

THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN POST-DICTATORIAL ARGENTINE JEWISH FICTION: MANUELA FINGUERET'S *HIJA DEL SILENCIO*

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In the last few years the topic of memory has elicited widespread scholarly interest across the humanities and the social sciences. Sociologists, historians, literary and cultural critics have converged to develop new ways and perspectives to approaching the study of memory, remembrance, and oblivion. This fascinating topic has recently witnessed a surge of bibliographical materials that range from the study of memory after the Holocaust, to the debate on the building of memorials and monuments, to the relationship between memory and historiography at different historical periods. My interest in the study of memory however, stems from the necessity to rethink and reinvent the complexities and the richness of Argentine nationality.

In Latin America, the debate on how to remember has become a matter of survival, especially for societies that are experiencing a transition from military rule.

In the past two decades, the topic of memory has caught the attention of many Latin American scholars and intellectuals who see memory and oblivion not only as fundamental aspects for the development of the nation but as essential elements in the ongoing process of re-democratization. By examining the relationship between memory and oblivion in relation to the formation of national identities, Eduardo Rabossi has suggested that if recollection of past events can help *construct* the identity of an individual or a group, the act of forgetting can then be a determining factor in the *destruction* of those identities (*Usos del olvido* 9).

One difficulty for many Latin American writers, as for all survivors of Latin America's numerous "dirty wars", is that many of their fellow citizens believe the best way forward lies in amnesia, and the condition for the possibility of the so-called process of re-democratization is the erasure and forgetting of the experience of the victims.¹ Many intellectuals, writers, and cultural critics, however, agree that in order to overcome the trauma imposed by the military *juntas*, the memory of the atrocities that took place during the 1970's and 1980's must be constantly engaged.²

The trauma of the dictatorship must be understood not as a single, isolated recollection of an event, but rather as a process that can be accessed by the memories of individuals or groups through the occurrence of flashbacks or traumatic reenactments that convey its incomprehensibility. The Greek word *trauma* or wound, originally referred to an injury inflicted on the body, but in its later usage, especially within the frame of Freud's work on the subject, the term can be understood as a wound inflicted not only upon the body, but also upon the mind.³ Trauma, as has been shown by Freud, occurs only after a *latency* period. This is why trauma must be considered a *process* rather than a simple or single experience of events given that those events "assume their force precisely in their temporal delay" (Caruth 9). According to Cathy Caruth, "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4).

Furthermore, trauma has a social dimension, as has been suggested by Kai Erickson, given that traumatic wounds inflicted upon individuals "can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up"⁴ ("Notes on Trauma and Community" 186). According to Erickson, trauma can create a community by grouping people together that share a common feeling of pain and angst.⁵ For these groups or communities of survivors the importance to tell the

story becomes itself a matter of survival.⁶ Dori Laub has pointed out that although the “imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task [...] no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion” (63).⁷ Thus, the trauma of the dictatorship has caused a “memory crisis”, to use a term coined by Richard Terdinan and has therefore produced a considerable corpus of studies in an effort to understand the meaning of remembering and forgetting in the now *post*-dictatorial Southern Cone.

In *The Untimely Present*, Idelber Avelar sees mourning as the post-dictatorial imperative *par excellence*. According to Avelar, post-dictatorial texts engage in a kind of “mournful memory” that attempts to overcome the trauma represented by the dictatorships. Many of these texts often delve into various post-dictatorial phenomena such as clinging to national identity in exile, the oblivion of the catastrophe upon the arrival of democracy and finally, the weight of the memory of those who died.

Speaking about the Uruguayan experience (which resembles that of Argentina’s very closely), Hugo Achugar has noted the ethical dilemma of a post-dictatorial society caught between the need to remember and the desire to forget: “A feeling of guilt arises from the fact that Uruguayan society knows [...] that it has come out of the dictatorial catastrophe without being able to clarify doubts and misgivings, or punish those responsible [...] the bad conscience of an important part of the country has preferred to live with guilt rather than risk achieving justice” (*La balsa de la medusa* 45). In this sense, a democratic utopia cannot be made up of silence and oblivion but rather, words and recollection, as has been suggested by Mahel Moraña.⁸

In the post-dictatorial Southern Cone, the memories of the past suffer endless attempts of erasure, not only politically and institutionally, but also socially. The effects of globalization, the frenzy to consume newer, faster and better products seems to leave little time to question, to examine and to reflect on each novelty that is left behind.⁹ In a market that strives to live in a perpetual present

even the value of historicity, painfully attached to the experience of the dictatorship and the thousands of "disappeared" citizens, has been squandered.¹⁰

These insightful readings into the meaning of remembering and forgetting in the context of the Southern Cone have achieved, at the very least, one important objective: they have been able to denounce, even challenge, the reality of the politics of oblivion programmed by the military *juntas* and preserved by the "transitional" democratic governments.¹¹ In this sense, the study of collective memory in Argentine literature and culture and their relationship to the building of the modern nation-state leads one to (re)consider the significance of memory within marginal or discriminated groups as in the case of the Jews.

As the largest Jewish community in Latin America, Argentine Jewry grew mostly as a result of the crises that plagued Europe throughout the twentieth century. Over the years the Jewish community of Argentina managed to grow steadily and for the most part Jews assimilated almost entirely into the mainstream of Argentine society. Yet anti-Semitism has been entrenched in every aspect of Argentine life from the very beginning. Almost every major institution in Argentina, the military, the Catholic Church, and the government have allowed, and at times encouraged, anti-Semitic policies that aimed to destabilize the Jewish community. During the last dictatorship Jews were especially targeted because they were seen as mortal enemies to the so-called "Western" and "Christian" way of life. As Jacobo Timerman suggested in his *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (1981)¹², the Argentine generals had identified three types of Jews: those who, like Sigmund Freud, undermined the Christian family; Karl Marx, for opposing the Christian concept of society; and Albert Einstein, for destroying the Christian interpretations of time and space (130).

It is estimated that of the 30,000 Argentines that were abducted and murdered between 1976 and 1983, more than fifteen percent were Jewish or of Jewish descent. These figures become even more

appalling when one takes into consideration that the Jewish community of Argentina during that time did not exceed one percent of the total population.

The *Report of the National Commission on the Disappeared*,¹³ created by President Raúl Alfonsín in 1984, provides several testimonies of survivors of clandestine jails that explain how the Argentine generals and their cronies revived Nazi techniques directed against Jews.¹⁴ Timerman described it as follows:

Its adherents hung pictures of Hitler in the rooms where Jewish political prisoners were interrogated; special tortures were invented for Jewish prisoners; the food allotment for Jewish prisoners in clandestine prisons was reduced; rabbis who dared to go to the jails to visit Jewish prisoners were humiliated. (131-132)

Timerman raises a crucial issue seldom considered by today's cultural critics and historians, which is, to what extent were the leaders of the various military *juntas* willing to "eliminate" the Jewish elements of Argentine society?

The generals and their civilian accomplices fanned the prejudices of Argentine society by encouraging the reading of the notorious "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" and other heavily anti-Semitic publications that could easily be found in any major bookstore in the Argentine capital. Anti-Semitism was justified by the agents of the military *junta* who perceived Judaism as a deformity of Christianity that challenged the very core of the Argentine establishment.¹⁵ Jews were seen as carriers of "subversive" ideas that had to be fought against until the very end.¹⁶ These notions excused the torturers and their repressive apparatus (or so they thought) from questioning the system imposed by the upper echelons of the military. The military and its affiliates felt they were ridding the country of an international Jewish conspiracy (Hodges 188).

The trauma of the dictatorship left an indelible mark in the conscience of the population of Argentina. Since the arrival of democracy

in 1984, Argentines have attempted to come to terms with the events that transpired during those seven years. Yet, many figures within the process of re-democratization, fueled by the need for social and political stability, have encouraged and supported a politics of amnesia aimed at the erasure of the experience of the victims. Memory and oblivion have thus become hotly debated issues amongst Argentinean intellectuals who agree that in order to overcome the trauma imposed by the military *juntas*, the memory of the atrocities that took place must be constantly engaged, and the pressure to forget continually combated.

The memory crisis wrought by the Dirty War has produced a considerable corpus of literature that deals implicitly and explicitly with the role of both memory and oblivion in the (re)construction of a national identity. In their search of an understanding of the events that took place, many Jewish writers have looked to the past for answers. This latest generation of Argentine Jewish writers is more plural and more complex than ever. These are writers that come from different cultural backgrounds whether Ashkenazi or Sephardic; the second or third generation of immigrants that afford both male and female perspectives. They come together, however, in their attempt to understand their origins and celebrate their Jewishness. Their struggle to reaffirm their identity as Jews and, in many cases, as survivors of the last military dictatorship, is apparent in the literature they have produced since the disaster. This is a literature that focuses on the past in an effort to reconstruct an elusive Argentine identity, favoring the recovery of familial genealogies and family histories that recover, in a sense, the voice of the Other. The most representative authors of this period are Ricardo Feierstein, Alicia Steimberg, Marcos Aguinis, Ana María Shúa and Manuela Fingueret. These Jewish authors have found in the novel, more than any other literary genre, a space that allows them to explore the relation between history, memory, and national identity; a medium through which to channel their voices and project the political and social concerns representative of their minority status.

An attempt to understand the most recent Argentine military dictatorship through the lessons of the Holocaust has been one of the goals

pursued by Manuela Fingueret. Although she is perhaps best known for her poetry, her works of fiction clearly demonstrate her versatility and dynamism as an artist. Her most recent literary production includes two novels: *Blues de la calle Leiva* (1995); *Hija del silencio* (1999); and her essay *Barbarie y memoria* (2000). In her most recent novel, *Hija del silencio*, Fingueret compares the tragedy of the Holocaust to the Argentine disaster by contrasting the personal and collective memories of three generations of Jewish women survivors.

Rita, a young and idealistic *peronista* militant, is kidnapped by men in civilian clothes and taken to the ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada),¹⁷ where she is held prisoner and tortured for an undisclosed amount of time. Rita, who describes herself as both a Peronist and a revolutionary, is also Jewish, which will ultimately worsen her incarceration in the notorious clandestine jail. In order to withstand the pain of torture (as she is raped, beaten and shocked with electric prongs in her mouth and genitals), she evokes her childhood and adolescence years and weaves them with the stories she heard from her own family's experience in Nazi concentration camps. The plot of the novel is divided between the protagonist's own personal memories and those of her mother and grandmother. The novel is thus structured as a puzzle made of recollections from the past of three generations of women. These recollections however are incomplete, due to her mother's inability to open up to her daughter:

Los recuerdos de infancia ocupan en ella un lugar preponderante, de singular emoción. Su madre, la abuela Jasia, su amiga Leie la pintora, a quien describía con lujo de detalles, forman parte del mundo entrañable que evoca. Y de pronto calla con una densidad que no dejaba espacio para las preguntas. Absorbí desde chica esa fragmentación, esa forma abrupta de callar. (9-10)

Silence plays a key role in the novel, giving equal importance to the things that are said and to those that are left unsaid. Silence, furthermore, serves as a way to negotiate the need, on the part of the characters, to tell

their stories, giving meaning to the title of the novel. Thus, at the end, the protagonist's fragmented identity begins to evolve as she realizes she is the daughter of her mother's silence: "soy hija de tu silencio" (202). In this sense, the novel problematizes the concepts of memory and oblivion insofar as the transmission of the experience from one generation to another, as explained by Yerushalmi when he observes that: "When we say that a people 'remembers' we are really saying that a past has been actively transmitted to the present [...] Conversely, a people 'forgets' when the generation that now possesses the past does not convey it to the next, or when the latter rejects what it receives and does not pass it onward" (109). What prevents the protagonist from forgetting the memories of her family is the familiarity of the present she is living, which, in her own words, is: "Un pasado que es presente y un presente que es pesadilla" (167). The memories of the Holocaust help the protagonist reaffirm her identity as a woman, and Argentine, and a Jew. In the end, her identity, like her memories, are made up of both words and silence.

The memories of her family's aids Rita in the construction of her identity as an Argentine and a Jew, and help her survive "debajo de esta capucha mugrienta que pretende contenerlo todo: náusea, cuerpo con llagas, piel en suspenso, voces oscuras, gritos tan desgarrados como sus silencios, ojos que ocultan miradas lascivas" (11). The brutality of the environment blurs the lines between the memories of the concentration camp and the clandestine jail:

Una mano que desgarra, cerca de esta capucha por la que trato de respirar con dificultad. ¿Qué más van a hacer si no acepto sus reglas? Acaso entienden la piedad? [...] ¿Soy la que esperé ser o esta mano que tira del trapo como si fuera el telón de una función que necesita muchas despedidas? Soy una actriz de un elenco inestable. Un desvío momentáneo de las incertidumbres de ella. Pero yo anclé en el Río de la Plata. O en esta morgue helada que no alcanzo a reconocer, inundada de cuerpos viscosos,

llenos de ira, mano a mano con ese infierno que tratan de reproducir a carcajadas. (17)

The protagonist assumes the identities of her mother and grandmother, based on her very own experience and suffering. For the first time, Rita is able to understand the actions and attitudes of her mother. Their suffering brings them closer in spirit and their common denominator becomes their persistence and their instinct of survival at the face of adversity. Memory becomes for the protagonist a form of resistance: “Los recuerdos inquietan, pero traen un poco de calidez que este lugar niega” (32). In this sense, memory becomes contestatory, seeking to subvert the official discourse of the *junta* and restore an alternative narrative that had been forgotten, displaced or entirely erased by the dictatorship’s repressive apparatus. Although the memories of the *Shoah* are thoroughly unpleasant, they provide her with the will to resist and survive her torture: “Me dijeron que la tortura no se aguanta más que doce horas y sin embargo conmigo no han podido” (34), and: “Entre-tengo estas largas horas, estas interminables noches armando mi propio rompecabezas entre gritos, olores, recuerdos, silencios y miradas” (64). Consequently, memory heals her: “Cuando los recuerdos logran filtrarse entre las heridas, sobrevivo”. (172)

In addition, as explained by Yael Zerubavel in *Recovered Roots*, this reconstruction of the past by marginalized groups may constitute a kind of “counter-memory” that subverts the official discourse of the nation, and helps reconstruct, redefine, or entirely transform their conception of national identity. At the same time, the narrator is aware of the selective nature of recollection: “¿Qué induce a reabrir estos episodios? ¿Por qué aparecen éstos y desecho otros? ¿Será que van anudando la desolación a la que me sometí?” (66). Inherent in the act of remembering are choices made regarding what to leave in and what to leave out. Thus, according to Pierre Vidal-Naquet “every memory is by definition, selective”, because it “makes choices and, consequently, it eliminates what is flat, what appears uninteresting, even though that is what, perhaps ten, twenty or fifty years later, will, on the contrary, stand out” (“History and Memory” 15). Therefore, in line with Vidal-Naquet,

memory is selective because in the end “memory is choice” (15). The acrimony of her confinement forces her to recover the memories of her family’s suffering in order to understand the meaning of her struggle. From within the walls of her cell she is able to hear the hustling and bustling of everyday city life, adding to the surreal quality of her existence: “Atada a la cama de hierro, mojada, sedienta, dolorida, soy toda cuerpo y palabra [...] Afuera circulan autos. Los escucho, casi los puedo palpar en la noche fría. Son parte de un paisaje audible que reconozco. Un espacio distinto de éste, un espacio en el que la gente existe.” (67).

The sound of the cars passing by outside her prison cell helps her realize, in her delirium caused by torture, that what is happening is indeed real. She is suddenly reminded that while she is being tortured, life outside goes on as if nothing at all were happening. The affirmation that people indeed “exist” alludes to the discourse of terror common among the torturers. It was common practice for the prison guards to tell their prisoners “vos no existís”, or “vos no sos nadie” (you do not exist, you are no one), as part of the psychological torture and process of dehumanization.¹⁸ The trauma suffered during the torture sessions is such, that soon, the narrator begins to blur the lines between what happened to her mother and grand-mother in Terezin and what is happening to her in Buenos Aires:

Aún resuena en mi cabeza el chirrido de las gomas sobre el asfalto húmedo. Brazos que me levantaron en vilo como una pelota y tiraron adentro de un camión. El rebote contra el piso de metal, y un trayecto infinito en el que pensé en mi madre, en otro camión, en otro lugar, pero con la misma violencia. Ella en Minsk hacia Terezin; yo, en Buenos Aires, hacia ¿dónde? Una casta de asesinos. Los nazis gaseaban, hambreadan, humillaban. Aquí insultan, torturan, violan. Casta de asesinos. Los escucho reír, jugar, beber... ¿Estoy allá o aquí? (67)

The resemblance in the suffering of the two women is not coincidental; on the contrary, Fingueret is able to draw parallels from both experiences and successfully show the repressive apparatus of the Argentine military as the legacy of the concentrations camps, as a story that is left unfinished.

In *Hija del silencio*, Fingueret probes the limits of representation by comparing two distinct yet closely associated historical events. Fingueret shows her readers what can be learned from the experience of the Holocaust by representing it through the memories of fictional survivors that live to witness their daughter's suffering. The experience of the Holocaust is repeated some twenty years later (not in Germany or in Poland, but in Buenos Aires) with an almost uncanny resemblance that restores the Nazi Holocaust as a rational subject of inquiry.

Throughout the twentieth century, Argentine Jewish writers have attempted to come to terms with their past and their tradition in numerous ways, realizing that even where memory can sustain and be sustained by a dominant group (as in the case of the military *juntas*¹⁹), it may also serve as a tool through which to challenge the views of an authoritarian regime. Through memory, groups can subvert hegemonic discourse and attempt to restore alternative narratives that had been forgotten, displaced or entirely erased by the dominant group.²⁰ In this respect, Yerushalmi's reflections on forgetting help redefine these concepts when he asks: "Is it possible that the antonym of "forgetting" is not "remembering", but *justice*?" (117).

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NOTES

¹ Such has been the case in Argentina, where the presidential candidate that had promised justice failed to deliver and in 1986 Congress passed a law presented by then President Raúl Alfonsín, which came to be known as the "Ley de Punto Final". This law set a deadline for the submission of legal cases against the perpetrators of human rights abuses

in Argentina, which prompted several thousands of people to rush to the courts to present their cases. As the number of cases increased, the government began to feel pressure from the highest echelons of the military and by March of 1987 a military rebellion ensued threatening the stability of the already fragile democracy. The rebellion successfully came to an end but its leaders were given light sentences in order to avoid “upsetting” the armed forces any further. By May of that year a new law was enacted: “La Ley de Obediencia Debida” (The Law of Military Obedience), allowing hundreds of individuals who had been involved in the dictatorship (as torturers, kidnappers, assassins, and members of paramilitary death squads) to claim they were following orders from their superiors. The military continued to grow restless and when Carlos Saúl Menem came to power in 1989 he supported and implemented a politics of national reconciliation giving a general pardon to several members of the armed forces, political militants, leaders of the Malvinas/ Falklands War, and those who had masterminded the rebellions under the Alfonsín presidency. Less than a year later, Menem decreed a second pardon or amnesty to all the military leaders of the dictatorship, including the Chief of Police of the Buenos Aires Province who alone was responsible for thousands of kidnappings, acts of torture and homicides. In the past few years, a handful of generals have been confined to in-house arrest as they await a new trial on the abduction of the babies of those who were tortured and murdered.

² Cultural critics such as Fernando Reati, Idelber Avelar, Nelly Richard, Hugo Achugar, Mabel Moraña, Marcelo Viñar, Teresa Porzecanski, and Ricardo Foerster; and writers like Eduardo Galeano, Tununa Mercado, Cristina Peri Rossi, Ricardo Feierstein, Mario Szichman, and Marcos Aguinis have been instrumental in engaging the study of remembrance and oblivion in each of their countries.

³ According to León and Rebecca Grinberg, trauma is taken to mean any violent shock to the mind and its repercussions to the personality of any given individual (*Migration and Exile* 10).

⁴ Erickson maintains that any trauma shared by a group “can serve as a source of commonality in the same way that common language

and common backgrounds can" (186). Compelling examples abound: survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, even survivors of natural disasters such as earthquakes and so on, and specifically in our context, survivors of the Argentine dictatorship and its repressive apparatus.

⁵ In Argentina one can find several groups that have been brought together by the traumatic experience of the dictatorship (such as Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S.), the Falklands/ Malvinas War (Veteranos de Malvinas), or the terrorist attacks on the Israeli Embassy and the Jewish Community Center of Buenos Aires (which are now being remembered by Memoria Activa, a group comprised of survivors and concerned citizens, both Jewish and non-Jewish).

⁶ See Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limits*, and Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies*.

⁷ She goes on to say: "There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech*" (63).

⁸ See: "(Im)pertinencia de la memoria histórica en América Latina" (35).

⁹ "The erasure of the past as past is the cornerstone of all commodification, even when the past becomes yet another commodity for sale in the present. The market operates according to a substitutive, metaphorical logic in which the past must be relegated to obsolescence. The past is to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving a remainder" (Avclar 2).

¹⁰ Sergio Rojas believes this frustration on the part of the intellectual lies in: "No poder contar *la historia*, no poder contar *con la historia*, no poder contar *con la memoria*, esto es precisamente nuestro malestar en la democracia..." (as quoted in Richard 27).

¹¹ In a poignant essay entitled "Memorias fracturadas", Marcelo Viñar, has recognized that "designar los puntos de urgencia [significa] afirmar que la realidad humana que se semiotiza correctamente, se transforma. La investigación es la terapéutica, no son dos instancias diferentes. Trabajar el tema de la cultura es construir la memoria del

futuro" (46). In "El Uruguay posmoderno y la pérdida de la memoria" Hiber Conteris, argues that individual and collective memories guarantee the historical continuity of a country and therefore ensure the recuperation of the nation's identity, its past, its present and its future (111).

¹² *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* is a testimonial narrative that depicts Jacobo Timerman's survival after incarceration and torture in a Buenos Aires clandestine detention center.

¹³ *Nunca Más: Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1998.

¹⁴ While incarcerated in clandestine detention centers, Jews were subjected to additional beatings and kinds of torture solely for being Jewish (For instance, swastikas were painted on some of the prisoner's backs, while others had to "confess" to their Zionist ideologies that sought to destroy the Argentinean way of life). Some torturers had nicknames such as "el gran *furher*" and "el coronel", or would tell their prisoners they were members of the Gestapo. Other survivors have reported hearing time and again the expression "a dead Jew is a good Jew", and so on. (*Nunca Más...* 71).

¹⁵ Timerman put it in the following manner: "When the extreme Right combats its natural enemies, its most hated object is the Jew. Its hatred is focused upon the Jew. This hatred inspires the extreme Right, exalts it, elevates it to romantic, metaphysical heights. Its natural enemy is the Left, but its target of hatred is the Jew" (64). Furthermore, as explained by Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato, the anti-Semite will contradict himself simultaneously: [...] el antisemita dirá sucesivamente —y aún simultáneamente— que el judío es banquero y bolchevique, avaro y dispendioso, limitado a su ghetto y metido en todas partes: Cualquier cosa que se diga o se haga, o piense caerá en la jurisdicción del antisemitismo; tanto le valdrá ser generoso como mezquino, sucio como limpio, elegante como desaliñado, tímido como audaz, religioso como ateo. (*La cuestión judía en la Argentina* 210).

¹⁶ "...political prisoners were not spared when it came to torture or murder: but the psychological relationship was simple-confrontation

with one's enemy or adversary, and the desire to destroy, to eliminate, that individual. *With Jews, however, there was a desire to eradicate.* Interrogating enemies was a job; but interrogating Jews was a pleasure” (Timerman 66) (The italics are mine).

¹⁷ The notorious ESMA was the Argentine Navy's most prestigious military school. During the dictatorship it served as one of the most brutal secret detention and torture centers.

¹⁸ According to Marguerite Feitlowitz, the dictatorship is alive today due to these aberrations used in everyday language. In her view, society cannot recuperate from the trauma of the dictatorship until the language is “cured” from its abuses (“Códigos del terror” 92).

¹⁹ In Argentina, during times of crisis the ruling *junta* would make every effort to recover the “nation's glorious past”. During the Malvinas / Falklands War, for instance, school children and adults alike were reminded of how the Argentines, united in a common struggle, had been able to repel and drive back the invading British forces which had twice attempted to takeover Buenos Aires in 1805 and 1806. Other acts, like the 1978 World Cup, which Argentina hosted, were manipulated by the *junta* to arouse the national fervor of the masses invoking once again the memory of a triumphant and undefeatable nation. Sadly, even throughout the process of redemocratization, the discourse of the generals endures. In 1992, during the tenth anniversary of the Malvinas / Falklands War, the democratically elected president, Carlos Saúl Menem, proclaimed during his speech: “Los mil muertos argentinos son antorchas en la ruta del heroísmo latinoamericano” (as quoted on Viñar 41).

²⁰ In Argentina there are currently several groups that seek to challenge the policies of oblivion that were started by the military dictatorship and continue unchallenged under democratic rule. The best known such group is the association of Madres de Plaza de Mayo in all its variants: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia Contra el Olvido y el Silencio); Familiares de Desaparecidos, and several other groups affiliated either to religious or human rights organizations.

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