea of Blumberg as "El Señor" invoked a common citizen worthy of respect. It is a title that entails esteem without conferring an actual title.[399]

Throughout 2004, Blumberg frequently characterized himself as the "people's spokesperson" in order to justify his demands. For example, by the third march in August, he called for the elimination of *la lista sabana* (literally, a white sheet). This refers to an electoral practice in Argentina in which one votes by choosing a political party rather than individual candidates. As such, it is all or nothing: one must vote for all the candidates from a party or none at all. Many commentators observed that this was a strange demand since it had nothing to do with crime and was an explicitly political issue. Blumberg defended his position as follows: "Out of every ten people who called me, eight have said that the *lista sabana* should be eliminated. I agree. So why not do it? I am a spokesperson for what the people ask."[400] When asked in the same interview whether he had any doubts that people supported him, he responded that he had

[399] He was also frequently called "Engineer Blumberg." In June 2007, newspapers reveal that he never received the engineering degree that he claimed to have had from a university in Germany that turned out not to exist.
[400] *La Nación,* August 29, 2004.

no doubts because he "felt the 'thermometer' of the streets. The people embrace me, they encourage me and they ask me to struggle (*lucha*)"

One factor in understanding Blumberg's public appeal, as I have already discussed, was fear. Fear was only one aspect of his empathetic appeal. Love was another. Quotes such as the one above, in which Blumberg speaks of being embraced by the people, suggest this. They embraced him through their empathetic links with him that stemmed from the loss of his child. The primary motivating force and moral legitimacy of his movement was a father's suffering and grief over the loss of his child. Avowedly uninterested in obtaining personal political power, his tragedy forced him into action. This spurred his transformation from "common citizen" into 'apolitical' activist and 'involuntary leader.'

If, as I argued earlier, the kidnappings bore a resemblance to the disappearances during the dictatorship, the similarity in the effects of such events on family members are also comparable. Early discussions of Blumberg focused on his transformation of anguish into action. Only days after the first march, the media were already proclaiming "a hope born out of grief."[401] In the words of another journalist, "Until the crime of his only son, he was a simple business man. In a few days, he knew an obscure world of corruption and inefficiency that involves police, criminals, and civil servants. From his grief, he decided to fight for better laws and more security."[402] Another magazine celebrated "the greatness of a man that is making his personal tragedy into everyone's cause."[403]

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[401] *Clarin*, April 4, 2004
[402] *Revista Veintitres*, April 1, 2004
[403] *Gente,* April 6, 2004.

The same magazine marked his transformation from an ordinary man who was just “one in the crowd” to a heroic figure who was fighting for the security of all Argentines.

This was a frequent observation expressed in numerous other publications. The transformation of Blumberg from apolitical “common citizen” into a social activist mirrors the transformation that I described in Chapter 10 of family members of the disappeared. This narrative of Blumberg’s heroic transformation through grief replicates almost verbatim that of the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers*. The success of the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* movements was also to turn “personal tragedy into everyone’s cause.”

Let me just point out that I am only highlighting an equivalence here between rhetoric and not of action or ends. While the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* risked their lives in confronting a military dictatorship that was actively responsible for the deaths of their family members, one cannot say the same of Blumberg who was making demands of a constitutional government with the support of powerful economic sectors and the mainstream media. However, profound similarities exist on a discursive level. Individuals face one of the worst experiences a human being can face and, out of it, build social movements that aim to make the country a better place. This transformation requires courage and overcoming fear. “Father courage,” Blumberg was proclaimed on the eve of first march by one publication. In another interview in the aftermath of Axel’s murder, Blumberg declares, “All this is terrifying.” This heroic transformation also requires personal strength. Similar to the rhetoric of the Mothers and the Grandmothers, there is frequent reference to struggle and to the positive aspects of struggling. To struggle in Spanish, *Luchar,* has a distinctive meaning that generally ties its

usage in its Marxist meaning to leftwing group. The Blumberg mobilization appropriated this rhetoric of *luchar* that is common to many progressive organizations in Argentina. As one sign I saw at the second Blumberg march attested, "Thank you Papa Blumberg for your *lucha*."

"They are not my Mothers": the political uses of kinship terms and the mobilization of grief

References to Blumberg as a father, like the one above, also highlight another equivalence between Blumberg and family member human rights groups. I heard numerous other references to Blumberg as a father figure. Both were social movements organized around kinship terms and predicated on the affective feelings defined by such relationships. Blumberg's love of his child motivated him into action. He does not want other families to go through the same suffering. His parental love is then projected onto all Argentines who come to see him as a father figure. They, in turn, become his surrogate children who he vows to protect from crime. Similarly, the *Grandmothers* and *Mothers* are motivated out of love for their children and grandchildren and their love is also projected outwards.[404]

Politicians often invoke kinship terminology to speak for the nation. The shared sense of belonging to a nation is seen as both a literal and figurative

[404] Others tried to take advantage of this resemblance. Blumberg was approached by conservative journalist Bernardo Neustadt to "make a weekly campaign like that of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo." Blumberg's refusal to do this was pointed to as an early indicator that he was not part of that reactionary sector. (His response: "I told him that he was one of the people responsible for the problems there are in Argentina. He's a lawyer that said a ton of barbarities and supported a government that destroyed the country.")

extension of blood ties reflected through kinship. Kinship terms can also be used to make political distinctions as well. The *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* employ kinship terms on both a literal and a symbolic level. It is literal in the sense of their relationship to their disappeared children and grandchildren but symbolic in their relationship to those who support them. For that reason, they are often referred to as "our mothers" and "our grandmothers" in the progressive press.[405]

In September of 2003, several months after being elected president of Argentina, Néstor Kirchner addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations. He announced a bold vision for Argentina's future. "The defense of human rights occupies a central place in the new agenda of the Argentine Republic. We are the children of the Madres and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and for that reason, we insist on supporting in permanent form the strengthening of the system of protection of human rights and the judgment and condemnation of those who violate them."[406] In claiming kinship with the Mothers and the Grandmothers in the speech, he was seen to be making his political allegiances clear. For this reason, Kirchner was accused of being divisive.[407] Those who took issue with Kirchner's use of the first person plural declared: "they are not my mothers."

As Blumberg's crusade conjured images of shared kinship including Blumberg's own declaration described that "Axel is the son of all of you", some observers were reminded of Kirchner's statement. In the words of one

[405] Página/12, October 22, 2002.
[406] Página/12, September 26, 2003.
[407] One editorial's response: "if Doctor Kirchner considers himself to be president of all Argentines, it is not acceptable for him to define himself by taking a position that stirs considerable adhesion and rejection." He is then accused of historical revisionism and of being "partial." (*La Nacion,* September 28, 2003)

commentator, “I would like to say to President Kirchner, who in one of his first speeches said ‘we are the children of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo,’ that at least in my case, he was mistaken. I am not the son of Bonafini nor the brother of Schocklender[408], and symbolically I proclaim myself to be the son of Blumberg and the brother of Axel.”[409]

Mobilizations around kinship terms are predicated on parents making their mourning over their murdered children public. For grief and suffering to be transformed into everyone’s grief, it needs to be visible. How else can one share in the grief of someone one does not know and identify with them as common kin? In Argentina, like in much of the Western world, grief and suffering over the loss of family members is often understood to belong to the private domain. In contrast to the public rituals of lamentation that take place in many cultures throughout the world (such as Inner Mani as documented by Seremetakis 1991), in urban Argentina, conspicuous displays of grief in the public sphere over “private” losses are unusual.

During the dictatorship the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* were both ignored and discredited in the national media. To make their plight public, they silently protested through weekly marches in the Plaza de Mayo to call attention to the disappearances of their children carrying photographs of their children and wearing *panuelos* engraved with their child’s name and date of disappearance. The power of the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* in protesting the disappearance of their children was in making visible what was invisible and unacknowledged by

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[408] Sergio Schocklender, mentioned in Chapter 9, was accused and imprisoned for murdering his parents. He claimed to be innocent and went to work for the *Mothers* after his release. Bonafini refers to him as her son.
[409] *Diario Los Andes*, April 3, 2004.

the dictatorship. Their display of grief was not simply to call attention to their grief but to call attention to the government that caused it. They forced recognition of a grief that was not admitted.

The distinction between public and private grief is pertinent here. While Blumberg became a visible public figure, his wife was largely absent from public view. Although she appeared by his side at both marches in April, she did not speak publicly. As criticisms of Blumberg's politics mounted, one question raised was "where is the wife?" By the end of May, Nora Cortiñas, one of the leaders of the Founding Line Mothers, deemed Blumberg a fascist while making reference to the absent mother: "we would like to speak some time with the mother."[410]

The question "where is the wife" was intended both literally and rhetorically. Such comments reveal a gender dichotomy: Blumberg as paternal figure and Mothers and Grandmothers as maternal ones. Other commentators celebrated Blumberg's appearance as an unprecedented public display of paternal grief. They criticized the assumption that maternal grief was seen as more "natural" than paternal grief because of the perceived bond formed by the woman's social and biological role. For example, an article by psychologist and journalist Sergio Sinay wrote of how images of the *mater dolorosa* - from the Virgin Mary to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo – figured prominently in public consciousness while paternal suffering was absent. He hailed Blumberg as the embodiment of paternal grief, "a fertile source of paternity."[411]

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[410] *Pagina/12* May 29, 2004

[411] Perspectivas Sistemáticas, "Juan Carlos Blumberg, un padre." http://www.redsistemica.com.ar/blumberg.htm

Critics tied Blumberg's paternal grief to his call for *mano dura* measures. As the gender dichotomy was raised between fathers and mothers, the underlying belief was that the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* were less punitive and more nurturing, less concerned with increasing penalties for criminals and more concerned with social welfare than Blumberg. In sum, "maternal politics" of the Mothers and Grandmothers were considered more compassionate and empathetic than the "paternal politics" of Blumberg. Blumberg's advocacy of *mano dura* was seen as a product of his role as stern and strict father who ruled his family with an authoritarian "firm hand." It would be considered a natural extension of his paternal privilege, therefore, that he took the leading role in the "Crusade" while his obsequious wife stood unobtrusively by his side.

Blumberg's description of his own upbringing at a strict Catholic school with corporal punishment and his own stringent rearing of Axel supported this interpretation. For example, he recounted an anecdote (in an interview that opens with Blumberg declaring what good friends they were) in which a then 8-year old Axel received a bad grade in school. To teach him what the world was like for those who do not do well in school, Juan Carlos forced him to go to work in his factory. He also boasted of forcing 10-year-old Axel to pick cotton in a plantation for an entire day in 45-degree heat as a means of teaching him how fortunate and privileged he was. The fatherly image that Blumberg conveys is of a disciplinarian who embraced a "tough love" approach to raising his child. In such a scenario, his wife's silence was interpreted as maternal acquiescence to a domineering patriarch.

This was not the case. María Elena Blumberg did not remain a docile wife standing silently by her husband. After her early appearances at the first two

marches, she did not appear by his side at all. Most remarkable of all is that she did not even sign the Blumberg petition. After she did not attend the third march in August, Maria Elena was described as a "mystery." She remained at home alone. An importune reporter called her that night. She answered in tears. When asked, "Why didn't you go to the march?" She answered, "No, for what?...I am already dead. I am the living dead." The reporter persisted, "Why do you say that you are dead?" "Because I am. I no longer exist. They took away from me everything that I had." After breaking down in tears, she ended the interview.[412]

A portrait of a marriage shattered by tragedy emerged.[413] A husband devoted all time and energy to seeking justice for his murdered son while his wife stayed at home in virtual seclusion, devastated by the loss. In the words of a friend of the family, "They live in the same house, nothing more." When asked why Maria Elena did not sign his petition, Blumberg explained, "My wife could not overcome her grief. She is paralyzed. I have drawn strength out of the grief, she cannot."[414]

Part of the narrative of both the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* and Blumberg is one of heroic resilience. They are common citizens who overcame

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[412] Revista Dia 8, August 28, 2004. She would make the same claim two years later as the trial for her son's murder begins: "Today Axel and I are dead." (Clarín, July 19, 2006)

[413] This may not be entirely true. Before Axel's kidnapping, the couple was rumored to be on the verge of separation. Some said the couple already separated at the time of Axel's murder and Juan Carlos was living with another woman. However, another reason was also suggested for the couple's alienation. When Axel was kidnapped, they disagreed over how to handle the kidnapping. Maria Elena wanted to obey the kidnapper's orders and to pay the ransom without the police being involved. Blumberg made the ill-fated decision to contact the police. So in the background of their broken relationship there may also be blame and guilt.

[414] Ibid.

traumatic loss and transformed tragedy into positive action for the good of everyone. But what about those who did not? What happens to those who did not *superar* (overcome) their grief? Overcoming grief is necessary to transform it. In the course of my fieldwork, interviews and testimonies made references to numerous suicides by family members of the disappeared. Yet the human rights literature does not speak about them. A blank spot exists. When I raised this question with the mental health team of a human rights group, they became defensive. My question appeared to irritate them. I did not understand why. "What are you talking about? There aren't any suicides" was the response.

I was confused. I later realized that this mental health team worked primarily with those who were members of family member groups. In raising the question of those who did not overcome their grief, I was inadvertently challenging the dominant heroic narrative. I had asked the question because the subject emerged out of testimonies and interviews with family members. I had been surprised by such references myself because the conventional literature on the disappeared that I read in preparation for my fieldwork speaks exclusively of a heroic transformation of grief. I was unprepared to encounter references to family members who were destroyed by the disappearance and incapable of transforming that loss into participation in groups.

Much like the question of where was Blumberg's wife, the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* are frequently posed the same question in reverse: "why are there *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* of the Plaza de Mayo and not *Fathers* and *Grandfathers*? Where are the fathers? Where are the grandfathers?" This was a question posed to me by a childhood friend of my father's when we met shortly after I arrived in Buenos Aires. When he asked the question, I launched into the

stock reply. There were no *Grandfathers* and *Fathers* because only middle-aged women – considered harmless to the dictatorship – could participate in the marches. It was too risky for the men to be there. At the same time, many of the women were housewives who did not work and many who did left their jobs while the man worked. As such, it was a division of labor. He nodded at my explanation and then, with a mischievous grin, said that the absence of the fathers and grandfathers was a "suicide wish." At the time, I did not know what he was referring to but I later heard several family members give similar explanations. They referred not only to suicides but also to fathers and grandfathers who died from health-related illnesses, heart attacks in particular, after the disappearance. These health-related deaths were attributed to the disappearance of their child.

Blumberg versus Kirchner: "the duel that's coming"

The first major confrontation between Blumberg and human rights groups occurred in May 2004 when he met in Mendoza with family members of a former police commissioner who had been sentenced to prison for the murder of a teenage boy, Sebastián Bordón. Blumberg distinguished Bordón's murder from that of his son. "In that case, the kid (Bordon) was on drugs, he acted badly, he assaulted a policeman. After, yes, the police acted badly, they did things they shouldn't have done."[415] Whether Blumberg was aware of it or not, he was repeating what the perpetrators said during their trials to defend their actions. In

[415] Página/12, May 19, 2004.

1997, Bordón was an 18-year-old from Buenos Aires province on a school sponsored graduation trip in Mendoza. After having a nervous breakdown he was left by the teachers in a police station so that his parents could pick him up. Ten days later, he was found dead at a bottom of a ravine with signs of being brutally beaten. For the crime, five police and two civilians were given between 2 and 15 years in prison both for their direct role in the murder and for the cover-up for it that resulted in his body being missing for ten days. Autopsy results revealed no use of drugs or alcohol.

In response to widespread criticism of his comments, Blumberg maintained that meeting with the family of the police commissioner was only the product of his role as a spokesperson of the people. "I listened to them like I listen to each and every citizen."[416] It was part of Blumberg's tour of Mendoza, what US politicians call a "listening tour." He met with the governor of the province, members of the judiciary and the Chamber of Commerce before gathering a crowd of thousands in the center city plaza to listen to his demands. This was part of a larger tour Blumberg made that year that would take him across the country and to the United States.

Bordón brutal murder was an emblematic case of police brutality. His parents created their own foundation in his name and were support by other family members of victims, including the *Mothers* and other human rights groups. They had even called Blumberg after Axel's murder to offer their condolences and participated in the first Blumberg march. In her response to Blumberg's comments, Bordón's mother made a link between all of the victims' families and

[416] *Página/12*, May 19, 2004

argued that they needed to remain united together for a common cause. Among the victims, she included the disappeared and victims of *gatillo facil* (quick-triggered police). The idea that victims needed to stick together was a recurring topic. In attacking other family members, Blumberg violated this implicit agreement. One government official close to Kirchner said "it is very important that all the family members have a strategy in common to struggle against impunity."[417] Blumberg was criticized for his "individualistic" approach. An unnamed source in the government stated, "He wants to handle things in his way and he has no interest in working together with the other families of victims. Sooner or later, this was going to show." Others accused Blumberg of thinking his son was better than the sons of other parents who suffered through the same experience. In the words of one, "For you, Axel is worth more than a kid from the slums or a kid who takes drugs or a kid who doesn't study in a private school."[418] Other offhand remarks made by Blumberg pointed to his class prejudice. For example, in a widely circulated and criticized statement, he remarked that he believed in a "qualified vote" in which people should be able to vote according to their level of education and the vote of those who were more educated should count two or three times those who were not. Although Blumberg eventually apologized to the Bordón family for his remarks, he also denounced the controversy as part of a movement against him and accused human rights organizations of being a part of it.

Another high profile kidnapping sparked the next conflict between Blumberg and human rights groups. On July 25, Nicolás Garnil, a 17-year-old

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[417] *Revista Veintitres*, May 20, 2004.
[418] Ibid.

from the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro, was kidnapped. Another media frenzy greeted this case. It was covered in dramatic detail as family members made empathetic open appeals to the kidnappers. Nicolás' sister wrote an open letter to the kidnappers, offering herself in his place. His mother, Susana, wrote another letter 11 days after he was kidnapped, writing, "I am on my knees in front of you. You don't know me but you do know mothers. Think about them and think about me. On my knees, I tell you that I don't hate you. On my knees I pray to you to return my son. On my knees, I swear to you to pray until the last day of my life."[419] Blumberg appeared together with Garnil at the press conferences and they appeared together on the cover of *Gente* magazine under the caption "Together we can defend our children's future". The magazine even included a free candle to take to Blumberg's next march. In the end, Nicolás was set free after twenty days captivity after the payment of $65,000 peso ransom.

Despite the safe return of her son, Susana read an open letter to Kirchner requesting him to personally take charge of the insecurity problem "or, alternately, would you tell me where we can make a Museum of Memory for those victims." The comparison to the Museum of Memory was seen as an incitement as well as a concerted political attack by accusing Kirchner of only being concerned with the disappearances in the past and not the kidnappings in the present. Some accused Blumberg of being the intellectual author of the letter. The Museum of Memory had been formally announced on the anniversary of the military coup. The Argentine right was already attacking the Museum on the grounds that it was "divisive" and "opened new wounds." After Garnil made her

[419] *Revista TXT,* August 20, 2004.

statement, Blumberg, consciously or not, repeated the same rhetoric when he was asked about the Museum in an interview that also criticized human rights groups for not offering support to him.

> We all have to be united in a common cause. We must not look to the past, but to the future. Where do we want to go? Here, there are some old wounds that have to scar. We all have to be together. We must not fight. I respect the ideas of the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* of the Plaza de Mayo. They are people that have also suffered. But they never came to see me. This I must also say.

By his third march at the end of August, the battle lines were drawn. Blumberg has taken on a more explicit, increasingly hard to deny ideological bent that put him into direct conflict against human rights movements. His discourse is predicated on the differentiation between good and bad Argentines, the so-called *gente decente* (decent people) and criminals. In his speech, he aligned human rights organizations with criminals. He declared: "Because here human rights are only for the criminals and not for the citizens like yourselves, nobody from the human rights organizations came to see me when they killed Axel."[420] Controversy still reigned over the attendance. Although the organizers tried to claim over 180,000 people, most estimates put the number far lower, at 30,000. On the day of the march, *Página/12* interviews human rights and NGO activists who had previously attended the marches but who had now "defected" from him.

[420] CELS, a prominent human rights organization, was quick to point out that this was incorrect. They had contacted Blumberg after the murder of Axel.

They all state that he had become a polarizing and divisive figure and that his march was now "political."

As early as a month after his initial appearance, Blumberg had already been perceived as the first major political threat to the power of popular President Néstor Kirchner. Blumberg's emergence as the leader of a popular movement was seen as "the end of the Kirchner honeymoon." By the third march in August, one magazine features Kirchner and Blumberg on the cover with the headline, "the duel that's coming." Blumberg maintained that he had no political aspirations and did not intend to run for office. Blumberg also resisted accusations that he was right wing (*derechista*). In fact, he said repeatedly, in August and September that he was "center left" and described himself as a "human rights lover." Blumberg was either willfully misrepresenting himself or he was politically naïve and did not understand how he was being used. This was feasible because, as he constantly reiterated, Blumberg claimed to have lived his entire life outside of politics.

Blumberg's association with the right, whether he accepted it or not, became indelible. As Blumberg's Crusade increased its security proposals, he called for trials by jury and the creation of an Argentine FBI. He publicly embraced US approaches to crime. While in the US, he met with the Manhattan Institute, a neoconservative think tank that pioneered the "zero tolerance" approach to crime implemented by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. The trip was funded by an conservative Argentine think tank. By the end of 2004, he won "Humanitarian of the Year" award from the *Latin Trade Magazine's* (considered the *Forbes Magazine* of the region) yearly Bravo awards.

The left accused Blumberg of being a fascist. In August, Hebe de Bonafini

called Blumberg a “Nazi” and a “Pinochet addict” and accused him of clamoring for another military coup.[421] Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel called his Crusade the “road to fascism.”[422] The *Grandmothers* were characteristically more moderate in their attacks. Two weeks before the third march, *Grandmothers* President Estela Carlotto told reporters that Blumberg “does not exist.” Later, in an editorial for a weekly news magazine, she clarified her position saying that she wrote this because he “is intolerant” and “does not accept that others think differently or have other points of view.”[423] Her primary example was Blumberg’s attempt to block the appointment of Maria del Carmen Falbo as solicitor for the Supreme Court of Buenos Aires province. She both opened and closed the editorial with references to their shared grief and their similar status as parents of murdered children. She wrote, “I accompany him in his grief. What mother does not understand the brutal murder of their child. I understand him and I grieve with him.” Although sympathizing with his grief, she attacked him for trying to impose his point of view on everyone else. After attacking his politics, she concluded, “”I should once again make clear that I profoundly respect his grief.”[424]

“Respectable Grief, Mistaken Objectives”

If “respectable grief, but mistaken objectives” encapsulated Carlotto’s response to Blumberg, she was repeating the exact phrase used against the

[421] *La Vaca*, August 31, 2004.
[422] *Revista TXT,* August 20, 2004.
[423] Revista Veintitres, August 26, 2004.
[424] *Revista Veintitres,* August 26, 2004.

Mothers two decades earlier. The title comes from an editorial in *La Nación* from January 4, 1985. It quotes the president of Argentina at the time, Raul Alfonsin, in response to the annual March of Resistance held by the Mothers. He declared, "I respect the suffering of the mothers, but I do not share their political objectives which are clear and well-known and do not correspond with national interests."

Like this statement, many other criticisms levied against Blumberg's Crusade were criticisms that had been leveled in the past against the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers*. For example, when Susana Garnil attacked the Museum of Memory after the kidnapping of her son, a government minister responded: "It seems to me a tragic reference. It's the part of Argentina who discovers suffering only after it happens to them."[425] The same could be said about the Mothers and the Grandmothers who, by their own account, were also motivated into action by personal loss. As a journalist of another progressive magazine observed, "the same people who justified the kidnapping of the disappeared are marching today because they are kidnapping their own." He concluded with the question: "Is it that up until they kidnap you, you don't complain?"[426]

Likewise, Jose Pablo Feinmann (a prolific philosopher, novelist, historian, screenwriter, essayist, and editorialist) observed how Axel Blumberg ceased to be the major figure in the Crusade in his name as his father overshadowed him. He noted that, "everyone forgot about Axel because everyone is looking at [Juan Carlos] Blumberg" and described Juan Carlos as "Axel's shroud."[427] Yet

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[425] *Página/12*, August 18, 2004
[426] *Revista TXT,* September 10, 2004.
[427] *Página/12,* April 27, 2004.

Feinmann's observation applies equally to the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers*. Hebe de Bonafini and Estela Carlotto are well-known public figures in Argentina. Yet very few Argentines know the names of their disappeared children.

Even Carlotto's criticism of Blumberg for opposing the nomination of a government appointee was odd because she had done the same only a month earlier. In June, Carlotto challenged the nomination of a Supreme Court appointee. Carlotto rejected the nomination because in a court decision the candidate had refused a woman's right to prove she was ex-President Juan Domingo Peron's biological daughter. According to Carlotto, this constituted the candidate's failure to uphold the Constitutionally guaranteed "right to identity' and thus made her unfit to be on the Supreme Court.

Many other criticisms of Blumberg were equally true of family member human rights groups. Another mother whose child was murdered opposed Blumberg by stating that the death of her son neither gave her authority nor made her an expert to handle the problems of Argentina's security. A visiting Colombian writer and journalist criticized Blumberg by saying that grief was "always a bad adviser."[428]

The Moral Authority of Suffering and Grief

In setting up this parallel, I want to discuss the underlying claims of movements organized around the grief of parents of dead children. On one side, Blumberg was aligned with other parents whose children were kidnapped by

[428] La Nación, September 12, 2004.

criminals. On the other side were the *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* whose children were kidnapped and murdered by the dictatorship. They are allied with parents whose children were murdered in democracy at the hands of *gatillo facil,* quick-triggered police.

George Lakoff's *Moral Politics* (2002) offers a framework for understanding how moral authority in politics is established. According to Lakoff, moral authority is patterned on parental authority. As the central organizing institution of social life, the family is the dominant metaphor for politics. Political policies are consequently derived from family based moralities. Blumberg, as I noted earlier, is the embodiment of the strict father while the *Grandmothers* and *Mothers* embody the nurturing mothers. That Blumberg emphasized the need for punishment while the *Grandmothers* and *Mothers* emphasized the need to understand underlying socio-economic causes of crime follows from their respective family models.

Parents, following their traditional authoritative role over their children, make claims against the state in the names of their children. This representation is then extended to the entire cause that the parents represent. The *Mothers* and the *Grandmothers* represent not only their individual children but all victims of the dictatorship. In the same way, Blumberg does not only represent Axel but he comes to represents all victims of crime. The status gained from having lost their children is used to make a much broader representational claim. Both movements are similar in how they mobilize around empathy as a means of promoting their cause, an empathy resulting from their loss. Parents who lost their children do not lose their parental authority. Instead, surrogate families are created around these mobilizations. Blumberg becomes the father to his

supporters in the same way that the *Grandmothers* and the *Mothers* become the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* to theirs.

Shortly after Axel's murder, I am attending a human rights trial in La Plata, the capital of the province of Buenos Aires, I am sitting next to two *Mothers*. We begin talking. They ask me if I am an international observer. I respond that I am a graduate student doing my fieldwork. We talk as we wait for the trial to begin. The name of a human rights lawyer who I interviewed the previous week is mentioned. One of the *Mothers* praises his work and then says, "And, you know, he's not even a family member." The comment strikes me as odd since I am familiar with his biography. He was active in human rights throughout the dictatorship and after. He had friends and colleagues who were tortured and disappeared. The comment – that he would devote himself to a human rights organization even though he did not directly lose a family member - was intended as a compliment. In this case, that a human rights lawyer would seek justice for the disappeared although not "directly affected" was considered remarkable or anomalous enough to mention. The tacit, default expectation is that only those who have lost family members would devote their lives to such a cause.

Grief is the source of the legitimacy of their demands. Loss instills a person with a special kind of authority. This idea has relevance elsewhere. *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd wrote in an editorial published in the August 10, 2005: "The moral authority of parents who bury children killed in Iraq is absolute.". She made this in reference to Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq who, through the loss of her son, emerged as one of the most visible public figures opposing the war. Numerous observers remarked upon the similarity between Sheehan's protest outside of Bush's Texas ranch

and that of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*.[429] Dowd's editorial was controversial. Many writers pointed to the numerous parents of soldiers who died in Iraq who still supported the President. Others criticized the notion that parents derive any "moral authority" from the loss of a child.

In cases such as Blumberg, the *Grandmothers* and Sheehan, parents are granted a special moral capital after the loss of a child that gives their demands added legitimacy. This capital is not natural or self-evident. Why is someone whose actions are motivated out of direct loss endowed with a moral authority that someone unmotivated by direct loss does not have? As an anthropologist, I am not interested in addressing the question whether parents *should* have moral authority because their children were killed. What interests me is *why* they do.

The notion that grief or suffering can be a source of moral authority of grief or suffering is not new. The idea that an individual can gain privileged insight through physical suffering and pain is enmeshed in various religious traditions (see Gluklich 2001). A moral valorization of suffering is also embedded in Christian traditions. However, the moral authority of suffering has a particular resonance in the current historical moment. The earliest reference to the concept of a moral authority of suffering that I could find is in sociologist Barrington Moore Jr's *Injustice: the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978). However, he uses the concept in the opposite sense. He speaks of circumstances in which people accept injustice because it stems from a moral authority that conveys to victims that they deserve their suffering. The moral authority of suffering that I am referring to is the reverse. Parents who have lost their children mobilize around

[429] In Argentina, the similarity has also been noticed, Página/12 called her "*La loca* de Texas" and compared her protest to an *escrache.* (August 19, 2005)

their grief to make political demands against those in power who are responsible for the loss. Their authority stems from their direct experience of loss and their status as victims. This forms part of the current historical moment in which lived experience is privileged as a way of understanding the world and statuses of victimhood and suffering are endowed with moral valorization.

As I have previously mentioned in an earlier chapter, family members of the disappeared are defined as those "directly affected" by the disappearance. This forms part of contemporary psychological discourse on victimhood. For example, a Kleinian psychoanalyst discussing the aftermath of disasters, writes, "One cannot draw a rigid distinction between the survivors and the bereaved. The bereaved feel themselves to be survivors of whatever caused the death of their loved one, even if they were never threatened by what killed him. The survivor of a disaster is also bereaved. Even if he has not lost known and loved people, he has been in the presence of the dead and dying, which cannot but affect him" (Isabel Menzies Lyth 1989:248). A similar point is made by sociologist Frank Weed in his analysis of the anti-drunk driving movement in which he argues that the victim is considered to be not only the person harmed in the crash but also the bereaved individual who lost a family member or loved one (1990). Whether the loss stems from natural disasters, mass violence, or drunk-driving accidents, family members can also be considered victims.

The Antipolitics of Blumberg's Politics

If parents of dead children have a privileged authority, their authority is undermined by accusations that they are "too political." Much like Cindy

Sheehan has been constantly accused in the rightwing media of, in the words of Bill O'Reilly, being "run by far-left elements who are using her," Blumberg was accused of "being used" by right-wing politicians interested in damaging Kirchner. The accusation that grief was used for political ends served as a means of discrediting the grieving parent. Although their emergence as public figures is predicated on transforming a loss occurring in the domestic sphere and making it public, figures such as Blumberg and Sheehan cannot be perceived as being too involved in politics. This is paradoxical. By mobilizing their grief to make demands against the state, they are "doing politics." However, their moral authority is challenged by accusations that they are too involved with politics when the movements that they are mobilizing around grief invariably have specific political goals.

This may explain why Blumberg so repeatedly rejected the label of politics. His moral authority originated out of both the love and authority stemming from his parental status to the victim. This status made his actions selfless and pure-intentioned. They were predicated on his desire to prevent others from experiencing his loss. His goal was to make the country a better place "for the lives of our children."

Human rights groups also use a similar series of representational claims. By being the voice of human rights universals, they are laying claim to an apolitical space in which there is no political debate (who is against human rights?). Like Blumberg, they are motivated out of a desire to prevent what happened to their children from happening to others and, like Blumberg, this is part of their general desire to make the world a better place. Their difference with Blumberg is that this desire to make the world a better place leads the

Grandmothers and the *Mothers* to reclaim the politics of their children. Since Axel was perceived as not having any political beliefs, Blumberg, unlike the *Mothers* or the *Grandmothers,* cannot reclaim the politics of his child.

At the same time, human rights groups are often perceived to be apolitical. Human rights groups themselves sometimes tacitly embrace the label. In fact, they are often expected to be apolitical. As I have argued earlier, being perceived as "apolitical" helped the *Grandmothers*. To open oneself to accusations of being political or making it political is to undermine one's moral authority. Through the course of my fieldwork, I heard this numerous times in casual conversation with people. "You know, those (*Mothers*, *Grandmothers*) organizations are political ones… It was one thing about what happened to their children but then they became political." The expectation that human rights groups should be apolitical is a normative one.

Whether one is sympathetic to the radical chic of Giorgio Agamben or to the Liberal establishment of Michael Ignatieff, both agree that human rights movements need to acknowledge that they form a politics. According to Agamben (1998), when human rights groups do not acknowledge their politics they are feeding into the biopolitical powers that they are supposed to be contesting. For Ignatieff (2000), they are simply making unjustifiable claims. At the same time, accusing human rights groups of being engaged in politics is a common means of discrediting them.

While human rights groups mobilize around the political identities of their children to make strong claims, Blumberg's rejection of political labels increased as his movement more explicitly embraced politics. Blumberg's appearance as a political actor was predicated on his lack of politics (and, also, his son's lack of

politics) and his purity of intent. This perception was key to his appeal and was used to distinguish his movement from earlier emanations of middle class malaise. One editorial written after the first march by Bartolomé de Vedia differentiated the appearance of Blumberg from the *cacerolazos* of 2001 by Blumberg's untainted objective. The *cacerolazos* were economically motivated. The middle class had been swindled of their dollars by the banking system. Their life savings had been slashed. Since bank accounts were frozen they were unable to withdraw their money as the value of the peso depreciated. The *cacerolazo* was their collective response. Blumberg's Crusade was about the sanctity of life itself. In the words of de Vedia, "they went out into the street to defend the highest and noblest value that a *pueblo* can and should preserve: human life." Organized around life itself, the Crusade formed a politics with no politics. de Vedia continued:

> Yesterday's march is the first in many years that does not have the capacity to divide anyone. It cannot generate dissent or opposition. What dark mind could have disagreed with the avalanche of people flowing into the streets demanding only integrity and security for everyone? It was a march for *concrete, visceral life*…It was a song (*canto*) to everyday life, to the inexhaustible desire for living, to ultimate truths, to respect for one's fellow man as the supreme expression of human dignity.[430]

Blumberg's continued emphasis that his movement was apolitical baffled many.

[430] La Nación, April 2, 2004.

Why did he not just admit that making demands to change laws was a textbook definition of "doing politics"? Nobody seemed to believe him anyway. However, positioning his political movement outside of politics was the basis of his appeal.

As progressive intellectuals debated the significance of Blumberg's movement during 2004, many saw him as the political continuity of the military dictatorship. As I argued, his *mano dura* policies paralleled the same demands made during the dictatorship. His association with several prominent supporters of the military dictatorship only enhanced this perception. However, Blumberg's rhetoric is not a mere echo of the military dictatorship's discourse. It is its contemporary version. As I argued at the onset of this chapter, the enemy who was once conceived of as a communist has transformed into a criminal. Blumberg's criminal is the contemporary form of the military dictatorship's subversive.

So Blumberg's assertion that he is not engaged in politics is in a way correct. His claims are grounded in an antipolitics. There are no politics because there are no ideological sides to the debate. Unlike the dictatorship's actions in the 1970's, his crusade is not conceptualized as an ideological confrontation. In Blumberg's discourse, the line is drawn between legality and illegality: law-abiding citizens who obey the law and criminals who break the law. If the earlier cold war was played out as a war of ideologies, in Argentina it had a particularly brutal enactment. The military dictatorship attempted to wipe out "communist subversion" not just in terms of actions but also in terms of their beliefs. The "subversive enemy" of the military dictatorship was defined on the basis of ideology, not simply action. In this case, beliefs are not an issue. What the criminal believes is irrelevant. The enemy is a criminal and nothing more.

Blumberg, Neoliberalism, and the Privatization of Security

Neoliberalism in Argentina is not only responsible for the poverty that causes crime (Teubal 2004:Svampa 2005) but also for the state's inability to effectively combat it. One of the hallmarks of neoliberal reforms across the globe is the privatization of security. As political scientist Robert Mandel has written, "even the area most tightly associated with government control – the provision of security for its citizenry – has fallen prey to the privatization tidal wave." (Mandel 2001:129) Mandel traces the trend of security privatization to the end of the Cold War and the spread of neoliberal economic policies. The privatization "tidal wave" has had consequences for both internal and external security matters, both with the explosion of domestic private security forces and the proliferation of mercenaries in foreign conflicts. For example, outsourcing in the current Iraq war has led to the presence of almost as many private defense contractors as US troops.

In Argentina, when Menem took power in 1990, he launched a wave of privatization and sold off many state owned enterprises in a period of two years, including the national airline, the water system, the gas and oil industries, highways, ports and shipyards, telephones and even the post office. These neoliberal reforms led to the weakening of the Argentine state. The weakening of the state led to the state's inability to carry out its responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is the protection of its citizens. A cornerstone of political theory is that the state has a monopoly over the use of violence. Security experts see the privatization of security as threatening or challenging this monopoly (Mandel

2001;2002; Avant 2005)

The collapse in trust in the role of the state and a consequential lack of faith in public institutions has led to the privatization of security in Argentina, in Latin America, and, to a large extent, throughout the world. As the state loses its capacity to protect the lives of its citizens, private security services proliferate as citizens are increasingly left to combat crime on their own. Goldstein (2003;2005) has examined this phenomenon in his analysis of vigiliante lynchings in Bolivia. As Michael Taussig has observed (2003), fear of crime motivates many Colombians to support paramilitary violence, including extrajuridical executions. Anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen has analyzed how private security services have replaced the police forces as the visible markers of security and authorized violence in South Africa (2006). Security services are one of the major growth industries in Argentina. In the midst of the Argentine economic crisis in 2001, one international security company, Smith-Brandon, published a paper entitled: "Argentina: disaster or opportunity?" The economic crisis was presented as an ideal business opportunity for security services. Private gated communities are just one small manifestation of this that has been of significant interest to anthropologists in North American (Low 2003), Latin America (Caldeira 2001), and the rest of the world (Falzon 2004). In Argentina, gated communities are the preferred residential choice for the middle and upper middle classes living outside city borders. Global private security companies offer anti-kidnapping schools for business executives. Other companies sell bulletproof glass, kidnapping insurance, and armor and radar for cars.

Several months before Axel's kidnapping, Oliver North of Iran-Contra

Affair infamy visited Argentina.[431] He was in the country to advise corporate executives about the problems of insecurity. Other ex-CIA and FBI agents also visited Argentina throughout the year on similar trips. Cold war warriors like Oliver North shared the political ideology of the dictatorship. Many global security companies, like Kroll, have close ties with the FBI and CIA and employ many former agents from those organizations. The same Cold War warriors who once worked in the government to fight communism in Latin America now work in the private sector to combat criminals. In Argentina, many military and police figures accused of crimes against humanity for their role in disappearances and torture have been found working for private security companies. Several of these men run their own security firms, including one that was responsible for security at Argentina's largest airport.

The emergence of Blumberg's movement needs to be situated within this larger phenomenon. As Blumberg became a reference point for family members of kidnapping victims, he began receiving telephone calls from people who reported kidnappings to him. Many of these kidnappings were only reported to him as people refuse to go to the police for help because they are scared of either their corruption or incompetence. Instead of turning to the police, they turned to Blumberg. The week after Axel's death, Blumberg claimed that he had been notified of twenty kidnappings previously unreported to authorities.

By August, the Axel Blumberg Foundation has a security commission. The commission compiles and analyzes all of the kidnapping reported to the Foundation receives. The majority of them had not been reported to the police. A

[431] *Página/12*, January 20, 2004

close associate of Blumberg who works in the Foundation interviewed on the eve of the third march in August stated: “Many people with kidnapped family members call us and not the police. And we help them.” When asked if the help was in the form of psychological assistance, he responded: “No, we help them find their family members.” When pressed about what this means, his response is terse: “For now, I cannot say more, but we are working on those matters as well.”[432] These “matters” were reputedly investigations into criminal gangs. A private foundation is occupied with a task that is supposed to fall within the powers and duties of the state. Blumberg has become an extralegal force attending to one of the state’s key responsibilities. The tragic irony is that Blumberg has aligned himself with the very same political forces that necessitated his “Crusade” in the first place.

Postscript

Blumberg’s meteoric rise to prominence in 2004 was tempered by a decline in influence by 2005. In the last chapter, I discussed the December 2004 nightclub fire in Buenos Aires that resulted in the death of hundreds of young people. As the families mobilized to demand justice for their dead children, Blumberg turned up at one protest rally at the invitation of some parents. Young people at the demonstration called him a “fascist” and a “Nazi.” The crowd was so hostile that Blumberg was forced to take refuge in a nearby hotel. These were the same family members who attacked Estela Carlotto with eggs because of her

[432] *Revista Poder*, August 28, 2004.

perceived support of the mayor of Buenos Aires after they demanded his resignation. It was an odd convergence. Both Carlotto and Blumberg, two individuals who mobilized movements around the suffering of the loss of their children and eventually conflicted with each other, came into conflict with another group of family members mobilized around the grief resulting from the untimely deaths of their children.

In early 2006, the website for the Axel Foundation had disappeared from the internet. However, Blumberg made a media comeback in August as the trial began against the criminal gang accused of the kidnapping and the murder of his son. On August 31, he led a new march on the Plaza de Mayo. The discrepancy between the organizers' estimates and other sources was even greater than ever before. Blumberg claimed 300,000 attendees, while media sources estimated the number at 35,000. In addition to opposition *piquetero* groups, Kirchner's most prominent political opponents, Mauricio Macri and Ricardo López Murphy, were also present. Macri and López Murphy had joined together to form a new rightist coalition in an attempt to defeat Kirchner in the 2007 elections. Speculation now revolves around Blumberg running on the party's ticket as candidate for governor of the province of Buenos Aires province. Blumberg has wavered at the speculation, balking at the possibility that the movement he launched will now irrefutably be associated with a political party. He would finally be compelled to cease claiming he was not engaged in politics.

Conclusion: The Emergence of the *Nieto* and a Culture of Memory

The first time I glimpse the ESMA (The School of Navy Mechanics), it is unintentional. I am returning from a trip to a nearby Carrefour lying on the outskirts of the northwestern city limits with a friend who had kindly volunteered to drive me there to see if I could find an inexpensive refrigerator for my newly rented appliance-less apartment (I could not). On the way back, we briefly stop at the house of his ex-wife who lives in the upper-middle class neighborhood of Nuñez. As we turn off her street onto the ample boulevard of Libertador, I recognize the building immediately. Surrounded by an imposing iron gate and impeccably maintained grounds, the ESMA is a stately building with imposing columns. The orderliness and cleanliness of its immaculate surroundings stands in sharp contrast to the graffiti and decay that characterize many other Argentine public facilities.

When tourists approach Auschwitz, a common experience upon entering the compound is one of bewilderment at how such an enormous atrocity could have taken place in such a scenic and seemingly innocuous countryside. Ghastly events demand ghastly landscapes. In a similar sense, I am struck by my own equally naïve expectation. How could such atrocities take place in such an elegant building in such a tranquil and affluent neighborhood? At least five thousand people disappeared through its gates. They were detained, tortured, and most of them were eventually murdered. Many of the people who lived in the neighborhood, who passed by the ESMA on their way to and from work, claimed to have no knowledge of the horrific events transpiring inside.

March 24, 2004 is an historic moment marking the transfer of the ESMA

from the Armed Forces to the city of Buenos Aires. The formal announcement takes place on the 28th anniversary of the military coup. President Kirchner is signing the decree authorizing the transfer. The building is to be transformed into a Museum of Memory. I arrive early. A sizeable crowd has already gathered, a motley assemblage of human rights veterans, neighborhood associations, family members, radical political groups, teenagers, and pierced and tattooed twenty-something neo-hippies decked out in t-shirts depicting *El Che* or various icons of *rock nacional*. The wide boulevard of Libertador is blocked off to traffic. Although summer officially ended a few days earlier, it is a hot and humid day. The open boulevard offers no respite from the heat. Sweat drips as the crowd seeks shelter beneath the scarce trees and stoplights.

Photographs of the disappeared hang from the imposing iron fence surrounding the building. I stroll down the sidewalk. Walking towards me from the opposite direction is Horacio, a grandchild recovered one year earlier in April 2003. This is his first anniversary of the coup with the knowledge he is a child of the disappeared. We greet each other briefly and then he continues on with a sense of determination and urgency. “I am looking for my mother.” I am briefly confused until I realize that he is referring to the photographs of the disappeared that are lining the iron fence of the ESMA. He is searching for her photograph.

As the crowd accumulates by the front entrance gates, I wait for the event to begin. The sun is searing; the wait, uncomfortable. Finally, a bustle of activity and an announcement: “Don’t push to the front. Protect the *Grandmothers* and the *Mothers.”* I see a small group proceeding towards the front gates. The crowd attempts to open up a space for them to pass. “If you advance, you will step on us,” the crowd is warned. Human rights groups have been invited to the official

signing inside with Kirchner. Shortly after they enter through the gates, Hebe de Bonafini's *Mothers* appear in the crowd. Up until that moment, it was uncertain whether her group would show. They had refused to taken part in the official ceremonies and had threatened not to come if the provincial governors from the Peronist party were also present. Kirchner angered his party by giving in to Bonafini's demand and disinviting the governors. Conservative pundits mistakenly predict that siding with Bonafini over his fellow party augured a rift in the Peronist Party. They are wrong. Instead, it signals Kirchner's increasing consolidation of power. Bonafini also causes controversy when she rejects the idea of a Museum and argues that space be used as an art school. She later causes even greater controversy when she states that if is to be made into a museum, it should display the guns that revolutionary organizations of the 1970s used. As Bonafini's small group passes through the crowd, a group chants: "*Madres de la Plaza, el pueblo las abraza* (Mothers of the plaza, the people hug you)." Hebe responds by pumping a revolutionary fist in the air.

Fifteen minutes later, Kirchner emerges through the front gates after signing the official executive order. He passes ten feet away from me, flanked by a small entourage. The crowd pushes back to allow him passage. I marvel at the lack of security at the event, especially one in which the President is attending. Police presence had been rejected. The only signs of security were the self-designated "civil security" provided by several *piquetero* groups. The crowd moves *en masse* around the corner where the public event will take place on a side street featuring speeches by Kirchner, Buenos Aires mayor Aníbal Ibarra, and several children of the disappeared. Of the children of the disappeared, one grew up with their biological family while the other is the latest child of the

disappeared located by the *Grandmothers.* Both were born in the ESMA.

Kirchner's speech marks a decisive shift in government rhetoric. Kirchner takes full responsibility as President of the country for the previous democratic governments' failure to address the crimes of the dictatorship. "I come to ask forgiveness in the name of the national state." He denounces the "shame of having been silent during 20 years of democracy for such great atrocities." This last criticism provokes the objections of Raúl Alfonsín who appointed the National Commission of the Disappeared and who put the military Junta on trial. Many believe the oversight is deliberate. Kirchner words have a great symbolic relevance. They are intended to announce a new era of accountability and mark a break with the impunity of the past. More than any other act, the act in the ESMA consolidates Kirchner's support among human rights organization.

Following the speeches and musical performances, I wander through the vast complex. For the first time in its history, the ESMA is open to the public. The atmosphere is festive and triumphant. I follow a crowd who are all flowing towards the main building where the disappeared were held. They gather in its closed courtyard that had served as a meeting area and dining room. People are singing, waving flags, cheering. The scene conjures images of a victorious army charging into the abandoned fortress of the vanquished. The crowd soon dissipates as people head up the staircase leading into the offices. I follow. In each non-descript office room, people are exploring every desk drawer and file cabinet, tossing papers around, rummaging through what the Navy left behind. They are trying to make sense of what they see. It is an effort to find material traces of the horror that took place almost three decades earlier. The premises have been hastily abandoned. Traces of ordinary office life are still present. A

man tears down a photocopied piece of paper taped on the wall that bears the name of the ESMA. People are writing with chalk on the walls, others with magic marker. I am astounded at the freedom people have. Some dump the papers found in filing cabinets over the balcony. They flutter like confetti onto the closed courtyard. I pick one up. A mundane bureaucratic form reveals nothing of interest.

As I wander through another room, a young man climbs over a locked storage area. He hands to his friend a box that he has uncovered. “We’ve got souvenirs”, his friend shouts, as he tears open the box to reveal ceramic plates. He hands the pile to the surrounding crowd. People are generous. They take one plate from the stack and pass the rest on to the next person. The pile is handed to me. I examine a non-descript white plate without design, logo, or insignia. Why would anyone want to keep one? I pass the stack on to the others.

Not everyone is celebrating though. Small groups of individuals are crying as they wander through the building. Some head up to the *capucho,* the attic where many of the disappeared were detained. Perhaps their family members were among them. Several people yell in vain at those pilfering items. “We have to preserve all of this. What are you doing? Stop taking things.” Nobody pays them any heed. The artifacts they are taking appear inconsequential. The next day, newspapers will use these events to cast a shadow over the event. They will report of vast “looting” and “vandalism” that took place there. H.I.J.O.S. will even be compelled to issue a statement rejecting accusations of their involvement. “It is objectionable to accuse us of actions that we have not committed, bearing in mind that we struggle so that the ESMA is preserved in its entirety and serves as

proof in trials against perpetrators of state terror."[433]

The "looting" appears mundane to me, more symbolic than actual. Any proof that had remained in the complex at the time of eviction would have been transferred or eliminated. Everything left behind appears incidental.[434] I am wandering through another office as a man unearths a pile of books. The crowd begins to distribute them. The banality of one title catches my eye, *Business Management With a Human Face*. I see someone walking off with a map depicting two Germanys and the Soviet Union. As I exit the building, a teenager runs past me smiling gleefully displaying a broken office telephone he has taken to his friend. What is left behind is no different from what former tenants of an apartment leave behind after a hasty eviction, items not worth the effort of moving. The chalk graffiti will be washed off although the conservative press will object more to the graffiti's content than its permanence (someone wrote "*Montoneros Venceremos"* - the group's slogan "we will win"). The black magic markers on the walls will be painted over when the space eventually is transformed into a Museum. The ESMA existed as the central manifestation of the dictatorship's power. That the complex had been closed to the public heightened its aura of mystique and terror. The untrammeled access serves to demystify it. It also gives a tangible sense of victory. As I exit through the main gates, I head down the main avenue. I trample upon a small and rumpled flyer. I pick it up. *"No a La Entrega de La ESMA*" ("No handing over of the ESMA"), it declares. The group who printed the flyer is unidentified. It is the sole visible

[433] Página/12, March 26, 2004.
[434] I could be wrong. Some reports said that military signs were also taken.

manifestation of opposition to the event I witness that day.[435]

The Emergence of the *Nietos*

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section examined the changing images of the disappeared from innocent victims to political activists and then looked at debates around this newly dominant image. It also asked about the disappeared who reappeared and why they have had a more marginal role in human rights than family member organizations. The second section examined the search for and recovery of the kidnapped children of the disappeared. I have proceeded historically from the earliest cases to the most recent. In the initial cases, the *Grandmothers* posited restitution as a necessary, healthy, and reparatory action. However, as the children reached adolescence and adulthood, the *Grandmothers* were faced with more complicated and difficult cases. In some cases, children seized upon their new identities. In other cases, they rejected them. Still other presumed children of the disappeared refused outright to learn their biological identities. The third section traced the politics of human rights in Argentina and focused on the larger institutional context. I examined the central debates between human rights groups and the broader Argentine political and economic situation. The appearance of Néstor Kirchner in 2003 marked a decisive shift in this account and a victory for the reformist sector of human rights. The turning over of the ESMA to become a Museum of Memory

[435] The previous day, there had been a protest by the military students and their parents who had been studying there and had been forced to find new accommodations for their education.

represents one of the most important events marking this shift. The event also marks the appearance of the *Nieto* (Grandchildren) as a family member assemblage alongside the *Grandmothers, Mothers,* and *H.I.J.OS*.

Recovered children of the disappeared have historically been conspicuously absent from public view. While the children are the central focus of the *Grandmothers'* work, the grandchildren have not had a very visible presence in the history of the institution. Only a small number have given interviews over the years. This was initially the *Grandmothers'* decision. Faced with the public scrutiny that the early cases attracted, the *Grandmothers* wisely shielded their grandchildren in an effort to preserve their privacy. The public cases that I examined in this thesis are in the minority. They only became public because of the controversies resulting from them.

Most cases of restitution have a single public act signaled by the *Grandmothers'* announcement in a press conference. I attended three during my fieldwork. During these conferences, Estela Carlotto gave biographical information about the disappeared parents and then described the family member's search. Little information about the situation of the children was given. Two explicitly asked for privacy. In fact, more information was given about their disappeared parents and family members (especially if they were actively involved in the search) than the life of the located grandchild.

This tradition of protecting the grandchildren's privacy was still in place when I arrived for fieldwork. I was initially surprised because, at the time, the grandchildren were no longer children but adults in their mid-to-late twenties. Most were older than their parents were at the time of their disappearance. Their parents were protagonists of political struggle in the 1970s. However, in the

present, the *Grandmothers* were the primary protagonists and represented the public face of the organization. At the time, only a few recovered grandchildren spoke publicly about their experience. When I had my first meeting with the organization at their headquarters in November 2003, the secretary of the organization told me flatly that even with a vow of anthropological anonymity, "not many grandchildren do interviews. Only a handful."

As I discovered, even those who had spoken publicly in the past were reluctant to do interviews in the present. After an interview with one *Grandmother* who had located her grandchild in the mid-1980s, I inquired about the possibility of speaking with her granddaughter. I thought it would be possible because she had given several interviews in the past. She told me that her granddaughter never liked giving interviews and had not granted an interview in the past five years. She preferred not to speak about her experience. "She wants to put it all behind her," she said. I understood. I would not have wanted to speak to me either.

However, several grandchildren consented to interviews without hesitation after I met them.[436] One of these interviews was an unmitigated disaster. She was a child of the disappeared recovered in the 1980s. We had met in the *Grandmothers'* offices. She had given interviews in the 1990s but none this decade. After we had spoken casually on several occasions, I asked about the possibility of an interview as she accompanied me down the elevator of the fourth floor offices to unlock the front door so I could leave. She agreed. She had decided to stop giving interviews because she had grown tired of speaking about

[436] In total, I interviewed five recovered children of the disappeared and informally spoke with several others.

her experience. She agreed to speak to me because I was an anthropologist and thus "serious." I tried to schedule the interview outside of the *Grandmothers'* cramped offices, but instead she decided we should have it in her tiny, shared office room; less than propitious circumstances for an interview.

During the interview, I asked a question about her childhood. Her friend also working in the room interjected, "I thought you stopped talking about all of this stuff." My informant responded, "It's okay. He's an anthropologist." Anthropology had a positive association for Argentine human rights activists since it was linked to the work of forensic anthropology (I always demurred that I was a sociocultural anthropologist). She continued to recount her life history but then paused and said, "but you know all this, right? You've already read this." I had since I had read the *Grandmothers'* literature and had prepared for the interview by reading through several interviews that she had given throughout the years. I had mistakenly decided it would be better to start with more general questions before moving on to specifics, even if it meant she would be retelling a story that I already knew. When I went on to ask more specific questions about her experience, I saw her apparent discomfort and changed the topic. Instead of talking about her life, we ended up spending the rest of the interview discussing more general human rights issues and her work with the *Grandmothers.*

A transition occurred during my fieldwork in which the grandchildren (*nietos*) emerge as more public figures. In April 2003, Horacio was the first grandchild to speak at the press conference announcing his restitution. He immediately went to work for the organization in their publicity area and was proud of his public prominence. When we first met, he was visibly pleased that I recognized him before we were introduced. He asked if I had seen his

photograph in the article about him that appeared in the Canadian press. He looked slightly disappointed when I told him that I had read about him in the local press. When I opened our interview by discussing the anthropological norm of anonymity and pseudonyms, he appeared almost offended that I would use any name other than his own. “With me, you have no problem. I am Horacio.”

However, in the last years, growing numbers of grandchildren have given spoken publicly. In 2005, the *Grandmothers* debuted a radio program on a national public radio station called *Radio X la Identidad.* The program is devoted to interviews with both family members searching for their relatives and located grandchildren. Numerous grandchildren who have never spoken publicly before have given interviews on the program.[437] By point of contrast, the Oral Archive of *Memoria Abierta* that I discussed in the introduction is comprised mainly of family member interviews conducted in 2002. Although they interviewed grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, as well as children of the disappeared who grew up with their biological families, in the entire archive there is not a single interview with a recovered child of the disappeared.

For years, the *Grandmothers* had predicted a “passing of the guard.” They were ageing. Most were in their late seventies or eighties at the time of my fieldwork. In interviews, they spoke of an imminent generational turnover. Other family members would continue their work when they were no longer able. In the past, they were referring to the aunts and uncles or even the children of the disappeared who grew up with their biological families who are searching for their

[437] In addition, some grandchildren from earlier chapters who had never public spoken about their lives begin giving interviews. Among them is Ximena Vicario who embraces the *Grandmothers’* rhetoric entirely when describing her experience.

siblings. Today, when they speak of this, they are referring mainly to recovered grandchildren taking up the search. The *Grandmothers* have been reference points for all family members searching for their missing relatives. They have been the symbolic focus of the struggle.

The emergence of the *Nietos* marks an important transition, one still underway in the present. The *Nietos* have now become the public face of the organization alongside their *Grandmothers*. An institutional photograph from 2004 shows only the *Grandmothers.* A photograph from a year later shows both *Grandmothers* and *Nietos.* Instead of the *Grandmothers* as primary actors in the struggle and the grandchildren as primary objects (the objects of their search), the *Nietos* become political actors and active subjects. This change is even reflected in the press releases announcing restitutions. Instead of stating, as they did in the past, "We found another grandchildren," their press releases now read, "Another grandchild found us."

The explanation as to why the *Nietos* appeared between 2003 and 2006 cannot simply be explained in reference to their age. While one may explain their increasing public visibility as a rite of passage marking adulthood, as I mentioned above, the children of the disappeared had become adults years earlier. The passage of children of the disappeared into adulthood was linked to the change in strategy that the *Grandmothers* embraced in the late 1990s. Since the grandchildren were adults and therefore autonomous agents, the *Grandmothers'* public campaigns directed them to question their biological identity in an effort to lure them to the organization. This process was described in Chapter 6. Children of the disappeared began working for the group around this time. Others who had grown up with their biological families and were looking for their missing

siblings had joined H.I.J.O.S. when the organization appeared in the 1990s. H.I.J.O.S. would allow them to become protagonists in the human rights struggle. While a few still remained active in the group, most complained that the group was disorganized and dysfunctional. They saw their primary human rights activities within the *Grandmothers.*

The *Nietos* emerged as a public group ten years after H.I.J.O.S. Their arrival was not linked to their age but to the appearance of Kirchner and his human rights policy. The first major appearance of the *Nietos* as collective actors on a political stage took place on November 20, 2003 when a group of them met President Kirchner in the *Casa Rosada*. Though the *Grandmothers* had met with all of the country's presidents since the restoration of democracy, this was the first time a president had met with grandchildren. The primary purpose of the meeting was to petition the state to expand the indemnizations to include kidnapped children of the disappeared. In a joint statement that was read at the meeting, they spoke of the need for "symbolic reparation for the damage committed by the genocidal state." They spoke from the perspective of their own suffering. The state, they said, had a debt to them that it needed to repay. Their public appearance was also linked to their desire for public recognition. "With great suffering, we recognize and remember what happened to us. Now we want others to recognize and remember it."[438]

The *Nietos* were directly petitioning the state on behalf of their own experience. This was a novel development. In the past, the *Grandmothers* would speak for them. Not only were they speaking on behalf of their own experience,

[438] Página/12, November 21, 2003.

they were using their experience to speak on behalf of other children of the disappeared, including those who had not yet been recovered. They argued that the only way that the state could repair the damage that was done by the military dictatorship was to find the rest of the disappeared children and "facilitate for their return home by all means that the state has available." In other words, they were advocating compulsory extractions of blood for presumed children of the disappeared who refused to undergo a genetic verification of their identities. They argued for less judicial discretion in such cases following the Supreme Court's recent ruling and supported the pending bill that would require the "compulsory genetic tests."

The *Nietos* did not need to make these requests since the *Grandmothers* had already petitioned Kirchner on many of the same points. Even if the meeting only reiterated demands that had already been made, the *Nietos'* public appeal on behalf of themselves, their parents, their grandmothers as well as children of the disappeared who had yet to be located had an important symbolic value. As one journalist reporting on the event remarked, "Some of the points had been dealt with by the *Grandmothers* in a previous meeting. Now it was the grandchildren who were speaking, putting forth their own concerns and telling him their personal stories."[439] Four months later, their meeting with Kirchner yielded tangible results. Children of the disappeared who were appropriated during the dictatorship would be given economic reparation. They would receive the same that family members received for the disappeared – the monthly salary of a state worker multiplied by twenty, totaling 220,000 pesos (US$73,000). In

[439] Página/12, November 21, 2003.

the announcement, Kirchner embraced the arguments the *Nietos* made in their meeting. The state had a responsibility to the disappeared children – it had to "assume its debt" because it had abandoned them when they needed help.

Coinciding with the emergence of the *Nietos* as political actors is a documentary film featuring them as protagonists. The same week as the transfer of the ESMA, a documentary called *Nietos* is released in Buenos Aires. The film, made by a child of the disappeared who grew up with his biological family, is a "generational testimony." Although the *Grandmothers'* and their struggle were already the subject of a feature length documentary (*Botín de guerra*[2000]), *Nietos,* as the title implies, is exclusively devoted to the grandchildren. At one of the *Grandmothers'* events several weeks after the film's release, I spoke with a child of the disappeared who worked on the film and also stars in it. I told him I liked the documentary but I was surprised by its focus on the grandchildren's everyday life in the present. This was intentional, he answered. "We wanted to make something that was not political" and told me that the group hoped the film could be used to help raise funds for the organization. The director of the film, Benjamín Ávila, argued that the purpose of the film was as an emotional appeal. "The idea was to move away from the political, because dialogue with the public originates out of the emotional and not from intellectual reflection." [440] As one film critic pointed out in his review of the film, *Nietos* "understands that, in short, the hope for a less cruel world resides in the possibility of communicating tragedy." Here, the *Nietos,* and not, as it had been in the past, the *Grandmothers,* were the ones communicating their tragedy. This, as I have argued throughout this thesis,

[440] Revista *TXT,* March 26, 2004.

is the basis upon which human rights appeals are made. The *Nietos* communicating their tragedy marks their emergence as human rights activists.

Kidnapping Children as the Defining Act of the Dictatorship

The *Grandmothers* have long framed the systematic theft of children as representative of the utter depravity of the military dictatorship. They frequently refer to it as one of the most abhorrent actions committed by the dictatorship. The appropriation of babies is seen as proof of the military's perversity. I do not dispute their assessment but alternate interpretations of similar acts occurring in other parts of the world also exist. For example, *ProBúsqueda,* an organization in El Salvador that is modeled directly after the *Grandmothers,* attempts to unify children who were forcibly separated from their families during the country's civil war. A priest from *ProBúsqueda* interprets the fact that Salvadoran armed forces did not kill the children of their enemies as a sign of their humanity. Confronted with children, he argues, the military was unable to kill them so they left them in orphanages, sold them, or raised them as their own.[441] The Argentine military, in an account by one military perpetrator, kept pregnant women alive long enough to give birth because they considered themselves "pro life." The children were innocent of the actions of their parents and could be saved. This is certainly a perverse and abhorrent logic but would it be any less perverse or abhorrent to kill babies and pregnant women outright as has been done in other countries? Framing the kidnapping of children of the disappeared as the most perverse

[441] From the 2005 CBC documentary *Where are The Children.*

action of the dictatorship helped to heighten the prominence of the issue. It emerged as one of the most pressing and publicized issues resulting from the dictatorship. I would argue that because of the *Grandmothers'* efforts, the kidnapping of children has become one of the central and defining acts of the dictatorship.

At the time of the 28th anniversary of the military coup, the children of the disappeared are one of the most discussed issued relating to the dictatorship. Signs placed outside of the ESMA on the day of the transfer refer exclusively to the kidnapped children. Yellow signs resembling those used to signal traffic state, "Here many disappeared women gave birth and their babies were stolen by *los genocidas* (those who committed genocide)*"* Later that evening, as I watch television coverage of the day's event, the children of the disappeared are one of the main topics of discussion. An ex-disappeared who had been in the ESMA is asked if he had seen any pregnant women when detained there. A child of the disappeared on another channel was asked ingenuously whether it was not time to "move on" with the past. He responds by saying that if he had only recently found out his identity, the issue is "not in the past but in the present."

After the act in the ESMA, the *Grandmothers* public prominence increases. They have support of the government. In 2005, the Argentine national legislature approves a law to commemorate the organization. They declare the date of the anniversary of the founding of the group (October 22) as National Right to Identity Day. In 2006, a campaign called "*Gracias Abuelas"* (Thanks Grandmothers) is launched to commemorate the 29th anniversary of the group. The *Commission to Thank the Grandmothers* is comprised of actors, athletes, artists, academics and musicians, among others. The activities of the campaign

include a petition drive so that everyone can register their support for the organization. At the same time, a cultural center renames one of its auditoriums after the group. The petition states, “So impressive are these *Grandmothers* who, like all grandmothers, bring the past into the present but even more do not tire of indicating us the future road: freedom, justice, and identity.” The campaign is accompanied by taped solicitations from famous local figures praising the group. Throughout the country, local governments, NGOs and other associations join forces with the *Grandmothers.* The *Banco Provincia de Córdoba* (Provincial Bank of Córdoba) agrees to hang the *Grandmothers’* posters in the public spaces of its banks. In 2007, plans are released to transform the former headquarters of the *Grandmothers* (they moved in 2005) into a House of Memory commemorating the organization. The plan consists of transforming the institution into a museum for group tours and a space for photographic exhibitions, projection of videos for students, and conferences and seminars.

Perhaps no greater indicator of the wider cultural currency of the topic of the children of the disappeared exists than its manifestation as a popular culture phenomenon. In 2006, the breakaway hit on Argentine television was *Montecristo*. It is in many respects a typical *telenovela* (soap opera), a lurid and histrionic melodrama filled with romance and intrigue. It is also a contemporary adaptation of Alexandre Dumas’s *The Count of Montecristo,* except in its updated version the protagonist is a kidnapped child of the disappeared. The soap opera’s narrative charts his discovery of his identity. Narrative twists include finding out that the father of his best friend was the man involved in his kidnapping. The show was such an enormous success that the *Grandmothers* received an influx of consultations from young people who questioned their

biological identities as a result of the show. The restitution of one child of the disappeared in the fall of 2006 was even attributed to the show's success. The subject has long attracted artistic attention. At least several novels (e.g. Osorio 1999; Andruetto 2003) and numerous films (*Cautiva*[2003], *Figli/Hijos*[2001], *Vidas Privadas*[2001], *Los Pasos Perdidos*[2001], *La Historia Oficial*[1985]) have addressed the subject matter with varying degrees of artistic success but not even the Oscar winning *La Historia Oficial* had the commercial success of *Montecristo*. It is even considered to have transcended the genre's limited boundaries by integrating an important political topic into the kitschy format.

Juan Cabandié, Representative Nieto

Given the prominence of the issue, the choice of speakers for the central public act in the ESMA is not surprising. To represent the human rights movement, the speakers are neither *Mothers* nor *Grandmothers* nor even *Ex-disappeared* who had been detained there. Rather, they are children of the disappeared who had been born in the ESMA. One of them had been given back to his biological family to be raised. The other, Juan Cabandié, had been given to a police officer to be raised. Juan's speech garners as much media attention as Kirchner's. His restitution had only been officially announced two months earlier, in January 2004. This was his first public event. In his speech, he embraced the institutional ideology of the *Grandmothers* almost verbatim. He told the crowd: "I spent a long time searching and, two years ago, without any strong evidence, I put a name to what I was searching for. 'I am a child of the disappeared,' I said." He had already intuited his identity before the genetic results came in. He

described his presence at the event as proof that the dictatorship's "evil plan" did not succeed. It failed because "the dictatorship could not erase the registers of memory that flow through my veins and brought me to the truth."

The ESMA is considered one of the primary "sites of memory" of the Argentine dictatorship. This is easy enough to understand because it was the main site of military terror. Pierre Nora, noted for his seven-volume work on *Les lieux de mémoire* in France, defined a site of memory as a material or non-material entity that through human will or the passage of time becomes a site "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself."(1989:7) I would argue that not only the ESMA but also the children of the disappeared, like Juan Cabandié, function as sites of memory. Cabandié's speech makes this explicit. When he speaks of the "registers of memory that flow through my veins," he is putting forth a biologized and innate view of memory. He is not referring to a memory of his own experience. Memory is a substance he contains, located in his blood and in his genes. He is the embodied memory of his parents as well as the memory of what the dictatorship did to them.

As a "site of memory", the reproduction of individual and familial memory is seen as intertwined with the reproduction of a collective and societal memory. This is why Juan and another child of the disappeared who was also born in the ESMA were chosen to speak at the event. Children continue the memory of their parents when they are gone. Parents see themselves carrying on through their progeny. The recovered children of the disappeared are key symbols of both the past and to the future. As children and grandchildren, they represent the future generation that the dictatorship attempted to disappear through its actions. Their presence at such events attests to both the continuity of their parents but also to

the continuity of their parents' politics. Juan's speech literally announces the emergence of the kidnapped and recovered children of the disappeared as activists who have taken on the politics of their parents.

In one of the more startling phrases of his speech, after discussing the journey that led him to discover his identity, he declared, "Now I am Juan Cabandié Alfonsín. *I am my parents*, Damián and Alicia. I belong to them and I have their blood." To say "I am my parents" is a striking statement. The statement reveals his complete identification with them, not simply as their son but as them. It is a claim to literally take on their identity. Very few children would want to make such a claim. What did he mean by it? One can become one's parents by "following in their footsteps." In this case, Juan has subsumed his parents' defining identity – not a biogenetic identity but a political identity. If political action defined them, by speaking at the ESMA and emerging as a political actor in his own right, Juan can claim to literally be his parents and not merely his parents' son. Here, kinship is less a biological fact than it is a political act.

In his speech, Juan also drew a parallel between his situation and that of all Argentines. These were, in Página/12's assessment, "the words that defined the day": "truth is absolute freedom." The statement both referred to his individual situation as well as to the entire country. "This is the beginning of the truth thanks to a correct political decision, but it is not enough until it goes down to the core. Truth is freedom and just as we want to be completely free, we need to know the whole truth." In other words, just as he needed to know the truth about himself and his identity, Argentines also need to know the truth about what happened during the dictatorship. As I argued in Chapter 6, the children of the disappeared

and their experience of doubt have been used rhetorically to represent the doubt experienced by all Argentines. Here, Juan is providing the definitive response to any lingering doubts. As someone who no longer doubts his identity, he represents a path for the rest of the country to follow. By transforming to ESMA into a Museum of Memory, it is destined to become a site for the production of memory and, via memory, truth. Juan is making an analogous argument about himself.

If this point seems obscure, journalists have made the connection explicit. For example, an interview with Juan that appeared in *The New Internationalist* makes the link:

> Neither individuals nor nations can survive without a clear view of the past. Says Juan Cabandié: 'The best thing about having found the truth is that I now know who I am and where I come from. I know what I will say to my children; I can now construct an identity.' Perhaps one day, with the new memory museum, Argentinean society will be free to make the same claim.[442]

Juan's life story follows the *Grandmothers'* idealized account of restitution in almost every respect. His kidnapper was an abusive policeman who had been separated from his wife and family for several years. Juan was no longer in contact with him at the time of his restitution. He retroactively cited his abusive treatment as proof that this man was not his real father (since, in Juan's opinion,

[442] *New Internationalist*, December 2005, Issue 385.

no father would treat their real child the way he treated him). He cited having doubts about his identity because of a lack of pictures of his mother pregnant with him or of himself recently born. He also had inchoate knowledge that his identity was fraudulent that was confirmed after his restitution. Many events he recounts in interviews are examples of Freud's concept of Nachträglichkeit (belatedness). They are events whose meanings are only revealed retroactively. For example, he never wanted to celebrate his birthday (the date his kidnappers put on his birth certificate) although he did not know why the date depressed him. After the restitution, he understood why this was so. It was because it was not his real birthday. He had also always wanted to be called Juan without knowing that this was the name his mother gave him. In retrospect, he claims: "I was always Juan Cabandié, only for 26 years I did not know it."[443] In other interview, he embraces the idea of restitution as being "born again". "It was like being born again. I had another first and last name, another date of birth."[444]

However, what is notable about Juan's account of his restitution is how it departs from the *Grandmothers'* idealized account of restitution. Juan frames his incipient doubts about his identity almost entirely in political terms. In Juan's self-description, he was raised to respect authority by the abusive man he thought was his father. He recalls saluting the soldiers as he went by the ESMA when he played nearby as a child, unaware that he had been born inside. He had handed out flyers in support of Carlos Menem when he was in high school. As a teenager, he describes himself as conservative and even a "borderline fascist."

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[443] Página/12, May 26, 2007.
[444] Recuperar identidad es para hijo desaparecidos gozar "libertad" y "dignidad," http://ar.news.yahoo.com/s/21052007/24/argentina-recuperar-identidad-hijo-desaparecidos-gozar-libertad-dignidad.html

However, his politics changed and his doubts about his identity were a product of this change. In interviews, he has offered different but complimentary accounts of what sparked his transformation. According to one interview, his doubts were provoked by a television documentary about the ESMA that profoundly affected him. In another, he was moved while reading *Nunca Más*. In other accounts, it was through volunteering to help the poor without knowing why because he had not been raised with a sense of charity. In another interview, he cites the importance of seeing Fidel Castro speak. In another interview, he cites the transformative shift occurring on the night of the protests that heralded the collapse of the government during the economic crisis: “Then, on the night of 19 December 2001, in the midst of the *débâcle* [the national protest against the country’s failing economy], I found myself in the Plaza de Mayo and I understood that I no longer identified with the values of my adoptive parents."[445]

It is notable that he would pick that day as the one that led him on the path to recover his biological identity. Many commentators now interpret the date as heralding the collective political awakening of Argentina (see Goddard 2006; Dinerstein 2002). The collective protest that drew masses of people onto the streets to protest and bring down the government is a defining event in recent Argentine history. In other words, Juan’s rejection of his adopted parents (metaphorically likened to the neoliberal order imposed by the dictatorship) came at the moment when all Argentines rejected the government (and the neoliberal order). If this seems like a fanciful connection, in an interview from a documentary film, Juan likens his appropriator’s abusive treatment of him directly

[445] *New Internationalist*, December 2005, Issue 385.

to the dictatorship. “I realized later that the same logic of the dictatorship, the same subject, legitimacy, is what this man set up in his house, a psychological torture, a kind of closed circle where I was raised so I wouldn’t ask about myself.” By citing the importance that date had for him, rejecting his adoptive parents’ values is likened to Argentines rejecting their government. In his account, the collective political experience of all Argentine coincides with his private experience.

At that moment, however, he still did not know that he was not his parents’ biological child. The growing alienation that he felt from his supposed parents led him to that speculation. “And then I had a crazy idea. I told myself for the first time: ‘Perhaps I am a child of the disappeared.’[446] In these accounts, he does not attribute his doubt to the normal set of markers that the *Grandmothers’* narratives put forth (i.e. lack of family resemblance). He suspected that he was a child of the disappeared because of political differences with his parents. His experience of doubt is structured around politics.

After the appearance at the ESMA, the handsome and charismatic Juan (who bears a passing resemblance to actor Jake Gylenhaal) becomes the most visible of the *Nietos,* a media figure and a political actor in his own right. He gives frequent interview in the press and makes numerous appearances at the *Grandmothers’* events. An episode of *Ser Urbano,* a popular news program hosted by the star of the hit film *Nueve Reinas* is devoted to Juan’s life story. In 2005, León Gieco, a legendary figure of *rock nacional* sometimes described as the country’s Bob Dylan, released a song called “*Yo soy Juan (el ultimo*

[446] Tomás Bril Mascarenhas – The New Internationalist – December 2005 – Issue 385)

aparecido)" (I am Juan [the last appeared]) about Juan's restitution. As the title implies, Gieco sings the song from Juan's perspective, a first person account of a child of the disappeared. The music video for the song plays with this convention by intercutting footage of Juan lip synching Gieco's lyrics with Gieco lip synching excerpts of Juan's speech in the ESMA. The lyrics mix religious imagery (the chorus is "God wasn't there where I was born") with the *Grandmothers'* blood rhetoric ("I am the child of the blood [*Hijo de la sangre* = biological child] that guides my path.")

The event at the ESMA marks the start of Cabandié's political career. At the act, Juan met Alicia Kirchner, the president's sister who serves in Kirchner's cabinet as minister of Social Development. A month later, she called Juan to offer him a job working in the Ministry of Social Development in Youth Direction. In 2006, Cabandié was named federal coordinator of the Youth Advisory – National Direction of Youth under Alicia Kirchner. On September 16, 2006, they declared a National Youth Day to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of "Night of the Pencils," the day in which a group of young teenagers were disappeared by the dictatorship. In his speech, Cabandié identified his own and Kirchner's politics with that of the disappeared. The disappeared were "fighting for the same as us." He then told the crowd that Kirchner "asks us to be transgressive, to recover activism and become protagonists."[447]

Juan becomes a prominent supporter of the *Juventud Kirchnerista* (Kirchner Youth), Kirchner's youth faction. In 2007, Buenos Aires Mayoral candidate Daniel Filmus offered him to be a candidate for city legislator on the

[447] Ministerio de Desarollo, September, 19, 2006, "Los lápices escriben nuestra historia," http://www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar/prensa.asp?idprensa=553

Kirchner-affiliated *Frente para la Victoria* (Front for Victory) ticket. In accepting the offer, Juan stated: "The only way to transform reality is through organization, the legislative and executive branches, through politics."[448] Filmus, a professor of sociology and Minister of Education, was Kirchner's choice for Mayor. Days before the election, Filmus told Cabandié in a public event, "You represent the best of our youth. Your parents would be proud of you."[449] In selling himself as a candidate, Juan linked his politics to his restitution. "Knowing my identity helped me to deepen this ideological, social and political position."[450]

The primary occasions a rift between Kirchner's candidate and the sitting mayor Jorge Telerman, a progressive politician who formed an anti-Kirchner center-left block. Cabandié accused Telerman's block of being aligned with the right and argued that Filmus represents the only progressive choice. Telerman lost in the primary, resulting in a run-off between Filmus and Mauricio Macri, the center-right politician who had been courting Juan Carlos Blumberg's candidacy for provincial governor. Macri is from one of Argentina's wealthiest families, a businessman noted for being president of the country's most celebrated soccer club, Boca Juniors. Lingering hostilities between Filmus and Telerman damaged Filmus in the general elections. Macri won an easy victory in June 2007. His victory was seen as fueling the opposition in the countdown to the October 2007 general elections at the same time Kirchner announced plans to step aside in order to allow his wife to run. This move would allow him to run again in the future and was seen as an effort to create an enduring Kirchner dynasty. After

[448] Página/12, May 26, 2007.
[449] Página/12, June 22, 2007.
[450] Página/12, May 26, 2007.

winning, Macri, who opponents liken to Menem, indirectly criticized Kirchner's human rights policy. He announced, "There will be no more blaming the past – we're here to build the future."[451] Despite losing the election, Juan is still considered to have a promising political future.

The Struggle for the ESMA

A parallel can be drawn between the *Grandmothers'* struggle to recover kidnapped children of the disappeared and the struggle to recover the ESMA. Both are contested struggles framed around competing narrative accounts. These were seen in previous chapters of this thesis that address contentious restitutions and compulsory extractions of blood. To believe the *Grandmothers'* account of what happened (the kidnapping and theft of identity on the part of the appropriators who are by definition incapable of loving the children that they stole) is to believe in the necessity of restitution. Juan, unlike many others, had no conflict over his restitution. In his account, the most agonizing part for him was waiting for the official results of the genetic verification of his identity.

The history of the struggle over what to do with the ESMA is also the struggle between conflicting narratives. Much like Juan's appearance represented the triumph of the *Grandmothers*' account of the past, the turning over of the ESMA marked the triumph of the human rights movement's account of what happened in Argentina during the 1970s.

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[451] Bloomberg.com, "Kirchner's Argentina Electoral Losses Fuel Opposition," http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=aW3k2PK80UME&refer=latin_america

In January of 1998, Carlos Menem proposed demolishing the ESMA and erecting in its place a monument that would serve as “a symbol of national unity.” The proposal surprised the political opposition as well as the human rights movement who all rejected it outright. The timing of the announcement indicated the perceived intent of the proposal. It came at a key moment for the human rights struggle. The 20th anniversary of the coup in 1996 and the confessions of Adolfo Scilingo one year earlier had revitalized human rights in Argentina. Of particular importance was the addition of H.I.J.O.S to the constellation of human rights groups, marking the emergence of a new generation. The activities of H.I.J.O.S. (including their introduction of the *escrache* into the repertoire of human rights protest) helped to revitalize an ageing movement.

The activities of new human rights groups like H.I.J.O.S. and older groups like the *Mothers* and *Grandmothers* were instrumental in reopening legal investigations. Human rights lawyers and sympathetic judges were beginning to find the juridical means to pursue justice against military perpetrators that circumvented the amnesties and pardons. For example, at the time, a judicial inquiry into the systematic abduction of minors would lead to the arrests of Videla and Massera later in the year. At the same time, Judge Garzón in Spain was beginning to pursue international justice against Chilean and Argentine military leaders (Garzón would issue an arrest warrant for Pinochet in late 1998, followed by subsequent warrants for Argentine military perpetrators) (Bermudez and Gasparini 1999; Anguita 2001). Meanwhile, the center-left coalition FREPASO were attempting to annul the laws of *punto final* and due obedience in order to restart trials against military perpetrators. Menem’s proposal was viewed as a concerted effort to curtail this newfound momentum that was on the brink of

achieving tangible successes for the first time since the 1980s. Menem's intent was explicit. The "symbolic value" of the proposed monument was "national reconciliation" and was "based on the effort to leave antinomies behind and to take on the lessons of recent history."[452] In the words of Menem's general secretary, national reconciliation was considered "the objective of all Argentines"[453]

Menem offered the proposal as a compromise. The area would be opened to the public. Family members would be able to pay tribute to the disappeared there. Since this was what family members wanted, he believed that they would accept his proposal. Human rights organizations, however, were outraged. The Permanent Assembly of Human Rights called it an "act of insanity." Bonafini vowed that her *Mothers* would stop the demolition with their bodies, if necessary. The Founding Line *Mothers* deplored the proposal's "lack of sensitivity." Estela Carlotto rejected it but, at the same time, proposed a children's hospital or a shelter for abandoned children to be built in its place. Bonafini argued that it should be maintained exactly as it was to show what took place there. She proposed that the building "be open and with free access to everyone so that they can write on the walls what they think of this."[454] The government responded by accusing the center-left opposition and the human rights movement of wanting to "go backwards with old wounds."

Menem framed the proposal as one of pacification. He divided Argentines into two camps – the majority who wanted to leave the past behind and to "move

[452] Clarín, January 8, 1998.
[453] Clarín, January 9, 1998.
[454] Clarín, January 9, 1998.

on" and those – the human rights activists - who remained in the past and "reopen old wounds." His vision for the monument was one where the two sides would come together and put aside their old grievances. This was the *dos demonios* approach described earlier, one that postulated two opposing sides in a civil war. Putting aside old animosities was a prerequisite for national unity. This narrative, however, did not work because it required the acceptance of the human rights sector. They refused to accept it. Their intransigence against any form of reconciliation precluded Menem's offer. The history of human rights in Argentina is a history of obstinacy, a refusal to give in or to concede on any point. For example, whenever human rights activists are asked about forgiveness, the answer is invariably the same. They say that it is not up to them to forgive but the person who disappeared child. In the same way, the *Grandmothers* have been accused of obstinacy in refusing to make deals with military and police couples who have their kidnapped grandchildren. One of the larger problems with the issue of forgiveness is that it implies that the people who committed the acts have asked for it. No military perpetrators have ever asked forgiveness for their actions. They continue justifying their actions.

Human rights groups lobbied to stop Menem's plans for the ESMA. Federal Judge Adolfo Bagnasco finally suspended the plans. Bagnasco was investigating the systematic theft of babies at the time. He based his order to suspend the demolition on his ongoing investigation. He argued that demolishing the building could eliminate key evidence in the investigation. They also required the building to reconstruct what occurred there. Meanwhile, the political opposition proposed a "Museum of Nunca Más" modeled on the Holocaust museum in Auschwitz. By 2000, after de la Rúa succeeded Menem as President,

the Buenos Aires city legislators approved a bill demanding the national government to return the ESMA to the city. The municipality had ceded the land to the Navy in 1924 so they felt that they were justified in asking for it back. They announced their intention to transform the ESMA into a Museum of Memory to "protect and cultivate collective memory" of state terrorism. "It is necessary to preserve the places that constitute the paradigmatic testimony of criminal repressive action like the ESMA building."[455]

In the midst of the controversy resulting from Menem's proposal, an editorial written by historian Luis Alberto Romero epitomized the position of the human rights movement. Menem's plan was an attempt to "construct another past." The objective of creating a monument of national reconciliation was "to invent a memory of what happened." He then referred to the actions of the human rights movement who were in the process of constructing a different memory. One of the key objectives of the human rights movement had been to undermine the view that what took place was a civil war. Rather than a civil war, they struggled to make what happened understood as genocide. He described this memory construction as "a highly specialized work of intellectuals, politicians and citizens, this is to say those who want to imprint on the spontaneous memory of society a certain orientation tied to values that they have chosen." He then pointed out that those who had supported the dictatorship's actions in the past were the same ones who were trying to forget about what happened in the present. The ESMA could not be transformed into a symbol of national

[455] Clarín, May 21, 2000.

reconciliation because no such thing ever existed. They were trying to impose a memory of the past that had no empirical basis in reality.[456]

Romero's focus on memory as constructed rather than "spontaneous" is important. When human rights groups speak of memory, they speak in terms of its construction. Memory is goal directed – it requires work. For that reason, references to memory in Argentina within the human rights movement are omnipresent. The Park of Memory is a still unfinished sculpture garden in memory of the disappeared that borders the muddy shores of the River Plate. There is a government sponsored Commission of Memory, a Center for the Study of Memory, organizations named Open Memory, Good Memory, Active Memory, and the aforementioned Museum of Memory in the works.

The invocation of memory automatically opens up a space for its contestation. Social scientists refer to this space of contestation as the "politics of memory." The human rights movement embraced memory as a key concept. Why memory? As I have already suggested, memory, as opposed to its cousin history, is seen as open, collective, spontaneous, organic, and shared. In this view, memory is active, conscious, subject-based, and goal-directed. Memory is also seen as belonging to the people while history belongs to those in positions of power. Since history represents what is officially canonized, memory represents its counter-discourse. Memory is thus seen as a force of resistance against the "official history." In Argentina, the official history was that of "the two demons." The memory was that of genocide.

Memory as a discourse has been the provenance of human rights.

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[456] Clarín, January 13, 1998.

However, during the debates over the ESMA, the right also begins using the concept. However, instead of seeing memory as being constructed, they argue for memory in terms of a societal whole. The memory of the human rights movement, they argue, is a partial memory. Consequently, the proposal for a Museum of Memory in the ESMA represented a "selective," "partial," or "half" memory of what occurred during the 1970s because it focuses exclusively on state terrorism while ignoring the "terrorism of the left." The discourse of "whole versus selective memory" is used exclusively to argue for the "theory of the two demons."

Human rights advocates criticized this usage. For example, at a human rights conference I attended sponsored by the *Grandmothers*, one talk was by a communications graduate student who was also a member of H.I.J.O.S. His talk analyzed debates in the media about the transfer of the ESMA. He attacked the right for "co-opting" memory. His implied argument was that memory was a concept that belonged to human rights groups. He was visibly upset that memory had been cynically "appropriated" by those who had previously no investment in the concept. That defenders of the dictatorship would even speak of memory was objectionable.

In addition to being a key term of human rights, memory is also an academic concept. The memory discourse of human rights is inseparable from memory as an academic object. The production of academic work about memory comprises an important part of Argentine social science. In the 1990s, the SSRC (Social Science Research Council) of the US launched a project called Memories of Repression with the support of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. The SSRC fund had three interrelated objectives all around the advancement of

knowledge about collective memory. The first was to generate theoretical and empirical knowledge about memory. The second was to promote the development of researchers trained in such issues and the third was to subsequently create a network of public intellectuals in the region who worked on issues of social memory. They eventually published a ten volume set of works that examined numerous issues around memory: commemorations (Jelin 2002), monuments and places (Jelin & Langland 2003), archives (da Silva Catela & Jelin 2002), role of the media (Feld 2002), local struggles (del Pino & Jelin 2003) roles of institutions and actors, how young people made sense of the past, etc.

"We are people with memory," is a sentence often repeated by human rights activists. I heard it numerous times during the course of my fieldwork. "To speak about memory is to speak about human rights," a novelist said at a talk marking the 20th anniversary of CONADEP's *Nunca Más.* The link between memory and human rights has its origins after the dictatorship, in particular with the testimonies of family members and survivors before CONADEP and the Trial of the *Juntas.* However, the movement towards what can be called a "culture of memory" was linked to the emergence of memory as a form of resistance against impunity. In the late 1980s, when the amnesty laws exempted prosecutions and Menem eventually pardoned those who were convicted, human rights activists saw a long struggle in front of them. Around the same time, Klaus Barbie was arrested in France for his role in the deaths of 4,000 people during World War II. Human rights activists drew a powerful lesson from his trial. His trial began months after Alfonsín passed the amnesty laws. If Barbie could be arrested, stand trial and eventually be convicted for his role in war crimes committed four decades earlier, it gave human rights groups in Argentina hope. As long as

memory of the events of the dictatorship remained “active,” there was hope that justice, although curtailed in the present, could be pursued in the future. Memory was inextricably linked to demands for justice. At the beginning of the 1980s, references to memory are more literal. They refer to the memories of the survivors and ex-disappeared in testifying about events that occurred years earlier. By the late 1980s with the emergence of a “culture of memory,” the predominant carriers of memory are family members. They become the embodiments of memories of what occurred during the dictatorship.

The act in the ESMA opened a debate about what memories should be included in the future Museum of Memory. I attended several public conferences devoted to this topic. Memory needs to be broad and inconclusive, everyone concurred. However, at the same time, they agreed that the accounts of military perpetrators justifying their actions should not be permitted in the museum. Memory is always selective. The future Museum of Memory in the ESMA represents the institutionalization of the human rights narrative of the dictatorship. The recent political successes of the human rights movement have been in part tied to Kirchner’s power. These successes are not irreversible. However, if memory emerged as a counter-discourse – a discourse of resistance in response to a lack of justice – a whole set of questions are raised when that discourse becomes *la historia official* (the official history) and the possibility of justice reemerges.

As of the present moment, 88 children of the disappeared have been recovered out of an estimated five hundred. The last one was located in July 2007. This number is certain to change. More will appear in the future but the majority will not. In 2007, Ana di Lonardo, the former director of the National

Genetic Data Bank, claimed that the Bank is incomplete and only has sufficient genetic information to locate only 100 more grandchildren.[457] The rest of the family profiles are either absent or incomplete. This ensures that the search for the kidnapped children of the disappeared will continue in the future.

[457] Clarín, March 23, 2007

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