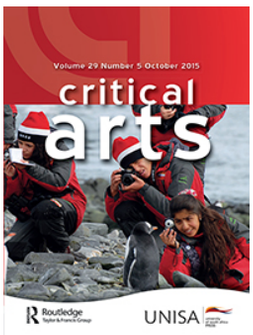

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Memory and childhood in the melodrama of the Malvinas War: *The Children Who Write on the Sky*

Mirta Varela

Abstract

To celebrate the bicentenary of Argentina's Republic in 2010, many films produced that year depicted this country's heroes and episodes of the War of Independence in the 19th century. However, *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó* (What Time Left Behind), a six-episode television drama series for Canal Telefé, rather chose to depict events of the 20th century, half of which were set during the periods of dictatorship. This article focuses on one of the series' episodes, Adrián Caetano's *Los niños que escriben en el cielo* (*The Children Who Write on the Sky*), whose central story takes place against the backdrop of the 1982 war between Argentina and England over the Malvinas (Falklands) islands. In view of placing this programme within the general context of Argentine audiovisual production during recent years, three main ideas are proposed in this analysis. The first is the relationship between memory and childhood, as the story assumes the point of view of a boy who struggles with the dilemma of whether he should reveal a military fraud. Second, the analysis highlights the use of archival documentary footage within the fiction and the resulting hybridisation of the film text. Finally, the article focuses on the function of the movement from social to political undertones in television melodrama.

Keywords: childhood, cinema, Malvinas/Falkland War, melodrama, memory

Introduction

Grand celebrations were held in Argentina in 2010 to mark the bicentenary of the nation's independence. The 'Permanent Committee of the Bicentenary of the May

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Revolution of 1810', which was created within the Cabinet of Ministers of the Presidency, organised public events around the country and mass concentrations in Buenos Aires. In addition, several historical films premiered as part of the celebrations, including the noteworthy *Belgrano* and *Revolución: El cruce de los Andes* (Revolution: The Crossing of the Andes), as well as a television miniseries entitled *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó* (What Time Left Behind). The two films recounted the lives of Manuel Belgrano and José de San Martín, the two generals who led the war for independence in the 19th century; both regarded as 'patriotic heroes' in traditional Argentine historiography. In contrast, the six episodes of *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó* narrate various moments in 20th-century Argentine history; with three of them addressing the military dictatorships. The television miniseries uses historical events as the basis for dramas that combine both real figures and fictional characters, and in some cases make use of archival materials.

In this article I analyse one particular episode of the abovementioned television miniseries: Adrián Caetano's *Los niños que escriben en el cielo* (*The Children Who Write on the Sky*), whose central story is set against the backdrop of the 1982 Malvinas War. I propose to interpret this episode as a condensed representation of certain features characteristic of the audiovisual figuration of recent Argentine history. I start by describing the production context and then approach the analysis from three core themes, which allow the programme to be contextualised within a series of general shifts in Argentine audiovisual productions in the past few years. The first of these themes is the relationship between memory and childhood, in view of which the story adopts the perspective of a child who reveals the military's ruse in a classic tale of initiation. The second theme is the use of archive materials in fiction, and the hybridisation and contrast of textures. The third theme is the shift from the social to the political in television melodrama. The latter point constitutes a more general hypothesis about the way in which melodramatic fiction – in both film and television – has so far changed the polarity of its oppositions since the political transition, which included the Malvinas War, in the early 1980s.

Two centuries of history

Revolución, el cruce de los Andes (hereafter referred to as *Revolución*) was a film presented at an official function hosted by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at Argentina's Government House. The director of the RTA (Radio Televisión Pública) was in attendance at this function. Also present was the star of the film, Rodrigo de la Serna, a popular actor regarded as one of the 'official actors' of the political movement known as Kirchnerism in Argentina, due to his explicit support for the government and his work in different fictional programmes on the public television network. *Belgrano* premiered in the city of Rosario at the Monument to the Flag (Argentina's flag design is attributed to Manuel Belgrano) as part of the celebrations

organised by the national government. While *Revolución* was the first film directed by Leandro Ipiña, *Belgrano* was directed by Sebastián Pivotto, who was only known as the director of the film *La leyenda* (2008).[1] Juan José Campanella – the film director who won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film with *El secreto de sus ojos* (*The Secret in Their Eyes*) in 2009 – was also involved as the producer and film editor of both *Belgrano* and *Revolución*. Campanella's participation suggests these films were planned more as major commercial productions than as artistic showcases for their directors. The films' production also received the support of Radio Televisión Pública (RTA) and the consulting assistance of Javier Trímboli, a historian who works in the RTA film department and also helped organise the massive centennial celebrations in Buenos Aires in 2010. In short, these film projects were part of the new perspective on history held by public institutions during this unique period, the bicentenary of Argentina's Republic, but were also framed within the political context of the times.

The bicentennial celebrations coincided with a fierce debate in Argentina's print and broadcast media, which exposed significant tensions between the Grupo Clarín (which owns the television station Canal 13) and the government (which used the state-owned television channel Televisión Pública to transmit its own position). This is the context in which one of the most popular private television stations – Telefé, owned by Telefónica, one of Grupo Clarín's largest competitors – produced *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó*.

Unlike the government, which chose relatively unknown directors for its historical films, Telefé opted for a prestigious director, Israel Adrián Caetano. In 1998 Caetano co-directed *Pizza, birra, faso* (Pizza, Beer and Cigarettes) with Bruno Stagnaro – a film that inaugurated what would become the 'Nuevo Cine Argentino'.[2] From 1998 through to 2010, Caetano not only premiered ten films acclaimed by the critics, such as *Bolivia* (2001) and *Un oso rojo* (*Red Bear*, 2002), he also directed the 2002 miniseries *Tumberos*, a story about life in custody filmed almost entirely in the former Caseros prison, which made a major impact by using topics, sets and languages formerly unknown in Argentine television. Caetano's films and television programmes are characterised by the crude language of marginal characters in urban and marginal settings, and his stories often involve situations of extreme violence in which characters can see no way out. Thus, Caetano does not seem the obvious choice to direct a television history of Argentina in the 20th century, unless we consider the fact that half of the episodes in *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó* are set during military dictatorships, while another episode is about the life of Simón Radowitsky. An anarchist from the worker's movement, Radowitsky killed Coronel Falcón, the military official responsible for a brutal act of repression around the time of Argentina's centennial celebrations. These events during the first decades of the 20th

century had already been covered in a well-known Argentine film, *La patagonia rebelde* (1974). As happens in many countries around the world, private television becomes the generator of a historical tale that, in many cases, recovers topics that have already been addressed in film; in other cases, it becomes the first voice to recount certain episodes from recent national history.

The last Argentine dictatorship has been the topic of a significant number of documentary and fiction films that have considered testimonies, interviews and autobiographies as more suitable methods for reflecting memory than traditional historical accounts. However, the choice of this period as the framework for film or television programmes of this genre can often produce a sense of closure. This was the case with two programmes produced by Telefé: *Montecristo*, a highly successful soap opera that aired in 2006 and *Televisión por la identidad* (Television for Identity), a series of three anthologies broadcast in 2007. While the organisation Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo was involved in *Televisión por la identidad* from the start, it also became involved with *Montecristo* near its end when it transpired that the programme had encouraged many young people to have DNA tests to find out whether they were children of the disappeared. The fact that Telefé produced *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó* is thus not surprising; the series, which aired between 2006 and 2010, is one of several fictional accounts of the dictatorship presented from the perspective of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In this regard, Telefé used a different medium to translate the perspective of both the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, in which the Grandmothers group played a prominent role.

Memory and childhood

Israel Adrián Caetano's *Los niños que escriben en el cielo* (hereafter *Los niños*), one episode of the series *Lo que el tiempo nos dejó*, was referred to as 'historical fiction' by its producer, Sebastián Ortega. Indeed, this episode depicts a scam orchestrated by the military government, whereby Argentine children were encouraged to write letters and send them inside chocolate bars to soldiers fighting in the Malvinas War. But after the end of the war, journalists denounced the fact that the chocolates donated by Argentine citizens to help soldiers on the battlefield were sold by the military, who pocketed the profits. In Caetano's *Los niños*, the letter sent by the main character is found inside a chocolate bar purchased at a local shop, thus proving the military's fraud. The incident of the chocolate bars containing children's letters had enormous political repercussions after the Malvinas War, as it gave the yellow press a melodramatic illustration through which to reveal the cracks in the support base of the dictatorship.[3] In addition, later in the story, the main character discovers that the

soldier whom he was asked to encourage via a telephone call broadcast nationally, had in fact died during one of the very first battles of the war. In effect, the military proved to be capable of playing even with the innocence of a child. The impact of the mock public radio broadcast is further strengthened in the episodes' recreation of the programme *24 horas por Malvinas* (24 hours for Malvinas) in which the boy is a guest.[4] This fundraising programme, which at the time was received by the public with suspicion, functions as a symbol of the media's complicity with patriotic propaganda scams. In addition, the cover of the magazine *Gente*, which features the face of the boy asking: 'What happened to the chocolate I sent to the soldier?', was also reproduced in Caetano's programme.

The viewpoint of the child/student during the war – and more generally during the dictatorship – had already been assimilated by Argentine society. The experience of school children is omnipresent as a theme in fiction films about the Malvinas War, such as *Los chicos de la guerra* (War Children, 1984); *La deuda interna* (Internal Debt, 1988); and *La mirada invisible* (The Invisible Eye, 2010), among others. This theme's prominence is an indicator of how difficult it is to represent the role of civil society during the war. It allows for the figuration of two notions: the *child* or *adolescent* (a non-adult) and the *patriotic ritual*. School determines the actions of children who have no room for autonomy. For their part, patriotic rituals are the civil practice that embodies martial values: war and army are not presented as an exception but instead as the continuity of childhood games and school rituals.[5] If children's innocence is betrayed by the military's deceptions (as is the case in *Los niños*), the adolescent's vitality suffers a sudden passage to the adult world by seeing death up close (as in *Los chicos de la Guerra*).

During the dictatorship, children also often appeared in the Argentine newsreels *Sucesos argentinos*, where they were shown cheering on General Videla at official events organised in his honour in different cities across the country.[6] These newsreels bared the artifice of civil support, which was far from spontaneous, and made it evident how difficult it was for the military government to construct public self-celebratory functions that appeared to be real. The presence of the children in *Los chicos de la guerra* and in *Los niños* (despite the fact that two decades had passed between the making of the two) allows the filmmakers to construct an image of civil society as disciplined, yet also as weak and unaware of its implicit support for military power. In other words, while the images of society manufactured by the dictatorship reveal that civil support and discipline were neither homogenous nor complete, the images constructed under democracy, in so far as they forgive civil society for its support of the dictatorship, only serve to emphasise it. The false spontaneity of a young public shows the military coercion that was required to organise these rallies, which were supposed to symbolise popular support. The

excess of school ritualisation hides the voluntary acceptance of non-school rules by adults during the dictatorship. In *Los niños*, for example, a father accepts these rules but with a certain mistrust. However, he also profits from the war as a producer of Argentine rock music (since the military forbade radios from playing English songs during the war, there was an unexpected surge of Argentine rock music). Given the adults' ambivalence, the children and the school allow for a relatively closed off and organised world to be configured – one that can only be sustained through deceit, lies and repression. This focus on childhood and youth also allows the men who fought in the Malvinas War to be referred to as *chicos* (boys), a fact that has been frequently highlighted in analyses of these fighters.[7]

There is one news story about a school, made for the television station Canal 9 in 1982, which does not substantially differ from scenes in more recent fiction films that ridicule the school rituals of the dictatorship period.[8] In the news story the reporter asks students questions, following what appears to be a script drafted with the teacher, who gives a lesson on sovereignty for the cameras. The children respond sincerely about what they have recently learned about the Malvinas. The existence of this original material – which took itself seriously, though it is hard to watch today without a dose of irony – can help explain the recurring use of the school setting in films about the period.

In *Los niños* it is the boy who wants to unmask the military's ruse. His music producer father is thrilled about the opportunity to turn a profit with the new Argentine rock music, and he lets himself get carried away by the wave of propagandistic patriotism. The boy's mother thinks only of protecting her son and tries to help him understand war, truth and deceit generally, rather than focusing on the specific political context. The moral of the programme is eloquent: even a child could have unraveled the propagandistic messages of the dictatorship and figured out that the chocolate bars were never reaching the soldiers. If the adults did not do so, it is because they refused to see the truth until fear hit close to home (the government spokesman becomes threatening when the boy refuses to be part of a scheme to convince the public that he is in fact a soldier's pen pal). The Malvinas War thus becomes a detonator that blows up the military's lies and the deceptions civil society had to live with during the dictatorship. What is most troubling is that while the main character is growing up (he has his first experiences of love, death, mendacity and fame) during the Malvinas War, the adults around him do not seem to 'grow' during the episode.

The year 2012 saw the release of the film *Infancia clandestina* (Clandestine Childhood). This film, whose story is also set during the dictatorship, was promoted as the first movie to offer a different point of view of the period by incorporating a child's view of the violence. The film's director, Benjamín Ávila, is the son of a

disappeared mother (he was a child during the dictatorship). This fact was highlighted in the film's publicity as evidence that this was a true autobiographical story in spite of the film being fictional. *Infancia clandestina* was produced by Luis Puenzo, the director of *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*, 1985), the first Argentine offering to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, which became a token film during the transition to democracy in Argentina, just after the Malvinas War.

It would be hard not to ask how the forms of representation of the dictatorship have changed since the transition to democracy. *La historia oficial* is told from the point of view of a woman who adopted a daughter of disappeared parents without knowing it. The main character represents a comfortable middle class that was complicit through omission, but sought to escape its collusion with the dictatorship as soon as the crimes of the military became known. Nearly three decades later, *Infancia clandestina* is told from the viewpoint of a boy whose Montonero activist parents force him to change his name and date of birth, while living underground and witnessing violence. Even if this were to be seen as a trick to keep the child safe, the film appears to question the Montonero couple. The film thus attributes to the left-wing parents all the actions of which Argentine society had accused the military for three decades: changing the identity of the children of the disappeared, forcing children to witness their parents' kidnapping or murder, and changing their date of birth. In *Infancia clandestina* it is the parents who change the boy's identity and jeopardise his safety, while the military officers oblige him to pronounce his real name and then hand him over to a reactionary but caring grandmother. One noteworthy aspect of this and similar films is that the parents are always depicted as guilty or absent; the mothers are impotent or absent, and instead the grandmothers assume the maternal role, even if (or because) they tend to be very conservative. Among all the temporal disruptions that political transitions produced – and the Malvinas War is central in the Argentine transition – generational leaps are among the most important. For example, *La historia oficial* staged the discourse that took *Radicalismo* to power (the so-called 'theory of the two demons').[9] At the same time, *Infancia clandestina* was produced by RTA-Public TV; in fact, RTA's director, Tristán Bauer, a key figure in the area of public communication under Kirchnerism, personally handled the promotion of the film. In both cases, the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo supported the films, which seems logical given that both films emphasise the importance of this organisation's role.

In addition, while in *La historia oficial* the little girl's kidnapping is represented through images of children playing (the little girl cradles a doll as her cousins burst in with toy machine guns), animation is used for the kidnapping scene in *Infancia clandestina*. In *Los niños*, the battle scenes are either part of the boy's dreams or presented 'live' as television images. Thus, scenes of violence appear to be

aestheticised when mediated through the representation of a child's perspective, yet they are not when presented through archival television images.

The television archive

Archival television images take up a significant amount of time in *Los niños* and, in doing so, provide the programme's only narrative of the war. The episode begins on 2 April 1982, the day Argentine troops disembark on the Malvinas Islands, and ends immediately after Argentina's surrender. The documentary images of the period reveal the ambiguity between what is and is not known. These images are introduced into the programme's diegesis through scenes in which characters watch television (either the boy on this own, or with his whole family); they are interspersed with dramatised scenes in which the boy features as a guest on a television show. However, documentary images also appear in other parts of the episode: abruptly, with no justification, and in a somewhat extemporary fashion. In this regard, it seems that any attempt to fictionalise these images should fail because, except in cases where it is necessary to place the fictional characters in real scenes from the period (as in *24 horas por Malvinas*), the actuality images released by the media at the time of the events could not be any rougher. Thus, by altering the framework in which the images were originally received, only a distanced, ironic view of them is possible today.

Furthermore, the contrast between archival colour television images and black-and-white photography prompts the viewer to contrast the official discourse of the dictatorship with that of the victims. While the colour television images refer to the official discourse on the war (and are easily mistaken for fiction), the black-and-white images show the dissenting discourse.[10] For example, visible in the latter are political signs that read: 'Malvinas yes, dictatorship no' and 'The Malvinas belong to the workers, not to the torturers'. These slogans introduce ruptures that make it difficult to speak of a homogenous Argentine society during the war. The opposition between color and black-and-white visual material reveals an oscillating interpretation of the Malvinas War as an episode associated with either the dictatorship or the transition to democracy. This difficulty is directly related to the question of whether civil society can be interpreted as either a passive victim or an active collaborator of the military during the war – and, to a certain extent, during the entire dictatorship.

In addition, Argentine rock songs from the period accompany the archival images as musical background. The music is presented as an inseparable element of the war, since, as explained earlier, during the conflict radio stations were forbidden from playing music in English. In fact, this prohibition led to a renaissance of Argentine singers and musical groups, whose recitals became the first massive gatherings at the end of the dictatorship.[11] Rock music can be heard over the episode's title sequence,[12] and is also incorporated into the narrative, as the boy's father organises rock concerts

and the boy mixes audio tapes for his school sweetheart. The fact that the father is a concert promoter allows the story to introduce the flip-side of the audience's perspective (which is similar to the youth's viewpoint during the Malvinas War). This produces a shift similar to that of *Iluminados por el fuego* (Blessed by Fire, 2005), whose main character is a former fighter who has become a journalist. Unlike *Los chicos de la guerra* and other films made shortly after the war – films in which the media are presented from the perspective of the audience – in *Los niños* the media and mass culture are presented from a point of view which is similar to more recent films about the Malvinas War, such as *Iluminados por el fuego*. Indeed, as soon as the dictatorship ended, films incorporated the audience and spoke in the first person plural, e.g., 'we' who have been deceived by the government. However, nearly three decades later, we see the other side of the story: the media have become the frequent targets of criticism. It is also pertinent to ask whether this questioning of the media's role during the dictatorship also applies to Argentina's media today.

The archival television images used in *Los niños* show crowds in a square cheering on General Galtieri, along with interviews with passers-by and military officials making statements we now know to be false. Most of these images were taken from *La República perdida II* (The Lost Republic, Part 2), a documentary that premiered in 1986. This film was a sequel to *La República perdida I* (The Lost Republic, Part 1), which premiered a year after the war. Both documentaries were directed by Miguel Pérez, a well-known film editor. Pérez's work as an editor is quite relevant here, since the selection of images for these films has served as an indispensable archive for Argentine cinema ever since. Argentine films have borrowed from the Pérez scenes ad nauseam and, in many cases – as in *Los niños* – have also made use of Pérez's editing and montage. *La República perdida I* premiered as part of a campaign that swept Raúl Alfonsín into the presidency of Argentina and presented the future president's main beliefs. In fact, during Alfonsín's mandate, both films became part of the national school curriculum. Therefore, as noted earlier in relation to the articulation of a child's perspective, the use of archival material in *Los niños* follows the same ideological configuration as the national process of transition to democracy. In this regard, this programme's aim of historical reconstruction to mark the bicentennial celebrations promoted by the Kirchner administration is no different from the discursive social narratives configured during the government of Raúl Alfonsín.

Social and political melodrama

The fact that the Malvinas War was one of the historical events selected for commemoration and representation during Argentina's bicentenary year, brings up many questions. One of these is whether the ways in which Argentina's cinema and

television have represented the Malvinas War have changed over time. Although there are specific ways of representing the Malvinas War, any references to the war cannot be isolated from the way in which the theme of the dictatorship is dealt with in film and television.[13] Melodrama depicting the Malvinas War has received very little critical attention, despite the fact that melodrama is at the core of Latin-American mass culture. Indeed, as I argue elsewhere, in the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, there was a significant change in the use of melodrama in Latin-American audiovisual production.[14] In Argentina, this shift cannot be considered outside the scope of the Malvinas War and the transition to democracy.[15]

In the case of television melodrama, which circulates through a mass media market more than film does, it is noteworthy that the soap opera became the Latin-American genre par excellence during the same period.[16] Although television was the medium most directly associated with the discourse of Latin-American dictatorships – the medium that most openly welcomed the intervention of military power – it nonetheless did not suffer radical transformations during the periods of transition to democracy. Although some small changes took place immediately, especially with news and current affairs programmes (less so in the case of fiction), these changes seem only superficial when considered in relation to how important an institution television became under the military regimes, and how its consolidated structures persisted afterwards. The particular case of Brazil, for example, clearly shows that the national television industry's foundations were laid during the dictatorship, along with a new type of melodrama aimed at a middle class that no longer had any qualms about the genre's lack of legitimacy.[17]

During Argentina's political transition, melodrama served to loosen structural tensions: the gap between rich and poor.[18] In classic film melodrama, the conflict between rich and poor corresponded to the conflict between tradition and modernity, thus allowing for the coexistence of different temporalities of diverse Latin-American cultures. Although the end of the dictatorships in the 1980s augured a better future, not only did many of the promises of democracy go unfulfilled (especially at the economic level) but, paradoxically, culture began to turn towards the past and memory. The discourse of memory has not been equally important in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and other countries in the region, but in Argentina's case it did serve to shift attention away from social contradictions and onto political vindication. The past was no longer synonymous with 'traditional', as it was in classic film melodrama. Instead, the past became synonymous with 'dictatorship', and as such it could not be forgotten if justice was to be achieved. Paradoxically, 'modern' – traditionally understood in a republican and democratic context – no longer meant 'future' and 'progress'; it now meant a return to the past through the culture of memory.

Despite these differences, melodrama never ceased to be television's dominant formal principle (the constructive principle that organised its themes and materials) during this period. On the contrary, the blood ties that melodrama reclaims as an indicator and proof of *anagnorisis* (the recognition of the identity of a character in Greek tragedy, which presupposes a change from ignorance to knowledge) remain as the articulating element of numerous human rights groups, which were originally based on female family ties. Indeed, the most important Argentine organisations associated with the disappeared, and thus with human rights, are collectives of mothers and grandmothers, later followed by collectives of children and other relatives. In this regard, melodrama, far from fleeing, hiding, covering or contradicting politics, has moved in the direction of politics. However, the price has been the filing away of social contradictions: from social melodrama, whose main focus was the contradiction between rich and poor, to political melodrama, which focused mainly on the contradiction between repressors and victims. In the television episode about the Malvinas War that I have discussed here, this shift is evident. *Los niños* reveals a conflict within the middle class, which is obliged to revise its political position: 'Nothing good ever comes of war,' says the boy's mother; and 'We have our beliefs but we never got involved in politics,' says the boy's father when the family begins to fear the war's consequences. However, for the family the war also represents the likelihood of economic growth.

Conclusion

In one scene of the 2010 Argentine television episode discussed in this article, Adrián Caetano's *Los niños que escriben en el cielo*, a young boy places a sticker with a map of the Malvinas Islands on a window pane; it bears the words 'The Malvinas belong to Argentina', a claim most Argentines would still agree with, although most would be opposed to war. While in this television episode patriotic discourse is consistently conveyed through archival television material, it is also expressed by a character: a warm yet distant teacher, who reproduces the official discourse word for word. However, whereas the teacher is tolerant when the children heckle the Brits in class, the boy's parents show two slightly different attitudes towards this patriotic fervor: the mother is prudent and conservative, while the father tells the boy it is all right to put the sticker on the window.

Immediately after the end of the Malvinas War in 1982, the nation's attention focused on those considered victims of the dictatorship. By 2010 there had been a shift towards civil society and its responsibility (either direct or by omission) in the actions of the military. This shift can be interpreted as signifying growth in term of people's awareness of this responsibility, but the insistence on certain topics suggests a different type of continuity. The child's perspective, the politicisation of melodrama, and the oscillating use of archival audiovisual material in color and

black-and-white allow the screen and narrative treatment of the theme of the war to be isolated from that of the dictatorship. This becomes even more evident in the way in which the films and programmes I have discussed above deal with expressions of nationalism. Indeed, after the Malvinas War, expressions of nationalism became difficult in Argentina, other than during FIFA's World Cup tournaments. During the 2001 economic crisis, a raggedy Argentine flag frequently became the symbol of wounded nationalism. The bicentennial celebration of 2010 was a particularly apt moment for the resurgence of nationalistic expression. The distinction between legitimate national demands and the exacerbation of a nationalism that goes against universal human rights has become a taboo topic in Argentina, as in other Latin-American nations. Obviously, this is an eminently political topic that merits its own work, yet I feel obliged to argue that in the television programmes I have discussed in this article, nationalism – like many other social issues – is treated as if it were a child's problem, that is, as something adults would have resolved a long time ago, and as something we therefore need not seriously reconsider in the present.

Notes

1 *La leyenda* was produced by McCann Erikson Argentina and Telefé as part of a non-traditional ad campaign for Chevrolet.

2 On 'New Argentine film', see Aguilar (2008) and Andermann (2012).

3 *Gente* – the Argentine equivalent of *People Magazine* – was one of the strongest supporters of the dictatorship from the beginning. Thus, its coverage of the story, with the headline 'What happened to the chocolate I sent the soldier?', became a public emblem of the final months of the dictatorship.

4 *24 horas por Malvinas* was aired on the public television station ATC during the war to raise funds for the soldiers. A number of actors, singers and celebrities participated to show their support for the war, donating money and personal objects for auction. For an analysis of this programme, see Rodríguez Ojeda (2012).

5 As Federico Lorenz (2006: 33) points out: 'It is quite noteworthy that school was a crucial space in three important films that sparked debate about the military dictatorship among the general public during the years of the transition to democracy. *La noche de los lápices* (*Night of the Pencils*, Olivera 1986), *Los chicos de la guerra* (Kamin 1984) and *La historia oficial* (*The Official Story*, Puenzo 1985) offered a very critical view of classrooms, albeit from different perspectives. All three highlight the repressive and pseudo-military nature of the educational system.'

6 Material accessed at the audiovisual archive of the Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, originally from the Film Museum of Buenos Aires.

7 Rosana Guber (2004) noted this passage from 'children' to 'veterans' that was later utilised extensively. As Verónica Tozzi (2009) points out: 'The use of the term "children" also immediately allows us to visualize the soldiers and their parents as victims of the dictatorship', which also helped them 'avoid any suspicion of being in collusion with the dictatorship'.

8 Television material accessed at the audiovisual archive of the Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani.

9 According to this public discourse, since violence is inherently wrong, no matter its purpose, the violence between the state and revolutionary organisations is deemed equivalent. The use of the term 'state terrorism' was part of this ideological dispute within human rights organisations and political parties during the period known as the 'transition to democracy' in Argentina.

10 Black-and-white film had already been used for a similar effect in a great number of films about the Malvinas War (see Varela 2013).

11 The term '*rock nacional*' was used to refer to all rock music sung in Spanish in Argentina. On the role of Argentine rock during the dictatorship, see Pujol (2005).

12 In fact, *Los niños que escriben en el cielo* is also the title of a 1981 album by Argentine rock legend, Luis Alberto Spinetta.

13 Although films about the Malvinas War have been analysed in several works (see especially Vitullo [2012]), television programmes about this conflict have only been studied by way of the works mentioned earlier.

14 I have traced the evolution of some Latin-American film directors in the 1980s, such as Miguel Littín, Héctor Babenco and Luis Puenzo. In the case of the first two, their films of the 1960s and 1970s depicted real people living on the fringes of society. Yet the three directors tended towards melodrama in the 1980s – a melodrama, however, in which the conflict is more political than social; see Mirta Varela, 'Melodrama, industria e internacionalización en las transiciones políticas latinoamericanas', keynote presented at the Congreso Internacional Hispanic Cinemas In Transition, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Campus de Getafe, 8 November 2012.

15 The most internationally renowned Argentine director of the 1960s, Fernando 'Pino' Solanas, also made the transition from documentary to fiction, though not to melodramatic fiction: *El exilio de Gardel, Tangos* (*Tangos, The Exile of Gardel*, 1985) and *Sur* (*South*, 1988). In the case of Puenzo, there was no such transition: his only film before the dictatorship was the feature film *Luces de mis zapatos* (The Light in My Shoes, 1973).

16 Latin-American cultural studies recognised its importance during the 1980s. Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987), for example, understood melodrama as the clue to interpret Latin-American culture.

17 Although the market for global soap operas expanded in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Argentina during the dictatorship years, the case of Brazil is striking from both an aesthetic and cultural point of view. The soap opera became a genre for industrial export during the last Brazilian dictatorship, in which *Rede O Globo* also expanded significantly. What is interesting is that this growth was accompanied by the gradual acceptance of the cultural legitimacy of the soap opera, which increasingly targeted a middle-class audience during this period. During the dictatorship, the military censored all live television shows that were difficult to control. These restrictions created serious problems for the live transmission of information and led to the subsequent growth of 'prerecorded' formats that would not be affected by live censorship. The programmes that most suffered from military censorship were ones with 'live studio audiences' that had the highest television ratings, but were considered uncouth by the middle class. *Rede O Globo* opted to 'modernise' its screen

presentation in what some authors have referred to as 'cleansing the grotesque'. *O Globo* used two complementary strategies: on the one hand, it eliminated programmes with live studio audiences that were profitable yet problematic in terms of censorship; on the other, it increased its investment in soap operas. To do so, it hired several leftist authors, such as Dias Gomes and Eduardo Coutinho, among other illustrious writers from the Brazilian Communist Party (see Sacramento 2011). Although a direct correspondence cannot be established between Brazil and the television models in countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Bolivia, what is certain is that two contradictory processes were unfolding at the end of the dictatorships in the region.

18 By contrast, Matthew B. Karush (2012) argues that melodrama in Argentine radio and cinema has exacerbated the contradictions between rich and poor, while always adopting the poor character's perspective. This contrast seems evident in Karush's analyses of Argentine adaptations of Hollywood films, where the introduced changes consistently serve to deepen social contradictions.

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