

and he lost track of time and space, broken. On the day of the opening match, the guards moved him to a new camp, and he knows the date only because of the excitement in the streets. The World Cup started on June 1, 1978, and for the next month, the military dictatorship hosted the soccer world. The rulers made the tournament slogan a pun of the phrase "human rights" -- roughly, *We are human and we are right* -- mocking the international community fighting the kidnapping and torture of political enemies. The World Cup gave a measure of psychic relief to a population that had created the dictatorship with its fear.

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Norberto Liwski is incredibly lucky -- he lived. *Alejandro Kirchuk*

The military didn't simply seize power. It was asked to seize it. Two years before, the nation suffered through a conflict that on its worst days looked like civil war: right-wing paramilitary groups, engaged in battle with communist guerrillas, both trying to fill the power vacuum left by the death of President Juan Peron, who defined postwar Argentine politics. The violence spread to the streets, bombs exploding, both sides kidnapping their enemies, or anyone who might bring a ransom. The right-wing assassins killed students, and the left-wing militants murdered a former president. People wanted the military to step in, and on March 24, 1976, it did. Tanks rolled through the streets. The conservative military crippled the guerrilla groups, using a torture and targeting machine, breaking the left-wing resistance in just a few months. The dictators won, but the torture continued, driven by fear and hatred, killing union leaders, advocates for the poor, students and teachers, and finally, anyone who supported liberal political positions. The wrong book meant a death sentence.

The military managed the World Cup with the precision and intent of its torture machine. By the start of the tournament, the military had never felt stronger, emboldened by the extermination of political enemies and not yet battered by the rising inflation and lost public faith that would follow. The generals would use violence and cruelty to maintain the authority originally given to them; they would rule for five more

years before collapsing after a failed invasion of the British-held Falkland Islands in 1982. But the peak of their power, and of their violence and cruelty, coincided with the World Cup, which ended in an Argentina victory, although in many ways it hasn't ever really ended at all. Those 25 days remain hidden in the national shadows, and with the games starting in Brazil, those days are forcing themselves back into the light.

"I think the 1978 World Cup is one of the deep wounds of Argentine society," Liwski says. "Every four years, a new World Cup reactivates those wounds."

TIME DOESN'T EXIST in the courthouse lobby.

That's not some existential statement about the legal proceedings in the basement. The art deco clock on the wall no longer has hands. It's a few months before the 2014 World Cup, and downstairs a judge waits to hear evidence about crimes from the 1970s. Several times a week, continuing the process that began with democracy's return in 1983, another hearing in the trial of the guards at ESMA convenes.

The Escuela Superior de Mecanica de la Armada, a naval school, served as the largest and most infamous dictatorship concentration camp. It occupies a lush, sprawling campus a few blocks from Estadio Monumental, where the 1978 World Cup final was played. That distance links the torture and the sporting event in the minds of many Argentines. The former camp now serves as a "memory space," as the government calls it -- a physical expression of a deep civic dream, much like the odd relationship to the World Cup, and, of course, these ongoing trials. For 31 years now, Argentina has been trapped in a search for justice and meaning that won't end, punctuated by verdicts and pardons and new trials, as the political mood changes from administration to administration.

Lawyers yawn and open the sports pages. Monitors from human rights organizations fire up laptops and prepare to take notes, the whole thing cloaked in the thin veneer of civilization, as if the men facing prosecution raided pension funds instead of torturing their neighbors.

A well-dressed older woman takes the stand.

A court reporter announces her name: Consuelo Orellano. In 1979, the dictatorship

kidnapped her husband, Nestor Ardeti. He remains disappeared, one of 30,000 who vanished during what historians call the Dirty War. Today, the cases of dozens of the men responsible for the death of her husband, and so many more, continue. Her friends watch quietly from the gallery, full of nervous tics. One rubs endless circles on her index finger with her thumb. Another slides her ring on and off. The two women providing moral support have known each other for years; they watched and celebrated the '78 World Cup final together. In the back row, young men and women tap away on computers, recording the details.

"My memory is failing," Orellano says.



Argentina In 1978: A World Cup And A Dirty War

ESPN senior writer Wright Thompson discusses his exploration into Argentina's collective memory of the 1978 World Cup and the simultaneous political strife stemming from a military dictatorship.

Her friends lean in. She has testified many times before, but with her slowly vanishing mind, there's one story in particular she wants to get right. In 1988, during democracy, she rode bus No. 273. A young policeman got off, and she recognized his face: one of the oppressors who years earlier had come to her house to steal her property after they'd already taken her husband. She chased him down a street and saw him enter a police station. When she got inside, he'd vanished into the back. She told the duty officer she wanted to see a friend, and when the young officer came out, she screamed at him. The cop never said a word, and she suddenly became very afraid and ran away. One of her

friends in the gallery pulls her sweater close and nods at every correct detail.

"To this day," Orellano says, "my son has trouble entering a police station. ... I hope they are brought to justice. I have a lot in my heart."

She walks slowly from the room.

A man imprisoned with Orellano's husband embraces her with tears in his eyes. Survivor's guilt comes off him in waves. Her friends wrap her up in their arms and help her into the foyer. Everyone gathers in a circle, old women now. These cases will send more people to jail. Currently, 2,450 stand accused of crimes against humanity. Three hundred and ninety-seven are in progress. In a different courtroom, preparations continue for a trial to punish those who knew and didn't intervene. The circle of culpability expands year by year.

At Nuremburg, only 207 Nazis stood trial, and Argentina will surpass that number by a factor of almost 12. As long as Argentina keeps identifying and punishing monsters, then a nation of people -- every citizen alive between 1976 and 1983 -- can continue to believe in the myth of civilization, in the myth of themselves as civilized. If barbarity can be countered by the rule of law, and if evil can be identified as the root cause of that barbarity, then the orderly mechanism of a courtroom also absolves a nation of its collective guilt. The trials, with lawyers asking specific questions about mundane details, keep the focus on the monsters and not the lurking self-knowledge embedded in the national soul: We are all monsters. The next witness takes the stand, a survivor of ESMA, and he testifies about kidnappings and mock executions.

"I am gonna tell something I never said before," he says.

Facing the room, he holds his hands up in the air, very close together, his wrists nearly touching, as if they were still bound. The gallery falls silent.

"I was a year sleeping with my hands like that," he says.



The wall of disappeared now stands at a former navy school, a former torture chamber. *Fabian Mauri*

IT WAS JUNE 25, 1978.

Mario Villani looked at the soccer game playing on the small black-and-white television at the end of the hall. The guards had opened the cells and allowed prisoners to sit in their doorway and watch. Anyone who happened upon the weird scene would never forget it.

Pale and skinny ghosts, maybe 20 in total, with blindfolds pushed up on their foreheads, peering at a flickering screen. Some would be killed in the next transfer, just three days away. Around the corner, blood dried on the light blue walls of the torture chamber. Mario thought for sure he'd die here.

Argentina scored.

Guards pressured the prisoners to scream "Goooooool!" during the game. No one dared turn away, or close his eyes. Not cheering loud enough could get a prisoner listed for the next transfer. Mario thought about Juanita. She'd been transferred two months

ago. He had liked her, and one night a guard brought her to his cell with a leering grin, a sexual present. In bed, over two evenings, they whispered all night, like humans. Juanita told about her husband, and Mario told about his wife. They held each other. Nothing else happened. In the morning, the guards took her away. Two days later, a guard brought him outside and told him to tell Juanita goodbye. Mario gave her a kiss, confused.

"It's not getting to you too much?" the guard asked.

"What do you mean?"

"We're transferring her," the guard said.

He never saw her again and tried not to linger on her terrifying final moments: Juanita, naked, human cargo on what prisoners would come to call a death flight. Her fate weighed on him the night of the World Cup final. The guards put Mario in charge of making sure the television worked. In his previous life, he'd been a physicist. He stared into the 18-inch screen and imagined it as a window into a world going on without him. A packed stadium didn't know he'd been kidnapped. He would live and die, and nobody would ever acknowledge his existence, much less his death, and at the end, his family wouldn't get a body to put in the ground.

He sat under the harsh glow of fluorescent lights, looking into a world he'd never touch again. The television showed the ruling junta celebrating, a triumphant General Jorge Videla and Admiral Emilio Massera handing the trophy to the national team. Mario felt haunted. He fought the tears. If a guard saw him cry, he might go out on the next death flight. They'd strip him of his clothes, give him an injection of sodium pentothal to keep him woozy and pliable, fly him up in a loud airplane over the waters where River Plate meets the Atlantic Ocean. Alive and confused, he would be pushed out of an open door into the infinite blackness, the howling engines and the howling wind. The water would break his bones, and the fish would eat his flesh.

Mario Villani's memories of 1978 are much different from those of many of his countrymen. *Charles Ommanney*

MARIO VILLANI is 75 now.

His wife, Rosa Lerner, holds his hand when he says the word "haunted," reliving a soccer match. They live in Miami Beach, having left Argentina a decade ago to be close to their grandchildren. She watches closely, swallowing hard and biting her thumb when he describes his torture.

"When he talks," she says, "he hears the screaming of the prisoners."

Nobody has ever found Juanita's body, nearly 40 years after Mario saw her taken away to die.

Twenty or so prisoners watched the game, and maybe two or three of them survived. He says he doesn't have nightmares about it anymore.

Rosa rolls her eyes, saying, "Now, now."

"Listen," she says, and then tells about how he still goes back to prison in his dreams. Mario punches the air in his sleep. If she wakes him suddenly, he cowers and covers his face.

"He talks," she says. "He screams."

Sitting in their apartment, he holds a list of everyone who disappeared during the 1978 World Cup, going down it name by name, trying to remember. Four of the people were his friends. One of the four he knew, a woman, is still disappeared. He can almost see her face.

"Maybe a bit tall," he says. "Short hair. Brown or black or ... I don't recall now."

That woman's husband disappeared too, and Mario closes his eyes, taking himself back to the screams, fighting hard for a face. When he cannot remember, he looks stricken, full of guilt, as if his failing memory killed this man again.

~~"If you knew him before ..." Rosa says, mournfully.~~

~~He struggles with the details now. Years after his 1981 release, Mario happened upon Turco Julian, one of the most brutal torturers, outside a pharmacy in central Buenos Aires, and now he's fumbling with the story. Rosa guides him, a little correction here, a shade of detail there.~~

~~"No, *mi amor*," she says gently.~~