The Spoils of War: Accounting for the Missing Children of Argentina's "Dirty War"

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Abstract (English)

During the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976 – 1983), 30,000 civilians disappeared. Most of these people were taken by the military to clandestine prisons where they were tortured and killed. The children of these victims were also seized, and pregnant women were kept alive long enough to give birth. An estimated five hundred infants and young children of the disappeared were given for adoption to highly connected families. This thesis consists of a historical background of these events and then offers a series of explanations as to why the military did this.

Abstract (French)

Pendant la dictature militaire en Argentine (1976. 1983), 30.000 civils ont disparu. La majorité de ces personnes a été emmenée par les militaires aux prisons clandestines où elles ont été torturées et détruites. Les enfants de ces victimes ont été également arrêtés, et des femmes enceintes ont été maintenues vivantes assez longtemps pour donner naissance à leur enfant. On estime que cinq cent bébés et jeunes enfants des disparu ont été donnés en adoption a des familles hautement connectées avec la junte. Cette thèse commence par présenter un historique de ces événements puis propose une série d'explications quant aux motifs qui ont amené les militaires à commettre ces actes.

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Anthropology and Violence

Violence is a ubiquitous element of the tribal and traditional societies on which anthropologists concentrated their attention during the first century of their discipline. Yet violence is absent from most of the early anthropological literature. When it was discussed, it was generally depersonalized and viewed as a tacit element of cultural practices such as feuds, witchcraft, initiation rites and warfare.

Many early anthropologists identified feuds as the predominant form of violence. In *The Andaman Islanders*, Radcliffe-Brown describes violence this way where "the whole art of fighting was to come upon your enemies by surprise, kill one or two of them and then retreat."(Radcliffe-Brown 1932:85) In his summary of the anthropological literature on feuds based on ethnographic evidence from Mediterranean and Middle East cultures, Jacob Black-Michaud argues that what had been identified as a feud "yields a bewildering variety of interpretations, ranging from individual acts of lethal retaliation for homicide, injury or insult, to repeated acts of full scale aggression between large ethnic groups whose adult male population may number several thousand strong."(Black-Michaud 1975:1) So the word "feud," as it is generally employed by anthropologists, would seem to subsume numerous different types of violent actions in one general term.

Like feud, witchcraft also represented a locus of violence in the conventional representation of tribal and traditional societies. The classic definition of witchcraft in the anthropological literature is that it is "the covert use of mystical forms of aggression by human agents."(Goody 1970:207) Writing about witchcraft among the Azande, Mary Douglas describes how "every death was [said to be] caused either by witchcraft or by

vengeance magic against the guilty witch."(Douglas 1970:XVI) Individuals may resort to witchcraft accusations as a weapon of attacking another person. The accuser can then become a victim of physical or ritual violence as a reprisal.

Early anthropologists showed no interest in violence as a thing-in-itself nor did they attempt to suggest what categories of behavior constituted violence, that is, whether it was limited to the infliction of lethal force, injury, and pain, or whether it might also include psychological violence (e.g. threats, coercion) and loss or damage to property. This lack of anthropological interest in violence as an object of inquiry can be traced to the limitations of the dominant theoretical perspective of this period. Functionalism, the reigning anthropological paradigm, located social life in the "ethnographic present," i.e. time out of time (Fabian 1983). Further, these ethnographies were often normative accounts of behavior, from which conflict, coercion and resistance are either absent or deemphasized.

The description of warfare in Raymond Firth's *We, the Tikopia* is an example of writing in this tradition. According to Firth, war functioned as one of several possible "mechanisms of population control" that could also include celibacy, "*coitus interruptus* sex gratification," infanticide or sea-voyaging. Of these options, war was a "last resort" to be utilized only in the most severe cases to drive out a section of people to ensure social stability. Firth acknowledges that, at the time of his writing, European contact and fear of the colonial government would prohibit this from occurring. (Firth 1936) Recently, the absence of the European colonial presence from the "ethnographic present" has become one of the major critiques of functionalism. (Asad 1973; Fabian 1983) This monopolization of violence in the hands of the colonial powers was a reason why anthropologists could ignore violence since the colonial presence itself was largely disregarded. The colonial context was the reason most functionalist anthropologists

were able to do research among a specific community. It was also a reason why violence could not be addressed in their work. Endogenous violence was relatively rare since the colonial powers had a policy of suppressing it in the interest of an orderly civil administration and economic development along imperial lines.

In the United States, the "Culture and Personality" school's focus on the effects of child rearing practices on the personality of adults precluded any interest in violence. In ascribing a dominant psychological state to each culture, violence, when mentioned, had an abstract and symbolic quality. (Stocking 1982)

There were exceptions of course. Notably, the work of Roy F. Barton, a now forgotten figure of early American anthropology. His ethnographies of hunting among the Ifugao, particularly *The Half-Way Sun: Life among the Headhunters of the Philippines* (1930), detail both the extensive preparation time devoted to strategizing violence as well as the graphic execution of their plans. Edmond Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954) is also anomalous in its departure from the orthodoxy of his day that was based on equilibrium and social solidarity. As Adam Kuper writes, according to Leach, "to understand the actual flux of social relations the anthropologist must consider the anomalies and contradictions,and see how ambitious individuals are manipulating political resources."(Kuper 1973:197) Oscar Lewis' *Children of Sanchez*, an autobiography/oral history of a Mexican family, also departed from the anthropological norm in its focus on the "culture of poverty." His informants all speak of endemic domestic violence and abuse. (Lewis 1961:xii)

In the 1960's a shift occurred in anthropologists attitudes to violence. This resulted due to a confluence of several developments. First, functionalism declined as the key anthropological theory. Related to this is the advent of the post-colonial era.

From this point, many anthropologists could not avoid violence in their communities, especially after violence erupted after the departure of the colonial powers.

The events in Vietnam and other Cold War counterinsurgency movements were also catalysts for anthropologists to address violence, especially in light of many anthropologists' activities in the anti-war movement. Eric Wolf's comparative analysis of the "peasant wars" in China, Russia, Mexico, Algeria, Cuba and Vietnam was written at the height of the Vietnam War to warn against "'Viet Nams' in the future."(1969:x)

Wolf's work coincided with the rediscovery of Marx by anthropologists – not the functionalist or crudely materialistic Marx of the cultural ecologists of the 1950's and '60's (e.g. Marvin Harris) but Marx as an anti-functionalist. Marx's anti-functionalism manifests itself in a distinctive and central way in his understanding of conflict. The functionalists had generally swept conflict under the rug. Not coincidentally, the functionalists would be criticized for being ahistorical because in Marx's post-Hegelian dialectic, conflict represented the motor of historical change. According to the Marxist position, without conflict, history could not exist. (Cohen 1978)

A concurrent development concentrated on examining the more subtle and institutional forms of control and domination. Erving Goffman focused on deviance and incarceration in *Asylums* (1961) and on people who were unable to conform to standards of normality in *Stigma* (1963). Goffman's concept of a "total institution" anticipated the "pan-opticonism" described in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.(1977) In this book, Foucault traces the transformation of punishment from spectacle – including public torture and execution - to incarceration. In a similar vein, around the same time Norbert Elias's working on the "civilizing process" was finally published. One of the consequences of this process was the state's monopolization of the use of violence, resulting in its gradual disappearance from the public sphere. Anton

Blok's history and ethnography on instrumental violence committed by the Sicilian *mafia* would be inspired by Elias' work. Blok's thesis argues that the *mafia* flourished because the Italian State was unable to monopolize the use of physical force in western Sicily. (1974)

The emergence of what is now called "the anthropology of violence" dates to the 1980's. The sub-field tends is interdisciplinary in that it draws from a disparate range of theorists from psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literary criticism. Sigmund Freud, Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, particularly Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno, and various figures lumped into the "post-structuralist" camp like Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jacques Derrida, have all been utilized by anthropologists working on violence.

Many anthropologists studying violence are forced to address the rising tide of nationalism around the globe in which religious or ethnic groups attempt to assert a right to self-determination and statehood through violent struggle. (e.g. Nagengast 1994) The body of literature on this kind of ethnic and religious violence is large and growing rapidly. It generally concentrates on collective violence in the form of riots or demonstrations and popular uprisings. The significance of many of these studies is to show how "eternal" ethnic and religious hatreds are historical products that are shaped by events in the recent past. (e.g. Malkki 1996) The majority of contemporary anthropological work on violence is devoted to this kind of analysis. Much of it concentrates on violence in Southeast Asia (see Das 1995; Kakar 1996; Tambiah 1997; Daniel 1996).

In attempting to determine what constitutes violence many anthropologists have examined its more subtle and ambiguous manifestations. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and the less theoretical notion of structural violence both assert that

social, economic, and political injustice can constitute violence against marginal communities and individuals. According to Bourdieu, "Gentle, hidden exploitation is the form taken by man's exploitation of man whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible." (Bourdieu 1995:192) Both terms are difficult since it is not violence perpetrated by individuals but by institutions, structures, laws, or traditions. In the words of Paul Farmer, structural violence "all too often defeats those who would describe it."(1997:272), but, at the same time, Farmer argues for studying the way in which suffering is caused by structural violence.

Many of analyses of symbolic and structural violence develop with a political economy framework that documents the violence of poverty and inequality wreaked by a rapidly expanding globalization. The political economy framework is part of a shift that occurred from the traditional anthropological view of cultures as discrete and isolated entities. This focus on political economy may have its anthropological origins in Wolf's work, *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century,* which examined the impact of capitalism on peasant societies and its importance as a factor in driving the "peasant" wars of Mexico, Russia, Vietnam, Algeria, China and Cuba. (1969) The importance of Wolf's work lies in its understanding of the effects of world historical events in a local, anthropological context.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes is perhaps the most vocal proponent of this perspective. In *Death Without Weeping* (1992), Scheper-Hughes asks, "What if disappearances, the piling up of civilians in common graves, the anonymity, and the routinization of violence and indifference were not, in fact, an aberration?"(1992:219) She argues that suffering can be routinized through the "violence of everyday life." "In advanced industrialized societies and in modern, bureaucratic, and welfare states, the institutions of violence generally operate more covertly."(Scheper-Hughes 1992:221)

An examination of the effects of structural and symbolic violence has led to an emergent anthropological discourse on "social suffering." According to Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock, "Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people, and reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems."(1997) This leads anthropologists to focus on "the primacy of the phenomenological domain of experiences"(1997 xxv), and the way in which violence is experienced by individuals and communities.

In addressing the suffering caused by large-scale political catastrophes, many anthropologists have appropriated from psychiatry and psychoanalysis the language of trauma. Robben and Suarez-Orzozco have recently argued in their edited volume *Cultures under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma* for a "mutually intelligible and fruitful conversation" between psychoanalysis and anthropology "around the enduring problem of collective violence and massive trauma."(1999:1) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has become the dominant medical approach for treating victims of military violence.

However, the usefulness of PTSD in cases of collective political violence has been questioned, especially in how it ignores the political and social dimensions of trauma. PTSD has been criticized for transforming the "social into the biopsychomedical" as well as being ingrained with assumptions that have "roots in contemporary ideas, trends and fashions within Western societies" that may affect its unproblematic exportation to other cultures. (Summerfield 1998; see also Young 1995) PTSD itself has also become an object of anthropological scrutiny (Young 1995)

Anthropological focus on suffering and on structural violence is on victims of violence but not on its perpetrators. As anthropologists began to follow Laura Nader's suggestion to "study up" (the term taken from her article in the now classic 1969 edited

volume *Reinventing Anthropology),* there was a turn to looking at the culture of perpetrators of violence. A growing body of anthropological literature has focused on violence and the nation-state, specifically what has been called 'cultures of terror.' Within anthropology, the literature on 'cultures of terror' has its origins in Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (1987) which detailed the devastating effects of the colonial rubber industry on indigenous populations. Taussig's ethnography shifts from a focus on the colonial imagination that sustained the culture of terror to the responses of the indigenous peoples affected by it. Taussig has more recently turned away from looking at resistance and "studies of the poor." As Taussig sardonically asks, "After all, who benefits from studies of the poor, especially from their resistance? The objects of study or the CIA?" Michael Taussig described this move from victim to perpetrator as a "refunctioning of Anthropology." This refunctioning "would have to turn its resolute gaze away from the poor and the powerless to the rich and the powerful – to current military strategies of "low intensity warfare" as mach as to the role of memory in the cultural constitution of the authority of the modern State."(1992:52)

Two recent edited volumes, *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror* (1999) and *The Paths to Domination, Resistance and Terror* (1992) have followed Taussig's path in this shift from victims to perpetrators. In *Death Squad,* Jeffrey Sluka attempts to define a culture of terror:

> These are societies where 'order' (more precisely, the order of stratification or social inequality) and the politicoeconomic status quo can only be maintained by the permanent, massive, and systematic use or threat of violence and intimidation by the state as a means of political control. A culture of terror is an

> institutionalized system of permanent intimidation of the masses or subordinated communities by the elite, characterized by the use of torture and disappearances and other forms of extrajudicial ""death squad" killings as standard practice.(Sluka 2000:22)

Jennifer Schirmer's *The Guatemalan Military Project* examines the actions of the military "through the eyes of Guatemalan officers themselves." (Schirmer 1998:1) Schirmer's book contains interviews with more than fifty military officers as well as various other Guatemalans in positions of power during the counterinsurgency campaign that began in 1982 that led to the deaths of an estimated 75,000 people. Anthropologists working on state terror can also be in a dangerous position. *Fieldwork under Fire*, another edited volume (1995), examines the difficulties facing ethnographers working in violent field sites; most of them in the context of state terror.

This thesis is concerned with a historically particular variety of violence. The context is the military terror that became known as the "Dirty War" in the mid- to late-1970's in Argentina. It is intended as a contribution to the emergent anthropological discourse on state terror. My focus will be on one horrifying and puzzling aspect of the state terror of the 1970's – the treatment of pregnant women prisoners and the subsequent appropriation of their children by military authorities.

Introduction: Starting Backwards: The Weekly Marches

On April 30, 1977, fourteen middle-aged women gathered at the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. Their assembly came at the height of the Argentine 'Dirty War' when hundreds of men and women were disappearing each week never to reappear. They were kidnapped in their homes, at their places of work, or right off of the street. The fourteen women were mothers whose children were among those who had disappeared. They went to the Plaza to demand their return. Their choice of the Plaza was not accidental; it had a symbolic value.

The Plaza was a historic square that occupied a key role in Argentina's political history as a space for political protest.[1] The mothers, united by their grief and their determination to find out what had happened to their children, had exhausted all official channels and decided to make their protestations public, undeterred by the personal danger they were incurring. The police, said to have been complicit with the disappearances, told them that they could do nothing to help them.[2] The military units, believed to be directly responsible for the kidnappings, denied all involvement and claimed no knowledge of their whereabouts. Politicians were powerless, having been divested of all political power when the military had seized control the previous year. With a few notable exceptions, journalists would not help or they would find themselves at risk of disappearance. The powerful Catholic Church, at least in its official capacity, offered no assistance.

As their silent marches became weekly events, the women donned their trademark white handkerchiefs and began carrying photographs of their missing children. They became known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They marched because of a prohibition on public gatherings that forced them to keep moving. As word

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[1] When Perón became vice president in 1944, thousands of workers converged on the square to show their support. A year later, when Perón's police arrested student demonstrators, their mothers gathered there to protest their arrest.(Rock, 148-150)

[2] The military notified the police before a kidnapping. The police would give them a "green light".(Nunca Más)

spread, more mothers in similar states of distress joined them each week. The fathers stayed home, not because they were too afraid, but because their presence in the Plaza could invite a reprisal from authorities. Older women in their traditional roles as "mothers" could not be construed as a threat. As mothers, they would exploit the traditional status of "motherhood," but, on the other hand, they were also constrained by it.[3] At first, authorities ignored them, and, then, as their numbers began growing and they began attracting international attention, they were ridiculed, denounced as "madwomen" or "crazies" [*las locas*].[4] But, in spite of these denunciations, the mothers continued marching.

One of the mothers marching each week had a daughter who was pregnant at the time of her disappearance. She met another mother on the square whose daughter was also pregnant at the time of her abduction. Through a chain of acquaintances, they met another mother whose daughter had given birth shortly before her disappearance. When she was kidnapped from her house, the military not only seized her daughter but her six- month old grandchild as well. The fate of both remained unknown. From these chains of acquaintances, the mothers formed a network of mothers who were not only searching for their children but for their potential grandchildren as well. In October of 1977, twelve of these mothers formed the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo[5], a group devoted not only to finding out the fate of their children but that of their grandchildren as well.[6]

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[3] See Schirmer(1994) for this argument.
[4] For a more detailed history of the formation of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, see Fisher (1989), Guzman (1994) or Mellibovsky (1997).
[5] From this point on, I will simply refer to them as the Grandmothers.
[6] Maria Isabel Chorobik de Mariani, one of the founders of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, said in 1986, "On this long road, we Grandmothers got together and organized a group to look for the disappeared children, at first thinking that there were just a few of us, and then realizing to our horror, that there were hundreds of us." (quoted in Arditti 1999:50)

One mother had received news that her daughter had given birth in prison.[7] Nothing more was known. What happened to her and her newborn baby remained a mystery. As the fragmentary pieces of information were assembled, a consistent and shocking pattern emerged - the pregnant women who had been kidnapped by the military were being kept alive long enough to give birth. The fate of the children was at first unknown, but rumors surfaced that childless military families were adopting them.

Additional information, brought by the disappeared who "reappeared," confirmed further reports of torture and execution. They spoke of pregnant women they had seen inside the prison. Before giving birth, these women were taken to military hospitals. Neither mother nor baby ever returned.[8]

Weaving together whatever information they could find, the grandmothers became self-described "Sherlock Holmes'."[9] They pored over birth records searching for forgeries or birth certificates signed by military doctors. They also received reports from midwives who had been present when the women gave birth in military hospitals. Babies were separated from their mothers immediately following birth; the fate of the mothers remained unknown, although the presumption was that they had been murdered shortly after giving birth. As their efforts became more widely known, the Grandmothers started to receive anonymous tips. Individuals would call and tell them about a baby that had been suddenly adopted by a neighbor who was also a military officer. The Grandmothers would then attempt to determine whether this child was a child of one of the disappeared and if so, the child of which mother.

Accounting for the Missing Children

[7] The grandmother, Chicha Mariana, received a phone call in December 1976. A man informed her that her granddaughter was alive. (Arditti 1999:57)

[8] For a more detailed history of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, see Arditti(1999)

In 1983, the military regime fell after a humiliatingly brief war with the British over the Falkland Islands. Following the restoration of democracy, the Grandmothers were able to intensify their search for their missing grandchildren. While it was believed that their children had been killed[10], they believed that their grandchildren were still alive. Locating them became their central objective.

The new democratic government created the Argentine National Commission for the Disappeared (CONADEP). CONADEP systematically investigated and documented the human rights abuses that occurred during the military regime, publishing their findings in what would become a surprise best seller, Nunca Más. Several other Latin American countries, including Brazil and Uruguay, have published their own versions of Nunca Más, addressing their own human rights abuses at the hands of military dictatorships.[11]

Tracking down a potential missing child would only be the first step in a long and arduous process. Anonymous tips could not provide the evidence necessary to convince skeptical judges to annul adoptions. Even worse, many of the judges were responsible for the adoptions in the first place and had no interest in reversing them. In 1984, one judge from a juvenile court told the Grandmothers:

> I am convinced that your children were terrorists, and "terrorist" is synonymous with "murderer," I do not intend to return children to murders because it would not be fair. They do not have the right to have them. So I will rule not to return

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[9] As a member of the Grandmothers has said, "We call each other detectives. We call each other Sherlock Holmes." (as quoted in *Sixty Minutes*, April 23, 2000)

[10] The exhumation of the Mass graves where many of the victims were buried would take place later. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo would argue against the exhumation, refusing to acknowledge the murder of their children until those responsible were held accountable. (See Robben 2000)

[11] For the relation of the burgeoning human rights movements to the establishment of a new democratic government in Argentina see Jelin (1994).

any children to you. It does not make sense to disturb these children that are in the hands of decent families that will be able to educate them right, not like you educated your children. (quoted in Arditti 1999:57)

Undeterred by the hostility of the judiciary, the Grandmothers sought to establish more infallible and incontrovertible proof of the child's identity. They explored the possibility of using the newly available technology of genetic testing as a means of verifying the identities of the children to the satisfaction of the courts. Acting on behalf of the Grandmothers, geneticists from the United States developed an "index of grandpaternity" test that confirmed the affinity between child and grandmother with an accuracy rate of 99.95%. After intensive lobbying, the Grandmothers persuaded the government to establish the National Genetic Data Bank of Argentina in 1987. This data bank would store the genetic information of relatives in the case that a child is one day located.

The Grandmothers estimate that the total number of kidnapped children is somewhere between four and five hundred. They have specifically documented the identities of 256 missing children. Of these, 88 had already been born when they were kidnapped. The rest were born in captivity. Of the 256, only 60 have been located, and, as of the present moment, 31 of them have been returned to their biological families. An additional 13 were being raised jointly by their adoptive and biological families, while 7 had been killed. The children being raised jointly were the rare cases in which the adoptive parents did not know the origins of the child when the child was adopted. While in the majority of cases the baby had gone directly for adoption to a family with close ties to the military, some babies had been left with orphanages. In the remaining

cases of children who have been located, the Grandmothers are caught in a protracted legal struggle with the adoptive family.

Since it would be impossible to summarize in the confines of this work the status of every case, I would like to give as an example the history of one particular "high profile" case that has received international media attention over the past couple of years. This case is important because of the unintended consequences it has had for Argentina's human rights struggle.

Silvia Quintela was a progressive doctor working in poor shantytowns on the outskirts of Buenos Aires when she disappeared on January 17, 1977.[12] At the time of her abduction, she was pregnant. She was held in a clandestine prison at the Campo de Mayo military base until she gave birth. Immediately separated from her child, she was taken to a nearby airfield where she was stripped naked and drugged and then thrown by soldiers out of a plane over the ocean, a fate shared by many of the disappeared. Her husband, Abel Madariaga, had fled into exile to Sweden. After the fall of the military regime, he returned to Argentina where he learned about the birth of his son. From the testimony of former disappeared and midwives, he believed that a military doctor named Norberto Atilio Biano had adopted the child. Bianco's role, like other military doctors, was to perform Caesarean sections on *desaparecidas*. Bianco had two children, a boy named Pablo and a girl named Carolina. Pablo was believed to be the son of Madariaga and Quintela. Carolina was believed to be the child of another *desaparecida*. In 1987, Madariaga filed a lawsuit to compel Bianco to submit the children for genetic testing. Instead, Bianco and his wife fled to Paraguay with the two children. An Argentine judge demanded extradition but Paraguay refused. Finally, after ten years, with the help of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Paraguay

[12] As I will explain later, working with the poor was one of the key risk factors for disappearance during the 'Dirty War.'

extradited Bianco and his wife to face kidnapping charges. Unfortunately, by the time Paraguay finally complied with Argentina's extradition request, the two children were legally adults. Given the choice by Paraguay, they refused to return to Argentina or to submit to DNA testing on the grounds that they had no desire in knowing their 'true' identities.

This case is one in which the Grandmothers cannot seek justice without being forced into the position of being accused of harming the people they are trying to help: the grandchildren. The Bianco children, presently legally autonomous adults, refuse to submit to genetic testing. They argue that compelling them to submit to genetic testing against their will would be a form of violence against them. The Grandmothers argue that the violence had already occurred and will continue as long as the children have the identities of the people who were complicit with the murder of their parents. The Grandmothers, who are not only arguing on their own behalf but on the behalf of their children and their grandchildren, are put in a situation in which to argue on behalf of their grandchildren, they are forced to contradict the expressed interests of those grandchildren. The situation can be seen as an example of what french philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard has called the "differend." Lyotard describes the "differend" as "the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim." (Lyotard 1988) The grandmothers, who cannot argue for their grandchildren, without directly contradicting them, have been put in this position.

As an unanticipated and unintended consequence of this case, General Videla, the military dictator during the 'Dirty War,' was arrested in 1997 for facilitating the kidnappings and put under house arrest. Since the kidnappings were discovered to be part of a deliberate and organized operation, Videla, in his capacity as head of state and the military, was held responsible not only for the kidnappings but for playing an integral

role in their cover-up. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights concluded that the Argentine military viewed the kidnappings as part of a larger counterinsurgency strategy. This led to a watershed. Once Videla was convicted, more arrests followed. Although the Military was given amnesty in 1989, the charge of kidnapping babies was not included in the pardon. Charges of "baby snatching" became the last recourse in seeking justice against the perpetrators of the 'Dirty War.'

In 1998, more high-ranking military officers were placed under arrest in connection with their roles in the kidnapping, including Admiral Emilio Massera, head of the Navy during the dictatorship, the branch of the military most directly connected with torture and terror. In total, nine more senior officers were detained. In addition to the arrests, the government allocated $600,000 to be used by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo to facilitate their continuing efforts to locate missing children.

Back to the Beginning: A Research Question

Instead of analyzing the current situation, I want to return to the beginning in order to address some significant questions. Keeping pregnant women prisoners alive long enough to give birth is an action that is as horrible as it is bizarre. Why did they do it? Why did the military keep the pregnant *desaparecidas* alive long enough to give birth only to take the child and then kill the mother?

I would like to attempt to answer this question. Perhaps no answer exists, but I do not believe that this is an exercise in hopeless speculation. Actions so bizarre demand an explanation. I believe I can identify several factors that shaped the cultural landscape in a way that made such abominable actions permissible.

I do not propose to try to read the minds' of the perpetrators. I should rather keep in mind what Maria Isabel Chorobik de Mariani, founder of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, has observed:

> With the warped mentality of the kidnappers, you can never put yourself in their place. You can't think like them. But it has to do with why they raised them. It wasn't out of affection. Is it in order to make the child of a political activist into a soldier, in order to make him a torturing policeman? I have asked myself this so many nights that I haven't been able to sleep, wondering why. I haven't reached a conclusion, because we can't think like them. (quoted in Stener Carlson 1996:72)

The "them" in question are the perpetrators, the torturers, the kidnappers. But according to many social scientists the "them" can also be the "us". The emerging consensus by many social scientists and psychologists who have studied and interviewed perpetrators of atrocities is that they are not intrinsically different from anyone else. In the words of journalist John Conroy, "When most people imagine torture, they imagine themselves the victim... Yet there is more than ample evidence that most torturers are normal people, that most of us could be the barbarian of our dreams as easily as we could be the victim, that for many perpetrators, torture is a job and nothing more."(Conroy 2000:88;See also Crelinsten and Schmid) Or, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, "Anybody, at any time, may equally find himself victim or executioner."(Sartre 1958:15)

Giorgio Agamben has observed that "one of the lessons of Auschwitz is that it is infinitely harder to grasp the mind of an ordinary person than to understand the mind of a Spinoza or Dante."(Agamben 1999:13) Anthropologists have long been aware of this

seeming paradox. I make no claims at being a mentalist. I am not trying to discover what was going through the minds of these torturers when they decided to keep the children and babies of the disappeared alive in order to be adopted by military families.

I will argue that the perpetrators' actions were profoundly informed, shaped and justified by disparate cultural images, symbols, and discourses. Their abhorrent actions can therefore be open to social science inquiry. It is precisely these cultural images, symbols and discourses that I propose to identify and trace as factors that can help explain what occurred.

The view of violence as "pre-cultural" or antithetical to culture cannot hold. As Arjun Appadurai writes, "wherever the testimony is sufficiently graphic, it becomes clear that even the worst acts of degradation – involving feces, urine, body parts; beheading, impaling, gutting, sawing, raping, burning, hanging, and suffocating – have macabre forms of cultural design and violent predictability." (Appadurai 1998:229) In the case that I am analyzing, the actions of the military - keeping the pregnant woman alive long enough to give birth and then killing her and keeping the child – will be analyzed as part of a cultural project.

However, before proceeding any further, I will need to provide a cursory account of Argentina's recent history to address broad events leading up to the 'Dirty War.' After this circuitous route through the general context, I will be able to return to the specific events at hand.

Part I: Through the Past Darkly

The Military Junta took power on March 24, 1976.[13] The heads of the army, navy, and air force coerced the inept administration of Isabel Perón to step down. Respectively, their names were Jorge Rafael Videla, Emilio Mássera, and Orlando Agosti. Shortly after which General Videla was declared the president. Unlike any other of the military actions of the 1970s (and unlike corresponding events in Chile that allowed Pinochet to take power from Salvador Allende), it was a bloodless coup. In a remark he would later regret, a by-then nearly blind Jorge Luis Borges remarked "now we are governed by gentlemen."(cited in Feitlowitz 1998:6) And this was a widely held sentiment. Judging by their manner and appearance, they were the consummate Argentine gentlemen; both urbane and well educated.[14]

The coup was welcomed by almost the entire populace, including Jacobo Timerman and his newspaper *La Opinion* (a liberal paper usually compared with *Le Monde*). As Timerman would write retrospectively, "the entire country... breathed a sigh of relief."(Timerman 1981:26) Even leftist terrorist groups welcomed the coup, believing it would serve to bring their enemy out into the open, and thus, facilitate the next stage of revolutionary class warfare. The coup took place after several years of escalating violence between left wing terrorist groups and right wing death squads and many people believed that the military taking control would only lead to stability.

Needless to say, that did not happen. The events that took place between 1976 and 1979 came to be referred to as the 'Dirty War' a.k.a. The Process for National Reorganization, abbreviated as *el proceso*.[15] During this period, an estimated 30,000

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[13] Junta is the Spanish word for coup.

[14] This is characteristic of many of the Argentine military elite. Antonius Robben (1995) has used the term "ethnographic seduction" to describe his interactions with high-ranking Argentine military officers who can be both dapper gentlemen and perpetrators of atrocities. Also, see journalist Tina Rosenberg's depiction of Alfredo *"el angel"* Astiz, the navy lieutenant who infiltrated the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (1991). The blonde haired, blue-eyed, baby faced Astiz (who was said to resemble a young Robert Redford) spoke English and French fluently, read Julio Cortázar novels, and loved art museums and classical music.

[15] As many commentators will ironically point out, *el processo* is also the translated title in Spanish of Franz Kafka's *The Trial.*

people disappeared; they were kidnapped by the military and taken to clandestine detention centers where they would be tortured and eventually killed. The military called it a dirty war because it was a war "without battlefields or boundaries," a war that demanded "unconventional" tactics. (Feitlowitz 1998:152) In the first 16 days of the coup, 152 individuals died in political violence. By September 1976, an average of thirty kidnappings took place each day with only 1% of the disappeared ever reappearing alive. The word *desaparecido* was originally coined in Guatemala in the 1960s, but the events in Argentina would introduce the term into international vocabulary.

This wasn't the first military coup but it was unlike any other in terms of the scope and breadth of its violence. Many histories of Argentina will trace the inauguration of the country's 'modern era' to 1930 when the first military coup took place with the overthrow of President Hipolito Yrigoyen of the Radical Civic Union.[16] In the next four decades, seven more military coups would take place in all-too-regular intervals: 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and, finally, 1976.

People initially supported the junta of 1976 only because Isabela Perón's government was so incompetent. Isabela was the widow of Juan Domingo Perón, a domineering figure in Argentine history.[17] To this day his influence cannot be understated in Argentina. Juan Domingo Perón was a charismatic populist who galvanized the working class that made up the base of his support. His leadership was pure cult of personality, an exemplar of Max Weber's concept of charisma.

The movement that would come to be known as Perónism was inseparable from the man, just as Perón would come to be inseparable from the movement that he inspired.

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[16] Yrigoyen was the first president to have been elected through secret ballot and despite the name, his party was only moderately liberal one that persists to this day. He was the first candidate who represented and served the interests of the emerging middle class

[17] Perón and Perónism has exerted a strong fascination on political scientists and economists. For more on Perón see Crassweller (1987) or Page (1983)

And then there is the enduring allure and mystique of Evita. Eva Perón, his immortal and immortalized wife, threw herself onto the cause of the "descamisados" or the "shirtless ones". She died a martyr's death at the age of 33. Later her embalmed corpse was stolen and kept hidden by the military, only to make its triumphant return to Argentina alongside Perón.

The Perónist state was an interventionist one with a strongly regulated economy. Between 1947, from the time Perón took office, to 1955 when he was ousted in a coup, the number of people in unions had risen from 600,000 to 6 million (Guest 1990:16), and his rule saw the stabilization and expansion of the emergent middle class. Perón was able to accomplish this with sheer popular support, despite maintaining, at best, ambivalent relations with the two traditional pillars upon which all leaders of Argentina before him were forced to stand: the Church and the military. The Church never liked him, especially after he legalized divorce. Although he came from the military, the resolutely anti-populist military establishment resented his populism and grew to despise him. In the end they deposed him from power. If I have made Perón sound appealing, it should be sufficient to observe that many of his ideas were rooted in Italian fascism – Mussolini was Perón's key influence and he was a close bedfellow of Francisco Franco in Spain. Perón would even boast in 1943, "I will do what Mussolini has done without his mistakes," though it is unclear as to what Perón considered Mussolini's "mistakes" to be. Perón had served as an Argentine military observer in Mussolini's Italy at beginning of WWII where he was able to witness Mussolini's policies firsthand.

Perón was a larger than life figure and his politics and policies were filled with contradictions. He supported unions only so far as they blindly supported him. He was considered a friend to the large Jewish community in Argentina, but he also allowed

Argentina to become a "safe haven" for Nazi War criminals.[18] His programs have been described as "a mixed bag of nationalism and social welfare"(Andersen 1993) as he attempted to take what would be termed a "Third Position" between capitalism and communism (not to be confused with Anthony Giddens's "Third Way"). This made him distrusted in the United States. The State Department vacillated between thinking he was a fascist and thinking he was a communist.[19]

After fleeing the country in 1955, Perón would spend most of the next two decades alongside his friend Francisco in Spain, all the while plotting his eventual return to power. This is where the ambiguity (or, perhaps, schizophrenia is a better word) inherent in Perónism becomes most apparent. He was able to inspire devoted and fanatical groups of followers from both the extreme right and the extreme left. Both remained to fight for his legacy during his long absence from Argentina. Both believed they represented the "true Perón." Perón would endorse both sides, both seemingly impervious to his contradictions. He advised his followers that "violence from above must be met with violence from below."(Gillespie 1982) With these words, he incited outbreaks of terrorist violence that began in the late 1960s, including the sensationalistic assassination by the Montoneros of the General who had seized power from Perón.[20] The Montoneros were the most famous leftist Perónist group, and they will be discussed in greater detail later. With violence crippling the country in the early 1970s, Perón made his triumphant return in 1973. A crowd assembled to meet him the night before that was estimated at over one million. When a Perónist Youth group (another leftist group) approached to march, they were fired upon by the military. It would seem that Perón had made his decision to side with his right wing followers – either that or those

[18] In the most notorious case, Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped in a suburb of Buenos Aires on May 11, 1960 by Israeli agents who took him to Israel to be put on the trial.(Arendt:1963)

[19] Argentina remained suspiciously neutral throughout most of WWII. After the war, Argentina became renowned as a safe haven for Nazis fleeing war crimes. For more on the complicated relationship between Argentina and the Nazis see Newton (1993).

were his true colors all along. Or the aging general was being used as a political tool by forces beyond his control. The following year he called the Montoneros "immature imbeciles (Verbitsky 1995:191) and died a month later. At this point, his grieving widow, Isabela, a former cabaret dancer, stepped in to take power and made such an utter mess of an already bad situation that the military felt compelled to step in and depose her.[21]

It Takes Two to Tango: The Myth of the Dirty War

The conventional understanding of the Dirty War is that left-wing terrorist groups had acted so violently that a response from the military was demanded. In this understanding, the military had simply gone too far in waging their war. Though justly provoked, their sin was a lack of restraint. Once set into motion, the machinery of terror could not be stopped. The very notion of a Dirty War would seem to presuppose that it was a war in which two sides were fighting each other. Journalist Martin Andersen, in his book *Dossier Secreto* attempts to debunk this point of view (Andersen 1993). He argues that the Dirty War was based on an imagined threat perceived by the military of terrorist groups who were, in actuality, never that much of a threat. Andersen states categorically: "At no time did the insurgents pose a real threat to the state."(Andersen 1993:13) As I have already mentioned, the main terrorist group of the early 1970's was the Montoneros, a leftist Perónist group inspired by Che Guevara and named after the mythic guerillas who fought the Spanish on horseback during the 19th century.[22] Anderson argues that despite the wider support that they may have had among young

[20] They also attempted unsuccessfully to trade the corpse of the General for the embalmed corpse of Evita.
[21] The military would often see itself in the role of caretaker of the country. When they felt the political situation was spiraling out of control, they would see it as their "sacred responsibility" to take control. I will address this further below.

middle class radicals, they only had around five hundred active guerillas participating in terrorist activities at any given moment. Most of their terrorist activities were directed against private property not people. They bombed banks. Their most spectacular act was the kidnapping of the Born brothers, heads of the multinational company Bunge & Born. It would become the most profitable kidnapping in world history - the Montoneros pocketed 60 million dollars in ransom money as well as truckloads of food and clothing for the poor, and they renegotiated contracts for Bunge & Born workers.

The other large terrorist group, the ERP, (a Maoist group) was less than two hundred strong at the start of the military regime. All in all, not much of a threat in comparison to the Argentine military which was 135,000 strong. At the time of the coup in 1976, leftist terrorist activity had declined from a high of 520 "subversive actions" in the month of September 1974 to less than 200 in January 1976. (Guest 1990: 20) Meanwhile the military would estimate between 15,000 to 30,000 guerillas. (Marchak 1999) The so-called terrorists barely merited the epithet. They were mostly poorly organized, poorly armed and badly trained young adults and teenagers – idealistic college students from more privileged backgrounds inspired by the exploits of Che, who though most closely associated with his activities in Cuba was born and raised in Argentina, a true homegrown hero.

As if that wasn't enough, right wing terrorist groups were far more active and far more violent than either the Montoneros or the ERP. The most prominent right wing terrorist group was the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (AAA), a phantom organization founded and led by José López Rega, a nefarious and enigmatic figure. In a story so strange it could only be real, López Rega was a police corporal and a mystical astrologer nicknamed "The Sorcerer"(*el brujo*) and later known as the "Rasputin of the Pampas." He became Perón's personal butler in Madrid. Upon Perón's return to power,

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[22] For a history of the Montoneros see Gillespie (1983)

he was appointed minister of social welfare and then commissioner general of the police. He effectively took power after Perón's death. Before seizing power, the military forced him out of the country where he became involved with anti-Castro Cubans in Miami while having a hand in the assassinations of Chilean exiles.[23] The AAA was a truly brutal organization targeting lawyers, journalists, psychoanalysts, and just about anyone with leftist sympathies. Just as the Montoneros and ERP would kidnap and ransom businessmen, the AAA did the exact same thing. They would also kill right wing political rivals and then blame the murders on the Montoneros. Many assassinations committed by the AAA were falsely attributed to the Montoneros. The AAA was funded with money coming from the government and could act with impunity because they had official protection from the army. No member of the AAA was ever arrested for any murder or other crime committed. They also acted far more brutally than their left wing counterparts, prompting historian Richard Gillespie to observe that "the Triple AAA was widely regarded as sinister and fought a far dirtier war than the most unprincipled guerrillas."(Gillespie 1983:186) Their tactics included picking up wounded Montoneros in Social Welfare Ministry Ambulances and bringing them to detention centers where they would torture and kill them.

By the time of the 'Dirty War,' the ERP had been completely decimated. All of the Montoneros' original leaders had been killed as well. Andersen alleges that the leader of the Montoneros at the time of the coup, Mario Firmenich, was actually a double agent who had been working as any army intelligent agent since 1973. Firmenich would have the Montoneros take credit for attacks that were carried out by the AAA. Two high-profile assassinations that lost the Montoneros public support when they claimed credit for them turned out to be committed by the AAA. When Perón made his

[23] López Rega would inevitably be arrested by the FBI in 1986 and extradited from Miami. He died in prison in 1989. (Andersen 1993:322)

return to power, the Montoneros had been able to come out in the open as a legitimate political group. A year later, Firmemich forced the Montoneros to go back underground. After being visible for more than a year, most members of the Montoneros had nowhere underground to go. This made them easy to identify and locate for the military. Meanwhile, Firmemich was safe in Paris. On several occasions, he also secretly met with Emilio Mássera to "discuss a truce." (Andersen 1993)

The picture being drawn here is one in which the threat of left-wing terrorism had eroded long before the military seized power. In sharp contrast to its left-wing counterparts, right-wing death squads, acting with impunity, armed and aided by the military and the government, had a free reign throughout the early 1970's. Moreover, the leader of the biggest terrorism group may have actually been a government informant. The question arises as to what created and perpetuated the military terror. The enemy may not have been entirely imagined, but its threat was not just over-exaggerated, it was maintained long after it had ceased to be a threat. The military nurtured this myth of an imminent communist takeover to the point in which the Dirty War would not reach its bloody pinnacle until 1978. Causally, it doesn't make sense that the peak of state terror occurred long after the threat of "subversive" terrorism had not merely ebbed but ceased to exist. For this reason, any instrumental explanation of military terror cannot be sustained.

The Political Economy of Terror

Analyzed economically, the Dirty War should be seen as an attempt to restructure the state centered Perónist welfare state into a neo-liberal, multinational, capitalist friendly model. For banks, the Military Junta was an attractive investment –

they were imposing authoritarians bringing the magic of stability.[24] (Pion-Berlin 1989:Smith 1989) During the incipient years of the regime, money was flowing. Loans from the International Monetary Fund, Chase Manhattan, Bank of America, Citibank and other institutions gave the illusion of prosperity, at the same time when disappearances were occurring on a daily basis. In total, U.S. banks lent 3 billion dollars to the Military Junta – 1.2 of which went directly to the government of state agencies. They also helped finance a 1 billion-dollar security apparatus that included detention centers equipped with the means of torture. But most of the money was used to keep the economy artificially inflated to give the aura of prosperity. The reality was an absolute disaster of financial irresponsibility, corruption and mismanagement.

Those first years of the coup would become known as the years of the "sweet money" (*la plata dulce*). People would go on shopping trips to New York, they traveled throughout the world, while they imported expensive electronics. The economic excess went hand in hand with a war against the poor. Shantytowns around the outskirts of Buenos Aires were bulldozed and the homeless were made to be invisible. Anyone working with or for the poor was susceptible to becoming "disappeared". In this 'Dirty War,' the military literally attempted to "clean" the country. Murals, posters and graffiti were washed away, streets were filled with flowers, and the bustling nightlife lent the city an "unreal" quality. (Feitlowitz 1998)

Jose Martinez de Hoz was the economic minister during the Junta. He was a businessman with strong ties to the United States. Under his control, "prices were deregulated, exchange controls eliminated, federal expenditures curtailed, credit tightened and wages frozen."(Pion-Berlin 1989:104) These moves made him a popular figure in the world of transnational capitalism. In 1977, during a visit to the country,

[24] Reagan advisor and former UN ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick would make the distinction between "totalitarian" communist regimes that were to be fought against and "authoritarian" capitalist regimes that were to be supported.

David Rockefeller, the chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank and a buddy of Martinez de Hoz praised the strength of Argentina's economy, saying, "I have the impression that finally Argentina has a regime which understands the private enterprise system."(quoted in Andersen 1993:250) If his impressions were indeed correct, a more stunning indictment of the "private enterprise system" would be difficult to imagine. During the military's reign of terror, the foreign debt quintupled to 39 billion, 500,000 workers lost their jobs, and inflation rose 450%. (Andersen 1993:306) Martinez de Hoz's economic policies were so disastrous that Argentina has yet to recover from them. They crippled the middle class while entrenching the underclass. "Between 1976 and November 1981, 200 companies every month went bankrupt; interest rates reached ceilings of between 250 and 300 percent; the number of unemployed reached 15% of a work force of 10 million."(Graham-Yoll 1982:XI) Yes, the Junta inherited a troubled economy from their predecessors. Yet it would be impossible to avoid the conclusion that their economic policies made matters far worse.

The temptation may exist to attempt to separate the neoliberal economics of Martinez de Hoz with the actions of the military. But as Gary Wynia observed, "[The Army's war on subversion and Martinez de Hoz's economic program] were complementary and inseparable. The butt for both was the urban sectors: the unions, industry, and much of the middle class. The Army's task... was to shatter their collective bargaining power and means of resistance; Martinez de Hoz's role was to weaken and ultimately destroy the economy on which they subsisted, for example, by eliminating the state as a major source of employment."(Wynia 1986:124) The military actions were instrumental in installing the economic reforms. "Pursuing the goals of competition, lower inflation, and fiscal balance, the government set out to deactivate those groups, such as labor movements, whose interests were tied to a protective, interventionist and

expansionary state."(Pion-Berlin:1989:14) Indicative of this is the large number of the disappeared who were active in trade unions.

> Hated and feared, objects to be despised yet also of awe with evil understood as the physical essence of their bodies, these are just as clearly objects of cultural creation, the leaden keel of evil and mystery stabilizing the ship and course that is Western history. With the cold war we add the communist.... The military...like the conquerors of old....discover[s] the evil they have imputed to these aliens, and mimic[s] the savagery they have imputed. – Michael Taussig (1987:9)

Cold War Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Global Circulation of Torture

Closely connected to this economic explanation is the politics of the cold war and counterinsurgency doctrine. Donald Hodges has traced this doctrine to James Burham, a conservative American intellectual and architect of cold war policy who had a strong influence around the world, including France and Argentina.(Hodges 130-133) The events of the Dirty War must be seen in a wider context of parallel Dirty Wars occurring throughout the world - events that took place in Algeria, Vietnam, Greece, and throughout South America. It's impossible to discuss any political developments in Latin American in the second half of the twentieth century (or even in the rest of the world) without being forced to address the role of the United States. However, unlike Chile in 1973 and most of the rest of Latin America, the C.I.A and the United States government have never been directly implicated in the Argentine military coup. But some links exist. According to journalist Martin Andersen, Henry Kissinger may have played an indirect role. Kissinger met with the Argentine Foreign Minister in June of 1976 shortly after the coup. Kissinger was expected to voice human rights complaints but Kissinger only asked how long it would take for them to solve their "terrorist problem." When told that it

would take a year, he approved, thus giving them a "green light" to go ahead with the repression.[25] (Andersen 1993)

Both the US and the French throughout the '60s and '70s taught Argentine army intelligence officers methods of torture, misinformation, and political assassinations. Going back to 1956, members of the Argentine military took classes at the School of War in Paris while French colonels taught Argentine officers in Buenos Aires counterinsurgency tactics used by the French in Indochina and Algeria (Verbitsky 1995). The very notion of a Dirty War (*la guerra sucia*) can be traced to what De Gaulle called *la sale guerre* in Algeria (Horne 1977). As David Pion-Berlin describes the rapid dissemination of French counterinsurgency doctrine: "Writing in 1964, an Argentine Colonel stated categorically that the hard-line French views had thoroughly penetrated the Argentine armed forces at every rank." (Pion-Berlin 1989:99)

Meanwhile, the CIA was attempting to coordinate greater interaction among security forces in Latin America to combat the 'red menace'. US Army School of the Americas (SOA) was founded in 1946 to teach counterinsurgency doctrines and methods. Videla "graduated" in 1964. Other illustrious graduates would include Manuel Noriega. Massera spent time at the "Inter-American Defense College," another similar US military endeavor. At the State Department's Office of Public Safety in Los Fresnos, Texas, where foreign military were supposed to learn how to diffuse bombs, they were taught how to make them (Andersen 1993). At the SOA, some of the popular class titles were "Urban Counterinsurgency," "Counterguerilla," "Psychological Warfare," and "Public Information." The Argentine military officers became teachers as well as students, disseminating their instruction to the Nicaraguan Contras and death squad leaders in El Savador and Guatemala.

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[25] Journalist Christopher Hitchens has recently alleged in Harper's Magazine (March 2001) that Kissinger also gave Indonesia what amounted to a "green light" to invade East Timor in 1975. It would seem that Kissinger has played the

And then there was *Operacion Condor*, a plan that had gone into effect in late 1975 that was Másterminded by Pinochet and the Chilean intelligence agency. It attempted to coordinate the intelligence operations of Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru, by allowing security forces to cross borders to carry out political assassinations. Political refugees in any of these countries would be in extremely precarious positions. Since the military conceived subversives as an internationally organized body (this was itself a myth), *Operacion Condor* allowed them to fight their 'war' beyond the confines of national borders.

Although the Dirty War was a local variant of world events, inconceivable without the Cold War, it also differed from the events occurring in the rest of the world because of culturally specific understandings that I will now attempt to identify.

"In Defense of Western, Christian tradition." – the Dirty War Ideology

Argentina would merge the national security and counterinsurgency doctrine disseminated by the United States and France with its own distinct form of right wing Catholic nationalism. The military saw Argentina as a victim of an international campaign of subversion being waged on multiple fronts both in Moscow and New York and literally believed that the Dirty War was the launching ground for World War III. Right before the coup, General Videla said "As many people as necessary must die in Argentina so that the country will again be secure."(Feitlowitz 1998:6) Two days after the coup, Videla was designated the president. Immediately, he stressed the theme of subordination while denouncing subversives. When Videla was questioned in 1977 regarding the disappearance of a woman in a wheelchair, he answered, "one becomes a terrorist not only by killing with a weapon or setting a bomb but also by encouraging

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role of a traffic light signal in the transit of international atrocities.

others through ideas that go against our Western and Christian civilization."(Feitlowitz 1998:54) A subversive could be any person whose ideas were contrary to "Western, Christian tradition." In defining a "subversive," the definition was so elastic that it could be applied to an extremely broad cross-section of society. Videla labeled a subversive as "anyone who opposes the Argentine way of life."(Pion-Berlin 1989:4)

Subversion was perceived everywhere and its elastic definition allowed it to be found everywhere as well. The gross overestimation of guerilla groups was part of this paranoia. In a widely disseminated statement by the governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, Iberica Saint Jean, the scope of military violence knew no boundaries: "First, we will kill all the subversives, then we will kill their collaborators, then their sympathizers, then those who remain indifferent and finally we will kill the timid."(Feitlowitz 1998:45)

The 'Dirty War' was conceived as a war of ideologies. As General Leopoldo Galtieri proclaimed, "WWI as the struggle between armies, WWII one between nations; WWIII will be a conflict between ideologies"(Rock 1993: 231) For the military, World War III would be the war where Christian values would triumph over subversion and communism. Videla declared that international subversives had attacked Argentina, "not only in a material sense but, what is worse, on the level of ideas, since this aggression aimed at subverting our system of life." (Deutsch 1986:240) It was their own embellishment of cold war discourse, yet the terms they spoke in were distinct in their extremity and in their strong theological underpinnings. Subversives were considered a "a minority that we do not consider Argentine."(Arditti 1999:8) Videla would consistently use Roman Catholic themes of sacrifice along with the idea of a collective national essence or soul (*el ser nacional*) (Feitlowitz 1998). An example from a speech given on Christmas Eve 1976 by General Videla: "Without a doubt the year ends under the sign

of sacrifice. A shared, indispensible sacrifice which marks the beginning of our way to the true reuniting of Argentines; through sacrifice we will be able to face the future, ourselves, and the world."(Rodriguez 1994:278)

Who was to be sacrificed? The military promulgated a myth of persecution by invisible enemies. According to the military regime, Argentina was under attack from all sides by sinister international conspiracies involving both international communist operatives and a Jewish/Zionist campaign involving Jews controlling the United States, the Soviet Union and Israel. When Jacobo Timerman was detained and tortured, most of the questioning revolved around a Zionist conspiracy to invade Argentina and turn Patagonia into a second Jewish State. (Timerman 1981)[26] So hence, General Cristino Nicolaides could talk about a "Marxist-Communist international ... that has been active since 500BC." (Rock 1993:231). As tempting as it is to snicker at statements such as these, statements reeking of rabid paranoia and teetering on the brink of lunacy, we shouldn't discount their profound consequences. The myth of persecution by foreign enemies allowed many Argentines to ignore or disregard human rights protests. Human rights groups were considered fronts for international subversion. One of the more famous slogans in response to human rights accusations boldly declared "*Nosotros somos humanos, nosotros somos derechos* (we are human, we are right)," an obvious play on words directed against human rights groups that graced many posters, bumper stickers, and T-shirts during the Dirty War.

Freud, Einstein and Marx were considered the three main ideological enemies. Freud was condemned for destroying the Christian concept of the family, Einstein for destroying the Christian concept of time and space, and Marx for all the obvious reasons. (Timerman 1981:130) Psychoanalysts particularly suffered because their role

[26] In the end, Timerman was found "guilty" of being a Zionist, stripped of his citizenship and sent on a plane to Israel. After witnessing Israel's invasion of Lebanon, he ended up returning to Argentina after the restoration of democracy.

according to the military was to "bolster the spirits of the guerillas." Hundreds of psychoanalysts were killed. Many more fled into exile. Censors prohibited the use of psychoanalytic language. School textbooks were rewritten. Words like democracy were removed. Operation Clarity removed 8,000 "ideologically suspect" professors and teachers from schools. Sociology, psychology, anthropology and many other social science departments were completely dismantled.

Anyone helping the poor would also be considered "ideologically suspect" by the military, including social workers, teachers, community organizers and even Catholic priests. While the Catholic Church in Argentina was and still is notoriously conservative (particularly in comparison with some of its more progressive Latin American counterparts), there still existed a minority of priests associated with liberation theology and the Third World Priest Movement who fought on behalf of the poor. In total, 17 priests were murdered. As one disappeared priest was told by his interrogator, "You aren't a guerilla... you're not involved in violence but you don't realize that when you go to live in these [shantytowns], you are bringing people together, you are uniting the poor, and uniting the poor is subversion." (Mignone 1988:107) Of these priests, it was said [Ruben Chamorro, the director of the ESMA]: "They will not confuse us, either with their titles or their ecclesiastical robes, nor with their cunning and speculative behavior. An infinite minority cannot be allowed to continue upsetting the minds of our youth, teaching them foreign ideas and turning them into social critics, with an interpretation cunningly distorted of what Christian doctrine is. All this is subversion." (Marchak 1999)

The Meaning of Disappearance – The Reshaping of Reality

Once a person disappeared, they became, to paraphrase the title words of Jacobo Timerman's memoir of his experience, "prisoners without a name" in "cells without a number." They were stripped of their identities. There was no due process, and no formal charges were filed. To be officially arrested and transferred to an authorized prison was a sign that a person would re-emerge. Once identified and located, the person would not be killed. In the case of a disappearance, the person simply vanished. The vast majority of people (62%) were kidnapped in their homes.(Nunca Más 1986:11) The rest could be taken at their place of work or study or even off of the street. Most of these people had absolutely nothing to do with leftist terrorist organizations. If they weren't in trade unions or helping the poor, they could be involved in a variety of "dangerous" occupations, including lawyers, teachers, psychiatrists, and scientists. A person could disappear just for having one's name found in the phone book of another person who disappeared. In some cases, a person disappeared simply because of mistaken identity.

Though the selection of individuals targeted for disappearance was rather arbitrary, the kidnappings were highly organized operations that followed a fairly standardized procedure. Before making a kidnapping, the military would notify the local police in advance, asking for a "green light". Once given, the operations would usually involve five or six men with heavy weaponry in a 'signature' vehicle – an unlicensed green Ford Falcon. They would storm the house, blindfold the intended target and then dump them into the back seat and drive off while the other men would steal everything of value in the house. Sometimes, they tortured the person in the house before taking them. These military operations were hierarchical but also de-centralized. In the words of one general speaking retrospectively, "the country was divided into zones, and each zone had, in addition to normal political authorities, a military authority that was

responsible for the fight against subversion. Then each zone was divided into subzones, and each subzone into areas. So the whole territory was controlled in a geographical arrangement."(Marchak 1999:283)

The disappeared person would then be taken to any one of an underground network of detention centers that sprung up to detain the *desaparecidos.* These camps had been planned from the beginning of the 1970s. 340 of these clandestine detention centers existed throughout the country. The most notorious of which was the ESMA or the *Escuela Superior de Mecanica de la Armada* (Navy School of Mechanics), which has been described as 'Argentina's Auschwitz.' Located in an unassuming suburban Buenos Aires neighborhood, the prison was hidden in the basement. An estimated 5,000 prisoners were killed there. Only two hundred survived.

Were most Argentines aware of what was going on around them? This is not an easy question to answer but it is safe to conclude that almost every person had at least a peripheral awareness of the disappearances. The oft-quoted refrain that greeted news of a disappearance was, "it must be for something," squarely placing the blame on the victim. If they did not directly know a *desaparecido*, most people knew *of* a *desaparecido,* whether it was a co-worker, a neighbor, a distant relative or a casual acquaintance. If the disappearance didn't personally touch the individual (if it wasn't a close relative or a good friend), the tendency was to ignore it. With few notable exceptions, disappearances were met with silence. For example, one woman disappeared on a crowded bus during rush hour. She was on her way home from work. The bus stopped, a group of armed men climbed aboard and yanked her off of the bus by her hair. No one said a word, except for one woman who meekly told the men, "not by the hair." Once the woman was taken off of the bus, the bus continued on its route as if nothing had occurred. (Feitlowitz 1998)

Why were people silent? Were they terrorized? Some people were but some people clearly were not. A large number of people even maintain that they were not aware of what was going on around them. As one individual has said, "I didn't see people that frightened. People were comfortable. People were shopping and travelling and everything was fine."(Marchak 1999:29) The question arises as to whether we take them at their word or view them like certain Germans who claimed not to know what was going on inside the concentration camps in their midst. Many people liked the illusion of security that the military provided upon seizing power. The reports are contradictory. Some people lived through the entire period terrified for their lives, forced to carry their identification cards everywhere, afraid of being disappeared like so many others. Other people carried on with their everyday lives in sweet oblivion. They went to nightclubs and restaurants and, at least, acted as if life was 'normal.' The difference in people's experiences can probably be attributed to people who were in "risk" categories for disappearances – leftist students, union members, and certain doctors, lawyers, teachers and social workers – as opposed to those who were not.

What is certain is that disappearances as a military procedure, a *modus operandi* of eliminating political enemies, allowed many people to carry on their everyday lives *as if* everything was perfectly normal. In this way, disappearances were integral to sustaining what Michael Taussig has called a "culture of terror." From the article "Terror as Usual", Taussig describes the effectiveness of disappearance as a mode of state violence:

> Above all the Dirty War is a war of silencing. There is no officially declared war. No prisoners. No torture. No disappearing. Just silence consuming terror's talk

for the main part, scaring people into saying nothing in public that could be construed as critical of the Armed forces. (Taussig 1992:26-27)

Certainly, many people had nothing critical to say about the military. However, the people who did were the ones who were silenced for fear of being the next *desaparecido*. But the large numbers of people who supported the military should not be ignored. One cannot make the conclusion that every Argentine was terrorized during this period. Not every Argentine was an innocent victim. Many supported the military regime. Many supported the repression. The military state during the 'Dirty War' should not be seen as disembodied from the population, especially those segments whose interests it was directly serving.

But relatives and friends of the disappeared undeniably lived through this period in agonizing terror. Their loved ones had disappeared without a trace. They could not even receive acknowledgment or confirmation of their deaths. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo would later argue against the exhumation of the mass graves, refusing to acknowledge the murder of their children until those responsible were held accountable. [27] Disappearances exacted an extreme psychological toll on the relatives and loved ones of the disappeared. As Vincente Angel Galli, director of mental health of the Argentine government observed, "To presume the death of people you not seen dead, without knowing the conditions of their death, implies one has to kill them oneself. I believe that is one of the more subtle and complex mechanisms of torture for the relatives and for all the members of the community.... To accept their deaths we have to kill them ourselves." (quoted in Arditti 1999:15)

The military would not acknowledge having any role in the disappearance, thus making it even more frustrating for the families. Perhaps the more important

observation is not that people simply lived in terror but that the regime was able to maintain itself through the systematic denial of its own actions. This denial required the skillful recasting of reality. To quote Taussig again,

> To an important extent, all societies live by fictions taken as reality. What distinguishes cultures of terror is that the epistemological, ontological, and otherwise purely philosophical problem of reality-and-illusion, certainty-and-doubt, becomes infinitely more than a 'merely' philosophical problem. It becomes a high-practiced tool for domination and a principal medium of political practice.(Taussig 1992:150)

It could be safe to make the conclusion that the Junta would have quickly lost popular support if the scope of its brutalities were known. Pressure from the United Nations/ international community and from their own citizens would have led to the collapse of the military regime. They certainly would not have been able to hold the World Cup of soccer in Argentina in 1978. So the military acted in secrecy and denied all accountability for its actions. And so there were no disappearances. Quite simply, the disappeared did not exist.

But questions about the disappearances persisted. Finally, Videla went on television and made the following statement - "There are several reasons: they have disappeared in order to live clandestinely and to dedicated themselves to subversion; they have disappeared because the subversive organizations have eliminated them as traitors to the cause; they have disappeared because in a shootout with fire and explosions, the corpse was mutilated beyond identification, and I accept that some persons might have disappeared owing to excesses committed by the

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[27] See Robben (2000).

repression."(Feitlowitz 1998: 28) The most he acknowledged were a few scattered excesses. This view persists to this day. For a large segment of the population, a few scattered excesses were permissible in the name of "national security." When questioned further, the military systematically dismissed the allegations as the result of an "international anti-Argentine campaign," which fed from and into the paranoia that the country was under attack from invisible enemies; in this case, human rights organizations.

The military's production of reality went even further than rhetorical denials. The nightly news would report daily shootouts taking place between 'subversives' and the military. According to these reports, the military would always inevitably triumph, killing the armed subversives in a befittingly heroic manner. Of course, these "shootouts" never took place. Alicia Partnoy describes in *The Little School*, based on her experiences in the concentration camp known by the same name, the fate of two of her fellow prisoners – Zulma "Vasca" Aracelli Izurieta and Cesar Antonio "Braco" Giordiano. "On April 12, 1977 after more than four months in detention they were made to bathe and put on their own clothing.... I listened as they were injected with anesthesia – the guards joked about it and I could hear the deep and rhythmic breathing of those who are asleep. The guards wrapped them in blankets and took them away. The next day, April 13, 1977, the two couples appeared in *La Nueva Provincia*, the daily newspaper of Bahia Blanca, as having been killed in a 'confrontation' with military forces in a house in General Cerri near Bahia Blanca." (Partnoy 1986:125) This was not an isolated instance but constituted a standard operation. Argentine newspapers from the time of the 'Dirty War' are littered with accounts of "shootouts" that never occurred. The military would even artfully arrange the dead bodies of the disappeared with guns and terrorist

paraphernalia as "evidence" of the "shootouts" for display to photographers and television crews. The photographs would then grace newspapers and television news.[28]

Once a person disappeared, the family of the *desaparecido* would have to petition the courts, but lawyers who did so risked being disappeared themselves. Out of all the newspapers only Jacobo Timerman's *La Opinion* and the English language *Buenos Aires Herald* pressed the government on this issue. They also did this at their own risk; 100 journalists were forced into exile, another 92 were disappeared including Timerman.

Once disappeared, the person would be subjected to routinized torture and then they would be killed – either executed (the body would then be buried in a mass grave or incinerated) or drugged and taken up on an airplane and tossed out while still alive. Only a very small minority re-appeared. On March 2, 1995, retired Navy Captain Adolfo Scilingo publicly confessed to participating in two of these weekly death flights.[29] He admitted to participating in two of the flights in June or July 1977. The flights took place every Wednesday for two years. On a typical flight, 15 to 20 people were drugged and dragged on a plane. Once they were in mid-flight over the ocean, they would be stripped naked and dropped out of the airplane. (Verbitsky 1997) Most of the Navy took part in this - "most of the men participated in a flight. It was done in order to rotate people, a kind of communion." (Verbitsky 1997:29) When Scilingo felt guilty afterwards and confessed to a military chaplain of the ESMA, he was told that it was a "Christian death, because they didn't suffer, because it wasn't traumatic, that they had to be eliminated, that war was war and even the Bible provided for eliminating the weeds from the wheat field."(Verbitsky 1997:30) From the military's point of view, they were acting

[28] Because of this "theatricality," some scholars have focussed their analyses on the performative aspects of the 'Dirty War.' (see Taylor [1997] and Graziano [1992])
[29] Although these flights had been common knowledge before Scilingo's confession, Scilingo was the first member of the military to go on the record and discuss his involvement with them. When *El Vuelo* came out in Argentina it created a huge sensation. Shortly after, Masked gunmen attempted to assassinate Scilingo.

like true humanitarians – as one Admiral put it, "Now you'll ask me, why would we waste an injection on those prisoners? But we did." (quoted in Rosenberg 1991:86)

The Treatment of Pregnant Women

Women made up 30% of the disappeared. 10% of them were pregnant at the time of their disappearance. Though this strikes me as an extremely and unusually high number, I cannot conclude that pregnant women were specifically targeted. Certainly, the military had no qualms kidnapping women in advanced stages of pregnancy, but I have not been able to find any evidence that this was part of a more general plan. Although, lack of evidence doesn't necessarily exclude it as a possibility since so much of the evidence is unavailable. In accounting for the high percentage, it may be because the vast majority of the disappeared were so young. Over 58% were between the ages of 21-28 and 80% were between the ages of 17-35. However, the percentage of women who were pregnant is still much higher than any statistical sample of women in that age bracket in the general population.

Several of the detention centers had facilities for pregnant women. The most notorious one was the Campo de Mayo Military Hospital which was part of the ESMA. According to the testimonies of six obstetricians, four midwives and two nurses who worked in the hospital during the years 1976-77: a) the prisoners were women in an advanced state of pregnancy; b) their admission into the Epidemiological Unit was not registered; c) the women were kept in the unit blindfolded or with their eyes covered in black sunglasses, and guarded; d) in most cases they were subjected to Caesarean sections (carried out at night), and after the operation the mothers were immediately

separated from their babies, the fate of both was indeterminate. (Nunca Más 1986:294-295)

A nurse at the hospital testified that "pregnant women were held, tied to the beds by their hands and feet in the throes of labor and given a serum to accelerate birth."(Nunca Más 1986: 295) The women would be killed shortly after giving birth. In the majority of cases, the babies were then given up for adoption to childless married couples. In the Navy Hospital, "there was a list of married couples in the Navy who could not have children of their own, and who were prepared to adopt one of the children of people who had disappeared. The man who drew up the list was a gynaecologist attached to the Navy Mechanics School." (Nunca Más 1986:289) "Ruben Chamorro [director of ESMA] used to give guided tours for senior navy officials around the rooms where the pregnant women were waiting to deliver their children." The list "had been compiled of navy wives who had no children and were anxious to adopt."(Guest 1990:44)

The Lacuna

How many babies were there? We are confronted by the large disparity between the number of missing children that the Grandmothers estimate exist (400-500) and the actual documented cases of missing children (256). To account for this disparity, María Isabel Chorobik de Mariani, a founder of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, argues that "nothing is known about the children about whom a complaint was never made."(Stener Carlson 1996:108) The verified cases are only those in which a mother or a spouse or a friend knew that the woman was pregnant at the time of her disappearance and then came forward with this information. Since pregnant women

were rarely killed while they were still pregnant, the conclusion is that if a woman who was pregnant was abducted, her child should be alive. Exhumations of the mass graves by forensic anthropologists have supported this conclusion. However, the estimate of the Grandmothers goes beyond this assumption since it posits the existence of pregnant women whom no one knew were pregnant at the time of their disappearance. Or, at least, no one who would come forward on their behalf to attest to this. Since the time spent in the clandestine detention centers could last more than two years and that there were widespread rapes, we might also assume that there were babies born from these rapes. As far as I could find in the course of my research, however, none have been documented.

This problem points towards a more general question surrounding the large disparity between the documented number of cases of disappeared which is put around 10,000 and the estimates of human rights groups which is usually around 30,000. More conservative estimates will put the number between 15,000 and 20,000. In accounting for the disparity María Adela Gard de Antokoletz, a representative of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, has said:

> We say "thirty thousand *desaparecidos*" but these are the determinations of the human rights organizations. In Jujuy there's a mine that has been extremely rich in silver. In this mine ninety people disappeared – there's only one official complaint. Only one. Here, going from Buenos Aires to Rosario, there's a large factory called Talmed. In Talmed there disappeared and were killed (the number goes for both) two hundred and fifty people. There are seventy official complaints. Of the disappeared who were from a military family, the families

didn't lodge a complaint, except in rare cases. (quoted in Stener Carlson 1996:72)

The numbers have become (or have always been) political. Supporters of the military will discard the estimates of human rights groups and contend that CONADEP over-exaggerated the numbers for political purposes and that the actual number of deaths is closer to three or four thousand.[30] Although mass graves where the bodies of the disappeared exist, most of the evidence has been destroyed. Incinerators disposed of the bodies of thousands of the disappeared, not to mention the thousands who were thrown alive into the ocean, their bodies never to reappear, except in the rare instances when the corpses washed up ashore.[31] In other words, there is no way of verifying the number of the disappeared beyond the claims of people who came forward on their behalf.

Why did such a large number of people refuse to come forward? If we believe the estimates of the human rights groups (and I believe their numbers are justified), we must assume the existence of large numbers of people who knew a neighbor, a relative or a friend who disappeared did not come forward on their behalf. Human rights groups will assert that it is out of shame or out of fear; shame because there is still the stigma attached to having been a relative of a *desaparecido* and fear because of the threat of reprisals. Shame would be the likely cause in the case of military families. Although the political climate in Argentina is more hospitable to human rights, especially after the restoration of democracy in 1983, the dangers of reprisals have not sufficiently

[30] In the words of one Argentine lawyer, a defender of and apologist for the military, "I believe the dead could have numbered about 3,000, of which more than half died in open combat with the legal forces, police forces and gendarmeries."(Marchak 1999:36). In the words of a Major in the Argentine military, "The 30,000 that the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo claim do not exist." (Marchak 1999:300)

[31] In military slang, the word to refer to *desaparecidos* thrown from an airplane was "fish food."

subsided.[32] Fear would therefore be a likely motivating factor for the large numbers of uncounted *desaparecidos,* especially in the cases of those people from more marginal communities. The rest could also include cases in which entire families disappeared, leaving no relative or friend to come forward or, simply, people without anyone to come forward on their behalf. It would be difficult to imagine an empirical study that could explain why people who don't come forward, don't come forward. The very fact that they don't come forward precludes their presence in social science research. Regardless of why they don't come forward, the continuing silence of large numbers of relatives or friends or neighbors who knew of *desaparecidos* but refused to come forward make them inaccessible for social science inquiry beyond broad speculation.

However, I would argue that this inaccessibility should not be an excuse for anthropologists. If anything, it should point out how little is actually known about state violence, and this should tell us to be weary of making any large generalizations that cannot be supported. Even in the case of Argentina, which is considered to be one of the most heavily documented cases of state violence in recent years, we can only account for one-third to one-half of the people who were killed. Anthropologists and other scholars addressing the 'Dirty War' have ignored the significance of this absence.

For example, Antonius C. G. Robben, taking a psychoanalytical perspective, argues that "the disappearances carried out in the intimacy of the home invaded the primary object-relation of parent and child, and provoked intense guilt feelings among the surviving parents about having failed to protect their adult and adolescent children."(Robben 2000:71) He draws the conclusion that "the politicization of the dead by the military led mothers to cope with their separation anxiety either by a projective search for the human remains or by in introjective vindication of the revolutionary ideals

[32] This is especially true considering there have been at least three attempted military coups since 1983. Some of those who have come forward have also been subject to violent anonymous attacks.

embraced by many disappeared before their abduction."(Robben 2000:71-72). Unfortunately, this interpretation can only account for the small minority of mothers; the mothers who formed the Mothers of the Disappeared, who bravely and openly contested the military regime at the height of the 'Dirty War.'[33] After the fall of the regime, the Mothers split between the more radical wing who came to embrace the ideals of their children by advocating general social justice and the less militant mothers whose goals were limited to seeking justice for their disappeared child. But most mothers with disappeared children joined neither group. To use the estimates of the human rights groups that the mothers themselves use, we would have to assume that many mothers did not even come forward to say that their child died. Robben's account can only account for a minority of mothers' response to the disappearance of their child leaving us in the dark as to the response by most mothers.

Witnessing and Testimony

The disparity of numbers is one barrier facing social scientists looking at the 'Dirty War,' in particular, but this isn't merely a problem that can be limited to one particular instance of violence. The obstacle is not only an epistemological one but also an ethical one since it forces social scientists into deciding how to delineate the most abominable practices. Most social scientists analyzing violence are faced with its inaccessibility and remoteness. This remoteness of violence to anthropologists can be seen in almost direct opposition to victims' immediateness with it. This immediateness can be impossible to convey since it can defy any form of representation. On one hand, there exists the remove of the social scientist. As Michael Taussig writes, "Most of us

[33] And at great personal risk as well. The original Mothers group was infiltrated by the military. Three of the founding members disappeared along with two French nuns who were helping them. All of them were

know and fear torture and the culture of terror only through the words of others."(Taussig 1987:3) Hence Taussig's concern is with how narration can attempt to mediate the culture of terror and how anthropologists can address violence without being voyeuristic and without reproducing it. (Taussig 1987; Taussig 1992)

Many anthropological works on violence, such as Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence* (1991), have focused on storytelling and narration. Since the object itself is so difficult to reach, the concern falls on how that experience is mediated by victims.[34] While this may be part of a more general trend in anthropology of the past two decades that has focussed on the role of narrative in anthropological representations, the problem of analyzing violence may be the extreme case on an epistemological sliding scale. In other words, narrative is the only accessible source for the vast majority of anthropologists looking at violence.

The remoteness of violence to social scientists can be directly contrasted with the immediacy it has to its victims, an immediacy so intense that language is incapable of expressing it. Taussig describes this "ineffability" as a primary feature of the "space of death." Philosopher Elaine Scarry, in her abstruse work *The Body in Pain* (1986) argues in a similar vein: that the pain experienced by victims of torture is beyond description; that it resists all attempts at representation.

Everything that I can claim to know about what happened during the Dirty War and what specifically happened to the pregnant women prisoners is through the testimony of survivors. Because I am not looking at the events through their mediation in narrative testimony, I should address this epistemological problem before proceeding any further with my analysis. On one hand, we have social scientist researchers, kept at such a distance from the object of their research, that they are only able to observe it

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killed.

indirectly through the mediation of others. On the other hand, we have these 'others' - those who witnessed and experienced violence, those who are incapable of putting into words - incapable of fully mediating their experience. These two epistemological obstacles are interrelated, but I do not believe they are insurmountable. I do not believe we are stuck in epistemological murk, unable to make any claims whatsoever.

French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard has addressed this problem in his work, *The Differend* (1988). He begins by addressing the arguments of Holocaust revisionists:

> You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it. Most of them disappeared then, and the survivors rarely speak about it. When they do speak about it, their testimony bears only upon a minute part of this situation. How can you know that the situation existed? That it is not the fruit of your informant's imagination? Either the situation did not exist as such. Or else it did exist, in which case your informant's testimony is false, either because he or she should have disappeared, or else because he or she should remain silent, or else because, if he or she does speak, he or she can bear witness only to the particular experience he or she had, it remaining to be established whether this experience was a component of the situation in question." (Lyotard 1988:3)

The arguments made by Holocaust revisionists are not the "ultra-relativistic" claims about the impossibility of truth, as some critics profess. In fact, it's just the opposite. They deny the Holocaust occurred on scientific grounds – they argue that

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[34] Anthropological accounts almost inevitably focus on victims of violence rather than perpetrators, if only because victims are much more likely to talk about it with anthropologists. Feldman's (1991) ethnography is a rare exception in the literature.

there is a lack of real "scientific evidence" for the gas chambers at Auschwitz. According to Lyotard's argument, the proof that they require is impossible to produce. To prove to them that the gas chambers were actually used to kill would require a witness who could attest to seeing this happen. If a witness can be produced, then the witness would have had to survive. A survivor, by the very fact of their survival, can be used as evidence against the fact that gas chambers were used to kill. A witness who could positively attest to the "proof" of the gas chamber's function would have to be dead. Giorgio Agamben has identified this as "an essential lacuna" at the core of testimony – "the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to."(Agamben 1999:13)

But there is even a more practical problem in addressing this lacuna. Most of the testimony comes from the testimony of those who survived - the one- or two-percent of the disappeared who reappeared. On one hand, we are told that survival was dependent on chance and circumstance. Collaborating with the military was no guarantee of survival just as refusing to give any information was no guarantee of being killed. From many accounts, this seems to be the case. As Tina Rosenberg observed, "collaboration was no guarantee of survival. Many people who broke and fingered companeros were killed. Many who didn't turn in anyone walked out alive."(Rosenberg 1991:95)

On the other hand, survival could also be contingent on the individual's circumstance. The bizarre contradiction is that in certain cases, the more "innocent" the individual was the less the chance the person had of survival. Those who were Montoneros had a greater chance of surviving after disappearance than those who had no affiliation with the left-wing terrorist group. The explanation is that Head of the Navy, Emilio Massera, growing disgruntled with the neo-liberal economic reforms of the state,

attempted to reinvent himself as a Perónist populist. To do this, he began employing disappeared Montoneros as speechwriters and political advisors in the clandestine prisons. After releasing them, he then would employ them to administer his looted properties. (Rosenberg 1991)

The people who participated in what happened did not only deny all personal involvement in what occurred. They denied the events occurred altogether. Even if relatives knew where they could find the baby, it would still be denied, and anyone who helped them would themselves fall at risk of disappearance:

> In a hospital in Quilmes one midwife, after hearing a prisoner shout out her name, wrote to her parents informing them that their grandchild had been born. When the relatives came to the hospital the birth was denied. The midwife, together with a nurse who had made inquiries about the prisoner, were both kidnapped and disappeared.(Fisher 1989:107)

Not only have they denied the events occurred, they have attempted to eliminate all evidence of their occurrence. A document issued by the Ministry of the Interior during the dictatorship gave explicit instructions of what to do with the children of the disappeared. This document was destroyed by the military (along with countless others, including a reputed list of the names of all the disappeared) before the return to democracy in anticipation of future inquiry and/or accountability. (Arditti 1999:198) The military also acted in awareness of the possibility that one day relatives might come looking for the missing babies and attempted to deliberately mislead any investigations into concluding that the babies had been killed. For example, one baby girl was given for adoption after both her parents and her two older siblings had been killed. The

military claimed that they were all armed subversives who had been killed in a shootout. They buried the bodies and then buried the baby's clothes and her pacifier in a fifth empty coffin with her name on it, implying that the newborn infant was an armed terrorist that had been involved in the shootout. (Taylor 1997:142)

Another problem, perhaps an even greater challenge, is the difficulty in making any broad generalizations about what occurred. The violence, while authorized from the highest ranks of the military command, was also decentralized. As Timerman writes, "Each officer of a military region had his own prisoners, prisons, and forms of justice, and even the central power was unable to request the freedom of an individual when importuned by international pressure."(Timerman 1981:26-27) In his own case, when he was kidnapped: "From the outset, President Rafael Videla and General Roberto Viola tried to convert my disappearance into an arrest in order to save my life. They did not succeed."(Timerman 1981:29) Videla and Viola intervened not because of any concern for Timerman's welfare but because of the international attention that his case received. The failure of the military dictators to intercede in Timerman's abduction indicates a defuse hierarchy. Timerman concluded that his life was saved only because the military wing who captured him were Nazis who believed Timerman was "one of the sages of Zion" and that they would use him in a trial against the international Jewish conspiracy.[35] (Timerman 1981:30) Many other relatives and friends of the disappeared were confronted with this same problem. When they contacted powerful people for assistance, even high-ranking military officers were powerless to help them, even if they were inclined to do so.

[35] "It sounds absurd to read that my torturers wanted to know the details of an interview they believed Menahem Begin had held in 1976 in Buenos Aires with the Montoneros guerillas. It is less absurd when you're being tortured to extract an answer to that question."(Timerman 1981:72) The army believed that Begin was trying to seize Patagonia for the establishment of a second Jewish state. For anyone familiar with Begin's politics, the idea that he would meet with Marxist guerillas in Argentina is truly absurd, especially when considering that Israel was selling weapons to Argentina's military throughout the 'Dirty War.'

We read contradictory reports about the treatment of pregnant women. On the one hand, from most reports, pregnant women were subject to routine rape and torture - the same treatment as most of the other female (and male) prisoners. One of the most horrifying examples of this is that of a spoon a detention center doctor (nicknamed Mengele) attached to the end of the electric prod that was specifically used for torturing pregnant women. This instrument was used to electrically shock the fetus inside the woman's body. This would often lead to miscarriages.

On the other hand, one Grandmother, Otilia Lescano de Argañarez, reported:

> My daughter was six months pregnant. We know from survivors from the camp where she was taken that she was well treated because they had their eyes on the baby. They gave her vitamins, a real mattress, and made her believe that they would set her free.(quoted in Arditti 1999:60)

These two contradictory reports make it difficult to make any types of generalizations about the treatment of women during their pregnancies. In the first case, the pregnant woman was brutally assaulted and the focus of the violence was on her unborn child. In the second case, the military apparently attempted to take care of the woman as best as possible to ensure a healthy child.

Part II: Explanations

The problem that I have found with most analyses of political violence is that they tend to conceal more than they reveal. In sorting out the ethnographic data from survivors' testimonies and trying to show the regularities that conform to their theses,

social scientists will often leave absent all the irregularities that do not fit. I would argue that these absences can be of equal significance to that which is included.

In attempting to avoid this problem, I will critically engage the explanations that have been suggested by others. The first explanation is instrumental. In this explanation, the military did not want the children of the disappeared growing up seeking to revenge the murder of their parents. Raising the children of the disappeared as their own would function as a preemptive strike. They were preventing a possible event in the future from ever taking place. This explanation has been used by the military to justify their actions. Emilio Mignone was told by Army General José Antonio Vaquero that "one of the problems we have to face is that of the children of the disappeared, who will grow up hating the military institutions."(quoted in Arditti 1999:50) This would be the military's attempt to solve this problem.

This explanation cannot hold. Bluntly put, if the fear of the children of the disappeared growing up seeking revenge was a motivating factor in their actions, the military could have killed them alongside their parents. Were they unable to kill innocent children in the same way that they were able to kill innocent adults? Were they prevented by some obscure qualms? Although a rare occurrence, young children were killed. And this certainly cannot account for why they would hold the pregnant prisoners alive long enough to give birth. If the fear of the children of the disappeared growing up seeking revenge had been a chief motivating factor, then there would have been no reason to keep the pregnant women alive long enough to give birth to their fetuses.

Moreover, in the cases of babies who were already born at the time they were kidnapped, they weren't always taken for adoption. The military would select one of several possible options. The child could be left with neighbors. The child could be sent to an orphanage where they would either be handed back to relatives or adopted. The

child could be taken to the victim's relatives. The child could be left abandoned in the place where their parents were kidnapped. Or the child could be kidnapped and taken to the secret detention camps where they could be tortured or they could be forced to watch their parents tortured. (Nunca Más 1986:14) Again, it's difficult to find exact numbers to break down the possibilities, but even if the final option was the most prevalent, their actions weren't entirely systematic either. Nevertheless, this does not preclude authorization from above.

The second explanation is economic. The babies of the disappeared were commodities – they were objects with use value for the military. In military lingo, they were "spoils of war," valued possessions that could be seized by the victorious soldiers from the vanquished enemy. When kidnappings occurred, the army ransacked homes and stole everything they could. This looting of the possessions of the disappeared was extremely widespread and followed a "well-used *modus operandi* which was very carefully worked out." (Nunca Más, 271). Everything of value was siezed by the military. Even after the person was disappeared, their torturers would continue to attempt to profit off of them. Several cases occurred where the army forced prisoners to sign over their property/bank accounts to military men only to be killed after transferring it. In the words of Nunca Más:

> It is worth repeating that the violations committed by those responsible for repression involved not only attacks against the freedom and security of individuals, but also the systematic and simultaneous transgression of other legal rights, such as property and public documents to facilitate the transfer of goods or to set up non-existent transactions. False deeds, false documents, false car

registrations and certificates of ownership were made out to expedite looting and theft. (Nunca Más, 272)

Babies and small children were also seized and on some occasions they would be given for adoption to military families. To quote Nunca Más, "the repressors who took the disappeared children from their homes, or who seized mothers on the point of giving birth, were making decisions about people's lives in the same cold-blooded way that booty is distributed in war." Police physician Jorge Antonio Berges, known as "Dr. Death" or the "Argentine Mengele," supervised the birth of numerous pregnant desaparecidas. Described by Jacobo Timerman as an "implacable torturer, incredibly cynical and nasty," Berges' job was to make sure prisoners didn't die under torture. He also had a side business consisting of selling babies born in captivity. To do this, he facilitated the falsification of birth certificates. From the evidence, some babies were considered more valuable than others. Prospective couples could choose the baby they wanted based on description of the woman's looks and her level of education.(Feitlowitz 1998:67) One pregnant woman was killed in her last trimester of pregnancy because she was said to be "ugly" and they were afraid that the child would be as well. (Taylor 1997)

This explanation is plausible but insufficient. Taking the children of their enemy as their own could also be construed as a symbolic victory. They could have killed the woman before she gave birth, but reincorporating the child of the subversive into the national body would serve as a final and tangible victory over their invisible enemies. The child would be raised with the military's values and beliefs. By having the child of a subversive raised by an army officer, inculcating their values into the child, their victory over subversion would take the physical form of the child of the disappeared: literally

and metaphorically the future. Since the 'Dirty War' was conceived as not only a struggle for Argentina's future but as "a process for national reorganization," their actions would be an attempt to actualize this process.

This understanding would only serve to explain the functional aspect of their actions. We could still ask what historical events and cultural images could have led this to occur.

The Role of the Military

The military believed itself to be performing a national service by taking power. They considered it to be their obligation. The origins of this belief comes from the professionalization of the Argentine military that occurred in the latter half of the 19th century. The Argentine military has been described as "one of the most highly professionalized armies in Latin America."(Politics and Anti-Politics 46) What does 'professionalized' mean? "By professionalized is meant the formation of a technically trained army officers corps comprised of paid career men dedicated solely to professional matters."(46) The long term effects of professionalization was "politicizing the armed forces to defend their corporate interests, which they identified as synonymous with those of the nation." (Rodriguez 1994: xiii) This politicization also resulted in the military believing "that civilians existed to serve a military purpose." (Rosenberg 1991:107)

A 1966 military training manual, required reading for every soldier, was explicit in linking their military role in the "war" against communism with a political and social role:

> Communism wants to destroy the human being, family, fatherland, property, the state and God. Nothing exists in Communism to link women with home and family because, proclaiming her emancipation, Communism separates her from domestic life and child raising to throw her into public life and collective production, just like men.... The father is the natural head of the family. The mother finds herself an associate of this authority. (quoted in Rosenberg 1991: 110.)

These roles came via the rapid transformation of the army in the late nineteenth century from unruly gauchos to a disciplined hierarchy based on the Prussian model. In the middle of the 19th century, the army was composed of "volunteers, bounty soldiers, minor criminals, and unwilling recruits"(Potash 1969:2) In 1869, President Sarmiento established the Colegio Military to train the Argentine militia. From this point only graduates from the Colegio could receive commissions. This led to a standardization and homogenization of the army in which they would all receive the same education. In the 1880's, President Julio A. Roca used the army to consolidate his political power and "what had been an ill-disciplined cavalry force of impressed soldiers led by amateur officers became a conscript army with modern arms and a professional officer corps."(Loveman and Davies 1978:47)

Roca established the War Academy to help train officers in military strategies and weaponry. In 1899, he brought in German officers to organize the academy on the Prussian model. It was set up in 1900 modeled on the one in Berlin.(Loveman and Davies 1978:51) "It transformed uneducated and uncultured draftees into literate and articulate citizens, who were aware of their moral and social obligations and who recognized the necessities of hygiene and a healthy way of life."(Loveman and Davies

1978:51) From 1906 until the beginning of World War I, Argentine military officers were sent directly to Germany for training.

Through the twentieth century, the Argentine military began to see itself as set apart from the rest of the country. They are frequently likened to an elite caste set apart from the rest of society with its own institutions and customs. Military families live in their own communities, they go to their own schools, and even practice endogamous mating rituals, as military officers are supposed to marry the daughters of other military officers. Within this closed-off hierarchy, the navy sees itself above the other branches. As Tina Rosenberg writes, "of all the brances of the armed forces, the navy is the traditional service of the upper class. Just as Argentina looks down on its Indian neighbors, that is how the tall, white, educated men of the navy view the army and the police."(Rosenberg 1991:86) The navy, the most refined branch of the military, was also the branch of the military most directly responsible for the 'Dirty War." In many ways, the military elite lived separate lives from the rest of Argentina. In taking power, the military leaders believed itself to have an obligation to take power. With obligation comes a sense of privilege and entitlement. This entitlement would allow them to take the children of civilians. The belief that civilians 'served a military purpose' would make permissible the appropriation of civilian children for childless military families.

Disappearance and the National Body – the Medicalization of Subversion

What is abundantly clear is that the military viewed their actions as preventing the transmission of subversion to future generations. General Ramon Camps, head of the Buenos Aires police and a notorious torturer, said in an interview in 1983: "It wasn't people that disappeared but subversives. Personally I never killed a child; what I did was

to hand over some of them to charitable organizations so that they could be given new parents. Subversive parents educate their children for subversion. This has to be stopped." (quoted in Fisher 1989:102) This would be the justification for not giving the child to the relatives, especially the grandparents. The grandmothers educated their children for subversion – they had already proven themselves in the eyes of the military to be unfit parents.

But why would it be desirable for the military to take the child of their enemy? For this to occur, the military would have to not believe the child of a subversive to be "tainted" with their parent's subversion. They were not culpable for the actions or beliefs of their parents. In most ethnic conflicts this would seem unthinkable.

To fully understand what happened, I think we need a better understanding of how the military conceptualized subversion. The criteria for subversion were not people's actions but their beliefs. By defining subversion at the level of ideas that people held, subversion became a psychological state. Subversion as conceptualized as a state of mind led to the use of biological metaphors with subversion viewed as a disease that affected the body. Not only the individual body but the entire population was contaminated. The social body was conceptualized as a biological entity – a living organism that was riddled with disease. Since the military believed subversion was transmitted through the rearing practices of the parent, by taking the child of a subversive as their own, they were preventing it from being "infected" or "contaminated". Admiral César A. Guzzetti explained right wing violence simply as the body's 'natural' reaction to a disease of "left wing" subversion. In explaining this, he said: "My concept of subversion refers to terrorist organizations on the left. There is no right wing subversion or terrorism. The social body of this society is contaminated by a disease that erodes its entrails and forms antibodies. Those antibodies cannot be considered in

the same way that one considers a microbe. As the government controls and destroys the guerrilla, the action of the antibodies will disappear. I am convinced that in the next few months there will be no more action from the right, something that is already underway, It is only a natural reaction to a social body."(quoted in Taylor 1997:277) The repression was conceived as the body's means of fighting the disease of subversion. To fight the disease, the infected part of the social body had to be attacked at the source of transmission.

As Diane Taylor has observed, the use of "medical terminology allowed [the military] to target not only the 'disease' but the entire population. Theories of contagion suggest that all people are at risk of catching and spreading the disease."(Taylor 1997:96-97) Subversion was not only conceptualized in the medical language of germ theory, it was also likened to a cancer. Unlike Nazi Germany, the target was not a cancer – the target had cancer. The cancer was subversive ideas, ideas that infiltrated the body of the person and contaminated them. Antonius Robben recounts the conversation that took place between a father looking for his missing son and a colonel in the army with whom he had come into contact. The colonel told the father, "Pretend that he has cancer and ...that he is in an operating room and that there is a butcher and a doctor; pray that it will be the doctor who will be operating on him."(Robben 1995:92-93)

By taking a child away from the relatives, they were preventing the child from being "infected" with their parents' subversion. The problem with this conceptualization of subversion is that it did not seem to be adhered to in practice. The military made no attempts to "cure" the adult *desaparecidos* from subversion. This germ theory of subversion would make it seem that individuals could be cured of the disease, but the military had no interest in saving them. In the camps, rehabilitation did not exist. These

weren't "reeducation" centers, although the military sometimes described them as such. As a metaphor, the germ theory of subversion stayed exactly that - it doesn't seem like it was put into practice. However, as a metaphor it might have been enough to make them believe in saving the child.

Sacrificial Lambs and Idealized Mothers

Medical terminology was one means the military used of conceptualizing subversion. Another means was the use of religious terminology. In addressing subversion, a recurring theme was less one of fighting a disease but of committing a sacrifice. As I have already argued, the military viewed themselves as saving the child from the fate of the mother. In his speech after seizing power, General Videla employed the word "sacrifice" three times. The "national recovery" of Argentina required more than solving Argentina's economic troubles. These economic ills were symptoms of a deeper spiritual malaise. In Videla's words, the military was performing a "national service... in fulfillment of their unrenounceable obligation." (quoted in Rodriguez 1994:78)

The belief in sanctified motherhood and the cult of the Madonna is prevalent within many conservative branches of Latin Catholicism. Writing about Spain, Timothy Mitchell observed that the Spaniards' "special devotion to the Virgin Mary was part of the problem rather than the solution: the extreme idealization of the maternal instinct created special dangers for Spanish women Catholics and special risks for their children and was intimately connected to the dynamics of priestly power and desire in Spain."(Mitchell 1998:) In Spain, women were historically required to set aside one child for the Church - the child belonged to the Church. Extrapolating from Spain to Argentina may appear to be an unjustifiable leap but in consideration of the close

historical and cultural ties between the two countries, I may be forgiven for taking it. The Catholic Nationalism of Spain under Franco's iron fist bares close resemblances to the ideology of Argentine Junta.

According to Mitchell in Spain, an instance of this idealization was "the defense of the purity of womanhood... Spanish Catholicism made a true fetish of it through the cult of Maria."(Mitchell 1998:19) Mitchell argues that this idealization constituted a form of symbolic violence against women as it promulgated an idealized view of maternity that led to "total abnegation, unlimited sacrifice, and implicit rejection of normal ego striving."(Ibid: 24) Following Bourdieu, under certain conditions symbolic violence can be transformed into physical violence. If sanctified motherhood was the ideal conception of womanhood, could this be what the military were attempting to reproduce? Were they trying to violently transform the subversive women into sanctified, idealized mothers and then sacrifice them after the child had been born, after they had fulfilled what the military saw to be their sole purpose? In the detention centers, female prisoners were tortured in front of the image of the Virgin Mary (Taylor 1997:84).

The violence was committed against women who had explicitly rejected traditional conceptions of womanhood. Women who disappeared were women who had rebelled against their appointed roles. They had high levels of education – they were professionals (doctors, social workers, psychiatrists) or students. Their progressive political views along with their education and professional skills were a direct challenge to patriarchal constructions of gender roles. Again, this bares similarities to Spain. During the Spanish Civil War, "sexual attitudes and gender roles had become a battleground where modernizing Spaniards struggled against the inertia of tradition and the formidable educational and financial power of the Church."(Mitchell 1998:72) The

"Dirty War," though four decades later, would also occur at a time when sexual attitudes and gender roles had become a battleground. Like much of the world, Argentina had been affected by the "sexual revolution" of the 1960's and 1970's. The most liberated, and, hence, for the military, the most dangerous, women were the ones who were joining the Montoneros. Images of dangerous communist women with guns pervaded the 'Dirty War' just as it did the Spanish Civil War. It was also evident in the proto-Nazi Freikorps' imagination during their against communism in Germany after WWI, as described by Klaus Thewleitt(1989). Writing about Spain, Mitchell writes that the reaction against the liberalization of women's roles during the Spanish Civil War led to a push for "the restoration of Woman to her throne (that is, the home) that meant the exaltation of maternity, the acceptance of hierarchy and the concept of *pater familias*."(Mitchell 1998:83-84) This observation could equally be made about Argentina during the 'Dirty War.'[36]

Is the cult of Maria present in Argentina? From her fieldwork in Argentina's pampas, anthropologist Kristi Anne Stølen writes that "the figure of Mary has become the focus of worship as the truly human element in the holy family. She is the model of Christian virtue, the ideal to which the faithful aspire. The authority of Mary is, however, based on her relationship to Christ, which gives her the contradictory attribute of motherhood and virginity. The maternity of the Virgin is passive and her femininity asexual. She submerges herself under the masculine forces of God and Christ."(Stølen 1996:249) "Subversive" women were going against what the military held to be the natural order. The goal of the Process was to restore this natural order. A children's textbook during this period was explicit about this goal: "for psychological and physical reasons, the male should be acknowledged as the authority... By her nature the woman

[36] For more on gender during the Dirty War see Taylor (1997)

represents kindness and love. Unless things are so, anarchy and dissatisfaction become a fact." (Rock 1993:230)

By the very meaning of the label, "subversive" women were considered to be unfit mothers. According to historian Donna Guy, "mothering has many meanings for Argentines."(Guy 2000) She argues for two predominant conceptions of motherhood. The more modern conception of which was where the mother "was measured in terms of how well she raised her child." The older conception was one of mother as martyr. According to a popular religious history, sometime in the middle of the 19th century in Argentina, a woman died of thirst on a dusty road with an infant by her side. Miraculously her breast milk continued after her death, keeping the infant alive until discovered. The mother became a popular, uncanonized saint – the patron saint of truck drivers in Argentina. She has the most elaborately developed set of shrines and rituals of any popular saint in Argentina. In this case, according to Guy, motherhood is seen as a kind of passive martyrdom – the ideal mother is a dead mother.

In the case of the pregnant *desaparecidas*, both conceptions of motherhood are present. On one hand, like the modern conception, the fitness of the mother was questioned - the "subversive" parent/grandparent was deemed unfit to raise a child. As I previously mentioned in an earlier example of their petition to the court, the grandmothers were explicitly told that because they had raised "subversive" children, they would not be allowed to raise their grandchildren. The goal of the adoptions was to place the child in a home deemed to be good and proper by the military authorities. On the other hand, by keeping the mother alive long enough to have the child, they were turning the mothers into passive martyrs.

To quote again from Mitchell's account of Spain, "when people on the Nationalist side were talking about women, they were talking about morality; when they were talking

about morality, they were talking about the family; hence they were talking about society, hence about Spain. Woman was wife and mother, nucleus of the family; as the fundamental national unit, the family had to be defended."(Mitchell 1998:98) Women rebelling against the patriarchal order were punished and killed. Deemed unfit to be mothers, their children were taken away from them and placed with families that would raise them "properly." Female sexuality was threatening to the military and needed to be controlled. In writing about rural Argentina, Stølen writes, "there are two main categories of women: 'decentes' (decent) and 'indecentes' (indecent): their sexual availability is an important distinguishing criterion."(Stolen:154) She concludes that "it is worth noting that women are held to be responsible for the maintaining of sexual morality."(Stølen 1996:157)

Argentina and Race

Stølen has written that in the Argentine pampas, "the fear of infertility is great, and if conception is delayed or miscarriages occur, the couple goes to great expense in consulting doctors, and the women are willing to undergo comprehensive medical treatment to become mothers. In addition they consult "curanderos", and make promises to saints. Childless couples or couples with only one child are pitied." (Stølen 1996:181) I believe that it is safe to extrapolate that what would be true among farmers in the Argentine pampas would also be true for the Argentine military.

Certainly, the desire for a child was great enough that they would be willing to take a child from their enemy. It has been observed that the Argentine military did something that the Nazis would never have done by taking the children of their prisoners and making them their own. The babies were not viewed to be carriers of subversion by

virtue of being born alone. Although the elastically defined definition of "subversion" could not possibly be viewed as constituting a distinct "race," there was no biological basis for "subversion." The babies were not considered to be carriers of subversion by virtue of being born, in which case they would not have been born at all.

In justifying adopting the child to another family, a military doctor told another doctor that he was trying to "improve the human race," thereby raising the shadow of eugenics. To explain this, I will need to briefly explore the meaning of eugenics within Latin America. Historically, Latin American eugenics differed from many of its regional counterparts in that it was not based as heavily on race. Eugenics programs emphasized environmental factors almost as much as heredity. To quote historian Donna Guy, "faced with the prospects of viewing problem children as the simple result of heredity or the consequences of a combination of biological and environmental factors that were often preventable, the male physicians attending the [first Pan-American Conference on] Eugenics and Homiculture Congress"opted for the latter. (Guy, 2000, 34)

This general tendency to avoid using race as an explanatory cause was also historically characteristic of many Argentine conservatives and nationalists. They didn't employ the race concept because racism itself was part of the 19th century scientific enterprise that they were directly reacting against. As David Rock writes, "The nativism adopted by the traditionalist writers at the turn of the century abandoned the strain of Social Darwinism favored by liberals and *cientificas*, recognizing that it belonged to the positivist viewpoint they were attempting to dislodge."(Rock 1993: 41) Similarly, as Rock continues, "their own concerns were not with quasi-biological and incipiently racist categories like "blood" or "craniates" but with cultural concepts, "values" and "traditions."(Rock 1993:41) The Argentine right wing was less interested in racial purity

than with instilling their "Western, Christian" values into the Argentine youth. One of the strongest unifying features of the Argentine right was their stance against "materialism".

In Argentina, politicians and intellectuals generally identified as liberals were the ones who were more likely in the 19th century to hold what we would characterize as racist views. They tended to blame the failure of Argentina "as the result of racial inadequacy." (Shumway 1991:140) Domingo Sarmiento, one of Argentina's "founding fathers" and a key figure in Latin American liberalism in the 19th century, imputed, on one hand, Argentina's Spanish heritage, arguing that Spain was "the cradle of barbarism, a parent to be cast off and replaced,"(quoted in Shumway 1991:138) while then suggesting that "the failure of democracy in Spanish America can be explained only by taking into account the inadequacy of Latin peoples, particularly when combined with the 'barbaric' Indians, to govern themselves."(Ibid:140-141) Shumway argues that blaming Argentina's failure on race provided an ideological justification for the mass killing of indigenous populations when the liberal government under Sarmiento came to power in the 1860's.(Ibid:144)

Shumway contrasts liberal groups with the nationalists who praised their Latin heritage and argued that "the Latin peoples" were "the legitimate heirs of Greek intelligence and sensibility."(Ibid:247) This argument was made by Jose Enrique Rodo, an Uruguayan philosopher, in his enduringly popular and influential treatise, *Ariel*. Rodo's position, like many Latin American conservatives, was that Latin American peoples were the counterbalance to the materialism of the United States. (Ibid:247) These nationalists were also less likely to share "the racialist precccupations of Argentine liberalism."(Ibid:247) Their national pride was countenanced by their xenophobia, leading them to vehemently oppose Sarmiento's "open door" immigration policy (aimed primarily at bringing in Europeans).

I would argue that because of the lack of adherence to racial or biological categories, what happened in Argentina stands in sharp contrast with other global atrocities. Roland Littlewood has given examples of atrocities linking military rape with human reproduction, including 25,000 Bengali women who became pregnant in rapes by Pakistani soldiers in 1971, 5,000 babies who were abandoned by their mothers after the Rwanda Massacres, and the Serbian rape camps where Serb soldiers raped Croatian and Bosnian women until they became pregnant, holding them until they could no longer have an abortion and then sending them home. Littlewood writes: "Since the Nazi Holocaust, an explicit 'eugenic' motivation has been of academic interest in explaining massacre and genocide, whether in immediately displacing or eliminating another human group so that material resources and territory may be acquired, or else as some elaborated or implicit notion of denying reproductive advantage related to local notions of 'race' or the biological integrity of a 'nation.'"(Littlewood 1998:210).

Women were raped in Argentina, but I have read no evidence of women becoming pregnant in prison with their rapist's children and then giving birth to them and then being killed. The Argentine military had no qualms in taking children who were not biologically theirs. These differences can be explained by the fact that the Argentine military were not concerned with the "biological integrity" of the nation and that they didn't conceive of the subversive as being inherently biologically distinct.

Political Modernism

The military believed that they were saving the children from the fate of their mothers. People weren't born subversives; they became subversives. Children of subversives were destined to the fate of their parents because subversives were

believed to be products of bad parenting. Throughout the Dirty War, parents were asked to vigilantly keep track of their children. In the words of the military, "parents are primordial agents in the eradication of this nightmare. They must keep watch, participate and report whatever complaint they deem necessary."(quoted in Taylor, 107) Familial responsibilities were conflated with national responsibilities.

The contemporary idea that political authority and familial authority are separate entities did not emerge until the 17th century social contract theorists. (Stevens 1999). Pre-Enlightenment, the role of the king to his subjects was that of a father to his children. In Argentina, this pre-Enlightenment version of sovereignty in which the political and/or religious leader has absolute power over its subjects as the father figure is apparent. With this form of sovereignity, the leader has the right to take a child of one of its subjects, especially in the cases in which the family was deemed unfit to raise the child. An example of this from 19th century Italy is the infamous case of Edgardo Mortara, a young Jewish boy who was said to have been secretly baptized by his Catholic maid. Catholic dogma dictated that a baptized child could not be raised by Jewish parents so the child was taken away from his family in 1858. David I. Kertzer identifies the outcry resulting against this action as a key historical moment in the transition from Papal authority to the modern Italian nation-state. (Kertzer 1997)

Foucault has documented the shift in forms of political power from the overt forms of coercion to the subtle and minute. The events in Argentina can be seen as a mix of the two forms; where pre-modern and modern forms of power are both evident. While followers of Foucault will generally tend to (over)emphasize the discursive breaks in his work, continuities can be of equal relevance. The forms of power here are not only "inquisitional;" they are also distinctly modern.

Argentine nationals explicitly rejected Enlightenment conceptions of government. Since states reproduce themselves through laws of citizenship and through birth practices, can the actions of the military be seen as part of how the military state was ensuring its reproduction? In a speech entitled "A time for fundamental reorganization for the nation," given shortly after the coup, General Videla said "it should be abundantly clear that the events which took place on March 24, 1976 represent more than the mere overthrow of a government. On the contrary, they signify the final closing of a historical cycle and the opening of a new one whose fundamental characteristic will be manifested by the reorganization of the nation, a task undertaken with a true spirit of service by the armed forces." It may be problematic to use the military's own words to explain what happened, but, at the same time, too often, there is a tendency not to take what perpetrators of violence say seriously. The very idea of a "fundamental reorganization for the nation" is inseparable from modernity.

Zygmunt Bauman has argued that modernity was a primary cause of the Holocaust. While acknowledging that "mass murder is not a modern invention," he argues that the Holocaust "also bore features that it did not share with any of the past cases of genocide. It is these features which deserve special attention. They had a distinct modern flavour."(1991:88) What are these modern features? *"Modern genocide is genocide with a purpose.* Getting rid of the adversary is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: a necessity that stems from the ultimate objective, a step that one has to take if one wants ever to reach the end of the road. *The end itself is a grand vision of a better, and radically different, society.* Modern genocide is an element of social engineering, meant to bring about a social order conforming to the design of the perfect society."(1991:91) Bauman argues that both Stalin and Hitler "showed what the

rationalizing, designing, controlling dreams and efforts of modern civilization are able to accomplish if not mitigated, curbed or counteracted."(1991:93)

If we accept Bauman's thesis then it would be impossible not to link the violence associated with the 'Dirty War' to the problems associated with modernity. If, as Bauman writes, "the Holocaust is a by-product of the modern drive to a fully designed, fully controlled world, once the drive is getting out of control and running wild"(1991:94), then the 'Dirty War' would be too, although the 'Dirty War' was both less 'controlled' and less 'out of control' at the same time. The military saw itself fighting for a "better, and radically different, society." The idea that there can be such a thing as a national reorganization is only understandable in the context of the advent of modernity. In their statement shortly after the coup, the Junta declared "During the period which begins today, the armed forces will develop a program governed by clearly defined standards, by internal order and hard work."(quoted in Rodriguez 1994:177) That their programs were a miserable failure is less indicative of the problems of modernity than with the problems of the regime. The relevance for my own thesis is that this reorganization can be glimpsed directly by the practices at hand. By taking children of the disappeared and placing them with families that they deemed to be fit, they were actualizing this national reorganization. The drive to control lives and to remake people was being fully realized in their actions.

The Uncertainty of Being Argentine

Modernity and globalization are inseparable. As I have already discussed, a link has been made between the military's violence and broad neo-liberal economic reforms that accompanied the dismantling of the Perónist welfare state. Most analyses have linked the violence with the regime's economic program through their instrumental

effects – that labor union members were at a very high risk of disappearance as well as anyone working with the poor. However, this instrumental link can not account for the shear excess of the violence. Arjun Appadurai (1998) has recently offered a compelling analysis of ethnic violence that if extended to Argentina allows one to make the symbolic link between the large scale processes of globalization and the micro-dynamics of interpersonal violence, including the fate of pregnant *desaparecidas.*

Appadurai has argued that ethnic violence can be associated with "certain forms of *uncertainty* regarding ethnic identity." According to Appadurai, the processes of globalization have led to "a growing sense of radical social uncertainty about people, situations, events, norms and even cosmologies" (1998:226). In examining specific acts of ethnic violence, he explores the way in which "the ethnic body can be a theater for the engagement of uncertainty under the special circumstances of globalization."(Ibid:226) "The killing, torture, and rape associated with ethnocidal violence is not simply a matter of eliminating the ethnic other. It involves the use of the body to establish the parameters of otherness, taking the body apart, so to speak, to divine the enemy within."(Ibid:233-234)

In the case of Argentina, the violence was political not ethnic. There is a tendency to try to differentiate between political and ethnic violence but these two categories can be called into question. The jurist Raphael Lemkin coined the term "genocide" in 1933 and helped lead to the creation of the Genocide Convention. Lemkin first defined genocide as "the denial of the right of existence of entire human groups... many instances of such crimes have occurred when racial, religious, political and other groups have been destroyed entirely or in part."(quoted in Staub, 7) For all the obvious reasons, the Soviet Union under Stalin and several other countries objected to including the definition of genocide to include violence against political groups. Bowing to

pressure, the Genocide Convention finally did not include political groups as a category. (Staub, 7-9) If Argentina's violence was not genocidal, it was only because the numbers weren't large enough.

At the same time, the violence in Argentina can be directly linked to the processes of globalization and to a radical social uncertainty of what it means to be Argentine. The terror was the military's attempt to resolve this uncertainty. To quote General Videla, the dictator during the 'Dirty War', the violence was directed against "a minority which we do not consider Argentine." The violence also coincided with the institution of neoliberal economic reforms that led to the dismantling of its protectionist welfare state. However, by the military's very definition of subversion, the parameters of otherness could not be divined within the body of the disappeared. To invoke that discarded dichotomy, what made a subversive a subversive was not what was in their bodies but what was in their minds. In dissecting the body of their enemy, the enemy they found was indiscernible from themselves. So hence they could take the babies of their prisoners as their own.

The role of violence on the ethnic body is to bring closure to these situations of categorical uncertainty. What is uncertain in Argentina is not an ethnic identity but a national identity - what it means to be an Argentine. Taking the child of their enemy as their own provides a sharp contrast to documented cases of ethnic violence. But, at the same time, the violence in Argentina has the same "horrible range of intimacies" that Appadurai identifies – "this violence is a horrible effort to expose, penetrate, and occupy the material form – the body – of the ethnic other" (Ibid:239)

The intimacies in Argentina ranged from the most banal to the most brutal. Rape was commonplace. Prisoners interacted closely with their guards and torturers. In the words of one survivor: "It was a completely insane situation. Torturers were in

constant contact with those they tortured. That is the basic difference between jails and concentration camps. In a jail, on one side of the bars you have the guards, the police, the administrators. On the other, you have the prisoners. In a camp, the two worlds intermix."(Feitlowitz 1998:72) This testimony comes from a physicist who spent four years as a prisoner in five different camps. From the same testimony, he describes playing cards with the guards during their breaks. Another torturer brought his young daughter to work with him to meet some of the prisoners. (Feitlowitz 1998:73-74)

Women prisoners were taken out to dinner by their torturers. In one widely promulgated story that has never been verified, a woman fell in love with her torturer.[37] There is ample evidence that female prisoners fascinated the military officers in charge of them. For example, journalist Tina Rosenberg writes:

> One night three officers took seven or eight women prisoners out to dinner. The prisoners always agreed to go, in order to ingratiate themselves, to show how recovered they were. Acosta (head task force of ESMA and considered a true psychopath) was almost shouting at them in the restaurant. "You know that our relationships with women since we met you are practically destroyed," he said. He said that they had all married daughters of other navy officers, women who didn't know how to talk. The prisoners, on the other hand, could discuss books, movies, politics. (Rosenberg 1991:94)

According to Appadurai, these intimacies are ways of making the "other" more tangible. The military also attempted to do this by connecting "subversion" to visible habits of individuals – styles of dress, hair length, and general demeanor became

[37] This would become the inspiration for *Paso de dos*, a popular play by Eduardo Pavlovsky.

"markers" of subversion. In schools, guidelines were set for proper appearance and behavior for both male and female students. For males, short hair and a jacket and tie were mandated. Long hair and beards were viewed as markers of subversion. Women were to have their hair pulled back, wearing skirts or dresses and all blouses buttoned to the neck. (Taylor 1997)

Even with these markers, subversion still remained an abstraction, the enemy still remained invisible. Appardurai writes that "one clue to the way in which these large *numerical* abstractions inspire grotesque forms of bodily violence is that these forms of violence – forms that I have called vivisectionist – offer temporary ways to render these abstractions graspable, to make these large numbers sensuous, to make labels that are potentially overwhelming, for a moment, personal."(Appadurai 1998:240) The subversive was the ultimate abstraction. It could not be defined by biological attributes. It was not an ethnicity, nor was it a religion.

If the body is the site for making abstractions real and resolving uncertainty, what would this mean in the context of my research question? By keeping pregnant *desaparecidas* alive long enough to give birth and then adopting the child, the military was able to resolve the uncertainties of national identity - what it meant to be Argentine. The invisible enemy, the "subversive," was produced in front of them. The child found within the body of the subversive would be taken and raised as their own. This would not only ensure that the child would not grow up to become a subversive but it would serve as a justification for their actions. They were not only producing an "other;" they were also reproducing themselves.

At the beginning of his memoir of his experience as a *desaparecido,* Jacobo Timerman writes: "It is essential, I suppose, to attempt some explanation of what Argentina is. Yet I find it almost impossible to do so in normal terms. The problem is not

merely that I find it difficult to explain Argentina in comprehensible terms to outsiders, but that I myself perhaps am unable to understand her."(Timerman 1981:15) He then goes on to paraphrase Borges that "the Argentine is not a citizen but an inhabitant; that he lacks an idea of the nation where he resides, but views it as a territory which owing to its wealth, can be exploited rapidly."(Timerman 1981:16) His conclusion: "Argentina as an entity does not yet exist; it must be created." (Timerman 1981:16) Integral to the experiences of both perpetrators and victims is the question of the meaning of being Argentine. The military attempted to create their own vision of Argentina.

It has almost become a banality to speak of nations as "imagined communities," struggling to come to terms with their national identity through "invented traditions" or "guiding fictions," but it's also impossible to avoid the conclusion that this problem has plagued the history of Argentina. In describing the development of Latin American states, Nicholas Shumway argues that "the process of concept preceding political reality found in the United States and much of Europe was in large measure reversed; guiding fictions of national destiny had to be improvised after political independence was already a fact."(Shumway 1991:2) After the fall of the Spanish Empire, the geographic reality of Latin American nations preceded any ideas of nationhood. "What had been merely geographic areas of the Spanish Empire suddenly had to understand and define their destiny as autonomous units; they had to create guiding fictions of peoplehood and nationness in order to approach the ideological consensus that underlay stable societies in other parts of the world"(Ibid:3)

Argentina was especially plagued by this 'identity crisis.' Argentina did not even officially settle on the name "Argentina" until sixteen years after the country's independence from Spain. Independence resulted more directly from the political collapse of the Spanish Empire than from any internal developments. The nascent

nation was "neither a country nor even an idea for a country."(Shumway 1991:8) In tracing the guiding fictions that emerge in the 19th century, Shumway sees the country torn between elitist liberals centered in Buenos Aires looking towards England and Western Europe for direction, and nativist conservatives reacting against modernity while mythologizing its *gaucho* past.

For a cross-cultural comparison, Liisa Malkki has documented a graphic account of Hutu and Tutsi violence that could suffice as a horrifying contrast to the events that took place in Argentina.(1996) In it, a Hutu refugee describes how the stomachs of pregnant Hutu women were cut open and the women were forced to eat their own fetus: "There was a manner of cutting the stomach. Everything that was found in the interior was lifted out without cutting the cord. The cadaver of the mama, the cadaver of the baby, of the future, they rotted on the road. Not even burial. The mother was obliged to eat the finger of her baby. One cut the finger, and then said to the mother: Eat!"(1996:91) In another account, "For the pregnant women, the stomach was cut, and then the child who had been inside – one said to the mama: "Eat your child" – this embryo. One *had* to do it."(1996:91) Malkki analyzes this as "an effort to destroy the procreative capability, the 'new life' of the Hutu people."(1996:92)

In Argentina, the military were not trying to destroy life – they believed they were saving it. The rhetoric of the Dirty War was one of "life" and "love." In the words of General Ramon Camps, "The use of force to put an end to violence does not simply imply hate since it is nothing other than the difficult search for the restoration of love. In the war we are fighting, love of the social body that we want to protect is what comes first in all of our actions."(quoted in Graziano 1992:153) Subversives were often identified with death. They not only represented the forces of death – they were already considered dead. It was "a war between those who side with death and those of us who

side with life." (quoted in Taylor 1997:74) "We will not allow death to roam freely through Argentina." (quoted in Taylor 1997:75) Or in the words of Emilio Massera, "for love of life, for respect of those who have fallen and will fall, for those who are being born, for those who... wish to be reborn as free men, for all of them I say: death will not triumph here."(quoted in Arditti 1999:26) By keeping their pregnant prisoners alive until they gave birth, they were making life out of the death of their enemies.

In Place of a Conclusion

We can either see perpetrators as acting against their will or in accordance with it. We can see wartime atrocities as the perversion of human nature or as the fruition of humanity's darkest instincts. The clandestine detention centers in Argentina during the Dirty War created a space that gave men in the military the opportunity to do what they wanted to do outside of any possible recriminations. Within the camps, they had the illusion of absolute power. But it was more than just an illusion since they also had the opportunity to realize it. This power not only bestowed upon them the capacity to kill other people but it gave them the right to decide who would live and who would die. This would also be one of the most common definitions of sovereignity.

From most accounts, we get the sense that the prisoners were left at the discretion of their guards. The guards were able to do whatever they wanted with them. Perhaps the more interesting question is not why they did what they did but under what circumstances were they able to do it? Under what conditions could people have been left, stripped of their identities and of their rights, to the mercies of people who could do whatever they wanted to them, including taking their babies and children as their own. To the question why did they keep pregnant women alive long enough to give birth only

to then kill them and take the baby, the answer would simply be because they could. Because they could do it and get away with it. Or, at least, so they believed.

The parents had been forcibly removed from Argentine society, denied all of their rights as citizens. They had been excised from the social body – all ties to the world outside the camp had been severed. As I have already described, the military attempted to completely erase the identities of the disappeared. They were only referred to as numbers. Even being heard calling another prisoner by their name could constitute cause for punishment. Survivors have reported being told similar things by their torturers. As reported by one woman: "In this moment you are nobody. You don't have any rights, you don't have any voice, you are neither alive nor dead, you are *desaparecido.*"(quoted in Conroy 2000:171) In the minds of the military, the mother's identity had been erased. All ties connecting her to the rest of the world had been cut. Having erased the identity of the mother, they could feel free to take the child. The newborn baby had a "clean slate" and thus could be reincorporated into the social body.

The events in Argentina are one of the most heavily documented and analyzed cases of state violence in the twentieth century, but we still end up trying to fill in the void because most of the "evidence" does not exist. And this was the goal of the military actions during the 'Dirty War.' - to kill their enemies without leaving evidence. The disappearances, the staged shoot-outs, the elaborate public relations campaign and the adamant denials by those in power were all part of the same plan. The military would not have taken the children of their prisoners unless they believed they could get away with it. In the end, the military's appropriation of the children of the disappeared was predicated on their belief that they could remake the children as their own. It should therefore come as a cruel or tragic irony that the children of the disappeared themselves became the evidence needed to hold the architects of the military terror accountable for

their actions. In 1989, President Menem pardoned the convicted military leaders in response to the growing threats of another coup. However, "child trafficking" was not included in the pardon, and in 1998, the leaders during the Dirty War were put under house arrest, convicted for their roles in the kidnappings. Part of the proof that was used was the genetic identity of the children (matched through genetic testing with their grandmothers). Their genes provided the evidence of their kidnapping.

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