

requested that, before arresting a priest, the Armed Forces inform the appropriate Bishop." Verbitsky cites the work of Mignone: "[S]ometimes the green light was given by the Bishops themselves. On May 23, 1976 the Marine Infantry detained priest Orlando Yorio in the Bajo Flores section of Buenos Aires and 'disappeared' him for five months. One week before his arrest, Archbishop Aramburu had withdrawn Yorio's license for no apparent reason. Several things that Yorio heard during his captivity make it clear that the Armed Forces interpreted that decision and, perhaps, some criticism from his superior in the Jesuit Society, Jorge Bergoglio, as authorization to take action against him. Most certainly, the military had warned both Aramburu and Bergoglio of the supposed danger that Yorio posed."⁴⁸

The basis for this "danger," which was apparently accepted by Bergoglio, who would become the senior cardinal of Argentina and later Pope Francis I, rested on a notion accepted by most bishops: any condemnation of human rights violations was a threat to the homeland and God. That is, most Argentine bishops either actively or passively, and in public, accepted the actions of the dictatorship. The dictatorship understood these actions as part of a common Christian undertaking against the "atheistic subversion," whose justification was ecclesiastical and whose actions were military. In March of 1977, Admiral Massera clearly summed up this connection between the secular and the sacred: "When we act as a political power, we do not cease to be Catholics; when Catholic priests act as a spiritual power, they do not cease to be citizens. Pretending that both are infallible, as well as their judgment and decisions, would be sinfully arrogant. We all act on the basis of love, which is the sustenance of our religion. We don't have any problems and our relationship is optimal, as it should be among Christians."⁴⁹

Like in the previous instantiations of "Christianized fascism," the intimacy between God and its military nation was highly emphasized.⁵⁰ The foot soldiers of the repression shared this sort of sacred sentiment, which was at the root of the Argentine reformulation of fascist ideology conceived in the 1930s and 1940s. It seems that the torturers proved their loyalty to the Cross and the Sword by shouting, while performing kidnappings, "For God and the Homeland!" During one of the kidnappings, the perpetrators wrote on the walls of the victim's home, "Long Live Christ The King" and "Christ Saves." The nationalists' idea that they were God's envoys on earth was constantly repeated in the camps. They forced prisoner Nora Iadarola, for example, to repeat "five hundred times" the following phrase

from the nationalist liturgy, "Long live Videla, Massera and Agosti! God, the Homeland and the Home!" The mandatory repetition of this nationalist principle by the victim did not represent clerico-fascist ideology but rather its actualization. It was the ultimate realization of the legacy of the fascist idea in Argentina.

Death and Ideology

The dictatorship's nationalist theories were by no means original. Long-standing arguments were constantly repeated. The Cross and the Sword continued to articulate the idea of the nation. However, the exterminatory practice took on new meanings, broadening its ideology and turning itself into an ideological postulation. The means became an end. In short, practice became a central element of the theory of the dictatorship. Massive torture, violence, and death were sources of national ideological regeneration.

If the Nazi practices of total extermination are compared with those of the dictatorship, the quantitative and even "qualitative" differences are more significant than the similarities. Nonetheless, unlike other totalitarian regimes, the Argentine military and the Nazis were both fascinated by secrecy and used a language of extermination that was rich in euphemisms. This was not a chance occurrence but rather the product of a chosen affinity.

Among the most unique of the Argentine extermination practices was the stealing of children, which apparently did not take place in European fascist regimes. *Nunca Más* (the truth commission report) describes it like this: "The repressors who seized the children of the disappeared from their homes and from mothers during delivery determined the fate of those creatures as coldly as if they were dispensing with war booty."⁵¹

The idea of war booty enabled the military to take "disappearance" one step further. If the victim loses his or her identity through degrading and dehumanizing torture, that situation culminates in the ultimate sacrifice of identity as represented in death via disappearing. For Videla, the unreality of the disappeared ensured that the military would own the prisoners' fate even in death: "The disappeared are just that, disappeared. They are neither alive nor dead; they are disappeared."⁵²

Children born in captivity are also, in a certain way, disappeared insofar as they do not know and hence continue to embody the theft of the

biological identity of their dead parents. The theft of the identity of the children of the disappeared ensures a distorted memory of the military camps, a memory in keeping with how the military would like them to be represented. Children as war booty represent the military's attempt to ignore a past bound to the lost identity of parents; they ensure the perpetrators an ideological victory in the realm of memory for generations. In this sense, the memory policies of the extreme right, which after 1983 were continued under democracy, started in the camps themselves. This is not an Argentine particularity. If the Nazis, for example, destroyed any trace of their victims by destroying the memory of the family unit, the Argentine dictatorship was satisfied with the physical sacrifice of parents and the appropriation of their children's identity.

The Argentine camps, then, were factories of invented identities fueled by torture. As indicated in testimonies on the concentration camp at the *Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA): "...when we arrived at ESMA, we saw many women on the ground, on mats, awaiting the birth of children. Some were from [camps in] other branches of the Armed Forces (the Air Force, the Federal Police, the Córdoba Army, the Mar del Plata Navy). Others were 'from' ESMA." Taking away children, which ensured that those with "no hope of reform" would receive the ultimate punishment—mainly, knowing that their children would not know that they had been their parents—was organized according to very clear and systematic guidelines. The efficacy of these operations was cause for pride among the perpetrators, who perhaps, through the deformation of Christian values accomplished by the ideology of Catholic nacionalismo, considered them acts of Christian charity: "The then director of ESMA, Captain Rubén Jacinto Chamorro, personally accompanied visitors, generally high-ranking members of the Navy, showing them where pregnant prisoners were housed. He bragged of the 'Sardá' (which is the most important maternity hospital in Buenos Aires) set up in the camp."⁵³

Generally, the new "parents" were chosen from among the groups that supported the dictatorship. As so effectively depicted in the films *The Official Story* (1985) and *Captive* (2003), these were people with ideological, religious, and/or financial ties to the military. Victims' testimonies indicate that "at the Naval Hospital there was a list of Navy couples that could not have children who would be willing to adopt children of the disappeared."⁵⁴ The sacrifice of the victims was the ideological reward for those parents willing to receive children coming out of the disaster and offer them a deformed version of family love.

The connection between the nacionalista myth and reality was often tenuous. In the case of the children appropriated by the dictatorship, the secret ideological mark was to be imposed for generations. Since they did not know their true identities, these children were the true products of the camps.

While justifying disappearances and the stealing of children, nacionalismo glorified fascist ideas that often determined who lived and who died. Outside the camps this ideology of death took on another form, attempting to adapt to a society that could engage in racism in daily practice but did not tolerate an explicit articulation of racist ideas. Society at large preferred silence. For those who wanted to see it, what was going on inside the camps was clear. If nacionalista ideology was the xenophobic product of a country undergoing radical transformations, largely due to the arrival of European immigrants, the words of General Albano Harguindeguy, minister of the interior under the dictatorship, on the need to continue immigration out of racial concerns can only be understood from this historical perspective. In 1978, Harguindeguy spoke of the need to encourage European immigration. For the general, this was an urgent concern in order "to continue to be one of the three whitest nations in the world."⁵⁵ This explicit racism took the form of an open recognition of the need to eradicate other "non-European" expressions of the nation. The depth and scope of this desire was, once again, manifested in the camps.

Anti-Semitism and the Radical Other

Racism was a critical component of the camps. Prisoner Sergio Starik recalls that one detainee "was beaten more, and they told him it was because he was dark skinned...and they shouted 'negro de mierda' at him."⁵⁶ Racism was also linked to a sexualized image of the enemy; the enemy was generally defined as sexually heterodox, whether as heterodox women and/or prostitutes or homosexual men. On occasion, male prisoners were forced to dress like women. Insults were common as their bodies served as ideological metaphors. In 1984, the Dyszel family published a condemnation of the disappearance of their son in the newspapers, and the response they received from one perpetrator was symptomatic of this ideology as a whole:

Jewish bastard: I am one of the people who killed your WORTHLESS
PIECE OF SHIT of a son and your whore of a DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

There are now 2 FEWER JEWISH ZIONISTS IN THE WORLD. If you only knew where we had BURIED them!! You would drop dead, *Judío puto*.⁵⁷

The crudeness of this communication represents an ideology that emphasizes the supposed machismo of perpetrators but in no way allows them to speak openly. The secret must be kept. It would seem that the perpetrators seek to relive the continuous disappearance of the victim and the ongoing nature of the resulting trauma. Through the compulsive repetition of trauma, the perpetrators feel more powerful, though in some cases they were no longer active. The perpetrator wants the parents of the victim to suffer the loss as a transcendental absence.⁵⁸ The argument that if the parents knew the truth they would metaphorically die disguises the fact that if the parents actually die the immediacy of the trauma vanishes, which the perpetrator wants to prevent from happening. Whereas, for the victim's family, finding out where their disappeared relative was buried was an important step toward working through the trauma, for the perpetrator the disappearance of the victim had to mean constant trauma, and hence the repressor identified the parent's finding the child's grave with the death of the parent. The message really entails a projection of the killer's desire. It is not the parent of the victim but rather the perpetrator who would be degraded if the site of the child's grave was revealed. In the ideological formation of the perpetrators, the mystery of a disappearance must be a legacy that keeps the memory of extermination alive, and the perpetrators must project the disappearance onto the victims' relatives. What for the killers is a victory over death that must be repeated time and again is for the relatives an open wound that the killers do not want to heal.

In 1981, Jacobo Timerman wrote about his experience in the Argentine concentration camp system. Timerman had been illegally kidnapped by Argentine military personnel in 1977 and was subsequently tortured in three clandestine camps and held in two prisons. After intense international pressure, in 1979 the Argentine dictatorship stripped Timerman of his Argentine citizenship and deported him to Israel.⁵⁹ Timerman emphasizes the centrality of anti-Semitism to the Argentine dictatorship.⁶⁰ Argentina did not experience genocide in the classical sense but the concentration camp experiences of Argentine Jews had genocidal dimensions. Outside the camps, Argentine Jews were not targeted for being Jewish, but once inside the camps the situation changed. The main reason behind

this state antisemitism inside the camps was rooted in the Argentine traditions of fascist ideology. Timerman was the first to make explicit this central dimension of dictatorial anti-Semitism.⁶¹ His writing on his experiences first appeared in *The New Yorker* and American liberal intellectuals and newspapers broadly supported him. For pundits on the American right, Timerman was "irresponsible and dishonest." For American conservative pundit Irving Kristol, "though Anti-Semitism may be rife in certain segments of Argentinean society the government has been doing—and is doing—its best to render it ineffectual." Kristol concluded, "Jews in Argentina today lead lives that are not very much more nervous or fearful than those of non-Jews." He claimed that "Mr. Timerman and his left-wing associates" were criticizing a Republican administration that was trying to move the Argentine dictatorship "towards greater liberalization."⁶²

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believed, "There is no doubt that there are many anti-Semitic trends in Argentina, but not in the Nazi sense." For Kissinger the lack of a Nazi dimension to Argentine anti-Semitism somehow downplayed Timerman's point about the centrality of anti-Semitism in Argentina. Argentine human rights advocate, progressive Catholic thinker Emilio Mignone was visiting New York during the affair and he simply stated that "Timerman has told the total truth." Mignone explained that, "All political prisoners or dissidents have a hard time of it when they are arrested, but the Jews suffer more than the others. They get the worst beatings, the crudest torture, the vilest insults. The important thing about Timerman is that he spoke up; that is the best policy in facing a repressive regime."⁶³

In Argentina, Mignone represented a notable exception. While mainstream conservative commentators in the United States sought to downplay Timerman's book as an "exaggeration," in Argentina the book's contention that the military dictatorship put forward an anti-Semitic program was met with either silence or anti-Semitic attacks.⁶⁴

Most testimonies concur with Timerman's account. While she was being tortured, the Argentine Jewish citizen Nora Strejilevich could hear the perpetrators "assuring her that 'the problem of subversion' was their primary concern, but 'the Jewish problem' was followed in importance, and they were archiving information." Miriam Lewin, who was held in a concentration camp of the Argentine air force, remembers that inside the camp, "The general attitude was of deep-rooted anti-Semitism. On one occasion they asked me if I understood Yiddish. I replied that I did not, that I only knew a few words. They nevertheless made me listen to a cassette they had obtained

by tapping telephones. The speakers were apparently Argentine businessmen of Jewish origin, talking in Yiddish. My captors were most interested in finding out what the conversation was about.... They collected the information obtained in files, including in them the names and addresses of people of Jewish origin, plans of synagogues, sports clubs, businesses, etc.... The only good Jew is a dead Jew, the guards would say."⁶⁵

The military concern over Jewish activities in Argentina had its origins in long-standing conspiracy theories of Argentina's fascist ideology. Timerman recalled later that he was accused of being a leading member of the Argentine section of the Jewish conspiracy.⁶⁶

The zigzagging, and often opaque, connections between anti-Semitism, authoritarianism, and the Argentine state ran through an array of discourses and practices in twentieth-century Argentina, from what is called the Tragic Week of 1919 to fascists and Catholic nacionalistas, and from Uriburu's dictatorship to the concentration camps of the 1970s.

Timerman argues that from the point of view of the perpetrators, torturing Jews was complemented by a sense of elation. With prisoners in general the perpetrators made clear that they wanted to destroy them mentally and physically, but "with Jews, however, there was a desire to eradicate. Interrogating enemies was a job; but interrogating Jews was a pleasure or a curse. Torturing a Jewish prisoners always yielded a moment of entertainment to the Argentine security forces, a certain pleasurable, leisurely moment."⁶⁷

Timerman signals the central role of jokes and physical degradation in the Argentine concentrations camps. The two were intrinsically linked. As several testimonies show, the dictatorship literally inscribed anti-Semitic discourse in the bodies of the victims. Different forms of torture were used in order to establish in physical terms the ideologically proposed animality of Jewish corporality.

Former inmate Pedro Miguel Vanrell remembers that there was a Jewish prisoner at the camp of Club Atlético, "[a perpetrator] would make him wag his tail, bark like a dog, lick his boots. It was impressive how well he did it, he imitated a dog as if he really were one, because if he did not satisfy the guard, he would carry on beating him.... Later he would change and make him be a cat.... There Julian, the Turk, always carried a key ring with a swastika and wore a crucifix round his neck. This character would take money from the relatives of Jewish prisoners."⁶⁸

Daniel Eduardo Fernández, who was a prisoner at the same camp, recalls that while he was being tortured, "They continually went on at me

as to whether I knew any Jewish people, friends, shopkeepers, anybody, as long as they were of Jewish origin.... There was a torturer there they called Kung-Fu, who would practice martial arts on three or four people at a time—they would always be prisoners of Jewish origin—who were kicked and punched."⁶⁹

Fernandez continues, "Jews were punished simply because they were Jewish. They would be told that the DAIA (the Argentine Jewish umbrella organization) and international Zionism subsidized subversion, and that the organization of the *pozos* [holes/camps] was financed by ODESSA [an international group which supports Nazism].... All kinds of torture would be applied to Jews, especially one which was extremely sadistic and cruel: the rectoscope, which consisted of inserting a tube into the victim's anus, or into a woman's vagina, then letting a rat into the tube. The rodent would try to get out by gnawing at the victim's internal organs."⁷⁰

This torture reinforced the supposed dirtiness and animality of the Jewish victims. It is not surprising that most testimonies regarding these practices are from non-Jewish witnesses who survived the camps. Most Jewish prisoners did not.

The Nazi example was a source of inspiration for the perpetrators. Delia María Barreda y Ferrando remembers, "One of the military personnel who called himself the Great Führer made the prisoners shout Heil Hitler!, and at night they could frequently hear recordings of Hitler's speeches."⁷¹ In addition, the perpetrators painted the faces of Jewish prisoners with "Hitler moustaches." In several camps Jewish prisoners had to sit down on their knees when facing portraits of Hitler and Mussolini. They also were obliged to insult themselves as Jews. In other camps, they were ordered to say "I love Hitler."⁷² Prisoners also had swastikas sprayed on their backs in order to be identified and punished as Jewish.

These acts represented the callous humor prevalent in the Argentine concentration camps. The "joke," of course, was only funny to perpetrators insofar as it presented the bodies of Jewish victims as physical fulfillments of the ideological wish to exterminate them. Inscribing Jewish self-hatred on the bodies of the victims became an example of their total submission.

Timerman points out that when non-Jewish prisoners were tortured, the torturers mockingly spoke of whether they "sang" a "tango" or an "opera" if the torturers did not get much information, they said that the victim had sung a tango. Timerman argues that other "jokes" used the