

Linked by Blood: Exploring Judaism and Genetics in the
Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo

by

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Introduction

The Argentine Military Dictatorship of 1976 to 1983 waged a genocidal battle against its own citizens to eliminate political violence and social dissent. The armed forces kidnapped, tortured, and murdered an estimated 30,000 people considered “subversive” to the national interests of Argentina’s economic and social future. The military powers dismissed Congress and replaced members of the Supreme Court to pursue their agenda of lethally subduing the enemies of the Argentine state.¹ Under the pretext of fighting the global threat of communist ideology for the sake of the Argentine nation, the armed forces targeted Jews, trade unionists, psychiatrists, intellectuals, and student activists in their National Reorganization Process (*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*).

The various branches of the armed forces, including the army, navy, marines, and air force, kidnapped and tortured thousands of people in nearly 400 secret torture centers.² Officials used dark green tinted Ford Falcons to quickly kidnap people off streets, at subway stations, from work, or from their homes, and drive them to secret detention centers for interrogation, torture, and, most often, execution. The armed forces kidnapped entire families, including young children and pregnant women. The guards murdered the women after they had given birth in the clandestine torture centers. Military officials at the clandestine torture centers gave the babies and young children to families sympathetic to the right-wing regime.

The few prisoners released by the armed forces served as threats against political dissent to terrify the population. They also left uncertainty about the fate of

¹ Ronald Dworkin, *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), xiii.

² Alfonso Daniels, "Argentina's Dirty War: The Museum of Horrors," *The Telegraph*, May 17 2008.

the others kidnapped by the armed forces. Argentines coined the term “*los detenidos-desaparecidos*”, or the “detained-disappeared”, as a way of explaining the physical absence of those kidnapped by the dictatorship. Argentines now refer to those who never reappeared after the dictatorship as the ‘disappeared’.

This thesis analyzes the activism of the Jewish members of the most notable and longest lasting Argentine human rights groups: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Madres de Plaza de Mayo*) and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*). The Jewish activists in the Mothers and Grandmothers revolutionized the use of genetics and forensic anthropology to identify and reify the social and biological identities of the disappeared. In doing so, they fought for truth and justice for both the polarized Jewish community and the greater Argentine society following the dictatorship. The armed forces kidnapped approximately 21 Jewish children and disappeared approximately 2,000 Jews. This thesis argues that the scientific advancements made possible by the Jewish Mothers and Grandmothers explicitly rectified the Argentine nationalist model of citizenship by reestablishing their minoritized identities.

The Mothers and Grandmothers emerged in the post-dictatorship period as the fiercest advocates for democracy, truth, and justice. They centered their fight against the former military powers by working on the physical and social restitution of the disappeared. They founded the groundbreaking genetics and forensic anthropological projects: the National DNA Gene Bank (*Banco Nacional de Datos Genéticos*) and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (*Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense*). By establishing the importance of genetic identity, the Mothers and

Grandmothers could prove their biological relationship to their disappeared or their executed family members. Their biological relationship to the disappeared both substantiated their claims that the armed forces kidnapped the disappeared and provided the necessary legal evidence to reclaim their kidnapped family members. The coordinated efforts of the Grandmothers and the various experts in the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) generated a “small scientific revolution,” developing innovative methods of DNA testing and other genetically based forensic techniques to identify the remains of other victims of genocides around the world.³

The EAAF and BNDG innovated the field of genetics by applying new genetic identification methods to match victims of Argentine political violence to their living kin. The military dictatorship’s systematic disappearances of bodies demanded a new type of forensic anthropology, as by the 1980’s forensic anthropology had only dealt with victims of conventional wars, crimes, and accidents.⁴ The specific manifestation of political violence of the Argentine dictatorship expanded the role of forensic anthropologists from solely identifying skeletons to locating both the living and dead victims of political violence.⁵ For the first time, forensic science became integral in human rights investigations.⁶

³ Adam Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science after Atrocity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 54.

⁴ Francisco Ferrándiz and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, "Introduction: The Ethnography of Exhumations," in *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights*, ed. Francisco Ferrándiz and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 15.

⁵ Antonius C. G. M. Robben, "Exhumations, Territoriality, and Necropolitics in Chile and Argentina," *ibid.*, 44.

⁶ Mercedes Doretti and Clyde C. Snow, "Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights: The Argentine Experience," in *Hard Evidence : Case Studies in Forensic Anthropology*, ed. Dawnie Wolfe Steadman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 293.

The EAAF and the National DNA Gene Bank (BNDG) developed the field of genetics to identify violations of human rights in the physical remains of the disappeared, as well as to identify the genetic identities of the children of the disappeared taken by the military. This thesis illustrates how the biological identity of individuals identified by the EAAF and BNDG becomes an identity that essentializes legal, social, and religious characteristics of the individuals raised in adoptive families.

Dr. Victor Penchaszadeh participated in the creation of the *grandparentage index* used to identify the first missing children, and is now the president of UNESCO's Latin American and Caribbean Network on bioethics.⁷ According to Penchaszadeh, "the identity of people is much more than the genetic identity. We have a biological, cultural, familiar, historical, political, linguistic identity and it is not reducible to a DNA sequence. Identity is a complex phenomenon, it is not just the genome."⁸ However, the family members searching for the disappeared emphasized genetic ideology as the key to finding their missing kin and getting the truth about the disappeared. This ideology drew from the eugenics-based ideologies of the military dictatorship, complicating the ethical understandings of applying genetics to reshape social and cultural identities.

Nevertheless, for the first time, the process of articulating biological identity by means of genetic testing entailed the restructuring of social, political, and cultural communities following traumatizing political violence. Since 2017, the Grandmothers

⁷ "Victor Penchaszadeh Was Declared Distinguished Personality of Science," (2014), <http://en.mincyt.gob.ar/news/victor-penchaszadeh-was-declared-distinguished-personality-of-science-9470>.

⁸ Ibid.

have located 120 kidnapped individuals. The 120 children of the disappeared identified by the BNDG learn not only of their biological family, but also the grim fate of their birth parents. They can choose to incorporate themselves into the biological family that searched for them for years, or reject them entirely. Further complicating this narrative is the extent to which the parents of these appropriated children knew of their biological parent's fates. Often times, these adoptive parents are sent to prison for forcibly changing a child's identity, which constitutes a crime against humanity. This process is traumatic and divisive, and raises ethical dilemmas on how to rectify crimes of the past, taking into account the social contexts of the present.

The work of the EAAF allows the repatriation of the dead to their family members. Following the work of geneticists in 1984, the biological identification of the disappeared signified the ability to repatriate families with the remains of disappeared loved ones, continue normative life processes of mourning, locate children of the disappeared, and alter the collective memory of the communities in the social re-establishment of their missing kin.

The reclamation of Jewish children of disappeared back to their Jewish families involves a process of socialization to the Jewish Argentine identity. This socialization entails the recuperation of Jewish Argentine history. The Ashkenazi Jewish Community in Argentina, since its social prominence in the late 19th century, has faced institutional and social forms of anti-Semitism owing to anti-Semitic nationalism. The Jewish community has endured the brunt of state terror under the implementation of nationalist, authoritarian regimes throughout the 20th century.

The surviving Jewish victims of the Military Dictatorship of 1976 note the heightened level of anti-Semitism in the concentration camps of the armed forces. Jacobo Timmerman's account of surviving a torture camp in *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, the most famous and most cited work on Jewish experiences of the dictatorship, details his experiences of anti-Semitism in both his professional life as head of the Argentine newspaper, *La Nación*, and the anti-Semitism of his experience in the concentration camp. His work highlights the continuation of Jewish persecution from the Nazi concentration camps in the 1940's to the torture centers of Argentina in the 1970's. He claims that his imprisonment in clandestine torture centers indicated the armed force's genocidal anti-Semitism.

Many authors, victims, and activists compared the mechanisms of extermination of the Argentine military forces to the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. For example, Daniel Feierstein's *Análisis de la práctica social genocida* compares the Nazi genocide to the Argentine genocide in the genocidal characteristics of extreme nationalist doctrine.⁹ Jewish victims of the Argentine Dictatorship create many of the works done on Argentine memory and trauma in the 20th century. Emmanuel Kahan, an academic on Jewish history in Argentina, argues that the "Holocaust began to spread beyond the Jewish experience as a symbol of the fight against forgetting, tied to it never being repeated and by virtue of the demand for

⁹ Daniel Feierstein, *El Genocidio Como Práctica Social : Entre El Nazismo Y La Experiencia Argentina : Hacia Un Análisis Del Aniquilamiento Como Reorganizador De Las Relaciones Sociales* (Buenos Aires; México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

justice.”¹⁰ Academic work on the Holocaust formed the paradigm from which rhetoric on memory, justice, and trauma of the Argentine dictatorship emerged.

The trauma and injustice of the military dictatorship remains unresolved into the present day. The Jewish Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo continue to locate their missing grandchildren, indict military officials for committing crimes against humanity, and pass down the complex history of the Jewish Argentine identity to future Jewish Argentines through community socialization. The identification of the Jewish disappeared remains’ through the work of the EAAF allows for the disappeared’s burial with Jewish customs, 30 years after their disappearance. However, the absence of Jewish bodies places families in a state of permanent suffering, as, according to Jewish law, they cannot properly memorialize their dead without a physical body to bury.

Furthermore, incidents of anti-Semitism within the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo convey how social, cultural, and religious identity manifest in the politically charged activism of the Mothers and Grandmothers. These human rights groups utilize inherently exclusionary and anti-Semitic nationalist rhetoric to fight for their human rights as Argentine citizens, forcing Jewish Argentine activists to create their own human rights groups, all the while seeking the principles of memory, truth, and justice.

I began working on this project after studying under Daniel Feierstein, the author of *Análisis de la práctica social genocida* at the *Universidad de Buenos Aires*. Through the gracious hospitality and help of various friends and acquaintances, I

¹⁰ Emmanuel Kahan and Laura Shenquer, "The Use of the Past During the Last Military Dictatorship and Post-Dictatorship: The Holocaust Negotiation for the Jewish Community," *Temas de Nuestra América* 32, no. 60 (2016): 144.

conversed with human rights activists working in Argentina about the Jewish Argentine identity in the context of human rights work. I was given the privilege of speaking with Alejandra Naftal. Naftal survived the concentration camp *El Vesubio* at age 17 and is now director of the *Memoria Abierta* at the *Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos*, the museum space of the former concentration camp, *ESMA*. She told me that she did not fully comprehend the significance of her Jewish identity until she was being tortured at *El Vesubio*. As her interrogators taunted her with anti-Semitic curses and interrogated her on her Judaism, she screamed out “I am a Jew and an Argentine!” That was the moment that she realized her inescapable, biological identity as a Jew.

My Argentine Jewish family introduced me to the experience of Sara Rus to illustrate the collective trauma of the Jewish community in Argentina. Sara Rus is Eastern European Jewish immigrant who moved to Argentina after surviving Auschwitz. The armed forces disappeared her only son, and she joined the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo to fight against the military dictatorship. Her experience explicitly makes clear the disenfranchised, diasporic identity of the Jewish community in Argentina as a community whose members have faced various forms of religious and social persecution.

Marcelo Brodsky, a Jewish Argentine photographer, curator of Memory Park, and a director of the human rights group *Buena Memoria* gave me a tour of *Parque de la Memoria*. He walked past a wall in which the names of those who disappeared under state violence are etched in stone. Much of the work of memory and truth is

painful; Brodsky's deliberate rush past his brother's name etched into the wall of the disappeared showed me this.

This thesis serves to articulate how the Jewish victims of the military dictatorship worked to expand scientific capabilities of genetics and forensic anthropology to remedy the injustices their traumatized families experienced under the dictatorship. I argue that the Jewish human rights activists working in the Mothers and Grandmothers work to negate the Argentine Dictatorship of 1976's inherently anti-Semitic ideology through the reclamation of the identities of the kin the Argentine armed forces attempted to destroy.

Chapter 1 is the history of genetics projects as they come to be institutionalized within the Argentine legal framework. The Mothers and Grandmothers inspired new genetic and forensic anthropological technologies to restore the identities of the children of the disappeared and bring the former military powers to trial for concealment of identity, forced disappearance, and genocide. The success of their gene banks in matching the children of the disappeared with their biological families has broached ethical concerns on the significance and valorization of biological identity as a human right. These ethical concerns are outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2 explains how Argentine nationalism as a fascist project excluded and persecuted Jews in shaping their Jewish political identity in the years between 1919 and 1976. The chapter delineates the formation of Argentine nationalism as an inherently anti-Semitic ideology. The Jewish activists who worked during the

dictatorship, and in explicitly national human rights groups, had to negotiate between their Jewish identity and Argentine identity in fighting for truth, justice and memory.

Chapter 3 provides case studies of two Jewish activists in the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Rosa Roisinblit and Renée Epelbaum, who pioneered genetics projects to reconstruct their biological families and mend their Jewish and Argentine communities. I spoke with the Epelbaums at length about the identification of the remains of their cousin Lila and the significance of her reburial at the *La Tablada* Jewish cemetery. The chapter utilizes interviews from the family members of these two families to construct their specific Jewish Argentine identity in the context of nationalist dictatorship and Jewish diaspora theory.

Chapter 1: Grandmothers and Genetics

Introduction

In 1977, a group of mothers of the disappeared mobilized to form the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They organized to pressure the government to release their detained and disappeared children. Many mothers of women pregnant at the time of their disappearance learned that their daughters had given birth in clandestine torture centers. As the armed forces occasionally disappeared young children with their parents, grandmothers joined the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo as well. These mothers and grandmothers assembled to form the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, focusing their efforts in locating their stolen grandchildren and arresting those who illegally adopted children of the disappeared. In the years following the dictatorship, the Grandmothers searched for the children appropriated by the military, and alongside the Mothers, demanded justice for the crimes against humanity committed by the armed forces.

During the Military Dictatorship of 1976, the Grandmothers sought the help of geneticists and forensic anthropologists to assist in their efforts to locate and identify their grandchildren. The Grandmothers needed these scientists to prove their biological connection to children assumed to be their grandchildren, identify the remains of the disappeared, and determine whether their daughters had given birth before their execution. The geneticists and forensic anthropologists who helped the Grandmothers ultimately expanded the capabilities of genetic testing to identify biological relationships between distant relatives. The Grandmothers worked to institutionalize their innovative scientific endeavors, creating the National DNA Gene

Bank and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team to manage and expedite their search for both their missing grandchildren and the missing remains of their children.

The incorporation of genetic technology and forensic anthropology into human rights investigations first occurred following the political repression and genocide of Argentine citizens. The technological advances made to identify the unique state of the remains of the disappeared revolutionized the use of forensic anthropology. The EAAF's work in Argentina constructed the scientific work of forensic anthropologists as human rights work. In the context of human rights, the BNDG and the EAAF currently work to both reclaim the human right to knowledge of a person's biological identity and the to charge those who forcibly change or destroy a person's identity with a crime against humanity.

The BNDG and the EAAF reconstructed legal conceptions of identity to rectify historical injustice. The coordinated efforts of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the BNDG, and the EAAF illustrate a complex intersection of political, social, and biological frameworks. This intersection reflects the political ideology fueling the military dictatorship's incentive to break apart familial relations. The Grandmothers, the BNDG, and the EAAF reconstruct divided biological families as a means of healing a society wounded by genocidal dictatorship. In the context of Argentine human rights groups, the rehabilitation of the Argentine collective centered on the restoration of the biological identity of the stolen children of the disappeared. This restoration meant the social reconstruction of the family destroyed by the dictatorship.

The Argentine government's use of genetic testing complicated legal understandings of selfhood, autonomy, and identity. The family members of the disappeared demanded that the Argentine government forcibly remove their biological kin from the adoptive families that raised them. The children of the disappeared became political, social, and biological substitutes for their parents, propelling them into a national trauma and complicating their own concepts of identity in the post-dictatorship era. In conflating biological identity with family-centric human rights, the BNDG and EAAF created notions of kinship that rested on direct, biological relationship.

Methods of Disappearance

The Argentine Military Dictatorship of 1976 imposed its military rule over the country following the coup d'état deposing President Isabel Perón. General Jorge Videla, the head of the Army and the leader of the first military junta, justified the coup as a means to remedy the economic and political instability that plagued the country. Political instability of the 1960's and early 1970's led to the emergence of violent leftist and rightist extremist groups. The state labeled the leftist guerrilla groups and leftist activists as 'subversives'. The leaders of the military junta defined the subversives as "anyone who opposes the Argentine way of life."¹¹ As president of the military government, General Videla stated, "in order to guarantee the security of the state... all the necessary people will die."¹² However, by the time of the coup in March 1976 the armed forces had already eradicated the threat of left-wing terrorist

¹¹ Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life : The Grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7.

¹² Ibid.

violence. Videla himself mentioned in January 1976 that the guerilla groups did not pose a serious threat to Argentine national security.¹³ The army, composed of about 200,000 members, greatly outnumbered the approximately 400 armed insurgents still active in Argentina at the time of the coup.¹⁴ The military used the excuse of violent, political instability to impose their own ideologically backed state terrorism.

The government illegally detained countless people to terrorize the Argentine population. The armed forces kidnapped and savagely tortured those labeled subversives before their execution. The report produced by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, *Nunca Más*, describes in detail the mechanisms of the dictatorship, labeling the work of the armed forces as a “mass extermination” of political dissidents.¹⁵ The Argentine government worked with military governments in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay in ‘Operation Condor’, a coordinated effort to eradicate Communist thinking in the Southern Cone of Latin America.¹⁶ The Argentine armed forces crossed international boundaries to kidnap Argentines in neighboring countries in an effort to protect the ideological purity of Argentina and the surrounding countries.¹⁷

The armed forces used various techniques to terrorize the population into docility and destroy the identities of those they murdered. Their preferred method of terror involved “disappearing” people, secretly detaining people and refusing to give information of their whereabouts to acquaintances and loved ones. The armed forces murdered those detained in clandestine torture centers in a variety of different ways.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dworkin, 209.

¹⁶ Ibid., 255.

¹⁷ Arditti, 12.

Sectors of the armed forces shot prisoners in mass executions and placed them in mass graves; the military fabricated media reports of staged battles to both explain the deaths of those they shot and validate the army's statements on the persistent threat of guerrilla groups. Some clandestine torture centers placed bodies on city streets for the public coroners to find them.¹⁸ These bodies ended up in mass graves or pauper's graves, marked in files in official reports of the bodies as "NN", "*Ningún nombre*" or "No name".¹⁹ The armed forces burned bodies to completely destroy evidence of the prisoner's existence.²⁰ In the famous "death flights", the armed forces drugged the detainees and dropped them from planes into the river *Rio de la Plata*.²¹ Bodies from these flights periodically washed up on the banks of the river in Uruguay.

The disappearance of Argentine citizens threatened the population with a similar fate of their own disappearance. The phenomena of the disappeared paralyzed public protest, forced the relatives of the disappeared into social isolation, and impaired attempts to mobilize against the government.²² The disappearances of Argentines made it so that the body would be "placed beyond the reach of anyone who cared about the person in life," placing the family members in a state of terror and permanent suffering.²³ Furthermore, the armed forces' systematic destruction of physical bodies indicated attempts to exempt itself from future responsibility of these crimes.

¹⁸ Dworkin, 210.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

²² *Ibid.*, 233-34.

²³ Rosenblatt, 113.

As mentioned previously, the military kidnapped approximately 500 pregnant women, detaining them in clandestine concentration camps to deliver their children before murdering them.²⁴ The armed forces also kidnapped young children along with their parents.²⁵ The military took the children from those they disappeared in what they described as doing the “best for the child’s welfare.”²⁶ The armed forces treated the children of the disappeared as “war booty,” giving children away to families sympathetic to the right-wing regime.²⁷ Hospitals forged birth certificates with false birth dates to change their identities.²⁸

Argentine Military Ideology

The Argentine form of nationalism inspired the military to murder its political enemies. The military pursued lethal action against those considered ‘subversives’ because the army considered itself “guardians” of Argentine values and way of life.²⁹ The dictatorial powers conceptualized the fictitious subversive agents as posing an existential threat to Argentine society, claiming that they were fighting the subversives’ ‘conspiracy against Civilization’.³⁰ The military justified the detainment

²⁴ Victor B. Penchaszadeh and Lavinia Schuler-Faccini, "Genetics and Human Rights: Two Histories: Restoring Genetic Identity after Forced Disappearance and Identity Suppression in Argentina and after Compulsory Isolation for Leprosy in Brazil," *Genet. Mol. Biol. Genetics and Molecular Biology* 37, no. 1 (2014): 300.

²⁵ Dworkin, 286.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rosenblatt, 4.

²⁸ Kathryn Sikkink, "From Pariah State to Global Protagonist: Argentina and the Struggle for International Human Rights," *Latin American Politics and Society* 50, no. 1 (2008): 4.

²⁹ Dworkin, xiii.

³⁰ Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War : Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (2014), 128.

and massacre of the subversive population due to the “impossibility of restoring the enemy’s humanity.”³¹

The purposefully ambiguous definition of Argentina’s domestic enemy meant that the majority of the Argentine population fit the model of the ‘subversive’. Military officials explicitly sought the disappearance of those who took part in or supported the leftist political parties, those who espoused ideology that was prohibited by the dictatorship (i.e. Communism), those with some sort of vague affiliation with a leftist organization, etc. It targeted friends, acquaintances, and family members of those who participated in leftist groups, identifying them by using names that appeared in the address books of those taken by military officials, and names spoken during torture sessions.³² Furthermore, the armed forces threatened to disappear those whose position in power or class they desired.³³ Occasionally, the military disappeared people randomly or in cases of mistaken identity. The deliberately vague definition of subversive meant that anyone could be disappeared, thus intimidating the Argentine citizens into docility.³⁴ The Argentine state’s form of kidnapping people made it so that the state symbolically monopolized the prisoner’s fate, even when, unbeknownst to the loved ones of the disappeared, the state physically killed the prisoner.³⁵

³¹ Ibid., 126.

³² Feierstein, 262.

³³ Dworkin, xiv.

³⁴ Ibid.; Alison Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina : Protest, Change and Democratization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 40.

³⁵ Sikkink, 133.

Military Ideology as Biological

The Military Junta utilized eugenic and biological rhetoric to justify their military operations. The subversive's political identity did not differ from their biological identity in this ideological framework, thus the military could only destroy the subversive population through biological death.³⁶ Following Michel Foucault's concept of biopower and Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception," the state's sovereignty signified its inherent power to destroy the biology of any entity that threatened to dismantle the state's dominion over its citizens.³⁷ The state, in this 'state of exception', could perform extrajudicial actions to save itself from destruction. A member of the military junta explained:

the social body of the country is contaminated by an illness that in corroding its entrails produces antibodies. These antibodies must not be considered in the same way as the [original] microbe. As the government controls and destroys the guerrilla, the action of the antibody will disappear... this is just the natural reaction of a sick body.³⁸

The military specifically targeted pregnant women for kidnapping, theorizing that the military could breed out the "subversive strain" within the Argentine population.³⁹ The military believed that "subversives breed subversives," and that kidnapping the disappeared's children freed them from "subversive education."⁴⁰ The armed forces also used 'germ theory' to justify the kidnapping of the children of the disappeared, especially as the children of the disappeared were taken from the

³⁶ Luis Alberto Romero and James P. Brennan, "History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century," (2013): 215.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge: Vol. 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 135; Giorgio Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

³⁸ Rosenblatt, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁰ V. B. Penchaszadeh, "Ethical, Legal and Social Issues in Restoring Genetic Identity after Forced Disappearance and Suppression of Identity in Argentina," *Journal of community genetics* 6, no. 3 (2015): 208.

biological centers of subversion and sent to members of the right-wing, economic elite.⁴¹

It is important to note the role of American eugenic ideology in the nationalist rhetoric of the Argentine armed forces. The leaders of the military junta attempted to dismantle and reorganize Argentine society in its National Reorganization Process. This process clearly evokes the ideologies of the American eugenics movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. The attempt to engineer social stability in society by purifying it of subversives reflects the American eugenicists who believed they could “engineer” a more stable society.⁴² The creator of eugenic ideology, Francis Galton, noted, “we may not be able to originate, but we can guide. The processes of evolution are in constant and spontaneous activity for opportunities to intervene.”⁴³ The armed forces attempted to guide the political fabric of the nation by physically disappearing members of the Argentine society.

Furthermore, Kevles’s *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity* outlines the development of the “new eugenics” of the 1970’s and 1980’s. This type of eugenics conflated intelligence and race to justify economic inequality and reproductive sterilization campaigns.⁴⁴ The new eugenics movements challenged the assertion that “social pathology” stemmed from environmental factors, instead claiming that it came from a person’s inherited genealogy.⁴⁵ The armed forces utilized the genetic concept of “social pathology” to rationalize their massacre of

⁴¹ Rosenblatt, 2.

⁴² Kathy J. Cooke, "Duty or Dream? Edwin G. Conklin's Critique of Eugenics and Support for American Individualism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 35, no. 2 (2002): 368.

⁴³ Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

political dissidents, noting the seemingly immutability of their socialized and political identities.

Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo

Once the military began its campaign of disappearance, family members of the disappeared began seeking information on detainment and disappearance of their loved ones. The military did not release any information on its genocidal activities, implicitly threatening any formal institution that attempted to seek information on the disappeared. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo publicly protested the lack of information given to them from government officials on the whereabouts of their children.⁴⁶ Every Thursday, they defied the military's ban on public gatherings and marched in a circle around the *Plaza de Mayo*, the plaza in the center of the governmental sector of Buenos Aires.⁴⁷ Wearing white handkerchiefs, they demanded the release of information on the whereabouts of their children. The military responded to the Mothers by blaming them for raising subversive children, stating that their children were alive, had escaped the country, and were living abroad.⁴⁸ The Mothers did not believe the military's response and continued their fight to learn about their children's fate.

In October 1977, a group of 12 Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo gathered to form the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They organized around one demand:

⁴⁶ Guillermo Wulff and Mayo Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, *Las Abuelas Y La Genética : El Aporte De La Ciencia En La Búsqueda De Los Chicos Desaparecidos* (Buenos Aires: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 2009), 15.

⁴⁷ Marjorie Agosin, *The Mothers of Plaza De Mayo, Linea Fundadora : The Story of Renèe Epelbaum, 1976-19895* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea, 1990), 19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

“that the children who had been kidnapped as a method of political repression be returned to their legitimate families.”⁴⁹ The armed forces publicly denied the Grandmother’s claims about the kidnapping of their grandchildren.

In 1980, the movement successfully located the kidnapped sisters Tatiana Ruarte Britos and Malena Jotar Britos. As the first grandchildren to be found, these sisters legitimized the Grandmother’s claims regarding the armed forces’ kidnapping their grandchildren.⁵⁰ Soon after the identification of the Britos sisters, the Grandmothers began locating more grandchildren through various means, including anonymous reports, reports from survivors of detention camps, forged birth certificates, suspicious adoptions, etc.⁵¹ These identifications relied on circumstantial evidence and witness claims about familial resemblance between children and their disappeared families. To legally rescue their grandchildren, the Grandmothers needed biological proof that the children they located were their biological descendants.

Post-Dictatorship

In 1982, as the dictatorship relinquished power to democracy and human rights groups located the mass graves of the disappeared, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo realized they would never see their children alive. Their cries directed at the armed forces for their detained children, “*aparición con vida*”, or “appearance with life”, became a symbolic cry for justice, as the Mothers knew that the armed forces murdered their children.⁵² Humans rights groups worked with the government to seek

⁴⁹ Arditti, 37.

⁵⁰ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 16.

⁵¹ Penchaszadeh, 209.

⁵² Rosenblatt, 94.

the whereabouts of the disappeared. Raul Alfonsín became Argentina's democratically elected president in 1983, and with his presidency the process of indicting the previous military for crimes against humanity began. President Alfonsín's administration created the National Commission on the Disappeared Persons, or CONADEP, to create a database on the crimes committed by the armed forces. CONADEP produced the report *Nunca Más*, which exhaustively details the crimes of the military during the dictatorship. This commission provided evidence to the tribunal at the Trial of the Juntas in 1985. The tribunal sought the indictment of the military officials who directed the various mass killings and clandestine torture centers in the Process of National Reorganization.

The human rights leaders in the post-dictatorship era had the responsibility of naming, identifying, and condemning the crimes of the dictatorship.⁵³ The Argentine courts used witness testimony from the armed forces, survivors of the clandestine concentration camps, and testimony provided by the forensic anthropologists to find out the truth about the fate of the disappeared.⁵⁴ The human rights groups' work in compiling testimony regarding the crimes of the dictatorship provided damaging evidence against the nine defendants of the Trial of the Juntas in 1985.⁵⁵ By emphasizing Argentine society's "right to truth", the human rights groups legitimized their grievances about the egregious disappearance of their loved ones and the kidnapping of the disappeared's children.⁵⁶ The human rights groups underscored their version of history as "truth" to denounce the falsified narratives presented by

⁵³ Sikkink, 5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁵ David Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power : Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 102.

⁵⁶ Sikkink, 13.

members of the armed forces. Furthermore, the trials helped to deconstruct the military's potent monopoly on law and civil society, reestablishing civil trust in state power and promising to move Argentine society to a state of rehabilitation.⁵⁷

The military's involvement in the Trial of the Juntas complicated the Grandmother's attempts to reclaim their grandchildren. The administration of former President Raúl Alfonsín directed the Trial of the Juntas. His process of indictment attempted to assuage the fears of the military complex in Argentina and protect the fragile democratic government. Alfonsín decreased the risk of another military coup in response to the Trial of the Juntas by focusing proceedings on the nine commanders-in-chief of the three military Juntas that ruled Argentina during the dictatorship.⁵⁸

The armed forces threatened to overthrow the new democracy in response to the trials. Alfonsín's government passed two laws that appeased the worries of members of the military. The Full Stop law (*Ley de punto final*), passed in 1986, stopped further judicial actions against the military.⁵⁹ The Law of Due Obedience (*Ley de obediencia debida*) complemented the Full Stop Law. The Law of Due Obedience passed in 1987 and protected those below the level of colonel in Argentina, as to continue judicial attention on the leadership of the Junta and avoid unrest caused by arresting lower level officials.⁶⁰

The Mothers and Grandmothers argued against Alfonsín's concessions to the former military government. The crimes that superseded the Full Stop Law and Law

⁵⁷ Rosenblatt, 57.

⁵⁸ Pion-Berlin, 78.

⁵⁹ Romero and Brennan, 263.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.

of Due Obedience included rape, theft, and the abduction and “concealment of minors.”⁶¹ The Grandmother’s lawyers argued that the Full Stop Law and the Law of Due Obedience did not cover the crimes of kidnapping minors and changing their identity, therefore they could proceed to find lower level military officers and the adoptive families of the children of disappeared guilty for kidnapping.⁶² This argument allowed the Grandmothers to continue their work in locating their grandchildren. However, the Grandmothers continued to fight back against the amnesty laws, stating they could not fight for their kidnapped grandchildren and “forget the suffering of their mothers, our daughters... we want to recover the kidnapped children.”⁶³ They alluded to the necessity of collective memory, stressing that they were searching for the truth and demanding justice for both their kidnapped grandchildren and their disappeared children.⁶⁴

Grandmothers and Genetics

The Argentine courts demanded that the Grandmothers provide substantial proof of biological relationship to accept their claims about locating kidnapped children.⁶⁵ Once they mobilized in 1977, the Grandmothers immediately set out to contact scientific institutions in Sweden, France, and the United States to develop genetic tests capable of providing this information.⁶⁶ Paternity tests already existed at the beginning of their search in the 1970’s. However, the disappearance of the parents

⁶¹ Arditti, 47.

⁶² Sikkink, 12.

⁶³ Arditti, 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Wulff, *Las abuelas y la genética*, 15.

⁶⁶ Dworkin, 310.

of children complicated the techniques needed to identify biological relationships between Grandmothers and their grandchildren. The Grandmothers needed to develop a genetic test that matched grandchildren to grandparents or extended families, as no test existed at this point.⁶⁷ A contingent of Grandmothers traveled to New York, where they met an Argentine geneticist in political exile, Victor Penchaszadeh, through the Argentine Information Service Center.⁶⁸ He helped them locate geneticists capable of assisting the Grandmothers. The Grandmothers then met with Eric Stover, the director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in Washington DC, who directed them to a geneticist at Berkeley, Mary-Claire King.⁶⁹

Mary-Claire King traveled to Argentina to speak with the Grandmothers about the possibility of creating a test to biologically prove the relationship between grandmother and grandchild. According to King:

The Grandmothers had splendid circumstantial evidence that stolen children were appearing in different parts of the country and that the Grandmothers need to know was not simply who a child was not – that is, that the child was not in fact the biological child of the people who were pretending that it was their child – that is, that the child was not in fact the biological child of the people who were pretending that it was their child- but in fact who a child was.⁷⁰

The case of Paula Logares crystallized the value of genetic testing in the restitution of children stolen from the disappeared. Paula Logares was born June 10, 1976 and disappeared along with her parents on May 18, 1978.⁷¹ By various means, the Grandmothers located Puala, who had been adopted by the deputy superintendent

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 38.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁰ Mary-Claire King, interview by Marc Kilstein, 2014.

⁷¹ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 47.

of the Buenos Aires police, Rubén Lavallén.⁷² Rubén changed Paula's official birthdate to repudiate claims that Paula was the child of disappeared.⁷³ Employing the model of a paternity index, and accounting for the disappearance of parents, Mary-Claire King utilized blood groups and human leukocyte antigens (HLA) to create a test that calculated the probability of a biological relationship between two blood samples.⁷⁴ This test became known as the *grandparentage index*. The Grandmothers utilized this genetic test to fight for Paula's restitution back to her biological family, winning a Supreme Court case against Rubén Lavallén's claim to Paula in December 1984.⁷⁵

Furthermore, King and her team developed an innovative technique that utilized mitochondrial DNA to match stolen grandchildren with their grandmothers or maternal relations.⁷⁶ As highly variable mitochondrial DNA exists in every cell and is solely inherited from mothers, King provided a nearly foolproof genetic test that could match maternal relatives with their stolen kin. However, the mitochondrial DNA model only provided biological proof between grandchildren and their maternal relatives. Further work has been done since to develop genetic testing.

Scientific Methods of the BNDG and the EAAF

In order to legally reclaim their grandchildren, the Grandmothers needed 99.99% confirmation that the person in question is the child of the disappeared. Their need to confidently prove biological relationships meant the necessity creating a

⁷² Ibid., 46-47.

⁷³ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁴ Penchaszadeh, 208.

⁷⁵ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 49.

⁷⁶ King.

genetic data bank. The Ministry of Justice directed the process of genetic testing and data banking, centralizing it in the immunogenetics laboratory in the Durand City Hospital.⁷⁷ In the laboratory, a file opened for every family member searching for disappeared relatives in order to bureaucratically organize data collection.⁷⁸ The use of biological data became an important tool to not only reconnect biological families torn apart by the dictatorship, but also identify the presumed remains of the disappeared.⁷⁹ Genetic information became a valuable asset to human rights work.

The Grandmothers needed to institutionalize their genetic technological center to both protect sensitive data and expand their search for their grandchildren. In May 1987, the Grandmothers worked with various government bodies and the Immunology Service of the Durand Hospital to draft a bill for the creation of a National Genetic Bank.⁸⁰ Law 23.511 established the nationalization of the DNA Gene Bank, the first of its kind in its use to identify victims of human rights violations.⁸¹ The grandparents and biological kin of the disappeared could deposit blood and DNA samples into the bank.⁸² The bank saved the genetic information of the grandparents and kin, in the event of their deaths or future inaccessibility, to continue the search to find the kidnapped children of the disappeared for posterity.⁸³

The Mothers and Grandmothers work inspired the Argentine government to create the National Commission for the Right to Identity in 1992. The institution exists under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, but works

⁷⁷ Penchaszadeh, 208.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 209.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 208.

⁸⁰ Arditti, 72.

⁸¹ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 72.

⁸² Sikkink, 10.

⁸³ Ibid.

in collaboration with the BNDG to provide information to those searching for disappeared relatives, or for those suspicious of their familial situation, and who want to anonymously see if their doubts have merit.⁸⁴

Currently, the genetic clinics utilized by the Grandmothers use a variety of different genetic procedures, depending on the family members available to donate blood. Advances in genetic technology improved the ability of scientists to match the genetic relationship between kin. The labs primarily use microsatellite markers, or SSRs, to determine kinship in the absence of mitochondrial DNA.⁸⁵ High levels of variation exist in SSRs, and SSRs exist in both somatic cells, and the Y and X sex chromosomes.⁸⁶ If only paternal relatives can provide blood samples, the BNDG utilizes the SSRs on Y chromosomes to show biological relationship between males and the possible descendant of the disappeared. If only maternal relatives can provide blood samples, the BNDG utilizes the mitochondrial DNA technique to match samples.⁸⁷ Utilizing large numbers of SSRs provides the scientific evidence necessary to confirm biological links between a suspected child of a disappeared couple and their family.⁸⁸

Grandmothers and Exhumations

The Grandmothers also worked to create the EAAF to exhume the mass graves across the country. Following the return to democracy, the courts ordered

⁸⁴ Penchaszadeh, "Ethical, legal and social issues," 210.

⁸⁵ "Genetic Aspect - the Identity," Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, <https://abuelas.org.ar/idiomas/english/genetic.htm>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

gravediggers and medical examiners to lead the first exhumations of mass graves. These inexperienced professionals inadvertently destroyed evidence and traumatized the family members present at the exhumations. Following these disastrous exhumations, the Grandmothers asked American forensic expert Clyde Snow to work on a professional anthropological forensic team to conduct exhumations.⁸⁹ Clyde Snow recruited young Argentine students to help prepare the exhumations.⁹⁰ These students formed the EAAF, the first forensic teams devoted to human rights works.⁹¹ The team aimed to identify the bodies buried anonymously in mass graves in order to return them to their families for reburial.⁹² Furthermore, their forensic studies of the remains countered the statements produced by the military regarding both the militancy of the disappeared, countering reports of shoot-outs and suicide.⁹³ The forensic anthropologists were able to determine both the style of execution the military used during the dictatorship and whether women had given birth before their execution. By exhuming the graves, the forensic team could see whether a fetus or baby had been buried alongside a pregnant disappeared woman.⁹⁴

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo broke into factions in response to the exhumations of the EAAF. The Grandmothers are implicated in this drama, as many of the Grandmothers belong to the faction *Línea Fundadora*, which supports the work of the EAAF. The other group, the *Asociación Madres*, opposes the exhumation of bodies, based on their belief that finding the bodies of the disappeared weakened their

⁸⁹ Rosenblatt, 95.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

commitment to fighting for justice against the dictatorship. The group opposes the memorialization of the disappeared, exhumation of bodies, and the economic reparations given to families of the disappeared.⁹⁵ The *Linea Fundadora* and the Grandmothers officially support the work of the EAAF. The Grandmothers note that the identification of their kidnapped grandchildren is intrinsically linked to the exhumations of mass graves of the disappeared, as these exhumations indicates the presence or absence of a missing grandchild to search for. The division between the two groups also illustrates class conflict and anti-Semitism within these human rights groups. The Mothers who belong to the *Linea Fundadora* are primarily Jewish, or married to Jewish men.⁹⁶

Restitution

Locating kidnapped children raised ethical questions on the proper legal procedure of reinstating the identity of children stolen from the disappeared. The courts had to cover the legal, ethical, and psychological components of repairing biological families.⁹⁷ Dr. Victor Penchaszadeh details the procedure of judicial processing of children:

The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo acted as legal representatives of relatives of victims and presented claims in the courts whenever circumstantial evidences provided a strong suspicion that a particular child could be the offspring of a disappeared person (such as forged birth certificates signed by physicians known to have had links with the repression, alleged home deliveries, reports by survivors from detention centres, and anonymous reports). When the judge in charge of a case considered that the circumstantial evidence was valid, court-appointed psychologists and child psychologists from the Abuelas met with the judge in charge to draw up an action plan that prioritized the best interests of the child. An investigation was started

⁹⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 105; *ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁷ Penchaszadeh and Schuler-Faccini, 300.

which included approaching the adults raising the child and determining whether or not they were the child's biological parents. If the investigation proved that the child was not a biological son or daughter, the judge ordered that his/her genetic markers be compared with those of potential relatives. Genetic identification was considered positive when the inclusion probability of grandparentage was higher than 99.9%.⁹⁸

In each case, the confirmation of biological kinship between a kidnapped child and relatives of the disappeared began a procedure to determine the culpability of the adoptive parents. The process of indicting the parents who adopted the children of the disappeared depended on the political inclination of the democratic governments of the 1990's and 2000's. The presidency of Nestor Kirchner in 2003 marks the beginning of the period of the resurgence of politicized human rights campaigns to punish those who knowingly adopted children of the disappeared. Former President Kirchner declared the Law of Due Obedience and Full Stop Law unconstitutional in 2005, and reinitiated the prosecution of those indicted for crimes against humanity.⁹⁹ The Supreme Court under the Nestor Kirchner Presidency declared that no statutes of limitations applied for crimes against humanity regarding forced disappearance.¹⁰⁰

The Argentine courts recognized that the kidnapping of minors to forcibly change their identities fell under the category of a crime against humanity. The Argentine courts in the 1980's outlined how the kidnapped children of the disappeared are victims of crimes against humanity:

(a) the children taken from their captive mothers and raised by appropriators were victims (b) international human rights law establishes the state's obligation to investigate crimes against humanity, find the truth, prosecute and punish the perpetrators and provide reparation to victims; (c) the right to identity and to learn the truth about oneself and about the fate of disappeared parents are fundamental human rights, which should be preserved even in the minority of cases in which these children were adopted in good faith; (d) the

⁹⁸Penchaszadeh, 209.

⁹⁹Ibid., 211.

¹⁰⁰Sikkink, 14.

biological family, who battled against all odds and risked their lives during the dictatorship to search and find the offspring of their disappeared loved ones, had a legitimate right to recover the appropriated children and (e) the best interests of the child, as determined by the courts, with the advice of child psychologists, always guided the decisions.¹⁰¹

The Grandmothers persuaded the Argentine Foreign Ministry to include the ‘right to identity’ in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the late 1980’s, which permitted the Argentine judges to demand blood tests from individuals suspected of being children of disappeared even when the adoptive parents objected.¹⁰² The Grandmothers lobbied at the United Nations for the addition to mention the right to identity as a fundamental human right.¹⁰³ This addition was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1989, “explicitly stating in its article 9 that State Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, the continued use of genetic information to preserve and defend human rights, and as form of reparation “to repair the consequences of violations of the right to identity and to bring to those responsible to justice,” garnered the attention of the United Nations to designate forced disappearance as a crime against humanity.¹⁰⁵

The courts usually favored the side of the Grandmothers who searched for their children. However, a Supreme Court in 2003 “accepted the objection of a presumed victim of identity suppression to be tested, based on their right to

¹⁰¹Penchaszadeh, 209.

¹⁰² Ibid., 14.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 207.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 208.

privacy.”¹⁰⁶ In 2008, the Supreme Court reversed its decision to uphold the privacy of the children of the disappeared. The courts found that genetic testing trumped the right to privacy in order to find and punish the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and repair damages to the surviving victims of the dictatorship. The courts outlined its reasoning to defend: the rights of the family members to learn the fate and identity of their kidnapped kin; the right of society to heal from the wounds of the dictatorship through truth building and historical reparations; and the obligation of the state to investigate crimes against humanity.¹⁰⁷ The Argentine legal system recognized its power and obligation to establish the truth of the cases of identity suppression and forced disappearance, and the importance of extracting DNA from suspected individuals related to the courts to achieve the truth regarding these cases.¹⁰⁸

Biological Identity

The Grandmothers valorize the biological, cultural, and social identities of their missing king. Grandmothers outline the importance of recuperating biological identity as follows:

Each person is born with cultural, biological, and social charges, transmitted from previous generations, which constitute his or her essential characteristics as a person. These charges make each human being different and also link each person to social groups and to traditions that present certain peculiarities that combine with maturity and experience to make a complete and balanced person.

¹⁰⁶Penchaszadeh, 210.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

All of these aspects constitute identity, which provides a reference point for a person to compare himself to others in a society. The slightest change, replacement, or suppression of this identity produces serious harm to the individual. A person without roots, a family or social history, without a name by which to be identified, is prevented from discovering his true identity.¹⁰⁹

The military dictatorship inadvertently created a framework of activism and human rights rhetoric that correlated biological identity as a form of truth, as the dictatorship lied about disappearing a substantial component of the population. The perversion of the normative biological family in the form of disappearance complicated the victimhood of the family members of the disappeared. The family members and the forensic anthropologists exhuming graves became the advocates for the disappeared. The Argentine forensic anthropologists see their work as “fighting the lies of the violent with the truth of the victims” to rebuild a democratic society.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, members of the victim’s broader communities, such as religious or academic institutions, work to defend the history of their disappeared colleagues, friends, companions, etc.¹¹¹

For the Grandmothers, the children born in captivity who have yet to be found continue to embody the biological identity of the disappeared.¹¹² The Grandmothers’ attempts to reclaim their grandchildren indicate their fight against the military’s monopoly of the disappeared’s social and physical fate.¹¹³ The Grandmothers, in fighting to locate their missing grandchildren, reclaim the social history bound to the biological history of the disappeared.

¹⁰⁹ "Genetic Aspect - the Identity".

¹¹⁰ Rosenblatt, 66.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹¹² Finchelstein, 134.

¹¹³ Ibid.

The surviving kin of the disappeared replace the social existence of their disappeared family members in the form of advocacy and memorialization. This is exemplified by the group *HIJOS*. The group, named “Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence”, whose acronym, *HIJOS*, means children in Spanish, formed in 1994 in response to the legal immunity given to their parents’ murderers.¹¹⁴ Spurned by this injustice, they came together to form a group that: demands justice; the necessity of reconstructing personal histories; reclaim the fight of their fathers, mothers and 30,000 disappeared; and the reclamation of the identity of the other children of the disappeared.¹¹⁵ They performed *Escraches*, or public demonstrations of public shaming, in front of those who perpetrated crimes against humanity and had been given immunity by the Menem government.¹¹⁶ They are active to this day.

Both the members of the armed forces and the human rights groups created in response to the dictatorship emphasized the importance of biological relationships in creating family-centric notions of identity. The dictatorship saw biological relationships as capable of creating subversive populations. The Grandmothers took the armed forces’ belief that biological identity dictates other forms of social identity, and advocated for the return of their biological kin to rehabilitate their traumatized communities. Furthermore, family members often suffer from the trauma of witnessing or experiencing the disappearance of their loved ones, and often take responsibility in locating their disappeared loved ones.¹¹⁷ Family members also

¹¹⁴ "Historia," H.I.J.O.S. por la Identidad y la Justicia Contra el Olvido y el Silencio, http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/index.php?option=com_content&%3Bview=article&%3Bid=19&%3BItemid=400.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Diana Taylor, "'You Are Here': The DNA of Performance," *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 1 (2002): 151; *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Rosenblatt, 55.

frequently deal with the quotidian consequences of a person's disappearance, such as legal matters of marriage or property ownership.¹¹⁸ These components of the political violence helped to form the family-centric notions of biological identity.

The EAAF and the BNDG's work in identifying remains reflect the Mothers and Grandmothers' movements to fight for the right to truth and memory. The members of the EAAF must decide "how to assign moral weight to the cultural views of a given survivor population versus intuitions about the potential needs and expectations of future generations."¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the scientific and social work of the forensic anthropologists depends on the politics and religious affiliation of the communities whose victims the EAAF attempts to identify.¹²⁰ Their work underscores the significance of cultural mourning practices in restituting bodies to their respective communities.

The EAAF and BNDG rely on the family-centric notions of relationship established by the Mothers and the Grandmothers. These scientific projects focus on normative social notions of kinship, as the most successful form of restitution relies on scientific advancements related to immediate biological kinship. This reliance has provided ethical issues. For example, the EAAF's need to track down relatives for DNA sampling made it so that biological kin who desired to disassociate from their family's trauma became bearers of the identity of the disappeared. The EAAF must decide to pursue action towards contacting disassociated biological kin.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹²¹ Snow, 308.

It is important to note the victim's relatives in creating the family-centric models of human rights work. Relatives act as active participants in the process of exhuming victims, as they occasionally are the only ones with genetic information and antemortem data.¹²² They also protect mass graves, gather communal support for the opening of burial sites, exert pressure on governmental and political institutions to carry through with the human rights organizations' call for truth and justice, and demand "the highest scientific standards and technical facilities."¹²³

The EAAF and BNDG's work broached ethical and social concerns on identity based on the concept of a biological, nuclear family. Their work created a new form of understanding victimhood, as the physical disappearance of victims complicated not only the technical aspects of the work, but also the political and social aspects of the work in the integration of family members into their forensic anthropology.¹²⁴ The work of the EAAF extended the family centric notion of victimhood, as the forensic anthropologists believe they have duties to the living victims of violence, considered those whose loved ones disappeared or who themselves experienced the imposition of terror, in the identification of the remains.¹²⁵ The EAAF is credited for creating the model of scientific activism in regard to repatriating those affected by state violence.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the ideologies of the human rights groups complicated the work of the EAAF, setting the first

¹²² Robben, 16.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁵ Rosenblatt, 32.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 47.

example of the family members' protesting of the exhumation of remains through the work of genetic forensic anthropology.¹²⁷

According to the members of the EAAF, the team is "committed to science as a practice and privileged form of truth, political autonomy, moral universalism, and a focus on the needs of victims and mourners."¹²⁸ Over 30 years of their existence has given them experience on managing the social complexities of their scientific work. Their work combines a version of humanism that combines universalistic traditions of human rights and humanitarianism with a specific understanding of mourning and death that arises from the work of identifying remains.¹²⁹ The work of the EAAF attempts to retroactively attempt to undo the raciology inherent in biological anthropology, by "understanding the range of variation within and between groups without necessarily creating artificial boundaries between them."¹³⁰ The work of the anthropologists takes into consideration how the disappeared person identified in life, or how their social, familial, religious, and political communities identified them.¹³¹

The genetics work of the EAAF and BNDG reflect the desire to "redeem" the genetics community "from a shameful past."¹³² Furthermore, anthropologists working with the EAAF note that because the populations subjected to political violence do not fundamentally differ biologically from their oppressors, these experts "see good forensic science as a refutation of racism and pseudoscience, a way of turning the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 85.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁰ Dawnie Wolfe Steadman, "Introducing Forensic Anthropology," in *Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights: The Argentine Experience*, ed. Dawnie Wolfe Steadman (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Halls, 2003), 12.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "Victor Penchaszadeh Was Declared Distinguished Personality of Science".

page on a past association between early genetic research and eugenic philosophies.”¹³³

Conclusion

The EAAF works with families to return biological kin to their families, reversing the eugenically based ideologies of the armed forces. The work of the Grandmothers and the genetic institutions they worked to build attempt to undo the dictatorship’s construction of society, and reclaim the social place of the disappeared in their respective communities.¹³⁴ Their work extends beyond restructuring the family unit and into repairing the community.

The advancement of DNA identification further demonstrates the importance of the Mothers and Grandmothers in developing scientific methods. At the time the Grandmothers contacted Mary-Claire King, DNA methods could not match grandparents to their grandchildren. Utilizing human lymphocyte antigen and blood group antigens, the genotypic combinations were unique enough to confirm that children of the disappeared were the descendants of the parents of the disappeared.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the discovery that mitochondrial and nuclear DNA could be recovered from skeletal remains revolutionized the work of the forensic anthropologists, who could identify the dead through DNA comparisons with their living relatives.¹³⁶

For the first time, the 2005 identification of 12 individuals thrown from planes into the ocean verified accounts of “death flights” committed by the armed forces.

¹³³ RosenblattRosenblatt, 27.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 172.

¹³⁵ Snow, 307.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 308.

“The establishment of identity and cause of death of human remains that had floated in seawater for weeks, if not months, and then been buried for more than twenty-five years,” demonstrates the extent to which scientific advancements have assisted the genetics-based forensic anthropological work in not only identifying the cause of death, but also certifying the crimes committed by the dictatorship.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Robben, 71.

Chapter 2: Jewish Identity and Argentine Nationalism

Introduction

Chapter 2 introduces the faction of the Jewish community in Argentina that mobilized to vocally oppose the human rights violations of the Military Dictatorship of 1976. This chapter contextualizes the activists' Jewish sociopolitical identities formed in the midst of rampant anti-Semitic Argentine nationalism. Jacobo Timmerman's *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, written during the dictatorship, attests to the prevalence of nationalist ideology in government institutions during the dictatorship, and how this especially anti-Semitic form of nationalism targeted Jewish citizens as biopolitical enemies of the state. Argentine Jewish activists involved in various human rights groups mobilized to deplore the anti-Semitic tendencies of both the armed forces and the human rights groups in the era following the dictatorship. Argentine nationalism proved incompatible with the democratic values of the post-Dictatorship Argentina, although many human rights groups, including Jewish human rights groups, appropriated language from biological nationalist rhetoric to legitimize their Argentine identity.

In addition, many scholars, Jewish civil rights mobilized to condemn the Argentine Jewish establishment's refusal to neither criticize the Military Dictatorship nor advocate the release of the Jewish prisoners of the dictatorship. This chapter demonstrates the manifestations of Jewish identity as a political identity in the era of heightened anti-Semitic nationalism, noting Jewish valorization of memory, truth, and history in countering the nationalism of the dictatorship.

Argentine Nationalism

The tenets of genocidal, anti-Semitic Argentine nationalism emerged in the ideology of state terror of the Military Dictatorship of 1976 to 1983. This form of nationalism developed in the ideologies of the founding leaders and intellectuals of modern Argentina. 19th century Argentine officials, such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, General Julio Argentino Roca, and Napoleón Uriburu, advocated for the enslavement and annihilation of native populations in Patagonia and the Pampas region by the military to allow for the settlements of white colonizers.¹³⁸ White, European settlers instigated horrific violence against native populations, as they believed they deserved Argentine land to cultivate Christianity and European culture in Argentina.¹³⁹ The Argentine nationalist intellectuals of the 19th century contrasted the white, Christian settlers from the native populations and the Jewish, intellectual, cosmopolitans. According to prominent nationalist writer Ernesto Palacio, native populations and the cosmopolitan populations did not deserve Argentina land, as both populations lived “nomadic” lifestyles in either the countryside or the cities.¹⁴⁰ Prominent Argentine leaders conceived of modern Argentina in the 19th century as a nation that required the extermination and disenfranchisement of domestic enemies for the interests of Christian Europeans.

Argentine nationalists sought to establish a homogenized Argentine society founded on Catholic principles. These nationalists idealized Argentina as Catholic, anti-cosmopolitan, anti-leftist, anti-liberal, and anti-Jewish.¹⁴¹ An article published in

¹³⁸ Finchelstein, 14.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

the prominent Argentine newspaper *La Nación* in 1881 warned that new Jewish immigrants to Argentina could produce the nation's disintegration, as they threatened the desired homogeneity of Argentine society.¹⁴² As outlined in Chapter 1, Argentine nationalists drew from eugenic ideologies to theorize about the significance of an ethnically homogenized nation. Furthermore, nationalists believed that Argentina's democratic constitution and the democratic institutions of the Argentine government were inherently anti-Catholic, thus validating their totalitarian and fascist forms of idealized government.¹⁴³ The explicitly exclusionary characteristic of Argentine nationalism, combined with historical legitimization of genocide and totalitarianism, laid the ideological foundations for the six repressive military coups of the 20th century.

Argentine nationalists justified dictatorship as a form of rule, owing to their xenophobic fears of communism and hatred for leftist governance.¹⁴⁴ The nationalists perceived the democratic institutions as illegitimate, and, due to Argentina's history of political violence, saw violence as a means of achieving their idealized form of Argentine government.¹⁴⁵ The nationalist tendencies of the Argentine state validated the violence against political dissidents. The patterns of human rights abuse throughout Argentina's history involve both the implicit and explicit support and tolerance of state terrorism.¹⁴⁶

The *Semana Trágica* of 1919 marked the first instance of nationalist violence directed toward the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. This weeklong period of

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁵ Brysk, 28.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

anti-Semitic and anti-worker violence materialized due to the tension between striking workers, the majority of who were foreigners, and the armed forces, including the police and army backed by the upper class and the Radical Party.¹⁴⁷

The Russian immigrant workers personified the ideological enemy of Argentine nationalists. The ruling class believed that the Russian workers represented an existential, foreign threat to Argentina.¹⁴⁸ As Russian workers embodied nationalist anxieties, and Russian Jews made up 80% of Russian immigrants at the time, Jews were further implicated in the national fear of foreigners.¹⁴⁹ The Argentine ruling class perceived the Russian immigrants as reflecting the values of the Russian revolutionary parties that had just then overthrown Tsarist rule. A worker's strike by these immigrant workers exacerbated the upper classes' fears of the worker's revolutionary potential. The upper class believed that Bolshevik, Russian anarchists, or German forces within Argentina inspired the workers to strike.¹⁵⁰ Using biologic rhetoric, Argentine nationalist Tomas Amadeo stated that "Russia is at present sick, and most of those who emigrate from that country suffer from that sickness, thus spreading all over the world a perturbing current."¹⁵¹

A contingent of nationalist groups, named collectively as the "*Defensores del Orden*" (Defenders of Order), mobilized an assault against the striking workers.¹⁵² This group included the *Liga Patriótica Argentina*, headed by the congressman Manuel Carlés, which consisted of military officials, government officials, priests,

¹⁴⁷ Victor A. Mirelman, "The Semana Trágica of 1919 and the Jews in Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 37, no. 1 (1975): 61.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵² Ibid., 62.

and members of the Argentine aristocracy.¹⁵³ These mobilized Argentine nationalists organized pogroms against the Jews in retaliation for the worker's strike, which involved shooting and assaulting workers and Jewish civilians on January 10, 11, and 12 of 1919.¹⁵⁴

The intensity of the pogrom against the Jews stemmed from vicious anti-Semitism of the ruling class, military, and the Church. Argentine Catholic groups in the early 20th century generated anti-Semitic sentiment within Argentine society.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the perceived economic threat of foreign immigrants aggravated the severity of the pogrom, as non-Jewish Argentines saw their Jewish economic partners as invasive competitors. Argentines hoped to “free themselves” from the economic threats of their Jewish counterparts.¹⁵⁶

Jewish Political Identity

Uriburu's coup against President Yrigoyen in 1930 represents the initiation of the political legitimization of fascist nationalism. The violence and nationalist nature of Uriburu's coup set the precedent for ensuing Argentine dictatorships in the 20th century.¹⁵⁷ The era of the Uriburu coup marked the beginning of the proliferation of explicitly Catholic, anti-Semitic and xenophobic nationalist groups in Argentina. This group of factions included the Argentine Nationalist Movement (*Acción Nacionalista Argentina*), the Argentine anti-Jewish Movement (*Acción Antijudia Argentina*), the Argentine Guard (*Guardia Argentina*), the Argentine Fascist Party (*Partido Fascista*

¹⁵³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 68; Brysk, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Finchelstein, 31.

Argentina), and the Nationalist Youth Alliance (*Alianza de la Juventud Nacionalista*).¹⁵⁸ These nationalist groups demonstrated a resolute commitment to militancy in upholding their interpretation of their anti-Democratic, Catholic values.¹⁵⁹

Anti-Semitism increased in Argentina in the 1940's. Despite the rise of institutional anti-Semitism, the Jewish community still engaged in Argentine civil society. Jewish women participated in the *Junta de la Victoria*, an anti-fascist organization that supported the Allied causes during World War II.¹⁶⁰ Jews also joined the Argentine Communist Party in the 1940's.¹⁶¹ However, the decision by the Director of the Department of Immigration, Santiago Peralta, to restrict immigration of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust following World War II reflected Argentine nationalist sentiment present in Argentina's governing institutions.¹⁶² This refusal set a model of exclusionary immigration policies directed towards Jews in the post-war period.¹⁶³

Jewish political activity changed with the presidency of Perón. President Juan Perón assumed power following the dictatorship of 1943 to 1946. His presidency consisted of a form of democracy founded on a campaign to expand the social and economic rights of Argentines.¹⁶⁴ Perón's relationship to the Argentine Jewish community was complicated, owing to Perón's open recruitment of former Nazis to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Laura M. Herbert, "The History of Argentine Jewish Youth under the 1976-1983 Dictatorship as Seen through Testimonial Literature" (Ohio State University, 2007), 18.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶² Ibid., 20.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Finchelstein.

Argentina and his pronounced resistance to the formation of the state of Israel.¹⁶⁵

However, as Perón's populist platform included the need for economic and social integration of marginalized groups, Jews attained positions in the government not previously available to them.¹⁶⁶

Nationalist groups continued to target the Jewish community throughout the 1940's and 1950's. Nationalist groups attacked Jews in response to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Argentine political culture and economic conditions instigated anti-Semitic violence in the 1950's and 1960's. The capture of the former Nazi Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires in 1960 further complicated the relationship between the Jewish community and the Argentine government. Nationalist groups disapproved of Israel's manner of kidnapping Eichmann in Buenos Aires, and sought punishment for his Israeli kidnappers.¹⁶⁷ Following the Eichmann incident, the nationalist group, *Movimiento Nacionalista Tacuara*, later called *Tacuara*, utilized the rhetoric and militancy of the nationalist groups of the 19th century and channeled violent anti-Semitism toward the Jewish community following the Eichmann kidnapping.¹⁶⁸

The figure of the "subversive," the symbol of the enemy of the Military Dictatorship of 1976, emerged in the 1960's nationalist rhetoric regarding the guerilla groups fighting the repressive dictatorship of General Onganía.¹⁶⁹ *Tacuara* worked with the government to form the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*, or Triple A. The

¹⁶⁵ Rein Raanan and Martha Grenzeback, *Argentina, Israel and the Jews : Peron, the Eichmann Capture and After* (Bethesda: University of Maryland press, 2003), 169.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁶⁹ David R. Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis : Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 33.

Triple A became the death squad of the dictatorship, drawing its tactics on terror from French use of repression in Indochina and the US doctrine of national security.¹⁷⁰

Tacuara's racially influenced violence codified the state's power to erase the identities of those that fit the nationalist model of the vaguely defined enemies of the state. Their racial ideology reflected the eugenic ideologies outlined in Chapter 1.

Jewish Argentines and Guerrilla Movements

Guerrilla organizations formed in the 1960's and 1970's to fight back against oppressive social and economic policies of the Argentine government.¹⁷¹ The two notable leftist guerilla groups to actively pursue political violence into the 1970's were the *Montoneros* and the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* or ERP. The *Montoneros* had roots in Catholic integralism and nationalism and was then Peronist, and ERP had roots to the Trotskyite group, the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*.¹⁷² These groups incited violence towards the individuals and institutions they perceived as imperialist or complicit with the military powers.¹⁷³ The *Montoneros* murdered the former president General Pedro Aramburu in 1970, and occupied various towns in Argentina. Their purpose was to lie "bare the state's impotence", through heroism, sacrifice, and violence.¹⁷⁴ The Argentine state sought the complete destruction of leftist guerilla groups.

Jews participated in Argentine leftist groups and the guerrilla organizations of the 1970's. In the years directly preceding the Military Dictatorship of 1976, Jewish

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 117.

¹⁷¹ Romero and Brennan, 189.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 190.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 189-90.

activists joined Leftist groups ranging from Maoism and Soviet communism to center socialism.¹⁷⁵ Jewish youth took part in left-wing Zionist organizations, some of which worked with the Peronist youth group *Juventud Peronista*.¹⁷⁶ Many Jewish leftists sympathized with the Palestine Liberation Organization as well.¹⁷⁷ The Jewish leftists also engaged with nationalist groups that sought to improve the social conditions of Argentina and took part in Argentina's leftist politics. Liberal Jewish Zionists in Argentina attempted to reconcile with leftist groups; however, many of the Argentine leftist groups denounced Zionism as a form of oppression, inhibiting socialization with Jewish Zionist groups.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, many Argentine Jews joined the *Montoneros* and ERP to fight against right-wing guerilla groups.¹⁷⁹

Peron's return to Argentina in 1973 exacerbated the violence between leftist and rightist guerilla organizations. The Ezeiza Massacre of 1973, the foundation for much of the political violence of the mid-1970's, occurred at the celebration of Peron's physical return to Argentina from his exile in Spain at the Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires. A Peronist right wing sniper attacked the crowd waiting for Peron at the airport, murdering 8 Peronists and instigating the ensuing struggle between Peronist leftists and Peronist rightists.¹⁸⁰ Following the Ezeiza Massacre, the Triple A developed into a paramilitary function of the state. An explicitly anti-Semitic Minister under Peron, José López Rega encouraged the work of the Triple A. The Triple A

¹⁷⁵ Seymour B. Liebman, "Argentine Jews and Their Institutions," *Jewish Social Studies* 43, no. 3/4 (1981): 321.

¹⁷⁶ Beatrice D. Gurwitz, *Argentine Jews in the Age of Revolt: Between the New World and the Third World*, vol. 8 (Boston: Brill, 2016), 160.

¹⁷⁷ Liebman, 321.

¹⁷⁸ Gurwitz, 8, 152.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁸⁰ Finchelstein, 114.

targeted specifically Jewish left-wing activists in its fight against the leftist guerilla groups.¹⁸¹

The death of Perón and the election of Isabella Perón as President of Argentina in 1974 furthered political mayhem in Argentina. Her presidency marks the beginning of the use of state-sanctioned terror techniques that the military continued to implement during the Dictatorship of 1976. Isabel Peron promised to “purge the government” and invest in the military and business sectors of the government.¹⁸²

Isabel Peron’s Triple A

Isabel Peron urged the Triple A to destroy leftist guerilla organizations by kidnapping and disappearing their members. Fascist, Catholic, anticommunist nationalism marked the Triple A’s ideological incentive to destroy leftist groups, interpreting these groups as the Argentine state’s existential domestic enemy.¹⁸³ Isabel Peron became the formal leader of the Triple A, and in 1974 instituted an indefinite “state of siege” to murder the members of the ERP and *Montoneros*.¹⁸⁴ Under Isabel Peron, the Triple A carried out extreme violence towards Jews, government officials, journalists, activists, lawyers, intellectuals, union representatives, and leftist militants and guerillas.¹⁸⁵ The Triple A cooperated with the Argentine military’s involvement with other Latin American countries to eradicate communism in the Southern Cone in Operation Condor, training under the CIA’s

¹⁸¹ Raanan and Grenzeback, 232.

¹⁸² Romero and Brennan, 208.

¹⁸³ Finchelstein, 115.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 119-20.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 120.

School of the Americas.^{186,187} The political and economic instability in the country under Isabel Peron's presidency, the constant presence of death and terror created by the leftist and rightist guerilla factions, including the failed operations of guerilla organizations to take over the Argentine provinces of Buenos Aires and Formosa, created the conditions necessary for the military coup to successfully take over Argentina.¹⁸⁸

The Subversive

The armed forces including General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and Air Force Brigadier Orlando Ramon Agasi, led by General Jorge Rafael Videla deposed the presidency of Isabella Peron on March 24, 1976. Following the takeover of the government, the Generals named the militarization of the government as the National Reorganization Process, which utilized nationalist, bureaucratic, neoliberal, and totalitarian ideology to “wage” war against political dissidents. Moreover, the military government took over Isabel Peron's government with an “all-embracing arsenal of Nazi ideology as part of its structure.”¹⁸⁹

The armed forces characterized the internal enemy as the ambiguous ‘subversive’, based on the anti-Semitic nationalist model of the existential enemy of the Argentine state. According to the military government, the domestic enemy wanted to destroy the Argentine Family and its traditions.¹⁹⁰ This is paradoxical, as

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹⁸⁷ Taylor, 160.

¹⁸⁸ Romero and Brennan, 215.

¹⁸⁹ Jacobo Timerman and Toby Talbot, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 69.

¹⁹⁰ Finchelstein, 8-9.

the armed forces destroyed Argentine families through kidnapping and murder. The members of the armed forces saw the subversives as a threat to Argentine “traditions” and “national being” in their perceived desire to destroy the Church.¹⁹¹ According to the military officials, the “subversive” wanted to impose a foreign and anti-national culture into Argentine society.¹⁹²

The military state carried out its ideological plan to reorganize the country by targeting those that vaguely fit their definition of ‘subversive’, as outlined in Chapter 1. Military officials targeted anyone who could question its problematic violations of human rights or its nationalist ideology, especially intellectuals, activists, leftists, lawyers, journalists, and psychiatrists.¹⁹³ These occupations connoted cosmopolitanism, Judaism, and difference, which contrasted from the idealized homogeneity of Argentine society desired by military powers.¹⁹⁴ Referencing the genocide of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust, the military powers wanted a “final solution” to the threat of subversive behavior. They murdered thousands of people who had no relation to militancy, but who formed the world “they found intolerable and incomprehensible, and who hence constituted the enemy.”¹⁹⁵ The Argentines that worked in the occupations most susceptible to state terror came from the middle class, signifying the victimization of a large population with high amounts of resources.¹⁹⁶

The dictatorship utilized torture camps to concentrate the subversive population to effectively hide them from society, torture them, and quietly murder

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Brysk, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Timerman and Talbot, 95.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹⁶ Brysk, 40.

them. At its time of publishing, CONADEP's *Nunca más* had recorded 340 detention centers.¹⁹⁷ The goal of these camps also was to completely erase the social, political, and biological existence of those kidnapped. As stated by former prisoner Jacobo Timmerman, "a political deed can be achieved through the destruction of an individual; violence committed upon one person can signify the solution of a political problem, the strengthening of an ideology, a system."¹⁹⁸

Anti-Semitism and Dictatorship

Military officials perpetuated the nationalist ideology of anti-Semitism in Argentine civic society. The military did not allow Jews to enter the upper-echelons of military service, which, as Argentina experienced a period of almost 40 years of military rule, essentially meant the institutionalized rejection of Jews from roles in governmental leadership. Seymon Liebman's "Argentine Jews and their Institutions", written in the midst of the dictatorship, maps out the disenfranchisement of Jews:

Jews are barred from rising to the higher echelons of the military and only a Catholic can be president and vice-president. Since the military, the Church and the trade unions are the three principal national powers and Jews are barred from the first two, and are unaffiliated with the third, it is obvious that they have no place in the power structure of the nation. Jews are a factor in the economic life but not in the political, intellectual or cultural arenas.¹⁹⁹

The Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983 named their regimen the National Reorganization Process with the intention of Christianizing the country. The

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹⁸ Timmerman and Talbot, 139.

¹⁹⁹ Liebman, 316.

dictatorship's attempts to impose obligatory Catholic education in secondary schools exemplified how they idealized Argentine society as a Catholic society.²⁰⁰

The concept of the "subversive" was inherently anti-Semitic. The military officials personified the "subversive" as the Argentine who fought against the nationalist's conception of Argentine society conflating the Catholic God and the homeland.²⁰¹ Moreover, the armed forces proclaimed themselves as the "defenders of western and Christian civilization."²⁰² However, the military's agenda to Christianize Argentine society also implied the terrorized members of professional occupations deemed anti-Catholic, of which Jews held many positions. The persecution of journalists, lawyers, and psychiatrists correlated to the disproportionate amount of Jewish victims of the military dictatorship.²⁰³

The numbers of Jewish disappeared relative to the total Argentine population indicate the overrepresentation of Jewish victims of the dictatorship. Approximately 2,000 Jews were murdered during the dictatorship.²⁰⁴ Immediately after the return to democracy, CONADEP documented 8,960 disappearances, of which Jews represent 8.86% of the total number of disappeared.²⁰⁵ Human Rights organizations have documented closer to 30,000 disappearances, signifying Jews represent 5% of the total amount of disappeared persons.²⁰⁶ These statistics are significant as Jews make

²⁰⁰ Timerman and Talbot, 95.

²⁰¹ Finchelstein, 123.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Brysk, 40.

²⁰⁴ Leila Miller, "Argentine Children of 'Disappeared' Learn of Jewish Parentage," *Jewish Journal*, August 13 2014.

²⁰⁵ Hernán Dobry, *Los Judíos Y La Dictadura : Los Desaparecidos, El Antisemitismo Y La Resistencia* (2013), 24.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

up only 1% of the Argentine population.²⁰⁷ In 1999, Juan Pablo Jaroslavsky and Raúl Castro, appointed by COSOFAM (*Comisión de Solidaridad de Familiares de Desaparecidos*) presented a report to a Spanish court detailing the violation of human rights of Jewish Argentines during the Military Dictatorship, naming it the most significant massacre of Jews since World War II.²⁰⁸

Much of the academic debate on the explicit anti-Semitism of the Military Dictatorship centers on structural versus individual expressions of anti-Semitism toward the Jewish community. Academics concentrate on whether the military actively sought out Jews to disappear or whether the torturers in the clandestine torture centers were especially anti-Semitic.²⁰⁹ The contingent of public figures and scholars that believe anti-Semitism accounts for the disproportionate amount of affected Jews during the dictatorship note the percentages of Jews murdered by the state, the anti-Semitic epithets used in torture centers, and accounts of Jews being kidnapped solely for being Jewish.²¹⁰ Guillermo Lipis argues that the extortion of many Jewish owned companies and businesses indicates economically incentivized anti-Semitism.²¹¹

The *Boston Globe* published an article in 1976 regarding the anti-Semitism of military forces. The article tells of a medical student studying with a friend whose apartment had been mistakenly targeted in a raid by security forces looking for a man named Juan Montalván. The two women did not know the man the armed forces were

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Fernando Mas, "Revelan Que Existía Un Plan De Emigración Masiva De Judíos," *La Nación*, March 9 1999.

²⁰⁹ Dobry, 26.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

²¹¹ Guillermo Lipis, *Zikarón - Memoria : Judíos Y Militares Bajo El Terror Del Plan Cóndor* (Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo Extremo, 2010), 109-10.

looking for. However, after looking through one of the women's address book, noticing many Ashkenazi last names, security forces asked one of the women if she was Jewish. She said yes, and was taken away by military officials.²¹² In another account of explicit anti-Semitism performed by security forces, a man was kidnapped solely for being in the presence of Jews, as indicated by the Israeli stamps on his companion's passports.²¹³ As political enemies and those freed from concentration camps escaped to other countries, they were able to confirm the especially severe punishment allotted to Jewish prisoners and the armed forces' use of anti-Semitic language in kidnapping and torturing prisoners.²¹⁴

The armed forces attempted to hide their anti-Semitic tendencies for fear of international retribution. Renée Epelbaum, whose activism in the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is outlined in Chapter 3, states, "The military in Argentina has been anti-Semitic by tradition. They tried to hide their anti-Semitism. They did not want Jews... in the States, whom they consider to be very powerful, to become critical. So they did not interfere in Jewish community life."²¹⁵ This debate remains a point of contention within the Jewish community, especially in regard to the work of the Jewish institutions that removed themselves from legal accountability of the detained Jewish prisoners.

The anti-Semitism inherent to the ideology of Military Dictatorship exacerbated the anti-Semitic tendencies of the armed forces. Argentine human rights groups recognize that the Jewish Argentine community was disproportionately

²¹² Dobry.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 394.

²¹⁵ Rita Falbel and Irena Klepfisz, "Renée Epelbaum: Still Struggling for Truth and Justice in Argentina," *Bridges* 1, no. 1 (1990): 92.

affected by state terror, and that Jews suffered more than non-Jewish prisoners in detention centers.²¹⁶ Testimonies collected during the Trial of the Juntas in 1985, from both Jewish prisoners and non-Jewish prisoners, tell of special tortures given to Jewish prisoners solely for being Jewish.²¹⁷ Many Jewish prisoners attempted to hide their Jewish descent by lying to their torturers about their last names, telling them, for example, that they were Polish Catholics.²¹⁸ Alejandra Naftal, in her testimony to the Trial of the Juntas, notes that some military officials changed the last names of Jewish prisoners as to keep them from receiving exponentially worse treatment from guards.²¹⁹ The Jews “lived a double punishment” as both Argentines living in a repressive regime and as Jews in an anti-Semitic country.²²⁰

Jacobo Timmerman

The account of Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, the head of the leading Argentine newspaper, *La Nación*, details his torture and house arrest by the armed forces in 1977. His account, published during his time in exile in Israel in 1981, revealed crucial information about the severity of the crimes committed by the armed forces and the machinations of the dictatorship itself. His position as the head of a respectable institution in constant dialogue with key political figures of this era garnered international attention. His account substantiated claims

²¹⁶ Dworkin, 67.

²¹⁷ Dobry, 26.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Hernán Dobry and Daniel Goldman, *Ser Judío En Los Años Setenta: Testimonios Del Horror Y La Resistencia Durante La Última Dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Eds., 2014), 49.

²²⁰ Dobry, 412.

regarding the virulent anti-Semitism used by every level of military official he was exposed to during his period of arrest and torture.

Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number narrates the experience of Jacobo Timmerman as both a Jewish Argentine and a publisher of *La Opinión*, the prominent newspaper that explicitly opposed the lethal violence in the country. At first a proponent of the Dictatorship in 1976, Jacobo Timmerman soon found himself the enemy of both the military powers and leftist guerillas. In a special act of resistance against the armed forces, Jacobo Timmerman published the *habeas corpus* presented by family members of the disappeared, a legal formality that symbolically questioned the disappearance of Argentine citizens.²²¹ He notes that every other newspaper, except for the English language *Buenos Aires Herald*, had stopped publishing the *habeas corpus* of those who had disappeared.²²² His rationalization for this included the “need to believe that a newspaper constitutes a powerful institution.”²²³ He was detained, released with the efforts of foreign dignitaries from both the U.S. and Israel, and reflected on his role both as a newspaper publisher and as a Jew in Argentine society in his narrative. His story describes the specific brand of Argentine anti-Semitism utilized by military officials and those in the political sphere. This narrative, harking back to the concepts of virulent anti-Semitic Argentine nationalism outlined earlier in this chapter, indicates the anti-Semitic disposition of the armed forces. Timmerman states:

each time a military government comes into power in Argentina, typical anti-Semitic acts disappear (the bombs placed in synagogues and Jewish institutions), for a military government at the outside imposes a certain order.

²²¹ Timmerman and Talbot, 123.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

But the Jew as a citizen senses that his situation is altering: military government do not name Jews to public posts; state radio and television prefer not to hire Jews; and so on.²²⁴

However, during the Dictatorship of 1976, “security forces could repress Jews simply because they were Jews.”²²⁵

Timmerman discusses implications of the convergence of his Jewish identity as an immutable biological identity and the politics of the military dictatorship. He writes that his “Judaism was a political act”, and that the nuances of his Jewish identity, such as his Argentine Jewish identity and his political affiliations in Argentine nationalist parties, did not matter so long as he was Jewish.²²⁶ Timmerman equates communism and Zionism for their “ultimate intention” of “the destruction of the nationality”, and note that the military government spent energy and violence eradicating them both in their nationalist fury.²²⁷ He says that, in the interrogation process in the torture center, “there comes a moment when one can perceive the interrogator has lost all hope. And that moment coincides with a shift from general political topics to the theme of the Jew, the Jewish personality, the role that Jewish ideology plays in the interrogated prisoner.”²²⁸ He goes on to say that “once they reached the Jewish theme, it was impossible to harbor any hope of resolution, for their lifelong opinions of Jewish designs were beyond modification, rooted in their existence and not in their political convictions.”²²⁹

²²⁴ Ibid., 68.

²²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²²⁶ Ibid., 139.

²²⁷ Ibid., 100-01.

²²⁸ Ibid., 68.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Timmerman recounts the rampant anti-Semitism in the concentration camps.

In his account, he mentions that those in charge of the concentration camp:

...hung pictures of Hitler in the rooms where Jewish political prisoners were interrogated; special tortures were invented for Jewish prisoners; the food allotment to Jewish prisoners in clandestine prisons were reduced; Rabbis who dared to go to the jails to visit Jewish prisoners were humiliated. And, basically, the extremists encouraged and protected books and magazines that contained anti-Semitic literature. Some magazines pronounced that President Jimmy Carter was a Jew and that his real name was Braunstein with the same blend of levity, hatred, and rationalizations used by Nazis in their claim that Franklin Roosevelt was a Jew.²³⁰

Timmerman touches on the designation of Jews across both time and space as occupying that of a permanent scapegoat, regardless of the political or social context. As he meditates on the vicious anti-Semitism he experienced in the torture center, he notes, “it frightens me to think that we are all the same in a given moment, we Jews all become Jews again, only Jews. That a Jew is only that, a Jew. And that the others are not Jews, and really, they are not.”²³¹ He notes the immutability of the Jewish identity in the various contexts that they exist, saying “We Jews still occupy the same place in history. We have that place reserved.”²³²

The military officials utilized Timmerman’s religious identity as a political weapon to torture him. From Timmerman’s perspective, the experience of Europeans during their rule under the Nazis mirrored the experience of Argentines under the Military Dictatorship:

The Argentine military members, like the German Nazi rulers, have succeeded in educing opposition to their theories to a minimum within their own land. As in Germany, those individuals who are untouched by repression, violence, and

²³⁰ Ibid., 132.

²³¹ Ibid., 135.

²³² Ibid.

irrationality are happy. As in Germany, they enjoy the benefits of an order erected by those who give orders, for those who adjust to the established order.²³³

Timmerman's story tells of the prevalent use of Nazi-era racial epithets to describe Jewish prisoners, anecdotes of Jewish prisoners attempted to change their last names so as not to be identified as Jewish, and the especially high rates of Jewish prisoners. The Military Dictatorship had, according to Timmerman, tried to shield the international community from the acts of anti-Semitism committed by the military, so as to not receive negative attention from the Jewish Community in the United States.²³⁴

Timmerman's narrative traveled to Jewish communities in the United States and Israel. His testimony of the genocidal anti-Semitism present in the state-run torture centers illustrates the enforcement of anti-Semitic Argentine nationalism as protocol by military officials. The military officials' bias towards Jews, and their power over Argentine citizens during the dictatorship, signified the permanent subjection of Argentine Jews to the 'subversive' identity.

Jewish Human Rights Activists

The contingent of the Jewish establishment that directly communicated with the military junta did little to defend the Jewish disappeared. The most prominent and visible cornerstones of the Argentine Jewish community in Buenos Aires are the AMIA (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*) and the DAIA (*Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas*). AMIA, and its legal associate, DAIA, rose to prominence following the wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the

²³³ Ibid., 156.

²³⁴ Ibid., 131.

late 19th and early 20th centuries. It soon opened to becoming a cultural center for the Jewish community, hosting and organizing weddings as well as creating a prominent Jewish cemetery. Its cultural prominence placed it at the forefront of the dialogue between leading Jewish public figures, from the variety of different Ashkenazi sects of Judaism, during the political unrest and military state of the 1970's and 1980's. Multiple Jewish figures, including Hernan Schiller and Rabbi Marshall Meyer, denounced the inaction of the AMIA and DAIA for its active disregard for the plight of the Jewish disappeared and the families who sought the help of the main Jewish cultural center. The Association of Family Members of Jewish Disappeared (*Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos*), composed of the family members of Jewish disappeared, and the Jewish Movement for Human Rights (*Judíos por Derechos Humanos*) are the Jewish Argentine human rights groups formed during the dictatorship. The Jewish Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo worked in both of these groups to not only fight against the armed forces, but also critique the Jewish Argentine establishment.

Many Argentine Jews responded to the virulent strains of nationalism manifesting in their government. Some of the Jews directly affected by the dictatorship came together to form distinctive groups focusing on their Jewish identity, contradicting the Argentine nationalist rhetoric regarding the “Christianizing” of Argentina. As the Jewish community was disproportionately affected by repression, and “Jews were disproportionately active in the human rights

movement, this sector of the movement inevitably sought a vehicle for recognition of its identity.”²³⁵

Rabbi Marshall and journalist Meyer and Herman Schiller founded the Jewish Movement for Human Rights in 1979 to publicly denounce the human rights violations occurring across the country. These two figures organized in response to the testimonies of Jewish families. At the time, no organizations were denouncing a specific point that united many of the families: the news of anti-Semitism experienced by detainees in torture centers.²³⁶ The reform Rabbi Roberto Graetz supported the creation of the group, noting that while “good Christians spoke out about how the Church had become the bastion of the Dictatorship”, no contingent of Jews were speaking out about the complicit Jewish community.²³⁷ In 1980, Meyer and Schiller gathered Jewish Argentines already active in groups such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights to formally establish the Jewish Movement for Human Rights.

The group produced a mission statement for a 1983 public protest, in which they utilized rhetoric of both Jewish tradition and Argentine citizenship to discuss their goal of bringing to light the human rights violations of the dictatorship. Emphasizing their Argentine identity demonstrated their commitment as Jewish citizens of Argentina to maintaining the wellbeing of the Argentine state. Their mission statement declared that the Jewish Movement for Human Rights would use the “humanistic vocation of social justice that comes from the foundation of Judaism to fight “for the dignity of the Argentine society exposed to the scourge of

²³⁵ Brysk, 51.

²³⁶ Dobry, 156.

²³⁷ Ibid., 157.

authoritarianism, repression, and violation of human rights.”²³⁸ The statement included a commitment to fight “racism of whatever nature,” calling other human rights groups to recognize the anti-Semitism of the dictatorship.²³⁹ It also included a statement on their support for nationhood for both Israelis and Palestinians.²⁴⁰

Human rights activists occasionally used anti-Semitic rhetoric as a reflection of nationalist discourse. The Jewish Movement for Human Rights attracted Jewish activists for the absence of discourse on anti-Semitism of the dictatorship in Argentine human rights groups. Jewish family members of the disappeared noted the presence of anti-Semitic prejudice in the human rights social sphere, especially in the work of the leftist human rights groups. They felt disenfranchised as many Argentine human rights groups ignored topics related to Jews.²⁴¹ These Jewish activists “did not feel content with the traditional fight” for human rights, nor with the leftist groups, nor with the organizations of human rights. They felt the need to create their own contingency that would navigate the non-Jewish human rights projects while acknowledging their Jewish identity.²⁴² The Jewish Movement for Human Rights supported for Jewish family members of the disappeared who could not find support from other human rights organizations, especially in regard to their denunciations about anti-Semitism that their loved ones had been subjected to.²⁴³ The Jewish Movement joined the league of visible groups fighting the dictatorship against their

²³⁸ Ibid., 161.

²³⁹ Ibid., 162.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 157.

²⁴² Ibid., 158.

²⁴³ Ibid., 160.

violation of human rights. Some human rights groups, such as Peronist and Christian movements, explicitly disassociated from the Jewish Human Rights organizations.²⁴⁴

Religious Rhetoric in Human Rights

Religious rhetoric shaped the era of Justice projects. Jewish mothers and grandmothers joined the Mothers and Grandmothers in the fight for the truth on the whereabouts of their children and grandchildren. The Argentine dictatorship and the justice projects emerging post-Dictatorship utilized religious rhetoric to sanctify their ideologies. The nationalist ideology of the Dictatorship has been outlined in this chapter. However, it is important to note that the Mothers utilized a Christianized narrative to lay bare the hypocrisy of the Military Dictatorship in murdering their children to Christianize Argentina. This also limited the discourse and symbolism necessary to include the Jewish community in the broad narrative of Argentine citizens as victims of the dictatorship. The Mothers evoked Christian symbols by making “pilgrimages to sites of popular Marian devotion and evoked the suffering of mothers seeking children crucified by a state that claimed to be Christian but did not even allow the family to bury its dead.”²⁴⁵ The Mothers directed these symbolic attacks at the government, which had established itself as a Marian institution.²⁴⁶ In a 1978 paid announcement, the Grandmothers plead the public for information on their children, stating, “We appeal to the conscience and the heart of those who have or know of our disappeared grandchildren.... God enlighten those who receive the smiles

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 171.

²⁴⁵ Brysk, 48.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

and affection of our grandchildren to respond to this anguished call to conscience.”²⁴⁷

According to Mary-Claire King, the Grandmothers say that the utility of mitochondrial DNA to prove maternal kinship “proves that God is a woman because she put mitochondrial DNA on earth specifically for the use of” the Grandmothers.²⁴⁸

The Jewish leaders who worked in human rights campaigns noted that their inspiration for fighting for social justice in Argentine society came from the religious teachings of Judaism. This use of Jewish values symbolically challenged the reasoning of the Argentine nationalists to Christianize the country. Speaking in the midst of the dictatorship, Argentine Reform Rabbi Roberto Graetz notes “the defense of life and the search for justice are intimately bound. In no context can a Jew take on the position of defending terror that collects innocent victims”, and neither can Jews remain silent during the explicit violations of human rights.²⁴⁹ When critics of Graetz pointed out the political component of his activism, he responded that to him, “the fight for human rights was an ethical, religious calling,” and that his work “was only a reflection of the prophetic tradition of Judaism, of social denunciation.”²⁵⁰ Marshall Meyer similarly notes that “to take seriously the Torah and Judaism there is a need to take very seriously the human rights”, and that he, as a Jew, must work towards creating a better place for the world, as according to Judaism, the world is always in a state of creation.²⁵¹ Israeli Ambassador Dov Shmorak declared that Marshall Meyer represented “the best of the Jewish tradition” due to his bravery in standing up for

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 49.

²⁴⁸ King.

²⁴⁹ Dobry, 124.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 132.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 138.

human rights.²⁵² Hernan Schiller noted that his *Nueva Presencia* “was a secular publication that attempted to reclaim the best of the humanist tradition of Judaism.”²⁵³ He stated that the publication strove to recognize the “revolutionary and activist tradition that Jews have in Argentina”, which was evident “in the era of immigration, in the participation of the creation of unions, and the *Semana Trágica*.”²⁵⁴ This further demonstrates Jewish activists’ reclamation of their Argentine identity by challenging the monopoly of the state’s narrative of the Christianized country.

According to *Zikaron: Memoria* author Guillermo Lipis, the work of the Jewish leaders of these human rights campaigns follows the traditions of Judaism outlined by the Hebrew Bible. He mentions that “the Jewish tradition always considered the word as one of the strongest tools that represents” the ethical just as much as it represents the aesthetic.²⁵⁵ According to Lipis, the central axis of the bible demands that Jews practice denunciation in opposition to the “submission of the human being to the mediocre conformism and authoritarianism” exercised across history.²⁵⁶

Citizenship

Accounts of virulent anti-Semitism occurring under the military state reached both the U.S. and Israel.²⁵⁷ The involvement of the U.S. and Israel in the safekeeping of Argentine Jews indicates the transnational characteristic of the Jewish population

²⁵² Ibid., 149.

²⁵³ Ibid., 325.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 320.

²⁵⁵ Lipis, 10.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁵⁷ Dobry, 41.

in Argentina. Jewish identity reflected the rhetoric of Argentine nationalism that portrayed Jews as having dual loyalty to both Argentine and Israeli interests, as many Jews were forced to rely on foreign assistance in surviving the regime.

Representatives of both countries: Menajem Beguin, the Prime Minister of Israel, the State Department of the U.S., and the World Jewish Congress conceived of plans to evacuate the Jewish community from Argentina.²⁵⁸ The Israeli government promised to provide help to those who were “persecuted for their origins, for their Zionist or political activism, and their family members who were in danger.”²⁵⁹ Many Jews utilized the service of *Sojnut*, or the Jewish Agency for Israel, in their desire to flee the country.²⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the Jewish exodus away from Argentina corroborated the Argentine nationalist’s argument about Jewish political disloyalty to Argentina.

Many of the human rights projects, and projects that sought truth against the era of impunity following the dictatorship, spoke of Argentine citizenship to emphasize their role in the national narrative. The human rights movement in Argentina following the dictatorship brought together grieving families, civil libertarians, and concerned religious figures. The Jewish human rights projects utilized rhetoric regarding Argentine citizenship to emphasize their involvement and existence as Argentine citizens under the Argentine government. Human rights groups that focus on citizenship can emphasize their role in the collective community of the state in the “mutual construction of social well-being.”²⁶¹ This understanding of Jews as citizens of Argentina affirmed their commitment to improving the condition

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 42.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 193-94.

²⁶⁰ Lipis, 39.

²⁶¹ Karen Ann Faulk, "Searching for Justice: Citizenship, Human Rights, and Anthropology," ed. Annette H. Levin and Natasha Zaretsky, *Landscapes of Memory and Impunity* (Brill, 2015). 166.

of the Argentine state, especially in eradicating the violent anti-Semitic nationalism that rejected plurality and diversity.

The activism of Jewish organizations regarding Argentine violation of human rights “places Jewish Argentines within the public register of citizenship and the struggle against impunity in a way some would argue is integral to the contemporary Argentine national imaginary.”²⁶² Jews and non-Jews noted the danger of anti-Semitism to the perpetuation of democratic ideals. The noble-prize winner Perez Esquivel stated that “the problem of anti-Semitism is not only a problem of Jews, but also of the whole community. Anti-Semitism is trying to corrupt the whole Argentine nation.”²⁶³ Schiller similarly noted that anti-Semitism was used to destabilize democracy.

Conclusion

The Argentine nationalist framework for human rights groups inherently excluded Jewish activists from fully partaking in the denouncement of the crimes of the military dictatorship. Moreover, the AMIA and DAIA, the most prominent, nationalist Jewish organizations in Argentina, did little to help the Jews suffering genocidal anti-Semitism. The Jewish Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo evoke the activism of their disappeared Jewish children in fighting for both the Jewish community as well as the Argentine collective.

²⁶² Annette H. Levine and Natasha Zaretsky, "Introduction," ed. Annette H. Levine and Natasha Zaretsky, *Landscapes of Memory and Impunity: the Aftermath of the AMIA Bombing in Jewish Argentina* (Brill, 2015). 2.

²⁶³ Dobry, 167.

The work of Jewish Argentine human rights groups directly or indirectly coincides with the Argentine Democratic institutions working with forensic technicians following the dictatorship. Many Jewish Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo continued their work with the help of Jewish organizations, utilizing the tenets of Judaism discussed in this chapter as well as the Jewish teachings on kinship, as they continued the search for their grandchildren and the grandchildren of their allies. By reclaiming their grandchildren, the Grandmothers can resocialize their biological kin to the specific, marginalized Argentine Jewish identity. Their work is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Roisinblits and the Epelbaums

Introduction

The armed forces kidnapped and disappeared members of the Epelbaum and Roisinblit families shortly after the military coup d'état in the 1977. Rosa Roisinblit, the mother of the disappeared Patricia Julia Roisinblit, and Renée Epelbaum, whose three children disappeared, joined the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and fought for the advancement of scientific technologies to reclaim their kin. These two women exemplify how Jewish Argentine activists combined the tenets of their Jewish identities and Argentine nationalist rhetoric to reclaim the identities of their children through the work of the National DNA Data Bank and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team. Rosa Roisinblit became the vice-president of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and Renée Epelbaum became the founding member of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The histories of the Roisinblits and Epelbaums illustrate the complexities of national identity entailed in Jewish diaspora, especially in relation to the national trauma experienced in a historically anti-Semitic country. Rosa and Renée utilize both narratives of Argentine nationalism and the valorization of memory and history in Judaism to socially and biologically reconstruct the identities of their disappeared kin. Their dialogue on memory, history, and biological kinship mirrors both the Jewish values and the values of Argentine human rights groups seeking justice against the military officials.

The EAAF's ongoing work to identify remains of the disappeared, and BNDG's work to confirm biological relationships between stolen children of the

disappeared and their kin, refashions the social identities of the children of the disappeared. Judaism's valorization of blood lineage and historical memory complements the work of these institutions in restituting the biological identities of these disappeared. The genetics groups allow family members of Jewish victims of the dictatorship to reclaim their biological kin in order to heal the traumas they suffered under an anti-Semitic dictatorship, work toward fostering collective identity, and refashion their highly valorized generational continuity. By reclaiming and reburying their Jewish kin through the use of Argentine genetic technology, the Epelbaums and Roisinblits strengthen the political Jewish Argentine collective in remembering the Military Dictatorship of 1976. The reclamation of Jewish victims' remains normalizes Jewish life customs, allowing for the proper memorialization of the dead within the Jewish community.

The works of various theorists on trauma, collective memory, kinship, and Jewish diaspora underscores the specific narratives of these Jewish families in reclaiming their Jewish kin and shaping both Argentine collective memory and Jewish collective memory. The Argentine human rights groups and the Jewish Argentine human rights groups restructure the rhetoric of the nationalist-centric dictatorship to undo the destructive work of the dictatorship and reclaim the identities the armed forces attempted to destroy.

Memory, Biology, and Kinship

The Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo focus on preservation of traumatic memory to fight for justice and nullify the lies of the

military dictatorship. In the decade following the dictatorship, as new generations emerged, events suggested an urgency in transmitting the trauma and violence of the dictatorship: “the “confessions” made by several perpetrators in Argentina... regarding their involvement in the repression; and the emergence... of HIJOS, an organization grouping sons and daughters of disappeared persons, former political prisoners, and exiles.”²⁶⁴ The Due Obedience and Full Stop Laws of the late 1980’s damaged the work of memorializing the disappeared, as Argentine courts pardoned military officials guilty of orchestrating disappearances of hundreds of people. The country began an era of forgiving and forgetting, and former torturers and members of the armed forces were forgiven for their crimes. The Mothers and Grandmothers detested the reintroduction of the armed forces into the Argentine collective society.

The work of preserving the memory of the disappeared and the nature of their violent crimes required a community devoted to the work of memory upkeep. This community usually wrests on the biological community of victims. In “The Traces of “Postmemory” in Second-Generation Chilean and Argentinean Identities,” Alejandra Serpente notes the definitions and roles of memory communities in upkeep and preserving memory. In human rights groups, familial relations usually define the “memory community”.²⁶⁵ Serpente notes the territorialization of memory as it relates to both the familial determinism of the activists in Argentina as well as the nationalistic rhetoric used in forging narratives of the past. According to Serpente, memory of the dictatorship can only persist if it includes the narratives at the

²⁶⁴ Emilio Crenzel, "Present Pasts: Memory(Ies) of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone of Latin America," in *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, ed. Francesca Lessa and Vincent Druliolle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 5.

²⁶⁵ Alejandra Serpente, "The Traces of “Postmemory” in Second-Generation Chilean and Argentinean Identities," *ibid.*, 133.

periphery of the politics of memory, so as to include the mergence of political and traditional familial identities.²⁶⁶ This inclusion of peripheral politics becomes especially critical to the role of Jewish memory in Argentina, where Jewish bodies are inherently marked as negatively different from the majority.²⁶⁷

Collective memorialization is itself a highly political act, challenging notions of dominant narratives or shaping communal understandings of the past. Memories of the past have implications for the present and the future. Those who work to memorialize the disappeared in Argentina do not only mourn the dead, but also reflect on the significance of the dead in shaping the present. Past events, and memories of past events, mark and effect the political divisions of the present.²⁶⁸ According to Vicki Bell, the work done to commemorate and bring forward the past frequently “marks the divided present, constituting a much more dynamic and contested politics in which the collectivity is also recognized as structured in many ways as to be the attitude and narratives one adopts in relation to that recent past.”²⁶⁹

The burden of upholding the memory of the disappeared usually lies on the family members directly related to the disappeared. Though many of these family members suffered the direct trauma of their loved one’s disappearance and want to share their stories, the family members are also valued within the human rights group framework following the dictatorship as legal guardians of the disappeared. The biological kin of the victims of the dictatorship become the both victims of the

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 152.

²⁶⁷ Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 704.

²⁶⁸ Vicki Bell, "Afterword: The Politics of Memory in the Long Present of the Southern Cone," in *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay*, ed. Francesca Lessa and Vincent Druliolle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 214.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

dictatorship and living advocates for the disappeared. Their roles as advocates shaped their social community.

In works of memory communities, especially in those of the various social communities in the heterogeneous population within Argentina, the concept of kinship can be expanded to those who belong to communities affected by the dictatorship. As Cecilia Sosa argues: “If we understand kinship as a set of practices that institutes relationships of various kinds, which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death, then kinship practices will be those” relevant to the various forms of community that address both life and death, ultimately expanding the definition of kinship to better formulate the trauma of the dictatorship in the work of the memory communities.²⁷⁰

However, it is important to note that the biological framework used to reconstitute the children of the disappeared inherently neglects both socialized and historical implications of identity. Cecilia Sosa presents the social complications of understanding identity and memory through biology. Claim to memory and identity of the disappeared become entangled with both the political and the biological, as the biological family members of the disappeared became equated with the “truth” of their disappearance and state violence in their testimony regarding their loved ones.²⁷¹ Sosa notes how the ideology of the “wounded” family as the hallmark of the Argentine human rights groups created a “monopoly of power, memory and pain”, so that the biological family came to be the sole bearers of the trauma and confined

²⁷⁰ Cecilia Sosa, "Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Mothers of Plaza De Mayo and Los Rubios," *ibid.*, 216.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

understandings of trauma to the immediate family members.²⁷² Sosa notes how the use of familial rhetoric in democracy “transformed” the relatives of the disappeared into victims, as the family members, through blood testing, managed to claim ownership of the disappeared and became the legal victims of the dictatorship in the era of democracy.²⁷³

Judaism’s biblical valorization of generational, blood lineage coincides with the biological ideology of the Argentine human rights groups. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin argue that Jewish identity is “founded on generational connection and its attendant anamnestic responsibilities and pleasures” that “affords the possibility of a flexible and non-hermetic critical Jewish identity.”²⁷⁴ They note the specific difference between Catholic traditional values on identity and Jewish values on identity: “In opposition to a traditional Jewish culture, which, in virtually all of its varieties, considered literal descent from Abraham and thus physical kinship as of supreme value in establishing identity, Paul preached kinship in the spirit as the mark of identity.”²⁷⁵ In terms of belonging and the formation of communities, they determine that “contact with other people who share the name of a given identity and seem to feel organically connected to a community can produce a sense of nostalgia even in one who has never been near the things that that community does.”²⁷⁶ The Jewish community in Argentina not directly affected by state terror relies on these feelings of nostalgia to sympathize with the members of the community affected by anti-Semitism. The identification of individuals as descendants of the Jewish

²⁷² Ibid., 65.

²⁷³ Ibid., 65-66.

²⁷⁴ Boyarin and Boyarin, 701.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 702.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 704.

disappeared broadens this community of sympathy and those implicated in the shared memory of the Jewish community.

The restitution of the children of the disappeared involves their socialization back into their biological communities. The victimization of the Jewish political identity travels through generations of Argentine Jews by means of “postmemory”. Coined by theorist Marianne Hirsch in describing the experience of the descendants of Holocaust survivors, postmemory “describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.”²⁷⁷ The Mothers and Grandmothers utilize testimonial witnessing and generational exchange to disperse memory to the generations that follow their own biological existence. Postmemory invokes the use of familial relations in transmitting trauma and memory between generations.²⁷⁸ According to Serpente:

postmemory privileges familial spaces of intergenerational communication because the nature of the traumatic events violently ruptures the link between private individual memories, and our public memories shaped by external political and cultural expressions of which national memory is formed. It is precisely the sacred Catholic familial space containing these private memories that the dictatorships in Argentina and Chile wished to exult, while at the same time actively destroy it as part of their plans for national reorganization.²⁷⁹

Furthermore, Serpente argues that the Grandmothers and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have a “privileged status” as not only biological kin of the disappeared, but also bearers of witness and testimony of their personal catastrophes. However, the

²⁷⁷

²⁷⁸ Serpente, 138.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 140.

postmemory community, though defined primarily by the biological community of the victims of violence, can also be transmitted by peers of the same generation who did not suffer to the same extent as the biological kin of the disappeared. Explicit reference to the Holocaust regarding memory of state terrorism in literature reflects the reality that many of the victims of state terror were descendants of Holocaust survivors, indicating the constructive ways in which Jewish memory and Argentine identity merged in the post-dictatorship era.²⁸⁰

The individuals within the Jewish community in Argentina form a unique, diasporic Argentine Jewish identity that is neither exclusively Jewish nor exclusively Argentine. However, Serpente asserts, “diaspora entails the conjunction of two different sociopolitical terrains, and the compatibility between different cultural identities... for example, the formulation that ‘hybrid’ identities that inhabit two different cultural domains can also challenge dominant historical narratives at the same time.”²⁸¹ According to Homi Bhabia, the diasporic communities construct their own versions of “history memory” that define the narrative of their minority positions.²⁸² The construction of the Jewish identity in a diaspora context continues Jewish existence in its cultural creation alongside its existence as a national identity.²⁸³

The Jewish activist’s work to organize specifically Argentine Jewish human rights groups reflects the Jewish diasporic commitment to biological community. Moreover, these Jewish activists had to project their social identities onto the

²⁸⁰ Serpente, 137.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 151.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Boyarin and Boyarin, 720-21.

bureaucratic and scientific information produced about the fate of their disappeared. As the CELs, or the Center of Legal and Social Studies, created records on each individual disappearance for lawyers and relatives to establish the truth about the disappeared, but only included factual, testimonial information, the legal work on the disappeared created a social vacuum to be filled by various political, scientific, and social groups to interpret the data found by the commission.²⁸⁴ “Political power entails the power of self description,” but the disappeared and dead do not have the ability to self describe, thus the loved ones describe the political and social identities of the disappeared for them.²⁸⁵ For example, some interpret the *Asociación* sector of the Madres’ stance on their condemnation of exhumations as based on their predominantly Catholic background.²⁸⁶ Bhabha notes the use of social identity in the political sphere in which he states:

we have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialize lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, creates a culture of disparate ‘interest groups’ or social movements. Here affiliation may be antagonistic and ambivalent; solidarity may be only situational and strategic; commonality is often negotiated through the ‘contingency’ of social interests and political claims.²⁸⁷

The identification of remains further compounds the role of identity and memory for the family members of the disappeared, Argentine society, and the international community. The reclamation of the physical remains of the disappeared indicates not only the deaths of the disappeared, but also a new manner of evoking the

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 145.

²⁸⁵ Zoë Crossland, "Buried Lives: Forensic Archaeology and the Disappeared in Argentina," *Archaeological Dialogues* 7, no. 2 (2009): 152.

²⁸⁶ Sosa, 71.

²⁸⁷ Alejandra Serpente, "The Traces of “Postmemory” in Second-Generation Chilean and Argentinean Identities," *ibid.*, 151.

engagement of the disappeared within the living community.²⁸⁸ In conjunction with the human rights groups, the objective of the EAAF was to not only identify the remains of the disappeared, but more symbolically return the histories to those the government tried to destroy, and re-establish them within the communities from which they had been taken.²⁸⁹ In the event of the identification of remains, the community and its collective memory can end their state of permanent suffering, and mourn their loved one by their means.

Reburial of the remains resituates the role of the disappeared in living society. According to Zoë Crossland, “the ghostlike state of the disappeared is created by, in part, their lack of temporal incorporation into the world of the dead by passing through funerary ritual.”²⁹⁰ The identification of the remains allows the generations that follow to acknowledge the disappeared’s death and existence in memory, by their reincorporation into the community from which they had been taken.²⁹¹

In her account of the Grandmothers search for their missing grandchildren, Rita Arditti explicitly mentions the connection of the memory work of the Grandmothers to the memory work inherent to the practice of Judaism. She quotes the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi on his remarks on forgetting: “What we call ‘forgetting’ in a collective sense occurs when human groups fail- whether purposely or passively, out of rebellion, indifference, or indolence, or as the result of some disruptive historical catastrophe- to transmit what they know out of their past to

²⁸⁸ Crossland, 146.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 151.

²⁹⁰ "Violent Spaces: Conflict over the Reappearance of Argentina's Disappeared," in *Matériel Culture : The Archaeology of Twentieth-Century Conflict* ed. William Gray Johnson John Schofield, and Colleen M. Beck (London: Routledge, 2002), 122.

²⁹¹ 153.

posterity.”²⁹² Arditti notes that the Grandmothers work for the preservation of memory opposes the determination of the former military leaders to forgive and forget the past.²⁹³ This relates to her comments on biological identity, in which Arditti underscores how “truth becomes a cornerstone of the recovered identity of the found children. By changing their names, their ages, and their identities, the appropriators turned the children into objects, depriving them of their history.”²⁹⁴ She further notes that the significance of one’s own name as a remnant of one’s identity reflects the relationship with one’s parents, who gave one that name.²⁹⁵ The restitution of the disappeared children to their biological families helps heal the social trauma incurred by the dictatorial forces, as “individual identities develop as part of a larger social process” of collective memory.²⁹⁶

Rosa Roisinblit

The story of Rosa Roisinblit, the vice-president of the Grandmother of the Plaza de Mayo, and the identification of her grandchild, Guillermo Perez Roisinblit, illustrates an example of a Jewish human rights activist who advanced scientific methods to rehabilitate her biological community and her social community. A leader and infallible figure of the Grandmothers, Rosa Roisinblit and the president of the Grandmothers, Estela de Carlotto, spearheaded the campaign to reclaim their stolen grandchildren, develop genetic testing to confidently match grandchildren with

²⁹² Arditti, 163.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 122.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 123.

grandparents, and garner foreign attention to the human rights abuses occurring in Argentina.

Rosa Roisinblit was born in Moises Villa, in the province of Santa Fe, in Argentina, in 1919 to Salomón Talovsky and Alte Milstein. Her parents were babies when they arrived in Argentina from Russia to join the other Jewish immigrants fleeing Tsarist persecution. Rosa trained to be an obstetrician.²⁹⁷ She had one daughter with Benjamin Roisinblit, Patricia Julia Roisinblit, born in 1952.

Patricia was a medical student and active in the leftist guerrilla group *Montoneros* when military officials kidnapped her with her partner, Manuel Pérez Rojo.²⁹⁸ Patricia was eight months pregnant at the time of her disappearance in October 1978. She was able to arrange for her 15 month old baby, Mariana, to be dropped off with her relatives before she was taken to RIBA intelligence base in Buenos Aires.²⁹⁹ Witness testimonies were used to confirm that Patricia was moved to the ESMA to give birth; she gave birth to Guillermo November 15, 1978. Miriam Lewin, a fellow prisoner at ESMA who knew Patricia before her kidnapping, testified at the trial that Patricia named him “Rodolfo Fernando”.³⁰⁰ Patricia was murdered after giving birth to Guillermo at the ESMA concentration camp.³⁰¹

Military officials informed Rosa Roisinblit that her daughter was to give birth and to prepare for the arrival of the newborn. The child never came, so Rosa turned to

²⁹⁷ "Rosa Roisinblit," Buenos Aires Ciudad, <http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/educacion/programasymemoria/archivos-por-la-memoria/rosa-roisinblit>.

²⁹⁸ Uki Goñi, "How an Argentinian Man Learned His 'Father' May Have Killed His Real Parents," *The Guardian*, July 22 2016.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Susana Colombo and Pablo Calvo, "Las Abuelas Encontraron a Otro De Los Hijos De Desaparecidos " *Clarín*, February 9 2001.

³⁰¹ Goñi.

human rights organizations and the Jewish establishment for help in locating her missing grandchild. She noted that the established Jewish legal center, DAIA, did not attempt to help her in any capacity.

A lawyer introduced Rosa to a group to four or five grandmothers, and thus they began to start searching for their grandchildren.³⁰² As part of the Grandmothers, Roisinblit calculated Patricia's due date and canvassed the city, including hospitals, orphanages, and juvenile courts to finding possible clues as to her child's whereabouts.³⁰³ Rosa noted the difficulties of managing the genocidal actions of the dictatorship, as kidnapping of children for political reasons had never been done previously.³⁰⁴ Ultimately, Rosa spearheaded the campaign for accurate genetic testing. Rosa recognized the necessity of obtaining foolproof genetic analysis of the relationship between grandmothers and their grandchildren to legally reclaim their biological grandchildren, especially following the identification of Tatiana Ruarte Britos and Malena Jotar Britos in 1980.³⁰⁵ She worked closely with geneticists and helped coordinate the creation of the EAAF.³⁰⁶

In 1986, Rosa organized a meeting between the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and former President Alfonsín. She demanded that the president recognize the need to create a database with genetic information, so as to expedite the urgent process of reclaiming children stolen by the dictatorship. By this time, the Grandmothers had located 38 kidnapped children. She alluded to their upbringing in adoptive families as

³⁰² Caroline Brothers, "Argentine Grandmothers Still Searching for Stolen Grandchildren," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, August 7 2016.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 16.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 66.

‘slavery’. Rosa the especially urgent matter of returning the kidnapped children back to their biological families for the right of the children to grow up knowing their biological identities.³⁰⁷ This meeting convinced former President Alfonsín to establish the BNDG in 1987.³⁰⁸

Mariana, the sister of Guillermo and grandchild of Rosa, joined the Grandmothers when she was 17 years old to help search for her missing brother.³⁰⁹ On April 13, 2000, Mariana received an anonymous tip about a man who matched her brother’s case.³¹⁰ Mariana was able to locate her brother, who worked at a café. He was 21 at the time.

Mariana handed Guillermo a note that said, “My name is Eva Mariana Pérez, I am the daughter of desaparecidos. I’m looking for my brother. I think he might be you.”³¹¹ Mariana told him about their parents. He did not believe her until he saw a photograph of José Manuel Pérez Rojo, the man Mariana claimed was Guillermo’s father. The resemblance between him and José Rojo struck Guillermo. He immediately took a blood test to confirm his identity.³¹² The blood work was sent to the United States to a blood analysis center used by the Grandmothers, effectively confirming Guillermo as Rosa’s grandchild and making Guillermo the 70th grandchild located by the Grandmothers.³¹³

Guillermo confronted his adoptive parents, Francisco Gómez and Teodora Jofre, about his adoption. After the fourth confrontation his father admitted that

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 71-72.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 69.

³⁰⁹ Miller.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Goñi.

³¹² Miller.

³¹³ Calvo.

Guillermo was the son of desaparecidos and that his mother had been Jewish.³¹⁴ Thus, Guillermo was able to both confirm his biological, Jewish identity and learn of the complicity of his father in kidnapping him from his biological mother.

Guillermo met Rosa two months after the blood test, calling her “Baba”, Ukrainian Yiddish for grandmother, at their first meeting.³¹⁵ In 2001, the trial against the couple that raised Guillermo began. A report by human rights groups showed that a group associated with the Air Force and the Army captured Patricia Roisinblit and José Rojo, and that Guillermo’s adoptive father was the first person associated with the Aeronautics forces to be arrested for the kidnapping of minors.³¹⁶

Guillermo Roisinblit became angry with his biological family during the trial. At first, “he wanted to know nothing” about the Roisinblits, and defended his adoptive mother, “with whom he had always had a good relationship.”³¹⁷ In an interview with the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* at the time of the trial, Guillermo told the reporter, “I want to keep on being Guillermo Francisco Gómez... I want to remain the son of my parents and not of two people I have never known.”³¹⁸ In defending his adoptive mother, he said that “she had protected me, raised me, fed me, educated me --- [and I thought] it’s not possible that this is a bad person...”³¹⁹ For three years, Guillermo refused to do the blood work necessary to end the trial.³²⁰ Even

³¹⁴ Goñi.

³¹⁵ Miller.

³¹⁶ Calvo.

³¹⁷ Miller.

³¹⁸ Brothers.

³¹⁹ Miller.

³²⁰ Ibid.

worse, his grandmother was the criminal plaintiff against his appropriators, deepening the wound and conflict about his identity.³²¹

The confirmation of the biological relationship between Rosa and Guillermo propelled Rosa to claim Guillermo as her grandson, even though he refused to acknowledge the implications of his biological identity for years. Rosa persisted in contacting him and working to get him to understand her trauma. She called him often, and he would answer, saying “Why do you keep calling? I do not want to know anything about you, do not call anymore.”³²² But she continued. One day, she asked him, “Tell me, Guillermo, this lady you call your mother, is she my daughter?”³²³ The explicit mention of their biological connection prompted Guillermo to change his mind and accept Rosa’s efforts. She said, after she asked him about his mother, “He realized that, faced with the truth, there was nothing he could do... he accepted the truth.”³²⁴

After 3 years, on April 23, 2004, the judicial system confirmed Guillermo as the grandchild of Rosa Roisinblit, and in September 2004 he adopted the last names of his biological parents.³²⁵ Since then, Guillermo takes interest in his Jewish background. He maintains a relationship with Teodora Jofre, but has stopped contacting Gómez after Gómez threatened both him and his biological grandmother.

In May 2016, Guillermo testified in the case brought against Francisco Gómez, his adoptive father, for the murder of his parents. Implicated in the trial was a

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² "Me Llevo 15 Años Conquistar El Cariño De Mi Nieto," *infobae* (2016), <http://www.infobae.com/2016/05/22/1813308-rosa-roisinblit-me-llevo-15-anos-conquistar-el-carino-mi-nieto/>.

³²³ Brothers.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Miller.

leading member of the junta, 90-year-old air force chief Omar Graffigna.³²⁶ His adoptive mother, Teodora Jofre, proclaimed her innocence by stating that she believed Guillermo to be “the illegitimate child of one of her husband’s comrades.”³²⁷

Almost 40 years since she began searching for her lost grandchild, Rosa Roisinblit was able to stand before Gómez and other security officials involved with the kidnapping and murder of her daughter and her son-in law, Manuel Pérez Rojo. At the May 2016 trial, she stated that she hoped to “find out who took her children, who killed them, and where they are.”³²⁸ Speaking about the trial, Rosa stated:

This is what I’ve been hoping for. After many years, I now get this satisfaction, that finally the confirmed details that those people that are being tried now that took part in the disappeared of her children. Now maybe justice has been served. I am not waiting for my daughter to appear live, of course not, but the State has to tell me where she is, who took her. Even though it was a vicious dictatorship, it was the State, and I will wait for this response from the State.³²⁹

At 97, Rosa Roisinblit continues to fight for justice in the efforts to continue to identify the children of the disappeared living under false identities.

Guillermo’s New Identity

Guillermo struggled with the realization that the parents that raised him were not his biological parents. Furthermore, he had to grapple with the fact that his biological mother was a Jewish member of the *Montoneros*. In describing the experience of learning about his biological identity, Guillermo stated, “I was one person, and then I was suddenly another person... The knowledge that you’re Jewish it’s a revelation. And knowing that the people who you call ‘parents’ aren’t your

³²⁶ Goñi.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ "Me Llevo 15 Años Conquistar El Cariño De Mi Nieto".

³²⁹ Ibid.

family. And knowing that your parents, apart from having a tragic ending, you won't ever meet them. That is also very complicated.”³³⁰

Guillermo reclaimed his biological identity following the end of his fight with Rosa by changing his last name to Roisinblit. The reclamation of Guillermo's biological identity meant the recuperation of his Jewish ancestry and his socialization to Jewish cultural practices of his biological family. Guillermo told the Jewish Journal that he felt “robbed of his Jewish identity”, especially considering he was raised and married Catholic. To Guillermo, “Identity is... knowing a lot of people that you share blood with, knowing your history, knowing about your ancestors, finding yourself in the gestures of others.”³³¹ He attends Rosh Hashanah and Passover dinners with Rosa and “is interested in learning more about Judaism.”³³² Through the work of the BNDG, Guillermo has been resituated in the Jewish community, both in the historical understanding of the Jewish identity of his ‘ancestors’ as well as the socialized and performative gestures of his Jewish family members, in finding himself in “the gestures of others.” However, the three years between learning about his biological family and changing his name hinted at Guillermo's moral and ethical trauma in renegotiating his social existence.

The anti-Semitic Process of National Reorganization sought to reconstruct Argentina as a Christianized society, covertly altering the society's biological framework and attempting to reconstruct Argentine political beliefs through murder. The armed forces altered the histories of the family members of the disappeared. In learning about the existence of his biological kin, the Argentine human rights society

³³⁰ Miller.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

emphasized the need for Guillermo to reclaim this biological identity as his own. His comments on this process point to the socialization of the biological information through the mechanisms of the BNDG and the Abuelas. Guillermo conflates his biological information with his biological family's socialized identity. His biological identity entails a new form of socialization, in which he can now recognize himself "in the gesture of others" and know "his history."

Sosa's argument on the problematics of biological essentialism inherent to understanding identity as "truth" emerges in Guillermo's testimony on his identity. However, as Guillermo constructs his own identity realizing his biological parents' past and prompted by the work of the Grandmothers, he chose to valorize his biological identity over his socialized identity. This reclamation of his biological family restructures his social identity, but to Guillermo, his socialized identity had been false, and his biological identity is "truth". To Guillermo, "there's nothing more positive than knowing the truth."³³³ Guillermo sees his adoptive parents as robbing him of his biological identity. He notes that finding out about one's biological identity is an act of freedom, because, according to Guillermo, "there's a point where you feel trapped from a truth that isn't yours, from a truth they fabricated so that you would not be with who you should have been."³³⁴ He passed on the last name Roisinblit to his two children, stating, "being able to give my child the last name that belonged to him was a victory."³³⁵ The "victory" of passing his last name to his grandchildren exemplifies the transmission of trauma to generations born following the dictatorship. "Postmemory" takes form in the reclamation of a last name with the implicit

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

historical burdens of both Jewish identity in Argentina as well as victimhood of the dictatorship.

Rosa's Jewish Argentine Identity

Rosa is proud of her work as vicepresident of the Grandmothers. In an interview during the trial against the murderers of her daughter, Rosa noted that she immediately began searching for her daughter following Patricia's disappearance.³³⁶ Her daughter's disappearance propelled her to organize and work with the Grandmothers.³³⁷ She believes that her fight for the truth has been worthwhile, given the many successes of the Gene Bank in matching the children of the disappeared with their biological kin.³³⁸ At the time of the trial, the Grandmothers identified 119 children stolen by the armed forces. She noted that each "success", as she calls it, "pushes her to keep fighting, to keep innovating."³³⁹ The babies they had been searching for are now adults, with children of their own. Now, she said, the grandmothers are interested in searching for the grandchildren of the children of the disappeared so they do not live in "lies and darkness."³⁴⁰

Rosa's conceptions of time and memory changed with the identification of her adult grandchild. After being reunited with her Guillermo, Rosa noted that "it's not the same as knowing him since he was a baby, when you get play grandmother, take him to the park. I can't take him to the merry-go-round when he's already a man."³⁴¹

³³⁶ "Me Llevo 15 Años Conquistar El Cariño De Mi Nieto".

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Goñi.

She had to “win over the love” of Guillermo following the trial against his parents in 2001, “it was a fight of patience.”³⁴² Her activism, however, does not cure the pain of losing both her child and, for 21 years, her grandchild. She notes that the wound of the dictatorship “will never be healed.”³⁴³

Rosa was a member of the Association of Family Members of Jewish Disappeared and continues to work with Jewish groups. Since the *AMIA* has held an event memorializing the Jewish disappeared of the dictatorship, Rosa has noted the relationship of the Argentine government to the Jewish community as being “a good relation”. She noted that the Kirchners attended a 2004 memorial for the Jewish disappeared, held at the *AMIA*. Rosa also traveled to the United Nations with former president Nestor Kirchner, and met family members of the victims of the attack.³⁴⁴

Rosa explicitly spoke about the Jewish Argentine identity lost in the 21 children kidnapped by the dictatorship. Roisinblit spoke at a 2014 memorial for the Jewish disappeared, saying, “from my Jewish identity, I fight to recover the identity of our grandchildren, the only living desaparecidos.”³⁴⁵ By identity, she meant both biological identity and social identity. She alluded to “the construction of identity that the Jewish immigrants had done since the end of the 19th century, those who arrived looking for a better way of life with a strong Jewish identity to adopt an Argentine identity.”³⁴⁶ She noted the need to recuperate the Jewish identity of the disappeared,

³⁴² "Me Llevo 15 Años Conquistar El Cariño De Mi Nieto".

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ "Rosa Roisinblit: “El Fallecimiento De Néstor Kirchner Es Un Golpe Muy Fuerte, Muy Duro”," *Iton Gadol*, October 28 2010.

³⁴⁵ "Recordaron En La Amia a Los 1.900 Desaparecidos De Origen Judío Durante La Dictadura Argentina," *Telám*, September 12 2014.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

“our” grandchildren, as she referred to the Jewish disappeared.³⁴⁷ In this speech, she noted that she was the one who made the list of grandchildren stolen from Jewish families, and reassured the Jewish assembly “they are searched like all of the others.” In searching for the stolen Jewish children of the disappeared, Rosa mentioned “there is a need to recuperate the identity of our grandchildren, but also their Argentine and Latin American identity. There is nothing better than if history does not repeat itself.”³⁴⁸

Rosa’s speech highlights pivotal themes of diasporic identity and the reclamation of Jewish identity as a form of resistance to genocidal nationalism. She compares the reclamation of the Jewish grandchildren stolen by the dictatorship to the Jewish immigrants who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by evoking the Jewish immigrants who came to Argentina “with a strong Jewish identity” to “adopt an Argentine identity.” Roisinblit perverts this narrative of Jewish diaspora in the identification of the Jewish disappeared, who most likely have a strong Argentine identity but have to adopt a Jewish identity following the restitution and reclamation of their biological, Jewish kin. However, Roisinblit emphasizes the need to recuperate the “Argentine and Latin American identity” of the children of the disappeared, to recontextualize the nationalist narrative of the dictatorship and the human rights groups that follow. Her work in biological restitution illuminates how she perceives restituting identity. Her comments reflect the diasporic significance of the reclamation of not only the Jewish identity of the disappeared grandchildren, but their Latin American identity as well.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

Roisinblit attempted to expand notions of biological kinship to the members of the Jewish community by stating that the Jewish grandchildren by the dictatorship are, in the predominantly Jewish audience, ‘our grandchildren’. Roisinblit expanded her definition kinship to include members of the Jewish community as much of the discourse involving the appropriation of children of the disappeared concentrated on the biological relationships between people. She emphasized that any form of kinship between members of the Jewish community in Argentina, a diasporic community, can facilitate sympathy and understanding between Jews who otherwise might not see themselves as relating to each other.

The Epelbaums

The case of Renée Epelbaum and the disappearance of her 3 children illustrates how the BNDG, EAAF, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and AMIA coordinated to provide political, social, and religious identity to the ghost-like existence of the disappeared Jewish Argentines. Through the work of the BNDG, EAAF, and the coordination of the AMIA’s coordination of the Buenos Aires Jewish cemetery *La Tablada*, the remains of Lila Epelbaum were reburied and given a headstone, per Jewish customs. Her mother’s fight as a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo, the subsequent identification of one of her children, Lila, and the role of the Epelbaum’s extended family in memorializing and disseminating information about the case to the Jewish community epitomize the convergence of genetics, political violence, and Jewish diasporic identity manifesting in Argentine society. Lila’s

reburial signals the reclamation of a Jewish identity fraught with both political and religious violence.

Renée Epelbaum was born to Jewish Russian immigrants in the province of Entre Ríos. Her family fled Russian persecution and went to the Jewish colonies in Argentina established by Baron Hirsch.³⁴⁹ On growing up Jewish, Renée stated that her parents “were Jewish, of course”, but were not very “traditional” and that she and her husband were “very integrated into the Argentine society.”³⁵⁰ “We all knew that we belonged to the Jewish community,” she states in an interview.

Renée Epelbaum, her husband Raúl Epelbaum, and her three children Luis, Claudio, and Lila lived in Buenos Aires. Her husband died young, leaving Renée with her three children. Lila and Claudio were active in the Peronist Youth group in high school at the National High School of Buenos Aires.³⁵¹ Military officials kidnapped her eldest son, Luis, a 25-year-old medical student, as he left the *Facultad de Medicina* on August 10, 1977. Renee sent her two remaining children, Claudio, aged 23, and Lila, aged 20, to their country home in Uruguay. Military officials, working under the Operation Condor were able to enter Uruguay and kidnap Claudio and Lila from the Epelbaum country home on November 4, 1977.³⁵² Lila was last seen in the clandestine torture center *El Banco* according to testimony of those that survived there.³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Falbel and Klepfisz, 88.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

³⁵¹ "Homenajearon a Lila Epelbaum, Una Militante Desaparecida," *Infojus Noticias* (2014), <http://www.archivoinfojus.gob.ar/nacionales/homenajearon-a-lila-epelbaum-una-militante-desaparecida-5161.html>.

³⁵² R.L., "“Los Que Confesaron No Se Arrepienten De Nada”," *Página 12* (1995), https://www.pagina12.com.ar/especiales/30anios/reportajes-renee_epelbaum.html.

³⁵³ "Homenajearon a Lila Epelbaum, Una Militante Desaparecida".

Epelbaum was a founding member of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. On being an activist, Renée stated, “Our aim was to recover our children, to know about their fate, where they were, how they were treated. We wanted to know, of course, what their situation was.”³⁵⁴ She also was a ruthless opponent of the dictatorship’s methodology. She stated in an interview:

Let’s assume my son was even a terrorist- it was not the case. But even if we assume he was, he should have been tried. He had a right to an honest trial. You can’t justify torture, kidnapping, and killing. You can’t justify clandestine methods. Because if you do something clandestine, it means you don’t dare do it publicly... because if you accept that you’re giving way to lawlessness, everybody can do whatever they like and you can’t lead a normal life.³⁵⁵

She helped establish the *Linea Fundadora* movement of the Mothers, which disagreed with the other contingent, *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, on matters relating to the exhumation of unidentified bodies, reparations from the government, and the establishment of a foundation to help the children of those ‘who disappeared’.³⁵⁶ She insisted that the *Linea Fundadora*, at the time of the interview in 1989, was opposed to the Due Obedience Law, which pardoned those military officials who followed orders. “Somebody killed my daughter because he was obeying orders. He knew he was committing a crime, so he is guilty,” she stated.³⁵⁷

Renée fiercely advocated for the work of the EAAF. In a 1993 letter, Renée explained the necessity of the EAAF to identify evidence of torture and murder in the remains of the disappeared to sentence the military for crimes against humanity. She wrote that her contingent of Mothers, the *Linea Fundadora*, accepted “the exhumations of cadavers as long as it is ordered by a judge in the course of

³⁵⁴ Falbel and Klepfisz, 88.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 91.

investigation and carried out by forensic experts, such as the group of anthropologists Clyde Snow trained in our country.”³⁵⁸ The letter indicates her belief in the necessity of scientific advancement to identify how those detained by the dictatorship died.

She desired to know where the remains of her children were. She stated, on the matter of the remains, that “when we ask to know the fate of our children this implies knowing how they died... who the executioners were and who was responsible for giving the orders. It is not only about knowing if five thousand were thrown into the sea and the rest were buried in unmarked graves.”³⁵⁹

Renée died February 7, 1998. Though she fought for scientific advancements for the identification of the remains of the disappeared, she did not live to see the identification of her children’s remains.

Lila Epelbaum’s Remains

In May 2014, nearly 30 years after their kidnapping, the EAAF found the remains matching the Epelbaum siblings in an unmarked grave in Sector 134 of the Avallaneda Cemetery.³⁶⁰ The EAAF contacted the surviving cousins of the Epelbaums, Alicia Rieber, the first cousin of Lila, Luis, and Claudio. With Alicia Rieber’s approval, the EAAF exhumed the grave of Renée Epelbaum to get genetic information from her remains, although she had donated her blood to the BNDG in case the remains of her children were found. The EAAF was able to confirm that some of the unmarked remains belong to the Epelbaum family. One bone was

³⁵⁸ Wulff and Asociación de Abuelas de Plaza de, 108.

³⁵⁹ R.L.

³⁶⁰ "Identificaron Los Restos De La Hija De Yoyi Epelbaum, Fallecida Integrante De Madres Línea Fundadora," *Télam* (2014), <http://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201405/65092-identificaron-los-restos-de-la-hija--de-yoyi-epelbaum-fallecida-integrante-de-madres-linea-fundadora.php>.

genetically female. Thus, they were able to identify the bone as Lila's. However, as the other remains were identified as male, it was unclear as to which of the remains pertained to the Epelbaum brothers, Luis and Claudio. According to the AMIA's funeral director Jose Kviatek, because the EAAF could not correctly correspond the exact identification to the Epelbaum brother's remains, they could not be buried at *La Tablada*, as Jewish custom requires the correlation of the individual body to its tombstone. Moreover, in respecting the human rights group's slogan, "appearance with life!" *La Tablada* cannot officially memorialize any disappeared person without their remains.

News of the identification of Lila's remains was made on May 2014.³⁶¹ The *AMIA* published that the identification of Lila's remains meant that she could finally be given a "Jewish burial", "providing an answer to the efforts of her loved ones" after decades of work for justice and memory, and helping heal society with her identity.³⁶²

Lila's memorial occurred on August 10, 2014. It involved both a program at Lila's former high school, the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires*, and the interring of Lila's remains at the Jewish cemetery *La Tablada*. The Grandmothers, friends, and acquaintances spoke at the memorial, calling those in attendance to maintain the commitment of Renée to "Never forget, never forgive!"³⁶³ A program of debates hosted by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Student Committee of the secondary school with the historian Federico Lorenz, the cofounder of the EAAF

³⁶¹ "Los Restos De Lila Epelbaum," *Página12*, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-247391-2014-05-30.html>.

³⁶² "Se Brindó Sepultura a Lila Epelbaum Stopolsky Z'L, Desaparecida Y Asesinada Durante La Dictadura," (2014), <http://www.amia.org.ar/index.php/news/default/show/news/2032>.

³⁶³ "Homenajearon a Lila Epelbaum, Una Militante Desaparecida".

Patricia Bernardi, the researcher Victoria Basualdo, and the journalist Werner Pertot did a panel titled, “Youth and Dictatorship”.³⁶⁴ The memorial’s inclusion of political discussion indicated a unique conflation of political and social memorialization of a dead member of the social and political communities.

Lila’s reburial marked the second time the remains of a Jewish disappeared person were interred at *La Tablada*. Only one set of remains identified by the EAAF, those belonging to Cecilia Podolsky de Bronzel, were also reburied in *La Tablada*. The interring of Lila was presided over by Rabbi Daniel Goldman, the rabbi from Bet El, Marshall Meyer’s congregation. She was buried next to her mother. The interring of Lila’s remains brought “comfort to the Mother’s hearts”, and allowed the Epelbaum’s to find closure on the whereabouts of their cousin’s remains.³⁶⁵ However, the inability of the EAAF to determine which of the male remains belongs to Lila’s brothers continues to be unresolved.

The Epelbaum’s cousins, Alicia and Daiana Reieber, took part in a program created by the *AMIA* called *Eduiot*, or “testimony” in Hebrew. Since 2014, the program invites the family members of the Jewish disappeared to tell their stories to the networks of Jewish secondary schools in Buenos Aires. The website comments on the demands of Judaism to observe the continuation of memory, and the necessary creation of gathering spaces between elders and younger generations in the construction of collective identity.³⁶⁶ Its mission statement states that *Eduiot* applies principles of memory found in Judaism to the crimes of state terrorism. Its objectives

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ "Los Restos De Lila Epelbaum".

³⁶⁶ "Proyecto Eduiot : Toma De Testimonios a Familiares De Desaparecidos Judíos," (2015), <http://www.amia.org.ar/index.php/news/default/show/news/2571>.

include: the recording of the stories that parents or family members of the Jews disappeared during the Military Dictatorship have made about them, to be used with the purpose of maintaining the memory of what happened to them in educational environments; the creation of a spaces for exchange and transmission between family members of the disappeared and young students; and to acquaint the students of these schools to know about the personal histories of these disappeared, those of which are part of their history as Argentine history.³⁶⁷

As Renée had left no direct biological heirs following her death in 1998, her niece and grandniece told the story about their disappeared cousins to the Jewish high school students taking part in *Eduiot*. By relaying the story of the disappeared Jewish Argentines, implicitly suggesting their affiliation to the victims of state terror, the cousins of Renée Epelbaum involve the younger generations of Argentine Jews into a national narrative of anti-Semitic persecution. Alicia and Daiana still follow the biological essentialist narratives of family members bearing the brunt of traumatic memory, and their normative roles as family members in teaching future generations about the crimes of the dictatorship. The fact that Daiana Rieber never met her disappeared cousins, but was a family member tasked with narrating the history of her family's experience under the dictatorship, exemplifies Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and the expansion of victimhood created by scientific projects.

Eduiot hopes to expand the memory of the Argentine dictatorship and undermine the work of Argentine nationalism in reconstructing notions of Argentine identity not conditional on Catholicism nor anti-establishment. The group's affiliation

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

with *AMAI* also reconstructs historical notions of the Jewish establishment's overt inefficacy in helping the Jewish disappeared at the time of the dictatorship.

Epelbaum and Jewish Memory

Renée Epelbaum committed her life to fighting for justice and truth in Argentina. In interviews, she often brought up the Holocaust as a reference for the pain she was suffering. As the only living person from her immediate family, she stated “I’m a sort of survivor because I’m the only one left in the family. Like after the Holocaust – by chance- only one person in a family remains alive. This is my case.”³⁶⁸ Talking about the dictatorial powers, she said, “the military people were criminals, the worst criminals in the world because they did what the Nazis did, the same thing, the same horror. The only difference is the number of victims.”³⁶⁹ Regarding the CONADEP, she noted “It proved the existence of 340 concentration camps- even more than the Nazis had. The Nazis had bigger camps. Can you imagine that? Nobody could imagine that happening in Argentina, not even us.”³⁷⁰ Renée used the holocaust as a paradigm to understand her sense of victimhood as an Argentine. Her sense of victimhood, and intimate knowledge of the Holocaust, shows that her Jewish identity shaped how she perceived herself as a Jewish Argentine.

Renée was committed to maintaining and disseminating her narrative as recourse to maintain the memory of the disappeared. In an interview with the newspaper *Página12*, she said, “Now we have to be the memory. I remember the words of Ellie Wiesel, a writer and survivor of Auschwitz, and winner of the Nobel

³⁶⁸ Falbel and Klepfisz, 88.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 92.

Prize... he said, in front of what was Auschwitz: “Close your eyes and you will hear the screams, the shrieks of those who were here...you will feel the grief of your elders.”³⁷¹ She noted that that because of the sacrifice of the Mothers and Grandmothers, “this holocaust must be remembered just like the Jewish holocaust in Europe. We must not forgive, we must not forget. A thing like that should never happen again. *Nunca Más* must be a kind of banner for the future.”³⁷² References to the Holocaust reflect the specific language of victimhood and trauma that human rights activists utilize in regard to collective memory and trauma.

Much of Renée’s discourse on memory deals with generational transmission of memory and the trauma that will be passed down to future generations. She “would talk fondly of her missing children, lamenting the fact that she would never have any grandchildren”, she said: “my future died the day my daughter and two sons disappeared.”³⁷³ She claimed, “A mother can never forget her children. We must keep their memory alive.”³⁷⁴ The future of Argentina depended on memory according to Renée. On the self-imposed amnesty laws of the military powers, she said, “unless we learn the truth about the desaparecidos our sadness will never end. Argentina will be forever haunted by their ghosts.”³⁷⁵ Noting the work of the Jewish groups on memory, she noted that the objective of the Jewish led Foundation for Social and Historic Memory is “keeping alive the social and historical memory.”³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ R.L.

³⁷² Falbel and Klepfisz, 93.

³⁷³ Harold Briley, "Obituary: Renee Epelbaum," *The Independent*, February 24 1998.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Falbel and Klepfisz, 93.

The biological rhetoric regarding the memories of the disappeared illustrates how memory itself is personified and given identity. Renée's description of memory as "alive" and the disappeared as "haunting," reflect on the spectral notions of collective identity, and the manifestation of that spectral identity in the performance of memory as an identity. This performative identity traverses the boundaries of the territorialization of the legitimized trauma inflicted upon the family members of the disappeared, becoming a public act of mourning that becomes entrenched in the Argentine public consciousness. This traversal is important, as it reacquaints Renée's personal victimhood within the social sphere of the state of Argentina. The ghosts of the disappeared haunt all of Argentina, not only the Epelbaums.

Furthermore, the identification of Lila's remains resituates Lila Epelbaum in the living community as a memorialized victim of the dictatorship. Owing to Renée's fierce advocacy for the EAAF, she was able to posthumously identify her child's remains, and give her a proper burial correlating to her religious beliefs. With the identification of Lila's remains, the Jewish community can properly memorialize her.

Epelbaum experienced the dictatorship with a critical eye toward both the Argentine Jewish community, as well as the international Jewish community. She noted the fear of the DAIA during the dictatorship, and its inability to intervene in matters relating to the dictatorship.³⁷⁷ She said that the dictatorship was smart in not collectively targeting the Jewish community, but targeting specific Jews, as to not upset the international Jewish community.³⁷⁸ However, she criticized the Church

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 92.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

more, noting its complicity and the actual power of the church in stopping the bloodshed of the dictatorship.³⁷⁹

Epelbaum used generational memory in Jewish understandings of memory to explain the mission of the Jewish human rights groups. She notes that, following the dictatorship, the *Judíos por Derechos Humanos* became the Foundation for Social and Historic Memory, “so that younger people can take it into the future to newer generations.”³⁸⁰ She stated that the group still demands “truth and justice”, but that the group now focuses on leaving a legacy, “because biologically we don’t have a very far horizon.”³⁸¹ Epelbaum noted the importance of Jewish values on the disappeared, as the social component of memory outlives the biological death of those who hold the memory of the disappeared. The memories of the disappeared must be expanded to the broader community, following Jewish traditional assumptions on memory and truth.

She noted that both the *Linea Fundadora* and the Foundation for Social and Historic Memory both fight to preserve historical memory. The *Linea Fundadora* differs from the Foundation in its concerted efforts to “get the truth and to obtain justice.”³⁸² She said, “the Foundation is only dedicated to keeping the memory alive because the main concern of the human rights groups is the future. In order to have a future, we have a memory of the past.”³⁸³ The Jewish understanding of the memory and past becomes important in the reconstitution of the present.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid., 93.

³⁸³ Ibid.

By telling the story of their cousins, the Epelbaums place their disappeared kin into the present. The cousins are called upon to account for the present and future relations between those affected by the dictatorship and those who exist beyond the parameters of victimhood in understanding the significance of the disappeared.

Epelbaum's comments on her Judaism tell of the diasporic identity inherent in Jewish Argentine identity. On attending a conference in Israel, she stated:

It was wonderful. We had the opportunity to listen to the problems of Jewish women in many countries. These are not just the problems of Jewish women because the problems of all women are the same. So it was interesting to hear about the situations of women in different countries and to discover the common links and purposes.³⁸⁴

She noted that the women's conference went to the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Shamir, and said, "We came united. We said to him: do not divide us."³⁸⁵ She touched on universalist notions of human suffering, saying that the Israeli women and Palestinian women "all have the same pain. All human beings. All mothers have the same pain, suffer the same sorrows. So what we need is tolerance, acceptance of each others' ways of living."³⁸⁶ In her concluding remark in this interview, she says "as we say- blood is always red."³⁸⁷

Epelbaum's final remarks on her Judaism detail how her diasporic identity shaped her activism and experience of herself as a victim. Epelbaum notes how the Jewish community can be divided by the state of Israeli politics in a direct reference to Yitzhak Shamir. She also expands notions of the kinship between Jews when she states, "all women are the same." Though this can be interpreted as problematic, as not all women are the "same", it does touch upon the need to expand concepts of

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 94.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

human suffering beyond that of biological kinship within the Argentine framework of human rights groups.

Conclusion

This thesis outlined the work of the Jewish activists in creating and promoting the Argentine National Gene Bank and the Argentine Anthropologic Forensic Team. As members of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Renée Epelbaum and Rosa Roisinblit used the genetics projects to reclaim their grandchildren stolen from their children and identify the remains of the Jewish disappeared. The grandmothers work through nationalist, family-centric models that work to both reclaim the social identity of the disappeared through their kin and indict those guilty for crimes against humanity.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the work of the Grandmothers revolutionized the use of genetics and forensic anthropology in applying them to prove human rights violations. In identifying the children of the disappeared, these genetic institutions created a social and legal paradigm that valued biological identity over the adoptive family's social identity. In these paradigms, the establishment of the biological identity of the various forms of disappeared returns the disappeared to the social and political communities from which they had been deliberately and violently disassociated. I argued that the disappeared's re-introduction into society disrupts the work of the anti-Semitic armed forces to homogenize and Christianize Argentine society by means of genocide.

The cases of the Epelbaum and the Roisinblit families serve as examples of the Jewish activists working in an anti-Semitic, nationalist environment to advance the applications of science to the broader nation. By reclaiming the identities of their biological kinship, and taking the place of their disappeared family members, Rosa

and Renée reconstructed the biological family taken away from them by state violence.

Rosa Roisinblit's case demonstrates her role as a Jewish Argentine in working in a nationalistic project aimed at identifying cases of human rights violations. In searching for and locating her stolen grandchild, Rosa exemplifies the work of Jewish activists, turning her story into a broader narrative of an Argentine Jewish community's fight for human rights. The reclamation of her grandchild not only signifies the restitution of her biological kin following their politically incentivized death, it also means shaping her Jewish community's diasporic narrative in Argentina to include Guillermo as a victim of anti-Semitic, nationalistic terror.

Renée Epelbaum's case exemplifies how the work of the EAAF recovers the social identities of the anonymous remains of the disappeared. The forensic anthropology team restored the Jewish identity of Renee's disappeared children through the identification and subsequent reburial of her daughter. Unfortunately, Renée died before the EAAF identified the remains of her children. However, the constant reference to her Jewish identity in her activism demonstrates the convergence of social and religious identity in human rights work in Argentina. In referencing her Judaism often and as an advocate to establish the right to identity as a human right, Renée emphasized the role of history and memory in the right to one's biological identity. Her advocacy and constant perseverance to establish the EAAF resulted in the identification of Lila's remains.

Lila, Claudio, and Mauricio Epelbaum's experience as Jewish activists in explicitly Argentine militant groups delineates the broader narrative of Jewish youth

as activists in a nationalist-centric narrative. By bringing up the history of their activist cousins murdered by state powers to younger generations, and the reburial of Lila in *La Tablada* Cemetery, the EAAF contributes to the collective memory in the Jewish Argentine community in remembering the trauma of state terror and re-established normative Jewish memorialization.

The use of biological identity to reconstitute social identity effectively disrupts established social communities. The bioethical problems of using genetic research in identifying the children of the disappeared emerge in the legal and social processes following identification. The advancement of genetic information has made the identification of children of the disappeared possible. However, both socially removing people from families that raised them and reinstating them to biological families, using this information to indict the adoptive families for crimes against humanity, and exhuming the graves of the disappeared to determine their biological identities, all illustrate the uncharted social consequences of valorization of biological identity as a means of restituting lost loved ones. From the Grandmothers perspective, the consequences are justified, owing to the fact that the original social disruption occurred as a violation of human rights. This restructuring of biological identity as a “human right” invalidates the social communities that come to raise the children of the disappeared. Occasionally, the Grandmothers are able to coordinate with the adoptive families in raising the biological children, but the process remains chaotic and traumatic for the descendants of the disappeared as they become disassociated with their established social communities and newly associated with their biological kin.

The innovative genetic techniques created to undo the work of extremist nationalist violence have ethical flaws in their application. The Argentine courts now mandate the forced blood extraction of those suspected of being a descendant of the disappeared. The Argentine court's decision to uphold the right of the state in obtaining biological information defies the privacy of individuals immediately affected by the knowledge of the genetic information, continuing notions of governance as outlined by Foucault's biopolitics. As indicated in Guillermo Roisinblit's three year reluctance to provide a blood sample, and in the Argentine's court decision to mandate blood samples, the state's biopolitical responsibility to own its citizens' biological information opposes the biological privacy of the individual. Sosa's argument about the inherent biological essentialism of the human rights community to completely undermine the work of the dictatorship becomes apparent in the case of the Noble siblings, who, knowing that they are most likely the children of the disappeared but refuse to give genetic information to the courts, want to be recognized as victims "as part of a domestic realm suddenly engendered by violence."³⁸⁸

Though ethically challenging, the scientific advancements championed by the Mothers and Grandmothers have had broader use in helping rehabilitate traumatized communities. The collective Jewish community, already undermined by nationalist tendencies, reclaims the children of the disappeared in order to situate their community within Argentine society's narrative of state violence. Renée Epelbaum and Rosa Roisinblit's work in creating the BNDG and EAAF reshaped notions of

³⁸⁸ Sosa, 81.

identity to rehabilitate their families, the Jewish community, and the Argentine community at large.

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