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"We're All Victims"

Changes in the Narrative of "National Reconciliation" in Argentina

by Valentina Salvi

Translated by Luis Alberto Hernández

While the call for "national reconciliation" as a way to avoid criminal trials for human rights violations has been a constant refrain in the discourse of the armed forces since the return to democracy in Argentina in 1983, it has been made from different positions and in response to diverse conjunctures. Changes in the rhetoric of national reconciliation have been employed as a political and extrajudicial strategy by both the military and civilians for 30 years. The proposal of national reconciliation has oscillated between the need to forget the long-term effects of an "antisubversive war" and a sort of "duty to remember" in which all Argentines are brothers in the evocation of collective pain.

Keywords: National reconciliation, Memory, Military, Responsibility, Argentina

On October 5, 2006, the first "act in tribute to the officers killed" in the Montoneros' attack on the Twenty-ninth Mountain Infantry Regiment was held at the

monument to General José de San Martín in the Buenos Aires plaza of the same name on a day designated as a "national day of the victims of terrorism." This event had a precedent in one celebrated on May 24 of that year at the monument to those fallen in the Malvinas and South Atlantic IslandsWar in the same plaza under the slogan "Soldier, do not ask for forgiveness for having defended your country." Both events were organized by the Comisión de Homenaje Permanente a los Muertos por la Subversión (Committee of Permanent Tribute to Those Killed by Subversion) and counted among their organizers relatives of the officers killed by the guerrillas during the 1970s, civilian groups gathered under the slogan Memoria Completa (Complete Memory), and retired officers who were members of the Unión de Promociones.[1]

Up until 2006, after the annulment of the Punto Final (Clean Slate) and Obediencia Debida (Due Obedience) laws[2] and the reopening of the trials for crimes against humanity, the public space had not been the channel chosen by these groups to convey their demands and representations. Rather, for three decades their activities had been conducted behind closed doors, in military clubs and military churches, and they had applied political pressure on the state in a corporate manner, emerging into the public sphere when the pursuit of justice entailed a sense of direct and real threat (Brienza, 2009: 77). However, since 2006 some new factors have encouraged public demonstrations by this sector of Argentine society that has traditionally shown a distinct revulsion for them, among them the deinstitutionalization of the memory of the "struggle against subversion" in the armed forces, the reluctance of its authorities to award their stamp of approval to "acts of homage" to those "killed by subversion," and the silence or even passivity of active cadres regarding the fate of the officers prosecuted and convicted of human rights violations (Salvi, 2011b).

That October afternoon, Ana Lucioni[3] and José María Sacheri,[4] the only speakers at the event, ended their speeches by proclaiming that they spoke as "victims of a fratricidal war" and that they remembered the past and its dead with a "conciliatory message" in order to "save the future" for "the destiny of the fatherland" and for "the future of Argentina." In front of at least 1,000 attendees holding white banners on which, next to the names and photos of civilians and military killed by the guerrillas during the 1970s, was written "Víctima del Terrorismo—Nunca Recordado" (Victim of Terrorism—Never Remembered), Sacheri said,

> And we gather here today to pay tribute not just to our past but to our future, the future of our children and their descendants, the future of Argentina. We come here publicly to raise the flag of harmony, to definitely close Argentina's tragic past and lay the foundations of progress in peace, without discord, without violence, without resentment, hatred, or revenge.

The call for national reconciliation as a way of avoiding trials for human rights violations had been a constant in the discourse of the Argentine armed forces since the "Documento final de la Junta Militar sobre la guerra contra la subversión y el terrorismo" (Final Document of the Military Junta on the War against Subversion and Terrorism), broadcast April 28, 1983. However, that call had undergone resignification as a result of the turn at the end of the 1990s in the memory of the "struggle against subversion" from the figure of the "victors of the antisubversive campaign" to that of the "victims of terrorism."

This article seeks to explain the changes in the rhetoric of national reconciliation as a political strategy and a symbolic recourse promoted by civilians and retired military

officers who remember and seek to justify the so-called struggle against subversion in order to deal not only with the representation of a violent past but also with the legal, political, and moral responsibility that derives from it (Jaspers, 1998). The goal, then, is to analyze how the figure of the "victims of terrorism" participates in the resignification of these memories.[5] Within this framework, my interest is to explain the way in which the rhetoric of national reconciliation helps to create a moral community capable of managing its own history while coping with the questions raised by society.[6]

From Victors to Victims

During the first democratic decade, the narrative of the struggle against subversion, shared by the officers who had participated in the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (Process of National Reorganization) and the new military leadership and by the relatives of the officers killed by the guerrillas, assembled in Familiares y Amigos de Muertos por la Subversión (Relatives and Friends of Those Killed by Subversion—FAMUS), was characterized by a triumphalist and denialist tone. The military prosecuted for human rights violations, the officers on active duty, and the civilians close to them denied the clandestine and systemic character of the disappearances and the very existence of the disappeared. According to the "Documento final,"

> many of the disappearances are the consequence of the manner in which terrorists operate. They change their real names and surnames and know each other by what call "noms de guerre" and have plenty of forged personal documentation. This is all related to what is called "going

> underground"; those who decide to join terrorist organizations do so surreptitiously, abandoning their families and their social and working environments. It's the most typical case: the relatives denounce a disappearance whose cause they cannot explain or, knowing the cause, don't wish to explain.

From a perspective that prioritized the results obtained in the military field, the military felt like victors in the antisubversive war, and therefore the document demanded "recognition of the struggle for freedom, justice, and the right to life" for those who had "stoically endured the effects of an attack that they did not provoke or deserve." Moreover, the military also rejected the so-called theory of the two demons,[6] since they did not accept being equated with those against whom they had fought (the "subversive criminals") or the prosecution of their commanders alongside of the guerrilla leaders (Altamirano, 2007: 20). General Mario Aguado Benítez, commander of the Fifth Corps, said in the first months of democracy, "Our enemies are never going to forgive us for defeating subversion" (*La Nación*, January 14, 1984). Similarly, after the publication of the report of the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Comission on the Disappearance of Persons—CONADEP), the retired first army chief of the democratic period, General Jorge Arguindegui, maintained that the trials of the military juntas that were about to start were a "Nuremberg trial but in reverse: there the ones judged were the defeated, not the victors" (*La Razón*, March 27, 1985).

At the same time, FAMUS[7] maintained that the members of the armed forces should be remembered for "their capacities and courage" and "their sacrifice," for "having given their best," putting "their families at high risk" in "absolute self-

surrender" in order to "save the fatherland," and that having taken on the sacrifice of "fighting subversion" made them virtuous men worthy of recognition. For FAMUS, "the war had not ended" because the "murderers" had been transformed into "sacrificed victims" and the "heroes" into "prisoners of war." It denounced this situation (*Tributo,* 1982 **[please list this reference, including title of article]**) and went on to say,

> It is now up to us, if we are well-born, to show gratitude to those who brought us PEACE and therefore we owe them our LIFE, our FREEDOM, and the possibility of living in a DEMOCRACY, but meanwhile the military chiefs are deprived of their liberty and the institution to which the Argentine people owe gratitude is being discredited. FAMUS invites all citizens to accompany our PRISONERS OF WAR, express well-deserved gratitude in the places where they are, and show them that, yes, IT IS AN HONOR HAVING FOUGHT AND HAVING WON.

These public statements were framed in the narrative of war and victory so dear to the armed forces and the commanders of the Proceso. They adopted the core of the representations that made possible the criminalization of the cadres, a war for the "survival of the nation," and, having "defeated the subversion militarily," constituted the basis for their demand for social and political recognition of the armed forces' role. They were convinced that having fought on behalf of the fatherland, peace, and democracy exempted them from having to offer any explanation to justice and society.

The same tone filled the pronouncements of the Carapintada rebellion of April 1987,[8] which received the name of "Operation Dignity" because it sought to give the army back its dignity at a moment when it was the target of "a campaign of public anger orchestrated by those who, when the opportunity arose, were defeated." Its main

demand was to prevent the prosecution of "more comrades arrested and scorned merely for having fought and won a just and necessary war that made the current regime possible."[9] This triumphalist view of the past was grounded in the belief that the survival of democratic institutions was due to the military's having won a war against subversion. Besides halting the prosecution of the middle-ranking cadres of the army accused of human rights violations, the rebels sought to stop an alleged "smear campaign on the part of the mass media" and gain social recognition for the struggle against subversion.[10] This position with regard to the repressive past was not a banner raised exclusively by the rebels but also reflected the claims of broad sectors loyal to the army, including its high command. The "winners" could not accept, especially, that their commanders were being held in prison by a civilian court decision and considered amnesty imperative.[11] In a speech on May 29, 1987 (Army Day), the commander of the army, General José Caridi, said, "This victory has cost the army dearly: many years of struggle against an insidious, wily and cruel enemy, its merits and martyrs, the aggression and indifference of some citizens, the conviction of its commanders, and, finally, the committal for trial of numerous comrades" (Grecco and González, 1990: 51). Although this first decade under democracy ended with the pardons of the former commanders,[12] the armed forces were forced by civil society to answer for the forced disappearance of persons, and the war narrative was replaced by another that recognized the violence by the state. In the face of this reality, the military reaffirmed their role as the true defenders of the democratic institutions against the Marxist threat and continued to see themselves as saviors of the nation.

At the end of the 1990s, the memory of the struggle against subversion underwent a significant turn after the declarations by Captain Adolfo Scilingo and the former NCO Víctor Ibáñez, who recounted the details of the "death flights,"[13] and the

announcement of General Martín Balza recognizing the torture and disappearances perpetrated by military officers.[14] These statements deprived the military of the ability to represent themselves as saviors of the fatherland against the Marxist threat or as victors in a just war against a subversive enemy (Badaró, 2009: 311). The former chief of the Second Army Corps and minister of planning under the military regime, Major General Ramón Díaz Bessone, who was president of the Círculo Militar from 1994 to 2002, coordinated the three-volume collection *In memoriam* (1998), which established the bases for the turn of the military memory toward the figure of the military as victims. This "homage," considered by the military community as the counterpart of the CONADEP's *Nunca Más*, advocated for remembrance of the struggle against subversion as a just cause. Nevertheless, its claims of what was done by the army during the period of illegal repression are presented against a narrative of the recent past that begins with the suffering endured by the army officers and their relatives murdered by the guerrillas.

Díaz Bessone's book provided support for a new interpretative framework within which to evoke the recent past: *memoria completa* (complete memory). This happened at the same time as the progress made in the trials for crimes against humanity, starting in 2003 with the repeal of the Obediencia Debida and Punto Final laws, the scant space that the victims of the guerrillas had received in the memoirs of militants, the silence about the armed struggle in the memoirs produced by the human rights organizations, and the refusal of the state to recognize or accommodate any of these meanings of the recent past (Catela, 2010: 121) . Since the mid-2000s, the associations of relatives, civilians, and retired military that rally behind the banner of Memoria Completa have emerged as a new actor in struggles over memory in Argentina. Aiming to popularize a narrative about the recent past that allows them to

transcend the strong corporatist framework of the military circles, they seek to question the legitimacy of the human rights organizations and promote their demands with a discourse centered on "the victims of terrorism" aimed at a policy of national reconciliation.

From a binary perspective that replicates the rhetoric of confrontation among Argentines, Memoria Completa considers the social memory of the 1970s a "partial memory," an "unfair" one because it obscures the existence of a "revolutionary war" that produced "unrecognized victims." Memoria Completa has not only appropriated but resignified two of the demands historically supported by the human rights organizations: memory and truth. It seeks to present a narrative about the recent past that is the more credible the more clearly it opposes the memory of the disappeared and the struggles of the human rights organizations (Salvi, 2011a).

With this purpose in mind, the figure of the "victims of terrorism" is emptied of political and moral ambiguities and purified in order to replace the immoral and antidemocratic generals of the Proceso with "innocent victims" in the pantheon of military heroes. In the list drawn up by Díaz Bessone in *In memoriam*, the murder in March 1960 of the four-year-old Guillermina Cabrera, the daughter of an army NCO, occupies the leading role in the military memory that has always been played by the kidnapping and murder of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu by the Montoneros in 1970.[15] This reframing of the military memory around the figure of the victim, which seeks to take advantage of the socially accepted stereotype of the innocent victim by focusing on child, whose innocence is beyond any doubt (Giesen, 2004: 47) , denotes not only how morally reassuring this passivity is but also how socially obligatory is compassion for such a victim. Furthermore, the figure of Aramburu is too contradictory—strongly associated with the disputes between Peronists and anti-

Peronists and with the putschist and antidemocratic image of the army—to continue to be the first and most prominent victim of the "revolutionary war."

Moreover, for these organizations of civilians and retired officers, the figure of the "victim of terrorism" tends to rival the figure of the detainee-disappeared. Colonel Julio Argentino del Valle Larrabure and Lieutenant Colonel Jorge Ibarzábal, who were kidnapped and murdered after the attacks on the military arms factory in Villa María and the Azul Regiment, have become martyrs of the struggle against subversion.[16] These officers, remembered as martyrs because they "fell defending the fatherland," have replaced generals of the Proceso such as Videla, Viola, Galtieri, and Menéndez, who represented a symbolic obstacle for the framing of the army as an innocent victim of terrorist and subversive violence.

Thus the military memory crystallized in the figure of the victim and ended up highlighting certain traits of the officers and silencing others in order to strengthen the idea that the military did not kill to save their country but died for it (Portelli, 2003). In other words, it was no longer a matter of officers' fighting the enemies of the nation but one of officers' not giving up defending it. Furthermore, this turn toward the memory of the "victims of terrorism" was made possible by ignoring what the army did during the period of illegal repression—their responsibility for the systematic disappearance of people.

"We Are All Victims"

With the turn toward the "victims of terrorism," Memoria Completa has anchored its discourse in traumatic events that serve as a basis for producing unity and adherence and for making demands and disputing meanings in public space. It seeks to

receive recognition for the human losses not only from the state but also from civil society. To achieve this it uses the nationalization and equalization of the "dead of a fratricidal war." However, this requires that both the political violence and the illegal state repression be interpreted as a broad network of fraternal ties that incorporates the nation in its totality as a victim. As Ana Lucioni said in the Plaza San Martín, "We have all lost a loved one. We have all suffered the absence of a father, a son, a brother, a husband or a friend."

As the human rights organizations have done with the disappeared, Memoria Completa seeks to project the "victims of terrorism" onto a common symbolic space in order to stimulate collective attachments. For this purpose, it appeals to the language of kinship and family ties to denote the ties that bind nationals to their country. Just like the primary image of the family, the fatherland represents the domain of love—the selfless emotional bonds that connect parents with their children, children with their parents, and siblings with each other. Sacheri's remarks in the Plaza San Martín are eloquent in this regard: "We the victims are not the only ones hurt in this war: the whole nation has been, but we can affirm that we the victims are the least culpable for these wars of terror and the ones who have been the hardest hit by these wars, to which we want to say, calmly but definitely, 'Enough!'" When Sacheri says that "the whole nation was lacerated" by "unwanted violence among Argentines," a memory that is called "complete" seeks to speak publicly on behalf of "all the dead." For this it is necessary to amalgamate and equate not only all the dead but also all the bereaved. The differences and hostilities of the past are abandoned and the current struggles and demands overcome in an all-inclusive "we" in which "all the dead are Argentines" (Márquez, 2004: 7):

> Twenty-five years after the end of the bloody and savage war of the 1970s we are left with a sad death toll of legal forces and terrorists, peaceful and violent people, men and women from the right and the left, innocent and guilty, good and bad, old and young, rich and poor. They all had a common denominator: they were all Argentines. They are the dead, our dead.

The nationalization and equalization of the "victims" transform the memory of the "victims of terrorism" into a platform for the establishment of a public debt searching for acknowledgment. The particularity of this debt is that it introduces a dialectic through which the victim, having suffered harm, establishes the moral obligation of remuneration (Agamben, 1998: 20). With the evocation of traumatic events, Memoria Completa seeks to strengthen the victims' public positioning: being presented socially as victims allows them to complain, protest, and present their demands in a framework of legitimacy and have their voices heard. This attitude, says Ricoeur (2003: 117), places the rest of society in their debt. The public debt not only helps to create a claim to which the rest of society is bound but also makes it possible to demand retribution. In summary, the turn toward the memory of the wounds allows the sectors that remember and claim the "struggle against subversion" to ask for recognition and political and symbolic reparations in the context of the silencing of social and state memories for the victims of the guerrilla war.

In addition, with the notions of "an internal war," "a fratricidal war," or "a fight among Argentines," Memoria Completa seeks to introduce into the scenario of struggles over memory a line of argument that equates all the victims and compensates for the suffering and violence. In contrast to the triumphalist discourse of the first years of democracy, which sought to differentiate between the victors of the antisubversive war and the subversives who had been turned into heroes and martyrs, Memoria Completa

puts the emphasis on the human losses and brings together all the injured parties around its "common denominator."

What does the shift from the narrative of victors to one of victims do to the rhetoric of national reconciliation? At first, the idea of reconciliation was triggered by the need to forget the effects of an "antisubversive war," but here forgetting has a productive dimension: remembering past misfortunes has to be prohibited to make way for a national peace process. The idea of reconciliation as a national peace process was part of the justification for the amnesty law promulgated by the last military junta in 1983 and for the pardons of former commanders and generals granted by President Carlos Menem in 1990. At a second stage, after the annulment of the Punto Final and Obediencia Debida laws, the call for national reconciliation was reinforced not through forgetting but through a "duty of remembrance"[17] in which all Argentines were brothers and sisters in the evocation of shared suffering. In the face of the reopening of the trials, it was essential for the members of Memoria Completa to restore the discourse of national reconciliation to the public debate as a way of securing impunity in the negotiated and consensual form of a pardon. This was a political and extrajudicial strategy that sought to promote forgiveness and thus to close down the debate about the past and control its future manifestations (Ricoeur, 1999: 62).

The idea of national reconciliation rests on a set of ideological categories that are repeated in the slogan "Memoria Completa." These categories are derived from the rhetoric of war with the addition of those of debt and victimhood. When the narrative of war invades the entire discursive sphere, it not only approaches the past as a territory of conflict but also interprets the present that evokes it as its continuation. And since remembering means reopening old wounds, the national peace process can only emerge from healing the wounds of the past. This is exactly what Lucioni said:

> Today, after 31 years, we continue to feel the same pain for so much unnecessary bloodshed. . . . Consciously or unconsciously, they were the bloody tools of particular interests that have nothing to do with the interests of the country. Therefore, today more than ever, we should pray for reconciliation, peace, and union among all Argentines. And if we are not able to reverse it we will fall prey to it **[can you clarify what "it" means here?]**.

But how does Memoria Completa intend to prevent the struggles and confrontations of the past from continuing in the present, with "the nation bleeding to death"? From this perspective, healing can only come from forgetting, from a mutual commitment not to remember the misfortunes of the past and to avoid the arm of justice, which represents a tool of revenge (Loraux, 1989). Future coexistence depends on the preventive erasure of the past—pretending that nothing happened and not asking questions about the causes of the conflicts that run through Argentina's political life. In other words, national reconciliation assumes the restoration of a conservative ideology according to which any form of disagreement or conflict—especially disagreement that derives from the need to assign blame and responsibility— is incompatible with social peace (Lira and Loveman, 1998).

Furthermore, the call for national reconciliation is put forward as a unitary and consensual discourse that invites all the parties to abandon their sectarian interests for the common good. This conciliatory and harmonious idea of reconciliation has as its starting point the assumption that violence is the result of a confrontation between two camps, the legal forces and the terrorists. This position, which was reproduced in the first years of democracy by the theory of two demons, maintains that there were two

evils in Argentina and they were comparable. On the one hand, positing two equally perverse parties introduces an undifferentiated view of violence that obscures the specificity of state terrorism and political violence. On the other hand, it not only removes responsibility from the military involved in human rights violations but also proposes a sort of "double repentance" as necessary for reconciliation between two camps (Feld, 1998: 83). It is not so much that this double repentance is presented as the only way out of the conflict as that the equalization of blame denies, obscures, and conceals the conditions that made it possible to criminalize the armed forces.[18]

What new justifications emerge when the proposal for national reconciliation is based on the memory of the victims and the figure of the public debt? First of all, reconciliation is worded not as a "double repentance" but as a "mutual pardon." The demand for reparations and retribution that the figure of a debt establishes in the struggles for memory seeks to produce a reversal in the dialectics of forgiveness. As Ricoeur states (1999: 63), the person who caused harm can only ask for forgiveness, while only the victim has the power to grant it. With the memory of the "victims of terrorism," Memoria Completa seeks to appropriate forgiveness as a power deriving from the fact of presenting themselves publicly as injured parties and therefore as society's creditors. This is what the speakers said in the Plaza San Martín:

> All of us here are victims, those who participated in the wars of the 1970s and those who did not participate, because the whole of Argentine society was the victim of a past of violence that affected it in its entirety, without exclusions. . . . But we the victims are innocent of any mistake or horror committed, de jure or de facto, by the various national administrations since the second half of the twentieth century, We the victims, who have been bathed in the warm blood of our parents and have cried in silence each drop

> of water in the tears of blood, take the first step. I repeat, we offer our open hand even to those who killed and murdered our parents.

Memoria Completa presents itself as offering an "open hand" to its "attackers" and renouncing vengeance for the indignities and humiliations suffered by the "victims of terrorism." Therefore it considers it just for the terrorists of yesterday and the adversaries of today to put aside their desire for revenge or retaliation and grant amnesty to those who forgive them. This self-exculpating argument rests on an equation of the suffering of the "victims of terrorism" with the situation of the officers sent to jail for human rights violations. Thus the victim-victimizer relationship is reversed and the groups associated with Memoria Completa, spokespersons for the officers who have been indicted, appear in public forgiving their "attackers" even though no one has asked them to. As Ricoeur puts it (1999: 65), forgiveness is first and foremost a gift. While "giving" means handing over something that we possess without asking for anything in return, this relationship has its dangers. Forgiving when no one has asked one to means not only overlooking the possibility of a refusal or rejection—the drama of encountering the unpardonable—but also reintroducing the logic of debt. It establishes an unequal link in that the one receiving it is bound to reciprocate. Of course, being treated as victims publicly reinforces the claim for retribution and the obligation of recognition by turning Argentine society into the beneficiary of the reconciliation. Therefore, in a turn in the discourse, national reconciliation is formulated as a pardon that erases the acts committed, and the officers charged with and prosecuted for human rights violations are presented, through their spokespersons in the struggles for memory, as forgiving the victims of repression. This act of renunciation makes them entitled to forgiveness for the crimes they committed during the period of state terrorism.

Conclusions

In this article I have discussed the turn taken around 2000 in the memory of the so-called struggle against subversion from the figure of the "victors of the antisubversive war" or "saviors of the fatherland" to that of the "victims of terrorism." From that moment on, the emphasis was placed especially on the associated changes in the rhetoric of national reconciliation, from the idea of double repentance involving two equally perverse parties to one of mutual forgiveness among the victims of a fratricidal war. My analysis of the two narratives had examined the way in which the rhetoric of national reconciliation deals with the legal, political, and moral responsibility of military officers and the armed forces for the illegal repression.

Hannah Arendt (1994; 2007) argues that collective blame conceals the criminal responsibilities of the perpetrators of massive crimes because it builds a kind of universal complicity among the members of a community or nation. At the same time, collective victimhood disguises the responsibility not by equalizing blame but by establishing feelings of solidarity and compassion in order to equalize the sufferings and, consequently, the behaviors. Both help to exonerate the perpertrators morally and legally, but while the first calls for developing a kind of collective remorse, since society as a whole appears to be guilty of the violence of the past, the second invokes feelings of compassion. Paraphrasing Arendt (2007), we might say that one encourages vicarious blame while the other fosters vicarious compassion. Vicarious blame assumes that no criminal blame is associated with the acts of the past, while vicarious compassion involves sympathizing with the victim even though that person was a repressor. Thus, collective victimhood reaffirms the solidarity with the victimizer in that it extends compassion for the damage and suffering endured by a group to the whole of

society. Undifferentiated victimhood functions as an instrument of apology and massive exculpation. It is not a question of indicting and punishing everyone equally but one of forgiving and making full reparations so that no individual or institution can be regarded as responsible for the crimes committed. In short, with the turn toward the figure of "victims of terrorism" and the equalization of "all the victims," Memoria Completa creates a way of replacing the rule of "everyone" with the rule of "no one." In other words, the maxim of collective guilt, that "where everyone is guilty no one is" (Arendt, 2007: 151), is supplanted by another equally exculpatory one, that "where everyone is a victim no one is guilty."

Notes

1. The relatives and friends of the dead officers are assembled as the Asociación de la Víctimas del Terrorismo en Argentina and Familiares y Amigos de Víctimas del Terrorismo and present themselves as unrecognized direct victims of "subversive terrorism" as wives, children, nephews, fathers, and mothers of officers "killed by the subversion." Among the civilian organizations are the Argentinos por la Memoria Completa, Grupos de Amigos por la Verdad Histórica, Foro por la Verdad Histórica, Jóvenes por la Verdad, Verdad sin Rencor, Argentinos por la Pacificación Nacional, and the Asociación Unidad Argentina, which embody a "struggle for memory, truth and the reconciliation of all Argentines" and against "the humiliation, harassment, and persecution of the fundamental institutions of the nation." Another organization that is concerned with the defense of the officers in prison for human rights violations is the Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de los Presos Políticos Argentinos**.** The Unión de Promociones is made up of retired officers whose objective is to defend and support their "detained comrades and their families."

2. In June 2005 the Supreme Court declared the Punto Final and Obediencia Debida laws unconstitutional, thus endorsing Law 25.779, by which Congress had overturned them in 2003.

3. President of the Comisión de Homenaje Permanente and the daughter of First Lieutenant Oscar Lucioni, who died on October 10, 1976, in an attack by the Montoneros.

4. A member of the Asociación de las Víctimas del Terrorismo en Argentina and the son of Carlos Alberto Sacheri, a nationalist philosopher killed by the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army—ERP) on December 22, 1974.

5. The analysis starts from a theoretical and methodological perspective that, instead of focusing on what the social actors are capable of saying or thinking about certain symbols or meanings from the past, stresses the symbols and meanings that are available in their cultural frameworks and, in a given time-space juncture, are shaped by social actors to allow one or another interpretation of the past (Olick, 2007).

6. This work is based on observations of public events convened by the groups of Memoria Completa between 2006 and 2009 and a survey of secondary sources such as magazines, books, web pages, speeches, pamphlets, and communication materials produced by these organizations.

7. This interpretation materialized with the initiative of President Raúl Alfonsín of simultaneously prosecuting both the military high command and the leaders of the Montoneros and the ERP. Later, it became widespread with the preface to the report *Nunca Más*, written by Ernesto Sábato (Crenzel, 2008: 82).

8. The public activities of FAMUS showed a time line closely linked to the politico-military agenda of the first decade under democracy, especially as a response to the

research done by the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desapareción de Personas and the trial of the military juntas. During those years, it dealt with the allegations of human rights violations by proposing to improve the public image of the armed forces and damage the prestige of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo by exposing the drama of the military and police attacked by the guerrillas. This discourse was complemented not only by a bellicose stance toward the human rights organizations but also by an effort to justify the actions of the generals of the dictatorship (Marchesi, 2005: 179). FAMUS became inactive in 1991 after the pardons of the former commanders and generals.

9. Also known as the Semana Santa (Holy Week) Uprising, led by Lieutenant Colonel Aldo Rico. The carapintadas, who painted their faces with shoe polish to distinguish themselves from the *generales carablancas* or armchair generals, were mostly officers indicted for human rights violations.

10. Letter dated February 18, 1987, months befote the uprising, from Lieurenant Colonel Aldo Rico to his brigade commander (Verbitsky, 1987: 164).

11. After the conflict, the government fulfilled the principal demand of the rebels: stopping the trials. On June 4, 1987, the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience) established that the officers could not be accused of punishable crimes because they were following orders.

12. In the trial of the military juntas Jorge Rafael Videla and Emilio Eduardo Massera were sentenced to life imprisonment, Roberto Eduardo Viola to 17 years in prison, Armando Lambruschini to 8 years in prison, and Orlando Ramón Agosti to 4 years in prison.

13. On December 23, 1990, President Carlos Menem fulfilled his announced wish to pardon the former commanders and generals Camps, Suárez Mason, and Richieri, among others.

14. Scilingo made his comments on the television program *Hora Clave* on March 12, 1995, and in an interview with the journalist Horacio Verbitsky that resulted in the book *El vuelo* (1995). Ibáñez's declarations on the Hadad and Longobardi program on April 24, 1995, confirmed those made by Scilingo.

15. Balza's message was delivered on April 25, 1995, in front of a television audience. Besides acknowledging the torture and disappearance of people he admitted the illegitimacy of the acts committed by officers under his command during the period of unlawful repression and moved away from the idea of human rights as a campaign implemented to discredit the institution.

16. The daughter of Mayor David René Cabrera, Guillermina Cabrera died as a result of the explosion of a bomb planted in the family house by the Ejército de Liberación Nacional/Movimiento Peronista de Liberación Uturuncos, one of the first Peronist youth organizations radicalized in the 1960s. Aramburu was the leader of the dictatorship called Revolución Libertadora (Liberating Revolution), which overthrew the government of Perón in 1955, and was responsible for the execution of civilians and military loyal to Perón in June 1956.

17. On January 19, 1974, when the ERP attacked the Tenth Regiment of the First Armored Cavalry in the city of Azul in Buenos Aires Province, Ibarzábal was taken hostage, and after nine months in captivity he was killed. On August 10 of that year, the ERP attacked the Fábrica Militar de Pólvoras y Explosivos of Villa María, in Córdoba, and took Larrabure hostage. His body was found on the outskirts of the city of Rosario in August 1975.

18. Nora (2008) maintains that we live in a time that creates in each of us the obligation to remember and turns the recovery of belonging into the principle and the secret of identity.

19. Feld (1998; 2001) shows that the idea that there were "repentant officers" is part of a grand narrative created by the mass media in 1995 and that when these repentances were offered they were showcased on television, demanding a sort of counterpart to the "other part" as a way of moving toward "national reconciliation."

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