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Challenging Memory, Truth, and Justice: Reworking the Kirchnerist Narrative (Argentina, 2003-2015)

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

Spanish

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

This project examines memory and human rights politics in present-day Argentina. I argue that presidents Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-present) have garnered great political success from their construction of a compelling narrative regarding 1970s revolutionaries and the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. This account of the past, which I term the Kirchnerist narrative, proposes that a young, heroic, and innocent generation of leftist militants was brutally massacred by state forces for trying to better the world and that this generation should be memorialized through the pursuit of forms of memory, truth, and justice that unquestioningly revere these political combatants. After tracing how this narrative has been established through political discourse, the opening of trials against former perpetrators, surprising alliances with prominent human rights organizations, and the transformation of former torture centers into memorial sites, I consider a growing corpus of cultural production from those closely related to this narrative's heroes (former leftist militants and their kin) that challenges and reworks what are deemed to be partial conceptions of memory, truth, and justice, criticized as having been co-opted for partisan political gain.

Through an analysis of leftist cultural criticism—journalism, scholarly texts, three novels, and one film—that negotiate differing understandings of Argentina's past and less Manichean portrayals of guerrillas, state forces, and civil society, this project seeks to interpret the hegemonic struggle to make meaning of Argentina's recent past taking place in present-day political and cultural production. By examining how a divisive narrative about a national past employed for partisan politics has resulted in a new body of texts that have found what Doris Sommer terms "wiggle room" to rework accounts of the past in ways more representative of the authors' experiences, I hope to provide a critical framework useful for examining memory and human rights politics in and beyond Argentina, particularly in much of Latin America, where several current presidents had roles in their countries' recent histories of political violence, truth and reconciliation commissions continue to develop, memorial sites increase, and what Fernando Rosenberg has termed "narrativas de verdad y reconciliación" abound.

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Introduction: The Surge of Human Rights Culture in Argentina and Beyond

During the past two decades, a staggering number of museums and cultural sites dedicated to the remembrance of recent political violence and to "the promotion of human rights" has emerged throughout much of Latin America. Many of these sites are former detention and torture centers that have been converted into memory spaces while others are newly constructed centers. Examples of such sites include Chile's former detention and torture center Villa Grimaldi, which first opened its doors to the public in 1994 and then inaugurated its *Parque por la Paz* in 1997; Chile's Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos that opened in 2010; the Monumento a la Memoria y la Verdad in El Salvador that was completed in 2003; El Salvador's new monument to the *El Mozote* massacre, inaugurated in 2011; Argentina's Parque de la Memoria - Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado that opened in 2006; Argentina's largest former clandestine center of detention, torture, and extermination, the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), which officially opened as the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA in 2008; Uruguay's Centro Cultural y Museo de la Memoria, inaugurated in 2007; Brazil's Memorial da Resistência, inaugurated in 2009; and Peru's Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social, opened in 2014.

Though these memorials and the contexts in which they have been created differ significantly, they have all been instituted with the support of post-authoritarian governments seeking to honor the victims of violent pasts in public forums. The mission statements of each site reveal that they share a common desire to remember the past in order to prevent such events from occurring "ever again" (*nunca más*). These memory sites have also all been created in the wake of truth and reconciliation commissions in

each of their respective countries and bear at least informal—if not formal—relationships with such commissions and the reports that resulted from them.[1]

Given that these memorial sites follow the completion of the truth and reconciliation commissions in their respective countries, the use of human rights language—what Michael Perry refers to as a global "moral lingua franca"—legitimizing their existence is not a surprising further commonality (4). Examples of these appeals to human rights can be found within the statements of purpose from the different memorial sites, such as Chile's Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos that describes itself as "un espacio destinado a dar visibilidad a las violaciones a los derechos humanos cometidas por el Estado de Chile entre 1973 y 1990; a dignificar a las víctimas y a sus familias; y a estimular la reflexión y el debate sobre la importancia del respeto y la tolerancia, para que todos estos hechos nunca más se repitan."[2] The Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA's mission statement provides a second example of such ethically-charged human rights language in its stated objective to "preservar y transmitir la memoria de lo allí ocurrido que testimonia los delitos de lesa humanidad del terrorismo de estado, y la promoción y defensa de los derechos humanos."[3]

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[1] These commissions, in chronological order, are the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* in Argentina (1983-1984); Uruguay's *Comisión Investigadora sobre la Situación de Personas Desaparecidas* (1985) that was later followed by the *Comisión para la Paz* (2000-2002); the *Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* in Chile, commonly known as the Rettig Commission (1990-1991), that was later followed by the *Comisión Valech* (2003-2005, 2010-2011); El Salvador's *Comisión de la Verdad para El Salvador* (1992-1993); Guatemala's *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (1997-1999); Peru's *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* (2002-2003); and Brazil's *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (2012-2014).

[2] http://www.museodelamemoria.cl

[3] http://www.espaciomemoria.ar

Such statements recognize that crimes against humanity have been committed in the past and that the victims of these crimes need to be honored; and they also promote the protection of rights in the future. The moral language employed avoids explicit partisan and political references—aside from recognizing the state as the agent of terror—allowing for a more simplified narrative regarding the past and making political objections difficult, given that to reject such statements is, seemingly, to oppose human rights.[4] However, in spite of the apparently nonpartisan, ethical rhetoric used to support these spaces, these memory sites and the truth and reconciliation commissions that preceded them have often been tied to particular ideologies and surrounded by considerable political debate, reaffirming assertions that human rights are not only easily politically appropriated, often "adopted by the right and the left, the north and the south, the state and the pulpit, the minister and the rebel" (Douzinas 33), but also inherently political: "nothing other than a politics, one that must reconcile moral ends to concrete situations" (Ignatieff 21-22).[5]

This is also the case in Spain, where public debates regarding the country's past of civil war (1936-1939) and dictatorship (1939-1975) have become more prevalent during the past decade, particularly surrounding the establishment of the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*—initially proposed in 2004 and finally passed in 2007.[6] Unlike the transitions from authoritarianism to democracy in much of Latin America, there was no truth

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[4] See Michael J. Perry regarding how "the morality of human rights has become a truly global morality" (4).

[5] For more regarding the political contexts and controversies surrounding these sites and commissions, see Ana Guglielmucci, Priscilla Hayner, María Silvina Persino, and Nelly Richard.

[6] See *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 310 (27 December 2007): 53410-16. Available online at http://www.boe.es.

commission in Spain when the country transitioned to democracy in 1975. Rather, an amnesty law commonly referred as the *pacto del silencio* was established in 1977 by political elites from both sides who agreed not to discuss the past or seek punishment for the crimes and human rights violations committed during four decades of war and dictatorship.[7] Despite a prolonged pacted transition, many discussions regarding the recuperation of historical memory have recently entered political discourse.[8]

Debates regarding how the past should be memorialized and how not-so-non-political human rights language and legislation should be enacted have taken place in the Hispanic world and beyond not only in broad public forums, including political speeches, legislation, journalism, and the creation of memorial spaces, but also in literary and filmic production and criticism. This phenomenon, taking place globally, is evidenced by a rapidly growing critical bibliography regarding the possibilities and complexities of promoting human rights awareness with literary and cultural production by scholars who include Sophia McClennen, Joseph Slaughter, Paul Gready, Michael Galchinsky, Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, and Alexandra Schultheis Moore.[9] Such scholarship highlights the space fiction offers to more deeply engage what Gready terms "novel truths"—the "uncomfortable truths" and "unfinished business" that remain after the rulings and "rigid certainties" of legislation and truth commissions (156).

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[7] *Boletín Oficial del Estado* 248 (17 October 1977): 22765-66. Available online at http://www.boe.es.

[8] See Jo Labanyi and Carlos Jerez-Farrán and Samuel Amago's analyses of these political and cultural debates.

[9] See also *PMLA*'s special issue *The Humanities in Human Rights: Critique, Language, Politics* (2006); *Comparative Literature Studies*' Spec. issue *Human Rights and Literary Forms* (2009); and *South Atlantic Review*'s Spec. issue *Human Rights and the Humanities* (2010).

Despite the many years of political violence in much of Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century, the recent truth and reconciliation commissions there, and the aforementioned surge in memorial spaces, texts from such countries have often been left out of these recent critical reflections on cultural representations of human rights.[10] This intervention therefore aims to address this significant gap, taking as a point of entry Fernando Rosenberg's study on what he terms "narrativas de verdad y reconciliación": 21st-century Latin American novels in which longings for utopic revolution have been replaced with hope in human rights, understood "como un discurso global que se imagina como superación de la política" (94). As Rosenberg argues, these narratives find themselves at the intersections of human rights, globalization, and the transnational publishing industry with an "euforia neoliberal" that distinguishes them from earlier postdictatorial texts' emphasis on mourning revolutionary loss (94).

While the surge of recent human rights politics, literature, and cultural production is a global phenomenon, particularly in the Spanish-speaking world, this project will focus specifically on these processes in Argentina, positing that an examination of particularly politically-charged and contested uses of memory, truth, and justice there during the last decade might provide a window into how human rights language and concepts are more broadly mobilized with differing aims and outcomes. Within this project, human rights culture in its broadest sense is understood as discourses, practices, and spaces—to include, but not be limited to, political speeches, fictional storytelling,

[10] Notable exceptions include the "Human Rights in Latin America" section of *PMLA*'s Spec. issue *The Humanities in Human Rights* (2006) and several essays within McClennen and Moore's *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights* (2015).

and memory sites—that defend human rights, taken to mean the rights of people to live with dignity and without having physical, psychological, and/or emotional violence individually or systemically inflicted upon them. An understanding of human rights culture as "infinitely adaptable and amenable to the needs of both the powerless and the powerful to legitimize all sorts of grievances" is crucial to this study that examines the manners in which human rights culture negotiates meaning and power (McClennen and Slaughter 1).

In Argentina, human rights politics with respect to the country's last military dictatorship (1976-1983) have formed a central part of the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-present), resulting in the recent emergence of numerous memorial spaces, much political and financial support being offered to human rights organizations, and the prosecution of hundreds of the military dictatorship's perpetrators. Through an in-depth analysis of presidential discourse and acts aimed at memorializing leftist militants victimized by the country's last dictatorship and an examination of cultural criticism, novels, and films that have challenged and reworked Kirchnerist human rights politics, this study hopes to further interpret how meanings of such human rights concepts as memory, truth, and justice are negotiated with different political aims and outcomes, remaining subject to endless re-significations in Argentina and beyond.

While some have suggested that the advances toward justice made by Kirchnerist human rights politics are the first of their kind within Argentina, a brief examination of the country's transition from dictatorship to democracy challenges such assertions. Immediately preceding the elections that resulted in the country's recuperation of

democracy, the military passed an amnesty law that prohibited the prosecution of crimes committed by the military, but Argentina's newly elected president, Raúl Alfonsín, had repealed this law within his first week in office in December of 1983 (Hayner 33). Within this same week, Alfonsín also created the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), to which he appointed ten members, naming Ernesto Sábato as the chair. The commission took more than 7,000 statements over a nine month period and documented the disappearance of 8,960 people, though the report estimated the actual number of disappearances to range between 10,000 and 30,000, given families' fears of coming forward after having recently experienced a period of brutal state terrorism. Additionally, the commission identified 365 detention centers throughout Argentina in which the military imprisoned and tortured those detained. The CONADEP's report, entitled *Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, was released in an abridged version that became a national bestseller that "dotted the beaches as summer vacationers in swimwear read the dreadful testimonies" (Taylor 12). The report was soon followed by the *Juicio a las Juntas* in 1985 that was open to the public (with limited space) and videotaped, though only brief daily segments without audio were broadcast nationally, with the exception of the reading of the final sentence that did include sound.[11] These trials resulted in the arrest of five senior military officers with key roles in the dictatorship's operations.

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[11] See Claudia Feld's *Del estrado a la pantalla* for an in-depth analysis of the effects of media representations of the trials over the years, beginning with the lack of circulation of much material during and soon after the trials, to the subterranean distribution of images and recordings from uncertain sources until the mid-1990s, to the national broadcast in the late 1990s of affectively edited videos, produced in a way that made learning of the horrors of the dictatorship both sufferable and emotive. In 2011, *Memoria Abierta* and the Universidad de Salamanca worked with the *Cámara Nacional de*

However, under political pressure from the military and in a period of great economic and social instability due to financial debt and two attempted military coups, Alfonsín passed the *Ley de punto final* in 1986 and the *Ley de obediencia debida* in 1987. These controversial laws, which Alfonsín had originally opposed, ended all investigation and prosecution of political violence committed during the dictatorship and excused all military subordinates from legal punishment for crimes executed under orders made by their superiors during the dictatorship (Jelin "The Politics of Memory," 47).[12] The military revolts and the financial crisis, which had resulted in part from the foreign debt accrued in order to finance the military dictatorship, thereby undid much of the work of the CONADEP.

When Carlos Menem succeeded Alfonsín in office, he continued and furthered such amnesty policies by granting a presidential pardon to the senior officers who had been arrested during the *Juicio a las Juntas* and urging Argentines to leave the past behind. Menem justified his politics of oblivion by arguing for the necessity of national reconciliation and socio-economic stability with an increasingly neoliberal economy.

Apelaciones en lo Criminal y Correcional Federal to have the videotapes of all 530 hours of the trials digitalized. Parts of these videos can be found on *Memoria Abierta*'s website, and the entire archive can be accessed at *Memoria Abierta*'s headquarters and the Universidad de Salamanca.

[12] Elizabeth Jelin's study reveals that Alfonsín began differentiating levels of responsibility of perpetrators and advocated "due obedience" policies from the very beginning of his presidency and that, at the time of his election, the majority of political leaders proposed policies that were much more cautious in dealing with the military or even favorable toward them ("The Politics of Memory," 47). Nonetheless, Jelin writes that even during the early period of Alfonsín's presidency, prior to these amnesty laws, many human rights organizations were already distancing themselves from the government, "demanding a more forceful attitude in terms of 'truth' (elucidating what happened with the disappearances), 'justice' (contesting the administration of justice with regard to the military responsible for the violations), and redress (demanding freedom for political prisoners and detainees)" ("The Politics of Memory," 48).

Menem's suggestions that the work of the CONADEP and of other human rights organizations that sought to reveal information about the violence of the past was no longer needed and that Argentina had moved forward was not well received among many. It was not until Néstor Kirchner's presidency that this dictatorial past and its human rights violations were politically recuperated.

Like human rights politics in Argentina, literary and filmic production that examines the dictatorial past has been prevalent during the last three decades. In the literary sphere, what Idelber Avelar described as the vocation of literature in *Alegorías de la derrota*—the mourning of the defeat of predictatorial socialist projects and of literature as the placeholder for the ideology of such projects—took on particular importance during the 1980s and 1990s when there was little space for leftist or human rights-oriented discourse in the conservative, neoliberal political sphere. For Avelar, as for León Rozitchner, Alberto Moreiras, and Nelly Richard, the Southern Cone transitions from dictatorship to democracy were primarily substitutions of military dictatorships with globalized neoliberal regimes that perpetuated the repressive economic measures implemented during dictatorship.[13] These critics therefore advocate a Benjaminian approach to the production and criticism of literature, believing that such works should act "contra nuestro tiempo y, se espera, en beneficio de un tiempo venidero …. Como el ángel benjaminiano de la historia, mira hacia el pasado, a la pila de escombros, ruinas y

[13] Rozitchner's recent *Acerca de la derrota y de los vencidos* contends that Argentina's current democracy was born not of a desire for peace and reconciliation but of the failure of the Malvinas War and a pact that the military imposed upon Argentine citizens. For Rozitchner, the economic terror established during the military dictatorship continues today.

derrotas, en un esfuerzo por redimirlos, mientras es empujado hacia delante por las fuerzas del 'progreso' y la 'modernización'" (Avelar 286). The narratives that these critics argue to be examples of the mourning of the ruins and shards that remained from the revolutionary past in the margins of a neoliberal, past-erasing present come predominantly from the 1980s and 1990s and include novels by Southern Cone and Brazilian authors Diamela Eltit, Tununa Mercado, João Gilberto Noll, and Ricardo Piglia.[14]

Also particularly prevalent in the literary sphere in the 1990s in Argentina were testimonies of leftist militancy. Eduardo Anguita's and Martín Caparrós's three-volume *La voluntad: Una historia de la militancia revolucionaria en la Argentina* serves as an exemplary case of such works, though its genre cannot be categorized as solely testimonial. As Hugo Vezzetti has argued, these testimonies suggested a heterogeneous and individualized approach to narrating the 1960s and 1970s, though they generally shared a similar leftist ideological commitment: "Hoy, los sentidos y las memorias mezcladas de ese pasado ya no se presentan en bloque: hubo diversos pasados, recuperados desde diversos horizontes y proyectos … Las memorias de la militancia que se abrieron en los noventa establecieron el molde de una recuperación personal" (101). Though not all literary production of the 1980s and 1990s participated in such leftist allegories of mourning and testimonial accounts of militancy, as Miguel Dalmaroni has demonstrated, an ideological commitment to predictatorial leftist Peronist projects is undoubtedly a common trope in much of the literature from this period.

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[14] Francine Masiello's study on post-dictatorial literary production reaches similar conclusions, suggesting that literature and art have the potential to "cultivate tension, revealing the conflicts between an unresolved past and present" when "faced with the numbing logic of neoliberal regimes" (3).

Avelar's rationale no longer holds, however, in present-day Argentina where Kirchnerist human rights politics have opened the historical events of the 1970s and 1980s to much public discussion. Accordingly, much Argentine literature and film from the past decade no longer shares the same ideological commitments of works produced in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet authors, filmmakers, and cultural critics continue to take up the dictatorial period in an emerging body of works that, like those Rosenberg has termed "narrativas de verdad y reconciliación," cannot be classified simply as narratives that mourn the defeat of revolutionary projects. Bearing in mind what many consider an exhaustion of discussions of the past and memory politics by the Kirchners—described by Laura Di Marco as "el debate cotidiano ... como la rata en su rueda" focused upon "las heridas de los años setenta"—why is it that novels and films that stress the importance of examining and remembering the revolutionary and dictatorial past continue to be produced? What might these works be trying to do that is different from the ways historical memory is being recuperated by Kirchnerism, or, according to Di Marco, adulterated "como si fuera un recurso político más de su caja de herramientas para construir poder, aquí y ahora," and from the narratives of the previous two decades?

The prevalence of these narratives regarding the past suggests a perceived need for either further remembrance of the past not unlike that proposed by Kirchnerism or for, as I argue, new ways of remembering the past: for an opening of the narrative being told in the political sphere. In my use of the term narrative, I mean to signal the constructed nature of the account of recent history that has often been related by both Kirchners and of the diverging versions of this past found in cultural criticism. This study therefore proposes a two-fold analysis: firstly, of how Argentina's two most recent presidents have

constructed a compelling human rights-oriented political narrative—what I term the Kirchnerist narrative—that vindicates the militant left; and, secondly, of how recent fictional and non-fiction narratives remember 1970s leftist militancy and dictatorship in ways that challenge present-day memory politics, re-negotiating understandings of memory, truth, and justice.

A recognition of the manners in which language shapes our understandings of experiences and is itself formed by those experiences is important to this study. Though language is not the only source of meaning for historical events, it is a crucial one, as Adam Hodges notes: "language—and more specifically, discourse—does not simply reflect events that take place in the world. Discourse infuses events with meaning, establishes widespread social understandings, and constitutes social reality" (5). As for Hodges in this particular instance, for the purposes of this essay, discourse can be understood in its Foucauldian sense as acts of linguistic communication that both reflect and construct ideologies of power. Elizabeth Jelin's argument regarding the reinterpretations and rewritings that discourse in the present can continually grant the past is therefore particularly important as well: "El pasado ya pasó, es algo determinado, no puede ser cambiado. El futuro, por el contrario, es abierto, incierto, indeterminado. Lo que puede cambiar es el *sentido* de ese pasado, sujeto a reinterpretaciones ancladas en la intencionalidad y en las expectativas hacia ese futuro" (*Los trabajos de la memoria*, 39). This research project takes conceptual roots in these conceptions of how narratives regarding the past created by repeated acts of discourse are always constructions forever open to reinterpretations and rewritings.

Chapter 1, "The Kirchnerist Narrative: Partial Memory, Truth, and Justice," will examine the Kirchnerist narrative that extols a young, idealistic militant generation that fought for its ideals, was brutally massacred by state terrorism, and should be indiscriminatingly honored in the present through the pursuit of (a particular form of) memory, truth, and justice. This chapter considers the Kirchners' emphasis on memory, truth, and justice in relationship to 1970s leftist militancy and the last military dictatorship in speeches and other discursive practices, including tweets; juridical proceedings; alliances with human rights organizations; and financial and political support offered to memorial spaces. The goal of this chapter is not to analyze each of these practices extensively. Rather, it is to more broadly demonstrate the centrality of human rights to the Kirchners' political discourse and practice that have negotiated understandings of memory, truth, and justice, rendering partial conceptions of each of these concepts. I do not highlight the partiality of these ideals within the Kirchnerist narrative in order to make moral judgments or suggest there are better ways of memorializing the past, for any single narration will necessarily be limited and biased. Rather, I intend to illuminate in what ways this narrative is incomplete and how, in an even more surprising turn of Argentine memory politics than this narrative itself, the partiality of Kirchnerist human rights politics has resulted in the emergence of marked criticism, much of which comes from within Kirchnerism's own cultural ranks.

The second chapter, "Toward a Less Partial Narrative: Nonfictional Responses to the Kirchnerist Narrative" explores journalists', philosophers', and scholars' expansions and rewritings of the Kirchnerist narrative focused around two particular questions. The first of these is the partisan politicization of human rights during both Kirchners'

presidencies. While this project does not intend to suggest that human rights can exist outside of politics, it does argue that the degree to which human rights are used for partisan purposes can vary. It is for this reason that Chapter 2 will consider studies by José Pablo Feinmann, Beatriz Sarlo, and Victoria Donda, among others, regarding the ways the Kirchnerist narrative has appropriated human rights concepts for political causes as well as the Kirchners' limited involvement in human rights organizations prior to their presidential careers. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the responses of cultural critics—including Claudia Hilb, Héctor Leis, Hugo Vezzetti, and Graciela Fernández Meijide—to the Kirchnerist narrative's glorification of 1970s leftist militants. Represented primarily as victims of state terrorism during the CONADEP proceedings in order to secure certain rights and reparations, leftist militants have come to be celebrated as human rights heroes by the Kirchnerist narrative. As my analysis of these cultural critics' texts will show, the political diversity and complexity of these individuals, their beliefs, and their actions is often homogenized, simplified, and even negated in this political narrative's attempts at honoring them.

Both Chapters 3 and 4 analyze fictional literary and cinematic retellings of the 1970s and conceptions of human rights that diverge from those represented by Kirchnerist politics. Examining the spaces opened to question the Kirchnerist narrative by these fictional works' uses of storytelling, aesthetics, and form, these two chapters consider what sort of "wiggle room"—as proposed by Doris Sommer—these works might be able to establish in their responses to and reworkings of the Kirchnerist narrative. Chapter 3, "Militants Reconsidering Militancy," discusses the representation of the narrators in Martín Caparrós's 2008 *A quien corresponda* and Leopoldo Brizuela's

2012 *Una misma noche*, who once identified themselves as militants—Peronist and Kirchnerist ones, respectively—but, through the course of the texts, begin to distance themselves from such alliances. The protagonists' critical depictions of current human rights politics, despite their previous identifications with corresponding ideologies, will form the focus of this chapter's analysis. *A quien corresponda*'s narrator, Carlos, does not critique his generation's desire for more social equality that led to leftist militancy, but he does blame Argentina's present-day even greater inequalities on those endeavors that resulted in devastating political violence. Additionally, Carlos repeatedly points out the lack of coherence between the ideals for which he and his comrades fought and the values highlighted by the Kirchnerist narrative. In *Una misma noche*, Leonardo's cynicism is more nascent, with his shift in identification taking place during the course of the novel as he works through repressed memories of his father's collaboration with the military regime and becomes increasingly less tolerant of the uncritical and divisive nature of Kirchnerist human rights rhetoric.

The focus of the fourth and final chapter, "Defenders of Whose Rights? A Child's Retelling of Montonero History," is the vulnerable perspective of children of Montonero parents represented in both Laura Alcoba's 2008 *La casa de los conejos* and Benjamín Ávila's 2011 *Infancia clandestina*, children who both witness historical events and inherit their parents' memories of such events. While the parents in Alcoba's memoir are markedly more absent than Juan's parents in *Infancia clandestina*, the child narrators in both works find themselves in precarious situations. The representations of the danger faced by the child protagonists and the resulting trauma with which they must cope question whether those praised as the greatest defenders of human rights by the current

political administration might have denied their own children certain rights. Without vilifying militancy, both texts refuse to heroize the actions and ideals of these Montonero parents. This chapter examines the ethically ambiguous narrative constructed by these works of fiction regarding those individuals elevated as heroes for their defense of rights by the Kirchnerist narrative.

In examining rewritings and reworkings of the Kirchnerist narrative by cultural critics—novelists, filmmakers, journalists, and scholars—I hope to draw attention to the diverse forms in which this political narrative is continually being reshaped. The objective throughout this project is to study recent constructions of human rights ideology in relationship to 1970s militancy and dictatorship in Argentina in order to develop a broader understanding of how human rights related to those victimized by recent political violence are varyingly conceived of and represented. In doing so, this study aims to provide insight into parallel cultural processes taking shape on a global scale, contributing to recent scholarship that examines the ever in-flux relationship between human rights, politics, and cultural production in which new meanings are continually being negotiated.

Through an analysis of these differing understandings of human rights ideology in regards to Argentina's recent past, I hope to shed light on what such interventions reveal about human rights themselves and their relationship to politics—questions that include the following: if human rights are always political, can the degree to which they are politicized vary? What dangers are there in implementing human rights policies as a form of partisan politics? What do the conflicting manners in which human rights are being discussed, debated, implemented, represented, and reimagined in political and cultural

spheres reveal? Lastly, can cultural production seek out wiggle room—the "gaps in destabilized systems as they scramble to make adjustments," making contestatory moves "not forward or backward, but sideways"—in order to establish some degree of cultural agency within present-day partisan uses of human rights (Sommer 4-5)?

Chapter 1: The Kirchnerist Narrative: Partial Memory, Truth, and Justice

This study contends that Kirchnerist politics have relied heavily upon what I term the Kirchnerist narrative: a vindication of the militant left crushed by military dictatorship in need of "memory, truth, and justice" in the present. I argue that the conceptions of memory, truth, and justice argued for by this narrative and its interpretations of the 1970s are partial—both in their incompleteness and partisan nature. The argument that political discourse regarding a tumultuous past and human rights would be partial, or "quasi-representative" in Claude Lefort's terms, is hardly surprising or particularly worthy of analysis in and of itself.[15] However, the ways that this narrative became central to the Kirchners' political success, allowing for a president largely unknown prior to his election to rise greatly in popularity and power, demonstrating "los alcances de la productividad del discurso y la función constitutivamente política de la retórica," does merit examination (Muñoz and Retamazo 130).

This first chapter analyzes the Kirchnerist narrative that celebrates a heroic generation that was brutally massacred for trying to make the world a better place, demanding the pursuit of (a certain type of) memory, truth, and justice to honor those sacrificed. The founding of this narrative is traced through an examination of the Kirchners' presidential discursive acts, annulment of amnesty laws, opening of trials,

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[15] For an in-depth analysis of the concept of political representation, see Hanna Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation* in which she traces key understandings of representation from such intellectuals and politicians as Thomas Hobbes, James Madison, and Edmund Burke, arguing each conception alone to be "plausible but partial, and hence incorrect," considering the intersections in the different symbolic, descriptive, and substantive approaches she analyzes in order to identify a more complete interpretation of the concept of representation (11).

partnerships with human rights organizations, and support offered to memorial spaces with the objective of demonstrating the cruciality of partial conceptions of memory, truth, and justice to the Kirchners' political discourse and practice.

Once again, the partiality of these ideals within the Kirchnerist narrative are not singled out in order to imply that there are more appropriate or complete ways of memorializing the past. As Ana Soledad Montero writes, this idea of a partial narrative that approximates Lefort's concept of a "quasi-representation" allows us to consider "el carácter 'fallado', no uniforme y no totalizante de la democracia, cuyo rasgo constitutivo y específico es la vacuidad del lugar del poder y su permanente necesidad de legitimación: son el debate y el discurso político los que, en tanto institucionalización del conflicto, permiten escapar al fantasma del pueblo-Uno" ("Puesta en escena," 340).

In exploring the partiality of this narrative, then, I intend to illuminate how it has functioned to legitimate political power and how discursive practices in support and in contestation of the Kirchnerist narrative have also struggled to memorialize Argentina's recent conflictive past. I suggest that when the Kirchnerist narrative is considered alongside differing responses from journalists, scholars, novelists, and filmmakers (in later chapters of this project), a more heterogeneous and full—yet ever incomplete—representation of the past and conceptualization of human rights begins to develop. Furthermore, in line with Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek's argument that incompleteness "is essential to the project of hegemony itself" and the space from which hegemonic possibilities are born, I propose that an examination of these partial interpretations of the past might help trace processes of hegemonic struggle taking shape in the present (2). These are processes that form and are formed by imagined

communities, as Mariano Dagatti has demonstrated, drawing from Eliseo Verón (1987), Patrick Charaudeau (2006), and Elvira Arnoux (2008): "los discursos políticos involucran procesos identificatorios que dan cuenta de las prácticas e imaginarios sociales de una comunidad determinada: su sentido histórico, sus valores, sus movilizaciones en función de objetivos e ideales, su identidad como pueblo" (3).

The Kirchnerist Narrative in Political Discourse

> Formo parte de una generación diezmada, castigada con dolorosas ausencias. Me sumé a las luchas políticas creyendo en valores y convicciones a los que no pienso dejar en la puerta de entrada de la Casa Rosada. (Néstor Kirchner, 25 May 2003)[16]

Perhaps one of the most frequently cited passages from either Kirchner, this brief portion of Néstor Kirchner's inaugural speech as President summarizes much of the Kirchnerist narrative in two sentences. The key phrases within it that will be analyzed here and placed in dialogue with similar Kirchnerist discursive acts in order to establish an understanding of what the Kirchnerist narrative is are "formo parte de una generación," "diezmada, castigada con dolorosas ausencias," and "valores y convicciones a los que no pienso dejar en la puerta de entrada de la Casa Rosada." Though the words memory, truth, and justice do not appear within these particular two sentences, the version of these three concepts called for by the Kirchnerist narrative is very much present. As I will demonstrate, it is through the pursuit of memory, truth, and justice that the Kirchnerist administrations have sought to end impunity for atrocious crimes committed in the past—

[16] All citations from presidential speeches, unless otherwise noted, can be found at http://www.presidencia.gob.ar/discursos.

ones that decimated a generation—and resurrect a militant political ethos dedicated to certain convictions and values.[17]

"Formo parte de una generación"

The term "generation" is used repeatedly in both Kirchners' speeches in reference to 1970s leftist militants, a group in which they both proudly assert having participated. I suggest that the discursive choice of generation, rather than something along the lines of "party," "group," "movement," or, more specifically, "guerrillas," "leftist militants," "revolutionaries," or "Peronists" has several important implications.[18] First, it suggests that militancy is not a political choice or decision, but something into which one is naturally born. This term creates space for both Kirchners—Fernández de Kirchner in particular—and many others from their generation whose political activism was limited to consider themselves *compañeros* of the disappeared. Following this, referring to 1970s militants as a generation supposes their ideological stances to be normative and implies that contemporaries with differing convictions either did not exist or were a minority.[19]

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[17] See Ana Soledad Montero's "Memorias discursivas de los '70 y *ethos* militante en la retórica kirchnerista (2003-2006)" for more regarding this concept of a discursive militant ethos.

[18] See the interview of Eduardo Anguita and Martín Caparrós (authors of *La voluntad*) by Horacio Bilbao in which Anguita discusses the nebulousness of this term: "Comparto con Martín que la idea de generación es una idea superficial. Nunca se la definió. Se la nombra como un mito. ¿Qué la define? ¿Que éramos jóvenes? Las pocas veces que se habla de generación, la del 37, la de los 80, la de los setenta, es porque se la usa. No me gusta," though he does go on to suggest this concept to have a certain validity, "Pero sí creo que hay un fenómeno en el cual una porción de la sociedad que no fue mayoritaria, nutrida, impulsada por un escenario internacional ..." (qtd. in "Dos voces que cuentan dos relatos de los 70").

[19] For an analysis that contradicts this assumption of militancy as normative for this entire generation, see Sebastián Carrasai's *Los años setenta de la gente común* in which Carassai demonstrates that, though the participation of a young generation in militancy was an undeniable phenomenon in the 1970s, those active represented a minority that came primarily from upper- and upper-middle-class families, being a minority even

Furthermore, as I will explore in my examination of the "valores y convicciones" used in Kirchnerist discourse, the ways in which this generation is described as ideologically homogeneous and non-partisan neglects the significant political diversity of past and present militants. Finally, the use of generation is important with respect to the many mentions of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (often referred to solely as "madres" and "abuelas") and of H.I.J.O.S. (similarly often mentioned solely as "hijos") in Kirchnerist discourse, as it stresses the affective, familial roles of these disappeared militants as children, grandchildren, and parents.

I offer here a few examples that further contextualize the ways in which both Kirchners describe their generation:

> Argentinos, argentinas, pertenezco a una generación que no se dobló ante la persecución, ante la desaparición de amigos y amigas y ante el mayor sistema represivo que le haya tocado vivir a nuestro país. (Néstor Kirchner, 14 May 2003)
>
> No somos marcianos ni Kirchner ni yo, somos miembros de una generación que creyó en ideales y en convicciones que ni aún, ante el fracaso y la muerte perdimos las ilusiones y las fuerzas para cambiar al mundo. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 12 December 2007)
>
> Será que soy parte de una generación que veía la cosa y arremetía; iba con todo. Así les salió y así les costó. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 1 March 2013)[20]

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within those sectors. Carrasai's text argues that the vast majority of this supposed generation, especially those from middle class families, did not in fact participate in leftist militancy.

[20] Curiously in this citation, Fernández de Kirchner both includes and distances herself from this generation, using the pronoun "les" to differentiate those whose lives were sacrificed.

A generation that never gave up despite great persecution, the disappearance of its loved ones, and the most repressive system Argentina has ever experienced, this generation—sometimes referred to as a "generación perdida"—is communicated to be fierce and self-sacrificial. According to Kirchnerist discourse, these heroes' willingness to give everything—including their very lives—for their values and convictions has left their mothers, grandmothers, and children with a profound absence, but it has also left an exemplary path for those in the present to follow:

> La mayoría de las víctimas pertenecían a una generación de jóvenes, hijos de muchos de ustedes, hermanos nuestros, con un enorme compromiso con la Patria y el pueblo, con la independencia nacional y la justicia social, que luchaban con esperanza y hasta la entrega de sus vidas por esos ideales. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)
>
> Queremos que haya justicia, queremos que realmente haya una recuperación fortísima de la memoria y que en esta Argentina se vuelva a recordar, recuperar y tomar como ejemplo a aquellos que son capaces de dar todo por los valores que tienen y una generación en la Argentina que fue capaz de hacer eso, que ha dejado un ejemplo, que ha dejado un sendero, su vida, sus madres, que ha dejado sus abuelas y que ha dejado sus hijos. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

It is in honor of the exemplary ideals of these victims, whose sacrificial commitment to their country and social justice led them to lose their lives, that memory, truth, and justice should be sought in the present.

Kirchnerist discourse articulates the importance of these human rights values in light of what it establishes as the common patriotic objective of Argentina's founding

fathers and 1970s guerrillas: equality for all. The sacrifices of this generation are praised as nationalistic ones in their contributions to social justice, and continuity is established between 1970s revolutionary battles and Argentina's nearly two hundred years prior War of Independence:

> Vengo, en cambio, a proponerles un sueño: reconstruir nuestra propia identidad como pueblo y como Nación; vengo a proponerles un sueño que es la construcción de la verdad y la Justicia; vengo a proponerles un sueño que es el de volver a tener una Argentina con todos y para todos. Les vengo a proponer que recordemos los sueños de nuestros patriotas fundadores y de nuestros abuelos inmigrantes y pioneras, de nuestra generación que puso todo y dejó todo pensando en un país de iguales. (Néstor Kirchner, 25 May 2003)

For Dagatti, this discursive linking between Argentina's founders, guerrillas, and present-day militants represents the construction of "una narración identitaria, capaz de organizar retrospectivamente y prospectivamente el tiempo histórico, en el que el proyecto del locutor aparece como la culminación de los sueños fundacionales y generacionales" (6). In addition to representing Kirchner as the culmination of the dreams of the nation's founders and of 1970s leftist militants, this linkage presents long periods of history as monolithic blocks, specifically consolidating the military dictatorship and the two neoliberal decades that followed, on the one hand, and the hopes and dreams of the generation of 1970s leftist militants and present-day Kirchnerist supporters, on the other.[21]

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[21] See Montero for more regarding this "salto temporal entre el año 1976 y el momento de la toma del poder" in Kirchnerist discourse that suggests the convictions and dreams of this generation were devastated in 1976, latent during 25 years of dictatorship and

Proposed as a dream here and in several other moments, the call to remember the sacrifices of those who died for social equality evokes Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and the civil rights movement in the United States, suggesting the need for significant transformation of Argentina in the present. It is through a new generation of militants that will seek equality and justice that Kirchnerist discourse suggests this dream can be realized. "Vengo a proponer un sueño" also forms the chorus of a song made up as a promotional video based on part of Kirchner's acceptance speech, including the two sentences chosen at the beginning of this chapter to represent the Kirchnerist narrative ("Formo parte de una generación diezmada, castigada con dolorosas ausencias. Me sumé a las luchas políticas creyendo en valores y convicciones a los que no pienso dejar en la puerta de entrada de la Casa Rosada").[22] This music video, created by the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, present-day militants, and musical artists and citizens who chose to participate, was released as a tribute to Kirchner on the third anniversary of his death, October 27, 2013. It includes clips of Kirchner delivering this speech as well as the singing and quoting of it (often while dancing) by different groups of Argentines of all ages. Portraying a diverse body of supporters enthusiastically engaged in Kirchnerist rhetoric and the proposition of this dream in particular, this tribute to Néstor Kirchner speaks to the resonance of this particular discursive act.

This dream of transforming the country by rebuilding the militancy of the Kirchners' generation is communicated to be a revaluing of politics that, in their purest

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neoliberalism, and can now finally be acted upon once again ("Memorias discursivas de los '70," 14-16).

[22] The music video can be found here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbiYBW9IotY. Accusations of plagiarism of the 2008 "Yes We Can" Barack Obama promotional video have been made ("Otro plagio K").

form, serve to further equality and justice in contrast to the corruption by corporate interests of the dictatorial period and following neoliberal decades (again, a period often represented as a monolithic block in Kirchnerist rhetoric):

> Tenemos que volver a reconstruir el espacio de los militantes, de los cuadros, tenemos que volver a valorar la política y no queremos que se repita la mecánica casi empresaria de la política que tiende a acordarse de los amigos y de los compañeros para utilizarlos en cuestiones electorales. (Néstor Kirchner, 11 March 2004)

For Dagatti, Kirchnerism has been successful in making the political sphere and the role of the president legitimate once again after "un contexto de disolución de los lazos políticos y de fuerte desconfianza en las instituciones y la clase dirigente," and these discursive articulations of what a purer form of politics should look like have played a significant role in this process (2).[23]

María Antonia Muñoz and Martín Retamazo have also analyzed this discursive revaluing of politics by Kirchnerism, focusing on the role of "el pueblo" within speeches, a subject that is communicated to have been a wounded victim in the past but the principle protagonist of present-day politics now that its greatest adversary—various forces associated with neoliberalism (such as privatization, individualism, and the old political guard)—is no longer in power. For Muñoz and Retamazo, these Kirchnerist representations of the State as an instrument for social, economic, and political recovery

[23] See Montero, who writes, "En oposición al gobierno 'policíaco' de la dictadura y a la 'burocracia' representada por la derecha peronista, la juventud peronista postulaba la 'lucha política.' Frente al pensamiento único neoliberal, Kirchner postula la centralidad del Estado, la convicción y la decisión política" ("Memorias discursivas de los '70," 13).

diametrically opposed to the neoliberal tendencies of the 1990s is a mythical one that has have proved very effective in strengthening Kirchnerist political influence.

Encouraging the resurgence of their generation's ideological battles and the great patriotism of the nation's founding fathers, the Kirchners have described themselves as a bridge between old and new generations of militants:

> Mi compromiso es irrenunciable e irrevocable, no solamente por su memoria [la de Néstor Kirchner], por su legado, sino, fundamentalmente, por los jóvenes que tanto esperan de este nuevo país y en el que espero ser un puente entre las nuevas y viejas generaciones. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 21 June 2011)

The political involvement during the Kirchners' presidencies of *nietos recuperados* (children of the disappeared who were appropriated as infants by the military, given to families with military connections, and have since recovered their true biological identities, primarily through the work of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo), such as Juan Cabandié, Victoria Donda, and Victoria Montenegro, has played an important role in this Kirchnerist bridging between the generation of 1970s leftist militants and its kin. As Ceferino Reato and Graciela Fernández Meijide argued in the television program "Periodismo para Todos" on October 20, 2013, the Kirchners have portrayed young Kirchnerist militant groups such as La Cámpora as inheritors of what Perón termed "la juventud maravillosa."[24]

This act of joining generations and fighting for justice is depicted as requiring great sacrifice—even of life itself—as it did in the past, which Cristina Fernández de

[24] http://www.eltrecetv.com.ar/periodismo-para-todos/20-de-octubre-periodismo-para-todos_064642.

Kirchner's following remarks regarding her husband's refusal to abandon these values suggest:

> Para finalizar, yo les prometo a ustedes, mis compañeros y compañeras, y a los 40 millones de argentinos, y a todos los compañeros de la patria grande también—como dijo él—que no iba a dejar las convicciones en la puerta de la Casa de Gobierno y no las dejó, y no solamente no las dejó, sino que por no dejarlas dejó la vida. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 25 October 2011)
>
> Fue su último acto de amor. Lo supe más tarde, cuando me enteré de sus terribles e insoportables dolores. De su sacrificio casi inhumano. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 20 April 2013, Twitter)

These descriptions of Néstor Kirchner's death as an almost inhuman sacrifice realized in order to bring about a more just country cast him in the same light as the "héroes anónimos" of the Kirchners' generation. For Montero, "el ascetismo, la disciplina, la subordinación de lo personal a lo político y un estilo de vida sacrificado" are some of the key characteristics of the ethos of 1970s militancy that are present in Kirchnerist discourse's mythification of militant figures ("Memorias discursivas de los '70," 5). Both militant and Kirchnerist discourse often portray leftist militants as heroes who suffered and sacrificed their very lives for their country: "tanto en la retórica militante como en la kirchnerista el valor de morir (en la primera) o sufrir por la Patria (en ambas) son tópicos recurrentes y característicos" (Montero "Memorias discursivas de los '70," 6). The above citations from Fernández de Kirchner suggest that Néstor Kirchner, who died of a heart attack, can also be included in this group of martyrs. Similarly, lawyer, former convict for his accused role in the murder of his parents, and someone Hebe de Bonafini (leader of

the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) has described as like a son to her, Sergio Schoklender has named Kirchner as "el desaparecido 30.001," not only discursively equating Kirchner and the disappeared, but both Kirchnerist and 1970s leftist militancy, suggesting the objectives and sacrifices of those involved in each to be alike (Reato, "Néstor Kirchner y la alianza").

Additionally, as Montero has argued, Kirchnerist discourse draws significant parallels between itself and 1970s militancy not only in its verbal allusions to a generation that is being resurrected in the present, but in its imitation of a Peronist discursive mode that continually draws attention to its supporters and opponents ("prodestinatarios" and "contradestinatarios," respectively, in Eliseo Verón's terms) ("Puesta en escena," 319). For Montero, Kirchner began his presidency in 2003 with a more inclusive discourse that frequently employed the *nosotros* form of verbs, used to describe "todos los argentinos," but soon after transitioned to a divisive mode resembling Peronist populist discourse. Using an "ethos discursivo militante" that is "marcadamente informal, juvenil, transgresor y beligerante," a Peronist militant ethos comes to dominate Kirchnerist discourse and constitute its "memoria discursiva" ("Puesta en escena," 319).

"diezmada, castigada con dolorosas ausencias"

> Era el 11 de marzo del 73, una generación de argentinos nos incorporábamos a la vida democrática con la fuerza y el deseo de construir un nuevo país. Después nos tocó vivir tantas cosas, nos tocó pasar tantos dolores, nos tocó ver diezmada esa generación de argentinos que trabajaba por una Patria igualitaria, de inclusión, distinta. (Néstor Kirchner, 11 March 2004)

Repeated mentions of the decimating, brutal effects of state terrorism upon the thousands of disappeared persons, their family members, their comrades who survived, and the nation are a second important element of the Kirchnerist narrative. As present in the above citations ("la persecución," "la desaparición de amigos y amigas," "el mayor sistema represivo que le haya tocado vivir a nuestro país," and "el fracaso y la muerte") and the following ones, these narrations condemn the military dictatorship's acts of violence and destruction that, decades later, had not been prosecuted or had been officially pardoned.

Famously on March 24, 2004, the twenty-eighth anniversary of the military coup and the day on which March 24th was first commemorated as the "Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia," Néstor Kirchner apologized on behalf of the State for the crimes committed during that period and the impunity that followed:[25]

> Como Presidente de la Nación Argentina, vengo a pedir perdón de parte del Estado nacional por la vergüenza de haber callado durante veinte años de democracia por tantas atrocidades. Hablemos claro: no es rencor ni odio lo que nos guía y me guía, es justicia y lucha contra la impunidad. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

The lack of justice and of trials of those who committed gross crimes against humanity twenty years after the democratic transition is hard to dispute. Nonetheless, the suggestion that the State had remained silent regarding this past neglects the significant work of the CONADEP, the *Nunca más* report, and the *Juicio a las Juntas* during Raúl Alfonsín's presidency, suggesting Néstor Kirchner to be the first to make any sort of

[25] See Pablo Sirvén's questioning of Kirchner's choice to name the day of the 1976 military coup as a day for honoring human rights and national memory.

progress in human rights battles with respect to this period of state terrorism.[26] Not surprisingly, Alfonsín was offended by this assertion, responding, "Siento dolor porque creo que fue injusto y omitió parte de la historia de la democracia de los argentinos .... Se podrá considerar que se hizo poco o mucho ante tanto horror y dolor. Lo que no puede afirmarse es que durante mi gobierno se haya guardado silencio" ("Alfonsín: 'Estoy dolido'").

The 2006 revision to the prologue of the *Nunca más* report similarly challenges the human rights advances made under Alfonsín's administration, though it should be noted that, in recent years, Fernández de Kirchner has reclaimed now-deceased Alfonsín as a precursor to Kirchnerism's human rights politics, not without criticism.[27] The *Nunca más* revision critiques the original prologue, written by Ernesto Sábato, the CONADEP's chair, for its relating of what has commonly been referred to as the *teoría de los dos demonios*; that is, that both the State and leftist militants are equally to blame for the political violence of the 1970s and early 1980s. Whereas the original 1984 *Nunca más* prologue began, "Durante la década del 70, la Argentina fue convulsionada por un terror que provenía tanto desde la extrema derecha como de la extrema izquierda," the 2006

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[26] For Montero, the differences in the judicial measures of Alfonsín and Kirchner can be summarized in the following way: the measures enacted by Alfonsín are more in line with an institutional form of justice that attempts to be neutral and balanced, while those of the Kirchnerist administration are admittedly and proudly "no neutral," anti-institutional, and politically motivated ("Justicia y decisión en el discurso presidencial," 30).

[27] See, for example, José Cutello's article in *Perfil.com* in which he writes of the posters created by Kirchnerist militants that filled subway stations with an image of Juan Perón, Raúl Alfonsín, and Néstor Kirchner together in order to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the creation of the opening of the memorial site at the former ESMA. Cutello describes this as one example of the "apropiación simbólica que .... irrita a muchos alfonsistas que denuncian un 'uso mezquino' de la figura del ex presidente, sobre todo teniendo en cuenta que mantuvo hasta el 31 de marzo de 2009 duras críticas contra el kirchnerismo."

version states, "Es preciso dejar claramente establecido—porque lo requiere la construcción del futuro sobre bases firmes—que es inaceptable pretender justificar el terrorismo de Estado como una suerte de juego de violencias contrapuestas como si fuera posible buscar una simetría justificatoria."[28] Furthermore, as Reato has written, the new prologue adds hundreds of victims that were killed in the ten years that preceded the military coup in their "combate por la revolución," regardless of whether they were victims of the Triple A, died in shootouts with the police, or were killed by the accidental misfiring of their own explosives (*Operación Primicia*). This correction of the original prologue and the inclusion of militants who were not killed directly by military or paramilitary forces are significant rewritings of history, and they are ones that suggest the Kirchnerist administration to be the first in truly seeking memory, truth, and justice—a disputable assertion when considered in light of the work of the CONADEP.

After apologizing on behalf of the State on the first Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia, Néstor Kirchner narrated this period of state terrorism in the following manner:

> A partir del 24 de marzo de 1976, se aplicó un plan coordinado y sistemático de exterminio y represión generalizados, con un costo humano minuciosamente calculado, que sometió a miles de personas al secuestro, a la tortura y a la muerte y los convirtió en 'ausentes para siempre', 'ausentes para siempre', como cínicamente proclamó el mayor responsable de los crímenes. Otros miles poblaron las cárceles sin causa o con procesos ilegales y muchos miles más encontraron en el exilio la única forma de sobrevivir. Cientos de niños fueron

[28] Available online at http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/investig/articulo/nuncamas/nmas0001.htm.

> arrancados de los brazos de sus madres en cautiverio al nacer y privados de su identidad y de su familia. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

This systematic repression and extermination of thousands of people who were kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared; imprisoned without cause; forced into exile; or kidnapped as infants and deprived of their biological identities is communicated not only to have devastated a past generation, but to continue to haunt the present through the persistence of impunity:

> Dijimos que veníamos a terminar con la impunidad, que queríamos justicia, verdad y memoria, y salieron a decir que por qué removía el pasado. Yo pensaba y pienso que no es el pasado sino que es el presente doliente de 30.000 argentinos que fueron desaparecidos por pensar diferente. (Néstor Kirchner, 11 March 2004)

A focus on impunity with respect to past crimes dominates much of Kirchnerist rhetoric, reinforcing the need for memory, truth, and justice in the present, particularly for the mothers, grandmothers, and children (and their respective human rights organizations) of these "dolorosas ausencias," for whom this need is described as a societal debt:

> Tenemos la obligación desde el Ejecutivo, desde el Parlamento, desde la propia Corte Suprema de Justicia y de los Tribunales, de adoptar y diseñar los instrumentos que, garantizando todos los derechos y garantías que otros argentinos no tuvieron, permitan finalmente enjuiciar y castigar a quienes fueron responsables del mayor genocidio de nuestra historia. Se lo debemos a quienes fueron las víctimas; se lo debemos a sus familiares, a las Abuelas, a las Madres, se

> lo debemos a los sobrevivientes que no pueden seguir estando sometidos a la tortura del relato permanente de la tragedia. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 12 December 2007)
>
> Quiero confesarles algo: si bien nuestro Gobierno en materia de derechos humanos, en materia de castigo, castigo con la ley y la Constitución y los jueces de la Constitución, sobre los genocidas todavía y pese a eso, yo, como argentina, siento con esas mujeres una inmensa deuda. Los argentinos todos, todavía tenemos una inmensa deuda. Porque es cierto que están siendo juzgados, porque es cierto que están en prisión, porque es cierto que están purgando penas, porque es cierto que hay procesos judiciales que se abren todos los días, pero todavía no hemos podido encontrar a sus hijos ni a sus nietos y esa es una deuda que todavía no ha sido saldada por el conjunto de la sociedad ni de los gobiernos. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 25 May 2013)

Perhaps surprisingly, Fernández de Kirchner includes the armed forces in the list of those to whom society owes a termination of impunity, arguing that those who were not, in her husband's terms, "asesinos repudiados por el pueblo argentino," need to be separated from those who were so that a sort of societal healing might begin to take place and all Argentines might be able "to look one another in the face":

> Y se lo debemos también a las Fuerzas Armadas, para que de una vez y para siempre, en vistas del Bicentenario, se pueda separar la paja del trigo y entonces los argentinos podamos todos volver a mirarnos la cara. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 12 December 2007)

As developments were made with the annulment of the *Ley de Obediencia Debida*, the *Ley de Punto Final*, and with the prosecution of many crimes committed during the dictatorship (acts that will be discussed shortly), the Kirchners highlighted the ways in which Argentina had become a global example for human rights advances.[29] Asserting that though the country was once known for its decimating human rights violations, its stances on international human rights law in the present have made it an international model:

> El respeto irrestricto de los derechos humanos constituye hoy un nuevo paradigma nacional. En el pasado hemos sido referenciados en el mundo por su violación, hoy, cuando estamos empeñados en conocer la verdad y castigar a los culpables, queremos también motorizar su defensa a escala planetaria. (Néstor Kirchner, 25 September 2007)
>
> … porque los derechos humanos, de los cuales me enorgullezco de ser Presidenta de un país líder y ejemplo en materia global, pudo rescatar por la fuerza, el coraje y la voluntad de ese hombre, con el acompañamiento de este Parlamento, por la decisión de nuestros más altos tribunales de justicia, precisamente, el fin de la impunidad. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 10 December 2011)

Argentine judge María Servini de Cubría's request that four Franco-era officials accused of human rights abuses (two of whom are still alive today) be extradited and tried for crimes against humanity—crimes that to this day have been protected by Spain's 1977 amnesty law—is one example of how Argentina has understood its leadership role in global human rights affairs.

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[29] See Kathryn Sikkink's "From Pariah State to Global Protagonist" regarding Argentina's transformation in this regard.

These advancements in memory, truth, and justice that have followed a decimating period have played a significant role in making the past decade in Argentina (2003-2013) what Fernández de Kirchner has termed a "década ganada." The phrase was first used in Fernández de Kirchner's speech to Congress on March 1, 2013 and particularly prevalent in her public address to the nation on May 25, 2013 for the celebration of the Día de la Patria and the ten-year anniversary of Néstor Kirchner's inauguration at which over half a million people were present. "Década ganada," sometimes spelled "dékada ganada," has become a popular phrase among supporters and detractors of Kirchnerism, with critics often celebrating an anticipated "fin de ciklo" in 2015.[30] In her speech on May 25, 2013, Fernández de Kirchner addressed her critics, suggesting that the idea of a "década ganada" is difficult for private interests that are negatively impacted by increasing equality and solidarity within the country: "mal que les pese, es una década ganada." In *10K: La década robada*, Jorge Lanata, journalist and founder of the newspaper *Página/12* before it became an essentially pro-administration paper, criticizes Kirchnerism's involvement in a money-laundering scandal, through which Lanata claims they made millions of dollars, as well as earlier signs of problems within the administration that supporters from the Argentine left should not have so easily dismissed or excused.

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[30] This term is prevalent in anti-Kirchnerist journalism and also the title of a book by Fraga Rosendo (*Fin de Ciklo*). See also Mariano Grondona's *El Poskirchnerismo: La política de las nuevas generaciones* that proposes the end of Kirchnerism to hold a historical potential not unlike that which followed the end of Juan Manuel de Rosas's and Juan Domingo Perón's regimes. Grondona expresses hope that what will follow is a type of postkirchnerism, that would not fall simply into antikirchnerism, as he argues to have been the case following the end of Peronism. Instead, this postkirchnerism, Grondona writes, would be parallel in transformative possibility to the nation building processes of such leaders as Juan Bautista Alberdi and Justo José de Urquiza after the end of Rosas's dictatorship.

Though Fernández de Kirchner is careful to stress that the decade has not been won by the government—but by the *pueblo*—, this new phrase is certainly indicative of the ways in which both Kirchners have understood and narrated their administrations' response to the brutalizing effects of the dictatorship and the impunity that followed. Arguing that what preceded them was tragedy and decimation, both Kirchners have sought to construct a narrative that suggests that it is only within their political terms that progress has been made with regard to human rights, with the "década ganada" serving as the newest articulation of that to date.[31]

> Tenemos que ganar otra década más, para poder recuperar los casi 50 años de atraso, de miseria, de malas políticas, de endeudamiento. Podemos decir con orgullo, cada hombre y mujer de este proyecto, que hemos construido la década ganada frente a tanta tragedia. **(**Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 29 March 2013, Twitter[32])

"valores y convicciones a los que no pienso dejar en la puerta de entrada de la Casa Rosada"

The values, principles, and convictions of a decimated generation that need to be resurrected in the present are frequently mentioned in Kirchnerist discourse, though the specifics of these values are often quite nebulous, at times identified as a general commitment to equality and social justice. Luis Gasulla points to the vagueness of these values when arguing that human rights have been co-opted by a divisive political project

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[31] While Kirchnerist human rights politics are often highlighted by those who suggest the past decade to have been a "década ganada," it is important to note that this phrase refers to the broader political projects of both Kirchners, extending beyond criticism of solely memory politics.

[32] See #decadaganada on Twitter, used in thousands of tweets by both those supportive and critical of Kirchnerist politics.

that fiercely defends itself against any type of criticism without identifying any sort of specific objectives of its own: “En los gobiernos kirchneristas, hasta los símbolos de los derechos humanos se sumaron a una guerra contra todo aquel que no conformara su bando, su ‘nosotros’ defendiendo el proyecto sin cuestionamientos. Aunque no está claro de qué hablamos cuando se menciona la palabra ‘proyecto’” (384). Examples of the prevalence of these values and convictions within speeches by both presidents include the following:

> Tenemos la fuerza de aquellos que nos incorporamos a la política porque este país creíamos que se podía cambiar. Tenemos la fuerza y la decisión de aquellos que llegaron a la política, no por un marketing artístico o demás, sino por convicciones, convicciones políticas, ideológicas y doctrinarias de un país distinto. (Néstor Kirchner, 14 May 2003)
>
> Queridas Abuelas, Madres, Hijos: cuando recién veía las manos, cuando cantaban el himno, veía los brazos de mis compañeros, de la generación que creyó y que sigue creyendo en los que quedamos que este país se puede cambiar. Fueron muchas ilusiones, sueños, creímos en serio que se podía construir una Patria diferente. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

The political and ideological convictions of those who believed and dreamed they could change the country—recuperated from “el período de auge de la militancia setentista, evocado como un tiempo de utopías, sueños y compromiso”—are described here as admirable motivations for political involvement, as opposed to the greedy interests of other politicians, and these ideals are said to live on in those that remain of a decimated generation (Montero “Memorias discursivas de los ‘70,” 16).

Both Kirchners emphasize the importance of renewing these ideological battles in the present, repeatedly declaring that they will not leave such convictions behind now that they are presidents:

> Queremos recuperar los valores de la solidaridad y la justicia social que nos permitan cambiar nuestra realidad actual para avanzar hacia la construcción de una sociedad más equilibrada, más madura y más justa. (Néstor Kirchner, 25 May 2003)
>
> Yo quiero decirles a todos ustedes, en honor a los cuarenta millones de argentinos, en honor a todos los compañeros y compañeras vivos o que ya no están y a nuestra propia historia, que no vamos a dejar las convicciones, como nunca lo hicimos y que vamos a seguir trabajando con todos y por todos por una Argentina más justa, más equitativa y más solidaria. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 10 December 2011)

The idea of not abandoning convictions and beliefs or revising them in order to be more pragmatic, particularly financially so, frequently appeared in Néstor Kirchner's speeches, who argued that the ideology of his generation will help—not intervene—in constructing "una Argentina normal" and "un país en serio" (phrases often recycled by detractors to express the discrepancy they perceive between Kirchnerist discourse and practice):

> Tenemos que dejar de sentir vergüenza de las cosas que defendemos, nos quieren hacer sentir a veces que son posturas que deben ser 'revisadas' en nombre de la supuesta racionalidad. ¿Qué es la racionalidad, amigos y amigas, compañeras y compañeros? ¿La racionalidad es bajar la cabeza, acordar cualquier cosa pactando disciplinada y educadamente con determinados intereses, y sumar y sumar

> excluidos, sumar y sumar desocupados, sumar y sumar argentinos que van quedando sin ninguna posibilidad? (Néstor Kirchner, 11 March 2004)

According to the Kirchnerist narrative, this decimated generation's belief in the possibility of a more just and equal society was not unrealistic in the past, nor is it so in the present.

There is a tension, though, in Kirchner's recuperation of 1970s leftist militant values and his support of a nationalized capitalism in order to help rebuild the economy after the 2001 financial crisis, as Javier Waiman explores in his examination of Kirchnerist cultural hegemony. In suggesting that Argentina can be a "país en serio" with "convicciones y valores," the Kirchnerist narrative highlights the need for present-day adoptions of these ideals.[33] An encouragement of present-day militancy that recuperates the ideological struggles of those lost to state terrorism follows what Kirchner describes as a clinging to long-held convictions. In a speech given at the official opening of the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos (ex ESMA) on November 21, 2007, Kirchner suggested that the activism of present-day Kirchnerist militants, who were present there in great numbers with posters, flags, and other signs of support, reminded him of the "héroes anónimos" of his generation, adding "el espíritu de ellos estará pensando: volvimos, estamos, todavía podemos ganar."

As in this speech, the Kirchnerist narrative commonly likens the militancy of the 1970s with that of the present day, homogenizing the diverse ideologies that existed within different militant organizations then and now. It is a discourse that fuses various Peronist, radically right-wing, and leftist revolutionary organizations and simplifies their

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[33] Martín Caparrós also writes of the incongruity between wanting a "país normal" and calling for "un proceso de cambio cuasi revolucionario" (*Argentinismos* 93).

diverging ideologies to a general desire to change the world in order to bring about equality and justice. In an attempt to promote unity and suggest that the "valores y convicciones" of a decimated generation, its survivors, and those who have taken up its causes are non-partisan ones, the language used to discuss these beliefs is a generic one, said to be relevant to the interest of all Argentines:

> Por eso Abuelas, Madres, hijos de detenidos desaparecidos, compañeros y compañeras que no están pero sé que están en cada mano que se levanta aquí y en tantos lugares de la Argentina, esto no puede ser un tira y afloje entre quién peleó más o peleó menos o algunos que hoy quieren volver a la superficie después de estar agachados durante años que no fueron capaces de reivindicar lo que tenían que reivindicar. Yo no vengo en nombre de ningún partido, vengo como compañero y también como Presidente de la Nación y de todos los argentinos. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)
>
> El Presidente, que está sentado a mi izquierda, junto a todos los argentinos cambió en estos cuatro años y medio ese escenario que teníamos aquel 25 de mayo. Lo hizo en nombre de sus convicciones que son las mías y las de muchísimos argentinos que siempre creímos en el país y en sus hombres y en sus mujeres, en el Pueblo y en la Nación. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 12 December 2007)

Furthermore, the ending of impunity for and the remembrance of this decimated generation is described as neither ideological nor political, but as done in the name of "todos los argentinos y también creo en nombre de la condición humana,

independientemente del lugar en que uno haya nacido o al dios que le rece" (Fernández de Kirchner, 24 March 2010). According to Kirchnerist rhetoric, the demand for memory, truth, and justice is said to have roots in all religious traditions and to be a universal value, expanding far beyond the ideology of certain political groups, and the pursuit of these human rights is therefore a moral obligation:

> Yo creo que nosotros tenemos, y cuando hablo de nosotros hablo de todos aquellos que creen en el ejercicio de la memoria, de la verdad y de la justicia y que viene hasta de mandatos bíblicos, ni siquiera nos detenemos en un capítulo político o ideológico. La demanda de justicia perseguirás, de memoria y de verdad, viene de todos los mandatos, de todas las creencias, de todas las religiones y por eso son valores universales. No estamos planteando valores en la Argentina o valores traídos de los pelos aquí, lo que estamos planteando son valores universales, los que nos convierte en un país que mire con dignidad y con orgullo al mundo y que también sea mirado por el mundo con respeto y honor. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 24 March 2010)

Yet, the argument that the convictions of Kirchnerist human rights politics seeking solidarity and justice are non-partisan and non-ideological is at odds with Fernández de Kirchner's frequent drawing of parallels between Kirchnerist and Peronist politics.[34] Graciela Alejandra Inda's examination of "los peronismos" of Kirchnerist rhetoric explores the effective uniting of the fight for social rights (particularly as

[34] These Peronist references within Fernández de Kirchner's speeches mark a shift in Kirchnerist discourse as Néstor Kirchner rarely mentioned Perón (see Caparrós's *Argentinismos* 54).

embodied by Eva Perón) with the fight for human rights (especially as personified by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) in Fernández de Kirchner's discourse. Inda argues that human rights have played a central role in the presidential discursive battle for hegemony, suggesting that Kirchnerist discourse has resignified the fight for memory, truth, and justice as a Peronist militant battle carried out in the present day on behalf of the *pueblo* (217). The militancy of the Kirchners' generation has thereby been recuperated and transformed to include the fight of human rights organizations against impunity, resulting in a broader social project that identifies Evita with the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in what Inda terms "una operación clave" for Kirchnerist politics that revolves around a commitment to certain "valores y convicciones" (226).

Fernández de Kirchner's repeated assertion that her convictions are Peronist ones and that, above all else, she has been a Peronist militant all of her life ("sobre todas las cosas, soy una militante peronista de toda la vida." Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 10 July 2013, Twitter) is problematic given her limited involvement in militancy until recently.[35] Furthermore, her claim that her administration's pursuit of equality and justice is simultaneously universal and in line with Peronist politics—particularly the line of Peronism associated with Evita—is contradictory.

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[35] Other examples of this assertion include the following: "Y fuimos nosotros desde la historia, desde la construcción que hizo el peronismo, en el que siempre he militado, los que volvimos a articular la alianza entre el capital y el trabajo que permitió construir un país más justo para todos los argentinos y todas las argentinas" (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 4 March 2008) and "Como todos ustedes saben el día 17 de noviembre es una fecha muy particular para los hombres y mujeres que militamos toda la vida en el peronismo, es el retorno, luego de 18 años de exilio, el primer retorno de Perón a la Argentina y fue instituido como Día del Militante" (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 29 August 2008) (Inda 203).

> Todas estas cosas que hemos construido y, junto a esto, que constituye sin lugar a dudas el piso de protección social, no de asistencia social, sino de protección social que es por lo que siempre peleó Eva Perón, ese piso de protección social que no es la caridad ni la limosna, sino el derecho a tener jubilación, trabajo y reparación, lo hemos completado además, con el más formidable plan de obras públicas de que se tenga memoria. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 9 February 2010)
>
> Eva es la Argentina. Espero que esta vuelta del pueblo en esta década sea la vuelta definitiva y nadie pueda humillarlo o desaparecerlo. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 30 May 2013, Twitter) [36]

The claim that the "década ganada" has restored Peronist ideals in making politics about social justice and the *pueblo* is similar to the previously mentioned Kirchnerist claim that there is a need to revalue politics, understanding politics as a way of furthering equality rather than neoliberal interests. However, the discursive employment of Peronism gives this argument a more partisan tone. Peronism encompasses many diverse and conflicting political traditions, both leftist and right-wing ones, but it is nonetheless political, divisive, and far from universal. Fernández de Kirchner herself has pointed out these contradicting characteristics, using them as a defense of Kirchnerist politics:

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[36] For more regarding the importance of Evita to Fernández de Kirchner's discourse, see Inda, who demonstrates how the figure of Evita, who appears very frequently within Fernández de Kirchner's speeches, unlike Juan Perón, "es constantemente reconstruida y revisitada, según un modo que no es meramente recordatorio o conmemorativo. La práctica política de Evita es convertida en guía que muestra cuál es la posición política que hoy representa 'sin dobleces' al pueblo argentino" (206).

> … de la derecha nos dicen que somos marxistas, y los de la presunta izquierda nos dicen que somos de derecha. Yo digo que ese es el certificado perfecto de los peronistas. Cuando de la derecha te dicen que sos marxista y cuando de la presunta izquierda revolucionaria te dicen que sos de derecha, pero seguro que sos un peronista consumado hecho y derecho. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 12 March 2012)

In other moments, such as Fernández de Kirchner's synopsis of the twentieth century during her speech on May 25, 2013, which commemorated the "década ganada," the president attempts to reconcile these incongruities. In this speech, Fernández de Kirchner maintains that she brings up Peronism not in order to discuss divisive, partisan politics, but to recognize an undeniable historical movement that forever changed Argentine history for the better. According to this narrative, prior to Eva and Juan Perón's leadership, only exploitation existed for the working class; but, through their efforts, workers gained considerable rights and came to be valued citizens:

> Luego vinieron siglos de desencuentros, avances y retrocesos y también casi una década que cambió la historia en el siglo XX, y no quiero con esto, por favor, que lo vean como un sesgo partidario, es simplemente una carga histórica innegable, un movimiento político, el peronismo que vino a cambiar definitivamente la historia del país. Un hombre y una mujer que les enseñaron a los argentinos que al lado de cada necesidad había un derecho, que les dieron educación, vivienda, vacaciones, aguinaldos, a partir del año 53 convenios colectivos de trabajo que le dieron al trabajador, que incorporaron al trabajador y a la mujer a la vida política

> de los argentinos, que también, porque es innegable, afectaron intereses, porque antes de que llegara el peronismo, había explotación en el país; porque antes de que llegara Juan Domingo Perón y Eva Perón ... solamente había explotación. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 25 May 2013)

This narrative of a couple who transformed the political sphere in their championing of the working class, bringing justice and equality to what was previously devastation due to the governing of private interests, discursively links Peronist and Kirchnerist politics, attempting to suggest the objectives of both movements are much broader than partisan ones, but simultaneously conjuring the divisive nature of each.

Similarly, Fernández de Kirchner's equating of the fierce opposition that she and Néstor Kirchner have faced to that suffered by Eva and Juan Perón suggests a pursuit of memory, truth, and justice that is of a divisive partisan character, making visible the existing tension "entre la justicia como institución neutral e imparcial garantizada por el Estado de Derecho y la voluntad política de la máxima autoridad estatal de aplicar una justicia claramente imparcial, cargada de valores y convicciones particulares que pujan por convertirse en universales" (Montero "Justicia y decisión en el discurso presidencial," 14):

> Creo que es fácil entender también los ataques permanentes que sufrieron primero Néstor como presidente y después esta presidenta; tal vez después de Perón y de Evita, las dos personas más difamadas, atacadas, ultrajadas y descalificadas de toda nuestra historia. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 25 May 2013)

Arguing that opposition to these movements that have sought equality and universal moral values above all else comes from affected interests, rather than political differences, Fernández de Kirchner posits that the convictions and ideals of these leaders are conflictive and partisan only to those who stand to lose from the spreading of equality.

Kirchnerism's likenesses to Peronism can also be found in what Montero describes as its militant ethos that "plantea un antagonismo fundamental en el campo político estableciendo una frontera que excluye radicalmente a los adversarios ... [e] implica necesariamente la emergencia de un significante o una figura hegemónica (i.e., un líder)" ("Puesta en escena," 318). Kirchnerism's discursive relationship to Peronism is not unlike Ernesto Laclau's articulation of populism as something that "never emerges from an absolute outside and advances in such a way that the previous state of affairs dissolves around it, but proceeds by articulating fragmented and dislocated demands around a new core" (177). In the case of the Kirchnerist narrative and populist rhetoric, the fragmented and dislocated demands come in part from the remains of Peronism and the battles of human rights organizations in the midst and wake of Argentina's last military dictatorship, particularly the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, whose relationship to Kirchnerism will be discussed in greater detail shortly. Understanding populism not to be a "fixed constellation but a series of discursive resources which can be put to very different uses" is a useful way of interpreting the seemingly conflictive identification Kirchnerism draws between itself and Peronism (Laclau 176). As populism and "the people" are not fixed entities according to Laclau, neither are the antagonists of the Kirchnerist narrative that have included the *Clarín* media conglomerate, neoliberal

politics, private interests, and public intellectuals that have spoken of Kirchnerism in a critical manner.[37]

Lastly, Kirchnerist discursive mentions of the convictions and ideals of their generation ignore the prevalent use of armed violence by militants, as Hugo Vezzetti has argued in his examination of this narrative in which "la fe miliciana, las prácticas de la muerte como medios habituales de la acción política" have been suppressed in favor of representing "una generación de jóvenes y de ella podían recuperarse los ideales, las expresiones de una solidaridad generosa y el deseo de un mundo mejor .... esa visión pacificada de la militancia que no habría tenido otras armas que sus valores personales" (100). Similarly, Inda writes that one of the crucial differences between the militancy advocated by the Kirchners and that of their generation is the complete absence of a call to arms. Instead, Inda argues, Kirchnerism "reivindica las luchas 'pacíficas y democráticas' de los jóvenes del setenta pero rechaza el uso de las armas" (212). Having no other arms than their ideological commitment to equality, this generation's beliefs in the possibility of a better world and its sacrifices in order to attempt to bring that about are related as admirable acts that might serve as an example for present-day politics.

The reception of Kirchnerist discourse regarding a hopeful generation that was massacred in its attempts at bringing about equality and should be honored in the present through the pursuit of memory, truth, and justice is greatly influenced by Kirchnerism's alliances with media organizations. Beatriz Sarlo writes that just as Juan and Eva Perón

[37] For more regarding the polarizing populist strategies of Kirchnerism, see María Antonia Muñoz and Martín Retamazo. See also Bruno Preatoni regarding how the *Clarín* media conglomerate came to form "el adversario necesario e ideal" for such politics.

understood that a populist politics depended upon their ability to reach the masses and therefore made political use of radio, the Kirchners have recognized the necessity of mass media forms of communication for their political success, including television, newspapers, and new media, such as twitter, blogs, and online journalism. Media organizations that have in part acted as Kirchnerist apparatuses include the newspaper *Página/12*, television's *Canal 7* with programs such as "6, 7, 8," *Canal* 9's "Duro de Domar" and "Televisión Registrada" ("TVR"), and the hundreds of bloggers Sarlo refers to as "los blogueros K" (157).

The relationship between Kirchnerism and the *Clarín* media conglomerate, which was once a powerful and mutually beneficial alliance that turned intensely hostile in 2008 after Fernández de Kirchner's conflicts with agricultural exporters, has brought the political importance of these alliances front and center. The recent controversy surrounding the *Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual* (more commonly referred to as the *Ley de medios*) has further polarized supporters and critics of the political administration with the former loudly supporting it, as demonstrated by the pro-Kirchnerist militant organization La Cámpora's often-repeated slogan "*Clarín* miente" and Hebe de Bonafini's harsh criticism of the Supreme Court for taking years to defend it and threats to enter in the Palace of Justice and reveal unknown, incriminating information about the judges ("Bonafini comenzó").

Given this split between Kirchner and *Clarín*, Kirchnerism has encountered "la necesidad de construir una esfera pública hegemonizada por el gobierno que coincide con el cambio de estrategia publicitaria gubernamental en Canal 7" (Sarlo 150). Less than two days after the Kirchnerist *Frente para la Victoria* party faced significant defeat in the

2013 elections, the Supreme Court announced its decision on this case, ruling the limits on how many radio and television licenses any one company can have constitutional. Those affiliated with Kirchnerism have celebrated the weakening of a media monopoly, and some have even suggested this to be an extension of Kirchnerist human rights politics, likening Héctor Magnetto, CEO of *Grupo Clarín*, to military repressors.

Many others have heavily criticized the ruling, arguing it to be an unconstitutional, corrupt abuse of power by Martín Sabbatella, whom Fernández de Kirchner appointed as director of the *Autoridad Federal de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual* (AFSCA) in October 2012, when the case was well underway. Critics have also argued that the Kirchnerist administration has been purchasing more and more media outlets, asserting that in Buenos Aires it now has direct or indirect control of all television channels except El Trece (Lanata, "Sabatella, entre la impunidad y las mentiras").

In addition to alliances with media organizations that have allowed for the abundant dissemination of Kirchnerist speech acts, the Kirchnerist narrative has been constructed and strengthened by the political administration's annulment of amnesty laws, trials of crimes committed during the military dictatorship, alliances with human rights organizations, and financial and political support offered to memorial spaces. I offer here a brief overview of these undertakings and relationships that have played a crucial role in the establishment of the Kirchnerist narrative.

Kirchnerism's Pursuit of Justice

> El estado argentino, en sus tres poderes viene tomando decisiones en contra de la impunidad preservando la memoria, la verdad, la justicia y han comenzado las

> condenas a los culpables de las graves violaciones a los derechos humanos …. El respeto irrestricto de los derechos humanos constituye hoy un nuevo paradigma nacional. (Néstor Kirchner, 25 September 2007)
>
> Lo dijimos cuando se dictaron en la Plaza, lo reiteramos hoy: ni el punto final ni la obediencia debida ni los indultos fueron los caminos adecuados para alcanzar la verdad e imponer la justicia. Sólo han sido enormes heridas y frustraciones cuidadosamente envueltas en las formas pero carentes de contenido ético …. Hemos acompañado la anulación de las leyes de punto final y obediencia debida en la certeza de que ése era el camino institucionalmente adecuado para desandar el sendero de la impunidad al que nos condujeron y al que nos quisieron dejar atrapados. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

Legal proceedings and prosecutions have been crucial to the Kirchnerist narrative's conception of justice for the decimated militant victims of the past. Soon after assuming office in 2003, Néstor Kirchner set out to form a new Supreme Court with the establishment of an executive order (*Decreto 222/03*), which resulted in justices appointed under Menem resigning or being removed. Kirchner then appointed new justices, including Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni, who has avidly supported Kirchnerist human rights politics. With this new Supreme Court in place, both the 1986 *Ley de Punto Final*, which prohibited the prosecution of any crimes committed during the military dictatorship beyond the 1985 *Juicio a las Juntas*, and the 1987 *Ley de Obediencia Debida*, which stated that all officers and subordinates below those commanders tried in the *Juicio a las Juntas* were only acting under orders and could therefore not be tried for

acts of violence, were determined unconstitutional and annulled.[38] Likewise, Menem's pardoning of the commanders tried in the *Juicio a las Juntas* was invalidated.

Following this termination of amnesty, many trials against those who committed crimes against humanity during the military dictatorship have taken place throughout the Kirchners' presidencies. As of January 2015, there have been 134 trials during the Kirchners' presidencies with 142 additional cases that have been elevated to trial and attorneys having recommended an additional 38 cases also be tried. In the trials that have taken place, 955 individuals have been processed with 554 of them having been convicted of crimes against humanity ("Informe de la Procuraduría"). Among more recent developments in these trials are the fifty-year and fifteen-year prison sentences former generals Jorge Rafael Videla and Reynaldo Bignone respectively received in July 2012 for overseeing the systematic theft of babies from political prisoners; the life-sentences Bignone, ex-commander Santiago Riveros, and repressors Luis Sadi Pepa, Eduardo Oscar Corrado, and Carlos Tomás Macedera received in March 2013 for gross crimes against humanity committed at the Campo de Mayo detention and torture center; and the trials that began in 2012 against sixty-eight defendants for their alleged roles in the *vuelos de la muerte* practices against 789 victims.

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[38] As Ana Laura Pauchulo has demonstrated, the process of annulling these amnesty laws first began in 2001 when Federal Judge Gabriel Cavallo revoked them as unconstitutional. In 2003, with President Kirchner's approval, the lower house of Deputies and the Senate voted to abolish them, but it was not until 2005 that the laws were officially determined to be unconstitutional due to dispute regarding whether these amnesty laws could be overturned. Ultimately, it was a change in the Argentine Constitution brought about by Menem in 1994 in order to increase "free-trade" across international borders that granted certain international human rights norms constitutional standing within Argentina. This alteration of the Constitution allowed the amnesty laws of the 1980s and the presidential pardons granted by Menem to be considered unconstitutional by international law standards (Pauchulo 39).

As previously argued, the Kirchners have repeatedly pointed to Argentina's transformation from a country that was once known for its human rights abuses to one that is lauded for its progress in ending impunity and punishing previously protected perpetrators. Fernández de Kirchner's following remarks demonstrate these new understandings and practices of justice to be central to Kirchnerist politics and conceptions of human rights:

> Yo espero que en estos cuatro años de mi mandato, estos juicios que han demorado más de treinta años en ser iniciados, puedan ser terminados. Tenemos la obligación desde el Ejecutivo, desde el Parlamento, desde la propia Corte Suprema de Justicia y de los Tribunales, de adoptar y diseñar los instrumentos que, garantizando todos los derechos y garantías que otros argentinos no tuvieron, permitan finalmente enjuiciar y castigar a quienes fueron responsables del mayor genocidio de nuestra historia. Se lo debemos a quienes fueron las víctimas; se lo debemos a sus familiares, a las Abuelas, a las Madres, se lo debemos a los sobrevivientes que no pueden seguir estando sometidos a la tortura del relato permanente de la tragedia. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 10 December 2007)
>
> Y yo decía, tengo acá una frase del discurso que pronunciara con motivo de la asunción en el 2007 que, si me permiten, lo voy a leer textualmente, referido, precisamente, a los juicios de derechos humanos: "Yo espero que … estos juicios que han demorado más de treinta años en ser iniciados, puedan ser terminados". Si bien se registra un gran avance en los mismos, lo único que sueño y lo único que le pido a la Justicia de mi país, es que el próximo presidente que tenga que prestar juramento el 10 de diciembre del 2015, no tenga que volver a pronunciar

> esta frase y hayamos dado vuelta definitivamente una página tan trágica de nuestra historia. (Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 10 December 2011)

For the Kirchnerist narrative, the ending of impunity through the prosecution of crimes against humanity brings about a sort of healing that allows all Argentines to be able to move forward, turning the final page of a tragic chapter of history and beginning a new one. This laying to rest of Argentina's recent violent past calls to mind ex-President Menem's presumed attempts at seeking reconciliation for the country in his pardoning of military commanders and in his suggestion that more acts of memory, truth, and justice would only further divide the country. Yet, the means of achieving this resolution have been entirely different, with juridical proceedings playing an essential part of Kirchnerist human rights politics, which contends that the country cannot move forward until the debts owed to the disappeared and their survivors are paid fully.

Responses to these trials from those involved in human rights have varied widely, as Francesca Lessa has demonstrated. Those somewhat critical of the trials due to questions regarding their effectiveness include Alfonsín; the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS); and Judge Andrés José D'Alessio, who, as a judge of the Federal Criminal Appeal Court, served in the *Juicio a las Juntas*, later becoming Attorney General (1987-1989), but resigning due to political conflicts with Menem's administration. Though Alfonsín commented that he was in favor of the trials, he pointed to the importance of following the constitution, rather than a partisan conception of justice, and the difficulty of collecting information three decades later (Lessa 75). D'Alessio was more critical, claiming that the government was intentionally taking its time with the trials for its own personal benefit, and arguing that the trials have been

‘“politicized to such an extent that the government is using them politically,’” serving as a form of “‘historical revenge’” (Lessa 75).

The CELS’s 2012 *Derechos humanos en Argentina* report presents a primarily favorable review of the progress that has been made in the last ten years with the annulment of amnesty laws and trials, but it also highlights the challenges that the trials continue to face and areas in need of improvement. The report begins its discussion by asserting the CELS’s protagonism in the beginning of these endeavors in 2001 (prior to Kirchner’s presidency) when the amnesty laws were first declared unconstitutional in the “Simón” case presided over by Judge Gabriel Cavallo and propelled by the CELS and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. After reviewing what it describes positively as an undeniable consolidation of the judicial process for the trial of human rights crimes committed during the military dictatorship, the report identifies shortcomings of the trials, which include the long time lapses (often years) between the issuing and confirmation of sentences, the lack of standardization between jurisdictions that allows individual judges to design investigations in accordance with their own personal criteria, a shortage of courtrooms in which to hold the hearings, a lack of protocol and protection for those providing testimony—particularly after the disappearance of Jorge Julio López in 2006—, and the exclusion of sexual violence as a crime against humanity.[39]

Graciela Fernández Meijide, mother of a disappeared son, long time human rights activist, and commissioned CONADEP member, has also criticized these trials,

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[39] López, the main witness in the trial of Miguel Etchecolatz, the former Director of Investigations of the Buenos Aires Province Police, disappeared two days before the sentence against Etchecolatz and has yet to re-appear, with general consensus being that “López’s disappearance was an orchestrated warning to those who were considering giving evidence in other such trials” (Bell and Di Paolantonio 151).

suggesting that many victims' relatives (herself included) would prefer information regarding those they have lost over more trials. Moreover, Fernández Meijide has argued that the implementation of trials against perpetrators will only further discourage the military from sharing information, advocating instead for a plea bargain system that would lessen criminal sentences in exchange for information regarding the location of bodies, stolen children, and documents (Lessa 75-76). The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo have also criticized the terribly limited information the military has provided in these trials, though they are firm supporters of the trials themselves, as are the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. The support of these two organizations is not surprising, given their intimate relationship with the Kirchners' administrations, which will be discussed shortly.

H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos e hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) has eagerly applauded present-day trials, continually providing up-to-date information about them through their social media outlets and supporting the government's advances in this domain. To a certain extent, the trials have taken up the work of H.I.J.O.S., legally bringing "¡juicio y castigo!" (the organization's motto) to those responsible for human rights violations, as Ana Laura Pauchulo has examined. Famous for their *escraches*—"acts of public shaming [that] constitute a form of guerrilla performance" (Taylor 2003; 151) against those responsible for detaining, torturing, and disappearing the parents of their generation—, H.I.J.O.S. have been in the practice of carrying out what Pauchulo describes as a "symbolic trial and act of punishment" since 1995 (209).

Yet despite the common goal of H.I.J.O.S. and the Kirchnerist narrative in punishing those who tortured and murdered thousands of Argentine citizens, it is

important also to recognize their differences. As Pauchulo explains, the *escraches* staged by H.I.J.O.S. serve not only to "point out a lack of trial and punishment of those who kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared during the dictatorship"—a lack that is now being dealt with legally—, but also to identify "the need for 'social condemnation'—for the need for civil society (in addition to the State) to also denounce the *genocidas* and the *genocidio*" (209). In other words, though the State is now responding to H.I.J.O.S.'s cries for judgment and punishment on a juridical level, their organization's work should not be considered limited to this objective. Instead, an understanding of how its "social condemnation" worked to forge "a new community based on a commitment to remember the dictatorship" and recognize its effects on all of society—not just those tortured or their immediate family members—is important in comprehending the symbolic trials of H.I.J.O.S. and present-day trials (Pauchulo 209).

Becoming Sons and Daughters of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo: Surprising and Powerful Alliances

> En los momentos terribles de la noche dictatorial, fueron mujeres y hombres, pero sobre todo mujeres, mujeres, las que se organizaron para enfrentar a la barbarie, Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Esta casa y esta institución del pueblo las recibe con los brazos y el corazón abiertos, reconociéndolas su tremendo valor. Ese puñado de mujeres sin más poder que su dolor, su amor y su coraje, enseñaron el camino de la lucha para reconstruir un orden democrático y por conseguir una cuota de justicia y de verdad. Ellas fueron un maravilloso ejemplo

> de la resistencia frente a la barbarie que trató de suplir la lamentable defección de muchos otros. (Néstor Kirchner, 24 March 2004)

Also fundamental to Kirchnerist human rights politics is its alliances with human rights organizations. The reopening of trials has played an important part in the facilitation of these relationships, particularly with two of the most emblematic human rights organizations: the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, as formerly pro-Kirchnerist journalist Ernesto Tenembaum has suggested, writing that the "toma de posición" represented by Néstor Kirchner's reopening of trials "le permitió generar una especial relación con las Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, cuyos pañuelos blancos decorarían, de ahora en más, todos los actos oficiales" (55).[40] This alliance has been pivotal and beneficial for all three parties: "tanto objetiva como subjetivamente fue un acto fundador, donde jugaron un papel los afectos, las convicciones demoradas, la imaginación, viejas experiencias sobre las que se habían acumulado los años y, sobre todo, la certeza de que la iniciativa era portadora de muchos bienes y pocas desventajas" (Sarlo 189).

Given the present-day loyalty between the Kirchners and the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, it is difficult to imagine that this relationship only began once Néstor Kirchner became president. As several journalists and scholars have highlighted, Néstor Kirchner did not reach out to Hebe de Bonafini or Estela de Carlotto, presidents, respectively, of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, or involve himself with human rights organizations while he was Governor of Santa Cruz (1991-2003) or at

[40] Despite Tenembaum's move from supporting to criticizing Kirchnerism, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, *Palabras más, palabras menos*, the political television program he and Marcelo Zlotogwiazda co-hosted from 2008 to 2014, was cut by *Clarín*, allegedly for not taking strong enough stances against the administration.

another point prior to his presidency.[41] As these critics argue, the presidential alliances with the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo have been crucial to making the fight for human rights for victims of the dictatorial past central to their presidencies, which has obfuscated their lack of involvement in such issues prior to 2003 and taken attention away from the continuation in the present of many of the neoliberal economic practices of previous decades.[42] For Adriana of the Ex-Desaparecidos, interviewed by Ari Gandsman, this discursively pro-human rights administration that has done little to change economic policies lacks coherence: '"What is curious in the current situation is that Kirchner has taken objective steps towards ending impunity but nevertheless the economic plan continues being the same. That a government should be so contradictory is not something we expected'" (Gandsman 417).

The recounting of the beginning of the relationship between Néstor Kirchner and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo by José Pablo Feinmann (often referred to as "el filósofo del kirchnerismo") in *El Flaco* reinforces this description of it as a strategic alliance, rather than a lifelong identification with human rights on the part of the president. In this text, Feinmann records the following dialogue he and the president shared after Kirchner had informed him that he would be speaking at the United Nations and asked Feinmann what he would say about the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo:

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[41] See, for example, Luis Gasulla, Beatriz Sarlo (*La audacia y el cálculo*), and Enrique Andriotti Romanin.

[42] Beatriz Sarlo argues that this pact has allowed Kirchnerism to condense history symbolically: "si nadie es comparable con las Madres, Kirchner que no hizo nada durante toda la dictadura no tiene nada que reprocharse y, sobre todo, nadie puede reprocharle su inacción. Además se fortalece públicamente, en nombre de la República, el pacto del gobierno con las organizaciones de derechos humanos. Nótese bien: el pacto político es con las organizaciones y ellas son el soporte y el contenido de la imagen con la que se condensa la historia" (*La audacia y el cálculo*, 186).

> ‘Todo. Todo lo mejor que me saliera y que me saliera del corazón. Es lo más grande que dio este país. Es lo que frenó las venganzas’.
>
> ‘Sí, lo que frenó las venganzas. Ellos masacraron treinta mil y nadie les tocó un pelo. Las Madres y las Abuelas piden justicia. Es la mayor apuesta a la paz y a la vida que se puede hacer. ¿Sabés que voy a largar? Que somos sus hijos. Que somos hijos de las Madres y las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo’.
>
> ‘Muy bien. Adhiero. Hace tiempo que pienso en una bandera nueva para este país’. (Feinmann 80-81)

It is not only the Kirchners’ embracing of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo that is surprising, but these organizations’ decision to align themselves with a political party and, at least by association, with one another, given their previous opposition to political institutions and the significant ideological and personal differences between the two groups. Since the dictatorial period, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have symbolically embodied the defense of human rights in Argentina domestically and globally. Though they are certainly the most well-known human rights organization in Argentina, as their leader, Hebe de Bonafini, is perhaps the country’s most recognizable human rights activist, many other human rights organizations have intentionally distanced themselves from the organization and Bonafini due to their often controversial and radical stances.[43] Two particular organizations that have done so are the Madres de

[43] One of Bonafini’s most widely known controversial acts was to celebrate the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, stating, “Me puse contenta de que, alguna vez, la barrera del mundo, esa barrera inmunda, llena de comida, esa barrera de oro, de riquezas, les cayera encima” (“Hebe de Bonafini y sus 10 exabruptos más

Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Primary reasons for the split in the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in 1986, resulting in the Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo (the much larger organization headed by Bonafini, referred to here simply as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo) and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, included Bonafini's authoritarian leadership style and growing extremism, which, among other sources of conflict, prohibited members from supporting the exhumations of mass graves, the genetic identification of the disappeared, and accepting reparations from the State for those lost. For Bonafini and, therefore, for the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, anything less than "aparición con vida" was "blood money" and a "prostitution" of the memory of their children (Gandsman 369). The genetic data bank formed by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in order to match family members with babies of the disappeared that were kidnapped and illegally adopted is therefore off limits to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, though Gandsman's research indicates some members to have secretly submitted genetic samples.

Central to the differences between the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo is their politics. While the Madres are known for their radical stances and, until Kirchner, refusing to sit down with politicians—Argentine or otherwise—that do not share a commitment to their children's revolutionary politics that they have adopted, the Abuelas are a more moderate organization. Due to the emphasis of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo on matching the disappeared's stolen children with family members and their tendency to avoid divisive partisan politics, they have been able to receive more widespread financial and political support, but not without provoking the criticism of the Madres de Plaza de

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recordados"). For Bonafini, this attack on Wall Street was an attack on global capitalist forces and should therefore be applauded.

Mayo. Journalist for the pro-administration newspaper *Página/12*, director of the CELS, and former Montonero Horacio Verbitsky's argument in 2002 that Bonafini and her organization had marginalized themselves from the vast majority of those involved in human rights efforts and their significant advances points to this repudiation of political institutions on the part of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. After listing the progress made by the CONADEP, the CELS, the Supreme Court, and other human rights organizations in pursuing memory, truth, and justice for those victimized by the dictatorship, Verbitsky writes, "Para la señora de Bonafini nada de esto vale nada, no es revolucionario como Saddam, Milosevic, las FARC o la ETA" ("Verdad o consecuencia").

Though the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo did not want to associate themselves with one another and had little in common politically, the emergence of a government that has made human rights politics central to its discourse and practice has brought them under the same partisan umbrella. Gasulla explains that, in spite of the eternal differences between Carlotto and Bonafini, "ambas defienden a ultranza al oficialismo como nunca lo hicieron con ningún gobierno desde el regreso de la democracia. Estela me corrige: 'No es que los defendamos, ellos son como nuestros hijos. Es así. Kirchner fue una sorpresa'" (298-99).

The alliance of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo with the Kirchnerist administration is not entirely surprising, given the organization's history of meeting with many different leaders in order to promote their cause and their centrist politics that is similar to that of the Kirchners, though their decision to commit to a particular political party is unexpected. Hebe de Bonafini's adoption of Kirchner as one of her own sons, on the other hand, is rather astonishing, leading Romanin to ask, "¿Cómo es posible que la

Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, que históricamente se caracterizó por confrontar con el Estado y con los distintos gobiernos de Argentina, hoy protagonice un proceso de institucionalización y acompañamiento al gobierno nacional?" (39). In posing this question and in the response that follows, Romanin begins to fill what he identifies as a gap in current scholarship that has analyzed the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in depth but focused primarily on the earlier years of the organization, not addressing the (still in progress) significant shifts of the organization during the past decade: "La evidencia empírica reciente acerca de Las Madres sugiere que su adhesión al proyecto inaugurado por Néstor Kirchner en 2003 expresa cambios profundos que aun no han sido analizados" (40).[44]

One of the most emblematic moments in this shifting relationship was Bonafini's announcement on January 25, 2006 that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo would be holding their last "Marcha de la Resistencia" that day, stating that the *rondas* were no longer necessary because '"el enemigo ya no está en la Casa Rosada como en la dictadura, como en los anteriores presidentes, y a este gobierno ya no hay que resistirle sino acompañarlo'" (Meyer). The Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo expressed surprise at this decision with which they disagreed and about which they said they were not consulted. Carlotto responded by stating that Bonafini's choice not to participate could be respected, but it was not shared by the Abuelas, for

[44] Romanin provides a detailed bibliography of this scholarship that includes the following studies: examinations of the moral origins of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo that served as a vital response to the dictatorship by Jean Bousqet (1984) and Héctor Leis (1989), the political uses of memory and pain by Jennifer Schirmer (1994) and Ignacio Dobles Oropeza (2009), the widening and transformation of its objectives by Elizabeth Borland (2006), its discursive corpus by Martin D'Alessandro (1998), and its use of maternity as a political strategy by Marysa Navarro (1989) and Judith Filc (1997) (40).

whom the "Marcha" '"no es una marcha contra el Gobierno y aunque se va en sentido positivo es necesario seguir pidiendo: no se sabe dónde están 30 mil desaparecidos, no están en la cárcel todos los asesinos y no hemos encontrado aún 500 chicos robados'" ("La Asociación de Madres comienza su última Marcha de la Resistencia"). These two positions with regards to the *rondas* were the inverse of what might have been expected prior to the Kirchnerist decade given the more radical, anti-institutional politics of the Madres and the more moderate, reformist position of the Abuelas.

Public responses to the alliances between Kirchnerist politics and the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo have varied, ranging from a general support of the State making these issues a central part of its project to suspicion and criticism of the increasing partisan politicization of human rights causes. As Sarlo writes, for the majority of the population, nobody is comparable with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and their newly established relationship with the President is one to be celebrated. There is also a certain pressure among more "progressive," intellectual sectors of society to support this alliance or be deemed right-wing, military sympathizers: "quien no coincida con esta versión de la historia representa a *Clarín*, es amigo de Héctor Magnetto o simpatiza con los militares. El escudo ético de estos dos símbolos de la lucha por los derechos humanos posibilitó la falta de críticas al Gobierno" (Gasulla 360-61).

Among those who do question present-day human rights politics are those who describe the alliances between human rights organizations and the government as a "negocio" or an "escudo ético" that is based less on an authentic identification than on the mutual benefits that result from the relationship, which will be further examined in Chapter 2. For Marcelo Parilli, Bonafini and Carlotto were perfectly aware of Kirchner's

prior lack of human rights activism and should therefore know '"que se adueñaron de una bandera para tapar las violaciones a los derechos humanos del presente,'" suggesting that Kirchnerist present-day attempts at promoting human rights only extend to the disappeared and their family members, rather than including present-day human rights violations (Gasulla 299). Nora Cortiñas, co-founder of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and, later, of the Línea Fundadora branch, has made the following statement, '"Algún día llegará la justicia social de los desaparecidos que nada tiene que ver con el partidismo y el negocio de hoy'" (qtd. in Gasulla 298). Bonafini has faced fierce criticism by some of her former allies, who "claim her to be a casualty of Kirchner's bourgeois takeover," having been "seduced" and "co-opted" by Kirchner who now "spits on the blood of the disappeared" through her new political alliance (Gandsman 421).

The scene caused by a protest attacking Kirchner's government carried out by 365 different human rights and leftist political organizations on March 24, 2006 further demonstrates the strong objections of many involved in human rights to these alliances. On this occasion, representatives from these groups voiced their objection to many of the government's stances, including paying off external debt and the repression and even criminalization of political opposition. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo had declined to participate in this event; and though the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo were a part of it, they expressed shock at the reading of these criticisms from a document they claimed never to have seen or signed. Carlotto spoke out against the event and organizers, accusing them of taking advantage of this highly significant date, while Cortiñas of the Madres Línea Fundadora dissociated herself both from the Abuelas and those who had organized the

protest, asserting that the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora did not want to be co-opted by either the government or any leftist party (Gandsman 426-27).

Gasulla considers highly questionable the immense amount of money given by the State to the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, which disproportionately exceeds the funds given to other organizations (in 2007, for example, 65% of the subsidies granted by the *Secretaría General* went to these two organizations alone, with the Madres receiving 43% of all subsidies), calling attention to what he describes as a very corrupt pact between the government and these two organizations (305). For Gasulla, the laundering of millions of government pesos designated for the *Sueños Compartidos* housing project run by Sergio Schoklender would not have been possible without the tacit complicity or willful ignorance on behalf of Bonafini, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and government officials responsible for distributing those funds. Arguing this case to be emblematic of the corruption involved in the pact between the Madres and Kirchnerism, Gasulla writes, "Un grupo de oportunistas vinculados con Bonafini y un Gobierno que necesitaba contener simbólica y económicamente a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo posibilitaron que, en los últimos años, la Fundación se transformara en una megaempresa multiuso y en una jugosa caja política" (240).

Accusations of corruption in how Kirchnerist administrations have demonstrated a bias in offering government positions to those involved in human rights and Kirchnerist militant organizations (La Cámpora, in particular) and overpaying these young individuals have also been rampant. There is a somewhat common perception that many Kirchnerist militants share little with 1970s leftist militants and are instead overindulged, immature youth who blindly support and fiercely defend the government against all

opponents—*Clarín* in particular—in exchange for employment, inflated salaries, and other perks, including smart phones and chartered flights to watch Argentina compete in international football competitions.[45] Though there is not space here to delve into this topic in length, it is worth briefly noting the recent Juan Cabandié scandal in which this ESMA-born congressman was videotaped challenging a young police officer, Belén Mosquera, when she required him to show her his insurance documents. In the video that Cabandié claims has been doctored, he is seen arguing with Mosquera, yelling, "yo soy más guapo que vos … porque yo me banqué la dictadura," and asserting that he is a child of the disappeared and should not have to show her the requested documents, "porque yo soy hijo de desaparecidos, porque yo pongo huevo. Porque yo tengo que estar donde tengo que estar bancando a los hijos de puta que quieren arruinar este país" ("Yo me banqué la dictadura"). In the video clips that circulated widely in online and televised news, Cabandié is next seen and heard calling a Martín (assumed to be Martín Insaurralde), asking him to apply a "correctivo" to Mosquera, who was fired soon after the event.

This video was released a few months later in October 2013, just before elections, and news coverage of the incident erupted. Among the many critics of Cabandié were Victoria Donda and Matías Reggiardo Tolosa, fellow *nietos recuperados*. Both publicly condemned the actions of Cabandié and his mistaken belief that being born in a clandestine detention center and illegally adopted granted him a special moral code.[46] In

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[45] As Laura Di Marco writes, "Clarín miente" is an "inconfundible sello camporista … como un mantra que forma parte de la batalla cultural de la juventud del oficialismo" (44).

[46] See "Victoria Donda, sobre Juan Cabandié: 'El ser hijo de desaparecidos no te da una moral especial'" in *La Nación* on October 14, 2013.

addition to expressing his disgust at Cabandié's actions, Tolosa wrote the following regarding Cabandié's lack of political qualifications:

> Luego decís "Estoy adonde tengo que estar" y sabes que Juan? no estoy de acuerdo, no tenes una carrera política propia y generada en base al mérito y el esfuerzo, lamento informarte Juan que no has hecho una acumulación de mérito suficiente como para llegar al congreso sin otro argumento que sea el mero hecho de ser hijo de desaparecidos …. ser parte de esa elite de Youppies llamada pomposamente La Campora que administra fraudulentamente una compañía aérea cuyo gerente no presenta un solo balance hace 4 años, y que se resiste a declararla empresa pública para no ser controlado por la oposición y por eso crees que hacer zarpar un vuelo exclusivo con militantes en 2009 solo para ver un partido de eliminatorias es algo normal, un privilegio más que te corresponde [*sic*].[47] [48]

Tolosa's criticism of Cabandié and La Cámpora more broadly echoes that of many who believe militants and human rights activists aligned with Kirchnerism often not to be genuinely dedicated to or adequately qualified for their jobs, but individuals whose

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[47] See the lengthy letter written by Tolosa that was published in *La Nación* on October 15, 2013.

[48] The reactions from Donda, Tolosa, and others regarding Cabandié's attempted abuse of his identity as a *nieto recuperado* are reminiscent of the debates between Remo Carlotto and Horacio Verbitsky in 2005. After a fire in a prison in Magdalena (in the Buenos Aires Province) killed thirty three inmates and Carlotto's primary response as Secretary of Human Rights for the Province was to offer psychological support to victims, Verbitsky criticized Carlotto's lack of concern for human rights in the present, rather unclearly equating his leadership in this situation with that of the military dictatorship. Carlotto's response to this attack included a mention of the persecution his family faced during the dictatorship as a form of defense, which led Verbitsky to accuse Carlotto of using this experience as an excuse for focusing his work as Secretary of Human Rights on violations of rights during the dictatorship and not the present ("Pasado y presente"). This criticism was part of a wider frustration on Verbitsky's part with the favor shown to Estela de Carlotto and her family members by the Kirchnerist administration (Gandsman 429-430).

unquestioning support of the Kirchnerist narrative has granted them much power. Contrasting himself with the neoliberal administrations of the 1990s at his presidential inauguration, Néstor Kirchner famously stated, "No he pedido ni solicitaré cheques en blanco," but perhaps the political and moral capital gained from alliances with human rights organizations could be argued to serve as its own type of "cheque en blanco" (Néstor Kirchner, 25 May 2003).

For Jelin, the political capital given to the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo by the Kirchners has paradoxically resulted in a more exclusive form of collective memory that obligates those desiring to participate to be directly related to a victim or to have been active in 1970s political militancy ("Víctimas, familiares y ciudadanos/as"). Jelin argues that this non-inclusive form of remembrance runs two significant risks. The first is that memories not particular to the organizations that have received Kirchnerist support will be forgotten. The second is that memory, in light of present-day human rights politics, will become "el vacío constitucional que convierte a las memorias en memorias literales de propiedad intransferible e incompatible," though Jelin hopes that those desiring to participate in acts of remembrance will be able to break the exclusivities and particularisms that plague present-day articulations of memory in order to create more inclusive acts of remembrance ("Víctimas, familiares y ciudadanos/as," 59).[49]

Like the prevalence of the pursuit of memory, truth, and justice in Kirchnerist discourse, the annulment of amnesty laws, and trials against those who committed crimes against humanity during the dictatorship, alliances with the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza

[49] Similarly, Ari Gandsman examines the special moral capital granted to parents after losing a child—particularly in the case of the Madres and Abuelas—that "gives their demands added legitimacy" (503).

de Mayo have been crucial to the construction of the Kirchnerist narrative. As argued here, these alliances were surprising given the incongruent politics of the parties involved and the organizations' previous resistance to align themselves with Argentine political institutions. Criticism of these alliances has focused primarily on the pacts made between the State and the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo that are agued to have resulted in a weaker commitment to human rights causes on behalf of the organizations and a strengthened political narrative for the Kirchners that diverts attention away from less popularly supported political practices and emphasis on human rights violations in the present. The argument that the Kirchners have co-opted human rights causes and organizations for political gain will be further explored in the second chapter.

From Spaces of Terror to Sites of Memory

> Yo estoy extremadamente emocionado, pero les quiero decir a las Abuelas, a las Madres, a los H.I.J.O.S. que cumplimos con la palabra empeñada. Está la ESMA, ha sido recuperada, la ESMA está en manos de quienes tiene que estar. Esto va a ser una memoria viva para el mundo, para Latinoamérica y para todos los argentinos. (Néstor Kirchner, 20 November 2007)

On the first "Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia" (March 24, 2004), after ordering the portraits of Generals Videla and Bignone to be removed from the Colegio Militar and famously apologizing on behalf of the State for the crimes of the dictatorship and the silence that followed, Néstor Kirchner officially announced the plans his administration had to recuperate the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) in order to turn it into a memory museum. This former naval academy served as the nation's

largest detention and torture center during the military dictatorship where an estimated five thousand Argentines were disappeared. Ex-president Menem had announced in 1998 that the space would be evacuated and all of the buildings would be destroyed so that a green space could be created there as a monument to reconciliation; but this decree received severe criticism and, ultimately, a Supreme Court ruling this measure to be unconstitutional (Persino 63). Though not unanimously so, Kirchner's plans for the museum were much better received than his predecessor's.

The Kirchners have since been heavily involved in the recuperation of the former detention and torture center, which officially opened as the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA in 2008, soon after both Kirchners spoke there on November 20, 2007, announcing that the space had been cleared entirely by the military and was now in the hands of those committed to human rights activism. This memory space includes the offices of several important human rights organizations; the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti, a cultural center that includes several components: exhibitions of visual art and photography, a space for theatrical and musical performances, a movie theater, a library and research center, and an educational program; and the recently-opened Espacio Cultural Nuestros Hijos, founded and directed by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, housing visual art exhibits, film showings, writing exhibits and workshops, music and music therapy courses, and theater workshops and performances. The site also offers visitors regular guided tours, particularly of the Casino de Oficiales where those detained were kept and tortured. Though many other memorial sites have been established or further developed in recent years (including Ex-El Olimpo, Ex-Club Atlético, Ex-La Perla and the Parque de la Memoria-Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de

Estado), thanks in part to the financial and political support of the Kirchners' administrations, the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA is unquestionably the memorial site that has received the most assistance and support from the State and has therefore also been subject to the most controversy.

Silvia Tandeciarz has argued that, "despite the tensions evident in these struggles to define the past, the significance of the ESMA's takeover cannot be overstated. It represents a changing of the guard, a shift from a government of complicity to one in which the once-silenced victims occupy center stage" (166). Tandeciarz recognizes that there are questions and debates regarding how the government should go about memorializing the dictatorial past, but she considers the fact that it is attempting to do so far more significant, believing that the "nation's promise, a promise expressed in the struggles for social justice violently repressed nearly three decades ago" is finally being recuperated (166).

Though many cultural critics would agree that the government's recuperation of this space and its human rights politics more broadly are positive improvements in comparison to the politics of "reconciliation" under Menem, others are more critical than Tandeciarz surrounding the partisan politics involved in the space. Several speeches took place on March 24, 2004, when Néstor Kirchner first announced his plan to recuperate the former ESMA as a memorial site. These include Kirchner's speech that has been discussed in fragments in the early part of this chapter, the reading of a poem written by a disappeared woman while she was detained at ESMA, and the speech made by Juan Cabandié, who had just recovered his biological identity weeks before the event and testified, "En este lugar le robaron la vida a mi mamá, ella aún está desaparecida" ("24 de

marzo de 2004"). On the one hand, these commemorations made perfect sense given the event's location. On the other hand, on this inauguration of the "Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia," acts of remembrance were dominated by a "lenguaje particularístico" that focused on the experiences of leftist Peronist militants, Montoneros more specifically, who had been detained at the former ESMA, thereby excluding the experiences of many other militant groups or those who had been detained elsewhere (Jelin "Víctimas, familiares y ciudadanos/as," 55).

Discussing the partial politics of Argentine memorial spaces and human rights, Ludmila da Silva Catela observes, "estos lugares de memoria, junto a las políticas de las cuales nacieron, también revelan el lado más complejo de la memoria: el de su manipulación, el de la imposición de unas voces sobre otras" (55). Ana Guglielmucci has analyzed the divisive responses to the creation of the *Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA* among human rights organizations, describing the controversy provoked by decisions on who would and would not attend the events held on March 24, 2004, as well as by questions regarding how and for whom the memorial space would be constructed. Pressing questions included whether the areas where detained prisoners were tortured would be maintained and restored in order to serve educational purposes and if the naval school and military officers would continue to occupy part of the premises.[50]

Guglielmucci's examination of the disputes and rivalry surrounding many aspects of this new memorial site demonstrate its partiality that is often glossed over due to the universal character of the human rights language used to describe it: "El lenguaje de los

[50] Most involved were opposed to this, but the CELS argued that allowing them to stay would provide the site with more financial resources and that the coexistence of the military and human rights organizations might serve to improve the relationship between soldiers and civilians.

derechos humanos, por su carácter universal, permitió representar la sociedad como un orden moral compartido …. permiten rearticular—a través del olvido selectivo—una coherencia que el crudo presente no encuentra" (263). Thus, while the discursive acts used to describe the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA and the events that took place on March 24, 2004 suggest this space and the Kirchnerist narrative it embodies to be inclusive of all who value the rights of others, closer examination reveals the politics of the past and present to be more complex and divisive, as Vera Carnovale's recent reflections on this site indicate:

> ... el Museo de la Memoria no logra ser un espacio de y para todos. Quizás porque el discurso militante es monocorde y solemne, quizás porque resulta finalmente hermético, quizás porque su reiteración puede aturdir y su sacralidad impide decir. Lo realizado hasta aquí no es poco y merece el reconocimiento de la comunidad política; pero sigue corriendo el riesgo de quedar encapsulado en el mundillo alrededor de aquella memoria militante. Sólo las apropiaciones más amplias, más irreverentes de ese espacio de memoria permitirán inscribir en él nuevas significaciones, nuevas expectativas. Y entonces sí, la memoria de lo que fue horror podrá cumplir con la más linda de sus promesas: atesorar futuro. ("Límites de la memoria militante")

A more recent manifestation of these tensions is the outrage provoked by the *asados* and parties hosted at the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos Ex-ESMA by Julio Alak, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, in December 2012 and another *asado* organized by Carlos Pisoni, Deputy Minister of Human Rights, and members of

H.I.J.O.S. in August 2013. Nora Cortiñas expressed her disgust at these uses of the site, asserting, "No se puede banalizar lo que vivimos, de ninguna manera" and "La ESMA [está] para recordar que es, para que sirva para las generaciones que vienen, no para un gran festejo …. ¿Qué les pasa a los jóvenes que tienen oportunidad de reivindicar a sus padres? Me tiene indignada esta situación" ("Nora Cortiñas, sobre el asado"). ESMA-survivor Enrique Fukman of the Asociación de Ex-Detenidos Desaparecidos reported that when he explained to those participating in the second *asado* that the bodies of their *compañeros* were burned in that exact site and that a barbeque there was therefore entirely inappropriate, "Nos respondieron en forma burlona. Su actitud era despectiva y patotera …. Ni siquiera tuvieron reparo en pedir disculpas, ni siquiera pudieron entender que esto nos podía lastimar" ("Insólito argumento"). Juan Cabandié, in contrast, has celebrated the fact that this memorial space is being resignified by these celebrations: "Me da una alegría tremenda que haya asados y murgas …. La ESMA tiene que ser un ámbito de resignificación. Por eso celebramos" ("Cabandié, sobre los asados").

The many disputes regarding how this former detention and torture center should be recuperated and used are representative of broader contestations of the partiality of the Kirchnerist narrative's memorialization efforts. Though debates regarding how, who, what, when, and where to remember are common and unavoidable when creating memory sites and memorial practices, the centrality of memory, truth, and justice to Kirchnerist politics has heightened these tensions and brought them center stage.

In conclusion, the Kirchnerist narrative, constructed by and reflected in discursive acts, judicial practices, alliances with human rights organizations, and the development of

memorial spaces, is a disputed one. The creation of this narrative and resulting political discourse and practice have contributed significantly to the Kirchners' electoral success, though not without significant contestation from other sources regarding the forms of memory, truth, and justice pursued by this project. Montero's argument that like all political discourse, Kirchnerist discourse is performative and necessarily incomplete, resulting in power and truth being permanently subject to debate and questioning, certainly holds true in considering the constructed nature of the Kirchnerist narrative that is ever subject to reworkings of it ("Puesta en escena," 341). The following chapter considers some of the ways in which cultural critics have responded to, challenged, and expanded this narrative through nonfiction discursive acts.

Chapter 2: Toward a Less Partial Narrative: Nonfictional Responses to the Kirchnerist Narrative

Much uncertainty and hopefulness followed the 2003 presidential election of Néstor Kirchner, who was largely unknown prior to the election and received merely 22% of the national vote, only becoming president when Carlos Menem decided not to participate in a run-off. Kirchner, with the lowest percentage of votes in the elections of any of the country's presidents, was considered a blank page by many cultural critics with little knowledge of his prior governance in Santa Cruz. As Beatriz Sarlo's investigations elucidate, articles written the day of Kirchner's inauguration in 2003 in diverse journals demonstrated a certain cautious optimism about this new political leader whose rhetoric inspired both Joaquín Morales Solá from *La Nación* and Mario Wainfeld of *Página/12* (*La audacia y el cálculo*). Three years later, however, as Sarlo relates, these two journalists and the publications for which they write found themselves much more divided regarding the country's president, the former becoming a strong critic of the president and the latter a partisan journalist, *La Nación* definitively distancing itself from the political administration and *Página/12* becoming "su órgano" (*La audacia y el cálculo*, 169-170).

This shift from initial curiosity and openness regarding a little-known president to marked polarization is representative of a broader cultural phenomenon in which citizens and cultural critics, initially enthusiastically willing to "abrirle un crédito" to the nation's new leader, particularly one not marked by known political controversy in the wake of an economic meltdown, eventually found themselves deeply divided (Sarlo *La audacia y el*

cálculo, 172). This phenomenon has been particularly experienced within those who might be supposed to fall within Kirchnerism's own cultural ranks—those associated with human rights activism, 1970s leftist militancy (by their own political activity or that of those related to them), and the Argentine left more broadly—many of whom readily supported Kirchnerism in its early phases but have since taken diverging positions.

Within these sectors, on the one hand, Argentina has seen the formation of Carta Abierta, a group of public intellectuals that claims partisan independence but has fiercely defended Kirchnerism since its formation in 2008, birthed of a commitment to support Fernández de Kirchner during the deep conflicts the administration faced with agricultural exporters. On the other hand, also within these populations that might be expected to support Kirchnerism, there are many cultural critics who have strongly opposed both Kirchners' political projects, though not without facing reproach from Carta Abierta, who has taken up the term *destituyente* to label those who critique the president. As Sarlo writes, this term that Carta Abierta explains to apply to any historically dominant population attempting to overthrow a government that rules against its interests is particularly malleable and has become quite useful to Kirchnerist discourse: "'Destituyente' entró directamente en el discurso de los Kirchner y les propuso una clave interpretativa de gran peso; los gobiernos 'populares' corren siempre el peligro de ser destituidos, ya sea en el sentido clásico del golpe de Estado, ya sea en el de un debilitamiento de fuerzas que los deje inermes frente a sus enemigos" (*La audacia y el cálculo*, 134).

The Kirchnerist narrative that attempts to reclaim 1970s leftist militancy in the present day through a mobilization of human rights discourse, alliances, and symbolic

acts has played a crucial role in this cultural shifting from open-minded interest to diverging support and opposition. This chapter considers criticism of the Kirchnerist narrative from journalists and scholars that might be expected to support the Kirchnerist narrative given their association with leftist militancy, human rights, and/or corresponding ideologies. These are critics, who like Claudia Hilb, find themselves in a precarious position with respect to the current official Argentinean left, attempting to "confrontar el automatismo con que una parte del pensamiento progresista—el de una izquierda en la que me sitúo, pero en cuyos modos dominantes de pensar no me reconozco—reacciona frente a los acontecimientos, sirviéndose muchas veces de clichés que ya han perdido cualquier atisbo de reflexión verdadera o de interrogación" (10).

The principal cultural critics whose varying degrees of opposition to Kirchnerism's partisan politicizations of human rights and idealization of 1970s leftist militants will be examined here include José Pablo Feinmann, a former *Juventud Peronista* militant, a journalist, and political philosopher at times referred to as "el filósofo kirchnerista" due to the close relationship he shared with Néstor Kirchner; Claudia Hilb, sociologist and former militant in the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*; Hugo Vezzetti, a psychology scholar whose research focuses on social memory and human rights; Graciela Fernández Meijide, human rights activist and politician that served on Argentina's *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP) in 1983, first becoming involved with the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* following the disappearance of her 17-year-old son in 1977; Victoria Donda, human rights activist, politician, supporter-turned-critic of Kirchnerism's human rights politics, and the daughter of leftist militants appropriated by the military

after being born in the former ESMA while her mother was in captivity, only recuperating her biological identity in 2003 at the age of 26; Martín Caparrós, former Montonero militant, journalist, and prolific writer who has opposed Kirchnerism from its very beginnings and whose 2008 *A quien corresponda* is examined in Chapter 3; Héctor Leis, scholar and former Montonero who, through his *Un testamento a los años 70*, asks for forgiveness for his role in Argentina's recent political violence; and Beatriz Sarlo, scholar, journalist, literary and cultural critic, founder and director of the literary journal *Puntos de vista*, and former militant in the *Partido Comunista Revolucionario*.

This growing body of cultural criticism towards the Kirchnerist narrative from those most closely related to its heroes indicates there to be significant disagreement regarding how to memorialize this period and pursue memory, truth, and justice for those most severely affected by its violence. In examining the competing understandings of revolutionary aspirations, political violence, and human rights propagated by the Kirchnerist narrative and these cultural critics' responses to its memorialization of leftist militants, this chapter aims to interpret broader cultural battles to make sense and political use of the past. I would like to argue that though these cultural critics often affirm experiencing a sense of marginalization from the official left for their opposition to certain aspects of Kirchnerism, the texts analyzed here form part of an ever-growing critical mass of cultural production that, through their struggles to define what fuller forms of memory, truth, and justice might look like, rework understandings of leftist political identification itself in present-day Argentina.

Memory and Human Rights as Partisan Politics

One of the main points of criticism these scholars and journalists have taken with the Kirchnerist narrative is its partisan politicization of human rights that often seems motivated more by political gain than a genuine concern for the rights of those murdered during the dictatorship or of present-day citizens.[51] Questions regarding the authenticity of Kirchnerism's identification with human rights causes and 1970s leftist militancy have been frequent among such critics, including Leis, who writes that the Kirchnerist administrations "adoptaron valores y objetivos de la generación del 60 con escaso realismo y sin ninguna autenticidad" (60). Leis goes on to further criticize former militants who have uncritically considered this government to represent "la realización de sus anhelos en las políticas populistas," taking advantage of the political opportunism such loyalty has granted them in the form of official positions (62). Sarlo writes that Kirchner's identification with this generation in his inaugural speech is one in which "se instituyó a sí mismo como miembro de un linaje del cual no se había declarado hermano, en público, durante treinta años," and is completely incoherent with the Kirchner of the previous two decades: "el caudillo que más había acompañado a Menem en la privatización de YPF no sólo sin protestar sino ensalzándolo como el mejor; alguien que había olvidado los setenta durante los veinte años que siguieron, ese hombre encuentra la ocasión para recordar y lo hace al jurar como Presidente" (*La audacia y el cálculo,* 176; 168).

In a similar vein, Julio Bárbaro, writer, politician, scholar, and government official to the Federal Broadcasting Committee (COMFER) during Néstor Kirchner's

[51] This use of memory approximates what Luisa Valenzuela describes as a seeking "to profit in one way or another from others' pain" in her foreword to *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*, an edited volume that takes up this topic, though those accused of profiting from memory are primarily former perpetrators (ix).

presidency, has argued that both Kirchners have grossly exaggerated their past militancy, as is detailed in his 2014 *Lejos del Bronce. Cuando Kirchner no era K*, consisting of testimonies from supposed fellow Peronist militants in Santa Cruz "que describen a Néstor Kirchner como un joven tan torpe como prepotente, y lo acusan de colaboracionista de la última dictadura" ("Tenemos un gobierno"). For Bárbaro, this superficial level of participation in revolutionary organizations has resulted in Kirchnerism's mistaken vindication of something they do not truly understand, contrary to the cases of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and Pepe Mujica in Uruguay, presidents who were protagonists in their countries' revolutionary pasts and have consequently not centered their politics upon reclaiming such ideals (qtd. in Di Marco, "De la revolución").

In keeping with this criticism of the actual commitment of Kirchnerism to the rights of those assassinated during the country's last dictatorship is Donda's 2013 letter to Fernández de Kirchner, published in *Clarín*, in which Donda expressed her frustration with the limits of the administration's commitment to human rights, writing,

> Yo fui parte del kirchnerismo, es cierto. Pero del que juzgó a los genocidas y derogó las vergonzantes leyes del perdón. Del que recuperó la ESMA como un espacio para la memoria y bajó de la pared los cuadros de los genocidas .... Hoy, Cristina, la vida y la política nos encuentran en caminos separados. Siento que los cuadros que bajamos de la pared, vuelven simbólicamente a su lugar; que las empresas a las que les pedimos que se vayan del país, regresan a llevarse lo que es nuestro y a contaminarnos; y que la corrupción resucitó de la peor forma posible. ("La carta de una 'nieta recuperada'")

This letter was primarily provoked by President Fernández de Kirchner's rather surprising appointment of César Milani as head of the army in 2013, which was opposed by many involved in human rights in Argentina given Lieutenant General Milani's alleged involvement in gross crimes against humanity during the country's last dictatorship, including the disappearance of father and son Alfredo and Ramón Olivera. Those who have spoken out against this appointment include Argentina's Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) and its president, journalist Horacio Verbitsky, otherwise strong supporters of the President; the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora and its cofounder Nora Cortiñas; Carta Abierta's president Horacio González; and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner. Hebe de Bonafini is one of the very few of Fernández de Kirchner's supporters who has stood by the president in this decision, facing profound reproach and suspicion for having done so, including the burning of a giant figure of Milani and Bonafini embracing one another by individuals affiliated with various human rights and present-day militant organizations—including H.I.J.O.S.—on the 2015 Day of Memory.

As previously argued in Chapter 1, the Kirchners' association with the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo has often been described as more of a strategic alliance than it is representative of a lifelong commitment to these organizations' objectives. As Feinmann relates in *El Flaco*, Néstor Kirchner's plan to center much of his political project on human rights and establish relationships with Hebe de Bonafini and Estela Carlotto developed early in his presidency, despite his and Fernández de Kirchner's lack of involvement with either organization prior to this moment, particularly during their time governing in Santa Cruz. These alliances have played a crucial role in allowing "los

Kirchner, que eran nuevos en el tema de la memoria" to transform such a principle "con éxito en el centro significativo, moral y político, de su gobierno" (Sarlo *La audacia y el cálculo*, 142).

These political alliances have been particularly powerful for the Kirchnerist narrative given the Madres' "untouchableness"—their affective and symbolic moral weight as mothers who courageously protested the disappearance of their children and have, for decades, continued their battles to memorialize their daughters and sons, representing "un más allá del debate .... una demanda ética que es aceptada por casi todos" (Sarlo *La audacia y el cálculo*, 185). Both Kirchners' close relationships with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Bonafini have contributed to the strengthening of the Kirchnerist narrative in obscuring both presidents' previous lack of involvement in the organization's struggles and symbolically extending the societal reverence granted to the Madres to both presidents: "Ese lugar común traza una línea imaginaria: las Madres de un lado; del otro, el resto del mundo y, por lo tanto, si nadie es comparable con las Madres, Kirchner que no hizo nada durante toda la dictadura no tiene nada que reprocharse y, sobre todo, nadie puede reprocharle su inacción" (Sarlo *La audacia y el cálculo*, 186).

Nonetheless, alleged money-laundering scandals within the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Bonafini's seemingly unquestioning support of both Kirchners' politics have resulted in criticism of the organization becoming more permissible in the last few years, including that of Luis Gasulla mentioned in Chapter 1.[52] Criticism of the manipulation of

[52] Further criticism of Hebe de Bonafini from the left comes from Leis, who admired her courageous political and moral commitment throughout the dictatorial period, but suggests her to have subordinated the defense of human rights to the causes of various terrorist groups, including the FARC in Colombia, the Basque ETA, Hamas, and even Al-Qaeda (74).

human rights by the political administration during the past decade has not been limited to the government's implication in the Schoklender and Madres de Plaza de Mayo money-laundering debacle, but has extended to accusations of a presidential co-opting of memory and human rights politics for partisan purposes: "el uso del pasado en las disputas del poder y una politización mezquina del tópico de los derechos humanos" (Vezzetti 58). Journalist Ernesto Tenembaum, supporter-turned-critic of Kirchnerism and the author of two texts in which his increasing cynicism presents itself (his non-fiction *¿Qué les pasó?* and novel *Una mujer única*), has spoken out against the manipulation and "manoseo muy fuerte del tema de los derechos humanos" in which terms such as "cómplice de la dictadura" and "genocida" are used regularly to characterize those who oppose or criticize the administration (qtd. in Ajmat, "La caricatura del periodismo"). This "arbitraria y sucia" misuse of memory politics, Tenembaum argues, has resulted in an unfortunate broader mistrust among the general population when it comes to topics of historical memory (qtd. in Ajmat, "La caricatura del periodismo").

One telling example of these abusive uses of memory politics for partisan purposes is the likening of Héctor Magnetto, CEO of *Grupo Clarín*, to military repressors. Following the Supreme Court's 2013 ruling on the constitutionality of the limits of the *Ley de medios* regarding how many radio and television licenses one company can own, an image of Fernández de Kirchner removing a portrait of Magnetto—an imitation of the iconic depiction of Néstor Kirchner removing Videla's and Bignone's portraits—with the slogan *Nunca más* circulated on Twitter.[53]

[53] See https://twitter.com/PVacaNarvaja/status/395285675207323649/photo/1 from Patricia Vaca Narvaja, Argentine Ambassador to Mexico.

The parallels cast between military repressors during the country's most brutal dictatorship and the head of a media conglomerate that became one of Kirchnerism's principal opponents is indicative of a manipulation of memory and human rights politics for partisan purposes.[54] Though unlike cultural critic Alejandro Katz, who argues Kirchnerism to have corrupted and devalued "palabras con las que era posible expresar ideas que a muchos todavía nos provocaban emoción, y con las que designábamos cuestiones muy concretas: justicia, igualdad, inclusión, democracia," I would suggest memory, truth, and justice not to be pure concepts that Kirchnerism has corrupted, but discursive elements that can be employed for a myriad of purposes, having been amply utilized by the Kirchners for partisan politics (26).[55] The understanding of Kirchnerism's co-opting or manipulation of memory and human rights politics this project argues is thus not a perversion of something inherently pure, but negotiations of affectively-charged human rights discourse and symbolic alliances for political gain.

This self-interested partisan character of the Kirchnerist narrative is particularly evident in the narrative's erasure of President Alfonsín's human rights advances, as mentioned in Chapter 1. As Sarlo argues, "paradójicamente, Kirchner llegaba para reivindicar la memoria y comenzaba olvidando el Informe de la CONADEP y el juicio a las Juntas," though this forgetting was quite intentional, a strategic neglect of the

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[54] See also Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh Payne's discussion of the contradiction in how Fernández de Kirchner explained that she did not attend the 2008 Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia ESMA event because she "did not want to capitalize politically on the memory of the Argentines"; but, days later, "attributed attacks on her presidency to her decision to 'choose the path of the people, of human rights, and of a fair and equitable society'" likening "the farmers' protests in 2008 against her government to the military coup in 1976" (33).

[55] See Costas Douzinas regarding how human rights are often "adopted by the right and the left, the north and the south, the state and the pulpit, the minister and the rebel" (33).

decades-old battles that the Kirchnerist narrative had picked up in order for Néstor Kirchner to present himself as the first president to take up such issues, implying, in Sarlo's words, "si yo no estoy, dice el fundador, no hay pasado; donde yo no estuve, no hubo justicia .... se instituía como el primero de un nuevo comienzo. Un punto cero de pasaje iniciático que lo introducía en un mundo emocionante, triste, evocativo, nostálgico, revolucionario, democrático, afectivo, filial, ético y político" (*La audacia y el cálculo*, 190-191).

In addition to disagreeing with partisan appropriations of memory and human rights politics, cultural critics have suggested there to be an incongruity between the rights Kirchnerism has sought for those killed during the military dictatorship and those in the present day, a period described by these critics as one of ever-growing inequality with little state support being offered to the country's most vulnerable sectors. Vezzetti refers to the CELS' 2008 report on the deterioration of citizens' social and legal rights, noting that the CELS is a trustworthy organization that does not typically oppose the government, in arguing that "no se puede decir que en la Argentina exista, o se esté construyendo, una cultura de los derechos humanos, ni en el Estado ni en la sociedad" (41-42).

This "contraposición de las políticas hacia el pasado y las acciones en el presente" has played a determining factor in Victoria Donda's shift from supporting to criticizing Kirchnerist human rights politics (Vezzetti 40). Donda has voiced disapproval with the administration's previously mentioned appointment of Milani as the military chief and criticized the selection of Carlos García Muñoz as an official within the *Secretario de Derechos Humanos*. The selection of Muñoz, a Kirchnerist militant who was detained

and tortured during the dictatorship, was contested by Donda due to his known convictions of domestic abuse and rape (for which he was imprisoned in Spain for ten years), though Human Rights Secretary Martín Fresneda and Fernández de Kirchner denied having knowledge of this before García Muñoz's 2015 resignation; for Donda, "los derechos de las mujeres son derechos humanos," rights about which she does not believe the administration to be particularly concerned (qtd. in Bistagnino, "El Gobierno hace un recorte de los derechos humanos"). Donda has frequently criticized Kirchnerism's "recorte de los derechos humanos" that does not address present-day disappearances of citizens by the police, violence against women, pollution and practices of unsustainability, or the violated rights of indigenous populations, contending, "todo esto es Derechos Humanos, no sólo las violaciones cometidas hace 30 años por los militares. Eso es un recorte hipócrita. Uno más de los que hace el kirchnerismo" (qtd. in Bistagnino, "El Gobierno hace un recorte de los derechos humanos").

This incongruity between the rights sought for disappeared leftist militants and the promotion of equality and rights among present-day citizens might be argued to be parallel to the often-criticized incompatibility between the ideologies of collective leftist revolutionary projects and universal individual human rights, simultaneously discursively vindicated by Kirchnerism. The use of the language of human rights, a form of politics that have been argued to be "a convenient cover for the extension of capitalist-democratic uneven relations of power by reinforcing imperialist hegemonic control .... not a sign of hope, but part of an ominous trend toward the extension of a neoliberal, global capitalist hegemony," to recuperate leftist militant movements that sought to bring about a revolution similar to the Cuban Revolution is therefore not a likely one (Williams xv).

Leis describes this paradoxical ideological shifting from radical leftist politics to classical liberalism by those from this generation as an opportune form of historical revisionism, writing that in the 1960s and 1970s, young revolutionaries did not find much difference between democracy and dictatorship, understanding both forms of governance to be "burguesas" and contrary to their ideological principles. Nonetheless, Leis proposes, "después de la derrota política y militar de sus fuerzas, los 80 los conducirán sin mucha reflexión hacia la democracia y los derechos humanos. Estos temas, lejanos de sus antiguas preocupaciones revolucionarias, serían ahora su vía acceso al poder. Surgió entonces un oportuno revisionismo histórico" (75). Furthermore, Leis argues, the prevalent form of official historical memory that justifies pardoning revolutionary violence under a collective Marxist paradigm, considering the use of armed violence a necessary means to achieving a greater good, but pursues justice for and imprisonment of the dictatorship's perpetrators under the liberal and individualistic ideology of human rights is "intencionalmente perversa" (78). Fernández Meijide's *Eran humanos, no héroes* makes similar arguments, citing former *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* militant Helios Prieto: "si nos tomamos en serio la tolerancia y los derechos individuales, cualquier análisis histórico de lo que fue el PRT-ERP no puede dejar de comenzar por el hecho de que fue un grupúsculo intolerante enemigo de la democracia y que hacía mofa de los derechos humanos" (200). If universal human rights are to be used to pursue memory, truth, and justice for the past, these critics argue, they cannot be selectively applied to certain humans and not others, but must be used to pursue justice for all who were killed by political violence, including those murdered by revolutionary armed struggle, a topic that will be further analyzed shortly.

The incoherency of this simultaneously Marxist and classical liberal recuperation of Argentina's recent past also presents itself in the country's memorial sites, particularly the Parque de la Memoria-Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo del Estado. Vezzetti writes of the controversial decision to include the names of revolutionaries killed by fellow guerrillas or by the detonation of their own arms at this monument, considering this a "condensación de significados, entre la honra a las víctimas (la denuncia de un crimen contra la humanidad) y la celebración de los combates del pasado .... una difícil formación de compromiso entre el ideal de los derechos y una figura absoluta de las luchas" (42). Citing scholar Héctor Schmucler, Vezzetti discusses the inconsistencies of present-day human rights politics that imply human rights to be valid for certain victims and not others, including police officers, soldiers, politicians, and union workers assassinated by those elevated as heroes by the Kirchnerist narrative (84-85).

Following this incongruity between the ideologies of leftist militants committed to radical equality and the protection of individual rights is the disconnect between the militancy of the past and that of the present day, despite the Kirchnerist narrative's attempts to cast these phenomena as parallel. Central to much of the criticism regarding this incoherency is the fact that 1970s leftist militancy was fought against the state and ruling powers in an attempt to bring about what those who participated believed to be a more just form of statehood, in contrast to institutionalized Kirchnerist militancy, which has started from and remained within the political administration's control, resulting in many young Kirchnerist militants having been offered positions within the government. Victoria Donda has criticized the blind obedience of many Kirchnerist militants serving as senators who vote against their conscience because they are pressured to do so. Donda

has contrasted the moral compass of the eight senators who refused to allow Juan Perón to force them to vote against citizens' rights to protest in the 1970s, abandoning their revolutionary and political affiliations in order not to succumb to such pressure, with the cowardice of conflicted senators who were pressured to vote for the controversial 2012 antiterrorist law, whose vague and ambiguous definition of terrorism and harshening of punishment many fear might lead to the criminalization of social protest, and the likewise contested 2012 revisions of the Ley de Aseguradoras de Riesgos del Trabajo (ART) that significantly increased costs for workers' risk insurance and, according to Donda, is "nefasta para los trabajadores" (qtd. in Di Marco, "De la revolución").

For Julio Bárbaro, the idea of militants serving as paid politicians and vice versa is absurd and contradictory to the very definition of anti-hegemonic militancy: "La militancia termina cuando es rentada ... No existe la militancia paga porque el militante es, siempre, el dueño de un imposible, el que vive en la víspera de la construcción de un mundo mejor .... La militancia siempre es contra el poder, como una forma de confrontación con los poderosos" (qtd. in Di Marco, "De la revolución"). Following closer analysis, it is indeed difficult to sustain the argument that present-day militancy carried out on behalf of the state, often from within the state or those that hope to fill positions there, is a continuation or recuperation of 1970s leftist militancy that hoped to overthrow dictatorial and democratic regimes not committed to Marxist principles.

Humans or Heroes?

Cultural critics have contested not only what they consider to be the disingenuous and inaccurate manners in which Kirchnerism has portrayed itself as fiercely dedicated to

human rights and as a continuation of 1970s revolutionary political projects, but also the Kirchnerist narrative's inauthentic understandings of the historical period and social actors: "discursos públicos, los monumentos, las fechas y los actos de conmemoración" described as "sólo herramientas destinadas a controlar el relato del pasado, no a conocer y explorar la historia" (Katz 132). Many of these critics take issue with the Kirchnerist narrative's heroization and idealization of leftist militants, suggesting instead the need for more complex critical analysis of the responsibilities of different sectors of society during the dictatorship and the period of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence that preceded it. This cultural criticism rejects Manichean victim/perpetrator and innocent/guilty binaries in favor of explorations of the roles of revolutionary armed struggle and middle- and upper-class concern for security, proposing that "la Argentina de esos años no tuvo combatientes, ni héroes. La lucha convirtió a todos en víctimas y victimarios recíprocos. Hubo más víctimas en un lado que en otro, pocos inocentes y muchos culpables" (Leis 46).

Criticism of the Kirchnerist narrative's discursive avoidance of the violence inflicted by revolutionaries and its pursuit of justice only for those assassinated by state forces is abundant. Héctor Leis writes that it is inaccurate and dishonest to speak of state terrorism as if it were "una entidad pura y separada del resto de la sociedad, tal como pretenden las organizaciones de derechos humanos y el gobierno de los Kirchner," stressing instead the need for more thorough examinations of the past and the "beligerancia compartida" (41-42). Leis disputes Kirchnerism's transformation of militants into innocent victims that were killed for wanting a better world, asserting that "en nombre de los derechos humanos el gobierno está suprimiendo la identidad

revolucionaria de los 'compañeros,'" which he goes on to argue does no justice to history nor to former *compañeros* in not acknowledging the political and ideological causes for which they were willing to kill and be killed (42). If this past were examined more truthfully, according to Leis, consideration would have to be given to the political motivations behind the activities of both guerrillas and the military; and while the latter's methods may have been demonic and illegal, they were not, Leis insists, pathological or nonsensical as is commonly asserted.[56] Hugo Vezzetti makes a similar argument, demonstrating that many considered the pre-1976 coup state of Argentina to be warlike due to the escalation of revolutionary violence, further calling into question descriptions of the dictatorship as a purely evil regime that appeared out of nowhere (49). These political motivations for past violence are not taken into account by the "reduccionismos imperantes en el debate público sobre los derechos humanos" that prioritizes individual justice over "la necesidad superior de reparar el daño producido a la comunidad política como tal" (Leis 57).

An argument that the greatest homage that can be paid to leftist militants who died during the dictatorial period is not an idealization of them, but critical analysis that considers the motivations behind and consequences of their political actions is common to the writings of Fernández Meijide, Hilb, Leis, and Vezzetti. Each of these critics believes in-depth analyses of this period in Argentina's recent past to be critical for past, present, and future generations, particularly in a moment in which the predominant narratives are either ones like the Kirchnerist narrative that suggest revolutionaries to

[56] To support this claim, Leis points out that pregnant *guerrilleras* were not executed until they had given birth because there was a belief that though the souls of leftist militants were condemned, the following generation could still be redeemed (55-56).

have been innocent idealists whose political commitments are not taken into account or, at the other extreme, pro-dictatorial understandings of the past that claim the elimination of subversives to have been necessary.[57]

To this end, Vezzetti proposes the need for "una recuperación menos congelada de ese pasado y de sus efectos sobre el presente" that allows for the kind of open debates he describes as having been prevalent among leftist militants in exile during the dictatorship but non existent in public discourse in Argentina, particularly in the present day in which there has been an attempt to impose "una formación de memorias y olvidos que es hegemónica en el discurso de la izquierda y en las expresiones residuales del peronismo revolucionario, y que ha penetrado el movimiento de los derechos humanos" (39; 83). Sarlo similarly critiques the Kirchnerist narrative's emphasis on "el momento romántico de la revolución. Sólo evocan la voluntad transformadora, no sus tácticas," suggesting that all those who belonged to the revolutionary left, herself included, must engage in constructing more accurate representations of the period that move beyond the Kirchnerist narrative's representation of "la militancia de superficie, juvenil y barrial" ("La matriz mesiánica"). Fernández Meijide argues that present generations "cada vez necesitan más herramientas que les tornen menos difícil la construcción de su futuro," citing Leis in suggesting that their ignorance of more truthful understandings of recent history—given their lack of access to accurate narrations of it—subjects them to "el yira-yira del karma nacional" (205). Likewise, Hilb writes that it is her generation of former

[57] See Vezzetti, who describes these opposing narratives as "dos formaciones polarizadas de memoria y olvido. Una, minoritaria y nostálgica de la dictadura, repite el relato de la 'guerra anti-subversiva' y agrega una justificación retrospectiva: esa guerra habría 'salvado' la democracia. La otra focaliza todos los males en los ejecutores del terrorismo de Estado y desconoce las responsabilidades de la sociedad y de las organizaciones guerrilleras" (39).

militants' responsibility to "legar a las generaciones que nos sucedieron una reflexión sin concesiones sobre nuestra responsabilidad pasada. Ese es, a mi entender, el mejor homenaje que podemos tributar a aquellos valores originarios de justicia, de libertad y de igualdad" (133). Taking this a step further, Hilb writes that she defends her right to believe that some of her fellow *compañeros* would have engaged in asking and attempting to answer these same difficult questions had they survived (12).

Hilb, Leis, Fernández Meijide, and Vezzetti's book-length examinations of revolutionary militancy respond to this identified need for critical analyses that provide more nuanced and heterogeneous representations of this recent historical period and its social actors. In an attempt to break from the crystallizations of the *teoría de los dos demonios* and Manichean understandings of "los buenos y los malos," the essays in Hilb's 2013 *Usos del pasado: Qué hacemos hoy con los setenta* include examinations of what justifications there were for the use of armed struggle; how the use of arms by leftist militants contributed to the escalation of violence that ultimately resulted in a military coup; the results of the Cuban Revolution decades later: namely, how the need for a totalitarian government in order to enforce radical equality challenges romanticized interpretations of revolutionary principles; and the re-appearance of revolutionary violence after the restoration of democracy in the 1989 assault on the military barracks in La Tablada, which Hilb argues to depict the tragic "destino totalitario del pensamiento revolucionario del siglo XX, el devenir de la ilusión de eliminar toda contingencia de los asuntos humanos y de fabricar una realidad a imagen y semejanza de una idea" (89).

Leis's 2013 *Un testamento de los años 70: Terrorismo, política y verdad en Argentina* addresses this cultural need for more complex narratives about the past in

sharing many of Leis's own experiences as a Montonero and what he describes as the terrorist acts in which he and his *compañeros* engaged, though they would have never described them as such at the time. Writing with a greater distance from this past, Leis explains, "Hoy sé que la conducción de los Montoneros no sabía hacer política, sólo sabía usar la violencia con fines políticos, que es la mejor definición de terrorismo que existe" (48). *Un testamento de los años 70* examines the dissonance between the idealization of Ernesto "Che" Guevara among guerrillas and Guevara's own writings in *La Guerra de Guerrillas* in which he rejects terrorism, identifying it with the political right and distancing himself from anarchists engaging in terrorism because of a belief that such acts made political work with the masses too difficult (12). Leis laments Guevara's early death, writing that he who influenced so many to join militant organizations might have been the only one with the "autoridad moral" to impede the "giro terrorista" that eventually took place within militant organizations in much of Latin America (31). In order to better understand the armed political violence of the period, Leis proposes a patricidal and filicidal framework, arguing that his generation was raised to consider the military "los padres de la Patria" and the military had deemed their children's generation of subversives unredeemable but did attempt to "rescue" the following generation in the appropriation of the babies of those detained (52). For Leis, confessions, pardons, and reconciliation are essential for Argentina to recognize this recent past as one common to all and not a source of justification for divisive partisan politics increasingly "más instrumentales y menos verdaderas" (93). Furthermore, Leis predicts that if the past is not worked through more honestly, another period of significant violence is likely to result (93).

In *Eran humanos, no héroes*, Fernández Meijide examines the national and international factors that led many young people to participate in revolutionary militant organizations and to take up arms as "una vía rápida para superar el sistema burgués al que el pensamiento revolucionario consideraba irremisiblemente ligado al capitalismo explotador del proletariado" (87). Fernández Meijide situates these processes within a broader Latin American context in which the military coup in Chile that overthrew socialist President Salvador Allende had a significant impact, leading many to believe in the necessity of violence in a moment in which attempting to bring about a socialist revolution from within democratic systems seemed impossible (94-95). *Eran humanos, no héroes* discusses not only the roles of guerrillas and soldiers, but also considers how citizens not directly involved in either organization impacted this period of history, many of whom initially sympathized with revolutionary organizations until violence escalated, particularly after the assassination of politician and union leader José Ignacio Rucci in 1973. At this point, Fernández Meijide writes, many citizens supported the military coup and initially believed that military rule had re-established order given the reduction in visible crime and violence on the streets, not initially aware of the torture and assassinations that were taking place in clandestine centers (151).

In addition to analyzing different factors that led individuals to militant organizations and organizations to armed struggle, Fernández Meijide's text compares truth and reconciliation commissions and processes throughout the region, an area with which the author is quite familiar given her position as the Secretary of Denunciations in Argentina's CONADEP. Comparing Argentina's recuperation of democracy, largely brought about by the incompetence of the military regime following a failed war in the

Malvinas Islands, to the democratic transitions in neighboring countries, like Chile, where the military had more control over the process, Fernández Meijide explains how the military's weakness allowed for an immediate investigation of the regime's crimes and the subsequent trial of officers. In both the period that shortly followed the restoration of democracy and present-day trials, Fernández Meijide signals the great strides made within the country with regards to justice, but also questions how such advances have limited the pursuit of truth. Comparing Argentina's transitional justice politics to those of South Africa in which perpetrators were motivated to share information about their crimes by the reward of amnesty and the fear that they might be convicted of their crimes by those they abused if they did not share this information, Fernández Meijide laments how very little information Argentina's armed forces have shared given the lack of incentive to do so and the likelihood of conviction if they do. Fernández Meijide therefore questions whether such exacting justice has been worth the cost; that is, a great lack of truth about much of the military's actions during the last dictatorship, positing Kirchnerist recuperations of certain aspects of militant politics to have further reduced access to truth and, thereby, fuller forms of justice: "la política regida por una frase desdichada de nuestro pasado, 'al enemigo ni justicia', nos dejó a todos sin ella" (25).[58]

[58] Hilb similarly explores the paradoxical relationship between pursuits of justice and truth in Argentina, writing, "Hemos obtenido mucho, muchísimo, con los juicios; hemos también, y probablemente fuera inevitable, pagado un precio en verdad" (107). Leis takes this a step further in arguing that justice that does not subordinate itself to truth is not in fact justice, but a source of political enmity, writing that as justice cannot deny its relationship to vengeance, truth cannot negate its reliance upon confession and forgiveness (94).

Vezzetti's *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* emphasizes the importance of plural discussions and memories that recognize and debate revolutionary violence, considering such disputes essential to more meaningful forms of memorializing the past's victims, writing, "la conmemoración ha perdido el horizonte de una memoria histórica común, capaz de recuperar y reintegrar ese pasado, con diferencias y debates, con miras a un futuro diferente. Ésa es la dimensión más profunda de la deuda con las víctimas" (215). The text engages in these types of discussions through a recuperation and analysis of not-widely circulated or considered criticism of revolutionary violence, particularly discussions within the journal *Controversia*, edited from exile in Mexico; examinations of many different leftist cultural critics on topics of armed struggle; analysis of the religiosity of self-sacrifice within revolutionary organizations; consideration of conceptions of Che Guevara's *hombre nuevo* that led to the "voluntad de *ser* un revolucionario a contramano de las evidencias que mostraban que faltaban las condiciones para *hacer* una revolución"; and discussion of the memory politics at play in different recently inaugurated memorial sites (140). Vezzetti argues for recognizing the victims of revolutionary violence and for acknowledging how these acts contributed to a widely-sensed need for order to be forcefully re-established, not to equate the crimes enacted by the military with those of leftist militants in alignment with the *teoría de los dos demonios*, but to remember the past truthfully, justly, and with fuller memory.

Each of these cultural critics delves into the topic of revolutionary violence, considering its omission within the Kirchnerist narrative's celebration of combatants damaging to understandings of the past. For Leis, as previously mentioned, the violent acts of revolutionary organizations (in which he affirms having participated) were acts of

terrorism that resulted in approximately 1,000 deaths, which do not compare in number to the estimated 8,000 people killed by the military and 1,000 killed by the Triple A, but do represent the lives of individuals as entitled to human rights as those killed by the state, despite the lack of official recognition of these deaths. Leis distances himself from the *teoría de los demonios* in arguing that these assassinations should be prosecuted with differing levels of legal punishment, but he insists that a politics truly concerned with human rights must recognize these 1,000 assassinations. Vezzetti demonstrates how many revolutionaries themselves considered the taking up of arms by other militant organizations to be terrorist acts, citing a *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* publication from 1975 that described the escalation of armed violence as inexplicable as merely a political tactic: "'La abundancia de cadáveres produce un acostumbramiento [...] una confusa orgía de sangre, más parecida a las 'vendettas' sicilianas que a una lucha política'" (qtd. in Vezzetti 71).

The violence committed against those who had little or nothing to do with the state's attempt to quell revolutionary organizations as well as violence enacted *within* revolutionary organizations are the subjects of further criticism by these journalists and scholars. Leis contends that a significant amount of people were killed by guerrillas largely for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, given the organizations' monthly execution quotas and the tendency to kill those in police uniforms, only later to discover that some of these victims were allies or sympathizers with the very organizations that had assassinated them (68). Fernández Meijide similarly discusses a shift that begins in 1974 in which the Montonero leadership, "contra toda racionalidad, en una escalada sin destino," ordered the execution of neighborhood police, despite the fact that many

Montoneros residing in those areas had close relationships with the officers and some of these policemen were sympathizers with the Montoneros' fight (143). These executions and the lack of neighborhood security that resulted from them were pivotal in the decreasing societal acceptance of revolutionary activities and increasing fears of violence that led many ordinary citizens from sympathy with revolutionary causes to supporting the coup.

This controversial taking up of arms that was not supported by all revolutionary organizations—and resulted in the fracturing of these into different groups—provoked debates from exile, as the contributions from Juan Carlos Portantiero, Nicolás Casullo, Oscar Terán, José Aricó, and Héctor Schmucler to the journal *Controversia* in 1979 indicate. Fernández Meijide suggests Schmucler, who directed *Controversia* and, later, *La Intemperie*, which will be discussed momentarily, to be one of the very first from the left to question the use of arms, rejecting the right of revolutionary organizations to "levantar las banderas de los derechos humanos porque no los respetaban dentro de su propio funcionamiento interno" (197). Nonetheless, as is argued by the critics this chapter examines, these analyses and debates did not continue within Argentina following the return of democracy and continue not to do so on a prominent scale due to the hegemony of the Kirchnerist narrative and likeminded heroizations of leftist militancy.

A notable exception to this lack of debate regarding militant armed struggle came about in 2004 when, in an interview with the Córdoban journal *La Intemperie*, Héctor Jouvé, a former member of the *Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo* (EGP), discussed the execution of two members of his own organization—Adolfo Rotblat and Bernardo Groswald—in Salta in 1964. The response letter to the journal of philosopher and former

EGP militant Oscar del Barco received widespread attention that provoked much intellectual argument regarding the role of revolutionary organizations in escalating violence in pre-dictatorial Argentina. Del Barco's letter of response argued the following:

> We have to take on that essentially irredeemable act, the unprecedented responsibility of having intentionally caused the death of a human being …. all of us who sympathized with or participated in some way in the Montoneros movement, in the ERP, in the FAR, or in any other armed group are responsible for their actions. I repeat: there is no 'ideal' that could justify the killing of a human being, be it General Aramburu, or a militant or a police officer. *Thou shalt not kill* is the principle that is the foundation of every community. (115)

The debates that followed took place within *La Intemperie* and beyond—in such publications as *Conjetural*, *Página/12*, *Pensamiento de los Confines*, and *El Ojo Mocho*—included the participation of former militants and intellectuals Schmucler, Diego Tatián, Jorge Jinkis, Eduardo Grüner, Tomás Abraham, Nicolás Casullo, Horacio González, and León Rozitchner, with many of the responses having been compiled in Pablo Belzagui's two-volume *Sobre la responsabilidad. No matar* (Pavon).[59]

Jinkis's response to Del Barco's argument that all associated with revolutionary militancy share responsibility for the violence revolutionary organizations enacted

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[59] This debate has most recently been reignited by discussions of the legacy of Argentine poet and former Montonero Juan Gelman after his death in January 2014. Gelman, whose son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter were disappeared, broke from the Montoneros in 1979 and focused on his writing, demanding truth and justice for dictatorial crimes. Commenting upon this position of Gelman's, Del Barco made the following comments, "Pero para comenzar él mismo tiene que abandonar su postura de poeta-mártir y asumir su responsabilidad como uno de los principales dirigentes de la dirección del movimiento armado Montoneros. Debe confesar esos crímenes y pedir perdón por lo menos a la sociedad. Los otros mataban, pero los 'nuestros' también mataban. La verdad y la justicia deben ser para todos" (qtd. in Reato, "Los olvidos").

includes the contention that, in Del Barco's rejection of framing assassinated leftist militants as innocent victims (an act with which, in and of itself, Jinkis does not disagree), Del Barco suggests these militants to be guilty victims, thus setting up a false dialectic between innocent and guilty victims. For Jinkis, such a dialectic is "a victory by the enemy, a maneuver carried out by 'security forces,' an invading army or the racist politics of the terrorist state" in which the victims "decide and become responsible for the actions of the enemy" (123). Jinkis also underscores the paradoxical nature of "Thou shalt not kill" as a fundamental imperative, proposing that if one were not to defend to death one's child or loved one, that person might be considered "a murderer precisely by holding to such a precept" of non-violence (122).

For Juan Bautista Ritvo, problems arise from Del Barco's taking of "Thou shalt not kill" as a universal commandment, rather than a tribal maxim to be applied to those within one's own community, as Ritvo argues the mandate to be in its Biblical origins and in its later application to theories of just war. Ritvo posits that this ethical commandment must thus be understood contextually as something that applies only to those who behave as though they belonged to such a community and might, furthermore, necessitate killing those who threaten the lives of this community. Grüner expands upon this, suggesting that if "difference does not exist, if at root everyone is the same ... there is no possibility of a serious politics, and then the bastards win," arguing that politics are in essence an identification of differences within any community and a struggle to rule with and for those who share your convictions (139).

Grüner cannot agree to what he describes as Del Barco's equating of the violence carried out by Videla and other military figures to that of revolutionaries, writing that,

"politically it is not the same thing to kill whilst having the power and instruments of the State as when one doesn't" (138). Nonetheless, Grüner does not deny that the violence carried out by revolutionaries was criminal and points out that he and others have previously stated this; he does, however, vehemently disagree with Del Barco's description of leftist militant as serial killers, suggesting such "slippage into a journalist-police slang to be profoundly depoliticizing at the least" and a gross homogenization of the historical and political determinants of which these violent acts were a result (138).

In the midst of these critical responses to Del Barco's letter, Diego Tatián comes to his defense, suggesting many of these responses seem to have misunderstood the genre of Del Barco's brief letter in which he himself proclaims, "this is not a reasoned argument" (141). For Tatián, the impossibility of the mandate for no one to kill—or, likewise, for the disappeared to be brought back—should make obvious such statements' non-literality. In turn, this calling for the impossible, Tatián continues, is not reductive, but an attempt at representing the "unpresentable, to designate the residue of a common pain which cannot be denied," a statement that "denotes the ultimate meaning of all those fragile features protected by human rights organizations in Argentina and in the world at large in the last decades" (142). Tatián, as someone who does not identify with the *teoría de los dos demonios* or "the position that has angels on one side and devils on the other," considers Del Barco's letter to have intentionally provoked imperative debates (142).

Alejandro Kaufman's reflections on these polemics, published in 2007 in *Sobre la responsabilidad. No matar*, similarly consider Del Barco's provocations important, pointing to the necessity of recognizing the diversity and disagreement among the many different militant organizations in the 1970s. Reminding his readers that there were not

just the ERP and Montoneros, but dozens of revolutionary organizations that experienced "years of dissolution and reconstruction" partially due to disagreements regarding the role of armed struggle in bringing about a revolution, Kaufman argues the essentialness of considering the "diffuse, shifting, and heterogeneous" nature of the revolutionary collective subject (152).[60]

Kaufman's arguments are echoed in the frustration of many cultural critics with what is understood as the Kirchnerist narrative's homogenization of revolutionary organizations and leftist militants that lead to less accurate interpretations of the period. Feinmann has provocatively claimed, "No existen los setenta," explaining, "había tantos grupos y proyectos diferenciados que, en case de existir, sólo pueden existir en tanto diferencia, en tanto caleidoscopismo, en tanto enfrentamientos continuos, acuerdos también continuos, en tanto riqueza de una época imposible de meter en una simple fórmula" (52). Scholar, journalist, former detained militant (PRT and ERP), and co-author of the three-volume *La voluntad* Eduardo Anguita affirms supporting "muchísimas de las cosas" that the Kirchnerist administrations have done, but signals the problems involved in the oversimplified reclaiming of a generation that was fraught with divisions and oppositions, stating, "la Argentina es un país muy complejo, y que simplificar esto

[60] For further analysis of the debates provoked by Del Barco's letter, see Patrick Dove's examination of the relationship between ethics and politics within these conflicts. Dove posits that Del Barco's "Thou shalt not kill" grants sovereignty to ethics, while critical militant responses to the letter prioritize politics, resulting in the disputes being characterized as the result of two clashing points of view. Dove, instead, suggests that neither ethics or politics constitute the totality that Del Barco and his opponents suggest of them. Rather, for Dove, politics and ethics mutually inform and constitute one another, and through a closer consideration of the contested relationship between the two in these polemics, "the interruption of the political by the ethical and the interruption of the ethical by the political" can be observed, potentially leading to a "reciprocal touching, informing and destabilization" that Dove describes as urgently needed in the present (295).

como una reivindicación o no de los setenta, nos lleva al engaño" (qtd. in Bilbao, "Dos voces que cuentan dos relatos de los 70"). Anguita goes on to explain how within the Kirchnerist administration itself there are former members of more right-wing Peronist organizations, like the Guardia de Hierro, serving alongside former Montoneros and other leftist militants, all claiming to be recuperating a unified political tradition, rather than acknowledging the deep conflicts between the many different organizations of this generation.

Likewise, *La voluntad*'s other co-author, Caparrós, interviewed with Anguita, asserts that describing 1960s and 1970s militants as a generation is not convincing to him, suggesting instead that this was "un conjunto de gente muy heterogénea, unida por un objetivo, que cuarenta años después, se refleja en vidas que siguieron caminos muy diferentes" (qtd. in Bilbao, "Dos voces que cuentan dos relatos de los 70"). For Caparrós, these individuals were and continue to be quite diverse, as is evidenced by their differing participation in militancy four decades earlier and their varied later life trajectories thereafter. Caparrós is especially critical of the claim that this generation is now governing, arguing that many former militants also governed during Carlos Menem's presidency. The only difference between then and now, Caparrós contends, is that Kirchnerism has discursively reclaimed this "generation" and leftist militancy, meaning what is in play is not who governs on behalf of this "generation," but "qué discurso lleva adelante cada proyecto político" (qtd. in Bilbao, "Dos voces que cuentan dos relatos de los 70").

While the critics whose challenging of certain aspects of the Kirchnerist narrative examined here understandably often present themselves as marginalized by the official left and progressive discourse, their criticism is part of a growing corpus of journalism and scholarship that plants questions and suspicions about the authenticity and accuracy of more hegemonic memory and human rights politics. As this chapter has demonstrated, among these critics' objections are the incongruities between both Kirchners' pre-presidential and present-day relationship to human rights politics and organizations, abuses of human rights politics in casting political opponents as accomplices of the dictatorship, obfuscation of revolutionaries' political identities and activities, and inconsistent juridical practices that hold those who acted on behalf of the state accountable to criminal law, but excuse revolutionary violence, thereby enacting a partial form of justice that accordingly results in incomplete forms of memory and truth. This growing body of non-fiction cultural criticism indicates there to be increasing reservation and opposition from the left—particularly from those directly or indirectly involved in past leftist militancy—to accept the Kirchnerist narrative's political memorialization of revolutionaries. These writers' opposition to a narrative that they argue to co-opt human rights and memory politics for personal political gain and inaccurately idealize a "generation" to which many of these critics affirm having belonged suggest this official narrative's conceptions of memory, truth, and justice to be not only incomplete, but also dangerous to past, present, and future generations' understandings of the past.

More heterogeneous understandings of the past are beginning to be formed by this growing body of nonfiction that has opened up debates and begun to rework the Kirchnerist narrative by engaging in more critical depictions of the 1970s, revolutionary

organizations, armed violence, and broader societal responsibility for the dictatorship's violence. In this way, conceptions of memory, truth, and justice—and human rights discourse more broadly—are being revealed to be highly adaptable and fluid, subject to processes of negotiation by both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces, resulting in a continually in-flux, more heterogeneous narrative of this conflictive period to which non-fiction cultural production is also contributing, as Chapters 3 and 4 will explore.

Chapter 3: Militants Reconsidering Militancy in Martín Caparrós's *A quien corresponda* and Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*

In both Martín Caparrós's 2008 *A quien corresponda* and Leopoldo Brizuela's 2012 *Una misma noche*, the protagonist is a former militant who once believed firmly in the causes to which he had committed but now takes a more critical stance on leftist militancy, particularly that of the present day. The novels' protagonists share the belief that the Kirchnerist narrative and militancy have rendered simplified and inauthentic depictions of social actors—both those who acted on behalf of the state in detaining and torturing militants as well as leftist militants who were killed for their political actions. These works suggest that the polarizing discourse of present-day politicians and leftist militants that have capitalized on human rights as a political platform is reductive and harmful, especially to those with relationships with individuals characterized simply as repressors or victims. Standing in contrast to the Kirchnerist narrative, *A quien corresponda* and *Una misma noche* propose more complex renderings of such individuals, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of a complicated past.

Though each of these novels expresses a frustration with the ways in which Kirchnerism has narrated this past in a divisive and reductive fashion, they differ in the degree to which they oppose the Kirchnerist narrative and militancy. In Caparrós's novel, Carlos was a Montonero who believed fervently in the promise of a Socialist world and in the imminence of the triumph of 1970s revolutionary projects. The loss of his partner, Estela, and the uncertainty as to what happened to their still unborn child at the time of Estela's disappearance are painful experiences that Carlos had learned not to think about

in order to continue with his life. However, his friend and former *compañero*, Juanjo, who now occupies an important position in the Kirchnerist administration, sets in motion a chain of events that force Carlos to grapple with this past, which results in critical reflections on both 1970s and present-day leftist militancy. For Carlos, the desire he and his *compañeros* shared for radical equality was not bad, but the belief that they could find enough support throughout the country to win was tragically mistaken. Furthermore, their fight for justice is suggested to have resulted in devastating political violence and even greater inequalities in the present day. In addition to questioning 1970s leftist Peronism, Carlos is particularly critical of the Kirchnerist narrative's claim to be continuing this fight given ever-increasing inequality in the present. Additionally, for Carlos, this narrative's memorialization of the disappeared does not in fact honor Estela or lost comrades; rather, it reduces them to lifeless and voiceless monuments.

In *Una misma noche*, Leonardo's cynicism is more nascent, with his shift in identification with Kirchnerist militancy taking place during the course of the novel as he works through repressed memories of a night in 1976 in which he witnessed his father aiding the military in attempting to detain a neighbor. These contained memories return and flood Leonardo's thoughts when he witnesses the involvement of the police in robbing the same home in the present (this time with new neighbors) and the symmetry between the two events cannot be ignored. As a young adolescent, Leonardo was limitedly involved in 1970s leftist militancy, admiring and helping his cousin and her *compañeros* that met in his home. He more actively participated in Kirchnerist human rights militancy as an adult. Despite having taken up these causes and having spent the past thirty-four years trying to forget his witnessing of his father's actions that particular

night, Leonardo moves toward an understanding of the factors that might have led his father to collaborate with the military regime. Furthermore, he becomes increasingly frustrated with the divisive nature of Kirchnerist rhetoric that classifies individuals simply as heroes or monsters, though he does not reject the Kirchnerist administration nearly as vehemently as Carlos in *A quien corresponda*.

This chapter examines how the protagonists' critical depictions of current human rights politics, despite their previous identification with supposedly corresponding ideologies, suggest the limits and obstacles the Kirchnerist narrative has imposed on understanding the past, particularly so for those with intimate relationships with individuals represented merely as heroic *desaparecidos* or monstrous repressors by official memorial practices. As both novels explore, coming to terms with deeper and more conflicting truths, truths similar to what Paul Gready has termed "novel truths"—the "unfinished business" and "uncomfortable truths" that remain amidst the "rigid certainties" of juridical practices and truth commissions that novels are well equipped to unpack—, requires a willingness to dig deeply and often painfully (156). For the narrators of both novels, who had previously coped with difficult memories of loved ones by not confronting them, such pursuits become necessary in order to construct more complicated conceptions of memory, truth, and justice than the limited and damaging ones of official memorial practices.

Complicating and Debating Memory, Truth, and Justice

One of the primary criticisms both novels make of the Kirchnerist narrative is its pursuit of a singular and limited conception of memory, truth, and justice ("La Memoria,

La Verdad y La Justicia"). In *A quien corresponda* and *Una misma noche*, memory, truth, and justice are demonstrated to be much more complex and difficult to understand than political discourse would suggest. Ambiguities abound in these works, and memory, truth, and justice are depicted as elusive, uncertain, and often changing. Like Jacques Derrida's archive, these concepts are shown to have a "future-oriented structure," that makes them unstable, "always possible to re-interpret" (46).

Una misma noche challenges official memory in its demonstration of the complexities involved in remembering that rarely result in straightforward narratives. Throughout *Una misma noche*, there is an attempt to understand "esa lengua que ordena secretamente el mundo que nos parece un caos; la lengua en que se nombra, no solo a mi padre, sino todo lo innombrable" (258). This is exhibited in the novel's chapter titles—successive letters of the alphabet—and Leonardo's repeated declarations that he is writing about the past in order to try to understand it, speaking to a desire to uncover a language that will make sense of the past and present. Nonetheless, while reconstructing the past by writing memories bring Leonardo and the reader closer to a comprehension of it, language ultimately proves to have significant limitations as the last chapter, Z (a black rectangle), demonstrates. Language is crucial to shaping understandings of the past, but certain acts and realities remain unnamable. Furthermore, even those acts which can be described by language are demonstrated to be subject to endless rewritings, as is particularly experienced when the protagonist describes four possible hypotheses as to the events that may have transpired that evening in 1976, though he was present and likely knows somewhere within him what occurred (142-46).

Leonardo's struggling attempts to remember this moment point to the difficulties involved in remembering, particularly when memories have been suppressed for decades.[61] The prolonged repression of these memories is said to have produced a confusion within Leonardo between fiction and reality, as the novel's four parts—titled Novela, Memoria, Historia, and Sueño—suggest, pointing to the ways in which fiction, memory, history, and dreams blend together in attempts at retelling the past, producing uncertain narratives.[62]

This mixture is experienced throughout the novel and particularly so in the novel's last few chapters in which Leonardo dreams a sequence of events regarding that night thirty-four years ago. In this dream, Leonardo discovers that, within what he describes as a secret language that orders the chaos of the world, "papá" translates to "he who opens the door." As he calls out for his father, his father repeatedly kicks him in the stomach (as he kicked open the neighbors' door thirty-four years ago) to the cheering of those surrounding the act. In response to these kicks, Leonardo does not feel pain, but an enormous hole that opens within him, as if a door within him were being opened that led "al vacío y al océano," where his father throws him (260). Throughout this fall into the ocean and emptiness, Leonardo states that he says nothing "y sobre mí se cierra el mar del olvido" (261).

A brief chapter separates this scene from Leonardo's recollections of a corresponding one two years earlier (1974) in which he dove into his pool, submerging

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[61] For an analysis of the role of trauma in this novel as well as its impact on Leonardo's memories of this time period, see María del Carmen Castañeda Hernández.

[62] See Castañeda Hernández, who describes the novel's representation of a violent past as one that "no se puede clasificar ni como historia ni como ficción en sentido estricto—que logra restablecer una coyuntura entre la realidad, el arte y la memoria" (126).

himself deeper and deeper until he reached the bottom, barely being able to stand it, but wanting to know that he could, desiring to feel "cómo es no poder más" (271). Leonardo describes the "fondo espléndido, el centro de la tierra. Su negrura" that he discovers in doing so, which is visually interpreted by the novel's following and final chapter, which is only a black rectangle (271). This memory approximates Leonardo's attempts throughout the novel to remember that night, pointing to the significant difficulties involved in doing so and the uncertainties and darkness that remain even once one has. The majority of the novel is filled with Leonardo's writings on this night and its similarities with one in the present, but neither the reader nor the protagonist is left with a clear, "rigid certainty" of the events that took place by the novel's conclusion.

Memory is thereby understood within the novel not to be stagnant or definitive, fitting into a tidy political narrative, but ever changing and unclear, continually open to reconstructions, as Elizabeth Jelin ("Revisitando el campo de las memorias") has suggested and as is similarly suggested by Albertina Carri's 2003 *Los rubios* in which "the call for total memory" is replaced by "an exploration of the unavoidable gaps and contradictions" and the "fundamental inconclusiveness of memory and identity" (Nouzeilles 266-268). For author Brizuela, the changing and elusive nature of memory that can continually be reconstructed is essential to the novel that relates "cómo nuestros recuerdos van cambiando con el correr del tiempo. Cómo basta un solo dato para que nos contemos un mismo recuerdo, de manera distinta, en un relato con diferentes sentidos ... [cómo] podemos recrear el recuerdo, y esa recreación modifica nuestro presente" (qtd. in Alvarez, "Feria del libro"). The concrete actions Leonardo and his father took that night—what might approximate official truths—are thereby revealed not to be as

important to him as the ways in which the protagonist remembers and understands them, as Brizuela has remarked: "lo que hace el padre en la novela es mucho menos importante que lo que el hijo deduce de la contemplación de las acciones del padre" **(**qtd. in Alvarez, "Feria del libro"**)**.

Leonardo stresses that he must write in order to understand—"pero yo estoy a tiempo de entenderlo, me digo, si escribo"—, but the understanding he seeks is not at all a mere recounting of what took place that night (26). Rather, it is a grappling with his father's and his own (in)actions and an attempt to come to terms with how they have formed him. It is only by writing that Leonardo believes he can make sense of these experiences, and he sets out not simply to give an account of the events that took place those two evenings, but to discover the connections between them, their significance to his relationship with his father, and his own responsibility and complicity in the two events: "Y comprendo que la escritura es una manera única de iluminar la conexión entre el pasado y el presente. Y eso me alienta a empezar: no como quien informa, sino como quien descubre" (43). The interpretations Leonardo draws from his limited and confusing memories regarding his father's actions that evening compose what he describes as his "verdad más profunda" (167), a truth he writes his mother has seemed to perceive within him ever since that night thirty-four years ago, but which remains to him "una verdad que yo mismo no consigo entender" (72), though writing brings him closer to doing so.

Leonardo's uncertain and conflicting memories of what happened that particular evening in 1976 are not unlike the "inconfundible desorden de la memoria" that he reads in his neighbor Diana Kuperman's 2005 testimony in the *Juicios por la Verdad*. In this testimony, Leonardo writes, "no había en ella ninguna secuencia reconocible: ninguna

escena de aquellas que describe el *Nunca más*," pointing to the incongruities often found between official memory and individuals' experiences (172). Leonardo's discoveries regarding the Papel Prensa case, which plays an important role within the novel, further challenge the Kirchnerist narrative, suggesting that it may not only be too simplified, but might also cover up important truths that threaten a narrative predicated on the absolute heroism and innocence of 1970s leftist militants.[63] Through his readings of Diana Kuperman's testimony in the *Juicios por la Verdad* and his dreamlike reconstructions of the past, Leonardo suggests that it was a Montonero known as el Topo that had given the military Kuperman, Graiver, and Goldenberg's names. Within Leonardo's imaginations of this scenario, el Topo is a Montonero who was involved in the historical kidnapping of brothers Juan and Jorge Born, respectively Manager and Director General of Bunge & Borne, one of Argentina's most powerful corporations, who were eventually released for a ransom of sixty million dollars.[64] Leonardo also dreams el Topo to have been the responsible party for collecting a suitcase full of money each month from Jaime

[63] *Una misma noche* directly situates itself in present-day Argentina with the inclusion of the Papel Prensa case, related to the broader conflict between Kirchnerism and the *Clarín* media conglomerate. In August 2010, Fernández de Kirchner presented the document *Papel Prensa: La verdad*, which was immediately followed by investigations of the 1976 allegedly brutally forced sale by the military regime of shares of Papel Prensa, Argentina's largest manufacturer of newsprint, after its largest shareholder, David Graiver, died in a plane crash. Graiver's widow, Lidia Papaleo, and her recent conflicting testimonies as to whether the sale of her shares in newspaper *La Opinión* and Papel Prensa in 1977 were negotiated under duress or not (and whether current *Clarín* CEO Héctor Magnetto directly participated in such alleged torture sessions) play an important role in Brizuela's novel. For more on this case and its contradictions, see, for example, Santiago Marino and Glenn Postolski.

[64] For more regarding the historical involvement of David Graiver in investing the millions earned from the ransom paid for the Born brothers, see Marcelo Larraquy.

Goldenberg, David Graiver's right-hand man for whom Diana Kuperman worked.[65] Leonardo's imaginative reconstruction of this past explains how el Topo had refused to provide these names or any information no matter how brutally he was tortured until they brought his four-year-old daughter to witness his torture sessions. El Topo's daughter's presence broke his silence and led him not only to provide names but to assist in their torture, and it is Diana Kuperman's surprise at recognizing his voice while detained, as recorded in her testimony, that allows Leonardo to make this connection.

It is a nagging feeling that something is missing from the official story—"que los Graiver—y probablemente Diana—eran gente sin escrúpulos, codiciosos al punto de aceptar un dinero manchado de sangre"—that leads Leonardo to seek truths beyond "la versión más simple y generalizada por esos tiempos" (137). Doing so allows Leonardo to discover another possible truth in which a Montonero might have been involved in Kuperman and Goldenberg's detention and torture as a result of the trauma he faced in having his daughter present while being tortured. This possible truth challenges one that relies upon an idealized understanding of 1970s leftist militants in its explorations of the choices that many were forced to make when faced with extreme circumstances, providing less lifeless and more authentic depictions of social actors and the decisions they made. It also moves beyond absolute understandings of the categories of victim and torturer, examining how one person could be both, thereby revealing what Sophia

[65] The novel's narration of the Papel Prensa case—like its retelling of much of the dictatorial period and present day—hybridizes fiction and reality with the invention of such characters as Diana Kuperman, Jaime Goldenberg, and El Topo, who, within the novel, are associated with a fictional representation of real-life banker and Montonero investor David Graiver.

McClennen has described as the "dialectical intersections" between perceived "absolute reified divisions" of these categories (14).

The deeper truths constructed by Leonardo's writings are ones in which nobody is entirely innocent, including Leonardo himself, and in which what author Brizuela describes as "capas y capas de culpas y silencios" are uncovered (qtd. in Friera, "Leopoldo Brizuela y *Una misma noche*"). From the novel's very beginning, Leonardo's guilt regarding what he has seen and is reluctant to share presents itself. After witnessing a man waiting idly on his street at three o' clock in the morning—something Leonardo considers odd—, a car with three other men, the door to the Chagas' home left open, and a police car with two officers, Leonardo describes the "culpa de saber, de haber sido testigo" that he experiences (15). Soon after, he thinks to himself how lucky he is that the men did not see him and that he will not be held responsible for what he saw: "Por suerte, no me han visto. No seré su testigo. Puedo seguir mi vida" (16). This fear of witnessing, the reader soon learns, stems from what Leonardo saw thirty-four years before when his father assisted the military in breaking into the Kupermans' home and the lack of action he took, thereby becoming complicit in such acts.

As Leonardo delves further into his memories, he begins to recall what he saw his father do and how, rather than intervening, he chose to play the piano, attempting to escape the moment, an avoidance practice he says he has continued into the present day, though now through writing: "¿no había seguido haciendo lo mismo, cambiando el teclado de mi piano por la máquina de escribir y después por la computadora, refugiándome en el arte de mentir mientras los demás matan?" (163). Leonardo never physically harmed anyone, but he finds himself responsible for having participated in

dictatorial violence by remaining silent as such practices took place and in the years that followed. Throughout the novel, Leonardo is accompanied by a deep guilt and a sense that he is not as different as he would like to believe from those portrayed as monsters by the Kirchnerist narrative: "*No puedo ser como ellos. No quiero ser como ellos. No debo ser como ellos. No habría querido ver lo que vi*" (123).

This understanding of guilt in which all who were present and turned a blind eye are implicated in the disappearance of thousands of citizens is quite different than that of the Kirchnerist narrative, which distinguishes simply between victims and repressors—those who were disappeared and those who tortured and murdered them.[66] As the novel's broader understanding of responsibility insinuates, such violence could not have taken place without the predominant silence of society. Brizuela's articulation in an interview of the parallels between the protagonist's fears about what he knows and those of civil society during the dictatorship points to a much broader societal complicity than what is often presented by official memory: "Pero es un miedo más sobre lo que se sabe, no sobre lo desconocido. Siempre se ha insistido sobre el desconocimiento de la sociedad civil, que no sabía lo que sucedía durante la dictadura. Y sin embargo, el chico Bazán percibe un montón de cuestiones, aunque tal vez no les pueda poner en palabras" (qtd. in Friera, "Leopoldo Brizuela y *Una misma noche*"). As Laura Di Marco writes, the Kirchnerist narrative has found "tierra fértil" in alleviating the unconscious collective

[66] Robert Meister's (2011) analysis of the roles of bystanders and beneficiaries during repressive regimes and periods of transitional justice highlights the similarities between these two categories. According to Meister, in addition to bystanders becoming beneficiaries and vice-versa, they can each also become perpetrators, victims, or witnesses. His analysis of the fluidity of these positions is similar to what Leonardo identifies within himself and others, once again contesting a simplified victim/oppressor binary.

guilt of much of society who felt that they did not intervene as they should have during the dictatorial period but now have the opportunity to do so in supporting a human rights oriented political project ("Divididos por los 70").

The deeper, more complex truths presented in *Una misma noche* call for a less simplified understanding of justice. That is, one in which there is space to wrestle with questions like the following ones Leonardo asks himself:

> ¿Era igualmente culpable, y merecía igual castigo, el que mató y torturó que el que simplemente no se atrevió a enfrentar el horror? Y aun hoy, quien señalaba y se creía con derecho de ejercer el castigo, ¿podía creerse verdaderamente inocente? ¿O solo acusamos para no ver que el mal que habita en el otro también acecha en uno? (251)

Innocence and guilt are not easy to determine within this novel, thereby insinuating justice to be a much more complicated process than what is presented by the Kirchnerist narrative. Definitive understandings of these categories are needed for legal trials regarding crimes of the past. However, the novel suggests that more multifaceted conceptions of guilt and justice are also crucial to cultural memory, truth, and justice—to a grappling with the "unfinished business" that "novel truths" are well suited to explore (Gready 156).[67]

These truths in which forms of complicity and implication are examined are met with significant resistance by those more inclined to accept the Kirchnerist narrative. In describing his militant aunt and uncle's denial of what happened that particular night at

[67] Michael Rothberg's forthcoming *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* provides a useful framework for moving beyond a guilty/innocent paradigm, looking at various forms of implication that include bystanders, beneficiaries, and others deeply connected to pasts that they did not experience directly.

his home thirty-four years ago, Leonardo writes, "No quieren comprender que, de alguna manera, aquella noche nosotros negociamos, porque toda negociación quita pureza, o por lo menos recuerda la impureza de sobrevivir" (41). Likewise, Leonardo writes that he had thrown himself into human rights organizations for years in part to avoid remembering that night and avoid admitting his own complicity to himself, "Para protegerme de ese recuerdo yo me había adherido a las víctimas. Quería ir aprehendiendo un abecedario que por fin me ayudaría a contármelo, tolerablemente, algún día. Mientras tanto había tenido que vivir aparentando que mi terror no existía" (130).

Part of Leonardo's fears regarding confronting these memories stem from a concern for how such recollections will compare to more official narratives of the past, such as those told by the CONADEP's *Nunca más* report and the Kirchnerist narrative. Writing of the Manichean character of these narratives, Leonardo suggests that they do not begin to touch the essence of his own (and, it is implied, that of many people's) experience in which they were not and are not purely good people, suggesting victim/oppressor and angel/demon binaries often used to describe this period to be false and harmful, particularly to his own attempts to remember this period (83).[68]

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[68] In several contexts, including *Operación Primicia*, Ceferino Reato has referred to the polarizing tendency of Kirchnerist discourse that considers militants to be pure heroes and former repressors to be absolute monsters as the "teoría de ángeles y demonios," a spin on the *teoría de los dos demonios*. The *teoría de los dos demonios*, which Kirchnerist discourse often suggests attempts at critical analyses of leftist militant violence to be propagating, originated as a term in reaction to the CONADEP's *Nunca más* report, whose prologue, as discussed in Chapter 1, suggested the violence committed by militants to be equivalent to that of the State ("Durante la década del 70, la Argentina fue convulsionada por un terror que provenía tanto desde la extrema derecha como de la extrema izquierda"). Reato articulates his own position against both of these theories in the following manner: "Ni dos demonios ni ángeles y demonios. Mi posición es que un periodista debe preocuparse sólo por llegar lo más cerca posible de la verdad, tanto en el presente como en el pasado. Y que no debe distraerse con ese tipo de teorías, que son

Writing about the disparity between Leonardo's own memories and official memory induces fear in him not only because he has to confront other truths about himself, but because he is concerned about how others will receive a more truthful narrative that digs below the surface of official ones, exposes the complicity and impurity of most individuals—including Leonardo and his parents—, and recognizes that "basta que nos nombremos de manera distinta para que varíe todo el relato, y sobre todo, el juicio del lector. Para algunos seremos, claro, héroes. Para otros, cómplices—digo, temblando—. Colaboracionistas" (37). While part of Leonardo has yearned for the "embriaguez de poder liberarme," another part has dreaded the way the actions he and his parents took that particular night—or even the fact that his father was once a soldier—would be received by his *compañeros*, present-day human rights and Kirchnerist militants whose polarized understanding of this complicated past does not tolerate ambiguities well: "Porque además, si yo hubiera actuado de otra manera, si hubiera mostrado eso que él había hecho, o si tan solo me hubiera mostrado como familiar de un marino, las víctimas, estoy seguro, me habrían expulsado" (130). This rigid understanding of the dictatorial past that would not allow for the son of a soldier to have anything to do with a human rights organization is shown to have contributed to less complete interpretations of the past, despite significant political emphasis on memory, truth, and justice.

Leonardo's friend and former student, Miki, a leftist Peronist and Kirchnerist militant whose guerrilla father was killed and whose mother directs the Rodolfo Walsh Institute at the former ESMA, where his detained uncle and aunt were most likely tortured, has a difficult time understanding the ambiguous nature of these memories for

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artificios políticos pensados para avalar o respaldar determinadas decisiones de poder" ("Gelman: ni dos demonios, ni ángeles y demonios").

Leonardo. When Leonardo attempts to express the importance of this to Miki, telling him, "se dice que somos los relatos que nos contamos sobre nosotros mismos. Pero también somos aquello que no podemos expresar en ningún relato," Miki grows impatient, asking if there is something concrete about which Leonardo cannot write (84).

Pablo, like Miki, a former student of Leonardo's and the son of *desaparecidos*, also has a difficult time with uncertainties in stories about the dictatorial past. Pablo was named after a guerrilla who, upon knowing he had been discovered, locked himself in his house, electrified the door knobs, poured gas over the floors and walls, and shot himself only after being certain that he had killed seven soldiers. When Pablo tells Leonardo that he wants to write stories about "nuestra historia," he means the story of his disappeared parents and their guerrilla fight, stories that have a definitive form and purpose, for, as Leonardo writes, Pablo "no soporta la ambigüedad de la literatura. La función que él otorga a escribir, a imaginar, no es buscar la ambigüedad de la vida, oh no: es aniquilarla" (132). This mention of annihilating ambiguity references the 1975 Decrees of Annihilation, designed to annihilate the subversion of leftist militants, thereby establishing a sort of parallel between Pablo's intolerance of views contradictory to his own and the perceived need for eradicating subversion in the 1970s. Pablo and Miki's intolerance of the uncertainties of Leonardo's memories and writing process underscore the Kirchnerist narrative's rigid certainties regarding 1970s leftist militancy and the dictatorial past that have contributed to the psychologically damaging repression of Leonardo's memories not congruent with this narrative.

Una misma noche's conception of memory is quite different from that of the Kirchnerist narrative, which advocates a fixed understanding of past events predicated on

rather absolute estimations of individuals who were either innocent, heroic victims or monstrous perpetrators. The novel's construction of truth as something that is deep within Leonardo but difficult to access and discern similarly stands in contrast to the Kirchnerist narrative's representation of truth—one that suggests the crimes of the dictatorial past are obvious ones that must simply be uncovered and exposed through juridical proceedings and the release of hidden military records. Furthermore, the guilt that Leonardo experiences as he explores these deeper truths allude to a broader societal complicity that is not limited to those who tortured and disappeared people on behalf of the state, implicating all who chose not to look or intervene while atrocities were being committed. Justice within the Kirchnerist narrative relies upon certain, coherent understandings of right and wrong and of memory and truth as well as easily identifiable heroes and victims, but *Una misma noche* implies that each of these notions are more complicated.

In *A quien corresponda*, official memory—referred to within the novel as "la Memoria"—is repeatedly and vehemently criticized by Carlos. For the protagonist, "la Memoria" is the current political administration's demand that 1970s leftist militants be memorialized in a particular way in the present despite the fact that, as he tells Juanjo, the administration governs on behalf of the same wealthy people who were once their generation's enemies (98).[69] Carlos's condemnation of the partisan uses of memory and human rights in order to develop popularity for a political project that represents that

[69] Caparrós has argued that official memory has led to the word memory—"tan plural" in its other uses—to be restricted to one singular meaning within present-day Argentine culture. He writes of how strange he finds the concept of a Museo de la Memoria to be if museums, by definition, are not always a place of memory (of memories of dinosaurs, successful painters, and so on), writing that this idea of memory is a "consagración de la palabra con un sentido único" (*Argentinismos* 83).

which militants died trying to oppose pervades the novel. Taking issue with the argument that official memory practices serve to keep similar events from ever happening again, Carlos proposes that there would be more discussions and debates regarding why the events of the past unfolded they way they did if this were truly the objective:

> La Memoria es acordarse de que los militares los secuestraron los torturaron los mataron. La Memoria se volvió una obligación moral social: para que no se repita, dicen. Para eso—o para lo que fuera—deberían pensar por qué decidieron matarnos, qué tipo de sociedad querían ellos y cuál nosotros, quién apoyaba a cada cual, pero no: se esconden detrás de la Memoria y repiten frases hechas. Son malos que matan a unos chicos, la Memoria … Otra forma de exculparse o de manipular o de dejar que piensen otros, la Memoria. (206)

For Carlos, "la Memoria" is a political form of manipulation that prefers simple "frases hechas" that will serve its own political aims to an examination of the causes of the military dictatorship and an analysis of the types of societies that different groups were trying to form in the 1970s.[70] In an interview, Caparrós expressed his own surprise and frustration regarding the lack of debate produced by the novel, suggesting that this discussion is sorely missing not only within the novel's representation of the present-day

[70] This position is a common one among many journalists, cultural critics, and other public figures, including Santiago Cantón, the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and an adviser to Sergio Massa, who is the founder and current leader of the *Frente Renovador* political party and a 2015 presidential candidate. When interviewed about Kirchnerist human rights politics, Cantón discussed the positive advances that have been made with recent trials but also emphasized the danger of their partisan appropriation of human rights that has led the administration's members to consider themselves "dueños de los derechos humanos," leading to a problematic "falta de autocrítica" (qtd. in Baron, "El kirchnersimo cree ser el dueño de los derechos humanos").

political climate, but also in that climate itself: "Yo pensé que se iba a producir cierta discusión: no produjo nada. Quizás nadie quería discutirlo …. yo lo escribí porque estaba muy cabreado por todo el uso que se estaba haciendo con eso, y como tenía algunas tiradas bastante violentas, pensé que iba a haber discusión" (qtd. in "Martín Caparrós en Eterna Cadencia").

Like Leonardo in *Una misma noche*, Carlos is not satisfied with simplified narratives or explanations and continually seeks to identify and comprehend deeper truths.[71] Whereas Coronel Mariano Díaz Latucci (with whom Carlos meets in order to learn more about the disappearance of his partner, Estela) believes that discussing the past in the present is harmful to Argentine society, Carlos dedicates much of his writing to attempts at understanding the many questions he has regarding the country's and his own personal past—ones that he finds the Kirchnerist narrative to have avoided entirely, despite its continual discussion of the 1970s.

In several parts of the novel, Carlos writes of imaginary conversations he would have with Father Augusto Fiorello, the chaplain at the detention and torture center where it is believed Estela was imprisoned and the priest whose murder in the present day begins the novel. Carlos partially desires to hate the man who convinced soldiers of the righteousness of torturing and murdering guerrillas, and he spends a great part of the novel mapping his plan for vengeance, which involves the priest's murder. However, Carlos often finds himself more interested in understanding the priest than in exacting

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[71] See also Caparrós's *Argentinismos*, in which he writes of how he wishes he could see truth as simply as this narrative claims to, suggesting it to contain comfortable, easy truths that are not sustainable upon deeper examination (12). For Caparrós, absolute truths are problematic precisely because they are absolute and certain, which impedes the possibility of critically considering and revising them, processes he considers necessary to more critical understandings of the past (22-23).

revenge for Estela's murder. In an imaginary conversation with Estela, Carlos tells her, "Yo no quiero matarlo todavía, flaca, yo querría entenderlo" (259), and he later writes, "Yo podía matarlo, pero lo que realmente quería era hablar con él: que me explicara" (267).

Similarly, in the Editor's Note at the end of the novel, at which point the reader discovers that it is Valeria, Carlos's present-day lover, who has compiled his writings to form the novel, the following observation is made by Valeria: "Ahora me parece que, más que vengarse, lo que quiso fue escribir su historia" (319). For Carlos, as for Leonardo, writing is a means of discovering and coming to terms with the past that demands piercing the surface of simplified "frases hechas" and binaries. When Carlos does this, he does not discover a deep hatred for a monstrous priest whom words cannot describe. Rather, he finds sympathy for the doubts and questions he imagines the priest must have faced at certain moments in his life, deeply surprising and frightening himself by the ways in which he is able to identify with him: "No podía dejar de pensarlo—con una forma rara de la simpatía: la comprensión que se puede descubrir—de pronto, descubrir—hacia aquel o aquello que uno imaginaba básicamente incomprensible …. y esa misma cercanía me resultaba aterradora" (119).

It is not only Father Fiorello whom Carlos cannot bring himself to hate or categorize as entirely evil, despite his loss of Estela and many *compañeros* as well as the crushing defeat of the revolution in which he once believed. Carlos also finds it difficult to detest soldiers who tortured militants. In his crusade to help Carlos learn more about Estela's disappearance, Juanjo convinces Carlos to meet with Velarde, who, according to Juanjo, remembers Estela from Aconcagua. Carlos assumes Velarde to have been a

fellow leftist militant, but, through the course of their conversation, he realizes that he was part of the military and responsible for many acts of torture there. Carlos is stunned by this discovery, but even more surprised by his own response: "no entendía por qué seguía sentado con él—un represor, un torturador, un asesino, me decía—, por qué seguía escuchándolo, tratándolo como a una persona normal. No entendía, sobre todo, por qué no lo miraba con todo el odio del mundo" (46-47).

To his own dismay, Carlos continues to listen to Velarde as he equates the convictions he and his fellow soldiers had to those of leftist militants in that both groups believed they were saving the country—the former from gross socio-economic inequality and the latter from violence and disaster. Velarde goes on to produce a version of the *teoría de los dos demonios* in arguing that both sides committed horrible atrocities, and, though he does not agree with this theory, Carlos is stupefied by the lack of hatred he feels for him, a hatred that would have come easily to him thirty years before: "que no sabía cómo hacer para odiarlo por lo que había hecho treinta años atrás. Y me sentía una basura" (50).

No longer able to categorize as neatly between "nosotros" and "ellos" as he once could or as the current political administration does, Carlos prefers to seek deeper, more uncomfortable truths that require an ability to listen to individuals that committed terrible crimes (25). In his conversations with several former repressors, an emphasis is placed on their patriotic motives that permitted them to believe Argentina's future welfare depended on their eradication of subversion, and parallels are drawn between the acts of violence of both groups, each committed in their own ways in order to bring about different types of worlds in which each group deeply believed. While the narrator does

not agree with the positions of these former repressors, he chooses to listen to them in order to attempt to understand.

Furthermore, the text examines the ways in which soldiers and priests were used by broader social sectors to do their dirty work in exterminating those they considered to be subversives, only to be subsequently cast as villains. Major Oscar Aldo Paredes, who continues to believe that the military's use of torture and murder was necessary in order to save the country, tells Carlos that such acts were committed on behalf of much of the population, who begged to be defended but quickly turned on their "rescuers": "peleamos por ellos, le digo, los salvamos, y después cuando ya habíamos ganado nos tiraron a la mierda como un trapo de piso …. ah no, pero mire esos militares cómo puede ser que anduvieran haciendo cosas como ésas, quién se podía imaginar, qué animales" (221). The same is said of the church with regard to priests who aided the dictatorship, "esa iglesia hizo lo mismo que los ricos argentinos: después de usarlos, abominó de los que le hicieron el trabajo sucio, los echó a los leones" (309).

As in *Una misma noche*, then, attention is called to the blamelessness of few and the complicity of many, despite their professed outrage at the atrocities committed by the military. In an interview regarding the novel, Caparrós highlighted this broader societal connivance in the dictatorship, particularly among middle and upper classes, beneficiaries who he suggests profited significantly from economic measures implemented then, "Hoy muchos de los ricos argentinos actuales no lo serían si no fuera por lo que hicieron los militares, y ahora son tan gratos y tan canallas que salen a hacer declaraciones en su contra" (qtd. in Cusimano, "Todo está por inventarse").

Additionally, in this interview and within the novel, attention is brought to the parallels between the fears of much of the middle and upper classes regarding revolutionary violence prior to the military coup and present-day outcries of insecurity.[72] The pervasiveness of these fears is noted by Carlos, who writes, "Los medios no podían dejar de hablar de la inseguridad, los amigos no podían dejar de hablar de la inseguridad, los argentinos no parecían saber hablar de ninguna otra cosa" (250). In a reunion among former *compañeros*, Guillermo complains of the unbearable state of insecurity within the country, and Juanjo accuses of him of joining the bourgeois chorus in his complaints. Guillermo negates this accusation, details the four times he has been attacked, and claims that he almost has more fear in the present than he did as a leftist militant during the dictatorship (162-64). Guillermo's anxieties are criticized by his other former *compañeros* as wealthy, right-wing concerns that reflect a lack of interest in addressing systematic inequalities that lead to higher crime rates. Caparrós has similarly suggested that present-day, largely irrational fears of insecurity have much to do with the widespread, though rarely discussed, societal support the military had in 1976 by panic-stricken citizens who were fearful of a Socialist revolution (qtd. in Cusimano, "Todo está por inventarse").

Carlos does not excuse himself or his generation of leftist militants from blame either. Instead, as will shortly be discussed in further detail, he suggests that their desire for radical equality and attempts to bring it about were doomed from the beginning and

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[72] See *Argentinismos*, where Caparrós similarly argues, "Hoy la mayoría de los argentinos tienden a olvidar que estaban en contra de la violencia revolucionaria, que preferían el capitalismo y que estuvieron muy satisfechos cuando los militares salieron a poner orden …. la sociedad argentina se armó un relato según el cual todos estaban en contra de los militares o, por lo menos, no tenían ni idea," referring to this as "el relato de la inocencia mayoritaria" (107).

resulted in devastating political violence and even greater inequalities in the present day. In addition to claiming responsibility for the ways in which his ideological acts contributed to societal destruction, Carlos partially blames himself for Estela's death and for not having been a better partner to her. Among the personal regrets he expresses are the doubts he had when she told him she was pregnant, his at times wavering political commitment and suggestion that they leave the country, which deeply disappointed her, and his cowardice in not dying for her and for the cause. Carlos's final words within the novel, as he resolves to enact his plan of vengeance, "Estela, no te preocupes: esta vez, no te voy a defraudar" (317), point to the guilt he feels surrounding the kind of partner he was to her, particularly when she, in Carlos's words, "siempre supo obligarme a ser mejor que yo" (143).

Definitive divisions of guilty and innocent or right and wrong do not hold within this novel in which Carlos prioritizes understanding the causes of violence and devastation above what he considers a simplified narrative constructed for partisan political uses. The truths that are sought in *A quien corresponda* differ significantly from what is meant by truth in the Kirchnerist narrative in seeking more complex understandings of why a military coup might have been a welcome response to the violent chaos of the 1970s for many, though few will admit this in the present.

Likewise, *A quien corresponda*'s conception of truth includes many ambiguities and unanswered questions, suggesting that certain truths may not be knowable, or that knowing them is not always for the best. There are insinuations that Valeria, Carlos's lover who visits him every Thursday, may also be his daughter, the child with whom Estela was pregnant before disappearing, though whether this is the case is never

clarified, and Carlos seems unaware of this possibility (290). At the end of the novel, the reader learns from Valeria's editorial note that Carlos and Father Fiorello died on the same day, though later falsified documentation discovered by a detective investigating the murder suggests that Carlos died two years prior. It is likely that Juanjo had something to do with modifying these records, but why he did so is less clear. Carlos's death is said to have been caused by a heart attack from natural causes, and Valeria adds, "lo cual significa que no encontraron indicios de ninguna otra cosa, pero tampoco los buscaron," implying the possibility of other causes without providing further details (318). The novel leaves the reader with several unanswered questions, illustrating a complex form of truth that does not attempt to know the answers to every question or categorize each event and person, leaving much open to interpretation.

Who killed Father Fiorello also remains a mystery with possible assassins including Carlos, the hit man he had hired to kill him but then tried to stop in order to do it himself, or somebody hired by Juanjo. Juanjo's involvement in this vengeance plan is revealed when Carlos is threatened one evening by Velarde, who warns him not to proceed with his plan to assassinate Father Fiorello. Carlos speculates that Juanjo is behind this threat, and when his suspicion is confirmed, Carlos asks himself if Juanjo might not be responsible for setting his entire plan (which began after the initial meeting Juanjo arranged between Carlos and Velarde) into motion due to some conflict the political administration might have with the church: "—un tema de presupuestos, una ley discutida, un candidato—y le sirviera que Velarde me pusiera en la pista de ese cura para amenazarlos, presionarlos" (287).

Juanjo pleads with Carlos not to carry out his plan of vengeance not for legal or moral reasons, but because an act of revenge by a former leftist militant would put the Kirchnerist narrative in danger because, as Juanjo reminds Carlos, its impact depends on leftist militants being perceived as innocent victims (283). Juanjo does not care if the priest is murdered; in fact, he offers to help orchestrate an "accident" that would kill him. What concerns Juanjo is how such an incident might threaten frail official versions of memory, truth, and justice.

Perhaps the novel's most pressing uncertainty has to do with Estela's life after her disappearance. Carlos imagines several different scenarios regarding what might have happened to her, including one in which she survived by forming a sexual relationship with her torturer and, after the transition to democracy, was forced to flee with a new identity, unable or not desiring to have any contact with Carlos. Carlos writes that this possibility is the one that hurts him most, but also the only one that gives him peace in allowing him to believe that Estela might still be alive and that she might also have betrayed the cause, as he implies he did (33-34).

The most banal and tragic possibility Carlos can imagine is one in which Estela maintained her ideological convictions throughout her torture, not providing any useful information to her torturers, and was killed soon after (38). Carlos has several imaginary conversations with Estela throughout the novel, and the versions of her with whom he converses vary significantly, sometimes resembling Estela as Carlos remembers her from thirty years before and other times approximating how Carlos imagines she would be in the present day. Carlos's uncertainties in not knowing with whom he is sharing these

conversations or how to remember her at times lead him to grow frustrated, "Ay, flaca, Estela: si supiera quién sos me podrías contestar mejor tantas preguntas" (260).

Eventually, though, Carlos's search to learn more about what happened to Estela—something he had previously avoided altogether—leads him to no longer be able to freely invent different potential scenarios for what might have happened to Estela. He writes that his fictionalization of history becomes less possible as his immersion in discovering details about Estela's disappearance brings him to remember her more concretely: "Me pasé años creyendo que, porque estaba muerta, podría hacer con ella lo que quería: …. Estos últimos tiempos, desde que empecé a reconstruir su historia, me di cuenta de que no podía … tenía que tomar alguna decisión: decidirla" (143). In remembering more actively, Carlos loses the ability to freely reconstruct history as he chooses, finding himself forced to reckon with memories and truths that had lain dormant within him for years. As for Leonardo in *Una misma noche*, then, discovering repressed memories is a complicated and uncertain process, but one that leads to the discovery of more truthful memories.[73]

When Velarde warns Carlos not to continue pursuing revenge, he threatens him with "la verdadera historia de tu mujer" that will be released to the news sources if he does not obey (254). According to this narrative, Carlos turned Estela in, and, overcome with desperation, she gave the names and whereabouts of ten other *compañeros*. Carlos

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[73] Similarly, as Nouzeilles argues, in Carri's *Los rubios*, though there is a push against singular understandings of the past and movement towards more plural memories, this "does not translate into a superficial celebration of a liberal pluralism of memory according to which any form of recollection has exactly the same value as any other form of recollection," stressing instead "the inherently controversial nature of memory, even in the case of those who seem to be in complete agreement on their irrevocable condemnation of a violent past" (269).

denies this story, and it is unlikely that it is an accurate account of what happened, though the reader cannot be entirely certain. Juanjo's later admission to being the responsible party for this threat point to the ease with which Carlos and Estela's story could be manipulated by those in the current political administration as well as the political power that media alliances have granted the Kirchnerist narrative, allowing it to construct truths as it chooses.[74]

Truths regarding the past can always be fashioned to suit one's purposes, but Carlos's eventual inability to continue inventing what happened to Estela once he begins actively remembering her suggests that more authentic truths are not formed this way. Juanjo's indirect threat to spin and spread an untrue story about how Carlos and Estela betrayed one another and "the cause" indicate an abuse of power and media alliances on behalf of the current political administration. This threat also calls into question the supposedly absolute truths put forth by the Kirchnerist narrative and its motives for propagating a particular story. For Carlos, this narrative is one that exploits leftist militants' torture and deaths for political gain, allowing those in power to govern on behalf of the wealthy while pretending to have assumed the popular cause of the disappeared, abusing "la sangre de los muertos para engalanar … 'para pintar de rojo'—un gobierno que no intentaba ningún cambio" (283).

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[74] Related to this ability to create and disseminate truths as it desires is the Kirchnerist administration's exclusion of several intellectuals—including Martín Caparrós—from state-supported cultural activities due to these individuals' more critical stances on Kirchnerism. For Caparrós, who, like Beatriz Sarlo and Jorge Asís, was glaringly excluded from the *Salón del Libro* in Paris in 2014, though he was on the original list of guests, what is even more concerning is the administration's belief that the State is "un aparato que pueden manejar para su beneficio y el de sus amigos" (qtd. in "Martín Caparrós: 'El Gobierno'").

The precariousness of this narrative, of its claims to memory, truth, and justice, and of a government whose success depends upon it is underscored by Juanjo's offer to organize an accident that would kill Father Fiorello in order to keep Carlos from challenging the official narrative's uncritical adoration of 1970s leftist militants. In *A quien corresponda*, then, memory, truth, and justice are shown to be much more slippery and negotiable than representations of them in the Kirchnerist narrative insinuate.

Despite the presence of detective-fiction genre elements in both *Una misma noche* and *A quien corresponda*, many mysteries remain unsolved at each novel's close.[75] The lack of easy resolutions; the presentation of memory as a complex, non-linear, shifting process that attempts to arrive at and is shaped by deeper, difficult to understand truths; and the ways in which language fails to represent certain truths and memories all point to the complexity of memory and truth and of the forms of justice that can result from them. These understandings of memory, truth, and justice challenge the Kirchnerist narrative's certainties and absolute binaries regarding the past, opening possibilities for further discussion and debate of this past.

Una misma noche resists telling the reader exactly what happened that particular night thirty-four years ago, though Leonardo's attempts to understand it by writing about it seem to be the very purpose of the novel. The comprehension he reaches is not a detailed description of the actions his family took, but a recognition of the complicity of his mother, himself, and many others not often categorized as victims or repressors in the

[75] The uncertainties that remain despite these characters' exhaustive searches to uncover truths are much like those found in Carri's *Los rubios* and Nicolás Prividera's 2007 *M* in which the filmmakers' quests to learn more about their assassinated militant parents' identities result in vague, contradicting, and often unsatisfying responses.

detention and torture of thousands of individuals. Leonardo moves away from a concern that focuses solely on what actions his father may have taken to one that acknowledges the much broader implication of many citizens who remained silent due to fear or personal benefit, including himself. In its consideration of broader forms of guilt, the novel imagines a more extensive and complicated conception of justice than that of the Kirchnerist narrative. Additionally, the intersections of the victim/repressor dialectic are revealed in Leonardo's imagination of el Topo—a militant and victim turned informant and torturer—, suggesting the fluidity of these characterizations that must be examined more dynamically.

Likewise, *A quien corresponda* is primarily about Carlos's attempts to understand what happened to Estela and carry out his plan of revenge against Father Fiorello, but information is not discovered regarding Estela's detention, and whether or not Carlos is responsible for Father Fiorello's murder is uncertain. Carlos time and again writes that he desires to understand the past, but the "frases hechas" of official discourse designed primarily for attaining political power have closed memory, truth, and justice to deeper examinations. Carlos often finds himself surprised by his ability to listen to former torturers as well as his inability to despise them as he seeks to reconstruct a more nuanced interpretation of the past. In these conversations, attention is drawn to the ways in which broader society, particularly many from the middle and upper classes, supported the military coup due to fears of insecurity and power loss, only later expressing outrage at the acts of violence carried out on its behalf, demonizing those who attempted to serve them. Those complicit in the dictatorship are shown to share more in common than they would like to admit with former torturers. Furthermore, the present-day administration is

said to govern for these people's interests, despite its professed dedication to human rights and the *pueblo*. Carlos's less Manichean ideas of guilt and innocence, like his uncertain conceptions of memory, truth, and justice, thereby differ significantly from Juanjo's and those of the Kirchnerist government he represents.

What is deemed more important than definitive conceptions of memory, truth, or justice within these two texts—as has been explored in *A quien corresponda* and will be in *Una misma noche*—are attempts at understanding different perspectives, particularly those of former "monsters," rather than accepting a rigid and polarizing narrative that is suggested to have been constructed strategically for partisan purposes. In listening to these different stories, both narrators find these individuals to be less horrifying than they had previously believed. This does not mean that they come to believe that former torturers' actions were justified or acceptable, but, in accordance with Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil," they are able to see them as humans and understand how they might have made some of the decisions they did. In doing so, both narrators refuse an easy categorization of these individuals as purely evil and incomprehensible, characterizations they find to have been damaging to cultural understandings of the past.[76]

Re-humanizing Angels and Demons

[76] See Martín Kohan's 2003 novel *Dos veces junio* for a more in-depth fictional examination of the psychological motivations for soldiers who tortured on behalf of the state and a reflection on how heinous systematic crimes were brought about by the effective construction of a sense of patriotism and national unity—not only among soldiers, but also within civil society—that depended upon eliminating subversion.

In addition to being critical of the Kirchnerist narrative's limited conceptions of memory, truth, and justice and its demonization of those responsible for acts of torture that does not consider the implication of broader sectors of society, Carlos is infuriated by its memorialization of *los desaparecidos*. He writes that they have been turned into innocent, beheaded lambs and lifeless monuments, remembered for what their enemies did to them, rather than the political projects they were willing to fight and die for in order to bring about a radical revolution. In an imaginary conversation with Estela, Carlos rants, "Detesto conversar con un monumento, tener que tratarte como a un monumento. ¿Viste que los llaman los desparecidos? Como si lo único que hicieron en sus vidas hubiese sido desaparecer," pointing to the irony of this narrative's attempt to revere them by describing them by how their enemies eradicated them: "Somos los desparecidos, los que quedamos inscriptos en la historia por lo que decidieron nuestros enemigos, nuestros verdugos …. Nosotros, que quisimos ser tantas cosas, terminamos siendo los desaparecidos" (261).

For Carlos, this narrative's memorialization of the disappeared strips them of their agency, resulting in a less truthful history that does harm to the memory of those it purports to honor. Carlos's resistance to this narrative calls attention to the ways in which the Kirchnerist narrative has emphasized the innocence, laudable ideals, and disappearance of assassinated militants, rather than their radical views on equality and the measures they took to advance such ideals. Carlos explains, "Nos inventaron como ángeles, pobres muchachos bien intencionados, mártires conejos, para poder robarnos nuestra historia" (266). In this "stolen history," assassinated militants are described not as "gente grande, jóvenes decididos, militantes que pensaban y elegían sus destinos, que

pensaron que para conseguir lo que querían debían pelear y arriesgar sus vidas y las de los demás," but rather as "chicos y chicas generosos ingenuos que queríamos mejorar el mundo" (266). Carlos does not dispute their desire for a more just world, but he does clarify how they attempted to bring that about: "con un revólver en la mano. Lo cual no nos hace peores—ni mucho menos—: nos hace diferentes del relato" (266).

Author Caparrós has made similar arguments regarding the ways in which this narrative of an innocent generation murdered for its ideals results in lifeless depictions of individuals and inaccurate understandings of the time period. Furthermore, Caparrós has argued, such a narrative implies that the atrociousness of the violence enacted on leftist militants would somehow be justified if they were described more truthfully: not as innocent idealists stolen away from their homes for no reason, but as individuals involved in collective political projects, willing to fight with arms in order to change structures of inequality, thereby threatening the social and economic status of the powerful, who responded with brutal force. For Caparrós, the construction of the disappeared as a "víctima angélica" can only be explained by a belief that pertinence to revolutionary organizations "equivalía a justificar las desapariciones y los asesinatos. Seguramente porque pensaban que a los militantes es un poco más legítimo secuestrarlos y asesinarlos" (qtd. in "Martín Caparrós en Eterna Cadencia").

According to Caparrós, "La noche de los lápices" exemplifies this narrative's insistence on the purity and innocence of the disappeared in suggesting that the series of abductions and murders of teenagers from La Plata in 1976 was motivated solely by their protests for lower bus fares, rather than recognizing these students' militancy that led the military to consider them a threat ("Martín Caparrós en Eterna Cadencia"). *La voluntad*,

the three-volume history of revolutionary militancy in Argentina that Caparrós and Eduardo Anguita co-authored, was an attempt to break from what the authors consider an absolute injustice: "la construcción de la idea del desaparecido … esa relectura del pasado, que es una forma de volver a desaparecer a las personas en la medida en que se les quita su decisión, su subjetividad, y los convierte en objeto de una decisión ajena" (qtd. in Cusimano, "Todo está por inventarse"). Rather than focusing on the disappeared status of these militants and further disappearing them in doing so, *La voluntad* writes of how they were much more than the objects of their enemies' violence: "antes que nada sujetos de decisiones propias, la decisión de tratar de cambiar el mundo y eran sujetos políticos que creían que valía la pena ponerse en riesgo" (qtd. in Cusimano, "Todo está por inventarse").

This is a narrative that predates Kirchnerist human rights politics, originating within human rights organizations—the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in particular—during the dictatorship. At this time, demanding the whereabouts of disappeared leftist militants and contesting political violence required a cautious approach. Stressing the absolute innocence of these victims was therefore strategic and necessary in order for human rights progress to be made. Receiving assistance from human rights organizations during and after the dictatorship required surviving *detenidos desaparecidos* to present themselves as victims, whether they agreed with this term or not, as many interviews conducted for a study of the "Plan Nacional de Acompañamiento y Asistencia a los Querellantes y Testigos de Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado" elucidate. One interviewee commented, "No sé si asumir el papel, pero sí asumir el nombre víctimas, pero sin que nosotros nos sintamos víctimas. Porque fundamentalmente la asistencia y

contención que recibimos es por esa condición de víctimas" (Cardozo and Michaelwicz, "Ser o no ser 'víctimas'"). During the 1985 *Juicio a las Juntas*, this narrative was also encouraged, as identifying oneself as a political militant at this time "implicaba la definición misma de culpable …. lograr ser considerados 'víctimas' constituía una eximición de su supuesta culpabilidad" (Cardozo and Michaelwicz, "Ser o no ser 'víctimas'").

This narrative made more sense in that earlier context, though it disturbed *A quien corresponda*'s protagonist even then. Carlos tells Valeria that he never consulted with human rights organizations when Estela initially disappeared because he had strong objections to casting her as an innocent victim, rather than someone willing to fight and die for a cause: "hablar de Estela como una buena chica que estaba tranquila en su casa cuando vinieron los militares horribles y se la llevaron. Estela había peleado, sabía a lo que se exponía, yo no tenía ganas de convertirla en una víctima, y esas organizaciones lo que hacían era convertir a nuestros muertos en corderos degollados" (190).

Carlos's anger at how a narrative focusing on militants' victimization distorts history and further victimizes them is related to what James Dawes has described as the "paradox of suffering" in human rights storytelling. According to Dawes, narratives about the "inhumane treatment" of individuals and groups are essential to "the human rights regime, which in the long run may limit suffering," but these narratives may also cause further suffering and violence for the subject whose story is told (396). According to Dawes, the risks of human rights storytelling include reproducing the pain of victims and survivors, commodifying their suffering, and feeding voyeurism (401-02). These risks are particularly pronounced for Carlos in *A quien corresponda*, for whom the

Kirchnerist narrative's version of history is not only inaccurate and manipulative, but also degrading to those who died in a violent fight to bring about a revolution only to be remembered as *los desaparecidos*, passive objects of violence.

It is the persistence of this narrative after the democratic transition in 1983 and in the present day—periods during which there should be more space for honest discussion of the past—that comes under particular scrutiny in the novel. Carlos suggests it has continued as the dominant narrative for discussing 1970s militancy and the dictatorship in part because it is a strategic and profitable way of discussing the past for those seeking to attain political power: there is "nada más funcional, más manejable que un equipo de víctimas" (262) in a moment in which "El muerto es la gran cocarda actual: la etiqueta de lealtad comercial, el sello habilitante" (82). Carlos also proposes that it is a much more comprehensible narrative for "la gran masa estúpida" for whom, "les resulta más fácil recordar una matanza, la maldad de los malos, el famoso genocidio, que pensar las complejidades de un enfrentamiento por el poder de definir el modelo social" (177).

Nonetheless, Carlos does not limit the blame for this less truthful narrative to the current political administration or the general population; rather, he implicates surviving leftist militants have reinforced this narrative and made it a prevalent one. Including himself among those responsible, Carlos writes that the status of innocent, righteous victims was much preferred to that of mistaken, defeated revolutionaries and willingly assumed by many: "nos convirtió de equivocados en víctimas, de derrotados en víctimas—y no hay papel más generoso que el de víctimas … donde cualquier cuestionamiento arrugue ante la compasión obligatoria de pobrecitos esos muchachos cómo los asesinaron esos hijos de puta" (177-78).

This "generous" role of victim, as Carlos tells Juanjo, is one in which those who gained the trust and hope of thousands of Argentines in waging a war they should have recognized was doomed from the beginning are not held accountable for bringing the country to devastation and further inequality:[77]

> Porque quizás si no hubiéramos resultado tan víctimas tendríamos que haber rendido cuentas ante alguien—no sé ante quién, pero ante alguien—por todos nuestros errores, por nuestras pelotudeces, por haber revoleado a la mierda el capital social que habíamos conseguido, la confianza de tantos miles de personas, las esperanzas de millones, todo desperdiciado en el delirio de ganar esa guerra perdida de antemano. (178)

Carlos goes on to suggest that militants have embraced this narrative of innocence and victimhood to the point of convincing themselves to forget the violent means they employed in their attempts to change the world: "conseguimos que muchos se olvidaran de que nosotros también creíamos que la violencia era una forma de cambiar el mundo. Yo creo que hasta nosotros mismos conseguimos olvidarnos" (178). Carlos is not critical of the violence of leftist militants, which he argues was necessary to achieve their objectives, but of the broader cultural refusal to discuss and debate it, as if it never happened, a criticism taken up by Graciela Fernández Meijide, Claudia Hilb, Héctor Leis, and Hugo Vezzetti, as discussed in Chapter 2. Speaking to this need for more truthful discussions of the past, former Montonero Leis has criticized the persistent resistance to discuss armed struggle and the unquestioning glorification of militants, "El silencio es

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[77] In *Argentinismos*, Caparrós provides statistics for this increasing inequality, stating that in 1975, 4% of the population was poor; in 1997, it increased to 26%; and, in 2010, to 30% (19).

totalitario y eso reina en la Argentina, por eso hay que hacer catarsis y volver al pasado para aquellos idiotas que viven elogiando el pasado como si fuera una maravilla, tanto del lado militar como del guerrillero" ("Nosotros … fuimos fascistas").[78]

In addition to contesting the Kirchnerist narrative's emphasis on the innocence, victimhood, and disappearance of assassinated militants, Carlos challenges its glorification of their sacrifice. He argues that there has been an uncritical veneration of their young deaths, as examined in this project's first chapter. It is a prevalent narrative among surviving leftist militants and the general population, who have become obligated to remember them "como los mejores, los que sí se atrevieron," turning those disappeared into heroic martyrs without truly considering what the ideals they were willing to die for were and how they went about trying to realize them: "hablan de su entrega y de su sacrificio y de sus muertes y … nunca, nunca jamás de los jamases, se sentarán a analizar para qué murieron: qué querían. Ni a preguntarse si ellos—los que hablan de su entrega y de su sacrificio y de sus muertes—estarían de acuerdo con esas metas" (88).

Carlos does not disagree with the convictions he once shared with those who died (though he now believes their utopic ideals were destined to failure from the beginning) nor with the armed means they employed. However, he detests the way in which the

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[78] In Leis's *Un testamento de los años 70*, he suggests the violence committed by guerrillas like himself not to be so different than that of the military and police during the dictatorship, confessing his own crimes and asking forgiveness for them. Leis suggests this text to be, in part, a reaction to Kirchnerist uses and abuses of the past, describing debates regarding militant violence as always having been complicated, "pero nunca hubo un discurso tan hegemónico y perverso sobre aquellos años como ahora. La memoria es fundamentalista cuando el Estado no busca el consenso y asume una versión de los hechos como única, condenando a la sociedad a dividirse en torno de memorias opuestas" (qtd. in Pikielny, "Héctor Leis: 'Para que el país supere las divisiones'"). Leis's *Un testamento* has received a great deal of criticism by those who consider it to be propagating the *teoría de los dos demonios*.

current political administration has non-critically heroized them, successfully propagating a narrative for its own objectives in which political subjects killed in revolutionary combat have been turned into innocent victims willing to sacrifice their lives for nebulous ideals: "Que ahora los glorificadores de esos años quieren reciclar y revender esas ideas transformadas en postulados generales—la justicia, la igualdad, la democracia, los famosos derechos humanos—, pero nosotros no peleábamos por eso" (73).[79] Moreover, Carlos contends that a more thoughtful and truthful discussion of their legacy would have to recognize the differences between the radical equality sought by 1970s revolutionary projects and current inequalities. It is the misappropriation of guerrillas' convictions and pasts to fit a calculated narrative that simplifies and manipulates history in order to serve political purposes that Carlos condemns, repeatedly emphasizing the need for more truthful and critical approaches to discussing the past.

Carlos does attempt to analyze this period and the militancy of which he was a part thoughtfully, differentiating himself from the predominant narrative in suggesting that militants were badly mistaken, not in their desire for an equal and just world, but in the belief that others wanted the same thing. In an imaginary conversation with Estela, Carlos tells her that revolutionaries grossly misestimated what the *pueblo* wanted, assuming they desired "un país donde brillara la justicia impoluta, la igualdad incontestable, la bandera orgullosa, los mismos cuidados y posibilidades para todos, la voluntad de construir ese país entre todos" (140-41). In their crushing defeat, they came to realize that they were greatly mistaken, discovering that the military, the wealthy, and politicians had better understood how to gain their support: through more security and

[79] In *Argentinismos*, Caparrós describes what he terms as the "militante como héroe indefinido" narrative that has been developed by the Kirchnerist administrations (111).

consumer power. For Carlos, "el Error, la Madre de Todos los Errores" was the arrogance militants had in thinking they knew the "Gran Pueblo Argentino," sacrificing "todo para salvar a millones de personas que no tenían el menor interés en que las salváramos" (141-42).

In addition to criticizing the mistakenness of militants in presuming to know what the *pueblo* wanted, not unlike the futility of revolutionary sacrifice for the proletariat suggested by Carri's *Los rubios*, Carlos proposes that they are partly responsible for the ensuing dictatorial regime and the ever worse inequalities and injustices that followed.[80] In a debate with Juanjo, Carlos describes the 1960s as a time in which the country was in much better shape, despite significant inequalities: "Teníamos industrias en serio, fabricábamos coches, heladeras, aviones: había trenes que iban a todos lados … por supuesto que había diferencias escandalosas, injusticias brutales, pero la mayoría de los argentinos, mal que mal, vivía bastante bien" (23). According to Carlos, though their generation's indignation toward the enormous economic injustices of that period was right, their decision to attempt to "cambiarlo de raíz" was poorly gauged and destined to fail from the beginning, given their miscalculation of the *pueblo*'s values (23). Carlos laments that many years and lost lives later, the country is much worse than it once was: "después de todo este tiempo, de todos esos compañeros que murieron o se tuvieron que ir o se jodieron la vida, la Argentina está tanto peor de lo que era entonces. Tanto peor, hermano, un desastre" (24). He does not suggest that militants made it this way, but he does argue that their attempts at creating a more just and equal society resulted in conditions that allowed the military and the wealthy to drive the country to devastation.

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[80] For an analysis of the incongruity between the *pueblo* imagined by middle and upper middle class revolutionaries and that population itself within Carri's film, see Nouzeilles.

Like Carlos, Leonardo finds himself unsatisfied with the simplified and polarizing ways in which the Kirchnerist narrative describes social actors and historical events, and he continually attempts to produce more thoughtful analyses of them. Leonardo, who was quite young in the 1970s and minimally involved in leftist militancy then, has a more difficult time accepting the use of arms by revolutionaries, telling Miki he can understand armed struggle only in theory and is unable to imagine an actual scenario in which he would feel justified employing violence, no matter how just the cause was.

Leonardo becomes particularly upset when participating in a guided visit of the former ESMA. There, the guide, a young woman named Clara, who acts as if she were a comrade to the leftist militants tortured at this former detention center (though she would not yet have been born), speaks of General Aramburu's assassination as an "ajusticiamiento," stressing her intentional choice of words (238). When Leonardo shares this part of the visit with Miki, Leonardo expresses his horror at the way she took great pride in speaking of an assassination in a place where thousands of leftist militants were tortured and killed: "¿Cómo puede ser que en un lugar de muerte se ironice sobre la muerte? El horror de matar, de tener que matar … El horror que distingue al revolucionario del perverso … ¿Y qué habilita en cada uno, y en el mundo el hecho de matar? ¿Quién puede frivolizarlo sino un idiota?" (245). Unlike Carlos in *A quien corresponda*, Leonardo has a difficult time believing any kind of murder to be justifiable, and he is especially offended that this guide and others might boast in the Montoneros' assassination of Aramburu.

Leonardo's inability to see any form of murder as justifiable is similar to the position taken by Oscar del Barco as described in Chapter 2 in which there is no justification for the murder of another human being and the principle of "Thou shall not kill" is the very foundation of every community. Miki responds to Leonardo's outrage at the guide's comments with vague agreement and seems particularly curious when Leonardo tells him that President Fernández de Kirchner recently made a similar comment regarding Aramburu's death. Miki's interest leads Leonardo to question if Miki might share some of his own doubts regarding the president and the human rights politics of the past decade, despite his professed loyalty to this project. While *A quien corresponda* proposes that revolutionary violence is not discussed or debated within the Kirchnerist narrative, *Una misma noche* suggests that it is celebrated in a way that is uncomfortable and incongruous with the same narrative's indignation at the gross human rights violations committed under state terrorism. Both novels point to the ways in which this narrative has not thoughtfully discussed the use of arms by leftist militants, either ignoring it altogether or blindly heroizing militants and all of their actions. For Ceferino Reato, this noncritical treatment of militant violence that vacillates between silence and veneration "les sirve al kirchnerismo duro y a las organizaciones de derechos humanos no sólo para que los ex guerrilleros eludan los eventuales juicios por los delitos cometidos en ese tiempo, sino también para reivindicar en forma más o menos sutil la lucha armada" ("Gelman: Ni dos demonios, ni ángeles y demonios").

Leonardo, who has identified himself as a human rights and, later, Kirchnerist militant for many years now, demonstrates an increasing level of discomfort with the deeply divisive ways in which militancy and the dictatorship are discussed in the

Kirchnerist narrative, applying distinct sets of criteria to different social actors. This uneasiness culminates during his guided visit of the former ESMA where the guide's description of soldiers who worked at the ESMA—both before the dictatorship when it was it a naval school and during the dictatorial period when it operated as a detention and torture center in addition to continuing to train naval officers—drives Leonardo to a deep frustration. He finds her tone when describing the school in the 1920s—"adonde las familias más humildes del pueblo mandaban a sus hijos a labrarse un futuro"—condescending and at odds with his own family's story of his father's time there (218). Leonardo remembers his father's pride in telling him of how he became a naval soldier and was thereafter able to provide for his family, allowing his mother not to have to work any longer. According to Leonardo's family's story, his father did this of his own volition, not telling anyone where he was going when he disappeared for several months, and he was greatly admired for having done so.

Leonardo's frustration increases throughout the visit as he listens to the guide further demonize the soldiers who worked or studied at the naval school during the dictatorship. When Clara asks the group to brainstorm why officers may have invited students to perform guard duty overnight at the site (thereby making them aware of the detention and torture taking place there if they were not already), a couple of people from the group respond that perhaps they wanted to make sure no soldier was innocent enough to denounce the heinous crimes taking place there, thereby establishing "un pacto de silencio" (237). Leonardo, to his own surprise and horror, finds himself attempting to defend his father, beginning to say, "Porque creían que estaba bien," quickly correcting himself by responding, "Creían que lo que hacían estaba bien. Y eso es lo más terrible"

(237). Leonardo's distaste for the guide's absolute vilification of the military and his relationship with his father drive him to a position with which he is uncomfortable and feels the need to adjust. Though Leonardo does not intend or desire to justify what his father or others like him may have done, he does become less tolerant of those who take positions as extreme as the guide's and more aware of his own evolving understanding of this complicated period of history in which few—if any—can claim absolute innocence.

Toward the end of the guided visit, the group comes across a staircase in which Leonardo immediately recognizes the ironwork pattern on the stairs as the exact same as that of the steps on his father's boat. A series of realizations flood Leonardo in this moment:

> ¿Quién fabricaba los grilletes? ¿Quién limpiaba de sangre los lugares? ¿Quién sacaba las escudillas? ¿Quién fabricaba las picanas? ¿Massera, Chamorro, el Tigre Acosta, los elegantes oficiales que dormían en esos cuartitos? No. Para eso contrataban a la gente del pueblo, como mi padre o yo. Para eso les enseñaban mecánica—en estos tiempos en que ya no existen barcos. Con esos mismos saberes con que mi padre construyó mi casa, se construyó—hombres como él construyeron—el campo de concentración. Si me hubieran llamado a mí, yo no habría ido a parar a la Pecera con los militantes ricos y cultos que traducían del francés material para Massera, oh no. Me habrían puesto a construir estas cositas que en mi casa aprendí a hacer, mirando a mi papá. (241-42)

Here, Leonardo comes to better understand his father's potential role in the military and in this former detention and torture center. Rather than feel disgust for his father as he has feared he would if he came to understand him, therefore repressing memories for thirty-

four years, Leonardo is able to identify with his father and imagine himself having made similar decisions if he had been in his place.

Brizuela's remarks regarding Leonardo's ability to no longer fear knowing who his father was and, even more surprisingly, to be able to identify with him point to the importance of these kinds of recognitions that move beyond absolute understandings of good and evil or victims and oppressors: "La manera de responder del padre no me parece que sea muy diferente de la que habría tenido cualquier persona que hizo el servicio militar. La corrección política tiende a plantear que el padre en esta novela es un monstruo, que es un demonio. Pero me parece que es mucho más complejo" **(**qtd. in Friera, "Leopoldo Brizuela y *Una misma noche*"**)**. Brizuela proposes that once individuals are able to recognize broader societal complicity in the dictatorship as well as understand how Leonardo's father might have come to occupy the role he did, having to more honestly ask themselves, "¿cómo habría actuado yo, en su lugar?," they become aware of the "extrema labilidad de lo humano" as well as the "alta necesidad de la compasión" (qtd. in Alvarez, "Feria del libro"). As Carlos finds himself unable to hate the former repressors with whom he meets, preferring instead to try to understand how things happened the way they did, Leonardo is able to see how he might have made the same choices his father did and find compassion for a character much more ambiguous than the Kirchnerist narrative would suggest.

Questioning the "Década Ganada"

In addition to challenging the Kirchnerist narrative's idealization of lost militants, Carlos is critical of its claims to have taken up the ideological causes of 1970s guerrillas.

Fernández de Kirchner's description of 2003-2013 as a "década ganada" is not supported within this novel in which the present is understood as a period of great devastation—a continuation of the *derrota* that followed the military coup. In an imaginary conversation with Estela, Carlos explains to her how the military defeated 1970s attempts at revolution and managed to maintain Argentina's unjust capitalism (140). He goes on to tell her that the worst result of the dictatorship is not the disappearance of thousands of individuals, but the country's current devastated state, where "lo que queríamos cambiar sigue igual, peor: los pobres cada vez más pobres, los ricos cada vez más ricos, los poderosos cada vez más poderosos. Erramos como perros ciegos" (138).

Juanjo often speaks of the human rights advances of the current government and encourages Carlos to involve himself in it, though Carlos repeatedly refuses, criticizing its political abuses of the past. In one particular instance after Juanjo tells Carlos of the opportunities there are for him in today's government, Carlos responds, "¿Otra oportunidad de qué, Juan? … ¿De hablar de los muertos heroicos para justificar que siguen vivos y no hacen un carajo de todo lo que los muertos querían hacer? ¿De usar los setentas para tapar lo que no pueden ni quieren hacer ahora?" (16-17).

Carlos argues that the administration Juanjo represents has no real interest in human rights or the equality for which leftist militants once fought. Rather, he asserts, they have founded a narrative based on such ideals and the collective loss of thousands of Argentines because it is an easy way to gain political popularity. If they truly had inherited the convictions of 1970s militants—a dedication "al socialismo—la desaparición de los ricos, el gobierno de los obreros, todo para todos"—, Carlos contends, inequality would not continue to accelerate in the present (74). Speaking of the

incongruity between the government's rhetoric and actions when it comes to realizing the dreams of 1970s leftist militants, Carlos tells Juanjo what they are doing "no tiene nada que ver con 'lo que querían hacer esos compañeros,'" asking him how he is not terribly ashamed to be propagating a narrative in which inaugurating a sidewalk or a school is said to be a way of accomplishing the dreams "de aquellos compañeros que se hicieron matar porque querían el socialismo" (279-80).[81]

Criticisms of Juanjo's and the Kirchnerist government's claims to have inherited the causes of 1970s leftist militants are common throughout the novel by Carlos and other former *compañeros* to which Juanjo unconvincingly responds with "el discurso más obvio, más oficial, más grabador" (80), in one moment making the following case for himself and the government he represents: "los que realmente hacemos en la vida somos muy pocos, y el gobierno es el lugar de hacer. Es fácil pasarse la vida hablando de lo mal que hace el gobierno" (173), later adding, "Al final casi no importa qué hacés. La diferencia no es entre los que hacen esto y los que hacen lo otro: la diferencia es entre los que hacen y los que hablan, muchachos, ésa es la diferencia" (174). Carlos is stunned at Juanjo's admission, thinking to himself how glad he is that Estela is not there and does not have to be humiliated by such an argument that supposedly stems from the same convictions for which she was willing to sacrifice her life.

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[81] In *Argentinismos*, Caparrós signals the importance of the fact that while many militants were being tortured, murdered, or found themselves forced to leave the country, both Kirchners were becoming rich in Río Gallegos by selling usurious loans and foreclosing the homes of those who could not pay their mortgages due to the exorbitant interest rates. The incongruity in the present day between Kirchnerist populist rhetoric and neoliberal policies is thus suggested to be a longstanding one, in which "los militantes de verdad morían peleando contra ese sistema que ellos encarnaban como nadie" (81).

Carlos's attempts to explain "los progres" to Estela and his inability to make them comprehensible to her in their imaginary conversations further highlight the incongruity between those who support the Kirchnerist administration and the revolutionaries whose ideological battles they claim to have inherited. Carlos describes "los progres" as a new species that did not exist during Estela's time, individuals who like "los Valores Seguros en el Banco Moral" and "los Grandes Conceptos Indudables," easily persuaded by any politician who uses human rights language, unconcerned with how the continuation of neoliberal politics could possibly bring about change (204). They are not risk-takers, Carlos tells Estela, "van a lo seguro, a conservar esos valores consagrados, todo tal como está pero limpito," wanting things to remain as they are but sound nice (205). Carlos remarks how curious it is that many former leftist militants have embraced them, "como si fueran sus padres y sus madres, sus hermanos mayores; los consideran sus mayores aunque lo que ustedes hacían—lo que nosotros hacíamos, Estela—era todo lo contrario de lo que ellos hacen" (205).

Carlos's frustration with the Kirchnerist narrative's abuses of history, human rights, and disappeared militants echoes that of author Caparrós, who made the following statement in an interview: "me empezó a cabrear la canonización oficial de esa época por parte del gobierno de Néstor Kirchner …. no soportaba la utilización de los derechos humanos y de las historias de las víctimas como escudo de un gobierno que teñía de progresismo algunas medidas que no lo son" (qtd. in "Martín Caparrós asegura"). As *La voluntad* was a response to the prevalent narrative of the *desaparecidos* as innocent, young victims detained and disappeared for wanting a better world, remembered more for what was done to them than for the socialist political projects they knowingly entered

into armed combat to achieve, *A quien corresponda* is a response to the continuation of this narrative that has been further manipulated to serve political purposes in the Kirchnerist decade, not at all a "década ganada" for Caparrós.

Una misma noche's Leonardo is not as frustrated with the current government as Carlos is, having been a Kirchnerist militant himself, though, as previously mentioned, he does grow irritated with its polarizing descriptions of the past, particularly those made by Clara, his guide at the former ESMA. He also finds official rhetoric that suggests the past ten years to have been a "década ganada" incongruous with his own experiences, given the symmetry of the two nights thirty-four years apart that the novel explores. The present-day house robbery committed by a corrupt police band shares many likenesses with the break-in to the Kupermans' house thirty-four years before for which the military was responsible. Though much has changed in three decades, the repetition of a crime by the very individuals responsible for protecting citizens implies a certain persistence of crime enacted by the state.

The way Leonardo responds, keeping mostly silent, also points to the fears from the past that persist in the present day, an apprehensiveness Leonardo comments upon in the following way in a conversation with Miki, "--Pero yo, ¿por qué me callé? --le pregunto a Miki--. ¿Te das cuenta de que en otro país, o alguien de otra generación habría actuado distinto? ¿Dónde aprendí a callarme? ¿Y dónde aprendieron estos ladrones de ahora a actuar como los otros?" (36). Leonardo does not consider his response normal, instead believing that it is a product of having grown up during a period of state terrorism and inhabiting a present in which not all has changed.

Police corruption and rising crime are causes for prevalent complaints and fears of insecurity within the novel, ones similar to those in *A quien corresponda*. However, while these concerns are mocked within Caparrós's novel as primarily bourgeois anxieties similar to the ones that led to the military coup in 1976, they are not so in *Una misma noche*, where they indicate a continuation of abusive practices by state forces. Leonardo's neighbors, the Chagas, purchase and install several different types of locks, gates, and alarms, only for each of them to fail given the police's monitoring of their home and ability to outsmart their measures. Leonardo writes of how his neighbors speak of having their house broken into with phrases commonly used during the dictatorial period, such as "nos entraron" and "zona liberada" (18), suggesting the insecurity of the present day to be a perpetuation of that of the past, "a pesar de los avances de los derechos humanos" (24).

Leonardo's aunt and uncle, former leftist militants, mock the extreme fears and measures of the Chagas family, as Carlos does of those who constantly complain of insecurity in *A quien corresponda*. However, Leonardo believes that his relatives' ridicule of the Chagas family stems not entirely from ideological disapproval, but in part from jealousy, given that they were attacked several times during and after the dictatorship but did not have the same means to invest in a security system. Leonardo finds it impossible to believe that they are unable to identify with the fears the Chagas face or their desire to protect themselves, thereby suggesting that a "pure" leftist stance like theirs or Carlos's—one that denies present-day insecurity altogether—is subject to criticism (42).

Leonardo finds himself making similar ideological "compromises" when conversing with Marcela Chagas, admitting his fears of insecurity and recognizing how such comments contradict his own previously unwavering commitment to Kirchnerist politics: "Digo que la comprendo, que así no se puede más, y me mira incrédula. En la voz se me nota una culpa atroz, pusilánime, por traicionar a mi gobierno, a mi ideología. O un miedo casi infantil de quedarme sin ellos" (56). Likewise, after Leonardo explodes in anger because his mother has gone into his apartment out of fear that something may have happened to him, he realizes that his mother's anxieties are justified, asking himself the following questions regarding his mother's fears, "¿Y cómo habría podido negarlo? ¿Interpretando el papel de kirchnerista que atribuye la maldad del mundo a la conspiración de los medios?" (265).

These admissions of fear and insecurity and this criticism of the Kirchnerist tendency to blame complaints of social problems on media conspiracies are illustrative of Leonardo's self distancing from Kirchnerist militancy and from a dogged commitment to its narrative about the past. Leonardo's transition is also seen in his aforementioned irritation with the guide at the former ESMA; his reconstruction of the Papel Prensa case and imagination of how a Montonero might have been responsible for the detention and torture of Diana Kuperman and Jaime Goldenberg; his resistance to the demonization of former repressors; his indication of the complicity of much of society in dictatorial violence; his ability to understand and even identify with his father's choices; and his preference of ambiguities and uncertainties when it comes to the complex process of remembering the past.

Both *Una misma noche* and *A quien corresponda* illustrate ways in which the Kirchnerist narrative's limited conceptions of memory, truth, and justice have led to damaging understandings of the past that have negatively impacted the ways individuals remember lost loved ones and broader societal understandings of the past and social actors, which this narrative is said to have split into deceptively conceived categories. As works of fiction, these two novels are able to draw attention to what they propose to be inadequate understandings of memory, truth, and justice and oversimplified angelic victim/monstrous repressor binaries in unique ways. Author Brizuela has commented that this is why he chose to write about this past in a novel format, hoping to begin to work through a complicated, politically-charged, and uncertain history in a more imaginative manner than what is possible with journalism or other forms of non-fiction writing: "quise hacer algo que no admite el periodismo, preguntarme qué pudo haber pasado si en esa casa viviera ese personaje. También quiero que el propio lector se siente en ese lugar, que cuente qué habría hecho él" (qtd. in López, "Leopoldo Brizuela revive").[82]

In both novels, memory is a complicated, subjective process that requires significant work and often results in unanswered questions and ambiguities, much unlike the Kirchnerist narrative's imposition of a definitive way of remembering the past and those who died. Likewise, in these acts of remembering, the protagonist of each novel seeks deeper, more complex truths than those presented by the Kirchnerist narrative, recognizing the complicity of many during the dictatorship, dispelling myths of leftist militants as innocent heroes or of those who tortured and murdered them as

[82] In this same interview, Brizuela is careful to note that he does not consider fiction better than journalism (or vice-versa), but rather a more adequate medium for the type of piece he desired to create in this instance.

incomprehensible monsters, and seeking to better understand this past and those who played a role in it.

Guilty and innocent are relative terms in each of these works, though neither novel suggests that all are equally guilty, only that representations of one group as perfect and another as evil are not accurate or useful. Both novels advocate more complicated cultural interpretations of this period and of individuals in recognizing the complex circumstances that led people to make different decisions, demonstrating how one could be both a victim and a torturer, and examining forms of complicity by broader sectors of society. The kinds of justice imagined by the two works are thereby quite different than that of the Kirchnerist narrative. Naturally, trials of crimes committed during the dictatorial past need to follow rigid policies and result in definitive answers, and this does not come under attack in either novel. What is criticized, though, is how the Kirchnerist narrative has made blanket generalizations regarding the roles of different social actors in the past, as well as those in the present, continuing to uncritically support groups like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Former militants Carlos and Leonardo's self-distancing from a political project that Leonardo supported at the novel's opening and that claims to be a continuation of the one of which Carlos was once a part suggest the limitations of this project's endeavors. Dissatisfied with the Kirchnerist narrative, these militants-turned-critics in their searches to make sense of the past and its undeniable presence in today's political climate suggest the need for conceptions of memory, truth, and justice that are broader than the "frases hechas" and polarized discourse of their official versions.

Chapter 4: Defenders of Whose Rights? A Child's Retelling of Montonero History in Laura Alcoba's *La casa de los conejos* and Benjamín Ávila's *Infancia clandestina*

Beginning with the release of Albertina Carri's fictionalized documentary *Los rubios* in 2003, a new corpus of Argentine narratives created by children of militants, now typically in their thirties and forties, has begun to emerge.[83] This growing collection of stories regarding "clandestine childhood" includes the following semi-autobiographical films: María Inés Roque's 2004 *Papá Iván*, Nicolás Prividera's 2007 *M*, and Benjamín Ávila's 2011 *Infancia clandestina* and novels: Laura Alcoba's 2007 *Manèges*, *petite histoire argentine* and 2011 *Les Passagers de l'Anna C.*,[84] Patricio Pron's 2011 *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia,* Ernesto Semán's 2011 *Soy un bravo piloto de la nueva China*, Mariana Eva Pérez's 2012 *Diario de una princesa montonera—110% verdad*,[85] and Raquel Robles's 2013 *Pequeños combatientes*.

These recent works created by the children of militants break from the more established traditions of the previous generation when it comes to narrating the dictatorial past: that is, primarily from the literary *testimonio* and the cinematic documentary genres, though it is more of a fracture than a complete break as many of these works do incorporate elements of *testimonio* or documentary in their hybrid approaches to

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[83] See Gabriela Nouzeilles's analysis of *Los rubios*, a watershed work for this new corpus, regarding how the film provocatively breaks with established memory politics within cultural production and criticism related to this period in Argentina.

[84] These two works by Alcoba have both been translated from French into Spanish by Leopoldo Brizuela with the titles *La casa de los conejos* and *Los pasajeros del Anna C.*

[85] Pérez's novel began as a blog that she eventually transformed into a novel—attempting to "poner en circulación fuera de lo que llamo 'el gueto', que es el movimiento de Derechos Humanos, y ver cómo podía funcionar afuera. Porque lo hablamos siempre desde adentro" ("El diario").

storytelling.[86] Changing not only in form, but also in content, this new corpus of narratives represents militants—the authors' parents about whom they have unique perspectives to offer—more ambiguously than earlier literary and cinematic texts that tended to glorify them as human rights heroes, much like the Kirchnerist narrative.[87]

While these works cannot be strictly considered what Marianne Hirsch has termed "postmemory," given that the authors often narrate their own memories of their childhood and of their parents' political activity, rather than their parents' memories of events they were too young to remember that have been transmitted to them, the concept of postmemory is nonetheless useful to an analysis of these texts. The memories described by these narrators in literature and film come from their experiences as "testigos visuales" to their parents' militant activities but are also influenced by the ways in which their parents interpreted and explained these activities to them, particularly in the case of those who were very young during this period (Peller 2). Additionally, the ways in which these narrators' parents' generation has remembered these experiences plays a significant role in shaping their memories of the past. Hirsch's examination of how memories are transferred and transformed transgenerationally—of how the children of trauma victims and survivors construct new memories from their memories of their parents' memories—therefore provides helpful insights to an examination of how these

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[86] See Anna Forné, who writes that these newer works "instalan una ruptura con el formato testimonial canónico, sin por eso renunciar del todo la significación reivindicatoria y colectiva" (65).

[87] An emblematic example of these *testimonios* is Eduardo Anguita's and Martín Caparrós's three-volume *La voluntad: Una historia de la militancia revolucionaria en la Argentina*. Examples of earlier films that represent militants and their children more idealistically or as innocent victims include Marco Bechis's *Garage Olimpo*, David Blaustein's *Botín de Guerra*, Héctor Olivera's *La noche de los lápices*, and Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial*.

newer novels and films relate and differ from the ones of these authors' and filmmakers' parents' generation.

There is significant diversity in these narratives regarding childhood in the 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in the degree to which the narrators identify ideologically with their parents. As Adriana Badagnani notes, the ideological subject positioning of these narrators ranges from "la militancia más ortodoxa hasta la parodia más desviada de la doxa," resulting in the field of memory being constructed "como un espacio de lucha por el sentido" where "los textos elaborados por los hijos enuncian un trauma propio e introducen nuevos debates que impiden el congelamiento de una matriz de memoria ejemplar" through their conflicting interpretations of their own experiences (1).[88]

In many of these works, representations of militancy are ambiguous, neither condemning or heroizing, thereby challenging the Kirchnerist narrative as well as simplified attacks. Rather than contributing to already established forms of remembering, these narratives suggest the need for less partial depictions of militancy and dictatorship. Furthermore, as children of militants who were assassinated, disappeared, or exiled, these authors and filmmakers have a very personal investment in better understanding, remembering, and representing this period as fully as possible. The abundance of recent narratives about militancy and dictatorship by this generation, for whom these works are among their very first novels or films, indicates the need these individuals have to tell of their experiences with their own voices, shifting from being "personajes novelados a autores de novelas y cuentos," and creating narratives that more accurately depict their

[88] See Badagnani for a more in-depth analysis of the different degrees of identification that the works of children of militants assume with their parents' ideologies (4-5).

own experiences, reflecting "an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story" (Dema 3; Laub 78).[89]

From this corpus, this chapter will focus on two texts: *La casa de los conejos*, Alcoba's memoir about living in what served as a clandestine Montonero headquarters in La Plata in 1975 with her mother, and *Infancia clandestina*, a film based loosely on writer-director Ávila's family's return from exile to Argentina in 1979 in order to participate in the Montonero counteroffensive attack being waged on the military regime; a war that, within the film, results in the protagonist losing nearly his entire family. These two works, whose challenging of simplified narrations of militancy this chapter examines, have been selected for analysis because of their mainstream popularity and what has been considered the two works' lack of ideological engagement, given the youth and perceived innocence of the child narrators. For instance, the *Latin American Herald Tribune*'s review of Alcoba's novel suggests that, "It is that child's perspective that is the unique feature of the novel, which, rather than seeking explanations for what happened and passing judgment on the events, simply presents them with the innocent understanding of a child and leaves it up to the reader to interpret, reflect and make his or her own conclusions," avoiding "politically controversial subjects" altogether ("Argentina's Laura Alcoba").[90] Similarly, when Ávila was asked if he intended for his

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[89] Liliana Ruth Feierstein examines the "urgencia de sacar de sí esta historia, de no llevar solos la carga, sino dimensionarlo en su sentido social" for the authors of this new corpus, as demonstrated by the young age at which they create these autobiographical works, "desafiando las leyes de la producción autobiográfica, que por lo general se da a una edad avanzada y como 'cierre reflexivo' de una larga vida" (9).

[90] See also Gilda Waldman's analysis of the novel, which discusses the "mirada infantil, ingenua e incisiva," whose "toma de distancia impide que la narración adquiera un carácter ideológico, explicativo o moral, dejando al lector librado a su propia interpretación y valoración de lo acontecido" (108).

film to have a more "human" tone than political one, he responded, "Absolutamente. No quise que la película fuera ni política ni dramática," though he was quick to add, "pero sabía que iba a serlo, inevitablemente. Por eso, el acento no está puesto ahí" (Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte"). Ávila is aware of the inescapability of politics when representing this period of his childhood, but he suggests that the film's emphasis on universal themes of love and childhood makes it less ideological.

While the child narrators of these two works do not represent established political positions, I would like to argue that the more ambiguous and seemingly neutral stances taken by these two works, which neither demonize or heroize militants, are fairly radical in the present-day political climate, where depictions of militancy are quite polarized, either non-critically praising or condemning it. I suggest that the making of a film and the writing of a novel about militancy and dictatorship without the support of an established political position is in fact a radical act, which the authors participate in by representing themselves as children in these two works, thereby distancing themselves from easily identifiable ideological stances. Both authors have stated that their works are not meant to be critical of militancy, but the mere honesty with which they remember their parents and their childhood does challenge the Kirchnerist narrative that describes leftist militants as flawless human rights heroes.

In examining how these two works depict Montonero parents as neither evil nor perfect, but as loving parents with radical political convictions who had difficult decisions to make—ones that deeply impacted their children's lives—, I argue that more nuanced depictions of militants and other social actors can be formed. In order to demonstrate how *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina* radically challenge the

Kirchnerist narrative's idealization of militancy, I begin by discussing the hybridity of both works, particularly the authors' choices to use child narrators and fictionalize their own stories, creating mainstream, seemingly non-ideological representations of their childhood that I argue to be quite political in actuality. Following this, I explore how these two works act as what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux de mémoire* that dialogue and compete with previous and contemporary articulations of 1970s militancy and dictatorship, helping to construct dynamic and constantly evolving interpretations of the past.[91]

I argue that central to these two cultural sites of memory is a desire to further understand the ways in which the authors' identities have been formed by their childhood experiences of militancy and that, in order to engage with this past meaningfully, their stories must seek representations of their parents more authentic to them than what is described by Ceferino Reato as the Kirchnerist *teoría de ángeles y demonios*, as explained in Chapter 3, or the *teoría de los dos demonios*. These personal attempts at understanding identity result in ambiguous representations of the ways in which the narrators' parents' political affiliations affected their childhood. I suggest that these more human portrayals of militants are helpful not only to Alcoba and Ávila, but to broader contemporary interpretations of Argentina's recent past in challenging the Kirchnerist narrative's angelic depictions of militants as well as reactionaries' demonized ones.

[91] As Nora suggests, in a moment in which "historiography has entered its epistemological age, with memory ineluctably engulfed by history, the historian has become no longer a memory-individual but, in himself, a *lieu de mémoire*," I propose that these two texts as well as many in the corpus of which they are a part act similarly, challenging established understandings of history (18).

Radical, Mainstream, "Non-political" Representations of Montoneros

The mainstream appeal of *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina* is in part due to the hybridity of their genres, both fictionalized accounts of the authors' lives (though to differing degrees, as will be explored), and the childhood voice and gaze through which they tell their stories. This semi-autobiographical genre reduces the pressure for Alcoba and Ávila to remember and tell their stories exactly as they happened; and the stories' narration from a child's perspective allows them to avoid overt political positions, leaving them "less exposed" to criticism regarding the factuality of their accounts or their ideological stances.[92] This hybrid genre's use of fiction assists in the production of more universal stories that attract broad audiences, and it also grants Alcoba and Ávila creative freedom, allowing them to reconstruct their memories as needed in order to produce compelling stories.[93] In this way, these two works draw attention to the constructed nature of all memories and narratives about the past, ones that are continually subject to reworking, highlighting "la representación no como reflejo del mundo sino como construcción" (Aon, "Una cuestión" 225).

The hybridity of these two works has been touched upon by critics, including Anna Forné, whose analysis of *La casa de los conejos* describes it as "una labor de la

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[92] In an interview about *El espíritu de mis padres sigue subiendo en la lluvia*—a novel which is a part of this new corpus of narratives from children of militants—, author Patricio Pron expressed a similar sentiment: "Yo procuré que la novela tuviera un tono más ficcional, con el que yo me siento ligeramente más cómodo ya que la ficción es mi territorio. Me sentía menos expuesto" (qtd. in González 394).

[93] Discussing the importance of this liberty and ability to make her story more accessible and interesting to others, Alcoba has remarked, "que algo escrito sobre ese tema se pueda leer como una novela es una manera de ponerlo a distancia de uno para entregarlo a otro. Para mí la ficción es liberadora, claramente, mientras que la autobiografía pura es una manera de encerrarse. La ficción te alivia" (qtd. in Wajszczuk, "La ficción es liberadora").

memoria emprendida a partir de las evidencias del archivo histórico y completada por medio de la imaginación" and "un proceso de ficcionalización tanto del sujeto que narra su propia historia como de los materiales reciclados de recuerdos resucitados en la frontera entre la realidad y la ficción" (66). However, the connection between this hybridity, these narratives' mainstream appeal, and their ideological interventions has not yet been articulated. I propose this relationship to be important to an understanding of how these works and other similar ones are engaging with current political discourse and earlier narratives from the authors' parents' generation regarding 1970s leftist militancy and, therefore, in need of examination.

Linguistic choices have an essential role in the hybridity of *La casa de los conejos*, Leopoldo Brizuela's Spanish translation of Alcoba's *Manèges*.[94] Alcoba moved to France when she was ten years old due to the danger she and her parents faced in Argentina, and she has remained there since then, resulting in her having adopted French as her "lengua natural," the language in which she is most comfortable writing ("Tejemaneje: Entrevista a Laura Alcoba"). Additionally, Alcoba has commented that writing about this part of her childhood in a language she did not yet know at the time was helpful in granting her the emotional distance she needed in order to construct a narrative out of these memories that she has carried with her "de manera tan dolorosa"

[94] Brizuela, whose 2012 novel *Una misma noche* Chapter 3 examines, made the following proclamation in 2005, "pese a haber trabajado con Madres de Plaza de Mayo y con gente de Hijos, nunca pude hablar de eso, por miles de cosas y porque siento que es mucho más complejo" (qtd. in Cardona, "Hablar del recuerdo"). It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that his translation of Alcoba's novel two years after making this statement influenced his decision to write a novel about his own memories of this period.

(Saban and Alcoba 247).[95] As Alcoba notes, the writing about Montoneros in La Plata in 1975 in French "ya es extraño, ya es un invento," one that "ficcionaliza inmediatamente todo," greatly aiding her in being able to write about this period with the distance and freedom from her past such an act necessitated (qtd. in Wajszczuk, "La ficción es liberadora").

However, writing in French about her Argentine childhood is not without complications, as Alcoba has remarked, discussing, for example, how particular memories she has of her childhood in Argentina can only be fully expressed in Spanish: "Pero es verdad que en ciertos momentos, como yo trabajaba sobre una materia prima muy precisa—que eran esos recuerdos en Argentina—, afloraba el idioma en que habían ocurrido los acontecimientos y había cosas que no podía traducir, que no podía poner en francés" (qtd. in "Tejemaneje: Entrevista a Laura Alcoba").

One such example of these untranslatable experiences is *embute*, the word used within Alcoba's home to describe the hidden room where the Montonero printing press was kept. The novel's narrator describes this word as pervasive throughout this time in her childhood, but as having disappeared from Argentine dialect when she returns thirty years later: "ese término tantas veces dicho y escuchado, tan indisolublemente ligado a esos fragmentos de infancia argentina que me esforzaba por reencontrar y restituir, y que nunca había encontrado en ningún otro contexto" (47). Alcoba goes to great lengths to "find" this word when she returns to Argentina, even contacting the Real Academia Española, only to receive an unsatisfactory response.

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[95] Waldman similarly suggests, "El filtro lingüístico permite, entonces, convertir una historia personal y dolorosa en una ficción en la que los juicios de valor quedan suspendidos" (107).

In her search for this disappeared word, she discovers that though it was very much a part of her family's everyday language and common among the Montoneros they knew, it was never formally recognized as a word within the Spanish language, except as a conjugation of the transitive verb *embutir*, which translates as "to stuff" or "to cram." In part, this points to the slipperiness and instability of language that is always changing. Perhaps more importantly for this analysis, it suggests how language has the ability to simultaneously connect and distance one from her memories of the past, as does this place which Alcoba can only name in Spanish but whose very name no longer seems to exists in this language.[96]

Hybridity can also be found in the novel's different titles in each of its translations. The novel's French title is *Manèges, petite histoire argentine*, while it was translated to *La casa de los conejos* in Spanish and *The Rabbit House: An Argentinean Childhood* or *The Rabbit House: A Childhood in Hiding* in English. Both the French and English editions use subtitles that suggest Alcoba's experiences to be telling of a historical period within Argentina and signal how hybridity is found not only in the novel's use of languages, but also in its mixture of fiction, history, and memory, positioning itself "entre la ficción y la realidad, o lo que es casi lo mismo, en el terreno ambiguo e híbrido de la autoficción" (Negrete 621).[97] Such a subtitle does not exist in the

[96] See Adrianna Badagnani for more regarding this paradigmatic relationship with language experienced by the author-narrator (9).

[97] See Forné, who writes of the meaning of the phrase "un petite histoire" in the Francophone context, explaining that it "claramente hace referencia a la distinción establecida por los escritores y teóricos poscoloniales francófonos entre historia con minúscula e Historia con mayúscula, de las que la 'pequeña historia' corresponde a una versión no oficial en contraposición a la Historia oficial" (67).

novel's title in Spanish translation, perhaps because it is part of a recognizable corpus of recent works published by Argentine authors about the 1970s.[98]

The Spanish and English titles name the place in which Alcoba lived during these particular years, while the original title does so in a less direct sense, also encompassing additional meanings. As Alcoba has explained, the word *manèges* has several definitions in French, all of which she wanted to evoke with the title, but could not do in Spanish or English:

> Manège significa tío vivo, calesita o carrusel, y evocaba el universo infantil. Por el otro lado, evocaba los movimientos un poco obsesivos, la manera en que las imágenes que tenía en mente giraban sobre sí mismas de manera repetitiva, que tiene que ver probablemente con el tiempo traumático. Al mismo tiempo, es un juego de palabras. Manège significa en francés maniobra, manipulación, y ahí hay una alusión a un elemento de la intriga …. No se conservó en los idiomas a los que se tradujo, ni al inglés ni al castellano. (qtd. in Papaleo, "Laura Alcoba: Un libro sobre vivos y muertos")

Simultaneously encompassing themes of childhood, the—at times obsessive and uncontrollable—carrousel-like repetition of memories, and of strategic deception (a reference to how the house was eventually found by the military, which will be discussed shortly), the novel's original title for which the author cannot find a suitable translation is

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[98] This continually growing collection of recent literary and cinematic texts that take up militancy and the political violence of the 1970s includes not only the works by children of militants discussed earlier in this chapter, but also many other works, such as Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*; Carlos Gamerro's *Las Islas, El secreto y las* voces, and *Un yuppie en la columna del Che*; Martín Kohan's *Dos veces junio*, *Museo de la Revolución*, *Ciencias morales*, and *Cuentas pendientes*; and Claudia Piñeiro's *Un comunista en calzoncillos*.

indicative of the hybridity of its genre, one which Alcoba herself cannot define, writing, "La ambigüedad genérica es el corazón mismo de *Manèges* …. No sólo no sé qué es *Manèges* sino que desde el principio fue esencial para mí no intentar siquiera zanjar el problema; por el contrario, mantener la duda y la indecisión," describing how the text finds itself "en una frontera particularmente incierta y movediza entre realidad y ficción" (qtd. in "*Manèges / La casa de los conejos*, o la elección de una postura híbrida," 270).

This dynamic frontier occupied by the novel distances it considerably from the canonical *testimonios* of militants that were particularly prevalent during the 1990s.[99] These testimonies tended to glorify militancy, much like the Kirchnerist narrative in the present, partially as a reaction to the victimization of *desaparecidos* during the dictatorship and in the first few years that followed the transition to democracy. As discussed in Chapter 3, this unwillingness to admit or discuss the political activities of those who had been disappeared resulted from the risks involved in doing so during the dictatorship and soon after in an unstable period in which several attempted coups threatened to throw the country back under military control.

The presence of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" within the novel further contributes to its fictional character and hybridity, invoking a puzzle within *La casa de los conejos*, a Borgesian-like metafictive inclusion of stories within stories, and the structuralist and post-structuralist debates about the significance of the letter in this

[99] See Forné's analysis of how Alcoba's novel not only dissociates itself with the *testimonio*, but challenges that very genre by demonstrating the near impossibility of fully and accurately representing one's past, "desconsiderando los efectos posibles de la brecha temporal y las dificultades de la configuración narrativa de la memoria traumática" (71).

story.[100] Poe's short story is shared with the narrator by the Ingeniero, who explains to her that his idea for the *embute* where the Montonero printing press is to be hidden occurred to him while reading this story. A story in which "excessively obvious" evidence provides the best camouflage led him to leave the cables responsible for opening and closing the hidden door exposed, as if they were normal cable wires that the home owners had not neatly tucked away. Likewise, both placing the remote control for the secret door out in the open in the house and breeding rabbits there so that the coming and going of Montoneros could be explained by the purchasing of these creatures are meant to disguise the activities that take place at the house precisely by calling attention to it.

At the end of the novel, when Laura discovers that it was the Ingeniero who informed the military of the location of the home and of the strategic importance of this site, resulting in the deaths of all who remained there, she begins to wonder if the Ingeniero was not tortured into providing such information, as had been assumed, questioning whether he instead might have been an informant from the very beginning. Though he was always blindfolded when taken to the house so that he would not know its location, finding it when taken with the military in helicopter would have been easy, particularly so if he had intentionally left himself obvious clues with the cables and rabbits. Alcoba's reflection on this short story and its presence within her novel suggest an inextricability between literature and history—a "borrosa frontera entre ficción y realidad"—in which a certain degree of hybridity is unavoidable (Saban and Alcoba 250).

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[100] See *The Purloined Poe*, edited by John Muller and William Richardson, that includes analyses of Poe's work by Jacques Lacan, Shoshana Felman, Jacques Derrida, and Barbara Johnson, among others, as well as Slavoj Žižek's "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at its Destination?" in *Enjoy your Symptom!*.

This Borges-like implication of the inseparability of fiction and reality is certainly not a part of the *testimonio* genre with which these newer works by children of militants are breaking, though Alcoba's novel is largely based on her own experiences. *Infancia clandestina*, on the other hand, is more loosely based on Ávila's past. Questions regarding how much of the film is representative of Ávila's own experiences are frequent in interviews, and Ávila has shared that many aspects are, including his family's exile in Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba, where his Montonero parents completed counter-offensive revolutionary training; his family's clandestine re-entry in Argentina in 1979; his use of another name (in the film, Juan becomes Ernesto outside of his home); his mother's disappearance; and his older brother's appropriation by the military, though his identity was later discovered, making him one of the first *nietos recuperados* by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in 1984.

A key difference between the film and Ávila's own experiences is that the child who is appropriated in the film is Juan's baby sister. Ávila has explained his choice to represent his then eight-year-old brother as an infant girl as an attempt to "protegerlo, para no estigmatizarlo" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").[101] Other important differences between the film and Ávila's past are the invention of Tío Beto, who, within the film, "se convierte en el bálsamo perfecto para acariciar las necesidades propias de un infante," and María, Juan's first love (Garza, "La 'Infancia clandestina' del cineasta argentino Benjamín Ávila"). These two characters, essential to Juan's adolescent

[101] In a presentation at the Casa de América, Ávila spoke of how Vicky, Juan's baby sister, is also meant to represent of all of the estimated 400 children who were illegally appropriated by the military: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaPp4mK9Z2c.

development and to the film's treatment of clandestine childhood, were imagined by Ávila, who has explained the importance of distancing himself from his own history in order to create a story that captured its essence, describing the need for the film to have "su propia lógica, sus propias reglas, un relato con su propia identidad y su propia estructura, su propia manera, porque sí tenía muy claro qué quería contar, el tema de la película. Y no lo podía contar estrictamente a través de mi historia, tenía que construir un mundo autónomo para poder sumarle mi vivencia" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").

In order to create this autonomous world in which Juan's story better represents the themes of Ávila's past than an attempt at an exact depiction of it could, Ávila worked closely on the script with Brazilian Marcelo Müller, a friend of his and *Infancia clandestina*'s co-writer. Ávila explains that, as someone who knows a great deal about Argentina's history but did not experience it first hand, therefore not being weighed down by its "peso histórico," Müller was instrumental in helping Ávila find effective ways of creating a compelling cinematographic story inspired by his own life experiences (Goldbarg, "*Infancia clandestina*: Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"). This involved Müller, who had much more distance from Ávila's experiences, "limpiando lo que no servía y profundizando lo que sí" (Goldbarg, "*Infancia clandestina*: Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"), which ultimately produced a narrative "con su propia vida," characters, and structure (Torres, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").

For Ávila, constructing a cinematographic narrative that only loosely resembles his own is not a way of distancing himself from the firm ideological commitments of the *testimonio* or documentary genres, but a form of embracing a commitment to his

disappeared mother, his family members, militants in general, and all of their children and grandchildren, as the dedicatory at the end of his film indicates, broadly addressing itself to "todos los que han conservado la fe." Ávila considers his creation of a film that appeals to a broad audience, rather than one strictly limited to his own personal experiences, to be a deeply intimate and affective form of ideological commitment, though it differs significantly in form and content from the more established documentary genre: "No quería exorcizar nada de mi vida personal, porque eso lo hago con mi psicólogo. Hacer esta película era un compromiso personal, un deber íntimo, y mi intención era reivindicar esta manera de entender la vida, de jugarse por un ideal, pero desde las emociones" ("Hacer este filme").

Infancia clandestina's love story between Juan and María is crucial to making the film emotionally engaging for a mainstream audience who might not otherwise have interest in seeing a film about Argentina's last dictatorship. As viewers, we experience his falling in love with María on one of his first days at his new school in Argentina through his gaze, with the camera angle taking Juan's point of view by following María's every move in her practicing of rhythmic gymnastics. The scene that immediately follows Juan's absorption in María's gymnastics practice is one in which he has an arousing dream about her, which is followed in the next scene by a conversation with his mother in which he uncomfortably—but with great curiosity—asks how she knew that she was in love with his father. Romance blossoms between the two as they dance together throughout the entirety of Juan's birthday party and, later on a class camping trip, almost share a first kiss before being interrupted by classmates.

This sweet exploration of a first childhood love grants a certain universality to a film that is simultaneously quite particular in its focus on the life of a child of Montoneros in Argentina in 1979. Speaking to this universality, Ávila asks, "¿Quién no ha tenido su primer amor?, ¿quién no se ha enamorado alguna vez?," suggesting that the ease with which one can identify with this part of Juan's story makes an identification with much more particular parts of his past—that of clandestine childhood—a more likely possibility, helping viewers "entender poderosamente lo que siente" ("Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"). As will be discussed later in further detail, this young love becomes quite complicated as violence increases and Juan's parents do not allow him to have contact with anybody outside their home. Though the obstacles to Juan's relationship stem from a very particular situation, the despair he experiences at not being able to be with the person with whom he has fallen in love is once again an emotion with which mainstream global audiences can easily relate.

Infancia clandestina's gentle treatment of childhood love can be considered a part of what Tamara Falicov has termed a "globalized art-house aesthetic," present in this film and others like it that compete for funds at international film festivals to support the completion of their films. In order to win these competitions, an aesthetic that will easily cross borders is necessary.[102] As a coproduction that received support from Argentina, Spain, and Brazil, the winner of the 2011 Casa de América award, and Argentina's submission for the 2013 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film (though it was not selected as a final contender within this category), Ávila's film has demonstrated its

[102] In her examination of the six films competing for the 2011 "Cine en construcción" award at the San Sebastián film festival, Falicov found each film to have the following general characteristics: young protagonists; glossy, high production values; and character-driven narratives (260).

ability to appeal to transnational audiences. In addition to the centrality of María and Juan's love story to the film, its starring of famous Argentine actors Natalia Oreiro and Ernesto Alterio and its hiring of the greatly experienced and well-known producer Luis Puenzo have helped broaden its global presence.[103]

Further evidence of *Infancia clandestina*'s desire to appeal to global audiences can be found in the explanations offered at the beginning of the film regarding the Argentine political context in which it takes place. These quick written statements that flash on the screen after the movie's introduction tell of Perón's death in 1973, the detention and disappearance of revolutionary militants by paramilitary organizations preceding the 1976 military coup, the dictatorship from 1976-1983, and the return from Cuban exile of many Montoneros (some with children) for a counter-offensive operation, aiding in making the film accessible to those with little knowledge of Argentina's recent history. While these notes to the viewer were likely designed for audiences outside of Argentina, Ávila's comments on the surprising lack of knowledge his actors had prior to the filmmaking process regarding this history point to their usefulness for some Argentine audiences as well: "Y lo sorprendente para mí fue darme cuenta que la base sobre la historia que yo creía que todos teníamos naturalmente era una percepción errónea" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").[104]

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[103] As Falicov writes, it is quite unusual for these "globalized art-house" films to have the resources to hire famous actors or filmmakers. Ávila's relationship with Puenzo seems to have been what allowed him to secure these stars for his film (260).

[104] In response to learning of the actors' lack of knowledge of this past, Ávila required them to read several books and watch films before continuing so that they would all have a certain base knowledge of the period, which he deemed necessary for the creation of the film (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").

The brief insertion of historical context provided by these notes allows for a global audience to easily follow a movie whose emphasis is on universal and mainstream themes of childhood, love, and family, rather than explicit affirmations of particular ideologies that would not travel as fluidly between borders or within Argentina itself. *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina*'s lack of overt political references do not, however, make them ideologically neutral, though several reviews of these two texts have insinuated this.[105] I argue that it is not due to a neutral or "light" political view that *Infancia clandestina* and *La casa de los conejos* come across as more human than political, but a result of their hybridity and nuancing of the predominant polarized positions on militancy in the present, which the Kirchnerist narrative's heroization of militants as human rights heroes has underscored.

The mainstream appeal of these two works, due in large part to their hybrid genres that fictionalize and universalize their individual experiences, and their not-easily-identifiable ideological positions are in fact rather politically radical in their break with established ways of discussing militancy. Ávila's remarks regarding the many, who, like him, have vivid memories of this period but do not share them due to "un cálculo político," fearing that the telling of the war between guerrillas and military forces they experienced might reopen *la teoría de los dos demonios*, indicate the importance of this difficult and revolutionary moving beyond easy binaries into more ambiguous territory that more accurately represents the past (Ferrari, "'Infancia clandestina', la otra imagen del pasado argentino").

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[105] See, for example, "Argentina's Laura Alcoba" in the *Latin American Herald Tribune* and Ranzani's "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte" in *Página/12*.

Containing and Constructing *Lieux de mémoire*

Lieux de mémoire—following Nora, material, symbolic, and functional sites to which memory attaches itself—play an important role in the attempts to more fully portray Montonero childhood in both *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina*, as they do in many works from this new corpus of works from children of leftist militants, as Badagnani argues: "la narrativa de los hijos de desaparecidos aparece profundamente vinculada a la búsqueda de objetos del pasado" (8). Sites of memory permeate *La casa de los conejos*, from the flooding of memories Alcoba experiences when she returns to Argentina, entering into physical spaces of her childhood after nearly thirty years in France and commenting, "Empecé a recordar con mucha más precisión que antes, cuando sólo contaba con la ayuda del pasado," to the conversion of her former home into a memorial site that honors this strategic Montonero site and those who were killed there (12).

One important memory site within Alcoba's novel—the mermaid doll Laura's parents gave to her after their return from prison, a time away from their daughter that Laura's grandmother tried to conceal by telling her they were on vacation in Córdoba—suggests how such sites can recreate or transform one's memories of the past. The narrator, who, despite her young age at the time, was well aware that her parents were not in Córdoba, but in prison, and that the reason they were there had to do with the time they had spent in Cuba for revolutionary training, says the following about the memories this doll conjures for her:

> Por eso, en mi memoria, esa primera estadía en prisión y mi pequeña sirena plástica siguen estrechamente asociadas a la ciudad de Córdoba y un poco, también a La Habana, aunque en realidad la cárcel haya estado mucho más cerca, y la pequeña sirena de plástico hubiera sido comprada, probablemente, a la vuelta de la esquina. Aun hoy, cada vez que la miro, y aun sabiendo perfectamente la verdad, tengo la impresión de que mis padres fueron a buscarla muy, pero muy lejos, para mí, al Caribe o algún lugar semejante. Por eso también, aunque sé que Córdoba no tiene nada que ver con esta historia, yo la llamo 'mi sirenita rubia cordobesa' y es estrictamente por eso mi muñeca preferida. Además, sea como sea, en verdad, cuanto más la miro, más me parece llegada de otro mundo, completamente diferente. (32)

Knowing perfectly well that the doll was likely purchased around the corner from her house does not deter the young narrator from associating it with Córdoba, though she is well aware that the only thing this city has to do with the doll is the lie Laura's grandmother used to protect her. Laura simultaneously connects the doll with Cuba in her mind, not because her parents were there during this period away, but because she knows that their recent time there is directly related to their imprisonment. The memories Laura associates with this site of memory represent a curious fusion between reality and fiction—one she herself has crafted—, and the narrator seems to imply that all memories can be made subject to this fictionalization process.

In *Infancia clandestina*, the photographs shown after the film's ending are from Ávila's personal collection, and his comments on their presence within the film demonstrate their importance as memory sites: "The photos that appear at the end, which

are from my family in reality, is the moment that moves me the most as I get haunted by the echoes of that wonderful past that was destroyed at the moment portrayed by the film" (Caceres, "LatinoBuzz: Interview with Benjamín Ávila"). This statement regarding the significance of these personal photos as vessels of memory laden with affective content, particularly for those who have lost family members represented by these documents, [106] points to how other photographs present in the film also serve as sites of memory.[107] After Juan's father, Horacio, is killed, Juan must burn all of the Montonero documents they have in the home as well as family photos that would link him, his baby sister, and their mother with Horacio. Juan intently watches as these photos slowly catch fire and wither into ashes, while baby Vicky cries in the background. These physical sites of memory that recall Juan as a baby, his parents when they were younger, and an earlier birthday of Juan's conjure memories of a time in which his family was not in danger; and it is precisely in the moment in which this is crumbling—with the assassination of his father and the looming disappearance of his mother and sister—that Juan must destroy evidence of these joyful and very distant moments.

Another photograph of particular importance in the film is the polaroid snapped by Juan's classmates in the moment before he and María almost share a kiss. Juan carefully guards the photo, sharing it with his Uncle Beto in a dream after Beto has been killed. At the end of the film, Juan finds the photo in the pocket of his jacket, which has

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[106] The presence of Ávila's family's photographs within the film is similar to the inclusion of photos and other materials from Carri's parents in *Los rubios* that simultaneously "distort the real" and indicate "that something was out there, that resembled what is still in the picture" (Nouzeilles 268).

[107] See Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* regarding the ways in which photographs represent traces of the past in the present, mechanically reproducing these moments and referents in a way unimagined prior to the invention of the camera.

been thrown in a pile of others' belongings at the detention center where he is interrogated. There, he takes the photograph out and stares at it for a few moments, perhaps reflecting upon the disparity between the present moment and the one in which it was taken in the recent—yet very distant—past, when he was happily in love and his family members were still alive. This photo holds many memories for Juan, as well as for the viewer, and its recurrent presence and miraculous survival by the film's close—a moment in which Juan has lost nearly everyone and everything—underscores an awareness of how such objects can act as *lieux de mémoire*.

Yet another significant photograph within *Infancia clandestina* is the one on the passport Juan receives when his family re-enters Argentina, which gives him a new identity as Ernesto Estrada, because, like his parents, he must conceal his actual identity once they return to Argentina. This passport photo is first seen when Juan passes through customs after traveling by boat to Argentina, which is also when he is called Ernesto for the first time. The second scene in which the passport appears occurs when a flabbergasted Juan comes running home from school, after his classmates sing "Feliz cumpleaños" to him. Juan, unaware that it is his—Ernesto's—birthday, according to his new passport, sings with his classmates, looking around, trying to determine whose birthday it is. When he realizes very late into the song that his classmates are singing to him, he is embarrassed, and must hide his surprise. He rushes home and scrambles to find the passport, verifying that it is indeed his birthday. The passport photo suggests how photos and other *lieux de mémoire* can be deceiving, representing realities markedly different than the ways in which they were experienced, not providing entirely

trustworthy accounts of the past, while also raising questions about identity that will be examined later within this chapter.[108]

Additionally important to a consideration of *lieux de mémoire* within *Infancia clandestina* is Ávila's description of how he used his own memories of his childhood in the creation of the film, not needing to consult archives or other texts, because, as he has stated, in spite of only being seven years old at the time these events unfolded, "tengo enorme cantidad de vivencias muy frescas de esa etapa" (qtd. in Ferrari, "'Infancia clandestina', la otra imagen del pasado argentino"). In a similar vein, the presence of Ávila's brother on the set during one of the final days of filming is particularly important to the relationship between Ávila's own memories of this period and those created within and by the film. Ávila explains that, with his brother there, "las voces del pasado se hicieron eco" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila").

As examined, sites of memory abound in both of these narratives about clandestine childhood, demonstrating the ways in which memory attaches itself to objects and places, though not always in predictable or reliable ways. I would like to propose that these two works themselves can also be considered cultural memory sites, following Luciana Aon's examination of how similar narratives serve as places "donde se fomenta la memoria, donde se elaboran visiones del pasado, y donde esas narraciones crean y recrean sus sentidos en la lucha por la hegemonía" ("Aproximaciones," 180). This idea of

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[108] See Claudia Feld's analysis of a photo taken of Alice Domon and Léonie Duquet, the French nuns who, to much international protest, were disappeared by the military dictatorship. This photo was taken from the basement of the ESMA detention and torture center by the military, but it was presented as if it had been taken elsewhere and circulated widely with false information that the Montoneros were the responsible party for the kidnapping. It was not only the location of the nuns and the identity of the photographer that the military manipulated, but the fact that the nuns had already been killed by the time the photo was released.

films and novels about the past serving as *lieux de mémoire* in a continual hegemonic battle to reconstruct meanings of the past is seen in *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina*'s breaking from established forms of storytelling by children of leftist militants in an attempt to construct different types of memories that these authors find more representative their own experiences.

In the case of these two works, the battle for hegemony in the creation of new narratives about the past is quite personal, approximating what Liliana Ruth Feierstein, pulling from Dori Laub's theories on trauma, describes as testimonies (not in the strict sense of the *testimonio* genre, though) designed in the hopes that those who hear them "participará[n] en el cuidado de esta memoria," allowing these authors to "liberarse en parte del peso de la misma para dar lugar al futuro, a proyectos personales ligados a la vida" (140). Both *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina*, as cultural sites of memory, share a commitment to helping those who were appropriated as children discover their biological identities, the principal objective of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. According to Ana Ros, Alcoba's novel was, in part, an attempt to reach out to Marcela Noble, the daughter of Ernestina Herrera de Noble, the largest shareholder of the Clarín media conglomerate, as the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo had long suspected that she might be Clara Anahí, daughter of Diana and Cacho, the couple with whom Laura and her mother lived at the rabbit house, though the later results of DNA tests did not support this (51). The disappearance of Vicky, Juan's baby sister, at the end of *Infancia clandestina* shows great concern for this present-day problem as well, as does Ávila's first film, the 2004 documentary *Nietos: Identidad y memoria*. The importance of the cause of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo is deeply personal for both Alcoba, who had a

very close relationship with pregnant Diana, and Ávila, whose brother was appropriated and later found by the Abuelas.

In addition to wanting to aid in the search for Clara Anahí, *La casa de los conejos'* narrator explains that she writes, reflecting upon and constructing sites of memory in doing so, so that she can forget: "una última confesión: que si al fin hago este esfuerzo de memoria para hablar de la Argentina de los Montoneros, de la dictadura y del terror, desde la altura de la niña que fui, no es tanto por recordar como por ver si consigo, al cabo, de una vez, olvidar un poco" (12).[109] This is a past that the narrator explains she has avoided writing about for a very long time, believing that it would be best to wait until those of her parent's generation had died so that they would not be offended by her differing narrative or reject it altogether. The "temor de sus miradas, y de cierta incomprensión" was enough for Alcoba to keep her memories and her desire to write about them to herself for many years. That is until she could no longer do so. Alcoba writes that after her journey to Argentina in 2003, when she returned with her daughter for the first time since she left the country as a child, "narrar se volvió imperioso" (12). This uncontrollable impulse and need to narrate her past are like that described by Leonardo in *Una misma noche*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

For Alcoba, the objective of remembering this past is to come to terms with it, so that she can eventually forget it, thereby recognizing the interdependence of remembering and forgetting examined in depth by Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, which argues it to be impossible to recall and recount everything, necessary to forget certain

[109] For an examination of "la estética del olvido" in this novel, see Cecilia Lasa, who argues this aesthetic to be composed within the novel by that which is unnamable or difficult to describe, what is suggested or uncertain, and the presence of unanswered questions.

things in order to remember others, and a certain degree of forgetting to be imperative to forgiveness and moving forward from past traumas. The kind of forgetting *La casa de los conejos*' narrator seeks is not the same as the silencing of her memories, which she writes she had done for three decades out of guilt for having survived when so many others—particularly those with whom she lived—did not. Rather than desiring to rid herself of her memories or to continue suppressing them, the narrator attempts to overcome these painful recollections by working through them in a manner like that described by Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, finding a therapeutic release in the act of fictionalizing these memories: "Lo que veo explícitamente es que la ficción me ayudó a hacer de esa vivencia dolorosa una historia y tratar de superarla o de vivir con ella mejor, de hacerla pasar progresivamente al olvido" (Saban and Alcoba 250). As Karen Saban notes, in the narrator's act of recreating her story and herself through fiction, she is able to let go of much of the fear she has held on to for decades: "La narradora de *La casa de los conejos* puede deshacerse del pasado tan temido cuando lo recrea en una estructura temporal en la que puede también recrearse a sí misma como sujeto creativo" (7).

This therapeutic form of remembering through fiction in order to reduce the weight of the past is not something *La casa de los conejos*' narrator does solely for herself. After returning to Argentina and experiencing an imperious need to write about the past, Alcoba comes to the realization that many other survivors like her also have memories that need to be shared. While for many years she had deemed her own story much less deserving of witnesses than the narratives of those who had died or their descendants, she begins to recognize the essentialness of survivors' stories: "muy a

menudo pienso en los muertos, pero también porque ahora sé que no hay que olvidarse de los vivos. Más aún: estoy convencida de que es imprescindible pensar en ellos. Esforzarse por hacerles, también a ellos, un lugar" (12).

This need to bear witness is described not only as something survivors must do for themselves—for a personal coming to terms with their own trauma—, but also as something important for fellow survivors, who, like Alcoba, may have silenced their own experiences due to fears regarding the legitimacy of such stories or the way others will respond. What Alcoba describes as "hacerles … un lugar" is the creation of a space for their stories to be told and heard, a space to which *La casa de los conejos* contributes, as the responses Alcoba received from others regarding her novel suggest: "Recibo constantemente cartas de lectores que me escriben no para hablarme del libro, sino de su relación con ese episodio de la historia argentina. El hecho de haber puesto en marcha mi memoria puso en marcha otras memorias. Conservo esas cartas como algo muy valioso" (Saban and Alcoba 248).

In this dynamic between the author-narrator and her readers, like what Laub describes as the coming together of the survivor of trauma and the listener in which "a repossession of the act of witnessing" takes place, *La casa de los conejos* foments the development of other sites of memory, particularly those that had been silenced because they were deemed or assumed to be less worthy than those already circulating publicly (Laub 85).

At the same time, Alcoba is careful to clarify that the act of remembering should not be imposed from without, arguing for the importance of more organic forms of memory that are not prescribed or demanded. She criticizes those who propose "el deber

de la memoria," claiming "no se puede obligar a nadie a recordar, es una necesidad, un momento, son problemas complicados, no puede haber una receta, no se receta la memoria, hay un momento que está maduro o no" (qtd. in "Tejemaneje: Entrevista a Laura Alcoba"). Alcoba's sense of needing to tell her story comes from within, rather than from external pressures or a political project. Nonetheless, she recognizes that in giving voice to these experiences that she had kept to herself for many years because she feared how they would be received, she is able to lighten her own burden as well as that of others, carving out a space for their stories to be told and heard, contributing to the construction of a new corpus that allows for different kinds of memories to be narrated, impeding the "congelamiento de un relato sobre la historia reciente" (Badagnani 12).

Ávila's position differs from that of Alcoba's in that he describes the creation of *Infancia clandestina* as an obligation, commenting, "no era una película que quería hacer sino una película que tenía que hacer," something that, once finished, left the filmmaker with the sensation of "una especie de deuda saldada a partir de un compromiso que había adoptado desde muy temprana edad" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). The origins of this sense of obligation are expressed in the dedication at the end of the film, which appears in three phases, beginning with "Dedicado a la memoria de mi madre Sara E Zermoglio Detenida-Desaparecida el 13 de Octubre de 1979," to which is added, "A mis hermanos, mi padre, mis hijos," followed by, "Y a todos los Hijos, Nietos, Militantes y a todos aquellos que han conservado la fe."

As seen in this dedication, the obligation Ávila experiences to create *Infancia clandestina* is both very personal and collective, one that will honor his own family members as well as all connected to leftist militancy. According to Ávila, filmmakers

have a social obligation and need to recognize that what they create "construye parte de la historia audiovisual de [su] país" (Goldbarg, "*Infancia clandestina*: Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"). This obligation has led Ávila to be deeply concerned with communicating his convictions to his audience. He rejects the belief that worrying about the spectators' responses to his works is a form of aesthetically betraying himself, as he believes cultural production to be a form of social commitment whose message must be effectively communicated ("Hacer este filme").

In creating *Infancia clandestina*, Ávila attempted to achieve this by continually sharing his script and early takes of the film with others, asking them what they understood the film to communicate and making adjustments as necessary so that his objectives were better realized (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). Ávila describes this constant preoccupation with "las miradas de los otros" not as a mere desire to please others with his works, but as an attempt to express himself clearly so that he might convey that which he intends: "creo en la comunicación del cine: no lo hago por los otros, pero sí para los otros …. Ningún director debería traicionar su manera de ver la película por la mirada de los otros, si no preocuparse porque lo que quiere comunicar se comunique claramente" (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). The film—a new site of memory—is thus motivated by a sense of responsibility for the ways in which others receive it and a desire to faithfully represent a generation of leftist militants and their descendants.

As previously discussed, the form these works take is a hybrid one that fictionalizes the authors' own experiences in part due to the "imposibilidad de representar

la tragedia, por lo cual su proyecto es crear estrategias y lenguajes que permitan negociar la memoria," a theme Diana Pifano and María Soledad Paz-Mackay describe as common to this new corpus of fictional works by children of leftist militants (97). Needing for their stories, which differ significantly from those already told and present-day political rhetoric about this history, to be heard, these two authors employ written and audiovisual language in order to create these new cultural sites of memory, in a sense arguing that "Si toda memoria es una construcción … es tan lícita aquella que han construido los abuelos y compañeros de militancia—tradicionales arcontes de la memoria—como aquella que, con retazos de recuerdos, buscan elaborar los hijos sobre sus padres" (Badagnani 6). It is in part due to "la ineptitud del lenguaje a nivel semántico y narrativo" and the impossibility of representing their experiences exactly through non-fiction, then, that these writers turn to more abstract uses of language, constructing alternative grammars for discussing Argentina's recent militant and dictatorial past (Pifano 105). As Aon asserts, in these new narratives that seek differing truths, "la única certeza es, justamente, la búsqueda," a search that language is fundamental in constructing but can never fully capture ("Una cuestión," 228).

In *La casa de los conejos*, the previously mentioned linguistic decisions involved in the novel's creation—the choice to write in French rather than Spanish as well as not translating certain words from Spanish to French in the novel's original edition—play a significant role in the novel's creation of new cultural sites of memory. In her reflections on writing *La casa de los conejos*, Alcoba has commented on "la necesidad de encontrar las propias palabras, porque la cristalización de la manera de hablar sobre estos temas es muy fuerte," a crystallization she attempts to avoid by not writing or translating the novel

into Spanish herself (qtd. in Wajszczuk, "La ficción es liberadora"). Additionally important to the construction of new understandings of the past for Alcoba is the careful selection of the memories she chooses to include as well as those she excludes—"Yo elegí qué contar de lo que me contaron"—, preserving "una especie de libertad" to narrate her story as she chooses (qtd. in Wajszczuk, "La ficción es liberadora").

Like the already discussed word *embute*, *azar* appears several times in Spanish in the original French-language version of *La casa de los conejos*, most notably in a crossword puzzle that Laura creates for herself once she can no longer attend school and becomes "obsesionada por el miedo de volverme idiota, como la Presidenta," referring to Isabel Perón (113). Laura bases the puzzle on the events most relevant to her family's life at the time, reflecting on the irony of using the same notebook she had at her school, "donde debía ocultar y callar todo," to do so, no longer worried as she is certain she will not be able to return (115). Among the different words used in this crossword puzzle are "Isabel," defined as "imitadora fracasada y odiada"; "Videla," described by the word "asesino"; the word "muerte," which completes the phrase "Patria o …"; and "azar," a synonym for "casualidad," which Laura misspells as "asar," unaware of the mistake (115). She shares the completed puzzle with Diana, who explains the difference between "azar" and "asar," with the novel indirectly conjuring known torture practices that involved fire and burning victims, as is noted in the interview with Alcoba conducted by *Diario El Ciudadano* ("Tejemaneje: Entrevista a Laura Alcoba").

Laura narrates that she had not intentionally included this word—"*azar* se había encontrado allí sin elegirla yo, sólo para llenar las casillas suplementarias"—but its serendipitous appearance leads her to conclude that "esa palabra debía permanecer, que,

costara lo que costase, había que darle una oportunidad," resulting in her misspelling "Isabel" as "Izabel" in order to include it (117). For the author, the word *azar* is "el nudo, el centro del libro" because it offers the only possible explanation she can understand for "haber estado tan cerca de gente que murió y por qué estar del lado de los vivos con todo el peso que eso significa" (qtd. in "Tejemaneje: Entrevista a Laura Alcoba").

However, as Victoria Daona argues, this proposition of chance as the only comprehensible justification for why some people were killed and others were not cannot truly be sustained outside of the confines of the seven-year-old narrator's worldview. Neither state terrorism nor Laura's parents' choice to participate in leftist militancy were mere products of chance: "No fue el azar, sino las estrategias represivas las que operaron de manera siniestra sobre los militantes guerrilleros—capturados, libres, desaparecidos o sobrevivientes— …. Tampoco fue azarosa la historia que a Laura le tocó vivir; sus padres eligieron formar parte de Montoneros" (Daona 10). Likewise, Laura and her mother are able to flee to France because Laura's grandfather has the means to make this escape possible. César's comments that encourage them to take this opportunity imply that more Montoneros would do so if they could: "Los nuestros mueren día a día. Nos están masacrando …. yo no te voy a impedir que te vayas si tenés esa oportunidad" (111-112).

The narrator's dependence on *azar* in order to come to terms with the guilt she faces as a survivor does not take into account these crucial details as to why certain lives were taken and others were spared, though this is not to suggest that such occurrences can be rationally explained. Rather, it is to propose that the narrator and author's reliance upon *azar* in constructing this *lieu de mémoire* begins to explore more deeply the very

complex questions of life and death during this period, demonstrating the need for more discussion and debate of these topics; but it only goes so far, imposing limits to that which should be subjected to further criticism and analysis.

In *Infancia clandestina*, the language used to construct a new *lieu de mémoire*, challenging established and crystalized interpretations of militancy and dictatorship, is audiovisual. The film's aesthetics, which include harmonious and emotive music in many different scenes as well as different artistic camera angles, particularly the extreme close-ups in which just one or two body parts fill the screen, are important to *Infancia clandestina*'s nuanced representation of this period, suggesting there to have been great beauty in the midst of terrible violence.

Similarly contributing to an aesthetic that depicts the complexity of the period is the naturalness with which Juan and his classmates act, due in part to Ávila's decision not to share the film's script with the child actors, making sure they were unaware of the symbolic weight of the scenes in which they acted. For Ávila, this helped to recreate the same lack of specific knowledge he and other children like him had of the events unfolding around them, reinforcing the idea that this childhood was relatively normal, a conviction of Ávila's that will be further examined in this chapter (Garza, "La 'Infancia clandestina' del cineasta argentino Benjamín Ávila").

Perhaps one of the most striking choices made in terms of *Infancia clandestina*'s audiovisual language is the use of graphic novel images to represent all scenes of violence, never depicting them with human actors, much like Carri's use of Playmobile figurines to describe the abduction of her parents as an extraterrestial-like one in *Los rubios*. *Infancia clandestina* switches to these images in three moments: in the film's first

scene in which Juan's family is shot at by paramilitary forces, resulting in their leaving Argentina for four years; in the dream Juan has regarding his Uncle Beto's assassination, as it has been narrated to him; and during Juan's mother's assassination, which Juan hears but does not see while hiding in the *escondite*, and his following abduction by the military forces that find him soon after.

In these scenes, a deliberate choice to avoid realistic depictions of violence is made, with the "violencia psicológica" that Juan experiences being emphasized over the external acts taking place (Goldbarg, "*Infancia clandestina*: Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"). For Ávila, the illustration of physical violence in films such as *Kill Bill* leads to a normalization of this violence that often does not result in critical responses to it, one to which the writer-director did not wish to further contribute (Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). Working instead with animated drawings in order to communicate the brutality of these events, *Infancia clandestina* seeks to place viewers in Juan's place, hoping that such images will help them more closely identify with the protagonist, wanting "que el espectador sienta, hacia el final de la película, qué es Juan" (qtd. in Goldbarg, "*Infancia clandestina*: Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila").

Juan's vivid dreams also enable the viewer to identify closely with the feelings and thoughts he experiences. In one such dream, following his Uncle Beto's unexpected assassination, Juan is able to have a final conversation with him. The two share *maní con chocolate* as they celebrate Juan's "success" in his relationship with María, and Beto offers Juan one last piece of advice: "pase lo que pase, no te traiciones." The second dream of particular importance to this analysis of how *Infancia clandestina*'s audiovisual language helps to create new cultural memories of this period is the one Juan has soon

after discovering his father has been killed. The news of his father's death is relayed to him through the television in his family's living room, a pivotal scene that will later be more thoroughly examined. In the following dream, Juan imagines his classmates convening in his garage—where the Montonero supplies are stored—and surrounding a body whose face is covered with a television screen that initially shows a photograph of his father's face, just as he had seen on his own television before falling asleep. This face then changes, however, to the same photograph used on Juan's false passport, which identifies him as Ernesto. He watches his classmates—particularly María, who wears a bridal veil—repeat "al compañero Ernesto, presente," as he has observed his parents' *compañeros* do many times in their gatherings, realizing that he is witnessing his own funeral ceremony in which he is known by a name that is not his own. Like the film's graphic novel images, the audiovisual representation of this dream allows viewers to identify closely with the trauma Juan experiences in having lost his father and in fearing for his own life.

In *La casa de los conejos* and *Infancia clandestina*, then, *lieux de mémoire* play an important role in the fictionalized reconstructions of the two authors' childhoods; and these narratives, which are created by their respective authors' more abstract uses of written and audiovisual language, nuance seemingly solidified understandings of the past, becoming new cultural memory sites themselves that insist upon the need for further and differing narrations of this history.

Neither Heroes nor Monsters

Both of these cultural memory sites that are created in the authors' attempts to represent militancy and dictatorship in a way that is more authentic to their experiences represent Montoneros—the narrators' and authors' parents—more ambiguously than the Kirchnerist narrative has. For the narrators of these two texts, the Montoneros they represent are not merely figures to be demonized or heroized, but human beings who birthed them, raised them, and whom they knew intimately. It is natural that they would not remember their parents as absolutely angelic or evil, but would, instead, have a more complex understanding of who they were. Likewise, a certain distancing from ideological stances on militancy within these texts is not surprising as these authors attempt to articulate the complex ways in which they experienced clandestine childhood, rather than argue a political position.

One commonality shared by these two works in their representations of Montonero childhood is their familiarity with weapons, quite common items within their households/Montonero bases. In *La casa de los conejos*, the child narrator casually mentions her attempts to find a clean space on the kitchen table to eat her snack on weapon cleaning day (84). Similarly, in *Infancia clandestina*, guns are present in many of the film's scenes within the house, though Juan's parents do not allow him to touch or use them. A second similarity shared by the two narrators' experiences of clandestine childhood is the presence of what Laura cannot describe by any other word than *embute*, which is commonly referred to as an *escondite* in *Infancia clandestina*. These secret spaces in the two narrators' homes hide key objects for Montonero operations, such as weapons and publications, as well as the Montonero printing press in *La casa de los conejos*. They also serve as hiding places where the children know they are to go should

danger arise. The desire to be a good mini-Montonero is a third commonality between the two narrators' experiences. Laura and Juan continually concern themselves with not sharing their real names, identities, or any information that might compromise their parents, a preoccupation that causes great distress.

Both narrators' need to use alternative identities and the identity questions such acts raise are important themes within each work. In *La casa de los conejos*, Laura is allowed to keep her first name, but her last name must be changed. In the period before her family has received their new false identification documents, Laura is asked by her neighbor what her last name is, and she, knowing that under no circumstance is she allowed to offer her actual last name, simply replies that she has no last name. This response provokes concern on the part of the neighbor, which Diana is later able to remedy. Reflecting on this moment that she only remembers when her angry mother and Diana bring it to her attention, Laura asks herself, "¿Pero qué podría responder, entonces? ¿Cuál es, al fin y al cabo, mi nombre?," identifying the confusion that clandestine childhood has engendered for her, leaving her uncertain as to how to answer a question as basic as what her name is (68).

In *Infancia clandestina*, as previously mentioned, Juan must assume the identity of Ernesto Estrada whenever he is outside of his home. This makes his declaration at the film's close in which he identifies himself by his actual name all the more powerful. Juan, who has lost his parents and baby sister at this point and been interrogated for what is likely days, is left by the military at the door of his grandmother's house. He knocks on the door, and when his grandmother asks who it is, he does not initially answer, heavily breathing and seeming uncertain as to how to respond. She insists that whoever it is

identify himself, and Juan finally pronounces, "Soy Juan," after which music blasts and the film ends. This act stands in significant contrast to a similar one towards the close of Marcelo Piñeyro's 2002 *Kamchatka* in which the child protagonist inscribes his alias name—Harry—in a book about Harry Houdini before departing the home in which his family has hidden, an appropriation of clandestine identity that is furthered in the film's final scene in which the narrator affirms his father's insistence upon the importance of utopic resistance from afar.

The re-appropriation of Juan's biological identity with which *Infancia clandestina* closes is highly significant, as Ávila's following comments indicate: "Te diría que toda la película se construye para llegar a ese momento," adding that this moment "es la única vez en toda la película que él va a mirar a la cámara, que nos va a mirar para decirnos que nosotros también somos parte de esto" (qtd. in Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). This one and only direct gaze from the film's protagonist implicates the viewer in Argentina's recent past, not allowing him or her to remain merely as a spectator, challenging simplified categories of victim and perpetrator by suggesting ways in which spectators and witnesses might have participated in dictatorial violence.

These likenesses in the two narrators' experiences are not ones commonly regarded as aspects of a typical childhood; though, for Ávila, as he has stressed in several interviews, his life did seem normal to him at the time: "Para nosotros, era absolutamente normal la vida que llevábamos. La vida clandestina-militante era un estado de normalidad total. No era algo diferente de los demás" (qtd. in Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte"). Ávila repeatedly states that to depict this period of his life as he remembers it is not to represent it as abnormal or, worse, lamentable, though it seems unlikely that

present-day audiences who do not share similar experiences would consider this an average childhood.

Alcoba does not suggest her experiences to have been normal as Ávila does, but she is careful to state that the novel's more ambiguous representation of the choices made by her parents that resulted in such a childhood are not meant to condemn them, stating, "No es un libro que escribí contra mis padres. Ése era mi gran miedo y por eso tardé tanto tiempo en darle forma" (Saban and Alcoba 249). She describes the "doble trampa" involved in writing a novel about leftist militancy at a time in which the predominant narratives regarding this armed struggle are either "la idealización de una militancia que no fue la mía" or "la crítica de una generación" (Saban and Alcoba 249). Alcoba does not identify with either of these positions, explicitly distancing herself from the Montonero fight as well as from the *teoría de los dos demonios*. She explains that her disassociation with the Montonero fight stems in large part from her absence from Argentina since she was a young child: "En ese momento tenía siete años. Crecí en otro sitio, en un país democrático. O sea que no viene al caso reivindicar o ensalzar eso," while her rejection of the equating of the violence committed by the state with that of leftist militants is due to a belief that the horrors of the dictatorship have no comparison (qtd. in Papaleo, "Laura Alcoba: Un libro sobre vivos y muertos").

Alcoba's refusal to compare the two forms of political violence is in part motivated by her understanding of this period as "un enigma que me sigue ocupando, y que desde la interrogación me interesa … y sé que voy a volver a ese tema, pero con más preguntas que respuestas. Sobre todo con respecto a la opción de la lucha armada" (qtd. in Papaleo, "Laura Alcoba: Un libro sobre vivos y muertos"). This recognition of the

complexity and enigma of 1970s militancy, which Alcoba herself participated in to a certain degree as a young child but comments she still cannot understand, contributes to the novel's nuanced representation of this period.

The novel's critical examination of the hierarchies within the Montonero organization that seem to contradict the organization's political commitment to equality underscore the humanness of the organization that Alcoba refuses to depict as heroic. The differing treatment of the organization's directors, who send themselves to Europe so that they might denounce the human rights violations taking place in Argentina, and its thousands of "militantes de base," who must stay and defend the country, sacrificing their lives in order to do so, is identified by the seven-year old narrator who overhears César, the leader of their group, accidentally imply this to her mother. In response, Laura asks herself, "¿Qué ha dicho? ¿Puede ser verdad? ¿Los militantes de base dan su vida mientras los jefes buscan refugio en el extranjero? César parece arrepentido de lo que se acaba de decir, como tomando conciencia de lo que su respuesta sugiere" (120). As Cecilia Lasa writes, with these questions, "se socava la polarización víctimas-victimarios al sembrar dudas sobre la caracterización inmaculada con la cual se ha construido a los primeros," causing a break "en la figura homogénea del sujeto víctima, que no implica desconocer o reducir la responsabilidad del victimario" (7). A recognition of the imperfectness of the Montonero organization does not in any way lessen the responsibility of those who committed violent crimes on behalf of the state. It does, however, serve in constructing a

more accurate representation of these social actors, which includes a questioning of the inequalities that existed between Montonero leadership and rank and file.[110]

A longing for a childhood more normal than her own accompanies *La casa de los conejos*' narrator, suggesting a disappointment with the consequences of her parents' political convictions and actions. When Laura and her mother move to a house with a red-tile roof, the kind of house in which Laura has told her mother that she has dreams of living, her mother expresses satisfaction at having met this desire for her daughter, but Laura's reflections reveal her mother to have misunderstood her entirely: "Referirme a una casa de tejas rojas era, apenas, una manera de hablar. Las tejas podrían haber sido rojas o verdes; lo que yo quería era la vida que se lleva ahí dentro. Padres que vuelven del trabajo a cenar, al caer la tarde" (14). It is not the colors of the roof tiles that matter to Laura, but the kind of childhood and family life they symbolize to her, one in which the parents are present and fear does not pervade everyday life.

The absence of Laura's parents is not directly commented upon frequently in the novel, but their non-presence marks the text profoundly. Laura's father is imprisoned throughout the course of the novel, and she is only able to visit him twice. During the second visit, the encounter is quite tense, resulting in Laura vomiting in her father's ear. The increased anxiety and fear experienced in this moment and the following ones in which Laura must hide herself in her grandmother's car on the return home, waiting until it is dark to reunite with her mother, are explained only by the phrase "todo el mundo tuvo mucho miedo" (92). This interpretation of the increasing danger Montoneros and

[110] See Ana Ros for more on this inequality that is often avoided in discussions of Montoneros, but important to consider, particularly because decisions to intensify armed struggle were often made at the highest levels by those who were not on the ground, but in exile (55).

other leftist militants faced as disappearances by paramilitary forces increased and the military coup approached is only hinted at within the text by the child narrator, who seems to understand little and yet, as her physical reactions demonstrate, has absorbed a great deal of the extensive fear of the time.

After this second visit, it is determined that it is no longer safe to visit Laura's father, and he disappears entirely from the novel. As Daona suggests, this erasure of the father within the text is not particularly significant for the narrator, as, even before this moment, he was hardly present: "Respecto a la nena, ella tampoco dice si extraña o no a su papá, las visitas que realiza a la cárcel no trascienden ese espacio intramuros, la nena no nombra a su papá una vez que sale de allí" (9).

Similarly, Laura's mother is rarely with her, often in hiding or in the *embute*, working on printing publications and avoiding visibility as her husband's arrest has made her situation more precarious. After one period of prolonged absence, Laura does not even recognize her mother when she sees her: "Mi madre ya no se parece a mi madre. Es una mujer joven y delgada, de pelo corto y rojo, de un rojo muy vivo que yo no he visto nunca en ninguna cabeza" (31). Laura's inability to identify her own mother says more about her mother's absence in her life than any direct reflections on it possibly could. Furthermore, her response once she realizes that this woman with strange colored hair is indeed her mother suggests a great distance in their relationship: "Tengo un impulso de retroceder cuando ella se inclina para abrazarme" (31). This is not the welcoming reception one might expect between a mother and daughter after a long period of separation, but a relationship deeply complicated by fear and uncertainty, in part due to Laura's parents' political commitment.

Such ideological convictions do not, however, deter Laura from having a close relationship with Diana, perhaps in part because no state or paramilitary authorities suspect Diana or Cacho—"un matrimonio modelo, a salvo de toda sospecha, y que además espera un hijo"—of having any affiliation whatsoever with a leftist militant organization (53). Diana does not face the same dangers Laura's mother does, and she is able to spend more time with Laura in public where neighbors might see them without concern for their safety. The amount of time Laura and Diana spend together and the affection that they have for one another result in an intimate relationship developing between the two, one that more closely resembles a typical mother-daughter relationship than the one shared between Laura and her biological mother. This is partly evidenced by the novel's dedication to Diana, who was murdered when the rabbit house was discovered shortly after Laura and her mother fled, as well as in the ways Diana defends and comforts Laura when other adults become upset with the mistakes she makes while carrying the heavy burden of trying not to reveal any potentially incriminating information to others. Diana is one of the few people with whom Laura has a relationship, given the isolation she experiences from others while in hiding, particularly once it becomes too dangerous for her to attend school.

Laura's longing to connect with others and inability to do so further suggest the abnormality and difficulty of this life that she did not choose for herself. In one particularly revealing moment, while accompanying Diana in her distribution of *Evita Montonera* newspapers (disguised and wrapped as gifts), Laura comes into contact with another young girl much like herself, who accompanies a woman—perhaps her mother—in receiving the publications. This encounter in the plaza is brief, but it provides Laura

with a deep sense of solidarity and comfort in knowing that she is not alone: "sólo su mirada me bastó para comprender que ella vivía también en el miedo …. cómo me confortó ver a aquella otra niña. Fue como si aquel día, entre las dos, durante un tramo del camino, hubiéramos cargado juntas con el peso del miedo" (110). A silent but shared glance is all it takes for Laura to know that she has much in common with this young girl, and she is deeply grateful for this moment, as it is one of few opportunities she has to connect with another person, as fleeting as that connection might be.

Laura also tries to satisfy this human desire for interaction with others at home, particularly with the Ingeniero, who spends a good amount of time at the house early in the novel, when the *embute* is still being designed. The Ingeniero at times engages in conversation with Laura, and these exchanges are quite meaningful for her. However, he also rashly criticizes her in other moments, and the friendship she had perceived to exist between the two of them causes these remarks to wound her deeply. In a less severe moment, after Laura has asked the Ingeniero to make a second, smaller *embute* in a different part of the house because she is so impressed by the first one, he laughs at her, telling her he has more important things to do. Though his tone is not overly harsh, Laura is deeply offended and humiliated, explaining: "Me siento verdaderamente ridícula por haberle pedido eso …. Pongo mis brazos detrás de la espalda y aprieto fuerte los puños mientras me alejo a refugiarme en mi cuarto, falsamente indiferente, profundamente herida" (58).

Laura's pain comes from the recognition in this moment that the Ingeniero does not consider her a comrade or a friend, as she had hoped, but is merely being polite by conversing with her while at the house. She comments, "He querido jugar a la adulta, a la

militante, a la ama de casa, pero sé bien que soy pequeña, muy pequeña, increíblemente pequeña incluso," acknowledging her desire to relate to those who surround her and the difficulties involved in doing so (59). In a second moment, when Laura pretends to take a photo of the Ingeniero, he becomes outraged, screaming at her and grabbing her arm, leading Laura to cry uncontrollably (61). The Ingeniero brashly yells at her a third time after discovering her uncle's name written in her jacket (a hand-me-down Laura's grandmother has passed to her), and Laura's self reflections point to the incredible pressures imposed upon her to act as a careful adult militant at a very young age: "comprendo que lo que he hecho es gravísimo. Decididamente, no estoy a la altura" (100).

Laura becomes defeated when she fails to meet the nearly impossible expectations that her parents' *compañeros*—the only community of which she is a part—have for her. At the novel's very beginning, the narrator tells of an infant, the son of Montoneros, who could barely speak but managed to unknowingly betray his family when the police searched their house. The police had not found anything subversive and were ready to leave the home when they noticed the baby repeatedly pointing to a painting. When they removed it, they found the family's *escondite*, and all were arrested. Laura's parents tell her this story so that she knows the importance of keeping silent regarding any information that could lead to their capture, and she begins the novel convinced that she is up for the task, differentiating herself from the baby: "Pero mi caso, claro, es totalmente diferente. Yo ya soy grande, tengo siete años …. No voy a decir nada. Ni aunque vengan también a casa y me hagan daño. Ni aunque me retuerzan el brazo o me queman con la plancha. Ni aunque me claven clavitos en las rodillas" (17-18). The

narrator takes great pride in her perceived competency and is severely disappointed when she fails to meet the expectations she and those who surround her have placed upon her.

In addition to loneliness and an inability to please those who surround her, Laura experiences a great deal of danger and fear. She casually tells of a car accident she was in with her family in which her head was slammed against the windshield. She was not rushed to the hospital or even medically treated. Instead, as she narrates in a matter-of-fact tone, she and her parents had to escape quickly because they did not yet have their false identification cards, and, once the police arrived at the scene, this would have been discovered. The reader does not know the severity of Laura's injuries, other than Laura describing the crash as very violent, noting that her head was the first thing to hit the windshield (21). The narrator's brief and nonchalant mention of this event—the lack of shock and understanding of the danger that she likely faced in this moment—is jarring. Considering that the narrator is the voice that Alcoba has created for her fictionalized childhood self, this may be read as an implication of a certain degree of negligence on the part of militant parents, whose political commitment engendered serious risks for their families.

Laura's later frequent mentions of fear and yearning for protection also suggest her childhood to have been deeply impacted by her parents' Montonero involvement. When an acquaintance of Laura's mother insists that Laura be baptized in order to be under God's protection, Laura comments, "Quiero estar bajo la protección del Señor lo más pronto posible. No comprendo cómo he podido vivir sin Él por tanto tiempo. Y sin saber siquiera que lo precisaba" (38). Laura's desire for protection is also experienced when she and her mother arrive for the first time at the rabbit house, when her mother's

eyes are blindfolded so that she will not know where the house is located, thereby not being able to offer information about its whereabouts if she were to be tortured. Laura, who is not blindfolded, reflects, "Pero yo, yo lo veo todo," asking herself, "Que mi madre cierre los ojos, ¿me protege, también? Yo me guardo todas las preguntas para mí y no abro más la boca" (45).

Underneath the silence young Laura has been taught to keep, great fear simmers. Laura's obedience of her parents in her attempts to keep her questions and any potentially incriminating information to herself stems from this fear, rather than a trust in her parents' care for her, as Daona suggests, "Los padres de Laura transmiten a su hija una obediencia que se sostiene en el miedo terrible que le genera a la nena imaginarse el dolor provocado por la plancha o los clavos. Su obediencia no está fundada en la seguridad de los lazos afectivos, sino en el terror y el silenciamiento de los hechos" (4).

Alcoba has stated that French reviews of the novel that discussed it as "la historia 'de una infancia robada'" bothered her, but it is difficult to read the novel and not experience her childhood this way, at least to some extent (Saban and Alcoba 249). Alcoba's unease with this reading of her novel seems to come less from a disagreement with the interpretation of her own longing for a different childhood and more from a recognition of how fortunate she was to have survived when many others did not—a form of survivor's guilt present in several parts of the novel, as discussed with regards to the presence of the term *azar*—: "se robaron tantas cosas en ese tiempo en Argentina, tantas vidas. A quién voy a reclamarle yo nada" (Saban and Alcoba 249).

As might be expected given Benjamín Ávila's militancy in HIJOS, his support of the Kirchnerist political administration, *Infancia clandestina*'s dedication to all militants and their descendants, and the film's projection on the outside of the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos ex-ESMA on March 24, 2013 (the ninth Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia), the film is certainly not an attack on his parents or leftist militancy. Ávila, who strongly disliked the critical tone of Carri's *Los rubios*, commenting that it "le hizo mucho daño a la generación de los hijos, porque tuvimos que remontar una postura construida o dicha sobre los hijos que no es tal," fictionally represents his parents as very loving and present ones, who worked hard to keep their children as safe as possible given the risks that their return to Argentina produced for their family (qtd. in Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). This is experienced early on in the film, from the very moment in which their journey back to Argentina begins, with the tape recording Juan's parents have affectionately made for him. As Juan embarks upon this journey with his sister and his parents' friends, he listens to his parents' voices explain why they must journey home separately as well as the details of this arrangement. In these tapes, his parents establish parallels between their undercover re-entry in Argentina and the many disguised entries into different Latin American countries of Ernesto Che Guevara, an idol for young Juan, after whom his clandestine name is given. When Juan and Vicky arrive at their new home, the joy and love with which their parents embrace them after a short period apart is undeniable.

Nonetheless, I argue that the film's attempts to represent these Montonero figures realistically from the perspective of their child distances it from the heroizing narratives of leftist militancy found in earlier documentaries and testimonies (such as Eduardo

Anguita and Martín Caparrós's *La voluntad* and the Third Cinema testimonial documentaries called for by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's *Hacia un tercer cine*) as well as in political discourse, making it a more ambiguous film than might be expected given the filmmaker's political associations. As a film "plagado de grises" that occupies a space "fuera de los maniqueísmos y los lugares comunes que definen a buena parte de las obras que han abordado 'los años de plomo,'" *Infancia clandestina*'s representation of Montoneros does not fit neatly within established categories ("Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila"). Ávila himself recognizes this, explaining that the reality represented by the film "no es el mito o el infierno …. Es verdad que vivimos incontables situaciones de miedo, de horror, pero también había humor, amor, vidas sujetas a cierta normalidad, vidas más o menos parecidas a las de otras personas," noting that he sensed a strong obligation to create a film that proposes "una nueva mirada, un nuevo punto de vista sobre las ideas de aquellos militantes de los 70" (qtd. in "Entrevista a Benjamín Ávila").

In the early parts of *Infancia clandestina*, the normality of clandestine childhood upon which Ávila insists is fairly evident. Juan's family spends a good amount of time together, gently and affectionately caring for one another; and there is excitement, laughter, and love both inside and outside the home. In one early scene, after a Montonero meeting is hosted at the house, an *asado* follows in which all of Juan's parents' *compañeros* partake while music is played and sung. This lighthearted, calm atmosphere contributes to the somewhat paradoxical sense of normalcy that accompanies the filling of *maní con chocolate* boxes with bullets and money. It is also in the first half of the film that Juan experiences romantic love for the first time, falling for María, who

feels similarly for him. A successful birthday party in which all enjoy themselves is thrown for Juan, despite it not actually being his birthday and the short notice his parents receive. And on a class camping trip, Juan plays with his friends, and he and María advance their relationship. In each of these scenes, there is a hint of life being different for Juan, who has quite dangerous family secrets he must keep to himself, but the differences between his life and that of his peers do not impact his daily life in a severe manner.

This changes drastically, however, when Juan returns from the school camping trip. His mother picks him up and rushes him to the car, where she and his father, in hushed and incomplete utterances, communicate to him that his uncle has been assassinated. From this moment forward, tragedy ensues. Beto's loss is felt profoundly by his *compañeros* and family, but it is experienced particularly painfully by Juan, who has lost his confidant and mentor just as his life begins to shatter. During this second half of the film, Juan also loses his chance at a relationship with María due to the increased danger in which Beto's assassination places Juan's family, resulting in Juan no longer being able to attend school or have contact with anyone outside his family.

Following the dissolution of this relationship, Juan's already difficult circumstances further worsen. While feeding his baby sister the next day, the television program playing in the background is interrupted for a special announcement regarding a confrontation between armed forces and several defeated militants. One of these subversives, the announcer comments, was a high-ranking leader in the Montonero organization, for whom the military had been searching for over six years: Horacio, Juan's father. Juan, whose attention is slowly drawn from feeding his sister to the

television as more details are explained, finds himself standing in front of the screen when his father's photograph appears on it. The viewer watches Juan approach the television and discover the news from the same angle from which Juan has observed many earlier scenes unfold in his home. From this space at the intersection of several doorframes, Juan has been able to watch his family members and their *compañeros* interact while he remained invisible to them. Now, it is the viewer who takes this eavesdropping position, watching perhaps the most tragic moment thus far in this child's life unfurl before his very eyes.[111]

This is not the end of the tragedy, but the stimulus for what follows: Juan's near shooting of his mother, whose entry in the house startles the terrified and armed child; Juan's mother's assassination that Juan hears while hiding with his baby sister in the *escondite*; the detaining of Juan and Vicky by his mother's assassins; the interrogation of Juan by state forces; and his baby sister's appropriation by the military. Juan's childhood as represented in these later scenes in the film is far from ordinary; it is tragic. The incredible losses Juan suffers are a result of not only military repression, but of his parents' willingness to risk and sacrifice their own lives and the protection of their children for their political commitment.

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[111] This scene shares parallels with Prividera's *M*'s opening scene in which the camera focuses on a static-filled television screen, accompanied by the voices of multiple individuals sharing their testimonies, as well as *M*'s closing scene that returns to the same audio fusion of television static and ocean waves, this time with a collage of video footage of Prividera's disappeared mother. The cameraman in these two scenes (likely Prividera) assumes a position similar to the one found by the camera in the scene described above in *Infancia clandestina*, though it is the gaze of the child of Montoneros that the spectator assumes within this scene in *M*, as in several earlier scenes within *Infancia clandestina* in which Juan watched his parents and his comrades from the same space from which we now observe him.

While the first part of the film prior to Beto's disappearance portrays a more typical childhood, it is important to note that danger and disaster did not emerge entirely unexpectedly or without warning. Perhaps the scene in which the impending doom that awaits Juan's family is most overtly anticipated is the one in which Juan's mother and grandmother, Amalia, argue fiercely with one another over Horacio and Cristina's decision to return to Argentina when they are known guerrillas actively sought by the military. This argument climaxes when Beto tries to calm down a very distraught Amalia, reassuring her that all is "normal." Unable to contain herself, Amalia erupts, "¿normal? ¿A vos te parece normal que un chico tenga el nombre de no sé quién? ¿el cumpleaños de no sé qué fecha? ¿de no se sabe quién? … ¿A vos te parece que eso es normal?" These questions and the irrepressible anxiety Amalia has for the wellbeing of her family, particularly her grandchildren who have not chosen this life for themselves, identify this lifestyle as not at all ordinary, at least from her perspective.

The hurtful and intense exchanges between mother and daughter throughout this argument, which include Amalia suggesting martyrdom to be the objective of Montoneros and Cristina's declaration that, if she and Horacio were killed, she would rather her *compañeros* raise her children than her self-centered mother, eventually culminate in an embrace.[112] This hug does not resolve the ideological differences between the two nor bring them into agreement as to what is best for Juan and Vicky. It does, however, suggest the possibility of briefly transcending their markedly different

[112] Horacio and Cristina's decision not to leave their children with Amalia is the opposite of that taken in Marcelo Piñeyro's 2002 film *Kamchatka* in which the father's role as a human rights lawyer and the parents' close relationships with others who have been assassinated lead them to the painful decision of leaving their two sons with the boys' grandparents before they are found by state forces.

ideas of what is best for the children in recognition that this is what they both seek. Ávila's discussion of the importance of this brutal argument and ultimate embrace suggest it to be central to the film's proposition of a more affective representation of the 1970s, one that moves beyond strict ideological stances in favor of a "visión humana" that recognizes the humanity of both characters and, more broadly, of those who assume markedly differing political positions (qtd. in Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte"). Ávila explains that Amalia represents not only the "no te metás" approach to the political violence of the time, but that of genuine fear for her family members, while Cristina, though rather dogmatic, is also courageously faithful to her convictions, despite the immense risks involved in being so (Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte").

These two seemingly opposite positions and understandings of what is best for one's children momentarily dissolve in this hug between mother and daughter, described by Ávila in the following manner:

> Y esos dos personajes, en vez de seguir el camino de la historia que significó hasta ahora "es una cosa o la otra", terminan abrazados. Y me parece que la película es ese abrazo. Simboliza que eso "no es una cosa o la otra", sino que es un "todos juntos formamos parte de esto y, de algún modo, hay que llegar a ese abrazo". (qtd. in Ranzani**,** "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte"**)**

Ávila's remarks in this same interview that the film does not fully endorse either of these two positions, but proposes attempts at reconciliation, causing the viewer discomfort in its less established stance, suggest neither Amalia's nor Cristina's individual positions to fully capture the reality at hand (Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte").

The hug between mother and daughter may represent the film's central proposal for the present—that those with conflicting interpretations of leftist militancy would find common ground that is based more on affect than ideology—, but it is not an embrace that erases marked political differences or the painful and complex situation in which the family finds itself. Cristina is furious at her mother's response that the goal of militants is to be killed, and, relatedly, Ávila has argued that the film attempts to challenge the common cultural association between militancy and martyrdom—working toward an understanding in which militancy "no es sinónimo de muerte, sino sinónimo de creer" (qtd. in Ranzani, "Militancia no es sinónimo de muerte"). Nonetheless, Juan's uncle and parents are ultimately murdered for their political commitment. In this way, *Infancia clandestina* may be said to contradict Ávila's intended contestation of the position represented by Amalia; that is, for her to, according to Ávila, **"**expresar lo que todos los espectadores estamos sintiendo, mover las emociones y no estar juzgando todo el tiempo a los padres" (qtd. in Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). Rather than freeing the spectator from questioning the choices made by Juan's parents, Amalia's understandings of militancy predict the terrible violence that is to come upon the family and challenge Ávila's repeated declarations that the childhood represented in the film—like his own—is normal.

Cristina and Amalia's ability to embrace one another reflects the deep love they share for each other and for Juan and Vicky, but it does not ameliorate the danger Juan's family faces. This scene depicts the humanity and complexity behind each of these positions, suggesting the need for less simplified representations of them. It does not, however, resolve all questions as to the parenting decisions made by militants,

particularly given the film's ending in which Juan loses his uncle, his parents, and his baby sister due to these convictions.[113]

The objective of this chapter has not been to judge the ways in which the Montonero parents of these two stories navigated parenting and political commitment, but to consider how the more ambiguous representations of childhood and Montonero parents found in *Infancia clandestina* and *La casa de los conejos* differ from and challenge the Kirchnerist narrative's glorification of leftist militants as human rights heroes. As Ávila articulates, his illustration of clandestine childhood does not come from a "lugar culposo" that seeks to blame his parents for the danger and devastation he experienced, but it does not idealize them either (qtd. in Larroca and Godfrid, "Entrevista con Benjamín Ávila"). I argue that in both very personal texts, human and imperfect individuals are remembered, and these more truthful representations of leftist militants broaden the Kirchnerist narrative, expanding upon its interpretation of truth.

The need for stories that authentically represent Alcoba and Ávila's experiences lead them to develop new cultural sites of memory that must adapt language to articulate understandings of 1970s militancy that differ from established interpretations. It is in these two works' self-distancing from recognized positions and in their creation of more abstract and complex ones that they are radically political, while also being mainstream and seemingly ideologically "light." Their ostensibly less political angle that humanizes—rather than idealizes—their parents is precisely what allows them to

[113] For more regarding "el problema del compromiso político, la responsabilidad familiar y la ética," see Dema's brief analysis of María Teresa Andruetto's 2010 novel *Lengua madre* in his broader study of recent novels and films by children of militants (4-5).

challenge contemporary discussions of 1970s leftist militancy and develop more nuanced conceptions of memory, truth, and justice.

Conclusion: Negotiating Memory, Truth, and Justice

This project has examined, firstly, the memory politics of Argentina's current and preceding political administration that have played a central role in the electoral success of this political project and, secondly, a sampling of dissenting non-fiction and fictional responses to these constructions of memory from those closely related to the Kirchnerist narrative's heroes. The purpose has not been to judge how the Kirchners have memorialized the 1970s, but to interpret the ongoing hegemonic struggle to make sense of this violent period. These memory battles did not originate with Kirchnerist human rights politics, but they have become significantly more prevalent as those with much at stake in how social actors from this period are memorialized have responded to this political narrative's partiality, creating accounts of the past that they find to better represent their experiences and contribute to more accurate historical readings of the period.

These former militants and parents and children of assassinated militants (or, in the case of Brizuela's novel, the son of a military collaborator) suggest the Kirchnerist narrative to have misrepresented the convictions and identities of 1970s revolutionaries and, in some cases, those who participated in state terrorism. In their willingness to engage in critically considering leftist militancy and broader forms of guilt that include societal complicity in dictatorial violence, these cultural critics' narratives differ significantly from the Kirchnerist narrative and earlier cultural production, particularly documentaries and testimonies that unquestioningly revered leftist militants or treated them as innocent victims. These narratives from survivors and the relatives of those killed

reflect a need to bear witness to their traumatic experiences that do not align with the predominant political narrative about the past.

These works are part of a growing, heterogeneous corpus that indicate a pressing demand for more nuanced and complex understandings of the 1970s that attempt to analyze and debate the conditions that led to and helped sustain guerrilla warfare, a military coup, a brutal dictatorship, and what is depicted in some texts as increasing inequality in the neoliberal decades that have followed. For the authors of these texts, a true commitment to never again (*nunca más*) allowing such atrocities to occur depends upon critical examinations of the more uncomfortable truths and memories that persist and contradict the simplified interpretations of the past found in the Kirchnerist narrative; that is, that a young, innocent, and idealistic generation was inhumanly massacred merely for trying to better the world.

None of these authors deny the heinousness of the violence committed by state forces during the dictatorial period. They do, however, suggest that many more than those commonly cast as monstrous perpetrators share responsibility for such violence, including all who participated in armed struggle and complicit civil society that benefited or merely remained silent as such atrocities took place. Several of these writers also indicate that the casting of all who assisted the state in detaining, torturing, and assassinating leftist militants as incomprehensible monsters is not only inaccurate, but also detrimental to societal healing and more insightful interpretations of the period. More nuanced truths depend upon taking into account what Arendt has termed the banality of evil and the manners in which many citizens pled for military intervention as revolutionary violence and insecurity increased, only expressing horror at the measures

taken on their behalf many years later, as Caparrós's novel argues. Likewise, the depiction of murdered leftist militants as innocent idealists is argued to be inaccurate and harmful in denying those fiercely committed to revolutionary ideals their agency and humanity.

These cultural critics' reworkings of the Kirchnerist narrative and their opposition to this account of the past vary significantly, but they each suggest a need for understandings of memory, truth, and justice that go beyond those established by this cultural narrative. The texts examined here do not contest the necessary rigid certainties of trials, but the political uses of a superficial dualistic account of the 1970s that is employed simplistically against political detractors and to memorialize as innocent victims those who died in combat because they were willing to kill and be killed for resolute political convictions. From cultural critics' opposition to what they consider to be inauthentic Kirchnerist identifications with influential human rights organizations to criticism of the idealization and monumentalization of leftist guerrillas, these texts negotiate differing conceptions of memory, truth, and justice that I will quickly recapitulate here.

Within *Una misma noche* and *A quien corresponda*, memory is communicated to be a complicated, subjective process that requires significant work and often results in unanswered questions and ambiguities, as is evidenced by both novels' endings in which many uncertainties persist, despite continual attempts to find answers. This understanding of memory negotiates what Carlos of *A quien corresponda* describes as "la Memoria" within the Kirchnerist narrative: the simplified "frases hechas" of political discourse that indicate there to be no real interest in understanding the violence of the past, but, instead,

a superficial discursive explanation of it for political gain (206). The understanding of memory as complex and ambiguous presented within the novels and films examined in this project, underscored by Leonardo's unsuccessful attempts to discover a language that makes sense of the past in *Una misma noche*, affirm Jo Labanyi's argument regarding a similar phenomenon in Spain in which a memory boom that presents straightforward narratives about Spain's Francoist past has lost sight of the "difficulty of articulating the traumatic impact of past violence" (106).

Alcoba and Ávila's need to fictionalize their own experiences in order to be able to relate them suggest the need for distance from one's story to narrate its essence, while also highlighting the inescapability of muddling fiction and reality when attempting to narrate past trauma. This hybridization of memory is particularly evident in *Una misma noche*'s four parts (Novela, Memoria, Historia, and Sueño). Even though each part is labeled with a separate term, novel, memory, history, and dream overlap continually throughout the text, challenging the seemingly ordered divisions indicated by these titles. This mixture of fiction, memory, history, and dream is similar to *A quien corresponda*'s narrator's imaginary conversations with his disappeared partner in which he becomes uncertain of the version of her with whom he is conversing.

These narratives not only negotiate more complex, hybridized conceptions of memory when it comes to articulating a traumatic past, but also propose the need for new sites of memory that differ significantly from established idealized memories of leftist militancy found in the Kirchnerist narrative and documentaries and testimonies from the 1980s and 1990s. Through the construction of alternative stories and grammars (like the linguistic hybridity of Alcoba's memoir and the use of graphic novel images to depict

psychological violence in *Infancia clandestina*), these cultural critics participate in the creation of new *lieux de mémoire* more representative of their experiences. As Alcoba has stated, she had planned to wait to write of her clandestine childhood until her parents' generation had passed in order to avoid offending those that have clung to these instituted *lieux de mémoire* (12). However, after her return to Argentina, Alcoba can wait no longer, and her unconventional memoir ends up freeing many others to bear witness in ways they too had not felt free to do, with this alternative site of memory fostering the space for other repressed memories to begin to surface (Saban and Alcoba 248).

As seen in Chapter 2, more complete conceptions of memory are argued to require extensive critical debate and analysis. The cultural critics discussed in this chapter draw from varied sources and personal experiences to consider differing understandings of revolution, armed struggle, and the diversity of militant organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, reworking a simplified monumentalization of a collective group that is suggested to have been killed simply for wanting a better world. As Carlos in *A quien corresponda* posits, many former leftist militants have preferred a narrative of victimhood and innocence to actually discussing and attempting to arrive at more complex understandings of the responsibility of guerrillas in past and present violence. These cultural critics point to the necessity of considering heterogeneous interpretations of the period in order to construct more multifaceted collective memories, thereby indicating that truth is not something to be invented, but discovered through meaningful research, analysis, discussion, and debate.

As these cultural critics posit arriving at truths regarding this recent history to require much work, so, too, does *Una misma noche*'s narrator Leonardo by suggesting

that he writes to discover his "verdad más profunda" that becomes somewhat clearer through the writing process, but still remains elusive (167). Truth within these fictional narratives is understood to be confusing, something deep within that is difficult to access, often uncertain, and seemingly open to endless reconstructions, though this is ultimately opposed. Whereas Juanjo from the Kirchnerist administration in *A quien corresponda* is willing to assist in having the priest murdered and a cover story created in order to stop Carlos from enacting a crime that would undermine a narrative predicated upon the heroic and innocent nature of former militants, Carlos discovers that he can no longer continue imagining his murdered partner however he chooses once he begins to engage in remembrance practices.

Within the works examined in this project, these deeper truths that are discovered through difficult processes indicate the superficiality of truths proposed by the Kirchnerist narrative. These less profound truths include the suggestion that Kirchnerist militants are recuperating and continuing the struggles of 1970s leftist militants and the Manichean classifications of social actors as simply repressors or heroes. Rather than abide by these divisions, the novels and films examined in this project suggest truth to be much more nuanced and complex, demonstrating the ways in which perpetrators might have been victims and victims perpetrators, illustrating the fluidity that can exist in these categories. Likewise, the humanity of former repressors and collaborators is depicted, not in a way that excuses the violence they enacted, but one that uncomfortably dares to try to comprehend how they came to make such choices, also considering the darkness within oneself that might lead to similar actions, as emphasized by the persistent feelings of guilt experienced by Leonardo in *Una misma noche* and Carlos in *A quien*

corresponda. Children of Montoneros narrate the flawed humanity of their loving parents whose admirable commitment to their convictions resulted in great danger and devastation for their families. And attention is called by several of these works to the complicity of much of civil society that asked for and did not intervene during military rule. These truths, which Paul Gready would refer to as the "uncomfortable truths" that remain even after the effective transitional justice processes of the CONADEP and present-day trials, are ones that fiction is shown to be well suited to unpack (156).

Justice is complicated in these texts firstly by arguments like Graciela Fernández Meijide's that an unwavering dedication to justice for assassinated militants, especially during the past decade, has further damaged the possibility of gaining access to truth from the military, who has no incentive to provide information and has faced punishment for doing so. The interdependence of truth and justice in dealing with the past has meant that an absolute approach to one has served as a deterrent to the other. Furthermore, as suggested by these cultural critics, absolute justice and the defense of human rights have only been sought for certain individuals—assassinated leftist militants—while state forces killed by revolutionaries have not been considered deserving of the same justice or rights. In this way, justice and human rights are shown to have been negotiated to the service of some in a partisan application of human rights law. Leonardo's horror at the ESMA guide's naming of the killing of General Aramburu an "ajusticiamiento" suggests a perversion of the concept of justice by a narrative that unquestioningly heroizes leftist militants and demonizes the military (238).

The aforementioned blurring of categories of innocence and guilt, discussion of militant violence, and highlighting of societal complicity provide a differing

understanding of responsibility, insinuating that many not judged as repressors share blame and those judged to be human rights heroes might have acted as repressors toward others, reworking absolute categories and proposing the innocence of few, if any. Finally, the incompleteness of Diana Kuperman's testimony and present-day trials in *Una misma noche* recognize that much remains to be discovered despite the abundance of recent juridical proceedings.

These negotiations of conceptions of memory, truth, and justice reveal the "wiggle room" available within the partial Kirchnerist narrative, like that of any narrative about the past, particularly one understood to have been motivated by and employed for partisan political gain (Sommer, *Cultural Agency in the Americas*). This wiggle room has allowed for numerous reworkings of this account of the past and of conceptions of memory, truth, and justice, provoking debate and more critical interpretations as cultural struggles to make meaning of this period ensue. To propose the negotiability of these concepts and narratives about a conflictive past is not to advocate an entirely pluralistic understanding of the past in which all memories are equally valid, but, as *A quien corresponda* illustrates, to recognize the need for discussion and debate of competing memories in order to construct more critical representations of the past.

The hegemonic struggle to make sense and meaning of a conflictive and violent past taking place in Argentine politics and cultural production shares similarities with parallel processes in many countries, particularly throughout Latin America, as discussed in this project's introduction. It has been the aim of this analysis of Argentine human rights politics and cultural production to offer a critical framework that might prove useful in and beyond Argentine studies. More specifically, this study's recognition of the

harm a simplistic cultural narrative used for partisan politics can cause as well as the wiggle room and re-negotiations to which such constructed accounts of the past are subject might aid analyses of similar processes of coming to terms with the past. It is this project's contention that continued examinations of the spaces cultural critics are finding to construct new and diverging understandings of the past more representative of their experiences are imperative to more dynamic interpretations of how national histories, collective memory, and identity are forming across the globe.

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