

# Infidelities: Morality, Revolution, and Sexuality in Left-Wing Guerrilla Organizations in 1960s and 1970s Argentina

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“HE WOULDN’T SEE ME. HE DIED thinking I was a traitor,” former Montonera guerrilla Ana Testa says as she looks into the camera. She had given her account of how she had been tortured, but now she was remembering a different kind of pain. After she was liberated from a clandestine detention center, her partner, Juan Silva—who would later be “disappeared”—could have gone to her, but he refused.<sup>1</sup> This is not a mere anecdote. In it are enmeshed the views on love, activism, and morality held by many of the revolutionaries. This article looks at the role played by sexuality in the construction of a revolutionary morality as a key dimension for understanding the left-wing guerrilla groups active in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s.

In Argentina, as in other Latin American countries, the liberal regime that crystallized in the nineteenth century strengthened a family type based on the indissolubility of marriage, gender inequality, and patriarchal power. Under that model, female infidelity was not tolerated, as an adulterous wife represented a serious threat to patriarchy, challenging the phallic power of the male and, with it, patrilineal descent and inheritance. In contrast, it was acceptable for men to be unfaithful, and their authority over women was

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<sup>1</sup> *Montoneros: Una historia*, dir. Andrés Di Tella (Buenos Aires, 1994).

firmly established under a civil code (enacted in 1869) that denied legal rights to unmarried couples and out-of-wedlock children and offered no protection to female heads-of-household.<sup>2</sup> In the 1960s, the cornerstones of this family model were called into question as never before, challenging widely accepted values such as the sanctity of marriage and long-held assumptions about gender roles that determined the inferior status of women and male authority in the family. Infidelity sparked heated debates because it was at the heart of the sexual double standard. In fact, under Argentina's 1922 criminal code—still in force in the 1960s—a husband was only considered adulterous if he kept a mistress or was found with another woman in the bed he shared with his wife, but for a wife it was enough to have had a casual encounter with another man.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to Europe and the United States, where sexual changes were fostered by what Jeffrey Weeks termed the “permissive moment,” in Argentina the traditional family was challenged against a backdrop of rising authoritarianism, moral crusades, and deteriorating social and economic conditions.<sup>4</sup> It was in that context that armed groups emerged, encouraged by the Cuban Revolution and the labor and student struggles that were stirring the country and the world. In the years that followed, as Argentina became more and more involved in the continental war against subversion, the state launched increasingly brutal repressive actions, stepping up authoritarianism and intensifying political polarization. This eventually culminated in the 1976 military coup, which institutionalized torture, murder, and enforced disappearance as methods for combating political dissidents and social activists, claiming as many as thirty thousand disappearance victims, according to estimates by human rights organizations.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, feminist historiography and gender studies have offered new approaches for rethinking this crucial era, whose echoes are still felt today in Argentine society. One line of investigation has shown the persistence of women's inequality within guerrilla organizations, revealing that the issue took a back seat to the more important strategic goal of seizing political power.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that these groups were indifferent

<sup>2</sup> For an overview, see Dora Barrancos, *Mujeres en la sociedad argentina: Una historia de cinco siglos* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *Código penal* (Buenos Aires: Kraft, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> On the “permissive moment,” see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London: Longman, 1992), chap. 13. For more details on Argentina, see Isabella Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Daniel James, ed., *Nueva historia argentina*, vol. 9, *Violencia, proscripción y autoritarismo (1955–1976)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> For a pioneer study, see María del Carmen Feijoó and Marcela Nari, “Women in Argentina during the 1960s,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 1 (1996): 7–27. For a recent study, see Alejandra Oberti, “Género, política y violencia: Vida cotidiana y militancia en las décadas del sesenta y setenta” (PhD diss., Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2011).

with respect to such matters. Far from it; members of left-wing guerrilla groups held strong views on family, sexuality, and romantic relationships, which did not deviate from traditional ideas, imposing a “compulsory heterosexuality” (as noted by Florencia Mallon in the case of Chile), exalting virility, and promoting an ideal image of the revolutionary couple, which was both heterosexual and monogamous.<sup>7</sup> They also disapproved of the sexual revolution as much as conservatives did, although not for the same reasons, viewing it as an imperialist strategy that would throw the people off the revolutionary path.<sup>8</sup> Guerrilla groups also sought to exert control over their members’ bodies and discipline their sexuality in what Vera Carnovale has termed “full organization.”<sup>9</sup> More recent studies, along the lines proposed by Victoria Langland for Brazil, have highlighted the sexual and gendered portrayal of activists and guerrillas—particularly women—as the “enemy within” in both antisubversive propaganda and repressive practices.<sup>10</sup> Other studies have explored the sexualization of activists and captivity survivors, who were believed by their own peers

<sup>7</sup> For the concept of “compulsory heterosexuality” applied to Latin America, see Florencia E. Mallon, “Barbudos, Warriors, and *Rotos*: The MIR, Masculinity, and Power in the Chilean Agrarian Reform 1965–74,” in *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*, ed. Matthew C. Gutmann (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 179–215. For Argentina, see Osvaldo Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la conquista de América al siglo XXI* (Buenos Aires: Marea, 2004); and Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli, *Fiestas, baños y exilios: Los gays porteños en la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001). On heterosexual monogamy, see Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*, 142–47; and Andrea Andújar, “El amor en tiempos de revolución,” in *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones*, ed. Andrea Andújar et al. (Buenos Aires: Luxemberg, 2009), 149–70. For Brazil, see James N. Green, “‘Who Is the Macho Who Wants to Kill Me?’: Male Homosexuality, Revolutionary, Masculinity, and the Brazilian Armed Struggle of the 1960s and 1970s,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (2012): 437–69.

<sup>8</sup> Karina Felitti, “Poner el cuerpo: Género y sexualidad en la política revolucionaria de Argentina en la década de 1970,” in *Political and Social Movements during the Sixties and Seventies in the Americas and Europe*, ed. Avital H. Bloch (Mexico: Universidad de Colima, 2010). See also Valeria Manzano, “The Making of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality (1956–1976)” (PhD diss., Indiana University, Bloomington, 2009), 363–74.

<sup>9</sup> Vera Carnovale, *Los combatientes: Historia del PRT-ERP* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2011); and Oberti, *Género, política y violencia*. See also Paola Martínez, *Género, política y revolución en los años setenta: Las mujeres del PRT-ERP* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2009). An early study is Feijoó and Nari, “Women in Argentina.”

<sup>10</sup> Valeria Manzano, “Sex, Gender, and the Making of the ‘Enemy Within’ in Cold War Argentina,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 46, no. 3, forthcoming August 2014; Marta Vasallo, “Militancia y transgresión,” in Andújar et al., *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones*, 19–31; and Débora D’Antonio, “‘Rejas, gritos, cadenas, ruidos, ollas’: La agencia política en las cárceles del estado terrorista en Argentina, 1974–1983,” in *ibid.*, 89–108. These developments continue a line opened by Victoria Langland, “Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails: Reading Sex and Revolution in 1968 Brazil,” in *In from the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 308–49. In a different vein, see Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile, Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende, 1964–1973* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

to have traded sexual favors for their lives and were consequently cast as traitors in testimonial novels written in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup>

While these studies have shed significant light on the gender and sexual dimensions of guerrilla organizations and political and ideological struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, most have offered a somewhat simplified reconstruction of the role of sexuality within such organizations and paid little attention to its connection with their contemporary society and to the historicity of the process. In this article I propose a more complex analysis through three approaches. The first aims to give substance to the heterogeneity of sexual morality experiences, views, and positions. The second highlights the porous lines that separated the world of activism from the wider culture and society of the time.<sup>12</sup> The third involves a diachronic reconstruction that considers the specific characteristics of the different historical moments that can be distinguished in the period over which this fast-paced political process unfolded.

My hypothesis is that sexuality represented a dense arena of conflicts within guerrilla groups. Multiple positions vied against each other within organizations characterized by social and cultural heterogeneity and gender anxieties. These cannot be understood outside the context of a society permeated by intense debates—and deep uncertainties—over the changing family and sexual orders, which resonated particularly with young people. Tensions thus existed between the rigid morality preached by these organizations and the actual experiences of their members. These tensions were resolved or processed differently over time and became more pronounced as repression escalated and the organizations became more militarized, thus strengthening the direct connection between romantic fidelity and political loyalty.

Based on this hypothesis, I look at how infidelity in heterosexual couples was experienced, discussed, and addressed in the two leading guerrilla organizations active in Argentina during the period studied: the Montoneros and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Party, or ERP), the second of which was the military wing of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Workers' Revolutionary Party, or PRT). The article is divided into three sections. The first examines certain foundational elements that were at the root of the interlinking of the political and the personal in both organizations. The second reconstructs the ways in which the members of these organizations processed the conflicts in their love lives under conditions of clandestine living and armed struggle.

<sup>11</sup> Ana Longoni, *Traiciones: La figura del traidor en los relatos acerca de los sobrevivientes en la represión* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2007); Valeria Manzano, "Betrayal, Loyalty, the Peronist People and the Forgotten Archives: Miguel Bonasso's Narrative and the Peronist Left's Political Culture, 1984–2003," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 183–99.

<sup>12</sup> This is the perspective of Manzano, "Making of Youth"; Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*; and Alejandro Cattaruzza, "Un mundo por hacer: Una propuesta para el análisis de las culturas juveniles en los setenta," *Entre pasados* 7, no. 2 (1997): 67–76.

It underscores the gender and class tensions in the case of the ERP and the way in which sexual morality was linked to political disputes within the Montoneros. The last section explores the organizations' increasing militarization and the simultaneous development of codes of sexual and moral conduct that established a direct relationship between political loyalty (understood as sacrificing one's life for the cause) and fidelity to one's spouse or partner, as more and more militants fell victim to torture, kidnapping, and disappearance at the hands of the state.

To reconstruct this process I have had to rely on sources that are necessarily fragmentary. The traces of that past—both written and oral accounts—are marked by the historical circumstances in which these militants lived, as they came under attack by repressive forces, were forced to go underground, and were disappeared. Thus, for my analysis I had to piece together fragments and decipher evidence culled from memoirs and written and oral accounts (including twenty-five interviews I conducted myself and thirty drawn from the Archivo de Memoria Abierta in Buenos Aires); documents, magazines, and newspapers issued by these organizations; and novels published during the period studied.<sup>13</sup> To overcome these difficulties I have applied an analysis that involves the constant contrasting of sources and facts, taking into account the specificity of the discourse of each type of source and placing them in the contexts in which they emerged.<sup>14</sup> These methodological precautions aside, it is not my intention to produce a linear narration but rather to create a multifaceted prism—with different sides and perspectives—to shed light on how love, sexuality, and revolutionary struggle were intertwined in guerrilla organizations.

#### FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS: THE ARMED LEFT AND SEXUAL MORALITY

In 1959 the Cuban Revolution opened up a new political horizon across Latin America. In Argentina, Peronism—a movement that had granted workers their social rights—had been banned since the 1955 military coup that had deposed its leader, Juan Domingo Perón. The victory of the Cuban guerrillas spurred heated debates over strategy among advocates of social change, dividing the Left. In the early 1960s a number of Peronist factions emerged in Argentina, pushing to radicalize the movement, and the first guerrilla groups were formed there. The social and economic crisis that had aggravated the historical exclusion of peasants and workers

<sup>13</sup> *Archivo de Memoria Abierta* is a collective memory project that gathers interviews and information on victims of state terrorism established and maintained by the Acción Coordinada de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos, Buenos Aires. For more information, see <http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar>.

<sup>14</sup> For challenges posed by “recent” history, see Marina Franco and Florencia Levín, eds., *Historia reciente: Perspectivas y desafíos para un campo en construcción* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2007). On oral history, see Paul Thompson, *La voz del pasado: La historia oral* (Valencia: Alfons el Magnànim, 1988).

was compounded by a weak democracy and a stream of military interventions. Young people from both the middle and working classes—many of whom were the first in their families to gain access to secondary school and higher education—led the growing social and political unrest, which prompted new movements and organizations across the country. In 1965, in the small, poverty-stricken northern province of Santiago del Estero, a local Americanist movement and a Buenos Aires Trotskyist group merged to form the PRT. A few years later, the PRT's military arm would become one of Argentina's leading guerrilla groups.<sup>15</sup>

The decision to create an armed wing came in the aftermath of the military coup staged by Gen. Juan Carlos Onganía in 1966, which suspended parliamentary activities in Argentina, outlawed all political parties, stepped up repression and censorship, and brought the University of Buenos Aires under the control of the state. But these measures failed to suppress social unrest, fueling instead the radicalization of young activists. Che Guevara's death in 1967 had a similar impact, as his demise heightened the revolutionary aura that surrounded him and the need to continue his struggle. For the Left, Guevara represented the ideal new man of indomitable courage who was willing to give his life for the revolution.<sup>16</sup> His image embodied an eroticized virility and a way of loving that fell outside the reproductive goals of the bourgeois family, as Diana Sorensen has posited. That image united a community of "warriors" and provided the backbone of a phallogocentric identity.<sup>17</sup> But it also had a human side that was sensitive and compassionate and that conferred an exceptional quality to the guerrilla virility symbolized by Guevara: a virility that combined tenderness with bravery and the strength of the combatant with the sensitivity of a new man who felt deeply for his fellow human beings and was loved by them.<sup>18</sup>

Che Guevara's death rekindled debates over the question of taking up arms. During this time, the PRT was caught up in intense discussions that resulted in key ideological guidelines that would shape the party's long-term actions. These internal disputes legitimized a rhetoric based on morally disparaging one's opponent through accusations of "betrayal" (of the revolution, of the working class, and even of the party). The triumph of the proponents of armed struggle consolidated the dominance of Roberto Santucho, a leader whose family was very influential in the party, and thus the intertwining of political and personal relations (key

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of this period of Argentine history, see James, *Nueva historia argentina*, vol. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Hugo Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2009), 131–65; Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 183–222.

<sup>17</sup> Diana Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 15–53.

<sup>18</sup> Isabella Cosse, "Militancia, sexualidad y erotismo en la izquierda armada en la Argentina de los años setenta," in *Historia de la moral sexual y los comportamientos sexuales*, ed. Dora Barrancos, Donna Guy, and Adriana Valobra (Buenos Aires: Katz, forthcoming).

in any small organization) became linked to kinship and family relations (with their hierarchies, conflicts, and loyalties).<sup>19</sup>

With these changes, it became acceptable to invoke the greater good of the party to interfere in the love lives of its leaders and defend the institution of marriage. This was not the result of philosophical discussions but a by-product of the intersecting of the party's internal strife and Santucho's own marriage crisis. Santucho had married Ana María Villareal (known as Sayo) in 1962. They were both upper-middle-class university graduates who belonged to their provinces' intellectual elites. While Ana María's home province, Salta, had a more patrician past than Roberto's Santiago del Estero, both were set apart from the rest of Argentina in their strong mix of Catholicism and traditionalism, characterized by the sexual double standard, patriarchal power, and the submission of women. Roberto's was a classic example of the province's families, as he was the eighth child of a local *caudillo* (charismatic and popular leader) whose extramarital affairs were no secret. But like many middle-class youths, Roberto and Sayo defied established family values, although without breaking completely with tradition. While they did get married, they refused a church wedding; and while they agreed to participate in the honeymoon ritual, they transformed it into a political learning trip, emulating Che Guevara's epic journey across Latin America. After the honeymoon, they settled into conventional married life, with the traditional division of gender roles. Roberto threw himself into political activism, and Sayo devoted herself to motherhood, although supporting her husband and even participating directly in party politics. Roberto convinced her that his frequent long absences were necessary to further the cause. He offered her a love nurtured by political commitment and envisioned their future together as inseparable from the revolutionary struggle.<sup>20</sup>

In 1967, amid all the infighting in the PRT over strategy, the couple faced a major marriage crisis. Roberto fell in love with Clarisa Lea Place, a university student and fellow party member twelve years his junior. Clarisa was recognized for her unswerving loyalty as a militant, and, according to all accounts, she loved Roberto deeply. Pola Augier, her best friend and roommate, recalls how Clarisa believed Roberto would one day leave his wife for her. But that never happened. Sayo, who was living at the time at the Santucho family house, found out about her husband's infidelity, and it quickly became a matter of collective discussion within the organization. The affair was affecting internal party matters. Francisco, a former PRT activist, explains that the marriage crisis was undermining Roberto Santucho's image in the

<sup>19</sup> See Pablo Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas: El PRT-ERP; La guerrilla marxista* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 2001), 148; and Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 261.

<sup>20</sup> María Seoane, *Todo o nada: La historia secreta y la historia pública del jefe guerrillero Mario Roberto Santucho* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991), 27–87. On fertility rates, see Edith Pantelides, “La fecundidad argentina desde mediados del siglo XX,” *Cuadernos del CENEP*, no. 41 (Buenos Aires: CENEP, 1989), 21 (table 3.6). For other “discreet” youth rebellions, see Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*, 71–101, 115–31.



political discussions under way, so his comrades tried to prevent the matter from spreading beyond party leaders.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, the idea that the party's members and especially its leaders had to be an example of revolutionary morality and that a militant's private life was inseparable from his or her political commitment was by then accepted as natural in the organization.

When the issue of Roberto's infidelity was discussed among PRT leaders, the majority disapproved of his behavior and reprimanded both lovers, ordering them to end the affair. Pola remembers her friend telling her that she had been harshly criticized and humiliated. These political pressures were combined with family and personal pressures. In Roberto's case, he was also admonished by his youngest brother, Julio Santucho, who had recently joined the party after leaving a Jesuit seminary in Spain where he had been preparing for the priesthood. In a letter to Roberto, he told him:

[You] forget that this unique moment we are living is not about trying out new forms of relationships, but about living according to a revolutionary morality with the greatest selflessness and austerity possible: an honest and solidly built home, an unbreakable fidelity, a Justice in everyday life that must be the reflection of the highest ideal of the revolutionary. . . . Mutual devotion [in a couple] cannot be broken by the will of either of the parties involved without committing an injustice. In fact, it can never be broken, because when we give ourselves to another we do so fully and forever, without calculations or restrictions. The same is true when we give ourselves to the revolution, because both forms of devotion stem from the most intimate depths of our spiritual being, a being that surfaces to be realized in the construction of a new world. A new world where social relations will be novel not simply because they are arbitrarily different, but because they will be stripped of all selfishness and pettiness.<sup>22</sup>

The letter defines revolutionary love and views the romantic feelings that two activists can have for each other as intricately linked to their political ideals. In stark opposition to the affective individualism typical of Anglo-Saxon modernization, Julio proposed an ideal of love shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which placed social obligations above personal decisions and morality above passion. Romantic devotion was equated with revolutionary commitment in that they both demanded a complete renunciation through which individuals transcended their self-interest and became full and accomplished beings.

Julio's advice evoked ideas that were popular both outside and within the revolutionary Left. These ideas had echoes of Christian humanism but also of the writings of Erich Fromm, whose book *The Art of Loving* was

<sup>21</sup> My interview with Francisco R., PRT activist from Tucumán (Buenos Aires, 10 January 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Letter transcribed in Seoane, *Todo o nada*, 123–24.



a best-seller in Argentina at the time.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, Julio's advice reflected a conjugal ideal that extolled companionship and mutual fulfillment, a notion that had emerged as a reaction against the authoritarianism of traditional marriages. Julio, however, rejected the possibility of salvaging the marriage if it meant that Sayo had to accept her husband's affair, as Roberto seemed to hope.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Julio's words illustrate the extent to which sacrifice was glorified within these organizations in a way that tied the tradition of Christianity to the imaginary of the Left, for which giving one's life for the cause—as Che Guevara had done—was the duty of every revolutionary. Drawing on the two traditions, the letter contrasted authenticity with moral hypocrisy and placed the former at the core of both romantic devotion and political commitment. The ideal “new man” was thus connected with the tradition of Argentina's historical Left, which had been informed by an orthodox reading of Marxism that rejected the double sexual standard but defended love-based monogamy.<sup>25</sup>

The marriage crisis had a swift denouement: Santucho gave in to the pressures of both party and family and opted for what was best for him politically, which was ending the affair. When Clarisa found out, she was devastated, ashamed of her lover's behavior, and hurt by how she was treated by the party leaders. “They treated me like a prostitute,” she told Pola Augier, who defended her. She believed that the “natural” solution would have been for the two lovers to stay together. She lost all respect for Roberto, whom she had admired as a leader. As with “most men, he seized on his sense of responsibility as the perfect excuse,” thus demonstrating that “family was sacred” for the “leaders of the north,” who were still influenced by Catholicism and the preconceptions of that time, despite their Marxism.<sup>26</sup> Another party member, identified only as “Comrade L.,” viewed the episode in a similar way: Santucho had yielded to pressures from fellow party leaders and in the “name of the proletariat” had renounced “the most beautiful thing” that had ever happened to him—Clarisa.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> On Christian humanism in Argentina, see José Zanca, “El humanismo cristiano y la cultura católica argentina (1936–1959)” (PhD diss., Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> On companionship, see Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*, 115–53. In the letter, Julio said: “You can't ask [Ana María] to deny herself, to obliterate herself as a person; you can't use people as if they were instruments that can be picked up and discarded on a whim.” Quoted in Seoane, *Todo o nada*, 123–24.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the opinions voiced by Socialist and Trotskyist congressmen in *Diario de sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados*, 14 May 1964, Buenos Aires, Congreso de la Nación, 331, 341. For a view of socialist morality in the early twentieth century, see Dora Barrancos, *La escena iluminada: Ciencias para trabajadores, 1890–1930* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Pola Augier, *Los jardines del cielo: Experiencias de una guerrillera* (Buenos Aires: Sud-estada, 2006), 116; also available online at [http://www.revistasudestada.com.ar/web06/articulo.php3?id\\_article=463](http://www.revistasudestada.com.ar/web06/articulo.php3?id_article=463) (accessed 25 November 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Rolo Diez, *El mejor y el peor de los tiempos: Cómo destruyeron al PRT-ERP* (Buenos Aires: Nuestra América, 2010), 34.

The episode crystallized a close interlinking of the personal and the political, whereby the subordination of matters of the heart to party concerns was twofold. First, party authorities were seen as having the right to interfere in each other's love lives in the understanding that as leaders they had to set an example of moral integrity and that their love lives could potentially have political effects. Second, the importance attributed to romantic fidelity mirrored the value placed on political loyalty, crucial in a group in which political opponents were perceived as traitors. These multiple influences operated over a backdrop of deep-seated patriarchal values, with its naturalization of male-centered authority and the accepted male tradition of keeping a second home for a mistress, but they did so in different ways. In some cases they reaffirmed Marxist orthodoxy, while in others they cemented the very essence of the sexual morality that the new revolutionary morals were supposed to challenge. It is worth noting that disagreements with this tendency to interfere in the personal life of party members did not translate into formal dissent or party defections. In this case, for example, Clarisa and Pola did not leave the party but participated shortly thereafter as the only two women delegates at the Fourth Congress, held in 1968, where Santucho prevailed in his call for armed struggle and the first step toward the founding of the ERP was taken. The other female voice at this congress was Sayo's, although she had no voting powers. Her presence, according to Pola, represented an acknowledgment by party authorities of the "stability" of the Santucho marriage and an insult to Clarisa, brought on by "the hypocrisy of [the party's] monastic forces, which were trying to impose their morals."<sup>28</sup>

Radicalization was not limited to the PRT. In 1968, in step with student unrest in cities like Paris, Mexico, and Montevideo, protest movements erupted across Argentina, culminating in 1969 in the Córdoba worker and student uprising, which would be known as the Cordobazo and which dealt a mortal blow to Onganía's dictatorial regime. In that climate that same year, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Armed Revolutionary Forces, or FAR), which had been formed by Marxist militants to support Guevara's guerrilla efforts in Bolivia, adopted urban guerrilla tactics and joined forces with Peronists.

The year 1970 also saw the emergence of the Montoneros, an armed group that identified with Peronist ideas, massively attracting young activists and soon becoming one of the country's leading political forces. The Montoneros went public with a highly symbolic action: the kidnapping and assassination of Gen. Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, who had led the ousting of Juan Domingo Perón in 1955 and had ordered the execution of the military officers who had risen in defense of Peronism the following year. This action, which sealed the fate of the already weakened Onganía regime, took up the Peronist resistance tradition in a substantial way.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 112; and Seoane, *Todo o nada*, 125, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón: Los Montoneros* (Buenos Aires: Grijalbo, 1987), 119–39.

The Montoneros also contained foundational elements that engaged with sexual morality through the interlinking of the personal and the political. The organization was the result of the merging of various groups with different histories but connected by a common Peronist identity and the goal of achieving socialism through armed struggle. In the early stages, the founding members were especially influenced by the Christian tradition. Several of the original leaders—including Fernando Abal Medina, Mario Firmenich, and Carlos Ramus—had met in 1967 through the Catholic priest Carlos Mujica, a major activist for the poor in 1960s Argentina.<sup>30</sup> Graciela Daleo recalls joining the group as a life-changing experience, both personally and emotionally, for all those involved. Christian asceticism marked their shared everyday life. They ate frugally and embraced Christian humility. This did not prevent them from socializing, including flirting with each other. But their relationships were tinted with piety and governed by formal courtship rules. Graciela, for example, had been pining for Jorge for years, but when he finally asked her to be his girlfriend she told him she had to think about it and offered her cheek for a chaste good-bye kiss. Jorge, in turn, asked her to keep their relationship a secret until he could find a way to tell his mother.<sup>31</sup> In other social circles these formalities were considered stilted and old-fashioned and were being shed.<sup>32</sup>

The group gradually consolidated and in 1967 created the Comando Camilo Torres, named after a Colombian guerrilla priest killed the year before whose memory allowed them to reconcile their Christian beliefs with the decision to take up arms. The brigade was formed by some thirty young militants, all under the age of twenty-five, and focused on propaganda activities, handing out pamphlets and distributing their magazine, *Cristianismo y revolución* (Christianity and revolution). Daleo recalls that the group “observed very strict moral norms,” so she was outraged when one of their leaders, Juan García Elorrio, took advantage of his partner’s frequent absences to flirt with other women in the group. A year and a half later, the brigade had disbanded, and by late 1969 some of its members had decided to form a new group.<sup>33</sup> Daleo, who had taken a break from activism, received a visit from her friend Mario Firmenich, who in the past had taken a romantic interest in her and now wanted her help with the new organization. She remembers that when Firmenich contacted her one of the things he made clear was that the new organization would not tolerate any complications due to personal entanglements. “We treat these matters very seriously. The New Man cannot be irresponsible in his relationship

<sup>30</sup> Lucas Lanusse, *Montoneros: El mito de sus 12 fundadores* (Buenos Aires: Vergara, 2005), 127–38.

<sup>31</sup> Graciela Daleo, quoted in Eduardo Anguita and Martín Caparrós, *La voluntad: Una historia de la militancia revolucionaria en la Argentina*, vol. 1, 1966–1973 (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2013), 23–32, 107.

<sup>32</sup> Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*, 25–51.

<sup>33</sup> See Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón*, 81–86.

with his partner. Among us, nobody marries and separates on a whim, just because they feel the urge.” He immediately added: “And we don’t tolerate treachery [*agachadas*]. We’re very clear on that. We deal with traitors by executing them, you know.” According to her own account, Graciela did not ask who “we” were for security reasons. Shortly thereafter, she learned that by “we” Firmenich meant the Montoneros.<sup>34</sup> The value placed on fidelity by the Montoneros owed much to Christian sexual morality. But it was also linked to the Peronist tradition embraced by the Montoneros, as “loyalty” had been a defining feature of Peronism from the onset, to the point that the date on which the movement celebrated its anniversary was called Loyalty Day.<sup>35</sup> The concept took on its fullest and most sacralized meaning in a dichotomous discourse that opposed “good” to “bad” and “us” (working-class culture and the people) to the “other” (the oligarchy and unpatriotic forces).<sup>36</sup> The Montoneros took up this tradition when they presented themselves as the avenging force that would bring Perón’s traitors to justice and would defend the people against the enemies of Peronism.

In sum, in both organizations there were certain key foundational elements that defined their revolutionary system of morality, including placing a high value on sexual self-restraint, opening the personal lives of party leaders to scrutiny from their peers, and encouraging rigid rules. The process leading up to the creation of the ERP was marked by discussions over how revolutionary couples should behave, pitting those who defended the importance of stable relationships against those—mostly young people and women—who believed in passionate love and the individual’s right to fall freely in and out of love. There were no such discussions during the forging of the Montoneros, but its founding members were strongly influenced by asceticism and a rigid morality, and the organization would soon incorporate new groups that were emerging from different ideological traditions and had contrasting views on the subject. Lastly, both the Montoneros and the ERP—and the armed Left in general—exalted the figure of Che Guevara, holding him up as a symbol of an eroticized virility that combined bravery and human compassion. But at the same time in the two organizations, loyalty was seen as a substantial element of the connection between romantic ties and political obligations.

#### INTENSE LIVES: CONFLICTS OF THE HEART AND DISPUTES OVER MORALS

By 1970 young people were becoming increasingly radicalized, and their antiestablishment stance was not limited to politics. On the contrary, young

<sup>34</sup> Daleo, quoted in Anguita and Caparrós, *La voluntad*, 1:326, 354.

<sup>35</sup> Fernando Alberto Balbi, *De leales, desleales y traidores: Valores morales y concepción política en el peronismo* (Buenos Aires: GIAPER, 2007), 97–201.

<sup>36</sup> Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón, *Perón o muerte: Los fundamentos discursivos del fenómeno peronista* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2003), 71–74.

people—militants and nonmilitants alike—were rebelling in different ways against traditional family, sexual, and social values. According to a survey of people under the age of twenty-five featured in the magazine *Análisis* (Analysis), some young people viewed marriage as an obsolete institution, while others preferred to fill it with new meanings, seeing it as a way of “living together” or as an “enjoyable duty.” Despite these differences, there was a common rejection of the double standard of sexual morality. Most considered that adults were hypocrites because they accepted the separation between “physical love” outside the home and “spiritual love in the home” that provided a euphemism for adultery.<sup>37</sup> They questioned the “system”—a term that encompassed the whole of the political, social, and moral establishment and that itself reflected the generational clash. In Argentina, as in other countries, the family as an institution was widely perceived to be in crisis, but there was great uncertainty as to what that crisis would entail. This situation alarmed Catholic and traditionalist organizations, which countered with an avalanche of public statements, actions, and political lobbying calling on the government to defend the basic principles of family, order, and tradition that they claimed defined the nation and that they believed were being threatened.

The Left was not unaffected by these changes in the family and in romantic relationships. On the contrary, in these organizations they became especially contentious, as the conviction that an ideal “new man” had to accompany the dawning society forged by the revolution was not linked to any particular dogma or ideological definition of revolutionary morality nor to actual considerations regarding family, couples, and sexuality. Hence the open nature of the specific meanings ascribed to the new morality, which was defined only by abstract ideals and suggestive images, thus increasing the possibility of conflicts arising in concrete interactions. These conflicts were particularly significant within the Left because of the political commitment that tied together all aspects of life, including social, romantic, and sexual relations. Starting a relationship, moving in together, or deciding to have a child were all decisions with potential political effects. Roberto, an ERP militant from Buenos Aires, recalls long, painful arguments with his wife: she wanted to have kids, but he thought the timing was wrong because of their commitment to the cause, and she was afraid the revolution would take too long and she would miss her childbearing years.<sup>38</sup> Breakups upset militants, and, in many cases, they became a source of conflict that affected the entire group. In particular, these ruptures escalated from personal to collective concerns when they involved a close interlinking of intimate and political aspects, as was the case with infidelity, which, according to many accounts, emerged as a frequent problem. These conflicts expressed disagreements over sexual morality and the meanings that guided militant behavior, which became more and more important and visible as the organizations expanded.

<sup>37</sup> “Cómo se aman los jóvenes,” *Análisis*, no. 422 (15 April 1969): 40–46.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Robert, Buenos Aires, 10 August 2009.

Both organizations began to grow exponentially in 1970. The number of PRT militants doubled between 1970 and 1972, and membership grew even more dramatically after it reached 1,500 in 1973. This expansion altered the organization's makeup. The proportion of young people, women, and (mostly male) workers increased. Regional representation also changed, with new members coming from a wider range of regions, although the northern provinces still provided the bulk of new recruits. In 1975 half of the members were under the age of twenty-five, and two-thirds were under thirty; one-fourth were women; and there was an even number of members from working families and middle-class backgrounds.<sup>39</sup>

The data available on Montonero membership are not as detailed. We know that when the organization started out it was made up predominantly of middle-class activists, though recent studies have shown that early members also included working-class activists. By 1971, for example, Montonero membership included Peronists and textile industry unionists from working-class areas in the province of Buenos Aires.<sup>40</sup> In any case, the organization also grew at a dramatic pace. In 1971 Juan Domingo Perón himself, still exiled in Madrid, pinned his hopes for victory on this "marvelous youth" that was defying the power of the armed forces.<sup>41</sup>

In 1973 the Montoneros and FAR merged to form the largest political youth movement, with thousands of affiliated members. Their rallies were instrumental in lifting the ban on Peronism (although Perón himself remained banned) and securing the party's victory in the elections, which were held that March and restored democracy. The military in power allowed the elections to be held in the hope that it would weaken guerrilla forces, but the Montoneros came out of the voting strengthened and having reached their greatest political influence.<sup>42</sup> The new president of Argentina, Héctor J. Cámpora, opened up a brief but intense "Spring" during which political prisoners were pardoned and censorship was somewhat relaxed. The new government even encouraged what was referred to in the mass media as a *destape sexual* (literally, "sexual uncovering"), which was accompanied by the emergence of new discussions on issues such as divorce and a greater visibility of feminist and homosexual organizations and which in turn revived right-wing and conservative discourses in defense of the family and sexual order. Despite this more open atmosphere, the Cámpora government lasted only forty-nine days, and no measures connected with family relations or sexual behavior were adopted.

In that climate, the growth and the unification of the two groups heightened the importance of ideological differences on sexual morality. Accounts

<sup>39</sup> Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 71–80.

<sup>40</sup> Javier Salcedo, *Los Montoneros del Barrio* (Caseros: Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2011), 31–66.

<sup>41</sup> Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón*, 152–53.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 152–93.

from former militants provide evidence for the impact that love conflicts had in everyday interactions, but they also reveal that the different kinds of romantic and sexual relationships that were being openly discussed were all within the margins of the dominant heterosexuality. Homophobia was widespread even in left-wing organizations. Homosexuals were viewed as a threat to internal security, based on the preconception that their sexual orientation rendered them weak and unable to withstand torture without being broken. They were also believed to discredit the organizations, giving support to the Right in its accusations of “sexual debauchery” in the armed Left. I found no evidence of infidelity or love triangles involving same-sex couples. That does not mean such conflicts did not exist; instead, the prevailing homophobia forced homosexuals to hide their sexual orientation and precluded any discussion of homosexual relationships. The fact is that homosexuality-related issues were not dealt with openly in either organization.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, conflicts involving heterosexual couples frequently spurred heated discussions within the organizations over the ways in which militants engaged in and dealt with a wide range of romantic entanglements. There were husbands with lovers who were tolerated by their wives; there were also women who cheated on their husbands or formal partners by having affairs or flings; and there was no shortage of love triangles and passionate one-night stands. There were often less prototypical situations, when cheating on one’s partner was not a premeditated decision but a fortuitous and chance result. María, a Montonero guerrilla, was in a passionate relationship with Gustavo when, in late 1972, circumstances brought her together with Roberto, whom she started seeing only weeks after she broke it off with Gustavo. These overlapping relationships were both helped and hindered by the physical separations that militant activity or imprisonment imposed on couples, as was the case with ERP member Silvia, who, while her partner was in prison in 1973, became romantically involved with another man with whom she worked closely in the party. There were also casual encounters that arose from a mixture of physical attraction and emotionally charged moments, as occurred with Francisco and María Elena before they went out on their first guerrilla operation.<sup>44</sup>

These stories were not all that different from what other young people were experiencing in the 1970s, a time when separating sex from emotional commitment was accepted as natural. That did not mean, however, that “wearing horns” was taken lightly by men. The “macho” stereotype was still powerful in Argentine society, and being cuckolded was experienced by men as an affront to their masculinity, even among young artists and

<sup>43</sup> Rapisardi and Modarelli, *Fiestas, baños y exilios*, 140–73.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Francisco R., Tucumán PRT militant, Buenos Aires, 10 January 2012; Marta Diana, *Mujeres guerrilleras: La militancia de los setenta en el testimonio de sus protagonistas femeninas* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1996), 72–75; Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 240–41.



intellectuals, as is illustrated by the caricatures and lampooning featured in the humor magazine *Satiricón*. For women, it was increasingly a symbol of the sexism against which they had to rebel.<sup>45</sup> What made these stories different for clandestine militants was that such turbulent affairs of the heart were played out against the backdrop of guerrilla warfare and thus took on special characteristics. Rules imposed by the organization for security reasons meant that members had to compartmentalize the different areas of their lives and that all private information had to be kept confidential. It was easier to maintain “double relationships,” as they were dubbed, using a term that echoed the world of espionage and fit in perfectly with the mystique of a clandestine life. As a female ERP member explains, compartmentalization meant that “infidelity” was only discovered when “they [the men] were captured.” She recalls one case in which an activist was found to have been involved with three women, “one in each of the teams he led.”<sup>46</sup> The nature of their actions also meant that they looked death in the face every day, a risk that redefined their entire lives. And sex was a part of that. Montonero member Rolo Diez remembers how they saw it then: “Why renounce sweet love when we knew we could be dead soon? Why put off for tomorrow the *passionate screw* we could have today?”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the entanglements, affairs, and casual encounters—which, with such a young membership, often represented a militant’s first sexual explorations—accompanied the breakneck pace of their dangerous day-to-day living and the emotional demands of the constant death risk they faced.

How was it that such intimate affairs came to light? It should first be noted that many affairs—probably most of them—were never publicly discussed by the group. In many cases the parties involved were able to keep them private. Such was the case with Elena, who lived a “great, but forbidden, love” when she “crossed paths” with another militant.<sup>48</sup> It also happened that fellow militants learned of such affairs and decided not to make them public. In many cases, however, shared living and prolonged close interaction made it difficult to keep love crises private. Often, affairs or relationship crises were made public by the very people involved. The affected party might turn to the group (more or less formally) to settle the conflict or seek reparation. Estela, an ERP member, confessed to her husband that she had had an affair with a fellow member and, at his suggestion, agreed to take the matter to the group for discussion.<sup>49</sup> Another ERP activist recalls how most thought it was “natural for a couple’s problems to be discussed with the group.” And she adds, laughing, “everyone had something to say, but they were polite about it.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Jorge Sanzol, Roberto Hanglin, and Ceo, “¿Qué hace su mujer cuando usted no está?” *Satiricón*, no. 25 (February 1975).

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Martínez, *Género, política y revolución*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Rolo Diez, *El mejor y el peor*, 46; emphasis in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Diana, *Mujeres guerrilleras*, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 139.

The ways in which discussions were processed and measures were adopted were also diverse. In both organizations, when such a problem came up the procedure was often to conduct an intervention of the cell (the basic unit of operation), which involved a critical peer review and self-critical examination. Under democratic centralism (the principles of internal organization that governed these groups and that allowed for the possibility of discussion within a vertical structure), this step could lead in turn to an intervention of the body situated above the cell in the organization's hierarchic structure, although this did not always happen. In both cases these interventions (whether of the cell or the bodies above it) did not necessarily entail a sanction but could instead prompt discussions or negotiations situated halfway between the formalities of a vertical organization and the self-regulating negotiations of groups of young peers. Manuel, for example, describes how when a sentimental problem involving a couple came up for discussion in his Montonero cell, it was settled among the members themselves, as all were friends.<sup>51</sup> The intervention might be led by party authorities, which could be conducted in a manner similar to the patriarchal authority exercised by a father or an older friend. This paternal or older brother role was adopted, for example, by Luis Ortolani, a former communist and ERP leader, when he supposedly stopped an angry female member from leaving her husband after she found out he was “putting horns” on her. Ortolani's solution was to advise the husband to “satisfy [his wife] in bed.”<sup>52</sup>

During these early years, prior to Perón's return, neither organization had a fixed set of predetermined penalties for sanctioning members for their sexual indiscretions or their misconduct in handling their personal relationships. Stances were instead adopted on a case-by-case basis, and any decisions on actions to be taken were open to discussion—within the limits of armed and vertically structured organizations—and influenced by the specific circumstances. There were multiple factors that came into play in each decision. In what follows, I have chosen to examine more closely class and gender determinants in the case of the ERP and internal power struggles in the case of the Montoneros.

#### THE ROLE OF GENDER AND CLASS IN THE RESOLUTION OF LOVE CONFLICTS IN THE ERP

By the early 1970s relationship problems had become more visible amid the rapid growth in membership in the ERP, the massive influx of women, and the radicalization of political actions. In contrast to the Montoneros, the ERP incorporated the issue into its policy documents. Luis Ortolani, head of the ERP's Córdoba division and an instructor in the training school for

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Manuel, Buenos Aires, 27 March 2011. On this topic, see Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 354.

<sup>52</sup> Luis Ortolani, testimony on record at the Archivo de Memoria Abierta, 2010.

leaders, drafted a moral rulebook of sorts. Concerned over the effect that sentimental crises were having on members, in 1972 he published “Moral y proletarización” (Morality and proletarianization) in the political magazine *La gaviota blindada* (The armored seagull). According to Ortolani himself, his intention was to address problems that he had witnessed among members, namely, the imposition of arbitrary measures for alleged moral offenses and the need to regulate relationships to prevent male members from taking advantage of their female peers.<sup>53</sup>

In the text the family was defined as a political and military unit formed by a monogamous and heterosexual couple who were expected to bear children for the revolution and participate wholly in the life of the masses. It explicitly rejected any innovation in relationship styles and the new importance ascribed to sexuality, claiming it was a way of keeping women subjugated and of perpetuating bourgeois morality. But even as it criticized these bourgeois ideas, it also tacitly accepted the bourgeois conception of marriage and gender inequality as a natural order. Fidelity was extolled and upheld against the sexual double standard, which tolerated male adultery while it censured unfaithful women, and also against the behaviors associated with the sexual revolution, which posited the liberating nature of sex and the end of ties between men and women. The duties owed to the party were conflated with those owed to one’s spouse or partner. Romantic fidelity and political loyalty thus entwined guaranteed order in the organization and structured party morality.<sup>54</sup>

As Alejandra Oberti notes, the confrontational style of the document shows that the orthodoxy it rested on was a response to the nontraditional practices and ideas that existed in the organization.<sup>55</sup> Some party members say it was mandatory reading material, and others claim it was later banned. Whatever the degree of institutionalization, the document—the only political text from the organization that addressed revolutionary morality—was undoubtedly a key reference for members and was widely read and discussed. According to Diez, one of the criticisms it received when it first came out was that it was dated because it defended monogamy.<sup>56</sup> These differences were not expressed in categorical political confrontations or clearly articulated positions, but they did permeate daily dynamics. The recourse to penalties reveals a concern over the heightened sexual activity of members. While many turned to sex as a release and a way of experimenting, Ortolani and other leaders clearly saw the need to use internal discipline to regulate these behaviors.

Ortolani explains that he became concerned when he observed the everyday interactions between male and female militants. He remembers, in

<sup>53</sup> Luis Ortolani, “Moral y proletarización,” *Política de la memoria: Anuario de investigación del CeDInCI* (Buenos Aires), no. 5 (December 2004): 93–102.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Alejandra Oberti, “La moral según los revolucionarios,” in *ibid.*, 77–84.

<sup>56</sup> Diez, *El mejor y el peor*, 37.

particular, a rumor that there was a small group in which, before going out on an operation, “everyone had sex with everyone” because they believed sex “recharged” and “pumped them up to attack the enemy.”<sup>57</sup> While the veracity of this self-justifying account is debatable, there is no doubt that the document was a reaction aimed at regulating and ordering nonmonogamous relationships and that such relationships were not isolated instances. By then sexual experimentation had become widespread among certain youth sectors. For example, in Córdoba—Ortolani’s home province—a group of left-wing university students advocated free love and lived in communes with open couples.<sup>58</sup> While nothing that radical existed in the ERP, there were obvious differences of opinion. Pedro Cazes Camarero recalls both the “moral self-righteousness” of Santucho (“he was very formal and *machista* and gave too much importance to discipline”) and those he described as “liberals” and among whom he included himself. “We came from a kind of hippie, laid-back experience and found that whole peasant and Vietnamese-inspired moralism a pain in the ass,” he says.<sup>59</sup>

The ERP’s conception of morality was structured by class. The organization’s members assumed the vanguard role of the working class, which they idealized as the embodiment of revolutionary values. This meant that petit-bourgeois and intellectual members had to combat their own class tendencies through a process of proletarianization. But the party also took on the task of defending what it believed were proletarian virtues—although some proletarianization was necessary even to know what such virtues were. As Carnovale notes, this inconsistent and paradoxical reasoning opened the door for combating any departure from the party line as a petit-bourgeois deviation and a product of the individualism, arrogance, vacillation, and factionalism typical of that class, as well as a betrayal of proletarian values.<sup>60</sup> In his memoir, Diez explains the term *mameluquear* (from *mameluco*, Spanish for “worker overalls”), commonly used to refer to the weight that working-class considerations had in decision making, as workers were favored or judged more leniently (including by giving them greater responsibilities, excusing their weaknesses, or dropping any accusations against them), while *pequebu* (from the Spanish for “petit bourgeois”) members were treated more harshly.<sup>61</sup>

The issue was even more complex because for militants it was patently obvious that so idyllic a view of the working class was at odds with the real values held by actual workers. This was particularly evident in the case of infidelity. The party saw infidelity as a product of the moral hypocrisy of the petite bourgeoisie and contrasted it with the honesty that supposedly

<sup>57</sup> Ortolani testimony.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Alicia Kinerstol, Buenos Aires, 8 February 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Seoane, *Todo o nada*, 179.

<sup>60</sup> Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 228–40; Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 239–44.

<sup>61</sup> Diez, *El mejor y el peor*, 42.

reigned in working-class marriages. But the reality among workers—even those who were in contact with middle-class militants—was quite different, as gender inequality and the sexual double standard dominated their personal relationships. Working-class militants themselves often excluded their wives from their political activities, and working-class women in turn opposed their partners' engaging in political work because they were afraid that female militants would seduce them and take them away from their families. It was certainly true that their husbands were enjoying—perhaps for the first time—the benefit of being members of a certain class, as their status as workers and representatives of the “dark masses” made them more attractive to the opposite sex. This sparked conflicts in the family and set many wives against the organization. In some cases, their suspicions were justified. As a female ERP member active in a working-class neighborhood recalls: “The Party was breaking couples up; I mean, the guys were going crazy over the women militants [*compañeras*], . . . [and] there were a lot of jealous fits.” These interclass romances had political repercussions, as party leaders had to divert their attention from other matters to save marriages and calm down angry wives.<sup>62</sup>

Gender tensions cut across these class tensions. While the incorporation of women in guerrilla training camps expressed a commitment to gender equality, it also fueled the fears of those who valued the contribution of women but—heeding Che Guevara's advice—believed they were better suited to the rearguard.<sup>63</sup> Some still saw women as the weaker sex and at the same time were afraid they would challenge male power. Their concerns were compounded by the uneasiness caused by the new behaviors that were being adopted by women everywhere—not just in guerrilla groups—as they embraced their sexuality and became more demanding of their partners. These fears raised specters that fueled the imagination, and all sorts of debaucheries were pictured. Not only were cells where “everyone had sex with everyone” imagined, but charismatic men were also thought capable of turning “operative houses into their own personal harems.”<sup>64</sup>

These anxieties explain why the first to be charged with infidelity and penalized by the ERP's national authorities was a woman. In the early 1970s an entirely male politburo decided to punish an unfaithful wife who had been reported by her husband after he found her in bed with a fellow ERP member. According to Ortolani, the woman had only been

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 128, 224, 225, 237.

<sup>63</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, *Manual de guerrillas*, ca. 1961, available online at [http://librodot.com/en/book/detail\\_prod/1276](http://librodot.com/en/book/detail_prod/1276) (accessed 25 November 2012). On this subject, see also Vania Markarian, *El 68 Uruguayo: El movimiento estudiantil entre molotovs y música beat* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2012), 134.

<sup>64</sup> Ortolani testimony. See also Diez, *El mejor y el peor*, 35–37. These fears are also highlighted in the article “Las compañeras en la Guerrilla,” published in *Estrella roja*, no. 65 (1 December 1975): 18–19. “Operative houses” were those where activists lived, where they carried out political tasks, and from which they launched military operations.

unfaithful to her husband that one time, and the sexual encounter had occurred when the other man—a close friend of hers—had turned to her for comfort after learning that his brother had been killed in combat. “Nothing exorcises death better than sex . . . so it naturally led to that,” Ortolani explains. By imposing this penalty on a woman, the leaders were adopting a position in favor of men, defending the damaged manhood of their peer who had been cuckolded.<sup>65</sup>

The decision had repercussions. Certain leaders expressed their disagreement, recalling that no penalty had been imposed when the now wronged husband had earlier cheated on his wife. This exposed the unfair treatment of women and revealed how their behavior was measured with a different yardstick. When the decision was published in an issue of *Boletín interno* (the organization’s internal bulletin, of which no copies have survived) it fueled fears that the many clandestine relationships that existed would be discovered, and reports would increase. As an ERP member told Ortolani, if infidelity reports started pouring in, it would be catastrophic for the leaders’ credibility, because there were many of them, including himself, who were seeing two or even three women at the same time.<sup>66</sup>

There was no hegemonic position on these matters in the PRT or ERP, not even among the higher commands. As Diez recalls: “The situation was getting out of hand for party leaders, and penalizing every moral infraction would have meant purging the central committee. These romantic frenzies were most prominent in the Tucumán regional division. Even historical leaders—shining examples of proletarianism and revolutionary standing—had morality issues. It put them in an impossible situation. Some members of the central committee voted consistently against imposing penalties. Others defended the principles but looked for alternatives that would not undermine their authority and applied different solutions to identical problems. Still others criticized these irregularities and inconsistencies.”<sup>67</sup>

As some expected, many women whose partners were among the higher commands turned to the central committee to protest against sexual double standards. This was the case of Peti, who went before the central committee with a complaint against her unfaithful husband and succeeded in getting him removed from the position he held and the other woman demoted to student status in the party training school she directed.<sup>68</sup> This does not mean that the central committee always decided in favor of the woman. On the contrary; gender inequality was strengthened by the party’s criticism of the sexual behavior of female members who entered into new relationships while their previous partners were in prison. Although for the most part both cells and authorities accepted these relationships, they demanded

<sup>65</sup> Ortolani testimony; see also Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 222–24.

<sup>66</sup> Ortolani testimony.

<sup>67</sup> Diez, *El mejor y el peor*, 40.

<sup>68</sup> Described in Diana, *Mujeres guerrilleras*, 61–73.

“transparency” from women, who were required to be open about their new partners to avoid giving the idea that they were being unfaithful. The use of the term “transparency” revealed the enormous value placed on it in what was a simplified view of romantic relationships that ignored the extreme circumstances into which these guerrillas had been thrown and denied the possibility that they could find themselves in ambiguous situations or be emotionally attached to more than one person at the same time.<sup>69</sup> Neither did it take into account how badly an imprisoned—and most probably tortured—man could take the news of his partner having replaced him with another man, or how difficult it would be for the woman who had loved, and might still love, him to tell him she was seeing someone else.

Gender and class tensions were very much a part of the problems caused by sentimental crises. The forging of the “new man” undoubtedly sparked countless conflicts that seared the everyday existence and subjectivity of these guerrillas but that were also intensely political. Their views on sexual pleasure and eroticism could not be dissociated from the way in which they perceived their political relationships, both among themselves and with the party, and from the position they believed they had to take with respect to the moral status quo and the new morality they had to construct. Sentimental conflicts could, moreover, be used politically in ideological disputes within and outside the organizations.

#### POLITICAL STRIFE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE MONTONEROS

On 20 June 1973 Juan Domingo Perón returned from exile and was welcomed by thousands of supporters in a mass rally that quickly turned into a bloodbath when right-wing Peronists turned on Montonero militants, leaving dozens dead. This massacre marked the beginning of a period of escalating violence and internal strife that continued even after Perón was elected president in September 1973.<sup>70</sup> Far from reconciling the two warring factions, this triumph seemed to fuel their mutual hostility, with the members of each faction holding themselves up as the true representatives of Peronism and viewing the other's members as adversaries who were either traitors or infiltrators.

Both factions became embroiled in a battle to prove who was more devoted to their leader, to the people, and to the nation in a confrontation that also had gender and sexual undertones. Right-wing Peronists launched a campaign against the guerrilla groups that attempted to discredit them by calling them “drug addicts, homosexuals, and home-grown and foreign mercenaries.”<sup>71</sup> These accusations heightened homophobia among the guerrillas themselves, who responded to right-wing Peronists by chanting

<sup>69</sup> See Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 258–59.

<sup>70</sup> Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, 150–52.

<sup>71</sup> “Solicitada, 20 de junio—Ezciza—20 de julio,” *La opinión*, 20 July 1973.



in marches: “We’re not fags, we’re not junkies, we’re FAR and Montonero soldiers” and other antihomosexual slogans.<sup>72</sup>

The use of such homophobic slogans by both the Left and the Right coincided with the challenges to the sexual and gender order that were stirring Argentine society. Feminist organizations were questioning for the first time in the country’s history motherhood; gender, abortion, contraception, and sexual education were debated in the media; and politicians presented new bills on divorce and joint custody in parliament. Perón focused, as in his first two presidencies, on the importance of the family as the foundation of society and celebrated a domestic life built around the woman’s role as mother and housewife and the man’s role as breadwinner. Accordingly, the government passed a pronatalist decree that restricted the sale of contraceptives.<sup>73</sup> The government’s pronatalist measures represented a triumph for the traditionalist Catholic organizations and far-right sectors to which Perón turned for support. This family-centered agenda happened within a context marked by spiraling violence, further isolating the Montoneros, whose members were hunted and killed by paramilitary forces.

This political situation posed a challenge to the Montoneros as a relatively new organization that lacked a solid structure and a firm ideological backbone.<sup>74</sup> When it merged with the FAR in 1973 its diversity of ideological traditions and personal loyalties became even more pronounced. Many FAR leaders came from the Left and were students or intellectuals who were part of the bohemian social scene and the cultural antiestablishment and were thus open to sexual experimentation. This was the style, for example, of the editorial board of the newspaper *Noticias* (News), founded by the Montoneros in 1974 to combat the Peronist Right. It was formed by renowned journalists and intellectuals, many of whom came from the FAR, as was the case of the activist and poet Francisco “Paco” Urondo, who headed the newspaper’s political section.<sup>75</sup> As in other papers, the newsroom provided a laid-back and exciting environment where political and literary feats competed with drinking and sexual exploits. Martín Caparrós, who worked for the newspaper when he was just sixteen, remembers how captivated he was by the uninhibited and hedonistic atmosphere that surrounded Paco and his group, who felt no guilt in indulging in the pleasures of the flesh—or, as Javier Urondo recalls his father, Paco, saying, of “wine and flesh [*el vino y la carne*],” alluding at the same time to the Argentinian love of beef and of the female body.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Anguita and Caparrós, *La voluntad*, 1:681. See also Rapisardi and Modarelli, *Fiestas, baños y exilios*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> Karina Felitti, *La revolución de la píldora* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón*, 142–52.

<sup>75</sup> Gabriela Esquivada, *El diario Noticias: Los Montoneros en la prensa argentina* (La Plata: Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 2004), 86–113, 117–37.

<sup>76</sup> Martín Caparrós, *No velas a tus muertos* (Buenos Aires: La Flor, [1986]), 12, 13, 17. Javier Urondo, testimony on record at the Archivo de Memoria Abierta, 2005.

Many of the intellectuals in this group had addressed eroticism and sex in their artistic production. A few years earlier, in 1965, Piri Lugones, a Montonero militant, had penned a short story portraying the erotic games of a group of intellectuals and a complicated love triangle. The story reflected Piri's real-life stormy affairs and the wild parties she hosted, where rock stars and famous novelists mingled with guerrillas.<sup>77</sup> In a 1974 autobiographical novel that was essentially a portrait of the revolutionary intellectual, Urondo reflected on the meaning of love, how it differed from simple infatuations, and what the future held for revolutionary couples. When he wrote the novel, Urondo had just broken up with a prominent theater actress because he had fallen in love with another woman. His new love, Lilita "Lili" Massaferró, was a forty-seven-year-old editor, model, and actress famous for her great beauty and her promiscuous youth who had thrown herself into activism in 1971 after her oldest son was brutally slain by the police.<sup>78</sup> In his novel, Urondo admitted that couples could experience "displaced affinities" (most likely alluding to the "elective affinities" that Goethe had used to explain the fleeting nature of attraction).<sup>79</sup>

A similar concern was a central theme of Nicolás Casullo's first novel, *Para hacer el amor en los parques* (Making love in the park), a semiautobiographical account of the adventures of a group of friends who engaged in short-lived affairs amid collective dynamics marked by camaraderie, eroticism, and emotional commitment.<sup>80</sup> The author, a Montonero leader, believed that love was something that had to be experienced as often as possible. In his circle, it was hard for women to say no to sexual advances, in contrast to how things had been a decade earlier. In Casullo's words, "saying no would have sounded ridiculous, unacceptable," as "the revolution was also made in bed: the more orgasms you had, the more revolutionary you were, and the more revolutionary you were, the more orgasms you had." Beyond the sexual boasting, this account eloquently shows that there was a new social mandate to engage in sex as much as possible, which for women often entailed social coercion.<sup>81</sup>

In any case, sexual freedom was not limited to men. Many young Montonero women enjoyed challenging sexual puritanism. Mercedes Depino remembers how she and fellow FAR militants viewed sexuality differently from the original Montoneros: "We were very wild in that sense [in couple relationships]. We were careless because of the sense of

<sup>77</sup> Piri Lugones, "Homenaje a Kinsey," in *Crónicas del sexo*, ed. Manuel Mujica Lainez et al. (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez, 1965), 25–34.

<sup>78</sup> Her son, Manuel Belloni, had been a member of the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas. Laura Giussani, *Buscada: Lili Massaferró; de los dorados años cincuenta a la militancia montonera* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2005), 145–50.

<sup>79</sup> Francisco Urondo, *Los pasos previos* (1974; Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2011), 178–80.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolás Casullo, *Para hacer el amor en los parques* (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> See Anguita and Caparrós, *La voluntad*, 1:597.

freedom we had . . . because of our activism. We didn't want to relinquish our freedom in any way, . . . and suddenly, there was this fixed, closed structure governing couple relationships."<sup>82</sup>

Their experiences were obviously different from those common among the Montonero leaders who came from a Catholic background. These circles were dominated by family-centered ideas, which held the family up as the foundation of society and combined the Peronist and Catholic traditions.<sup>83</sup> Mario Firmenich, for example, believed militants should have five children—at a time when the average birthrate was half that—in order to boost population growth with future revolutionaries, and he proudly presented his family life as an example.<sup>84</sup> In line with this sentiment, Agrupación Evita (Evita Group), a Montonero popular front formed in 1973 and named in honor of Eva Duarte, Perón's famous second wife and a popular leader in her own right, sought to appeal to working-class women as housewives and mothers. But the female militants in the group—for the most part middle-class students—could not accept that domestic life was the sole fate of women, and many considered being assigned to Agrupación Evita a punishment. The interactions with working-class women, however, opened the eyes of most to the issues faced by women and the political connotations of gender inequality in the home.<sup>85</sup>

In sum, sexual issues were a source of disagreement among Montoneros, but they did not give way to an official document setting out principles. Instead, they were intertwined with political disputes. In 1974 the Montoneros were wrapped up in intense political discussions over how to deal with escalating attacks from paramilitary groups and Perón's support for such actions. On 1 May 1974 the Peronist leader drove the Montoneros out of Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, where workers had gathered for an International Workers' Day rally. The break with Perón fueled militarist tendencies in the Montoneros, who decreed that the organization would go underground. The decision was made without consulting its members and sparked heated internal debates.<sup>86</sup>

At *Noticias*, this decision spurred disagreements with the staff over the paper's editorial line, and Urondo was removed from the newspaper.<sup>87</sup> At

<sup>82</sup> Mercedes Depino, testimony on record at the Archivo de Memoria Abierta, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Among the first Peronists there was a range of positions regarding family, but they all shared a rhetoric that defended "the family" as "the basic cell of society," the maternal role of women (an argument used when women were granted political rights in 1947), and the protection of children. See Isabella Cosse, *Estigmas de nacimiento: Peronismo y orden familiar* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> "Montoneros: Guerreros políticos (Interview with Mario Eduardo Firmenich)," in Gabriel García Márquez, *Por la libre: Obra periodística (1974–1993)* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2000), 111.

<sup>85</sup> Karin Grammatico, *Mujeres Montoneras: Una historia de la Agrupación Evita, 1973–1974* (Buenos Aires: Luxemburg, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Urondo testimony.

<sup>87</sup> Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón*, 220–21.

the same time, Urondo's own conflictive love life became public and triggered a crisis that impacted the organization's leadership. Paco had recently begun a relationship with Alicia Raboy, a twenty-five-year-old *Noticias* reporter, while still with Lili. Lili learned of the affair by accident and, according to her own account, immediately requested a meeting with Julio Roqué, their superior. She was among the women who, through their work in Agrupación Evita, were becoming aware of the issues faced by women, and she now reproached her partner's behavior as not befitting of the "new man." She argued that it echoed old hypocrisies and that Paco was behaving like the stereotype of a manager who has an affair with his secretary. She demanded that the organization "really" lecture its members on the new values that should be embraced by the "new man"; otherwise, the men in the organization would be no more than "cowardly and unfaithful sexists, just like any other member of the petite bourgeoisie." Her denunciation linked the importance placed on loyalty by Peronists with a rejection of the petit-bourgeois lifestyle and the sexual double standard. The organization took up Massaferró's defense and penalized Urondo, bringing him down several ranks in the Montoneros hierarchy.<sup>88</sup>

None of the accounts of this episode question the veracity of the penalty. There are disagreements over what actually motivated it. Urondo's friends claim that the organization's leadership took advantage of the situation to reinforce his removal from *Noticias*.<sup>89</sup> The accounts are revealing in showing how these decisions could advance various political agendas within the organization. In fact, Paco's son, Javier Urondo, who was seventeen at the time, remembers that in the Montoneros, "monogamy was the only form of relationship accepted by the status quo, but at some levels of the organization there was some flexibility." His father's story shows that one could take advantage of that flexibility but that the leadership also had the power not only to put an end to it but also to use it against whoever did.

POLITICAL LOYALTY AND ROMANTIC FIDELITY  
IN TIMES OF TORTURE AND DISAPPEARANCES

Perón's death in 1974 crushed once and for all the hopes that had been pinned on his ability to solve Argentina's crisis. The administration of María Estela Martínez de Perón—Perón's third wife and widow, popularly known as Isabel Perón, who succeeded him in the presidency—was unable to check soaring inflation and quell the discontent it was sparking in the population or stop the spread of social protests and guerrilla actions. The reaction of the government, dominated by the far Right, was to further increase its support for the armed forces. In 1975, after Martínez gave them the authorization

<sup>88</sup> Giussani, *Buscada*, 215.

<sup>89</sup> Esquivada, *El diario Noticias*, 223–25; and Montanaro, *Francisco Urondo*, 80–90.

to “wipe out subversion,” the armed forces launched a full-scale military attack against radical militants, engulfing the country in torture and death.<sup>90</sup>

They began their offensive in the province of Tucumán, one of the main strongholds of the ERP, in a crackdown that ushered in the final stage of the revolutionary war. Initially, the organization sought to combine guerrilla actions with legal activities, but it quickly shifted to a military strategy alone in the belief that this would intensify political contradictions and precipitate the revolution. The ERP began organizing a regular army. Military ranks were established, power was concentrated in a single political and military chief (Santucho), discipline was tightened, and a greater emphasis was placed on revolutionary morality.<sup>91</sup>

Heroism was taken to a higher level with a new rhetoric. *Estrella roja* (Red Star), the ERP newspaper, began featuring narrative accounts by anonymous combatants who embodied the canon of virtues, among which the most important were giving oneself entirely to the cause, even if it meant death, and “resisting torture.” In these columns, loyalty was more than just a political and moral mandate; it became emotionally charged as it connected the living with the dead at a time when increasingly large numbers of members were being captured, killed, or disappeared. The flip side of this emotional imperative was discipline. The government’s military offensive demanded, according to ERP leaders, greater internal order to improve the organization’s own military capacity, with an “iron discipline” among subordinates and a “skillful and efficient command” from leaders.<sup>92</sup>

In this context, the Tribunal de Justicia—a disciplinary panel approved five years earlier—was finally formed and charged with administering justice within the organization, setting its political agenda, and developing the party. When it was created, no one thought anything of extending the tribunal’s jurisdiction to the sex lives of its members. Far from it, when the subject of sexual behavior came up at the meeting that created the tribunal, everyone burst into laughter when a metalworker from a working-class district of Buenos Aires finished his tirade against “double” relationships by recommending that “anyone who wants to keep a second woman should make sure to keep her very far away.”<sup>93</sup>

The first decisions issued by this justice tribunal were equally contradictory. The members appointed to the body were barred from serving because they themselves had been disciplined for having been unfaithful

<sup>90</sup> “El operativo independencia en Tucumán,” in “*Ese ardiente jardín de la República*”: *Formación, y desarticulación de un “campo” cultural; Tucumán, 1880–1975*, ed. Fabiola Orquera (Córdoba: Alción, 2010), 377–400.

<sup>91</sup> Carnovale, *Los combatientes*, 276.

<sup>92</sup> “Carta a Clara María de su compañero,” *Estrella roja*, no. 52 (9 April 1975); Alberto José Munarriz, *Estrella roja*, no. 66 (15 November 1975); “La vida en el monte,” *Estrella roja*, no. 65 (1 December 1975).

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Martínez, *Género, política y revolución*, 88, 98; and Pozzi, *Por las sendas argentinas*, 241.

to their partners. At its first session, the tribunal heard the case of one of its members, Lucio, who had “initiated a parallel relationship with another woman” after his appointment. At the following session, a second member, Matías, came under scrutiny when in an exercise of self-criticism after being appointed he confessed to having secretly maintained a double relationship over a period of eight months, although he had since ended it. The third case of sexual misconduct among its members considered by the tribunal was that of Leopoldo, who, in addition to being a member of this body, was one of the commanding officers. Not only had he concealed his relationship with another woman, but when it became public he had also continued to see her and refused to “regularize” his situation, despite being ordered repeatedly to do so.<sup>94</sup> The penalty for each officer depended on the degree of concealment of his alleged moral offense and his party rank. All three were removed from the tribunal, but Matías, who had come clean on his own, had examined his conduct, and did not occupy a leadership position, was not suspended from the organization and received instead a recommendation to be “reeducated.” The other two members received harsher penalties: Lucio was suspended from the Central Committee for a year, and Leopoldo was taken off the Executive Committee for eighteen months.<sup>95</sup> Being suspended meant that they stopped receiving the stipend that most full-time and clandestine activists depended on to support themselves, so it was a harsh penalty. These cases show how common had become the contradiction between an ideal of moral uprightness and the actual experiences of the militants and their living conditions, which favored more open, fluid, and fleeting coupling. But it also demonstrates how as these organizations stepped up their militarism they also tightened their control over all aspects of their members’ lives, effectively precluding any chances of contesting the dominant morality.

By 1975 the Montoneros were imposing strict rules of personal conduct and applying harsh penalties to anyone who deviated from them. *Evita Montonera*, the organization’s newspaper, revisited the issue of revolutionary morality and torture. Drawing on the moral authority of Algerian revolutionary leader Franz Fanon, the paper explained that political awareness built up the moral fortitude necessary to withstand torture and posed a question that many militants were probably asking themselves: “Can a fellow militant [*compañero*] be justified for breaking under torture and talking?” The answer given was categorical: “NO, nothing can justify it.” Anyone who talked lacked the fighting spirit required of all revolutionaries, and the penalty for all “traitors and snitches” was execution.<sup>96</sup> As the organization became more and more militarized and the number of torture and death victims grew exponentially, the loyalty mandate was intensified

<sup>94</sup> “Tribunal partidario,” *Boletín interno*, no. 95 (27 November 1975): 6.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “Juicio revolucionario a un delator,” *Evita Montonera*, no. 8 (September 1975): 21.

to the point that deviating from it could be punished by death. A corollary of the greater value placed on loyalty was the glorification of the family and the militant's duty toward it. The paper highlighted the link between giving oneself entirely to the cause and being "emotionally mature" in matters of the heart.<sup>97</sup> These views were in line with the exaltation of heterosexual virility as a trait of the ideal guerrilla, which aimed at counteracting the far Right's portrayal of guerrillas as effeminate and drug addicts.

In this way, revolutionary commitment—not as passionate surrender but as controlled determination—went hand in hand with emotional stability and restrained and responsible love. But for many activists, life was far from being ordered and stable. On the contrary, as Adriana Robles remembers: "Couples were living under great pressure due to political circumstances and clandestine life; relationships were being formed and breaking up" constantly.<sup>98</sup>

As with the morals upheld by the ERP, the glorification of the family by the Montoneros confronted the antisubversive discourse that projected onto guerrillas the fears that the sexual revolution (in its multiple and diverse meanings) had sparked in significant sectors of Argentine society. The wave of repression unleashed by the armed forces was accompanied by a vociferous antisubversive rhetoric from traditionalist Catholic organizations and far Right groups, which painted a picture of the enemy as a threat to both nation, family, and religion. Guerrillas—and especially women guerrillas—were depicted in such a way that their social and political antiestablishment stance was linked to a destabilization of the moral, familial, sexual, and gender order. This image was reproduced most starkly in the torturing of women guerrillas, as they were subjected to viciously cruel torments that revealed the "double threat" to the gender and political order that their lives posed and that brought about a "sexualization" of the state's extermination operations.<sup>99</sup>

It was within this context, then, that the Montoneros, like the ERP, stepped up their militarism and tightened the measures that regulated their love and family lives. In October 1975 the Consejo Nacional Montoneros (National Montonero Council) decided to implement a political strategy that prioritized military actions; at the same time, it also adopted the Código de Justicia Penal Revolucionario (Criminal code of revolutionary justice). Articles 4, 5, and 6 defined the crimes of treason, collaboration with the enemy, confession, and breaking under torture. Article 16 defined infidelity as having sexual relations with someone other than one's partner and equated it with the crime of "disloyalty." The code stipulated that the two parties involved in such an affair would be considered guilty even if only one of them had a steady partner. This definition was a significant innovation with respect to the code's precedent, adopted in 1972, where infidelity

<sup>97</sup> "Dos Jefes Montoneros caídos," *Evita Montonera*, no. 9 (November 1975): 22.

<sup>98</sup> Adriana Robles, *Perejiles: Los otros Montoneros* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004), 118.

<sup>99</sup> See Vasallo, "Militancia y transgresión," 28; D'Antonio, "Rejas, gritos"; and Manzano, "Sexing and Gendering."



was not addressed. No penalties were specified; rather, these were left to the discretion of the tribunal in each case. Yet a separate chapter listed the possible penalties for all offenses: demotion, expulsion, confinement, banishment, prison, and execution.<sup>100</sup>

The actual authors of the code are not known, and there is no information about the discussions it generated, if any. But we do know that the first to be judged under the code was Roberto Quieto, the organization's second-in-command, originally a FAR member. On 19 January 1976 he was found guilty of betrayal while he was being held by the military. He had been picked up twenty days earlier, when he was spending the afternoon with his family at a Buenos Aires beach, breaking the strict security rules he himself had set. In the weeks leading up to his abduction, his friends had found him dispirited by the escalating repression and concerned over the triumph of the positions advocating military action.<sup>101</sup> The tribunal sentenced him to demotion and death because he had allowed himself to be captured alive and had allegedly given information under torture. Many Montonero members criticized the ruling, which was ultimately not enforced, as Quieto was never found alive, another victim among the disappeared.<sup>102</sup>

In the sentence, published in *Evita Montonera*, the tribunal claimed that Quieto's reaction to the kidnapping resulted from "severe selfishness" and expressed his "individualistic and liberal" tendencies, which had been apparent for some time not only in his "failure" to live in a safe house but also in the "poor decisions" he had made in his family life. This was an allusion to the refusal by his wife, Alicia Beatriz Testai, to participate in armed struggle, thus allegedly putting her husband at risk whenever he visited his family. But it was also a reference to the repeated crises in his marriage, which were further complicated by his affairs with other women. The sentence thus drew a parallelism between complicated family situations and political treason that took on a clearly didactic tone.<sup>103</sup>

The same *Evita Montonera* issue that featured Quieto's sentence emphasized the intended lesson with an obituary that was its antithesis: a tribute to "Manuel," the El Litoral region commander. He represented the kind of heroic leader who proved his loyalty by choosing to die rather than surrender. According to the Montonero newspaper, this loyalty was in line with the

<sup>100</sup> Consejo Nacional Montoneros, "Código de Justicia Penal Revolucionario," 4 October 1975, *Lucha armada* 3, no. 8 (2007): 124–27. On the code, see Laura Lenci, "Justicia, política y violencia: Un análisis de los cuerpos normativos Montoneros, 1972–1975," *Jornadas de los partidos políticos*, Buenos Aires, 25 April 2008.

<sup>101</sup> This is confirmed by Lila Pastoriza, "La 'traición' de Roberto Quieto: Treinta años de silencio," *Lucha armada* 3, no. 6 (May–June–July 2006): 4–31; and by Alejandra Vignollés, *Doble condena: La verdadera historia de Roberto Quieto* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2011), 170–71.

<sup>102</sup> "Juicio revolucionario a Roberto Quieto," *Evita Montonera* 2, no. 12 (February–March 1976): 13–14.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* On the internal situation, see also Gillespie, *Soldados de Perón*, 264–72.

slain leader's faithfulness to his wife.<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, the aim of these articles was to make sure that members knew what the organization expected of them. The direct connection between sacrificing one's life out of political loyalty and leading one's personal life according to the organization's strict moral guidelines constituted a single, explicit, and irrevocable mandate.

Quieto's sentencing was a key piece in the construction of the demonized figure of the traitor within the Montoneros. The growing number of casualties was tragically accompanied by the denunciation of survivors, as Ana Longoni has pointed out, in the understanding that the only way prisoners could have come out alive was by surrendering information, which made them traitors. For women it also was seen as meaning they were guilty of sexual involvement with the enemy. This association of culpability was based on a hero-traitor dichotomy that did not take into account the radical asymmetry of vulnerability and domination between the tortured and subjugated prisoners and their captors. It led the Montoneros to adopt a decision that distinguished it from other left-wing organizations, as it instructed its members to commit suicide if they were captured, producing cyanide pills for that purpose and distributing them among its leaders and militants.<sup>105</sup>

These instructions contributed to more widespread fear. Paco Urondo himself—a friend of Roberto Quieto—was deeply upset by the leadership's decision.<sup>106</sup> Urondo was sent to the region of Cuyo by his superiors, despite having requested a different destination because he was well known there and feared he would face greater risk there. Shortly thereafter, on 17 June 1976, he was gunned down by members of the armed forces, but not before he had swallowed the cyanide pill as instructed. The obituary in *Evita Montonera* said nothing of Urondo's request. Neither did it mention that not long before his death he had been penalized by the organization because of how he chose to conduct his love life and that he had refused to make any changes.<sup>107</sup> On the contrary, before he left for Cuyo, he made out a will where he acknowledged Ángela, his daughter by Alicia. But their sacrifice—Alicia was kidnapped in the same operation while trying to escape—had redeemed them both: they had been made into a revolutionary example.

During those months, as losses increased, the Montoneros adopted new measures to control their members' love lives. They required everyone to report their relationships formally to their superiors and to wait six months before living together. According to Adriana Robles, this measure was adopted to address security concerns that made it hard to guarantee the safety of higher-ranking members in safe houses. But it was also part of the organization's attempts to bolster its members' "revolutionary spirit" by

<sup>104</sup> "Un jefe Montonero no se entrega," *Evita Montonera* 2, no. 12 (February–March 1976): 16.

<sup>105</sup> Longoni, *Traiciones*, 119–23.

<sup>106</sup> Javier Urondo, quoted in Vignollés, *Doble condena*, 208.

<sup>107</sup> "Oficial 1º Francisco Urondo," *Evita Montonera* 2, no. 12 (February–March 1976): 68.

adopting a stricter “moral stance.” Looking back, Robles says, “I realize now that six months was a very long time to get to know each other under the vertiginous lives we were living. But what impresses me most is that [six months] was much, much longer than what many of us were going to live.”<sup>108</sup> In her case, she and her partner had to give up their house to another couple who had been together longer and, perhaps coincidentally, were high-ranking members. This six-month rule was met with much disagreement. According to Depino, many spoke against the decision. She herself refused to formalize her relationship with Sergio Berlin, who would later be kidnapped and disappeared. She was nonetheless ordered to examine her behavior and admit her mistakes in order to avoid being penalized by the organization.<sup>109</sup> This disciplinarian approach gained increasing strength as more and more activists were killed or captured. In a 1978 interview published by a Spanish magazine, Horacio Mendizábal—a top-ranking officer with a Catholic background who would later be disappeared—explained that the Montoneros demanded that its members be as loyal to their romantic partners as they were expected to be to the organization.<sup>110</sup>

This strategy, however, proved inadequate in countering the blows from the armed forces, which had intensified their kidnapping, torture, and disappearance methods against guerrillas and activists. The militants who were still alive were no longer restrained by the harsh discipline of the groups. Ana Testa and Juan Silva settled in Buenos Aires. Ana quickly found a job, but Juan could not conceive of a life outside the cause. In 1979 he “hooked up again” with the organization, accepting its conditions: if his wife refused to rejoin the organization, he would have to live apart from her and their daughter. He left home on Father’s Day. “I couldn’t understand it, because I was still completely in love with him and he with me,” Ana said. Months later she was kidnapped and tortured but was released alive. Her survival meant bending to a different morality and pretending to have found her “true” femininity in order to make her captors believe she had been morally reformed. She also witnessed how other kidnapped women had to play along with their captors in a perverse game of seduction.

Ana never saw her partner again.<sup>111</sup> Juan refused to see her because he believed that the only way she could have survived was by betraying the organization. Shortly thereafter, he was kidnapped and disappeared. Ana never had a chance to tell him that she had never been unfaithful and that when she was tortured she had not given any information implicating him.

<sup>108</sup> Robles, *Perejiles*, 118.

<sup>109</sup> Depino testimony.

<sup>110</sup> Viviana Gorbato, *Montoneros, soldados de Menem ¿Soldados de Duhalde?* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericano, 1999), 305.

<sup>111</sup> See, more generally, Vasallo, “Militancia y transgresión”; and D’Antonio, “Rejas, gritos,” 89–108.

Her eyes still light up today when she speaks of him, and the love that still lingers in her eyes makes her pain more heartbreakingly real.

This article opens and closes with Ana Testa because her story crystallizes the dense and complex intertwining of love, sexuality, and revolutionary commitment in Argentina's guerrilla groups. My aim is to shed light on the unique intersections of sexuality and politics in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s. To do that, I have followed three lines of inquiry.

The first explores the specific characteristics of the politicization of personal relationships in Argentina's armed groups. In Europe and the United States, the overlapping of the personal and the political entailed acknowledging the discrimination caused by gender inequality in a combination of affective individualism and the human rights paradigm. In contrast, in Argentina's armed groups, the personal became political within a collectivity that sought to build new moral foundations with the aim of banishing capitalist values (including individualism) from social relations but also from family and romantic relationships. Far from advocating individual freedom, the revolution demanded that its members give themselves entirely to the collective cause and place the revolutionary struggle before their personal feelings, a logic that questioned the very separation between the private and the collective and, instead, regarded the intertwining of the two as natural. While this view was hegemonic, it coexisted with two variations. First, there was a concern that sexual behavior and romantic problems could affect military strategies—whether security measures, morale, or internal conflicts—and political discussions. These groups glorified family values and heterosexuality in part as a way of countering the accusations of immorality and sexual excess hurled by repressive forces and the far Right, but also because they were convinced that sexual debauchery weakened them for reasons of security, internal order, or morality. Second, there was a recognition of the political nature of male domination—or women's inequality, at least—bringing into the open the political connotations of gender differences. These different notions of the political nature of the personal often clashed and were scarcely addressed by both organizations in their ideological discussions, although they were more important within the ERP than in the Montoneros, which was also characterized by the influx of family-centered ideas from the first Peronism and from Catholic tradition.

The second line of inquiry entails applying a social history approach to the analysis of these armed groups. I explore this perspective from two angles. First, by acknowledging the porous lines that separated these organizations from the outside world, I gain new insight into the dissonance between the sexual conduct and attitudes of individual militants and the rules that sought to regulate their personal lives. These organizations—and their members—were influenced by the same conflicts that were shaking up the familial and sexual status quo in Argentine society in the 1960s and

1970s. This perspective leads me to assess the role of heterogeneity within these organizations, valuing its importance for interpretative purposes. Second, considering these groups from a social perspective requires that I look more closely at the characteristics of their membership structure and the daily interactions, interests, and conflicts that shaped the relationships among members and between members and their organizations. This allows me to reconstruct the different views on sexual morality that existed within these organizations and that resulted in different attitudes, stances, and judgments that, while not crystallizing in fully articulated positions—not least because positions that deviated from the party line were frowned on as factionalism—permeated the everyday and the ways in which conflicts over sentimental crises were handled. Its analysis revealed that different tensions, interests, and visions were at play in the conflicts created around sexuality. Gender inequality and class differences were explicitly interwoven, which underscored class contradictions and brought to the fore the anxieties sparked by the incorporation of women into guerrilla activities as well as by the new forms of femininity. While these are studied in greater detail in the case of the ERP, they were also present among the Montoneros. Generational differences also played a significant, although less evident, role. The massive numbers of young people in these organizations accentuated the conflicts regarding sexual morality, but generational factors combined with class and gender differences without overshadowing them. The vast majority of activists were young, and many were only just discovering their sexuality while simultaneously embracing the revolutionary cause. And they did so in a context in which the younger generations formed the frontlines of a confrontation against familial, sexual, and gender orders of which many militants also felt a part.

This cultural, social, and political context shaped the subjectivity of militants. It enabled the existence of a variety of relationship styles, which were accompanied by an equally diverse range of relationship issues within the organization that were impossible to understand from rigid and simplistic viewpoints. The very living conditions of the activists—underground life, guerrilla fighting, constant brushes with death—favored a dynamics of fleeting, contingent, and flexible relationships among the young people who were being hurled into emotionally demanding political, collective, and personal experiences. This reconstruction provides greater insight into the intersecting of revolutionary politics and sexuality by focusing on the conflictive tone that such interventions acquired and the existence of different definitions, ideas, and attitudes toward the armed Left's commitment to building new moral foundations. While disagreements arose in different situations and were sparked by varied factors, I have highlighted the tensions caused by gender and class and those emerging from subjective contexts, forms of social interaction, power structures, and specific political circumstances.

The third line of inquiry looks to the diachronic dimension—the chronology itself—as an explanatory factor that highlights the historical—and thus mutable and to a certain extent contingent—nature of the concrete measures taken with respect to sexual morality, as well as their ideological and emotional importance. I have identified three key moments. The first was the origins of these organizations, when foundational elements operated to legitimize the need to control sexual desires, subject the love lives of party leaders to collective scrutiny, and favor the establishment of rigid moral standards. From the onset both organizations combined these foundational elements with the notion of loyalty, though they were not developed without some resistance. The second moment is defined by the growing political importance and expanding membership of the organizations (including women joining in larger numbers) and is characterized by an explosion of sexual conflicts. Neither organization had an established system of penalties to deal with these conflicts or to punish members who failed to conform to the expected moral standards. Instead, behaviors that were found at fault were dealt with on a case-by-case basis and after discussion. The third moment is marked by escalating repression and the emergence of state terrorism, which boosted the more militaristic factions within the two organizations and led them to increase their control over the sexual and love lives of their members. The development of penal codes for moral infractions, which equated romantic infidelity with political disloyalty, served to naturalize the parallels between how militants behaved in their personal lives and how committed they were to the cause. Giving oneself entirely to the cause and accepting order in one's personal relationships were two sides of the same coin, constituting an explicit and irrevocable mandate. While the magnitude of repression and the growing number of members who were being kidnapped and disappeared precluded any possibility of challenging this view, they did not diminish its political, practical, and emotional significance. Leaders still dealt with relationship crises at their discretion, using them to settle internal disputes and set examples through penalties, as well as to resolve logistic issues or step up security measures. No less important was the use of sentimental bonds by repressive forces, which, in their efforts to dismantle the organizations, threatened militants with harm to partners or spouses and relatives.

No guerrilla was ever sentenced to death for being unfaithful to a romantic partner, but family and relationship problems had political repercussions inside and outside the organizations. From the onset, it was evident that personal lives were a core dimension of activism and political struggle within and outside these armed groups, and this is key not only for understanding the characteristics, ideological definitions, and internal conflicts of the organizations but also for shedding light on the political and ideological confrontation and the cultural disruption that cut across Argentine society. In 1975 that importance reached its maximum expression. Paradoxically,

as the state's repressive forces implemented an unprecedented system of extermination that would leave no trace of the bodies of the victims—not before subjecting them to vicious sexual and psychological abuse—the response from these organizations was to confuse romantic infidelity with political treason and exert greater control over their members, for many of whom affection, love, and sex had become the only weapons they had to make them feel that life was still possible.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ISABELLA COSSE received her PhD in history from the Universidad de San Andrés, and she is currently a researcher at Argentina's Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas. Her publications include the books *Estigmas de nacimiento: Peronismo y orden familiar, 1946–1955* (Buenos Aires, 2006) and *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires, 2010), as well as articles in journals such as *Journal of Family History*, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, and *Estudios interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*. She has also edited with Karina Felitti and Valeria Manzano *Los '60 de otra manera: Vida cotidiana, género y sexualidades en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2010).