



THE POST-DICTATORSHIP  
GENERATION IN ARGENTINA,  
CHILE, AND URUGUAY

Collective Memory and Cultural Production



*Ana Ros*



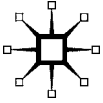
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palgrave  
macmillan



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URUGUAY

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2012 978-1-349-29880-8

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First published in 2012 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®  
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-29880-8 ISBN 978-1-137-03978-1 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137039781

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ros, Ana, 1976–

The post-dictatorship generation in Argentina, Chile, and

Uruguay : collective memory and cultural production / Ana Ros.

pages cm

Summary: "Southern Cone post-dictatorship generations reshape the collective  
memory of the dictatorial past through political activism and forms of artistic  
expression (cinema, literature, comics and photography). The author situates  
their work at the intersection of the individual and the collective: it is enabled  
by changes in the political context and can have a profound impact on the  
collective level. At the same time, these projects help artists and activists work  
through traumatic events individually. The first part of the book focuses on  
Argentina, where this generation's public interventions have broadened social  
involvement in remembering the past and encouraged learning from it for the  
sake of the present. In the second part, the author compares the exemplary  
achievements in Argentina with Chile and Uruguay, where political conditions  
are less conducive to genuine debate." — Provided by publisher.

1. Collective memory—Argentina. 2. Argentina—History—Dirty War,

1976–1983. 3. Collective memory—Chile.

4. Chile—History—1973–1988. 5. Collective memory—Uruguay.

6. Uruguay—History—1973–1985. I. Title.

F2849.2.R663 2012

982.06'4—dc23

2011049335

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Integra Software Services

First edition: June 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Für Jakob, in Liebe.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the support I have received throughout this project. Many of the ideas emerged in conversations with Jakob Feinig, who also helped find the best way of expressing them and supported me constantly throughout this process. Since I started exploring transmission and the post-dictatorship generation, my sister Ofelia Ros has been a key interlocutor. She was also a great help in defining the structure of this book. I much appreciate Mariana Grajales-Block's editorial comments on the manuscript, as well as her translation of texts published in Spanish. I benefited greatly from Federico Pous's feedback on the part about Argentina and Daniel Noemi Voionmaa's on the chapter about Chile. The final responsibility is, of course, mine. I want to thank my mother, Liliana, for sharing her memories with me, which has not always been easy, but helped me better understand the questions and concerns that drive my research in the context of my own story.

I especially thank the writers and filmmakers who kindly answered my questions about their work and sent me their books and films: Cristián Leighton, Lupe Pérez García, Natalia Bruschtein, Alejandra Almirón, Andrés Habegger, Matías Bergara, and Virginia Croatto. Equally important were the stimulating discussions with colleagues from different departments across the humanities and social sciences at SUNY-Binghamton during my tenure of the Institute for the Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) fellowship. Without the teaching releases enabled by IASH and the Dean's Research Semester Award at SUNY-Binghamton, I would not have been able to complete this project in a timely fashion. I am grateful to the Department of Romance Languages for supporting my application to these grants, and to Miranda Rodway, my teaching assistant, whose diligence enabled me to focus on the manuscript during the final months. Many thanks to Laurenz Feinig for his assistance in preparing the digital screenshot for the art cover. I also thank the Palgrave Macmillan editors for their confidence in my project, and the personnel who assisted me throughout the production process.

I want to thank Robert Redfern-West, editorial director of Academica Press, for granting me permission to use material from the book chapter “Young Argentine Filmmakers: Remembering the Past in Times of Crisis,” published in *Latin American Studies: Critique of Contemporary Cinema, Literatures, Politics, and Revolution*, edited by Dr. David Gallagher. I also want to express my gratitude to Dr. Ángel Esteban, editor of *Letral. Revista electrónica de estudios transatlánticos de literatura*, who granted me permission to use material from the article “¿Cómo heredar la militancia política del 60 y 70? Reflexiones en torno a tres cuentos sobre/de la generación de posdictadura en el Río de la Plata.”

## INTRODUCTION



### WHY WRITE ABOUT THE POST-DICTATORSHIP GENERATION?

This generation, to which I belong, inherited a painful past that also contains the promises of social change. The last wave of Southern Cone dictatorships (mid-1970s to late 1980s) was an attempt to bring to an end a period of great politicisation that threatened economic, political, and military elites as well as U.S. hegemony in the region. The years of brutal repression deeply harmed societies and destroyed political projects, social bonds, and individual lives. The horror survivors had been subject to and conveyed to society at large was crucial to eliminating solidary and anti-establishment identities (Feierstein 2007). The military primarily targeted different kinds of political organisations: armed and unarmed movements but also the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile and the supporters and sympathisers of such groups.

For decades, officers from the region had trained in French and U.S. institutions to fight their own citizenry, understood as potential “internal enemies.”<sup>1</sup> The Buenos Aires Chief of Police, Camps, “prided himself for synthesising both [the U.S. and French] perspectives, and, in the process, creating [a] unique brand of repression” (Arditti 1999, 11). The repression was coordinated between the countries through Operation Condor, a project facilitated by the United States through the Chilean intelligence agency CNI (Roniger 2010, 31). The military or paramilitary forces and police personnel (*repressores* in Spanish) organised a regime of terror through systematic abduction, torture, rape, and murder. The practice of disappearing

prisoners was a defining characteristic of the repression: after individuals were abducted, they were taken to a clandestine detention centre—of which there were hundreds throughout the region—and cut off from communication with the outside world. Many of them were sedated and thrown alive from planes into the sea or the Río de la Plata while others were killed and buried in unmarked graves. Because their relatives were denied any information about their death or the location of their remains, these persons are referred to as *desaparecidos* (the “disappeared”). For those who remain behind, the loss of a loved one without a death confirmation is a catastrophe of meaning, as Gabriel Gatti (2008) observes. Disappearance defies comprehension, as it defies language: the armed forces turned the adjective *desaparecido* into a noun.

The disappeared women and men had parents, siblings, daughters and sons, spouses, friends, and fellow activists for whom disappearance was a tragic event that transformed their lives and confined them to the condition of victims. They responded to this condition by organising and demanding truth about and justice for the human rights violations. After the dictatorships, the governments of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay responded to these demands in different ways in a context still marked by the presence of the military in public life. The dynamics between these three actors—human rights associations, the governments, and armed forces—laid the basis for the subsequent development of collective memory in the three countries.

In this book, I reflect upon the ways in which the post-dictatorship generations in the Southern Cone have reshaped the collective memory of regimes and revolutionary projects through activism and different forms of artistic expression: cinema, literature, comics, and photography. Who are the members of this generation, and why write a book about them? My biography can provide the beginning of an answer.

I was born in Uruguay in 1976, the third year of the dictatorships in both my home country and in Chile, and the year of the military coup in Argentina. Being a child during those years meant taking part in a cultural project created by the dictatorship, which shaped not only the formal institutions of schooling but also our leisure readings (Guitelman 2006). However, the earliest events that stand out in my memory are connected to the first democratic elections in 1985. One of the televised campaign ads featured the image of a political prisoner who was carried away by soldiers. They held him by his arms and legs as he formed a “V” with his fingers while a chorus sang:

“So certain things will not happen again.” My sister and I did not know or fully understand the meaning of the ad, but reenacted it with a friend, smaller and lighter than us, around the house. I also remember my excitement about a new girl at school whose family had just returned from exile in Holland, and my curiosity about the connection between politics—as I learned from the adults in my family, they were communists—and her having lived so far away until then. I remember another classmate in primary school, an introverted girl who surprised everyone by organising our first dances at her place. Many years later, she discovered that she was the biological daughter of Argentinean activists. The military had murdered her father and “disappeared” her mother in Uruguay a month after she gave birth. In the same classroom, there were sons and daughters of military officers who had served during the dictatorship and were later denounced for their involvement in torture.

Although the past, knowingly or unknowingly, impacted our everyday lives at many levels, the years of military repression, socialist projects, and guerrilla movements were not part of the high school and college curricula. When we were fourteen, my mother made us watch *La noche de los lápices* (Olivera 1986), a film about Argentinean high school students who mobilised to demand discounted bus tickets. They were abducted, tortured, and raped, and only one of them survived to testify. Although this film was meant to uncover the horrors of the repression, my mother used it to teach us about the dangers of being politically engaged. When, some years later, I attempted to bring up the dictatorship, she reacted very emotionally, and conversations quickly became fights.

For a long time, I therefore preferred to remain silent about the dictatorship, a subject that I perceived as unnecessarily polarising on the one hand, and the exclusive domain of the activists’ generation and victims’ families on the other. Years later, having left the country and about midway through my PhD, I began to understand that the crimes perpetrated by the military, and the way society dealt with them, had shaped my generation. The awkward silence about the armed movements, the survivors’ horrifying testimonies, and the governments’ evasive attitude toward the armed forces’ crimes moulded and constrained our ways of thinking and interacting. I realised that it was time to encounter the past.

This encounter took the form of a conversation with other members of my generation, primarily through their courageous and creative public interventions. In turn, they are engaged in a rich conversation with their parents’ generation, in which activism and



repression are examined in such a way that relations between generations, social classes, men and women emerge in a new light. These encounters with the past transformed our ways of understanding and being in the present. Through this book, I invite the reader to participate in these encounters.

\* \* \*

The term “post-dictatorship generation” refers to those who grew up under military regimes. In Chile, where the dictatorship lasted seventeen years, more than one age group fits this definition. The earliest-born remember the dictatorship more clearly than their Argentinean and Uruguayan counterparts, who were small children at the end of the regime. The political situation affected all of them, regardless of their degree of understanding of current events, and regardless of their family’s relation to politics. While the children of so-called bystanders grew up in an environment of fear, distrust, and isolation, the children of activist parents faced several possibilities: some went underground during their early childhood, others went into exile or were taken to prison with the surviving parent. If they became orphans, some were raised by relatives or adopted by families that ignored their origins. Still others were “appropriated,” raised by foster parents linked to the military who claimed to be their biological families, as was my classmate mentioned above.<sup>2</sup>

For these children’s parents, the dictatorship is related to traumatic memories they were unable to evoke or painful experiences they prefer not to revisit. Additionally, in the public sphere, representatives of the armed forces, the government, and the human rights associations defended conflicting narratives about the meaning of the dictatorial repression. In lieu of a historicised perspective and an analysis of different actors’ involvement, the post-dictatorship generation had to make do with the precept of remembering the military crimes in order to “never again” live through this kind of horror. This caused a state of confusion: How were such atrocities between the groups and individuals around them possible? How was one to prevent crimes committed by armed forces supposed to protect the collectivity? How was one to conceive of positive change after so many were tortured and murdered for wanting a better world? The present appeared enigmatic, and the future became a minefield. As a consequence, many members of the post-dictatorship generation became indifferent and were unable to relate their anger and frustration about the present to a conflictive past that also held the key to social change.<sup>3</sup>

Conversely, a concern for the present led others to investigate the past and contribute to the public debate about it. For them, politics today, the conflicts of yesterday, and the struggles about collective memory are not separable. Through activism, films, and literary texts, they raise fundamental questions and address unexplored aspects of the past, thereby sparking a lively debate. I explore these contributions throughout the chapters of this book.

In Part I, “Pushing the Envelope: Memory Formation in Argentina,” I analyse collective memory at the intersection of cultural production, generational change, and transitional justice. In Chapter 1, I reconstruct its development from the beginning of the dictatorship to the “boom of memory” (1995–2003), the period that witnessed the emergence of the post-dictatorship generation in the struggles about the meaning of the past. The “boom of memory” (Cerruti 2001, Lvovich and Bisquert 2008, Crenzel 2010) was followed not by a bust, but by a revitalisation and broadening of collective memory, analysed in the remainder of Part I.

In Chapters 2 to 5, I explore the slow unfolding of what I call “self-aware memory” in which the post-dictatorship generation played an important role. This period is characterised by an increasing awareness that memory is a construction informed by specific needs and produces specific effects. Memory is no longer seen as static, but as an open-ended and inclusive process that can be used to orient action in the present. Members of the post-dictatorship generation start questioning established institutionalised narratives. They explore subjects typically left aside, such as left-wing political violence and the role of “bystanders”—those who thought of themselves (and were often thought of) as mere spectators of a conflict.

Transitional justice, cultural production, and generational change are mutually enabling processes. Argentina was the first and only country in the region to prosecute the military juntas soon after their rule ended. Despite subsequent setbacks, this created an environment favourable to an intense cultural production that helped advance the collective elaboration of a painful past. Argentina is therefore an ideal starting point for establishing comparisons with Chile and Uruguay, countries in which the continuities with the military regime were much stronger, and advances in transitional justice more limited. Unlike in Argentina, where the junta fell in the wake of the catastrophic Falklands War, in Uruguay and Chile the very architects of the repression negotiated the terms of the transition with the future political elite. In these countries, an open debate about the violent past within and between groups and generations was more difficult. I hope

that this cross-national comparison can feed into the conversation about the past in Chile and Uruguay.

In Chile, the post-dictatorship generation has recently started to express itself publicly through documentaries and feature films, together with the surviving activists who have begun to elaborate their traumatic experiences. Having forged its forms of subjectivity and its communities in the struggles against the dictatorship, the younger generation is also concerned with reencountering each other and reinventing themselves in a liberal democratic society. In Uruguay, finally, the post-dictatorship generation has very limited public visibility. Issues related to the dictatorship remain largely unexplored by both the military and the left-wing parties, therefore, the transmission of the past to the younger generations is even more challenging. Typically, the latter feel neither entitled nor concerned enough to offer their perspective.

This book invites the reader to address the question of the “future of the past” at a unique moment in the history of the Southern Cone. Many towering figures related to the dictatorial past have recently passed away—Néstor Kirchner and Raúl Alfonsín in Argentina, Sola Sierra and Cardinal Raúl Silva in Chile, and María Ester Gatti in Uruguay—which makes the question of intergenerational relations more urgent. In addition, Argentina has recently condemned twelve of the most infamous torturers to prison for life; in Chile, perpetrators continue to be prosecuted and sentenced; and in Uruguay, the Caducity Law was abrogated as this book goes to print. As I will point out in greater detail in the conclusion, these developments should not be seen as the end of a process but, on the contrary, as points of departure for renewed efforts to mobilise the painful past for the creation of a more just present and future.

Throughout the book, I analyse texts and audiovisual material from Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay in their historical context. My study is informed by a rich theoretical literature on collective memory, outlined in the next section.

### COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

Since Maurice Halbwachs’s pioneering reflections (1992), the concept of collective memory has been marked by the tension between the individual and the social dimension (Olick 1999). Drawing on this debate, the Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin argues that the social context and the individual are interwoven (2003). On the

one hand, she agrees with Paul Ricœur (1999) that the individual's memories, based on unique life experiences as well as on the ability to retrieve them, constitute our identity and cannot be transferred. On the other hand, she stresses that these individual capacities are always "embedded in networks of social relations, groups, institutions, and cultures" (Jelin 2003, 10). We never remember in isolation; the act of remembering is always social in character.

However, this does not necessarily mean that collective memory is a reality shared by a society as a whole. Halbwachs argues that the narratives of specific groups (classes, families, religions) provide meaning to personal recollections. Groups assign meaning to the past through narratives in light of present circumstances and future goals, promoting them through "vehicles for memory" such as books, museums, monuments, films, and history books" (Jelin 2003, 25). Actors relate to the past in different ways, partly because they have lived through dissimilar experiences, and partly because they have specific and often conflicting interests. The group narrative supported by the most powerful institutions, especially those of the state, shapes the collective present and future according to the interests of one group and against the interests of the other groups. For instance, in Chile, the transitional government did not to prosecute the military's human rights violations, thereby creating a context of impunity at the expense of victims' interests. The political and legal response to the dictatorial crimes shapes ways of remembering.

As long as the government has not acknowledged their suffering and granted reparation, victims' relatives typically multiply their efforts to keep the *desaparecidos* present in the public sphere, efforts that can be understood through Todorov's concept of "literal memory" (Jelin 2003, 35). This concept refers to a way of remembering that focuses on recovering and preserving the painful event in detail, emphasising the uniqueness of the victims and the crimes. The act of remembering appears nontransferable: only those who suffered personally can remember and assign meaning to the past, which implies forms of memory focused on the victims and their families. The promoters of this memory interact with society at large by insisting on the moral duty to remember. This insistence often intensifies in relation to the resistance they encounter.

Once this group has made significant advances toward societal and governmental recognition, literal memory can give way to "exemplary memory." Without denying its singularity or minimising it, the "exemplary" way of remembering uses the painful event as a model to understand new situations with different actors and components

and allows us to draw lessons from the past to help orient our actions in the present. For instance, exemplary memory enables us to “take advantage of the lessons from the injustices suffered to fight against those happening nowadays” (Todorov 2000, 31).

However, this kind of thinking implies a certain emotional distance from the past, often difficult to achieve for those whose lives have been transformed by a traumatic event. In order to learn from an event, it is necessary to see it as something completed and no longer active in the present. This relationship with the past requires working through trauma at the individual level: the subject accepts and interprets the repressed elements—linked to intolerable experiences—that intrude into the present as a “presence without agency” in the form of unintelligible silences, voids, compulsions, and symptoms that control the subject’s affective world (Jelin 2003, 5). In an environment in which the victims’ memory has not been acknowledged, working through trauma can be understood as a betrayal of the dead and a political defeat. Antonius Robben notes that groups and individuals “cannot mourn their losses when others deny that those losses took place. The contest of memory denies conflicting parties sufficient room to work through their traumas and hinders them from gradually standing back from the past and proceeding from testimony to historical interpretation and from re-experience to commemoration” (Robben 2005, 127).

The opposite of working through is acting out trauma, expressed in recurring symptoms and ritualised reiteration. In a hostile environment for trauma elaboration, acting out expressions can become a basis for identity and generate a “fixation with and in the past accompanied by fear and resistance regarding change” (Jelin 2003, 51). When working through trauma is experienced as a betrayal, repetition is experienced as a way of resisting closure and forgetting, perpetuating the denunciation of the painful event. This complicates the process of mourning, a gradual freeing of the psychic energy focused on the lost object in order to reconnect with the present and the satisfaction of being alive.

Individuals do not experience acting out and working through as successive stages but as forces in tension. At the collective level, this translates into a similar tension between literal and exemplary remembering, two forms of memory with different social functions. The first is instrumental in revealing the crimes and fighting for truth and justice; once those goals become tangible, the second enables exploring other aspects of the past that are relevant to a broader range

of present concerns, thereby keeping the past central to the public sphere. As Pilar Calveiro states,

The exact repetition of the same narrative, without variation, throughout time, instead of representing its victory might represent its defeat. On the one hand, because all repetition ends up “drying” the narratives and the ears that listen to it; on the other hand, because memory is a recreation of the past from within the present circumstances and in the act of pondering a future project.

(Calveiro 2005, 11, my translation<sup>4</sup>)

Failure to connect a painful past experience to the present and to articulate it in such a way that others can understand and respond to it often results in collective forgetting. Exemplary memory, conversely, has the potential to expand the circle of individuals and groups concerned with the past. The tension between exemplary and literal memory is deeply connected to the tension between two kinds of intergenerational transmission: I distinguish between active transmission, on the one hand, and passive transmission, on the other.

The former is a process that involves survivors willing and able to tell their story and listeners capable of connecting this legacy to a new context, thus ensuring continuity between generations. As heirs, we do not choose a heritage, but, in Derrida’s words, our heritage “violently elects” us, and we must answer to a “double injunction”: on the one hand, to know and reaffirm what came before us, and choose to keep it alive; on the other hand, to behave freely in relation to the past, which implies interpreting, assessing, and critically selecting what to continue and what to abandon. To receive yet to select, to accept but to reinterpret—these are the contradictions implied in the act of inheriting: “the best way to be faithful to a heritage is to be unfaithful, that is, not to accept it literally, as a totality, but rather to catch it at fault to identify its dogmatic moment” (Derrida 2004, 2–4).

From the perspective of the older generation, this process involves an intergenerational expansion of the “we” of memory—that is, opening the past to those who did not experience it personally, expecting them to reinterpret what they have received and elaborate a critical response. Transmitting means accepting the loss of an “original object”—that is, a time that is past and cannot be retrieved exactly as it was—and accepting that changes will occur in the passage from one actor to the other (Hassoun 1996, 149).

Active transmission is fundamental in the production of exemplary memory. Dominant interpretations of the past can be re-signified as a

result of changes in a country's political context (for example, public acknowledgment and prosecution of military crimes), but the emergence of actors from a new generation is often decisive in establishing new meanings. Their questions and observations contribute to the emergence of a more complex image of the past that allows them and others to draw lessons for the sake of the present.

If active transmission is a dialogic process, one might ask what happens when, as a consequence of trauma, survivors cannot recall or find words to express their experiences; when instead of stories there are silences, voids, and symptoms. In these cases, the effects of the violent past seep into everyday life through, for instance, irrational fears, nostalgia, the sensation of always being at fault, enigmatic and contradictory perspectives on public matters, distrust, and isolation. Although they do not explain what happened, they communicate suffering. Rabinovich observes that individuals more intensely pass on the legacies they are unaware of and want to exclude than those they would like to be remembered for (2008, 92). I call this process passive transmission.

These symptomatic behaviours in the adult world impacted the post-dictatorship generation at many levels: "It is not necessary to have lived through torture or genocide to carry the memory of the horror inside you . . . . These silences [left by horror] produce intersubjective relations, go beyond individuals and do not need to be represented or explained in order to be transmitted" (Rabinovich 2008, 99). This indirect communication manifests itself in children's lives in more or less apparent ways: inexplicable habits and reactions such as never leaving the house without one's ID, feeling uneasy around police, or sensing apathy and confusion regarding one's own life and choices. In the absence of active transmission, the younger generation cannot relate to the past as heirs (seize, reinterpret, and own the past) and responds to it either with indifference or massive identification—two ways of failing to establish continuity. This book is about the struggle to create active forms of transmission and exemplary forms of remembering.

PART I



PUSHING THE ENVELOPE: MEMORY  
FORMATION IN ARGENTINA



## CHAPTER 1



# COLLECTIVE MEMORY FROM THE DICTATORSHIP TO THE PRESENT

As Jelin observes, “controversies over the meaning of the past surface at the very moment when events are taking place” (2003, 30). The Argentinean armed forces described the comprehensive set of policies implemented after the 1976 coup d’état as “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,” indicating that they aimed at transforming not only state institutions but also society as a whole. As Daniel Feierstein (2007) observes, the systematic repression sought to destroy the solidary bonds and anti-establishment ideas consolidated during the first government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946–1952).

When Perón became president, important sectors of the working class felt represented for the first time. Before finishing his second term, Perón was overthrown by a military uprising—the so-called *Revolución Libertadora* (1955)—that proscribed his party and banned all reference to him or his wife, Eva Duarte de Perón (known as *Evita*). After a brief semi-democratic interlude, the *Onganía* dictatorship (1966–1970) provoked passionate popular protests and the formation of numerous social movements propelled by a new generation of political actors. In this context, two guerrilla groups emerged: the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), which was mainly inspired by the Cuban revolution, and *Montoneros*, an organization that embodied left-wing Peronism. The latter counted on the return of Perón from exile to advance on the path to revolution, which contradicted the plans of Peronism’s orthodox wing.<sup>1</sup>

ERP and especially *Montoneros* grew considerably between 1970 and 1974, fighting at first the dictatorship, later the government of

Juan Domingo Perón, who favoured his right-wing followers at his return, and then his widow and successor Isabel Perón. In this period, both the armed forces and the paramilitary groups Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Triple A) and Comando Libertadores de América unleashed repressive violence against the left-wing urban guerrilla groups. Both ERP and Montoneros were already defeated militarily at the time of the 1976 coup (Tcach 2007, 99). According to Tcach, the coup and the ensuing years of repression were not necessary to fight the armed groups but aimed at implementing the above-mentioned “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional.” This process was intimately linked to the consolidation of a rentier-oriented, agricultural and livestock export model favourable to elite interests which was threatened by the Peronist and revolutionary aspirations (Feierstein 2008, 359). The armed forces sought to subjugate the entire society by simultaneously hinting at the horror inflicted to the prisoners and articulating a rationale for the repressive acts. For the military, leftist groups were corrupting the country with ideologies adverse to national values, and the dictatorship restored order, thereby saving the population from the Marxist threat. Since the “internal enemies” did not engage in traditional warfare, the military claimed, extraordinary measures were necessary—a “dirty war.”

Despite the guerrillas’ military defeat, the repression continued throughout the entire dictatorship period. Afraid that the population would be seduced by “subversive” ideas, the military created an environment of constant threat. In 1977, the governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, stated in an interview with the British newspaper *The Guardian*: “We will first eliminate the subversives, then their accomplices, later their supporters and finally those who are indifferent” (Mundo 2009). “Subversion” was defined very broadly: it included not only the armed and unarmed movements of the left, but also beliefs that seemed to question Christianity, private property, and the family, presented as traditional Argentine values. “Subversion” encompassed “all kinds of social confrontation,” including those not typically thought of as political, such as “the quarrel between children and parents, parents and grandparents” (General Videla, quoted in Lvovich 2008, 17). A daily TV and radio show posed questions such as “How have you raised your kids?” and “Do you know what your kids are doing, *right now?*” suggesting that political activism was the result of parental irresponsibility (Feitlowitz 1998, 37).

The forced disappearances, mentioned in the introduction, were key in this attempt to rule through terror: not knowing what

happened to those who had vanished made others imagine the most unbearable fate and, paralyzed in fear, desist from political action and denunciation (García Castro 2001, 198). The dictator J. Rafael Videla introduced the term *desaparecidos* during a press conference in response to the constant inquiries of the mothers of the *desaparecidos*: “It is a mystery, a *desaparecido*, a nonentity, it is not here: they are neither dead nor alive, they disappeared” (quoted in Böhmer 2009, 90). In response to this state of terror, most so-called bystanders internalized the logic of repression and withdrew into the private sphere. The popular expression “there must be a reason,” often invoked by onlookers when they learned about or witnessed the military’s violence, reflects the degree to which many actors disconnected from politics and from each other as a result of state terror (Feitlowitz 1998, 114). However, the relatives of the *desaparecidos* organized quickly. For them, repression was not justifiable, but a series of intolerable acts of violence.

Before the end of the regime, the junta passed the “Law of National Pacification,” which amnestied the “excesses” of the repression. In addition, before passing the law, they released the “Final Document of the Military Junta on the War Against Subversion and Terrorism” (1983), an attempt to frame its public understanding and the acts it amnestied. This document underlined that a constitutional government had demanded the armed forces’ intervention through a legal act, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized the “dirty war,” and that the human rights violations were “acts of service to the nation.” The document also denied the existence of clandestine detention centres and the *desaparecidos*: it claimed that the latter had either died in combat, gone into exile, or were living underground. Finally, it announced (and warned) that only God and History were to act as Supreme Court for the military’s acts (Lefranc and Talens 2004, Lvovich and Bisquert 2008). This “Final Document,” however, did not achieve the desired effect and rallies against the law took place in the final days of the dictatorship. When the public sphere reopened after the fall of the junta, the human rights associations<sup>2</sup> led by the mothers of the *desaparecidos* (Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) denounced the crimes of the armed forces, asked for their children’s return, and demanded punishment (“Alive they took them, alive we want them back!” and “Truth and Justice!”).

When the first democratically elected president, Raúl Alfonsín (1983–1989), assumed office, he repealed the “Pacification Law” and signed two decrees committing for trial both the seven main leaders of the urban guerrilla groups and the members of the first three military

juntas. Given the armed forces' rigidly hierarchical structure, he considered that the juntas were ultimately responsible for the repression during the dictatorship. As Crenzel (2011) points out, the narrative implicit in Alfonsín's decrees laid the basis for the development of the "two demons" theory, which blames the tragic events on the leaders of the two groups and presents society as a passive victim of their violence, foreign to their extremist ideologies. Furthermore, since Alfonsín signed first the decree about the guerrilla leaders, they appeared as the "instigator demon" (Feierstein 2008, 338).

This perspective is also put forth in the prologue of *Nunca más* ("Never Again" 1984), the shocking and influential report produced by the *Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP), formed at the initiative of Alfonsín's government. The commission was asked to investigate the fate of the *desaparecidos* and heard thousands of testimonies on abduction, torture, and executions from survivors' and victims' families. The prologue condemned political violence regardless of its ideology: "During the 1970s, Argentina was torn by terror from both the extreme right and the far left" (*Nunca más* 1984).<sup>3</sup>

Highly influenced by the debate that accompanied the presentation of the report on TV, some organizations within the human rights movement rejected this perspective and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo also criticized that the report did not include a complete list of military personnel involved in human rights violations (Crenzel 2011, 57–64). The report includes the names of those *represores* mentioned in the testimonies received by the commission, but the full list of alleged perpetrators derived from the investigation, was handed only to the president, . Once the victims' testimonies about torture and their detailed descriptions of the clandestine centres had disproved the military's claims in the "Final Document," they accused the CONADEP of being left-wing sympathizers and as seeking revenge because their families had suffered in the "dirty war" (Crenzel 2011).

During the 1985 trial of the military juntas, similar tensions emerged. On the one hand, although Argentina became the only country on the continent to convict the top military leadership in the context of transitional justice, this was not sufficient for the human rights movement. Firstly, they considered that all the perpetrators, regardless of their rank, needed to be put to trial. Secondly, they were disappointed by the judges' verdicts: a mere five of the nine defendants were convicted and only two of them sent to prison for life, while the other three were to serve between four and seventeen years (Lefranc and Talens 2004). On the other hand, the armed

forces disapproved of this trial and the increasing number of charges now presented against perpetrators. In an attempt to maintain control over the situation, Congress passed two laws: the “Full Stop Law” (1986), which established a sixty-day limit for initiating new trials against alleged perpetrators, and the “Due Obedience Law” (1987), which exonerated of any charges those below the rank of colonel. Despite these laws, the military continued to stage a series of uprisings demanding the immediate termination of all trials. The human rights associations were also frustrated with the two laws, which they referred to as “forgiveness laws.”

Although these laws were perceived as a step backwards by the latter, the testimonies gathered in the *Nunca más* and offered during the trial of the military juntas had uncovered an incontestable truth: there had not been a war but a systematic plan of extermination of those considered political enemies. A central part of this plan, the *desaparecidos* became highly visible and turned into the emblem of the human rights movement. However, these achievements were realized at the expense of the *desaparecidos*’ political identity. In order to prevent the defenders of the dictatorship from justifying the repression as a legitimate response to political violence, both the trial of the military juntas and the *Nunca más* depoliticized the image of the *desaparecidos*, detaching them from the revolutionary project that had been so crucial for their generation.<sup>4</sup>

In the trial of the military juntas, the victims’ political activities were considered irrelevant for the purpose of establishing the truth about the military’s crimes, and were therefore avoided when witnesses took the stand. Similarly, the *Nunca más* offered general information about the *desaparecidos* but silenced their political commitment, especially if it involved armed struggle. In order to avoid dealing with the guerrilla fighters, the report excluded them from the purview of its inquiry, namely, what happened at clandestine detention centres. According to the report, most of them had committed suicide or died in combat, and were therefore not detained. From this perspective, most victims of the repression were “innocent” of the main “crime” targeted by the armed forces: participating in politics. Named by Crenzel (2011) the “humanitarian narrative,” this interpretation of the past helped convict military perpetrators, a major concern at the end of the regime, but did not help re-establish the relations the repression sought to eradicate (inspired by solidarity and rebelliousness).

For instance, the humanitarian narrative did not promote a clear defence of activism in the face of repression; on the contrary,

political involvement became a taboo topic. Often, the families of the *desaparecidos* were offended when asked if the victim had been politically active or belonged to an armed organization (Bonaldi 2006, 161). Hence, the *desaparecidos* entered collective memory primarily as “innocent victims” different from, and somehow more victimized than, the “activist victims” (Calveiro 2004, 136). In addition to insinuating a possible justification of repression, this emphasis on the *desaparecidos* created a hierarchy in detriment of survivors of clandestine detention centres. A living reminder of their *compañeros*’ (fellow activists’) political involvement, survivors’ voices were delegitimized for not having the same moral authority than the disappeared victims (Feierstein 2008, 288–289). Also, survivors had to bear the suspicion of having collaborated with the perpetrators in order to save themselves, which contributed to their ostracism.

This representation of the horror prevented survivors from offering a reflection on their revolutionary project, essential for re-establishing oppositional politics, and from articulating the effect repression had on them, essential for understanding how it affected the society at large. As Feierstein observes, survivors “were turned into talking machines in charge of testifying about the horror and required to remain silent about their previous political activity, or about their feelings after being liberated” (2008, 356–357). Perhaps as a result of the extremely difficult circumstances they were dealing with (traumatic experiences, the loss of beloved ones, guilt for having survived, the failure of a life project, and the rejection of others), survivors adjusted their words to the humanitarian narrative. They typically presented their dead and disappeared *compañeros*, as heroes of a “sacralized past that, mystified, becomes untouchable, omitting, once again, their commitment to political change” (Kaufman 2006, 68).

According to Feierstein (2007), by demanding the recognition of depoliticized victims and blaming two extremist “demons” for the atrocities, the public understanding of the military’s crimes became simplistic and incoherent. The media contributed to this process by presenting testimonies, exhumations, and forensic discoveries in a sensationalist way without addressing their political context, thereby creating what Feld has characterised as a “horror show” (2010, 27). This treatment of the past prevented an examination of the reasons behind the guerrilla’s and the military’s actions from a historical perspective: it was as if anti-establishment collective practices or critical attitudes had never before existed in Argentina, when suddenly a group of lunatics decided to arm themselves, and a group of equally lunatic officers reacted by implementing a regime “capable of killing

anybody” (Feierstein 2007, 333). Cultural production in this period also failed to contextualize the repression. The films *La noche de los lápices* (Olivera 1986) and *La historia oficial* (Puenzo 1985) are informed by and inform this humanitarian narrative. As an example, Feierstein (2007) mentions that even the young 1970s activists in Olivera’s film talk and think according to the 1980s hegemonic representation of the repression, including the theory of the two demons, which does not reflect the actual perspectives of the youth a decade earlier.

Concurrently, the immediate centrality of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in the struggle for legal justice created the impression that the “ownership” of the memory of the *desaparecidos* was restricted to family members: only relatives could protest in their name since their loss made them, too, victims of state terrorism. For the families, this “ownership” was an obvious response to their pain—they could not but denounce what had happened to their loved ones. It was also the cornerstone of a community that, after years of public disregard during the dictatorship, finally had a voice. The families’ “ownership” produced two interconnected reactions: pity for the victims and their families, on the one hand, and passivity in relation to their cause, on the other. As Gatti underlines, the fact that relatives of the *desaparecidos* became the only authorized spokespersons was convenient for those, both inside and outside of the armed forces, who preferred the subject to remain in the private sphere (2008, 22). Paradoxically, although they had died for a collective project, the *desaparecidos* became central to the public sphere primarily through the suffering of the closest family members.

The increasing visibility of the *desaparecidos* in the public sphere was perceived as a threat by the armed forces and led to two additional uprisings in 1988. In 1990, the newly elected president Carlos S. Menem, anxious to end the conflict—“the military issue,” as he referred to it—granted pardons to the imprisoned guerrilla leaders and to a large group of military personnel prosecuted for human rights violations, including the officers already convicted in the trial of the military juntas. In Menem’s case, the interest in reconciliation was closely linked to the neoliberal turn he envisioned for the country, since political stability was key for attracting foreign investment (Lvovich and Bisquert 2008, 51–52). His neoliberal policies were a continuation of the economic system implemented under the dictatorship and the pardons an extension of the military crimes.

The pardons provoked massive popular demonstrations, but once the government had declared them irrevocable, the human rights

narrative entered a phase of stagnation, or “memory eclipse,” as Crenzel (2011) called it, intensified by the increasing trivialization of politics in the media. However, the pain and frustration had not subsided and behind the appearance of calm, the tension increased. As Jelin (2003) observes, collective reinterpretations of the past are facilitated by changes in the political context and the emergence of new generations ready to get involved in the memory struggles. Both were about to happen.

In 1995, only five years after Menem’s pardons, Adolfo Scilingo, a retired naval officer, broke the military’s “pact of silence,” a tacit agreement to abstain from publicly talking about the repression. In an interview with a journalist that was published in *El vuelo* (Verbitsky 1995), Scilingo acknowledged the abduction, torture, and murder of the *desaparecidos* and his own participation in the—until then denied—“flights of death.” Although his confession was not driven by remorse but by dissatisfaction with how promotions were handled between the navy and the government, it marked a turning point in the formation of collective memory. Other officers followed in his footsteps, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martín Balza, who presented self-criticism on behalf of the institution and accepted responsibility and apologized for the military’s crimes, no longer qualified as “excesses” or mere “mistakes.”

In parallel with these admissions, the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo presented charges against perpetrators for “appropriations”—abducting prisoners’ babies—a crime not included in the Due Obedience and Full Stop laws (see Chapter 2). They also initiated “Trials for Truth” on the basis of the right to truth and to mourning established by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Although they knew that the perpetrators on trial could not be convicted because of the “forgiveness laws” and Menem’s pardons, these trials further contributed to public acknowledgment of the victims’ families, maintained pressure on the military, and kept the officers in court, which could eventually lead to a reopening of the cases.

By this time, the sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* and survivors had come of age and understood their parents’ past as their own, and in need of being appropriated. This implied not only knowing and interpreting the national and family history from their perspective, but also taking a position on how to deal with the consequences of state terrorism in the present. The political changes described above inspired the emergence of the group H.I.J.O.S. (“Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence”), which immediately occupied a central place in the human rights movement



and in society at large. As we will see in the next chapter, this group recovered the political role of the *desaparecidos* and succeeded in raising awareness about the need for legal justice by outing unpunished perpetrators.

Scilingo's declarations, the military's *mea culpa*, the new possibilities of military prosecution, and the emergence of H.I.J.O.S. brought human rights back to the centre of the public sphere. The proliferation of acts of remembrance from 1995 to 2003 became known as the "boom of memory" (Jelin 2003, Lvovich 2008). The media engaged in reconstructing the repression through TV programs, and the *Nunca más* was reprinted. The twentieth commemoration of the coup (1996) attracted unions, political parties, neighbourhood associations, and artists concerned with the defence of civil rights and minorities.

The end of the millennium witnessed a revitalization of the struggle for human rights: in 1998, the junta member Emilio Massera was placed under protective custody for several instances of children appropriation. Monuments, commemorative plaques, and public archives were inaugurated throughout the country. The construction of the Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires along the Río de la Plata, a symbolic grave for the *desaparecidos*, and the monument to the victims of state terrorism were surrounded by an intense debate about how to remember the conflicts of the past. Moreover, the dictator Videla was prosecuted on charges of participation in Operation Condor. The massive attendance to the events organized for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the coup revealed growing popular support for truth and justice.

The 2001 institutional and economic crisis contributed to the intensification of the protests against the human rights violations of the past, seen as closely related to the suffering of Argentines at the beginning of the millennium, a sentiment expressed in the popular slogan "Yesterday disappeared, today excluded." Social exclusion and massive emigration seemed to confirm that, like the dictators, the current political class did not value Argentines' life and dignity. The crisis indicated the failure of the economic system established under the dictatorship and taken to an extreme by Menem's neoliberal policies in the 1990s. Its consequences—unemployment, poverty, and hunger—were understood as the very problems that the 1970s activists had been fighting against, linking the struggles of the past and the present. The relations of distrust and the isolation created by the repression were compatible with the neoliberal preoccupation with individual well-being but now the model's cracks started

to become visible and other forms of interaction appeared possible. In this context, the image of the *desaparecidos* as men and women fighting for social justice became more prominent.

This re-emergence of activism, in addition to the above-mentioned gestures of acknowledgment of the human rights violations, and the affirmation of the need for justice created a safer environment to start approaching 1970s activism, mostly obscured until then by the image of the “innocent victim.” In addition to the work of H.I.J.O.S., in the mid-1990s novels, films, testimonies, and academic studies started presenting victims of state terrorism also as activists with a political project. Some examples are *Cazadores de utopías* (Blaustein 1996), *Montoneros, una historia* (Di Tella 1998), *La voluntad. Una historia de la militancia revolucionaria en la Argentina* (Anguita and Caparrós 1998), and *Garage Olimpo* (Bechis 1999). Otero (2010) notes that these works, among others, contributed to the crisis of the humanitarian narrative.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, as Feierstein (2007) points out, already in the mid-1990s a group of former disappeared detainees had started to think about the detention centres outside the limits of the humanitarian narrative, as laboratories for the transformation of the whole society. They conceived of the dictatorship as an extreme manifestation of long-existing problems. Pilar Calveiro, herself a survivor, notes that the humanitarian narrative overlooked the structural character of political violence and its relation to class struggle: instead of a rupture, the coup should be understood as the outcome of a gradual substitution of politics with violence since the 1930s, and a weakening of democratic institutions since the 1955 coup (Calveiro 1998).

However, the crisis of the humanitarian narrative has not erased the human rights associations’ contributions to collective memory, but allows other perspectives to complement it. The view on the repression and the *desaparecidos* that they helped establish continues to be part of the discussion; it enters in dialogue with the new interpretations, sometimes staying in the background, sometimes resurfacing. I see memory formation as a nonlinear process in which actors build on previous contributions and revisit and reconfigure themes.

President Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) played an important role in unsettling the humanitarian narrative, which helped enable the slow unfolding of a complementary understanding of the past. Firstly, he vindicated the 1970s revolutionary project and the generation of activists, with which he identifies. Secondly, he tackled the military’s human rights violations. During his presidential campaign, he announced his intention to revoke the “forgiveness laws,” which happened soon after he took office. In 2003, he abolished the

non-extradition decree signed by his predecessor de la Rúa, which mandated the automatic denial of all extradition requests of military personnel. He also replaced top military officials and Supreme Court justices of the “automatic majority” (those who supported Menem’s pardons and economic policies). Furthermore, Kirchner’s condemnation of state terrorism included significant acts of symbolic reparation for the victims.<sup>6</sup> He asked that the portraits of the dictators Videla and Massera were taken down from the walls of the Military College. For the victims, the most significant act was perhaps the creation of a commemorative institution at the *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica del Armada* (ESMA), a former clandestine detention centre infamous for the cruelty of its torturers. This institution joined smaller *lugares de memoria* and inspired the creation of others.

According to Lvovich and Bisquert (2008), Kirchner’s effort to vindicate 1970s activism involved selectivity and mystification. By presenting his government as inheritor of *Juventud Peronista* and other 1970s groups, he overlooked that the revolutionary youth did not hold liberal democracy in high esteem (Lvovich and Bisquert 2008, 83). It seemed that the armed struggle had become the new taboo of memory. Similarly, the new prologue of the *Nunca más*, presented by Human Rights Secretary Eduardo Luis Duhalde on the thirtieth commemoration of the coup, refutes the symmetry between military and guerrilla violence, but it neither contextualizes the violence nor relates it to society at large. On the contrary, society appears as unified and untiringly demanding truth and justice since the end of the dictatorship, omitting the existence of groups with different agendas, such as Familiares de Muertos por la Subversion (FAMUS), the periods of indifference toward the military’s crimes, and the electoral successes of high-ranking figures of the dictatorship as provincial governors and majors (Lvovich and Bisquert 2008, 92).

Nestor Kirchner’s wife and successor Cristina Fernández de Kirchner continued his work. Since 2009, trials have taken place throughout the country on an unprecedented scale, organized in cases and “mega-cases” for each detention centre or repressive event. In March 2011, judges started investigating civilian collaboration with and instigation of military crimes, including personnel of the judiciary and businessmen. In July 2011, out of 1,757 individuals prosecuted for crimes against humanity, 187 had been convicted and 427 are in preventive custody (CELS 2011). Although progress toward justice has made possible an increasingly critical and creative approach to the past, systematic prosecution also poses a challenge to the development of a collective memory fuelled, so far, by limited criminal prosecution.

As Héctor Schmulcer observes, although legal steps are necessary for trauma elaboration, they should not be seen as an end point since the crimes at hand are not just judicial matters but problems that concern us all as human beings (2000).

To conclude, Kirchner's vindication of activism and the legal advances in relation to the military crimes enabled a critical approach to and debate about the actions and ideas of the 1970s political groups. Intellectuals of the left, former activists, and the generation of their children were now able to question the humanitarian narrative without being perceived as defenders of state terrorism. They could reconcile a critical approach to activism with a commitment to the prosecution of the perpetrators. The crimes of the armed forces had been established as unjustifiable, and the greater the advances toward the goals of truth and justice, the more the past of activism became amenable to critical understanding. In the following chapters, I analyze the contributions by the post-dictatorship generation produced during and after this phase, which I have called "self-aware memory" (see Introduction).

## CHAPTER 2



### LIVING THE ABSENCE: THE CHILDREN OF THE *DESAPARECIDOS*

The changes in the political context addressed in Chapter 1 are key for the emergence of new interpretations of the past. However, the arrival of new generations that question established views, analyzed in this chapter, is also an important step in fostering active forms of intergenerational transmission. The children of the *desaparecidos* are the first members of the post-dictatorship generation to participate in the memory struggles.

They were either raised by a surviving parent or by relatives, adopted by couples who did not know their origins, or “appropriated.” This term refers to a systematic practice regarding the prisoners’ sons and daughters. The murder of pregnant prisoners was postponed until delivery, and the newborn was then handed over to government officials, military personnel, or police officers. A network of judicial and administrative personnel enabled the registration of the babies as biological children (Arditti 1999). Clandestine detention centres kept lists of couples with close links to the armed forces eager to “adopt”: they either could not have had children of their own or wanted to contribute to the attempt to “eradicate subversion.” If these children did not know who their parents were, they would not be able to make their stories and ideas live on. What is more, they would be raised in an ideology opposed to their parents’, and with a positive perspective on the armed forces’ role during the dictatorship. At a symbolical level, this was an attempt to turn them into accomplices of their parents’

disappearance. Some appropriated children experienced physical punishment, sexual violence, and emotional distance, while others were treated with affection.

The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, an organization of mothers of *desaparecidos* that was formed during the dictatorship and is committed to finding their grandchildren, coined the term “appropriation.” This group attempts to trace the children and confirm their identity through DNA testing. The children are then invited to meet their relatives and learn who their parents were. The Abuelas call this “restitution.” So far (in October 2011), 105 out of 500 children have been restituted. Typically, restitution is a deeply disturbing event, especially for those who were localized in their late teenage years or as adults and did not suspect the truth about their past. The feeling of having lived a fiction in which most of them were not who they said they were is intertwined with feelings of loss: they lost both their biological parents and those whom they believed to be their parents.

On a practical level, a tiresome process of legal identity change intensifies the sense of fragmentation: a legal person ceases to exist and a new one is created. Often, they encounter difficulties transferring information from one to the other (for instance, contributions to retirement funds are typically lost). These children typically experience the need to learn as much as they can about their parents, from the details of their private lives to their political struggle. They search for pictures, letters, documents, and anecdotes: everything is valued, but nothing is sufficient to replace a direct knowledge of their parents. In some cases, their grandparents are already dead or not healthy enough to remember. In this context, the character of active transmission as a construction of meaning between individuals becomes evident.

The children of *desaparecidos* raised by a surviving parent, relatives, or former *compañeros* of their parents experience a similar insatiable need. Adults initially often hid information about their parents from them: the dictatorship made it dangerous to possess compromising information, and the children’s ignorance served to protect them and their families. In addition, being the relative of a *desaparecidos* was a stigma in a society shaped by a dictatorial logic, and, as mentioned above, the subject became taboo even in the human rights collective memory. For sons and daughters who grew up in their parents’ silence about their experience as activists and their disappeared spouses or partners, asking about it seemed to add more pain and thus threaten what remained of their parents’ youthful hopes and sense of belonging. This tacit pact of silence between children and parents had the

effect of delaying a collective elaboration of the dictatorship decades (Kaufman 2006). The sociologist Alejandra Oberti (2004) mentions a mother who told her daughter Verónica that her father was temporarily abroad although he was one of the disappeared. Veronica's mother took this white lie, actually a consolation for the whole family, as far as sending presents to Verónica "from" her father, until she was a grown-up and realized by herself what had happened to him.

The sociologist Gabriel Gatti (2008), himself the child of a disappeared activist, observes that sons and daughters inherit a void, an erasure, a "catastrophe of meaning," a trauma that could not be elaborated by the previous generation and is passed on to the next one. There is a pending encounter, "programmed" into their lives since their birth.<sup>1</sup> Void and lack of meaning risk consuming children's affective world and displacing their own history as individuals. To start living for them means to inhabit this void and embrace the challenge to make sense of disappearance: "we all are caught in the search for meaning and the daily negotiation of its absence" (Gatti 2008, 25). This negotiation takes different forms: attempting to somehow create new family-like communities (H.I.J.O.S., HERMANOS), or producing art and knowledge. This allows them to represent the traumatic and reconnect with the present, previously devalued and evaded as a result of the strong identification with a powerful yet untold story that pervades their lives through fantasies, idealization, and fear (Kaufman 2006, 60).

The children of the *desaparecidos* cannot alter the past, but they can face the question of what to make of their story, and how to respond to it. Gatti refers to this as the need of overcoming the orphan condition without ever ceasing to be an orphan, and creates the term "post-orphan" to name it (2008, 145). The prefix "post," just as in "post-dictatorship," implies a strong sense of continuity but also involves the idea of an "after." This generation is still marked by the memory "dictatorship, yet belongs to a different time and is engaged in the construction of the present.

The following sections explore the ways in which the children of the *desaparecidos* negotiate the absence, the lack of meaning and the pain at the intersection of the individual and the collective, contributing to the formation of collective memory while simultaneously dealing with their own life story. I locate them on a spectrum that spans from a more rigid separation of public and private to an understanding of their interconnectedness. In Catela's words, these differences respond to the need of "adjusting their dramatic lives to a world that, in spite of everything, keeps spinning" (Catela 2001, 24).

### “THEY LIVE ON IN OUR STRUGGLE”

After its foundation in 1995, the group H.I.J.O.S. started questioning important aspects of the human rights narrative and its effects. More concretely, they distanced themselves from the image of the *desaparecidos* as “innocent victims” and presented them as revolutionaries.<sup>2</sup> They preferred to think of themselves as the children of a generation that fought for a more just society, rather than as the sons and daughters of victims. By privileging the revolutionary project over its tragic end, they chose life over death. Therefore, they argued that all the activists from the 1970s deserved equal appreciation, distinct from the Madres, who had initially suggested that the *desaparecidos* were different from the other victims (survivors or exiles), because they had sacrificed their lives. The members of H.I.J.O.S. were eager to learn as much as they could about their parents’ political work: their motivation, projects, and forms of organization. Since the survivors were intimately familiar with these practices, they became key interlocutors.

By choosing life over death, the members of H.I.J.O.S. privileged continuity over rupture. They embraced their parents’ struggles and chose to continue their fight in their own political context, understood as an extension of the social model implemented during the dictatorship. This is expressed in the motto “We were born in their struggle, now they live on in ours.” The emphasis on the continuity, however, displaces the encounter with the loss and the ensuing emotional struggles. When H.I.J.O.S. was founded, its members decided that it was not going to be a “self-help group to lament their fate,” but a space for action, for changing how society related to the past (Bonaldi 2006, 151). Additionally, the strong identification with their parents explains H.I.J.O.S.’ reluctance to engage in a critical evaluation of activism.

Héctor Jouvé, who was part of the guerrilla group organized by Ernesto “Che” Guevara in northern Argentina, observes that when H.I.J.O.S. invites him to talk about his experience, they insist that the same forms of political action need to be retried today (Del Barco 2005). Jouvé has a different perspective, suggesting that individuals need to start questioning their ways of life, choices, and (lack of) options to produce social change—they need to live and interact in revolutionary ways in the here and now instead of having revolution as a final goal. However, members of H.I.J.O.S. do not engage in that discussion, perhaps because they interpret it as a rupture with or a betrayal of their parents’ legacy. At the same time, they also refrain from publicly discussing and defending their parents’



armed struggle (Guarini and Céspedes 2002), and expelled members who in a TV show suggested the possibility of resuming it (Bonaldi 2006, 172). They avoid publicly endorsing the armed struggle, but also resist a critical analysis of it. Although they do not encourage a critical discussion of the 1970s methods, their own form of organization (*horizontalismo*) differs markedly from Montoneros and other hierarchically organized groups (Bonaldi 2006, 172).

One of the group's key innovations is the *escrache*. Although H.I.J.O.S. was in favor of trials against officers and soldiers, its members did not trust the legal system and decided to take justice in their own hands: "if there is no justice, there is *escrache*." *Escrachar* means denouncing unpunished perpetrators and collaborators through an awareness-raising campaign in the neighborhood where they were allowed to live normal lives. This was followed by a scheduled festive march and protest in front of his house. More than thirty in total, these *escraches* were open to the general public, closely followed by the media, and helped pronounce a symbolic "guilty" verdict, just as a trial would. The *escraches* were also the sentence:

Until the nullification of the impunity laws in 2003, and the consequent revitalized expectations for justice, H.I.J.O.S. should be credited with limiting the *represores'* social and spatial freedom. . . . *Escraches* trapped torturers and assassins by building metaphorical—and mobile—jails in neighborhoods throughout Argentina.

(Kaiser 2008, 187)<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the practice of *escrache* reinterprets the human rights movement's demands for justice by introducing the idea of collective moral reprobation of the crimes in the absence of and as a substitute for transitional justice. By involving the perpetrators' neighbors (they were provided information in advance, and invited to the *escrache* in person) the members of H.I.J.O.S. showed that the *desaparecidos* were a collective problem. The ultimate message was that collective awareness and punishment were crucial to rebuild community links broken by social trauma, and to start relating to each other outside of the dictatorial logic. During the trials against the perpetrators enabled by Néstor Kirchner's and then Cristina Fernández' government, H.I.J.O.S. played a crucial role in denouncing bureaucratic obstacles and the military's threats and attacks on witnesses—the group became the main source of information about and promotion of the trials (Ros 2012).

In sum, H.I.J.O.S. established the presence of a new generation in the politics of memory. By breaking the taboo about their parents'

political involvement and presenting justice as an unquestionable and attainable goal, the group members opened up 1970s activism as a period to be discovered and discussed from multiple angles. Other sons and daughters could then explore new ways of relating to their parents' absence and approach activism from a critical perspective. The insights gained in the process help them address the challenges of today. A new group of actors embarks on the path to exemplary memory.

### THEY LIVE ON IN OUR EVERYDAY STRUGGLES

In Chapter 1, I mentioned the paradox that in the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship, the *desaparecidos* became public symbols through the private suffering of their families, who presented them primarily as victims of state terror. In their effort to distance themselves from the image of the victim, H.I.J.O.S. focuses almost exclusively on the collective revolutionary project and disregards what were considered "private" aspects of the activists' lives. In a third step, addressed in this chapter, sons and daughters struggle with the memory of their parents differently, highlighting the double condition of the *desaparecidos*: on the one hand, they are parental figures; on the other hand, political symbols.

I analyze the first documentaries about the children of the *desaparecidos* as adults: *Botín de guerra/Spoils of War* (Blaustein 2000), (*h*) *Historias cotidianas/Histories from Everyday Life* (Habegger 2002), *H.I.J.O.S.: El alma en dos/The Soul Split in Two* (Guarini and Céspedes 2002), and *Nietos, identidad y memoria/Grandchildren, Identity and Memory* (Ávila 2004). As Verena Berger (2009) observes, unlike other audiovisual productions, these documentaries highlight the scope of the military's crimes by showing a plurality of intertwined testimonies, thereby producing a choral effect.<sup>4</sup> Each documentary emphasizes different aspects of the sons' and daughters' lives: from activism in H.I.J.O.S. to their struggles to find a meaningful life project. A comparative perspective on these films deepens our understanding of remembering, a process that occurs at the intersection of the private and the public, the individual and the collective, affection and politics.

The sons and daughters interviewed in the documentaries have all, at one point in their lives, dealt with the same issue, the impossibility of reaching their mother and/or father through their own recollections. While for the relatives and friends who have known the victims, disappearance organizes their life into a "before" and an "after" of an

insuperable loss, for sons and daughters, there is no “before”: they can only mourn the life that they could have had if their parent(s) had survived. They long for something that never happened and never will: knowing their parents directly, and living in a family free from the specter of torture and murder. All they have are memories shared by others and photographs, but these are never sufficient, and become just another reminder of the impossible encounter. As Lucila Quieto observes in *H.I.J.O.S.: El alma en dos*: “I think we all have something recurring with pictures. . . . There are many missing pictures in our lives” (Guarini and Céspedes 2002).

To mourn the absence of their parent(s), sons and daughters first have to “know” who they were: they need to “encounter” them only to, paradoxically, lose them again. Eventually, most of them realize that this process becomes a search for themselves: who they are and who they want to be. In other words, mourning implies coming to terms with the other life, the one they do have, in which they need to find a meaningful project, combining legacy and choices.

In the course of their quest, as mentioned above, the children of the *desaparecidos* find themselves dealing with their parents’ double condition as both family and public symbols of revolution and justice, which responds to larger series of dichotomies: affection/politics, emotions/intellect, private/public. Within this framework, agreeing with their parents’ political project seems to imply repressing painful feelings of abandonment and melancholy about a stolen past. Conversely, expressing those emotions seems to imply an opposition to their parents’ struggle. This perspective interferes with the process of mourning and the possibility of imagining a life that, though different from their parents’, is still meaningful.

For instance, Florencia Gemetro, daughter of the disappeared activist José María Gemetro, identifies with the image of her father as a revolutionary and deals with the loss through full-time activism in the group H.I.J.O.S. In one of the assemblies, she states: “We don’t think we have to individualize or humanize our parents” (Guarini and Céspedes 2002). When in a different documentary, (*h*) *Historias cotidianas*, Gemetro is asked about her father’s politics, she answers: “It is the same project that today, at twenty-three years of age, I choose” (Habegger 2001). This can be interpreted as a way of attempting to keep her father alive, evading the impossibility of reaching him, and the resulting pain—a feeling that, as seen in the previous section, was not central to the group’s agenda.

Unlike *H.I.J.O.S.: El alma en dos*, the documentary (*h*) *Historias cotidianas* primarily deals with non-activist sons and daughters

(Gemetro is the only activist in a group of six). The questions asked by the director, son of a disappeared father himself, address the effects of disappearance in their lives at many levels. He wanted to show a broader picture, including but going beyond what he calls the “institutional expressions” of collective memory. “The idea was to depart from the specific, the emotional microcosms that, in the end, is what constitutes us as subjects and informs our actions or omissions” (personal correspondence with the author, June 2010). When he encourages Gemetro to talk about her father from this perspective, emotions surface, and we see the pain in her face when she says: “He was a vet, he taught courses, he was a neighbor, he was my father” (Habegger 2001). Later, in an interview about this film, Gemetro sounds troubled by the tension between the affective and the political: “I appreciate the film’s exploration of the emotional dimension, which has not been done before, but I would have liked to see more testimonies of H.I.J.O.S. members [included in the film], in order to show a more political position and to offer an answer more collective in character” (Bianco 2001). She adds that the feelings expressed by the non-activist sons and daughters made her confront her own pain and relate to it in a different way (Bianco 2001).

Similarly, in *H.I.J.O.S.: El alma en dos*, Lucila Quieto, daughter of the disappeared activist Carlos Alberto Quieto and an H.I.J.O.S. activist, describes her feelings of abandonment by and longing for her father as something limited to childhood, incompatible with the more intellectual kind of knowing and understanding that she considers typical of maturity:

At some point in our lives we all had that dilemma of “if *he* cared so much for me why did he keep on doing activism?” “Why did *he* decide to go on if *he* knew *he* could die?” “*He* was selfish; *he* didn’t care for me or for my Mum.” You think like that only when you are a kid. You say: “I need my Dad and my Mum.” You don’t understand much. As time goes by you get to know what happened and can tell that it wasn’t selfish at all. *They* cared so much about us, *they* cared so much about everybody that *they* went forward and none of them ever thought that they all would die, get killed, *they* never thought everything would turn out as it did.

(Guarini and Céspedes 2002, my emphases)

While the father as an individual is the object of her “private” and affective childhood recriminations, the adult Lucila Quieto switches to the more impersonal “they” when it comes to explaining the choices that pull him away from her. The dual approach to her past captured in this quote informs not only her work for H.I.J.O.S. but

also her artistic project titled “Archeology of Absence,” exhibited in 2000–2001.

“Archeology of Absence” consisted of projecting pictures of the disappeared parents onto a white wall. The ethereal texture of the projection allowed Quieto and twelve other sons and daughters to “enter” the compositions and pose next to their parents, who suddenly seemed animated by their new interlocutors (Amado 2009). By doing so, Quieto not only reconstructed impossible pictures of a stolen past but also created her own “pictures”—ideas, representations—of a time that was previously handed over to her as fixed images that she could only relate to as a passive recipient. “Entering” their parents’ pictures represents the challenge of approaching the past as a time gone by: the children cannot recover the past—their parents’ personality, feelings, and thinking—exactly as it was.

As Derrida reminds us, all encounters with the past and with the dead are acts of creation in the present, a construction more than reconstruction (Derrida 2001b). Accordingly, in “Archeology,” Quieto does not create the illusion of looking at a “real” picture; on the contrary, she exposes the old picture’s borders, wrinkles, stains, and textures in the new one. As Amado observes, the symbolic meeting between parents and children occurs through the creation of a space in which the impossible encounter between the living and the dead, the 2000s and the 1970s, is made possible (2009, 147). Past and present do not eclipse each other, nor do they merge—they interact and create new compositions. One can infer that this process helped the children understand that in spite of not having access to either their own memories or the times in which their parents made decisive choices, they are part of that history, and that history in turn shapes their present.

Quieto mentions that many intense emotions emerge during the photographic sessions, and she usually ends up exhausted and with a headache. Being surrounded by their parents’ images and space has an emotional and psychological impact on the children. For an instant, they experience something similar to the longed-for proximity, which becomes the impossible goodbye that has hindered closure. Eight years later, in an interview with Ana Amado, Quieto would remember this project as what really helped her understand and accept the past while embracing the present as the time in which to become an actor (2009, 175). Even though Quieto’s “archeology” represents a personal moment in sons’ and daughters’ elaboration of the past, it reaches out to a larger audience: it was exhibited in galleries nationally and internationally, and much of it is available online.<sup>5</sup>

Silvina Stirnemann, daughter of the disappeared activist Mario Alfredo Stirnemann and president of H.I.J.O.S. Paris, also underlines the importance of working on a personal project parallel to the collective one. An essay about the Argentine dictatorship for a political science class offered her the possibility of researching and learning about that past, thereby discovering her own history in what was typically presented as her parents' history:

You cannot be recognized only for what your parents were. That is not possible. At conferences, people look at me as if I was carrying those 30000 dead people on my shoulders. But I need to recover my individual history: the sensations, the emotions, the things I lived internally. I do not only need to recover the inherited history, the history that was mine because of my parents, but also the history I lived as my own. The group H.I.J.O.S. shouldn't suck up all your identity, otherwise you wouldn't ever exist.

(Guarini and Céspedes 2002)

She had always been preoccupied with investigating her father's disappearance, locating his remains, and working for H.I.J.O.S. Paris, without connecting to the emotions that accompanied her since she was a child. Learning about and understanding the past from her own perspective while identifying what she thought and felt enables her to recover the past and make a decision about her identity ("otherwise you wouldn't ever exist").

Christian Czainik, son of the disappeared activist Antonio Czainik, also went through a process of encountering the past and the parental legacy in order to find himself in the present. He was in primary school when his father disappeared, and has clear memories of him and their relationship. Czainik was brought up in revolutionary ideology, and his father prepared him for the imminent struggle by making him crawl under a double bed with a rifle. Coming of age, he thought that he needed to follow his father's choices in order to honor his legacy: "At one point I fantasized that I had to keep up with my father's ideals" (Habegger 2001). However, this "way of connecting was very melancholic" and meant living "in the past, thinking about a future without enjoying the present." Ultimately, he found a way to connect with the present in his own way: "I thought it was better to have my own ideas, which in fact I had, and that I had to show what I thought and felt. I thought it was healthier, too." By accepting his thoughts and feelings free from the guilt of letting his father down, he connects to the present as strongly as his father did—a way of inheriting his legacy.

That's why it took me so long to find my place in the world. Now I feel I found it. Acting is my place. I like it very much. I enjoy it a lot. It gives me great pleasure, and I think it is important to experience pleasure in life. You have to take that into account. I am doing it now: I didn't do it before.

(Habegger 2001)

I now turn to a final aspect of these documentaries, introduced by restituted children. As we have seen before, the individual and the collective level need to be thought together in order to understand lives shaped by a historical tragedy. The restituted sons and daughters could be seen as exclusively embodying personal drama. Emotions, central to their situation, are often highlighted in the public media. Yet, these sons and daughters also remind us that the past was the outcome of a collective process and that it asks to be dealt with collectively. Most of them did not suspect who their parents were until they were localized by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. This unawareness connects them with all those who think that the dictatorship has not affected them in a direct way, since until not long ago, most of them were part of that group. Conversely, society can identify with them more easily than with the orphan children in H.I.J.O.S., often understood as radically different from those who seem to be unaffected by the dictatorial crimes.

Manuel Gonçalves' case illustrates this situation. He is the son of Ana Granada and Gaston Gonçalves and was five months old when his mother was killed during an attack on their house. His mother managed to wrap him in a mattress while the bullets flew through the air and ricocheted on the walls. The military offered him for adoption without any attempt to find relatives. At the age of nineteen, in 1995, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo localized him and he recovered his identity. The possibility of being a child of *desaparecidos* had never occurred to him. What surprised him most, however, was that he had unknowingly met his brother. Gonçalves was a bartender and fan of a popular rock band that regularly performed at the bar; the bassist was his brother. He observes: "I believe that any person around me, anybody, can have a past like mine: No one more or less my age is exempt from the possibility of having been appropriated back then. I think they all can worry and at some point think that they could be one of us" (Habegger 2001). Even though he may not mean this literally, as we know that there are only about 500 appropriated children, this implies that the military's crimes involved and affected society as a whole.<sup>6</sup> In fact, today, many years after this documentary was made, civilians are put to trial for collaborating with

appropriations: judges, doctors, and administrative personnel at the hospitals.<sup>7</sup> Gonçalves' observation also reminds us that appropriations required the tacit complicity of many so-called bystanders since the individuals receiving the babies were embedded in social relations: they had neighbors, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo localized many missing grandchildren thanks to the information provided by civilians unrelated to the armed forces or the families, some of whom were threatened or killed by the military (see Chapter 3).

The examples analyzed in this chapter have shown possible ways of dealing with disappearance and with the parental legacy through the real and imagined public/private dichotomy. While Gemetro feels primarily connected to the revolutionary project, for Quieto and Stirnemann the public and the private are complementary ways of dealing with the absence. Czainik opens up the possibility of inheriting his father's legacy in his private life without replicating the latter's choice of collective political action, and Gonçalves shows that a private drama can become a collective wake-up call.

In a nutshell, H.I.J.O.S. and the pioneering documentaries analyzed in this chapter authorized a new generational voice, composed of multiple perspectives on the 1970s that were united by their condemnation of the dictatorship. It now became possible for other sons and daughters to consolidate their presence in the subgenre of dictatorship cinema. The documentaries analyzed in the next chapter can be seen as the next step in the slow unfolding of more inclusive memory practices: they challenge the human rights movement's established narratives by pointing to and addressing silences and taboos that can make it difficult to relate to the past and its effects.



## CHAPTER 3



### ADDRESSING SILENCES, TABOOS, AND MARGINS

Building on the contributions analyzed in Chapter 2, the films and the novel discussed below go even farther beyond the traditional narratives on the dictatorship. The directors and the author, also children of *desaparecidos*, problematize memory and narratives that neither capture their experience nor respond to their concerns, and demonstrate how timely disagreement can contribute to the revitalization of collective memory. Their challenging attitude toward established narratives triggered the kind of passionate intergenerational debate so crucial for active transmission.

More concretely, they address the taboos of activism, armed struggle, and revolutionary violence and seek to understand the 1970s by exploring how different kinds of activism (grassroots, underground, and armed struggle) shaped the lives of young women and men. They construct a multidimensional image of the activists in which the thrill of the revolutionary project coexists with fear, betrayal, disagreement, confusion, and tension between the personal and the political. Finally, they also introduce the idea that memory is not disinterested and neutral, but a socially regulated practice: “slogans such as ‘memory against oblivion’ or ‘against silence’ hide an opposition between distinct and rival memories (each one with its own forgetfulness)” (Jelin 2003, xviii).

### *LOS RUBIOS: ICEBREAKER AND TRIGGER*

By the time *Los rubios* (2003) was released, the taboo around activism had already weakened. The film further pushes the envelope by addressing other topics so far excluded from public debate: the armed struggle, the fundamental disagreements within left movements regarding this method, the fact that these movements were dominated by middle- and upper-class students and professionals whereas the working class did not unanimously embrace their cause, and the controversial idea that memory is not an exact reflection but an interpretation of the past by a community of actors, the 1970s activists, who reject other perspectives because of a sense of “ownership.” *Los rubios* is the first film to challenge the human rights associations’ narrative from within. It is directed by Albertina Carri, the daughter of a disappeared couple, Roberto Carri and Ana María Caruso, who is close to their surviving *compañeros* and engaged in the struggle for truth and justice.

One day, the almost four-year-old Albertina was stopped on the sidewalk, taken into a car, and asked to identify her family members on photographs. Then, she and her sisters (12 and 13 years old) witnessed the capture of their parents. Many years later, Albertina realized that she could not remember these events but had created filmlike images based on her sisters’ descriptions, in which she saw herself as the protagonist. The day of the abduction was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with two “characters” and a story in permanent construction through a negotiation with others and their own elaborations of pain and the absence (Carri 2007, 17). Her family initially hid the disappearance from her (she was told that her parents were working abroad), and she waited for them every day, imagining their arrival by bus or by car. The truth about the disappearance did not necessarily help her make sense of it: “I think when I was twelve, somebody tried to explain something about some bad men and good men. Something about Peronists, *descamisados*, the working class, soldiers, Montoneros. I didn’t understand a word. The only thing I remember from that conversation is that it made me think of arms, gunshots and heroes” (Carri 2003). Coming of age, she was surrounded by the pain of her parents’ absence and a heroic narrative of 1970s activism. However, something impelled her to explore the past in a cinematic project on her own.

Her first impulse was to turn to family and friends. She shot forty hours of interview footage but could not figure out how to use this material: instead of bringing her closer, it seemed to further alienate

her from the past. Relatives and friends were waiting for her with a readymade story; some had not slept all night preparing for the interview. A voiceover in the film states: “my relatives . . . remember in such a way that Mom and Dad become two exceptional beings, beautiful, intelligent. My parents’ friends structure their memory in such a way that everything becomes a political analysis.” She continues: “All I have is my diffuse memory contaminated by all these versions. I believe that any attempt I make to approach the truth will actually take me further away from it” (Carri 2003). In other words, she gives up the idea that there is a truth about the past that can be captured through the logic of preestablished narratives, or what she calls “supermarket narratives” (Moreno 2003). She realizes that new interview strategies can help her unsettle them.

Her approach to the interviews can be understood through Proust’s concept of “involuntary memory” (1913–1927). Unlike “voluntary memory” (conscious recollections that seek to decipher and rationally order the past), “involuntary memory” (triggered mainly through the senses) evades the supervision of conscience and makes the past flash into the present as if it were alive. New experiences and perspectives emerge, perhaps closer to the texture and complexity of the past. She asks questions that appeal to the sensorial level, for example about her parents’ voice or height: Albertina’s aunt “remembers” with her body how she used to touch her sisters’ shoulder when they were chatting. These memories make the *desaparecidos* break through the abstractions (victims, heroes, exceptional beings)—they emerge, for a moment, as individuals of flesh and skin. Carri learns about her father’s good looks and habit of cheating at volleyball and her mother’s quick-witted answers and sense of humour.

These “minimal features” (Moreno 2003) help retrieve new memories about already established topics. Activism appears in a new light, as an integral part of everyday life. A former comrade remembers Caruso’s goulash and links it to her image in the kitchen, cooking gnocchi, taking care of Albertina, then a baby, and her sisters, while explaining who the real political adversaries were: “she appeared as Susanita [the Argentinean prototype of a traditional woman] but in reality she was Rasputin [laughs]” (Carri 2003). Even the armed struggle, a subject excluded from collective memory, surfaces through Carri’s decision to use the concreteness of everyday life as entry point. A former comrade, a woman, evokes images of the meetings at the Carri-Caruso house, in which “the children were present; children, arms, all mixed up.” This shows how deeply interconnected political violence and everyday life were.

Asked about her father's personality, another former male comrade who had decided not to join a combat group sheds light on a different aspect of the armed struggle, the disagreements about it at the heart of the leftwing movements: "one will never talk to these people again; they had become your enemies. I never saw Roberto in that way and I know he didn't see me as his enemy either, but we no longer had anything to say to each other" (Carri 2003).

Besides her appeal to the concrete and sensorial, Carri also includes unusual witnesses. In the quest for her past, she goes to Morón, a poverty-stricken area at the west of Greater Buenos Aires where her family lived underground and many Montoneros did grassroots work. Accompanied by her film crew, Carri first interviews her former next-door neighbour, a woman who does not leave her house and is filmed through the window. When asked about the Carri-Carusos, she answers: "my sister was here, not me, I don't know anything" (Carri 2003). When she expresses concern about the camera, the crew explains that they are working on a college assignment. Then she recognizes Carri—"I remember you, but when you were three years old"—and immediately goes back on her words, clarifying that she was told that a girl named Albertina had lived in that house. When a member of the crew invites her to talk about her memories, she declines: "for me they were very good people, I don't have anything else to say" (Carri 2003). However, they insist, and the interview absurdly oscillates between her memories of a close relationship with the family (she spoon-fed Albertina, the girls celebrated a birthday party at her house, and they once spent Christmas together) and her denial of having known the family. She finally articulates the fear that her words might cause her trouble: "Who knows where this will be shown!" (Carri 2003). Continuities between the past and the present become obvious: the fear of being associated with the "subversives" has been internalized and manifests itself twenty years after the dictatorship.<sup>1</sup>

The interview with a second neighbour, also a woman, is crucial for understanding what happened to her parents. From a poorer background than the first one, she is willing to share her memories and confirms that everyone in the area knows the Carri-Carusos' story but is afraid to talk. On the evening of the abduction, soldiers were on the roofs and on the streets. They broke into her house, brought her son and husband in, and made them all lie on the floor. Someone from the neighbourhood told them to let her husband go since he was "a decent person." She then clarified that they were not the wanted activists and told the soldiers that "there are three blond girls, the man

is blond, the woman is blond; they are all blond.” They immediately went to the Carri-Caruso house. After the couple had been taken away, the neighbour’s husband shared friendly *mates* with the soldiers; the neighbourhood was again “super peaceful” (Carri 2003).

The interview makes obvious the gulf that separated this neighbour from Carri’s family: they stood out in the neighbourhood for belonging to a higher class and were considered outsiders, the “others,” the blondes. When Carri showed this tape to her maternal aunt, she screamed: “my sister was never blonde . . . !” (Carri 2003). The “blondeness” of the Carri-Carusos does not point to the actual colour of their hair, but to the race-class connection in Argentina: “Blonde” equals upper class. This interview challenges the idea that the working class was unanimously supportive of the revolutionary project and always organically linked to activists.

All the aspects of the past unearthed by Carri’s film—the sensorial and concrete, the armed struggle and the disagreements about it, the class gap between activists and members of the working class—unsettled the preestablished human rights narrative and therefore provoked strong reactions in the groups that identified with it. When she applied for funding to the Argentinean National Institute of Film and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA), the committee, primarily consisting of members of the 1970s generation, rejected her proposal and sent her a short fax:

We believe that this project is valuable and, in this sense, asks to be revised with greater documentary rigor . . . If the protagonist’s complaint about the absence of her parents is the core of the film, then it requires a more rigorous inclusion of the testimonies of her parents’ *compañeros*, with their affinities and discrepancies. Roberto Carri and Ana María Caruso were two politically engaged intellectuals in the 1970s whose tragic destiny deserves to be appreciated by this work.

(Carri 2003)

Carri includes the reading of this fax in *Los rubios* because it shows the difficulty of dealing with her parents’ disappearance in a context that seems to admit only one representation of the past, the one authorized by the former activists.<sup>2</sup> For the first time, a film about the consequences of the dictatorship presented memory as a construction, exposed that a generation sought to protect its “ownership of memory,” and presented this as an attitude that hinders active forms of intergenerational transmission. Carri explains the rejection in terms of divergent needs: “They are thinking about the film they need as a

generation, and I understand that they need it, but I am not the one to do it, I mean, I just don't feel like doing it" (Carri 2003).

Members of her own generation, however, voiced similar criticism. A student organization at Buenos Aires University School of Sociology named after the director's father affirmed that if her last name were not Carri, they would already have organized an *escrache* to denounce the film (Aguilar 2008). They see it as an attempt to devalue the struggle of Carri's parents and their generation: by mentioning the *escrache*, a technique used to publicly expose unpunished perpetrators, they situate *Los rubios* in proximity to the repression.

The student association "Roberto Carri" and the woman named Albertina Carri both inherit the legacy of Roberto Carri, a Marxist sociologist who taught at Buenos Aires University, an activist, and a father. After the screening of *Los rubios* at the Buenos Aires Independent Cinema Festival, a man in the audience identified himself as an old friend of Albertina Carri's parents and told her: "I don't know how your parents would comment on your film but I am sure they would be proud of your courage" (Lerman 2005). Similarly, Horacio González, sociologist and friend of the director's father, commented that her nonconformism toward his generation reminded him very much of Roberto Carri's discourse (Carri 2007).

Behind the dispute between those who claim to be his intellectual children and his daughter lies the intractable reality that there is no way of knowing what Roberto Carri thinks or what he would say about his daughter's film or about his disciples' disapproval of it. As Derrida reminds us, "the dead are now only *in us*," and everything we say of and even to the dead "remains hopelessly *in us* or *between us*, the living, without ever crossing the mirror of a certain speculation" (2001b, 160, emphases in the original). Ultimately, the questions at stake are: What do we want to say now about the past and the dead, and for what purpose? What does it mean to be good heirs of our parents' legacy, especially when this includes a failed project for social change that provoked merciless repression? *Los rubios* starts answering these questions by stating that the past is lost; all we have, instead, are memories, narrative constructions that assign meaning to the events in dialogue with others who have unique experiences that impel them to pose questions and reshape collective interpretations. In the Argentina of 2003, when the film was released, this was a very bold statement, and one that the 1970s generation resisted. However, two years later, Nouzeilles summarizes the position of other intellectuals who consider *Los rubios* a critical contribution to the formation of a memory more aware of its trajectory and effects:

Carri's acknowledgement of memory's multiplicity does not translate into a superficial celebration of pluralism of memory according to which any form of recollection has exactly the same value as any other form of recollection. In *Los rubios*, we learn the inherently controversial nature of memory, even in the case of those who seem to be in complete agreement on their irrevocable condemnation of a violent past.

(2005, 269)

Carri's unusual entry points are typically devalued in the analysis of the past. Firstly, sensations, emotions, and the concreteness of everyday life are marginalized by narratives that claim to provide unproblematic explanations. Secondly, the marginalized inhabitants of working-class neighbourhoods are typically not considered valid interlocutors in the debates about the past. Finally, Carri herself, unable and unwilling to adhere to the standard perspectives, is marginalized by the INCAA and creates a film that in its turn avoids marginalizing other forms of memory. Unsatisfied by the predominant narratives, she recreates in her film the experience of living with the absence of the parents for the audience in a nonlinear structure based on fragments that combines different genres: documentary, feature film, and animation. This entails distancing herself from the typical ways of (re)presenting *desaparecidos* and surviving activists. Since the material becomes part of her mental and emotional process, instead of using the classic "floating head technique" (close-ups of interviewed persons introduced by a caption), she does not identify her parents' *compañeros* and friends, and their interviews are played back on TV screens (Image 3.1).

Similarly, the letters from her parents are only shown briefly as material being analyzed by the film crew, and there is never a close-up of family pictures: they are cut into pieces to make collages, or displayed on cork boards in the background in a seemingly random fashion (Image 3.2).

She refuses to reconstruct her parents' political trajectory and the circumstances of their disappearance, the staple of many other documentaries on this subject:

I wanted to avoid elements such as testimonies, pictures and letters that leave a reassuring feeling in the audience. Something like: "done! I already met Roberto and Ana María, and now I can go home." What I propose is, precisely, that we will not know them, there is no possible reconstruction. They are inapprehensible because they are not present. Making them present, as it usually happens, should not be the point. I let the absent remain absent.

(Moreno 2003)



**Image 3.1** The actress taking notes while watching an interview with a former activist in *Los rubios* (Carri 2003)



**Image 3.2** The actress looking at pictures and thinking while we hear the audio of an interview with a former comrade of her parents in *Los rubios* (Carri 2003)

Because of the director's radical choices, *Los rubios* triggered a process of rethinking activism among the 1970s generation, and also between generations. It inspired other films by sons and daughters of disappeared activists to take up the search of the past, as we will see in the remainder of Part I. The timing of *Los rubios* is closely connected to its impact: it raised the right questions at the right moment. Carri notes that this film would have been inconceivable in the first decade



after the dictatorship, when actors focused on revealing the concealed and denied atrocities and on sensitizing society to the need for truth and justice (Carri 2007, 114). *Los rubios* inherits more than a decade of films that worked on establishing a specific representation of the 1970s, the activists and the conflict, which enables Carri to explore new areas of the past and new forms of representation. After *Los rubios*, remembering can no longer be understood as simply adhering to a consensual, already-established view, which implies that everything has already been said, thus closing the past to further analysis. Carri allows younger generations, previously reduced to the role of uncritical spectators of a history of heroes and demons, to connect with the past and the possibility of learning from it.

### THE QUEST FOR “PAPÁ IVÁN” BEHIND THE DEAD HERO

*Papá Iván/Dad Iván* (2004), released one year after *Los rubios*, is closer to the traditional documentary format: The director, María Inés Roqué, presents a portrait of her father, Julio Iván Roqué, a disappeared activist who occupied a leading position in Montoneros. We learn that he was a high school teacher and principal in Córdoba, where he met and married Azucena Rodríguez, a politically engaged educator, with whom he had two children: María Inés and Iván. In 1966, he became part of a resistance group against the Onganía dictatorship (1966–1970) and in the late 1960s founded the local branch of *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR), an organization famous for its urban guerrilla warfare. After FAR merged with Montoneros, Roqué occupied a position in the national leadership. In 1971, when María Inés was five years old and her brother Iván two, Roqué went underground and from then on had only sporadic contact with his wife and children. In 1973, he was in prison for a short time, and in 1977, after seven hours of solitary combat against a large group of heavily armed soldiers, he destroyed compromising documents and killed himself.

In 1972, after the Trelew Massacre, in which many imprisoned *compañeros* and close friends of Roqué were brutally killed in spite of his efforts to free them, he wrote a letter to his children explaining his ideas and choices in case he would not see them again. In an interview, the director explains that this letter had been on a long journey before reaching its addressee (Bianco 2005). María Inés’s maternal grandmother put it in a can and buried it on a parcel of land that she owned in Córdoba. She burned it in 1977 before joining her daughter, exiled in Mexico, with María Inés and her brother. However, Roqué’s former

secretary (an academic without links to the armed struggle and unrelated to the Roqué family) kept a carbonated copy and hid it in a book until the end of the dictatorship. María Inés received the letter when she was sixteen years old; it unsettled her profoundly and became the point of departure for *Papá Iván*. In the film's opening sequence we see childhood pictures of her father and hear her read: "I write this letter, afraid that I won't be able to explain what happened to me, because I left when you still needed me very much and never returned. Even though I am sure that your mother is going to tell you the truth I prefer to leave you my own words, in case I die before you reach the age at which you can understand things well" (Roqué 2000). However, rather than fulfilling the need for understanding, as her father had envisioned, the letter intensified it. A trained filmmaker, María Inés returned to Argentina to interview her father's former FAR and Montoneros *compañeros* and interviewed her mother in Mexico.

She started her film project in 1995, the year H.I.J.O.S. was founded in Argentina; however, she approached the past from a different angle: while the group attempted to question the image of the *desaparecidos* as victims and presented them as heroic revolutionaries, María Inés Roqué already had a hero: "In Mexico and Argentina, people looked at me as the daughter of a hero . . . I would rather have a living father than a dead hero" (Roqué 2004). Her real need was to understand her father as a person in the circumstances that had turned him into a hero and deprived her of his presence. The difference between H.I.J.O.S. and María Inés Roqué is perhaps due to her experience of exile. Mexico received a large number of persecuted activists who constructed memory in a different context than the human rights associations in Argentina: since political commitment was not stigmatized, there was no need for depoliticizing the *desaparecidos*. In this situation, remembering or talking about (armed) activism was not threatening, but a way of reaffirming social bonds and a sense of belonging. Additionally, feelings of guilt for having left, the pain caused by the separation from their dearest ones, and the disruptive experience of living in a foreign country typically led them to idealize what they had lost, especially their fallen *compañeros*.

Like most letters left by political activists to their children, Roqué's is a text written in a situation of great danger—the crisis of the armed struggle—to be read in an uncertain future. As Blejmar (2009) observes, letters and pictures are the most direct connections between disappeared parents and their children. However, the

distance between the letter's author and the recipient surfaces when the author tailors his or her history according to the image he or she wants to convey to adults in a time that might be quite different from what he or she had envisioned (Blejmar 2009).

Roqué presents his life as a succession of events that consistently reflect his political commitment and eventually turned him into a revolutionary, from his time as a primary school student to his high school teaching and later involvement in the armed struggle. When his former *compañeros* are asked about Roqué, they describe him as an exceptional political thinker and strategist—intelligent, pragmatic, and brave but also tender and compassionate. In the interviews as in the letter, Roqué's choice to join the armed struggle appears as an inevitable response to the escalation of state violence against students' organizations and trade unionists under the Onganía dictatorship.

While *Los rubios* introduces the taboo topic of violence, *Papá Iván* directly addresses the operations themselves, described by the interviewees as simple practice—a signal followed by a car chase, and then shooting the target with a FAL rifle. In his letter, Roqué explains that he hates violence—the reason why many of his closest friends have died—but it is the only way of confronting intrinsically violent social structures: “the truth of the capitalist system is violence. Violence is essential to this system responsible for hunger and pain, for the humiliation of our people. Only brutal force can hold it together” (Roqué 2000).

His wife's testimony provides a counterpoint to this narrative, in which politics and his life and death are explained as the logical unfolding of a linear process. For Azucena Rodríguez, political violence is deeply problematic. She explains that for her, the armed struggle “was sacrificing your life and I always thought that life is to be lived, not to be sacrificed. Because I believe that the daily struggle is worth it, with your children, with what you do, with what you think with what you build and this [armed struggle] was a project that led to death. I am against it and I rebelled against it” (Roqué 2000).<sup>3</sup> Through this disagreement, Roqué emerges as a husband, a father, and an imperfect human being capable of hurting others. Rodríguez tells the story of a betrayal that remains painful to this day.

When Roqué decided to go underground, he expected his family to go with him; however, because of her convictions, Azucena decided not to follow him. “I remember telling him: ‘I am not going underground just because I am your wife.’ You don't go underground just because you are someone's wife.” While for her this was a temporary separation, for her husband it meant the end of the relationship:

soon after going underground he started a new relationship with a comrade who was also active in the armed struggle, and with whom he had another son.<sup>4</sup> Eight months later, during a surprise visit, he told his wife about it: “Your father asked me if I had another relationship, and I said no. And he said, of course, for you it is more difficult, I do have another relationship” (Roqué 2000). For her, this was devastating since she was still in love, and subsequent visits were destabilizing reminders of their bond, and also of his relationship with another woman.

These events illustrate some of the contradictions experienced by the 1970s activists for whom, on the one hand, family was a distraction from their revolutionary duty and a remnant of the bourgeois lifestyle they opposed, and on the other hand, a way of feeling protected and projecting themselves into the future through their children in times when both death and revolution were around the corner. It seems that this contradiction was often resolved through an integration of family and politics, including underground resistance, even if this implied founding a new family. Perhaps for this reason, other women followed their husbands despite their lack of conviction. Even though women were considered valued political interlocutors and were presented as equal partners in the struggle for social change, maternity tied women to the private sphere.<sup>5</sup> Activism was as a space not necessarily free of patriarchal tendencies (Moreno 2000).

The typical image of an interviewee crying about the loss of a disappeared relative, comrade, or spouse is here replaced by the image of Rodríguez confessing to her daughter in tears: “it hurt me very much that he abandoned us because he was the father I wanted for your brother and for you, he was the father I had chosen. It hurt me very much that he left me but it hurts me more for the children than for me because I thought that he was the father that my children needed” (Roqué 2000). For Rodríguez, being a good parent implies being present, and teaching through everyday lessons and examples. This is her main reason for not having risked her life in armed struggle, in addition to what Roqué refers to in his letter as “her constitutional impossibility to exert violence.” The counterpoint introduced by Rodríguez creates a fissure in the consensual approach to the disappeared activists: it is a perspective deeply committed to the political project, yet in part critical of it.

The denunciation of *compañeros*, usually under torture, is another counterpoint to the heroic narrative introduced by *Papá Iván*. Difficult to address and to judge, it is a subject thus far largely avoided by the 1970s generation in films, literature, or academic studies. One

of these “betrayals” caused her father’s death. He was hiding in the house of an elderly couple; the man, called “the uncle,” was pointed out to the soldiers by prisoners from inside a car. When interviewed by María Inés Roqué, the “uncle” seems troubled; although he tries to evade direct answers, it becomes clear that he led the armed forces to the house where Roqué was living underground.

Denunciation under torture had been anticipated by the Montoneros leadership, who, in order to prevent it, had distributed cyanide pills to the activists. The figure of the *quebrado* (“the broken”)—the prisoner who did not resist the torments and gave up compromising information—was despised but also feared since one could not be certain about others’ response to physical and psychological distress, but neither about one’s own. After the dictatorship, survivors of clandestine detention centres were suspected of having collaborated with the military, another reason why their testimony was undervalued.<sup>6</sup> By including this part of the “uncle’s” testimony, the documentary breaks another taboo. Thereby, it enables questions such as: Does revealing information under torture make former prisoners less deserving of the status of victims? Could the divisions between victims be understood as a continuation of the military’s rule through terror? Feierstein points out that the ultimate goal of Argentine clandestine detention centres was “adaptation,” prisoners’ total or partial identification with the perpetrators’ values after their identity was annihilated through physical and psychological torments. Whatever their reasons, traitors were a product of the clandestine detention centres, and an example of successful adaptation (2007, 379).

The documentary addresses an even more controversial figure in the world of activism: the prisoner who changed sides. María Inés Roqué interviews Miguel Ángel Lauletta, a prisoner who, in order to save his family, agreed to falsify documents for the military and, according to several testimonies, asked to participate in the operation to capture Roqué. According to them, he was active in the shooting at the house and proposed a toast to his death. Lauletta denies this and underlines that he was a prisoner, and not in a position to bond with the *represores*. However, he does not react to the accusation with surprise: “it is pretty uncanny but it is interesting that somebody can conceive such an idea” (Roqué 2000).

According to other witnesses, the officers replied that the death of an enemy who had fought so bravely until the last minute was no cause for celebration. This reflects the respect between the leading combatants on both sides, another important aspect for understanding the pervasive violence of the 1970s. The sociologist Hugo Vezzetti (2009)

explains that the sense of mutual respect derived from having overcome the fear of death. This set them free to perform unimaginable acts and set them apart from most people, still slaves of that fear. Both sides were fighting to death (“homeland or death,” “to vanquish or to die”), and having offered their life seemed to make their decision to kill acceptable—Che Guevara’s classic phrase to his combatants was “You are already dead.”

According to Vezzetti, the risk involved in combat triggers a feeling of vitality, passion, and community with other *compañeros* similar to a religious experience. However, all activists exposed to combat situations did not share this feeling. Another comrade, Pancho Rivas, observes: “like in any war story, there is much drama, sacrifice and pain, and there is also joy...but I did not live it with joy at the end” (Roqué 2000). He started to have doubts about what they were doing, and his activism became a painful experience: “when I was sure about what I wanted, I lived it with plenitude and calm. I think that he [Roqué] always lived it like that, at least until the last time I saw him. He truly believed in what he was doing and was coherent with that belief, and I don’t know if one can ask more of life” (Roqué 2000). This moment evokes a dialogue between a father and a daughter (a reminder of the agreement between activists to raise each other’s children if they died) in which life experience is transmitted. Rivas offers María Inés Roqué an assessment of the movements and the activists that allows her and her generation to critically address their own experience: What do they believe in as a generation? Do they live coherently with these beliefs? What do they ask of life?

The end of Roqué’s letter expresses his feelings for his children and Azucena Rodríguez: “I loved and respect her much and I regret the pain I could have caused her.” But he also reaffirms his certainty about the path he chose, and considered it as a legacy to his children: “I will fall with dignity and you will never have to be ashamed of me. Hugs and kisses from an inconsolable Dad who never forgets you but does not regret what he is doing, you know: ‘free or dead, never slaves’ ” (Roqué 2000). This letter was not written to be answered; his author will never even know its effect on the addressees. *Papá Iván* is an answer to her father’s letter, also addressed to society at large. The film enabled her to “more or less” accomplish the goal of understanding who her father was and why he did what he did, although there is a question that will always come back, reminding her that there can be no closure: “has he ever really pondered his own loss?” Just like *Los rubios*, Roqué’s film responds to a need of understanding her father—a need that cannot be satisfied by the heroic narrative

alone. To understand him, just as Albertina Carri does, she breaks through preestablished narratives, inevitably also breaking taboos and enlarging the collective debate about 1970s activism.

### *THE RABBIT HOUSE: REMEMBERING “THAT PARTICULAR ARGENTINE INSANITY”*

Laura Alcoba’s childhood experience in a *casa operativa*, a Montoneros underground operational centre, puts her in a unique position to contribute to an understanding of the 1970s. Her novel *The Rabbit House* (2008)<sup>7</sup> deals with the situation of those activists who were deeply committed to the leadership’s decision to embrace the armed struggle and go underground. For the writer and her mother, this implied relocating to a house known only to the national leadership, in which the printing press for the periodical *Evita Montonera* was concealed behind the façade of a rabbit farm.

Building the farm served as a smokescreen for the construction of the *embute* (a hidden chamber) in which compromising material, arms, and the printing press were kept. The distribution of the rabbits justified the frequent trips with the van charged with copies of *Evita Montonera*. The mission was assigned to Diana Teruggi and Daniel Mariani, an activist couple that did not fit the military’s stereotype of the “subversive”: he was an executive at a Buenos Aires firm and kept his “real” job, and she looked “exactly like the pretty blonde wife of a normal business executive”; finally, they were expecting a baby (Alcoba 2008, 42). Laura Alcoba and her mother—who had been declared a wanted person in the press—lived with the couple for about a year. Her mother then went into exile to France, where Laura would join her two years later.

Shortly after they left, the military attacked the “rabbit house,” killing everybody except for Daniel (who was not there but would be killed eight months later) and Clara Anahí, the couple’s three-month-old baby. Thirty-four years later, Clara Anahí is one of the almost 400 persons in Argentina who do not know that they are children of *desaparecidos* whose families are looking for them. The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo have long suspected that Clara Anahí is Marcela Noble, the adoptive daughter of Ernestina Herrera de Noble, the largest shareholder of the media conglomerate Grupo Clarín and editor of *Clarín*, a leading newspaper that supported the dictatorship.<sup>8</sup> *The Rabbit House* was an attempt to reach Clara Anahí, whose mother Diana was very close to the author: she was her main support in an environment of permanent fear and danger.

The prologue is addressed to Diana, to whom the author explains why she waited so long to write this story. She feared the disapproval of the 1970s activists and their question “what is the point of stirring all that up again?” (Alcoba 2008, 1). “All that” refers to life in an armed underground organization during the dictatorship, which remains a sensitive topic for the left. The narrative in which the coup appears as a legitimate response to the armed struggle still has support among members of the armed forces and so-called bystanders. In this context, the fact of raising the subject openly could be understood as an attack on the activists.

Therefore, interviewers often ask about her stance toward the political violence of the 1970s. Alcoba stresses that she despises the military’s crimes; at the same time, she wants to avoid “the usual trap” of idealizing or condemning 1970s armed activism (Papaleo 2010). Idealizing the armed struggle often implies an uncritical attitude toward the decision of the Montoneros leadership to intensify the attacks, a fatal mistake that cost thousands of lives. Conversely, condemning the armed struggle seems to imply that the military’s crimes are justifiable. The either-or trap prevents a critical understanding of violence, the project Alcoba embarks on in her novel. To create a voice less prone to pass judgment, she uses the seven-year-old Laura as the main narrator: her less filtered thinking helps capture the texture of an everyday life marked by violence.

However, she is aware that this can only be a beginning since “more voices are necessary to understand that period” (Lojo 2008). She suggests that the survivors of the repression have not been asked for their testimony often enough, which is necessary for a more complex picture of that period: “I finally took this step [of writing the book] not only because I think about the dead all the time, but also because I know that the survivors must not be forgotten. I have become convinced of how important [it] is to remember them. To force myself to give them a space, too” (Alcoba 2008, 2).

Giving survivors a space to make their testimony public also helps her deal with her own condition as a survivor: “The fact that I am now gathering my memories in order to describe the Argentina of the dictatorship, the Montoneros and the reign of terror, all from a child’s perspective, is not so much to help me remember as to find out whether, afterwards, I can begin to forget” (Alcoba 2008, 2). This seeming paradox—remembering in order to forget—underlines the interconnection of personal and collective in mourning processes. Nicolás Prividera (see next section) similarly affirms in an interview that “there is a right to forgetting, but I think that it can only be



exercised once we have remembered everything we should remember” (Kairuz 2007).

By retrieving her painful childhood memories, Alcoba contributes to the collective understanding of those years, typically presented exclusively from the perspective of the historical and geopolitical context of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, which makes it impossible to assign meaning from the perspective of the present. Conversely, imposing the present worldview and subjectivity on the past can also impede understanding. Cultural production about the 1960s and 1970s political movements and armed struggle faces the challenge of avoiding this either-or trap and combining knowledge of the past and the present to offer instructive interpretations.

Memorial sites<sup>9</sup> can be helpful for avoiding this trap: shaped by the choices of actors such as curators, their materiality to some extent resists attempts to impose the present on the past. Alcoba’s novel was inspired by a trip to Buenos Aires in 2003 during which she visited the “rabbit house,” today a memorial of which Clara Anahí’s grandmother is in charge. Her return to the site was very important—as Jelin (2003) stresses, memories are anchored in material markers: Alcoba recognized the space disfigured by the bullet and bazooka holes from the attack (200 soldiers, helicopters, and tanks had been used to kill or capture 7 adults). The site triggered images, sensations, sounds, and feelings—fragments from her childhood, like snapshots of an album to be arranged in a narrative form, *The Rabbit House*. In this novel, the author expresses what the girl perceives, feels, and understands as introspective monologues by putting the thoughts of a seven-year-old into an elaborate language.

The girl’s perspective reveals important aspects about the enigma of how massive violence and the permanent presence of death became possible and tolerable. One of these aspects is the existence of a routine. Once something enters the realm of routine, it becomes possible and normal in spite of its “exceptionality”: owning and carrying firearms, the idea of killing and being killed. The arms become part of Laura’s universe. Before her father was taken to prison and she moved into the *casa operativa* with her mother, the three lived together in a different clandestine place with an attic: “Mummy and Daddy hide newspapers and weapons in there, but I mustn’t say a word. The others don’t know that we have been forced to go to war” (Alcoba 2008, 9). In the rabbit house, the firearms become part of an everyday routine: “Today is the day for cleaning weapons. I try to find a clean corner of table that isn’t strewn with oil-covered rods and swabs. I don’t want my bread and *dulce de leche* getting dirty” (Alcoba

2008, 82). Although she is scared of armed soldiers, arms themselves have become normal objects for her; she describes a visit with her grandparents to her father in jail: “A soldier is standing on either side of the door. Each of them holds a massive firearm. . . . The barrels seem to have been well oiled—I find myself right in front of a black hole, and I can see how shiny it is” (Alcoba 2008, 88).<sup>10</sup> Laura has also grown used to being alert on the streets of La Plata (“we always stop several times on the way, to check whether anyone is following us. It’s just a matter of habit. . . I have learnt to make these checks into game”). She now travels under a blanket in the car so the neighbours will not ask questions and has learned to keep any compromising information—such as her last name and address, or anything related to her parents—secret (Alcoba 2008, 16).

Besides the routines of those involved in the armed struggle, the novel also addresses how so-called bystanders become disconnected from the terror. Laura observes that the city is “full of people who aren’t taking part” in the confrontation in which she is immersed and “sometimes don’t seem to realize that it’s even happening.” She reflects: “If they’re just pretending not to realize, they’re doing a very good job” (Alcoba 2008, 34). In a study about so-called bystanders in La Plata, Mariana Caviglia (2006) proposes that everyday life contributes to either reproduce or challenge patterns of social order. Therefore, once individuals get used to living under a dictatorial regime (experiencing open repression on the streets, being searched or questioned, learning about missing persons), the possibilities of subverting it become more remote.

After March 24, 1976, the day of the coup, the inhabitants of the “rabbit house” become more anxious as they learn that many of their *compañeros* have been killed or disappeared and that the police have started to inspect every house. *Evita Montonera* needs to be distributed to warn other underground activists, and Diana asks Laura to accompany her. To conceal the content of the boxes, they wrap them as gifts in colourful paper decorated with ribbons. The woman waiting for them at a square to receive the “gift” is also accompanied by a little girl: “I could tell just by looking at her that she was also living in fear. I knew the fear would still be there afterwards, and for as long all this lasted, but meeting this girl was a comfort to me. That day, it was as if the two of us were able to share the burden of our fear—which was bound to make it feel a little less heavy” (Alcoba 2008, 113). That was certainly the case for many activists: sharing not only a political project with transformative potential, but also the risk of dying created strong bonds between them that alleviated the anguish.

At different moments of the novel, we can see them laughing at the meetings, enjoying their time together—for Laura, the other activists had become like a family. Partly for this reason, leaving the group was a difficult process for those who left and for those who stayed behind.

When Laura's mother decides to go into exile, César, the group leader, disapproves. She argues that she can denounce state terrorism from Europe and adds: "Lots of militants have already left, haven't they?" César replies: "You're right, lots of militants have already left. But not the grassroots, just the leaders, *la conducción*" (Alcoba 2008, 122–3). He regrets having told her since this is not meant to be public knowledge. After four additional meetings, he authorizes their departure: "We accept that you will leave with your daughter. But we won't do anything to assist you. The organization won't give you any money, as it does with members of *la conducción*. You won't receive help of any kind from us . . . you'll be on your own . . . Our people are dying every day. They are massacring us. We can keep fighting, we have to keep believing . . . I am not going to stop you from leaving if you've got the opportunity" (Alcoba 2008, 124). This brings up another subject often avoided by the 1970s generation, the inequality between the leadership and the rank and file (*militantes de base*), also addressed by *M*, the film analyzed in the next section. The *conducción* was privileged and could count on the support of their organization if they wanted to go into exile. This is especially problematic given that the decision of going underground and intensifying the armed struggle was taken at the highest levels.

The decision to leave saved the lives of Alcoba and her mother. The author draws attention to the arbitrary boundary between the death and life, the result of chance. Still at the "rabbit house," Laura creates a crossword puzzle, and the word *azar* ("fate") forms itself by chance. However, it is misspelled as *asar* because it intersects with *Isabel* (for Isabel Perón), which she changes to *Izabel* since she feels "fate" is more important. For Alcoba, that crossword puzzle is the core of the novel: "the only bearable answer [to how the two survived] is chance" (Lojo 2008). For the seven-year-old Laura, chance touches many aspects of her life. When the tension in the "rabbit house" increases, she asks herself: "Am I a wanted person too? Yes, in some way, no doubt, although I know I'm here just by accident. Could I have been the daughter of a military man? No, that was impossible, unbearable, it wouldn't have been me" (Alcoba 2008, 64). In this reflection, she embraces her parents' story. Although a story of pain, fear, and exile, it at the same time makes her who she is. This is the paradox of existence, very visible in the case of the sons and daughters

of victims: we *are* by chance. In order to inherit, we need to accept our circumstances and decide what to make of them.

**“HISTORY DOESN’T TELL ITSELF”:  
NICOLÁS PRIVIDERA’S *M***

*M*, released in 2007, is the first film that quotes the previous works by sons and daughters of disappeared activists (especially their concepts and language), identifying a subcategory within films on the dictatorship (Aguilar 2007, 171). Prividera refers to them as “*M* and its sisters” (Amado 2009, 170). This “family” of filmmakers emerges out of the need of understanding their parents’ life and disappearance outside of the preestablished narratives of the human rights associations. Their approach is clearly distinct from that of H.I.J.O.S., but there is a parallel since the latter also think of themselves as “siblings,” related by a shared tragedy.

Prividera’s mother, Marta Sierra, then a thirty-six-year-old biologist working at the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA) in Castelar, Morón, was abducted five days after the coup, when he was six years old and his brother two months. The director hardly remembers her and grew up in a family who considered her disappearance a closed case. There is no information about why she was taken, where to, how and when she died, and the whereabouts of her remains. None of the testimonies by survivors mentions her presence at a clandestine detention centre, and her name does not appear on any of the commemorative plaques for the *desaparecidos* in Buenos Aires; it is as if she had been forgotten in the collective attempts to remember. Prividera explores her fate with the certainty that clues, if any, will not come from the military or other state institutions: the many existing public archives have not crossed their information, and important military archives are still closed. His only possible sources are those who knew his mother as a political activist.

The reasons for her abduction are unclear, as is her degree of involvement in Montoneros. The documentary starts with fragmentary voiceovers expressing perplexity about Sierra’s disappearance: “For years, I have wondered why her and not me. And I still do . . . I still wonder who paid to kill an innocent comrade like her” (Prividera 2007). Among her coworkers, many agree that Sierra was a union member and taught at a school created by fellow members for illiterate INTA workers and adults from the surrounding humble neighbourhoods. Some of the founders and teachers of the school were Montoneros, just as Sierra herself. Her teaching was

considered *trabajo territorial* (grassroots work), which in the context of deprived neighbourhoods included alphabetization, political education, and assistance in fields such as health, housing, and construction of roads.

The Montoneros activists engaged in these tasks were referred to as *militantes de superficie*, but in the slang of the time they were also known as *perejiles* (“foolish,” “trusting”), a designation probably created by the *represores*. In 1974, when the leadership decided to focus on the armed struggle at the expense of grassroots work and the organization went underground, many *militantes de superficie* were left behind: they were not full-time activists, but had a regular job and family not involved in politics, which made it difficult to take this step. They therefore became an easy target for the armed forces. These activists, who once had decisively contributed to the fast growth of Montoneros, in a different phase of the movement, were considered a problem since they had compromising information. Their work in the communities no longer had a clear purpose within the movement, and became “foolishness” (Aguilar 2007, 184). Additionally, the organization needed activists for the armed struggle, and the *perejiles* constituted the main pool of recruitment. Since there was no time to lose, they had to start fighting with minimum training, which exposed them to great danger.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the film, Priverera states that he is not looking for someone to blame for his mother’s death but to understand who bears responsibility for her fate. This is expressed in the scene in which he appears reading Pilar Calveiro’s *Politica y/o violencia* (2005), followed by a close-up of a highlighted paragraph of that book expressing his point of view. Calveiro, a former Montoneros activist and survivor of a clandestine detention centre, addresses parties, unions, and armed organizations involved in the explosion of violence that caused the destruction of the movement: “it is necessary to . . . stop those who were in positions of responsibility in the past from hiding it in the present” (Calveiro 2005, 19). Priverera’s film is an attempt to hold the left, especially those who were close to his mother, accountable and urge them to take charge of their past. This implies reaching out to a generation of survivors struggling to critically understand the tragedy they were part of.

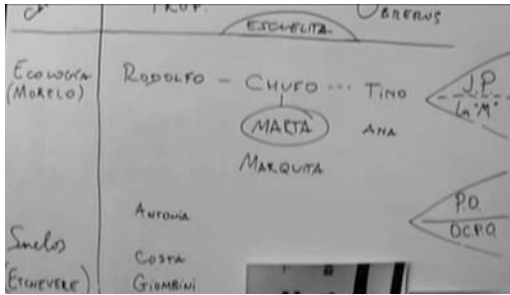
Priverera approaches his mother’s generation not directly but through his family, since Sierra’s relationship with them can provide clues about her political commitment. He interviews his paternal grandmother and aunt, thereby discovering that they can only offer speculations about Sierra’s political activities: she did not talk about

it and they did not ask. They affirm that, at the time, Argentines avoided talking about their political affiliation, which nevertheless could be inferred from what they did, said, and remained silent about. The long silence imposed by seven years of dictatorship after her disappearance discouraged them from speaking up and finding out the details about her fate. Priverera leaves this meeting with few answers, new questions, and his mothers' old address book, which contains her coworkers' contact information.

The next episode in his search sets the tone for the documentary. We hear a phone conversation between the director and Marquita, a former colleague of his mother who alerts him that she is in treatment for cancer and going through a depression. Because her psychiatrist recommended not bringing up sad memories, she is reluctant to participate in the documentary. After this conversation, Priverera articulates his perspective on memory, transmission, and accountability: "There are no possible excuses, it is not a matter of 'this is my private life' or 'I don't feel like talking.' They were adults who were in their right minds in the past and even more so in the present. They have to take charge of their history, when they were 20, 30 years old; they cannot just say 'I made a closure', 'I forgot it' or 'I am not interested in talking about it' " (Priverera 2007). For the director, knowing the past through firsthand accounts is irreplaceable since it offers younger generations a model for understanding their role in the present. "The protagonists have to explain the meaning of their acts, otherwise the members of the next generation become doubly orphan: they have not only lost their parents but also the possibility of writing their own History by contrasting it with the one that precedes it" (Koza 2007). However, state terrorism survivors not only have a significant story to tell, but also emotional difficulties to do so. Noriega (2007) has criticized Priverera's lack of patience and empathy with Marquita. In response, the director affirms that this is necessary and justified since "history does not tell itself, we need to interrogate it, to expose its conditions of production, to question it" (2007).

Thanks to the interviews, Priverera is able to create a diagram of the complex interconnections between the political organizations present at Sierra's workplace, which he gradually completes with names and details (Image 3.3).

The INTA union included workers and university students/professionals with a variety of affiliations to groups such as Montoneros and Organización Comunista Poder Obrero. Priverera



**Image 3.3** Diagram of the political structure of INTA made by the director in *M* (Prividera 2007)

shows how actors experienced the events differently according to their class position and role in Montoneros, and how these factors correspond to their greater or lesser reluctance to examine possible mistakes that led to the tragic outcome, the death of thousands of activists.

Miguel Villarreal, known as Chufo, was in an influential position and served as the connection between the union and Montoneros (*militante de enlace*). Isabel, a good friend of Marta, who was not very involved in politics, remembers that the latter admired him and identified him as the starting point of her commitment to social change. According to Isabel, when Chufo learned that Marta had been killed, he immediately visited her mother to offer consolation since he felt guilty. However, we learn that soon after, he used Marta's death to recruit Ana, another union member, for the armed struggle: "We should not forget what the despots did to Marta." The editing of these interviews suggests that those in leadership positions were aware of the great danger that *militantes de superficie* were exposed to.

In the conversation with Marquita, Prividera underlines the greater vulnerability of the *militantes de superficie* by pointing out that, unlike his mother and many others, Chufo managed to leave to Mexico. Marquita, a rank-and-file member like Marta, explains the logic behind what now appears as inequality (which also emerges in *The Rabbit House*): since the *militantes de superficie* were less compromised than the leadership, she thought, the military would not persecute them, and "somebody had to stay" (Prividera 2007). Marquita admits that this logic was incorrect, and Prividera wonders how they could misread the situation so fundamentally.

The director then brings up the disconnect between activists from the professional middle class and those with a working-class background. Rodolfo and his wife, mid-level leaders who belong to the first group, remember with pride the integration of professionals and workers in the same union. However, Tino, a worker, affirms that the leaders recruited him and other workers primarily to extend their influence in the workplace and the neighbourhood. He also stresses the distance between the two groups in relation to collective action: “They dreamt up that we were going to act massively. What the fuck! Most of us did not understand anything.” His wife confirms this perspective—“they had a different education”—but still remembers with nostalgia the time they spent together discussing and working on services for the neighbourhood: “We were very good *compañeros*” (Prividera 2007).

Prividera’s editing implies that workers clearly preferred the concrete work with the poor to political theory debates. Tino is disappointed about the movement’s leaders at the national level: “Now I know how to make a revolution. But leaders who should have known, who were to face the greatest risks, allowed many *compañeros* to die victims of the violence. They should have known that the power of the regime’s violence and the economic power rest on the existence of thousands of mercenaries, the military, who killed people without giving a shit” (Prividera 2007). Rodolfo and his wife, conversely, dismiss the commonly held view that the Montoneros leadership made a mistake and underestimated the adversary’s power. They affirm that, given the massive mobilization of young people, it was impossible to imagine that the right would prevail.

The only “heroes” and “victims” of Prividera’s film seem to be the working-class activists and the *militantes de superficie* who concretely advanced their interests. Tino remembers Marta as blonde—as in *Los rubios*, a sign of belonging to the upper class—but her simplicity and passionate struggle to improve workers’ conditions made him realize that she was not a snob (*cajetilla*). Like the *perejiles*, workers were highly exposed to the repression: Tino was brutally interrogated about Chufo and Rodolfo but did not know anything because they had stopped coming to the neighbourhood. After the dictatorship, Rodolfo visited only once: “That’s why I spoke of being disappointed, abandoned. But they think differently” (Prividera 2007).

Prividera then encounters another facet of the story that helps him explain his mother’s fate, the denunciations among coworkers, the existence of informants, and the role of civilians in the repression. He finds out about the existence of a document that listed



INTA employees suspected of political engagement that were later detained and discharged. Marta was on this list, which means that someone had turned her in to management. In his search for this person, Prividera learns about undercover police agents who often infiltrated unions and movements, denunciations by coworkers, right-wing union members, or even the union leadership. Three witnesses suspect that Marta Sierra's supervisor, Haydeé, turned her in. The latter, however, implicates another person, a "very arrogant man" who once threatened Marta ("you will remember me for a lifetime"). We do not learn who this man was and whether his threats were personal or political in character.

According to Rodolfo and Haydeé, the fact that nobody could imagine what would happen to the detainees made the practice of denunciation widespread: it was assumed that denunciations resulted, at most, in discharge, temporary detention, or relocation. Prividera's uncle also drew up lists at his college and soon after her abduction told the family that Marta deserved her fate "for being connected to those bastards who plant bombs." Sierra's mother, sister, and husband did not respond and hid their emotions. Polarization had pervaded all social spaces: work, neighbourhood, university, and family.

His investigation of Sierra's death takes the director to his most intimate circle: on the day of Marta's abduction, she was at her parents' place next door, recovering from a small surgery. Soldiers broke into her apartment and pointed a gun at Nicolás Prividera, who was asleep, and asked his father about Marta Sierra's whereabouts. He then told them that she was next door. According to Prividera's aunt, he could never forgive himself for that. The military, the Montoneros leadership, so-called bystanders, family, himself, nobody is innocent, *M* seems to claim, perhaps encouraging the audience to reflect about past and present suffering for which (knowingly or unknowingly) they might be responsible.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the film, Prividera realizes that it is impossible to track down those responsible through his mother's *compañeros*. The multiple levels of involvement with the military make it difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions. Therefore, the collective elaboration of the past also needs to happen at multiple levels. This is illustrated in the film's two epilogues.

For the first epilogue, he organizes a meeting of the middle-class and the working-class activists who participate in the film. Their heated debate in the present highlights the distance between the two groups in the past. This suggests that intergenerational transmission should include a truthful "internal" debate among those involved in the 1970s revolutionary project. In the second epilogue, the director

inaugurates a plaque in memory of his mother at INTA in a ceremony, at the end of which the staff exclaims: “Marta Sierra, present!” In the director’s words, “naming enables us to invoke what is lost” (Prividera 2006, 39). This act includes the *perejiles* in the collective memory of the repression and simultaneously spreads knowledge about the past: during his first visit to INTA, Prividera had learned that the younger workers did not know what had happened at their workplace during the dictatorship.

## CHAPTER 4



### BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Whereas the films discussed in Chapter 3 revisit the past in order to challenge existing narratives, the films and texts analysed in this chapter focus on creating intergenerational dialogues and mutual understanding. They focus on sons' and daughters' conversations about 1970s activism with their surviving father and/or mother. As I explained in Chapter 2, this subject tends to be avoided in everyday life since it is linked to painful memories of murdered friends and relatives, torture, and humiliation. Moreover, the construction of memory about 1970s activism is fraught with an intense mix of feelings: nostalgia for the years in which life had a clear purpose that brought young people together in an awareness of making history, a sense of failure for not having achieved one's goals, a fear of being held responsible for the advent of the dictatorship, and confusion about the meaning of those experiences in the less politicised present. For all these reasons, passive forms of transmission prevailed and the next generation grew up in a symptomatic silence, which often produced a burning desire to know.

However, any intergenerational dialogue about the 1960s inevitably brings together two worlds—the parents' youth and the youth of today—that tend to clash because of different “constellations of meaning” (Calveiro 2005, 14). The differences become tangible when the discussion touches on some of the choices made by their parents, such as joining the armed struggle while raising children. These choices had a direct impact on the children, as they are the reason why many of them grew up father- or motherless. It is therefore a challenge

for the daughters/sons and parents discussed in this chapter to engage in a genuine dialogue, and moments of incomprehension should be seen as initial steps of a process that requires persistence and empathy on both sides. Finally, these efforts to comprehend the activists' choices in the past also help both generations better understand the ideology of the present.<sup>1</sup>

### CHILDREN AND REVOLUTION: *EL TIEMPO Y LA SANGRE* AND *ENCONTRANDO A VÍCTOR*

*El tiempo y la sangre/The Time and the Blood* (2004) is an intergenerational project. Sonia Severini, a former activist whose husband was killed by the armed forces, invited Alejandra Almirón, a member of the post-dictatorship generation, to direct a documentary.<sup>2</sup> The film is centred on a series of meetings of former activists who had been engaged in grassroots work in the shantytown of Villa Angela, Morón.<sup>3</sup> Many of them had been imprisoned or held in clandestine detention centres while others, like Severini, went into exile. Most of their former *compañeros* disappeared. The activists' sons and daughters, now in their early twenties who had expressed the need to know more about that part of their parents' life attended the meetings. The intergenerational character of the project is established at the beginning of the film in Almirón's voiceover:

In the '70s, I was witness to a confusing situation. My only clear memory is Perón's death that benefited me with a few days off from school. I grew up in the shadow of a euphoric generation, but my own time was quite different. One day I met Sonia [Severini]. She had belonged to Montoneros and wanted to talk about her activism in the West. She opened a little window for me to spy on those who marked a path I never walked on myself.

(2004)

The documentary is also a window on the past for the sons and daughters who want to know more about their parents, and for Severini, who realizes her deep need for reflecting on this most intense and tragic period of her life, still surrounded by questions. This becomes clear in the conversations with her *compañeros*, in which she tries to understand what happened to their collective political project and to them as individuals.

The meetings take place in family houses where parents, sons, and daughters talk in larger or smaller groups. We are taken from one group to the next, as the editing reconstructs the chronology of the events through the activists' accounts: firstly, the grassroots work with

the inhabitants of Morón in preparation for Perón's return from exile; secondly, Perón's split with Montoneros and the latter's decision to go underground; and finally, the increasing repression after Perón's death and the coup.

The former activists describe the first period as the best four years of their lives during which they met "the best persons ever" and tell humorous anecdotes and stories of camaraderie, uncommon themes in films about activism and repression. One can speculate that the presence of young interlocutors encouraged them to revisit areas of the past typically put aside in response to the audience's expectation to hear about pain or heroism. For example, they relate the challenges involved in keeping up the image of the solemn and austere activist, especially if they come from the middle or upper class. For instance, Ricardo Outker comments that two leading members of the organization caught him and Marra playing tennis, clearly an upper-class sport. They hid their racquets and pretended to be in an area reconnaissance exercise: "it was as if the police had caught us" (Almirón 2004). Another activist, Julio, tells a similar story. He enjoyed wearing expensive clothes, a liking that was perceived as an obstacle for bonding with the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods and incompatible with the activist lifestyle: "it was very hard for me to leave my previous life behind, but I believed that activism represented all that was pure. If I wanted to get involved, I had to do my best and could not afford the luxury of being contradictory" (Almirón 2004). Their generation was marked by the confidence of having found the right path and the possibility of sharing it with a vast community of young men and women. Severini states: "We were happy, we felt that we were making history, violence was unquestioned. How naive we were! How daring we were!" (Almirón 2004).

The theme of unquestioned violence introduces the second phase of the movement. The former activists voice their sense of having been betrayed by Perón, who sided with the conservative wing of Peronism against Montoneros. The tone changes, and more sombre but equally unexpected memories emerge. They remember this period of crisis as very confusing: after the split with Perón, the inhabitants of Morón (mostly Peronists) asked them to stop coming since their presence could cause a military attack, and, unlike the activists, they had nowhere else to go. Despite these demands and their own reluctance, a comrade in a leadership position asked the group to continue working in the area since the organization had to keep functioning in a time of crisis. This request put both the inhabitants of the area and the *militantes de superficie* in great danger. Today, the activists are as

confused about the phase inaugurated by the decision to go underground as they were back then: How safe was it to continue doing grassroots work for those who were not (yet) wanted? Which activists were given cyanide pills? How did the organizational structure disintegrate so fast? How could some exiled activists in the late 1970s be convinced that the fall of the dictatorship was imminent and return in the midst of cruel repression to join the “counteroffensive”?<sup>4</sup>

When the attention turns to the armed struggle, the dialogue between activists and children becomes tenser: while the former think that violence was inescapable and describe the situation as “a funnel” that ended in taking up the arms, the latter question both its inevitability and its suitability. “I feel that perhaps it wasn’t the ideal approach to struggle,” affirms Iván Roqué, son of Julio Iván Roqué and brother of María Inés, the director of *Papá Iván* (Almirón 2004). At this point, the documentary intercalates childhood memories of the sons and daughters: one son, Diego, saw his parents lying on the living room floor covered in blood before he was carried away by a soldier. María,<sup>5</sup> Severini’s daughter, shares a very different memory that also conveys the dramatic impact of the repression on their lives: as a child, she did not want to do the wonder woman’s spins, because she was afraid of disappearing like her father.

Apart from having grown up in a new constellation of meaning, in which, as Calveiro observes, open violence is hypocritically condemned (Calveiro 2005, 15), sons and daughters find it difficult to accept Montoneros’ choice for the armed struggle because of their painful childhood experiences. In addition to this, dialogue is made more difficult by unresolved feelings of guilt on the side of the activists. This is the reason for a misunderstanding between Diego’s sister and Luis, a former activist who was close to her disappeared parents. Luis becomes irritated when she insists on understanding why her parents’ remained at home although they knew that the military could find them there: “What you really don’t understand is why they did not quit the organization when everyone around was dying” (Almirón 2004). We then learn that he quit, used the false papers provided by Montoneros to find a job, bought a car, and even underwent psychoanalysis with his false name.

However, the tensest moments in this intergenerational dialogue occur when they touch on the choice of having children in such difficult circumstances, which included the possibility of leaving them behind as orphans (Luis affirms: “we knew we could be killed and we knew what we were involved in. We were not just innocent victims”).<sup>6</sup> Chufó’s son Juan Manuel (see Chapter 3) is very critical of his father’s

choices, which led to his violent death after his return from Mexico (he poisoned himself on the run from the military):

*JUAN MANUEL.* Risking so much was heroic but also a little silly.

*CAMUSSO [a former activist .]* For me it doesn't have anything to do with being more or less silly, naive or kamikaze. It has to do with historical periods, this is easier to see in other countries than in one's own, but there are periods when things are simply black or white.

*JUAN MANUEL.* Why did they [his parents] have three kids—*three*—while their *compañeros'* houses were falling one after the other?

The meeting gives Juan Manuel the opportunity to ask this question and voice his frustration; yet, he does not receive an answer. In this early stage of active transmission, the role of the younger generation is mostly that of spectators of a history that is made more accessible by unexpected anecdotes about the years of activism and dictatorship. The intergenerational encounter also opens up a space for activists to talk and remember outside of the role of victims. However, there is little space for dialogue as soon as there is substantial disagreement: each side embraces a perspective without engaging with the other's ideas or making an attempt to learn from the past. This could explain why, throughout the film, Almirón appears playing "Simon," an electronic, memory-enhancing game.

For Severini, the project is an opportunity to remember, but also to better understand this phase of her life in relation to the present. A voiceover drawn from one of her texts reads "we lost and we know that we lost, but they also lost and don't even know it," as we see images of homeless people, protesters, and passers-by in the streets of today's Buenos Aires. This reflection introduces a concern about the situation in which both generations are constructing their projects, and the former activists have something valuable to share despite the tragedy. "What did we all lose?" and "What are the battles we are losing today?" are questions that can help foster intergenerational dialogue and enable us to build on the past. According to Feierstein, "understanding the end of the 1970s revolutionary practice as a defeat is instructive, it teaches us to fight better, to perfect the tools, the means, and the assessment of the battles to fight. . . . On the contrary, understanding it as a mistake ('we were wrong') has a paralyzing effect, similar to horror. If they believe that they were wrong, that without the fight there would not have been a massacre, the victims take charge of the perpetrators' guilt (2007, 379)."

While *El tiempo y la sangre* primarily introduces generational differences, Natalia Bruschtein's *Encontrando a Víctor/Finding Víctor* (2005) deepens them, producing a crisis that ultimately transforms both participants. In their late teenage years, the director's parents Víctor Bruschtein and Shula Erenberg joined the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (PRT) and later the party's armed wing (ERP). The repression disintegrated the family: Víctor's older brother, Luis, was exiled in Mexico; his sister Leonora and her husband, Adrián, were killed; and his father, Santiago, was abducted. After these tragic events, Erenberg went into exile while her husband stayed to find out what had happened to his father, Santiago. Víctor Bruschtein was abducted less than a year later, in May 1977, a few days after the disappearance of his younger sister, Irene, and her husband, Mario. From the six original members of the Bruschtein-Bonaparte family, only two survived: Luis and Laura Bonaparte, a member of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and an internationally known human rights activist (Mary 2010).

Twenty-five years later, Natalia Bruschtein returns to Argentina to understand her father's decision to stay, and investigate the open questions around his disappearance. She interviews her uncle Luis, her grandmother Laura, and her aunt Ana Villa, all of them exiled in Mexico. The most significant dialogue, however, is the one she has with her mother. Bruschtein's questions about this period show a genuine desire to understand why her parents would put themselves in harm's way even though they had a child, and her mother's answers reveal the logic that informed their decisions thirty years ago. Asked about Víctor's decision to stay in Argentina, Erenberg explains: "for him, you were not more or less important than his *compañeros*, his party, his activism or his dreams" (Bruschtein 2005). This is painful for a daughter to accept and difficult to understand in a time in which most individuals have withdrawn into the private sphere and separated it rigidly from collective projects. However, these differences encourage the examination of the present and the meaning of our choices in it: What are our priorities? What has replaced activism as the only thing that could be as important as one's children or family today? What do we dream of? What do our answers tell about the ideology that shapes our lives?

This pattern repeats itself throughout the documentary: when the subjectivity of the past emerges, the present becomes amenable to critical examination. Unlike most sons and daughters whose films I discuss in this book, Bruschtein abandons the classical interview format and the emotional distance it imposes in order to engage in





**Image 4.1** Conversation between mother and daughter in *Encontrando a Víctor* (Bruschtein 2004)

a dialogic and dynamic interaction with her mother. Visually, this is expressed in shots of the two together as dialogue partners instead of the typical alternating shots (Image 4.1).

This exchange submerges Bruschtein into the past and helps her overcome the deep generational gap. As Calveiro notes, the reconfiguration of the world that started thirty years ago implies much more than “new forms of accumulation and distribution of wealth”; it includes “a restructuring of societies, politics, imaginaries and the world as a world of meaning” (2005, 14).

Erenberg tries to explain how Víctor and she, along with many other activists, combined choices that in the present seem mutually exclusive, such as risking their lives and having children. She refers to a sense of community and connectedness that question the current conceptions of subject, family, and private sphere: “since there was such a deep affective bond among *compañeros* and we all thought, loved and felt so similarly, you knew that if something happened to you, a comrade would immediately replace your affection for your child, it was going to be alright and protected; there wasn’t a risk that he or she wouldn’t develop well” (Bruschtein 2005). As Laura Bonaparte mentions in an article, Leonora’s and Adrián’s newborn baby was raised as their own son by a couple with whom his father was living when the police murdered him. That baby is now “a beautiful, generous and very intelligent young man” (Bonaparte 2011). Adrián saved the

baby and his *compañeros*: once he noticed that a police car was following him, he walked straight past the house where they lived and led the police away from them. Otherwise, the *represores* would have decided over the baby's fate—he would perhaps have become one of the 500 appropriated children. While the systematic appropriations aimed at eradicating “subversive ideas,” for the activists, raising each other's children represented a continuation of their collective project. The polarization of society in the 1970s makes evident the importance of the family in the transmission and reproduction of ideology, typically overlooked in times of “peace” and “consensus.”

Before going into exile, Erenberg was torn between the desire of leaving to save her life and the impulse to stay with her *compañeros*. Erenberg's exile is linked to what is perhaps the saddest revelation for the director. The only reason why her mother did not return during the dictatorship was that, unlike Montoneros, her party did not encourage exiled activists to do so: “If I had belonged to the Montos, I would have returned. My life was like a black hole: What was I doing in Mexico?” (Bruschtein 2005). We see mother and daughter looking at each other in silence for a few seconds. The daughter then gives a hint of a sad smile: she was also part of that “black hole,” and if Shula had returned, she would have probably grown up without a mother. Most activists who participated in the Montoneros “counteroffensive” have disappeared (Zuker 2004). It was very difficult for Bruschtein to work with this material. After the interviews, she had to wait for three years before she could edit it (personal correspondence with the director, October 2010).

When Bruschtein questions activists' decisions about their children's fate, Erenberg answers: “Yours is a *legitimate* feeling but, although we took much care of you, we never pondered whether in the future you will feel our absence or be angry because we exposed ourselves. Our priority was that you live in a fairer world. And this might sound like a cliché today, but it was also a *legitimate* feeling” (Bruschtein 2005, my emphasis). Erenberg recognizes both her daughter's and her own perspective as legitimate at different moments of history, a condition for intergenerational dialogue that allows both sides to better understand the past and the present: “It is necessary to build a bridge between our current gaze and the gaze from the past. It is not that one is true and the other false; they are two different constructions that belong to two different moments of power and resistance” (2005, 16). This “bridge” implies investment and empathy on both sides. The kinds of questions asked by Bruschtein and her attentive listening invite her interlocutor to connect with her emotions

and avoid defensiveness or evasive generalizations that increase the distance.

The end of the film represents the end of Bruschtein's search. It returns to the first image of the film, a picture of Víctor with a short note on its back: "So my daughter doesn't forget me and can recognize me when we see each other again. So the rest don't forget who I am. Thinking that you think of me does me good. Love you all, Víctor" (Bruschtein 2005). At the end of the film, the director poses next to her father in a projection of the image on a wall (the technique created by Quieto and also used by Prividera in *M*, discussed in Chapter 2): she caresses his face and holds his hand (Image 4.2). The



**Image 4.2** The director posing next to her father's picture in *Encontrando a Víctor* (Bruschtein 2004)

process of making the film enables the encounter Víctor wished for in his note. Unlike Roqué, he does not leave a long letter explaining who he was and why he died—perhaps anticipating that it would never be enough—but a promise of a reencounter when his daughter is ready to find him. Through *Encontrando a Víctor*, she realizes that her parents' world was so different from hers that it is not possible to judge their decisions—in terms of right or wrong—with the eyes of the present. This makes the feeling of abandonment vanish and allows the director to reconcile with her father, who emerges as a person who died at the age she started making the documentary: a young man with dreams and hardships in a time in which both were a matter of life and death.

Free from the false dilemma to either uncritically admire or criticize the past, she is able to use it for addressing concerns we today typically face as individuals (the purpose and meaning of life and parenthood) as well as collective problems of the present such as inequalities, state violence, and social isolation. *Encontrando a Víctor* allows Bruschtein to begin a new phase of her life, defined by something other than being “the daughter of”—she becomes an actor of her own time. Her next documentary project, *Bajo el mismo sol/Under the Same Sun* (Erenberg 2009), cowritten with her mother, examines crimes against humanity today and the existence of impunity made possible by political pressure and powerful interests. The shift from Víctor's disappearance to worldwide patterns of cruelty and injustice shows that the experience of the families of *desaparecidos* concerns us all, not only as part of the societies in which these crimes took place, but also as human beings.

The next novella, also by a daughter of a *desaparecido*, reflects the process of integrating her father's disappearance into her life and into the community that for a long time preferred not to hear about it, condemning sons and daughters to silence.

### *EL MAR Y LA SERPIENTE:*

“WE CANNOT CHANGE THE PAST, BUT . . . ”

Paula Bombara's *El mar y la serpiente/The Sea and the Snake* (2005) relates an encounter between mother and daughter, a private conversation, postponed for many years, about a shared tragedy (Blanco 2006). The author narrates the story of her father's disappearance and the subsequent abduction of her mother and herself from their apartment in Buenos Aires. The first part of the novella is narrated by the three-year-old daughter. Bombara uses fiction to return to a time she does not remember and reconstructs the events of her life through the eyes of the girl who had just turned three when

her father was abducted and killed. We then reencounter the same story through the dialogue between a teenager who finds out that her father had not died of a heart attack, and her mother. The latter now becomes the principal source of “memory” since the teenager claims to not remember anything. The conversations with the mother help her contextualize memory fragments and make other memories surface.

Like Alcoba, Bombara gives voice to a child that makes sense of the tragedy around her with the intellectual and emotional tools typical of her age: fragments organized around details that attract her attention, limited vocabulary, description of emotions as bodily sensations, and an unmediated relation between thinking and saying. The reader can deduct the course of events (her father’s “disappearance,” life underground, and her mother’s abduction) from the girl’s observations. This intensifies the pain since we know the violent reality that she does not know about the disappearance, although it is already shaping her life. For instance, once her mother realizes that her husband will not return from distributing flyers (*volanteada*), after the obligatory one-hour wait,<sup>7</sup> she starts packing to go to her in-laws’ house:

Mum has water in her eyes. But she doesn’t cry.  
 It’s a lie.  
 She cries. But inside.  
 Mum fakes a laugh. (Bombara 2005, 14)

When they arrive, the girl notices that this new situation starts repeating itself: “Grandpas also cry inside. And when water falls from their eyes they go to the bathroom. When they look at me, they fake a laugh. I also know how to fake a laugh. When I laugh, my grandma calms down. She hugs Mom. Mom calms down” (Bombara 2005, 15). These descriptions capture the desperation of a family who have to go on with their lives despite the violent disruption caused by the disappearance: they have to cope with the anguish involved in the never-ending search as they continue their routines.

Furthermore, the girl’s experience of her father’s absence reveals the perverse logic and effects of the junta’s practice of disappearing individuals. For her, the only imaginable reason why a person can be missing is that they lost their way, which is inconceivable in this case since her father is an adult. This becomes clear in the following passage, when the mother tells the girl that her father is at work but will meet them later:

I say, *and Dad?*  
 She tells me, *I don't know.*  
 Dad left by bike.  
 Dad is lost.  
 I say, *Dad got lost?*  
 Mum looks at me. She doesn't talk. A lot of water falls from her eyes.  
 I say, *don't cry, Mummy.* I say, *he will find himself, you'll see.*  
 . . . Dad got lost but he will come back because grown-ups know  
 their way. (Bombara 2005, 15–16)

Families describe its inconceivability as the most painful aspect of disappearance. In *Encontrando a Víctor*, Laura Bonaparte notes that this category is impossible to comprehend for two reasons: firstly, because we only lose inanimate objects that can neither return nor ask for help, and secondly, if the body is missing, there is no final confirmation of someone's death and a life remains incomplete. This is impossible to accept since we relate to life as a cycle with a beginning and an end.

Through a child's eyes, the protagonist then relates experiences about her and her mother living underground in a coastal town and then in Buenos Aires: "Mum played at hiding herself during the trip"; "Mum cut my hair like a boy. She also cut her hair like a boy"; "Here I also have aunts and uncles that I don't know" (Bombara 2005, 17, 18, 27). The feelings related to her father's (possible) death are mostly described as bodily sensations; for instance, when the mother tells her that her father had died of a heart attack and she will not see him again: "My tummy hurts. A lot . . . I look at the ceiling. It moves. I dry the water from my eyes. But more and more keeps coming. I am full of water" (Bombara 2005, 20). Similarly, after her mother's abduction, the girl is worried that she, too, will disappear: "I don't cry anymore. I am dry. Something pricks me inside" (Bombara 2005, 40). As for Carri (Chapter 3), the moment of abduction constitutes a traumatic event that the girl will not be able to remember when she grows up, but is not able to forget right away either: "When I close my eyes I remember those men entering my house and Pamina [the cat] screamed and left to the room. We stayed with the men. They hit her on the head and grabbed me by the arm. It hurt me a lot and I started crying. She grabbed me by the other arm and shouted to let me go . . . They had weapons and wanted to kill us" (Bombara 2005, 39).

Her grandmother asks her not to talk about these events to anyone, which anticipates the silence that will surround them for the years to come. The novella's second part, "The History," starts when the

girl, now a teenager, learns that her father has disappeared. She is angry that her mother kept the truth from her for eight years. She then starts asking her: Why did he “disappear”? Who abducted him? Why him and not other activists? Why was her mother also abducted? What happened to her in detention? The mother is surprised that her daughter does not seem to remember anything about events she had experienced so intensely. However, for both of them, (new) memories emerge and old ones become clearer in the conversations. The daughter remembers having missed her mother very much for a time that felt longer than the two months of her detention, and realizes that the habit of talking to her father in her mind had been encouraged by her mother during her childhood to help her deal with his absence. We remember in interaction with others who first pass their memories on to us and later in turn receive our own memories as meaningful “content.” Paula Bombara is able to tell her memories (how she dealt with her father’s disappearance) through the novel because her mother did it first: she can tell her history because she was told a history.

Although the dialogue with her mother is an important aspect of the teenagers’ discovery of her past, the time spent alone assimilating the shocking information is equally important. This process is expressed in paragraphs that capture her mental activity during this process. Her mother tells her about torture at the detention centre and explains that her father did not die of polytrauma trying to escape from a police car, as the police had affirmed and the judge ruled,<sup>8</sup> but was tortured and, moribund, taken to a hospital, where the doctors were instructed to not help him. Some words resonate in her mind, reflecting her difficulties to assimilate what she heard:

“We were all tortured. They knew everything. If you were Jewish or dark-skinned poor you! Terrible terrible terrible terrible. We were all tortured. There is not an answer for that.

“They knew everything. They didn’t care about anything. Polytrauma”.

(Bombara 2005, 73, spaces in the original)

Torture especially intrigues the daughter, but her mother refuses to talk about it, which illustrates the restrictions imposed on active transmission by a limit experience, and the importance of the contexts of enunciation. For the victims, it is humiliating to talk about torture in front of their children unless they do so in the context of a trial against the perpetrators (Dandan 2011). However, the idea of torture torments the teenager who decides to ask her again in the future. She

needs to tame the unbearable images of horror through words, in order to surround the trauma already conveyed through silences and symptomatic behaviour. In fact, after the teenager starts to learn what her mother went through at the detention centre, she understands that what she had previously experienced as possessiveness is rooted in a traumatic past. When the teenager learns that her mother made a snake toy with pieces of fabric provided by the torturers, she thinks: “How horrible! Two months blindfolded, in pain and even so she made a toy for me . . . . I think she is like that with me because she is afraid something might happen to me” (Bombara 2005, 81, spaces in the original).

The dialogue helps the girl understand her mother’s behaviour in the context of her history. However, when it comes to her parents risking their lives, we see an initial incomprehension similar to *Encontrando a Víctor* and *El tiempo y la sangre*. The teenager questions her importance to a father who chose to distribute pamphlets in a very dangerous moment, shortly after Montoneros had ambushed a military truck to obtain arms, killing two soldiers:

—But we had a very important reason.

—Yes. I know what you are going to tell me: The story of the better world.

—Don’t play down its importance! Everything we did was necessary! It was important! Very important! It was our best present for our children!

—But for me the best would be having him with me! . . .

[Daughter’s thoughts:] I understand I understand everything but who understands me? She knows very well that everything would be better if Dad were alive!

(Bombara 2005, 84, spaces in the original)

They overcome this moment of mutual incomprehension when the teenager accepts that what happened to her parents also happened to her. Despite her lack of clear memories, it is a shared story: “This is what happened to us, love, there is no way of changing the past” (Bombara 2005, 86). There is no way of changing the past, but their relation to it will change depending on the political context and their individual experiences.

As a way of starting to own that past, the mother proposes that the teenager record an interview with her, listen to it, and come up with new questions for the next interview. The process of owning her story involves an impulse to share it with her classmates and teacher. In the third part, “The Decision,” after an intense struggle, the protagonist writes an assignment on the *desaparecidos*, to be read aloud



in class. The teacher determined the topic, but the teenager is the one who chooses to write it in the first person, and from the perspective of a daughter of a disappeared father. By doing so, she overcomes her mother's fears that classmates or teachers will reject her if they believe in the narrative of the "war against subversion." In these early years of the post-dictatorship period, the victims' perspective was still struggling for recognition, and so-called bystanders oscillated between shock and denial.

In her essay, she explains that the *desaparecidos* fought for a world in which words and ideas matter and are respected, something she finds lacking among her classmates—she uses the past to critically relate to the present, which indicates that she has accepted her story and is ready to use it as a guide. She concludes with the idea that every disappeared father, mother, or child of a family is also the teacher, artist, or worker whom society needs and does not have in the present. "There is a lack of 30,000 persons who could have done so many things . . . We cannot even ask them what time it is. We cannot change the past. But we can remember the injustice of their absence from our lives. I won't be able to forget it. I have my Dad who reminds me of the other 29.999" (Bombara 2005, 106–107).<sup>9</sup>

In her essay, she bridges the gap between the memory of the victims and the rest of society by underlining that the effects of the repression are collective. Also, her successful struggle to overcome her own and her mother's fears about making their story public indicates that younger generations are about to take the lead in the process of collective trauma elaboration. H.I.J.O.S. Mexico campaigned in similar ways to sensitize society about the political disappearances in the present using the slogan "Los desaparecidos nos faltan a todos" ("The *desaparecidos* are missing from all our lives") and a series of family portraits—and also artists, musicians, and athletes—holding the picture of *desaparecidos* in public spaces.<sup>10</sup>

Similar to Bombara's novella and the two films explored before, the final novel in this chapter is structured around the conversations about 1970s activism between a mother and her child. However, in this case, the missing father did not "disappear" in the sense of the word used so far.

### DEMASIADOS HÉROES: "I'D RATHER HE WAS DEAD"

*Demasiados héroes* (2009)/*No Place for Heroes* (2010) deals with an unexplored period of Laura Restrepo's life, her four years of underground activism in the Trotskyist *Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* (PST) during the dictatorship in Argentina. The acclaimed Colombian

writer bases her novel on a trip to Buenos Aires with her son Pedro Saboulard (in the novel, “Mateo”) to meet his father (“Ramón”). The plot is developed primarily through dialogues between mother and son written in a colloquial register that reconstruct the conversations between Restrepo and Saboulard during their trip (Kollmann 2009). The persons and events that appear in these conversations are inspired by the writer’s experience during the dictatorship.

In the novel, the Colombian activist Lorenza (“Lolé”), Restrepo’s alter ego, travels from Spain to Argentina to support the underground resistance against the dictatorship. She falls in love with a comrade in a leadership position, Ramón, with whom she has a son, Mateo. During the most intense phase of the repression, she fears so much for the baby’s safety that she asks Ramón to return to Colombia with her, risking to be judged as *quebrada*, “broken by fear.” Surprisingly, he agrees. However, after a few months of separation from activism, he starts feeling disoriented and depressed, which results in a deterioration of the relationship and their eventual separation. When Lorenza asks him for a divorce, he seems to accept, but soon after kidnaps their son and returns to Argentina. In the book, the teenager Mateo refers to this event as the “dark episode” not only because it harmed his mother but also because he has no direct memories of it and for a long time had to make do with his relatives’ evasive answers (Restrepo 2010, 5).

After many months of despair, Lorenza travels to Argentina and recovers her child through an elaborate plan. Twelve years after the end of the dictatorship, Mateo, now a teenager, sets out to look for his father, whom he had not seen after the rescue. His mother, now a renowned writer, accompanies him to Argentina, and the novel tells the story of their journey—like Alcoba, Severini, and Bruschtein—to the place where memories are anchored. This trip includes two separate processes: while the child looks for his father, Lorenza reenounters a story she had not found the right tone to write about and had become mysterious even to herself. It is a story that involves her own pain and the suffering of many others, but it also recounts the best years of her life.

Although his mother has talked to him about the “dark episode” many times, Mateo is never completely satisfied. For him, the “episode” inaugurates his father’s absence from his life and contains the key to, if not understanding or reconciling with him, at least bringing to an end the years of uncertainty. Unexpectedly for Mateo, in order to grasp his parents’ relationship, he needs to submerge himself in the world of 1970s activism, a phase of his mother’s life he is

attracted to and rejects at the same time. On the one hand, Lorenza's activism separates him from her and is the reason why he does not know his father. On the other hand, his biography is the result of love story between activists in the turmoil of the 1970s underground resistance.

His parents' separation in Bogotá was to a great extent caused by incompatible ways of dealing with the shock of having left the party: while Lorenza avoided her feelings by focusing entirely on her "new" life, Ramón could not adjust to a lifestyle similar to the one they were struggling against in Buenos Aires (Lorenza's was an upper-class family in a rigidly structured society). She explains to her son that it is common among people who were close in times of danger to discover that nothing else keeps them together once the fear and the struggle for survival are over. Mateo then focuses on understanding the times of danger when his parents fell in love and decided to have a child.

In response to his curiosity, his mother tells him about clandestine work for the PST: enrolling new members among industrial workers, meeting with dockworker unionists, printing and delivering bulletins about the party's political views and the repression. She explains the party's history and internal organization, the ways in which they survived economically underground, and the precautionary measures they took to protect themselves and each other from the persecution. They used a *nom de guerre* (Lorenza was Aurelia and Ramón was Forcás), forged identification cards and passports, had a false identity for outsiders, did not share any personal information with insiders, always had a *minuto* when two of them met in a public space (an explanation of what they were doing in case soldiers were to interrogate them), and left the meeting point after a ten-minute wait to alert the others that an activist had been abducted and they were in danger. For Mateo, these stories are as distant from reality as action and sci-fi films. When Lorenza tells him that the leaders asked her to donate (*cotizar*) a recently inherited property in Colombia to the party, he cannot help but compare his mother's situation to Luke Skywalker's in *Star Wars*:

The turning over of one's inheritance is a test any hero has to pass . . . The hero has to renounce his former life and blood ties in order to begin clean and pure on his quest, without prior ties, to his new family, the secret society . . . You were fulfilling all the prerequisites, mother, and you still don't even realize it; change of name, truncated identity, coded language, secret society, danger of death, superior ideals, renunciation of the previous life.

(Restrepo 2010, 193)

When the dialogue touches on the other face of activism, the horror of repression, it is equally hard for mother and son to connect. In Buenos Aires, Lorenza meets her former *compañeros* and learns about their “real” lives, back then and in the present. One of them, Dalton, was a musician, a fact that brings music into the conversation between Lorenza and Mateo. She comments that Argentine rock was “their” music, the music of the resistance. When Dalton was about to lose all hope in prison, he discovered part of a popular song’s line by Sui Generis (“Canción para mi muerte”) carved on the wall of his cell by another prisoner, and this kept him alive.

—“Like in *Night of the Pencils*”—Mateo said [ironically]. “I’ve seen that movie.”

—Well, yeah, it’s nothing new. In such endgames, whatever happens is like the story of the cat with raggedy paws,<sup>11</sup> it’s been told time and again. But at the moment in which it happens, it carries great significance.

(Restrepo 2010, 33)

While Mateo is trying to understand his parents’ history, Lorenza makes her own discoveries about her time as an activist and wants to share them with her son. Mateo, however, wants to hear stories about his father as a person, an ambiguous figure. Apart from being a brave political leader, his father also kidnapped his son in a desperate attempt to recover Lorenza’s love, and then abandoned him. Mateo was two years old the last time they were together, and his father had never tried to contact him. Because of her desire to protect her son, but also out of guilt, pain, and confusion, Lorenza tended to minimize or evade Ramón’s neglect of Mateo. This prevented the latter from dealing with it, which in turn intensified his feelings of abandonment. “Mateo felt that when she came between him and the raging bull of his abandonment, she prevented him from seeing it fully, and left him defenseless against its charge” (Restrepo 2010, 156). Now, her son had decided to deal with his story and forced her to do the same.

He had been told that his father was a political prisoner in the past. This information had helped him deal with his absence throughout the years. During the trip, he learns that Ramón had been in jail only briefly for attempted robbery after the dictatorship. This is disappointing in two ways: on the one hand, the robbery attempt damaged the fantasy of his father being a righteous outlaw and intrepid political leader. On the other hand, the short jail sentence destroyed the only imaginable justification for not having contacted his son during all

these years—Mateo wanted to imagine a father who thought of him every day in his reclusion and who tried to find him once released. At this point, Mateo's disappointment makes him wish his father had died during the dictatorship for political reasons: "I think I'd rather he was dead. So I could forgive him" (Restrepo 2010, 155). If he had a disappeared father as Andrea Robles, a woman he meets in Buenos Aires through his mother, his abandonment would have been the result of a struggle for a meaningful cause.

However, as we have seen in the films and the text analyzed above, the sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* often struggle with the idea of not having been important enough for their parents to stay out of harm's way. Marta Dillon, a leading H.I.J.O.S. activist, observes: "What a paradox, many adopted children would like to be children of disappeared parents to escape the pain of knowing that they were abandoned or rejected by parents who did not want them. But us, who know that we are children of the *desaparecidos*, who is there to save us from that specter?" (quoted in Amado 2009, 157, footnote 3).

Since his father is alive and he can find him, Mateo's situation is fundamentally different from that of the *desaparecidos*' children. However, the contradictory image conveyed by his mother (a brave political leader and a master of forgery and disguise vs. an inconsiderate man who did not measure the consequences of his acts) and her reticence to let him meet his father turn Ramón into an enigmatic and spectral presence. In a letter to Ramón—written by Restrepo's son, Pedro Saboulard, during their trip—Mateo affirms: "You have grown in me like a ghost, like a fear of darkness and hatred for vegetables. I recognize your absence in the insecurity of my adolescence and this arrogant shyness that isolates me from others" (Restrepo 2010, 168).

His mother cannot help Mateo understand who Ramón was and why he never looked for him, since her knowledge of this man is filtered by her own experience: a love story born underground and shaped by the constraints of life under threat. Lorenza's description of her first encounter with Ramón, which focuses exclusively on their physical attraction, is insufficient for Mateo: "All right, stop Lolé, I want you to explain to me why you fell in love with Forcás. Was it his pretty hair, his wide shoulders and the wool smell?" (Restrepo 2010, 119). Lorenza had never pondered over this question, and her reasons are closely linked to the intensity and meaning of the historical moment: they shared the same political commitment and he represented the opposite of her family. "Did he seem like he would be a good father?" asks her (their) son from a different world: "A good father? No, Mateo, I didn't think to ask myself that. I didn't even ask

myself if he was a good man” (Restrepo 2010, 120). In other words, the criteria for starting a relationship and having a child were different from the ones that prevail today—as in *Encontrando a Víctor*, the contrast makes it possible to critically reflect on today’s choices.

Mateo realizes that there are many things Lorenza does not know, including aspects of her life with Ramón and the “dark episode,” but he also understands that, unlike him, she does not want to know more. For her, the story of kidnapping and torment indicates that the military’s political violence had accessed her most intimate space, the couple, and she cannot forgive herself for this failure. As Andrea Robles tells Mateo, this is a search he needs to undertake alone, like her and many other sons and daughters. His quest takes him to the space of his last memory (or so he thinks, since it could also be based on a picture), Bariloche. This is where he last saw his father and where he meets him again, closing a circle. Instead of going back to Colombia, he decides to stay with Ramón for a while: “Trust me Lorenza. I’ll find out who this man is, and when I’ve figured it out, I’ll come back” (Restrepo 2010, 272).

Realizing that her son is taking charge of his own history leads her to also find answers she was looking for herself. So far, she had not found a way to talk about the past and thereby break the silence, but she knew that sooner or later it had to happen since “the past that has not been tamed with words is not memory, only a sort of spying [no es memoria, es acechanza]” (Restrepo 2010, 244). While Mateo is in Bariloche, Lorenza spends a week with Gabriela, a former comrade. They talk about the subjects they could not allow themselves to even think about during the dictatorship: the fear, the disappeared *compañeros*, and those outside of their group they suspected of also being underground activists. In an interview, Restrepo remembers, “we lived in that silence, it was like living underwater” (Kolesnikov 2005). After the dictatorship, pain and stigma dissuaded activists from talking about those subjects, but during that week, Lorenza and Gabriela laugh, let sadness emerge, discover who was who behind their *nomes the guerre*, make small confessions, and retrieve difficult memories about the military’s brutality. Little by little, the texture of those years starts coming to light.

These discoveries helped her find the right tone for her novel, intimate and simple, like a conversation between two women who remember behind closed doors: “No heroes, no adjectives, no slogans. In a minor key. Without delving minutely into major events, keeping just the echo” (Restrepo 2010, 244). In a writing process that took five years and six drafts, she gradually shifted the novel’s focus from

the mother to the son. Thereby, she counteracted the initial impulse to talk about activism with the rhetoric and from the perspective of the 1970s, as a heroic action performed by a youth with a superior sense of ethics and courage (Kollmann 2009). The outcome of this process is a novel that portrays activists not as heroes but as regular men and women who led a revolutionary life and sought fulfilment in a collective project.<sup>12</sup> As Restrepo remembers, in spite of the suffering, those were the best years of her life: “It was so clear what and whom we were fighting against, and what it was that brought us together. This kind of company was very difficult to find afterwards” (Kollmann 2009). The contrast implies a judgment of the present and invites an intergenerational debate on the struggles we should engage in today.

## CHAPTER 5



### THE PAST IN THE PRESENT, THE PRESENT IN THE FUTURE

The films and texts analyzed in this chapter represent the latest step in the development of Argentine collective memory and go farthest in their attempt to include new themes and perspectives into public debate. The authors ask to what extent individuals take into account past mistakes when making decisions in the present. Thereby, they advance a relation to the past that can be understood as exemplary in Todorov's sense.

Firstly, Lupe Pérez García questions the commonly held idea that all those who did not belong to the armed forces or activist groups were merely passive spectators in a war between "two demons" and validates the role of so-called bystanders as political actors in the past and present. Secondly, Lucía Cedrón introduces questions of guilt and forgiveness through the story of a man who turns in his son-in-law to the armed forces to save his daughter's life. Victoria Donda, finally, draws attention to the need to go beyond a demonization of the perpetrators in order to understand the character of the crimes and the society that made them possible.

These authors are atypical voices in the public debate about the dictatorial past, which indicates an expansion of those entitled to talk about it: Pérez García is the daughter of so-called bystander parents and not an activist herself, Lucía Cedrón grew up in exile and returned to Argentina during the crisis, and Victoria Donda is a left-wing activist and politician raised in a right-wing family with a former soldier as paternal figure.



*DIARIO ARGENTINO: WHERE WERE YOU WHEN HISTORY WAS HAPPENING?*

This creative documentary, released in 2007, starts with a simple dilemma: The director, Pérez García, has never been able to differentiate between her left and right hands. She thinks that this problem originates in her childhood and therefore travels to Argentina, the country in which she was born and grew up. Once there, she starts searching for clues about historical events she cannot make sense of through the political categories of left and right. At the origin of Pérez García's confusion lies the killing of left-wing supporters by right-wing followers of the same political leader, Juan Domingo Perón, in the infamous Ezeiza massacre (1973). Her confusion extends to the present: it includes the popularly supported Falklands War in a dictatorship now remembered as unpopular and the contradiction between Carlos Saúl Menem's Peronist political affiliation and his neoliberal policies. These events are central to Argentines' subjectivity but also regrettable episodes they prefer to avoid. Whereas documentaries typically approach these moments separately, Pérez García focuses on the causal relations between them and on how they shape the present. In addition, she sets out to understand how individuals relate to the past and future when making decisions.

She explores these themes in conversations with her family and other persons close to her. For the sake of a deeper understanding, she develops strategies to avoid preconceived and formulaic answers. Firstly, she does not inform her interlocutors in advance what the project is about, making it impossible for them to prepare statements. Secondly, she engages interviewees' biographies—what did they think about the events when they were happening, and how did they act in relation to them? As indicated by the title, the film is a field diary that documents her investigation: exploration of archival material and conversations are intertwined with "entries" in the form of remarks introduced by the director's voiceover.

The documentary is oriented by implicit questions such as: Is it possible to learn from past mistakes and apply those lessons in what might seem a fundamentally different context? How do we come to make decision in the present that might become regrettable episodes in the future? How do individuals think of themselves and their decisions in relation to historical processes? These questions are closely linked to the director's concern about the post-dictatorship generation. In an interview, she observes that those born in the 1970s, like her, are

still captured by the drama of their parents' generation—lamenting their failure to make the revolution, celebrating their superior sense of social commitment, or criticizing their extremist positions. Mere spectators of an incomprehensible and awe-inspiring past, they are unable to become actors of the present, be aware that they are making choices, and understand how those choices contribute to reproduce or change society. So far, they have related to collective problems primarily as spectators, voters, and emigrants. The director observes that her generation occupies “a pathetic position of complicity and quietude” (Minghetti 2008).

The film proposes that her generation's apathy is, in part, the outcome of their parents' failure to engage in a critical examination of the past, especially their own role in it. In the dialogues with her mother—Teresa García, a history teacher—she encounters various evasive patterns. Firstly, her mother is reluctant to revisit sad episodes. Secondly, she explains her decisions through tradition and habit. When Pérez García asks her why at the end of the dictatorship she voted for the Peronist candidate Lúder, who supported the junta's self-amnesty law, instead of the radical candidate Alfonsín, who considered this law unconstitutional, her mother answers: “Because traditionally, one always liked Peronism more than radicalism; because of the previous generation; because of my parents” (Pérez García 2007). This introduces another explanation for the apathy of the director's generation: a political confusion sowed by the contradictions of Peronism. They are heirs to an impossible ideology and movement with very different connotations for the generation of their grandparents and their parents. It united actors with irreconcilable goals and ideologies and was linked to the most glorious but also most difficult periods of Argentina's past.

The director's family is Peronist on her mother's and on her father's side, and thus Perón was a constant presence since her early childhood. A metaphor of this connection between biography and history, her anniversary coincides with the day Perón returned from exile—she was three years old and created a memory of seeing his car from the balcony, as her family had anticipated, although this never occurred as his plane landed at the Morón airport instead of Ezeiza, where the massacre had taken place.

The confusion around Peronism becomes clear in the conversation about Menem's victory in the 1989 elections between the director, her mother, and her stepfather, Mario Bernich, an activist in the *Frente de Izquierda Popular* (FIP). Menem ran as a Peronist candidate for the presidency and during the campaign linked his own image to Perón,

commonly perceived as a defender of the working class, the welfare state, and national development. Once in office, Menem did just the opposite. His tenure was characterised by privatization, increasing external debt, and cuts that affected public health, education, and retirement. These policies caused the 2001 economic collapse, followed by the largest wave of emigration since the dictatorship, which included Pérez García and her husband. The director asks her mother why she voted for Menem in 1989, partly to understand why she voted for him herself.

Teresa compares her daughter's question to a "little knife" with which she is stabbed in the stomach—because the director's aim is not clear to her, she perceives her question as an attack. She at first attributes her decision to vote for Menem to nonsensical beliefs (*pelotudeces*) and then avoids the question by pointing to those who voted for Menem a second time, in 1995: for her, this is the really inexcusable mistake. When her daughter insists in knowing why Teresa voted for Menem the first time, the latter asks her, "but who else was one going to vote for?" At this point, Bernich comes to Teresa's rescue. Together, they try to explain the vote for Menem through the phenomenon of Peronism:

*BERNICH.* The thing is that Peronism is a political movement; it is a party but also a movement that included different social classes.

Those who remembered Peronism ended up voting for Menem thinking that Menem was Peronist but Menem wasn't Peronist, that's the issue.

*DIRECTOR.* Then I don't know what it means to be a Peronist because if Menem says that he is Peronist probably he thinks he is Peronist: he must feel like a Peronist.

*BERNICH.* No! But Menem sold the entire country to foreign monopolies! I understand that Peronism for you had lost all meaning because there is no longer such a thing after 1955.

*DIRECTOR.* But if Peronism became meaningless after 1955, why did Mom and I vote for Menem in 1989? See?

*TERESA.* Because people didn't vote for Menem, they voted for what they thought could be accomplished by Peronism as a movement.

*BERNICH.* People need to make their own experience. Think of how many struggles Argentina has undergone so far. Argentina as a country has suffered a lot because after the downfall of Perón we had four dictatorships and the military took control of the university twice. All those misfortunes are the reason why you had to emigrate to find a job. (Pérez García 2007)

Bernich offers a political analysis of the situation that does not fully account for why individuals kept responding to a political ideology linked to a long-gone period of national glory (1946–1955) in spite of its more recent connection to violent popular confrontation such as the Ezeiza massacre and the repression, which started during Perón's third government in the early 1970s. Instead, Bernich establishes a circular logic: people vote for a political movement that no longer exists because they vote according to the positive memory of a political movement that used to exist. He explains Menem's 1989 victory as one more necessary experience in a learning process. However, when he adds that this process started more than fifty years ago, included four coups d'état, and the ongoing institutional crisis, his argument loses strength.

Through these difficult questions about past decisions, Pérez García is in fact addressing the present: if individuals can see themselves as actors of the past who had an impact on historical processes, they will also realize their role in the construction of the present. Instead of looking at those typically considered protagonists of history (the armed forces, activists, politicians), Pérez García aims to capture and underline the agency of "ordinary people," the Argentinean middle class, a vast sector of society. Her very common last names serve as another coincidental metaphor: from 1940 to 1966, a very successful radio show, titled *Los Pérez García*, portrayed the life of a family that became the "symbol of the middle class strengthened by the first Peronism [1946–1955]" (Minghetti 2008). Although artists and intellectuals have criticized the exclusion of this group from reflection about the dictatorship through the theory of the "two demons," until very recently, this did not translate into analyses that included them. By asking for their opinion for a film, a privileged vehicle for memory (Jelin 2003), Pérez García restores their role as actors. In recent years, other members of the post-dictatorship generation have also reflected on the role of so-called bystanders.<sup>1</sup>

The Argentine middle classes are not typically thought of as political actors, but are not thought of as victims either, although many *desaparecidos* belonged to this class. The director's father, a loyal follower of Perón, was deeply disappointed by his leader's final government in 1973 and died of a cardiovascular accident in 1995, after Menem's reelection. His daughter's voiceover remembers: "The last time I saw him standing, he was shouting at the TV '¡Menem y la reputa madre que te parió! [strong Argentinean swear]' " (Pérez García 2007). When an employee at the cemetery asks whether her father had died a natural or violent death, she hesitates. The director affirms:

“my old man was killed by Menem, who buried the last opportunity of constructing the country he had dreamt of. And like him, many others exploded [*reventaron*] before turning sixty” (Bianco 2008). The director’s effort to validate the voice of “common” persons also includes those of her generation who, like her, are not children of *militantes* or victims of state terrorism. By making this film, she pushes the envelope of memory, underlining that their parents’ lives are legitimate entry points to understand how past events shape the lives of both generations.

Younger generations’ decisions in the present are in part the result of how the past has been interpreted across generations. The director’s decision to emigrate during the 2001 crisis illustrates this point.<sup>2</sup> We see footage of hundreds of people out on the streets, protesting against the government, banging pans, burning tires, and throwing objects. We see a young woman dragged by her hair by policemen in riot gear, the use of water cannons and tear gas against protestors, and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo defiantly and confidently asking police what they did with the arrested. To round off this sequence, the director’s voiceover states: “I like to think of Argentina as a revolutionary country, but that Argentina usually ends badly. So I waited for the first available flight and got the hell out of there” (Pérez García 2007). For Feierstein, this lack of faith in rebellious collective action shows the *represores*’ success in conveying the left’s defeat as the inevitable outcome of any attempt to defy the hegemonic order. This message was crucial to establishing the logic of impotence that surreptitiously operates in society today (2007, 378).

The impulse to leave in the face of social conflict instead of participating in it is linked to the continuing prominence of the repression in collective memory. As Martín Caparrós, a pioneer of the recuperation of 1970s activism in collective memory, observed: “The memories of death have covered up the memories of life... there was much suffering but there was also much happiness in doing what they [the 1970s activists] thought had to be done” (Pérez 1998). We learn that Teresa García was so concerned for her grandchildren’s security that she insisted the director leave as soon as possible. This fear is clearly rooted in the experience of the dictatorship since the children were not at risk during the crisis. Her persistent fears explain Teresa’s resistance to talk about the dictatorship: for her, the military threat is still present.

The predominance of pain in addition to the absence of a critical and collective assessment of the 1970s movements produced in many members of the post-dictatorship generation the impression

that popular protests are dangerous and doomed to fail.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in the last half-century, the option of leaving the country in the face of difficulties has become an integral part of Argentines' imaginary.

The choice between staying and leaving is a key dilemma of Pérez García's generation, introduced in the film by the director and her closest friend, Ariana. The latter is a sociologist who cannot live off teaching and researching and works as a marketing consultant for a multinational company. She receives a job offer in Brazil, which would considerably improve her economic situation, but she does not accept it. As she explains to her friend, she feels she does not have time to explore new possibilities. The director is in a similar situation: if they are going to stay in Spain, they have to sell their property in Buenos Aires and take out a thirty-year mortgage. Unlike her husband who is concerned for their children's future in Argentina, she still hopes to return. As Pérez García observes in the film's press dossier (2006), for different reasons Ariana, Teresa, and she are disconnected from something fundamental in their lives: one's vocation (Ariana), one's daughter (Teresa), and one's country (herself). This invites a comparison with the 1970s youth and their rootedness in a collective project that anchored them to a place, helped orient their lives, and made their choices meaningful. However, as we will see in the next two sections, the crisis of 2001, for the first time since the dictatorship, also encouraged the youth to form social movements and revisit the 1970s.

We do not know if Pérez García and her family will return or not, or if her trip to Argentina helped her resolve the confusion between right and left. Nevertheless, the discussion with her family about their reasons for acting one way or the other in the past helps her to start relating differently to her choices. She expresses this through a metaphor. Close to the end of the film, the director goes to the cemetery to leave flowers on her father's niche and walks past Perón's grave: her initial impulse is to leave one of the bouquets (perhaps she had bought it with that intention), but she hesitates and then walks away. Once back in Barcelona, she goes with her family to a park, and her older son teaches his younger brother to salute like Perón, telling him to say first *compañeros* and then "prisoners." The director then realizes that one day her older son will be able to explain the difference between right and left to her. The last scene shows the children walking away on a path. This ending can be read as a statement that each generation's efforts—including the director's—can contribute to positive change.

*CORDERO DE DIOS: ON LIFE PRIORITIES  
AND THE PRIORITY OF LIFE*

If the 2001 crisis pushed Pérez García to leave the country, it had the opposite effect on Lucía Cedrón, director of *Cordero de Dios/Lamb of God* (2008), who decided to return from France to Argentina. In 1976, when Cedrón was one year old, her mother and father had gone into exile with her, thus escaping the military's persecution. Her maternal grandfather, Saturnino Montero Ruiz, was already living there, escaping the threat of the guerrilla movements. He was a right-wing politician, mayor of Buenos Aires during the dictatorship of Lanusse (1971–1973), and director of Banco Ciudad. Her father, Jorge Cedrón, was a socially engaged filmmaker and sympathizer of Montoneros. Montero Ruiz's son-in-law, he had been hired by Lanusse's regime to make a film on San Martín's patriotic deeds, *Por los senderos del Libertador* (1971). Using the revenue and stage props from this film, Cedrón made the underground film *Operación massacre* (1973), based on Rodolfo Walsh's investigative journalism on the 1956 capture and murder of Peronist militants under the Aramburu dictatorship (1955–1958). This clandestinely circulated film was crucial for Montoneros' recruitment of young activists (Avelleyra Castro 2006).

In 1980, when Lucía Cedrón was five years old, her grandfather was abducted in Paris. While her mother was reporting the crime to the police, her husband was stabbed to death at the squad. A few hours later, Lucía's grandfather was released without ransom. The circumstances of Jorge Cedrón's murder were never elucidated.<sup>4</sup> When his daughter Lucía Cedrón was sixteen years old, her mother decided to return to Argentina while she stayed in Paris, where she had friends and study plans. In 2001, when Saturnino Montero Ruiz died in Argentina, Cedrón returned to comfort her mother and help her with paperwork. She found herself in a city in total chaos and rebellion. She saw the Madres de Plaza de Mayo being chased by soldiers on horseback spraying gases forbidden by international conventions, and closely witnessed a man's death (Iribarren 2008). She immediately realized that this was the place she wanted to put her time, energy, and work into: "I am convinced that one affects one's context and is affected by it constantly" (García 2008, 73). The money she was to receive as inheritance and had planned to use for a film project was lost when her bank failed. Despite this, she made the film, *En ausencia/In Absentia* (2002), her first filmic exploration of disappearance. This helped her understand that she had a story to tell about activism

and repression: “I realized I wasn’t going to be able to shoot one more single frame before facing the subjects that were really tormenting me. It was like turning the light on and lifting the ghost’s sheet to see what it is made of” (García 2008, 77). This was the starting point of her first feature film, *Cordero de Dios* (cowritten with Santiago Guiralt, who also worked on *Los rubios*). *Cordero de Dios*, Lucía Cedrón’s response to her story, is inspired by persons and events from her life constituting what she calls “literal metaphors”: “It is not an autobiographical film. It departs from real facts to tell something else” (Iribarren 2008). But what exactly is that “something else”?

The film tells the story of Guillermina, a thirty-year-old woman who lives in Buenos Aires, the city in which she was born in the 1970s into a politically divided family. Her parents—Paco and Teresa, not activists themselves—support their Montoneros friends. Her maternal grandfather, Arturo, is a landowner and veterinarian with conservative views. Because of his involvement with Montoneros, Guillermina’s father disappears. Mother and daughter go into exile to France but, unlike Cedrón, the former stays while the latter returns to Argentina.

Decades later, in the wake of the 2001 crisis, criminals kidnap Guillermina’s grandfather and ask for an exorbitant ransom. Teresa returns from France to support her daughter, but mainly to testify in the trials against the *represores* who had kidnapped and tortured her during the dictatorship. Teresa is reluctant to help her father: she does not want to sell the house—the only memory of her disappeared husband—or accept the ransom money from a military officer who tries to bribe her into not testifying in the trials. Guillermina is unable to understand her mother’s attitude. During one of their many arguments, she questions her principles and coherence: “What is the point of so much ideology for you all if you are capable of letting a man die just like that?” (Cedrón 2008). After this, the mother is ready to share a part of her story she had so far kept to herself: When Teresa was abducted during the dictatorship, her father asked the officer who now tried to bribe her for help. He agreed to release her in exchange for her husband. Teresa and her father never talked directly about this because, as she explains to her daughter, “there are some things that don’t get resolved by talking,” yet it meant the end of the relationship between father and daughter (Cedrón 2008). From then on, she lived a “borrowed” life, a life gained at the expense of the person she did not want to live without.

Teresa had never shared this with Guillermina, who feels cheated and deprived of her own history. After much discussion, however, they empathize, sell the house, collect as much money as they can for the





**Image 5.1** Teresa, Guillermina, and Arturo meeting in the car in *Cordero de Dios* (Cedrón 2008)

ransom as possible, and manage to rescue Arturo. The film finishes with an ambiguous shot of Arturo entering the car accompanied by Guillermina, while Teresa looks expressively to the front (Image 5.1).

For the director, this is the most important scene of the film:

I always imagined the film as a big funnel of 90 minutes. My goal was to be able to give these three beings the chance of meeting once again, and then who knows what they'll do with their lives! It took me 90 minutes to bring the three of them together in the last shot (actually they are four, counting the one conspicuous by his absence); that family comes together again, and then, well, they will decide what to do.

(García Castro 2008)

By creating this final ambiguity, the director sets not only the characters but also the audience free: we can now imagine the kind of encounter we think they should have. One could argue about whether or not the women will forgive Arturo. For the director, however, this is a film not about forgiveness but “about the desire to put oneself for a moment in the others’ shoes and accompany them on the roads life put in front of them and in the decisions—impossible decision in many cases—they had to make” (García 2008, 75).

In the film, she also emphasises the need to share knowledge about the past in order to illuminate the present. Guillermina is upset about not having known the circumstances of her father's death, but even more so about having been deprived of her mother's history for so many years. Having understood the importance of dialogue, she challenges her mother. When the latter explains that she avoided talking to Arturo because "there are things that cannot be solved by talking," Guillermina replies: "but not talking does not make them go away either" (Cedrón 2008). The 1970s generation has a legacy, but often their stories are so painful that talking and thinking about them can be very difficult. After seeing the film, Cedrón's mother, to whom it is dedicated, did not talk to her daughter for a year (Sanzol 2008).

The director observes: "The survivors carry a tremendous burden as a generation . . . I am grateful to them because, in the end, those who are no longer here cannot teach us anything: whatever we can learn, we will learn from the survivors" (Iribarren 2008). Teresa's transformation could be read as an invitation to her parents' generation to reconnect with activism, seek justice for the crimes, and build communities in which human life is valued above all else and solidarity is not just a virtue of times long gone: "there is not much we can do with the dead, but with those who are alive, everything is possible" (Russo 2008). It is the role of the sons and daughters to create encounters with the survivors in which the latter can share the sense of empowerment that characterised their activism and infused their political project. Feierstein emphasises that "we need the 1970's generation to help us understand (once again) that this social organization is not the definitive or the only possible one, that not all collective struggles will end in genocide, and that the goal of the annihilation was precisely to prevent us from talking, thinking, discussing and assessing what happened to us" (2007, 348).

They did not intend to leave a legacy of paralyzing pain, but one of transformation and empowerment. They dreamt of a society in which women and men relate to each other in more humane ways and pursue their own and others' well-being as inseparable. These projects were brutally interrupted by the repression and could not be actively transmitted to the post-dictatorship generation. The gap between these two generations can be grasped through the following contrast: In an interview, Lucía Cedrón observes that for her parents' generation, exile was a tragedy—even though it saved their lives—since it meant a separation from a community of young men and women (García Castro 2008, 5). Conversely, when, thirty years later a

severe economic crisis hit the country (2001), the youth left without hesitation, as *Diario argentino* seems to affirm.

Cedrón affirms: “The country we have today is the result of what has been done and what hasn’t been done. That’s my inheritance. And my responsibility is not doing what my parents couldn’t do but what I can do with the cards I have been dealt” (García Castro 2008). For her, this meant making a film that allows the audience to draw lessons from the painful events of the past for the sake of the present. Cedrón proposes a reflection on the complexity of human relations under conditions of fear and violence that ask for empathy instead of judgment. She creates two scenarios, situated in 1978 and in 2002, both characterised by an abduction. In the first one, a life is traded for another, and there is no way of avoiding death. In the second, the choice is between the life of the hostage or a ransom that requires confronting a painful reality. This time, life becomes the priority: it triumphs over her impulse to keep the house, the last reminder of her husband, who belongs to a past that cannot be changed. She comes to terms with her history, which enables her to transform the present by deciding to rescue her father.

In the logic of the humanitarian narrative, comparing the military’s systematic repression to ordinary criminal acts is unacceptable. They are only viewed from the angle of historical specificity; any comparison is taken as an attempt to erase their uniqueness and amounts to oblivion. Gustavo Noriega, editor of the cinema journal *El amante*, has made such an argument (2008). Cedrón also encountered this reaction in a public debate: “A fool told me that I was equating two abductions motivated by very different reasons. I am not doing that, but I am convinced that a person’s life is worth the same in any circumstance” (Lazzarini 2009). In an interview, the director observes that this idea is expressed in the film by an old friend of Teresa who urges her to rescue her father: “do it now that your old man is alive . . . You deserve to give yourself a chance,” to what Cedrón adds, “I think that we, the Argentine people, deserve another chance” (Lazzarini 2009).

### ... VICTORY ALWAYS: RESTITUTED CHILDREN RESTORE POLITICS

The 2001 crisis is also the entry point for *Mi nombre es Victoria* (2009),<sup>5</sup> an autobiographic text by Congresswoman Victoria Donda. At the end of 2002, she and her *compañeros* from the group *Venceremos* (part of *Patria Libre*) were occupying one of the many abandoned office buildings of banks that had failed during the crisis.

They installed a cultural centre and offered legal advice. Additionally, she collaborated with the *Movimiento Barrios de Pie* in establishing solidarity networks in neighbourhoods dramatically affected by the crisis through cooperatives, workshops, job centres, and a soup kitchen named *Azucena Villaflor*. One day, two members of HERMANOS—a subgroup of H.I.J.O.S. that helps the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo track down appropriated children—came to the soup kitchen with the secret mission of obtaining pictures of Donda to compare them with who they suspected to be her disappeared parents. At that time, she was not Victoria Donda but Analía, daughter of Raúl and Graciela (names she uses in the book to protect their privacy): a greengrocer long retired from the military and a homemaker from a lower-middle-class area at the south of Greater Buenos Aires.

This episode, told from the perspective of the HERMANOS members, opens her autobiography, a story shaped by the gradual escalation of violence that climaxed during the last dictatorship. Donda's parents, José María Donda (born 1955), called Cabo, and Hilda Pérez (born 1951), known as Cori, are members of the 1970s generation. They grew up in a country in which the most popular political movement, Peronism, was outlawed. The exile of its leader, General Perón, was followed by anti-Peronist military regimes (self-proclaimed “revolutions”)<sup>6</sup> and feeble democracies manipulated by the armed forces. This environment—in which there was no room for negotiation, as Victoria observes—made revolution appear the only road to political change. In addition, the generation of Donda's parents was inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution and, more generally, by the ongoing Latin American national liberation movements and their goal of ending the oppression of the poor. Perón's corporatist inclusion of the workers and Eva Perón's devotion to the poor became the referents of a national revolutionary process ambitioned by vast segments of the youth organized in Montoneros, the movement of left-wing Peronism.

However, for the generation of the parents of the 1970s youth—Victoria's grandparents—Perón, a leader who did not accept ideological opposition, was a controversial figure. While Cori's father, Armando Pérez, a committed member of the Communist Party, had been in prison during Perón's government, Telmo Donda, Cabo's father, worked at the Ministry of Human Development, where he also served as a union leader. Paradoxically, considering their respective evaluation of Perón, Pérez was more open to the couple's participation in Montoneros than Donda, who was influenced by the norms of middle-class conservatism. The harshest condemnation, however, did

not come from their parents but from Cabo's brother, Adolfo Donda, ten years his senior.

Because of the age difference, the relation between the two brothers had always been one of protection and admiration: they were passionate about the Navy and both attended the naval high school. By the time Cabo entered the institution, it was already marked by the country's polarization. On the one hand, the administration had started to reorganize their training at the service of what would become the naval task force charged with eliminating "subversion" through illegal repression. On the other hand, a group of Peronist students protested against these changes. Most of them disappeared during the dictatorship. The Donda brothers took opposite sides: while Adolfo pursued a military career, Cabo joined first FAR and then Montoneros—a choice his brother could not tolerate. In 1973, after Perón's return from exile and the Ezeiza massacre, Cabo and Cori got married. In spite of the tension, he asked Adolfo to be his best man.

After Perón's death, the repressive violence against underground movements escalated, and the couple moved into a house at the outskirts of Morón, where Cori did grassroots work.<sup>7</sup> Cabo had been assigned a leading position in the movement, and they occasionally participated in guerrilla operations together. In 1976, they had their first daughter named Eva Daniela, after Eva Duarte de Perón, who they had to leave with her maternal grandmother, Leontina, a year later when—in the midst of a wave of deaths and "disappearances"—Cori learned that she was pregnant again. By then, Adolfo was already part of the naval task force<sup>8</sup> operating at ESMA, a detention centre known for the cruelty of its torturers. After having told them to leave the country, he decided to turn in Cori as bait to capture his brother. Shortly after, perhaps as a result of having asked for his brother's help, Cabo was captured.

Cori was taken to ESMA, where she suffered humiliations and violence, including giving birth to a baby despite knowing that it would not see her again. A nineteen-year-old prisoner named Lidia helped her during the delivery. When they were left alone for a moment, Cori sowed two little rings of blue surgical thread to her earlobes in the hope that one of them would survive to look for her. She named the baby Victoria. Fifteen days later, Héctor Febrés, ESMA's most sadistic torturer who was also in charge of the "maternity ward," took the baby from Cori's side and gave her to a friend, a noncommissioned officer who was part of the naval task force at the ESMA and collaborated in torture sessions. He renamed her Analía. Then, Adolfo Donda

consented to Cori's "relocation," a euphemism for sedating prisoners and throwing them from a plane into the river or the sea. After Cori had disappeared, her mother, Leontina, repeatedly turned to Adolfo for help, which he rejected. However, this did not discourage her, as she became one of the founders of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.

After the fall of the dictatorship, Adolfo sued Leontina for Eva Daniela's custody and, with the help of a legal system still pervaded by the logic of the repression, won the case. He eliminated "Eva," which linked her to left-wing Peronism, from her first name and raised her as "Daniela," with the idea that her parents were terrorists who had abandoned her. Once the dictatorship was over, Leontina's activism in the human rights movement became a menace, and he threatened her until she left to Canada, where her other children were already living for economic and political reasons.<sup>9</sup>

Many years later, in 2003, Spain issued an extradition request for a group of torturers, including Raúl, Analía's "father." She always thought that his role in the dictatorship had been minor and learned that he was accused of being a torturer at the moment of leaving the hospital room where he lay in an induced coma, with his face disfigured, after a failed attempt to shoot himself. A few days later, she was told that she was very likely an appropriated child. The blue stitches on her earlobes had been a decisive clue in the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo's search. In 2004, the DNA tests confirmed that she was Cabo's and Cori's daughter, and her name was Victoria. She also learned that she had "lost" two years of her life—she had been registered as born in 1979 instead of 1977—and that Febrés, her godfather, the man whom she used to hug and call "uncle," was the torturer who took her away from her mother and gave her to Raúl and Graciela. In 2007, Febrés was put to trial but soon after was found dead in his cell, poisoned with cyanide. He took with him the knowledge about the fate of hundreds of appropriated children.

Victoria Donda was the seventy-eighth restored grandchild. By telling her story, she draws attention to the ones who remain to be discovered. Far from intending to provoke pain or horror in the readers—a reason to put the book away and forget about it—her biography invites reflection on many subjects, regardless of the reader's proximity to or experience of activism and repression. By presenting a lucid analysis of political events and individuals lives, including her own, the author allows the reader to relate to both.

For example, the author mentions that once somebody at work asked her grandfather Telmo Donda whether he had children and he

answered: “I had two sons. One is dead because he was a Montonero. The other one is dead in my eyes because he is a murderer” (Donda 2010, 62). This seemingly private statement of a father indicates that the political conflict on a concrete level often amounted to a killing between “brothers,” between individuals who knew each other. Neither the armed forces nor the activists were isolated from society, “two demons” who confronted each other. This is one reason why it is difficult for Argentines to confront the past. As Derrida establishes in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, for unforgivable evil to emerge, a situation of proximity is necessary (knowing each other, sharing a language, or spaces) and “that at the most intimate of that intimacy an absolute hatred would come to interrupt the peace” (2001a, 49).

To exorcise this hatred, it is necessary to recognize it and recognize oneself in it. At the end of the book, when the most painful details have been revealed, Donda affirms: “It happened in Argentina, it happened just thirty years ago and it happened to all of us” (2010, 243). For the author, her story needs to be understood in relation to thirty million stories of lives that were affected by the dictatorship in different ways. This includes those who typically think of themselves as outsiders—those who “chose to ignore what was happening and must now face the horrors they refused to see” (Donda 2010, 243). Donda anticipates readers’ strategies to distance themselves from the most painful aspects of her story and thus avoiding challenging and productive reflections:

When we face someone who is so full of wickedness, when the inconceivable appears before our eyes, we tend to defend ourselves by arguing that the person in question cannot be human . . . have a soul, or feelings. However, I refuse to take that road: Adolfo Donda, my uncle, is as much of a human as I am and through his veins flows the same blood as mine. (Donda 2010, 130)

We need to accept that the acts of violence in Donda’s biography were carried out by persons like us in order to explore the most disturbing question: how individuals become disconnected from (proximate) others, to the point of being able to inflict unlimited suffering. As Feierstein observes, “relating to perpetrators as crazy, perverse, and pathological beings cancels the possibility of understanding how repression works, since it appears as unintelligible actions disconnected from our reality. The category of radical evil detaches repressive cruelty from our everyday life and protects us from the emotional shock of discovering the genocidal potential in every member of modern societies” (2007, 240).

The relation between Victoria and her sister, Daniela Donda, yet again shows how dynamics between individuals are intertwined with the violent past. Daniela's first words to Victoria are "you might be my sister, but know that I don't have anything to do with my parents and I don't forgive them for having chosen *delinquency* over raising their daughter" (Donda 2010, 195; my emphasis). She refuses to share their parents' pictures and documents with Victoria because she does not want them to be in the archive of a human rights association (Donda 2010, 201). Their limited encounters lead Victoria to believe that the abyss between them is insuperable: the man Daniela considers a father is the murderer of their parents for Victoria. The latter sees her sister as doubly victimized: she lost her parents, was socialized into the ideology of those who murdered them, and is unable to grasp her own condition of victim: "We didn't get to know each other before our lives were so brutally transformed, and I continue to wonder which of the two took the worst part" (Donda 2010, 202).

Similar to the Donda brothers' tragic story, the impossible relation between the Donda sisters is like a metaphor for a country that remains divided. In the year in which Victoria's autobiography was published, Daniela held a speech in a public commemoration organized by the Association of Relatives and Friends of Terrorism Victims in Argentina (Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de Víctimas del Terrorismo en Argentina, AFyAVita). The members of this association equate the deaths caused by the guerrilla and the armed forces. Together with the Association of Relatives and Friends of Argentinian Political Prisoners (Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos de Argentina, AFyA PPA), they demand the release of the officers serving a sentence for crimes against humanity under the dictatorship. As if the country was under a military regime, they refer to them as "political prisoners" and reactivate many aspects of the military narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the military's narrative, the only one allowed under the dictatorship, continues to be promoted today. This should be understood in relation to another continuity that Donda draws attention to, the fact that military leaders of the dictatorship remain influential after the end of the dictatorship. After being exonerated by Alfonsín's laws, Adolfo Donda and other perpetrators worked for a corrupt businessman linked to Menem's administration, Alfredo Yabrán, behind the façade of firms such as Brides (for **Brigadas de la ESMA**). There are indications that military and paramilitary illegal actions also extend into the present. In 2006, Julio López, whose testimony against Miguel Etchecolatz was key for his conviction and



who posed a threat to many other perpetrators, disappeared. In 2007, as mentioned above, Febrés mysteriously died during his trial while in preventive custody in Navy facilities. Violent acts of this kind directly impacted Victoria in the present: when Adrián Jaime made a documentary about her (Jaime 2008), Adolfo Donda from his “prison” orchestrated a campaign to prevent the film’s release and distribution: the production company was stormed, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S. received menacing letters, a note signed by the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Triple A) was left in Victoria’s apartment, and her phone conversations were wiretapped.

However, the past reaches into Victoria’s life not only in these disturbing ways, in which the dictatorial logic remains unchanged, and appears to condemn individuals to relive it. Her experience as an appropriated child also allows insights into creative ways of dealing with the seemingly insuperable opposition by opening a space to ask questions without (evident) answer. Restituted children like Victoria, who accept their feelings of love for their appropriators,<sup>11</sup> pose a dilemma for themselves and others. Most observers disapprove of their feelings by arguing that love and lies are mutually exclusive. This can be interpreted as a symptom of society’s discomfort in relation to, and difficulties in “reading,” a situation that challenges the ally/enemy logic. Conversely, Donda is consistent with her attempt to relate with perpetrators as human beings and avoid demonizing them. She embraces her conflicting origins: “I am a product of the dictatorship as much as I am the product of the affection that Graciela and Raul gave me, and I see myself in them as much as I see myself in Cori and Cabo, whom I love all that one can love those one has never known.” (Donda 2010, 240). The circumstances forced her to find a solution in order to remain faithful to herself, an activist who for many years had fought for prosecuting perpetrators. She accepted that she could not stop loving Raúl, but this was not going to interfere with the need for justice. He would have to respond for his role at the ESMA, as well as for her appropriation.

Additionally, the multiple examples of Raúl’s love, care, and respect for Victoria mentioned in her book impel us to ponder questions that challenge the logic of demonization and invite us to understand cruelty: How is it possible to be a loving father and a torturer at the same time? Are we all capable of cruelty under certain circumstances? What does it take, in terms of psychological processes, to torture a person?<sup>12</sup> How is the training of soldiers and police personnel related to the abuses that took place during the dictatorship? How should democratic societies relate to institutionalized state violence? What should

be the role, if any, of these institutions? Why are these questions largely neglected in public debate?

As a member of Congress,<sup>13</sup> Donda tries to affect the present informed by the complexities of her story. A representative of the party *Libres del Sur*, she strongly opposed a program for 4,000 disadvantaged children between seven and fourteen years old that includes military training and wearing uniforms. Instead, she demanded guaranteed access to education, health, housing, and a first job (Donda 2011). Her engagement is thus not limited to the human rights abuses of the past, but includes exclusion and inequality in the present.

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Through their political and artistic projects, the children of *desaparecidos* sought to expand the limits of established narratives that did not fully respond to their concerns and questions. They entered into transformative dialogues with their parents' generation and thereby enabled an active transmission of a past that, surrounded by silences, had become enigmatic. Their projects went beyond the elusive images of victim and hero to encounter the concrete men and women who embraced a revolutionary project. In so doing, they broke the taboos of activism, armed struggle, and underground resistance and opened up a space for critically assessing the left movements. However, this critical perspective did not weaken their condemnation of the military crimes and their commitment to truth and justice. Furthermore, this expansion of collective memory encouraged the children of those who had not been activists to critically address their parents' experience. In their latest contributions, members of this generation went beyond the condemnation of the military's unspeakable cruelty, and understand it as the outcome of concrete societal processes. These efforts invite us to draw lessons from the past individually and collectively and to become aware of our role as actors of the present.

PART II



CHILE AND URUGUAY: MEMORY  
STRUGGLES IN NEGOTIATED  
TRANSITIONS

## CHAPTER 6



### CHILE: OVERCOMING THE STUNNED STATE OF THE PEOPLE

The Chilean post-dictatorship generation faces different challenges than their Argentinean counterparts. Firstly, since Pinochet was in power for seventeen years, those who were children at the beginning of the coup have clear memories of life under the dictatorship. Many of them organized against the regime and suffered repression, just as their parents' generation after the coup. Secondly, since the junta overthrew a democratically elected government and there were no guerrilla movements prior to it, there was no need of depoliticizing the image of the *desaparecidos* to advance transitional justice. Therefore, the image of the innocent victim and a heroic political past are articulated differently in Chilean collective memory. Thirdly, in Chile, the use of torture was more widespread than the practice of forced disappearance. The traumatic experience of the approximately 100,000 victims of physical and psychological torture and sexual abuse complicates the active transmission of the past. Finally, the continuities between dictatorship and post-dictatorship at the political and economic level are much stronger in Chile than in Argentina, which limits the prosecution of military personnel and impacts the struggles of human rights associations. In this chapter, I discuss the interconnections between this political context, cultural production, and the contributions of the post-dictatorship generation.

## COLLECTIVE MEMORY FROM THE DICTATORSHIP TO THE PRESENT

At the beginning of Pinochet's dictatorship, the armed forces seemed to dominate the public interpretation of the events. Similar to the Argentinean military's rhetoric three years later, the coup of September 11, 1973, was construed as a glorious battle against unpatriotic and godless Marxists who wanted to achieve total power through a civil war.<sup>1</sup> The armed forces used the polarization within the civilian population during Allende's government to justify the toppling of a democratically elected government as "the salvation of a society in ruins and on the edge of a violent bloodbath" (Stern 2010, 5).

The dictatorship incorporated lines about the military's role as saviours into the national anthem<sup>2</sup> and issued coins featuring a woman breaking free from her chains, accompanied by the date of the coup and the word "libertad." With the connivance of important segments of the local and regional press, the dictatorship attempted to explain away disappeared or murdered activists by pointing to alleged infighting within the leftist movements or their exile; just as in Argentina, their families rejected these explanations. Supported by human rights activists, they started to build a counterofficial narrative in which military repression was presented as a "cruel and unending rupture of life, an open wound that cannot heal" (Stern 2010, 5).

During the 1970s, however, the armed forces largely controlled the public sphere and sought to extend their influence through acts of self-validation: the Amnesty Law, which covered military crimes until 1978 (the most brutal period of the regime), and the 1980 constitution, adopted through a deceitful plebiscite. The new constitution, created by the civilians in the regime, turned Pinochet into a constitutional president and established the terms for a "protected democracy" that would enable what was considered a peaceful transition. This constitution authorized the armed forces to intervene in political life by designating them as guarantors of the institutional framework (*institucionalidad*); it effectively precluded antiestablishment parties from participating in politics by establishing a binomial electoral system; it severely restricted freedom of speech (artículo 8). Finally, it increased the president's authority by giving him or her the power to dissolve the Lower Chamber of Congress and extending presidential terms to eight years, with the possibility of reelection. In case he would not be reelected in 1988 (after his first term as constitutional president), Pinochet would remain commander-in-chief for ten years, and then become senator-for-life.

After the 1980 plebiscite and constitution, human rights organizations<sup>3</sup> increasingly denounced the ongoing atrocities of the regime in the public sphere, joined by professional associations who spoke out on behalf of victimized members. In addition, starting in 1983, “union members, working-class neighbourhood residents, and students elevated visibility to the protest held against the regime” (Lira 2011, 120). These movements were supported by centre-left and left-wing political parties, which reorganized after the initial repression and coalesced to resist the regime. During the following years, popular protest against the dictatorship intensified, fuelled by hunger, poverty, and unemployment in the context of a severe economic crisis. Artistic expressions from what was known as the oppositional cultural front and avant-garde movements played an important role in restoring “a popular ‘we’ ” and challenging the military logic (Richard 2007, 32–34). By the end of Pinochet’s first term, a majority viewed the repression as unjustifiable violence (Stern 2010, 6). This contributed to his ouster in the 1988 plebiscite with 55 percent of the votes against a second term.

This referendum led to the 1989 presidential elections, in which an oppositional politician was elected. However, Pinochet’s influence was far from over. Not only did he remain commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he also enjoyed significant civilian backing from strategic segments such as the investor class, landowners, and privileged families. In addition, *Pinochetismo* was not restricted to the upper class; he also had support among members of the lower middle class and the poor, defenders of traditional and religious values who identified with his right-wing politics. As the documentary *I Love Pinochet* (2001) suggests, for these humble partisans, sharing the passion for Pinochet with the upper class seemed to create proximity with the latter and thereby erase their disenfranchisement. The highly polarized public debate I discuss in this section could suggest that Chilean society is sharply divided between those for and those against Pinochet. However, a large group, less vocal and therefore little studied, does not neatly fit these categories.

Given Pinochet’s powerful position, the outlook for truth and justice was inauspicious. The post-dictatorship presidents—until 2010, all from the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, a coalition of centre-left parties opposed to the regime—faced a challenging situation. Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994), Eduardo Frei Ruíz (1994–2000), Ricardo Lagos Escobar (2000–2006), and Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010) were determined to reconcile Chileans. However, if this were ever to happen, it would be the result of embracing

rather than avoiding disagreement. As Peter Winn notes, “between the left’s demand for truth and justice and the right’s willingness to accept reconciliation on the condition that neither will happen . . . the Concertación took a middle way: truth and reconciliation” (2007, 9). They did not accomplish their goal, but during their governments, Chileans nevertheless broke the silence and started confronting a past of brutal repression that still manifests itself in many aspects of the present.

Following the Argentine model, President Aylwin formed a National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation to investigate and report on the human rights violations under the dictatorship. In 1990, the commission produced a document known as the Rettig Report, which contains a list of 2,279 murdered and disappeared individuals and documents the systematic character of the human rights violations. After additional research, the Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation added 899 cases to this list (Winn 2007).

When Aylwin presented the Rettig Report on TV, he apologized to the families of the victims on behalf of the nation and asked the armed forces to contribute to lessen their pain through what he vaguely called “gestures of acknowledgement.” Then, he presented what came to be known as the Aylwin Doctrine: he urged the courts to establish the defendants’ roles in each crime and the location of the *desaparecidos* before applying the Amnesty Law. He was aware that judges would have the last word and limited his ambition to obtaining “all the truth and all the justice to the extent of the possible” (Lazzara 2006, 18). The families of the victims and human rights associations, however, were disappointed by the lack of legal measures and the commission’s decision to omit the perpetrators’ names from the report.

Pinochet and his followers promptly accused the report of distorting and falsifying history. However, the exhumation of clandestine burial sites at Pisagua and Paine made denial impossible. They then turned to justifying the crimes as “regrettable, yet necessary excesses it is best to leave in the past in order to progress” (Stern 2010, 5). On its part, the Supreme Court, whose collaboration with the repression had been exposed by the Rettig Report, qualified the latter as “passionate, tendentious, and rash” (Matus Acuña 1999, 30). A unanimous Supreme Court decision endorsed the constitutionality of the Amnesty Law.

With the Supreme Court’s door closed to truth and justice, Congress now focused on the economic crimes of the regime. In 1990 and 1993, two commissions started investigating three checks that amounted to three million dollars made out by the armed forces to

Pinochet's son (*pinocheques*).<sup>4</sup> Their work came to a halt after the former dictator threatened with another military coup (*día de enlace* and *boinazo*), reaffirming his 1989 threat: "if anyone lays a finger on one of my men, the rule of law is over" (quoted in Collins 2010b, 79). It seemed as though Pinochet and his partisans were too powerful to take on in the struggles over collective memory, although a majority now believed in the need for justice.

In the early 1990s, only two symbolic trials of military personnel took place. The first crime tried in these years had occurred after the period covered by the Amnesty Law: fifteen policemen were prosecuted for their role in the 1985 *caso degollados* crime (addressed in the next section). The second was the 1976 murder of Orlando Letelier, Allende's ambassador to the United States. The secret police chief Manuel Contreras and his second-in-command were prosecuted. However, they received maximum sentences of six years, and the military authorities demanded the construction of comfortable special facilities staffed by military personnel. The request was granted, and the gesture of justice lost its meaning and became a new example of military power abuse.

This situation did not last long; as Stern observes, at the end of the millennium, changes in the political context pointed a way out of the stalemate. When Pinochet's tenure as commander-in-chief ended in 1998 and he became senator-for-life, many Chileans pressed charges against him. In the same year, the former dictator was arrested in London at the Spanish magistrate Baltazar Garzón's request. Concurring with Pinochet's "Carta a los chilenos" (1998), the right argued that subordinates had perpetrated the crimes he was accused of without his knowledge. Claiming that he was the victim of an international conspiracy, they protested on the streets of Santiago and attacked the British and Spanish embassies. They celebrated when he was released on medical grounds and returned to Chile as a free man in 2000.<sup>5</sup> Although his release dealt a hard blow to Pinochet's opponents, the international support encouraged them, and his detention inspired the post-dictatorship generation to join the struggle for truth and justice.

The return of the former dictator could not undo the significant steps undertaken during his absence. In 1998, President Frei's Minister of Justice Soledad Alvear initiated a judicial reform that tackled clientelism, ineffectiveness, and corruption. By establishing a fixed retirement age for Supreme Court justices, increasing the number of seats, and appointing notable jurists, Alvear ended Pinochet's hegemony in the Supreme Court. In this context, Judge Juan Guzmán took first steps to circumvent the Amnesty Law and proposed to



consider disappearance as “permanent kidnapping” (Stern 2010, 221). This allowed him to reopen cases that had been closed on the basis of the Amnesty Law, such as those related to the Caravan of Death and Operation Albania, which involved key actors of the illegal repression.

In the face of this new threat of criminal prosecution, the armed forces agreed to participate in a *Mesa de diálogo* (round table) to elucidate the fate of the *desaparecidos*. This initiative of President Frei’s Minister of Defense Edmundo Pérez Yoma brought together military and police officers, representatives of the human rights associations, political parties, the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, Freemasons, and academics. The information provided by the armed forces and the police about *desaparecidos* and perpetrators turned out to be unreliable, but this public exchange of individuals with conflicting perspectives at least signalled the existence of a collective problem. Despite the military’s reluctance to cooperate, Chilean society was now exposed to more information about the repression during the almost seventeen years of the dictatorship. As Lazzara notes, Pinochet’s arrest sparked an outpouring of testimonies and studies about these silenced years that were available in bookstores (2006, 20) and were widely read and circulated. Investigative journalists were particularly active in uncovering aspects of the repression.<sup>6</sup>

Historians also played a prominent role in sparking collective debate about the recent past through their *Manifiesto* (Historiadores 1999), a document published in response to Pinochet’s “Carta a los chilenos” (1998) and in line with their statements at the *Mesa de diálogo*. Instead of trying to impose an “official interpretation” as professional historians, they urged collective reflection: “It is not a text of consensual history that we want, but rather sources for history, for reflection about the past” (Sol Serrano, quoted in Stern 2010, 242). They invited Chileans to reflect on their role in the deeply rooted exclusion and intolerance that culminated in the 1973 polarization and to collectively confront the pain (“*dolernos*”) of having built a society capable of such atrocities. Similarly, in *Chile actual. Anatomía de un mito*, the sociologist Moulian stresses the importance of embracing the conflicting perspectives on the repression instead of promoting reconciliation as the primary way of relating to the past: “consensus is the highest stage of oblivion” (1998, 190).

In the context of Garzón’s investigation, the Clinton administration disclosed CIA documents that proved that the “dénouement of 1973 had been determined long before the conflict exploded in the country” in the United States (Lira 2011, 110). They also revealed the

presence of CIA informants at the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI), a key institution of state terror. In addition, there had been discussions at the CNI about murdering Aylwin in order to block the transition to democracy (Stern 2010, 229). These revelations weakened the “salvationist” narrative of the coup. In conjunction with Guzmán’s doctrine of permanent kidnapping, this put Pinochet and his officers in a difficult position. In addition, the increased international visibility made it more difficult to resort to the threat of a new coup.

Just before his return from London, the Supreme Court approved Judge Guzmán’s request to strip Pinochet of parliamentary immunity in order to prosecute him for fifty-seven counts of murder and eighteen abductions of unarmed civilians in the Caravan of Death. By then, 158 criminal complaints against Pinochet had already been filed. However, in 2001, on the basis of a controversial medical certificate, the Supreme Court declared him mentally incapable of standing trial. In 2002, he was diagnosed incurable, which protected him permanently from the law but also forced him to retire as senator, thereby dramatically reducing his impact on public life.

In the meantime, human rights violations had become an increasingly burning subject. In 2000, survivors of torture decided to fight for their rights and formed the Association of Former Concentration Camp Prisoners. In 2003, shocking televised testimonies of female and male prisoners about sexual violence broke the silence and drew attention to torture, a topic excluded from the Rettig Report. In response, President Lagos formed the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture to report on the survivors and advise on forms of acknowledgment and reparation. In 2004, after hearing thousands of testimonies, the commission produced a devastating document of more than 600 pages, known as the Valech Report, that includes detailed descriptions of over 35,000 cases of torture and descriptions of many of the 1,132 detention centres. Lagos granted the survivors monetary reparation, a way of assuming collective responsibility for their suffering.<sup>7</sup>

The members of the Organizing Committee of Former Political Prisoners stated that the monetary reparation (between 196 and 224 dollars per month) was meaningless given the disruption torture had caused in their lives, and in the absence of systematic prosecution of the torturers. Lagos, however, did not touch on the Amnesty Law, and once more, the names of the perpetrators were omitted from an official report. Furthermore, he offered impunity to offenders with a lower degree of involvement who provided reliable information to

help elucidate the death of *desaparecidos* and localize their bodies (out of the 3,178 known cases, only a few hundred have been found). Unwilling to trade justice for a part of the truth, however crucial, the victims and relatives of the *desaparecidos* strongly criticized Lagos's measures. The Organizing Committee of Former Political Prisoners released a document titled *Nosotros, los sobrevivientes acusamos* [We, the survivors, accuse] (2004), in which they stress that there can be no excuse for impunity. The document contains a list of almost 2,000 individuals—including military and police personnel as well as civilians such as journalists, lawyers, and doctors—whom the survivors accused of torture or facilitating torture.

After several officers' halfway *mea culpas* in response to the Valech Report, Commander-in-Chief Emilio Cheyre affirmed that the human rights violations were "unjustifiable" in any context and apologized to the victims on behalf of the army. In his "Chilean Army: End of a Vision" (2004) he committed to abstain from interfering with the judiciary but also expressed his concern about the indefinite prolongation of the trials. Lagos then urged the human rights associations to press charges before the end of Cheyre's tenure, which in fact would have limited prosecution: it is impossible to anticipate how much time torture survivors need before they can articulate their traumatic experience, as the Agüero-Meneses case demonstrated in 2001.<sup>8</sup> The Valech Report included only 35,000 out of an estimated total of 100,000 torture victims. Many of those who did not testify cannot or prefer not to remember (Winn 2007). The direct or indirect involvement of a large number of civilians (especially in the state bureaucracies) is another obstacle the identification and prosecution of those responsible for the crimes in a timely fashion (Villagrán 2005; Winn 2007).<sup>9</sup>

The Valech Report confronted Chileans with an unbearable reality: a vast segment of the population lived with the psychological and physical wounds of torture, abuse, and humiliation. Chile has more torture survivors in proportion to its total population than any of the other countries of the Southern Cone (Winn 2007). By the time the Valech Report was released, most Chileans were ready to accept their country's repressive past: a poll showed that 74 percent of Chileans approved the report and 86 percent believed that the testimonies were truthful (Stern 2010, 299). Denial and justification of the military crimes gradually became unacceptable and were confined to the private sphere.

Despite many obstacles, the human rights associations had won small legal battles (other judges followed in Judge Guzmán's

footsteps) and gained symbolic recognition. In addition to the reports, over one hundred memorials were created to commemorate the victims of the repression and signal the spaces where it had taken place across the country.<sup>10</sup> When, in 2004, news broke that Pinochet had a deposit of over 17 million dollars at the Riggs Bank, amassed through fraudulent activities, it became difficult to present him as an upright patriot. In 2005, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights demanded that Chile annul the Amnesty Law, which conflicts with the ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention Against Torture in the early 1990s. However, the Amnesty Law remains in effect.

Although Pinochet's partisans had lost visibility in this context, on the day of his death in 2006 they turned to the streets, showing that they remained strong and the country divided despite the Concertación's efforts to defuse the conflictive character of the past.<sup>11</sup> While crowds mourned at the hospital's main door and demanded a state funeral, thousands celebrated in downtown Santiago chanting "¡es un carnaval, se murió el general! [it is a carnival, the general died!]" and "¡y ya cayó! [it has fallen!]." <sup>12</sup> The latter makes reference to a tune sang during the protests against the dictatorship—"¡y va a caer!" [it will fall!]<sup>12</sup>—predicting the close end of the regime. Singing it again on the day of his death, but now confirming "the end," indicates that as long as Pinochet was alive, in many ways the dictatorship continued. He died shortly after his ninety-first birthday without a conviction and left a letter to be released posthumously through his foundation. In his "Message to My Compatriots," he assumed responsibility for the crimes he had been accused of and did not express regret. The Amnesty Law he had passed was still in effect, and although his 1980 Constitution had been amended, it had not been replaced. The day the right won the 2009–2010 presidential elections, after twenty years of Concertación government, a bust of Pinochet joined the celebration on the streets, thus indicating that he remains a powerful political symbol (Ramírez Soto 2010).

Even after his death, the figure of Pinochet continued to structure public debate about the past, while the towering figure of the early 1970s, Allende, was confined to the margins. Demonized and denigrated during the dictatorship, his government and reforms were rarely addressed in the post-dictatorship period. In 1990, Aylwin organized Allende's second funeral at Santiago's General Cemetery. Unlike the first memorial service, which took place during the dictatorship in Valparaíso and was restricted to Allende's widow, daughter, and nephews, this was a funeral with presidential honours. Thousands

of Chileans paid their last respects to their leader. Ten years later, in 2000, Lagos inaugurated a statue of Allende at the Plaza de la Constitución, facing La Moneda (the presidential palace), and presented him as a democrat and a leader true to his vision in a tense ceremony attended by protestors asking for justice and *pinochetistas* demanding the former dictator's release in London (Stern 2010, 285).

According to Winn (2007) the ten years between the burial and the statue confirmed that for the Concertación the only truly forbidden memory was Allende's government. While their opposition to the dictatorship united them, their relation to the Unidad Popular had the potential to divide them in the post-dictatorial present. The socialists had been part of Allende's coalition, while the Christian Democrats had denied their support to the leader. This division continued into the post-dictatorship period. More generally, the socialist government and its project was the potentially most divisive memory for Chileans because it pointed to the persisting inequalities and distance between the poor and the rich. For the former, Allende's government represented the hope of being treated as citizens entitled to a dignified life. For the latter, it represented the threat of losing their privileged position.

For Levinson, the silence about Allende is connected to the Concertación's continuation of the neoliberal economic model imposed by the dictatorship. He examines an advertising campaign about the benefits of advertising, whose slogan is "Publicidad. El derecho a elegir" [Advertising. The right to choose]. According to Levinson, this campaign implicitly establishes a connection with the haunting memory of the repression by suggesting that neoliberalism guarantees the right to choose, which Chileans did not have during the dictatorship. Implicitly, this campaign attempts to set up a binary choice between repression and capitalist forms of freedom. Questioning the latter seems to inevitably lead to repression. Levinson uses this as an entry point for understanding the post-dictatorship political apathy. He concludes that the coup happened in 1973,

but did not make a direct hit, a *real golpe*, until now, as Chile experiences a kind of mass concussion to which, in the end—because of the stunned state of the people and the stunned people of the state—nobody can testify. And that is the *golpe*, the impossibility of testimony, and through testimony (true or false), of *knowledge* of the event that is now striking.

(Levinson 2003, 99, emphases in the original)<sup>13</sup>

This way of dealing with the legacy of the dictatorship excludes the Unidad Popular and explains the decade of official silence about

Allende. Even after the inauguration of the Allende statue, public discourse about the former president focused on his death and largely excluded his political projects. In 2002, the Museum of National History for the first time included Allende, exhibiting his broken glasses and a photograph of the bombing of La Moneda. In 2003, President Lagos reopened the building's lateral door (80, Morandé Street), which had been bricked over during the dictatorship because it was the door used by Allende and through which his body was transported.

The clearest attempt of the Concertación to avoid dealing with Allende's government and class struggle is perhaps the inauguration of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights by Bachelet in 2010. Lazzara (2011) observes that the museum situates the Chilean case in the context of an international struggle for truth and human rights at the expense of an in-depth examination of historical processes and structural conflicts in Chile. The exhibition covers only Pinochet's repression, not the political projects it sought to eliminate and the social conflicts it sought to silence. In an interview with a museum guide, Lazzara learns that the institution instructs its staff to avoid discussing Allende's government during the guided tours because it is considered too controversial a topic. The museum, instead, aims at representing a country united in the defence of human rights. Drawing on Elizabeth Lira's reflections, Lazzara stresses that the museum does not help understand what made the coup possible—a history of class struggle and unpunished repressive violence against workers and native populations in the name of national pacification. As Lira observes, the collective silence about repression and impunity, the result of a shared feeling of impotence, was central to perpetuating these episodes: "That those repressive episodes would be repeated was a certainty, precisely on account of the impunity that perpetrators had enjoyed following each chapter of repression in Chile" (Lira 2011, 116).

The most recent "chapter of repression" was not followed by total impunity. Although Pinochet himself died unpunished, more than 500 agents of the regime are under investigation and more than 200 have been sentenced. However, only 56 are currently in the special prisons of Punta Puelco and Cordillera, while the others benefitted from sentence remissions. The families of the victims fear that if justice keeps moving at this pace, many more perpetrators will die unpunished, just as Pinochet did (Collins 2010a; Elmundo.es 2010).<sup>14</sup>

In a nutshell, collective memory formation in post-dictatorship Chile was marked by the Concertación's strategy of limited truth

and justice in the tension between the human rights associations and the armed forces' threats. In addition, as the Concertación avoided evoking the Unidad Popular, Allende's political project became a taboo. Political debate and mobilization was centred on the figure of Pinochet, which united those opposed to dictatorship and repression but prevented a critical discussion of Allende's legacy.

Lira is concerned that in this context Chileans "may become trapped by the duty to commemorate a tragedy, at the risk of forgetting the meaning of the lives of those who died in these circumstances" (2011, 126). The Chilean post-dictatorship generation thus faces challenges similar to their Argentinean counterparts, although there are also significant differences. One of the striking differences is the political passion of the youth before the end of the dictatorship and their apathy during the governments of the Concertación.

### PINOCHET'S CHILDREN?

In Chile, several age groups grew up under the military regime, almost twice as long as the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay. Since they were teenagers or young adults in the late 1980s, many have clear memories of repression, resistance, and the transition; thus, the term "post-dictatorship generation" does not fully capture their experience. I instead use the existing expression "Pinochet's children" to refer to this larger age group (those born from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s). Some of them were babies while others were young children when Allende died: all knew at an early age what it meant to live in a country with *desaparecidos*, curfew hours and heavily restricted freedom of speech and association. For instance, Allende and the Unidad Popular could not be discussed in public. The curricula were changed dramatically, and Pinochet himself reformed the geography and history programs to ensure "Pinochet's children" would develop as "patriotic" Chileans (Gómez Leyton 2010).

Despite these efforts, many of these children defied the dictator's expectations.<sup>15</sup> In the mid-1980s, when some of them were in college and others in high school, they proved that the memories of the Chile from before the coup were alive and strong. The longing for political freedom and hope for change inspired a massive student movement: the youth who joined it fought against the dictatorship and for a more egalitarian society. Several were arrested, tortured, and killed, but they continued their struggle and contributed to the 1988 "no" to the extension of Pinochet's term. However, the post-dictatorship turned out to be very different from the more equal, united, and free country

they had envisioned, as the Concertación continued the neoliberal model imposed by the regime and failed to meet the demands of the victims and their families.

Now, as mentioned above, it was no longer the hope of a better future that animated them, but the threat of regressing from a limited neoliberal democracy to a neoliberal dictatorship. Internationally, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the perceived “end of history,” contributed to making neoliberalism appear permanent and unavoidable. In addition, the Concertación’s efforts to co-opt the student movement and defuse social tensions led the youth to withdraw from politics and search for meaning in other spheres. In Carrasco’s words, youth apathy in the 1990s responded to the weakening of democratic values and the displacement of politics as an instrument to run society (Carrasco 2002, 16). Finally, the insistence on reconciliation with limited truth and justice led them to disengage from the past: Stern notes that at the turn of the millennium, three fifths of the middle- and lower-class youth expressed loss of interest in the human rights struggles, perceived as political squabble (Stern 2010, 264).

According to Stern, this youth articulated the need to understand the past in a way that allowed them to connect it with their everyday concerns: a discriminatory and classist society and an economic system focused on narrowly defined economic growth at the cost of the exclusion and failure of many (2010, 264). Pinochet’s detention in London inspired young people to get involved in the struggles about the consequences of the past: the former dictator’s arrest was a demonstration that the impossible was possible. While “commandos” of young people from Fundación Pinochet protested against his detention, sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* attended vigils organized by the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (Association of Disappeared Detainees) in anticipation of his conviction. During these meetings, and inspired by H.I.J.O.S. Argentina, sons and daughters decided to organize separately from the human rights associations and formed Acción, Verdad y Justicia, Hijos-Chile.<sup>16</sup> Different from Argentina, the group welcomed members without biological links to victims of the dictatorship. They started by sharing their stories in public spaces (both in shantytowns and downtown Santiago) and invited passers-by to contribute with a personal memory in order to put faces on the ciphers and make visible that the repression is a common problem (Stern 2010, 232).

Apart from shocking personal testimonies, Hijos-Chile received anonymous notes with the names, addresses, and workplaces of perpetrators, which led to the organization the *fumas* (“something rotten



that can befoul its environment”), the Chilean version of the *escraches*. These festive protests, in which they publicly denounced unpunished torturers and collaborators living and working in a society that ignores their past, were well attended. In the first year of the *fumas*, apart from DINA-CNI and other military officers, they also denounced a businessman, two doctors, a journalist, a university professor, and a company (Claro) linked to torture and illegal repression (Stern 2010, 235). Given the success of these events, they decided to form the Funa Commission, a space for political activism joined by new left-wing, environmentalist, and feminist youth organizations, university and anarchist groups, and a great number of persons without other political affiliation who “found [in the commission] a space for the construction of meaning for their life” (FUNA 2005).

The commission criticizes not only government secrecy and impunity but also human rights violations in the present, such as the torture and murder of young protesters: “Impunity has become an integral part of a society shaped by the dictatorship, in which the perpetrators, those who benefited from the crimes, those who occupied leading positions during the dictatorship, and current government officials can feel comfortable” (FUNA 2005). They establish a direct link between yesterday’s abuses by the armed forces and today’s abuses by politicians and technocrats: “Inequalities have intensified in our country and every day more Chileans are deprived of their right to study, free health care, a decent house and job” (FUNA 2005).<sup>17</sup> Fighting for the rights of these Chileans is for them a way of “recovering the dreams and hopes” of those who worked for social change in the past and those who gave their lives to end the dictatorship (FUNA 2005). The Unidad Popular’s dream now resurfaces among the youth. In 2003, more than 80,000 young men and women attended “The Dream Exists,” a rock concert at the National Stadium in honour of Allende.<sup>18</sup> The organizers proposed that Allende’s vision was a “dream worth having” and worth working for (Stern 2010, 285).<sup>19</sup>

Cinema played an important role in the process of reconnecting with the dreams and political struggles of the recent past. Films by “Pinochet’s children” and also by their parents’ generation, such as Patricio Guzmán’s two films (*Obstinada memoria*, 1997; *Allende*, 2004) and Andrés Wood’s *Machuca* (2004), brought the Unidad Popular government to the big screen. Likewise, Carmen Castillo’s *Calle Santa Fe* (2007) addresses activism in the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) during the years of the socialist government and the young director López Balló explores the armed

group Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria Lautaro in *La mujer metralleta* (2009). Almost thirty films, mostly documentaries, were produced since the late 1990s, many of them inspired by Pinochet's detention in London in 1998.<sup>20</sup> The production reached a peak in 2003 and 2004 in the context of the thirtieth commemoration of the coup; these films creatively address different aspects of the repression and also the resistance, the generational experience, and the continuities between the dictatorial past and the present.<sup>21</sup>

The documentaries analyzed in this chapter, created by "Pinochet's children," not only unbury the past but also aim at unsettling the Concertación's vision of a united country that advances toward reconciliation and *nunca más*. For the thirtieth commemoration of the coup, national television (TVN) "showed" September 11, 1973, through an overabundance of emblematic images and unproblematic narratives (Eltit 2005). According to Richard, the media commemorated by "carefully avoiding the edges of ideological confrontation" and the "journalistic narratives equally distributed the responsibility for the exacerbation of the historical violence between left and right" (2008, 65). Conversely, the group of young directors studied in this chapter seeks to spark controversy, raise new questions, and critically engage the present. Thereby, the directors create active forms of transmission, which has encouraged the collective process of taking charge of the 1973 crisis and mourning the horrors of the past.

The first section of the chapter introduces the perspective of three groups of "Pinochet's children." *Volver a vernos* and *Actores secundarios* focus on the protagonists of the 1980s college and high school student movement. The third documentary, *Apgar II*, explores the perspective of individuals born on September 11, 1973, in families from different social classes, with different political perspectives, experiences of the dictatorship, and interpretations of how to deal with its consequences. They were fifteen years old when the victory of the "no" brought the dictatorship to an end, which paradoxically also represented the end of a time of great political awareness and projects.

## THE END? *VOLVER A VERNOS, ACTORES SECUNDARIOS,* AND *APGAR II*

I see myself, how we were. I see them: Carola, Poli, and Goic, a whole generation, our generation. We were kids; I can see all of

us again. I can see my parents on the day of the coup: they cry and hug each other terrified, angry, because their lives and our lives have been destroyed. I feel the pain again, the mixture of astonishment and sadness of that day. It's been thirty years.

(Rodríguez 2002)

With these words, Paula Rodríguez introduces the audience to *Volver a vernos* (2002), a documentary about those who were children the day of the coup and saw their lives dramatically changed by the military repression. By following the story of three leaders of the 1980s student movement—Carolina “Carola” Tohá, Enrique “Poli” París, and Alejandro Goic—the film recounts how members of a generation that grew up under the shadow of the dictator became a leading force in the struggle for democracy. They belonged to the youth wings of left parties; their environment was the university and their battlefield the streets, where they held rallies and staged creative public interventions denouncing military violence.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to recovering the memory of the 1980s student movement, the film offers a broader reflection about repression and resistance: “Pinochet’s dictatorship was one of the many authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century. The so-called Pinochet’s children stand up on behalf of all the youth in the world forced to grow up under a dictatorship” (VisionaFilm 2003).

The three protagonists, Carola, Poli, and Goic, link their decision to become political actors to the disruption caused by the coup very early in their lives but most importantly to the example of those who died for a change they considered necessary. On the day of the coup, Goic, together with more than a hundred teenagers like him, went out on the street to resist. They were committed to the president and experienced his death as a personal loss: “I couldn’t believe it, I swear to you, I couldn’t,” he says, visibly moved. “We were just kids, it was something emotional . . . Allende was, and I think he knew it, our moral support. After all, had he not resisted to the end and sacrificed his life, our defeat wouldn’t have been just military and political but also moral. They would have taken away our souls. He kept our souls and hearts alive” (Rodríguez 2003). Taking Allende’s life as a reference point, Goic became a leader in the youth wing of the Socialist Party at the university.

Similarly, for Poli, activism was a way of connecting with his father, Enrique París Roa, Allende’s education advisor and a communist leader. On the day of the coup, he could have safely left La Moneda, because he was a doctor, but instead decided to stay until Allende

asked those who were with him to leave: they did so through the side door where the army was waiting. París Roa was taken prisoner and disappeared soon after. His son Poli was twelve years old and about to become one of the many Chileans exiled in France: “In all these years, I had to comprehend why at a certain moment he was faced with taking that decision. His place was there; his life was bound up with it. It’s as if he wanted to tell us: ‘Please try to understand. This is all part of my life and I can’t betray myself because that would mean betraying you’” (Rodríguez 2003). In the process of trying to understand his father, Poli felt the urge to return to Chile. He returns alone in the midst of the regime: “I did not come back to Chile with the intention of finding my Dad, or learning what happened to him. It had more to do with taking action; it’s as if we met in our actions and commitment. Through this, he left an indelible mark on me” (Rodríguez 2003).

Carola’s father, José Tohá, was Allende’s secretary of the interior, minister of defence, and personal friend. On September 11, 1973, he was also at La Moneda with the president. When the army entered the building, Tohá was detained and taken to different detention centres, where he was brutally tortured for eight months. His daughter was eight years old and went into exile to Mexico for five years.<sup>23</sup> “My whole life was taken away from me. Everything fell apart, all the people who were close to me had been captured, murdered, exiled, terrorized” (Rodríguez 2003). At a very early age, she directly experienced the political and the personal as intrinsically connected. In addition, she attributes to her father’s legacy the incapacity of disconnecting from social conflicts around her and the need to respond to them.

Their parents’ generation inspired Goic, Poli, and Carola to engage in the struggles of their own time. Unlike in Argentina, where H.I.J.O.S. had to unbury the political commitment of their parents—eclipsed by the figure of the innocent victim—there was no need to depoliticize Allende, París, and Tohá. It was less problematic to publicly identify with top officials of a democratically elected government, the victims of an illegal coup, than with guerrilla fighters, as in Argentina. This made it easier for the next generation to inherit their impulse to engage in political action.

The politicized environment in the 1980s both reflected and strengthened this impulse. The heterogeneous and increasingly vocal opposition to the regime was accompanied by a highly developed youth culture, which included forbidden protest music (used in the soundtrack of the *Volver a vernos*) and unauthorized politico-cultural

events.<sup>24</sup> As seen in Part I, in relation to Argentine activists, risking their lives in a common project created strong bonds between them and made “trust” a fundamental value. The inspiration drawn from the past, the vibrant environment, and the strong bonds between the activists were instrumental in recovering political freedom at the university, until then under the control of the regime through imposed deans. Their example inspired other struggles that lead to the demise of the dictatorship.

*Volver a vernos* does not end with the long-awaited defeat of the dictator in the 1988 referendum but explores how life continues for the “Pinochet’s children” after this event. More concretely, the film tries to understand the increasing distance from politics of those who, until then, had been its protagonists: “Nobody expected Carola, Poli, and Goic to give up political activism in post-dictatorship Chile” (Rodríguez 2003). All three agree that there was no clear space for them in the times of “agreements and negotiations” inaugurated by the Concertación. Goic explains that others, with degrees from European and American universities, returned at the end of the dictatorship to rule the country and joined “the race in the final ten meters.” Carola points out that an older generation had been waiting in the wings during the regime to occupy positions in political parties. For Poli, the leaders of the student movement did not know how to “recycle” themselves politically in the new configuration. Whatever the reasons, as Carola points out, “Pinochet’s children” “had the energy to build up a new democracy that somehow was scattered, lost, it remained unused” (Rodríguez 2003).

In this respect, *Volver a vernos* raises questions with implications for other societies that underwent a period of political effervescence before the fall of a tyrant: How is one to continue the struggle for more democratic relations once the dictatorship is officially over? How is one to keep the passion that drives resistance to oppression in a context of political “agreements and negotiations”? After two decades, in the early 2000s, Carola and Poli returned to politics during the government of Lagos, who had been close to their parents. However, Lagos refused to be connected with the Unidad Popular. He supported a neoliberal model and, during his campaign, made clear that “he would not be another Allende” (Lazzara 2006, 3). Carola defines herself as socialist, like her father, and affirms that she did not take from him the “rigidity of an ideology” but its “essence,” which she described as “the respect and dignity of people, it’s about shaping society to make that possible, giving up whatever is necessary to make it possible.” However, she adds, “nobody knows how to do this; it

is not about nationalizing companies or centralizing decision-making, there could be multiple ways” (Rodríguez 2003).

Carola as a politician distances herself from the Unidad Popular’s project and ideology without offering an assessment of its achievements and the reasons of its failure. Since social inequalities and the class gap remain, the memory of Allende sparks the same passionate oppositions as thirty years ago. Instead of addressing what is at stake in those reactions, the Concertación silences this period and focuses on commemorating its tragic ending. This makes it impossible to build on the experience of the Unidad Popular and evaluate the present from this vantage point. Allende’s government is not the only significant political project excluded from the memory promoted by the post-dictatorship governments. For similar reasons, the 1980s student movement was not remembered after the end of the dictatorship: it is a memory that could encourage younger generations to not accept their situations as given and engage in collective struggles.

In the year *Volver a vernos* was released, seven students were expelled from their high school for making the 1980s burst into the present. A professor asked her students to find out what happened in their high school (No. 12, Arturo Alessandri *Palma*) during the dictatorship and produce a report. Inspired by photographs, a group of students decided to reenact the 1985 occupation (*toma*) of the high school and document it in a short film. *Tomas* were a form of collective action commonly used by high school students in the 1980s to show that the regime was not invulnerable; it could be challenged and eventually defeated. Typically, between three and four hundred students entered a building at once, locked the adults in the teachers’ lounge, organized assemblies, and tried to keep the police away for as long as possible by throwing stones from the roof. If it was not possible to negotiate a safe exit, they tried to complicate the armed forces’ operation inside the building (crowding in the backyard, electrifying the metal stairs).

Just as in the pictures of 1985 (see Image 6.1), for the reenactment the students covered their faces, displayed flags and banners against oppression, and created a barricade made of chairs in a classroom.

The high school principal surprised them as they were shooting the film, thought that it was a real *toma*, and called the police. The students were expelled, and the mayor did not allow them to re-enroll. They took the case to court but were not allowed to return.

*Actores secundarios* opens with the leaders of the 1985 *toma*—the protagonists of the documentary—returning to the high school to



Image 6.1 Members of the student movement in the 1985 *toma* of the institute No. 12, Arturo Alessandri Palma, in *Actores Secundarios* (Bustos 2004)

express their support to the expelled students. They describe the situation as absurd: the overreaction to the representation of something that happened eighteen years ago shows that the simulacrum is not what the students did, but the current democracy. Talking to current students from this and other institutions, the protagonists of the documentary realize that the former do not know what happened in their high schools in the 1980s. One of them comments that those stories are from his grandmothers' times, although his parents are the same age as the protagonists (they are in their mid-thirties). The fact that the authorities felt threatened by the enactment seems to be linked to the students' ignorance: the revolutionary past of the institutions has been deliberately excluded from the younger generations' education; it is not meant to inform an understanding of their possibilities as actors in the present.

The memories evoked in the interviews with participants of the 1980s student movement challenge ways of relating to youth, community, and politics, thereby opening a space for potential change. They show that teenagers—often perceived as immature and in the need of supervision—act as adults if they are engaged in meaningful projects. They envisioned more egalitarian social relations, effectively organized a complex movement, and creatively combated overwhelming repressive force. They also demonstrated that it is possible to subvert the logic of fear even in the most adverse circumstances by reconstructing social bonds and developing mutual trust: “during the protests you knew that the *compañero* behind you had your

back and the one marching in front of you had the same certainty” (Bustos 2004).

As mentioned above, their experience of politics contrasts with predominant forms of political organization in the present. Firstly, the personal and the political overlapped. Activism was not only a political choice but also a space for building community: assemblies, protests, and volunteer work in native communities or shantytowns were also an opportunity to deepen friendships and enjoy themselves. Secondly, as one of them puts it in the film, they showed “an outstanding capacity to build progressive alliances across ideological divides” (Bustos 2004). A headline of the time characterised the Comité Pro-FESES<sup>25</sup> as “an organization in which all the tendencies, from the Democracia Cristiana to the far left, coexist” (Bustos 2004). The leaders succeeded in subordinating divergences to shared convictions about social justice and established a common agenda and strategy. Thirdly, the leaders’ perspectives and decisions were informed by their deep involvement in grassroots work and street confrontations, and decisions were collectively discussed in assemblies. This facilitated cohesion across the different levels of the movement and helped the leaders grasp the political environment.

Their short- and long-term projects are potentially the most challenging aspect of the student movement: they identified problems similar to the ones faced by students today and struggled in a way that can empower the latter. They were fighting for a project that went beyond Pinochet’s defeat; they wanted an egalitarian country in which education was a tool for promoting social justice. The main purpose of the 1985 *toma* was to create an opportunity to negotiate a platform of requests with the minister of education. It included democratization of the student unions (controlled by high school principals), allowances for students from humble backgrounds, equal access to higher education so far limited by entry exams (*Prueba de Aptitud Académica*), reduction of bus and subway fares, and investigation of students’ murders.

The *toma* of the Alessandri Palma high school was massive; students resisted the military for hours as the press covered the events. More than three hundred students were arrested and the minister of education resigned. In the following year, FESES called for a two-month strike of the education system to fight the *municipalización* (or devolution) of public secondary education and the privatization of emblematic high schools. Students refused to attend class, and teachers did not teach, as educators’ unions joined the strike, and parents’ associations supported it. As one of the participants explains,



this was not a typical strike, because students kept going to school in their uniforms every morning to organize protests, assemblies, and *tomas*. However, the students' demands were dismissed and devolution continued.

Despite the failure, these actions contributed to weakening the regime. Soon after, FESES called for a national two-day strike, as part of the Asamblea de la Civilidad, the umbrella organization of anti-Pinochet forces, which included professional and blue-collar unions, associations of shantytown inhabitants, and native communities. The end was close for Pinochet but also for the student movement. They wanted to overthrow the dictator to start a period in which politics remained integrated in everyday life and education served to fight social injustice, inequalities, and oppression. However, instead of a revolutionary upheaval followed by an abdication of the tyrant, the end was the result of political agreements, pacts, and a plebiscite that led to what Pinochet called a "protected democracy," marked by strong continuities with the dictatorship (see previous section). Paradoxically, for the students, the end of the dictatorship meant the end of their political project.

After having occupied a central role in the fight against the regime, as equal partners of other actors with a longer history of political involvement, the members of the student movement were now downgraded to *actores secundarios*: "secondary" or "supporting actors." When the centre and left-wing parties reorganized at the end of the regime, there was no space for the youth they had previously encouraged to join. Víctor Osorio Reyes, former president of FESES, affirms:

I was at the central committee of the Izquierda Cristiana and was a prominent member, but once my role in FESES was over, *fllo!* I was reduced to rank and file activist. . . . Once my prominent role in the student movement was over I became a pariah in the party, excluded from the organic structure and without any position. It was very hard because I had to rebuild myself from scratch socially and politically.

(Bustos 2004)

Another former student leader explains this situation as the product of a gradual disengagement of politicians from students that the latter could not or did not want to see: "While we were preparing to overthrow the dictator, they were preparing to govern" (Bustos 2004). None of the former high school activists occupies an important government position today<sup>26</sup>—in that sense, they remain "secondary actors." Students and recent graduates witnessed the depoliticization and consequent decay of FESES: the leaders were now selected by the

government, did not have a history in the movement, and did not continue its culture of dissidence.

Some of those who wanted to continue to work for social change joined guerrilla groups such as Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez and MAPU-Lautaro. These groups refused to accept the political and economic arrangements of the post-dictatorship years: the presence of Pinochet and the armed forces in politics, impunity, and the neoliberal model imposed by the regime. The Concertación increased the repression against armed groups and waited for four years before releasing Pinochet's political prisoners. In a context of decreasing political mobilization, armed insurgents were presented as ordinary criminals. Former student activists who joined those groups risked torture, death, and public criminalization (for instance, Ariel Antonioletti, a former FESES leader). In addition, since the Concertación continued the economic model established by the dictatorship, this generation now faced the dilemma of either entering the game (studying and succeeding in a competitive job market) or being left outside. Under these conditions, there was little time or space for activism.

Whatever their reasons, most of the former student activists withdrew, disappointed, from the political scene and were scattered. In the documentary, some of them remember the end of the movement as a political defeat, others as a personal failure, and others as generational contribution meant to end. However, all agree that the movement shaped their subjectivity: "having invested one's entire will in a project" and "living with that fire in the heart" shaped how they see the world, relate to others, and continue their search for meaning individually (Bustos 2004). As one of them mentions, the transformative experience of the 1980s student movement was not remembered as an important contribution to the fight against the dictatorship or a force for social change.

*Actores secundarios* somehow changed this situation. It not only allowed former activists to reconnect and see themselves as a generation again,<sup>27</sup> but also provoked an unexpected reaction in society. It rapidly became one of Chile's best-known documentaries and a year after its release, the directors commented: "We are quite surprised by the effects of the film. We have been invited to participate in many forums and are constantly asked to give talks at public and private high schools and colleges. There is a burning need to know more about this history and surprise about the fact that it has not been told before" (Toledo 2005). The directors deliberately produced a film that would appeal to an audience unfamiliar with the story and succeeded in communicating their experience to a large audience. We can imagine that

the success of the film is related to the “*revolución pingüina*,”<sup>28</sup> a massive high school movement that took place three years after its release. Another wave of protests has erupted as I write this chapter.<sup>29</sup> Just as in the 1980s, the students demand an educational institution that favours social justice and integration instead of reproducing and creating inequalities.

The last group addressed in this section was too young to participate in the 1985 *toma* but had long graduated from high school when the students returned to the streets in 2006. Different from the directors of *Volver a vernos* and *Actores secundarios*, in *Apgar 11* (2003), the filmmaker Cristián Leighton looks at those who did not have a generational political experience during the dictatorship. On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the coup, his film investigates the relation between the perspective of the protagonists and their parents on the meaning of that day, advancing a reflection on continuities across generations. The conclusion is not optimistic: the initial conflictive positions about *el once* [September 11] have not given way to a process of collective mourning and learning from one generation to the next. The film challenges the Concertación’s attempt to present the past as a finished matter and the post-dictatorship period as a steady movement toward reconciliation.

For *Apgar 11*, Leighton selected six individuals born on September 11, 1973, in different public and private hospitals and interviewed them shortly before their thirtieth anniversary. The film starts with a caption explaining the title: “*Apgar* is a test used to evaluate the newborn’s reaction to the delivery and adaptation to the environment in the first minute of life. The score goes from 1 to 10” (Leighton 2003). *Apgar 11*, the film, “measures” the protagonists’ adaptation to the phase inaugurated by the coup on the day of their birth. On that day, as on every day, approximately 700 babies were born in Santiago.

The first part of the documentary focuses on the six mothers that gave birth and the midwives that assisted them, an entry point to the contrasting worlds that coexisted then and now in Chile. While the army raided the maternity ward of the public hospital Barros Luco, arresting doctors and personnel (including the interviewed midwife), at the German Clinic the staff celebrated the news of the coup with champagne. Their only concern was that the inhabitants of a nearby shantytown would attack the clinic the next day during a long black-out. While the midwife at the public hospital San Juan de Dios will never forget the anguish of realizing that the Unidad Popular was over, the midwife at the private clinic remembers the image of the

bombs falling on La Moneda as a detached spectator; for her, it was “like in the movies” (Leighton 2003).

The six women assisted by the midwives on that day belonged to different social classes and held different political views; therefore, the coup impacted their lives differently.<sup>30</sup> On that day, shortly before the delivery, Soledad Parada, a middle-class pro-Allende sociologist, talked to her husband, who was working at La Moneda, on the phone: “we said goodbye without knowing whether we would see each other again” (Leighton 2003). By chance, he left La Moneda through the main door and survived, unlike those who left through the side door, who were detained and killed, like París and Tohá. Two months later, the family fled to Hungary with the newborn baby, María, and two sons. The plane was full of Chilean going into exile: “when the plane took off, we started to sing and of course to cry: we felt free, safe, but immensely sad. It was very moving to hear the whole plane singing ‘Venceremos’ [the anthem of Allende’s campaign]” (Leighton 2003).

For Adriana Torres, an upper-class businesswoman and *pinochetista*, Allende’s government was “traumatic” (workers attempted to occupy the family factory) and therefore the coup gave her great “joy” (Leighton 2003). She named her son César Augusto after two of the junta members who had led the uprising, César Mendoza and Augusto Pinochet (her husband wanted to give him the name of all four members of the junta). Like Torres, Carmen Aresti—an upper-class painter and *pinochetista*—had her baby, Rodrigo, at the German Clinic. Her husband, brother, and family joined the personnel celebrating the coup, and they kept celebrating during the three-day curfew. “The first years of the coup were very good for us. We were among the lucky ones; we lived those years like in a bubble, very protected. For people like the members of my family, who were not involved in politics, there was peace, prosperity, work, food supply [as opposed to the rationing implemented by Allende in response to the shortage created by industrialists], the streets were clean, there was no violence or delinquency. Those were good years for raising kids and working” (Leighton 2003).

María Pino and Silvia Morales had their babies at the public hospitals Barros Luco and San Juan de Dios, respectively. Both are housewives from humble backgrounds and have terrible memories of that day. Pino arrived at the hospital very scared, and when the military entered the maternity ward she escaped with her newborn baby, Úlrica. Morales went into labour three weeks early, the moment she saw the news of the coup on TV, and travelled to the hospital in an ambulance transporting wounded persons. She delivered her baby,

Fabiola, in a bed shared with two other patients. The baby was premature and sick; therefore, she and her husband had to take it to the hospital very often. They imply that the military on the streets harassed them permanently, and the documentary suggests that something serious happened to her, although she does not mention it in the interviews: "It is a memory I would like to delete from my mind forever" (Leighton 2003).

The second part of the documentary introduces the sons and daughters and their perspective on the coup and the dictatorship, closely connected to their parents' political perspective and experience.<sup>31</sup> María, daughter of Soledad Parada, defines herself as an exile, but unlike her parents, she assumes this condition once they return to Chile in mid-1980s. The country she finds is very different from the one her parents conveyed through their nostalgic memories. Her life, friends, and culture were in Hungary, but her family was in Chile: reuniting with the family was the main reason for their return. After their arrival, they lived with her maternal uncle, José Manuel Parada, and his family. This longed-for proximity was soon shattered when her uncle was abducted by the army and found decapitated three days later. María captures in few words the meaning of the event: "destruction, sadness, much sadness, many traumas. The family destroyed" (Leighton 2003).

Because her parents were shocked, she had to deal with the events alone, which made any possible healing even harder. The wound is still open: "a mention on TV of the *caso degollados* [decapitations case]<sup>32</sup> is enough to make everything come back: an avalanche of images, all the crying, everything" (Leighton 2003). Reconciliation does not seem to be a possibility either for her or for her mother: "I do not have hate in my heart, but nobody can ask me to reconcile with those who destroyed our family," María's voiceover states while we see her, once more, riding her bicycle on the streets of Santiago (Leighton 2003, see Image 6.2). Throughout the film, each interviewee appears in relation to activities, spaces, and objects that capture who they are. In María's case, her constant movement could be read as indicating a lack of roots or ties to a specific place, a product of her early exile. As a consequence of the *caso degollados* investigation, in 1985, César Mendoza (a junta member since 1973) stepped down as chief of police. His namesake César Augusto, Torres' son, like María, does not see reconciliation as an achievable goal; however, his reasons are very different from hers. He recognizes his detachment from the violent past: he was brought up in an upper-class family exclusively in the ideology of the right and was not exposed to the experience of



**Image 6.2** María riding her bicycle on the streets of Santiago de Chile in *Apgar 11* (Leighton 2003)

those who had suffered repression. He never questioned his family's perspective on the coup. The protests he coincidentally saw on TV on his birthdays were the only indicator that the overthrow of Allende was not unanimously celebrated. Just like the midwife at the German Clinic where he was born, he relates to the violence of the past as a detached spectator. To indicate his separation from the lives of most Chileans, the interview with him takes place in the courtyard of Lincoln International Academy.

His detachment leads him to depoliticize the past and the present, minimize the human rights violations, and explain the differences between Chileans as an abstract and unhistorical question of national character and lack of will: "we Chileans are always focusing on others' defects instead of their virtues, therefore we will never arrive at an agreement" (Leighton 2003). César Augusto's position can be understood in relation to his mother. She recognizes that her social circle pushed for the coup (they used to throw corn into the front garden of Allende's commander-in-chief, indicating that they thought he was a chicken), and therefore they are in part responsible for "what happened." However, she adds, "if we keep poking the wounds, we won't be able to construct anything better as a nation" (Leighton 2003). The first "we" creates an impression of proximity between the *pinochetistas* and the victims, united as a nation. However, it does not include the latter because "poking the wounds" refers to the victims' untiring demand for justice and recognition of the crimes.

These demands become an obstacle to progress and separate Chileans from each other, while oblivion would facilitate healing, a process that occurs naturally.

For Aresti's son Rodrigo, time is not enough, and neither is the conviction of the perpetrators, since "the capacity of healing that wound goes beyond what is humanly possible: they [the relatives] are going to die with that pain, and that is terrible" (Leighton 2003). This part of the interview takes place in the hall of the Universidad Católica; he is standing in front of an exhibition of the victims of the dictatorship. We then see him in the library and in other spaces inside the university, which suggests that his profession—he is a lawyer and law professor—influenced his position regarding the army's crimes. He says that learning about the human rights violations helped him realize that the truth of the relatives is legitimate, but so is the truth of the other side; therefore he prefers not to condemn anyone. This statement is clearly related to his mothers' position. When asked about the human rights violations, she answers:

Before, I was happy with the coup—I believed what the junta told us, and that was it. In the present, I have mixed feelings: I still have great affection and gratitude for Pinochet, and always will, that's why it is very hard for me to connect him with the human rights violations that have come to light, which implies a serious contradiction. I would like to be able to put him in a bubble. For us, the center-right *pinochetistas*, the subject of human rights violations has been very difficult and very painful.

(Leighton 2003)

While Aresti seeks to cope with the past through isolation and detachment—represented in the image of the bubble, employed to describe both the situation of her family during the dictatorship and the way in which she would like to deal with the memory of Pinochet—Úlrica, Pino's daughter, feels strongly connected with the crimes. When she was a child, her parents did not celebrate her birthday, to avoid problems with the neighbours—once, the latter thought the family was celebrating the coup and disconnected the electricity. When she turned twelve, she decided to never celebrate her birthday—a gesture of respect for those who suffered on that day. She does not define herself as a "political person," but does not hesitate to state that "there is nothing in this world that can possibly justify the outrage of human rights violations, especially not because of ideological differences" (Leighton 2003). Finally, Fabiola, also born in a humble public hospital, very recently learned about her mother's painful experiences on the day of the coup and during the first months of her life,

which explains why her birthdays were never happy for her parents. Her wish is to one day be able to spend her birthday with a family emotionally ready to celebrate because the abuses of the past have been repaired to the extent of the possible. The intersection of history and biography, which underlies the whole film, becomes evident at this point.

The documentary does not end with a conclusion, but with the scene of a baby being born on September 11, 2003—thirty years after the coup—and a legend that reads: “This documentary is dedicated to all those who were born and who died on September 11, 1973” (Leighton 2003). Drawing conclusions is a challenge that the audience has to face for the sake of the next generations.<sup>33</sup> In *Apgar 11*, Leighton creates a space for actors on both sides who would not usually talk about the past to listen not only to each other but also to themselves in a “dialogue” created through the editing.

However, this film did not reach the large audience, as its director had anticipated. Leighton had signed a contract with the public TV channel TVN stipulating that it would be broadcasted on prime time to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the coup. Consistent with the Concertación’s plan of national reconciliation, TVN wanted to convey that Chileans had come to terms with their history, and Leighton’s film challenged this perspective. Since he had been hired to make this documentary, rejecting it could have been understood as censorship; instead of broadcasting *Apgar 11* on prime time, as agreed, TVN showed it at midnight, when most viewers had already turned off the TV (Leighton 2003). Just as the film discussed in the next section, *Apgar 11* is a missed opportunity to foster critical discussion among Chileans, which is necessary for collective mourning and learning.

### *EL ASTUTO MONO PINOCHET: THE DICTATORSHIP THROUGH CHILDREN’S EYES*

Unlike Leighton’s film, the other documentaries broadcasted by TVN on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the coup were selected through an open contest. *El astuto mono Pinochet contra la moneda de los cerdos/Clever Monkey Pinochet versus La Moneda’s Pigs* (2004) was rejected. Additionally, the members of the National Council of Culture and Arts did not award one of the Fondart grants to this film.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Perut and Osnovikoff had to finance it mostly out of their own pocket (Caro 2004). What were the reasons for the institutional rejection?



Like *Appar 11*, Perut and Osnovikoff show that the past is not a resolved and finished matter but, on the contrary, a deeply unsettling subject that affects even the youngest generations. The directors visit working-, middle-, and upper-class primary and secondary schools in Santiago and ask children and teenagers to create theatrical sketches about the events around September 11, 1973. They also invite theatre students and a debate team. Perut and Osnovikoff reconstruct the events through scenes drawn from ten sketches: important historical moments are shown from ten perspectives, like voices that do not enter a dialogue but talk simultaneously.

In this sense, *El astuto mono* could be seen as the reverse image of the famous film *Machuca* (2004) by Andrés Wood, who, like Perut and Osnovikoff, belongs to the “children of Pinochet.” While *Machuca* shows the perspective of two eleven-year-old children from the time of Allende, *El astuto mono* documents the perspective of today’s children on those times. Interestingly, the experience of growing up in the 1970s is more attractive for audiences and scholars than the experience of growing up in the post-dictatorship period: *Machuca* has been studied extensively, while this is one of the first academic analyses of *El astuto mono*.<sup>35</sup>

The sketches open a window on a society marked by torture, murder, and violent class conflict, predicaments the children cannot but reflect. They express an intuitive knowledge of the causes and effects of the dictatorship (inequalities and classism, popular uprisings, and political repression). This persistence of the past in the present, in addition to the noticeable anxiety the past provokes in the children, is a call to action for adults. The sketches are a response to the adults’ interpretation of the past; hence the subject of transmission is constantly present in the film in the form of underlying questions: How have those who experienced the coup as adults explained it to the younger generations? How is the conflict taught in schools? What lessons have Chileans drawn from the brutal years of human rights violations to teach to those who do not have direct memories of those events, or were not even born when they took place?

These questions are particularly relevant given that textbooks for primary and secondary schools started including Allende’s government and the dictatorship as late as 2003, in ways that remain problematic. According to Winn, “these texts acknowledge the human rights violations perpetrated during the dictatorship, but explain the coup through an analysis of the crisis that led to it, a mixture of memory as a rupture and as salvation that has been internalized by many

Chileans and can emerge as the new dominant collective memory” (Winn 2007).

The children and teenagers in *El astuto mono* in all likelihood have learned little about the 1970s inside or outside the classroom prior to the preparations for this documentary. The directors asked them to talk to their parents about it and look for information online. For many, this was their first learning experience about the violent past. Thus, they approach it from an ambiguous outsider-insider position. They are outsiders in the sense that they do not have the same emotional investment as those who lived through the events as adults and have not fully assimilated the preexisting narratives and silences. They are insiders in the sense that they encounter the past through adults’ interpretation and the marks left by the violence on individuals, social relations, and institutions.

This unique position enables children and teenagers to express the contradictions, simplifications, and distortions that surround the memory of the conflict, which pushes many adults outside of their precarious comfort zones. Already the title chosen—“Clever Monkey Pinochet against La Moneda’s Pigs”—sparked controversy in the press before the film’s release. While Pinochet’s defenders were shocked because he was called a monkey, his opponents objected to him being referred to as clever (Corro 2004). In addition, the sketches, taken together, portray all the key actors involved in the conflictive past negatively—Allende and Fidel Castro on the one hand, Pinochet and the CIA on the other—producing a sensation of uneasiness in defenders and opponents of the regime alike.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, as the scholar Iván Pinto notes, this film is “hard to swallow,” which agrees with the directors’ position about the past as an unfinished and divisive matter that still manifests itself in the problems of the present (Pinto 2009). *El astuto mono* contrasts with the documentaries selected by TVN, according to Eltit commodities which are easy to consume and easy to forget, like most TV shows (2005, 32). I will now analyze three of the ten sketches that illustrate how children and teenagers read this political conflict from the perspective of a present that still struggles with its legacy.

In the first sketch—inspired by American “B” action movies, sci-fi, and adventure stories—approximately twelve-year-old children depict “Allende” as a powerful king who offers pizza, chicken, and ice cream to the people in exchange for their support. They ask him for money and land, which he refuses after hearing from them that they will waste it on “nonsense.” Instead, he proposes a new plan, to which the

people agree: they help him erect his castle in exchange for his support in building their town. Soon after they start working, “Pinochet” approaches the group incognito as “Juan de los Palotes,” an American who pretends to help in the construction of Allende’s castle, but instead starts hatching a plot against him, using to his advantage the people’s frustration about not receiving the expected remuneration.

Once he reveals his true identity (“Pinochet”), he turns out to be a combination of a beast, a robot, and a Roman emperor and starts brutally torturing the people, castrating them through genital electrification, stabbing them in the chest, and poking their eyes out. This theatrical representation reminds us that Chilean society is haunted by the spectre of physical suffering. The search for a reason behind children’s familiarity with suffering takes us in different directions: mainstream movies, the sensationalism of public media, video games. However, the violence in their representation of the 1970s is also linked to the experience of growing up in a society in which 3,000 people “disappeared” and almost 100,000 were brutally tortured—crimes that so far have gone largely unpunished. The younger generations are impacted by the dictatorial repression, although they have not directly experienced it.

Additionally, in the sketch, both leaders appear in a negative light, although Pinochet is depicted as incomparably more dangerous. How is it possible that Allende is portrayed as a king who denies land to the people when he implemented the most far-reaching agrarian reform in Chilean history? This interpretation reflects the subjectivity of children raised in a neoliberal culture in which narrow self-interest is considered the only valid and possible motivation for individuals’ actions. It is also linked to lack of historical knowledge about Allende’s Popular Unidad government—as mentioned above, the subject was not part of the curricula until recently, and it was nearly impossible to find meaningful cultural production that went beyond the typical “demonization or defense-against-demonization” of Allende’s government (Stern 2010, 311).

After “Pinochet” takes power, he tortures the “Chilean people” while enumerating the goods they are to receive during his reign: “I will promise you floating cars! Nintendos! Play Station 2! Game Cubes! Virtual Games!” (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004). The children relate the violence of the dictatorship to consumerism, which echoes the position that presents the military abuses as the price to pay for the so-called economic miracle engineered by Pinochet’s economists in the first years of the regime. Moreover, when “Pinochet” is torturing “the people,” he does not promise, but promises a promise, using



**Image 6.3** “Pinochet” (standing, on the right) addressing “the Chilean people” as their new president in *El astuto mono Pinochet contra la moneda de los cerdos* (Perut and Osnovikoff, 2004)

the future tense (“I *will* promise you”), which implies that he does not necessarily intend to keep his word. This resonates with the logic of consumerism in which the children themselves are immersed, as a never-fulfilled desire for goods.

Pinochet finishes the list of promises addressing a population that lies immobile, nailed to the ground (see Image 6.3): “And those who are against me: WILL DIE! Enjoy with me the years to come” (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004).

This scene is particularly disturbing since it captures the paralyzing effect of the repression on society during and after the dictatorship. As Poli París observes in *Volver a vernos*, the Chilean transition was marked by the fear of a return to the repression. The invitation to enjoy the years of terror conveys the cynicism of the repression that the children reconstruct through conversations with the adults or their Internet research. The shocking character of the past they encounter perhaps explains the choice of the sci-fi and adventure genres: situating torture, murder, and international conspiracy in the realm of fantasy is a way of expressing one’s incapacity to accept them as part of the reality.

While this sketch shows children’s awareness of the links between socioeconomic questions, on the one hand, and domestic and international politics, on the other, the next performance helps understand the aspects of *pinochetismo* and incomprehension of Allende in working-class Chile today. The markers of class—body language and

vocabulary—are unambiguous in this second sketch. It begins with “Allende” reading his inaugural speech: “I beg you to understand that I am just a man, with all the weaknesses a man has. Your victory has deep meaning. If victory was hard, it will be even harder to consolidate our triumph and build the new society, the new social coexistence” (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004). These last sentences foreshadow what happens in the sketch. Throughout the development of the plot, the teenagers portray Allende as a dreamer (“I would like to close my eyes for a moment and wake up to see everyone rich”) who faces challenges that go beyond his capacities (“I try to do things right, but it does not work. What else can I do?”). He is then betrayed by his own cabinet, which, driven by impatience and distrust, accuses him of stealing money: “He is stealing from the poor . . . he is keeping ‘the capital’ from the poor” (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004).

Conversely, Pinochet appears as a resolute member of the working class who is ready to put an end to the nation’s problems. His attack on La Moneda is depicted as an ordinary robbery instead of a political act: He expresses himself in gangster slang, outlines the assault on a blackboard, and during the attack uses a gun and sleeping gas. Pinochet’s supporters plan Allende’s death in a very cold-blooded way: “It is easy to buy the people since nobody trusts him anymore. Nobody wants him, only a few people do. So let’s just kill him” (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004).

It is striking that the working-class teenagers present Allende as an unpopular leader although he considerably improved the life of the poor<sup>37</sup> and unions staged massive protests in his defense until the final days of his government. How is it possible that they remember Pinochet as part of “the people” when poor neighbourhoods and shantytowns were subject to constant repression (surprise raids, heavy presence of the armed forces, random roundups), whether or not they were politically active? Both *Volver a vernos* and *Actores secundarios* note how shantytown inhabitants (*pobladores*) together with the students were the most active group in the resistance to the dictatorship. Compared to the students, many more *pobladores* were injured and killed during the protests, which, according to Carrasco (2002), reflects the classist character of the repression.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Pinochet’s privatization of public services (health, retirement funds, and education) contributed to creating an even deeper gap between working class and upper class (Collier and Sater 2004, 374). Although the repression of working-class resistance in shantytowns was central to the coup, it has been little explored in literature and cinema (apart from *Machuca* and the documentary *Mi hermano y yo*).<sup>39</sup>

This can help understand continuing working-class identification with Pinochet.

It is interesting to note that in *Machuca*, a fictional film about this period inspired by the directors' memories, there is no ambiguity: the poor are pro-Allende and the rich anti-Allende, while in *El astuto mono*, based on teenagers' understanding of the past thirty years later, things are more complex and confusing. The sketch shows the effects of the social identifications produced by authoritarian governments and neoliberal societies, which in many cases prevents younger generations from developing a perspective on class struggle in the present and on positioning themselves in it.

In the teenagers' sketch, before committing suicide, Allende takes off his glasses and says: "I was a fool. It was ridiculous to think I could change this country . . . that I could take it to glory. I want to be a child again, play again, without suffering, without pain" (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004). These words express Allende's disappointment not only about the people he thought he knew and understood, but also about himself as a political leader who underestimated the odds he was up against. In this context, taking his glasses off symbolizes the end of this illusion. Similarly, his wish to be a child expresses the teenagers' dismissive attitude toward projects of radical social change, which for them do not belong to the adult world of politics, but to the dreamy world of childhood. This is not surprising in a context in which collective projects have been substituted by individual self-interest and politics has been reduced to a technical matter: Allende's project cannot be grasped through the neoliberal lens.

In brief, by illuminating working-class identification with Pinochet and distance from projects of social change, this theatrical performance shows the difficulty of keeping utopias alive in a society marked by classism and harsh repression. The final sketch, conversely, shows the continuing presence of a self-conscious working-class youth that remembers Allende's dream or is reminded of it by social attitudes, hierarchies, and exclusions on a daily basis.

At the moment of making *El astuto mono*, Chile was among the four countries with the most unequal distribution of income in Latin America: in the early 2000s, more than 40 percent of the country's income was concentrated in the hands of the richest 10 percent (Cypher 2004). This vast disparity generated a deep social divide, in which a small middle class struggled to maintain its position between a huge mass of urban and rural poor and a small and powerful elite. As Cypher observes, in practical terms these numbers mean that

for the top 20% (and this includes the political class—right, left, and center), Chile is a great country full of expensive imported SUVs, cheap servants, spiffy private schools, marvelous skiing resorts, and exquisite weekend beach houses. No matter that monthly tuition in one of the private schools exceeds the entire monthly wage of the average worker, or that one day of skiing would cost that worker three to four days' income.

(2004)

These class gaps dramatically surface in the third sketch, which, unlike the preceding ones, was created by a theatre group. Its members, all of them in their early twenties, were asked to improvise a theatrical performance about social conflicts during Allende's government. Soon, the group starts making fun of Javier, the only one who does not belong to the upper class. When he realizes that the fiction resembles reality, he is hurt, and the improvisation takes an unexpected turn. Javier, in tears, says: "Sorry man, but I cannot turn such an important issue into a fiction. A kiddo raised so bad, who grows up and tries to blend into the system and can't make it, it's important to me because it is my biography" (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004). Present-day inequalities erupt in the performance and displace the directors' instructions to address social conflict in Allende's times:

*JAVIER.* You look at my fucking face and my fucking body and there I am: poor, fucked up, "*this asshole is like this and that.*" If I had grown up in the same conditions as you, if I had taken the same vitamins you did: that simple!

*ACTOR.* Why do you complain and I don't?!

*JAVIER.* Because you have had everything, asshole!

*ACTOR.* Am I complaining about the things you have had and I haven't?

*JAVIER.* Do you know why I care about what you had? Because I also want to eat what you eat, see what you see, go abroad every now and then. And I can't. I can't man, and you can. Keep on pushing me now, man! (Perut and Osnovikoff 2004)

The distance between the actors' experiences and perception of the world is such that it becomes an obstacle in their communication—it is as though they were speaking different languages. This raises an inconvenient question: are we capable of connecting meaningfully with someone from a different social class (without the mediation of guilt, pity, condescendence, or purely intellectual interest)?

This dialogue also shows that although the dictatorship attempted to make class inequalities and conflict invisible through terror and marginalization—the prohibition of protests, factory raids,

shantytown roundups (Ensalaco 2000)—Pinochet succeeded in erasing poverty mostly from the consciousness of the upper classes. While the preceding sketch showed a working class detached from its oppressive conditions (political alienation, identification with the oppressors), this one shows awareness of deeply rooted structures of injustice. Classism in the present evokes the polarization during Allende's times, underlining that the problem remains unresolved; the tragic events of the 1970s were not taken as a lesson.

In this sketch, the connection between past and present social injustice is not limited to class; it also includes race, sexuality, and gender. In Chile as elsewhere, class and race are closely intertwined. When at the beginning of the dialogue quoted above, Javier refers to his physical appearance as a marker of his poverty, he is referring not only to his clothes, but also to his darker skin and indigenous features that determine how he is perceived: "You look at my fucking face and my fucking body and there I am: poor, fucked up, *this asshole is like this and that.*" Javier's role as an outsider is not only due to the fact that he belongs to a racialized group, but also to his sexual orientation. In the heat of the argument, his "friend" refers to Javier's homosexuality as reprehensible and the reason why they stopped being close to each other. Under Pinochet, homosexuals were persecuted or killed, and they disappeared, just like leftists or the poor. The persecution of homosexuals continued for years after the fall of the dictatorship.<sup>40</sup> Macarena Gómez-Barris points out that "political democracy in Chile continued to exclude from the nation the social subjects it had fractured during the period of state violence . . . [namely] the most disenfranchised subjects of the nation (working class, indigenous, female, queer) . . . The state created new market subjects and citizens by erasing the memory and subjectivity of the dead, the tortured, and the survivor" (2008, 15–17)

Although the gender dimension is less explicit in the improvisation, it is clear that women play a subordinate role: they limit themselves to cheering for the upper-class actors and making fun of Javier. Sexism in Chile did not start with the dictatorship; however, Lucía Hiriart, Pinochet's wife, urged women to take a secondary role and focus on their duties as wives and mothers (Canadell and Uggén 1993, 48). The dynamics among the young people highlight the hierarchies reinforced by the dictatorship and the persistence of white, male, heterosexual, and upper-class dominance in the present. This power structure, in the 1970s as in the 2000s, is accompanied by a lack of empathy of the privileged, which raises the possibility that the tragic mistakes of the past may be repeated. Sol Serrano's observation at the



1999 *Mesa de diálogo* is still relevant in 2003: Chileans “have not taken charge of the 1973 crisis” (Serrano 1999).

*El astuto mono* explores how the legacy of violence has affected younger generations’ political imaginary, perception of society, and affective life. Perut and Osnovikoff highlight that the past is unfinished, deeply troubling, and in need of being addressed collectively. At the same time, the children’s and teenagers’ standpoint enables the directors to identify themes rarely addressed in adult discourse, such as torture, classism, and working-class approval of Pinochet. In this sense, Perut and Osnovikoff’s film is an attempt to deal with the coup as an integral part of a long history of social injustice and conflict that continues and structures Chileans’ lives.

The films analyzed in the final section of this chapter address parents’ difficulties of remembering painful moments and sharing them with their sons and daughters. In Giachino’s *Reinalda del Carmen, mi mamá y yo*, this difficulty manifests itself through profound pain, the incapacity to remember, and physical illness. In Ballesteros’ *La quemadura*, it manifests itself in the attempt to make sad subjects disappear by not mentioning them and cloud them in secrecy. Both films are an entry point for understanding societal oblivion.

### JOGGING MEMORY: *REINALDA DEL CARMEN*, *MI MAMÁ Y YO*, AND *LA QUEMADURA*

The first documentary by the journalist Lorena Giachino, released in 2007, tells the story of her mother’s best friend, Reinalda del Carmen Pereira, one of the pregnant disappeared prisoners. She was a member of the banned Communist Party and abducted from a street corner in Santiago as she returned from a prenatal checkup. Her disappearance was part of an operation later known as *caso de los trece* (the case of the thirteen), in which ten other party members and two MIR activists were abducted, mostly from public places, on September 15, 1976. Upon their families’ denunciations, the Supreme Court designated a judge to investigate the case. In agreement with the armed forces’ version, the latter declared that the group had crossed the border into Argentina and closed the case. In 1977, however, the Appeals Court of Santiago rejected this finding and reopened the case, initiating a long and arduous process in the quest for truth and justice.

More than a decade before the crime, the director’s mother, Jacqueline Torrén, and Reinalda Pereira had met in their neighbourhood and become inseparable. They belonged to different social

universes: while the former was from an upper-middle-class family in which nobody was involved in politics, the latter was a housekeeper's daughter. Nevertheless, they attended the same college, studied to become medical laboratory technologists, and then found a job in the same institution. When Pereira disappeared, Giachino was four years old. She grew up surrounded by pictures of Pereira and stories about her; she learned about her fate, but her mother did not share fully what the disappearance meant for her, and perhaps she was unable to confront it.

Many years later, Torr ns suffered a diabetic crisis and was in a coma for two months; the consequence was neurologic damage that manifested itself in partial memory loss. Giachino originally conceived the documentary as an attempt to help her mother recover her memory through the reconstruction of the friendship with Pereira. She noticed that her mother had a strong emotional connection to these memories that could facilitate retrieving them. In the process of helping her mother remember, Giachino reconstructs Pereira's story that had always remained incomplete for her mother, for herself, and for society at large. "The wish to help my mother recover her memory is intertwined with the wish to know what happened to Carmen" (Giachino 2007). The *desaparecidos* were rooted in families, circles of friends, colleagues, and coworkers—a fact that makes them part of numerous stories of individuals who were transformed by this tragic event. They will pass the wound on to the next generation, which manifests itself in the desire to know and understand. In Giachino's case, this desire intensifies since her mother's memory could keep deteriorating and she could eventually forget Pereira, making her disappear once again.

The documentary is an opportunity for Giachino and her mother to have conversations about Pereira, their years in college, and their time as coworkers. The daughter takes her mother to places that could help her remember the past: a memorial for the *desaparecidos* that includes a picture of Pereira; the house where she lived when they met, the college where they studied, and the laboratory where they worked together. Giachino also invites her mother to visit places related to Pereira's disappearance and interview persons who could have information. They go to the intersection from where she was abducted, talk to neighbours who witnessed the event, and interview Nelson Caucoto, the human rights lawyer who investigates *el caso de los trece*.

Finally, they visit the mineshaft at the Cuesta Barriga cliff, the place where Caucoto supposes Pereira's body was taken after she was killed in a detention centre. However, Torr ns does not follow her daughter

to the mine's entrance. There, Giachino meets a forensic anthropologist who has found bones of several bodies in the mine and is able to identify two of them as victims in *el caso de los trece*. She suspects that some of these bones could be Pereira's, but they have not yet been analyzed, and it is unclear when this will happen. After these visits and interviews, Torrén's suffers a new crisis and needs to be hospitalized. Perhaps Torrén's had always suspected her friend's fate, but hearing about it and visiting the likely murder scene pushed her to a limit. The doctor tells Giachino that her mother's participation in the documentary could be the reason for her relapse and that they should abandon the common project.

Even before the doctor's suggestion, the director had been concerned about the effects of the investigation on her mother: "recovering the historical memory can be an achievement, but it can also produce pain" (Giachino 2007). However, when her daughter asked her how she felt, Torrén's had answered: "It makes me sad but it doesn't make me bad" (Giachino 2007). She wanted to participate in the documentary because it was a way of honouring her friend. After the doctor's advice, Giachino realizes that she has to take over the search for the truth on behalf of her mother: "my mothers' need of recovering the memory was handed over to me" (Giachino 2007). As the title indicates, she does it for Pereira, for her mother, and for herself.

At the laboratory, Pereira's and her mother's common workplace, she learns that the friendship between the two women had been interrupted before the disappearance. After the coup, Torrén's preoccupation about Pereira's activism in the Communist Party increased and she started taking long leaves of absence because of strong bouts of depression. Additionally, Giachino's maternal grandmother mentions that her husband did not want Pereira to visit, because it could compromise them, which clearly disturbs her daughter Torrén's, who ends the conversation abruptly. Informed by these dialogues, the director concludes: "I realized that their friendship . . . started to vanish with the coup: both of them had started to disappear" (Giachino 2007). Not only Pereira was murdered, but a part of Torrén's also died. The director realizes that she will never know how her mother was before this traumatic event, which means a double loss.

The director takes over her mother's memory also for the sake of society at large. Parallel to the story of Pereira and Torrén's, she discovers how problematic the past still is for those who lived through it as adults and how many obstacles remain on the path to truth and justice. At the beginning of the documentary, she states: "I have

confirmed that, after thirty years, the culture of fear imposed by the dictatorship has not been overcome,” a reflection inspired by several encounters (Giachino 2007).

She travels more than 600 miles to meet the first witness of Pereira’s abduction who testified in court. However, when she arrives at his workplace, a market stand, he refuses to give her the interview: “My lawyer says that I don’t have anything to do with this, and I am going to appeal for legal protection [*recurso de amparo*] so nobody else bothers me with this case again because I just had enough [*me han hueveado mucho*]” (Giachino 2007). When the director insists, reminding him of the appointment they scheduled over the phone, and his agreement to be interviewed, he calls the police. Back in Santiago, she interviews two witnesses in the area where Pereira was abducted. They answer her questions and mention that other neighbours had seen everything but refused to testify in court. According to Amnesty International (2001), the latter were students at the Military Academy who came to Reinalda’s aid. They were threatened by the plainclothes agents who were trying to force Pereira into the car, and consequently refused to collaborate in the investigations.

In her quest for Pereira, Giachino then encounters suspected and unsuspected continuities in the legal system. Judge Juan Carlos Cerda’s dedication to the defense of human rights, truth, and justice began in the early 1980s, before the end of the dictatorship. Cerda, in charge of the *caso de los trece* since 1983, had brought forty officers to trial, including Gustavo Leigh, a member of the first junta, and refused to apply the Amnesty Law. Different from the dominant perception that it was impossible to prosecute military crimes during the regime, Cerda’s *caso de los treces*—together with Cánovas’ *caso degollados*—shows that some judges successfully opposed impunity.<sup>41</sup> The fact that a majority of the population (including the director, who as a journalist works with information) is unaware of the prosecutions during the regime made it easier for the Concertación governments to present themselves as a clear-cut rupture with the dictatorship in terms of human rights.

Cerda’s experience, however, highlights the continuities between the dictatorship and the post-dictatorship periods, not only because he started prosecuting *represores* in the early 1980s, but also because he continues to face obstacles in the late 2000s: during the dictatorship, he was almost expelled from the Appeals Court, and as the documentary was made, the right in Congress opposed his appointment to the Supreme Court. As Judge Cerda tells Giachino, “today, we still have to fight; we still have to convince the judicial environment

of the benefits of investigating the military crimes and confronting Chileans with the truth” (Giachino 2007).

The commitment of judges to the defense of human rights is necessary not only to try perpetrators but also to find the *desaparecidos*. At the Medical Legal Services, Giachino learns that, unlike popular belief, the work of forensics is not sufficient to legally identify remains found in exhumations; in addition, an “identification order” from a judge is necessary. After reading the conclusion reached by the experts, the judge in charge of the investigation has to state that the disappeared person in question was at the location where the remains were found, otherwise he or she cannot be considered identified. While the fate of many *desaparecidos* waits on the desk of a judge, families and human rights associations keep making their voices heard through the motto “Where are they?”

Giachino then visits a human rights archive in what used to be a DINA clandestine detention centre and recovery clinic for tortured prisoners. There is not enough staff to classify the information: “Every room and closet you open is full of documents. It’s insane! When are we going to finish?” wonders Silvia Pinilla, a former political prisoner who found in the work at the centre a way of dealing with her painful experiences.

The past keeps hurting emotionally, mentally, and physically those who were tortured and those who survived their *desaparecidos*. Pereira’s husband, Max Santelices, refuses to talk with Giachino about what happened to his wife. He was also an activist in the Communist Party and detained at the National Stadium. After Pereira disappeared, he started a long and unsuccessful fight to take her murderers to trial and learn about the fate of their unborn baby. When Giachino calls him, it is too late: he is tired and has a terminal cancer diagnosis. “What do you want from me, Ms. Journalist [*periodistisima*]?” he asks, irritated, and makes clear that she should not expect anything from him (Giachino 2007). Santelices dies before the film was finalized and released.

This situation highlights typical elements of intergenerational relations in the aftermath of state terror. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Nicolás Prividera also found it difficult to obtain interviews with crucial witnesses who are sick and have been advised to not stir up the past or prefer not to do it. Prividera’s Marquita, Torrén, and Santelices are cases in which, paradoxically, an illness perhaps provoked by the impossibility of forgetting limited their capacity to relate to the past. Can a younger generation’s desire to know be understood as an intrusion? How is one to draw a line between learning and intruding when

it comes to a tragedy that is collective but rooted in individual stories at the same time? How is one to resolve the contradiction between the collective need for their memories and the desire to protect the protagonists of that past from suffering?

After learning how difficult it is to find out what really happened with Pereira and where her remains are, Giachino comforts her mother with a borrowed dream. Antonia Cepeda, daughter of Horacio Cepeda Marinkovic, whose body was possibly thrown in the Cuesta Barriga mineshaft, dreamed of his father and another comrade playing with a child in a spacious, dark room while Pereira cooked. This dream had helped Cepeda live with the pain of not knowing what happened to his father. The director tells her mother that she dreamed of Pereira playing with her kid in a peaceful place, in which she asked Giachino not to worry because she was well. This dream could encourage her mother to keep on living after a past of death about which many upsetting stories remain to be told. Giachino's decision to embrace her mother's limits reflects an understanding that some tragedies survive their protagonists. The impossibility of remembering and the resistance to do so also function as a memory of the unspeakable: the coup is a blow to language, as Richard has noted, drawing on Patricio Marchant (2000, 173).

After *Reinalda del Carmen* was released, details about her death came to light when a *represor* confessed that she had been tortured in a clandestine detention centre. When Pereira asked her captors to be less brutal since she was pregnant, they intensified the torture. She then asked them to kill her, which they did with a cyanide injection. More than 2,000 cases of *desaparecidos* remain unresolved while many judges, Chileans, and the government prefer not to deal with them. Conversely, Giachino felt that she had to take charge of the truth about Pereira's fate and adds to the DVD the coverage of the moment in which this information was revealed to the press. Giachino's effort to honour Reinalda, whom, as she affirms, she does not know but loves through her mother, and to recover the memory of the latter, could be understood as a generational attempt to break the silence and make the past visible in the institutions that shape Chileans' lives in the present. Noemi-Voionmaa affirms that *Reinalda del Carmen* rejects the frozen image of the past that has been commercialized in the "new Chile" by keeping the traumatic memory alive (2011, 7).

Exploring and preserving the past is also central to René Ballesteros' *La quemadura/The Burn* (2009). Recurring scenes of the director plucking up courage and jumping into the water or

learning how to swim are a metaphor for the act of submerging oneself in buried memories (Quílez Esteve 2009, 339). Similarly, long shots of his sister Karin's gloved hands restoring an antique volume in a library and explaining a technique to preserve old photographs present the documentary as an effort to protect a fragile past that threatens to vanish. As Elizabeth Ramírez observes, the members of the post-dictatorship generation are perplexed men and women who live surrounded by the ruins of the past and the constant threat of their permanent destruction (2010, 62). The antique volume and the old family pictures, the library and the house, private and collective heritage, are equally important in the film since they hold the key to young generations' understanding of the enigmas of their life and time.

*La quemadura* shows the interconnection of national and family history through the story of Margarita Manriquez, the director's mother. She left to Venezuela during the dictatorship when her daughter Karin was five years old and her son René eight. The director observes that nobody explained to them what had happened to their mother; in fact, during the interviews he learns that the grandmother instructed the adults to avoid mentioning her and that they eventually gave her up for dead. Manriquez' absence became a taboo. Absent and surrounded by secrecy and incertitude, she became a spectre in her children's lives. All they received from her was a collection of books published by Quimantú, a press funded by the Unidad Popular government that made reading—until then a privilege of the elite—affordable to most Chileans: a book was now sold for the price of a pack of cigarettes.<sup>42</sup>

During the dictatorship, the army raided Quimantú and burned all the books and films they found. Since the literature published by the press had become compromising material, many owners quickly discarded them. Quimantú books started to disappear from Chile, and Manriquez started to disappear from the books of her collection. She had stamped her name on the first page of the books, and after she left, someone scratched it out. As time went by, her large collection of books was reduced to just seven, and Manriquez seemed to have been finally forgotten. However, not naming, concealing, or denying the past is not enough to make it disappear; it passes through the silences and voids to the next generation that eventually seeks active forms of transmission. Karin studied librarianship and graduated with a thesis that addressed the history of Quimantú; René left Chile, studied cinema, and graduated with *La quemadura*, a film about his mother's absence.

Twenty-six years after their mother's departure, René and Karin Ballesteros embark on a quest for Manriquez and the missing books from the collection for the making of the film. This is a quest for their own past and for the country the Unidad Popular created through projects such as Quimantú. This country ended abruptly in 1973 and was forgotten in the post-dictatorship period, depriving the youth from the knowledge of how different their present could have been. In addition, René and Karin Ballesteros's quest for answers signals the confusion of a generation that grew up surrounded by open secrets (the *desaparecidos*, other human rights violations, and clandestine detention centres), taboos (the Allende government), irreconcilable perspectives on the coup, and a disjointed demand for reconciliation on the part of the government.

As a crucial aspect of the quest, René Ballesteros contacts his mother and uses fragments of their phone conversations over different scenes. When he tells her that is difficult for him to understand why she left and stayed away for so many years, she first replies, "That's easy, you should ask your grandmother" (Ballesteros 2010). His grandmother says that Manriquez blamed her decision to leave on her ex-husband but, according to the latter, she just left without giving explanations. Ballesteros' father does not want to talk about this story and neither does his grandmother, who, in addition, has memory problems and often confuses her daughter (Manriquez) with her own mother, who died when she was a girl. The loss repeats itself across generations of orphans deprived of a legacy that could inform their actions in the present. This could be seen in relation to the post-dictatorship period in Chile. Many tried to invent the world anew, starting from themselves, as Alejandro Goic observes in *Volver a vernos*. Many, including the Concertación, technocrats, and conservatives, sought to "close the chapter" and forget those who were murdered in the attempt to produce social change (Rodríguez 2003). By making the film, René and Karin are breaking through this logic and reconnect with their legacy.

In *La quemadura*, there is more to silence than the mentioned reluctance to talk and memory loss, there are also repressed memories. In the dialogue between René Ballesteros and Manriquez quoted above, after a moment of silence she explains: "I don't know very well why I left." The director does not understand. "What?" he asks and she repeats, "I don't really know why I left either" (Ballesteros 2010). The hard blow of an axe answers this statement; the director takes the chopped pieces of wood inside the house and lights a stove. This is the only moment in the film in which we see fire, a direct reference



to the title, which is also connected to the fire set to the Quimantú publishing house. The burning of the books meant to eliminate the memory of the Unidad Popular serves as a metaphor for Manriquez and her adult relatives' attempt to erase their conflictive past. The word "quemadura," however, refers not to the fire but to the wound left by it. Burnt skin can recover its functions (covering, protecting), but it leaves a disfigurement. Similarly, Manriquez started a new life in Venezuela, had two more children, and avoided looking back: this drastic separation, in addition to her incapacity to explain why she left, signals the injury that never stopped burning.

When Ballesteros asks his mother about her life in Chile, she realizes that she cannot remember anything. According to Manriquez, after a difficult period of adjustment, of living like in "an unreal world" (for example, there are no seasons in Venezuela, but she still perceived changes according to the cycles of the Chilean climate), she forgot everything about her country. She does not remember the press Quimantú, having had stamped her name on the books, or how to cook typical food. She brought some books with her to Venezuela and kept buying more, but after a while gave them all away and developed an aversion to books. Manriquez attributes her lack of memories to the shock of being completely alone in a different culture.

Similar to Giachino, Ballesteros is interested in helping his mother recover the memories of the past. He dreams that he was the one who scratched out her name from the books, and the dream keeps haunting him. Dreams, memories, and fantasies become indistinguishable as he ponders the possibility of having done this during his childhood, but then realizes that he did not know about the stamp until very recently. The dream could be interpreted as an expression of guilt for not having broken the taboo for so long, thereby helping prolong Manriquez's "disappearance." In the present, he assumes responsibility on behalf of those who were involved in the situation that expelled her (including herself) but do not want or are unable to deal with it. As in Giachino's *Reinalda del Carmen*, the post-dictatorship generation takes over in the face of their parents' limits and looks for active forms of transmission of a past that is also theirs.

In a phone conversation, Manriquez remembers a second-hand bookstore called "El botoncito," where she used to buy books with her ex-husband. Retrieving this memory is deeply unsettling: she feels nostalgia for her country and anguish about not being able to remember more, but also about the fact that this memory might open the door to sad recollections. She confesses to her son that she dreads the idea of returning to Chile. René and Karin Ballesteros then travel

to Venezuela to meet her. The film does not show what happened during the trip, perhaps because it was insufficient to understand how it is possible to detach oneself from the past so radically.

As a performative example of the challenges involved in pursuing active transmission in a shocked society, the audience does not learn either the secret behind Manriquez's departure or whether the Ballesteros siblings found the answers they were looking for. Perhaps they need many more encounters with their mother to together start understanding what happened to her and how the abandonment impacted their own lives. An active transmission requires the reconstruction of the bonds between the different actors concerned with the past, but in their case the decades of silence and distance have turned them into complete strangers. This estrangement is expressed in a phone conversation:

*MANRIQUEZ.* What do you think about me?

*RENÉ BALLESTEROS.* I don't know. I feel I am just starting to know you.

*MANRIQUEZ.* Right. I don't know you either. (Ballesteros 2010)

As mentioned in the introduction, the willingness to confront painful memories is fundamental in the process of assigning meaning to the past. René and Karin return from the trip with many photographs of their childhood that Manriquez had kept in a suitcase, disconnected from her new life. She returned the pictures to her children, thus indicating that the past they want to recover does not belong to her.<sup>43</sup> This gesture contrasts with Karin Ballesteros's skilful effort to protect old family pictures at the beginning of the film since, as she notes, "they help me remember . . . bring back memories long gone in my mind" (Ballesteros 2010).

Manriquez's relation with the children also contrasts with the relation between the director and his sister, who help each other retrieve memories they could have not evoked alone. Although René Ballesteros directed the film, he observes that the research and shooting was a common "journey": "I always saw the film as a story of two siblings, a tale in which two adults revisit the remains of their childhood" (Morales 2010). The director also stresses the importance of his sister's participation and support in "finding a way of talking about what one is not supposed to talk about" (Morales 2010). This shows that although René and Karin are not children of disappeared activists, they grew up surrounded by imposed and symptomatic silences and were involved in interactions shaped by the logic of the repression.

“Our mother left in the context of the dictatorship in which censorship had pervaded everyday life: she was censored in the family. Back then, the subjects of conversation were limited, silence was important, and persons were erased. The same happened to our mother” (Morales 2010). It would be interesting to consider whether the story would have been the same if the father had left the household. It is possible that the way the family dealt with the conflict points to the increasingly oppressive gender relations under Pinochet: “state authoritarianism made other authoritarianism painfully visible” (Gómez-Barris 2008, 11).

However, her children’s visit helped Manriquez confront her ghosts and return to Chile. There, she confirms that although time has gone by, the emotions linked to painful unresolved situations are as strong as before. The film represents Manriquez’s trip through perhaps its most crucial moment: the encounter with her mother. Very old, with sight and memory problems, she still recognizes her daughter. After remarks about the cold in Chile and the weather in Venezuela, the mother becomes silent and visibly sad. Manriquez tries to comfort her: “Don’t be sad, things have already passed, let bygones be bygones.” However, far from gone, the past is everywhere in this meeting: in the sadness and loneliness of the former and in the foreign accent of the latter. “One cannot undo what is already done,” Manriquez reflects, but as their encounter demonstrates, it is never too late to start relating to the past differently, thereby allowing a transformation of one’s present.

Similarly, for Chileans, it is not too late to take charge of the pain caused to others in the past, to produce encounters, to unbury memories, and to tell forgotten stories such as that of Quimantú that help us notice what is missing in the present and imagine how aspects of today’s life, such as access to books and knowledge, could be different.

\* \* \*

The films by members of the post-dictatorship generation focus on memories that the Concertación government had marginalized in order to prevent popular demands for justice in relation to both military and economic crimes. The directors remember the accomplishments of the Unidad Popular, brutally undone by the coup; the youth’s struggles for a fairer tomorrow that has not arrived; and grey zones such as the fact that some military perpetrators were prosecuted during the regime. These memories, buried during the post-dictatorship period, are a reminder that a different Chile is

possible, a country that takes its past as a warning but also as an inspiration. Unlike the approach fostered by the government for the thirtieth commemoration of the coup, these directors invite the audience to ponder what they have made of the past and what the past has made of them. They challenge the idea of unity and progress by showing how, after thirty years, the coup and the dictatorship continue to polarize Chileans. Most Chileans do not believe in reconciliation and pass their perspective on to their children. The portraits of children and teenagers in the films show that their society is marked by silence, classism, rigid gender norms, violence, and disillusionment about politics and collective projects. Finally, in their films, the directors confront the culture of fear established by the coup and address the reluctance to remember, learn more about, and deal with still-too-painful memories. By so doing, the post-dictatorship generation points at the reflections and debates to come, crucial for enabling encounters between Chileans and embracing forms of exemplary memory.

## CHAPTER 7



### URUGUAY: MEMORY STRUGGLES AGAINST THE CLOCK

Similar to Chile, the end of the Uruguayan dictatorship also involved a plebiscite and a pact between the armed forces and the leaders of right- and left-wing parties. In addition, the Uruguayan post-dictatorship generation also grew up in a society with a large number of imprisoned, tortured, and exiled adults, on the one hand, and politicians who avoided these problems, on the other. However, some circumstances were specific to this country: Although there were comparatively few *desaparecidos*, Uruguay had the highest percentage of political prisoners in the region who had served the longest sentences. This was also the last country to prosecute military perpetrators or consent to their extradition.

At the end of the regime, the president had released political prisoners and amnestied military perpetrators, thereby validating the theory of the two demons and the war thesis that would shape the post-dictatorship period. In 1985, a plebiscite confirmed and legitimized the military amnesty, and the chief executives in the following fifteen years resorted to this vote to undermine victims' and human rights organizations' demands for truth and justice. Until the beginning of the millennium, there was no proper truth commission, no official published report on human rights violations, and no memorial or museum for the victims. The recent past was not subject of sustained and contentious public debates, discussed in the classrooms, or taken to the small or big screen. The left's narrative focused not only on the suffering of its members but also on the guerrilla's great deeds, which the right presented as the main reason for the advent of the regime;

yet, both respected the military amnesty. In this context, twenty-five years after the first referendum about the law, the population again voted in favour of the amnesty for the military in 2009. In this chapter, I examine the interconnections between this political context, cultural production, and the post-dictatorship generation's contributions to collective memory, the struggles for truth, justice, and the *nunca más*.

### COLLECTIVE MEMORY FROM THE DICTATORSHIP TO THE PRESENT

In 1985, after thirteen years of military dictatorship, Julio María Sanguinetti was sworn in as the first democratically elected president. In neighbouring Argentina, the trial of the juntas was about to begin, and half a year earlier, President Raúl Alfonsín had presented the *Nunca más* report. However, the Uruguayan transitional governments did not use these achievements as a model to deal with the human rights violations in their own country. Fifteen years passed before a truth commission was formed to investigate the fate of the *desaparecidos* and another five before perpetrators were prosecuted for the first time. Meanwhile, the political class constrained the public debate about the past, and the repression was surrounded by denial and deceptions. The historian Eugenia Allier observes that until 2006, Uruguay was the only country in the Southern Cone in which no military and police personnel had been prosecuted or extradited (2010, 133). The historical context helps understand the unique character of the Uruguayan post-dictatorship period.

The end of the Second World War and the ensuing reconfiguration of international economic power marked the end of the flourishing Uruguayan economy and the crisis of a highly integrated society in a very developed welfare state. A high standard of living was undermined by decreasing real wages in an inflationary context, an unusual problem in a country that had prided itself for being the "Switzerland of Latin America." The government responded to popular discontent, riots, and strikes through increasing repression, which led to violent clashes between police and protesters (Demasi 2004). As the crisis intensified, new actors such as the trade union federation Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT) organized sugarcane cutters, student movements, and the urban guerrilla Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Tupamaros (MLN-T).

Formed in the mid-1960s mostly by socialist activists, MLN-T was an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist revolutionary group. In 1971, the movement had more than a thousand active members (Radu

and Tismaneanu 1990). In an initial phase (1967–1970), they raided banks and financial firms and stole both money and documents, using the latter to expose economic crimes. They also kidnapped trucks transporting food and distributed the cargo among the poor (Zubillaga and Romeo 2004, 57, 67). Their actions were viewed sympathetically across society, a perspective that changed when the MLN-T actions became increasingly violent in 1970—they now planted bombs, kidnapped and murdered public figures—as they focused on confronting the armed forces.

With the support of the government, the paramilitary Death Squad and the military started to detain, torture, and kill members of the MLN-T. Given the civilian government's increasing dependence on the armed forces, the latter pondered the possibility of a coup d'état. However, a group of "traditional legalist" officers was opposed to this idea; they defended the constitution and the nonpolitical role of the armed forces (Petito Varela 2004, 99). In this troubled period, the internal cohesion of institutions such as the armed forces could not be taken for granted.

Despite these internal tensions, the armed forces succeeded in repressing the MLN-T and captured many of its leaders. In prison, many of them consented to a truce with the armed forces to negotiate their capitulation and worked with officers from Batallón Florida to investigate economic crimes that involved leaders of the traditional *Partidos Blanco* and *Colorado* (Alfonso 2004, 50). In addition, the MLN-T secretly discussed the country's polarization with the traditional parties, the Communist Party, and the leader of the newly formed left-wing *Frente Amplio* (FA) coalition, the recently retired General *Líber Seregni*. Within the armed forces, a group loyal to the general and willing to join forces with the MLN-T in case of a military coup was soon repressed (Alfonso 2004, 104). In the 1971 elections, the MLN-T supported the *Frente Amplio*, perceived as an opportunity to mobilize the masses, but made it clear that their favoured method was not electoral politics but revolutionary change (Zubillaga and Romeo 2004, 68). In sum, established actors recognized the guerrilla group as an interlocutor, and the armed forces were initially not united against them.

After the *Frente Amplio*'s electoral defeat, the MLN-T intensified its attacks against the armed forces, but now their popular support decreased considerably. In 1972, the group was crushed, along with the "legalist" sector of the armed forces. The now dominant group of officers, inspired by the Brazilian combination of conservatism, repression, and economic modernization, gradually marginalized President

Juan María Bordaberry (Petito Varela 2004, 100). Eventually, the army and the air force refused to recognize the new defence minister appointed by the chief executive and took over the public radio stations to broadcast their agenda.

In their broadcasted communiqués, the armed forces affirmed the war against the left, and what they presented as a commitment to defending the republican ideals and Uruguayan values against corrupting foreign Marxist-Leninist doctrines and hinted at the brutal repression to come: they would extirpate all forms of “subversion” and participate in all institutions related to “national security” and the national crisis. However, the communiqués 4 and 7 (1973) also resonated with the spirit of the guerrilla, as the armed forces demanded land redistribution, the elimination of foreign debt and unemployment and underlined the necessity of dealing with economic crime and corruption (Broquetas and Wschebor 2004).

As a result of this ambiguity, the left thought that the armed forces’ project was inspired by the Peruvian military’s left-wing coup (1968–1975)—for the Frente Amplio and the CNT, this was a conflict between honest and corrupt Uruguayans, not between civilians and the armed forces. Similarly, the Communist Party understood the communiqués as consistent with their struggle against the oligarchy and saw the military as allies despite their explicit rejection of Marxist ideology (Broquetas and Wschebor 2004, 58). Finally, the traditional parties Blanco and Colorado, lacking confidence in Bordaberry’s popular legitimacy and capacity to handle the crisis, did not object to the military’s advance into the political sphere if, as vaguely suggested in the communiqués, the institutions and republican forms of government would be kept in place (Broquetas and Wschebor 2004, 80).

Given the general confusion, Bordaberry was unable to mobilize the country in defence of the liberal democratic institutions. When the armed forces pressured him to resign and he asked the population to take to the streets, fewer than 200 persons followed his plea. The chief executive then negotiated what became known as the Boiso Lanza pact with the armed forces: Bordaberry was to remain in office until the end of his term in June 1976, but decisions were to be taken by the newly formed military-civilian Consejo de Seguridad Nacional (COSENA), of which he was a member. This body decided to withdraw Senator Enrique Erro’s parliamentary privileges for being in contact with the guerrilla and dissolved Congress for its refusal to support this measure. Technically, this was a coup d’état; however, since the president was involved in its execution, he



became a dictator, the coup a “self-coup,” and the regime a civic-military dictatorship. According to the historian Álvaro Rico, this complex process led to the “politicization of the military and the militarization of politics” and the “interdependency of politics and war” (2009, 211).

The historian Gerardo Caetano (2008) designates the initial phase of this process as “commissarial dictatorship”<sup>1</sup> (1973–1976), which was followed by a “foundational attempt” (1976–1980). During these years, dissidence in the public sphere was silenced: the CNT and the Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios (FEUU) were banned along with other left-wing groups and parties. Additionally, the armed forces took control of the university and applied strict censorship to the public media and all forms of creative public expression such as carnivals, literature, and popular music. The repressive practices (torture, murder, and forced disappearance), already in use before 1973, were now systematized and used against unarmed groups, individuals, and their families in a context of state terrorism.

Different from Argentina and Chile, the main repressive method of the Uruguayan regime was not forced disappearance or murder, but “massive and extended imprisonment” (Rico 2009, 234). It is estimated that the victims of the dictatorship served an average of six years. The armed forces’ documentation is incomplete and therefore the exact number of prisoners unknown. Rico estimates that nearly 6,000 men and women were held captive in the approximately fifty prisons and nine clandestine detention centres throughout the country (2009, 234–5). In a population of less than 3 million inhabitants, this means that between 1973 and 1977 Uruguay was the country with “the highest percentage of political detainees per capita in the world” (Sondrol, quoted in Lessa 2011, 179). This number does not include transitory detentions and supervised release, which means that many more than 6,000 men and women were subject to humiliation, torture, and sexual abuse.

The universe of confinement affected not only the detainees themselves but also their families, who were subject to mistreatment during their visits. In addition, the logic of punishment and surveillance was extended far beyond the prison walls: over 300,000 citizens, although not in detention, were classified into one three “threat levels,” depending on their political past and ideology. Since this “status” was made public, it often impacted individuals’ chances to find or retain employment, as well as their social life. In this context, the neologism *insilio* was coined, which conveys the “rejection endured by those who were persecuted or could have been persecuted” during

the dictatorship (Allier 2010, 35). In sum, during the dictatorship, the armed forces attempted to turn the country into a barracks.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Chilean example, the armed forces initiated a plebiscite to legitimize their oppressive rule. They proposed a new constitution to initiate a period of “protected democracy” in which the military would occupy a central role in political life. In the 1980 plebiscite, 57.9 percent of the population voted “no” to the new constitution, which, following Caetano’s periodization, represented the end of the “foundational attempt” and the beginning of the “transitional dictatorship” (1980–1985). Although the COSENA-appointed President General Gregorio Álvarez did not relax the repressive practices, several groups intensified their public opposition to the regime. In this context, the armed forces realized the need for an “exit plan” that would secure their immunity after the end of the dictatorship. To this end, officers soon started to negotiate with political parties—gradually allowed to emerge from clandestinity—who could serve as mediators with the population (Caetano and Rilla 1994, 274).

After several attempts, and efforts by both the Catholic Church and the Masonry, the terms of the transition were agreed upon at a 1984 Naval Club meeting that included representatives of the armed forces, the traditional Partido Colorado, the Unión Cívica party, and, surprisingly, the Frente Amplio, thus far considered “subversive.” If revisionism was to be avoided, the agreement needed to be as inclusive as possible. However, since its leader Wilson Ferreira Aldunate was imprisoned and banned from politics, the Partido Blanco did not participate, and Ferreira’s exclusion from the upcoming elections was one of the pact’s terms. The pact established an important role for the armed forces in the post-dictatorship period: COSENA was designated “advisor to the executive” on “national security matters,” and the armed forces’ jurisdiction now included threats to national security (“acts of subversion”) and crimes committed by military personnel or civilians in times of war (Allier 2010, 60). Moreover, the Naval Club Pact included a “pact of non-aggression,” never clearly explained but regularly mentioned by politicians as an expression of their commitment to peace and reconciliation.

Similar to Chile, the Uruguayan transition was thus marked by a strong presence of the armed forces that hindered advances in transitional justice.<sup>3</sup> Whereas in Argentina the junta leaders were discredited and replaced after the catastrophic Falklands War, in Chile and Uruguay the regime negotiated the end of their rule with the future political class, thereby making prosecution in the foreseeable

future almost unthinkable (Allier 2010). The participation of left-wing parties in transitional agreements of this kind is not unique to Uruguay, as Chile's oppositional front to the dictatorship (the Concertación) also included parties of different ideologies. However, what seems to be unique is that some of the MLN-T leaders, who were kept hostage during the entire dictatorship in the most inhuman conditions, participated in a secret dialogue with the armed forces after the end of the regime. The goal of this conversation between declared enemies was "to establish valid and effective channels of communication to avoid unwanted events for both the armed forces and the MLN-T, especially if the Frente Amplio was the ruling party" (minutes quoted in Alfonso 2004, 46). A possible explanation for this puzzling situation could be that some of the MLN-T leaders shared views about the meaning of the repressive past with the armed forces: they had been at war (Allier 2010, 59). Former MLN-T guerrilla fighters interviewed by Allier understand torture—the most debated human rights violation—as a legitimate method of struggle, and an integral part of the war between the MLN-T and the armed forces. "For us, torture was one of the rules of the game: there was like a certain tolerance, you knew what was going to happen to you and that you had to bear it. Their duty was to torture us and our duty was to bear it, and if we failed they broke us, but it was pre-established . . . we did not feel victimized, we felt it was a stage of the war" (Allier 2010, 138).

This way of thinking explains the absence of victims' organizations and public denunciation of torture in the immediate aftermath of the regime; the Tupamaros leadership discouraged both. This not only hindered prosecution but also helped establish the war logic that pervaded both right- and left-wing presidents' interpretation of the military's human rights violations. Closely linked to this logic, the theory of the "two demons" also became a recurring theme in the official narratives. The political parties included themselves in the group of perplexed bystanders caught up in the violent conflict between two groups alien to society: the army and the guerrilla. Thereby, politicians drew a veil over their passivity in the face of the 1973 advance of the armed forces into political life.

When the first democratically elected president, Julio María Sanguinetti (Partido Colorado), took office in 1985, hundreds of political prisoners were still detained. Their families had organized to demand their release, and soon the government approved the Ley de Pacificación Nacional, which amnestied prisoners, provided them with psychological care, and returned confiscated goods and prison expenses. In addition, the governmental institutions reinstated

employees who had lost their position for political reasons. Finally, it mandated the creation of an (unfunded) commission to facilitate the exiles' return. For the government, these measures evened out the wrongs without the need to investigate the thousands of human rights violations. Most strikingly, the Ley de Pacificación did not address the fate of 167 *desaparecidos* and their families.

In 1983, two years before this law was passed, the group Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos ("Familiares"), was created in collaboration with the relatives of Uruguayan detainees who had disappeared in Argentina. Given the high number of Uruguayans who had sought refuge in the neighbouring country, and the close links between the two regimes, most disappearances (126 out of 167) had taken place there. However, because of the comparatively small number of *desaparecidos*, Familiares did not obtain the much-needed international attention (Allier 2010). Initially, they organized public protests together with the families of the political prisoners, but once the latter had been released, this coalition dissolved and Familiares lost visibility. However, they kept meeting once a week to demand governmental acknowledgement of Uruguayan *desaparecidos* and criminal prosecution ("truth and justice"). In a society in which 1960s and 1970s activism had been stigmatized, Familiares focused on the sixteen disappeared children who were born in prison or abducted with their parents and whose innocence was unquestionable. With the support of the Frente Amplio and human rights organizations,<sup>4</sup> Familiares carried out a highly effective campaign to raise public awareness, which coincided with an avalanche of written and oral testimonies of former prisoners, exiles, and families of *desaparecidos*.

President Sanguinetti created two commissions to address the relatives' demands: the first one was to investigate the murder of the exiled politicians Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz (Partido Blanco) and Zelmar Michelini (Frente Amplio) in Argentina, and the second one was to report on the *desaparecidos*. Although the president himself instructed members of the armed forces to refuse their testimony, the first commission found incriminating evidence. However, it was not allowed to publish its findings, and the president passed the evidence on to the judiciary. As in Chile, many Uruguayan judges were implicated in the military's crimes and therefore not interested in effective criminal prosecution (Allier 2010, 52).

Allier observes that the commission on the *desaparecidos* does not meet the criteria for a truth commission (2010, 53). Firstly, it was composed of politicians in proportion to the number of their party's

seats in Congress. Secondly, it could not issue subpoenas and was forced to rely on voluntary testimonies. Thirdly, it did not arrive at final conclusions. Finally, the report was not published.<sup>5</sup> However, it has become known that the report endorses the military's perspective and presents the human rights violations as individual "excesses" typical of a war context; from this perspective, the armed forces as an institution could not be blamed (Allier 2010, 52). This did not satisfy Familiares, survivors, and human rights organizations who had started to press charges for murder, sexual abuse, abuse of authority, and arbitrary detention (by 1986, more than 700 complaints had been filed).

Minister of Defence Hugo Medina strongly opposed the prosecution of military personnel: if some guerrilla fighters had never been in prison and others had been amnestied, he argued, the armed forces were not going to accept prosecution. This created the context for the controversial *Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado* ("Law of Caducity of the Punitive Claim of the State"), which was initiated by representatives of the Partido Colorado who argued that the parties to the Naval Club Pact had committed to not holding the armed forces accountable for human rights violations. The law, which amnestied all military and police personnel accused of human rights violations during the dictatorship, was passed in 1986.

Since then, none of the post-dictatorship governments, right or left, has made an effort to repeal this law on the basis of unconstitutionality, as Kirchner did in Argentina with Alfonsín's laws and the Menem pardons. The lack of political will to abrogate the Caducity Law and the absence of collective debate on the repressive past are, to a large extent, the reason why both in the 1989 referendum and 2009 plebiscite, a majority of citizens supported the law. The large number of civilians with different degrees of involvement in the regime or condemnatory of the guerrilla, and the rupture of bonds of solidarity among Uruguayans also played an important role.

Soon after the Caducity Law was passed, Familiares started to promote the 1989 referendum. The MLN-T, the FEUU and the human rights organizations immediately supported the project, and the Frente Amplio ultimately joined them. In a year-long effort, activists collected the 600,000 signatures required by the Supreme Court to hold a referendum on the law, followed by an intense campaign to vote in favour (yellow ballot) or against (green ballot) the law. The parties in favour of the Caducity Law mobilized the memory of the repression, censorship, and fear suffered by the populations by suggesting that voting against would cause the return of the armed

forces. Sanguinetti, for instance, attempted to present the referendum as a choice between peace and war. Partly as a result of this discourse, 56.1 percent voted in favour of the law.

Two decades later, at the end of the first left-wing government in Uruguayan history, President Tabaré Vázquez (Frente Amplio) authorized a new plebiscite to abrogate the Caducity Law (2009). This time, 53 percent of the voters were in favour of the law, only 4 percent less than two decades ago. How should one interpret this result? How is it that the perspective about human rights violations remained almost unchanged? How did the memory struggles develop during this period? The result points to a twenty-year impasse on all levels: political context, collective interpretation of the past, and cultural production.

After the 1989 plebiscite, the government promoted the above-mentioned war narrative, in which the amnesty of prisoners and military personnel was presented as a legitimate closure. Any other interpretation was considered “revisionism” or the expression of an obsession with the past that interfered with the construction of a peaceful future. This idea is conveyed by Sanguinetti’s expression: “one should not have the eyes at the back of the head” (Lessa 2001, 179). Until the mid-1990s, the perspective of victims’ relatives and human rights associations became almost invisible. In this period, even the weekly protests of Familiares ceased, and the group focused on denouncing the situation in international forums such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations, which denounced the illegitimacy of the Caducity Law without obtaining a reaction from the Uruguayan government.

Just as Sanguinetti, President Luis Alberto Lacalle (1990–1995) strengthened the culture of oblivion and fear: during his term, officers accused of human rights violations received promotions. In addition, he rejected extradition requests from Chile in relation to the Berríos case after a group of generals threatened to step down.<sup>6</sup> It also confirmed the continued existence of covert regional military cooperation in the style of Operation Condor in the present and exposed the dishonesty of official investigations.

However, neither the Berríos case nor the discovery of Paraguay’s Archives of Terror, which confirmed that Uruguay had participated in the region-wide network of repression, sparked a meaningful debate about the human rights violations of the past. Setting a pattern for the next decades, events in Argentina helped wake Uruguay from its lethargy. Scilingo’s 1995 confessions about the flights of death and Balza’s *mea culpa* on behalf of the armed forces had a deep impact.

The debate intensified when “the armed forces underlined that in Uruguay there was nothing to apologize for to anyone and that the Argentine public *mea culpa* had not done any good but on the contrary further discredited the military, enabling new blows against the institution” (Alfonso 2004, 30).

Two anonymous confessions sent to the press about Captain Tróccoli’s prominent role as coordinator at the Buenos Aires clandestine detention centre ESMA forced him to acknowledge his role in the thus far denied torture and disappearance of Uruguayans. However, his statement was far from an apology: “I admit having treated my enemies inhumanly but without hate, as a professional of violence . . . I say this as an individual who is also a product of his time, his society, and past generations” (quoted in Allier 2010, 159). In the midst of public debate about Tróccoli’s confession, young generations came into play, giving new meaning and visibility to the human rights struggles.

In 1996, the student association at the University of Uruguay’s College of Humanities, where Tróccoli was studying anthropology, tried to prevent him from pursuing his degree, but the administration backed Tróccoli. In addition, in this political environment, the efforts of the young Senator Rafael Michelini were crucial to put the military crimes back in the public debate. The senator is the son of Zelmar Michelini, co-founder of the Frente Amplio and active denunciator of the military crimes abroad, murdered in Argentina in 1976 together with Deputy Gutierrez Ruiz, and the tupamaros militants William Whitelaw and Rosario Barredo. Senator Michelini met with politicians from different parties and officers to elucidate his father’s murder. Throughout his investigation, Michelini found out about new aspects of the repression, such as “Operation Carrot,” the exhumation of victims’ bodies to eliminate evidence. Michelini then launched a campaign to denounce impunity. On May 20, 1996 (the anniversary of his father’s death), he called for a march and gathered over 50,000 persons, including representatives of Familiares and human rights organizations. They silently marched under the slogan “Truth, memory and never again” (after the plebiscite in favour of the Caducity Law, justice was no longer on the list of demands). The March of Silence became an annual tradition in memory of the *desaparecidos*.

The March of Silence challenged the vision of the past promoted on April 14, the “Day of The Fallen in the Fight against Sedition,” proclaimed during the regime and abolished in 2005. Aldo Marchesi observes that these two days represent the two opposed interpretations of the violent past: a war provoked by the guerrilla and state terrorism (2002, 140). After the end of the regime, these narratives

could have led to confrontation in the public sphere, but “they did not enter in dialogue, nor did they attempt to refute each other” (Marchesi 2002, 140). Unlike September 11 in Chile and March 24 in Argentina, June 27 (the day of the coup) in Uruguay is not marked by confrontation; instead, two other commemorative days coexist in a tense balance: “on each of these days, a group commemorates what the other group wants to forget”—the military’s human rights violations or the guerrilla’s violence before the coup (Marchesi 2002, 140). Even so, the armed forces perceived the first March of Silence and Michelini’s insistence on denouncing human rights abuses as a threat. The Tenientes de Artigas lodge, a group of officers particularly invested in the repression, dismissed the young senator as a “post-modern leftist who has not smelled yesterday’s gunpowder” and today is eager to get publicity (Alfonso 2005, 66).

A few months after the first March of Silence, the annual August 14 commemoration of students killed during the 1968 protests was revitalized. The march on the Day of the Student Martyrs reached a record of 30,000 participants, mostly high school and college students, who had been occupying their institutions to resist the implementation of educational reforms. For them, there was a direct relation between the dictatorship and this reform imposed from above that would jeopardize the quality of public education and increase inequalities. Students did not only condemn the dictatorship and its effects, but were also suspicious of the political parties and their ambiguous role in the post-dictatorship period: protesters did not signal affiliation to political parties, integrated multiple groups with different interests and perspectives, and had a particularly joyful character (Sempol 2006a, 64).

Parallel to these successful events, and inspired by the Argentinean example, sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* organized to offer a generational perspective on the past by creating HIJOS-Uruguay. The number of sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* is quite small (approximately 50), but they also invited acquaintances whose parents had been exiled or imprisoned. As in Argentina, they sparked public debate and created awareness through *escraches*. However, as Sempol observes, in Uruguay, where the separation between politics and personal life is more entrenched, these protests were much more moderate and controlled (2006, 208). Typically, the *escrachados* had already been denounced previously and were not at home on the day of the protest, which, in addition, did not include street musicians, theatrical performances, or paint bombs as in Argentina.



HIJOS organized only eight *escraches* until 2004 and was harshly criticized by the governments of Sanguinetti (1995–2000) and Batlle (2000–2005). In 2003, the Chamber of Senators proposed a law on “Violent Home Perturbation” that outlawed *escraches*, presented as “a wild, ignorant, and arrogant way of settling differences” (Sempol 2006, 211).

The Comisión para la Paz (Peace Commission), created by President Batlle in 2000, was in part created to contain the human rights organizations’ public denunciations, including the *escraches* (Alfonso 2005, 118). Batlle highlighted that during the commission’s investigation (almost three years), *escraches* or criticism of the armed forces would jeopardize the conciliatory environment required for advancing its work (Sempol 2006, 212). Composed of representatives of political parties, unions, and human rights associations, the commission’s official goal was to reconcile Uruguayans by uncovering how many individuals had disappeared within and outside of the country, and what had happened to each of them. However, once again, police and military personnel were not legally compelled to testify; therefore, most officers (including retirees) invoked the “military secret” and did not release any information. In addition, the commission was not going to publish the names of the perpetrators: the chief executive declared that they were not entitled to seek “the truth” but “a possible truth that does not conflict with the goal of reconciliation” (Errandonea 2008, 40).

Whereas Familiares and human rights associations were enthusiastic about gaining information about the *desaparecidos*, HIJOS did not support the commission. If the Caducity Law obstructed prosecution and truth was outside of its purview, what was the commission’s purpose? They disagreed with the commission’s name: “Are we at war?” they asked ironically, stressing the continuity with the dictatorship established by Batlle’s government. “The price to pay for this peace is too high: silence, forgetting, resignation. It means accepting the forced disappearance, torture, murder and exile of our parents and their *compañeros*. We don’t want to and cannot pay the price for this peace” (Sempol 2006, 213). Most HIJOS members had not participated in the social movements against the regime as a generation, and therefore, for them, the repeal of the Caducity Law (not the end of military rule) would represent a rupture with the repressive past. In addition, since they did not vote in the 1989 plebiscite, they did not feel represented by the interpretation of the past it implies.

The Peace Commission's main contribution was the official acknowledgment that there had been *desaparecidos* and that the government needed to take charge of the problem. However, this was followed by an attempt at closure: the commission stated that the *desaparecidos* were all dead: they had been exhumed and incinerated, and their ashes had been thrown into the sea. This implied that the families' search for truth and the remains of their loved ones should end here. The president presented the commission's findings as the end of a process initiated in 1985 with the amnesty of political prisoners, which suggests that justice was not on his agenda.

Familiares, human rights organizations, and HIJOS refused to accept the commission's work as an endpoint, and inspired by the events in Argentina, Macarena Gelman, the daughter of a couple of disappeared activists, challenged the settlement between the armed forces and the political class that perpetuated oblivion. Gelman's parents had been abducted in Buenos Aires in 1976, when the military was looking for her grandfather, Juan Gelman, a poet and prominent Montoneros member. Her father, Marcelo Gelman, was murdered in Argentina and her mother, María Claudia García, in the sixth month of her pregnancy, was transferred to Uruguay in the framework of Operation Condor. She was kept alive until she delivered her baby and then murdered. Her remains have not yet been located.

Macarena Gelman was appropriated by a Uruguayan police office and his wife. She learned the truth about her parents in 2000, the result of an investigation conducted by her grandfather, Juan Gelman. He had intensified his search during Sanguinetti's second term, but the president refused his support, claiming that there had been no appropriations in Uruguay (Allier 2010). His successor, Batlle, instead, approved of Gelman's efforts and enthusiastically presented the case to the media. However, when Gelman filed a criminal complaint about María Claudia García's disappearance, Batlle remained silent. Once her grandfather had located her, she went through a difficult period of adjustment to her new identity. Struck by the difference between the Argentinean and Uruguayan authorities' responses to the *desaparecidos* and their children, Macarena Gelman became a prominent actor in the struggle to repeal the Caducity Law and locate the *desaparecidos*.

In the years after the first March of Silence, the Peace Commission, and the restitution of Macarena Gelman, other events began to modify the landscape of memory: in 1997, approximately 300 former women prisoners organized workshops on memory and gender in which they produced new testimonial material; in 1999 the nongovernmental

organization CRY SOL (Centro de Relaciones y Soluciones Laborales) was founded to provide emotional support to former political prisoners and create job opportunities; in 2000, the group Familiares de Asesinados por Razones Políticas was formed, and it stressed that the Peace Commission had not addressed their cases. In 2001, a memorial for the *desaparecidos* was inaugurated; in 2002, Simón Riquelo, the last appropriated child, was restituted; a law was passed to provide retirement funds to workers in the private sector who had been fired or incarcerated; finally, Familiares published *A todos ellos* (2004), a collection of testimonies about repression and loss. However, these events were meaningful mostly to the community of the victims and did not involve the rest of society, especially those who believed that repression had not affected them and knew very little about what happened.

The lack of inclusive memory practices and interest in honouring the victims can be illustrated through the politics of the built environment. In the early 1990s, the former Punta Carretas detention centre, a key institution of the repression, was transformed into one of Montevideo's most elegant shopping centres (Lessa 2011; Draper 2011). Paradoxically, members of the younger generations now learned about the building's past through their parents' surprised comments. In this sense, the shopping centre was a more effective vehicle for memory than the memorial for the *desaparecidos* inaugurated a decade later, in 2001. The latter is located in the peripheral neighbourhood El Cerro, in a peaceful but remote and somewhat hidden park. A majority of the population, including the inhabitants of El Cerro, still does not know that it even exists.

This memorial contrasts with the Argentinean Parque de la Memoria, located in the proximity of downtown Buenos Aires, as well as Argentina's ESMA memorial and the many Chilean memory institutions located in clandestine detention centres. In addition, it contrasts with the Holocaust memorial in Montevideo, an impressive structure located on the *rambla*, a highly frequented avenue along the coastline. In his moving inaugural speech in 1994, President Lacalle emphasised the need to commemorate the Holocaust to prevent intolerance and racism in the future. However, "what President Lacalle did *not* mention was that such episodes had happened again [after the Holocaust], in none other than the tolerant land of Uruguay, and that the entire Uruguayan collectivity was not united behind the cause of a memorial remembering its own detained and disappeared" (Aizenberg 2008, 233).

The Frente Amplio publicly condemned the traditional parties' evasive attitude and lack of commitment to addressing the repressive

Uruguayan past. Therefore, Tabaré Vázquez's assumption of the presidency in 2005 renewed hopes for prosecution, reparation, and location of the *desaparecidos*. It was the first time that a left-wing party had won the elections, and it was a victory closely linked to the increasing popularity of the MPP (Movement of Popular Participation). The latter, part of the Frente Amplio coalition since 1989, represented the MLN-T and other political parties that had confronted the armed forces in the 1960s and 1970s. Most MPP supporters were young men and women frustrated about the lack of opportunities and the absence of projects for social change.

Although Vázquez kept the Caducity Law in place, he instructed his senior aide Gonzalo Fernández to find ways of prosecuting perpetrators and accomplices by using gray areas of the law regarding economic crimes, crimes committed outside the country, and civilian collaboration. In 2005, on the Peace Commission's recommendation, Congress approved a law on forced disappearance, which helped bring the former dictator Gregorio Álvarez to trial two years later. He was the last dictator to be prosecuted in the region and was sentenced to twenty-five years. Vázquez also authorized excavations in military barracks, where bones of two *desaparecidos* were found. This partially disproved the Peace Commission's findings. In 2006, he granted Chile's extradition requests for the military personnel involved in the murder of Berríos.

This episode and the president's steps to enable legal justice encouraged prosecution of military perpetrators in Uruguay. That same year, Bordaberry and the regime's Foreign Minister Juan Carlos Blanco were sentenced to twenty years in prison for the murders of Zelmar Michelini, Gutiérrez Ruiz, William Whitelaw, and Rosario Barredo in Argentina. Simultaneously, Judge Charles prosecuted six officers and two policemen who were about to be extradited to Argentina for their role at the clandestine detention centre Automotores Orletti. Once more, other countries' influence was crucial to advance transitional justice in Uruguay. In military circles, these events were a cause for consternation, and the leaders from the time of the dictatorship wrote a letter to Vázquez assuming responsibility for the actions of all the subalterns to prevent new trials. When journalists asked them if the letter was intended as an apology, the former dictator Gregorio Álvarez answered: "Not at all! I'd rather fall on my back than on my knees" (El País 2006).

Finally, Vázquez asked a group of historians to publish an extensive study about the human rights abuses during the dictatorship on the basis of previous investigations and new archival material. This

was the first published official document about the consequences of state terrorism in Uruguay. During his presidency, human rights associations were granted a space to create a museum of memory, which was inaugurated in 2007. This project focuses on the dictatorial repression and does not address the political violence of the urban guerrilla or the popular discontent that preceded the coup.<sup>7</sup> However, Vázquez's policies were not unambiguous: soon after the remains of the *desaparecidos* were found, the president announced the end of the excavations and proclaimed June 19 as the official day of the "Never Again." June 19, however, is the widely celebrated birthday of the national hero, and also the "day of the grandparents." In his speech, the chief executive indicated that the "Never Again" to be celebrated was about the fraternal war, not state terrorism. Accordingly, he proposed to offer monetary reparation to both families and victims of the repression and families of victims of the guerrilla's political violence.

In 2008, Macarena Gelman urged the courts to reopen a probe into her mother's disappearance, and human rights organizations considered that it was time for a new plebiscite about the Caducity Law. They collected the 350,000 signatures required by the Supreme Court and started the campaign to abolish the Caducity Law. On the day of the plebiscite, citizens would also vote for the president and decide about another project of law. Unlike the 1989 referendum, this time only one pink ballot needed to be included in the envelope to vote in favour of abrogation. Many forgot to include it or could not find it in the voting room, which counted as a vote against the annulment, and others were confused about the proceedings and the implications of the issues to be voted on.

However, the presidential campaigns and the parties' attitude toward the plebiscite was what most impeded annulment. The Blanco and Colorado parties predictably did not support this plebiscite initiative, and neither did the Frente Amplio. The representatives of the latter did not promote it in advertisements or defend it in the televised debates: "Vázquez was against the plebiscite and Mujica was ambivalent" (Alicia Lissidini, quoted in O'Donnell 2009). Trying to capitalize again on the population's fear of military repression, the Partido Blanco focused on the fact that their opponent, José Mujica, had been a MLN-T guerrilla fighter who sought to overthrow a democratic government. As a result, only 48 percent voted in favour of repealing the law (50% plus one vote was required). Somewhat paradoxically, Mujica, the former MLN-T leader, received a majority in the first round and was elected president in the November *ballotage*.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after taking office, the new chief executive proposed a reform to release convicted officers above the age of seventy who had been key architects of the repression, arguing that he did not want old soldiers to decay in jail (Fernández 2010). He also proposed to make an effort to better integrate the armed forces into society; the new generations of soldiers should not carry the baggage of the past, and a peaceful coexistence with the military institution was necessary. Familiares and human rights organizations were alarmed by this attitude; Macarena Gelman stressed that the president could not forgive on behalf of the dead, the victims, and their families, whether or not he had suffered torture himself (rtve.es 2010). In addition, Macarena Gelman questioned Mujica's "war logic" by underlining that civilians and the military had been coexisting peacefully in Uruguay for decades (rtve.es 2010).

Macarena Gelman had taken her mother's case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos [CIDH]) before Mujica's election. In March 2011, the CIDH ruled in Macarena Gelman's favour, demanding that Uruguay repeal the Caducity Law and all other laws that prevent the prosecution of military crimes, allow access to all archives and information in order to determine what happened to María Claudia García, create a memorial in the place where the latter was held prisoner, and provide her daughter with monetary reparation for loss of earnings and damages. Congress then started to work on an "interpretative project" to annul the effects of the Caducity Law, which was rejected by just one vote: Frente Amplio Deputy Víctor Semproni voted against the party line. President Mujica had opposed the interpretative project by arguing, among other things, that it would jeopardize the Frente Amplio's chances for success in the next elections (Gil 2011).

President Mujica finally delegated the human rights violations to the courts and left the decision about the application of the Caducity Law to individual judges. However, since the military crimes were not considered crimes against humanity, they were subject to a period of prescription: after November 1, 2011, judges would no longer be able to prosecute. Familiares, HIJOS, and human rights associations campaigned to revoke this restriction (which conflicts with the CIDH verdict). The Frente Amplio has worked on different projects of law to avoid the time limitation on this crime and implicitly repeal the Caducity Law. As I write these lines, on October 27, 2011, after twelve hours of intense debate, Congress has finally revoked the Caducity Law and the time limit that prevented the prosecution of military crimes, now considered crimes against humanity—a category that

did not exist in Uruguay so far (El Observador 2011). On Friday, October 29, the president will sign the law and wait for judges' and prosecutors' response in the coming weeks.

Today, while in Argentina, twelve infamous torturers were condemned to prison for life, Uruguay seems ready to starting a new phase in the collective memory struggles (Calloni 2011). A "deal between left and right that for a quarter-century has prevented prosecutions for crimes against humanity" has arrived at an end (Calloni 2011). Hopefully, this will enable Uruguayans to collectively confront the pain, suffering, and death produced as a society. In addition, now, it could become possible to address violence, social divisions, and unaccountability in the present. The abrogation should not be understood as an endpoint but, rather, as the beginning of a long process of mourning, assessment, and efforts to realize active forms of transmission.

In a nutshell, since 1996, younger generations linked to the victims have expressed their interest in keeping the memory of the repression alive; in addition, the student movement has connected their struggles to the dictatorial past. However, these efforts were not accompanied by a sustained boom in cultural production or media coverage likely to take the discussion about the past into the public sphere and the educational institutions. There were few spaces or projects to channel and retain the interest of those who participated in the marches, creating, as in Argentina and Chile, inclusive dialogue and reflection. The youth did not develop a sustained involvement in the memory struggles, but remained marginal. Starting with the 2006 trials against Uruguayan perpetrators in the neighbouring countries, the crimes of the past gradually gained visibility; this is distinct from the momentary reaction to specific "scandals" that had marked the first decade of the post-dictatorship period. By drawing international attention to impunity in Uruguay, Macarena Gelman impelled the government to address the crimes of the past in earnest. Without her intervention, the Caducity Law would not have been repealed. These events created a different relation with the memory of the repressive past.

In the last five years, the families and children of the victims have redoubled their efforts and tried to reach out to the youth and actors so far indifferent to their struggles. In 2007, the last group related to the human rights violations emerged, the collective "Niños en cautiverio político" (Child Political Prisoners). Between 1972 and 1974, almost a hundred children had been in prison with their parents and were treated like prisoners; they were not allowed recreation time and were assigned a number, had to follow orders, walk in line, and lie on

the floor facedown during the random violent nighttime inspections (desaparecidos.org 2010). One of the collective's goals is to encourage the rest of society to recover their own history and memory: "telling our stories triggered others' encounters with their own stories of repression" (desaparecidos.org 2010). They believe that there is still a "lot of material to produce memories" and that the "The Uruguayan people deserves to break the walls that separate them from their past" (desaparecidos.org 2010). Similarly, the collective "Memorias en libertad," founded in 2009, invites those who were children or teenagers during the dictatorship to share their memories. There indicates a need for stories about the past that show how it impacted groups and generations other than the direct victims.

After the failure of the 2009 plebiscite, the need to reach out became especially pressing. The campaign for the "yes" had already involved many young men and women (mostly born in the post-dictatorship period) who organized events to draw attention to the need to vote. The documentary *Nos sobra una ley* [We Have an Unnecessary Law] (Di Candia and Legrand 2011) brought together young public figures and activists to reflect about the meaning and implications of the Caducity Law. The group *Iguals y Punto* (We are all equal [before the law], period), which includes members of HIJOS, human rights organizations, and unions, emerged to promote the idea that when it comes to human rights violations, differential treatment is unjustifiable. They emphasize that the group is not linked to political parties and open to all those who feel that the 2009 plebiscite has not changed the unjust character of the Caducity Law.

*Iguals y Punto* has organized awareness-raising artistic events and advertising campaigns that appeal to the youth, including a new version of the song "A redoblar" by several well-known young musicians, accompanied by a music video. This song, composed in 1979 by Mauricio Ubal and Rubén Olivera, was a coded message of hope about the end of the dictatorship and soon became a symbol for the people's suffering and resistance to oppression. The title means both "let's play a roll on the drums" and "let's redouble hope," which capture the spirit of this new phase of a struggle that had started during the dictatorship. A member of HIJOS produced the music video "A contrarreloj/Against the Clock," in which public figures of all ages affected by the human rights violations attempt to sensitize society about the need for eliminating time limitations for prosecuting. Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter are the main channels of communication for HIJOS and *Iguals y Punto*.



The late but intense reaction of these recently formed groups could be read as an acknowledgment that the failure of the second plebiscite is the outcome of insufficient cultural production, commemoration, and public debate. They feel that, as a generation, they are arriving late to the collective memory struggles. The rap incorporated into the music video of “A redoblar” communicates this idea: “They have put a lock; the script changes but the actor and the take are always the same. This is a problem. Stop feeding the hyenas that don’t pay what they owe. We don’t forget the Memory: children of the present, of this story, aware of the future, our turn has come” (2009). However, they are confident that through inclusive forms of action, they can help others become aware of the impact of memory in the making of the present, marked by intolerance and disillusionment with collective projects or the possibility of social change.

### THE POST-DICTATORSHIP GENERATION: UNLOCKING THE PAST

The prolonged absence of the post-dictatorship generation from the collective problems of human rights violations goes hand in hand with an absence of active forms of intergenerational transmission. There are many reasons for this absence. Firstly, as in Chile, the experience of torture is very difficult to share, especially with sons and daughters. According to former prisoners, after spending long years in jail, their initial reaction was to put this experience behind, not talk about it and focus on rebuilding their life (Allier 2010, 169). This, in addition to the former guerrilla leadership’s instructions to refrain from organizing (see above), contributed to individual and collective silence. Secondly, since the opposing interpretations of the dictatorial past as a war and as state terrorism coexisted without contesting each other, it was almost impossible to agree on how the dictatorship was to be taught in high school. Until 1996, the subject was not part of the curricula, and even after that date, teachers preferred to avoid it since they did not feel comfortable or prepared to discuss it with the students (Demasi 2001, 2008; Allier 2010).

The absence of cultural production about the dictatorial period mirrored and intensified this silence; the initial wave of testimonies at the end of the regime was followed by a profound silence in the arts, especially in cinema. The filmmaker Virginia Martínez observes that after the Caducity Law, there was implicit censorship of all material dealing with the dictatorship (2008, 114). Until 2006, public TV

channels did not broadcast and cinemas did not screen films on that period. In addition, Martínez mentions that the government refused to provide documents and pictures to the filmmakers who were not even allowed to film within the walls of buildings connected to the repression (Martínez 2008, 116).

The armed forces' powerful position was also an obstacle for filmmakers: when the trailer of Martínez's documentary about the restituted son Amaral García was shown in Uruguay, one of the interviewees received a phone call that threatened that her husband, a former police officer, was to lose his pension (Martínez 2008, 119). The slow advances in transitional justice also frustrated cultural production, since for a long time the human rights organizations needed to focus on the duty to remember and were not ready to advance on the path toward an exemplary memory. According to Martínez, her film *Por esos ojos* (1997) about the appropriated child Mariana Zaffaroni Islas was not well received by human rights organizations, because it approaches the problem from the perspective of both the appropriators and the family of origin.<sup>9</sup>

After the dictatorship, the armed forces defended the repression and the MLN-T defended its armed struggle without presenting a critical analysis of their actions. After an intense period of internal examination of their failure, both the MLN-T and the Communist Party decided that this was not the time for public self-criticism (Yaffé 2004, 190). Likewise, Yaffé observes that in the post-dictatorship period, the Frente Amplio reinvented its identity by focusing on the many party members who had suffered persecution and repression (including its most emblematic figure Seregni). The left now appeared as a cohesive group with a tradition of opposition to authoritarianism and defence of parliamentary democracy (Yaffé 2004, 188). This obscures the Frente Amplio's passivity in the face of the armed forces' takeover in 1973 and their initial understanding of "bourgeois democracy" not as an end but as a means for social change.

These emphases and omissions helped create a narrative of "epic, mythic, and emotional character" (Yaffé 2004, 192). The kidnapping and killing of the FBI torture advisor Dan Mitrione and the 1971 Punta Carretas jailbreak have become legendary events in the movement's history. They were popularized in books and films such as Costa-Gavras' *State of Siege* (1972) and *Tupamaros, la fuga del Punta Carretas* (2009), and former Tupamaros still commemorate them as examples of their courage and sagacity (Beck Casal 2011). Several biographies have fed into the tupamaro epic in the last fifteen years (Lagos 2010).<sup>10</sup> Since the MLN-T became part of the Frente

Amplio, the left parties praised the armed struggle at the service of their electoral agenda, disregarding the individuals who died. On the part of the post-dictatorship generation, memories of adventurous jail-breaks and tormenting imprisonment often inspire either uncritical admiration or deep pain. In the absence of dialogue, these feelings are insufficient to appropriate and inherit the past. Moreover, HIJOS note that these uses of memory make their parents “disappear as human beings with virtues, defects, and vacillations” (Sempol 2006b, 196). By recovering the “human” dimension of the *desaparecidos*, the members of this group can reflect on their parents’ decisions and motivations in relation to their own lives. They also reconnect the *desaparecidos* to the rest of society that otherwise tends to perceive their stories as foreign to their experiences and everyday life. For this reason, HIJOS used the *escraches* primarily to raise awareness about the *desaparecidos* and their lives. It appears that the Uruguayan organization of sons and daughters learned from the work and experience of their Argentinean counterparts, as well as from the Argentinean documentaries analyzed above.

Similarly, the college and high school students who in the mid-1990s fought against the education reform distanced themselves from the different images of the student martyrs that the political parties had mobilized. For them, the students killed in protests before and during the dictatorship were not only martyrs, revolutionary heroes, or defenders of democracy, but also human beings like them “who were working for what the students believed in at that time, in a context in which that was considered reason enough to kill them” (Sempol 2006a, 96). The students of the post-dictatorship period emphasise the “violation of their rights as citizens” of the students killed in the past (Sempol 2006a, 96). They have not studied the past student movements in depth, but stress that their death was unjustifiable, just as many aspects of the present that concern them such as social exclusion, police repression, and devaluation of public education.

The distance of the 1990s student activists from the image of the martyrs predominant in the 1970s and 1980s is in part due to the withdrawal of the young actors who organized to protest against the dictatorship, in many cases from student unions. As in Chile, at the end of the dictatorship many of the exiled or imprisoned activists recovered their leadership positions in unions, political parties, or movements, thereby displacing the younger generation that had craftily reorganized outlawed spaces for resistance against the military regime. The unwillingness to share leadership positions with the

young activists was based on the idea that 1960s activism was superior, which implied a negative image on the political initiatives of today's youth, judged soft, trivial, and in tune with "postmodern" times (Leal 1995, 144).<sup>11</sup>

HIJOS members reject this claim to the ownership of memory: "some public figures appropriate the past as something that makes them powerful, 'I am the owner of the truth', and questioning them is not an option because 'I lived it, I was there then I know what happened' " (Sempol 2006b, 202). Similarly, IR, the political group to which Macarena Gelman belongs, argue that some Frente Amplio members "make use of their long experience as activists to put you down, 'I was an activist in 1971', they tell you. Yes, but I was born in 1978, there is nothing I can do about it" (Silva 2010). For HIJOS, hierarchies and monopolies have restricted the participation of most Uruguayans in the construction of memory and discouraged debate, thereby making it difficult to learn from the past (Sempol 2006b, 200, 202). They stress that older generations need to open up to others' interpretation and refuse to be reduced to the role of passive listeners. They point to the necessity of active forms of intergenerational transmission: "they [their parents' generation] are not aware that the next generation needs a dialogue. If the experiences they lived are not assimilated and transformed, there is a rupture which manifests itself in two opposite but equally problematic forms: uncritical admiration and rejection" (Sempol 2006b, 203).

For a long time, however, the post-dictatorship generation feel neither entitled to nor concerned enough to offer their perspective about the dictatorship.<sup>12</sup> This has resulted in limited cultural production: while the material discussed in the chapters about Argentina, and to a lesser extent Chile, is the result of a selection on my part, in Uruguay—a smaller country in which the relation to the past is even more problematic—I discuss the entire cultural production I could find.

The literary texts and films analyzed in the following sections reflect the problematic transmission but also the response of the post-dictatorship generation to this situation: their demand and their effort to open up spaces to encounter and appropriate the past. Carro's novel and the documentaries by Viñoles and Gutiérrez are an expression of a problematic transmission—mainly through narratives that highlight suffering and heroism—and the post-dictatorship generation's difficulty to appropriate the past in this context. Conversely, the two short stories by Sosa and Mardero reflexively deal with the same problem. The authors offer sharp and humoristic observations about members

of the post-dictatorship generation struggling with the fantasies about the idealized 1960s. Finally, the comic book *Acto de guerra* explores taboos and gray zones of the conflict in an attempt to create a dialogue between the two generations in an informal way.

**THE PREDICAMENT OF NOSTALGIA: *ACERO Y PIEL*,  
*DESTINO FINAL*, AND *CRÓNICA DE UN SUEÑO***

Tony Carro, author of *Acero y piel/Steel and Skin* (2006), is the first member of the Uruguayan post-dictatorship generation to write a novel about the decades of guerrilla and military repression. He does not have former activists or victims in his family; his novel therefore helps understand the perspective of “bystander” children to the recent past. The stereotypical characters, romantic style, and melodramatic tone point to a problematic intergenerational transmission. Instead of creating possibilities for identification, they have a distancing effect.

*Acero y piel* is a tragic love story between *compañeros* set in the early 1970s. He, Felipe, is the perfect activist: From a working-class background, austere and free from the contradictions of middle-class youth, and at the same time educated and refined, “he was the perfect incarnation of Che since, in addition to some undeniable resemblance, Felipe was a young man full of dreams who deeply believed in the construction of the ‘new man’ and a more just society through social revolution. He was a typical representative of the working class who managed to succeed in his studies by suffering privations, and was now close to finishing his training as an architect” (Carro 2006, 29). Moreover, he is a charismatic speaker, drives an old jeep (typically fast), says “beautiful” things, and plays in a band: he is the perfect combination of toughness and sensitivity.

Similarly, she, Lucía, belongs to the middle class, but her parents are Spanish immigrants who were once poor and suffered hardship. At the beginning of the novel, her mother is dying of cancer and her devoted and loving husband has developed a depression. Lucía embodies a perfect balance of sensitivity and courage, openness and conformity, sensuality and purity. She is a literature student who turns to activism after Líber Arce’s death: “it was a very sad day and she cried copiously as rarely before” (Carro 2006, 36). She is an enthusiastic Frente Amplio member but also deeply religious: “I think that Christ was the first Marxist in History,” she states with a smile (Carro 2006, 51). Moreover, Lucía sees the guerrilla’s actions with sympathy but, unlike Felipe, does not believe in violence as a means for social change. Instead, she is confident that human consciousness can be elevated

through small gestures of solidarity (Carro 2006, 27, 51). Unlike her friends, Lucía does not smoke marihuana, “not as a matter of principle”; rather “she never did anything just because it was a trend” (Carro 2006, 21). She takes contraceptive pills but, before meeting Felipe, had been with only one man, Santiago, her high school sweetheart. After an intimate moment with Lucía, Felipe realizes that “her sensitivity, her lovemaking gestures, her commitment to the social cause, were nothing more than the reflection of her noble spirit” (Carro 2006, 49).

When they meet, it is, of course, love at first sight; this feeling intensifies when they discover their political affinities and he realizes that, unlike most girls, Lucía enjoys risky activities such as painting political slogans on walls at night. “So now, in addition to loving you, I can say we are *compañeros*,” observes Felipe, to which she replies, “What a beautiful word!” (Carro 2006, 49). However, consistent with the novel’s romantic style, there are serious obstacles to this perfect love. Lucía is still in a relationship with Santiago, who is well integrated in her family and for whom she feels great affection, although she is no longer in love. Santiago is the polar opposite of Felipe: from a military family with aristocratic background, he studies at the Military School and throughout the last year has received training to deal with “subversion” in Panama. When he discovers Lucía’s new love, he is enraged and alerts her parents to the situation. As a punishment, Lucía’s family forbids her to leave the house. During her reclusion she learns that she is pregnant with Felipe’s child and escapes to see him. They get married and live with his humble and nonjudgmental working-class family.

When the guerrilla attacks intensify, the repression escalates and Felipe and Lucía are eventually detained. Both are tortured, and she is harassed by a female soldier and brutally raped by a male officer. Whereas Lucía is liberated and goes into exile, Felipe is killed by Santiago—now an officer—in a premeditated act of revenge. She leaves their little daughter, Valentina, in the care of her old and handicapped father. At the end of the dictatorship, Lucía returns to Uruguay and reencounters her twelve-year-old daughter, her family, and her friends. This is also the beginning of a new love story with Pablo, Felipe’s and her own best friend, the man who secretly loved her and waited for her in resignation during all those years.

While reading this novel, I found myself wondering why the author chose the romantic style and the melodramatic tone to talk about the country’s recent history. A possible reason could be that the past has been transmitted to the younger generations by appealing to feelings

(fear, pain, guilt, and admiration) instead of critical assessment and debate. How is one to talk about others in pain, and the pain of others, without hurting them more? The author responds to this challenge by creating prototypical protagonists, flawless men and women; the reader can only lament their fate and condemn their torturers.

This choice echoes the humanitarian narrative that prevailed in Argentina twenty years earlier, revealing how the near-absence of transitional justice in Uruguay has limited collective memory to establishing the existence of the crimes and their cruelty (literal memory). Anything that could appear to be a criticism of the left and thereby justify the armed forces' human rights violations is omitted from the narrative. In the novel, published in 2006, the author feels the need to stress the protagonists' distance from the armed struggle in order to make the reader condemn the army's violence. For instance, Lucía comes to reject violence, and although Felipe believes in the revolution and keeps a gun at home, he assures her that he never shot anyone and owns it mainly for the purpose of protection. If they had been guerrilla fighters or approved of violence, the author seems to—perhaps unwittingly—imply, it would have been more difficult to denounce the brutal treatment Felipe and Lucía suffered at the hands of soldiers. This reflects the Uruguayan discussion that, far from understanding cruelty and human rights violations as unjustifiable regardless of their context, is still informed by the notion that torture and murder are intrinsic to war.

Additionally, just as the aims, content, and method of the 1960s political project were largely omitted from public debate and intergenerational conversations, they are also conspicuous by their absence *Acero y piel*.<sup>12</sup> Lucía and Felipe talk in abstractions only (“a better society” or “social justice”), without reflection on how to make these goals possible or what models to follow. When they disagree, for instance about whether or not to give money to child beggars, they briefly expose their arguments and quickly agree without exploring the issue. Their formulaic perspectives about social problems appear as parentheses; this contributes to the artificiality of the characters and the weakness of the novel's political dimension.

Similarly, the depiction of Lucía as an “eternal dreamer” (Carro 2006, 27) and Felipe as a romantic idealist (again, perhaps unwittingly) devalues the political project for which they are risking their lives, and it becomes a mere expression of youthful rebelliousness. The ending of the novel reaffirms this idea. Lucía's decision to give Pablo a chance could be interpreted as the triumph of mature moderation and steadiness over youthful passion and impetuosity. Lucía's

transformation after the experience of torture, imprisonment, and exile echoes the shift in the left in the post-dictatorship period, from defending revolutionary principles to defending democratic values.

The image of a heroic, flawless, and victimized left grew during the difficult years of right-wing governments in the decades after the dictatorship. The rhetoric of the oppositional left created the impression that they embodied a radical alternative, in continuity with the resistance during the dictatorship. Large segments of the population, including many young people, were hopeful that once the *Frente Amplio* was in power, things would change for the better, a hope closely linked to a mystified past of the left.

*Crónica de un sueño/Chronicle of a Dream* (2005) is informed by the nostalgia for a time not personally experienced by the director. In 2004, the Uruguayan filmmaker Mariana Viñoles and her partner Stefano Tononi travel to Uruguay to make a documentary on a presidential election that could be historical; the left has great chances to win for the first time. "I return to my country after three years. I return to reencounter my family and I also return to vote," the director's voiceover announces early in the film (Viñoles and Tononi 2005). She adds that she will vote for the Frente Amplio, presented, firstly, as a victim of foreign powers that impose themselves through violence: "We'll vote for the political movement that was considered a coalition of subversive groups during the Cold War, and repressed by the national armed forces with the support of the United States" (Viñoles and Tononi 2005). Secondly, the Frente Amplio is presented as a party that has fought untiringly for the same goals from its foundation in the early 1970s to the present: "Today, thirty years later, the Frente Amplio continues its struggle. After so many deaths, exiles, and repression, there is finally a possibility to govern" (Viñoles and Tononi 2005). For the director, the party is linked to a collective feeling of hope that connects her emotionally with a unified community, mostly of young people:

At the end of the regime, I was ten years old. With a red, blue, and white flag [the Frente Amplio colors], and making the victory sign to my parents—who were not communists—my sister Andrea took me to my first Frente Amplio rally. I remember that day as the beginning of a shared struggle, although back then, I did not understand the meaning of the events or how they would be part of my life. I see myself shouting, as my sister did, that the people united would never be defeated, and that the military regime was going to end.

(Viñoles and Tononi 2005)



After the dictatorship, during the government of the traditional Colorado and Blanco parties, the Frente Amplio grew as an alternative to the broken system—the path to end poverty, unemployment, corruption, military impunity, and violence. At the turn of the millennium, conditions became even worse, and many members of the post-dictatorship generation, including Viñoles, left the country in search of opportunities to either practice their profession (brain drain), simply find a job, or study. For these expatriate Uruguayans, a Frente Amplio victory represented hope for a return since this party had included the problem of emigration in their campaign. “That is why I come [to vote]. That is why many of us come, to try to realize the dream of being able to live in our country decently” (Viñoles and Tognoni 2005). In the first campaign speech fragment included in the film, Mujica addresses the problem of youth emigration. “Today . . . forty or fifty million dollars per year [come] from the two or three hundred dollars sent by the youth abroad to support those who stayed here. We are becoming a country that lives off begging after having expelled our children” (Viñoles and Tognoni 2005).

Viñoles focuses on Melo, her small hometown, to show the country’s economic decay during the right-wing governments. Her own family went from the comfortable salary of a banker grandfather and a large and inviting paternal house to not being able to use the fridge because of the cost of electricity. As she follows a group of activists that distributes information door to door and promotes the Frente Amplio with signs and banners, Viñoles interviews humble persons (porters, carton collectors, jobseekers); some are still conservative, but most are tired of politicians’ lies and the electoral corruption every five years (votes are bought with food, money, or construction material) and hopeful about a Frente Amplio government. In a speech, the candidate Tabaré Vázquez promises to eliminate poverty, create dignifying jobs, find out the truth about the *desaparecidos*, and respect sexual, gender, and race diversity. From each story of poverty and abandonment, the left emerges more strongly as the way to social change.

On the day of the election, the activists who appear in the film, Viñoles and her family, and many others vote anticipating the victory of the left. The film ends with the celebration on the streets of Melo, the neighbours singing slogans and hugging each other among laughs and tears of emotion and the soundtrack of a “A redoblar” by La Tabaré Milongón Banda. This scene links the joy about the Frente Amplio victory with the prediction made in the first line of the song, composed in 1979 in the midst of the repression: “volverá

la alegría a enredarse con tu voz/happiness will become part of your voice again” (Olivera and Ubal 1979). For Viñoles, the end of the oppression is not marked by the return of democratic institutions but by the victory of the party that for her had untiringly fought against oppression. In Chile, the oppositional front against the dictatorship, which includes the left, had the opportunity to govern immediately after the end of the regime for a prolonged period, disappointing popular hopes for economic and political change. On the contrary, for Viñoles and many Uruguayans, at the time of making the film there was reason to “redoblar la esperanza/redouble hope,” as the song proposes.

Moreover, in the context of the film, the song introduces a parallelism between the losses suffered under the dictatorship (deaths and exiles) and the losses of the post-dictatorship: emigration. In a coded way, pretending to refer to the last act of the *murga* performance called *retirada* (“departure”), the song explains “porque el corazón no quiere, entonar mas retiradas/because the heart doesn’t want to sing more departures” (Olivera and Ubal 1979). The same could be sang in a present marked by massive emigration, and the director, who is about to return to Brussels, reaffirms this connection as he reflects: “I take with me every moment engaged in this fight, also several questions and the deep memory, or nostalgia, of those who are not longer here” (Viñoles and Tononi 2005).

However, Viñoles’ fourth documentary, *Exiliados/Exiles* (Viñoles 2011), starts with the directors’ voiceover stating: “I didn’t say goodbye to my friends when I left Brussels, because I thought I would return soon. I didn’t. Six years ago, I returned to Uruguay, and only very recently did I start feeling I had actually arrived” (Viñoles 2011). The director remained in Uruguay, and the film tells, among others, the story of her father who decided to join her brothers in Europe, thus becoming one of the more than 700.000 Uruguayans living abroad (Valenzuela 2010, 6). In the process of making *Crónica de un sueño*, the director had decided to embrace her hopes and remain in Uruguay, a country now governed by the left. Thereby, she seized the opportunity to become an actor of the present, which is expressed in a poem she recites: “staying here/assuming my life/my transit/my time” (Idea Vilariño, quoted in Viñoles 2005).

A similar impulse to fully become an actor of his time might have impelled Mateo Gutiérrez’s filmic project, an intervention in the collective memory struggles. He was six years old when his father, Deputy Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz, was detained and murdered together with three other Uruguayans (Zelmar Michelini, William Whitelaw, and

Rosario Barredo) exiled in Buenos Aires. Almost thirty years later, Mateo Gutiérrez embarks on a film project about his father's life, *D.F. Destino Final/D.F. Final Destination* (2008). He worked on it for four years and conducted thorough archival research and thirty-three interviews with witnesses living in Uruguay, Argentina, and Spain. According to the director, *D.F.* responded to the "emotional need" of encountering his father by reconstructing who he was and "following his tracks" until the moment of his murder in 1976 (LR21b 2008). *D.F.* is a classic documentary in which a meticulous narrative advances through intertwined testimonies and archival material, recounting Gutiérrez Ruiz's life since his early childhood and its relation to national and regional political events.

In an interview, the director observes that his father's ideas, trajectory, and life were displaced when he became a symbol of the human rights struggle. This intensified his desire to "find" him: similar to Argentinean filmmakers such as María Inés Roqué (the director of *Papá Iván*), he "felt the need to recover the person he was behind the martyr he became for society" (LR21 2008a). Gutiérrez stresses that *D.F.* is a personal approach to his father's life, yet this personal dimension is not evident in the film. Unlike the Argentinean documentaries by sons and daughters of murdered detainees, *D.F.* does not feature Mateo Gutiérrez. The audience does not learn anything about his experience: for instance, what he remembers about his father and the night of the abduction, or how his death and its collective memorialization impacted his life.

Next to the many figures from politics, diplomacy, and the media, Gutiérrez interviews children of murdered detainees, who, unlike him, a few years younger than them, have a fuller memory of their parents: his brother Juan Pablo, Gabriela Schroeder (Barredo's daughter), Luis Pedro, as well Zelmar and Cecilia, Michellini's children. However, these sons and daughters mostly share memories and information about their parents' life and death but leave aside their own experience. Gutiérrez Ruiz, Zelmar Michellini, and Wilson Ferreira Aldunate appear as inspiring young leaders who are not afraid to pay the ultimate price for following their convictions about the needs of the Uruguayan people. These images contrast with the contradictions, deceptions, silences, and omissions of the dictatorship, but also the post-dictatorship period.

The sons and daughters become subjects of the narrative only once, when they appear moved by the memory of the last time they saw their parents. These emotional moments indicate how these crimes affected their lives and continue to hurt them. However, they are exceptional

in a story otherwise told in the “impartial and moderate tone” that the director intended (LR21a 2008). The absence of sons and daughters’ critical perspective confirms that the post-dictatorship generation has not assumed an active role in the debates about the past, in Uruguay dominated by politicians who participated in the conflict and, to a lesser degree, by direct victims and human rights associations.<sup>14</sup>

In the same way, Gutiérrez specifies that although his film deals with politics because his father was a politician, “it is not a political work in the strict sense of the word” (LR21 2008a). As mentioned above, HIJOS, the 1990s student movement, and Iguales y Punto have also made clear their independence from political parties. This could be understood as an expression of their disappointment with politicians’ lack of commitment to address the crimes of the past and the social problems in the present. In addition, the visible generational change in politics did not lead to significant changes in relation to the past. For instance, Rafael Michelini (Zelmar Michelini’s son) and Pedro Bordaberry (the former dictator Juan María Bordaberry’s son) each represent their father’s party in the Senate. Rafael Michelini was very active in the efforts to bring Juan María Bordaberry to trial for the murder of his father, while Pedro Bordaberry vocally defended his own father. Their antagonism almost escalated into a fistfight during a televised debate in 2006, which, apart from confirming the existence of two irreconcilable perspectives, revealed that both senators had manipulated information.<sup>15</sup>

For almost a decade Michelini had been unsuccessful in his demands for truth. Contrary to Chile, in Uruguay the identity of most perpetrators and the details about their crimes have not become public. The director of *D.F.* does not focus on prosecution but on exposing the truth about his father’s murder since, according to him, Uruguayans ignore many aspects of his father’s story and the dictatorial past: “It is very hard for me to speak of justice thirty-two years later . . . I was looking mainly for the truth . . . It is necessary to discern the truth and really know what happened” (LR21 2008b).

In a context in which the Caducity Law was still valid and prevented the human rights violations from being prosecuted, knowing the truth becomes a form of justice. The director underlines the absence of trials in Uruguay by establishing an implicit contrast with Argentina: the film starts with and periodically returns to scenes from the trial to the military juntas in Buenos Aires, in which Matilde Rodríguez, the director’s mother, testifies about her husband’s abduction. Through her and other testimonies, Gutiérrez’s film makes some significant facts available to a broader Uruguayan public. Firstly, his father, along

with Michelini, Whitelaw, and Barredo, was taken to the Automotores Orletti detention centre, where Uruguayan military personnel played an active role in the torture, murder, and disappearance of compatriots. Secondly, the person in charge of directing the abductions of his father and the other three Uruguayan detainees was the chief of operations at the Automotores Orletti detention centre, the ex-convict Aníbal Gordon. Finally, the documentary seeks to challenge the romanticized idea of this father's death by exposing the audience to the naked horror of the crime.

The camera zooms in on pictures of the corpses immediately after the murder and at the morgue: black-and-white images of bodies with clear traces of the abuses suffered before their death. These images are accompanied by the victims' names, which, after the viewers have learned about the victims' public and private lives for over an hour, create a feeling of sorrow, especially in Gutiérrez Ruiz's case. The legend that accompanies his picture reads: "my old man." This is one of the few moments in which the audience notices that this meticulous historical reconstruction is made by a son, hurt and eager to understand. When the filmmaker interviews former President Julio María Sanguinetti, who considers himself a personal friend of his father, Gutiérrez Ruiz abandons for a second time the objectivist register that structures the documentary.

*SANGUINETTI.* Let's make this clear: the Gutiérrez Ruiz and Michelini cases happened in Argentina. I wish they would have discovered something, but the crimes took place there and the investigation too. What we never knew and still don't know is what kind of connection with the case there was from here.

*GUTIÉRREZ.* Do you have doubts about the participation of Uruguayan military personnel in the clandestine centre Orletti?

*SANGUINETTI.* It's not a question of doubts. I don't doubt that there was instigation, but I don't know if that led to the murders, or how far it went, right? One never knows, these people acted with such impunity and brutality, mostly in Argentina. Aníbal Gordon and all those gangs were so brutal that maybe they were told to put pressure on or scare somebody and they killed a whole town. That was the world one was living in.

[*GUTIÉRREZ* apparently asks about the investigations in Uruguay]

*SANGUINETTI.* We? What were we suppose to investigate here?

*GUTIÉRREZ.* Well, there was a commission.

*SANGUINETTI.* Yes, right, that was done, that was done, but unfortunately we didn't have the possibility. The possibility wasn't here. Congress did an exhaustive investigation with a long report and

several testimonies. Of course they did it. What I am trying to say is that the trial was there, not here. Ultimately, there could be instigation from here, but the execution and the operative tools were there, right? (Gutiérrez 2008).

In this conversation, the director's position, which throughout most of the film can only be inferred from the editing, becomes clear: the government boycotted the commission and prevented the incriminatory information from becoming public. The director reacts to this lost opportunity not only by presenting an exhaustive investigation of the crime that includes suspects and accomplices, but also by locating it in a historical and biographical context. The film offers answers to questions that the government was supposed to address but actively avoided. For the director, the post-dictatorship society needs to start by establishing the historical truth.

In an interview, Gutiérrez affirms: "I tried to tell the new generations who my father was" (LR21 2008b); however, the film does not have a generational dimension, and its aesthetic appeal to younger generations is limited. The wealth of historical documentation is simultaneously the strength of *D.F.*, and an indication that the post-dictatorship generation has not found its place in the debates about the past. In the face of the older generation's "ownership of memory"—using one's firsthand experience to exclude younger voices—the director demonstrates that he has sufficient knowledge to intervene. His own intervention, however, is largely conspicuous by its absence: instead of debate, elaboration, and transmission, he chooses to deal with "hard facts" that are difficult to challenge.

In contrast to Carro, Viñoles, and Gutiérrez, the authors analyzed in the next section emphasise the specificity of the present, the result of a problematic memorialization and transmission. They also explore gray and little-known areas of the past, thereby unearthing its complexity. This facilitates identification on the part of the reader and encourages a reflective attitude.

### THE PAST AS A CHALLENGE: TWO SHORT STORIES AND A COMIC

In his short story "Qué difícil es ser de izquierda estos días/It's Hard to Be Leftist These Days" (2004), Gabriel Sosa interrogates Uruguayans' complex relationship with the political legacy of the 1960s through the figure of Rosalía, the daughter of former activists. The narrator humorously depicts Rosalía's ambivalence brought on by

the conflict between the ethics of activism that she learned from her parents and her professional choices: she studied advertising in the country's most expensive private university, the Universidad Católica de Uruguay. Her struggle becomes apparent when she introduces herself:

I know how these things are, people pigeonhole you. That is not who I am, you see? It's my job, I like it, but I am something else; in part because of myself and in part because of my family. I know, I studied advertising at the Universidad Católica, although I still have to complete some courses, which I'll do when I feel like it, but my thing is something else. I don't know, I like my art, I like who I am. You know what I mean? Besides, it's genetic, I grew up in my parents' home, my old man is an art activist; he worked with the Líber Arce brigade . . . Mateo<sup>16</sup> used to sing me to sleep . . . It is hard to be a leftist these days, she sadly remarks.

(Sosa 2004, 144)

Rosalía presents her interlocutor with a somewhat confusing situation: she affirms that she likes her job as a publicist, but she does not want to be "pigeonholed," that is, she does not accept this definition of her, because she "is something else" or "not like that." It is evident that advertising does not completely fulfil her: "my thing is something else." What is this "something else" that will not allow her to completely identify with what she does, in spite of the fact that she likes doing it? It is her parents' legacy. As the daughter of leftist activists, she cannot limit herself to being a publicist: she is also an artist. Her art is a vocational activity in which she engages for its own sake, not for money. It is what connects her to her parents. For her, the left is linked to that which seems unmarketable: thought, creativity, sensibility, social values.

Nevertheless, the neoliberalization of the 1990s, which involved, among other things, the commodification of those virtues and activities, undermines this link. The story exposes a tension between the ethics of activism in the 1960s and those of Rosalía's time. While the former entailed the subordination of all aspects of life to the project of achieving personal fulfilment within the common good, the latter separates work and personal fulfilment and abandons the idea of the common good. For the 1960s generation, everything was subordinate to activism: education, work, family, and especially the spaces of creativity: "the left had [...] taken over the cultural channels of expression" (Sosa 2004, 144). Meanwhile, in Rosalía's time, two opposing views of creativity coexist: her art as a creative and communicative gesture, and her work as a publicist, which puts creativity at the service of the market.

To convincingly explain why she should not be defined exclusively by her paid work, Rosalía makes recourse to her family history (her father belonged to the Líber Arce brigade) and to the leftist art scene in which she was raised, which becomes evident in her allusion to Mateo's close ties with her family: "Mateo sang me to sleep." Because of her genetics and upbringing, she is a leftist like her parents, in spite of her work as a publicist. Nevertheless, Rosalía feels inadequate before the 1960s paradigm of activism, which she understands as a model. She justifies her failure to meet the standards of her parents' generation by pointing to the character of her time: it is not that she is less of a leftist, but that being a leftist nowadays is much more difficult than it used to be. The assertion from which the story takes its title lies in the protagonist's feeling of shortfall.

Nevertheless, this situation, which Rosalía experiences as the cause of her difference and distance from her parents, could also connect her to them. The members of the 1960 generation themselves experience a similar tension after having to adapt to a life without political effervescence, resistance, and repression. Fernando Reati defines this as "the difficult (sometimes impossible) process of adaptation of leftist militants who, having suffered incarceration or exile, must resign themselves to live in the superficial consumerist world of the 1990s, as messengers of a past that seems to exist only in their memories" (Reati 2005, 186). The response to this dilemma is either assimilation to the new era, leaving the past behind, or social isolation, a new form of internal exile after the end of the regime. Either way, even though they do not participate in politics anymore, the members of this generation continue to be militants, and the choices they make will be judged as either a continuation or a rupture with that phase. In fact, when Rosalía talks about her father, she combines past and present tense: "My old man is a militant for art, he worked with the Líber Arce Brigade" (Sosa 2004, 144).

As mentioned, Rosalía seems to be aware of the impossibility of resuscitating the 1960s. However, this awareness is not source of encouragement in the quest for new forms of activism responsive to the characteristics of her own time, but a source of sadness. She experiences it as a personal failure, resulting in nostalgia, discomfort, and defensiveness. However, what she perceives as incompatible with a legitimate relation to the past (temporal distance and open-ended search) is precisely what can facilitate the production of exemplary memory. Firstly, the temporal distance could allow Rosalía to recognize that the activism of the 1960 was not ideal in all respects, thereby also clarifying what aspects of this legacy can and should be retained



in the present. Secondly, relating to the past as guide to rebuild collective projects does not imply finding a definitive answer to the question of how to inherit 1960s activism. Rather, it invites a constant reformulation of answers, according to the political configurations at the local and global levels. In response to Rosalía's lamentation about the difficulties of being a leftist today, Sosa asks, hoping, perhaps, to spark a long overdue debate: What does it mean to be a leftist today?

Natalia Mardero's short story "Los bolches"/"The Bolches" (2008) deals with a similar question: it reflects on how the left's shift from pursuing a socialist revolution to affirming a capitalist democracy in the absence of critical assessment has affected the post-dictatorship generation. The story suggests that this absence has contributed to a mystification of the left, which then enters individuals' life as an aesthetic or rhetoric element dissociated from their life choices. A declared adhesion to left ideology becomes compatible with consumerism, material ambitions, traditional values, and most importantly, lack of political activism. The memory of great deeds and suffering remain the measuring stick for young generations' political commitment; although some guerrilla fighters became politicians, the latter adjusted their discourse to the centre-left, and many former activists just quit. In a context in which political organization is in crisis, being a leftist becomes a matter of sharing a certain sensitivity—cultural preferences, jargon, and look. Mardero, and perhaps the post-dictatorship generation in general, experiences this inconsistency and draws attention to it as a first step toward rethinking politics and memory.

Born in 1975, Mardero is from the same generation as the protagonists of her story, a group of Uruguayan high school students in the early 1990s. They are known as "bolches," short for Bolsheviks, used derogatorily to refer to the left in the language of the military and the right. They do not seem to care about looks (no perfume, cosmetics, or trendy clothing) and choose a hippie urban style based on simple and worn-out clothes (solid colour T-shirts, fray hem jeans, flannel lumberjack shirts, and suede desert boots). Both men and women typically have long hair, parted in the middle. This look implies a critical attitude regarding the "game of the market," in which they choose not to participate. This echoes the memories of Mario García, an activist from the 1960s generation: "there were no differences between us, we were all the same, almost androgynous; the guys without chauvinism, the girls without makeup, we were all *militantes*" (García 1995, 36). In addition, *los bolches* smoke and drink *mate*, habits that connect them with the countryside and the working class, expressions of

nationalism distinct from an acceptance of U.S. cultural imperialism. *Mate* and smoking also signal adulthood and independence, which connects them to the earnest character of 1960s activists, as García puts it: “we grew up fast, old before turning twenty, we became tough because there was no time or space for the soft ones” (García 1995, 36). In keeping with the political orientation implied in their nickname, Mardero’s characters share the weekly expenses for the *yerba mate*. Instead of attending class, they stay at the bar across the street playing cards, an expression of irreverence and indifference toward institutions.

In a society divided between left and right, deprecating jargon to refer the opposite group has become part of everyday language. The equivalent of *bolche* for the right is *botón*, a code word for the armed forces during the dictatorship: Lorena, the narrator, refers to the owner of the bar as *botón* when he refuses to sell them beer. The excessive use of these terms empties them of their meaning and helps forget the specificity of the 1960s conflict. In addition, they deepen the mutual rejection of right and left.

Most importantly, the other students call them *bolches* because they were always ready to protest: “we defended all the causes, even the lost and in-existent ones. We were the first ones to defend the classmate suspended for breaking a window with a soccer ball or the girl who had written the biology summary on her skirt’s hem” (Mardero 2008, 100). In the eyes of the children raised in the post-dictatorship, the left is linked to a nonconformist attitude regardless of the goal. Lorena states: “we felt that everything sucked, and at the same time, not at all” (Mardero 2008, 100).

The *bolches* were also those who called for student assemblies: Lorena was the secretary and Nico, her boyfriend, chaired the meetings. She describes him as a “teen version” of Che Guevara: surrounded by “a mystic air when serving *mate* pensively and in silence,” respected by all, avenging, and “always alert before the authority” (Mardero 2008, 101). The *bolches* join a protest organized by all the Montevideo high schools, a common occurrence. Nico is leading the way and encourages others to sing the slogans. Everything is great, but one day a new student, whose father is British, arrives and “what happened had to happen” (Mardero 2008, 101). Hank is charming and, after a while, all the girls fall in love with him, his European jeans, and his aftershave, including the *bolche* ones who, unlike the shallow *chetas* (“preppy girls”), as Lorena calls them, were not supposed to care about these things.

Hank becomes best friends with Lorena, and Nico and starts playing *truco* with the group. As she falls for his good manners and sensitivity, Lorena listens carefully to Hank's favourite London underground bands, although music in English used to be against her principles. The short story ends with a *truco* competition between Nico and Hank: when somebody suggests that they were playing for a night with Lorena, Nico tries to hit his English friend and both end up on the street after the bar owner scolds them. The short story ends with Lorena's words: "After the spectacle, everybody dispersed and I stayed there, not knowing what to do, and feeling weird about not having anybody to walk me to the bus stop" (Mardero 2008, 202).

This short story indicates how in the absence of active transmission, and most importantly, a collective project that includes and supports the struggles of the youth, the revolutionary past lives on as a mere pose, a rebellious attitude bound to end as they grow up. The activism of the 1960s was transmitted as pure, free from the contradictions and inconsistencies that politically engaged middle class youth could experience. The emphasis on this purity in collective memory created an image of superiority to be followed unquestioningly. This imperative for purity became even more unattainable in a nonrevolutionary context and led to a superficial incorporation of the left into everyday life in the form of icons, as the graffiti quoted by García indicates: "I will return, and I won't be a poster. Che Guevara" (1995, 36).

Moreover, Lorena's situation—she enjoys being a *bolche*, but is attracted to Hank—echoes the contradictions of the left: its ambiguous relation with the armed forces, and also the policies of the Frente Amplio government, inconsistent with its traditional discourse. For instance, the most well-to-do have not been taxed in proportion to their wealth, and the government planned to sign a free trade treaty with the United States, which the other members of the Mercosur prevented. Former president Vázquez banned abortion and president Mujica increased and intensified repressive police operations in poor areas—he also proposed to transfer thousands of soldiers to the police in order to improve internal security. Finally, it has recently become known that, in 2006, Frente Amplio President Vázquez met with his U.S. counterpart George W. Bush to request military support in case of a war with Argentina about an environmentally problematic Finnish pulp manufacturer, located in Uruguay close to the Argentinean border.

Sosa's and Mardero's short stories call for a reassessment of the left, so parents and children's generations are able to leave behind

the myths and embark on the endeavour of reestablishing solidary relations and collectively confront the violence and injustice we produce and suffer as individual members of a class. Intergenerational reflection is a prerequisite for a collective project of well-being and the reconstruction of broken bonds between Uruguayans. Instead of offering a reflection about transmission, the final text analyzed in this chapter, the comic book *Acto de guerra/ Act of War* (2010), brings up highly contentious aspects of the past in an attempt to create a more complex memory.

The authors of *Acto de guerra* deal directly with the armed struggle and highlight its gray areas. As we will see below, the project propitiates an encounter between the generation of the parents and the children. The authors are linked to former activists: Rodolfo Santullo (the writer) is son of former activists exiled in Mexico, where he still lives, and Matías Bergara (the cartoonist) is a close friend who lives in Uruguay. The comic book's title captures the meaning of the conflict for many tupamaro leaders: a war against the government and the armed forces. Additionally, the cover design highlights the clashes developed in the comic strips, as the space is divided in two by the title: the top half shows military boots, and the lower half sneakers, both in movement. Furthermore, the narration alternates between the military's and the guerrilla fighters' perspective.

*Acto de guerra* starts with a remark that indicates how difficult it is for the young generations to address the armed struggle, often used by politicians to discredit the left or mobilize old fears in the population. In the preface, the authors note: "This book gathers several anecdotes we heard throughout the years and fictionalized. It was not our intention to offend any living or dead person nor to offer a history treatise. These tales about real men and women were created with the greatest respect, affection and admiration" (Santullo and Bergara 2010, 4). Anticipating that they will be judged opponents of the left because they bring up aspects typically excluded from the narratives about activism, the authors make clear that their work should not be understood as a criticism. This indicates that the environment is not favourable to an exploration and critical assessment of the armed struggle.

The book is divided in four comic strips, each preceded by the brief testimony of a former activist. Whereas the latter focus on the painful experience of detention, imprisonment, torture, and exile—the most fully explored aspects of activism—the former focus on guerrilla operations that involved shootings, manhunts, killing, and dying. The comic strips introduce characters that move between the two worlds

of the guerrilla and the army, stress that all actors lived in the same society and that dividing lines were not always clear.

In the first story, “El delator/The Informer,” Salazar alerts a sergeant about his guerrilla cell’s plans to kidnap a colonel and exchange him for captive *compañeros*. Salazar is afraid that events will get out of hand and trusts that the sergeant, a childhood friend, will stop the operation without hurting anybody. Salazar betrays his *compañeros* and the sergeant betrays him: they open fire on the Tupamaros, about to complete the kidnap operation. Two of Salazar’s four *compañeros* die, but the group kills the colonel and the sergeant. Deprived of his officer friend’s protection, and afraid that the survivors will discover his betrayal, Salazar talks to Lopetegui, another guerrilla fighter suspected of collaborating with the armed forces, and obtains a meeting with an officer.

Salazar then meets Lieutenant Reinoso. A light illuminates only the two of them, leaving the rest of the interrogation room in the dark. At the end of the meeting, Reinoso asks him why he betrayed his *compañeros* and Salazar answers: “I have a diabetic daughter and my wife cannot deal with it alone, the insulin, you know. I cannot afford making a mistake; regardless of what I think or what is wrong and right. I have a daughter, a family that needs me. You are likely to win, at least for some more years. If I make a mistake, what will my family do without me?” (Santullo and Bergara 2010, 21). The lights in the room go on, and Salazar discovers that “el Bebe” and “el Negro,” the two surviving members of the cell, had been sitting next to Reinoso all along: “Watch out who you trust next time,” he states, and the last panel suggests that he will be executed (Santullo and Bergara 2010, 21). Lieutenant Reinoso collaborates with the guerrilla, which completes the circle of betrayals in the story. The connections between the guerrilla and the armed forces, through informers and collaborators, create a complex image of the political landscape in the years prior to the coup—the story takes place in September 1968—that resists black-and-white approaches. In addition, after learning about his reasons, it is not easy to condemn the informer, but neither is it easy to blame his *compañeros* for punishing the betrayal.

The comic strip suggests that the events were confusing: at some point the guerrilla and the armed forces seemed to have equal chances of seizing power. The second story, “El sitio/The Siege,” suggests that four years later, when the guerrilla was about to be defeated, taking power still seemed possible, although not in the immediate future. After a long shootout, Nisdec (anagram of the tupamaro leader Sendic’s name) is taken prisoner and Lieutenant Arrospide tells him

that they did not kill him to be able to torture him. The prisoner answers: “this may last ten, fifteen years, or even longer. But it won’t last forever. Sooner or later, things will fall into place, we will be in power, and will remember everything, Lieutenant Arrospeide, everything” (Santullo and Bergara 2010, 38). The lieutenant then instructs his subalterns not to touch Nisdec.

Lieutenant Reinoso, from the first story, reappears in the third one: “Secuestro en el Palacio Díaz/Kidnapping at the Palacio Díaz,” which continues to explore the complex relations between political actors in the 1970s. There is disagreement within the armed forces about how to deal with Bogliaccino, who is very well connected to the Tupamaros and the Communist Party leadership: a group wants to capture him, and Lieutenant Reinoso wants to wait. When the former send out a team, the latter hires two skilled agents, not part of the state’s repressive institutions, who alert Bogliaccino that the army is in the building and take him out rolled up in a carpet pretending they are movers. In this story, one of the agents confesses to the other that, like the man they are supposed to abduct (and probably disappear), he enjoys listening to banned popular music. Also challenging stereotypes, the soldiers who guard the entrance complain about their commanding officer’s temper and are indifferent to the operation. One of them comments that he just wants everything to be over fast to be able to go home since his wife is waiting for him with freshly baked pastries. In the second story, the authors also depict rank-and-file soldiers as uninterested in the ideological struggles: they use the terms *tupamaro* and *communist* as synonyms, not knowing the difference between the two, and ignore Nisdec’s political affiliation.

Different from the first three comic strips, the last one is directly connected with the brief testimony that precedes it, and with Santullo’s biography. It focuses on the experience of exile, usually marginalized in the collective narratives about the past and considered less important than the experience of those who stayed and confronted the repression (De los Santos 2001; Dutrénit 2006). “La embajada/The Embassy” addresses an aspect of exile unknown to most Uruguayans without direct links to exiles: the active role of Mexican Ambassador Vicente Arroyo Muñiz in protecting persecuted Uruguayans, at a time when other embassies had stopped accepting refugees. The book is dedicated to him and to all Mexicans for their solidarity during the darkest period of Uruguay’s recent history.

After murdering a colonel in the first comic strip, “el Negro” is hiding and running away from the armed forces. Chased by a car and a group of soldiers, he jumps over the embassy’s fence asking for asylum,

and Muñíz comes out, wielding a gun, to protect him from the soldiers who had already captured him. Inside, among over a hundred other Uruguayans, he meets a female friend (who participated in the shootout depicted in the second story). She informs him that Mexico has already welcomed more than 300 Uruguayans and that they are about to leave. Muñíz travels himself in one of the cars that bring the refugees to the airport. During the trip, “el Negro” notices with surprise many men and women standing on the sideway, along the route. “It is a way to make sure that the cars will arrive safely at their destination,” explains Muñíz. “El Negro” identifies his mother, to whom he could not say goodbye in the crowd, but she does not see him, which underlines the exiles’ pain about not knowing when they will see their loved ones again. Santullo’s family probably did a similar trip to the airport to travel to Mexico, where he was born.

In an interview, he emphasises the importance of addressing this period of Uruguayan history in a comic book, since the typically youthful readers of this genre are often not well informed (rtve.es 2010). Through *Acto de guerra*, the authors transmit the past to their own generation, and those who are younger than them, and invite their parents’ generation to be part of this conversation. In the mostly indirect dialogues between the testimonies and the comic strips, the authors introduce the political violence, the gray zones, and the “human” side of activists (fear, betrayals, mistakes), subjects typically avoided.

In this sense, *Acto de guerra* creates an encounter between generations that enables the youth to complement the collective memory by including neglected aspects important for their understanding of both past and present. At the end of the book, the authors explain: “Neither of us arrived on time to see with our own eyes the Uruguay of the dictatorship; we were not witnesses or participants like our parents, their families and friends, and all those who were there. Therefore, in these pages, we cannot and do not want to do anything other than present an evocation of what we feel and believe the dictatorship was, in all its tragic and vertiginous character” (Santullo and Bergara 2010, 71).

\* \* \*

Many members of the Uruguayan post-dictatorship generation grew up in their parents’ silence at home, a consequence of the need to put behind long periods of reclusion or exile. Many others dealt with their “bystander” parents’ silence, adopted in the face of close military control and maintained after the end of the regime. These private

silences were intensified at the public level by a conversation of the deaf between—and restricted to—the actors of the conflict. In the absence of critical assessments, the right insisted in peaceful coexistence without redressing the victims, while the left emphasised three seemingly incompatible memories: the suffering of the repression, the guerrilla's epic feats, and the defence of democracy. This configuration led to deeply problematic forms of transmission.

The first group of works (by Carro, Viñoles, and Gutiérrez) is symptomatic of this problematic transmission: it connects to the past through uncritical admiration, the nostalgia of a promise, and the desire to be seen as a legitimate actor by the older generation, the protagonists of the events. The second group (Sosa, Mardero, Santullo, and Bergara), instead, creatively deals with the absence of active transmission: the short stories humorously address its effects on the post-dictatorship generation, heirs of revolutionary times and unattainable expectations. The comic *Acto de guerra*, for instance, goes beyond preestablished models and explores gray areas and ignored aspects of the repression. Perhaps most importantly, its combination of testimonials and comic strips could be understood as the beginning of a long overdue intergenerational encounter.



## CONCLUSION



### THE NEVER-ENDING PATH TO THE NEVER AGAIN

During the aftermath of state terrorism, the cultural production of the post-dictatorship generation was deeply connected with transitional justice. As we have observed, prosecution of the military perpetrators is fundamental to redress the victims, re-establish confidence in societal institutions, and connect society with a collective past typically denied or minimized by the government. However, as Schulcer observes, state terror cannot be fully grasped in legal terms, and must be understood in relation to the character of individuals and societal institutions (2000, 35). A trial typically falls short of answering the question of what made the crime possible; however, the symbolic force of the law—experienced as the ultimate expression of collective reprobation—can free actors from the burden of literal memory by establishing the criminal character of the state violence and the rights of victims. Therefore, criminal prosecution should not be seen as a closure but as a beginning.

Once the victims' concerns have been addressed, exemplary forms of memory become more likely, typically in relation to the emergence of new generations in the public sphere. These forms of memory present the crimes as a problem that concerns us as humans and social beings, regardless of our distance from the events. In this book, I have reconstructed the ways in which transitional justice, generational change, and cultural production mutually enable and constrain each other.

The possibilities for prosecuting perpetrators in the immediate post-dictatorship period depended to a great extent on the relative

influence of the victims but were also linked to the predominant forms of repression. The fact that the armed forces remained very influential in Chile and Uruguay made denunciation and prosecution even more difficult than in Argentina, where the armed forces were temporarily discredited after the catastrophic Falklands War. This defeat brought about the end of the regime and enabled the historic trial to the military juntas in 1985. Although it failed to fulfil many of the victims' demands, this trial publicly validated their perspective, thereby contributing to the flourishing of the humanitarian narrative in literature, films, and other "vehicles for memory" in the following years.

In addition, in Argentina—the country with the highest number of *desaparecidos*—state terrorism was more visible than in Chile and Uruguay. Violently separated from their loved ones and left to imagine the worst fate, the family and friends of *desaparecidos* desperately took to the streets as their only recourse to save, at least, their memory. Twenty years after the end of the military regime, even representatives of the armed forces understood the implications of their actions, albeit formulated in the inhuman logic of the repression:

There is no doubt that the disappearances were a mistake. If you compare them with those who disappeared in Algeria, it's very different: they were the disappeared of another country, so the French went home and got on with something else! Here on the other hand everyone who disappeared had a father, a brother, an uncle, a grandfather who still feels bitter towards us, as is natural.

(General Harguindeguy, quoted in Catoggio, 2005, 11)

In other words, in Argentina, the fact that perpetrators and *desaparecidos* came from the same society made justice for the forced disappearances more feasible than for colonial crimes, and the violent fact of the *desaparecidos*' radical absence impelled their relatives to action. In Chile and Uruguay, countries in which torture, sexual abuse, and prolonged detention were the most common forms of repression, the prisoners returned to their families, emotionally broken and eager to put the humiliation behind. Only time would help them realize the need to confront the traumatic experience and denounce it publicly.

In addition, in Chile and Uruguay, the end of the regime was negotiated between the junta and the future political class. The cooperation between the two resulted in a prolonged period of impunity and hindered collective acknowledgment of and cultural production about the repressive past. In these two countries, criminal prosecution was not the direct result of public pressure or political initiatives, but initiated

by institutions that mobilized international law: firstly, the Spanish Judge Garzón requested Pinochet's extradition in 1998. Secondly, Argentinean and Chilean judges requested the extradition requested of Uruguayan *represores* in 2006 and, in 2011, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of Macarena Gelman. These interventions encouraged local politicians and judges to take action and inspired citizens to deal with the past more actively through memory centres, museums, films, and literature.

In sum, legal action, whether initiated by international or national actors, was often decisive in enabling creative ways of dealing with the past that led to exemplary forms of memory. When Chile and Uruguay received the international wake-up calls, state terror assumed centre stage in the public debate, which in turn encouraged actors to start exploring the limits of collective memory. In this respect, Chile is considerably more advanced than Uruguay: the boom of memory and cultural production in the decade after Pinochet's arrest is comparable to the Argentinean one that began in the late 1990s.

The post-dictatorship generation plays a key role in these "booms." Following their own needs and concerns, its members ask new questions and challenge the established collective narratives. Struggling with and against the older generations, they engage in a process I have called active transmission, in which they critically inherit their legacy and confront the challenge of heirs identified by Derrida (see introduction): on the one hand, to know and reaffirm what came before us, and choose to keep it alive; on the other hand, to behave freely in relation to the past, which implies interpreting, assessing, and choosing between what to continue and what to abandon.

Building on the contributions of previous generations, members of the post-dictatorship generation address difficult subjects such as the "ownership" of memory, the armed struggle, class and gender relations, internal divisions and betrayals within the universe of activism, and the role of bystanders. They deliberately avoid closing the interpretation of the past and confront the audience with its complexity, thereby stimulating reflection. Progressively, marginalized aspects of the past are revalued and assessed critically, often through approaches that have been marginalized by state institutions, academic forms of historical knowledge, and the logics, forms of reasoning, and emphases deemed proper of (male, middle-class) adulthood. Many of the films and texts explore the past through neglected avenues such as the senses, emotions (Carri), humour (Sosa and Mardero), the routines of everyday life (Alcoba, Carri), and small children's perspectives (Bombara, Alcoba). In addition, filmmakers such as Bruschtein

value silences, gestures, and contradictions and are more interested in transformative dialogues than in factual information pure and simple. In their attempt to express the past through the margins, the authors creatively challenge traditional formats and genres, often combining documentary, animation, feature film, and photographic projects. For instance, *El astuto mono*'s experimental format (documentary and theatrical performance) is intimately tied to the project of exploring how children relate to the past. Through their work, these authors attempt to recover the texture and complexity of the past, not to reject more classical approaches. However, many of the pathbreaking filmmakers encounter resistance from institutions dominated by older generations, expressed for instance through denial of funding, as in the case of *Los rubios* and *El astuto mono*, or de facto boycott, as in the case of *Apgar 11*.

The post-dictatorship generation's explorations of the margins are part of a distinct tendency to unsettle the predominance of that which is labelled public, collective, and rational over the purportedly private, individual, and emotional. Among other things, these dichotomies make it difficult to expand the circle of individuals and groups concerned with the past. Key groups such as "bystanders" are either conspicuous by their absence or appear only as "private" individuals. In an impulse to subvert these dichotomies, authors and filmmakers make aspects of the past typically considered private accessible to public debate and situate public life in its private contexts. The question of women's predominance in active transmission and exemplary forms of memory is one of the many aspects explored in this book to be further developed in future projects. However, it could be explained by that fact that women in the 1970s had to deal with an often-insurmountable tension between a new role as activists and a traditional domestic role, and tensions of this kind inform their perspective today.

In sum, the tensions and conflicts introduced by the post-dictatorship generation's texts and films have produced a renewed interest in the past, evidenced by an important production of further material and a growing audience. The image of the past sparks when an established narrative is confronted with its contradictions and omissions, adding further voices and helping to reconnect with the past more deeply. Tensions unsettle the numbness produced by the repetition of the atrocity in words and images, unavoidable in the process of establishing a memory. By exposing the complex relations that made the tragedy possible, the post-dictatorship helps the past emerge under a new light, in which the traces of political confrontation

and repression became visible, and social change remains a promise. Thereby, the past becomes an experience from which to draw lessons for the sake of the present. Despite all these achievements, I want to highlight in closing that active transmission and exemplary memory are open-ended processes.

### NOT EVEN PAST: UNEXPLORED ASPECTS AND A CRITICAL RELATION TO THE PRESENT

Despite the post-dictatorship generation's important contributions, some of the most unsettling aspects of the past have been addressed in very limited ways so far. This includes grayzones and continuities between the dictatorship and the present, often invisible in plain sight.

Firstly, we know very little about the memory and perspective of those soldiers and officers who, in spite of being part of the military, did not identify with the regime and the repression and were caught in the middle of the conflict: for the armed forces, they could become "subversives," while the activists saw them as enemies (the film *El círculo/The Circle* by Aldo Garay [2008] tangentially deals with this aspect in relation to Uruguay). Similarly, one could ask about the experience and recollections of those conscripts, barely teenagers, often brought to the capital city from provincial cities and towns to guard prisoners. This subject is explored in the recent Chilean film *El soldado que no fue/The Soldier That Was Not* (Gutiérrez 2010) and addressed in *Estadio Nacional/National Stadium* (Luz Parot 2001), in which one of the former prisoners relates, among other painful memories, how a teenage guard and a prisoner fall in love. These soldiers' perspective is crucial because they embody a tension at once produced by the dictatorship that at the same time enabled it: although most were more deeply involved in the repression than civilians, we can imagine that many share with bystanders the fear and sense of guilt about not having interfered with the atrocities.

Secondly, there has been little room for the voices of those children of perpetrators who do not support their parents' deeds and are themselves victims of their violence at home. For instance, the Argentine group "El Puente"/"The Bridge" was formed by families of victims and families of *represores* who collaborated to find out more about how the *desaparecidos* died and where their remains are. In this group, the definition of victim is extended to the children of *represores* who suffered from their parents' violence. This shows that the effects of state violence reached into unsuspected areas. The perspective of these children could also help us better understand the logic

of cruelty and challenges the notion that perpetrators' families always reproduce their views on state violence and are therefore always guilty themselves.

However, there is also a group of children of former agents of state terror who embrace their parents' actions, and about whom we know very little. How do they situate themselves in the tension between their parents' ideology and the post-dictatorial present? How do they explain the horrors of the repression, and how does this inform their personal and political choices? These members of the post-dictatorship generation are likely to transmit a salvationist narrative of the dictatorial past and hinder progressive social change. Their relative invisibility especially in Argentina and Uruguay, in a context in which their parents' deeds lack moral standing, should not be confused with a lack of impact.

Finally, a striking absence needs to be highlighted: working-class and indigenous victims in Chile and Argentina have been rarely addressed in cultural production, an indication that the inequalities of the past are not even past. In addition to these entrenched structures of domination, it is important to address the continuities that link the present to the dictatorial past. Unaccountability and the delegation of social problems to the institutions of violence continue to pervade the post-dictatorial society.

To begin with, the very existence of an institution that professionalizes violence and prizes unquestioned obedience is deeply problematic because it has the potential to once again become detached from other social institutions that can counterbalance it (Bauman 1989, xiii). In this context, Captain Tróccoli's statement that he acted "without hate, as a professional of violence . . . who is also a product of his time, his society, and past generations" (quoted in Allier 2010, 159; see Chapter 7), is particularly relevant. In view of public statements like Tróccoli's, one should ask what narratives are currently transmitted to the new generations of soldiers: What do they learn about the military's role in the past? What are the implicit or explicit lessons taught by the impunity of older generations? Recently, a group of Uruguayan UN peacekeepers in Haiti abused a defenceless young citizen of this country. This helped expose other abusive behaviour of Uruguayan troops in Haiti. However, the connection between these abuses and impunity in Uruguay has not been discussed publicly. There should be a collective debate about the role, if any, of the institutions of violence, and about the ways in which they can be held accountable and subordinate to democratic control. It needs to be stressed that such a debate would take place in a society in which

the military heroes of the past have been celebrated uncritically for centuries.

Secondly, the logic of state violence continues to shape the functioning of social relations “outside of” the institution itself. In Uruguay, for instance, there continues to be a tendency to “delegate” social problems to the professionals of violence. During Mujica’s presidency, the police has undergone a process of militarization, and police repression in poor areas has increased, indicating that state violence is often understood as the only possible collective response to criminality. Uruguay still has an unusually high percentage of convicts, and recently many citizens publicly favoured lowering the age of legal responsibility for minors.

Understanding these unsettling continuities with the horrors of the dictatorship, along with the contributions of the post-dictatorship generation discussed in this book, helps confront the spectres of the past, better understand one’s role as an actor of the present, and start imagining a possible future.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. See Tcach (2007), Menjívar and Rodriguez (2005), and Esparza, Huttenbach, and Feierstein (2010).
2. We know little about the children of perpetrators, a topic that needs to be included in collective memory (see conclusion).
3. Susana Kaiser (2005) addresses similar questions based on interviews from a sociological perspective.
4. If an English version of a Spanish text is available, I quote from the translation; otherwise, I provide my own. If available, quotes from films are drawn from the subtitles; I occasionally alter them.

## CHAPTER 1

1. A traditional sector of the trade union movement, known as the syndical bureaucracy, and other groups such as Juventud Sindical Peronista, Comité de Organización, and Concentración Nacional Universitaria.
2. The following organizations started denouncing the armed forces' escalation of violence and human rights violations during Isabel Perón's government and the ensuing military junta: Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre (1937), Servicio de Paz y de Justicia (1950), Movimiento Ecuménico por los Derechos Humanos, and Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (1975). After the coup, other organizations joined this struggle, motivated by a specific goal: finding *desaparecidos* relatives in the context of clandestine repression and obtaining justice for the military crimes. They included Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas (1976), Madres de Plaza de Mayo (1977), Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (1983), Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora, H.I.J.O.S (1995), and HERMANOS (1999), dedicated to reuniting "appropriated" siblings. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo's despair and perseverance gave immediate visibility to the group, which became a referring point in the fight struggle for human rights. Finally, other groups aligned to this cause focused on the survivors' experience and struggle: the Asociación Nacional de Ex-Detenidos Desaparecidos (1984) and the Asociación Nacional de Ex-Presos Políticos (2000).



3. Although the report avoided creating a symmetry between the two groups—"the armed forces responded to the terrorists' crimes with a terrorism far worse than the one they were combating"—it did not quite challenge the idea that the military response was justified.
4. For a thorough analysis of how the *desaparecidos* were evoked in arts and politics since the end of the dictatorship, see *Memory of the Argentina Disappearances: The Political History of Nunca Más* (Crenzel 2011).
5. For a reflection on this new phase through intellectual and artistic production, see Safta (2004) and Zubieta (2008).
6. Menem's government created a legal status for those "disappeared against their will until 1983" that enable a comprehensive policy of economic reparations (Lessa 2010, 179). The law provided families with 220,000 Argentine pesos for each murdered or disappeared relative. This law was controversial, among other things, because it was accompanied by pardons and the negation of truth and justice.

## CHAPTER 2

1. Gatti draws on Marianne Hirsch's studies of postmemory in the context of the Shoah, in which she investigates "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before—experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 2008, 106–107).
2. Shortly before the emergence of H.I.J.O.S., Hebe de Bonafini, president of Madres de Plaza de Mayo, embraced the revolutionary side of the *desaparecidos* in the slogan "30,000 *desaparecidos*, 30,000 revolutionaries" (Bonaldi 2006).
3. For analyses of the internal functioning of H.I.J.O.S. and its interaction with society, see Gelman and La Madrid (1997), Catela (2001), Bonaldi (2006), Kaiser (2008), Amado (2009), and Whitener and Situaciones (2009).
4. Later in the decade, two additional documentaries of this kind were produced: *Niños desaparecidos. Quién soy yo?* (Bravo 2006) and the TV series *Televisión x la identidad* (Televisión Federal and Página12 2008), both promoted by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.
5. Most of the exhibition can be seen at [www.me.gov.ar/a30delgolpe/fotogaleria/lucila\\_quieto/](http://www.me.gov.ar/a30delgolpe/fotogaleria/lucila_quieto/), last access July 28, 2011. For the relation between photography, memory, and identity, see *Fotografía e identidad: Captura por la cámara, devolución por la memoria* (Catela, Giordano, and Jelin 2010).

6. The department of “Spontaneous Arrivals” [presentaciones espontáneas] at the National Commission for the Right to Identity (CONADI), was created to answer the concerns of young men and women who have doubts about their identity but have not been contacted by Abuelas. Among the persons that contacted this department there were men and women who are not children of disappeared parents and had not been adopted but felt that they could be one of the appropriated grandchildren. Although their reasons may vary, these cases indicate that the *desaparecidos* have impacted others outside of the groups of family and friends, and that they represent a possible answer to young adults who do not identify themselves with their social environment. For more information, see CONADI (2007).
7. Through an analysis of three TV spots encouraging children with doubts about their identity to contact the Abuelas, Gandsman (2009) observes the connection between individual concerns regarding personal identity and the collective questioning of national identity and belonging.

### CHAPTER 3

1. The film crew of *El Tiempo y la Sangre* (Almirón 2004, see Chapter 4) also encountered this reluctance to talk about 1970s activists among the inhabitants of Morón.
2. The committee’s position was echoed by the harsh criticism of Martín Kohan (2004), who considers the film an attack on the 1970s generation and its political project. In a footnote, he indicates that his is the perspective of *Punto de Vista*, a now defunct journal that sought to represent progressive Argentinean intellectuals (Naza 2005). His article triggered a passionate debate; see Bernini (2004), Amado (2004), Naza (2005), Lerman (2005), Sarlo (2005), Trimboli (2006), and Aguilar (2006). For Carri’s response to this debate, see Carri (2007). For additional commentaries, see Nouzeilles (2005), Page (2005, 2009), Garibotto and Gómez (2006), Alonso (2007), Quílez Esteve (2007), Ros (2008), and Carri and Noriega (2009).
3. *Papá Iván* was released in an environment increasingly prone to a self-critical attitude of the left. Mostly developed in books and journals, this assessment included the responsibility of left parties, unions, and armed movements in the massacre of activists. The most striking example is perhaps the debate in the journal *A la intemperie* (2004) between Oscar del Barco and other left intellectuals, who examined the implications of having supported movements that conceived murder as a regular practice. The films analyzed in this and the next chapter are part of this conversation.

4. María Inés' brothers, Iván and Martín, also confronted and elaborated the loss of their father through artistic projects. The first one took part in *The Time and The Blood* (Almirón and Severini 2007), analyzed in Chapter 4, and the second one, Martín, whose mother is also *desaparecidos*, reconstructed his history through a photographic project that includes images of his mother and poems that his father wrote for her and that were preserved by a mutual friend, Tununa Mercado (Bianco 2005).
5. Ana María Caruso's asthma attacks expressed the anguish she experienced in this respect (Carri 2008, 72).
6. For an in-depth analysis of this subject, see *Traiciones: la figura del traidor en los relatos acerca de los sobrevivientes de la represión* (Longoni 2007).
7. Originally published in French with the title *Manèges: petite histoire argentine*, in 2007.
8. On the day after the attack on the "rabbit house," Clara Anahí's grandmother, María Isabel Chorobik de Mariani ("Chicha") started an untiring search that led her to co-found the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in 1977. During the first days of the search, a police inspector, a Monsignor, and a chaplain from La Plata told her that the baby had been placed very high up, with very powerful people, and it was going to be impossible to recover her. Witnesses have now linked the police officer who participated in the operation and left the "rabbit house" with Clara Anahí with the one who brought a baby girl from La Plata to the house of Herrera de Noble (Plataforma 2006). For more than a decade, the latter has been hindering the Grandmothers' demands for DNA tests of her adoptive daughter. On June 17, 2011, after years of refusing, the latter has accepted her blood sample to be compared with the entire gene bank of the *desaparecidos* (Página12, 2011).
9. On memory sites, see Nora (1989).
10. This reminds me of Pancho Riva's difficulties to find the words for answering María Inés Roqué's question about how it was to participate in an operation with her father: "What do you mean how it was? Some people do things plainly; everything is so demystified" (Roqué 2004).
11. For a testimonial perspective on this kind of activism, see Robles (2004). Since the "perejiles" were not involved in the armed struggle, they have been linked to the image of the "innocent victim," depoliticizing their activism and implying that there were other non-innocent victims. These other victims remain a taboo; most of the feature films about 1970s activism have "perejiles" and not guerrilla fighter as protagonists: *La noche de los lápices* (Olivera 1986), *Garage Olimpo* (Bechis 1999), *Nueces para el amor* (Lecchi 2000), *Crónica de una fuga* (Caetano 2006), and *Te extraño* (Hofman 2010). An exception

to this is *Complicí del silencio* (Incerti 2009), a film made outside Argentina.

12. For a deeper understanding of this idea, it could be compared with the situation presented in the play *An Inspector Calls* (Priestley 1946).

## CHAPTER 4

1. For a reflection on the process undergone by the Argentine left at the public and private level, from the 1970s to the present, see Ollier (2009)
2. Almirón also worked on *H.I.J.O.S.: El alma en dos* and *Los rubios*.
3. Since so many territorial workers were active in Morón, it was also one of the epicentres of repression. In Severini's words, "Morón was a minefield" (Almirón 2004). There were five clandestine detention centres in Castelar, where Marta Sierra (*M*) worked and this group was assisting in housing and development. Marta Sierra is not mentioned in *El tiempo y la sangre*, but Chufo and his wife are remembered as part of the group, and this seems to be Tino's first appearance in a film. Unlike in Prividera's *M*, there are no doubts about the dead activists' affiliation—they all belonged to *Juventud Peronista* (JP)—which indicates that work in large unions, such as INTA's, required discretion.
4. Virginia Croatto is producing a film about the children of activists exiled in different countries who returned to participate in the "counteroffensive." Aware of the risk of appropriation, torture, and murder, they left the children in a kindergarten in Cuba under the care of some parents. Croatto was one of these children.
5. María Giuffra is the director of *La Matanza* (2006), an animated film about her father's murder based entirely on fragments from official military documents. Soldiers shot him in Morón in broad daylight, declared him a "NN (no name) homicide," and posthumously subjected him to a military trial. Giuffra also created a series of paintings entitled "The Children of the Process" (2005) in which she explores the impact of state terrorism on children. It is available at <http://www.mariagiuffra.com.ar/pinturaninos-proceso.html>, last accessed August 5, 2011. *El tiempo y la sangre* includes some of Giuffra's paintings and animations. Giuffra, Lucila Quieto (Chapter 2), and other artist sons and daughters of *desaparecidos* formed a collective for artistic projects, historical research, and reparation: <http://colectivodehijos.blogspot.com/2011/03/muestra-colectiva-mitusu-version.html>, last accessed August 17, 2011.
6. According to Susana Checa, there was great pressure on activists to refrain from having children: "The more or less veiled instructions to not have children were very problematic. Many activists, like me,

wanted to have children but we were not allowed to” (Carri 2007, 72). For the leadership, children interfered with the revolutionary practice. Interestingly, those children, as documented in this book, were one of the most active groups in unearthing their parents’ revolutionary practice.

7. Severini also mentions this one-hour wait in *El tiempo y la sangre*, the time before families or *compañeros* living in the same house relocated; it meant that the awaited activist had been abducted. The two first questions during the torture session were about their address and the leader of their group (*célula*). The Montoneros leadership asked for twenty-four hours of resistance to torture if they were captured, but the military learned about this and intensified the torture in the first hours.
8. Judge Guillermo Federico Madueño closed several cases like Bombara’s without investigating obvious contradictions and inconsistencies. He also rejected habeas corpus petitions filed by their families on behalf of *desaparecidos* detainees. In 2009, he was prosecuted for collaborating with the illegal repression during the dictatorship and covering up crimes against humanity. He died unpunished the next year (Llaneza 2010).
9. Another high school assignment by a daughter of *desaparecidos* parents, in the film *Por esos ojos/For Those Eyes* (Martínez and Arijon 1997), shows the specific predicament of appropriated children. The title of the assignment is “A young person looks for a job” and Mariana wrote: “The man in the gray uniform asked me: name and last name? What was I supposed to answer? That during my whole life, my people called me Daniela Furci but now there are other people who say my name is Mariana Zaffaroni Islas? That the name I had all my life, the one my parents—now in jail for having done that—gave me it is not legally mine? I preferred to feel illegal and not a traitor to them. So, I answered Daniela Romina Furci. Nationality? I am Argentinean. But I actually have two different origins: one from Uruguayan parents, subversives, and idealist combatants in the dirty war our country went through, and the other one from Argentinean parents. My Dad fought on the other side. One day I arrived to him and he chose between shooting me in the head or raising me as the daughter he had not been able to have. His humanitarianism and his desire of being the best father on earth made him decide for the latter. Now he is paying for it as if he had killed me. Occupation? I chose my father’s profession: political scientist. Once graduated, I was going to work at the Secretariat of State Intelligence, like him, but that is not sure, I do not want to make the same mistakes. After all these reflections, I realize that the man in uniform would never understand the drama of my life. He surely had his own problems” (Martínez and Arijon 1997).

10. See [http://hijosmexico.org/index-tomate\\_la\\_foto\\_los\\_desaparecidos\\_nos\\_faltan\\_a\\_todos](http://hijosmexico.org/index-tomate_la_foto_los_desaparecidos_nos_faltan_a_todos).
11. A children's game based on repeating the same poem/story over and over: "Este era un gato con los pies de trapo y los ojos al revés, ¿quieres que te los cuente otra vez?"
12. For Restrepo, this book is also a way of mending the mistake she made as an author of *Historia de un entusiasmo* (1986)/*Story of a Fascination* (2005), about the peace negotiations between the guerrilla group M-19 and state institutions in Colombia, a process in which she participated. The rage and impotence provoked by witnessing how authorities killed those who surrendered led her to write only about the heroism of M-19 and not about their mistakes. In *Demasiados héroes*, instead, she demystifies her own past political practice and establishes a clear distinction between PST's peaceful work and the groups who engaged in armed struggle. Nick Caistor (2009) criticizes this distinction between "good" and "bad" activists as romanticizing the resistance to the dictatorship in Argentina.

## CHAPTER 5

1. One of these sons and daughters is Lola Arias, author and director of the performance *Mi vida después/My Life After* (2009). For a review of the performance, see Sosa (2009). Also, it is worth mentioning the connection between *Diario argentino* and Mariana Caviglia's journalistic research published as *Dictadura, vida cotidiana y clases medias: una sociedad fracturada* (2006a) and *Vivir a oscuras: escenas cotidianas durante la dictadura* (2006b). Caviglia, also a member of the post-dictatorship generation, shares with the other authors and directors analyzed in this book a concern for understanding how the horror was possible. She looks for answers in her hometown, La Plata, among neighbours and family who belong to the group of middle-class "bystanders" focusing on their everyday life and routines during the dictatorship. Caviglia collected numerous testimonies about how individuals felt and what they did in relation to the repression they witnessed regularly (beatings in the streets, violent abductions from houses or public spaces, gunfights between the armed forces and *militantes*). The author proposes that many of the factors that made the repression possible were already present in society before the 1976 coup: in the previous dictatorships, tolerance to violence and authoritarian rule had already been partly naturalized. "Bystanders" also participated actively in the dictatorial logic, "the dictatorship was not only enforced by the military but also by citizen upon citizen and [it] was not only political oppression but also moral" (Restrepo 2010, 79). In addition, she proposes that the escalation of violence was enabled by bystanders' adjustment to witnessing violence in their everyday

life. Finally, the dictatorship extends its reach into the everyday life of bystanders in the present: its legacy includes, among others, devaluation of life and death (as we will see in the discussion of *Cordero de Dios*), distrust of collective action, passive acceptance of conditions as a given, and intolerance. Similar to Pérez García, Caviglia's studies thus seek to promote an understanding of the past that challenges the notion of fixed conditions linked to a supposed incapacity of "ordinary people" to be agents of history.

2. For other texts that connect 1970s activism and the 2001 crisis through the eyes of the post-dictatorship generation, see the short story "El grito/The Scream" (Abbate 2004) and the poem *El ignorante/The Ignorant* (Terranova 2004). For analyses, see Ros (2008; 2009). Like Pérez García, the authors of these texts are not sons and daughters of direct victims of the repression.
3. As Sonia Winer notes, those who accuse the post-dictatorship generation of lack of political passion, commitment, and knowledge do not take into account what it meant to grow up during the dictatorship: the correlation between knowledge/questioning and the threat of repression, the fact that as potential "subversives" or "informers" everyone represented a deadly threat to the others, and the devaluation and censorship of academic and artistic production (2003, 174–176).
4. She interviewed the former dictator Lanusse about her father's disappearance when she was sixteen, and later talked to the former Montoneros leader Mario Firmenich: "They taught me about the relativity and partiality of everything and about everybody's complicity" (Sanzol 2008).
5. I did not have access to the now available English translation *My Name Is Victoria* (2011). Translations are mine.
6. *Revolución Libertadora (1955–1958) and Revolución Argentina (1966–1973)*.
7. They are included in the list of dead and disappeared activists working in Morón, included at the end of *El tiempo y la sangre*.
8. For more information about how the task force operated and was organized, see <http://www.cels.org.ar/esma/historia.html>.
9. Unemployment, the direct consequence of the economic policies implemented by the dictatorship, in a family that additionally suffered the disappearance of a member, stresses the connection between politics and economy.
10. For a study on the current revival of military memory, see Salvi (2011). For a reflection on the problems and implications of equating the actions of the armed forces and the guerrilla, see Ferrari (2009).
11. Other examples are Macarena Gelman, the Reggiardo-Tolosa twins, Mariana Zaffaroni Islas, and Simón Riquelme.
12. For a study about the uses, meanings, and reactions to the use of torture in present politics, see Calveiro (2008).

13. Other appropriated children in politics are Macarena Gelman and Juan Cabandié. Juliana García is daughter of *desaparecidos* parents and candidate for the Party Frente de Izquierda.

## CHAPTER 6

1. On September 11, 1973, in the midst of confrontations between supporters and opponents of the government, General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende and the socialist-communist Unidad Popular government (1970–1973). The armed forces invoked an unproven plan of Allende’s government to murder all their political opponents (“Plan Z”). The junta persecuted political actors committed to democratic social change: Allende’s cabinet (ministers and undersecretaries), members or sympathizers of the Communist and Socialist parties, supporters of the government, activists of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), and left-wing Catholicism. This organization, which emerged in the mid-1960s, did not embrace the method of guerrilla warfare: The Unidad Popular’s theory and practice of institutional transition to socialism went against the emergence of insurgent movements. MIR’s military actions focused on self-defense, encouragement, and protection of the masses’ direct action and the protection of Allende (Tcach 2007, 98–99). During the dictatorship, MIR went underground and started the armed resistance, joined in the mid-1980s by the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR), linked to the Communist Party. Most members were killed by the repression. The main repressive organizations were the secret police Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA)—renamed Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) in 1977 because of its infamous international reputation—the armed forces, and the police.
2. These lines—omitted again at the end of the regime—are part of the original lyrics written by the poet Eusebio Lilo Robles in 1847 on the government’s request and read: “Vuestros nombres valientes soldados/Que habéis sido de Chile el sostén/nuestros pechos los llevan grabados/los sabrán nuestros hijos también [You brave soldiers that have been Chile’s support/your names are engraved on our chests/our children will know them too].” The poet Andrés Bello, in charge of approving Robles’s lyrics, decided not to use these lines (Neustadt 2011).
3. Many human rights associations were active in Chile during the almost seventeen years of the dictatorial repression. For instance, in 1973, the Catholic Church with the cooperation of other churches and the Jewish community formed the Comité Pro Paz to protect the persecuted men and women and provide legal assistance and social service support to their families. The committee soon started collaborating with the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos,



created at the end of 1974 by twenty relatives, and one year later already had 320 members. As a result of the dictatorship's unbearable pressure, the Comité was dissolved at the time the Agrupación was founded, but this was not the end of its work: in 1976, Santiago's archbishop asked Pope Paul VI to create the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, which enabled the group to continue its support of the victims and their families and to denounce human rights abuses under the protection of the ecclesiastic authorities. The Comisión Chilena de Derechos Humanos (1978) and the Corporación de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (1980) also provided legal assistance as well as medical and psychological care to the victims of torture, their families, and the families of *desaparecidos* and murdered prisoners. The Movimiento Contra la Tortura Sebastián Acevedo (1983)—named after a father who set himself ablaze in public demanding information about and release of his teenage children taken prisoners after a protest—focused on fighting for the physical integrity of prisoners. At the international level, many organizations sent their representatives to confirm and later denounce the ongoing violations (see Lira 2011, 117–118), for instance the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations General Assembly. During the Concertación governments, additional groups emerged to denounce the crimes of the armed forces: Hijos-Chile (1999), Agrupación de Ex Prisioneros de Campos de Concentración (2000), and Coordinadora de Ex Presas y Ex Presos Políticos de Santiago (2004).

4. For more information on this case, Pinochet's millionaire accounts in the Riggs Bank, and his other economic crimes, see Krstulovic (2006) and Castillo Irribarra (2007).
5. In *I Love Pinochet* (2001), the young filmmaker Marcela Saïd documents the celebrations that took place in Chile on Pinochet's return, mostly but not exclusively by the upper class.
6. For instance, Patricia Verdugo (1997; 1999, 2000), Camilo Escalona (1999), Adolfo Cozzi Figueroa (2000), Nancy Guzmán (2000), and Patricio Guzmán (2001).
7. He also increased the compensation offered to the relatives of *desaparecidos* and murdered prisoners initiated under Aylwin's administration.
8. It took Agüero almost thirty years and a prolonged absence from Chile—the space linked to his traumatic experience—to be able to denounce his torturer, Meneses, a prominent political scientist and defense analyst. For more information on this case, see Verdugo (2004). Rodrigo Atria's novel *Es tiempo ya* (2005) also illuminates the relation between torture and testimony.
9. Colonia Dignidad is a case in point: a whole village was turned into a clandestine detention centre in which political prisoners were tortured and killed (Villagrán 2005; Salinas and Stange 2006).

10. Perhaps the most prominent are the one at Santiago General Cemetery (1990), La Serena (2003), Paine (2006), and Punta Arena (2006). In addition, Lazzara (2011) enumerates eight spaces linked to torture, disappearance, and death during the dictatorship that were turned into memory centres and have been designated national monuments. These eight spaces are: Los hornos de Lonquén (1996), the former torture house at José Domingo Cañas 1367 (2002), the National Stadium, turned into a detention centre during the dictatorship (2003); Parque de la Paz de Villa Grimaldi (2004), Nido 20 (2005), the former detention centre at Londres 38 (2005), Patio 29 del Cementerio Central (2006), and the Pisagua concentration camp (2008).
11. The abolishment of September 11 as a national holiday in 1998 was primarily an attempt to stop recurring street confrontations between Pinochet's followers and his opponents, a pattern established in the last years of the dictatorship that intensified in the 1990s. Until 1998, this day prompted activists who had struggled against the dictatorship to meet and discuss. After the abolishment of the holiday, they became even more disconnected from each other (Candina Polomer 2002, 40).
12. Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff have released a film about the popular reactions to Pinochet's death (*La muerte de Pinochet*, 2011).
13. I borrow this phrase from Brett Levinson, who refers to "the stunned state of the people and the stunned people of the state" (2003, 99).
14. Right-wing President Sebastián Piñera continued the trials despite campaign promises to the armed forces to do the opposite, and despite the pressure of the church and Amigos y Familiares de Uniformados y Civiles Encarcelados y Procesados Políticos (Afucepp).
15. Other youth declared themselves pro-Pinochet and organized to support his regime in the Federación Nacional de Estudiantes Secundarios (FENES) but did not achieve visibility in the public sphere.
16. The documentary *Che bo cachai* (2002) by Laura Bondarevsky compares the work of the associations of sons and daughters in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, showing the common aspects of their fight but also the differences that derive from the political configurations in the three countries.
17. One of the latest *funas* targeted Monsanto. See <http://comisionfuna.blogspot.com/>
18. A symbol of the repression: thousands of prisoners were taken to the stadium, tortured, and executed. In *Estadio Nacional* (2005), Cármen Luz Parot documents the horror at this detention centre. She also looks at the human rights violations that took place at the Estadio

- de Chile in relation to the murder of the popular singer Victor Jara—after whom the stadium was renamed—in *Victor Jara, el derecho de vivir en paz* (2006).
19. In 2008, Allende's hundredth birthday was also celebrated with a concert at the National Stadium featuring international artists with cross-generational appeal (Joaquín Sabina, Juanes, Pedro Aznar, Inti Illimani).
  20. Many of these films are mentioned in footnotes throughout the chapter. For the intense production of the early 2000s, see Mouesca (2005), Pinto (2009), Mouesca and Orellana (2010), and Traverso (2010).
  21. An antecedent of this intensification of memory can be found in Nelly Richard's *Revista de Crítica Cultural* (RCC). During the post-dictatorship, this academic journal fostered an intense debate about the interconnectedness of politics, economics, culture, and the Concertación's way of dealing with the past. The articles published in RCC dealt with marginalized artistic production that challenged official memorialization and prevalent forms of remembering, constantly underscoring the painful and controversial character of the past.
  22. For more information about the college student movement and "Pinochet's children," see Carrasco (2002).
  23. A number of documentaries address the experience of the directors who grew up in exile after their families escaped military repression. In *En algún lugar del cielo* (2003), Alejandra Carmona reflects on the phase of death and persecution inaugurated by Pinochet and what it meant for her to grow up in exile in Paris after her father was executed in 1971. Focused on the country of reception, in *El telón de azúcar* (2006), Camila Guzmán, daughter of the director Patricio Guzmán, reflects on her generation's experience of growing up in Cuba during the golden age of the revolution, when the ideals were present in everyday life and children, called the Pioneers, were "the future of revolution and will be the new men." Macarena Aguiló's *El edificio de los chilenos* (2010) also tells the story of an exile, although this time as a consequence of her parents' returning to Chile, not leaving. When the Chilean Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) exiles in Europe decided to return to fight the dictatorship, they left their children (60 "siblings") with twenty adults or "social parents," in the "Proyecto Hogares."
  24. *Malditos. La historia de los Fiskales Ad Hok* (Insunza 2004) documents the relation between repression and the youth counterculture in the 1980s. It offers a critical perspective on the country built in the 1990s.
  25. The Federación de Estudiantes Secundarios de Santiago [Santiago High School Students' Federation] (FESES) was outlawed at the beginning of the dictatorship. In the mid-1980s, the Comité Pro-FESES took its place and sought to re-establish it.

26. After the electoral victory of the right in 2010, the founders of Izquierda Cristiana invited Víctor Osorio Reyes to become party president in order to rethink their agenda.
27. As a symbolic expression of this generation's reunion and reemergence in the public sphere, they created a website, "Movimiento Generación 80" (<http://www.g80.cl/index.php>), and are working on a development project that could become a solid alternative to the neoliberal model. "We have not participated in politics all these years. Today we want to participate, reconnecting with the causes and dreams that drove us in the past."
28. *La revolución de los pingüinos* (Díaz Lavanchy 2008) documents this protest.
29. Students have created the strongest and most visible movements in the post-dictatorship period. Today, in 2011, they protest against the poor quality and high cost of education, the most expensive in the world according to the economist Marcel Claude (Pérez 2011). Despite brutal repression, they keep protesting and confronting the armed forces. The messages on their signs indicate a connection with the dictatorial violence: "estudiantes chilenos exiliados de la educación de Mercado" [Chilean students exiled because of profit-based education], "no al exilio educacional chileno" [we say no to the Chilean education exile], "estudiantes organizados contra la represión del estado" [students organized against state repression].
30. I discuss five of the six families that appear in the film.
31. Saïd's *I Love Pinochet* (2001) also addresses this continuity through interviews with college students at Gabriela Mistral University: they remember the past according to their families' experiences and the information they received, and seem to be unable able to connect to each other's perspectives.
32. José Manuel Parada Maluenda, Manuel Leónidas Guerrero Ceballos, and Santiago Esteban Nattino Allende were the three victims of the case known as *caso degollados*. The three were members of the Communist Party. Parada was a former student of the José Victorino Lastarria high school (active in the mid-1980s protests), a sociologist who was working for the Vicaría de la Solidaridad. He and Ceballos were abducted at the front door of the Latinoamericano high school where the later taught. As shown in *Actores secundarios*, the student movement mobilized to denounce these murders and a year later to commemorate them. Today, a memorial marks the place where the bodies were found.
33. In the short film *Lo que recordarás de septiembre/I Wonder What You Will Remember of September* (2004), Cecilia Cornejo, exiled in New York since her early childhood, evokes and reflects about the effects of the coup in her life while answering her daughter's questions about September 11, 2001. Her answers will shape her memory of

that event. In her book's chapter "Two 9/11 in a Lifetime", Gómez-Barris (2008) explores how the generation of Chileans raised in exile in the United States mobilize the connection between these two tragic events in a public ceremony, to raise awareness about continuing struggles for social justice in different places.

34. The Fondart (Fondo Nacional para el Desarrollo de las Artes) was established in 1992 in order to boost cultural and artistic production, neglected and restricted during the military regime. Additionally, according to Bettina Perut, the Fondart jury was mostly conservative in the area of documentary production and chose to finance the work of established directors who prioritize the journalistic style instead of more experimental projects (Caro 2004).
35. Amaya and Blair (2007), Martín-Cabrera (2007), Tal (2005), and Traverso (2008) analyze *Machuca*. For a discussion of *El astuto mono*, see Martín-Cabrera (2011).
36. This perspective expressed by the children echoes the situation at the political level. Michael Lazzara observes that the "Socialist candidate . . . Ricardo Lagos made it clear that he would not be another Allende" and "ultra-right wing candidate Joaquín Lavín, facing indisputable evidence of the dictator's human rights violations, distanced himself from the General to secure his own political credibility" (2006, 3).
37. Allende's UP government provided health care and education and subsidized milk for schools and shantytowns and created employment opportunities for the poor in state projects.
38. Under the dictatorship, higher education was privatized and the status of student became a marker of elite status; therefore, the military and the police were less cruel when it came to repressing student protests, which contributed to their successes (Carrasco 2002, 130–131).
39. The documentary *Mi hermano y yo* (Gándara 2002) tells the story of a thirteen-year-old boy from a shantytown who was tortured and murdered by the army after a roundup in the neighbourhood in 1973. He is the youngest *desaparecido* in Chile.
40. As Victor Hugo Robles reminds us, the struggle of homosexuals in Chile was not over at the end of the dictatorship: "In a seven year battle and after losing in 1996, the gay and lesbian community finally won in the Chilean Senate when laws criminalizing same-sex sexual relations were repealed. Law 1047 and 18216 issued in December, 1998, repealed the same-sex law, Law 365, and ended the imprisonment of convicted gay men for up to five years" (Robles 1998).
41. Like Nelson Caucoto in the present, during the dictatorship there were lawyers committed to the denunciation of the military human rights violations, such as Andrés Aylwin Azócar, the brother of former President Patricio Aylwin. For a study on the human rights trials held during the regime, see Collins (2010).

42. Whereas Zig-Zag, the press nationalized by the Unidad Popular government to create Quimantú, had sold one million books in almost five years, the latter sold five million books in one year, which indicates that the Chilean people were eager to learn (MemoriaChilena 2004).
43. Manriquez took these pictures shortly before leaving Chile. Most of them were staged: she asked the children to wear different outfits and pose in different places, as if she anticipated that her life in Chile would turn into a fiction after many years of silence and distance. What is an experience after twenty-six years, *La quemadura* seems to ask, advancing a reflection on the character of memory. Similar to Carri and Giachino, for Ballesteros, memory is fragmentary, formed by silences and gaps, memories of others, emotions and fantasies. Panizza's *Remitente: Una carta visual* (2008) also explores the fictional character of the past, including recent episodes such as the celebrations on the day of Pinochet's death.

## CHAPTER 7

1. This conceptualization draws on Carl Schmitt.
2. As a result of this suffocating context, over 250,000 citizens—persecuted or just released from prison—went into exile.
3. For a thorough analysis of the military's interpretation of and discourse about the dictatorial period, see Achugar (2008).
4. The following nongovernmental human rights organizations were active in Uruguay, mostly after 1980: Servicio de Paz y de Justicia, Amnesty International, Instituto de Estudios Legales y Sociales del Uruguay, Servicio de Rehabilitación Social, and Servicio Ecuménico de Reintegración. The groups linked to or formed by victims of state violence will be mentioned throughout the chapter, together with the most recent projects and groups struggling against impunity. For example, the project "Memoria de la Resistencia", created in 2006, invites everybody to contribute their memories of the repression but also of gestures and actions of resistance. The newly formed Mesa Permanente Contra La Impunidad is particularly active in denouncing politicians' evasive attitudes regarding the human rights violations.
5. Something similar happened to *Uruguay Nunca más* (1989), the report published by the nongovernmental organization Servicio de Paz y de Justicia (Serpaj). Unlike its Argentinean counterpart, this report is relatively unknown.
6. Berríos was a Chilean scientist killed in Uruguay in 1993: his body, found floating close to the shore, disproved official findings that he was vacationing in Milan (Allier 2010, 125).

7. For more information on the museum, see Lessa (2010). For an updated English analysis of Uruguay's handling of the military crimes, see Roniger (2011).
8. Whereas the dictatorial past of Bordaberry's father discouraged many, especially among the youth, from voting for him, Mujica's past as a guerrilla fighter was not a liability.
9. Lately, the production of films about the dictatorship by or about the 1960s and 1970s activists has increased. Perhaps these contributions have inspired the work of the young directors from the post-dictatorship generation analyzed in this chapter. These films include *El círculo* (2010), *Decile a Mario que no vuelva* (Handler 2007), *Al pie del árbol blanco* (Loeff and Abend 2008), *A las cinco en punto* (Andrés Álvarez and González 2007), *Yo pregunto a los presentes* (Grupo de Cine 2007), and *Raúl Sendic Tupamaro 1925–1989* (Figuroa 2005).
10. The Uruguayan rock group *Cuarteto de nos* parodies the heroicizing narrative in their song "Tupamaro" on the album *Raro* (2006).
11. Leal's article is part of an edited volume on the differences between the 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s generations. The book has the merit of being the first one to address generations comparatively; however, as its title *DeGeneraciones* ("degenerations") indicates, there is clearly a negative judgment about the youngest generations.
12. This is perhaps the reason why some scholars are producing analytical material from abroad (Gabriel Gatti from Spain, Eugenia Allier from Mexico, Mariana Achugar and I from the United States).
13. The only Uruguayan film that addresses the intergenerational transmission of the 1960s political project, *Estrella del Sur* (Nieto 2002), is directed by a member of the parents' generation. A former *tupamaro* returns with his wife and children to live in Uruguay after a long exile in Spain. He reveals to his son that there are still weapons buried on the family land. When the father explains his political past to his son, he emphasises the contrast between the many exciting expressions of rebelliousness in the world and the gray, prudish Uruguayan society—activism and armed struggle appear primarily as an adventure. The son is indifferent to his father's political stance and uses the arms to take part in a conflict between street gangs.
14. The post-dictatorship generation's tendency to not articulate a critical approach is visible in relation not only to the past but also to many spheres of the present; I would dare to say that they do not even think of themselves in terms of a generation and therefore do not feel entitled to their own collective perspective. This is expressed in the fact that the only anthology of young writers (born after 1973) published in Uruguay, *El descontento y la promesa. Nueva/joven narrativa uruguaya* (2008), is edited by a senior scholar who also writes a prologue explaining to the readers, including the post-dictatorship generation, how they think, feel, and relate to the world.

15. They each attempted to discredit the opponent through the image of his father and mobilize the imaginary of the repressive and revolutionary past. Soon after the debate, a website uploaded a game to be played online in which the two sons physically fight each other in costumes connected to the stereotypes they incarnate. This suggests that in the end it is all a “game”: the human rights violations were not taken seriously at the political level and are not seriously considered in everyday life either.
16. Rosalía is making reference to two icons of Uruguayan leftist culture: Mateo represents the renovation and development of Uruguayan popular music, and the Líber Arce brigade (named after the first student killed by the police in a street protest in 1968) was an activist group known for its use of art in public spaces.



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