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## Remembering in Spite of All: The Construction of Collective Memory of State Terrorism in Mexico, Argentina, and Chile

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REMEMBERING IN SPITE OF ALL: THE CONSTRUCTION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY  
OF STATE TERRORISM IN MEXICO, ARGENTINA, AND CHILE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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in

The Interdisciplinary Program in Comparative Literature

by

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Para mi hermano Edel

Para mis hijas Valentina y Natalia

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of the formation of collective memory of State violence in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. By comparing these three cases, I pursue to discern how citizens can challenge the silence and amnesia that the groups in power want to impose on society after a period of State terrorism.

In order to examine the process of formation of collective memory, this dissertation highlights two important figures from which citizens have been able to build counter-hegemonic narratives, that is, *los exiliados* and *los desaparecidos*. I will highlight how they become lenses through which citizens can construct the memory of State repression. They become the evidence of the repression that the State wants to conceal, and have the potential of becoming important symbolic figures, and sources of knowledge, from which society can challenge silence and oblivion about State terrorism.

The unfolding of the objectives and arguments of this dissertation are based on the analysis of literary texts from Argentina, Chile, and Mexico; and on photography of Argentinian and Mexican photographers. I draw on performance studies, anthropological approaches to ritual, and literary criticism to examine how citizens create counter-hegemonic narratives of State repression, and how they incorporate them in the collective memory of their societies.

## INTRODUCTION

A common misconception affirms that if societies know their history, they will not repeat past mistakes. Although it is true that knowing about historical events can better inform citizen's decisions for the future, having knowledge of the past does not necessarily prevent societies from creating similar circumstances that would lead them to comparable outcomes. Moreover, the assumption that by simply remembering their past, societies make better decisions for the upcoming generations, does not take into account the complex, and permanent struggles of different groups within societies to construct narratives about their past. The past is not a static account that subjects in society can readily access because of the mere fact that these events have transpired. Groups in positions of power ensure the construction of narratives of past events that favor their current agendas, while minority groups have to engage in a constant tussle to give voice to their own discourses.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of the formation of collective memory of State terrorism in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. By comparing these three cases, I attempt to discern how citizens can challenge the silence and amnesia that the groups in power want to impose on society after a period of State terrorism. In spite of the terror imposed by the State, citizens from those countries have been able, to different extents, to construct counter-hegemonic narratives that dispute the official discourse of past events. The State, by different means, attempts to obstruct the remembrance of past events that are contrary to its current vested interests. Paradoxically, in its efforts to annihilate the political opposition, the State creates its own weaknesses, its own fissures, from which groups in society are able to interpellate the State, and create a collective awareness and remembrance of State crimes.



Remembering, and actively discussing the period of State terrorism that took place in Latin America, mainly during the 1970's and 1980's, is as crucial today as it was during that time. State violence in Latin America has not ceased. In fact, practices of State terrorism such as torture, enforced-disappearances, and extra judicial killings, used during the second half of the twentieth century, are still practiced today, and have even become institutionalized. In Mexico, violence has worsened since the administration of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), launched the war on drugs, which caused thousands of murders, and enforced-disappearances, to use the designation used by the United Nations. According to Amnesty International, between 2006 and 2012, 26,000 people were reported missing in Mexico. The Mexican State refuses to take responsibility for the increase in violence, attributing the scale of crimes to confrontations between drug cartels. Nonetheless, relatives, and human rights associations, declare that State officials take an active role in the crimes being committed, and that the State is responsible for thousands of enforced-disappearances in Mexico.

In order to examine the process of formation of collective memory, this dissertation highlights two important figures from which citizens have been able to build counter-hegemonic narratives, that is, *los exiliados* and *los desaparecidos*. I will highlight how they become lenses through which citizens can construct the memory of State repression. They become the evidence of the repression that the State wants to conceal, and have the potential of becoming important symbolic figures, and sources of knowledge, from which society can challenge silence and oblivion about State terrorism.

In this dissertation, I will use indistinctively the term *exiliados*, in Spanish, or exiles, in English, because the term in Spanish has not yet acquired a political connotation, as in the case of *los desaparecidos*. In regards to the citizens who were abducted by State officials, illegally

detained, and whose existence was effaced, I will use the Spanish terms *detenidos-desaparecidos*, or *desaparecidos*, with or without the definite article *los*. In English, there is not a suitable term that clearly expresses the characteristics of the crime. The United Nations, and Amnesty International use the term “enforced disappearance” to name this State crime that is perpetrated globally. In some instances, I will also use the term “enforced disappearance.”

In Latin America, the term *desaparecidos* has evolved into a political figure from which citizens have been able to interpellate the State. The term *desaparecido*, and more accurately the term *detenido-desaparecido*, describes the State’s systematic strategy to eliminate political opponents. This involves state officials illegally detaining, or abducting, citizens. These abductees are then brought to concentration camps, or illegal detention centers, and finally, they would be abducted and all traces of their existence would disappear. Family members had no information of their whereabouts, and in most cases, they never found them, even though in many State officials had arrested them in their presence.

*El exiliado*, the exiled one, and *los desaparecidos*, are key to maintaining the memory of State repression, as they can have become, especially *los desaparecidos*, political and symbolic figures to remind society constantly of the past that wants to be denied or undermined by the State. These figures have become *lieux de mémoire*, to borrow Pierre Nora’s term (1984), from which the collective memory of political repression can be created, maintained, and more importantly, perpetuated in a way that is meaningful, not only for the victims and for their families, but also for those who did not experience political oppression and repression personally.

Constructing the collective memory of State repression based on two figures considered as victims could be counterproductive, because it may obstruct the understanding of the complex conditions in which State repression is possible. Nonetheless, as Hugo Vezzetti asserts in *Sobre*

*violencia revolucionaria: memoria y olvidos* (2009), the point of view of the victims, and more specifically the voice of their families, was crucial to challenge the silence and the official narratives. However, in cases such as the Argentinian, dissident narratives about State repression continue to evolve. Discourses that are more recent are based on different experiences of State repression, and incorporate the notion of social responsibility, to try to understand how State terror was possible.

### **Historical Background**

During the 1970's and 1980's, Chile and Argentina, as well as other countries in South America, such as Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, underwent the horrors of military repression. Mexicans did not live under a dictatorship *per se* because the political leaders were always elected by so-called democratic elections; however, the Mexican State made use of the same strategies as the military Juntas in South America to suppress political opposition.

Prior to the implementation of terror, and counter-revolutionary tactics in the Americas to annihilate political dissidents, the French army developed these methods during the Indochina war (1945-1954) and the Algerian War (1954-1962). They tested and perfected techniques of torture to interrogate detainees, and introduced a new weapon: enforced-disappearances. The counter-revolutionary techniques were put in place to fight a supposedly internal enemy, who could be any person with ideas contrary to the status-quo.

France played a major role in the production of a state of terror in South America. In "Producing and Exporting State Terror: The Case of Argentina" (2005), Ariel C. Armony explains that even though Argentine officers were trained at the SOA in counterinsurgency, the French school of thought, developed during the Indochina war (1945-1954) and the Algerian War (1954-1962), "had a critical impact in shaping the Argentine version of the National Security Doctrine"

(312). Armony explains that this school of thought emphasized “an ideological, global approach to the phenomenon of insurgency,” and justified torture as a “legitimate military device.” Argentine officials made use of French expertise in inflicting terror in society, but they also incorporated counterinsurgency techniques used in the Vietnam War by the U.S. to fight “subversion” (312-313).

In the documentary *Escadrons de la mort, l'école française* (2003) Marie-Monique Robin,<sup>1</sup> also documents how French veterans from the Indochina and the Algerian war, provided the necessary ideological and technical training to officials in South America, especially to Argentinians, to torture, kill, and abduct their own citizens. The documentary features interviews where French veterans openly discuss the theory of counter-revolutionary warfare, and the techniques of torture, and abduction that they developed, especially in Algeria, to fight a new kind of “war” against civilian “subversion.” In Robin’s documentary, Chilean and Argentinian officials explicitly admit that they sought the ideological and technical training of French officials to fight the new type of war against “subversion.” French officials even visited Argentina to provide ideological training (Armony 312).

From the French experience, the United States learned how to train military officials, and put the counter-revolutionary tactics to work in Vietnam. These tactics were taught to officials from most Latin American countries in the School of the Americas (SOA), to fight the alleged advance of communism (Salgado Bustillos 13-14). In *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (2004), Lesley Gill explains that since the

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<sup>1</sup> Marie-Monique Robin is a French journalist who has received over 20 awards around the world for her investigative documentaries, among them she received the renowned “Prix Albert Londres”, equivalent to the French Pulitzer for her documentary *Voleurs d'yeux* about organ theft. For her film *Escadrons de la mort, l'école française* Robin received the Laurier du Sénat (The Senate Laureate, The Award for the Best Political Documentary), The Best Investigative Documentary Award by FIGRA (Festival International du Grand Reportage d'Actualité), The Award of Merit from the Latin American Studies Association (LASA/United States), and The Critics' Award at Cairo's Cinema Festival. <http://www.responsibletechnology.org/fraud/Bio-Marie-MoniqueRobinWAM>

nineteenth century the United States has attempted to become an imperial power. To fulfill this goal the United States has assembled the tools of repression that this enterprise requires (4-5). The School of the Americas has served this purpose in Latin America. Since 1946 the SOA has trained over sixty thousand soldiers in combat-related skills, and counterinsurgency doctrine (6).

The counter-revolutionary tactics would be later known as “dirty war.” In *Narrativas de la Guerra Sucia in Argentina* Jorgelina Corbatta explains that Argentinian State officials used the term to refer to the tactics that allegedly “terrorists” or “guerrilla” groups put in practice to fight the State, such as bombings, killings, and kidnappings, such as those used by group Montoneros. This “guerrilla” group emerged from the catholic conservative wing (the right), but in the 1970’s they identified with the left wing of the Peronista movement, defending loyalty to the motherland and the nation, social justice, and the antiimperialist fight. Its members were educated and well-off. By 1965 there were five identified “terrorist” groups in Argentina: Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR) Las Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (FAP), las Fuerzas Armadas de la Liberación (FAL), los Montoneros, and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo. However, at the onset of the last dictatorship in Argentina, their activities had already decreased significantly (Corbatta 17).

Family members of the victims of State violence began using the term to refer to the terror and repressive methods the military Junta used to win the so-called “war” (Corbatta). Nonetheless, they quickly pointed out that no such “war” ever took place, but an extermination campaign to eliminate real, perceived, or potential political opponents. In accordance, Elizabeth Maier, in *Las madres de los desaparecidos: ¿un nuevo mito materno en América Latina?* (2001), explains that in countries like Argentina, the term is widely rejected because it supposes an armed struggle between two armed forces, but it obscures the fact that the State manufactured the idea of an

internal “war” to murder its ideological opponents. The “dirty wars” tactics perpetrated by State officials throughout Latin America resulted in 120, 000 *desaparecidos*, hundreds of thousands of deaths, tortured, mutilated, and psychologically affected. More disturbingly, the “dirty war” gave rise to the introduction of terror in many Latin American countries. Thus, instead of the expression “dirty war,” the terms Terrorist State or State Terrorism to refer to the State tactics of repression and annihilation are preferred (Maier 162). However, the term has extended throughout Latin America, including Mexico, to indicate the crimes committed by State officials, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, forced exile, and enforced disappearances.

In this dissertation, I will use State terrorism or terrorist State to refer to the “dirty war” period for what it was: an extermination campaign put into operation by the State to annihilate political opposition.

### **State Terror to Create a New Social Order**

During this period, repression and violence were perpetrated daily to gain control over society and destroy political opponents. In “Victims of Fear: The Social Psychology of Repression” (1992) Salimovich Lira, and Eugenia Weinstein explain that the purpose of political repression is to destroy subjects as political beings, and to annihilate the opponents of the regime, to dominate gradually the entire population (74-76). In order to gain control over society, fear was the key element to achieve social inactivity. As Salimovich et al. explain: “such domination is accomplished as people internalize life threats and therefore engage in a self-regulatory process of learning socially approved behavior” (76).

Society in general lived paralyzed by fear. In “Fear and Military Regimes: An Overview” (1992) Manuel Antonio Garretón explains that the Southern Cone regimes were institutionalized systems that deliberately produced and spread fear (23). According to Garretón, the State inflicted

fear on its citizens through direct physical repression, threats, propaganda, and the omnipresent power of the State. However, as Garretón states, fear of the unknown was also crucial. Misinformation and the absence of clear rules about the “war” provoked many to fear constantly for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Under the so-called “war” against “subversion,” anyone could be subjected to repression. In *Poder y desaparición: los campos de concentración en Argentina* (1998), Pilar Calveiro argues that abducting citizens was one of the most effective ways to spread fear. The military Junta denied any involvement in the abductions and the cases of missing people; however, everybody suspected what was really happening. In Argentina, Calveiro explains, abductions were *secretos a voces* [public secrets]; nobody knew the specific reasons as to why people had gone missing, but everybody knew that those who *andaban en algo* [must have done something wrong] were taken and never seen again (78).

In Argentina, the existence of concentration camps was also a key element to disseminate fear. In *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the “Dirty War”* (1993), Martin Edwin Andersen explains that concentration camps were also a well-known secret. According to Andersen, people heard rumors about concentration camps and mass executions, but since no military regime had previously committed such slaughter, it was too hard to believe that the State could be killing their own citizens, especially since in Argentina the military Junta maintained strong ties with the Catholic Church (215). Calveiro argues that this denial of a known reality was very effective in the dissemination of fear in Argentina. Complete ignorance would only have produced passivity, and would have never caused the paralysis of society (147). The fear of the unknown was crippling because, as Salimovich and her collaborators explain, only what we partially know can be terrorizing and paralyzing. The actual horrors were never actually seen

or publicly observed; it was all rumors. The fantasy of horror, they explain, functioned as internalized self-repression and control of subjects, and society at large (76).

Fear of the unknown was permanent. However, the State also used open demonstrations of power to disseminate fear. For instance, Andersen describes that in Argentina heavily armed soldiers often patrolled quiet neighborhoods for no evident reason, asking for documents and making random arrests (214). Salimovich et al. explain that in Chile police regularly executed house searches, and arrested people in their homes, in front of their families, in the streets, at work, or during social activities; people knew that they were being followed and watched constantly, and feared that they could be arrested anywhere (76-77).

The objective of spreading fear in society was not merely to remain in power. The main purpose was to impose a new social order. Garretón argues that the goal of the military regimes in the Southern Cone was to “recreate the relations between the state and civil society in order to institute a nonredistributive, nonparticipatory brand of capitalism, and then to reinsert their respective economies into the world system” (16). Thus, as Garretón argues, the military regimes in South America were a “distinct phase of the development of capitalism” (15). In “Estragos de la experiencia y cuerpos re(in)sistentes: notas sobre narrativa argentina” (2003), Laura Martins, in accordance with Willie Thayer, also affirms that the dictatorships and authoritarian regimes were the transition that facilitated the social conditions to end the welfare state and impose the *neoliberal state*. During this process, the United States played a major role. Chile is perhaps the best-documented case of US intervention in the Southern Cone regimes, and the most significant because it was the first country to adopt the neoliberal policies endorsed by the United States.

In September of 1973, a military Junta overthrew Salvador Allende; the first socialist elected to the presidency by democratic elections in 1970. A large sector of the Chilean society



supported and encouraged the coup; however, the United States also intervened. In their analysis of the events that led to the coup d'état, some scholars emphasize the role of local conditions, while others highlight the intervention of external groups. In *The Capitalist Revolution in Latin America* (1997), Paul Craig Roberts and Karen Lafollete Araujo take into account the local conditions that favored the coup. They argue that the majority of Chileans wanted their military to take action to overthrow Allende. According to Roberts and Araujo, what finally convinced the Chilean military to take action was a public demonstration by Chilean women demanding them to save the nation (35). On the opposite end of the spectrum, authors such as Lubna Z. Qureshi in *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (2009) stress the United States intervention in Chilean politics, suggesting that if the U. S. had not interfered, the coup would probably have not taken place.

In reality, it was a combination of both. In *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (2011), Tanya Harmer argues that Chilean society was severely divided. Allende had won the presidential election by a slight margin; thus, a vast section of the population was not convinced that Chile's turn to socialism was the best option for them. Different sectors in Chile wanted another type of society, and they sought out external supporters (145-146). In *The Nixon Administration and the Death of Allende's Chile: A Case of Assisted Suicide* (2005), Jonathan Haslam argues that Salvador Allende was overthrown due to growing internal conflicts but also thanks to the support of the United States. Chile was particularly threatening to U.S. interests in the hemisphere. First, Allende's program of nationalization of companies and natural resources would deprive the United States of its investments in Chile. Second, the United States feared that Chile could become a leader of opposition to U.S. interests in the region, and an entry point for

the expansion of the Soviet and the Cuban presence in the continent, since both countries sympathized with Allende's socialist program (54-60).

The intervention of the United States in Chile was not limited to the coup. They had been active in preventing the election of a socialist candidate long before Salvador Allende was elected in 1970. In *Latin America and the United States: A Documented History* (2011) Robert H. Holden and Eric Zolov explain that the concealed involvement of the United States in Chilean politics, between 1963 and 1973, was extensive and continuous. For instance, the Central Intelligence Agency had spent three million dollars to influence the outcome of the 1964 Chilean presidential elections, and eight million were spent between 1970 and the military coup in September 1973 (280). According to Holden and Zolov, during the 1964 campaign the CIA administered money directly to the Christian Democratic Party and private citizen's groups more attune to U.S. interests. In addition to direct investment, the CIA organized an intensive anticommunist campaign in Chile (280).

Once Allende took power, U.S. intervention in Chilean politics, and economy, continued. The Chilean economy had severely deteriorated not long after Allende's administration had begun, and the United States deliberately took advantage of the crisis to fuel existing internal political and economic problems. According to Harmer, during the first year of Allende's administration social conditions had improved. Significant progress had been made in redistributing wealth in Chile; employment had grown and wages had increased. However, Allende's government faced the problem of sustaining such progress due to severe financial difficulties, and as early as the second year *la vía chilena* to socialism had become a progressively fragile model (145). Haslam sustains that Allende's economic reforms failed due, in large part, to Allende's poor understanding of the market, resulting in an economic crisis that boosted political opposition. Haslam argues that the

United States did not create the economic problem in Chile during Salvador Allende's administration, but that the United States certainly took advantage of the situation, and deliberately made every effort possible to destabilize the Chilean economy even further by cutting all economic assistance, funding anti-Allende groups to finance strikes, weakening the Chilean economy to make a bad situation even worse (128-149). In *Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America* (1995), Duncan Green also argues that Washington put in practice a destabilization program and other forms of sabotage to overthrow Salvador Allende (25). As Haslam states, international capital was not about to ignore "the attack on private enterprise and investment" in Chile, and the United States, "as the directing hand in world financial institutions" would not simply remain passive and allow the Chilean market to close (230).

After the coup d'état against Salvador Allende, the beginning of the neoliberal experimentation in the Americas was about to start. To begin the social transformation in Chile during the 1970s, David Harvey explains in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) that the first thing to be done after the coup was to negotiate loans with the International Monetary Fund and open nationalized assets to private and unregulated investments. Natural resources were privatized, except for copper, Chile's most important primary resource. Education, social security, and health care were privatized as well. According to Roberts and Araujo, Chile established a free market economy based on private property, so much that "even Margaret Thatcher's privatizations in Britain were small-scale in comparison" (35).

According to Harvey, the implementation of neoliberal policies in Chile was an experiment cautiously planned by the United States in order to test the neoliberal theory. Green argues that the first steps to implement neoliberalism in Chile took place almost 20 years before the coup d'état against Salvador Allende. According to Green, in 1950's the Department of Economics of the

University of Chicago set up a scholarship system to educate Chilean post-graduate students aligned with the ideas of economists Milton Friedman and Friedrich Von Hayek. Consequently, between 1956 and 1961, at least 150 Chilean students received US-government sponsored fellowships to study economics at the University of Chicago. Those students, known as the “Chicago Boys,” returned to Chile and became the intellectual force for the implementation of neo-liberal ideas under the Pinochet regime (24-25). Paul Roberts and Karen LaFollete Araujo acknowledge, in *The Capitalist Revolution in Latin America* (1997), that Chile began its reforms ahead of everybody else, without any role model. Thus, Chile became “the textbook case” for other countries who wanted “to copy the best of the Chilean experience and avoid the pitfalls” (37). One of those countries was the United States, which, according to Harvey, had gained very useful insight from the Chilean experiment to develop a neoliberal state in the U.S. in the 1980s (2005, 15).

In the 1980s and 1990s the so-called “democratic era” in Latin America began. In South America, Argentina held elections in 1983, electing Raúl Alfonsín as their new president. In 1990 Patricio Aylwin was elected president of Chile when Pinochet stepped down. Mexico is a peculiar case because since 1915, when the revolutionaries took down the dictator Porfirio Díaz, Mexico has supposedly lived under a democratic political system. However, ever since Porfirio Díaz was overthrown, the official party *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), allegedly founded to fulfill the ideals of the revolution, seized power in 1929 and maintained it for 71 consecutive years. While the PRI ruled, citizens knew that the president always chose his successor. The unofficial selection of the next president was known as *el dedazo* (the finger pointing). Thus, once the president had appointed the party’s nominee, it was understood that the PRI candidate was going to be the next president. It was not until the year 2000 that a different political party won the

presidential elections, and the country initiated what is known as “*la transición democrática*” (transition to democracy).

The families of *los desaparecidos*, incarcerated, tortured and murdered during periods of State terrorism, viewed the so-called “democratic era” with hope, and as the possibility of justice. However, justice was not the central concern of the presidents of “*la transición democrática*,” as their main agenda was to consolidate the transition to the new market economy. According to Green, in the 1990s Latin American governments sold hundreds of state-owned enterprises. Among them, Argentina and Mexico were the most intense privatizers, selling 173 state companies between 1989 and 1992. In the early 1990s Mexico’s privatizations surpassed by far the number of privatizations made in Chile in the 1970s. Carlos Menem in Argentina tried to privatize almost all state companies between 1990 and 1993 (Green 72-74).

Allegedly, the shift to a more open global market in Latin America would boost the economy by controlling inflation, generating employment, and economic growth. According to Mark Skousen in *Vienna & Chicago: Friend or Foes: A Tale of two Schools of Free-Market Economics* (2005), in Chile, the economic reforms, such as cutting government spending, denationalization, tax reforms, control of money supply, expanded trade, and privatization of social security, were a success. According to this scholar, Chile recovered from the economic crisis and achieved “an economic miracle of high economic growth, low inflation, and a booming export market,” becoming the new economic model for Latin America (79-81). However, according to Harvey, by 1982 Chile’s short progress was going downhill as the country was drowning in debt.

The adoption of neoliberal policies in Latin America has been beneficial to the economy at the macro-economic level. According to Green, there has been economic growth and, in his opinion, lowering and getting inflation under control has been the “the single greatest

achievement” of neoliberalism” (201). In “The Neoliberal Turn in Latin America: The Cycle of Ideas and the Search for an Alternative” (2007), Margheritis and Pereira explain that the positive outcomes of neoliberal reforms in Latin America have brought inflation down, attracted new foreign investment, and economic growth in the early 1990s. However, those reforms, they argue, have had an “uneven impact across and within social sectors, and since 1997 growth [...] slowed and new investment [...] declined” (25).

According to Green, neoliberal reforms improved the macro-economy; however, he affirms, the macro-economic variables pay little attention to income distribution, quality of life, and job security. Furthermore, according to Harvey in “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction” (2007), neoliberalism has failed to come close, let alone meet, the growth rates of the golden years of Keynesianism in the 1960s. In contrast with neoliberal policies, the Keynesian model is characterized by opposing the “free market;” it is controlled capitalism by the State. The Keynesian model even called for state ownership of some crucial national enterprises such as energy companies (Steger et al. 6). In “Neoliberalism, Democracy and Economic Policy in Latin America” (2005), Alfredo Saad-Filho et al. affirm that neoliberal reforms have only brought short-term macroeconomic stability and growth in Argentina. They also argue that even if neoliberal reforms have addressed high inflation, they have been unable to solve the concentration of income and wealth generated during the period when the Keynesian model prevailed, and has even exacerbated it. According to Harvey, neoliberalism has been successful in channeling wealth from poor to rich classes, and from subordinate to rich countries (2007, 22). In Latin America, by 1993, 60 million more people had gone below the poverty line (Green 100). In “Chile Between Neoliberalism and Equitable Growth” (2005), Ricardo Ffrench-Davis, a Chilean scholar, argues that unequal income distribution has been a major issue, and it is very evident in Chile. When he

published the book in 2007 poverty and inequality of opportunities were a fact for one in every five Chileans (Ffrench-Davis 100).

Neoliberal reforms have not created sufficient quality jobs (Saad-Filho et al 30). In fact, quality of life has deteriorated considerably for millions of people. According to Green, deterioration in the quality of life has been material as well as psychological. Millions of people experience high levels of anxiety because the neoliberal reforms have mainly produced temporary, part-time, and informal-sector jobs in Latin America; yet, state officials from Mexico and Argentina still argue that “labour deregulations” will create jobs, reduce poverty and generate economic growth (Green 203). The concentration of wealth has been so extreme that Harvey (2005) argues that the neoliberal policies were actually put in practice to continue the accumulation of capital to benefit the rich. According to Green, only a small élite of the Latin American population has benefited from the global market economy; thus, in their eyes it has been a success. However, for the vast majority, in the eyes of the poor, it has been a calamity (Green 200). The richer became richer, and only a small elite in Latin America gained economic power. Thus, as Susan George, an important critic of the World Bank, states in *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (1994), development under neoliberalism has not failed, because if its purpose was to integrate the upper classes into the global market economy, that has been brilliantly accomplished (147).

### **Approaches to Collective Memory**

Several scholars have contributed to the understanding of the creation and transmission of collective memory. Three salient specialists are Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Connerton and Pierre Nora. Maurice Halbwachs was the first scholar to argue that memory is always formed and maintained through social networks; even personal and private memories. According to

Halbwachs, the collective context is essential in keeping the memory active in the present; that is, the memory of a person can only be maintained in a group. When a person no longer frequents or belongs to the group that reminds him of certain memories, those memories will soon start to fade. Halbwachs clarifies that sharing a memory with a group does not necessarily mean that everybody has experienced the same event in the same manner; it means that the memories of the other members of the group support our own recollections. In this sense, Halbwachs explains, the duration of a memory and its significance, is to a great extent, limited to the duration of the group with whom we share those memories. Thus, to forget a part of our life is to lose contact with the people with whom we share certain memories.

In *How Societies Remember* (1989), Paul Connerton sets out to advance Halbwachs' understanding of how societies create and maintain their collective memory. Connerton agrees that the collective context is crucial to the permanence of the subjects' memory. However, Connerton is more concerned with the transmission of memory from generation to generation than with the formation of collective memory. Connerton argues that commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices are some of the most important *acts of transfer*, as he has termed them, that make remembering in common possible (39-40). Connerton identifies three kinds of memory, personal memory, which is based on our own experiences; cognitive memory, which is our capacity to pass on certain kinds of knowledge; and habit-memory, which is our ability to reproduce a certain performance. For Connerton, the habit-memory is the most important of the three because, according to him, performances make possible communication among groups. Performances carry the memory of the group to which we belong, because it is mainly through them that we are able to transfer our collective memories from generation to generation. Connerton argues that the study of performances and bodily practices "leads us to see that images of the past and recollected



knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances” (40). Both, bodily practices and commemorative events, are ritualized and become repetitive bodily acts of transfer by which we are reminded of our past.

Connerton’s approach is important to the purposes of this dissertation because it emphasizes the significance of the symbolic aspects of remembering, and the importance of ritualized performances in the transmission of a collective memory. Nonetheless, Connerton does not explain how it is possible to begin the process of formation of the collective memory of State repression. Post-dictatorship is a peculiar time in history because the vast majority of the population is eager to forget, and do not want to speak about what happened in the past openly. In “Social Processes and Collective Memory: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Remembering Political Events” (1997), Dario Páez et al., explain that in Chile after the dictatorship, forgetting was one of the main processes found in collective memory. According to Páez and collaborators, the memories of traumatic political events are “silent memories,” usually repressed, which are voluntarily forgotten and usually divide a society. Thus, in the remembering and forgetting dynamics of creating a collective memory, there is a strong *conspiracy of silence* (147-8), that needs to be broken to give way to the will of remembering.

Another leading scholar on collective memory is the French historian Pierre Nora. Nora is interested in examining what makes possible the creation and permanence of the collective French consciousness. In *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984), Nora asserts that rapid change is characteristic of the modern world. According to Nora, the way in which a group used to imagine its future traditionally determined what they needed to remember about the past to prepare for the future; and this in turn gave meaning to the present, which was a simply link between the two. However, in this time of continuous change, there is no unity of historical time. The line that traditionally

bounded the present to the future and to the past is no longer there. Nora argues that rapid change distances us more quickly from the past. Thus, as a consequence of rapid change, Nora affirms, it has become more crucial to remember what our descendants will need to know about ourselves, because the past nurtures our identity.

Hence, as Nora rightly points out, there is no spontaneous memory. As Nora explains, we deliberately have to create archives, remember anniversaries, organize celebrations, and create monuments. Nora calls these numerous ways of creating a liaison with the past *les lieux de mémoire*. A *lieu de mémoire* does not necessarily have to be a physical site or a material object; it can also be an intangible site such as symbolic element. Héctor Schmucler, an Argentinian scholar, affirms in “Las exigencias de la memoria” (2000) that memory is an act of will. Without that will, we will never transmit our social and political past to other generations. Without that will to remember, memory stops and gives way to oblivion, which Schmucler affirms, is nothing else than the interruption of the will to remember (5).

In his analysis of collective memory, Nora also underlines the differences between memory and history. The main difference proposed by Nora is that memory is social and is current, in opposition to history, which, according to him, is just the way in which modern societies organize the past. Memory is kept by living societies; not in archives. Memory is in constant evolution, open to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to lethargy and in need of periodic revival. History, in contrast, is the reconstruction of what no longer is, which is always problematic and incomplete. Memory is an ever-current phenomenon, a link that attaches us to the everlasting present. History, on the contrary, is an interpretation of the past that is not carried on to the present.

Most importantly, as Nora affirms, memory is effective and magical because it only accommodates those events that fit it well (Nora 1989, 8).

The approaches to the creation and perpetuity of the collective memory elaborated by Halbwachs, Connerton and Nora are illuminating; however, they do not analyze the possibilities for the construction of a shared memory after a society has lived a period of severe repression and political persecution, such as the State terrorism experienced in Mexico, Argentina, Chile. According to Páez and his collaborators, recent work on collective memory of political events has advanced in three directions. The first one serves sociologists and historians to describe “how the social past has been constructed or re-appropriated in order to serve current social attitudes and needs [...]” (148). The second approach focuses on the factors that “allow certain social events to be either retained or lost as part of the collective memory” (148). And finally, the third line of research is interested in “those factors that lead negative and repressed, not commemorated or institutionally denied, events to be retained as an important aspect of the collective memory” (149).

My dissertation focuses on the third line of research on collective memory. My interest is to inquiry how the creation of collective memory is possible after a period of dictatorship and severe State repression, when denial and “silent memories” (Páez et al) are the norm. With the beginning of “*la transición democrática*” in Latin America, justice was an agenda only for the ones who had suffered the horrors of the dictatorships personally. Politicians wanted to move forward and start new beginnings, as members of the old regimes were still holding positions of power in the new “democratic” societies. Furthermore, different segments of the civil society did not want to question what happened, and just wanted to move forward. For instance, Elizabeth Lira, a Chilean scholar, explains in “Remembering: Passing Back Through the Heart” (1997), that in Chile twenty-one years after the military coup and four years after the so-called transition to

democracy, there were two conflicting viewpoints in society. On the one hand, one sector of society maintained that it was necessary to remember what happened during the dictatorship, and punish those responsible for the crimes committed. On the other hand, some sectors of the society argued that in order for the Chilean society to move forward it was necessary to forget, and also *forgive*, the human rights violations for the sake of social peace (Lira 224-5; my emphasis). Nonetheless, forgetting and forgiving, or even punishing the high military or government officials who ordered the repression, will not be enough to prevent the past from repeating itself if citizens do not engage in an open discussion of how State terror was possible.

Hugo Vezzetti considers the question of how to make the new generations appropriate and claim the past they did not experienced. In order for this to be possible, Vezzetti affirms, the right to remember, and to discuss what happened, should not be seen as a privilege reserved only for the victims and their relatives. According to him, in Argentina the victims of the dictatorship, and their representatives, tend to see themselves as the bearers of the *truth* about what happened, and they see as *sacred* the transmission of that truth. The private trauma of State terrorism has to be socialized and recognized by society at large in order for the process of the creation of collective memory to begin. As Vezzetti states, remembering the past will be effective only when it is not limited to the victims and their representatives. But how can the process of the creation of collective memory of State terrorism begin, and be transmitted to future generations?

## **Chapter Summaries**

The unfolding of the objectives and arguments of this dissertation will be based on the analysis of literary texts from Argentina, Chile, and Mexico; and on photography of Argentinian and Mexican photographers. I draw on performance studies, anthropological approaches to ritual,

and literary criticism to examine how citizens can create counter-hegemonic narratives of State repression, and how they can incorporate them in the collective memory of their societies.

Chapter one, “Silence in the Midst of Terror and in the Aftermath: the Terrorist State’s Strategy to Remain in Power,” examines three literary texts, *Villa* (1995) by Argentinian writer Luis Gusmán, *El desierto* (2005) by Chilean author Carlos Franz, and *Cementerio de papel* (2004) by Mexican writer Fritz Glockner. The literary texts selected for this chapter deal with how the characters adapt to an unstable political environment, and how they become supporters, directly or indirectly, of a repressive State, by constantly making decisions based on the assessment of their places and possible gains under a repressive regime. The texts depict characters who do not have a voice in the chain of command, whose actions supposedly do not have any bearing on the internal workings of a terrorist State. However, they portray the everyday functioning of repressive regimes, demonstrating that the State does not exercise absolute control over the citizens. Drawing on Magdalena Villarreal’s analysis of power in *Wielding and Yielding: Power, Subordination and Gender Identity in the Context of a Mexican Development Project* (1994), I seek to underscore the fragility of power, and the possibilities of challenging a terrorist State. I stress that the decisions the characters make daily sustain a repressive regime. Consequently, I underline that a terrorist State can be challenged precisely through every day actions.

Chapter two, “Challenging the Silence of State Terrorism in Rituals and Performances: a Path to the Construction of a Dissident Narrative Of State Repression,” examines the role of performances, particularly rituals, as vital counter-hegemonic acts, and vehicles to challenge silence, and social amnesia. This chapter also argues that performances play a key role in challenging the official narratives of State repression, which deny, minimize, and justify State violence. The analysis of the practices undertaken by *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina,

*Comité Eureka* in Mexico, and *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* in Chile, will shed light on how performances, but particularly rituals, are vital vehicles to challenge hegemonic narratives of State repression. To understand the role of performances and rituals I draw on performance studies theory, as well as an anthropological understanding of the ritual.

In chapter three, “The Construction of a Political Place of Memory of State Terrorism: *El Desaparecido*,” the attention is focused on the political construction of the figure of *el desaparecido*. I compare the cases of Mexico and Argentina. These countries are emblematic; they exemplify two very different processes in the formation of *el desaparecido* as a *lieu de mémoire*. Forced disappearances were practiced in both countries during the campaign of political annihilation, the so-called “dirty war;” however, it is only in Argentina where *el desaparecido* has become part of the national consciousness and a key figure from which to discuss the past. In Mexico, regardless of the continuous battles undertaken by the family members, *los desaparecidos* are not an explicit reference to the “dirty war.” The repression against students in 1968, known as the massacre of Tlatelolco, is the only episode that has been kept in the national consciousness as the evidence of a repressive and authoritarian one-party regime. Furthermore, this chapter examines Argentinian photographer Gustavo Germano’s photographic work *Ausencias*, *Arqueología de la Ausencia* by Argentinian photographer Lucila Quieto, and the photographic campaign *Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos*, launched by H.I.J.O.S México, to discern the evolving construction of the figure of *el desaparecido* in Argentina and Mexico. The emphasis will be placed on the social and political possibilities of the figure of *el desaparecido* to contest silence, as well as on its role as a key element in the formation of collective memory.

Chapter four, “Exile: a Place of Memory in the Making?” explores the possibility of *exile* to become a *lieu de mémoire*; that is, an event from the past that citizens actively remember in the

present as a significant memory from which to be reminded of the past. This chapter addresses the cases of Chile and Argentina; however, to a lesser extent, the Mexican case is also considered. This chapter underlines the role of the *exiliados* as another fissure created by a terrorist State, precisely while trying to eliminate their political opposition. I concentrate the analysis on the struggles of exiles from Chile and Argentina to become political agents to interpellate the State in the aftermath of State terrorism. I examine the literary text *En estado de memoria* (1990) by Tununa Mercado, and the photographic work *Distancias* by Gustavo Germano. Exiles are usually not regarded as victims of State terrorism. However, this chapter stresses that exile is another form of torture, committed by a terrorist State to annihilate and isolate political opponents, and another experience from which citizens can challenge silence, and official narratives.

## CHAPTER 1. SILENCE IN THE MIDST OF TERROR AND IN THE AFTERMATH: THE TERRORIST STATE'S STRATEGY TO REMAIN IN POWER

*Where were you, Mamá, when all those horrible things were taking place in your city?* This is the question Claudia poses to her mother twenty years after Laura left Pampa Hundida in the midst of August Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990). Claudia's inquiry in Carlos Franz's novel *El desierto* (2005) is a daughter's request to end Laura's silence about her decision to leave Chile while *all those horrible things* were taking place in Pampa Hundida, the city where she had been appointed as the judge. Though Laura's responsibility was to protect the people of the city, she chose to leave precisely when her job was most crucial. As a result of her mother's secrecy, Claudia ignores the events that led to Laura's decision. Nonetheless, her mother's concealment of the past makes Claudia suspect that Laura wants to cover her responsibility in the crimes committed during the dictatorship. Understandably, since twenty years have passed since her mother left the city, it is almost impossible for Claudia to grasp why her mother, and everybody else in Pampa Hundida, refuse to talk about the past.

Laura's prolonged reticence to talk about the past and the crimes that took place during the dictatorship, including their consequences, is not unique. In each of the three literary texts chosen for this chapter, the silence of the main characters about the crimes ordered by the State prevails. Even the communities at large, when presented to the reader, maintain a tacit agreement to conceal the past. In the Chilean novel *El desierto* (2005) by Carlos Franz; *Villa* (1995) by Luis Gusmán, which addresses the Argentinian case, and Mexican author Fritz Glockner's text *Cementerio de papel* (2004), compliance and silence are the norm. Claudia's poignant question thus evokes the matter that all three novels embody: the main characters' decision to keep silent during, and after, the State repression, even when they know that silence will assure their complicity in the crimes, and the permanence of a terrorist State.



This chapter focuses its attention on how the characters adapt to new political circumstances, and how the power relations in which they engage daily make them stay silent. The permanence of a terrorist State depends on the everyday decisions the citizens make who, because of the initial fear, feel isolated, and powerless to change the environment that surrounds them. However, the characters' daily actions are not the result of conditioned social beings, who passively follow orders merely because of fear, or obedience to authority. Their decisions are the result of an active consciousness that engages in power relations, wielding and yielding power to protect their own resources, as Magdalena Villarreal describes by means of case studies in *Wielding and Yielding: Power, Subordination and Gender Identity in the Context of a Mexican Development Project* (1994).

Understanding that a terrorist State relies on strategies other than just mere force or fear to stay in power, that it engages its citizens in daily practices to make them stay silent, and that it is constructed daily on changing rather than static power relations, makes it possible to recognize the weaknesses of power. It allows the reader to envision the possibility of breaking the silence that surrounds State terrorism, to visualize the opportunities for change, disobedience, and defiance of a supposedly all-powerful State. In spite of the devastating effects of a terrorist and authoritarian regime on the private and social levels, subjects are still able to take an active role in making their own decisions, which could eventually lead them to speaking out.

The main objective of a terrorist State is to subjugate the entire social body to advance the political and economic agendas of the groups in power without opposition. Once established, repressive regimes attempt to secure their permanence by assuring that the citizens will consent and, more importantly, that they will remain silent about the crimes committed, as it guarantees the continuance of a repressive system, and the impunity of those guilty of the crimes committed.

The preferred practice to secure silence and submission is to spread terror and fear throughout the population. When citizens are in permanent distress and fear for their own lives and security, and that of their loved ones, the entire social body becomes immobile, unable to act, or react. In “Victims of Fear: The Social Psychology of Repression” (1992), Salimovich et al. explain that social inactivity is achieved when fear has infiltrated every aspect of the life of the people, when citizens internalize that fear as a constant life threat, and self-regulate their own lives and daily activities in an effort to protect themselves (72-89). Similarly, Schmucler in “Las exigencias de la memoria” (2000) maintains that in the case of Argentina, for instance, the terror instilled in society played a fundamental role in the permanence of the last dictatorship, as society became a passive observer of State crimes, merely wishing for it to be over, unable to say no (9).

Nonetheless, even under conditions of great terror, citizens can overcome fear, thus, a terrorist State resorts to other strategies that are not as violent as terror, but are as effective as fear to assure its permanence in power. The State creates networks of complicity throughout society to disseminate distrust amongst citizens. However, more importantly, the State generates the sense of being defeated beforehand by an unknown and greater power. In the three novels chosen for this chapter, the course of actions that the main characters choose is motivated by their perception of being helplessly overpowered, that even if they did something different, their minor actions would not be effective in transforming the circumstances around them, which they see as inevitable. Correspondingly, they believe that their actions, which directly or indirectly support a terrorist State, are insignificant and do not actually sustain the terrorist State. Additionally, to guarantee people’s lasting silence, the State subjects the citizens to shameful acts, such as sexual abuse, and the dishonorable decision to collaborate, as in the case of Laura in *El desierto*.

The literary texts selected for this chapter deal with how citizens interact and adapt to their new political environment, and how these characters are constantly making decisions based on the assessment of their places and possible gains under a repressive regime. The texts depict characters who do not have a voice in the chain of command, whose actions supposedly do not have any bearing on the internal workings of a terrorist State. However, they portray the everyday functioning of repressive regimes, demonstrating that they do not exercise absolute control over the citizens. Consequently, what they also convey is that repressive regimes are porous; they depend on the daily and ever-changing makings of power relations in which citizens engage.

### **Creating a Collaborator in a Terrorist State**

In the now classic reading of the making of a genocide machinery, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, originally published in 1963, Hannah Arendt exposes how even the most horrific political systems are sustained by meticulous bureaucratic routines, based on vertical chains of command. In her analysis of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a lieutenant-colonel in the Nazi regime, charged with the murder of thousands of Jewish people, Arendt exposes how a common man is capable of committing atrocious acts against humanity, shockingly without feeling remorse for the outcome of his decisions. According to her report, Eichmann views his actions (transporting Jews to concentration camps) as only one decision in the chain of command, and not as the verdict that put them to death. Eichmann shows no remorse, nor sense of responsibility for participating in the chain of actions that ultimately put into motion a systematic genocide. He did not have any particular feelings against them, and paradoxically admitted that he had some Jewish friends. Thus, what is striking about Arendt's report on Eichmann's trial is the revelation that Eichmann was just one of many, a joiner who felt protected by the chain of command, someone who followed the specific instructions he had been given. A joiner, as Arendt puts it, who was

incapable of making his own decisions to change the course of his life. Eichmann was a nobody, who went up in the ladder of command because his abilities were conducive to a systematized program to annihilate Jewish people.

Similarly, in “Hear (No) Evil, See (No) Evil Speak (No) Evil: Artistic Representations of Argentinian's “Dirty War,” Julia Reineman argues that a dictatorship does not just happen; on the contrary, there are certain events, and circumstances that lead to a repressive regime. Reineman affirms that to remain in power, dictatorships must enjoy the support of “multiple sources.” That is, a dictatorship, or a repressive regime, must enjoy wide support and approval within society to rise and stay in power (2).

Along the same line of thought, in *Poder y desaparición: los campos de concentración en Argentina* (1998), Pilar Calveiro asserts that in the case of Argentina the last dictatorship was not the mere result of an accidental moment in history. On the contrary, it was the outcome of specific social, economic, and political conditions, which preceded and served as a justification to put into practice the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Process of Reorganization) by the last dictatorship (1976-1983). Thus, according to Calveiro, the concentration camps installed in Argentina, bureaucratically and systematically operated to annihilate political opponents, were not external to Argentinian society and its history, but a part of it, and were born out of the characteristics of the established power relations (27). Furthermore, Calveiro stresses that the high value and consensus placed on obedience, as well as the dissemination of discipline and blind respect to authority amongst the citizenry, were crucial for the establishment of a terrorist State in Argentina. Thus, in a society that praises obedience over creativity and independence, the possibility of insubordination is only rarely contemplated. Lastly, Calveiro affirms that the concentration camps in Argentina need to be understood as an institutional enterprise, a repressive

political system perfectly structured, and mandated from the State itself, rather than an aberration created by a handful of monstrous minds (137). Hence, a terrorist State is not alien to the workings of a society; on the contrary, it emerges from within, and comes to the surface based on existing economic, political, social, and cultural circumstances, and the consent of the people.

The scholars' analyses of political systems of extermination imply that the State molds a certain type of subjectivity that can be easily conditioned to serve a terrorist State, someone who would be already immersed in a vertical hierarchical system, and engaged in superior-subordinate relationships. Someone who will readily fulfill the requests of the bureaucratic machinery put in place to annihilate political opponents, as s/he previously places a high value on discipline, obedience, and order as the foundations of a society. Allegedly, those citizens will straightforwardly serve the purposes of a repressive regime, and almost without difficulty will obey their duty, and follow what they are told to do.

In "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'Etat (notes pour une recherche)" (1976), Louis Althusser extensively analyses the role of the State in molding subjectivities to fulfill the needs of the groups in power. According to Althusser, the State shapes subjects according to the needs of the capitalist system. For that purpose, they are socialized in what the scholar calls the Ideological Apparatuses of the State. The IAS are any group in which the subjects are socialized, such as the institutions of education, recreation, clubs, church, the family, and also the media, through which the State ensures the making of subjectivities who will satisfy the goals of the dominant class, to guarantee the submission of the workforce to the established rules and order. Thus, in this view, citizens internalize a specific way of being and thinking that will serve the purposes of the State and the capitalist system.

However, even those subjects whose practices sustain authoritarian and repressive political systems are not programmed human beings unable to observe and ponder the context that surrounds them. Quite the opposite, citizens' actions are the outcome of careful scrutiny of their surroundings and vested interests. Even when immersed in strict hierarchical institutions, they never lose sight of their own personal interests, and act accordingly, even when it appears that they were simply following orders. Citizens adapt their actions to the limits of the new circumstances in a society that undergoes State terrorism, but they are not oblivious to their possible gains when they engage in power relations from the place they occupy. Thus, citizens do not consent, follow orders, nor stay silent merely because they have a personality fabricated by the State, but because of the daily and ongoing power relations in which they engage.

Villarreal argues that power is not a property that can be possessed by some and exercised over others. On the contrary, Villarreal states that power is in fact a relationship, where people, within their specific status, are constantly analyzing their positions and possible gains in relation to others, where sometimes they have to appear as powerless in order to obtain something in return. She describes power as follows:

Power is a fluid quality, embedded in social relations, in strategies, discourses and forms of organization. Power is not inherent to institutions, actors or social positions, but is socially constructed. It is wielded through complex processes which involve diverse forms of agency... [power is defined] as force relations and strategies that entail processes of enrollment and intentional or unintentional associations and dissociations. The power wielder has to rely on the actions of others who acknowledge the existence of his or her power. These actions generally entail subordination, compliance or resistance. Subordination, compliance and resistance are often intertwined and do not exclude each other, but they constitute the actions that sustain power relations. (223-224)

Hence, in order to secure its place, a terrorist State must maintain the appearance of an all-powerful entity that possesses complete control over the life and death of its own citizens, and must engage them daily in the makings of a terrorist State. Such political systems are neither

absolute powers nor autonomous apparatuses that function independently from society. As explained earlier, they arise in virtue of prevailing power relations, and values of order and discipline, already instilled in society, and because the social, economic, political, and cultural conditions already exist within society for people to consent to power. Nevertheless, terrorist and authoritarian regimes remain in power because they successfully engage their citizens in power relations where they see themselves as powerless, and as inevitably subjected to the terrorist State. However, as it will be argued, the main characters of the three novels selected for this chapter, choose to collaborate.

*Villa*, *El desierto*, and *Cementerio de papel*, expose the complexity of a society in which a repressive system is possible. By focusing on the complexity of power relations, outside dualistic understandings of good versus evil, these novels portray how the people put into place, and support a repressive power, and why citizens choose to consent and remain silent. As Edgardo Berg puts it in his article “El huevo de la serpiente: Villa de Luis Gusmán. El vuelo de Horacio Verbitsky y Poder y desaparición de Pilar Calveiro” (2009), in the case of *Villa*, these are texts that narrate the experience of horror, but from the critical eyes of the present, questioning how to narrate such liminal experience. What remains of that past in the present? What is the future of that past? Why did citizens consent? And why did they keep silent, during and in the aftermath? (14).

### **Self-interested Collaboration Disguised as Fear in *Villa* by Luis Gusmán**

In *Villa*, by Argentinian writer Luis Gusmán, Villa, the main character remembers in detail his gradual involvement in the crimes committed in the time immediately preceding the last dictatorship in Argentina, after the return to Argentina and the death of Perón (1974), and at the onset of the last dictatorship (1976). He witnesses the gradual transformation of the Ministry of Social Welfare, from the time José López Rega began using it to cover paramilitary operations to

kill and abduct political opponents, until the military Junta took over and continued the annihilation of the political opposition. In “The Father, the Law, Desire: Perversions of the Letter in Luis Gusman's Villa” (2008), Silvia Rosman explains that López Rega was appointed in 1973, and after the death of Perón he became the right-hand man of President Isabel Perón (1973-1974). In fact, López Rega was the creator of the first death squad in Argentina, the paramilitary group *Triple A* (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance). After the military coup in 1976 López Rega fled from Argentina (107).

Villa, the main character in Gusmán's novel, does not leave after the military coup. In fact, he tries to maintain his job readjusting to the volatile political circumstances. He makes every effort to place himself under the protection of Salinas, the new Minister, a military man appointed to continue the political persecution and abductions after the coup. Villa is a civilian doctor who works as an employee at the *Ministerio de Bienestar Social*, who due to his unwillingness to say no, and desire to keep his position, becomes an active participant of the extrajudicial killings taking place before and during the last dictatorship in Argentina. Throughout his life, Villa has found that it is easier to be under the shelter of a more powerful man and follow his orders, than to have to worry about making basic moral decisions. Thus, in times of such political instability in Argentina, he desperately wants to continue to be a *mosca* to remain immune from the unpredictability that surrounds him, especially since Firpo, the superior for whom he worked many years, dies. A *mosca*, as described by Villa, is someone who lives under the shadow of others, is told exactly what to do at all times, and follows orders. The phrase that characterizes Villa's position in life as a *mosca* is: *donde me daban lugar, me quedaba* [Where I was given a place, I stayed]. Thus, once he finds a comfortable position under the orders of someone else, his main objective is to remain there.



As a *mosca*, Villa is unable to make his own decisions and has to rely on others to know what to do, what to say, and what to think. For instance, when his superior Villalba tells him that he has to move to another location with Firpo, who has been demoted, he knows that it is very unlikely that his wife will approve, but he does not want to say no to a superior. He describes that moment as follows:

La cabeza se me abría en una pregunta infinita. Trataba de encontrar un argumento que más tarde también me sirviera para esgrimirlo con mi esposa. Como siempre, hubo algo que me salvó. Esta vez fueron las palabras de Villalba: -Villa, necesito a alguien de confianza al lado de Firpo. (*Villa* 111)<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it seems that Villalba saves him by providing the perfect excuse for his wife: he is just following orders. Villa knows that Firpo is losing his high position of power in the Ministry and is being demoted, thus, he chooses to obey in order to please Villalba. Villa does not want to relocate, but he decides to make the best out of the situation; he uses the opportunity to serve Firpo and Villalba at the same time, trying to appear to be loyal to both. Even if the move hurts his immediate career opportunities, Villa knows that in the future this decision could help him have a place under Villalba, but still remain under the protection of Firpo for the moment. In his youth, being a *mosca* seemed to be an easy task; in the current times the task is exhausting. He feels at a loss and alone because he no longer has the certainty of knowing for whom he is working, and a *mosca* must always know whose orders he is following. He feels reassured when he recalls the teachings of a *mosca* he met during his youth. His recollection reminds him that a *mosca* looks out for himself, and only for himself: “Aunque te parezca un absurdo y hasta mentira, un *mosca* siempre trabaja para él mismo” (*Villa* 114).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My head was open to an infinite question. I was trying to find an argument that would later help me with my wife. As always, there was something that saved me. This time it was Villalba's words: "Villa, I need someone of confidence next to Firpo. (My translation)

<sup>3</sup> Although it seems absurd and even a lie, a *mosca* always works for himself.

Villa is constantly evaluating his possible gains in case the political scenario changes in the future. For example, even though he possesses a couple of photos that would compromise his current position at the Ministry, he keeps them in a safe because these photos could be useful in the future, in case other political leaders take over:

No me animaba a quemar la foto, “Es borrosa, inofensiva, quizás algún día vuelvan los radicales”, me dije y la volví a guardar en el cofre. Y la de Onganía podría servir, “Dicen que si cae López Rega, tal vez vuelvan los militares”, pensé y también la guardé.” (*Villa* 147)<sup>4</sup>

Villa’s decisions to follow orders do not emanate from a conditioned subject who acts disinterestedly, but from someone who evaluates his stake every step of the way. Hence, in “Historia, memoria y novela en la Argentina de la posdictadura. La cuestión de la responsabilidad extendida” (2013), Paz-Mackay affirms that *Villa* echoes the claims in the Argentinian Society that questioned the Law of Due Obedience, pointing out that the so-called subordinate also made a choice. In this sense, she underlines the fact that the novel depicts the extreme actions subjects are capable of in order to fulfill the orders that come from the superiors, and in so doing, accomplish their own agendas (108).

Villa does not have any attachments to any organization or group. He is a solitary man looking out only for himself. He considers himself to be a neutral citizen who has no ideological beliefs, and who does not want to be involved in the politics of his country. Ironically, even though Villa strongly believes that he is not engaged in politics, he chooses to remain in an institution where politics is the only way to further his career. Villa is above all a *mosca*, someone who advances only if they navigate the politics and ever-changing power relations in any given group carefully. His lack of confidence in his abilities as a doctor makes him depend on his skills as a

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<sup>4</sup> I was not encouraged to burn the photo, "It's blurry, harmless, maybe someday the radicals will come back", I told myself and put it back in the safe. And that of Onganía could serve, "They say that if López Rega falls, maybe the military will return," I thought. Therefore, I kept it. (My translation)

follower, always willing to say yes to comply with authority. As Paz-Mackay affirms, the complicity derives from the lack of confidence with which he performs his job (114), which ultimately makes him comply with questionable orders that make him an accomplice.

In “Sobre Complicidades y Traiciones: Acerca de *Villa* y *El fin de la historia*” (2010), José Di Marco contends that Villa does not collaborate because of an ideological conviction, but rather because he is driven by pure fear: “el miedo lo lleva a obrar como un verdugo” [fear drives him to act as an executioner]. In Di Marco’s view, Villa possesses the moral characteristics that make him become an accomplice and a killer: he is fearful, excessively obedient, and respectful of authority, which he argues, are favorable elements to turn a nobody, like Villa, into a murderer (4). According to the scholar, the novel exposes that the roots of totalitarianism come from “una tendencia mental acomodaticia, una inclinación a la obediencia debida” [an accommodative mental tendency, an inclination to due obedience] (4).

Similarly, Luz C. Souto affirms in “Los subalternos en las ficciones de apropiación de menores” (2013) that Villa represents a character who is part of those subordinates who conditioned by the place in which they are, are driven to the cruelest actions against humanity. According to Souto, the subalterns become criminals who act under the orders of their superiors and do not stop to question the horrors they witness or in which they participate (51-52).

Villa is not an automaton who never stops to think about his actions. Even in situations of great danger, he is able to look beyond his fear and ponder the advantages and disadvantage of his decisions. For instance, in one of the occasions when he is summoned to attend to a tortured person, he realizes that the person is his first and only love, Elena. However, instead of giving her a relief to be able to endure further torturing, he decides to go against the order he was given, and injects her with a lethal dose of potassium, despite knowing that if discovered he could be punished

himself, and even brutally killed. At first, his decision could mislead the reader into believing that this is actually a heroic act of love to end Elena's suffering. However, when he confesses in front of her clandestine tomb, he admits that he killed her to save himself: "Ahora podría empezar a darte algunas razones. La primera es de índole absolutamente personal. Es egoísta: fue por miedo a que me comprometieras, que Mújica y Cummins averiguaran y pudieran relacionarte conmigo" (264).<sup>5</sup>

Even though Villa supposedly acts according to the relationship subordinate-superior, he never loses the ability to put himself first. Villa lets the reader into the complex world of the bureaucratic superior-subordinate, where people do not merely engage in vertical, but in changing power relations. However, to justify his actions, Villa himself wants to believe that he has no choice but to do as he is told, when in fact he makes his own choices. As Rosman affirms, "even following orders implies making choices, and in the context of the Ministry under López Rega, those orders now involve [for Villa as well] transporting arms, signing false certificates, and attending to tortured militants" (101).

In accordance with Rosman, Villa is in fact defined by the choices he makes, from *mosca* to collaborator (105). For instance, the first time he is asked to create a fraudulent death certificate without looking at the body, he at first insists that at least he must see the body. Believing that he is refusing to collaborate, he is confronted by the interrogators and he consents as follows: "¿O prefiere que busquemos otro médico?", to which he immediately responds: "No, señor, deme que lo extiende", "¿A nombre de quién?", inquires Villa, "Ya le dije que el nombre no tenía importancia. ¿Está claro, Villa?" to which he responds "—Está bien— le dije, mientras firmaba lo

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<sup>5</sup> Now I could start giving you some reasons. The first is of an absolutely personal nature. It's selfish: it was for fear that you would have compromised me, that Mújica and Cummins would find out and could relate you to me. (My translation)

que creía mi propia partida de defunción.” (172-173).<sup>6</sup> As we can see in his last statement, Villa is well aware of the severity of the crime; however, he immediately chooses to collaborate on this occasion, and all the subsequent times in which Mújica and Cummins request his services.

In order to keep his job Villa consciously chooses to engage in the crimes being committed, but he wants to believe that his actions are insignificant given the scale of violence. He considers that the State violence is much greater than what he does himself that, even if he actively participates, he is not responsible for the crimes because they would happen nevertheless. Thus, after he witnesses the horrific wounds of a severely tortured human being, which are extremely shocking to him, back at home in bed he reflects “[...] pensaba en el cuerpo del hombre tirado en la cama con el bajo vientre quemado. Y no sentí ningún remordimiento, no podía hacer nada por él, ni siquiera aliviarle el dolor” (179).<sup>7</sup> Even after he witnessed a horrific scene of torture, he is only worried about two things, when he will be called again, and if he ever will be able to erase those images from his brain.

As Paz-Mackay states, *Villa* gives an account of the “impartial” voices “que *eligen* no responsabilizarse de los actos criminales que observan,” (166; my emphasis).<sup>8</sup> Villa is “un personaje testigo de los abusos de poder de turno, que simplemente *elige* obedecer órdenes” (105; my emphasis),<sup>9</sup> keeping his own interests as the motive of his decisions. Thus, even when he begins to consider the gravity of the level of his involvement and responsibility, he quickly calms himself

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<sup>6</sup> “Or do you prefer that we look for another doctor?,” to which he immediately responds: “No, sir, let me extend it,” “Whose name?,” Inquires Villa, “I already told you that the name did not matter. Is that clear, Villa?” to which he responds “—All right— I said, signing what I believed to be my own death certificate. (My translation)

<sup>7</sup> I thought of the body of the man lying in bed with his belly burned. And I felt no remorse, I could do nothing for him, not even relieve his pain. (My translation)

<sup>8</sup> Who *choose* not to take responsibility for the criminal acts they observe. (My translation; my emphasis)

<sup>9</sup> A character witness to the abuses of the power of the moment, who simply *chooses* to obey orders. (My translation; my emphasis)

thinking: “Pero, ¿quién puede escapar de los acontecimientos que lo envuelven? Pensar en eso me tranquilizó: “(...) yo era una hoja en la tormenta, una hoja arrastrada por el viento” (Villa 174).<sup>10</sup>

One of the reasons why Villa sees himself as helplessly trapped by the circumstances is because he feels completely alone. After Firpo’s death, he trusts no one, and is not able to communicate his true feelings and fears, not even to his own wife. In fact, according to María Stegmayer in “Acerca de los usos estratégicos del policial en *El secreto y las voces* de Carlos Gamerro” (2010), Villa narrates “[...] el progresivo aislamiento del protagonista que transita prácticamente solo y en silencio el camino que lo llevará a sellar su complicidad con el horror” (183).<sup>11</sup> Villa lacks any sense of collectivity, and thinks of himself as helplessly overpowered by the circumstances, unable to assume the decision he makes as his own (183).

A superior-subordinate relationship involves making choices, and Villa is no exception. His gradual involvement in the crimes is possible due to the conscious choices he makes to remain in a comfortable place. As Villa looks back to narrate his gradual involvement in the crimes committed, in retrospect we can see that Villa is in fact conscious of the course of his life, and chooses to be the second, the follower, the *mosca*, and deliberately agrees to collaborate. Although it is probably true that he could not have done much completely on his own to change the course of the circumstances, it is certain that he is one of many who contributed, with his daily decisions, to maintain the systematic repression.

Villa’s decision to collaborate must be accompanied by silence about the horrors he witnesses and those in which he is an active criminal, thereby perpetuating his complicity. As Paz-Mackay asserts, silence is where social complicity is established. The complicities and network of

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<sup>10</sup> But who can escape the events that surround him? Thinking about it reassured me: “(...) I was a leaf in the storm, a leaf carried by the wind. (My translation)

<sup>11</sup> [...] the progressive isolation of the protagonist who walks almost alone and in silence the road that will lead him to seal his complicity with horrific actions. (my translation)

responsibilities secure the silence in the aftermath of a repressive regime, kept by many even after democracies are re-established (Paz-Mackay 121). Villa's silence is key for him to remain inside the system and secure his job. In turn, a terrorist State is dependent on the system itself to create accomplices, secure their silence, and maintain the impunity of those who committed crimes. As Berg affirms, the moral apathy and deliberate blindness of the narrator Villa, reveal that the bureaucracy of the State produces accomplices to its acts of political persecution and wretched crimes (17).

Villa brings us closer to the world of the citizens who in times of great political instability chose to collaborate, and agree to keep quiet, becoming accomplices of the most atrocious acts against humanity. Through the choices Villa makes we can see the gradual involvement of a citizen who becomes key to sustaining a fascist regime, and how a terrorist State weaves networks of support, complicity, and concealment within society.

### **Laura's Shame to Disclose Her Past in *El Desierto* by Carlos Franz**

In *El desierto* (2005) by Carlos Franz, Mario narrates the story of Laura. Mario is Laura's ex-husband, who always dreamed of becoming a fiction writer. Laura is a young graduate from a prestigious law school in Chile. The novel alternates Mario's narration with the letter that Laura writes to answer her daughter's question: *Where were you, Mamá, when all those horrible things were taking place in your city?* In the letter, which Laura never intends for Claudia to read, she recalls her gradual involvement in the crimes committed during Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990). Pinochet took power after the military coup d'état on September 11, 1973 against Salvador Allende. Upon Laura's return to Chile, Mario decides to write the novel he always wanted to create. During the dictatorship, overwhelmed by the horrific events taking place, he abandoned his dream, as he considered it irrelevant in face of the pain endured by many of his fellow citizens.

However, when he stumbles upon Laura's letter, which was blown by the wind when she comes back to Chile, he decides to write the novel. Mario narrates the first day of Laura's return, alternated with her letter to Claudia, where she attempts to explain to her daughter why she collaborated, and kept silent for twenty years. In the novel, the letter appears in italics, to distinguish it from Mario's narration.

Contrary to Villa, Laura is not a conscript nor does she share the type of personality that supposedly predisposes a subject to collaborate with a terrorist State. Laura is a young graduate from a Law school in Chile who has been appointed the judge of Pampa Hundida. Immediately from the onset of the dictatorship, and the establishment of a concentration camp within her jurisdiction, Laura is ready to initiate the fight to defend the rights of the population of Pampa Hundida. However, not long after the concentration camp is installed, she finds herself collaborating with Mayor Cáceres. In fact, as the newly appointed Judge to Pampa Hundida, Laura is the first person to be made an accomplice. In contrast to Villa, Laura is extremely confident concerning her professional abilities, knowledge, and desire to provide justice to the people under her jurisdiction. Nonetheless, she succumbs to fear, and chooses to believe that the only option available to help the people she is supposed to protect, is to collaborate with Mayor Cáceres, and remain silent about the extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances.

Very soon after her arrival at Pampa Hundida, when she starts her functions in her newly appointed position, Laura realizes that she is no longer in charge, that under the new political conditions she will be unable to exercise justice. Nevertheless, Laura refuses to accept the new fate of the people of Pampa Hundida and tries to stand up for them.

In her efforts to help the detainees, Laura pays a visit to Mayor Cáceres to argue the illegitimacy of the detentions. However, when Laura arrives at the concentration camp there is a



trial taking place. Mayor Cáceres quickly seizes the opportunity to make her an accomplice and invites her to attest the “legality” of the procedure: “Llegas en el momento preciso. ¿Quieres inspeccionar, patroncita? Puedes hacer algo mejor: darás fe de que aquí nada es ilegal. De que aquí no hay otra cosa más que la ley. Serán nuestra ministra de fe” (El desierto 149).<sup>12</sup>

Mayor Cáceres called Laura *patroncita*, a diminutive of *patrona*, a patron saint. In his view, Laura was the second authoritative figure, after the Virgin of Pampa Hundida. However, the use of the diminutive indicates a condescending tone that suggests that Mayor Cáceres did not consider Laura as someone who could do anything to help the *desaparecidos* of Pampa Hundida.

Laura does not contradict Mayor Cáceres’ statement about the “legality” of the hearings. Instead, she witnesses the trial and because of fear, she remains silent, attesting to the “legality” of the process. Only at this moment Laura realizes that the new regime has imposed martial law, and that her knowledge of the law will be useless to defend the people of the city. Laura feels completely powerless, because the new regime uses the legal jargon of a judge to legitimize Mayor Cáceres’ verdict to execute the prisoners by firing squad. She feels trapped, as she also understands that if she tries to use the same legal language to protest, she will be validating the place taken by the usurpers. Laura is unable to utter a single word, and even when all the twelve death sentences are read, all Laura is able to feel is fear, and she sits down:

Y entonces, Claudia, cometo el acto, un acto que no pienso siquiera, del que sólo es responsable mi instinto, y que por eso mismo me compromete hasta los huesos: me siento (...) Sentarse cuando había que mantenerse de pie; no es necesario más para palmar la tela moral de la que estamos hechos. (El desierto 153)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “You’ve come precisely at the right moment. Do you want to make an inspection, patroncita [little patron saint]? You can do something better: you will certify that here there is nothing illegal. That there is nothing beyond the law here. You will be our Minister of Faith” (The Absent Sea 118).

<sup>13</sup> “At that point then, Claudia, I do it: I do something I don’t even think about, something for which my instinct is solely responsible and which for that very reason implicates me to my very bones: I sit back down. To sit down when you should have remained on your feet —that’s all you need to show you the moral fabric of which we are made” (The Absent Sea 121). (This and all subsequent translations of excerpts of *El desierto* come directly from *The Absent Sea*, the translated edition of Carlos Franz’s novel, translated by Leland H. Chambers).

As her first attempt to save the prisoners failed, later Laura decides to approach Mayor Cáceres alone to defend the detainees. However, when she is tortured and sexually abused by him, she is overcome by the fear and pain, but also sexual pleasure. She surrenders and confesses critical information that would lead Mayor Cáceres to the hideout of the very young man whom she is supposedly trying to protect.

After her betrayal of the young man, who had sought her protection, she makes a pact with Mayor Cáceres: she will come back, upon request, to let herself be subjected to sexual abuse. However, every time she returns, she must mimic the same level of pain, and pleasure she felt during the first time Mayor Cáceres sexually assaulted her. In return, each time she comes, Mayor Cáceres will liberate one of the abducted citizens who he has already sentenced to execution. The contract between Laura and Mayor Cáceres becomes a pact of silence as well. As long as she keeps the secret and returns to simulate the first sexual abuse scene, Mayor Cáceres will continue to liberate prisoners. She accepts the stipulations of the pact because she desperately wants to believe that she is saving the lives of the prisoners.

However, she realizes very soon that she has become an accomplice. What is worse, she accepts that from the very beginning she knew that her collaboration would save no one. Nonetheless, she urgently wanted to believe otherwise to calm her moral anguish. Laura needed to trust firmly that she had found a way to protect the people of Pampa Hundida, and she was willing to sacrifice herself. However, she was in fact trying to save her moral conscience at the cost of the lives of the prisoners. All these years she has been ashamed of her decision to collaborate. It is humiliating, particularly because she betrayed her ideals of justice, which she thought were inherent to who she was.

Her silence enabled Mayor Cáceres to continue to commit the crimes without opposition, and she knew it, but decided to carry on with the farce and went back six more times to fulfill her part of the contract. She even kept silent when the mother of the first *desaparecido*, the first one who Laura tried to save, brutally reminds her of the severity of the crimes being committed in Pampa Hundida. The mother was desperate and came to seek help with the judge of the town. Nonetheless, even when she witnesses the mother's pain, Laura decides to continue to lie to herself, and consequently lies to the mother as well, telling her to remain confident, that her son probably fled to another country, and that maybe she would hear from him very soon. The mother was astonished; she could not believe what she had just heard from the judge, and in disbelief and even pity, she replied to Laura:

¿Pero en qué país vive usted, mijita? ¿Cómo voy a quedarme tranquila, esperando? ¿No sabe usted lo que ocurre cuando alguien desaparece así? ¿No sabe que cuando dicen que nunca los tuvieron, o que huyeron a no se sabe dónde, significa que nunca nacieron, que nunca los criamos, que nunca vivieron?" (El desierto 298)<sup>14</sup>

Finally, when she accepts that she in fact became a collaborator, she decides to flee the country. For twenty years she has kept her past secret. However, her daughter Claudia senses that her mother is hiding from her past and makes her confront it with a direct question: "Where were you, Mamá, when all those horrible things were taking place in your city?" A question that obligates her mother to break her silence and face her responsibilities for what happened.

Claudia does not wait for her mother's reply, because she is determined to find answers. She travels to Chile, a country that she has never visited. Claudia wants the people of Pampa Hundida to talk about what happened and to accept what she calls their collective guilt. In the

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<sup>14</sup> "But what country are you living in, child? How can I just wait around calmly? Don't you know what's going on when someone disappears this way? Don't you know that when they say they never had them or that they escaped and no one knows where they went, that it means they were never born, that we never brought them up, that they were never alive?" (The Absent Sea 238).

midst of the most important religious celebration in town, *La Diablada*, Claudia and her friends come to Pampa Hundida to make the people in town talk about the crimes committed in the past. Their plan involves a public demand for justice. Using placards and chaining themselves to the bars of the former concentration camp, Claudia and her friends shout and scream demanding justice. However, their voices are inaudible, and the attendees do not notice their presence. What Claudia and her friends have not realized is that the people of Pampa Hundida themselves made a tacit pact with Mayor Cáceres to remain silent. He stole the original Virgin for whom the *fiesta* is celebrated, and they had to replace her with a false figurine. He knew that the image of the Virgin was extremely important for the people of the city, that if he stole it, they would ask Laura to visit him to try to recuperate it. The people of Pampa Hundida had noticed that Mayor Cáceres was interested in Laura, thus, as soon as he stole the figurine, they requested Laura to use Mayor Cáceres' interest in her to their advantage to try to recover the Virgin.

The religious festivity had been celebrated for decades; it provides an identity to the people of Pampa Hundida and, to the political leader's delight, ex-mayor Mamani, it draws thousands of tourists every year. Thus, as well as Laura, the people of Pampa Hundida have a pact of silence that if broken would compromise the core of their identity, and economic well-being as well. For the people of the city breaking their tacit pact with Mayor Cáceres would entail losing their credibility as the authentic homeland of the Virgin. In the case of Laura, breaking the silence requires the acceptance of the betrayal of her values, which she thought could withstand Mayor Cáceres and the dictatorship.

The past is too painful for Laura. She suffered not only rape and torture by Mayor Cáceres, but also the horror of becoming an accomplice of the extrajudicial killings taking place under her jurisdiction. Since she left, twenty years ago, she has been trying to bury the past and forget her

traumas and complicity. However, it has been impossible; the psychological scars of the trauma and the pain are engraved in Laura's body. As De Toro explains in "Memoria performativa y escenificación: 'Hechor y Víctima' en El desierto de Carlos Franz" (2011), "la 'memoria corporal' de Laura queda almacenada en una recámara, en una despensa sellada por la represión, pero las marcas, las cicatrices, el dolor quedan inscritos y grabados en el cuerpo" (79).<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, Claudia's question motivates Laura to break her silence, even if it is just by writing a long letter, which she never intends to have Claudia read. Instead, the letter, in which she tries to answer her daughter's question, helps Laura to understand why she chose to collaborate with Mayor Cáceres, and to accept her responsibility in the crimes committed. Thus, after finishing writing the letter, Laura decides to return to Pampa Hundida to answer the question by being present and retaking her place as the judge, because as she explains in her own letter, there are questions that can only be answered with life itself.

Claudia never reads her mother's response to her question, but her return to Pampa Hundida makes Claudia trust that her mother will finally confront her past, and break the silence by accepting her responsibility. Claudia's inquiry offers Laura the opportunity to question her own past and involvement in the crimes committed. Laura and the people of Pampa Hundida had to live under a regime that neglected the possibility to ask 'why.' As Laura ponders in her own letter, they were living under a regime that only had rules but no explanations: "*el Estado totalitario no es aquel donde no hay ley, sino ese donde no hay nada más que leyes y ningún porqué. Y yo era la jueza en ese nuevo mundo*" (*El desierto* 49).<sup>16</sup> However, twenty years later Claudia demands to know 'why'. The question rekindles Laura's moral need to know why she collaborated, why she

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<sup>15</sup> Laura's 'body memory' is stored in a room, sealed by repression, but the marks, scars, and pain are inscribed and engraved on the body. (My translation)

<sup>16</sup> "The totalitarian state is not a place without laws but a place where there is nothing but laws without "whys." And I was a Magistrate in that new world (*The Absent Sea* 38).

kept silent, why she decided to flee, and why she has not talked about her past in the last twenty years.

As Laura reflects on her past actions, she accepts in her letter that it was not fear nor innocence, which made her a collaborator. When Laura confronts Mayor Cáceres, because she suspects that he has not been honoring the pact, she is no longer able to hide behind a veil of naiveté. Mayor Cáceres replied mockingly to her questionings: “¿No me digas que creíste realmente que un oficial como yo iba a desobedecer las sentencias de un consejo de guerra?” (El desierto 320).<sup>17</sup>

At this moment, Laura no longer had the choice of pretending that she did not know, or that she was saving the life of a prisoner every time she honored the pact. Thus, she decides to run away, to hide from her past, carrying with her a feeling of guilt. As Laura reflects on her letter to Claudia, the need to see herself as a victim of the circumstances, like Villa, made her accept the pact. As she acknowledges in her letter:

(...) sospeché que había honrado el pacto que él me propuso no sólo por altruismo, o deseo de hacer justicia, o culpa por no haber sido capaz de hacerlo de otro modo, (...) sospeché que había cumplido el pacto no por mera estupidez o inocencia (...) Yo había deseado sufrir, había deseado ser víctima. (El desierto 375)<sup>18</sup>

When Laura flees from Pampa Hundida to leave behind her traumatic past, she is escaping from the guilt of having become an accomplice to the executions committed by the dictatorship. The terror created by the regime kept Laura and the people of Pampa Hundida paralyzed, but it also created their feelings of guilt and shame for allowing the crimes to take place and continue. Like Laura, they wanted to pretend that they did not know anything. However, they were well

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<sup>17</sup> “Don’t tell me that you really expected that an officer like myself was going to disobey the sentences of a court martial?” (The Absent Sea 256).

<sup>18</sup> “I suspected that I had honored the pact he had proposed not only out of altruism, or the desire to serve justice, or guilt for not having been capable of doing so in any other way, (...) I suspected that I had held up my end not merely out of stupidity or innocence, (...) I had wanted to suffer, had wanted to be a victim” (The Absent Sea 300-301).

aware of the executions, as they always took place in the silence of the night, when everyone in Pampa Hundida could hear the gunshots. Setting the conditions for complicity was crucial to Mayor Cáceres to ensure the dissemination of feelings of guilt and shame in the midst of terror, to guarantee that everybody would remain silent.

All the years in exile have been marked by shame and guilt, as she names it. She feels shame for having agreed to a pact when she knew from the very beginning that it was all a farce; guilt for choosing to sit down when she should have stood up, and for remaining silent all these years. As the priest in Pampa Hundida reminds her when she comes back twenty years after: “—También usted calló, Laura, cuando se fue. No lo olvide” (126).<sup>19</sup>

Guilt and shame kept her in silence during twenty years, but Claudia’s question *¿Dónde estabas tú, Mamá...?* makes Laura try to utter the reasons why she collaborated. Laura describes the letter as a failed attempt to narrate the ineffable, but as a necessary step to confront her past, which ultimately makes her decide to join Claudia in Pampa Hundida to challenge the silence that the people of Pampa Hundida have imposed on themselves. As Laura reflects: “Incluso esta carta —lo sé bien, pero no puedo evitarlo— es un esfuerzo condenado por hacer inteligible lo indecible. Esfuerzo derrotado de antemano y que, sin embargo, debo hacer para que no nos gane el silencio” (El desierto 377).<sup>20</sup>

Writing the letter allows Laura to break the silence, even if she does not have Claudia read it. Furthermore, the writing exercise makes her realize that she must return to Pampa Hundida to take responsibility for her collaboration, which motivates Claudia to continue her fight to end impunity for those guilty of the crimes committed during the dictatorship. Laura reclaims her post

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<sup>19</sup> “You also were silent, Laura, when you left. Don’t forget that” (The Absent Sea 100).

<sup>20</sup> “Even this letter—I know it well, but I can’t avoid it—is a failed effort to make the unspeakable intelligible. An effort defeated beforehand, and which nonetheless I must make in order to prevent silence from gaining the upper hand” (The Absent Sea 302).

as the Judge of Pampa Hundida, because there are questions that can only be answered with life itself, as Mario narrates: “(...) había releído su propia contestación y confirmado lo que intuyó cada vez con más fuerza, mientras escribía esa carta: que hay preguntas que sólo se responden con la vida” (*El desierto* 13).<sup>21</sup>

### **Silence in Aftermath of State Terrorism in *Cementerio de papel* by Fritz Glockner**

*Cementerio de papel* (2004) by Mexican writer Fritz Glockner is a fictionalized account of a historic period in Mexico. The novel takes place in 2000, the year in which Mexico officially begins its “transition to democracy”. After more than seventy years of ruling the country, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) is defeated in the presidential elections by one of the parties of the opposition, the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN). Vicente Fox, as the newly elected president for the following six years (2000-2006), is in charge of carrying through the so-called “transition to democracy.”

The novel unfolds as a detective novel, alternating a fictionalized narration of the current political events. As in Carlos Franz’s *El desierto*, *Cementerio de papel* addresses why citizens remain silent in the aftermath of State terrorism. Fritz Glockner’s text takes place more than thirty years after the supposed end of the so-called Mexican “dirty war.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the power relations, the men that perpetrated the violence against the citizens, and their practices of terror, still play an active role in the current Mexican society, and are able still to inspire fear into the protagonists of *Cementerio de papel*, guaranteeing their silence, even after almost three decades have passed.

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<sup>21</sup> “(...) she had re-read her own answer and confirmed what she had gradually been coming to believe more and more as she was writing it: there are some questions you can only respond to with your life” (*The Absent Sea* 8).

<sup>22</sup> The Mexican “dirty war” will be addressed in chapter II of this dissertation.



Ironically, the silence is perpetuated at the time when the administration of Vicente Fox, the president of the “transition to democracy” (2000-2006) has promised to prosecute the people responsible for the political crimes committed in the past. As the first step to fulfill his campaign promise to prosecute the responsible people, Vicente Fox assigns the task of carrying out an investigation, and preparing a report to the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (CNDH), in which they will list the crimes committed, as well as the names of the people responsible for them. Sarcastically, in the first chapter of the novel, one of the guardians of the *Archivo General de la Nación*, which houses the recently declassified documents of State surveillance of civilians suspected to be political opponents in the years of the “dirty war,” discovers a body on the floor of one of the rooms of the building.

In “Espectros en el archivo: Cementerio de papel de Fritz Glockner y el retorno del pasado reprimido al Palacio Negro de Lecumberri” (2013), Vázquez explains that in June of 2002 the Supreme Court of Mexico ordered the transfer of thousands of classified documents of the *Secretaría de Gobernación* [Ministry of Interior] to the *Archivo General de la Nación* [General Archive of the Nation] (479). In “Las prisiones del archivo: pasado y presente de Lecumberri en Cementerio de papel” (2013), Susana Draper documents that The General Archive of the Nation was previously a high security prison called *Lecumberri*, but generally known as “*Palacio Negro*” *de Lecumberri*, which was inaugurated as a one of the main architectural symbols of the *Porfiriato*. In 1976, it was transformed into the National Archive of the Nation, housing the most important documents of Mexico’s history (352). During the so-called “dirty war,” many political prisoners were incarcerated at the *Palacio Negro de Lecumberri*, as it served as a clandestine detention center. Ironically, after thirty years they are returning to the cells of the *Palacio Negro*, but this time as an archive. The majority of the documents that the Archive houses about the “dirty war”

were produced at the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad*, the State intelligence agency in charge of surveilling society. Vicente Fox's administration wanted the Mexican people to have access to those documents, so that they could know the "truth" about the political crimes of the past.

Throughout the novel, the unnamed narrator informs the reader about the events that led to the "dirty war" in Mexico, as well as the protests and activities of different groups and citizens to demand punishment for the people responsible for the crimes committed. He also informs about their efforts to construct a national awareness of the Mexican "dirty war." The narrator highlights the work carried out by the mothers of *Comité Eureka*, who are in search of their family members abducted by the State. In fact, one chapter of the novel is dedicated to the story of this *Comité* as recounted by its president, Rosario Ibarra, during an interview conducted by the protagonists of the novel.

The unnamed narrator explains that immediately after the files were open to the public, hundreds of visitors came to delve into the documents, mainly family members, students, and scholars. The family members came in the hope of finding new information leading to revealing the destiny of their loved ones. Nonetheless, the data the family members found was, in many cases, contradictory to what they had witnessed, or knew about their family members. As Susana Draper affirms, *los desaparecidos* come back to the prison but as "una historia narrada por sus asesinos" [a story narrated by their murderers] (354). Moreover, many visitors quickly abandoned their personal research projects, as the Archive received a great quantity of inadequately organized documents, which made it extremely overwhelming and difficult to find any relevant information.

The release of the documents generated great expectations among the population, including political activists, and human rights defenders. Although many were skeptical that much progress would be made in terms of justice. Some people even affirmed that it was all part of a political

farce, Rosario Ibarra among them. Nonetheless, there was even greater expectation about the event where Vicente Fox's administration would release the results of the investigation carried out by the CNDH. Supposedly, Vicente Fox would reveal a list crimes, but more importantly, the names of the State officials found responsible for the crimes committee. However, their expectations were met with great disappointment when Vicente Fox announced that he would not disclose the list of names, arguing that it could hinder the investigations.

Rosario Ibarra, a very important figure in the arena of human rights activism, and the spokesperson of *Comité Eureka*, an organization which demands the return of all *desaparecidos* in Mexico, is certain that Vicente Fox will not deliver on his promise, and decides not to attend the event. According to the narrator, Rosario considers the event to be part of a political game and refuses to play along. As Draper affirms, her absence indicates how Rosario Ibarra has grown tired of the political uses of the past, such as the event organized by Vicente Fox, “que nunca correspondían a las demandas de la lucha por los desaparecidos sino a los intereses partidarios” (367).<sup>23</sup> In spite of all, the event itself was historical, without precedent, because at least the official silence about the recent violent political past in Mexico had been broken. As the narrator affirms: “las palabras del presidente de la CNDH rompían con un silencio oficial acumulado tantos años: luego de las investigaciones realizadas, se hizo patente la actitud autoritaria a un “problema político”” (27).<sup>24</sup>

A group of four young visitors to the Archive are particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities of truth that the recently released archives offer. They identify themselves as the

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<sup>23</sup> Which never corresponded to the demands of the struggle for the disappeared but to the party interests. (My translation)

<sup>24</sup> The words of the president of the CNDH broke with an official silence accumulated for so many years: after the investigations carried out, it became clear that the new administration would rule the country with the same authoritarian attitude of the previous administrations. (My translation)

fantastic four. They get to know each other as they independently embark on a quest for information about the times of the “dirty war.” Jacinto is a news reporter and is interested in finding anything that would lead him to write great news articles. Primitivo is a historian, interested in learning more about *Lecumberri* and the history of Mexico. Gustavo is a student searching for material to finish his thesis on the “dirty war.” The fourth member of the group is Enrique, who is interested in the Archive for very personal reasons; his father was abducted by State forces. Drawn to the Archive for different interests and projects, they become a close group of friends who share their research findings and motivate each other to delve into the unorganized thousands of released papers.

However, their hopes of truth are soon shattered when they learn about the body found in one of the galleries. They infer that the murder could be related to the recently unclassified documents that were generated during the “dirty war” in Mexico by the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS). Thus, they embark on an investigation to find the connection between the homicide and one of the most protected galleries of the Archive. They also conclude that if the homicide is related to those documents, then someone directly involved in the crimes of the past is trying to prevent the information from reaching a wider audience and be menaced by prosecution. The four visitors to the archive decide to clarify the homicide on their own as they highly suspect that it must be a well-known person trying to protect his reputation because he or she must still occupy a position of power.

Not long after having initiated their quest, they realize that they are constantly being followed. Nonetheless, they continue their investigations to find the reasons that led to the murder of one of the guards of the Archive. They were determined. Unfortunately, their detective enterprise come to a halt when the fantastic four receive an anonymous phone call telling them

that the girlfriend of one them has been abducted. The kidnappers threaten to torture her if they did not stop all inquiries about the murder. Thus, they decide to end the investigation, as they feel overpowered by the unknown person behind the murder, whom they assume to be very influential and capable of anything.

The person who stops them is Miguel, the former director of the extinct *Dirección Federal de Seguridad*. He does not want anybody to read the documents, so he desperately elaborates a plan to get hold of the documents that incriminate him, and that could possibly lead to a trial against him. Miguel is not as well positioned in the new political times, so, he does not want the information to be public, as he is incriminated in all the crimes committed, because he was the main interrogator and torturer. Although, he still considers that his actions were necessary and is in fact proud of his achievements in the persecution and annihilation of political opponents. He knows that the times have changed and he suspects that because of the campaign promises made by Vicente Fox he could be prosecuted. However, don Luis (Luis Echeverría Álvarez) his former boss, and president of Mexico during the times of the “dirty war” assures him that they still have useful connections within the current administration. Don Luis reassures him that they have nothing to worry about, that it is all part of a political maneuver to calm the activists and boost the levels of credibility of the new president, as he had promised to listen to the requests of human rights associations. In fact, Vázquez affirms that the chapter entitled “Viejos fantasmas” describes the pact of silence between the old regime, and the administration of the so-called “transition to democracy.” As don Luis himself indicates, “es un juego, es una ficción para acallar las clásicas protestas, supongo que tenían que hacerlo para cumplir con sus promesas de campaña” (67).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It's a game, it's a fiction to silence the classic protests, I guess they had to do it to keep up with their campaign promises. (My translation)

Miguel is not at ease with the recommendation to wait and do nothing, thus he decides to take matters into his own hands. As in the past, Miguel makes use of a network of collaborators, established during his time as director of the DFS, which was extremely useful to him when he played a key role during the most violent times of the “dirty war.” As the narrator states, “Miguel fue la pieza clave del sistema, el ejecutor, el represor, el despiadado, el torturador y el asesino” (153).<sup>26</sup> During the ‘dirty war’ Miguel had as many ears and eyes as possible, in every corner of the Mexican society, to know the activities, plans, and whereabouts of any perceived political opponent. As the narrator explains, in order to gather as much information as possible, Miguel, as director of the DFS “desplegó un sinnúmero de orejas, infiltrados, ojos, espías de todas las clases y prototipos: estudiantes, personal de limpieza de las universidades, periodistas, amas de casa, prostitutas, vendedores ambulantes” (73).<sup>27</sup>

At the *Archivo General de la Nación*, the guardian of the documents that incriminate Miguel is precisely one of his former loyal employees. The guardian is someone like Villa, a *mosca*, who wants to please and serve the people whom he perceives could protect him. He worked many years for Miguel when he was the director of the intelligence agency. However, he continues to be loyal to him, because Miguel still holds a privileged position in society. Miguel currently does not have a position in the bureaucracy of the State, but he works closely with State officials providing security services for them through his private agency. The guardian sees him as the means to remain in a comfortable position, thus he accepts to collaborate with Miguel in the theft of the documents.

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<sup>26</sup> Miguel was the key piece of the system, the executor, the repressor, the ruthless, the torturer and the murderer. (My translation).

<sup>27</sup> Deployed countless ears, infiltrators, eyes, spies of all classes and prototypes: students, cleaning staff from universities, journalists, homemakers, prostitutes, street vendors. (My translation)

As Miguel depends on the silence of society to guarantee that he will not receive punishment for the crimes he committed, nothing will stop him from recuperating the documents. He is confident that his collaborators will retrieve the archives. Nonetheless, he recognizes that he needs to be careful. He is living under times of great political change, where the ever-changing power relations could be unpredictable. As the narrator notes, Miguel knows that “en política la vida es como la rueda de la fortuna, en la que en ocasiones estás arriba y en otras estás abajo” (88).<sup>28</sup> For instance, as everyone evaluates their place in the new political times, and their possible gains under the new era, Felix el Gato, an ex-agent of the DFS and former Miguel’s informer, pays Miguel a visit, offering his services to steal the archives that document his involvement in the crimes of the “dirty war.” However, as Felix el Gato knows that Miguel no longer has control over any State agency, he ventures to offer his services at a high price, arguing that the new political times are more difficult, that we will have to pay more to other civil servants to agree to collaborate. Felix el Gato’s audacity would have been unthinkable during the times when Miguel was the director of the DFS, but in the current times Miguel’s political capital has decreased.

Miguel and his collaborators elaborate a plan to recuperate the documents. Everything is going according to the plan. However, things get out of control when Eva, the guardian they tricked into helping with the robbery, realizes that she is helping with the theft of official documents, and refuses to collaborate further. The thieves’ solution is to kill her and leave the body behind. As a trace of the theft has been left behind, now Miguel has to make sure that nobody could incriminate him with this murder.

This crime reveals that the power networks that made possible the use of violence and terror during the “dirty war,” are still in place within the modern Mexican society. Furthermore,

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<sup>28</sup> In politics, life is like the wheel of fortune, in which sometimes you are up and in others you are down. (My translation).

silence and the official narrative prevail, even after the discovery by the fantastic four that one more crime related to the “dirty war” will go unpunished. Once Miguel has secured the documents that incriminate him, he is interviewed by the press and assures them that he does not torture, he has never tortured, and that he has never murdered anybody. When a reporter asks Miguel about *los desaparecidos* in Mexico “el tema fundamental del informe de la CNDH que tanto se debatía y que podría implicar a Miguel” [the central topic of the CNDH report, widely discussed, and that could implicate Miguel], as the narrator explains, Miguel feels entitled and protected to respond: “Desaparecidos, como tal, no existen en México, aquí no estamos en Argentina, ni en Colombia o Uruguay” (240).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the political crimes of the past in Mexico continue to be concealed in spite of the fact that the archives were recently made available to the public.

As Susana Draper affirms, *Cementerio de papel* calls into question the supposed transition to a more democratic era in Mexico, when the administration of the so-called “transition to democracy” promised to bring justice in regard to the political crimes committed by the PRI. However, as she asserts, the novel highlights how the new administration led the citizenry into believing that the declassification of official documents meant access to the truth about the past. On the contrary, in spite of the open access to the documents of the DFS, silence and the official State narrative prevail, which discourages Jacinto, the news reporter, to write an article that contradicts the official truth, as he believes that nobody would believe him, or would be interested in publishing a story that refutes the official “truth.” As Draper puts it: “una vez que negocian la liberación de Claudia, todo vuelve a ser igual que antes: el robo del archivo queda encubierto y lo que gana es el silencio y la voz de Miguel” (359).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Disappeared, as such, do not exist in Mexico, here we are not in Argentina, nor in Colombia or Uruguay (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> Once they negotiate the release of Claudia, everything returns to be the same as before: the theft of the file is hidden and what wins is the silence and the voice of Miguel. (my translation)



When Miguel puts an end to the interview he is satisfied with himself, knowing that he had the last word. In the last chapter, named file sixteen, the fantastic four read the article where Miguel's version is published, which convinces them that their voices would probably never be heard. They continue to go to the Archive to finish their own personal research projects, convinced that they would have never been able to challenge whoever was behind Eva's murder. As the narrator notes "estaban conscientes de que el sistema se reproducía para poder mantenerse vivo, tenía que sobrevivir y el pasado podría tener un costo muy alto, por eso era mejor callarlo" (257).<sup>31</sup> However, the novel comes to an end with an optimistic interrogation by the narrator, wondering if the fantastic four would be able one day to challenge the official narrative. "¿Serían capaces de ponerle color a ese archivo negro?" (257),<sup>32</sup> asks the narrator.

Silence is the common denominator in *Cementerio de papel*, *El desierto*, and *Villa*. For different reasons, such as fear, consent or shame, the characters decide to remain silent about the crimes they know are being committed during or in the aftermath of a terrorist State. In all cases, the characters have the perception that they are facing others who, with the support of the State bureaucracy and monopoly on violence, overwhelmingly overpower them. Furthermore, as the texts unfold, the characters become more isolated and are unable to connect with others to overcome their fear and inability to challenge that power. Thus, they make the decision to surrender to what they perceive as a greater power. Hence, in all cases, the State, the bureaucratic system, and the networks of complicity set in place, guarantee the silence of the characters and the rest of society. The main characters live under the impression that what they are facing possesses an unlimited power, and that they inevitably have to collaborate, by action or omission. Ultimately,

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<sup>31</sup> Were aware that the system perpetuated to stay alive, had to survive, and that the past could be very expensive, so it was better to stay quiet (my translation).

<sup>32</sup> Would they be able color that black file? (my translation)

the terrorist State depends on that silence, the networks of collaboration, and the fear and shame of the characters to secure its power.

Their actions are not the result of helpless characters who have no choice but to collaborate. In the end, the decisions and actions of the characters that consent are driven by personal interests. Their actions are also motivated by their perception that nothing can be done to change the course of their situation and their surroundings. Nonetheless, as the hopeful question of the narrator of *Cementerio de papel* reminds us, it is always possible to contest what is perceived as a greater power. Even a terrorist State has fissures from which it can be challenged. The mere fact that on a daily basis the State must engage its citizens in power relations that would lead them to consent with power, as conveyed in the three novels chosen for this chapter, reveals this possibility.

## **CHAPTER 2. CHALLENGING THE SILENCE OF STATE TERRORISM IN RITUALS AND PERFORMANCES: A PATH TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DISSIDENT NARRATIVE OF STATE REPRESSION**

In the face of the destructive powers of the State to exterminate its own citizens, set in motion in Latin America during the 1970s and the 1980s, what have citizens done to prevent that groups in power hinder the construction of the collective consciousness and memory of State repression? Rituals and performances have stood out as powerful counter-hegemonic cultural practices that challenge the denial that surrounds State terrorism, during and in the aftermath. Performances and rituals have also been vital practices to construct a collective awareness and memory of State violence. When the State wants to silence all forms of dissidence, when people are afraid to talk, symbolic performances, especially rituals, are powerful actions, which fuel counter-hegemonic practices for citizens to defy the discourse of the groups in power, and to construct a collective awareness and memory of State repression.

In this chapter, the objective is to convey that performances play a key role in challenging silence and the hegemonic narrative of State repression. Particularly, I maintain that in order for performances to be a vital component in the construction of a collective awareness and memory of State terrorism, they need to be sustained practices, otherwise they are weakened and unable to challenge the official and prevailing narratives that deny, minimize, and justify State violence. Furthermore, performances must be practiced within a common cultural framework that enables the understanding of a dissident narrative, otherwise the spectators would not apprehend the performers' message, and the power of a ritual to construct a counter-hegemonic discourse will fail. Dictatorial and authoritarian powers are constructed in everyday practices, carried out by citizens, and are accepted by different sectors of a society because they are supported by existing cultural references and practices. Similarly, dissident discourses and rituals, in order to be

effective, have to be performed systematically and within a cultural framework shared by performers and the audience alike.

The analysis of the practices undertaken by *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, *Comité Eureka* in Mexico, and *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* in Chile, will shed light on how performances, but particularly rituals, are vital vehicles to challenge hegemonic narratives of State repression. To suggest that the cases of Argentina, Chile, and Mexico are alike would be simplistic and erroneous. My intention in this chapter is not to compare the three cases as equal, but to inquire about successful practices in challenging hegemonic narratives of State repression. Each case is unique, thus, the actions undertaken by the aforementioned associations of family members, the scope of their effectiveness, and the role of these groups and their actions in building a counter-hegemonic narrative, can be grasped only within the specific social, political, and cultural circumstances of each country. The central questions of this chapter are the following, Were these associations of family members able to break the silence of concealed repression? If so, how? Were their practices successful in constructing a dissident narrative that reached the rest of the society? Were they successful in impeding the erasure of the past, propelled by the groups in power to ensure the impunity of those responsible for the State crimes?

Undoubtedly, the crushing power of the State and the different groups of power, national and international, driven by political but primarily economic interests, would suppose the impossibility for regular citizens of defying such a destructive force. However, in the midst of terror and repression the family members of victims of State violence, primarily the relatives of the *desaparecidos*, compelled by their love for them, have constructed counter-hegemonic narratives, and to different extents, they have prevented the past from being forgotten. Citizens

abducted and later made to disappear by State officials are known as *detenidos-desaparecidos* in Latin America. The two words, joined together with a hyphen, convey the systematicity with which the State annihilates political opponents. State officials detain them, in the majority of the cases illegally, keep them in solitary confinement, and finally the detainees disappear, leaving no trace of their whereabouts. The term *detenido-desaparecido*, or *desaparecido*, singular and plural, refers to the citizens who were victims of this systematic State strategy to get rid of political opponents.

In Argentina, Chile, and Mexico organizations of family members have struggled with the denial and concealment of State violence during the so-called “dirty wars.” In Argentina, state officials named the dictatorship *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process) that lasted from 1976 to 1983. In Chile the dictatorship started in 1973 and ended in 1990. In Mexico, the period known as “dirty war” began in the late 1960s, and lasted until the 1980s, the 1970s being the deadliest period.

In Argentina and Mexico, the repression ordered by the State during the “dirty wars” was carefully concealed, with the exceptions of a few instances. In Argentina, the repression was mainly carried out behind doors, with forced disappearances being the preferred method of annihilation. Nevertheless, State officials always made sure that the arrests were performed in front of witnesses to ensure the spread of fear. State violence in Mexico was targeted to certain sectors of the population, and specific geographic locations, mainly the rural south. The violence perpetrated against rural dwellers was carefully concealed from the rest of the nation, as well as the enforced-disappearances executed in different urban cities, but primarily in the rural areas. In Chile, since the first moments of the coup d’état against democratically elected president Salvador Allende, the dictatorship publicly repressed the Chilean population. However, after the initial violence, the military Junta needed to establish a sense of normality; thus, the dictatorship

concealed and permanently denied the repression, especially the enforced-disappearances of political prisoners.

In Mexico and Chile, State officials did not use forced disappearances as extensively as Argentinian officials did. Nonetheless, in the three countries, the State systematically carried out enforced-disappearances to exterminate real or perceived political opponents, and in all three countries, almost exclusively the relatives of the *detenidos-desaparecidos* took to the streets to demand the whereabouts of their loved ones. The emotional need to find them prompted the relatives to carry out street performances and rituals to challenge the official narrative that denied all State crimes, violence, and the existence of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*. In Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, State officials, as well as others groups in power, consistently denied all allegations of State terrorism, and have permanently tried to convince the population that the best way to move forward is to forget the violent past. However, performances, and especially rituals, stand as acts of resistance against oblivion by decree. Since the very beginning, the family members of the victims of State terrorism understood that public demonstrations were the only path to gain visibility, to make their own experiences and narratives known, and to challenge the silence of the State. However, they had with very limited opportunities to do so, and had to plan every public demonstration strategically, if they wanted to engage the onlookers and achieve a greater impact. Not all public political demonstrations are successful at engaging the bystanders; some are ineffective and go unnoticed, or are quickly forgotten; while others captivate the observers, and are able to transform the performative experience into further activism and support.

### **The Unknown Mexican “dirty war”**

The dictatorships in the southern cone during the 1970s, especially in Chile and Argentina, are widely known and discussed. The events and circumstances that lead to the military coups, life

under the dictatorships, and its aftermath, have been the subject of academic discussions, and numerous scholarly publications. However, the Mexican “dirty war” period remains nationally and internationally neglected. The violence perpetrated in Mexico during the second half of the twentieth century was part of the large project for the Americas to develop an open market economic system. Thus, it is necessary to give a brief account of the Mexican “dirty war” and some of the reasons why the Mexican case remains unknown.

The repression in all three countries was in many ways concealed. However, the national populations, and the international community were aware of the violence taking place in Chile and Argentina. After all, in both countries the military Juntas declared a “war” against “subversive” groups. In Argentina, the fact that people were disappearing was not completely denied by the Junta, although they suggested that citizens were fleeing the country or leading clandestine lives. In Chile, the fierce violence was followed by the government’s strict control on society, with a curfew in place from 1973 until 1988, with a few lapses (Lira 2011, 115). In contrast, to a great extent, State violence in Mexico during the “dirty war” was and remains unknown on a national scale. Aside from a few instances of open violence, such as the massacre of Tlatelolco, the terror to which part of the Mexican population was subjected is, until today, generally disregarded.

For the family members of the victims of State repression in Mexico, it has been difficult to construct a collective awareness of State terrorism, because the State has been successful in maintaining this period hidden from the general population. During the “dirty war” in Mexico it was particularly challenging to portray the Mexican State as a violator of political and human rights, because the Mexican government gave a friendly hand to the politically persecuted from abroad and offered refuge to Chileans and Argentinians. Episodes of public violence against

Mexican citizens were enough to show the force of an authoritarian regime, but it did provide enough evidence to prove that the violence against Mexicans extended beyond isolated instances.

Mexico is a peculiar case among all Latin American countries that underwent the violence of State terrorism during the second half of the twentieth century. The Mexican government also aligned with the National Security Doctrine, launched by the United States. However, Mexico is normally not included as part of the analysis of the countries in Latin America that violently repressed political opposition to impose an open market economy. In general, scholars have not paid enough attention to the Mexican case, but more importantly, Mexican society at large has little knowledge of the political persecution and the repression that the Mexican State initiated in the 1960s against its own citizens. In *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982* (2012), Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo refer to the Mexican case as the *unknown* Mexican “dirty war” (my emphasis). As the scholars state, between 1964 and 1985, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay experienced periods of “state-sponsored terrorism commonly referred to as Dirty Wars” (1); however, Mexico is usually not included in that category.

In *La invención del Tercer Mundo: construcción y deconstrucción del desarrollo* (1996), Arturo Escobar explains that after World War II, the United States needed to expand its economy and create new markets to invest their excess capital. In order to do so, North America needed to create new consumers, and have access to cheap raw materials to support the growing capacity of their industry; especially the new multinational corporations. The alignment of the Americas was crucial for the United States to pursue its economic goals. Thus, in the conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1947, in which Mexico took part, the United States signed the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, to assure that the United States would provide military assistance to impose



by force market-oriented policies, which were designed to put an end to an economy regulated by the State (Escobar 73). This treaty became the doctrine of “national security” closely attached to the making of the new economic order, and the necessary repression to impose it.

Scholars such as Herrera and Cedillo mark the beginning of the so-called “Mexican dirty war” as September 23 of 1965, when the State began a counterinsurgency campaign after the assault on the Madera army barracks, when union leaders in Chihuahua, Mexico, successfully attacked military facilities in Madera city. The Union leaders demanded better life conditions, and the fulfilment of the promises of the Mexican revolution, such as access to productive land. However, even though “the government *institutionalized* arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, and irregular trials as weapons of war... *they never legally sanctioned or formally declared a state of siege* (Herrera and Cedillo 6; my emphasis). Nevertheless, the administrations of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), and José López Portillo (1976-1982) pursued the same goal as most of the rest of Latin American leaders: to annihilate any social movement that opposed the implementation of a new economic system; a project that continues until today.

Herrera and Cedillo, sustain that one of the reasons why the *dirty war* in Mexico is not a topic of discussion in academic research, and only a “vague memory” that has not been incorporated into the historical narrative, is because the ruling party during this period, PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), was very successful in creating the illusion of peace and political stability; while at the same time imposing a culture of silence on civil society for fear of government repression (10-11). In accordance with Herrera and Cedillo, Tanalís Padilla explains in *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priista 1940-1962* (2008) that State violence is only a blurred memory because the Mexican

government created what she calls *the myth of the Pax Priista*, largely based on the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. The Mexican State manufactured a “mythical state of the *revolutionary family*” (Carey 199; my emphasis).

Padilla affirms that the creation of this myth is largely due to Mexico’s economic growth during the sixties, 6 percent on average per year. During the 1960s Mexico experienced what is known as the Mexican “miracle”, a period of annual growth of 6-8 percent, and low inflation backed by a stable peso, explains Eirc Zolov in “Discovering a Land “Mysterious and Obvious”: The Renarrativization of Postrevolutionary Mexico” (234-272). Alexander Aviña writes in *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (2014) that the so-called Mexican miracle was possible due to intensified economic exploitation, undercut social reforms, and political repression that channeled resources from the poor to the rich, and from the peasantry to the city dwellers. In *Dictablanda: Politics, Work and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (2014), Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith explain that the growth was quantitative, but not qualitative; wealth was concentrated in the north of the country and in Mexico City. The role of the agricultural areas in south was to facilitate industrialization by providing cheap food to the cities, which enabled low wages in the urban zones. State repression was systematic in rural areas, while in the cities the State used the army only at key junctures and in critical places. State violence in the rural zones “was carefully masked [...] and carefully targeted,” concealed from the rest of the country, “—deployments often began at night, [and] soldiers killed while dressed as peasants—” (Gillingham and Smith 12-13). According to Elaine Carey in “Transcending Violence: A Crisis of Memory and Documentation” (2012), since State violence was perpetrated under the utmost concealment, “the secrecy of the brutality ensured a lack of uniform resistance

from the civil society” (Carey 200). In fact, for many years, the government even denied the existence of urban and rural armed resistance, “guerrillas.”

The PRI had a governing agenda that varied from region to region and adapted to different contexts. While some parts of Mexico experienced rigid authoritarianism, other places like Sonora, Guerrero, Sinaloa, and Chihuahua underwent State terror. Urban workers and the middle class enjoyed political and socioeconomic reforms and the “democratic opening” of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), while the impoverished peasants suffered extreme State violence as a means of “pacification” (Aviña 13).

Armed protests in rural areas, mainly in the state of Guerrero, unleashed the full force of the Mexican State, which used terror in the form of “torture, rape, [enforced] disappearances, death flights, strategic hamlets, the rationing of food and medicine, [and] the razing of villages” (Aviña 174). The State wanted to annihilate not only the rural “guerrillas,” but also the support base for Genaro Vázquez, and Lucio Cabañas, peasant and community leaders in coastal Guerrero, who decided to confront the State with armed groups, as they only encountered repression when the communities demanded the fulfillment of the promises of the Mexican revolution. Nonetheless, the Mexican State carefully created an image of defender of human and political rights. Thus, while Chileans and Argentinians found refuge in Mexico, and political parties from the opposition achieved legal recognition under the administration of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), the state of Guerrero was a war zone. Juan Fernando Reyes Peláez explains in “El largo brazo del Estado” that while Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) initiated the so-called “*apertura democrática*” [“democratic opening”], he simultaneously unleashed an unprecedented level of repression in Guerrero (406). As Aviña states “if Cold War Mexico appeared exceptionally different than a Latin America largely ruled by military dictatorships, coastal Guerrero and other

locales reveal a similar, more violent reality” (14). Thus, as clearly written on the back cover of Alexander Aviña’s book, it is merely a myth that Mexico was a stable and peaceful country surrounded by a sea of military dictatorships during the Cold War (*Specters of a Revolution* back cover).

The repression known as the *massacre of Tlatelolco* ordered in 1968 by Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), as brutal as it was, was only one single event. According to Gillingham and Smith before the massacre of Tlatelolco, the Mexican State relied on violence to control society more than traditionally acknowledged. The Mexican State used brutal force strategically, but always denied it, or concealed it from the rest of the population (26). The repression against urban and rural guerrillas, and entire rural communities primarily in state of Guerrero, began more fearfully during the administration of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). Rural communities and their leaders, who demanded the fulfillment of the promises of the revolution, were subjected to repression long before the “dirty war.” However, as Padilla points out, state violence increased in the sixties against Mexican citizens when the protests moved to the middle class and to the cities. However, violence perpetrated against rural communities was more dreadful. Entire communities were persecuted and targeted in an attempt to annihilate the “guerrillas,” which were led by Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez, rural teachers and leaders of the armed opposition in the state of Guerrero.

The severity of State repression in Mexico can hardly be denied; nonetheless it has been considered “light” compared to other repressive regimes in Latin America. Herrera and Cedillo sustain that this argument needs to be reconsidered because, “the government performed unprecedented human rights abuses.” They used “electric shocks, water boarding, mock executions, sexual violence, and they even tortured the militants’ babies” (8). According to

testimonies by both, former prisoners and repressors, “prisoners were executed, buried in mass graves, or cremated, while others were taken on the so-called “death flights” where bodies were put onto military planes and dumped into the Pacific Ocean” (8). In *México armado: 1943-1981* (2007), Laura Castellanos documents that Mexico was in fact the precursor of the *vuelos mortales* (death flights) in Latin America. As early as 1975 State officials traveled to Acapulco, Guerrero, to instruct the soldiers on how to carry out the executions, and how to transfer the bodies to throw them into the open sea (160-161).

The military and paramilitary groups in Mexico performed the same techniques and methods of torture disseminated by the United States in Latin America. The Special Prosecutor’s report, created during the presidency of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) documents that between 1953 and 1996, more than 1,000 soldiers were enrolled in the School of the Americas, and 340 Mexican officials received training in counterinsurgency tactics at the SOA between 1953 and 1980. Additionally, as Jorge Luis Sierra asserts in “Fuerzas armadas y contrainsurgencia (1965-1982), Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) sent Mexican officials to the International Police Academy in Washington to learn how to repress social movements, and public protests. Furthermore, the government of the United States, along with France, Japan, and the United Kingdom trained a paramilitary group known as *Halcones* to learn how to repress and kill protesters. This paramilitary group was used in the Corpus Christi massacre in 1971 in Mexico City. Other paramilitary groups were created, such as *Batallón Olimpia*. Its main action was the massacre of students on October 2 of 1968 (398-399).

The government of the United States was always very cautious to keep the military cooperation with Mexico secret. In *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, the United States and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (2015), Renata Keller writes that the United States feared that the

Corpus Christi massacre would expose “one of the many secret roles that the United States played in Mexico’s dirty war” (223). Based on declassified documents from the CIA, in *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (2011) Jefferson Morley reveals the collaborations between the CIA and Mexico during the Cold War, and asserts that the CIA’s station in Mexico was the frontline to fight international communism. In “Miguel Nazar Haro y la Guerra sucia en México,” Carlos Fernando López de la Torre states that one of the institutional results of this collaboration was the creation of the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (Federal Security Directorate) in 1947, under the supervision of the CIA and the FBI. Its main function was espionage, the infiltration and harassment of the citizens that were opposed to the regime. Miguel Nazar Haro, head of the Federal Security Directorate (DFS) from 1978-1982, was in fact one of the officials sent to Washington in 1965 to receive ideological as well as military training. After his return, Miguel Nazar Haro was appointed head of *Brigada Blanca*, a paramilitary organization in charge of the annihilation of the urban guerrillas; monitoring their families and friends, politicians, and leftists (60).

The so-called “dirty war” in Mexico, was certainly not “light”; it was, as in the rest of Latin America, an institutionalized extermination plan to annihilate dissidents, “guerrillas” and any of their real or probable supporters. The truth commission created in the state of Guerrero (Comverdad) in 2012 was able to prove that in 1971 the government of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) launched a genocide plan known as *Plan Telaraña* to exterminate the “guerrilla” forces of Lucio Cabañas, and its real or suspected support base in the rural communities (Petrich). The Mexican State, like the dictatorships of other countries in Latin America, launched and performed a systematic, aggressive, and horrific repression against dissident groups. However, as Padilla states, the Mexican “dirty war” is only recently coming to light “exposing the use of

torture, disappearances, the destruction of entire villages, and the disposal of bodies from airplanes in mid-flight –some of the same tactics employed by the most repressive Central and South American dictatorships” (15).

The history of Mexico during the years of the “dirty war” should be examined as part of a broader process taking place throughout Latin America to impose a new economic model, based on deregulated and open markets. During the 1970s, the doctrines and economic ideologies promoted by the United States shaped the political scenarios and the actions of the people in power against their own fellow citizens. As Daniel Feierstein affirms in “National Security Doctrine in Latin America” (2010), “the scale and the systematic character of the repression varied from country to country,” but in every case, repression and terror was used systematically to transform whole societies, and to annihilate any latent or real political opposition to the policies enforced by the United States (498).

Remembering economic motives of the “dirty wars” in Latin America is as relevant today as it has always been. The imposition of the neoliberal policies continues, or “an extreme version of Reaganomics” as Greg Grandin calls it in *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (2011), that is “deregulation, privatization, the extension of cheap credit to make up for falling wages, and the gutting of labor rights and social spending” (xi). As Grandin also affirms, the political repression against dissidents continues, “executed in some areas by a revival of the old Cold War alliance between death squads and the landed class” (xii). Yet, people in Latin America continue to fight for better living conditions, continuously deteriorating in a neoliberal open-market economy. Sadly, to strain social dissidence the same practices persist; extrajudicial killings, enforced-disappearances, and political imprisonment. In Mexico, the latest internationally-known case of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa, who were abducted in November of

2014 in the state of Guerrero, exposed not only the ongoing repression, but also the systematic impunity that persists. However, the mothers of *Comité Eureka*, an association of family members of the victims of the “dirty war” in Mexico, and more recently the children of the victims, are still fighting to make the Mexican “dirty war” visible.

### **Performances as a Place to Envision Change and Challenge Authority**

When State officials persistently denied the crimes committed, and refused to reveal the whereabouts of the detainees, some of their relatives decided to take their demands to the streets for the rest of society to see and hear their claims. It was not easy; however, in spite of fear for their own lives, many family members maintained their demands and resorted to street protests, creating counter-hegemonic performances and rituals that challenged the official narrative.

A performance is an action carried out to be viewed by others. As such, it comprises prior rehearsal and planning to ensure that the audience grasps the message. In the words of Richard Schechner in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013), performances are “restored behaviors,” “twice-behaved behaviors,” and “performed actions that people train for and rehearse” (28). However, Schechner maintains that when the audience observes a performance that does not take place on a stage, it becomes difficult to perceive it as a performative action. Defining what sets a performance apart from any other behavior is problematic, as the array of human actions and cultural products put on display to be viewed by others is infinite. According to Schechner, it is mainly through consensus that an action is classified as a performance, “convention, usage, and tradition say so [...] There is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance.” As a result of this conclusion, Schechner proposes that every action be considered a performance (38).



Defining every human action as a performance seems too broad of an explanation. However, there are two distinguishing aspects of any performance. The first one is that it requires an audience: it is an action performed “for those who are watching” (Schechner 28), including ourselves. The second distinctive aspect of a performance is that is ephemeral: it can only take place during the moment when the action is being performed and observed, explains Deborah Paredez in *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* (2006: 33). Performances are concrete actions, thus, they can only take place in the present, in the here and now. However, Paredez asserts that performances are not necessarily volatile. The scholar affirms that the power of performances, such as the ones carried out by the family members, reside in the emotions, the knowledge transmitted, and the possibilities the audience envisions for the future. In accordance, in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Diana Taylor explains that the ephemeral nature of a performance does not mean that it disappears; they remain in the knowledge transmitted through embodied practices. In this sense, Taylor affirms, performances become acts of transfer. In other words, the political performances carried out by the family members of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*, did more than just denounce the crimes committed; they transmitted the traumatic experience from the performers to the witnesses in the “shared and participatory act of telling and listening associated with live performance.” Even though the audience of the performances cannot possibly feel the same pain of the family members of *desaparecidos*, Taylor argues that it is possible to transmit the traumatic experience of victims of State repression; however, according to her, the act of transfer is inseparable from the subject who suffers it (Taylor 167-8).

The relatives of the victims of State repression were aware of the importance of choosing strategic performers to better transmit the pain associated with having family members *detenidos-desaparecidos*. The organizations of relatives also carried out their performances in public spaces

that were symbolically relevant, to have greater visibility and impact. The opportunities to use key public spaces were limited due to the repression of State officials. Nonetheless, they fought and even put their lives at risk to be able to present their narratives in strategic public spaces, and by specific performers.

The family members themselves, women in the majority of the cases, mainly in their role of mothers, and more marginally as wives, sisters and daughters, portrayed their ordeal. Having the family members be the performers of street protests made the pain more easily perceived as real; who else could feel more the pain of losing a loved one, to execution or forced disappearance, than the family members themselves, especially the mother? The organizations of family members chose specifically women to protest publicly as a protective measure against State repression. In many cases, the male family members did not agree with protesting against the military or authoritarian regimes, but in many others, it was a decision taken after carefully evaluating the outcomes of having male relatives challenging the State. Nonetheless, the State also repressed the women, although it had to be more careful to avoid international criticism. However, in spite of fear, drastic changes in their priorities, routines, and lifestyles which entailed dedicating most of their time and resources to find their loved ones, they continued looking for their family members and performing acts of transfer as strategically as possible.

In this sense, a staged performance of the traumatic experience, acted out by someone other than the family members, would not have had the same force to transmit the pain associated with the dissident narrative of State repression. Furthermore, in the aftermath, it is still mainly the family members who continue the public protests and demands. In “Missing in Mexico: Denied Victims, Neglected Stories” (2014), Sylvia Karl recounts a revealing phrase from an interview with Luisa Pérez, a lawyer of the Mexican Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, “without

relatives there are no [*desaparecidos*]" (16). The family members have the resilience to continue demanding justice decade after decade. As Tita Radilla, the daughter of Rosendo Radilla, *desaparecido* in Guerrero in 1974, points out in the documentary *12.511 Rosendo Radilla Case: An Open Wound from Mexico's Dirty War* (2006), directed by Vásquez Sansores and Hernández Tinajero, "If the family members don't do it, who will?" The personal significance of the crimes committed by the State makes it very difficult to abandon their struggles for truth and justice; it would feel as if it were a betrayal to their loved ones. Continuing their fight is the only way they see to vindicate their family members. In the case of the relatives in Guerrero, Mexico, for example, Karl asserts that despite all frustrations, denial of answers, and the exoneration of the perpetrators, many relatives continue to motivate others, because "they are convinced that the fight for justice has to go on." Citing Judith Herman, Karl names this persistence of seeking justice as the "mission of the survivor" (16), it feels as it is their duty to continue.

When the pain portrayed in a performance is deeply felt, it can be transmitted to the audience, Taylor explains. However, this does not mean that the onlooker will ever appropriate the pain of the performers, because no matter how powerful and convincing a performance might be, pain is never transferable. Rather, Taylor sustains, the efficacy of performances "depends on its ability to provoke recognition and reaction in the here and now" (188). The audience will never be able to feel the trauma and pain of the victim or the family members, but the empathy and recognition can take place in a more universal concern. As the claims of the family members evolved into the defense of human rights, the recognition intensified because the crimes were presented not just as political crimes against specific opponents, but crimes against humanity. In this sense, after Taylor witnessed *escraches* in Argentina, the public protests by the children of the *desaparecidos*, Taylor affirms that witnesses can also become politically engaged. In her own

words, “[...] most of us addressed or implicated by these forms of performance protest are not victims, survivors, or perpetrators –but that is not to say that we have not part to play in the global drama of human rights violations” (188). In accordance with Taylor, the performances of the family members, including the ones now performed by the children of the victims “transmit traumatic memory and political commitment” (164). Thus, in Taylor’s opinion, even those who did not experience the traumatic event can understand the suffering of State violence through the power of a performance by the family members, and engage in a political commitment, and possibly take that experience even further and transform it into a sense of collective responsibility.

Along the same line of thought, Paredez asserts that even though performances are localized and momentary (it can only take place at the space and time where the performers and audience meet). They have the potential to transcend the spatial and temporal limits. In Paredez words “the magic of performance resides in its ability to encourage transcendence beyond its discrete temporal boundaries.” Paredez explains that performances inherently occur in the present only; however, they can lift the audience out of the present “haunted by the ghosts of the past and gesturing toward future possibilities” (33). Performances then have to be considered in terms of their effect and affect, notes Paredez. A performance is effective when it captures the attention of the audience, and after that happens, as Paredez affirms, “the most potent effects of performance are often the affective spaces it can open for its participants” (33). After a performance captures the attention of the audience, it can lift everyone above the present, “into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense” (Jill Dolan cited in Paredez 33). In this sense, a performance goes beyond the strict present, but only if the audience is affectively engaged, and

in that case, Paredez argues, the political and social efficacy resides in creating “the condition for action” in the spaces beyond the now of the performance (33).

### **Performative Protests in the Construction of Collective Awareness of the “dirty war” in Mexico: Madres of *Comité Eureka***

In the only book devoted to providing the history of *Comité Eureka Las madres de los desaparecidos: ¿un nuevo mito materno en América Latina?* published in 2001, Elizabeth Maier recounts their history. In April of 1977, family members of political prisoners of the state of Nuevo León, and the family of Jesús Piedra Ibarra, the only *detenido-desaparecido* at that time in Nuevo León, founded the first *Comité* of relatives with the objective of finding and liberating the victims of State repression. In August of the same year, the group had already evolved into a national group of mothers of the *desaparecidos*, exiled, and political prisoners. Their official name was *Comité Pro Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados de México* (Committee for the Defense of Prisoners, Persecuted, *Desaparecidos* and Exiled in Mexico, my translation) (Maier 138, 181).

After 10 years, on their anniversary, they changed their name to simply *Comité Eureka*. Rosario Ibarra, the president of the *Comité*, explains that they wanted a catchy name that would also encourage people. One day, Rosario’s husband, who was not in the habit of going to Mexico City, told her: the day you pick up the phone and tell me just one word, Eureka! That day I’ll go to Mexico City, because I would know that you found our son. In Greek the word means I have found. Rosario describes that the word has two meanings for the *Comité*, to have found 148 *desaparecidos* over the years, but also to have found the road to the fight for freedom, democracy, and to have found themselves as *luchadoras* (fighters); as capable of challenging such a powerful enemy as the government (Maier 61).

As mother of the first *desaparecido* registered in Nuevo León Rosario Ibarra assumed the leadership role. Her drive was fundamental in the creation and permanence of the *Comité*. After the enforced-disappearance of her son, Rosario Ibarra worked tirelessly to find him. Fortunately, for Rosario Ibarra, her husband was able to provide for her completely -which was not the case for the rest of the mothers-, so that she could permanently move to Mexico City, the center of the political power in the country, to try to find their son (Maier 154).

Rosario also spent many hours and resources to broaden the base of the *Comité*. She personally traveled across the country and invited other women to become part of the association. Due to her central role, the *Comité* has been associated mainly with the public figure of Rosario Ibarra. Besides being the president of the *Comité*, after creating the association of relatives, Rosario gained notoriety as she also tried to seek justice through traditional political channels; she ran for president in 1982 and again in 1988. Furthermore, in recognition of Rosario Ibarra's work as an activist, she has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize on several occasions (Chávez Rodríguez). As a result, most of the attention has been centered on the figure of Rosario Ibarra and her role as an activist, rather than on the efforts of the entire collectivity demanding justice for the *desaparecidos* and the political prisoners. Director Cecilia Serna's documentary *Vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos* (2007) by, presents the history of *Eureka* giving voice mainly to Rosario Ibarra and her experiences. Nonetheless, without the committed work of Rosario Ibarra, her energy and encouragement to the other members, the international tours, and the connections she established with other groups of women in Latin America, it would have been extremely difficult for *Comité Eureka* to endure.

The method of forced disappearance of persons became "the most notorious hallmarks of Latin American regimes," in the words of Andrea Noble in "Family Photography and the Global

Drama of Human Rights” (2009, 67). As a result, the associations of mothers of *desaparecidos* also developed as a Latin American phenomenon that emerged during the second half of the twentieth century (Maier 30). These organizations were formed during the 1970s and 1980s, in the majority of the Latin American countries, as a collective feminine response to the concealed, denied, and organized State violence, practiced in many Latin American countries as part of a silent militarization to defend the hegemonic economic paradigm, except in Cuba (Maier 42).

Soon after the different associations emerged independently in various countries in Latin America, a larger group was created to organize all their efforts, and have a greater impact. The *Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (FEDEFAM) was officially constituted in Caracas in November of 1981, after the first convention in Costa Rica in April of the same year. Currently 20 associations of Family members of *desaparecidos* from twelve Latin American countries are part of FEDEFAM. From its inception, Mexico, as well as Chile and Argentina, participated in the FEDEFAM. In fact, in November of 1983, the IV FEDEFAM Congress took place in Mexico City, under the title “Vivos los llevaron, vivos los queremos” (Alive they took them, alive we want them back). One of the most important resolutions of this Congress was to declare 1984 as the international year against forced abductions in Latin America and the world (Corporación 63). The main objectives of FEDEFAM were to guarantee the coordination of all the organisms of family members in Latin America, to denounce forced disappearances, and to work with intergovernmental institutions for Human Rights to accomplish the categorization and punishment of forced disappearances (Ayala 132-133).

Every association of family members had to pursue its objectives under similar but unique circumstances. For the members of *Comité Eureka* in particular, it has been difficult to coordinate sustained and prolonged activities in Mexico City, the political center of the country, where public

protests have greater visibility. The majority of the members of *Comité Eureka* live in rural zones in the south of Mexico, as the great majority of *desaparecidos* are from those areas. Maier explains that the most common characteristic of the mothers of *los desaparecidos* in Mexico is their diversity; native of rural areas and the cities, immigrants in the large city of Mexico, or dwellers of relatively isolated villages of the mountains of Guerrero and Chihuahua. They also come from many different backgrounds. They are indigenous, and mestizas; peasants, working-class, storekeepers, and professionals; poor, middle class, and well-off; educated and even self-taught basic skills of writing and reading (Maier 141). Nonetheless, their activities have been numerous, and until today they continue to denounce the forced disappearances committed against their family members.

*Comité Eureka* had a total of 557 mothers, but only a fifth of them were actively participating. Most of the *detenidos-desaparecidos* were men, and after State officials abducted them, women had to become the heads of the household, and find ways to support their families financially. Thus, with very limited resources, it was difficult for many mothers to travel to Mexico City and participate in many of the activities. These circumstances made it almost impossible to gather all the members of the *Comité* to organize joint activities sustained throughout time. Adding to the difficulties of *Comité Eureka*, there are few mothers of *desaparecidos* from Mexico City itself (Maier interview with one of the members, Maier 194), which limited the human resources available.

However, in spite of all the limitations, along more than 30 years of work, they have had many important accomplishments, especially during the beginnings of their work together. Some of the most important ones are the Amnesty Law in 1978, that followed their first hunger strike, after which the government liberated more than 2,000 political prisoners, but only 7 *desaparecidos*



of the more than 550 documented cases in the country. The government also ceased thousands of arrest warrants, and allowed 57 exiles to return to Mexico (Maier 72, 189-90). In 1979 they were able to obtain the liberation of 30 *desaparecidos*, who were detained in clandestine prisons. Over the years, they have been able to liberate a total of 148 *detenidos-desaparecidos* (Maier 72, 194).

The permanence of the *Comité* has not been the result of one major accomplishment or event; but the outcome of a long learning process, the accumulation of many experiences, the modification of strategies, and the periodic renovation of their alliances (Maier 187). The achievement they had at the beginning were crucial to lift their spirits and continue the fight. However, in a way they were also counterproductive, as most of the family members of the newly liberated political prisoners abandoned the group after the Amnesty Law was passed. According to Rosario Ibarra, in an interview by Elizabeth Maier, at the beginning there were numerous women participating, especially the mothers of political prisoners in Monterrey, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Guerrero, and Sinaloa. There was a large number of political prisoners, and all the family members were working together. However, after the Amnesty Law, when thousands of prisoners were liberated, their family members stopped participating, and only the mothers of the *desaparecidos* continued working as part of the *Comité*. As Maier explains, on the one hand the mothers were celebrating the liberation of the political prisoners, but on the other, the Amnesty Law affected the *Comité* considerably reducing the number of its members. Thus, after the Amnesty Law the members were almost exclusively mothers of *desaparecidos*. They became such a small group that they had to associate with other organizations and sectors of society. As a result, the mothers of *Comité Eureka* organized the *Frente Nacional Contra La Represión* (FENCER); in defense of human rights (Maier 192-3).

At the beginning of their work together, they had specific objectives in mind, such as the liberation of all political prisoners; the return of all exiles, and finding information that would lead to find the *desaparecidos*. Accordingly, their performances were planned to create enough pressure to achieve those concrete goals. Thus, their actions were limited in duration and planned to accomplish specific outcomes. For example, their initial most striking performance was their first hunger strike. It was an extreme measure, an idea extremely criticized by everybody, even by organizations from the left (Maier 189). However, after realizing that the government would never fulfill the promises of providing information about their family members, they decided to take an extreme course of actions.

According to Rosario Ibarra, many opposed their initiative of a hunger strike, even organizations from the left, alleging that they could unleash a brutal repression (interview of Rosario Ibarra by Maier, Maier189). Regardless, they decided to continue with their plans, and on August 28, 1978 they undertook their first hunger strike. Selecting the best location was crucial, as they needed as much exposure as possible. This was going to be the first opportunity for them to let the rest of the nation know about their petition to liberate the political prisoners, but more importantly, about the existence of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*; the newly adopted repressive tactic in the Americas. Aware of the difficulties to ensure the use of a strategic place, they announced their plans, but not the location. Nobody, even members of the *Comité*, knew where the hunger strike was going to take place, except for Rosario. All the mothers had decided that the best course of action would be for them to ignore the location. Rosario was going to decide the location and let the rest of the members know that same day; they did not want to commit an indiscretion (Maier 186).

The location Rosario chose was the Metropolitan Cathedral, right in the heart of Mexico City. According to Rosario Ibarra, making the decision to carry out the hunger strike at the Cathedral of Mexico City was a crazy decision, as nobody had used this place for any political demonstrations since 1968, when the students went up in the tower to ring the Cathedral bells. It was prohibited, it was taboo, recounts Rosario Ibarra, to do any political demonstrations in any part of the Zocalo, (central plaza in Mexico City); all demonstrations were prohibited during the administration of Echeverría (Interview with Rosario Ibarra by Maier, Maier 189).

In order to assure as much exposure as possible, and to put pressure on the government, the timing of the performance had to be optimal as well. The hunger strike was planned to take place just a few days before José López Portillo (1976-1982) delivered his second address to the nation. Mothers and family members from Guerrero, Sinaloa, Jalisco and Monterrey traveled to participate in the hunger strike. On that day, 84 women and 4 men began the strike that lasted for four days, explains Jesús Ramírez Cuevas in “Las inventoras de los derechos humanos: una huelga de hambre que hizo historia” (1). Rosario Ibarra needed to distract the authorities, thus, she had previously arranged an appointment to see Jesús Reyes Heróles, the secretary of State, that same afternoon. She informed State officials that before the interview the mothers were going to go to the Cathedral to pray for their children. To occupy the Cathedral successfully, they decided to divide in groups to draw less attention to themselves. Once inside, they took out the pictures of their *desaparecidos*, and all their placards. They were able to take possession of the atrium for four days, but decided to leave the day before the President’s Address to the Nation, to avoid a brutal repression. The next day, the President announced the first Amnesty Law to liberate 1,500 political prisoners. That was the first of seven hunger strikes in the course of ten years, and the first of four

amnesty laws (Ramirez Cuevas 2). Between 1978 and 1981 the mothers undertook three more hungers strikes –one lasted 15 days– in order to accelerate the release of the prisoners (Maier 192).

Besides having concrete goals in mind, they also undertook many other actions to raise awareness about the repressive tactics of the government, and the existence of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*. The scope of some of their actions to raise awareness was very limited, as they decided to speak directly to the people. They approached the population they considered politically sensitive to their cause. They visited them at their work places or schools. In an interview with Elizabeth Maier, Rosario Ibarra recounts:

Nos íbamos a la universidad de Monterrey –por ejemplo– a las 7 de la mañana que empiezan las clases y no terminábamos hasta las 5 de la tarde; salón por salón, en todas las facultades –porque en estas facultades muchos de nuestros hijos eran estudiantes– Hablé y hablé y hablé y hablé... con todos los estudiantes... dándoles a conocer el problema de los desaparecidos. Y así fuimos empezando a crear una conciencia en el pueblo de la necesidad de luchar por la amnistía” (Maier 188).<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, they visited workers to talk to them about the political prisoners and the *desaparecidos*:

Nos íbamos a Monclova, por ejemplo, a Altos Hornos, a hablar con los trabajadores, a las 6 de la mañana que salieron del turno; en Monterrey, a Fundidores; igual a Celulosa de Chihuahua. Allí, hacíamos lo que nosotras llamamos el “menudo político”. Hacía un frío bárbaro en Chihuahua, 5 ó 6 grados. Llevábamos menudo calentito, les ofrecemos el plato de menudo a trabajadores en Celulosa para que lo comieran en aquel frío. Mientras ellos comían, nosotras les echábamos el rollo político de los desaparecidos y los presos. Y así íbamos a las empacadoras, a las comunidades pesqueras de Sinaloa, nos íbamos a todas partes” (Maier 188).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> We would go to the University of Monterrey –for example– at 7 in the morning, which is when classes begin, and we did not finish until 5 in the afternoon; classroom by classroom, in every department –because in those departments many of our children were students– I talked, and talked, and talked, and talked... with all of the students... letting them know about the problem of *los desaparecidos*. And like that we started creating awareness among the people about the need to fight for the amnesty (My translation).

<sup>34</sup> We would go to Monclova, for example, to Altos Hornos, to talk with the workers, at 6 in the morning when they finished their shift; in Monterrey, to Fundidores, also to Celulosa in Chihuahua. There, we did what we called “political menudo” (a traditional Mexican hot soup). It was very cold in Chihuahua, 41-43 Fahrenheit degrees. We brought hot *menudo*, we offered a serving to the workers in Celulosa, for them to eat in that cold weather. While they were eating, we would tell them the political chat of *los desaparecidos* and the prisoners. And like that we would go to the packing companies, the fishing communities in Sinaloa, we went everywhere. (My translation)

In spite of the difficulties, their actions have been numerous throughout the years. At the beginning, their main concern was to let as many people know about the disappearances taking place in the country, as well as about the political prisoners. Additionally, as Maier explains, during the first years, the *Comité* concentrated their efforts on documenting the dimension of the enforced-disappearances in Mexico, to denounce them as an official strategy of repression, and to pressure the government for the compliance to the Amnesty Law (192). The mothers of *Comité Eureka* learned how to document the enforced-disappearances for international organizations such as the UN and the OEA, as they wanted to attract the attention of international entities defending human rights. Rosario Ibarra visited organisms such as the United Nations to deliver the files of the *desaparecidos*. She visited the OEA (Organization of American States) and International Amnesty. They visited Costa Rica, the United States, London, and even Cuba to protest in front of the Mexican embassy for the appointment of Mario Moya Palencia as ambassador, one of the Mexican officials responsible for the repression in Mexico during the 1970s. They also participated in meetings and international congresses (Maier 200).

Other activities carried out by *Comité Eureka* have been weekly *Comité* meetings; protests with the use of placards in front of military Camp 1, used as an illegal detention center; symbolically “taking” the offices of civil servants; performing *plantones* (sit-ins); *marchas* (public protest); blockages of avenues and highways; masses at Christmas, and rallies; creating and distributing flyers; among many other protests. According to the information provided in the *Informe Histórico*, over the years they have promoted hundreds of manifestations, press releases, rallies, assemblies; they have attended countless events for students, workers, teachers, political parties, demanding to know the truth and the whereabouts of their loved ones. They have also staged photographic exhibitions and posters to spread their demand to liberate their loved ones, in

universities, schools, neighborhoods, press conferences, and the Centro Nacional de Comunicación (CENCOS). They have also celebrated masses for the life and freedom of political prisoners. They have fasted, created letters and posters with the photos of their family members *detenidos-desaparecidos*, and have distributed them within the country, as well as overseas (Fiscalía 693).

Due to the great efforts of the relatives of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*, *Comité Eureka*, and the family members of Guerrero as well, the Mexican State has been able to obliterate completely the annihilation campaign that took place in the 1970s. Thus, it is because of their tireless work that the “dirty war” in Mexico is at least a blurred memory. In “Missing in Mexico”, Sylvia Karls calls the groups of family members in Mexico crucial groups of counter-memory that refute the official discourses of denial of the crimes committed by the State (1).

The Mexican government has cynically tried to wear out their association, by giving them false hopes. Unlike the case of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, who were ignored by the military Junta, which never accepted to meet with them, various Mexican presidents agreed to meet with *Comité Eureka* in several hearings, but only to give them false hopes. Between 1975 and 1976 Rosario Ibarra met, in a personal capacity, 39 times with President Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). Later, between 1977 and 1978, as the president of *Comité Eureka*, she met with President José López Portillo (1976-1982) a total of four times. The cynicism and denial was such that in 1978 José López Portillo, the commander-in-chief, told them: “yo sé que ustedes no tiene razón para mentir. Yo sé que ustedes dicen la verdad; que sus hijos fueron detenidos, que están desaparecidos, que están incomunicados. ¿Pero qué quieren que yo haga si mis colaboradores

me dicen que no es cierto?” At the end of his administration 100 more citizens were added to the list of *desaparecidos* (Fiscalía 693).<sup>35</sup>

*Comité Eureka* requested hearings with all subsequent presidents. Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) avoided meeting with them, but after the earthquake in 1985 he finally agreed. Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) granted the hearing after 18 months of negotiation with the Secretaría de Gobernación (Secretariat of Interior). Salinas de Gortari applauded the tenacity of these mothers and granted a “silent amnesty” to free the last two political prisoners of the guerrilla group *Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre*, and the liberation of six *detenidos-desaparecidos*. However, during his administration, political assassinations were committed, and a great number of enforced disappearances were registered in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Morelos (Fiscalía 693-694).

As an effort to be identified as the mothers of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*, in all their public performances they adopted the use of black dresses, with the photo of their missing relatives hung or pinned on their chests. In 1989, they also used this garment to perform one of their most courageous performances. In front of the National Palace, the seat of the federal executive in Mexico, they staged the crucifixion of mothers of *Comité Eureka* with their eyes blindfolded. According to Elizabeth Maier, the crucifixion was “un simbólico juego de espejos que manifestaba el dolor de la madre fusionado con la del hijo o hija crucificada por la desaparición” (192).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Maier interprets that in their role as mothers their performance challenged the paternal figure of the State:

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<sup>35</sup> I know you have no reasons to lie. I know you say the truth; that your sons and daughters were detained, that they are missing, that they are incommunicado. But what do you want me to do if my team members tell me that it isn’t true” (Fiscalía 693, my translation).

<sup>36</sup> A symbolic play of mirrors that exhibited the pain of the mother fused with that of the son or daughter crucified by the disappearance. (My translation)

con los ojos vendados por pañuelos negros, como si la Justicia se hubiera enlutado – intuitivamente interrelacionando múltiples símbolos de dolor e injusticia. Reflejando la dualidad hijo/madre sacrificada y agonizante, tan significativo para la cultura cristiana, se colocaron en sus respectivas cruces frente la representación arquitectónica del poder de la Patria –el Palacio Nacional– en lo que aparentara ser una simbólica conversación de cara a cara entre Madre y Padre” (59).<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, as courageous as the performance of the cruxifixion was, this act did not prevail in the social consciousness of Mexicans throughout the time. The media did not cover the performance and news of it never reached the rest of the nation. As part of the numerous activities and actions carried out by *Comité Eureka*, it helped to maintain the demand for justice and return of the *detenidos-desaparecidos* only within a sector of the society, mainly the family members of the victims. The work of *Comité Eureka*, founded in 1977 continues today, almost 40 years later. One of their latest achievements came in 2012, when they inaugurated the museum *Casa de la Memoria Indómita* (House of the Untamed Memory) in Mexico City. The museum is intended to keep the memory of the *los desaparecidos* of the “dirty war” in Mexico (Chávez Rodríguez).

In spite of all their work, they were not able to carry out counter-hegemonic performances that were systematically repetitive. Their performances, as successful as they were in achieving certain goals, and maintaining the need of relatives to keep fighting for justice and truth, did not develop into a national counter-hegemonic narrative that challenged the silence and denial of State terrorism. Their performances did not develop into rituals, sustained and repetitive actions throughout time, to remind the Mexican citizens permanently of their dissident narrative.

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<sup>37</sup> With their eyes blindfolded with the black handkerchiefs, as if Justice was put into mourning –intuitively interrelating multiple symbols of pain and injustice. Reflecting the duality son/mother sacrificed and dying, so significant for the Christian culture, they placed themselves on their respective crosses before the architectural representation of the power of the fatherland –the National Palace– in what appears to be a symbolic conversation, face to face, between Mother and Father. (My translation)



## **Performances of *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* in Chile**

In Chile, one particular group prevented the obliteration of the past and the denial of the crimes committed by the military Junta. The brutal force displayed by the military Junta during the coup d'état, and the subsequent days, was of such violence, that defying the State meant almost the certainty of being killed. However, once again, it was the family members of the victims, specifically the relatives of *los desaparecidos*, who challenged the Junta, and demanded to know the whereabouts of their loved ones. In *La Cueva sola: mujeres, memoria y lucha (ni perdón ni olvido)*, Flavio Salgado Bustillos states that the *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (Association of Relatives of the Detainees and *Desaparecidos*), hereinafter referred to as *Agrupación*, emerges in the midst of terror, impunity, fear, and blind obedience to the repressive regime. *Agrupación* was the first association to defy openly the Chilean military Junta led by Augusto Pinochet (23). Their activities have been numerous, such as street actions; hunger strikes; direct appeal to the UN; public processions; demonstrations; protests anniversary commemorations; rallies; chainings; cultural performances such as dances, and international tours, to name just a few (Stern 2006:125).

As in the case of *Comité Eureka* and *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the *Agrupación* confronted the silence and the denial of the military Junta about the enforced-disappearances, as well as a great deal of indifference from the Chilean society. Even though the military Junta murdered hundreds of people following the coup d'état, the Junta tried to conceal the evidence of the violence perpetrated. To that end, in 1979 Pinochet initiated the operation “retiro de televisores” to destroy the bodies of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*. With this operation, Pinochet ordered that all the bodies, hidden in different concentration camps, had to be exhumed and

destroyed, either thrown in the ocean, blown up with dynamite, or burned. The objective was to efface the evidence of the extrajudicial killings committed by the Junta (Salgado Bustillos 17).

In the midst of the dictatorship, which lasted seventeen years (1973-1990), it was extremely difficult for the *Agrupación* to become visible. The military Junta had ample and unlimited control of public buildings, plazas, and the mass media. The Junta could publicize all their activities, legitimize their authority, and to carry out rituals to unify the national will around their projects, and discourse of saving Chile from a chaotic situation, explains Hernán Vidal in *Dar la vida por la vida: Agrupación chilena de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* (29). On the contrary, the *Agrupación*, as a dissident group, faced enormous difficulties to interpellate the public conscious, and be noticed by the audience they wanted to reach. Additionally, mass media only acknowledged them to discredit them (Vidal 30).

The *Agrupación* was formed at the end of 1974, not long after the dictatorship was established. From the beginning, the *Agrupación* received support of the *Comité de Cooperación por la Paz en Chile*, sponsored by different religious organizations and denominations. After the president of the *Comité*, Helmut Frenz, a Lutheran bishop, was expelled from the country, the Catholic Church offered legal, social, and advertising services to the family members of the *desaparecidos*. In 1976 the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad de la Iglesia Católica* was formed, and has exclusively offered these services. They also provided office space for the family members to house the *Agrupación*. The *Agrupación*, mainly comprised of women, was the only group that publicly opposed the regime. This group of women was the only one that took to the streets, and did it, according to Hernán Vidal, with a suicidal bravery, as they knew they were risking their own lives (Vidal 19, 218).

It is worth noting that contrary to the leaders of the Catholic Church in Argentina, the leaders in Chile protected the population and openly opposed and criticized Pinochet's military dictatorship. In Argentina, the leaders supported the military junta, and had complete knowledge of the crimes against humanity being committed, in many cases they even witnessed the torture sessions at the concentration camps. According to Elizabeth G. Wilson in Argentina the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church historically sided with the powerful, while in Chile they embraced the protection of the poor and vulnerable. Moreover, Wilson states that the opposing response to the military regimes had to do with the personal formation of various bishops in the Chilean and Argentine episcopacies (21-26).

At the beginning, the sense of urgency to find their family members drove the *Agrupación* to engage in *acciones relámpago*; spontaneous and unorganized protests. They believed that they could not waste time. They thought that if they acted fast enough they could still find their family members alive. During 1974-75 the search for their loved ones was frenetic and frenzied; they wanted to inform as many people as possible of their ordeal. They threw pamphlets in crowded streets, disrupted traffic, protested at the entrances of the concentration camps and shouted calling for their loved ones, among many other speedy activities. These *acciones relámpago*, were performed under a time of great repression (Vidal 99).

However, the scope of their actions was limited. After the initial phase of their frenzied protests, they resorted to performing more organized activities that could attract the attention of the bystanders, and would make the military Junta address their petitions. Two of their most successful performances were hunger strikes, like in the case of *Comité Eureka*, and the chaining of some of their members in front of strategic governmental buildings.

They held the first hunger strike in 1977. It took place in front of the *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL), with 36 protesters. This first hunger strike lasted 10 days. The second hunger strike took place in April of 1978, a month after the Junta decreed an Amnesty Law to protect the perpetrators of any crime committed during the first phase of the repression. As a reaction to the decree, and because the junta had failed to fulfill all national and international commitments to provide information about the *desaparecidos*, the *Agrupación* organized the second hunger strike. In May of 1978 one hundred people initiated what the *Agrupación* now refers to as the “long” hunger strike (Vidal 106-7).

According to Vidal, the Amnesty Law that protected the perpetrators made the *Agrupación* mobilize more than ever before, making the year of 1978 the year of most activity in the history of the *Agrupación*. As part of the great mobilizations in 1978, the *Agrupación* also performed the chaining of fifteen women to the bars of CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina/United Nation Economic Commission for Latin America) (Vidal 107). As a result of the second hunger strike and the international attention they attracted, the military Junta was forced to acknowledge the *Agrupación*, and more importantly the existence of *los desaparecidos*. The military Junta could no longer deny the occurrence of enforced-disappearances, especially after the Church presented 619 cases of confirmed cases. Even though the military Junta did not acquire any commitments to punish the perpetrators, after the second hunger strike it was no longer possible for the Junta simply to disregard the cases of enforced-disappearances taking place in the country, and refer to them as a lie to discredit Chile (Vidal 109).

After the military Junta finally acknowledged them, in December of 1978 the bodies of fifteen peasants *detenidos-desaparecidos* were found in Lonquén, abandoned in the ovens of a lime mine. The discovery was announced by the auxiliary bishop of Santiago. This was the first

finding of *detenidos-desaparecidos* murdered in clandestine locations. The event was demoralizing for the *Agrupación*, as many of the family members realized that most likely their loved had been murdered as well (Corporación 29). Nonetheless, the realization that they were probably not going to find their loved ones alive did not make them stop. They were emotionally distraught, but they continued. As Vidal explains, the family members had made a commitment to the memory of their loved ones to whom the State subjected to enforced-dissapereance. This moral commitment to remember and search for those abducted was key to all the symbolic performances undertaken by the *Agrupación* (Vidal 85, 90). Due to this commitment, the family members could not accept the death of their loved ones without any further explanation or justice. Even though there was an internal acceptance of their death, they continued to defend the right to see their family member, dead or alive. Thus, the search is permanent, and they continue to demand the return of their loved ones (Vidal 92).

After the discovery of the bodies in Lonquén, the *Agrupación* organized the first religious pilgrimage to the mine in Lonquén in February of 1979. In April of 1979 they also organized another demonstration involving chaining themselves to the fence of the *Congreso Nacional* (National Congress). This time, the *Agrupación* planned to perform the activity in a place where there was enough space to chain the fifteen participants. They also chose a place that was strategically located, to reach as many spectators as possible. The National Congress is located in an intersection that provided them with a great visibility. They also chose this place to denounce the crisis in the Chilean democracy (Vidal 159).

One sector of the *Agrupación* organized all the street performances. According to Vidal, after it was clear what had happened to the prisoners, the section supported by the Church divided into two groups. The family members who were activists of the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda

Revolucionaria-The Revolutionary Left Movement), decided to separate from the rest of the group and engage in clandestine activities to organize an armed struggle (Vidal 98). The family members who remained as part of the *Agrupación* did not have any political experience, especially the mothers who were housemakers before the abduction of their relatives. As in the case of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, it was the unexperienced group of women who took to the streets to perform open acts of protest. Through their symbolic and public performances, they were more successful in challenging the dominant narratives of the military Junta, unlike the clandestine activities organized by the sector that separated from the *Agrupación*. They did this at the risk of their own lives, knowing that the Junta always followed all the members of the *Agrupación* (Vidal 137).

While their acts of protest and street performances were not repeatedly practiced in the same manner and under the same conditions, as in the case of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, the persistence of their different performances of protest throughout the years was crucial for the massive street manifestations that occurred in the 1980s. According to Salgado Bustillo, their numerous actions throughout the dictatorship were the fuel for the mass protests against the regime that developed since the mid-eighties. As he explains, their bravery to perform acts of protest made other people progressively lose their fear, going from a passive attitude to civil disobedience. Finally, all their actions led to the plebiscite in 1988, which made Pinochet step down (23).

In *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile* (2006), Steve Stern refers to their performances of protest as the “failure of silencing” (125). In Chile, the silencing campaigns have taken many forms since the dictatorship, and afterwards. During the dictatorship, the military Junta denied the enforced-disappearances and did everything possible to conceal the violence that followed the first phase of the dictatorship. After the dictatorship, under

“democratic” times, elected governments tried to silence any claims for justice in the name of “reconciliation” for the nation. However, for the *Agrupación* there could be no reconciliation without justice.

One of the most significant, defiant, and effective performances by the *Agrupación* is the performance of *La Cueca sola*, executed by the *Conjunto Folclórico*, the cultural segment of the *Agrupación*. The first performance of *La Cueca sola* took place on March 8, 1978, International Women’s Day, at the theatre Caupolican. The traditional *Cueca* is a courtship dance between a man and a woman, but in *La Cueca sola* women danced alone with the photographs of their husbands, or loved ones, pinned to their clothes (Salgado Bustillos 8). Dancing by themselves a well-known dance that entails the participation of another person, made the absence of a partner more evident. The photograph, attached to the bodies of the dancing woman, reminded the spectator, in a heart-breaking manner, that there was a void where another person should have been dancing. With the dance of *La Cueca sola*, the *Agrupación* contradicted the discourse of “normality” under the dictatorship, making evident the unnatural absence of their loved ones.

The dance of *La Cueca sola* was an intense political protest that denounced the existence of *los desaparecidos*, and the reluctance of the military Junta to clarify their whereabouts. In Salgado Bustillo’s words, there was nothing more transgressive during the dictatorship than *La Cueca sola*, because it openly defied the power of the Junta, challenged their narrative of national unity, and their denial of *los desaparecidos*. The dance was inspired in tradition, but it became a political act of denunciation created by women (Salgado Bustillos 28).

The performance of this dance became particularly rebellious when Pinochet declared the dance of *La Cueca* as an element of National Heritage. In 1979, a year after the first performance of *La Cueca sola*, by decree Pinochet declared the *Cueca* as the national dance of Chile, describing

it as the most genuine expression of the national soul (Salgado Bustillos 25). By attempting to transform a national referent into a symbol of the dictatorship, Pinochet created a higher platform for the *Agrupación* to denounce the crimes committed by the State. Pinochet put *La Cueca* in the spotlight, making this dance a clear symbolic national battlefield of two opposing narratives.

The women from the *Conjunto Folclórico* did everything possible to dance *La Cueca sola* and denounce the disappearances in strategic places. One significant difference between the performance of *La Cueca sola* and other protests organized by the *Agrupación*, is that *La Cueca sola* was performed “durante días fijos de la semana, [...] en torno a los símbolos de la dictadura”<sup>38</sup> (Salgado Bustillos 25). By performing the dance in a more systematic manner, on certain days of the week, and specifically around the symbols of the dictatorship, the *Agrupación* constructed a clear narrative that opposed the prevailing discourse available to Chileans. According to the military Junta, Chile was better off with the services provided by the Junta. The country looked orderly and the economy was improving. However, the *Conjunto Folclórico* of the *Agrupación*, dancing *La Cueca sola*, showed that the economic project of the military Junta had brought “order” only by concealing the murders and disappearances of all their opponents. The *Conjunto Folclórico* performed the dance around symbols such as the *Llama de la Eterna Libertad*, a monument that Augusto Pinochet built in Plaza Bulnes, or in front of the *La Moneda*, where the coup d’état took place. Pinochet inaugurated the *Flame of Eternal Freedom* on September 11 of 1975, to commemorate the second anniversary of the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende. The flame was in use until October 18, 2014 (Salgado Bustillos 25).

According to Salgado Bustillos, today *La Cueca sola* has a social and political function to fight against forgetfulness, recreating a tragic time in the history of Chile (26). However, as Steven

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<sup>38</sup> During specific days of the week [...] and around symbols of the dictatorship.



Stern affirms, in the case of Chile, reducing the memory struggles in Chile to memory against oblivion minimizes the dynamics of memory taking place. According to Stern, after the end of the dictatorship (1990), during the 1990s, four “contending memory frameworks” as he calls them, overlapped and struggled to gain legitimacy. Supporters of the Junta remembered the dictatorship as the salvation of a society in ruins. The relatives of *los desaparecidos*, human rights activists, and critics built counterofficial frameworks, remembering it as “cruel and unending rupture of life”. A third and closely related memory framework, “remembered the past-within-the-present as an experience of persecution and awakening [...]” Finally, “as memory and human rights controversy sharpened and coincided with other causes of political split and the crisis in the late 1970s, regime leaders and supporters developed a fourth framework –memory as mindful forgetting, a closing of the box on the times of the “dirty” war and excess” (Stern 2010: 4-5).

As Steven Stern explains, in Chile people did not just forget the past, but society was immersed in a sort of “memory impasse,” especially by the mid to late 1990s. There was a conscious component, a decision to “close the memory box,” as he calls it, “whether to save the political skin of those implicated by “dirty” memory, or in frustration because memory politics proved so intractable and debilitating. However, he argues, “memory of horror and rupture also proved so unforgettable or “obstinate,” and so important to the social actors and politics of partial redemocratization in the 1990s, that it could not really be buried in oblivion” (xxviii-xxix). What emerged, he argues, was an “impasse,” a cultural belief by the majority that Pinochet, the military and their social base of supporters and sympathizers remained too strong to seek truth and justice: “the result was not so much a culture of forgetting, as a culture that oscillated –as if caught in moral schizophrenia- between prudence and convulsion” (2010: xxxi).

Along the same line of thought as Stern, Michael J. Lazzara explains in *Chile in Transition: The Poetics and Politics of Memory* (2006) that in Chile different memory narratives coexist about the past between two extremes. For some, the coup d'état and the Pinochet's regime saved the country from economic collapse, and communism. For others, the coup d'état against Salvador Allende destroyed the dreams of a better future for Chile. However, after Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998, and the disclosure of his overseas bank accounts, the discourses about the past have become more nuanced.

After the arrest of Pinochet in 1998, Chile experienced an upsurge of memory. Steven Stern calls moments such as Pinochet's arrest a "memory knot," which he defines as "[...] specific events in time including anniversary and commemorations, and specific physical remains or places that *demand*ed attention to memory" (Stern 2010:4). Pinochet's unexpected arrest obliged the Chilean society to look again at the past, but this time the circumstances enabled a different lens, and "made it all but impossible for Chileans to deny that torture and disappearance occurred." Moreover, "the publication of the *Informe Valech*, a government-sponsored report on torture based on over 30,000 victims' testimonies," the discovery of Pinochet's secret bank accounts, exacerbated by suspicious of tax evasion and arms dealing, and the approval of democratic reforms to the 1980 Constitution brought disgrace upon the dictator and his family and further weakened the moral and political foothold of Chile's *pinochetista* faction (Lazzara 3-4).

For the family members of the *Agrupación*, who had struggled to have their voices heard, this "memory knot" provided the platform to have their narratives acknowledged. In Chile, the memory of the dictatorship had been centered in the figure of Pinochet; however, his arrest provided counter hegemonic narratives the opportunity to give voice to their own memory initiatives. The unexpected arrest of Pinochet in 1998 it made possible to advance their discourse

about Chile's past. Conflicting narratives about the past overlap and struggle to gain legitimacy. Memory is never static. The narratives of the past are in continual construction, and need to be permanently validated, and sustained by rituals and the repetition of those narratives. However, they are constructed around the events and the interests of the present. A change of events and interests in the present makes us change our narratives and our perspectives about past events.

### ***Madres de Plaza de Mayo: The Construction of a Counter-hegemonic Ritual***

Compelled by the desire to find their children, *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* were the first in Argentina to confront the repressive regime publicly in order to demand the whereabouts of their family members. In spite of fear, repudiation, repression, and the secrecy of terror, *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* took to the streets and became a symbolic force that not only opposed the regime, but also played a key role in unveiling the extermination campaign. They also created a collective consciousness and social memory of State repression, not only in Argentina, but in the rest of the Americas. Although this dissertation does not include an analysis of the work done by other groups in Argentina, it is necessary to acknowledge *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. They initially gathered with the rest of the mothers at Plaza de Mayo to search for their children, but they soon realized that they had to organize to look for their grandchildren as well, who had been born in captivity and then adopted by childless couples in the military or police forces. It was not an easy task to try to locate them; in many cases they had never seen the babies. Thus, one of their major achievements was their role in developing a new DNA test that could establish the connection of the grandchildren with their maternal grandmothers. Erin Blakemore explains that their incessant quest for their missing grandchildren led to new advancements in DNA identification. Geneticists in the United States, some of them from Argentina, created a novel way to use DNA to identify individuals by DNA inherited only from mothers, that even if mothers had disappeared, surviving

grandmothers' DNA could be used to identify the missing grandchildren. *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* have located 122 children from the 500 abducted babies. The story of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, like the trajectory of *Comité Eureka* and *Agrupación*, is a story of courage and love of a handful of women who confronted the power of a regime of terror.

Throughout Latin America, many powerful grassroots movements emerged during the same period. Nonetheless, only *Las Madres* gained international renown. As Andrea Noble asserts in "Family photography and the global drama of human rights," "the Argentine Madres de Plazas de Mayo is, without a doubt, the most prominent" among all the groups of mothers searching for their children in Latin America (67). Ulises Gorini rightly affirms in *La rebelión de las Madres* ((2006) that many social and political factors contributed to the creation and permanence of *Las Madres* as a symbolic force. However, in this section I argue that the creation of a ritual was the main reason for this group to be distinctive, and noticed. Through their ritual *Las Madres* systematically, and periodically, challenged the rhetoric of the military Junta, which made them be prevalent in the consciousness of the Argentinian society.

The concept of ritual has been widely discussed, especially in the field of anthropology. Since the beginning of the discipline in the nineteenth century, this concept has been as central tool of analysis of social structures. In *Archipiélago de rituales: Teorías antropológicas del ritual* Rodrigo Díaz Cruz (1998), underlines that there is a debate as to what exactly constitutes a ritual. Some scholars argue that rituals are a distinctive type of social practice. Others sustain that a ritual is in fact only an aspect of all human behavior, the communicative aspect (317). Aligned with the purposes of this dissertation, a ritual is considered a delimited social practice that can be set apart from the rest of human quotidian practices.

In the evolution of the concept, Díaz Cruz affirms, anthropologists have emphasized the role of rituals as a practice where tradition, cultural continuity, and the distribution of power are perpetuated. In short, rituals had been considered as a window to see how societies reproduce tradition and maintain cohesiveness. However, Diaz Cruz argues, a revision of the history of this concept opens up the possibility of looking at the ritual not only as a place where tradition repeats and consolidates, but also as a cultural artifact from which change is possible. Rituals are, or have the potential to be, essential in creating a space where questioning and discerning is possible, and not just a performance put in display to ensure the automatic permanence of social structures, power relations, and traditions.

One important aspect about rituals that has been overlooked from Durkheim's work, affirms Díaz Cruz, is how rituals also function as a platform from which societies construct their collective memory. Drawing on Durkheim's work, Díaz Cruz points out that two of the mechanisms that function as mnemonic devices in society are rituals and mythology (101). To illustrate the importance of rituals in the construction of collective memory, Díaz Cruz points out one specific passage from Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that defines the relationship between ritual and history:

So the rite serves and can serve only to sustain the vitality of these beliefs, [the mythology –a system of beliefs common to a group] to keep them from being effaced from memory and, in sum, to revivify the most essential elements of the collective consciousness. Through it, the group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and of its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures. (375)

Rituals ensure that subjects are reminded of the history of the group to which they belong; every time they participate in a ritual with the rest of their social group, they put in motion the act of remembering. Through their performances in common, they recall where they come from, and what they share with the rest of the group. In accordance, Díaz Cruz asserts, Durkheim sees rituals

and myths as invaluable instruments in the transmission of knowledge and experiences from the past. These two mechanisms help to maintain the vitality of the remembrances that tradition bequeathed to men.

In search for their loved ones, the members of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* undertook multiple actions. However, one of their efforts gave them international recognition: their weekly rounds around Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, wearing white handkerchiefs around their heads. Occupying the Plaza de Mayo, walking around the plaza, and wearing a white handkerchief, became powerful symbolic elements that developed into strategic points of reference in the creation a collective consciousness of State repression. After gathering at Plaza de Mayo almost by necessity, *Las Madres* evaluated the importance of maintaining their claims on the main plaza in the country, as Plaza de Mayo was a strategic place from which to become and remain visible. Surrounded by the buildings that represent the political, economic, and religious power in the country; *la Casa de Gobierno* (the Executive Mansion), *el Ministerio de Economía* (Ministry of Economy), *el Banco de la Nación Argentina* (the National Bank of Argentina), *la Catedral Metropolitana* (Metropolitan Cathedral) and even the *Histórico Cabildo* (Buenos Aires Cabildo), Plaza de Mayo is the focal point of the political life in Argentina.

When the military Junta realized that *Las Madres* were getting too much attention, they did everything possible to expel them from the Plaza, and make them go elsewhere. *Las Madres* had quickly understood the importance of their presence at Plaza de Mayo, and were determined to maintain their protests there at any cost, even after the Junta abducted three of their members, including the founder. So, they fought to keep their protests at Plaza de Mayo. According to Gorini, what set *Las Madres* apart from the rest of the opposition movement in Argentina was their civic courage, and the symbolic value of occupying Plaza de Mayo (64).

*Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* never intended to create a ritual that would stay in the memory of Argentina and the rest of the world; but they did. When they first decided to take their demands to a public setting, their only intention was that the head of the military Junta saw and heard them. However, they soon realized that they had engaged in a political battle that defied conventional ways of doing politics, as Ulises Gorini describes in *La rebelión de las Madres*. *Las Madres* was not the only group, nor the first one in Argentina to question and oppose the military Junta. During the first year of the dictatorship others groups were formed, and others created previously continued their work during the dictatorship. Some of the other associations were, the *Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre* (1937); *el Servicio por la Paz y la Justicia* (1974), the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* (1975), the *Movimiento Ecuménico por los Derechos Humanos* (1976), *Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas* (1976) and *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* (1980) (Gorini 31). *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* was formally registered as an association until 1979 (31). At the beginning, the mothers searching for their children sought advice within the rest of the protest movement, and were only some of the numerous people searching for their relatives without knowing very well what to do or where to go. However, after many different failed attempts, the mothers decided to take a different path to interpellate the regime.

The majority of *Las Madres* were homemakers with no political backgrounds, unlike many of the members of the other groups, who already had a great deal of experience in politics. The women that later formed *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, felt unrepresented among them, as they were not taken into account on major decisions. The leaders of these associations mediated the search of *Las Madres*, and for the most part relegated them to a passive role. They considered their demands as simplistic; thus, *Las Madres* often felt that those groups silenced their voices. As

Gorini describes, “las gestiones más importantes quedaban en unas manos, en especial las de los integrantes de la comisión.”<sup>39</sup> Many mothers did not like that “mediation,” as *Las Madres* felt the imperious need to do anything possible to search for their loved ones, delegating absolutely nothing. So, they decided to organize among themselves and turn to Plaza de Mayo (60).

Their decision to go to *Plaza de Mayo* was regarded as imprudent by the groups working within the permitted channels. Nonetheless, they were convinced that this was the only way to gain visibility; even at the risk of their own lives. After a while, taking their demands to a public sphere proved to be a very successful measure to gain the attention of the rest of the world, the military Junta, and eventually the rest of Argentinians. According to Gorini, the public nature of their resistance, while the repression was carried out behind doors, gave their movement a dimension that no other organization achieved. Thus, unlike other associations, in the case of *Las Madres*, a handful of women was enough to become a symbol of resistance for the entire nation (657).

In a sense, the vast experience other groups had in politics was counterproductive. They were following the old ways of confronting power, and due to the novelty of the new weapon used by the dictatorship: forced disappearances, they were late to create alternate practices to challenge the authority (Gorini 51). In contrast, *Las Madres* realized very soon that going to Plaza de Mayo was their only chance to disclose the horrors of the last dictatorship. Their weekly silent presence at the Plaza was their most powerful weapon against repression and denial.

In Argentina, the military Junta wanted to avoid the international isolation suffered by the Pinochet regime, who ordered public mass executions during the first phase of the dictatorship. Thus, in Argentina they adopted the methods developed by the French Army during the Algerian war for independence, implementing forced disappearances as their preferred weapon of choice to

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<sup>39</sup> The most important managerial activities were left in a few hands, especially those of the members of the committee. (My translation)



neutralize and quell political opponents, rather than open massive public detention centers, such as the one installed in the *Estadio Nacional*. In Chile, torture, assassinations and detentions were largely used, whereas forced disappearances were adopted to a lesser extent (Gorini 51). In Argentina, violent repression and assassinations were clandestine, although detentions were, in most cases, carried out in front of witnesses. Under these circumstances, the presence of *Las Madres* at the Plaza became crucial to reveal the forced disappearances perpetrated, but persistently denied by the Junta.

The recurrence and consistency of their presence at the Plaza de Mayo was decisive not only in the formation of this movement, as Gorini rightly asserts, but also in the creation a new form of resistance that would remain not only in the memory of this group, but in the social memory of Argentina. At the beginning, going to the Plaza was seen by *Las Madres* as one of their many initiatives, but after evaluating the effectiveness of their presence at Plaza de Mayo, they knew that this was the only place from which they should resist (Gorini 61), and from which they could create a new narrative that exposed what the Junta was trying very carefully to conceal from the international eyes. *Las Madres* undertook many other initiatives, from *acciones relámpago*, such as the ones carried out by the *Agrupación* in Chile, to very carefully organized marches of resistance (walking for 24 hours around the Plaza). They also fasted, created a book of poems, traveled to Europe and the United States on several occasions to denounce the disappearances and the violations of human rights in Argentina, among many other forms of protest and denunciation. However, going to Plaza de Mayo became the most effective, especially after they had attracted international attention. *Las Madres* at the Plaza were the proof of what the Junta was trying to hide to have a favorable image abroad.

In the beginning, *Las Madres* chose the Plaza as a practical place to meet new mothers in the same search. They decided to meet every Thursday at 3:30 p.m. to have a reliable space and time for other mothers to find them easily if they wanted to join them. The regularity of their meetings was essential to attract other women; if they were ready to join them they knew that every Thursday at 3:30 p.m. exactly, they could find other women searching for missing relatives.

Keeping the Plaza as a place for their meetings was not an easy task. Once the Junta realized that these women were gaining international attention, remaining at the Plaza became a pitched battle. However, State officials did not imagine how committed these women were. Even after three mothers were abducted by the Junta, the others decided, only five days later after the disappearances, to go back to the Plaza and perform their rounds. In spite of fear for their own lives, they returned (Gorini 185). The battle persisted throughout the dictatorship, and even after. (Gorini 288). During the World Cup in 1978, *Las Madres* continued their rounds at the Plaza, even though other Argentinians heavily criticized them, arguing that *Las Madres* were hurting the good image of Argentina in the eyes of the world. Regardless, they decided to take advantage of the worldwide attention on Argentina during the World Cup and continued going to Plaza de Mayo during the World Cup taking place in Argentina (Gorini 210). Once the World Cup was over, and almost all international media had left the country, the military Junta used violence to drive them out of the Plaza. State officials were determined to prevent them from coming back, and almost during the entire year of 1979, after the World Cup, they could not step into the Plaza. However, knowing the importance of their presence at Plaza de Mayo, in 1980 they decided to take it back at all costs, and they did.

Gradually, the initiative that at the beginning was seen by *Las Madres* as just one of many, became a conscious repetitive action performed at a precise time at a specific and strategic place.

Progressively, they added more emblematic elements to this action; the rounds around the Plaza, as well as the white handkerchief on the head became distinctive symbolic elements to this ritual in the making. Forced by the police to move from the Plaza de Mayo, due to the prohibition of public gatherings of two or more people, they decided to circulate in pairs around the Plaza. They soon realized that this new element gave them even more visibility.

At first, Gorini explains, they were a group of women sitting on benches at the Plaza, just gathered together. However, that made it difficult for women new to the group to recognize who at the Plaza was pursuing their same goal. Thus, the movement incorporated into their gatherings at the Plaza provided them with another level of visibility. They needed and wanted to be seen. The white handkerchief around the head was another circumstantial element that was soon consciously incorporated as a key element in their efforts to become visible and identifiable. They thought of the white handkerchief, initially a cloth diaper that was once used by their children, as a temporary element to recognize each other in a great assembly organized by the church in Argentina; one of the few public gatherings still allowed by the dictatorship, Gorini explains. This was not the first artifact they had used to try to identify one another. They had used a nail, symbolizing Jesus sufferings, and a carnation, Gorini explains. However, they quickly recognized that the white handkerchief, used *a la antigüita* (like the old times), around their heads, was not only effective to recognize one another, but to be noticed by others. This element would be their most distinctive symbol. Thus, they progressively and consciously added new elements to their initiative to gather at Plaza de Mayo, creating what Díaz Cruz calls *live rituals*, as opposed to the dead rituals that merely reproduce traditions.

In opposition to single or isolated performances, when carried out in a repetitive and systematic manner, rituals have the potential of constructing counter-hegemonic narratives that

challenge the prevailing hegemonic discourses, and endure in the memory of society. *Las Madres* created a ritual that achieved both, challenged the hegemonic narrative, and allowed the construction of a social consciousness and memory of State repression. For Díaz Cruz, what elements exactly constitute a ritual, is debatable. However, as Díaz Cruz clarifies, there are certain characteristic that all rituals share, *repetition, action, stylization, order, staging, collective dimension, multimedia, and singular time and space* (226-227). Using Díaz Cruz as a point of departure it becomes evident that the activities of *Las Madres* constituted a ritual.

First of all, all rituals entail *repetition*, in a given time or space, content, form, or a combination of those elements. The repetition of the performance *Las Madres* created at Plaza de Mayo was vital to challenge the silence of the military Junta successfully. Their weekly presence, at the same time, and in the same manner, walking around the Plaza, carrying the pictures of their relatives, and wearing the white handkerchief around their heads, was a constant remainder, internationally and nationally, of their unresolved demands. Even after entering “democratic” times, they continued their weekly rounds at the Plaza, as a political act to remind everyone that the democratic government had not clarified the cases of *los desaparecidos*.

Secondly, all rituals require *action*: a ritual is not a spontaneous activity, it implies doing something, not just saying or thinking something. As *Las Madres* increasingly grasped the scope of their initiative to stay at the Plaza, they also evaluated the impact of their actions. They were forced to add movement to their gatherings, walk around the Plaza, but they quickly adopted the new measure as part of their performance. Walking around in pairs, time and again, was an activity out of the ordinary during the times of the dictatorship, and as such, it attracted more attention to them. This action turned into one of their most distinguishing characteristics, their weekly rounds walking in pairs around *Plaza de Mayo*.

Thirdly, rituals require a “*special*” *behavior or stylization*: the actions or symbols displayed in a ritual are extraordinary, or ordinary but used in an unusual way, in a way that fixes the attention of the participants and observers on them. The use of photos of their family members, pinned to their bodies, as well as the handkerchief tied around their heads, were ordinary artifacts that in the context of the protest gained a political and symbolical dimension through which they challenged the narrative of the military Junta. The photos reminded others of the absence of the family members, and the handkerchief attached to their heads in an old fashion, placed attention on them as women of another time in a public setting, engaged in a political battle with the military Junta.

A ritual also entails *order*: rituals are organized events, in regards to people as well as cultural elements; they have a beginning and an end. As Díaz Cruz describes, in a ritual it is explicit who does what and when. *Las Madres* met at a specific hour and knew what to do and for how long. They ended their weekly rounds in one hour, and closed every gathering with a speech from one of the mothers; eventually this was a role assigned to the president of the association. Their final speeches were incorporated after a spontaneous address to the people. However, they added this new element as a closure for every gathering.

Rituals must also be *evocative presentational style or staging*: rituals intend to produce a state of alertness. To interpellate the onlooker, rituals must be performed in such a manner so that the bystanders notice the unusual behavior, and reflect on what they are witnessing. In the case of *Las Madres* their mere presence at the Plaza became noteworthy, as public gatherings were strictly prohibited during the last dictatorship.

Another characteristic of rituals is their *collective dimension*: by definition rituals possess a social meaning; their mere interpretation contains a social message. The ritual *Las Madres*

constructed was embedded in a social and cultural context that served as a framework for onlookers to interpret their presence at Plaza de Mayo. The family, as a pillar of the structure of society, and especially the role of mothers in the creation of guardians of the fatherland, were under careful scrutiny. *Las Madres* introduced their ritual in the national debate of what it meant for families and mothers to produce good citizens for the nation.

Rituals also require *multimedia*, the use of multiple and heterogeneous channels of expression: sounds and music, tattoos and masks, colors, odors, gestures, costumes, special dresses, songs, food, drinks, meditation, silence. *Las Madres* chose limited but very significant symbolic channels to communicate their message, mainly: the photos, and the white handkerchief, which became a symbol of the opposition movement in Argentina.

Lastly, all rituals are performed in a *singular time and space*: they fragment the flow of the daily life, and are carried out in a delimited time and space. The restricted time and space give peculiarity to the ritual, they create a limit (Díaz Cruz 226-227). This last aspect of a ritual is of crucial importance in the creation of a social consciousness and memory of State terrorism. The systematic performance of a ritual, within a restricted time and space, time after time, separates the ordinary actions of life from the distinctive behavior of a ritual. It allows for the onlookers to recognize a different source of information. After it is repeated, in the same manner, time after time, attracting the attention of the spectators, it is more probable for the audience to incorporate the new narrative into their collective remembrances.

*Las Madres* constructed a new ritual in the midst of terror. Their presence at the Plaza exposed what the military Junta wanted to keep secret from the international opinion. As Gorini states, these group of women demonstrated that *Poetry overcomes Power* (20; my emphasis). Their presence and the white handkerchief became a political weapon, the only one they had available,

as Gorini asserts, that the military Junta could not ignore, nor the rest of society in Argentina. The silence of their rounds at Plaza de Mayo contrasted with the strength of their presence. Their actions were persistent, recurrent, and systematic. *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* were probably unaware that they were creating a ritual, but in their will to become visible, they did. They created a new political space (Gorini 78), and a new dissident narrative, in which their mere silent rounds at Plaza de Mayo every Thursday at 3:30 played a major role.

As Gorini affirms, had they not made the decision to go the Plaza, the history and strength of the opposition movement in Argentina would have been different. Their ritual became a source of power. Protected, to a great extent, by the international correspondents in Argentina, *Las Madres* maintained their presence and political battle at the Plaza, constructing a new mechanism of power. As sustained by Edmund Leach, rituals constitute “un dispositivo de poder susceptible de ser utilizado por los individuos y los grupos [...] El poder del ritual es tan real como el poder de la autoridad” (cited in Díaz Cruz 249).<sup>40</sup>

The new political and symbolic performance created by *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* became a political weapon, first of all to break the silence that surrounded the extrajudicial killings, and, second to construct a narrative that contradicted the hegemonic discourse of a supposed “war” fought between two fronts. Furthermore, it developed into a key element in the construction of the social memory of the horrors perpetrated by the dictatorship. The groups in power depend on forgetfulness and the exhaustion of opposing movements to insure impunity, but rituals stand strong as a constant reminder of the crimes committed by the State.

The creation and permanence of rituals require a decision-making process about which the performers are conscious. Díaz Cruz explains that in the history of the development of this

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<sup>40</sup> A power mechanism susceptible of being utilized by individuals and by groups... The power of the ritual is as real as the power of the authority. (My translation)

anthropological concept, scholars tend to relegate the importance of human agency, concentrating their analysis on how rituals perpetrate tradition, unity, and cohesion. Rituals themselves are not celebrated just because traditions demands it, but as Díaz Crus sustains: “los rituales mismos producen situaciones, crean horizontes desde los cuales se tiene un rango de visión de la propia sociedad y forma de vida, de nuestro ser en el mundo, pero también, justo por tenerlo, desde los cuales los hombres rituales se hacen visibles y se definen a sí mismos frente a los otros” (314).<sup>41</sup> Rituals are not celebrated mechanically, on the contrary, as Díaz Cruz argues “los rituales son organizados y celebrados por sujetos con intenciones, creencias, deseos, intereses y emociones que «están ahí» , desempeñando algún «papel» en las interacciones sociales” (320).<sup>42</sup>

The new ritual *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* initiated during the most fearful times of the repression in Argentina, was not the result of coincidence or impulse. It was the outcome of a decision-making process that evaluated the best course of action given the circumstances and their own intentions, beliefs, and desires. Ulises Gorini rightly exposes that the movement created by *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* was not the result of a “natural” reaction of a mother. Only a handful of women took the initiative to protest openly, among hundreds of mothers searching for their children. The prevailing response among relatives was denial, depression, sickness, death, and suicide (25). Only a few women actively decided to initiate a struggle that evolved into a political battle and a dissident narrative sustained by the creation of a new ritual. At first, fourteen women gathered at the plaza, feeling alone, ignored, diminished, and discredited by society (Gorini 96). However, they persisted in their intentions to become visible from Plaza de Mayo, and even though

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<sup>41</sup> Rituals themselves produce situations, create horizons from which individuals have a broad scope of vision of their own society and way of life, of our being in the world, but also, just by having it, a space from which the ritual men make themselves visible, and define themselves before others. (My translation)

<sup>42</sup> Rituals are organized and celebrated by individuals with intentions, beliefs, desires, interests, and emotions that «are there» performing a «role» in the social interactions. (My translation)



only a small group of women gathered at Plaza de Mayo, they became the strongest opposing association, and a symbol of the resistance in Argentina and the rest of the Americas. As Gorini rightly asserts, while other organizations measured their strength in terms of the quantity of people they gathered, the force of this group of women never laid on the amount of people they congregated, but rather on the strength they gained as a solid symbolic force.

Their ritual, enacted and re-enacted in Plaza de Mayo, became the place where they could carry out their political battle, and where they challenged how State officials constructed the role of the last dictatorship in the history of Argentina. Rituals are a space where memory is constructed, and memory is a place where hegemonic groups reassert and solidify their place in society. But at the same time, rituals open the door to challenge the narratives of groups in power and established social relations. Rituals are political tools to contest power, to challenge what is and what will be remembered, and how the past will be presented to future generations. As Steven Hoelscher argues in “Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South,” remembering is a contested arena with very real political and material outcomes; the interpretation of the past is a relevant form of power, and its control brings heavy consequences in the present; therefore “memory consistently attempts to silence the voices of those who seek to interpret the past in contradictory ways” (Boyarin 1992:2, cited in Hoelscher 660).

Rituals function as mnemotechnic devices for society to construct their collective memory. When the people in power do anything possible to deny or underestimate the severity of State repression, citizens have very limited resources available to them to bring awareness and demand justice, much less to create a lasting memory of the repression. However, the creation of new rituals associated with the victims are of vital importance not only to create a collective consciousness, but more importantly, to scrutinize State terrorism during the “dirty war.”

According to Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1976), the ritual serves to keep beliefs “from being effaced from memory and, in sum, to revivify the most essential elements of the collective consciousness” (375). In this sense, rituals are powerful resources to construct dissident narratives of what the people in positions of power want to keep silent.

### CHAPTER 3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A POLITICAL PLACE OF MEMORY OF STATE TERRORISM: *EL DESAPARECIDO*

What elements become significant and which ones are cast aside in the process of formation of the collective memory of State terrorism? How can people create the symbols and the sources of reference to which to relate in order to remember the past? We rely on distinctive points of reference to recall past events, such as relevant dates, places, and cultural artifacts to enable groups, or entire nations, to construct a discourse about the past, and transmit it to future generations. When counter-hegemonic groups set out to create a lasting remembrance of State terrorism, the task is extremely challenging. The people in positions of power go to great lengths to obscure the past, as well as their responsibility in the killings, and enforced disappearances of hundreds, or thousands, of citizens. Nonetheless, however daunting, some counter-hegemonic groups have proven that the task is not impossible.

In spite of the efforts by certain groups in society to conceal the past, the family members of the victims of State terrorism have created places of memory, to borrow Pierre Nora's term. There is one key figure in the process of formation of the collective memory of the State repression during the years of the "dirty war" in Latin America that stands out as a clear evidence of the State's mechanisms to annihilate political opponents: *el desaparecido*.<sup>43</sup> However, even though forced disappearances were adopted in different Latin American countries as a new method to eliminate political opponents, the figure of *el desaparecido* has become a salient symbol and evidence of State terrorism only in countries, especially Argentina; while in others, like Mexico, the groups in power have successfully obscure the crimes committed.

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<sup>43</sup> Refer to chapter II for an explanation of the origins and uses of the term "dirty war."

## **Enforced Disappearances: The Perfect Weapon to Annihilate Political Opponents?**

With more or less frequency, forced-disappearances were a recurrent weapon in many Latin American countries during the second half of the twentieth century. Some dictatorships and governments used forced disappearances as part of a myriad of means to eliminate opposition. However, in Argentina, military officials implemented forced-disappearances in a systematic manner as the primary method to exterminate political dissidents.

The tactic seemed to be the perfect choice. The military Junta would simply allege complete ignorance about the whereabouts of the “missing” people. Nonetheless, when questioned about this matter, the Junta would quickly volunteer their own “speculations,” suggesting that the “missing” had probably fled the country. They would also hastily blame others for the disappearances, mainly the “guerrilla” groups, or even the supposedly extreme right. Forced disappearances were also perfect for their international political agenda, they would make political opponents disappear and nobody could blame them. Before the world’s eyes, their image would remain favorable. After all, the military Junta would argue that they were working to bring order to the Argentinian society and had no responsibility for the disappearances. In addition, forced disappearances were the perfect instrument to eliminate latent political opposition. They were intended to paralyze the rest of the population through fear, destroying the social fabric, and clearing the path for the adoption of a free-market economic system. In sum, forced disappearances would quickly put an end to political dissidence, existing or emergent, and with no crime to trace military officials were guaranteed impunity and free rein to implement a free-market economy.

Forced disappearances were not a new weapon in the world. The French Army made ample testing of this strategy during the Algerian war for independence, and then provided the necessary instruction to the Argentinian army to implement the same method in a systematic manner. Forced-

disappearances and assassination of political opponents began before the last dictatorship in Argentina, although not systematically. However, under the administration of Isabel Perón (July 1, 1974 – March 24, 1976), just before the last dictatorship, José López Rega, under her protection and authorization, killed and abducted political opponents using the paramilitary group he created, the *Triple A* (Argentine Anti-communist Alliance), the first death squad in Argentina, as Silvia Rosman explains in “The Father, the Law, Desire: Perversions of the Letter in Luis Gusman’s *Villa*” (107). Nonetheless, when the military Junta took power in 1976 in Argentina, they established forced disappearances as a systematic practice, creating and sustaining the necessary logistics and infrastructure to detain and abduct thousands of people.

When people started disappearing in Argentina, the families quickly began looking for their “missing” loved ones. Family members presented innumerable *habeas corpus* in the hopes of finding them, explains Ulises Gorini in *La rebelión de las Madres* (2006, 79). Nevertheless, nothing happened. The *habeas corpus* were received, but only to be filed and forgotten, while the family members were left to wonder about the fate of their family members. In most cases, the apprehensions were done during the day and in front of witnesses, or even taken away from their houses in front of their own family members; nonetheless, they could not be found. The plan was working. People would just disappear from the face of the earth, nobody would ever find them, nor their bodies; and no one could blame the military Junta for a crime with no evidence. However, information started “leaking” when some detainees were released by officials themselves.

The military Junta operated the concentration camps in the main cities, such as Buenos Aires; in the middle of the busy lives of the rest of the citizens. The Navy School of Mechanics, ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada), the largest clandestine center for torture, and forced-disappearances in Argentina, was located in the city of Buenos Aires. According to Pilar Calveiro

in *Poder y Desaparición: los campos de concentración en Argentina*, between 1976 and 1982 there were 340 concentration camps distributed throughout the national territory, in 11 of the 23 Argentinian provinces (29). Military officials let some detainees go back into society. The liberated prisoners informed family members about the existence of concentration camps, about the people they had seen in detention, and the horrific torture sessions. Meanwhile, the military Junta continued to deny any wrongdoing. However, slowly but surely, the scale of the disappearances made unsustainable the idea that the military Junta did not know anything about the disappearances.

Gorini (2006) states that at the onset of the last dictatorship people were late to react, especially the political parties from the left, because they had never been confronted with clandestine repression and a horror of such magnitude. They could not tell exactly what was happening, and when it became evident that too many people were disappearing, they did not think they had enough evidence to blame the military Junta. According to Gorini, at the very beginning of the last dictatorship, even *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* did not accuse the military Junta of the disappearances. In fact, Gorini explains, the initial goal of Azucena Villaflor de De Vicenti, founder of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, was only to be heard by the head of the military Junta, Jorge Rafael Videla, in order to inform him of the situation because, she thought, he probably did not know the real dimension of the problem. However, *Las Madres* were quick to understand the systematic nature of the disappearances as a strategy enforced by the military Junta to get rid of all political opponents. Thus, they were the first to accuse the Junta explicitly for the disappearances. From here on out, *Las Madres* would carry on a permanent protest and claim for justice for *los desaparecidos*. Thus, what the military Junta in Argentina thought would be the perfect weapon to get rid of the opponents to the new economic system, became a fissure in a

dictatorial regime that believed to have absolute power and total control over the life and death of the citizens.

### ***Los desaparecidos*: a Constructed Place of Memory**

Enforced disappearances were carried out in many Latin America countries during the second half of the twentieth century, during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s; yet, it is predominantly in Argentina where the figure of *el desaparecido* was constructed as a vivid place of memory from which to create a dissident discourse about State terrorism. How did *los desaparecidos* become a salient reference in the collective memory of State repression in Argentina, while in other countries such as Mexico, where the State also used enforced disappearances systematically, *los desaparecidos* have not become a *lieu de mémoire*, a place of reference to discuss the past?

In an attempt to answer the aforementioned question, in this chapter I compare the cases of Mexico and Argentina. These countries are emblematic; they exemplify two very different processes in the formation of *el desaparecido* as *lieu de mémoire*. Forced disappearances were practiced in both countries during the campaign of political annihilation, the so-called “dirty war”; however, it was only in Argentina where *el desaparecido* came to be part of the national consciousness and a key figure from which to discuss the past. In Mexico, regardless of the continuous battles undertaken by the family members, *los desaparecidos* are not a place of reference of the “dirty war.” The repression against students in 1968, known as the massacre of Tlatelolco, is the only episode that has been kept in the national consciousness as the evidence of a repressive and authoritarian one-party regime.

To discuss the processes of the creation of *los desaparecidos* as a place of memory, it will be imperative to address the political and social circumstances that are particular to Argentina and Mexico, which are relevant to the formation of the symbolic figure of *el desaparecido*, specifically

the so-called “transition to democracy.” The political and social particularities of these two countries will shed light on how a victim of State repression was transformed into a symbol of the past in Argentina, but not in Mexico.

To further the analysis of the construction of *el desaparecido* as a place of memory, I will also analyze the photographic works of Gustavo Germano and Lucila Quieto, who were themselves family members themselves of *desaparecidos* in Argentina. Germano and Quieto’s photographic expositions are significant because they show a permanent transformation of the image of *el desaparecido*, and show how photography helps to maintain the discussion of enforced-disappearances current, State terrorism, and their consequences for the family members and society today. I will also analyze the photographic work of *H.I.J.O.S. México*, an association formed mainly by children of *desaparecidos* and victims of State repression in Mexico, as well as politically conscious citizens.

H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio/Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence) is an organization created in Argentina, by the children of victims of the “dirty war”. After its formation, young people in other countries in Latin America followed the idea and formed their own H.I.J.O.S. associations, adding their country of residence to the title to better identified themselves. Today, versions of the H.I.J.O.S organizations exist in Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Guatemala, Paraguay, Uruguay, Colombia, and Peru.

### **What Exactly is a *Lieu de Mémoire*?**

In the formation of a collective memory many cultural artifacts are publicly made available to create a discourse about the past; museums, literary texts, monuments, films, and photography, to name just a few. However, before that is possible, in the case of State repression, it is



fundamental to acknowledge the past in order to make possible the creation of those places of memory. Pierre Nora uses the term *lieu de mémoire*, or sites of memory, to refer to a myriad of points of reference that help us remember the past consciously, such as physical sites, but also cultural artifacts that are relevant to a certain social group, and are part of the basis of their identity. Since there is no spontaneous memory, in “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire” (1989), Nora argues that societies make a conscious effort to create and maintain a connection with the past. We create “archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations” (12), and many other cultural artifacts to recall the past. Those places of memory become ‘anchors’ to revisit the past. The meaning of those places of memory is in continuous transformation; always adapting to current debates. Yet, they always aid in maintaining a connection with the past.

In *The Art of Memory* (1966), Frances Yates discusses the importance of the creation of a visual referent for a place in order to remember a body of information associated with it. Yates sets out to give the history of the art of remembering since the ancient Greeks. The art of remembering, Yates explains, is a “technique of impressing ‘places’ and ‘images’ on memory” (xi). A person who wishes to develop a special ability to remember, must first select the places, or mental images, to which he desires to assign information. In other words, “imprint on the memory a series of *loci* or places” (3). After the person has created a mental image of a *loci*, he can proceed to allocate the information, or material, he wants to remember. Thus, the formation of the *loci* is “of the greatest importance,” because “a *locus* is a place easily grasped by the memory.” The information associated with the *loci* will be easily available as long as it is attached to a visual image in the memory; the person will remember a place, or *loci*, and will be reminded of the information associated with the *loci*. Thus, Yates explains, if we wish to recall something, we must

place the information on a definite *loci*, or place in memory. Once the places are imprinted in the memory, they can be used again and again, and different material can be placed on the *loci* (6-7).

*Los desaparecidos* in Argentina were constructed as a *loci*, a place of memory, by which the citizens can recall, or be reminded of the period of the “dirty war” and the repression carried out by the State. When dealing with a collective memory, the creation of specific places, or *loci*, by no means signifies that every group assigns the same material, to use Yates’ words, to each place of memory. In society, a created *loci*, or place of memory, will face the struggles of different groups who are trying to assign their own views and discourses, or ‘material,’ to each *loci*. Nonetheless, the *loci*, the place of memory that *los desaparecidos* have come to be in Argentina, are a point of reference, an ‘anchor,’ from which to maintain a permanent discussion of their past under the last dictatorship. The creation of a counter-hegemonic place of memory faces many difficulties, but its formation is imperative to achieve justice, and a conscious society that questions authority. Thus, it is of vital importance to inquire how a group of Argentinians was successful in creating *los desaparecidos* as a place of memory, or *loci*, in spite the efforts of the State apparatus and groups in power to conceal the evidence of the repression.

### **Does Human Agency Suffice to Construct *el desaparecido* As a Place of Memory?**

According to Ulises Gorini in *La otra lucha* (2008), the construction of the figure of the *detenido-desaparecido* is the result of the permanent battle for justice carried out by *Las Madres*. In his own words: “...la lucha de las Madres [es] el proceso de construcción de la figura del detenido-desaparecido” (386). Gorini also affirms that even though the “weapon” of disappearance had been used in other parts of the world, even before the Argentinian tragedy, “la figura del desaparecido se consolidó a partir de la lucha de las Madres” (386). To a great extent, their

tremendous resilience and aptitude to analyze the political scenario was central to the creation of *el detenido-desaparecido* into a political entity.

In *No habrá flores en la tumba del pasado: La experiencia de reconstrucción del mundo de los familiares de desaparecidos* (2001), Ludmila da Silva Catela also sustains that since 1976 *Las Madres* and family members of *los desaparecidos* initiated and maintained various strategies to impose and defend the category of *el desaparecido*. They were successful to the point where “en la argentina contemporánea “desaparecido” ha pasado a “existir” como una noción de persona” (280).<sup>44</sup>

The battle to transform the “missing” into a political entity, and to make *los desaparecidos* visible has not been easy. The military Junta in Argentina did everything in its power to deny their existence, and when denying the existence of *desaparecidos* was no longer possible, they tried to ridicule and despise *Las Madres*. When that did not work, they made use of every resource possible to declare a massive death of all *desaparecidos* to put an end to all the demands for justice. This effort continued after the end of the dictatorship in the new democratic era (Gorini *La otra lucha* 302).

*Las Madres* never accepted the death by decree of all *desaparecidos*, claiming that if the dictatorship allegedly did not know anything about the “missing” people, how could it be that they were absolutely certain that all *desaparecidos* were dead. *Las Madres* affirmed that they would never accept the death by decree without bringing to justice all the people responsible and involved in the disappearance of their loved ones. What *Las Madres* wanted the rest of society to understand was that the Junta’s claim that all *desaparecidos* were dead was a strategy leading to the impunity of those responsible for the crimes (Gorini 2006: 369).

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<sup>44</sup> In contemporaneous Argentina “*desaparecido*” now “exists” among the living (my translation).

Playing with the suffering of the mothers and family members, military officials began “discovering” and digging out mass graves, which “proved” the imminent death of *all desaparecidos*. The vast majority of *Las Madres* did not want to receive those bodies. They did want to have the bodies of their loved ones, but they also believed that the bodies were being “found” just to declare their death and put an end to their claims for justice. The death of *los desaparecidos* meant that the crime of enforced-disappearance would prescribe. During the administration of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), the pressure from the state continued to convince the families to accept their death. However, *Las Madres* knew very well that if the crime prescribed they would lose the opportunity to continue their demands for justice. Thus, the defense of the slogan *Aparición con vida* [return of the desaparecidos alive] turned into a frontal battle against the official narrative, as it contradicted the government’s declaration that the missing people were all dead. If the people in power could not prove the death of *los desaparecidos* by bringing all the people responsible for their death to justice and punishing them, then *Las Madres* would never accept the death of their loved ones with no legal consequences for all the people involved in the disappearance of their children (Ulises Gorini, *La otra lucha* 332).

*Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* became a very important political voice in Argentina towards the end of the dictatorship, to an extent that no political party, trying to get their share of power, could ignore or dismiss them. In the so-called “transition to democracy,” if the political parties wanted to portray a “good” image in the public opinion in Argentina, and also abroad, they had to take into consideration the demands of *Las Madres* with regards to *los desaparecidos*. The political figure they constructed, like no other victim of State terrorism (exiles, political prisoners, or even the dead) made evident the impunity, and the State’s strategy to exterminate political opponents systematically, as well as the severity of the crimes against humanity committed by

military officials. According to Gorini, the problem of human rights abuses, exposed with the existence of *los desaparecidos*, became the focal point of the negotiations in the so-called transition to democracy. It had to be solved. In the new democracy, no political party wanted to inherit the problem of *los desaparecidos* (Gorini *La otra lucha* 545).

The political voice *Las Madres* had in Argentina maintained the figure of *el desaparecido* alive, during and after the last dictatorship, in spite of the efforts of the people in power to make them disappear from the political scenario and from the national consciousness. But how were *Las Madres of plaza de Mayo* able to become a significant player in the politics of Argentina? How were *Las Madres* successful in having a voice that had to be acknowledged? And in the process being able to construct *los desaparecidos* into a key figure and referent in the collective consciousness of the political persecution that took place in Argentina during the last dictatorship (1976-1983).

Unquestionably, family members demanding justice do not have the balance of power in their favor. Furthermore, the agents trying to conceal the past, expecting the protest movements to dissipate over time. By making the protesters feel helpless and exhausted, the people in power presume that the protests will eventually stop. *Las Madres* did not have many resources available nor political capital in their favor; however, they acquired a strong political voice, and were able to introduce and maintain the issue of *los desaparecidos* in the political agenda of Argentina. They were also able to transform *los desaparecidos* into a very significant symbol in the collective consciousness of Argentina, and part of the collective memory of State terrorism. Their resilience was a key factor, but this component alone could not have been the decisive element. Family members in other parts of Latin America have also been tireless fighters. After decades of struggle

they have never stopped actively demanding justice. However, in the case of *Comité Eureka*, they did not become such a strong agent in the Mexican political scenario.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the construction of rituals is crucial for the creation and preservation of a collective memory, especially in the case of State repression when the State wants to hide and obscure the crimes committed. In the next paragraphs, I will argue that in addition to the creation of rituals, and the resilience of the family members demanding justice, there are two key elements that support the formation of collective memory of State terrorism. First, the group demanding justice must be successful in attracting and maintaining the attention and interest of the international community. Second, following Wulf Kansteiner, I argue that it is imperative that their demands suit the particular political and social interest of the moment. In “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective memory Studies” (2002), Kansteiner argues that when trying to understand the creation of collective memories it is crucial to take into account the social, political and cultural dynamics of collective remembrance. According to Kansteiner, collective remembrance has to do more with political interest and opportunities of the present, than with the persistence of the trauma (196). Past events can only be recalled “if they fit within a framework of contemporary interests” (Liliane Weissberg, cited in Kansteiner 187).

### **Attracting International Attention to State Terrorism**

When *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* first went to the Plaza de Mayo their intentions did not include being noticed by foreigners; their goal was to attract the attention of the military Junta and their fellow countrymen and women. However, they soon realized that the cooperation of the international community and media was going to be crucial to their struggle. When nobody wanted to hear what they had to say, when they were regarded as “locas” (crazy) and when nobody

believed what they affirmed, that the military Junta not only knew about forced disappearances, but had ordered them, the international media looked at these women in the Plaza and helped them become internationally acknowledged.

Given the atmosphere of political polarization during the narrative of the cold war era, and the fact that political opponents were being labeled as “terrorists,” *Las Madres* were careful, from the very beginning, to construct an image of political neutrality. It was essential to be regarded as politically neutral before the international community. They needed to avoid being associated with the political identity of their children, or any other active political subject or party. For their struggle to be seen as legitimate, they had to remain politically neutral. They presented themselves as just mothers looking for their children. Their children had also be portrayed as innocent victims, never as “guerrilla” militants. *Las Madres* presented *los desaparecidos* as young people full of ideals, never as union workers, for example, even though the majority of the *detenidos-desaparecidos* belonged to that sector of society (Gorini 2006). The report created by the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*<sup>45</sup> (CONADEP) in Argentina, which is exclusively based on denounced cases, reports the percentage of *detenidos-desaparecidos* by occupation as follows: 30% workers, 21% students, 17.9% employees, 10.7% professionals, 5.7% teachers, 5% self-employed and miscellaneous, 3.8% homemakers, 2.5% draftees and subaltern personnel of security forces, 1.5% journalists, 1.3% artists, and 0.3% religious workers (*Nunca Más* 1986:296, cited in Da Silva Catela 2001:174). In order to establish the innocence of *los desaparecidos*, *Las Madres* claimed that if nobody had charged them with any crimes, or proven that their children were guilty of committing an offense, subsequently they were innocent. Hence, enforced

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<sup>45</sup> National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons

disappearances had been carried out against innocent people, regardless of the accusations by the military Junta condemning their children of being terrorists.

*Las Madres* wanted the public opinion to consider their filial relationship as their only motive in the search for their loved ones. They knew that their only chance to keep demanding the whereabouts of their children was to remain a non-political group. If they were associated with *Montoneros*, for example, their association would have lost credibility and be subjected to the pulling forces of political play. Time and again, they presented themselves as just mothers in deep pain because they did not know the whereabouts of their children. Their drama was the drama of any mother in the world, and they were doing what any other mother would do in the same situation. By conveying the image of a mother in deep sorrow, and nothing else, they also wanted to avoid any political confrontation with the military Junta. Besides, *Las Madres* believed that their image of not only women, but more importantly of mothers would somehow protect them against State violence. Sadly, this was not the case. The military Junta believed that *Montoneros* was behind them, because according to them, a group of politically inexperienced women could certainly not be acting on behalf of themselves. In their efforts to find their involvement with *Montoneros*, their movement was infiltrated and three mothers, including the founder of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, were subjected to enforced disappearance (Gorini 2006). Military officials never found such political associations, and *Las Madres* were successful in maintaining the neutrality of the image of a mother in deep pain and desperation looking for her children.

In *La rebelión de las Madres* (2006), Gorini cites an example of the European public opinion that asserted their role as just mothers. After their tour to different cities in Europe in 1983, a journalist reacts to the negative statements of a veteran Argentinian diplomat about *Las Madres*, and states:



Mire, coronel, el problema es que no hay madres de terroristas o madres de víctimas, hay simplemente madres. Ése es el centro del problema. Las Madres hablan como madres y como tal son escuchadas. Nada puede ser más emotivo que el argumento de una madre que busca a su hijo cuyo paradero es desconocido, y es por eso que los principales gobernantes europeos no han dudado en escuchar a las dos representantes de este drama argentino...” (570)<sup>46</sup>

However, as Gorini rightly affirms, they attained European support not just because of their condition as mothers, but because their demands and their association had gained considerable political dimension. They knew that their visits to Europe had political consequences at home and they took advantage of that. However, even though they were well aware of the political repercussions of their association, remaining just as mothers was crucial if they wanted to maintain the support of international public opinion. As Gorini explains *Las Madres* were very cautious and even though they were becoming a very important political subject, they had to present themselves as any other mother who would do the same under the same circumstances. Thus, the image of neutrality proved to be fundamental in their quest for international, and especially European, support. Had they accepted the support offered by the *Montoneros*, for example, or the young people they saw as too politically engaged, their movement would have probably lost credibility, international support, and visibility.<sup>47</sup>

For *Las Madres* it was crucial to rely on their identities as mothers to interpellate the military junta. They were not considered political agents, but their role as mothers could not be

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<sup>46</sup> “En Europa se hacen oír”, por Germán Sopeña; *Siete Días*. 23 de febrero de 1983; pp. 67-70 (Cited in Gorini Ulises, *La rebelión de las Madres* 570).

“Look, colonel, the problem is that there are no mothers of terrorists or mothers of victims, there are simply mothers. That is the core of the problem. *Madres* speak as mothers, and as such they are listened to. Nothing can be more moving than the argument of a mother in search for her son whose whereabouts is unknown, and it is because of that that the most important European leaders haven’t hesitated to listen to the two representatives of this Argentinian drama...” (My translation).

<sup>47</sup> Ulises Gorini mentions that during the World Cup that took place in Argentina in 1978, Montoneros offered to pay for a certain number of seats at the stadium for *Madres* to go and protest with their white handkerchiefs attached around their heads. They knew the political implications of being associated with Montoneros, so, they declined the offer (Gorini *La rebelión de las Madres*).

ignored, especially when the military junta valued women mainly as nurturers of the members of the nation. Embracing the maternity role allowed them to speak and act publicly, and challenge the military junta's narrative openly, and at the same time contest the limitations and boundaries of motherhood. The military junta tried to portray them as bad mothers, who had been unable to direct their children to serve the nation. Nonetheless, their identity as mothers was their only resort to be seen and heard, and they used it. They performed their role as mothers for others to see, choosing to be them, and not the fathers, or any other family member, who would publicly protest. In a sense, they took advantage of the dominant narrative about women that classified women as mothers, and nothing else, to challenge the state. As Jean Franco states in *Plotting Women: Gender and Representations in Mexico*, dissident subjects and narratives emerge within the constraints of the major narratives, such as religion, nationalism, and modernization, that attempt to control women. For instance in Mexico, as she documents, women were able to create dissenting narratives, even by performing the roles that others assigned to them. Franco refers to women creating dissident narratives within the major narratives as "Plotting Women," as they have been able to gain power, and make their voices be heard by creating counterhegemonic narratives quietly and secretly taking advantage of the roles, traits, and identities assigned to them. Thus, even in positions of subordination or restriction, women can create spaces for empowerment and dissident narratives (xii-xiv).

In the modern history of the world, there have been numerous atrocities, but not all of them are remembered, such as the Armenian Genocide, to name just one. In fact, most of them are briefly acknowledged and then quickly forgotten. In *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic and the Politics of Remembering* (1997), Marita Sturken defines collective remembering as a process in which conflicting agendas are revealed, as a field of cultural

negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history (1). In this constant negotiation, Kansteiner affirms, failure is the rule. According to Kansteiner “most stories about the past, even those designed for fame as collective memories, never make it beyond the group of a few initiated” (193). Similarly, in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (1997), Susan Sontag recounts many experiences of war, which have been widely documented, but barely roused the attention of the spectators around the world. Today, television and social media expose people to endless cases of human rights abuses, war, and political conflict around the world, but only a few are successful in sustaining the interest and outrage of the international community.

The memory of war, Sontag argues, is mostly local. Most wars, and conflicts, are quickly forgotten. As an example, Sontag cites the Chaco War (1932-35), a war between Bolivia and Paraguay that took the lives of one hundred thousand soldiers of these small countries. However, in spite of the close-ups photographs taken by Willi Ruge, which, Sontag adds, were superb, today those photos are as forgotten as the war. Susan Sontag argues that for a war, or conflict, to become the subject of international attention “it must be regarded as something of an exception, as wars go, and represent more than the clashing interest of the belligerents themselves,” but most wars, she continues, “do not acquire the requisite fuller meaning” (35-36).

Sontag names the Spanish Civil War as an example of a war which captured international attention. This conflict was seen as something bigger than the conflicting interest of local players; it was considered, Sontag explains, as “a stand against the fascist menace, and (in retrospect) a dress rehearsal for the coming European, or “world,” war” (36). In sum, for a conflict, or war, to reach and sustain international interest, and even inspire indignation, the conflict has to be regarded as more than just the struggle of two or more groups over specific and local interests. Thus, in the case of *Las Madres*, it was crucial for them not to be associated with any political group in

Argentina. They needed to remain autonomous to be able to present their ordeal as a universal drama; that of a mother suffering, trying to protect her offspring. Similarly, it was also crucial to portray their own children as innocent idealist young people, whose only shortfall was to dream of a better and more just society, in a country driven by the economic greed of its leaders. *Las Madres* were just mothers who had been, until very recently, homemakers with nothing to do with politics.

In Argentina, the military Junta was very much interested in being in good standing with the international community. Attracting foreign investment was one of the main goals in the newly open Argentinian market. To this purpose, protecting their image was critical to draw foreign capital. Thus, the military junta was very careful not to harm *Las Madres* in front of the international media. *Las Madres* knew that the military Junta protected the image they presented to the world, and used this to their favor. So, during the World Cup that took place in Argentina in 1978, they were able to continue their *rondas*. However, after the World Cup was over the military Junta made it almost impossible for them to go back to the Plaza, repressing them every time they intended to regain the space. The military Junta prohibited their gathering at Plaza de Mayo during 1979 (Gorini 290).

### ***Los desaparecidos* in Argentina During the “Transition to Democracy”**

The second key element to create and maintain the collective memory of repression is precisely the political and social circumstances of the moment. In *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995), Yael Zerubal asserts that the formation of collective memory is the continual “negotiation between available historical records and current social and political agendas” (5). Or as Kansteiner argues, it has to do with political interests and opportunities. In Kansteiner words:

[...] small groups whose members have directly experienced [...] traumatic events (veterans' or survivors' groups) only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their visions, and if their vision meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups, for instance, political elites or parties. (187-8)

The elected governments that ruled after the dictatorships in Latin America are more often than not described as the administrations that initiated the transition to democratic societies. Supposedly, an era of terror was left behind to initiate a new type of rule that ensured and protected the values of democracy. Thus, the elected governments after the dictatorship periods in Latin America are referred to as the administrations of the “transition to democracy.” However, drawing on decisive evidence from Argentina and supporting Willie Thayer, Laura Martins in “Estragos de la experiencia” (2003), rightly opposes this notion, explaining that the dictatorships were the real “transitions.” In the case of Argentina, for instance, the task of the military Junta was to prepare the society to become passive and adaptable to the needs of the market economy. Using terror as the main weapon, the military Junta subjugated a highly politically mobilized society, in order to prepare the social conditions to dismantle the welfare state and impose free-market policies to administer essential services to the citizenry. As Martins explains, the time of the last dictatorship in Argentina, known as *proceso de reorganizacion nacional* (Process of National Reorganization), was in fact the first step in the transition of Argentina to enter the global neoliberal market economy. A new type of society, docile and afraid to be politically active to challenge the authority, was needed to plunder the Argentinian collective wealth. Thus, the dictatorship process was the *transition* itself (my emphasis), which prepared the shift to a new economy. Near the end of the last dictatorship in Argentina, the military Junta prepared the proposal to privatize national assets, in the midst of a futile war, disguised as a nationalist effort to recuperate their sovereignty

over the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas). However, it was the government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) which implemented an aggressive plan to privatize national assets (Martins 1-2).

Towards the end of the dictatorship, when the military Junta in Argentina was preparing to transfer the power to civilians, *Las Madres* had already gained international reputation, but most importantly, they had finally been able to get the recognition of their fellow Argentinians at home. The political scenario was difficult. The military Junta was trying to establish an agreement with the political parties to avoid being persecuted in the new “democracy.” In *La rebelión*, Gorini explains that even though all political parties wanted to have their share in the handover of power, no political party could simply make an agreement with the military Junta to insure impunity of those responsible for the extrajudicial crimes. *Las Madres* had been successful in bringing the topic of *los desaparecidos* to the national agenda, and no political party was ready to have their political capital diminished by completely ignoring their demands. At the same time, as Gorini states, nobody wanted to inherit the problem of human rights abuses ordered by the military Junta, and the problem of *los desaparecidos* had become the most relevant. For the political parties at play to advocate for the defense of human rights was a way to gain popular support, but also to obtain legitimacy in a moment when human rights abuses committed during the last dictatorship were the main conflict to be resolved. After the collapse of the last dictatorship in Argentina, a solution to the human rights abuses became urgent; it had to be addressed. Furthermore, the military Junta left power in the middle of crisis, which did not allow them to secure impunity.

In 1982, the military Junta was already in trouble, mainly due to an economic crisis and declining credibility. Desperate to regain the support of Argentinians, in 1982 the military Junta decided to recuperate the Falkland Islands owned by the British government. According to Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), Margaret Thatcher had shown disdain over the financial

burden that the islands represented for the United Kingdom. She had actually cut grants and announced major cutbacks to the navy, including the guard of the Falkland Islands. All these measures were read by the Argentinian generals as an indication that the British would easily surrender the territory. However, contrary to what Argentinians officials expected, Margaret Thatcher quickly seized the opportunity to embark on a war that would boost her own image at home. According to Klein, Thatcher wanted to open the British market to foreign investment, and deregulate the economy; however, her approval ratings were too low to introduce any changes to the economy. Thus, the jolt, the disorder and nationalist excitement created by a war would create the necessary conditions to “use tremendous force to crush the striking coal miners and to launch the first privatization frenzy in a Western democracy” (Klein 10). It was after the disastrous and humiliating loss against the British government that the Argentinian military Junta collapsed (Klein 156).

When the Junta was forced to give up power, *Las Madres* were well positioned in the national political scenario, and the “problem” of *los desaparecidos* and human rights abuses was fresh in the minds of Argentinians. *Las Madres* also were enjoying wide acceptance and credibility amongst their fellow citizens. However, the military officials were not about to surrender without trying to negotiate their impunity. In *La rebelión*, Gorini explains that after the defeat of the Falkland War, the dictatorship was given more time in power to solve the difficult matters that the new “democracy” did not want to inherit, thus the fourth, and last, military Junta was formed due to the complicity of the political parties, union leaders, and the backup of the economic and financial powers (536).

During this new moment in Argentina, *Las Madres* understood that they needed to put pressure on the political parties that were negotiating the transition of power. *Las Madres* then

decided to use the force of mobilization, and made themselves, and their white handkerchiefs, visible in every single political gathering to ensure that during the “transition to democracy” human rights abuses and the problem of *los desaparecidos* were not forgotten (Gorini 2006). Additionally, leading up to this moment, *Las Madres* had worked hard to present *los desaparecidos* not just as a family drama, but as a national problem that exposed the complicity of the people in power to repress society.

According to Gorini (2006), when the time of the “transition” came, all the political parties had realized that *Las Madres* had become a potent symbolic force, able to mobilize the population. They knew and were afraid of the electoral cost that it would represent to ignore their demands for justice (547). Thus, Gorini adds: “luego de años de soledad, Las Madres observaban ahora cómo los políticos y sindicalistas necesitaban exhibirse a su lado. El tiempo del terror y las complicidades cedía su lugar al negocio de la imagen y el marketing electoral” (555).<sup>48</sup> Gorini explains that before the defeat in the Falkland Islands war, and even after, the political parties were willing to negotiate the impunity of military officials, but in the new times, the political leaders did not want to accept a negotiation that would expose them before the public opinion and eventual voters (548). Thus, since its very beginnings, the construction of the new democracy was heavily based, at least rhetorically, on the defense of human rights and the condemnation of the crimes committed by the military Junta.

Nonetheless, for *Las Madres* the fight continued. The media battle intensified to pronounce all *desaparecidos* as dead, and make the problem disappear from the political scenario. Politicians were not genuinely interested in supporting their demands; all they wanted was to put behind the

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<sup>48</sup> “after years of isolation, now *Las Madres* observed how politicians and union leaders needed to be seen next to them. The time of terror and complicities gave way to the business of the image and electoral marketing” (my translation).



problems of human rights abuses before taking power. Many “solutions” were proposed. One of the proposed “solutions” was to publish a list of *desaparecidos* and make the military officials provide some kind of information about them. This approach was rejected by the military officials because it would imply that the military Junta knew what had happened to them (Gorini 2006, 540). The other solution was to find them “dead” and prove, with the corpses in hand, that the demand “Aparición con vida” was beyond anything possible. Thus, *el show del horror* began, as Gorini calls it. Mass graves were found with hundreds of unidentified bodies, that first of all proved that *los desaparecidos* were dead, and second and more importantly, did not imply the direct responsibility of military officials. However, *Las Madres* firmly denounced the responsibility of the military Junta, and continued to demand “Aparición con vida,” until all the people responsible, one by one, were brought to justice and prosecuted.

At the time of the “transition to democracy” the existence of *los desaparecidos* could no longer be denied by the Junta, much less by the politicians trying to get a hold of positions of power. However, the battle continued because *Las Madres* knew that if in the negotiations of the transition of power *los desaparecidos* were declared as dead, their demands for justice would be very difficult to achieve. A declaration of mass death was intended to clarify the “fate” of all *desaparecidos* and become the last word on the matter. *Las Madres* were successful and their demands were continued on in the new “democratic” era. Those were not easy times for *Las Madres* because the military officials were still enjoying positions of power. However, it was important for the new democratic government to distance itself from the military Junta and to promote an image of justice. The military Junta left office with their power considerably diminished, and in no position to negotiate under their own terms. Thus, in 1985 the heads of the Juntas were sentenced to prison, an act of justice without precedent. However, the measure was

seen as very limited by some members of *Las Madres*, as the majority of the people that had made the disappearances and the executions possible, were still free.

### **Political Use of the Defense of Human Rights and *los desaparecidos* in Argentina**

According to Juan Mario Solís Delgadillo in “Dos divisions, dos historias de Plaza de Mayo” (2010), it was until the administrations of Néstor Kirchner and his wife Cristina Fernández (2003-2015) that *Las Madres*, and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* as well, enjoyed the support of the government, and more actions of justice were carried out. Solís Delgadillo documents that the achievements of *Las Madres* had been very poor before the Kirchners came to power. For example, there was nothing they could do to stop the law *Punto Final*, passed in 1986, only three years after the end of the dictatorship. This law put an end to the investigations and persecution of people accused of political crimes during the last dictatorship. They also could not stop the law *Obediencia Debida*, passed a year later in 1987, which mandated that no military official could be persecuted because they were just acting in obedience to their duties. In 1991, President Carlos Menem granted the pardon to the military head officials sentenced by the crimes committed during the last dictatorship in order to continue to ensure their impunity. Nonetheless, the problem of human rights abuses and *los desaparecidos* were still part of the national discussion, and as such they were still subjected to political interests and use.

Solís Delgadillo explains that Néstor Kirchner arrived in power in need of political legitimacy. Kirchner took power after Menem withdrew his candidacy from the runoff. In addition, according to Manuel Balán in “La denuncia como estrategia: escándalos de corrupción en Argentina y Chile” (2011), Kirchner came to power with a very low electoral support, due to a fragmentation in the Peronist electorate (176). Under these circumstances, Solís Delgadillo asserts, the Kirchners used the defense of human rights to obtain political legitimacy. The author explains

that during the presidential campaign of 2003 Néstor Kirchner did not make reference to the issue of *los desaparecidos*, and the defense of human rights was not part of his political campaign. However, once he was elected President, he approached *Las Madres* and *Abuelas* “en un contexto en el que la falta de legitimidad política de las urnas, el ex presidente Néstor Kirchner apeló a estas organizaciones para que le sirvieran de escudo ético frente a la amplia oposición política que se encontraría en el Congreso.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, Solís Delgadillo affirms, in exchange for symbolic capital, and as the Kirchners made political use of human rights defense, *Las Madres* and also the *Abuelas* were granted “espacios de incidencia política que no habían ocupado desde el retorno a la democracia.”<sup>50</sup>

During his administration, Terence Roehrig explains in “Executive Leadership and the Continuing Quest of Justice in Argentina” (2009), that Néstor Kirchner reversed two amnesty laws that protected military officials from prosecution, and in June of 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that the laws were unconstitutional, opening the door for judicial proceedings (722). Although Roehrig does not allude to the political use of human rights, the author argues that in fact the actions undertaken by the president were a decisive factor in the advance for justice in Argentina, in his words “while the efforts of several determined individuals, human rights groups, and European courts helped revive attempts to prosecute military personnel and police in Argentina, President Kirchner’s actions were the most crucial to remove the obstacles that blocked further judicial proceedings” (722). Moreover, Roehring affirms that without the “determined leadership” of Néstor Kirchner “the amnesty laws and pardons that were the chief impediments to prosecution might still be in place” (747). Thus, although the endless efforts and actions carried out by *Las*

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<sup>49</sup> “in a context in which the lack of political legitimacy of the ballot box, the ex-president Néstor Kirchner appealed to these organizations to serve them as an ethical shield before the ample political opposition that he would find in Congress” (my translation).

<sup>50</sup> “spaces of political influence that they had never had since the return to democracy” (my translation).

*Madres* and other groups advocating for justice and the defense of human rights were fundamental, it was until someone in a position of power, with great political gain at play, decided to endorse their positions, that their demands were heard, and the construction of a solid and public collective consciousness of State repression was possible.

The Kirchners not only facilitated judicial prosecutions, they also undertook the construction of the policies of memory (*políticas de la memoria*) as a key element of their political agenda. In “Políticas de la memoria” (2014), Florencia Larralde Armas affirms that with the presidency of Néstor Kirchner “las políticas de la memoria se convierten en un tema de Estado” (270),<sup>51</sup> and “para el 30 aniversario del golpe de estado la cuestión de la memoria ya era un estandarte del gobierno kirchnerista” (271).<sup>52</sup> Larralde describes that many new institutions with the word “memory” in their titles were created. Furthermore, with Kirchner in power, the memories of the family members and the victims not only did achieve a growing level of legitimacy, but they were also incorporated into the official memories of the National State (272).

In sum, the permanent demands of *Las Madres* to find justice for *los desaparecidos*, as well as the endless efforts of other groups to fight forgetfulness, were met with key political moments in the history of Argentina that made it possible to include their versions of the past in the construction of a shared collective memory. First of all, due to the collapse of the last dictatorship in 1982, it became urgent to address the crimes committed by the military officials. Facing the times of the sudden “transition to democracy,” made it impossible for the politicians to ignore the demands about *los desaparecidos*. The battle for justice and memory continued in the new “democracy” and subsequent administrations, until the Kirchner administrations attended to

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<sup>51</sup> “the policies of memory become a State matter” (my translation).

<sup>52</sup> “for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup the issue of memory was already a symbol of the kirchnerista government” (my translation).

the demands of *Las Madres* again, as it decided to stand up against cases of human rights abuses perpetrated during the last Argentinian dictatorship. In the meantime, *Las Madres* had been successful in maintaining the figure of *el desaparecido* in the national consciousness as an emblem of political repression during the dictatorship.

Taking into account the political moments during which the construction of the figure of *el desaparecido* in Argentina was possible is key to understand why in Argentina *el desaparecido* became a defining figure, but not in other places such as Mexico, where political disappearances were also taking place during the second half of the twentieth century. According to Kansteiner, when analyzing the construction of collective memory, many studies “tend to reduce collective memory to an effect of human agency” (182), while not enough attention is paid to the political, social, and cultural dynamics of this process. Considering the political and social circumstances surrounding the construction of collective memories is crucial, because as Kansteiner maintains, past events can only be recalled collectively “if they fit within a framework of contemporary interests.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, if a social group is successful in creating and putting forward a certain version of the past, it is not merely due to their own efforts, but also because their objectives fit into the interest of other groups in society. When other groups in society also benefit from their association with the groups that advocate for a dissident version of the past, it is more feasible that marginalized narratives become part of the agenda of the groups in positions of power. Collective memory is a continual process, in constant construction and reconstruction, or as Kansteiner puts it: “historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative” (195).

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<sup>53</sup> Liliane Weissberg, “Introduction,” in Ben-Akmos and Weisberg, *Cultural Memory*, 15 (Cited in Kansteiner, Wulf 188).

## **The Continuous Construction of *el desaparecido* As a Place of Memory Through Photography in Argentina**

The family members of *los desaparecidos* have undertaken courageous, heartbreaking, and numerous actions to try to find their loved ones. As the family members began the search for their relatives, the pressing objective was to make *los desaparecidos* visible. Using photographs of them became the instrument *par excellence* to prove their existence. Today, the enlarged black and white images of faces carried by protesters during marches hardly need any further explanation. Photographs provide “indisputable evidence” of the past, as Susan Sontag explains in *On Photography* (1977). In the case of *los desaparecidos* the photograph “stands in defiance, contradicting the attempted erasure of the *desaparecidos* by the military government,” asserts Julia Reineman (2011, 63). In accordance, Ludmila da Silva Catela in “Lo invisible revelado” (2009) affirms that pictures have been the most direct way to make disappearances visible. Furthermore, Da Silva Catela explains, pictures are the main support to reconstruct the identity of those abducted by the State. In other words, photographs constitute the main medium to represent the disappearance (337). Thus, while the State attempted to deny the existence of *los desaparecidos*, their family members have kept them in the public consciousness using photographs. Throughout time, photography has remained a privileged instrument that reminds us of past events, states Andrea Giunta in “Arte, memoria, y derechos humanos en Argentina” (1). They are, as Claudia Feld and Jessica Stites rightly assert in “Imagen y memoria” (2009), valuable instruments of social memory (25). The photography of *los desaparecidos*, used during the dictatorship to demand their whereabouts, and the photography created about them in the aftermath is in fact a political act against the erasure of memory that the state wants to impose about the crimes committed. Furthermore, the photography of the aftermath of *los desaparecidos* stands in opposition to the narrative that proclaims that *los desaparecidos* belong to the past and that no longer affect the

Argentinian society. The photography chosen for this chapter clearly conveys that enforced-disappearances have lasting consequences for the immediate family members, the children, and continues to denounce this crime against humanity.

Furthermore, the photographs exhibited at demonstrations, rallies, and other public protests, were used not only to provide evidence of the existence of *los desaparecidos*, but also to give a dimension of reality to the atrocities committed by the State. The photos showed who had been the specific human being detained, tortured and later abducted by State officials. In other words, the photographs were the evidence of a victim of terror that the State wanted to make invisible. However, *el desaparecido* is not the only victim being exposed with the use of photographs of *los desaparecidos*. The family members carrying the pictures were also victims left behind in agony, permanently being tortured by the disappearance of their loved ones.

In the case of Argentina, after the initial phase of denouncing enforced-disappearances with the use of photography, the construction of the figure of *el desaparecido* has continued through the exposure of the experiences that surround enforced-disappearances, specifically those of the family members left behind in constant distress and in search of their abducted relatives. The photographic work from Argentina analyzed in this section does not only provide evidence of the existence of *el desaparecido*, but also portrays the void with which other family members must cope after the enforced-disappearance of a family member. They provide evidence of the emotional consequences of the absence, *la ausencia*, with which they have to live side by side permanently.

*Ausencias* by Gustavo Germano, and *Arqueología del la ausencia* by Lucila Quieto, bring the experience of family member, *el familiar de desaparecido*, to the forefront, as a new point of reference from which to think, imagine and see *los desaparecidos*, creating a new image of them,

one that connects *los desaparecidos* with members of society in the present. Thus, the work of Germano and Quieto reconstruct not only the image of *los desaparecidos*, but also provide a visual reference of the impact of the disappearances on the family members.

Da Silva Catela, gives an account of how the image of *los desaparecidos* has been portrayed over the last decades in Argentina, and how the family members have changed the way in which they use the photos. When the family members first began their search, the photos were used as a tool to locate their relatives. Family members carried the photo IDs of the abducted relatives in the hopes that somebody would recognize and trace them within the institutions of the State. However, soon the pictures were utilized to denounce enforced disappearances actively, as well as publicly to honor the existence each *desaparecido*. The photos of *los desaparecidos*, demonstrating their existence and their absence, were the only proof of the mechanisms of horror used by the State. Since there are no pictures of enforced-disappearances taking place, the only proof left behind was the pictures of what once was (2009, 341).

Gustavo Germano and Lucila Quieto continue to denounce enforced-disappearances, but they do so by focusing the attention on *el familiar de desaparecido*. It would not be exaggerated to affirm that *el familiar de desaparecido*, the family member of a *detenido-desaparecido*, is becoming another place of memory in Argentina, a *locus* or *lieu de mémoire*, from which the formation of a collective memory of State repression continues in Argentina. *El familiar* is now recognized as another victim of State terrorism, and their experience is seen as derived from forced-disappearances, but the experience is also unique for each one of them. In *No habrá flores en la tumba del pasado* (2001), Da Silva Catela affirms that in Argentina, *el familiar de desaparecido* has become a new social category, and I would add, a new place in the collective



memory of State repression. In this category, *las madres* and *los hijos* of *los desaparecidos* are the family members that stand out in the social consciousness.

### **“Ausencias” by Gustavo Germano (2007)**

The family members of *los desaparecidos* live with the everlasting presence of the absence of the loved one who never completely abandons his/her place in the present. It is almost impossible to portray that eternal pain that causes the absence of a *desaparecido*. Nonetheless, in *Ausencias* Gustavo Germano is able to make the viewer imagine the emotional consequences of the absence of *los desaparecidos*, showing the void that persists decades after their abduction. In his work, *los desaparecidos* become visible today by highlighting the emptiness that occupies the space where they would have been.

The exhibition of *Ausencias*, according to the information on Gustavo Germano’s blog, has been well received in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Italy, Spain, Germany, Uruguay, France, and Switzerland. When *Ausencias* was exhibited in Argentina, the president of the moment, Christina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015), as well as Estela de Carlotto, the president of *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, attended.<sup>54</sup> *Ausencias* has brilliantly pictured the pain of the absence. In “Fotografía y memoria” (2011), Larralde Armas even argues that today *Ausencias* “se ha convertido en uno de los referentes sobre la problemática de las luchas por la memoria y la justicia.”<sup>55</sup>

The loss of a loved one after an enforced-disappearance is like no other. Family members describe the pain as permanent agony and helplessness, being aware that State officials know where they are, but deny their responsibility. At the beginning, they hold on to the hope of finding them alive, but as years and decades go by they have to come to terms with the idea that the

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<sup>54</sup> <http://ausencias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com/>

<sup>55</sup> Has become one of the referents on the struggles for memory and justice. (my translation)

possibilities of finding them are very slim. However, they continue the search for their loved ones, or their remains. Nonetheless, without the certainty of their death it is difficult to accept that their loved ones are dead. The work of Germano captures that permanent void. In the prologue of the book that compiles the photographs of *Ausencias*, Horacio Verbitsky affirms that Germano's work "da cuenta del vacío lacerante que la ausencia inexplicable provoca."<sup>56</sup> Their absence is eternal, the void is forever present, and it is carried on by the family members day after day.

The concept of *Ausencias* is simple and heart-breaking at the same time. The exhibition consists of fifteen pairs of photographs. Each pair is comprised with a photograph taken sometime in the past to capture an ordinary moment in people's lives, and a photograph in color, conveying the actuality of second the picture,<sup>57</sup> which Germano staged to recreate the first image. The photographs gain significance when contrasted next to each other. The second photo reproduces the same frame, the same location, and captures the same people, except for the ones that are no longer there. In some photographs, complete emptiness replaces the space occupied once by the now *desaparecidos* (see photograph 1).



1975  
"La Tortuga Alegre". Río Uruguay. Entre Ríos  
Orlando René Méndez  
Leticia Margarita Oliva



2006  
"La Tortuga Alegre". Río Uruguay. Entre Ríos

Photograph 1: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.

<sup>56</sup> Accounts for the excruciating emptiness that the unexplained absence causes. (My translation)  
<http://www.aletheia.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/Vinculos/fotografia-y-memoria.-sobre-201causencias201d-de-gustavo-germano>

<sup>57</sup> <http://ounae.com/gustavo-germano-fotografias-ausencias/>

Two aspects of the second photograph are strikingly different. First, an empty space replaces the image of one or more subjects who appear on the first photograph. Second, the passing of a prolonged period of time without those relatives is evident, as the people who remain have visibly grown older (see photograph 2).



1973

Raúl Alberto Ramat  
Angelita de la Rosa  
Blanca Fernández  
Manuel Ramat



2006

Angelita de la Rosa  
Blanca Fernández  
Manuel Ramat

Photograph 2: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.

Life went on for the family members and friends left behind, but all this time they have lived with the void created by the absence of their loved ones. Accordingly, Nathalie Herschdorfer maintains in *Afterwards: Contemporary Photography Confronting the Past* that in *Ausencias* (2011), Germano expresses the pain of those living with a void in their families, a gap they can never completely mourn. The photography of the aftermath of tragic events, such as that of Germano, “capture the impact of what remains,” the consequences of painful events, sometimes invisible to the human eye (84). What Germano conveys is the absence of *el desaparecido* that continues to be a part of the lives of many people. In *Ausencias*, *el desaparecido* persists, and the emotional repercussions of their absence are evident. *El desaparecido* becomes present when the viewer is confronted with the gap that continues, a void that is real and visible as a result of the

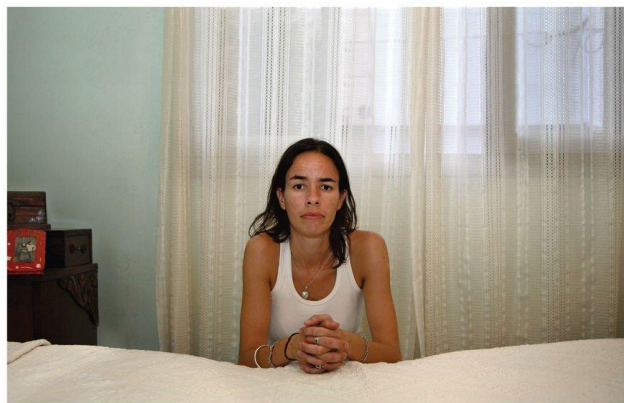
contrast of the two photographs. In Herschdorfer words, in *Ausencias*, it is precisely “their absence from the second picture that the *desaparecido* takes on a physical form” (84).

Furthermore, in *Ausencias* Germano is able to place the attention not only on *el desaparecido*, but he also makes the observer aware of the loved ones left behind. In the photpgraph 3, the onlooker is confronted with the absence of a mother and a father, but also with the loneliness in the life of a girl, Laura, who has been brought up without her parents. The first photograph shows a joyful moment in a new family, the birth of a daughter; while the second picture confronts the spectator with their absence 30 years after, and the idea of what could have been, and what was broken (see photograph 3).



1976

Orlando René Mendez  
Laura Cecilia Mendez Oliva  
Leticia Margarita Oliva



2006

Laura Cecilia Mendez Oliva

Photograph 3: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.

The viewer becomes aware of a life that was interrupted, as well as the consequences of the absence for the rest of the family. Giunta states that Germano introduces a different dimension of an enforced-disappearance, representing with the contrast of the photographs “los contactos cotidianos y la intimidad definitivamente arrebatados” (10).<sup>58</sup> Thus, the pairs of photographs put

<sup>58</sup> The everyday contacts and the intimacy taken away completely (My translation).



in evidence not only the disappearance of the body, but also the experience of time that goes by without those who have gone.

The contrast of the photographs, before and after, show the passing of time, but they simultaneously depict how it stays stagnant for the family members. The comparison makes the absence jump out, while at the same time it highlights the relatives in the second photograph. We can see them significantly older, but in very similar circumstances, same frame and same position, as if they had never moved while time went by, as if they had remained there, for decades, just waiting, getting older. The ordinary moment shown in the original photograph is interrupted, and becomes tragic; their quotidian lives are shattered forever (see photographs 4 and 5).



1975  
Omar Dario Amestoy  
Mario Alfredo Amestoy



2006  
Mario Alfredo Amestoy

Photograph 4: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.



1974  
Clara Atelman de Fink  
Claudio Marcelo Fink



2006  
Clara Atelman de Fink

Photograph 5: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.

What is striking about *Ausencias*, is that the photographs need no further clarification. The photographs are not accompanied by a description of the circumstances of the disappearance, only the year when each of the two photographs was taken, and the names of the people who appear in the photos. In the second photograph, a dot replaces the name of the person that is no longer there. We observe the same frame and a location that appears almost the same, except that in the second photograph it looks as if some people had been snatched away.

The photographs convey the disruption that the disappearances caused in the everyday lives of the family members and friends. It appears as if little has changed since the original picture was taken, except that there is a void that is not explained, and the family members are just older. And that is precisely what makes us aware of the rupture. Unexplainably someone is no longer there, and the person that remains did not move. A person is supposed to go through different stages in his/her life. However, the pictures portray men and women who have continued in identical circumstances throughout time, instead of undergoing a progression of change that would allow them to live different experiences in their lifetime. The lives of the people in the first picture were brutally interrupted, but the life of those left behind was suspended as well, by being denied of the advancement of time and the progression of life (see photograph 6).



1973  
Andrés Servín  
Raúl María Cairó  
Luisa Inés Rodríguez



2006  
Andrés Servín  
Luisa Inés Rodríguez

Photograph 6: *Desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Gustavo Germano.

When creating a place of memory, or a *locus*, Yates explains that all senses come together to remind us of the images stored in those places; however, Yates affirms, sight is the strongest of them all (4). In *Ausencias*, Gustavo Germano successfully creates an image of the absence itself. Contrary to the pictures used during the last dictatorship to provide evidence of the existence of *los desaparecidos*, *Ausencias* provides visual evidence of the absence, and the permanent presence of the absence. During the last dictatorship, the family members fought to make the *detenido-desaparecido* visible, and paradoxically, in Germano's work, it is through the presence of the family members that *los desaparecidos* continue to exist.

In the work of Gustavo Germano, *la desaparición* (enforced-disappearance) is portrayed through a different social actor, the family members and the people left behind. By creating an image of the absence of *los desaparecidos* through the people who closely experience their absence, Germano establishes the impact of their absence in the present. The photographs of *los desaparecidos*, usually black and white, initially used to protest and provide evidence of their existence, today might run the risk of being seen as something that belongs to the past; someone who no longer exists. However, when their images from the past are contrasted with the void of a place where they should be today, accompanied by their loved ones who have grown older without them, their presence once again becomes significant.

In Argentina, the absence of *los desaparecidos* permeates society at large, and is not exclusive of the family members. Gustavo Germano's brother was *detenido-desaparecido* at the age of 18 when Germano was only 11 years old. However, Germano wanted to portray not only the absence in his family, but in many others as well. The photographs show an array of people left behind, not just mothers and children, but a wife, friends, brothers, and fathers.<sup>59</sup> By showing

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<sup>59</sup> <http://ounae.com/gustavo-germano-fotografias-ausencias/>

how enforced-disappearances affected not only mothers, or children, but numerous people, such as students, lawyers, teachers, sisters, or grandparents, Gustavo Germano wants to communicate “el sentido colectivo de la tragedia.”<sup>60</sup> Germano shows that the absence is not only the loss of a family, but of society in general. The captions to the images do not provide any information of the kind of relationship between the *desaparecido* and the people who remain. The absence is not exclusive to certain people; the absence is felt by all of those who were close to *los desaparecidos*, and by the society at large.

In Argentina, it has been established that *los desaparecidos* indeed existed, and that forced-disappearances were in fact ordered and executed by State officials. However, the *detenido-desaparecido* continue to exist as society remains aware of their permanent void, and as the social consciousness goes beyond the certitude that they once existed. That is, in Argentina it has not sufficed that the State has accepted the occurrence of enforced-disappearances; their absence arouses many unanswered questions about social and economic issues in society, such as State violence, and human rights violations. In Germano’s *Ausencias*, the spectator acknowledges the void, the time people have lived with the presence of their absence,<sup>61</sup> but is also invited to imagine how life would be like if they had to experience the unresolved death of a loved one. Ultimately, Germano is able to create an image of the absence from which to keep constructing awareness and memory of State repression. The family members, the people left behind, and the void of which Germano makes the viewer aware, become the visual referent from which to create that image of State terrorism in the collective memory. The evidence of the permanent void portrayed in *Ausencias*, makes it possible to keep *el desaparecido* relevant in the present.

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<sup>60</sup> The collective sense of the tragedy (My translation) <http://ounae.com/gustavo-germano-fotografias-ausencias/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.revistasudestada.com.ar/articulo/589/ausencias-de-gustavo-germano/>



### **“Arqueología de la ausencia” by Lucila Quieto (2001)**

The photographic work of Lucila Quieto also exposes the repercussions of the absence of *los desaparecidos* in the present. Deprived of the presence and a relationship with her father, Quieto's photographs portray the desire to share the same space and time with him, to take the photograph that was never taken because of his abduction. Quieto did not have the opportunity to create a family record with her father because the State abducted him five months before she was born. The children of *los desaparecidos* grow surrounded by the narratives about their parents, leaving many gaps that are filled with their own imaginations, as they never had the opportunity to create memories of their own.

*Arqueología de la ausencia* portrays the desire of the children of *los desaparecidos* to create a remembrance with their parents, a memory of them sharing the same moment and space. In the same manner as Germano, Quieto makes the observer aware of the rupture of a relationship, and the consequences it represents for the family members. It is an absence that is felt daily. The family photographs of all those depicted which Quieto chose were also of ordinary moments in parents' lives, showing them happy, smiling, and enjoying life. The project was welcomed by many other children of *desaparecidos*, resulting in the photographic exposition *Arqueología de la ausencia*. Quieto first exhibited her photographic in 2004 at the *Museo de Arte y Memoria*, in Argentina (Larralde Armas 2014,5). This museum was inaugurated in 2002, as a place to think about and reflect upon authoritarianism and democracy.<sup>62</sup> Quieto's work has been received as a much needed space to create the memories that the military Junta made impossible during the seventies.

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.comisionporlamemoria.org/museodearteymemoria/inicio.php>

Da Silva Catela in “Lo invisible revelado” explains that contrary to the photographs used to denounce enforced-disappearances, the children prefer to use pictures of their parents in a livelier context, showing another side of them, and not just as victims of political repression. The children do not use identification pictures taken for official purposes, but photos of their parents smiling, or living a happy moment, rather than merely posing for an ID picture (354).

In order to create a photograph where children and parents appear together, Quieto projects old family photographs on the wall, to see them in their actual life-size dimensions. The children pose in front of the wall and the projected picture, creating a new image where the children can be seen next to their parents. In many cases they had a picture taken with their parents when they were very young, and in an effort to create another family picture, they pose in front of their images when they were younger, looking at their parents, being kissed or hugged by them, or inserting themselves in a happy moment in their parents’ lives. They create the presence of their parents in their lives today by posing next to them, recreating a past moment, imagining what it would be to be next to them today (see photographs 7, 8, 9, and 10).



Photograph 7, 8, 9, and 10: Children of *desaparecidos* in Argentina, by Lucila Quieto.

Once the new photograph is taken, the filial relationship becomes visible, creating a family record of a connection that was broken during the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). In photograph 11 the image of a mother and a daughter are superimposed in a way that they almost become one, one is the continuation of the other, showing the filial association between the two,

as well as the close connection of their lives. The sons and daughters have incorporated the lives of their parents into their own, they have embodied those past events and have become part of their own life narratives (see photograph 11).



Photograph 11: Mother and daughter, by Lucila Quieto

Those pictures connect the past with the present and create a new moment, a third time, (Longoni, cited in Larralde 2013: 3). Quieto replaces the absence of the loved ones by constructing a moment that is rationally impossible. The pictures show how the gap in time between the parents and the children is shortened, as they share the same space. However, at the same time, the observer is aware of the abyss that separates them. Nonetheless, the new pictures show a very strong emotional connection, and family memories of which they were deprived due to policies of the military dictatorship (see photographs 12 and 13).



Photograph 12 and 13: Children of *desaparecidos*, by Lucila Quieto.

As in the remembrance below created by Quieto, the daughter is no longer the spectator of beautiful moment in the lives of her parents, she now has a new memory of the love between her parents. The grown child inserts herself in the frame, extends her arms along the image of her parents, and turns to the camera, with a great smile on her face. Now, through the art of photography, the three of them are part of the same memory, as if a family reunion was finally possible. Now, she has a new memory, one in which she actually took part (see photograph14).



Photograph 14: Children of *desaparecidos*, by Lucila Quieto.

The family pictures chosen for *Arqueología de la Ausencia* are quotidian moments. The purpose is no longer the recognition of each specific *desaparecido*, but to portray them as part of a family and of the social fabric, to show that they still have a place in society today. Quieto does not choose to place a photo of the children next to the picture of the parents; they insert themselves live, establishing the current emotional relationship they maintain with their parents. The photography of *los desaparecidos* is no longer just a tool to denounce State repression; it is created purposely as a space of memory. With the experience of the family members as a new point of reference, forced disappearances are portrayed in a different dimension, that of the deeply emotional consequences that are carried on until the present. In Quieto's photographic exhibit, the

absence is not portrayed with a void, but by creating the image that was never possible, reuniting death and life on a photograph. In Germano's pictures, the observer can imagine the sadness of the family members left behind. They will forever miss the ones that were once a part of their lives, the ones who could not grow older with them. In Quieto's work, the children appear happy to be reunited with their parents, at least for a single event in their lives. However, they have created a new memory that will stay with them forever, for the rest of their lives. They have inserted themselves in their parents' lives, in a joyful moment, one that is not defined by the narratives about State terrorism. Through photography they can finally share a quotidian moment with their parents. As stated above, the pictures they chose to create a new moment with their parents, are not the iconic photos of a *desaparecido*, a black and white profile picture, usually an ID photo taken for official purposes. They chose to show their parents as any other person living their lives. In the pictures below, the children inserted themselves, smiling, as part of a group festivity, celebrating a life event with their parents, finally being together through the narratives they have created themselves, and not by the narratives they have been told by others about their parents (see photographs 15 and 16).



Photograph 15, and 16: Children of *desaparecidos*, by Lucila Quieto.

The work of Germano and Quieto are no longer just the evidence of the existence of *el desaparecido*, they reflect on the aftermath of State repression. As Herschdorfer puts it, this

photography tries to “capture its impact in what remains” and how events of trauma leave their mark on people and all the pain they have endured (14). The photographs they have created to document the experience of the families are an active *performance* to create a remembrance, and to show the bond that still persists.

Larralde Armas describes Quietos’ work on *Arqueología de la Ausencia* as “un acto performático,” the composing of a new picture, where for the first time children and their parents can be photographed together, creating a new photo that serves as a support to their remembrances. There is a real existence in the past, she explains, and at the same time a staging of a photographed situation, a new constructed moment, “la foto se convierte en una nueva interpretación de lo real, lo real imaginado, lo real proyectado, los deseos y los sueños que también tienen imagen... mundos reales y mundos imaginados que se encuentran” (2013: 4).<sup>63</sup> The children strongly desired this moment of closeness with their parents, side by side. It becomes real in a new imagined situation, an imagined experience in a real moment in their lives today.

The narratives about their parents have become part of their own life narratives; they are imprinted on them, just as their images are reflected on their bodies. When they stand in front of the wall and the projected picture, the image of their parents is reflected on their own skin; portraying how their parents’ past is a crucial reference to themselves, their own identities. They show that that past is part of them, and that they are a part of that past. Their parents are part of their memories, real, imagined, and constructed, because “solo desaparece lo que no deja huella” (only that which leaves no traces disappears] (Longoni, cited in Larralde Armas 2013: 7). A pleasant moment in their parents’ life is reflected on their bodies, and as the new image is taken, the projection of their parents’ past on their skin is now part of their new remembrances, they are

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<sup>63</sup> The photo becomes a new interpretation of the real, the imagined real, the projected real, the desires and the dreams that also have an image... real worlds and imagined worlds that meet in one moment. (my translation)

“retazos de un pasado que se imprimen en sus cuerpos del presente”<sup>64</sup> (Larralde Armas 2013: 4-5), thereby creating a new space to encounter their parents.

It is important to underline that the family members in Argentina are able to bring attention to their own experiences around forced abductions, its consequences, and what remains of State terror, because the image of *el desaparecido* had already been established as a strong symbol of repression. *El familiar de desaparecido* can be a new point of reference, and the focal point of an experience that had not been presented before in photography, because there was already a social consciousness about forced disappearances, and a created image of *el desaparecido*.

Photography has always been the means to create and imagine *el desaparecido*. In the case of the children, visual images have played a central role in how they construct the lives of their parents, as it is mainly through pictures that they know them (Larralde Armas 2013: 2). The lives of the children of *los desaparecidos* have been so deeply affected by past events, that their own lives are marked with the terror and consequences of enforced-disappearances. As Marianne Hirsch explains in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), the traumatic experiences of those before them “were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right,” and their connection with the past is not mediated by recall but by “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (5). The children of survivors, or *desaparecidos*, are so deeply affected by the traumatic events that it becomes imperative to construct their own identities and memories. In Hirsch’s words in “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile” (1996), post-memory is:

...a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up by narratives that preceded their lives, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generations, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created. (659)

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<sup>64</sup> Pieces of a past that are printed in their bodies of the present. (My translation)

The construction of the image of *los desaparecidos* continues to evolve. In the works of Germano and Quieto the attention shifts to the experience of the families and loved ones of *los desaparecidos*, but at the same time they continue to denounce State terrorism by bringing attention to enforced-disappearances. Their photographic work no longer seeks merely to identify the *desaparecidos* by showing pictures of their faces, but to create new images that communicate the aftermath of enforced-disappearances. Moreover, the images created of *los desaparecidos*, or about the experience of enforced-disappearance, is a performing act that stands against the erasure of the past. In Giunta's words, art and photography are "una forma de volver presente ese pasado buscando evitar su clausura; una investigación constante en torno a las texturas emocionales que las imágenes pueden provocar en su reflexión sobre lo sucedido en esos años (1976-1983) y su persistencia en el presente" (1).<sup>65</sup>

### **The Invisible *desaparecidos* in Mexico and the Eternal "Transition to Democracy"**

In México the period of the "dirty war" comprises the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s during the administrations of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970), Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), and José López Portillo (1976-1982), although the institutionalized practices of enforced-disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killings continue until the present. After the "dirty war" period was over, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI-Institutionalized Revolutionary Party), the party in power, continued to rule until the year 2000, when Vicente Fox from the opposing party Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), won the presidential elections. The year 2000 is referred to as the year when the "transition to democracy" finally materialized in Mexico, although prior changes to the constitution during the rule of the PRI are considered as pillar reforms in the

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<sup>65</sup> A way of bringing back that past in order to avoid its closure; a constant investigation into the emotional textures that the images can provoke in their reflection on what happened in those years (1976-1983) and their persistence in the present. (My translation)



long path towards democracy. The PAN remained in the presidential seat for 12 years, but in 2012 the PRI won the presidential elections once again; Enrique Peña Nieto will serve as the president until the year 2018.

The transfer of power from the PRI to the PAN was not an abrupt disruption of political forces. On the contrary, it was the result of a long process of reforms to the Constitution that the PRI itself elaborated to continue to portray an image of an open and democratic regime before the world and Mexican society. The various reforms to the Constitution, all delivered at times when the PRI needed to regain its legitimacy or to negotiate with opposing leaders, were put in place to guarantee, at least on paper, fair and transparent electoral elections, allowing the participation in the polls of the political opposition in a one-party regime. In this lengthy course, the defense of human rights never became an urgent topic in the political agenda of the State.

Contrary to the Southern Cone, the one-party regime in Mexico at all times tried to portray the image of exercising power under a democracy, or as Chappell Lawson calls it in “Mexico’s Unfinished Transition” (2000). The PRI always ruled under a “liberal façade.” The participation of the opposition parties was necessary to maintain the image of a liberal democracy, asserts Julio Labastida, and Miguel Armando López in their 2014 article “México: una transición prolongada” (753). Thus, during the 70 years of the PRI regime, the hegemonic party welcomed the participation of opposition parties to maintain that façade of being a democracy. Nonetheless, their participation was limited and always controlled by the PRI.

During most of the so-called “Mexican miracle” the PRI enjoyed the support of the masses. However, the PRI progressively lost the people’s approval. Lawson recounts that during the Mexican Miracle “urbanization and the growth of the service sector, for instance, created new social classes that were not linked to the PRI’s state-corporatist apparatus” (271). The new urban

middle-class, well-educated, and politically informed voters, as well as other social groups not directly benefitted from the state-corporatist apparatus constantly pushed to end the corruption and authoritarianism of the PRI regime (Lawson 271). According to Lawson, popular mobilization “pushed forward a halting, protracted process of political transition in Mexico” (267). As popular discontent spread, the PRI was forced to negotiate with the opposition parties that wanted to have a real electoral participation. Nonetheless, their participation took place under the PRI terms. In fact, the inclusion of other parties in the political game was gradually negotiated over the course of two decades. The negotiations took the form of political reforms, after the main opposing political parties agreed with the new rules of their electoral participation.

In his 2012 book *Historia mínima de la transición democrática en México*, José Woldenberg considers the reform of 1977 as the beginning of the “transition to democracy” in Mexico. This reform, although not sufficient, unfolded a series of transformations that culminated in the peaceful alternation of power in the year 2000 (30), that is, the political opposition took power through the popular vote without the use of violence, but based on the electoral rules upon which all political parties had agreed. Before 1977, other political reforms were created, but they were mainly limited concessions granted by the hegemonic party to gain legitimacy (Labastida and López). However, in the second half of the twentieth century, political and social unrest grew, forcing the PRI to negotiate reforms with the opposition parties. The presidential elections of 1976 were decisive to initiate the reforms of 1977. In 1976, José López Portillo (1976-1982) the candidate of the official party, PRI, was the sole person running for the position, which put in evidence that Mexico did not have a multi-party system, as the PRI claimed. Thus, in need of legitimacy, and to channel and control the protests through institutional venues, the PRI agreed to elaborate the political reform of 1977. The reform would create the possibility for more political

parties to participate in any given election, as it reduced the requirements for a political party to be officially registered and be able to participate in electoral elections, including the presidential. Thus, this would create an image of real competitive elections (Labastida and López 756-7).

In 1988, the PRI faced its deepest crisis of legitimacy. The PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, won the presidential elections in the midst of serious allegations of fraud. According to Lawson, 1988 was a “crucial turning point for Mexico’s political system”, because, “although the regime’s legitimacy had been eroding steadily, it now collapsed.” The allegations of shameless and colossal fraud “triggered mass protests and increasing social mobilization” (Lawson 272). In an effort to contain the demonstrations, the PRI agreed to create a new political reform. The PRI was forced to negotiate, because in addition to their deep crisis of legitimacy, for the first time in its history the PRI had lost the qualified majority of Congress (three-fourths of the seats), explains Rogelio Rodríguez Hernández in his 2005 essay “Conflicto y colaboración entre poderes” (194). Labastida and López explain that in 1988, after securing the presidency in the midst of allegations of fraud, the PRI was no longer in a position to grant concessions for other parties to enter the political game, but rather in serious need to negotiate, which it was able to do with only one of the opposing political parties, PAN (Partido Acción Nacional). Thus, the reform of 1989-90 was settled only with the PAN. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the presumed winner of the 1988 elections, and the party he represented FND (later PRD), refused to participate. After this reform, the PRI still maintained a significant degree of power. Nonetheless, it opened the path for real electoral participation and decreased the control of the PRI over the elections.

In 1994 Mexico faced another major economic crisis, known as the Tequila crisis, which the U.S. Treasury and the IMF used to demand instant privatizations in return for a bailout, according to Klein, the most dramatic case to date (242). The “precipitous devaluation of the

Mexican peso [...] plunged the country into renewed economic and political crisis” (Lawson 272). The year of 1994 was also the year when a new armed group, EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) declared a war against the Mexican State. The EZLN quickly gained international attention, contributing to the need to negotiate a new reform in order to reaffirm that the popular vote in the polls was the only legitimate path to ascend to power (Labastida and López 786).

The electoral reforms attained over the course of two decades were always the result of social mobilization and political conflict. The reforms made in 1996-1997 were not an exception. After the economic, political and social crisis of 1994, the president Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) had to agree to negotiate new political reforms. As Lawson affirms, given the social circumstances created after 1994 “Mexico’s rulers *could* have resisted meaningful political reform at the risk of igniting a massive social conflagration,” so that, in Lawson words, they had to negotiate and the “elite compromise led to democratization” (274).

The reform of 1996-1997 is seen as the culmination of a prolonged period of reforms that gradually created the rules upon which all political contenders agreed. Unlike the electoral reform of 1989-1990, this reform included the participation of the PRD, the third political force. According to the Ledesma and López, the participation of the three main political parties gave the legitimacy the new reform needed. According to Darren Wallis in “The Mexican Presidential and Congressional Election of 2000” (2001), this new reform ultimately made the electoral process fairer. First, “by enhancing the autonomy and powers of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), secondly by expanding the powers of the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE), and thirdly by leveling much of the finance and media playing fields” (307). The new and fairer rules were set, negotiated, and accepted by the three main political parties, including the PRI.

The first legislative elections under this new reform were held in 1997, after the first half of the administration of Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). The PRI obtained only 48% of the seats of Congress (Hernández 194), thus, the opponent parties “wrested control of the lower house of congress from the PRI” (Lawson 274). According to Lawson, the victory of the opposition parties finally “ended nearly seventy years of one-party rule and ushered in a new era of multiparty government” (274). The reforms of 1996-1997 and the mid-term elections of 1997 paved the way for the PAN to win the presidential elections peacefully in the year 2000, and the alternation of government to be possible (274). After more than 70 years, a different political party had won the presidential elections. The Partido Acción Nacional had replaced the Partido Revolucionario Institucional.

In sum, as Labastida and López affirm, the turn to democracy in Mexico was not the result of an abrupt change, disruption, or collapse of the one-party system, nor the consequence of external factors. On the contrary, the PRI had ample time and power to negotiate the terms of electoral inclusion, making sure never to lose the possibility to win the elections. Such is the case that they were elected to return to the presidential house only 12 years after losing it. The so-called democracy in México was the result of “la disolución paulatina de un régimen autoritario.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the reforms established “una forma de democracia predominantemente electoral”<sup>67</sup> (Labastida and López 750). The popular vote was presented as the legitimate way to consolidate a democracy, while less importance was granted to the defense of human rights, civil and individual guarantees, constitutional rights, (*libertades y garantías individuales*), or the enforcement of the *Estado de Derecho* (the rule of law) (Labastida and López 752). The so-called transition to

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<sup>66</sup> Gradual dissolution of an authoritarian regime. (My translation)

<sup>67</sup> A form of democracy predominantly electoral. (My translation)

democracy in Mexico was “una transición prolongada,” a prolonged transition, of reforms and negotiations that gradually put an end to the one-party system (750).

### **What to Do With the Crimes of the Past?**

Under the new circumstances of a fair electoral process, Vicente Fox the candidate of the opposition won the presidential elections in 2000, marking this year as the official beginning of the “transition to democracy.” During his presidential campaign, one of his promises was that once president he would investigate the crimes of the past, committed during the “dirty war.” A key juncture such as the so-called “transition to democracy” is when the new people in power have to decide what to do with the crimes committed by the previous rulers. In their 2006 article “Neither truth nor Justice: Mexico’s De Facto Amnesty,” Sergio Aguayo Quezada et al. explain that at the end of World War II the consensus was that the atrocities of the past should be forgotten, so that the new regimes would have a better opportunity to establish their power. However, after the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals the consensus changed, establishing that the best way to move forward was to confront the past in order to give way to democracy (57). Consequently, Vicente Fox’s choice was to prosecute the crimes of the previous regime, or so was his promise during the presidential campaign.

Aguayo et al. state that the decision to confront the past, “was one practical way that Fox’s new government could strengthen itself at a time when respect for human rights had been accepted as a universal source of legitimacy and a way to consolidate democracy” (58). In the new administration, some officials advocated for amnesty, while others demanded a special prosecutor. Vicente Fox faced continual social pressure to address the crimes committed by the PRI regime, and finally made a decision. He decided against amnesty and created a special prosecutor’s office. Supposedly, the main reason to create a special prosecutor was that it would have judicial

capacities to bring to trial the perpetrators. The work of the prosecutor's office was delayed, until finally in November 27, 2001 Fox announced the creation of the *Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Políticos y Sociales del Pasado* (FEMOSPP) [Special Prosecutor's Office for Political and Social Movements of the Past] (60).

According to Aguayo et al., the credibility of the special prosecutor's office was diminished from the very beginning. Fox removed the people initially in charge, and appointed other figures more favorable, and even associated, to the old regime. Nonetheless, after their investigations, the special prosecutor's office did something without precedent in the Mexican society, they charged a former president, Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), with political genocide, even though, as Aguayo et al. explain, political genocide has no basis in law. Accordingly, a judge ruled that the killings of June 10, 1971, known as the massacre of Corpus Christi, and the massacre of students in October 2 in 1968, could not be labeled as genocides. In his 2009 article "Remembering Democratic Time," B.J. Brandese explains that in the Corpus Christi massacre about 8,000 students encountered severe repression from the paramilitary group *Halcones*, who killed about 25 students. The repression was ordered by President Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) (437).

The special prosecutor failed to imprison any of the perpetrators of the previous regime, even Miguel Nazar Haro, the head of Federal Security, one of the main perpetrators of the "dirty war," who was released five months after his arrest. The accusations of political genocide certainly draw the attention and astonishment of the Mexican society. Though more importantly, it created false hopes that justice would be served. However, as Aguayo et al. affirm, the work done by the special prosecutor "is sufficient evidence to assert that the Mexican government granted the de facto amnesty to the oppressors of the old regime (...); as the pressure from the military and the

PRI outweighed the proposals of human rights groups.” As a result, “the culture of impunity remains intact” in Mexico (63-65).

In the prolonged transition to democracy in Mexico, “interminable” in the words of Aguayo et al. (56), there was never a sense of urgency to address the crimes committed by the old regime. The electoral reforms made possible the alternation of power. However, the PAN, with no majority in Congress, had to negotiate with the other parties, including the PRI. Moreover, the series of electoral reforms established that democracy was the result of fair elections, regardless of the prevailing impunity. The so-called democracy and legitimacy in power was based merely on the electoral sphere. Thus, the demands for justice in regards to the crimes committed during the “dirty war” never converged with the interests of the political elite. After Fox’s victory, the elected president brought to the national attention the need to address the crimes against humanity committed in the past, however, one year or two years after the beginning of his administration, the issue was no longer a priority for Fox’s administration. Finally, the demands of human rights activists were neglected and quickly put aside. Nonetheless, the demands for justice and the truth by the family members of *los desaparecidos*, especially in the state of Guerrero, have never ceased. In this state, the family members and social activists pressured the local government to create a truth commission, *Comverdad*. Their report was released in 2014, revealing the details and evidence of the crimes committed by the Mexican State. However, government officials made no efforts to distribute the report and make the rest of society aware of its contents.

### **The New and the Old *desaparecidos* in Mexico**

The special prosecutor created by Vicente Fox in 2000 did not clarify the crimes committed during the “dirty war” by the PRI regime, nor prosecuted any of the state officials responsible for the crimes. The office was dismantled in 2007 and the matter was quickly forgotten. Nonetheless,



the family members of the people abducted during the “dirty war” continued to demand justice and the truth. The case of Rosendo Radilla, an activist abducted by the Mexican army, in Guerrero in 1974, stands out. After more than 30 years of seeking justice in Mexico, his family succeeded in bringing the case to the Inter-American court of human rights, as indicated in the document *La sentencia de la Corte IDH Caso Radilla Pacheco vs Estados Unidos Mexicanos* published by the La Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (CMDPDH).<sup>68</sup>

In December of 2009, the international court found the Mexican State guilty in the enforced disappearance of community leader Rosendo Radilla. According to Emilio Godoy in “Rights: Mexico Ignores Inter-American Court Ruling,” the sentence also dictated the obligations of the Mexican government in regards to this case, and forced disappearances in general. The ruling in the case of Rosendo Radilla demanded the Mexican State to investigate the disappearance thoroughly, punish the perpetrators, determine the whereabouts of Rosendo Radilla or his remains, provide psychological aid to the family members, and execute modifications to the constitution to update the country’s laws on forced disappearances, which shields soldiers from prosecution for crimes.

The ruling of the Inter-American Court in the case of Rosendo Radilla was very significant not only to Rosendo’s family, but also to many other families in the state of Guerrero, as most of the disappearances that were carried out during the “dirty war” occurred in this southern state, and more specifically in Atoyac de Alvarez, the rural area where Rosendo Radilla lived. It is always difficult to determine the exact number of disappearances, however, according to the information presented in the document *La sentencia de la Corte*, at least 1,200 cases of forced abductions have been confirmed, 639 of which occurred in the state of Guerrero.

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<sup>68</sup> <http://cmdpdh.org/>

Undoubtedly, the Inter-American ruling meant a victory for Rosendo Radilla's family and all the family members of *los desaparecidos* in Mexico. For the first time in history, the Mexican State had been accused and charged as responsible for the disappearance of a citizen. However, the sense of victory was short lived by the family members. The Mexican State has not complied with the sentence, except for "the publication of the ruling on the official government record and in one other newspaper of national circulation."<sup>69</sup> The sentence stipulated that the ruling had to appear only one time in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* and only one time in a newspaper of national circulation.<sup>70</sup>

Tita Radilla, Rosendo Radilla's daughter, states in *La sentencia de la Corte* that they received the sentence with great joy, thinking that the day had come when the State would finally investigate the cases of enforced disappearances, and that after more than three decades the family members would know what happened with their loved ones. However, nothing has been done. The latest attempt to fulfill the demands of the Inter-American court was simulated by the Mexican State in December of 2015, when, as published in the *Diario Oficial de la Nación*, the State offered a reward to those who could provide information to locate Rosendo Radilla.<sup>71</sup> The State wanted to rely on the information the Mexican society could provide about a crime its own armed forces committed under a genocide plan ordered by the Mexican State itself.

The case of Rosendo Radilla and the ruling of the Inter-American court did not receive great attention in the media. Lack of interest by the government to find and to reveal the truth also persisted. Moreover, violence and impunity intensified during the presidency of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), when his administration began the so-called "war" against drug trafficking.

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/05/rights-mexico-ignores-inter-american-court-rulings/>

<sup>70</sup> [http://dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5131043&fecha=09/02/2010](http://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5131043&fecha=09/02/2010)

<sup>71</sup> [http://dof.gob.mx/nota\\_detalle.php?codigo=5411252&fecha=12/10/2015](http://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5411252&fecha=12/10/2015)

With this new so-called war, thousands of people have been killed, or abducted. Nonetheless, the culture of impunity, to which Aguayo et al. refer, has dominated. People continue to disappear daily; however, the Mexican State continues to show no urgency to conduct serious investigations to find the missing citizens, identify the bodies found in mass graves, nor to punish the perpetrators. It has been easier for the government simply to blame organized crime for all of it.

Human rights activists have pointed out that law enforcement of all levels, as well as the army itself are involved in extrajudicial killings and the disappearances that occur today in Mexico. Moreover, they point out that the forced disappearances that occur today in Mexico, at least in the state of Guerrero, are not unrelated to the crimes of the “dirty war.” The crisis of human rights in Mexico, torture, extrajudicial killings, and forced abductions, are the result of the culture of impunity that persists in Mexico since the “dirty war,” affirm the commissioners of the Commission of truth in Guerrero (Comverdad).<sup>72</sup>

Even though it has been acknowledged by the national and international media that thousands of people have been murdered or abducted in Mexico in the so-called “war” against drug trafficking, it was the case of the 43 students abducted in September of 2014 in the state of Guerrero that caused special outrage and attention. Mexico has a long history of massacres that are forgotten due to impunity, argue Sergio Aguayo and Clementina Chávez in “Ayotzinapa y la verdad” (177), including the forced disappearances during the “dirty war.” However, collective memory is never a finished process, and current events might rekindle “forgotten” ones, or as Steven Stern calls it, *memory knots*<sup>73</sup> may reawaken events from the past. The case of the 43 students has revealed not only the complicity of local and federal government institutions, but the

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/10/14/politica/008n1pol>

<sup>73</sup> “[...] the specific human groups and leader, specific events in time including anniversary and commemorations, and specific physical remains or places that *demand*ed attention to memory.” (Stern 2010: 4)

fact that the repression during the “dirty war,” and the one that occurs today in Guerrero, are not two separate moments in the Mexican history. They are actually a continuum that persists thanks to the chain of impunity that prevails after 40 years (Hernández 220). Forty years have passed since the “dirty war,” and it is only now, that the case of the 43 students could make the Mexican society look back and question the crimes committed during the “dirty war.”

One of the main questions that Aguayo and Chávez bring to the forefront is why should this case be considered more seriously than others? Why did the tragedy of the 43 students attract so much attention, when there are thousands of other cases throughout the country? Firstly, Aguayo and Chávez point to the identity associated with the victims. The case of the 43 students was portrayed as an aggression against innocent students. They probably could have been accused of being radicals, affirm Aguayo and Chávez, but never of being criminals (177). In the case of the other thousands of abductions, the State has always implied, or even openly argued, that they were probably involved in illicit activities and drug trafficking. However, in the case of the 43 students, their identity as innocent students, not related to drug trafficking, was quickly established, in spite of the government’s efforts to try to determine a connection between the students and their school with illicit activities.

Coincidentally, the 43 students were on their way to Mexico City to join the commemoration of the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the student massacre of Tlatelolco, reminding Mexican citizens that little has changed since the brutal repression against students in Tlatelolco in 1968. This event of the epoch of the “dirty war” is well engrained in the social memory of Mexican citizens. The identity of the 43 students as innocents led to national mobilizations arranged by students previously organized. In “¿Por qué casos como los de Ayotzinapa” García et al., point out specifically at the movement #YoSoy132. A group of students that organized in 2012, to protest

against Enrique Peña Nieto, PRI presidential candidate, and the repression he ordered in San Salvador Atenco during his administration as the governor of the State of Mexico.

As in the case of *Las Madres*, establishing the innocence of their sons and daughters, as well as the family members themselves, was key to attract and maintain international attention. *Las Madres* always portrayed themselves as just mothers, and their offspring as innocent victims. It was only decades later when they decided to vindicate their children as revolutionaries. In the case of the 43 students, it was equally fundamental to establish their identity as innocents, to be able to demand justice, which in turn also attracted international interest. Worldwide attention to this case put enormous pressure on the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) to show its commitment to democracy (Aguayo and Chávez 178), which forced Peña Nieto's administration to initiate an investigation to clarify the disappearance of the 43 students.

Nonetheless, as on many other occasions, the Mexican State attempted hastily to put an end to the “problem” of the 43 students. But due to international pressure and “acorralado por el desprestigio,” [cornered by discredit] on November of 2014 the Mexican government signed an agreement with the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (CINH), to allow a group of forensic experts GIEI (*Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes*/Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts) to conduct independent research on the case. In spite of the agreement for technical assistance, the Mexican government tried to close the case on January of 2015. On January 12<sup>th</sup> the president Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) announced to the nation that it was time to “move forward,” to “get over the pain and sadness” for the disappearance of the 43 students, that Mexicans could not be “paralyzed” by this tragedy. Later on that same day, the attorney's general office announced the conclusion of its own investigations and called it “la verdad histórica” [the historical truth] (178-179). The official version stated that the local police

arrested the group of students, turned them to the drug cartel *Guerreros Unidos*, who mistook them for a rival group, killed them, burned their bodies in a local garbage dump, and threw the ashes in the river. According to Aguayo and Chávez, their “verdad histórica” was just another attempt to “decretar el olvido” (oblivion by decree) (178).

However, thanks to the interference of the international group of experts (GIEI) forgetfulness by decree was not possible. In September of 2015 the GIEI made public the results of their own investigations. As it turned out, they provided conclusive evidence that the alleged fire that supposedly burned the 43 bodies never happened, demonstrating that the “verdad histórica” was false. They also recommended further lines of investigations and continued to carry out their own queries. According to Aguayo and Chávez, the case of the 43 students would have been treated just like many others massacres when the people in power, of any political party, hide the truth and obstruct justice. However, thanks to the work of the CNDH (*Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos*), and especially by the GIEI, the Mexican citizens could know the truth about this massacre. Aguayo and Chávez even affirm that this moment in Mexico has no precedent, it is, as they call it “un momento inédito en la historia nacional” (181)<sup>74</sup>, because for the first time Mexicans could know the truth. As Aguayo and Chávez explain, the group of international experts is the only hope that for the first time in history the Mexican State is not able to force obliviousness by decree. The words of Aguayo and Chávez echo the optimism of many Mexicans. For the first time in history, there are great expectations that “Iguala será la primera masacre sobre la cual conoceremos la verdad en un plazo relativamente corto” (178).<sup>75</sup> However, the administration of Peña Nieto, and the Mexican army are not facilitating the investigations. More than two year have

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<sup>74</sup> A historical moment in national history. (My translation)

<sup>75</sup> Iguala will be the first massacre about which we will know the truth in a relatively short period of time. (My translation).

passed after the disappearance and killings of the students in Guerrero, and the whereabouts of the students are still unknown.

One key factor made the administration of Peña Nieto accept the interference of the international community: its low levels of acceptance and credibility. The administration of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), and the president himself, have been immersed in serious allegations of corruption, thus, according to Aguayo et al., accepting the recommendations of the GIEI was their last resort to save their credibility (181). As Kansteiner points out, the demands of certain groups have to meet the interest of the people in power. Human rights groups and numerous organizations took advantage of the government needs and quickly offered their help to the parents of the 43 students (Aguayo and Chávez 177), to create enough pressure for the government to accept a group of international experts in Mexico to conduct their own autonomous investigations. Denying access to the GIEI would have meant the collapse of the little credibility the government had left. As Aguayo and Chávez affirm, the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto was cornered by its own discredit, and had to accept the autonomous investigations of the GIEI (178).

The 43 students “missing” are the first *desaparecidos* that actually exist in the Mexican national consciousness. Given the social and political circumstances, as well as the advances in the last decades in the fight for human rights, the family members of the 43 students received the support of the international community. Undoubtedly, groups and institutions fighting for human rights have played an essential role to create enough pressure in this case. During the years of the “dirty war” in Mexico, there were no strong institutions fighting for human rights in Mexico. The first human rights organization in Mexico was founded in 1979 in the state of Nuevo León. In 1989 the *Dirección General de Derechos Humanos* was created, but as a part of the Mexican Secretariat

of Interior. In 1992 it became a decentralized legal body, and until 1999 it was established as an institution with full autonomy.<sup>76</sup>

The collective memory of a group is always in constant construction, and events that occur in the present can ignite the need to revisit the past. That past only becomes relevant when it is significant and matters to different groups in society today, because as Kansteiner puts it, collective memory is “present-oriented” (195). It is too soon to tell if the case of the 43 students *detenidos-desaparecidos* in the state of Guerrero in 2014, will initiate a national discussion that could lead to the construction of a national consciousness and memory of the forced disappearances committed by the State during the years of the “dirty war.” However, one thing is certain; this case has already brought attention about, what the media and their own family members call, the “other” *desaparecidos* of Guerrero and Mexico today. Furthermore, the ongoing practices of repression in the state of Guerrero, after 40 years of the “dirty war,” became evident with the case of the 43 students subjected to enforced disappearance. Hence, it would not be surprising if this case brought to light not only the “other,” but also the “old” *desaparecidos*.

### ***Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos: a Photographic Campaign by H.I.J.O.S México***

In contrast to Argentina, the photographic works done about forced-abductions in Mexico are scarce. In Argentina, *el desaparecido* is already established as a symbolic figure that denotes State terrorism. Thus, the use of photos has evolved from being utilized as a tool to locate and denounce, to being the inspiration for many photographic exhibitions, and artistic creations, that continue to denounce State terrorism through the use of art.

In Mexico, family members and different associations continue their struggle to make the *desaparecidos* visible and be acknowledged by the Mexican society. *H.I.J.O.S México* is one of

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.cndh.org.mx>.



those organizations, which works closely with *Comité Eureka*. Their members initiated a photographic campaign entitled *Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos* (*Los desaparecidos* are missing to everybody). Their photographic campaign is intended to create a collective consciousness about the abducted in Mexico. The photos consist of people being photographed while holding a black and white picture of a *desaparecido*. Thus, there is a first picture, taken in the past, and a second photo produced by *H.I.J.O.S México* of a person holding the first photo. The photo of the *desaparecido* is iconic, requires no further explanation to be understood as the image of a *desaparecido*. The first photo, in black and white, is a picture of only the face of *el desaparecido*, and in most cases the woman or man is not looking directly to the camera. This picture has been enlarged and is being held by one or several people. The second picture captures that image in color, portraying that it is a current image with a piece from the past.

The campaign is comprised by two different types of settings, *Imágenes en la calle*, taken in public places in Mexico City (see photographs 17, 18, and 19), and *Imágenes de estudio*, taken in a studio (see photographs 20, 21, and 22). *En la calle* refers to the public space that people enter as soon as they leave their private homes. Most of the images in the streets are taken in public parks, of people who appeared to be passing by or are already there. Some pictures even show the people's belongings, or work materials in the cases of street vendors, put down while the picture is being taken. In the studio images, well-known people hold the picture of *los desaparecidos*. Public personalities participated in this campaign such as Elena Poniatowska, a writer Mexicans know very well for her work and political activism, *La noche de Tlatelolco: testimonies de historia oral* (1971) is one of her most famous books. Other well-known actors, musicians, and journalists that are recognized for their political activism and who participate in this project as well are Oscar Chávez, Daniel Giménez Cacho, and Ofelia Medina.



Photographs 17, 18, and 19: *Desaparecidos* in Mexico, by H.I.J.O.S México.

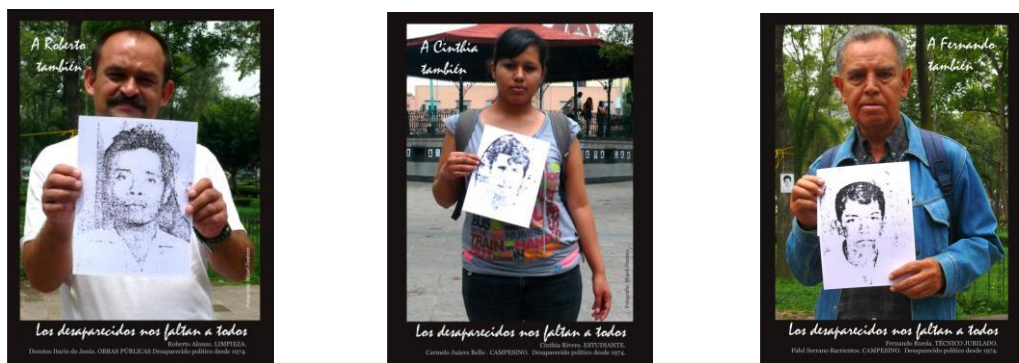


Photographs 20, 21, and 22: *Desaparecidos* in Mexico, by H.I.J.O.S México.

In all pictures, the image of the present is more salient, making the current image more relevant. The image of the person holding the first picture is bigger, in color, and it covers half or the full body of the person holding the picture. The black and white picture is visibly smaller, being embraced by the present-day person, being held with their hands in different positions, mostly at the center, as if they were given the choice of holding the photo in front of them, or as they considered more appropriate. The pictures show the importance that the citizens acknowledge *los desaparecidos*. The focus of attention is the person holding the picture. Their names, faces, and

bodies stand out first. What is most relevant about the black and white picture is not the identity of the *desaparecido*, but that the photo stands as a symbol of forced-disappearances.

In some cases, the black and white picture is seen from a distance, or it is so blurry that only the contours of the face remain. Although the identity of the *desaparecido* is important, as some information about the person is provided, the campaign highlights that what matters the most is the people today taking a stand against enforced-disappearances, and claiming the existence of *los desaparecidos* in Mexico (see photographs 23, 24, and 25).



Photographs 23, 24, and 25: *Desaparecidos* in Mexico, by H.I.J.O.S México.

As the pictures of *los desaparecidos* change hands, (some photos appeared being held by different people or groups in different pictures), and as they are being held by somebody who does not have a filial relationship with *el desaparecido*, nobody is claiming ownership over any of *los desaparecidos*. In this campaign they belong to anyone, they are everyone's responsibility, *nos hacen falta a todos*, regardless of who they are (see photographs 27, and 28).



Photographs 27, and 28: *Desaparecidos* in Mexico, by H.I.J.O.S México.

To participate in the campaign it is not a requirement to have a filial connection or know anything about the abducted person. The members of *H.I.J.O.S. México* are not all children of *desaparecidos* themselves. However, on their website they present themselves as children of *desaparecidos*, exiled, murdered, and political prisoners of Mexico and Latin America, and they also clarify that they have members who are sensitive to these issues.<sup>77</sup> Anyone can participate and be photographed with the picture of a *detenido-desaparecido*. Not even being Mexican is a prerequisite to participate in their photographic campaign. Although the majority of participants are Mexican citizens, the nationality is not important. What is significant is to inspire awareness about enforced-disappearances. Examples of non-Mexicans participating are two *Pussy Riot* members, a Russian feminist punk-rock protest group, and two *Aterciopelados* members, a rock band from Colombia (see photographs 29, and 30).



Photographs 29, and 30: *Desaparecidos* in Mexico, by H.I.J.O.S México.

However, nowhere in the photograph is the nationality of the person holding the picture mentioned, nor the nationality of *los desaparecidos*. Although, since *H.I.J.O.S México* are carrying out the campaign, and on their website [www.hijosmexico.org](http://www.hijosmexico.org) they list the names of 562 Mexican *desaparecidos*, it can be implied that the *desaparecidos* of the campaign are from Mexico. The invitation to participate in the campaign is open to anyone, not just the children or relatives of

<sup>77</sup> [http://hijosmexico.org/index.php?id\\_pag=16](http://hijosmexico.org/index.php?id_pag=16)

*desaparecidos*. They even invite people to contact them to have their picture taken, ¡Tómate la foto! ¿Quieres participar? Contáctanos (Have the picture taken! Do you want to participate? Contact us), appears at the bottom of the gallery of the pictures taken in a studio.

The campaigning does not seek to bring awareness in the aftermath of enforced-disappearances, such as the work of Gustavo Germano and Lucila Quieto from Argentina. The goal of the campaign *Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos* is to create awareness about enforced-disappearances, and the existence of *los desaparecidos*. It is not about making the viewer aware of the presence of the absent, but an effort to make *los desaparecidos* appear, and become part of the Mexican contemporary society and consciousness. It is an effort to acknowledge enforced-disappearance itself as part of the Mexican reality, to make the Mexican *desaparecidos* exist in the Mexican consciousness, because as described on their website, in many occasions, when people see them protesting in the streets, they believe that they are fighting for *los desaparecidos* in Argentina. To a great extent, the Mexican society is oblivious to the existence of the *desaparecidos* in their own country.

The captions that accompany each photograph provides succinct information. First, at the top of the image appears the name of the person, or group, to whom the *desaparecido* is missing. The person holding the picture is presented as the protagonist of the photo, the citizen who is making the claim. Their name is accompanied by the word “también” (also) to indicate that this is one more person of many who acknowledge the existence of *los desaparecidos*, and for whom it is important to know their whereabouts. Thus, the attention is placed on the person who holds the photograph, and the demand for justice that the performance represents. The attention is not placed on the *desaparecido* per se. At the bottom of the image, the name of the campaign is written in a larger font. Below, the information provided at the bottom of the image lists, in the first place, the

name of the person, or group holding the picture. They also provide information about their occupation. They use capital letter to distinguish this information from the rest of the text. On the following and last line, the full name of the *desaparecido* is given, followed by his/her occupation, using capital letters as well to indicate this information. Lastly, the information given after the occupation of the second person reiterates that the person of the image in black and white is a *desaparecido*. Furthermore, the campaign categorizes the enforced disappearance as political, naming the subject as *desaparecido politico*, or *desaparecido por razones políticas* [abducted for political reasons], followed by the year of the enforced disappearance.

The campaign conveys that it is not necessary to have known the *desaparecido* personally in order to care about his/her enforced disappearance; any citizen can and should demand justice for *el desaparecido*, regardless of filial associations. However, in the information provided, there is one piece that stands out as the connection between the person holding the picture and the person in the black and white photo: their occupation. It is not a mother, a father, a son, a wife, or a daughter, or any other relative making a stand. What is highlighted as a common denominator is that they both have an occupation in society. Their respective occupations are highlighted, using capital letters, indicating their function in a society, and as such the common relationship they both have with the State. The occupation indicates their bond with the rest of an organized society, and their place as contributors to that society through their work. It also signals that they both have a relationship with the State, as it is the entity that oversees and regulates professions and occupations in a society. Thus, in the photographic campaign initiated by *H.I.J.O.S México*, what determines the relationship between people in society nowadays, and all *desaparecidos*, is their status as citizens. In this photographic campaign, it is the citizenry who speaks out for the return of any, and all, *desaparecidos*.

## CHAPTER 4. EXILE: A PLACE OF MEMORY IN THE MAKING?

### Exile: a Forgotten State Crime?

A terrorist State, in its attempt to silence the citizenry, creates its own weaknesses from which society may challenge the official narratives, and bring attention to the crimes committed. This chapter explores the possibility of *exile* becoming a *lieu de mémoire*; that is, an event from the past that citizens actively remember in the present as a significant memory from which to be reminded of the past. It is a place from which citizens can permanently discuss the past because of its lasting consequences. Ultimately, exile can be a place of memory from which citizens can construct counter-hegemonic narratives about the past.

This chapter addresses the cases of Chile and Argentina; however, to a lesser extent, the Mexican case is also considered. The number of Mexican exiles during the 1970s is minimal when compared to the Chilean diaspora, and the thousands of Argentinians who left their country during the same period. Nonetheless, the Mexican case exemplifies how the State, by quickly putting an end to a crime that has consequences in the future, can skillfully conceal the terror and violence to which the citizens are subjected. Moreover, when the Mexican State granted amnesty for the Mexican political exiles to return, and political asylum to thousands of politically persecuted during the 1970s, mainly Chileans and Argentinians, the Mexican State obscured the brutal political persecution, and annihilation, being committed against their own citizens within Mexican borders. This chapter analyzes the struggles of exiles from Chile and Argentina to become political agents to interpellate the State in the aftermath of State terrorism. Exiles are usually not regarded as victims of State terrorism. However, this chapter stresses that exile is another form of torture, committed by a terrorist State to annihilate and isolate political opponents, and another experience from which citizens can challenge silence, and official narratives.

The analysis of the literary text *En estado de memoria*, (1990) by Argentinian writer Tununa Mercado, and the photographic work *Distancias* (2009), by Argentinian photographer Gustavo Geman, will shed light on how the narratives of the exiles also claim a place in the national discourse of State repression, and demand to be incorporated into the broader memory of State terrorism. These art works also portray that exile is in fact one of the major mechanisms established by State terrorism to eliminate their political opponents. More importantly, they depict that by incorporating exile into the dominant narratives of State terrorism, State crimes can be continuously discussed, and kept in the national consciousness.

The first step toward incorporating exile into the national and international narratives of State repression in the Americas during the seventies is for society to recognize that exile is one of the major crimes committed by the terrorist States against its citizens. Thus, it is crucial to put into question the triviality with which society regards exile. It is also essential to acknowledge that exile is a crime that never ceases to have consequences, both, in the lifetime of the exiles, and in the lives of their children. In *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales*, Julio Cortázar accurately describes the emotional distress undergone by exiles:

El exilio es la cesación del contacto de un follaje y de una raigambre con el aire y la tierra connaturales; es como el brusco final de un amor, *es como una muerte inconcebiblemente horrible porque es una muerte que se sigue viviendo conscientemente*, algo como lo que Edgar Allan Poe describió en ese relato que se llama *El entierro prematuro*. (11; my emphasis)<sup>78</sup>

The poem to which Julio Cortázar refers is about the horror of being buried alive. Supposedly, exile is not a violent crime, and ends when people have the opportunity to return to their home countries. However, narratives of exile contradict these widespread misconceptions.

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<sup>78</sup> Exile is the cessation of the contact of a foliage and of a root with the natural air and the earth; it is like the abrupt end of a love, it is like an inconceivably horrible death because it is a death that is experienced consciously, something like what Edgar Allan Poe described in that story that is called *The Premature Burial*.



First, they demonstrate that exile is in fact a violent strategy set in motion by the State to eliminate political opposition, and second, that once citizens are forced into exile, its consequences are everlasting, and that even the generations born in exile, or after exile, have to endure its consequences.

As the process of the creation of collective awareness and memory of State repression evolves, different narratives and experiences emerge on the public scene. Current political, social, and economic vested interests may transform narratives of the past into discourses relevant to the present. As long as past narratives are significant to some sectors of today's society, it is possible to engage society into a debate about those experiences and their consequences. *En estado de memoria* (1990), by Tununa Mercado, one of the early accounts which Argentinian writer published about exile, and Germano's photographic work *Distancias*, draw attention on how severely exile affects the subjectivities of the victims, and the importance of discussing exile as part of the narrative of State terrorism.

### **Exile as a Political Tool of the Systematic Plan to Annihilate the Political Opposition in Latin America**

After the coup d'état in 1973 against the democratically elected Chilean president Salvador Allende, thousands of Chileans were forced to leave their home country. Although it is difficult to determine exactly how many Chileans were forced into exile, in *Reckoning with Pinochet* (2010), Steve Stern states that it is estimated that the exile waves, first exclusively due to political reasons, and later mixed with economic hardship, were massive. Approximately, between 200,000 and 400,000 Chileans went into exile during the years of Pinochet's dictatorship, between September of 1973 and March of 1990 (36).

Exile has historically been a political weapon against the opposition. In "Political Exile in Latin America" (2007), Mario Sznajder, and Luis Roniger, describe exile, "as the removal of

opponents in a state framework as a result of confrontational politics,” and document that it has existed since colonial times in Latin America, known as *destierro* in Spanish (8-9). *Destierro*, or exile, had been used selectively; however, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, exile was adopted as an “important political practice everywhere in Latin America.” According to the Sznajder and Roniger, in fact, exile became “a central mode of conducting politics” throughout Latin America and was not exclusive to certain countries (7).

Exile was not merely a fortuitous consequence of political repression, and economic deterioration, it was a deliberate measure to obliterate political opponents, even when the State did not change the constitution to force the opposition to leave the country. Thus, more than an exception, specific to some countries in Latin America, exile was a common denominator during the 1970s and the 1980s, as a way to remove the political opposition. Citizens from other countries in the Americas such as Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti also had periods of political upheaval, severe political persecution, and deteriorating political, social, and economic conditions during the second half of the twentieth century, which forced hundreds of thousands of citizens to leave their homes.

According to John Dinges in *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and his Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (2004), the complicity of Nixon’s administration with the coup d’état in Chile “signaled other Latin American countries that repression reaching the level of state terror was acceptable policy to snuff out the left” (19-20). Similarly, in “Chilean Political Exile,” Thomas Wright and Rody Oñate Zúñiga explain that the military dictatorships of Brazil (1964-1985), Uruguay (1973-1984), and Argentina (1976-1983) deliberately used terror to force hundreds of thousands of people into exile. Bolivia and Paraguay also created the conditions of terror to make their citizens leave, although not as massively as in the case of other countries. In

Peru during the 1980s the Sendero Luminoso insurrection was countered by severe repression; the Civil War in Colombia in the 1990s, and the Sandinista victory in Central America in the 1980s, as well as the civil war in El Salvador, also forced hundreds of thousands of Central Americans into exile (32-33). In the case of Mexico, only a few dozen left the country, but returned soon after when president José López Portillo (1976-1982) granted amnesty to political prisoners to be released, and the exiled to return. Approximately 57 Mexicans came back from their exile in Cuba, Spain, or Italy (Díaz Tovar 209).

Without a doubt, the most extreme case of enforced exile in Latin America is Chile, where the military Junta led by Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), modified the constitution to expel the opposition as an attempt to redesign the political map of the country, as noted by Juan Pablo Terminiello in his 2017 article “Dictaduras, refugiados y reparación” (90). In “El Exilio Chileno” (1986), Lautaro Ríos Álvarez, explains that two months after the coup d’état the military Junta adopted exile as a State policy to eliminate its political opponents. In November of 1973 the military Junta issued the statutory order 81 (*Decreto de Ley* 81), to remove its political opponents from the Chilean territory “legally” (Ríos Álvarez 315).

In “L” *Memoria grafica del exilo chileno 1973-1989* (2008), Estela Aguirre and Sonia Chamorro describe how the military Junta marked the passports of unwanted Chilean citizens with an “L,” which stood for limited or as being a part of a list of undesirables, and a legend stating that the passport was valid for departure only, but not for re-entry. Later, the military Junta erased the legend leaving only the “L” on their passports (36). Ten months after, the dictatorship added statutory law 604 (*Decreto de Ley* 604), prohibiting the return of those already living abroad. According to the military Junta, they were hurting the image of Chile engaging in political activism abroad. Thus, the dictatorship declared them as political opponents, and with the new decree

prohibited them from entering the country (Ríos Álvarez 315). Moreover, in *Exilio y retorno: Chile 1973-1994* (2000), Carmen Norambuena Carrasco, states that in 1980 the military Junta introduced a new Constitution, approved by 67% of the electorate. The new constitution gave the President of the Republic the power to prohibit the re-entry or expel from the national territory citizens who committed acts against the interests of the Chilean nation, or represented a threat to the interior peace of the country (180).

Pablo Yankelevich, pioneer in the study of the Argentinian exile in Mexico, explains in “The COSPA” (2007), that in Argentina, after the coup d’état in March of 1976, hundreds of Argentinians felt forced to leave. However, the first wave of Argentinians went into exile prior to the beginning of the last dictatorship (1976-1983). During the second half of 1974, a year and a half prior to the coup, the deteriorating political situation during the administration of Isabel Martínez de Perón (October 1973- July 1974), made thousands of Argentinians leave the country. Under the protection of Isabel Perón, José López Rega, Minister of Social Welfare, operated the *Triple A* (Argentinian Anticommunist Alliance). The death squads of the *Triple A* patrolled the main streets to assassinate the most visible political leaders of the opposition, but it also abducted and made citizens disappear. Hundreds were tortured in concealed detention centers and buried in clandestine graves (68-69). Thus, even before the Argentinian coup, hundreds of Argentinians had left. Chileans and Argentinians went into exile with the hope of returning soon; however, their exile lasted more than a decade.

Nonetheless, irrespective of the hundreds of thousands of citizens in the Americas who were forced into exile, particularly during the 1970s, their experience has not been fully integrated as one of the narratives of State repression. In the process of constructing a collective awareness of State terrorism, during or in the aftermath, not all experiences are granted the same level of

legitimacy to become part of the national discussion of State repression; such is the case of the exiles. Terminiello recounts that the governments in Bolivia and Uruguay have recognized the State's responsibility in enforced displacement, and others such as Argentina, and Paraguay have later acknowledged exile as a human rights violation. Nonetheless, exile has received *marginal* attention when it comes to establishing the right mechanisms for reparation, and much less attention has been given to the claim to punish the responsible people (90). However, groups of exiles from Chile, and especially from Argentina, demand that the narratives of exile be incorporated as part of the broader narrative of State repression during the 1970s in South America. Ultimately, exile can become a source of knowledge for the continual construction of the memory of State terrorism.

### **The Narratives of Exiles Overshadowed by the Other “Victims”**

During the dictatorships, and after the return of democratic elections in Chile and Argentina, the attention was placed on demanding justice for the most direct victims of State terrorism, mainly *los desaparecidos*, political prisoners, the tortured, and their family members. The recognition by the State of the human rights abuses, and the economic compensations for the victims of State repressions were part of the mechanism of transitional justice established in the Southern Cone. However, society neglected to acknowledge fully the devastating experiences of exile. Moreover, the exiles themselves kept their experiences private. Political exile was usually accompanied by feelings of guilt, and a great deal of stigma, as well as distrust and accusation from the fellow citizens who stayed. In many cases, the decision to leave the country was not considered dignified, and exiles experienced contradictory feelings of regret, guilt, shame, and relief. In the case of Argentina, in *No habrá flores en la tumba del pasado* (2001), Ludmila Da Silva

Catela documents that amongst certain activist groups, leaving the country was perceived as “poco digna” [an unworthy decision] (98).

The stigma and discredit were not fortuitous. Pablo Yankelevich, explains in *Ráfagas de un exilio: argentinos en México, 1974-1983* (2009) that the military Junta in Argentina launched a campaign to discredit the exiles, accusing them of being responsible for the political violence in the country, and for creating an “anti-Argentinian campaign” abroad. They were portrayed as having an easy life abroad, showing Argentinians on the beaches of Acapulco, Mexico, for instance. Thus, it was recurrent to hear the accusatory phrase “por algo habrá sido,” expressing that the exiles had very likely done something illegal or unworthy, almost as criminals fleeing the country (18). While it is true that many of the exiles were supporters of the organization *Montoneros*, which led the armed resistance against the State, many of the exiled were critical of *Montoneros* and the armed organizations, as Yankelevich informs in “The COSPA” (68). Nonetheless, the campaign was fruitful, and it helped to create the conditions to neglect and forget the experience of the exiles.

Political activists, or those accused of being political opponents and persecuted by the terrorist State, considered exile as their last resort. The decision to leave everything behind was never easy. However, once settled in the new country, life supposedly became easy, away from the imminent danger of being killed, tortured, or abducted by State officials. Nonetheless, even if death did not seem as immediate a menace as it did in the home country, being uprooted, forced to leave their home country, and the life they knew, and having to face the unknown, took a toll on them, deteriorating their family environments, as well as their mental and physical health.

After the dictatorships ended, many Chileans and Argentinians returned to their home countries, but the return was never easy either. The country they encountered was very different

from the one they had left behind. Moreover, upon their return they often had to confront the accusatory attitudes of their fellow citizens, who, in many cases, considered that they had risked more, and fought harder, because they stayed. In the best case scenario, the exiles faced the widespread belief that they were returning from an easy life abroad, a sort of vacation while the worst phases of political repression took place and were surmounted in their home countries.

During and in the aftermath of State terrorism, the urgency of many citizens was to find their family members, who State officials had subjected to enforced disappearance, to rescue the people that could still be alive in the concentration camps, and to liberate political prisoners. Thus, at the return of the democracies, the widely publicized narratives of State repression revolved around other victims of State terrorism, mainly *los desaparecidos*, and survivors of concentration camps. According to Yankelevich, when democracy was reinstalled in Argentina, there was a marked increase of narratives and memoirs. There was in fact, a “saturación de la memoria,” a proliferation of testimonies of different origins. However, society neglected the experience of the exile and the narratives about it. As Yankelevich explains, testimonies of exile were produced as well. However, the attention was not placed on those narratives, but on testimonies that gave an account of more tangible traumas of the dictatorship, the vindication of the *detenidos-desaparecidos*, and the need to reflect on the actions and political options that led to the defeat of the left (Yankelevich, *Ráfagas*, 16).

The State’s strategies to discredit the exiled, and the urgency of the family members to bring justice to *los desaparecidos*, contributed to obscure the experiences of exile as another major crime of the dictatorships. On the contrary, the trials and punishments of the military were accompanied by arrest warrants for a few leaders of the *guerrillas* residing in foreign countries, ignoring the experiences and plights of the rest of the Argentinian population in exile.

It is only until very recently that research projects have emerged to disclose exile and its consequences (Yankelevich 2010, 16-17).

As stigma surrounded exile, the first memoirs and texts that provided details about life in exile circulated underground. It was only after the mid-nineties when memories of exile emerged more clearly, giving way to testimonies that claimed their inclusion in the history of the 1970s in Argentina. In the XXI century, the discussion and defense of human rights violation became a prominent concern, and as a consequence, narratives of exile upsurge as never before, recognizing it as one of the mechanisms of State terrorism to eliminate political opposition, as well as the contribution of exiles in the fight against the dictatorship in Argentina. Furthermore, in the public debate the newly emphasized presence of exile gained even more notoriety because of a never sanctioned legislative proposal to provide a symbolic and material reward to all of those who left the country because of political persecution (Yankelevich 2009, 18).

In Chile, exile has not been incorporated into the narrative of State repression either. For instance, in "*L*" *Memoria grafica del exilo chileno 1973-1989*, published in 2008, Estela Aguirre and Sonia Chamorro, publish their book with the main objective of raising awareness, in Chile, about a part of the history that has not been incorporated in the national narratives of State repression. According to Aguirre and Chamorro, exile remains a neglected story that has not been told in Chile. As the authors state, their book is part of the works whose purpose is to rescue part of the Chilean historic memory, which in many cases is relegated to testimonies, files, and private remembrances, but never becomes part of the collective memory (15).

As a way to create awareness about exile, the scholars highlight the international support that Chilean exiles received around the globe. First, they specifically portray a graphic memory of international support, that is, they present a collection of posters created at different moments



during the Chilean exile denouncing State crimes, or showing solidarity and commitment with Chileans in exile. Second, the authors present an account of how exiles expressed their plights and pain through artistic and cultural productions such as literature, theater, music, photography, and cinema. “*L*” *memoria gráfica* does not provide an approach on how today’s Chilean society debates the place of exile in its history, as its pressing objective is to create awareness, and make exile visible as a State crime, and a human rights violation.

### **Asylum for Foreigner Political Persecuted as a Means to Conceal State Terrorism: the Mexican Case**

The demand for justice, initiated in the midst of the dictatorships and political repression by the family members of the victims, mainly the families of *los desaparecidos*, did not include as a priority the defense of the exiles. Only in the case of *Comité Eureka*, in Mexico, their demands for justice pertained to all victims of State repression, including *desaparecidos*, but also political prisoners and exiles. However, after the amnesty law granted in 1979 by President José López Portillo (1976-1982), permitted the liberation of political prisoners, and return of the exiled, the organization’s claims for justice concentrated primarily on *los desaparecidos*.

Nonetheless, even though exile was not regarded as one of the serious and inhumane strategies to eliminate political opponents, Sznajder and Roniger explain that exile is in fact one of the various mechanisms put in place by the State to deal with opposition, defined as the removal of opponents as a result of confrontational politics (8). In the twentieth century, large sectors of society irrupted into the political arena, transforming exile from being a selective occurrence, into being a massive phenomenon. As political confrontations intensified, tens of thousands of Chileans, Uruguayans, Argentines, Brazilians, Paraguayans, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, and Cubans, among others, felt forced to leave their home countries (Sznajder and Roniger 18).

Citizens of all these nations, including Haiti, found refuge in Mexico, which granted political asylum to the persecuted, as it served the Mexican government to solidify its image as a country of refuge and political tolerance. However, Mexican citizens were being subjected to State violence as well. The article 33 of the Mexican Constitution prohibits foreigners to interfere, in any way, with the political affairs of the country, “los extranjeros no podrán de ninguna manera inmiscuirse en los asuntos políticos del país” [foreigners can not in any way interfere in the political affairs of the country]. If they ever engage in internal political affairs, the Mexican State reserves the right to expel any foreign citizen from the national territory. Thus, even when the Mexican government allowed, and even provided resources, for political refugees to continue their political activism from Mexico, the government protected its internal political affairs from foreign interference.

In Mexico, the State gave special support to the persecuted from Chile. Likewise, the Chilean exile in Mexico received remarkable international attention, as the family of Salvador Allende, headed by his widow Hortensia Bussi, as well as prominent political leaders and intellectuals, received refuge in Mexico (Rojas Mira). After the repressive events of 1968, the Mexican president Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), needed to regain legitimacy, and reaffirm the image of Mexico before the world as a firm defender of human rights. Therefore, president Echeverría ended diplomatic relations with the military Junta, led by Augusto Pinochet, immediately after the coup d'état on September 11, 1973. Additionally, Echeverría offered immediate and unlimited protection to Chileans, in contradiction with the fierce political persecution, and genocide plans, Echeverría orchestrated against Mexican citizens (Díaz Prieto 265). Echeverría wanted to put Mexico in the international scenario as a model of refuge. Thus,

in Latin America Mexico became the country of refuge from the political persecuted in Central and South America (Yankelevich 2009, 116).<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, during the administrations of José Lopez Portillo (1976-1982), and Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), around 150,000 Guatemalans, and 250,000 Salvadorians received political asylum in Mexico (Meyer and Salgado 36). Internally, and before the international eyes, the unlimited humanitarian aid to the political persecuted, obstructed, and obscured, the efforts of Mexican nationals to claim justice and create national awareness about the political persecution within the country. The determination to display a favorable image internationally even prompted the administration of Gustavo Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970), responsible for the most iconic event of State repression, the massacre of students in 1968, known as the massacre of Tlatelolco, to grant political asylum to intellectuals, politicians, and student leaders accused by the Brazilian government of being communists (Yankelevich 2009: 10).

### ***Los retornados in Chile: A State Policy to Conceal Exile***

Mexican political exiles received almost an immediate resolution to their situation, and little or nothing is known about their experience abroad. In the case of Chile, at the return of the democracy, the Chilean exiles received immediate attention as well, which in time also obscured exile as a State human rights violation, as well as its lasting negative consequences. Furthermore, the prompt help that exiles received by the democratically elected Chilean president Patricio Alwyn (1990-1994), prevented a continuous national discussion about exile, and halted further discussion about the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990) based on the experiences of exiles.

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<sup>79</sup> Luis Echeverría Álvarez was inspired by Lázaro Cárdenas' administration of (1934-1940), which granted political asylum, and unlimited aid to hundreds of thousands of Spanish Republicans in 1939 at the end of the Civil War in Spain.

The same evening that president Patricio Alwyn (1990-1994) announced the creation of the Truth Commission, he communicated the creation of the *Oficina Nacional de Retorno* (National Office of Return), to give support to the exiles that desired to return to Chile (Stern 2010, 36). However, the assistance was not motivated by the recognition of exile as a case of human rights violation, but merely sought to facilitate the logistics for their return. Thus, in Chile, at the end of the dictatorship, a new category was introduced, *el retornado*, the returnee, obscuring exile itself as a State crime. However, according to Stern (2010), the *Oficina Nacional de Retorno*, which only lasted three years (1991-1994), failed to alleviate the return of the exile fully, due to inefficiency and corruption, and because it functioned mainly as an informational and referral office. Nonetheless, as Stern asserts, “the symbolism of acknowledgement and repair by the state was culturally significant, and some 52,500 Chilean adults and children did return with some assistance from the *Oficina Nacional*,” even when the support was insufficient (2010, 36).

Contrary to the experience of exile from any other country in Latin American, the Chilean case gained global attention. The Chilean diaspora extended to all continents, and received support from around the world. Thus, at the end of the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990), the governmental decision to provide support to the exiles, was very possibly a political decision to gain legitimacy in the world as a defender of human rights. Hence, the assistance provided by the *Oficina Nacional de Retorno* was only transitory. In *Políticas de reparación: Chile 1990-2004* (2005) Lira Elizabeth and Brian Loveman explain that in 1994 the Chilean administration decided to close the ONR, arguing that the return of exiles was decreasing and becoming less feasible as the years went by, so, the government did not expect a continuous influx of returnees. However, as Lira and Loveman maintain, the closing of the *Oficina* had more to do with a political decision from the president Patricio Alwyn (1990-1994), as his administration needed to delimit the problems of human rights

violations, and implement the policies of reparation, the legal obligation of a State, to “make the transition” during his administration (277). As a result, by 1995 almost all State programs to support the return of the exiles had ended, and the returnees were no longer considered a topic of political discussion, even though many important aspects of the exile were never discussed, such as the political responsibility for the past. After the ONR was closed, the decision to return to Chile became a private decision (282).

The ONR did accomplish its political objectives. However, it did not do enough to help the returnees, or *retornados*, and did nothing to repair or acknowledge the thousands of exiles that did not return, even though, according to Lira and Loveman, more than half of the Chilean exiles did not return (282). Nonetheless, the government of the “transition” successfully distracted the attention from the State’s responsibility in the exile of thousands of Chileans, and prevented a national discussion about exile as a human rights crime, and its consequences.

In “Reparación por violaciones de derechos humanos” (2009), Yuri Cristian Gahona Muñoz sets out to investigate the perceptions of those who received any type of reparation from the Chilean State. In the case of the *retornados*, the interviews Gahona Muñoz conducted for this thesis research “Reparación por violaciones de derechos humanos” (2009), reveal how insufficient the State support was for them. Some interviewees declare that the support amounted to tax exemptions to bring back their belongings, and some health assistance (113). In Chile, the State has no political commitment to acknowledge and reimburse the Chilean exiles, and to recognize exile as a human rights abuse. However, the State and Chilean politicians do acknowledge the existence of the Chilean diaspora. Such is the case, that in 1999 Ricardo Lagos, a candidate to the presidency of Chile, then president of Chile (2000-2006), proposed a bill to recognize Chileans residing abroad as Region XIV, and grant them the right to vote in presidential elections. He also

acknowledged the lack of pertinent policies to facilitate the return of Chilean exiles, especially the accreditation of their degrees earned abroad (Lira and Loveman 293). According to the information published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, it is in the presidential elections taking place in November 2017, when the Chileans living abroad finally will be able to vote.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the Chilean State does recognize the existence of the Chilean diaspora; however, it has refused to compensate the exiles satisfactorily. In 2000, a year after Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006) promised to support the bill for Chileans living abroad to be granted the constitutional right to vote, a class suit was presented against the Chilean State on behalf of Leopoldo Letelier and 12 Chileans. The bill argued that the ONR had not done enough to alleviate all the suffering and consequences caused by enforced exile. The lawsuit claimed that exile had caused loss of self-determination and identity, psychological trauma, and disruption of their personal history, values, and culture. It also affirmed that the difficulties to define a new life project, due to cultural and psychological barriers, affected many exiles because the choice to leave the country was not based on a personal decision. All this —the lawsuit claimed “significó desarraigo, pérdida del núcleo familiar, inestabilidad económica y emocional, desintegración familiar, pérdida de seres queridos, aislamiento, e incapacidad de programar la vida a mediano o largo plazo” (Lira and Loveman 294).<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, the Consejo de Defensa del Estado (Council of National Defense), in its reply to the lawsuit, argued that exile had been constitutional, and legal, because the Military Junta leading the country at the time had issued Decree-Laws to expel legally and prohibit the return of Chilean citizens (Lira and Loveman, 295). Ironically, and contradictorily, ex-president Patricio

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<sup>80</sup> <http://chile.gob.cl/en/>

<sup>81</sup> It meant uprooting, loss of the nuclear family, economic and emotional instability, family disintegration, loss of loved ones, isolation, and inability to plan for life in the medium or long terms. (my translation)

Alwyn (1990-1994), and president Ricardo Lagos (2000-2006), had clearly expressed that the decree-laws, and even the Constitution imposed by the Military Junta (1973-1990) were illegitimate. Nonetheless, no State authority took charge of the response to the lawsuit, which, as Lira and Loveman affirm, made very clear the rejection of the petition of reparation, and the deep contradictions of the so-called “transition,” and policies of reparation implemented since 1990 (Lira and Loveman, 298-9).

In the process of constructing a collective awareness and memory of State repression, it is fundamental that the State recognizes its responsibility in the crimes committed in the past. It is equally crucial that the State implements appropriate policies of reparation, and remembrance of the political issues of the past as part of a national discussion. However, in the Chilean case, even though the State implemented programs to facilitate the return of the Chileans, it never engaged in a discussion about exile as a State crime and human rights abuse. The creation of a new social category, *los retornados*, and the limitation of its existence to the functioning of the *Oficina Nacional de Retorno*, allowed the Chilean State to acknowledge superficially the exiles, without fully committing to a State policy of reparation.

The stigma associated with exile has facilitated that society does not acknowledge this experience as a State crime. However, for the exiles it is crucial to make their experiences visible to the Chilean society. In *Exilio y retorno* (2005), Rody Oñate argues that, more than anything, exile is a human drama, generally dealt with in silence. It is an experience that causes pain, pity, shame, and even desire for revenge. Thus, he continues, “recuperar la voz del exilio chileno es un paso necesario para la salud mental de los exiliados y retornados” (18).<sup>82</sup> Likewise, Aguirre Argomedo, and Chamorro Martínez, affirm that it is necessary to tell the stories of the

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<sup>82</sup> Recovering the voice of Chilean exile is a necessary step for the mental health of exiles and returnees. (my translation)

exiles, which have been neglected as part of the national narratives. Thus, the efforts of many texts and works published by Chilean exiles about their diaspora focus on making their stories visible. For instance, *La Diáspora Chilena: a veinte años del Golpe Militar*, publishes the stories of many unheard voices of exile, such as the experiences of housemakers, journalists, mechanics, professors, labor workers, among others, and not stories of renown union leaders or politicians (cited in Oñate 19).

Furthermore, it is crucial for the Chilean exiles that the State and the Chilean society recognize their contribution to democracy, and to the end the dictatorship. While being in exile, Chileans forcefully denounced the crimes being perpetrated by the military Junta in Chile (1973-1990). Thus, many of the works published about the Chilean exile bring attention not only to the many stories of exiles, but also to the work done in exile to denounce the crimes committed. Nonetheless, there is little awareness in Chile about exile as a State crime. However, as Lira and Loveman affirm, exile has not been part of the political agenda in Chile since 1994. Still, it is necessary to create a national awareness of exile and its consequences.

### **Reparation Policies in Argentina: the Case of Exile**

Until very recently, exile lacked validation from the elected governments in Argentina as a narrative that gave an account of State terrorism during the last dictatorship (1976-1983). In fact, there had been such little recognition of exiles as victims of State terrorism that in Argentina there was never a State policy or strategy to offer assistance to those who wanted to return. It was only in 2006, in light of the thirty year commemoration of the coup d'état in Argentina, that the executive power addressed the matter, and initiated actions to recognize, and in some cases to honor, the humanitarian work carried out by foreign governments and international organizations to save Argentinian lives during the last dictatorship (Yankelevich 2009, 18). Hence, it has been



only very recently that exile has slowly begun to be incorporated as part of the narratives of State repression during the last dictatorship.

In Argentina, exiles themselves have claimed, and demanded, a place in the narratives of State repression. They have also initiated legal actions for the State to acknowledge its responsibility, and consider exile as a human rights violation that must be compensated by the State. In “Exiliados políticos,” (2012) Maricela Alejandra López recounts that in the late 1990s exiles formed different associations to make their experiences visible, to make the State recognize exile as one of the systematic strategies to eliminate political opponents, and for the State to indemnify the exiles. In 1998 the Comisión de Ex-exiliados Argentinos por la Reparación (CER) was funded. Their first action in 1998 was to send a letter to the *Subsecretaría de Derechos Humanos del Ministerio del Interior de la Nación*, requesting to include exile as a human rights violation. The letter enjoyed the support of other human rights organisms, such as *Las Madres* and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, and was initially accompanied by 250 signatures from exiles, and a description of 2,000 cases of exiles (López 4-5). CER’s objectives, stated on their website, are, first “lograr reconocimiento formal por parte del Estado argentino de que el exilio es una más de las facetas de violaciones de derechos humanos en la Argentina,”<sup>83</sup> during the so-called Process of National Reorganization. Second, to generate a political space to discuss the unresolved consequences of exile, such as problems of nationality of the children of exiles, and accreditation of degrees earned abroad. Third, to contribute to the construction of the collective memory of State repression, from the experience of exile.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> To achieve formal recognition by the Argentine State that exile is one of the many facets of human rights violations in Argentina. (my translation)

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/arg/doc/exilio.html>

In 1998 COEPRA “Comisión de Exiliados Políticos de la República Argentina” was formed, with the same objective of making exile visible to the Argentinian society. In 1999, a group of Argentinian exiles in Spain formed the Comisión de Exiliados Argentinos en Madrid (CEAM), who have consistently worked for the fulfillment of their demands. CEAM’s mission is to “exigir justicia e impulsar la Ley de Reparación del Exilio” [Demand justice and promote an initiative to pass the Exile Repair Act], which has not been approved by the Argentinian Legislators. The work of these organizations of exiles, along with COEPRA, formed in 1998, is to make visible the experience of exile and demand that it is recognized as a crime against humanity, and as such to be indemnified by the Argentinian State (López 1-2).

In 1998 Dr. Marcelo López Arias presented a bill to demand the State institute a law of Reparation to exiles. As CER states on their website, this bill is crucial to the recognition of exile as a human rights violation, and as another aspect of the systematic plan of repression and genocide. Furthermore, as they claim, having the recognition of the State is essential to defend their own dignity. Additionally, in 1999 another bill was introduced by Marcelo López Arias, and Juan Carlos Pezoa, this time to regularize the situation of the children without a nationality, that is, the stateless. In “Los Exiliados en La Justicia Transicional argentina” (2012), Luciana Micaela Gianoglio Pantano relates that Dr. Marcelo López Arias presented the bill again in 2003 and 2004, however he was not successful. In 2007, and 2009, the legislator Hugo Perié presented the bill again. This time he supported the bill with different cases in which the State had provided a monetary compensation to exiles, recognizing that exile was in fact forced by the State violence, and not the result of a personal decision (3). Moreover, this bill also establishes that exile is a crime “que aún no ha perdido su vigencia” [which has not yet lost its validity], that its consequences continue to this day, and as such must be repaired.

Exiles in Argentina have won important battles against the State. The most well-known example is that of Susana Yofre de Vaca Narvaja, who in 2004 received a monetary reparation from the State. Yofre requested political asylum in Mexico after her husband and one of her sons were murdered by the State. Her case is emblematic because the State recognized that Yofre, even though she requested asylum herself, was forced to leave the country. In her case her decision to leave was the result of political persecution and fear for her life and that of her family members. Gianoglio considers her case as the initial step taken by the Argentinian Justice to recognize exile as a human rights violation, and as a deliberate practice during the last dictatorship that was even contemplated as part of the National Security Doctrine (1-2). However, her case has not resulted in the approval of a Law directed to repair all exiles, and to this day the *Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Nación* continues to reject lawsuits of compensation to families that had to exile during the last dictatorship (Piscetta).

As in the case of Chile, in Argentina exile has not been a priority on the political agenda. Even during the Kirchners administration (2003-2015), which established the defense of human rights and reparations as a priority, exile was not included as part of the State discourse of Memory, Truth and Justice. Piscetta states that during the 12 years of Kirchnerism “nunca hubo voluntad política suficiente para sancionar una ley que permita clarificar la cuestión sobre los exiliados entre 1976 y 1983.”<sup>85</sup> As Gianoglio affirms, the reparations involve political choices and decisions. However, since the bill establishes an economic reparation, the economic issue has been used as the main argument to reject the bill (7).

Exile has not been exempt from controversies, even within the communities of exiles. Arguments within exiles have emerged and made matters more complicated. For instance, some

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<sup>85</sup> There was never enough political will to enact a law to clarify the question of exiles between 1976 and 1983. (my translation)

have argued that the bill is restricted to the Argentinians that could in fact leave the country, but that it does not represent the “insilio,” or internal exile, that is the citizens who were equally excluded from society but who could not leave the country. Furthermore, some argue that the ones who could leave the country had the economic and symbolic means to do so, and even enjoyed resources and opportunities that others did not have, because the ones that left had access to the resources made available for refugees by the host country (Gianoglio 10). Additionally, some exiles do not want to acquire a political voice by being categorized as “victims,” as they see themselves as vigorous political activists who had to continue their struggles with the State from abroad, and whose work contributed to the fall of the dictatorship. Making exile visible through a bill of reparation implies that they must accept the identity of a victim (Gianoglio 6). Moreover, as Gianoglio documents, some exiles distinguish between those who left to preserve their lives, and those who left to continue their fight against the State (6). There are also concerns about receiving a monetary compensation, because the policy could lose its political dimension, and be regarded by society as an insurance settlement (Gianoglio 8). Moreover, in her research, Gianoglio also found that even exiles consider that exile was not as harmful as other crimes, such as enforced disappearances. Thus, they think it would be an act of “injustice” to be compensated at the same monetary level as other victims of State repression, such as the family members of *los desaparecidos* (13).

In spite of the controversies about exile, Argentinian exiles are determined to make their voices be heard, and exile be recognized as part of the systematic plan to eliminate political opponents in the Americas during the 1970s. In order to do so, the first step is to make the rest of the society aware of the hardships, suffering, and lasting consequences of exile.

## Early Voices of Exile: *En estado de memoria* by Tununa Mercado

Tununa Mercado's text *En estado de memoria* (1990) is certainly not the only text written by Argentinian or Chilean exiles about their experience. However, as Yankelevich states in *Ráfagas de un exilio: argentines en México, 1974-1983* (2009), Tununa Mercado's work is one of the earliest ones to expose exile as a State crime against its citizens, and as an ongoing crime that had shattering physical, and mental consequences, on the exiles. Furthermore, according to the scholar, Mercado's text is one of the early texts in which the author establishes the "duty" to remember, that is, Mercado's literary account proposed that exile must be incorporated in the narratives and memory of State terrorism as a distinctive, but equally devastating, experience as the trauma of the other victims of State violence.

In Argentina, where the State did not change the constitution, the perception that leaving the country was an option was prevalent within the Argentinian society. Moreover, once in exile, citizens supposedly left everything behind, including the political issues that made them leave. However, as Yankelevich documents in "The COSPA," in the case of Argentinian exiles in Mexico, they were acutely active and engaged in the daily political events in Argentina. In Mexico, they founded two organizations, COSPA (*Comité de Solidaridad con el Pueblo Argentino*), and CAS (*Comisión Argentina de Solidaridad*), in which they supported each other and discussed Argentinian political matters (68). Thus, Argentina was far from left behind when their citizens were forced to leave. The following analysis of the literary text *En estado de memoria* conveys the brutality of exile on the lives of the citizens, and the everlasting consequences.

In *En Estado de memoria*, Tununa Mercado portrays exile as a deteriorating burden on the people who were forced to leave everything behind. She exposes how exile deeply affects her, emotionally, and psychologically. Ultimately, Mercado clearly conveys how exile is a permanent

punishment, even after the long-desired return to the home country. *En estado de memoria* is composed as a series of sixteen episodes in the life of the narrating voice during her two exiles, covering a total of sixteen years outside of her home country. Her first exile began with the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970), which made her move to France from 1966 until 1970. After four years of being back in Argentina, Mercado and her family decide to leave Argentina once again in 1974, during the administration of Isabel Martínez Perón (1974-1976), while the death squads of the *Triple A* began operating in Argentina. They took refuge in Mexico in 1974, where they stayed until 1986, three years after the end of the last dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), labelled by the military Junta as *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process). In 1986, Mercado and her family decided to return to Argentina permanently, after having gone back for several visits.

While in exile, Mercado somatises all the emotional pain she feels when she learns of a new death amongst her loved ones and acquaintances in Argentina. Everyday there are terrible news to endure about the death of someone close to the family. The events, tortures, killings and enforced-disappearances taking place in Argentina make Mercado's life almost unbearable in Mexico. Her health and entire body suffer tremendously, "un día en que el moridero al que nos tenían sometidos fue demasiado actual e inmediato, yo sentí que mi salud se desmoronaba" (18),<sup>86</sup> comments the narrator. Thus, even if the State subjects the bodies of others to the killings and torture, Mercado, even from the distance, includes herself as suffering along with her fellow citizens back in her home country. Every day she receives terrible news, of people close to her being killed. In that environment, even living miles away from Argentina, the terrible news which

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<sup>86</sup> A day in which the *moridero* (dying place) to which we were subjected was too current and immediate; I felt that my health was crumbling. (My translation)

arrive daily make her sit down at the border of the bed and cry, “vivir era sobrevivir” [to live was to survive], states the narrator (18).

The permanent dismay for the lives of those left behind, and even their own lives, make political exiles in Argentina undergo continual stress. However, as exile is supposedly a better state, Mercado feels that showing signs of her distress is not permissible. Hence, she believes that she must hide her anguish: “Yo, en cambio, postergo de una manera obstinada cualquier afloramiento de la angustia, en gran parte por buena educación, para no arruinarle la fiesta a nadie, escondiendo mediante artimañas altos picos de aflicción que me asaltan” (Mercado 10).<sup>87</sup>

Furthermore, exiles live in a permanent state of expectancy. They live day by day in a foreign land, but are unable to appropriate the new place and the new culture because their return may be possible at any moment. The constant distress about their unknown future is best tolerated among other fellow citizens who undergo the same situation. Thus, the force created by the interaction and communication with others Argentiniens living in Mexico is essential for Mercado to survive during exile. The meetings, gatherings and lively discussions amongst Argentiniens in Mexico occupy many hours of her life. Mercado recounts their numerous meetings, of ten hours a day, forty hours a month, four hundred and eight hours a year, and during all her years in exile in Mexico in total around five thousand hours, or probably much more because each gathering lasted more than the average. The need of being together creates, if temporary, support for each other. As the narrating voice states: “discutir, disentir, sospechar, era el modo de hacer un país en ese limbo argentino que era el exilio” (Mercado 74).<sup>88</sup> As the previous lines state, Mercado experiences exile as a limbo; as a temporal state that has a probable ending, even though it is unclear if or when

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<sup>87</sup> I, on the other hand, postpone in a stubborn way any outbreak of anguish, largely for good manners, so as not to ruin anyone’s life, hiding by means of tricks, high levels of affliction that assail me. (my translation)

<sup>88</sup> To discuss, to dissent, to suspect, was the way to make a country in that Argentinian limbo that was exile. (my translation)

it will happen. This state of permanent uncertainty and the loss of the place, and culture associated with her identity create a sense of emptiness, dispossession and nakedness (Mercado 48). That sense of being unprotected, out in the open, forces Mercado to search continuously for her identity. For example, Mercado desires to be Mexican and the impossibility of that ever happening creates a deeper sense of dispossession.

In Mexico, Argentina is idealized, but at the same time those exiled in Mexico try to appropriate a country that has taken them in but that inevitably will remain a foreign land forever. The possession of material objects associated with Mexico's folk culture is the preferred means to feel part of the host country. Mercado illustrates how all the houses of exiled Argentinians look the same, furnished with the same folk decorative objects and furniture: "la homogeneidad del mobiliario de los argentinos en México [...] a uno le creó la sensación de estar siempre en la misma casa [...] como si de una familia a otra no hubiera fronteras de gusto e intención y se permaneciera en un espacio común (Mercado 37).<sup>89</sup> Thus, the furniture helps them create a similar experience in exile and a sense of sharing one common space to which they can all relate and to which they can associate a new identity. As the narrating voice explains, this common space recreated in every house: "marcó una unidad ideológica defensiva en aquellos tiempos de destierro" (Mercado 38).<sup>90</sup> Likewise, once they are back in Argentina, the former exiles yearn for a country that was never truly made theirs. Mexico is now a place they remember with nostalgia, even if they disliked some of their daily experiences with the culture, as Mercado recounts.

The sense of time is also distorted during exile. Time seems to stop, awaiting for the return, which could happen at any time. In the meantime, the exile is unable to live looking into the future,

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<sup>89</sup> The homogeneity of the furniture of the Argentinians in Mexico ... created the feeling of being always in the same house (...) as if from one family to another there were no borders of taste and intention and one remained in a common space. (My translation)

<sup>90</sup> Marked a defensive ideological unit in those times of exile. (my translation)



because exile is supposedly just a deviation from their actual life. As the narrator states: “el tiempo sucede más allá, en otro sitio, se lo oye transcurrir en los silencios de la noche, pero se lo aparta, no se le quiere percibir porque se supone que el destierro va a terminar, que se trata de un paréntesis que no cuenta en ningún devenir” (29).<sup>91</sup> Moreover, once the return is possible, *el tiempo se agolpa en un instante* [all of the sudden time condenses itself abruptly]. Once she is back in Argentina, all of the sudden, those sixteen years that she spent in exile went by in front of her eyes in just one second.

Mercados’s subjectivity is deeply affected by the symbolic violence of being a *desterrada*, which forces her to be in a continuous reconstruction of the *identidad perdida* [lost identity]. The narrator of *En Estado de memoria* recounts that Argentinians in Mexico even resorted to “humillaciones lingüísticas” [linguistic humiliations] to hide their linguistic distinctions, avoiding even the use of words, phrases, pronouns, and accents particular to Argentina, such as the use of *che*, the pronoun *vos*, and their characteristic sound of the letter *y* and *ll*. As the narrator describes it: “se podía oír entonces, unos *poios* [pollos] y unas *gaínas* [gallinas] famélicas, con hambre de pertenencia” (36).<sup>92</sup>

In “El exilio chileno” (1986), Ríos Álvarez states that when discussing human rights violations, it is easily forgotten that exile in fact impedes and disrupts the achievement of numerous fundamental rights (305). As the narrator of *En estado de memoria* recounts hearing when she returned to Argentina: “se la pasaron bien en el exilio” [have had a good time in exile] (28), as if living in forced exile was the equivalent of forced period of relaxation. However, due to the

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<sup>91</sup> The time happens beyond us, somewhere else, we hear it elapse in the silence of the night, but we put it away, we do not want to perceive it because it is supposed that the exile will end, that it is a parenthesis that does not evolve into any future. (My translation)

<sup>92</sup> One could hear then, some *poios* [chickens] and *gaínas* [hens] famished, hungry for belonging (my translation).

assumed triviality of exile, due to exculpation, and the guilt associated with leaving the country, it is something that “se acepta oír” [one accepts to hear], states the narrator (28).

Whenever she is questioned about her experience in exile she always responds “al comienzo fue duro (...) pero después uno se va acomodando” [at the beginning it was hard, but one gets accustomed] (130), as if after some time life inevitably would go back to normal. That response, argues the narrating voice, entitles that one has to accept the insignificance attributed to life in exile, because it is always assumed that the ones who stayed had a worst time living directly under a repressive power.

Mercado's text challenges the assumption that life in exile was easy, showing that exile is in fact another form of violence, a symbolic violence, which destabilizes even more the terrorized subjects that had to leave their country. In *Masculine Domination* (2001) Pierre Bordieu argues that symbolic violence, even though is not physical, can not be opposed to a real form of violence, because the violence perpetrated against the subjectivity has real effects (34). In *En estado de memoria*, exile is presented as another form of violence that intensely affects and scars the subjectivity, both the subject's physical and mental health, and the lives of the exiles in every aspect. What is salient in Mercado's text is the emptiness and instability of the narrator, and the impact on her mental and physical health that even their long-desired return to Argentina causes. The passing of time is suddenly felt all at once, the emptiness, and sense of dispossession that the narrators feels in Mexico, continues once she is back in Argentina. However, she feels compelled to pretend that life is settling back to normal. Supposedly, the return would alleviate all her ailments. People assumed that it was a matter of time before her life returned to what it was before exile. As she states, that assumption made her feel as if it was just a matter of letting oneself be

shaped by the circumstances: “se me figuraba que uno era considerado como una masilla dúctil que se plegaba a las circunstancias con sólo ablandarse” (130).<sup>93</sup>

The return is, as the narrator expresses, a new exile, where the exiles feel foreign in their homeland, trying to recognize a country that is now completely different to what it was. The political situation is different, their status in their own home country is different, and in the case of the Argentinians who exiled in Mexico, many felt a sort of nostalgia, and the sense of loss of a country which they so desperately wanted to leave. As the narrator describes, exiles live *en estado de memoria*. They walk the streets of the country, remembering, and at the same time trying to be part of the new reality (132), but feeling on the edges of that reality the narrator describes “me fui dando cuenta de hasta qué punto era una intrusa, hasta qué grado una extraña en este país (...) la magnitud de lo que yo ignoraba me dejó a las orillas del mundo” (169).<sup>94</sup>

In Latin America, the narratives of the exiled have been neglected. Nonetheless, narratives such as *En estado de memoria*, and the activism of exiles in Argentina and Chile to make their experiences visible, and to have the State recognize exile as a human rights violation, are important steps to incorporate exile in the narratives of State terrorism of the 1970s.

### **Images of Exile: *Distancias* by Gustavo Germano**

*Distancias* is the sequence of *Ausencias*, Gustavo Germano’s first photographic work on the State crimes that were committed during the last dictatorship in Argentina. In *Ausencias*, Germano, an Argentinian photographer, captures the void of the absence of a loved one abducted by the State. In *Distancias*, the photographer attempts to convey the emptiness that causes being uprooted from the geographic space, the motherland, that is part of people’s identity. The distance

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<sup>93</sup> I was imagined that one was considered as a ductile putty that folded to the circumstances with only softening. (My translation)

<sup>94</sup> I became aware of the extent to which I was an intruder, to what degree a stranger in this country ... the magnitude of what I did not know left me on the shores of the world. (My translation)

between the subjects and their home country, and the time being forced to live in exile, create an emptiness, a permanent absence in the lives of the exiled. Ultimately, what *Distancias* seeks to portray is the constant absence created in a life that was brutally interrupted. As Germano explains, in *Distancias* he proposes to portray the intangible “lo que ya no está, lo que ya no es,” that is, the life of the exile that was taken away by a terrorist State and can never be recuperated. The exiles are forced to live in a limbo zone, not knowing if they would have the opportunity to return, how long will they will have to wait, or if they will ever see their homeland again.

In both, *Ausencias* and *Distancias*, Germano conveys the radical and traumatic change in the lives of the subjects, created by State terrorism. Enforced-disappearances and exile are crimes that can never be resolved, because even if the people responsible for the crimes are punished, those crimes have everlasting consequences. According to Germano, enforced-disappearances and exile “son crímenes que trascienden el propio instante en que fueron cometidos para convertirse en algo permanente,”<sup>95</sup> in the first case because the process of mourning is not possible, and in the second, because exile continues even after citizens are able to return. Exile and enforced-disappearances, he argues, are crimes that are continuously being committed, permanently, even after the fact. According to the artist, “son heridas invisibles, ocultas tras quienes han debido convivir con la permanente presencia de la ausencia y tras quienes nunca podrán volver a “su país” sin obligarse a un nuevo exilio” (Germano).<sup>96</sup>

*Distancias* is a challenging project because it intends to photograph the ineffable. In the case of *Ausencias*, the absence, the empty space, stood out in contrast with a prior image of *el desaparecido*. Thus, the absence was materialized as the empty space became evident. In

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<sup>95</sup> Are crimes that transcend the very moment when they were committed to become permanent. (My translation)

<sup>96</sup> They are invisible wounds, hidden behind those who have had to coexist with the permanent presence of the absence, and behind those who will never be able to return to “their country” without being forced into a new exile. [www.ausencias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com](http://www.ausencias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com)

Germano's *Ausencias* the observer can clearly see what was taken away. They become aware of the absence of those who are no longer there. In *Distancias*, Germano sets out to convey a crime that left no trace. There is no evidence of the passing of time while forced to live in exile, nor of the internal struggles of being uprooted. What is no longer there is the life that never was, the expectations and dreams that were suddenly interrupted, a life that went by but simultaneously stopped. What is in between life before exile, and life in exile is forever gone and will never be recovered. At the same time, the lapsed period of time is shockingly present in the lives of the exiles, as exile never ceases, and the invisible traumas and struggles will forever be part of their subjectivities.

The task of representing how citizens were uprooted from their country, forced to live in a foreign cultural environment, and the appearance of the cessation of time that occurs when the subjects live in constant anticipation of return, is extremely difficult. How it is possible to represent an experience that is subjective, that has no material referents to portray the emptiness of exile? How to create a visual representation of the void that exile creates? Nonetheless, Germano takes on the challenge to create a visual representation of exile, and the experience of the exiles. He intends to capture the interruption of time that represents what it is to live in exile, but at the same time, the progression of time in the midst of its cessation.

The displaced for political reasons, the people that had to leave their countries in order to save their own lives and those of their loved ones, have not been considered victims of State terrorism, as if by leaving they were automatically spared of any further damage, and no longer had to endure the violence of a terrorist State. *Distancias* is the recognition that political exile is in fact a form of torture, and a State crime. In *Distancias*, Germano chose to convey the traumatic experience of exile by portraying the first major political exodus of the twentieth century, the

Spanish Republican exile. As exile is usually not regarded as one of the major crimes of State terrorism, Germano wanted to call attention not only on the Argentinian experience, his country of origin, but on exile itself. According to Germano, even though throughout history there have been numerous exile experiences due to political reasons, he affirms that “el exilio trágico por antonomasia ha sido el provocado por la Guerra Civil de 1936-1939 en España. El exilio republicano español es el primer gran exilio político del Siglo XX en todo el mundo.”<sup>97</sup> As Germano notes, before World War II there had not been an exodus of political refugees of such quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The Spanish exodus was, in his words, the paradigmatic premonition of many more exiles that would mark the century.<sup>98</sup>

*Distancias* consists of fourteen pairs of photographs of exiles from Spain, many of them living in Mexico.<sup>99</sup> In *Distancias* Germano also resorts to the contrast of two photographs, one taken before exile and one after, generally of people still living in the host country. Germano exhibits a photograph of the subjects before exile, or taken right at the onset, next to the second photograph that he took 70 years after. The objective is to reproduce the first moment, or at least an image of the exiles in the same position, and in a similar setting. According to the artist, the relation between these two photographs, two stationary moments in time, captured 70 years apart,

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<sup>97</sup> <http://distancias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com/> The tragic exile by antonomasia has been the one provoked by the Civil War of 1936-1939 in Spain. The Spanish Republican exile is the first great political exile of the 20th Century worldwide. (my translation)

<sup>98</sup> <http://distancias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com/>

<sup>99</sup> France, Mexico, and Argentina were the main destinations of the Spanish exile. However, Chile and the United States also granted political refuge. Most of the Spanish exiled in the United States worked as professors at different universities, and since learning the language was difficult, they worked, and even funded, the Spanish Literature departments at U.S. universities (Villena, online). Thousands settled in Mexico, receiving almost automatic citizenship, as well as unlimited resources to settle, such as housing, a job, many of them within academic institutions, immediate validations of their degrees, even if they were not able to provide proof of having acquired them. According to Snznajder and Roniger, the Mexican revolution had created the spirit of solidarity that prompted the welcoming of Republican refugees (23).

“reconstruyen la historia, revelan y denuncia la violencia imprescriptible del exilio.”<sup>100</sup> According to Germano “lo que ha sucedido entre uno y otro instante denuncia lo que durante todo ese tiempo ha sido, y no ha sido.”<sup>101</sup>

In the case of *los desaparecidos*, the absence became the evidence of the crime. The family members were able to reassure society that *los desaparecidos* actually existed, as they were able to create the visual anchor of the crime. However, in the case of the exiles, it is extremely difficult to convey a crime that has no visual representation. Nonetheless, what is in between the two photographs can be comprehensible, but only when the spectator is able to imagine how the life of the exile was interrupted between those two images, during those 70 years; a life away from home after an abrupt interruption with all ties and everything they knew. According to Xavier Antich, *Distancias* is able to convey the life in exile through what the viewer imagines “a través de lo que vemos y de lo que imaginamos, en el hiato entre las dos imágenes, transcurre una vida entera. El exilio. La pérdida de todo. El desarraigo. La desposesión. El desamparo.”<sup>102</sup> *Distancias*, as well as *En estado de memoria*, communicate that exile, comparable to enforced-disappearances, is a crime that does not cease. When citizens are forced to leave their homeland for political reasons, and are not allowed to return for many years, going back to the motherland is akin to the experience of a new exile.

Germano provides very few, but revealing elements for the spectator to imagine the life story of the exile: the years when the photographs were taken, the place, and the name(s) of the subjects that appear on the picture. When the viewer sees the photographs, what stands out

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<sup>100</sup> <http://distancias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com/>, Reconstruct history, reveal and denounce the inexpressible violence of exile. (my translation)

<sup>101</sup> <http://distancias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com/>, What has happened between one instant and another denounces what has been during all that time, and has not been. (My translation)

<sup>102</sup> Through what we see and what we imagine, in the hiatus between the two images, a whole life passes. Exile. The loss of everything. The uprooting. The dispossession. The helplessness. (my translation) <http://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20110907/54211425759/la-muerte-en-los-ojos.html>

immediately is that the people have aged markedly. As the gaze of the spectator goes across the two pictures, s/he sees that many years have passed between the first and the second photograph. The second element presented to the viewers is the years that separate the two pictures; seven decades have passed between the two moments. The last piece of information that strikes the viewer is the difference in the names of the places where the photographs were taken, most of them geographically far apart from each other. When the spectator has all the elements, s/he is able to imagine the life that the exiles have spent far away from their motherland, from the place where they created the foundations of whom they are. The contrast is more striking when the viewer reads that the last picture was taken in the place away from their country, underlining the fact that they have spent most of their lives living in a foreign land, uprooted from everything they knew (see photographs 31, and 32).



1936  
Agueda Mata Torres  
Barcelona, Cataluña, España



2009  
Agueda Mata Torres  
Cuernavaca, Morales, México



1938  
Adela Barnés González  
Madrid, España



2009  
Adela Barnés González  
México DF, México

### Photograph 31, and 32: Exiles, by Gustavo Germano

Germano chose to present the exile experience case by case, person by person. Undoubtedly, the people presented in the pictures are part of social groups. Many of them joined the organizations that the exiles created in the host countries. He could have chosen to photograph groups of exiles in different countries. In Mexico, the administration of Lazaro



Cárdenas (1934-1940) received thousands of Spaniards. However, he presented exile as a private experience, because regardless of the number of people that surround the exile, even other fellow countrymen in exile, the abrupt interruption of the course of their lives, and the traumas of being uprooted, rejected, and banned from returning to the home country, and the life they knew, are first and foremost experienced privately.

In *Distancias* Germano reproduces as much as possible the frame of the first image. In the second image he chooses a very similar frame, background, position of the person, gestures, postures, facial expressions, accessories, clothing items, and similar location. When these two images are placed next to the other, time is depicted as stagnant; it went by and simultaneously remained stationary during seven decades (see photograph 33).



Photograph 33: Exiles, by Gustavo Germano

The photographs do not portray a human being in pain. The horror of forced exile for political reasons is not the result of the pain inflicted on the human body, which is precisely

what, in many cases, the exiles escaped. Thus, on some photographs, the men and women even appear smiling in the photograph taken right before exile, and on the image captured seven decades later. The horror of exile consists on the abrupt interruption of a life, how that life progresses in exile, and the internal traumas that are invisible to the human eye. As Germano asserts, forced disappearances and exile are “heridas invisibles” [invisible wounds]<sup>103</sup> (see photographs 34, and 35).



Photograph 34, and 35: Exiles, by Gustavo Germano.

The two pictures portray the subjects almost in identical circumstances, because what the contrast of the two images seeks to highlight is the difference in age while the images remain almost the same. On the second picture, they are notably older, as if time had passed, but at the same time remained suspended. Meanwhile people inevitably grew older, as if decades had passed hastily and the exiled did not have the opportunity to live their lives, and all of the sudden their life had gone by in front of them, and in a second moment they have become much older. As Tununa Mercado describes in *En estado de memoria*, the life of the political exile goes by in permanent expectancy, in the perpetual desire and hope of being able to return as soon as

<sup>103</sup> [www.ausencias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com](http://www.ausencias-gustavogermano.blogspot.com)

possible, not knowing if the wait will be short or long. Any day the circumstances may change, and any day they could have the opportunity to return. They do not leave their countries with a life project in mind because their lives are abruptly interrupted. Meanwhile, time goes by and they are unable to resume their life goals.

While living in the receiving country, political exiles inevitably have to engage in daily activities. Nonetheless, Germano does not present a progression of images of their lives in exile, he does not choose a collection of memorable moments throughout time to depict their experiences in exile. Germano chooses to present only two images, one taken before exile, and one after. However, he did not select randomly any moment of the seven decades they have spent away from their country. Germano decided to mirror the first image with a picture of the exile on their very last day away from home, showing that exile never ends, as if the first moment still defines and affects their lives in the present. The time and the life that occurred between the two is almost imperceptible. No information is provided to infer what exactly could have happened. Whatever occurred between the two moments is left to the imagination of the viewer. However, the contrast of the two moments, the striking difference of age, and the few elements at hand (years, places of residence before and after), drive the imagination. Those elements aid the spectator to imagine exile, that is, a life, in the case of Spanish, of seven decades away from their homeland.

One of the most striking images is that of Emiliano Avilés, mainly because of his advanced age that reveals to the viewer that the return is perhaps no longer a possibility, that he was subjected to a life among foreigners (see photograph 36).



1938

Emiliano Avilés  
Pirineo catalán, Cataluña, España



2009

Emiliano Avilés  
México DF, México

Photograph 36: Exiles, by Gustavo Germano.

Moreover, the two pictures depict two contrasting moments in Emiliano's life. Germano does not provide any information about the life of the person photographed, the viewer has to resort to his/her imagination to envision what could have been. In the context of the Spanish exile, the first image depicts a life with a purpose, with clear goals, and with a future in mind. He seems visibly happy, possibly full of dreams just the year before Franco defeated the opposition and thousands of Spaniards fled their country. He stands up straight, with a life ahead and the probable thought that he was going to live in freedom. The picture chosen to depict his life before exile portrays a person willing to fight for what he believes is right. However, his life would take a different turn. In 1939 the troops led by general Francisco Franco defeated their Republican opponents, and Franco initiated his repressive dictatorship that would last 36 years until 1975. Contrary to the first image, on the second picture there is no evidence of what drives Emiliano's life today. His life project was interrupted, unable to return, being uprooted from everything he knew.

Exile is elusive; it is a crime of a terrorist State with no marks, no visible scars, no physical evidence, invisible to the eye. The limited information provided to make the connection between the two images informs the viewer of the ineffability of exile. All the viewer can resort to is the imagination to envision the break with a previous life, the pain of being forced to live uprooted, and what it means to come to terms with the idea of dying in a foreign land. It is almost impossible to picture the feelings of alienation. However, it is precisely the lack of images, and information, between the two photographs, which depicts the traumatic experience of a life that was abruptly interrupted.

## CONCLUSIONS

When citizens are subjected to State terrorism it seems unconceivable to defy the silence and the official narratives imposed by the terrorist State; yet, it is possible. The central questions that guided this research project inquired how citizens can construct counter-hegemonic narratives to break the silence and defy the official narratives that deny the crimes committed by the State. How can these counter-hegemonic discourses successfully challenge the State's attempts to obstruct the creation of a collective memory of State repression? Finally, how can the narratives that denounce State terrorism become significant even for those who did not experience it directly?

During and in the aftermath of State terrorism in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, mainly during the 1970s, the State tried to silence all forms of dissidence to secure the impunity of those who committed crimes, and the imposition of the agendas of the groups in power. In the midst of terror, the State enforced silence upon society. The citizens who did not agree with the projects of the State, were either too afraid to talk, or believed that their actions would not modify the circumstances that surrounded them. To illustrate how citizen's daily actions and decisions give support to a terrorist State, and to argue that it is precisely through their daily decisions that citizens can challenge the State, I examined three novels, Luis Gusmán's *Villa* (Argentina), Carlos Franz's *El desierto* (Chile), and Fritz Glockner's *Cementerio de papel* (Mexico).

In this dissertation, I asserted that through performances, but especially rituals, minority groups are able to construct counter-hegemonic narratives to challenge the State discourses permanently. When citizens have limited resources available to them to make their voices heard, performances and rituals are the most adequate symbolic means to construct and present counter-hegemonic narratives. Furthermore, rituals stand as powerful symbolic cultural devices to create a collective memory of State terrorism, the formation of which the groups in power want to prevent.

The groups in power will try not only to obstruct the visibility of any counter-hegemonic narrative, but will attempt to prevent that those discourses are maintained as part of the collective memory. Thus, to defy the official narratives and construct an effective discourse, it is not enough to organize sporadic protests; it becomes necessary to carry out the performances in a systematic and sustained manner, so that counter-hegemonic discourses prevail.

I compared the cases of Mexico, Argentina, and Chile to shed light on the best practices to construct counter-hegemonic narratives that could become part of the collective memory of a society. *Comité Eureka* in Mexico, *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* in Chile, and *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, all associations funded almost exclusively by mothers of *desaparecidos*, initiated numerous informational activities, and street protests, including hunger strikes, to let their compatriots know about the crimes the State wanted to conceal. I examined the social and political circumstances in which each group attempted to build lasting counter-hegemonic narratives. Ultimately, the groups whose clamors for justice met with the vested interest of the groups in power, were able to maintain their narratives as part of the collective consciousness, and thus, were more successful at incorporating those narratives as part of the collective memory. As Yael Zerubavel asserts in *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995) “collective memory continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas” (5), and as such it is never complete.

In its attempt to eliminate all political opposition, the State created its own weaknesses from which citizens were able to dispute the official narratives of State terrorism. I argued that because of the permanent pain, trauma, and lasting consequences caused by enforced-disappearances and exile, those crimes become weaknesses, which I have called *fissures of power*.

The family members of *los desaparecidos* had to endure the pain of the permanent absence created by the impossibility to ritualize the death of their loved ones. In the case of the exiled, the abrupt interruption of their lives also created a permanent void that did not end upon their return to their motherland. The lasting physical, emotional, mental, and material consequences of these forms of terror have driven these citizens to demand the State to recognize them as victims of State crime and human rights violations that were part of the plan to annihilate political opposition in the Americas during the 1970s. The permanent consequences make it impossible for the victims of State repression to forget. Thus, they have felt impelled to challenge the prevailing narratives of State terrorism which deny, or undermine, the crimes committed.

I also analyzed the photographic work *Ausencias* by Argentinian photographer Gustavo Germano, and Lucila Quieto's *Arqueología de la ausencia* to explore the permanent construction and evolution of the political figure of *el desaparecido*. The family members of the victims have used to interpellate the State and society. Furthermore, I presented the photographic campaign of *H.I.J.O.S México*, an association of children of victims of State terrorism, to illustrate the emerging construction of *los desaparecidos* as a political figure in Mexico. I examined Tununa Mercado's literary text *En estado de memoria*, and Gustavo Germano's photographic work *Distancias*, to argue that exiles are a place of memory in formation. Ultimately, what the citizens attempt to do is to transform those crimes as places of memory, or *lieux de mémoires* to use Pierre Nora's term, through which society can permanently be reminded of the violence and terror to which the State subjected their citizens. In the case of *los desaparecidos* the family members have been able to construct the figure of *el desaparecido* as a place of memory, that is, as an event, idea, or image from which citizens are reminded of State terrorism.



I argue that in order to construct a place of memory, citizens have actively, and consciously to construct those experiences as a point of reference from which society can be reminded of their dissident narratives about State repression. The fact that those crimes have permanent consequences in the lives of the victims does not suffice for society to know about them nor to remember them. *Los desaparecidos* and the exiled become evidence of State terrorism only as citizens engage in constant political struggles with the State. The creation of places of memory is not spontaneous, especially when citizens attempt to give voice to a dissident discourse that contradicts official narratives. Minority groups have to take part in permanent battles with the groups in power to incorporate their narratives into the collective consciousness and memory of society. As Héctor Schmucler asserts in “Las exigencias de la memoria” (2000), memory cannot be created without the will to remember. In the case of the victims of State terrorism, this yearning for remembrance has to be permanent; otherwise, the State will successfully impose its own official narratives facilitating the impunity of those responsible for the crimes committed.

Furthermore, the citizens creating counter-hegemonic narratives have to choose carefully how they want the rest of society to remember the State crimes, so as not to be regarded as an event belonging to the past. For instance, Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín (1983-1989), president of Argentina after the last dictatorship, offered to construct a monument to honor and remember *los desaparecidos* to *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. However, *Las Madres* firmly refused such project. *Las Madres*, as well of the *Comité Eureka*, and the *Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos* demanded justice, punishment of those responsible, and to know the whereabouts of their family members. However, in yet another attempt to silence their voices, the State merely offered to portray *los desaparecidos* as an issue that belonged to the past, instead of directly addressing their demands for justice.

In the formation of *los desaparecidos*, and *exile*, as places of memory it has been crucial to interpellate not only to the State, but also to the rest of the society. The victims and their family members have presented their pain as mothers, children, and family members of the victims, but they have also emphasized that these crimes are not merely personal or family dramas, but crimes against humanity, and as such pertain to the rest of society as well. When citizens did not personally experience the horrors of State terrorism, it is difficult to visualize the pain others had to endure; however, when those crimes are presented as part of a broader narrative to which the rest of the citizens can identify, they are then able to empathize with the suffering caused by State terrorism.

When citizens are able to visualize other's pain, understand that State crimes were intended to have an effect on all citizens, and that those crimes violated human rights, the rest of society can also demand justice and truth about the crimes committed. When the victims of State repression successfully compel the rest of society, they create the notion of social responsibility, which facilitates the permanent questioning of the State's actions. As the rest of society becomes emotionally engaged with the past, through the defense of human rights and human dignity, the demand for justice and truth becomes meaningful not only for the victims and their family members, but for the rest of the society as well. Ultimately, what I intended to demonstrate in this dissertation is that in spite of the crushing powers of a terrorist State, it is possible to construct counter-hegemonic narratives that defend the dignity of the human life.

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