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Representations of Transnational Violence: Children in Contemporary Latin American Film, Literature, and Drawings

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Cheri Marie Robinson

2017
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Representations of Transnational Violence: Children in Contemporary Latin American Film, Literature, and Drawings

by

Cheri Marie Robinson

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Adriana J. Bergero, Chair

In this study, I examine representational strategies revolving around extreme violence and child/adolescent protagonists in films, literature, children’s drawings, and legal/political discourses in contemporary Latin American culture from an interdisciplinary approach. I analyze the mobilizing potential and uses of representations of child protagonists affected by violence and the cultures of impunity that facilitate its circulation. Within the works selected, I explore ways in which children can become sites of memory and justice through acts of witnessing, empathy, and the universal claim of natural law, with a primary focus on transnational and multidirectional depictions of violence (i.e. a violence in circulation) in extra-juridical, politicized, or aberrant environments in Latin American works. The historical periods contextualizing this study include the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) and its interconnectedness to the violence of WWII and the Holocaust in Reina Roffé’s “La noche en blanco” (Chapter 1), the impact of
transnational trajectories of genocidal violence in Argentine South Patagonia in 1959-1960 as depicted by Lucía Puenzo’s novel *Wakolda* (Chapter 2), Argentina’s transition to democracy (1990s) and the critical questions it raised regarding appropriated children and amnesty/justice in Dir. Gastón Biraben’s *Cautiva* (Chapter 3), and the circulation of the traumatic in an orphanage in Mexican director Guillermo del Toro’s filmic interpretation of violence during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in *El espinazo del diablo* (Chapter 4, Part A). My research investigates inter-discursivities from a non-traditional approach to literature, film, and archival drawings, which include fictional (diegetic) drawings by Spanish children (in del Toro’s films) and non-fictional drawings made by Argentine children in exile in the Netherlands (Chapter 4, Part B).

I extensively focus on analyzing instances of children’s experiences with what I term “recycled violence.” This repetition of extreme violence is demonstrated in certain works in their trans-temporal and trans-spatial return to the pain and horrors of the Holocaust or to other unresolved periods of violence still resounding in the present moment. In the works analyzed, child protagonists are enormously affected by political decisions, wars, and the severe breakdown of law and order. Considering these extraordinary circumstances, it is important to justly address the traumas/wounds caused by the radical and systemic violence of those who should protect them – guardians who instead inflict violence. Injustices are approached in this study through an exploration of the concepts of spectatorship and witnessing, the imperative of the Good Samaritan or ethical responsibility, and possible connections of truth and testimony to justice. Finally, I postulate that child/adolescent protagonists may facilitate the establishment of a fortified empathy in an audience/readership numb from an incessant bombardment by violence, among other reasons for the use of children in works revisiting periods of extreme violence.
The dissertation of Cheri Marie Robinson is approved.

María C. Pons
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University of California, Los Angeles
2017
To my family, biological, extended, and otherwise. You taught me how to listen and love.

To my friends. You are diverse, funny, intelligent, out-there, and beautiful.

To my mentors, advisors, and professors. You have inspired, challenged, and guided me.

To all those who have felt the sting of a violence never quite past. You adapt and overcome daily. This is for you.

Some days the violence of the past reclaims you; other days it sleeps in a Maze of tunnels running through your conscious and subconscious worlds.

Through these tunnels, there blows a wind.

At times, it is a softly flowing breeze caressing your spirit,

A gentle reminder you are not ever alone, even when alone.

Other times, it is a gale-force wind, a hurricane crushing you,

Backing you against the wall, the hard boundary of that hidden maze.

Always, in this wind, you perceive a presence and a light,

A presence that watches and records, a brilliant red spot of light signifying “on.”

The presence is an eye, many eyes, a room full of people, a field full of Watching spectators, a country, a world-wide audience viewing your secrets,

Stepping inside your tunnels and blinding you with that little red pin-point of light.

It is a subtle violence that follows you; a hidden, seemingly benign presence stalks you,

And although there are witnesses, no one lives in your tunnels but you.

No one can understand that you didn’t really escape a corporal invasion, a bodily violence,

Because your soul, your mind, your tunnels have lost the illusion of safety, and

This loss is irrevocable.
The wind now disturbs your maze along with that prick of red, an electric beam
Searing into the palaces of your mind – not illuminating them but filling them with a helpless
Rage, a sense of loss, a stain that will ever and always remind you of that breach in
The tunnel walls.
The presence has been punished and the light extinguished, yet the ghostly remnants of them
Linger on the wind.
There is ever that past violence threatening to pursue you,
Ever an anxious thought, a panic, a slight increase in respiration giving you away.
The violence may have left, but its marks still sting your soul.
Sometimes violence comes in the guise of a non-violent observation, but it is no less
Violent for the one who is the object of its gaze.
And even little red lights leave a perforation a mile wide.
There is a steady breeze blowing through the tunnels today, a reminder that violence
Never really slumbers.
It merely transports itself and melts into the shadows of someone else’s tunnels.
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I. Introduction to Critical Theories on Violence, Trauma, Memory, and the Child/Childhood

Although violence, its traumatic aftermath, and memory have existed from time immemorial, in the case of Latin America innumerable and enduring cycles of institutionalized violence – the conquest, colonial oppression, the institution of slavery, wars and genocides of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the twenty-first century’s focalized wars – have continuously affected, and continue to dramatically impact, the lives of generations of people. In particular, the past two centuries have borne witness to some of the greatest destruction in recorded history due to many technological innovations and the use of medicine and science to exert and implement biopolitical measures.¹ During the nineteenth century, Latin American countries attempted to directly transfer and implement a modern, Western, hegemonic model of the Nation-State, which resulted in the further silencing of cultural otherness that did not fit within the economic/cultural paradigm of Modernity and the global implementation of industrial capitalism. This was the case with the “residual” cultures of indigenous peoples, the working classes, and a myriad of other subjects closely monitored by state agencies and often marked by marginalization and misrepresentation, such as prostitutes/working women, street children, orphans, and homosexuals. Latin American cultural production singled out these marginal subjects as communities that fell outside of the desired imaginary of the family as proposed in

¹ Some examples include the atomic bomb and other agents of mass destruction (utilized either during World War I or World War II/the Holocaust) along with a myriad of dictatorships and cleansing wars unleashed upon the world in the name of ethnic and racial purity, imperialistic economic expansions, and political domination. According to Carlos De Nápoli, the first genocide of the twentieth century occurred in Namibia along with the first use of concentration camps. In his study Nazis en el Sur: La expansión alemana sobre el Cono Sur y la Antártida, De Nápoli describes the German presence in Namibia until the end of WWI as brutal: “...la retirada de los alemanes significó un alivio si se considera la ferocidad, los crímenes, violaciones y diversos actos de barbarie que en ellos habían cometido. Alcanza con mencionar que alrededor de la mitad de la población de Namibia fue eliminada, un acto que constituyó el primer genocidio del siglo XX. Fue justamente allí donde los alemanes montaron por primera vez los Konzentrationslagern, los campos de concentración” (160).
Esteban Echeverría’s *La cautiva* in 1837. They also appeared outside of the construct of Modernity’s ideal citizen of the Enlightened City – envisioned by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in *Facundo: civilización y barbarie* (1845) as a city fashioned through free, mandatory education and selective immigration. Ironically, although modernization meant social and political citizenship and democratic habilitation, it also created and carried out new cycles of violence, often with a total disregard for civil and human rights, as occurred with multiple, now notorious, genocides and dictatorships that have deeply affected generations of Latin American (and Spanish) communities.

In this study, I investigate contemporary films and literature that deal with the representation of children/childhood in environments operating in states of normalized violence.\(^2\) The historical periods contextualizing this study include the “recycled violence” of the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) in Chapter 1, the impact of the transnational diffusion of genocidal violence in Argentine South Patagonia (1959-1960) in Chapter 2, the emerging repercussions during Argentina’s transition to democracy (1990s) of the military dictatorship’s practices of appropriation and forced disappearance in Chapter 3, and the circulation of the traumatic in an orphanage during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in Chapter 4, Part A. In Chapter 4, Part B, I discuss archival children’s drawings, then conclude by examining intersections between fiction and the archive.\(^3\)

I utilize the term “transnational” to refer to this study because although the films *Cautiva* and *El espinazo del diablo* appear grounded in local areas and traditions, they represent the

\(^2\) These twenty-first-century literary and filmic works’ publishing or release dates range from 2001-2011 and have been chosen based on their unique representations of extreme violence, trauma, and children/childhood related to dictatorial, post-dictatorial, or war/post-war periods.

\(^3\) That is commonalities and/or differences in the hypothetical functions/purposes of fictional (diegetic) drawings made by Spanish children (in del Toro’s films) and drawings made by Argentine children in exile in the Netherlands.
circulation of transnational methodologies of violence (when transnationalism is viewed in a “nation-state framework”) and other movements among social cultures, classes, ideologies, etc. that could be classified as transnational (when viewed according to William I. Robinson’s reworked conceptualization of transnational studies). In his article “Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies,” Robinson posits,

Utilizing the nation-state framework for social analysis can be highly misleading and illusory, leading us to believe we are observing phenomena that is nation-state in character when in fact it is transnational. An essential task of a new transnational studies is to decipher the transnational essence in social phenomena that appear as national.

(573-574)

In line with Robinson’s proposition, I would like to consider the works in this study as transnational in character and as exhibiting a transnational violence.

1. Recycled Violence: Germany, Spain, and the Argentine Military Dictatorship

The 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship practiced several repressive methodologies, such as forced disappearances, that are now commonly recognized as originating in practices utilized by the Nazis in the 1930s-1940s, e.g. *Nacht und Nebel* or *Noche y niebla* [Night and Fog]. According to Marguerite Feitlowitz, in her informative work *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture, Revised and Updated with a new Epilogue*, the Argentine Intelligence Service/Secret Service was even revamped by former Nazis. This repetition of similar violent methods is also manifest in the Francoist regime in Spain (one of the Nazi’s allies), Vichy France, and other Latin American countries. I use the term “recycled

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4 William I. Robinson argues, “Social structure is becoming transnationalized; an epistemological shift is required in concurrence with this ontological change. Transnational studies requires that social science methods and the epistemological assumptions that underpin them revert back to those of classical political economy and sociology, which set out to theorize a set of relationships that were not self-evident in contemporary practices in order to highlight both structures and historic movement latent in existing conditions” (573).
violence” to describe the trans-spatial and trans-temporal transference of similar manifestations (e.g. methodologies/practices) of extreme violence from one geographical place, one historical moment to another – evinced in the transnational circulation of doctrines and policing methods employed by Fascism and National-Socialism, the proliferation of racial/genetic profiling, and the use of internment/concentration/work camps or detention centers in a plethora of countries during the twentieth century. Carlos De Nápoli provides the following telling information:

It becomes evident that the German war machine had experience fighting in Latin America even before the tragedies of the Spanish Civil War in which it took part. De Nápoli also confirms this prior experience:

As demonstrated, recycled violence circulates through the German war machine in Latin American wars, the Spanish Civil War, and WWII before it reemerges in the Argentine military dictatorship.

Feitlowitz includes in her definition of desaparecido/a a quotation taken from “(Marshall Keitel, explaining Hitler’s decree to his subordinates.)”:

The concept of individuals made to vanish originated with the Nazis, as part of the doctrine of Night and Fog. ‘The prisoners will disappear without a trace. It will be impossible to glean any information as to where they are or what will be their fate.’ (59)
Beneath a shroud of misinformation, lack of information, or a formal discourse of the benefits of a process that would revitalize Argentine society, the disappearance of “subversives” began as “a” method and eventually became “the” method of choice. This practice made the offending member of society simply disappear into the “night and fog” – no trace, no verifiable crime. Yet, the practice became so ubiquitous that the ever-growing multitude of “absent” bodies, identities, family members, citizens, former co-workers, and unaccounted for infants/children developed a tangible form. Those made to disappear, los/las desaparecidos/as, gradually shaped Argentine society through their absence; like a pozo en el pasto – to reuse a metaphor employed by Argentine writer Ricardo Piglia, among other authors – their presence was felt through the enormous hole (trauma is also a perforation, a hole, an absence) left by so many unaccounted for and “absent” members. This absence was also contrasted by a very present dialogue of the State that preached a very familiar, albeit anachronistic, discourse of salvation and civilization – reminiscent of nineteenth-century Argentina and Sarmiento’s barbarity versus civilization dichotomy in that the offending “Other” had to be expelled from the nation for it to progress.\(^5\)

In addition to disappearance, torture was also widely practiced in many secret detention centers and camps throughout Argentina. A violence begat in Germany decades earlier is again recycled in the Argentine practice of torture – evinced in Feitlowitz’s research: “Torture was often performed beneath portraits of Hitler whose recorded speeches were blasted through the halls. More than one concentration camp doctor was known as ‘Mengele’” (57). Not only did this practice rob the tortured of “voice” (absence of voice) while allotting to the torturer an

\(^5\) The expulsion of difference was also a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century Spain (Liberals vs. Conservatives).
abundance of “world” (presence of voice), but it allowed for the expulsion of the “Other” and a forced reformation of society that did not end with the transition of power from the military back to the people in 1983-1984. The overly present call for a transition out of the past as well as a focus on the present as it pertained to the future soon overtook Argentina’s brief initial foray into the collection of testimonials (Nunca más [Never again]), trials (Trial of la Junta), and tentative pursuit of justice. Instead of resuscitating the ghosts of past crimes, they were instead reburied in laws like Punto final [Final Stop], Obediencia debida [Due Obedience] (1986-87), and amnesties and pardons (1989) granted to the leaders of the coup (i.e. Videla, Massera, et al), which allowed for the very real presence of impunity to once again “absent” the excesses of the past.

Literature and Trauma Studies have significantly contributed to attempts at understanding violent events post-factum, seen in the work of theorists like Cathy Caruth who claim the actual moment of trauma is missed and it is only upon its delayed arrival (post-traumatic event) that one realizes what happened. In line with this popular theory, the belated nature of trauma is evident in the period of latency observed in Argentina post-dictatorship and then through the 1990s as impunity made its presence known. As the full import of the traumatic events of the military dictatorship slowly began to arrive – through literature, film, collective memory, and other movements like Las Madres, Las Abuelas, and H.I.J.O.S. – many called for truth and justice. The site of the wound was revisited in works such as Luisa Valenzuela’s “Cambio de armas” (1982) written in exile, Ricardo Piglia’s La ciudad ausente (1992), and Chilean examples like Roberto Bolaño’s Estrella distante (1996), purportedly based on or inspired by the story of El Ángel rubio de la muerte or The Blond Angel of Death – a reference to Alfredo Astiz in Argentina.

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6 See Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World for more on the power dynamics of torture and war.
(whose nickname was also taken from the Holocaust; Dr. Mengele was the original Angel of Death). In these works, there are figurative and literal references to presence and absence. In the short story “Cambio de armas,” for example, memory is both a very real absence and a tangible presence. The microcosm of the apartment where a female prisoner is deceived and held captive refers to the macro-sphere of the dictatorship, and just as the protagonist Laura is returned her memory as the man (her captor) walks out at the end of the story, so too was Argentine society given tangible clues to the atrocities of *el Proceso* (i.e. the Process of National Reorganization) in documents like *Nunca más* – although not sufficient in and of itself, it was the beginning of the rearming of memory.

The works I have chosen – with the exception of del Toro’s film *El espinazo del diablo* – operate in a time either soon before, during, or posterior to Argentine dictatorships. All of the child protagonists are exposed to people or cultures who/that allow for a spirit of impunity to flourish as they are left vulnerable to the whims of violence. These children are enormously affected by political decisions, wars, the breakdown of law, and arbitrary violence. As such, I believe it is pertinent to justly address the traumas/wounds caused by the violence of those who should protect them – guardians who instead inflict violence.

2. A Short Story, a Novel, Two Films, and Children’s Drawings: Descriptive Outline of Chapters

**PART 1, CHAPTERS 1 & 2: Violence, Family, and the Private Sphere**

**CHAPTER 1**: The Violence within and the Violence without: Reina Roffé’s “La noche en blanco”

I find it fitting to begin my dissertation with two literary works, especially considering Cathy Caruth’s claim regarding literature and traumatic experience:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing.
And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. (3)

In Chapter 1, I will analyze this fine line between knowing and not knowing, which I consider particularly evident in the story because the child protagonist appears on the verge of a traumatic break-through that awaits some future moment. In Reina Roffé’s short story “La noche en blanco” (2003), a complex, transnational circulation of violence first touches a woman, now older and greyer, in Vichy France during WWII, then a young girl decades later in a Southern Cone city like Paris. This violence re-emerges through the memories and internal musings of an old woman during a long sleepless night, which she and the young girl, Alicia, spend together in the old woman’s apartment due to violent events unfolding outside the apartment door. The old woman’s memories, as she waits within the apartment, reflect current exterior and past violent events, ones that manifest a “recycled violence.”

The chapter will include various sub-themes: From a brief history of the concept of childhood in the Western world to recycled violence as it relates to transgenerational traumatic experience, the invasion of the private sphere by public/national policies (reorganizational doctrines) and methodologies of violence across time (e.g. forced disappearances), the imperative of the Good Samaritan/ethical responsibility to intervene when possible, questions on the representability of the Holocaust and other traumatic events, and the idea of a failed witnessing.

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7 Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.*

8 “La noche en blanco” or “Sleepless Night” is part of a collection of short stories by Reina Roffé in *Aves exóticas: Cinco cuentos con mujeres raras.*
Marguerite Feitlowitz, Cathy Caruth, Pilar Calveiro, Michael Rothberg, Joshua Hirsch, and Carlos De Nápoli, among other theorists in Trauma Studies, Memory Studies, and Holocaust/Witness Studies, will be used as the theoretical bases of the chapter. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 share the theme of a circulating recycled violence, evident in the connection between the transnational dimension of the violence of the Holocaust, WWII in Europe, and Argentina.

**CHAPTER 2**: Cultures of Impunity and the Child’s Body as a Battlefield in Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda*

Chapter 2 will highlight another instance in which a foreign violence is exported to other shores where new children are preyed upon and wounded. The roots of this recycled violence, connected to a sinister Nazi war criminal and former concentration camp doctor, reach decades into the past. After the violence of war traveled from Latin America to Europe (1920s-1930s), it returned in the form of Nazi soldiers, medical personnel/civilians, and perpetrators of crimes against humanity as they escaped to countries like Argentina after the dust settled post-World War II.

In Lucía Puenzo’s fictional novel *Wakolda*, the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele brings the violence he perfected in German concentration camps to the South of Argentina where he practices deceptively curative corporal manipulations on a young girl. In Chapter 2, I will touch upon the trans-temporal and transnational circulation of extreme and systemic violence and

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9 As previously mentioned, the Germans first honed their war skills in Latin America in the 1920s (e.g. la Guerra del Chaco) and Spain in the 1930s (e.g. the bombing of Guernica/Gernika) before utilizing the skills and technologies developed in their own race-based and conquest driven war against soldier and civilian alike – on both the battle field and in concentration camps.

10 According to Carlos De Nápoli in *Nazis en el Sur: La expansión alemana sobre el Cono Sur y la Antártida*, “La fuga de criminales alemanes a través de barcos de la empresa Dodero con documentos otorgados por la ‘Comisión Peralta’ bajo órdenes de Perón, ha sido ampliamente estudiada. No así el caso de criminales que cruzaban el Atlántico en naves clandestinas hacia la Argentina” (137). For further information on the latter, see *Ultramar Sur* by Carlos De Nápoli and Juan Salinas.
government-sponsored cultures of impunity, from what I term the “ultimate impunity” of concentration camps to the “permissive impunity” of Argentina operating post-WWII on both the micro-levels (in the novel’s diegesis) and the macro-levels (evident historically). I will investigate historical trajectories of extreme violence in which the child’s body can represent a literal and metaphorical battleground upon which the biopolitical policies of the Nation and/or State can be exercised, i.e. historical and diegetic instances in which the child’s body, when it does not fit within certain artificial categories based on desirable genetics, is open to medical experimentation and exploitation. This is manifest in two different time periods in the novel as two female characters – the young Jewish girl, Nora, who survived Auschwitz and the young Argentine girl, Lilith, who is extremely small for her age, – both exposed to hormonal manipulations and other terrors at the hands of the doctor, meet in Bariloche in 1959-1960. I am also interested in examining the various characters’ obsessions and conclude with the idea of failed extermination projects.

I utilize Historian Benjamin Madley’s research on German colonial camps, Nazi camps, and other ideological and literary connections in my section on ultimate impunity, Uki Goñi’s historical investigation on the Nazi war criminals who relocated to Argentina for a permissive impunity, Giorgio Agamben’s work on camps and states of exception, various other texts in Holocaust Studies to discuss theories of “othering,” and Daniel Feierstein’s work on genocide as social practice, among other texts.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3: The Personal as Political and an Empathetic/Violent Witnessing in Gastón Biraben’s *Cautiva*

Chapter 3 will frame Gastón Biraben’s *Cautiva*, which I classify as a post-dictatorship memory/postmemory film, around the concepts of memory, identity, and justice by utilizing Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” Jacques Rancière’s study on the “emancipated
spectator,” and the film’s relation to Human Rights and the legal and political claims of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Regarding postmemory, Hirsch describes it as “. . . the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (103). Unbeknownst to her, the adolescent protagonist, Cristina/Sofía, is appropriated as an infant and raised by surrogate parents/appropriators linked to the military repression. Cautiva’s storyline resonates with Argentine post-dictatorship issues pertaining to truth and justice that remain pertinent today. These matters include the recuperation of appropriated children (spearheaded by Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S.) through the reinstatement of identity via reconstructed memories.¹¹

I will begin the chapter with Giorgio Agamben’s theoretical work on bare life and states of exception as they pertain to appropriation and forced disappearances. Second, I will provide a brief historical overview of organizations like the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, who combine the personal (or private sphere) with the political in their fight for justice. I believe that the film’s reconstruction of the memory of the quotidian and its connection to trauma are clearly linked to bare life, normalized violence, the restoration of identity, and testimony/witnessing. To better contextualize my argument regarding the rearming of memory and the spectator as witness, I will analyze several key scenes or sequences in depth that feature the child/adolescent protagonist as victim/witness as she discovers her biological identity. I will also provide background information on human rights legislation pertinent to the deprivation/restoration of

¹¹ In Identidades Desaparecidas, Gabriel Gatti speaks of this reconstruction: “Así es, las narrativas del sentido gestionan la catástrofe intentando reponer lo que ésta deshace, apuestan por re-unir cuerpos y nombres; por re-hacer la alianza de un sujeto con las cadenas de filiación que lo hacen tal; por re-componer individuos devolviendo sentido a la conexión de esas personas con sus inscripciones como miembros de un Estado [. . .]” (85-86).
identity and theorize regarding potential categories of witnessing, specifically what I term a “violent witnessing.” In conclusion, I will discuss the possibilities of representations of a suffering adolescent like Cristina/Sofía, one of which may be a strategic reactivating of what I consider a “fortified empathy.”

CHAPTER 4, PART A & B, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

CHAPTER 4, PART A: Children: Bodies of Unexpected Resilience, Resistance, and Unforeseen Justice

In Chapter 4, Part A, I will analyze representations of the traumatic in Mexican director Guillermo del Toro’s film El espinazo del diablo (2001). In the film, children are preyed upon in their only shelter, an orphanage run by teachers who support the Republican side, but they are also portrayed as active agents, despite extreme circumstances, once they choose to respond to the apparition of the traumatic. I find del Toro’s explicit depiction of unresolved trauma as a haunting and a literal wounding to be powerful images that speak to the physicality of trauma and to the normalization of violence during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). On the diegetic level, the micro-sphere of the orphanage reflects the battle without its walls – between the Nationalists, represented by the men who murder and steal from the orphanage, and the Republicans, characterized by the teachers and Carlos’ guardian, – a manichean yet, in my opinion, effective interpretation of a space meant to shelter (the orphanage) that is quickly converted into one of exceptional and extreme violence.

I aim to demonstrate, through detailed analyses of selected sequences, how del Toro’s character Santi and other orphan children (sites of open wounds/traumas) are converted into sites of memory and justice as the film progresses. First, the protagonist Carlos, then the other orphans gradually transition from a position of reactive repulsion to one of proactive solidarity with the phantom boy Santi, and as they do so, they facilitate justice. In the film, the grotesque is re-
appropriated to become one element among many leading to the diegetic recuperation of memory and the pursuit of justice (one based on natural law).  

Berber Bevernage’s *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* – as it pertains to the continuation of past crimes into the present – and Jacques Rancière’s theories on the “intolerable image” versus the “intolerability of the image” will aid my analysis of the traumatic past as it literally bleeds into the present through the wounded phantom child haunting the orphanage. Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma in addition to Gabriel Gatti’s theories on the restitution of sense and the figure of the (transnational) *desaparecido/a* will also inform my study of the traumatic, poignantly represented here by the incessant return of the phantom to the place of his murder.

**CHAPTER 4, PART B: Drawings: Literary/Filmic Representations and the Historical Archive**

In Part B, I will discuss children’s drawings, created in exile, of violent events during the Argentine military dictatorship. These drawings are stored at the *Archivo Nacional de la Memoria* in Buenos Aires. The images of families torn apart, pregnant women incarcerated, and armed guards serve as touching testaments to the effects of public policies and state-sponsored violence on private lives. I believe they demonstrate the necessity of human rights work to counteract violence, particularly methodologies of violence that aim to annihilate undesirable “Others.” In Part B, as with my analysis of del Toro’s film and the situation of the traumatic within a narrative of sense, I have chosen to contextualize the drawings (through an interview with one of the artists and historical data).

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12 In referring to memory, I do not mean historical or personal memories conveyed through testimonials, of which there are many on the Spanish Civil War, but rather the memory of violence itself (the circulation of the traumatic during the War). The film is a fictional interpretation of a hypothetical set of events, yet I propose it is still powerful as a representation of traumatic violence.
In conclusion, I will connect Parts A and B by contrasting representational strategies of the traumatic in fictional works like *El espinazo*, which utilizes a child’s drawings to shed light on hidden violence, and factual ones like the Argentine/Dutch archival drawings. Most importantly, the archival images highlight memories of violence from a child’s viewpoint – in contrast to the adult productions chosen for this project, which would include the diegetic drawings in del Toro’s film. I believe the drawings reflect the implications of the disregard for and the violation of children’s well-being and safety.

In addition to historical information, I will employ Kelly Oliver’s theoretical work on subjectivity, witnessing, and ethical responsibility and Daniel Feierstein’s studies on genocide. I use the term “discussion” because I would like to discuss the drawings and their possible functions in a historical and theoretical context without analyzing them as an art critic would analyze a painting. I have included the drawings within the text of Chapter 4 for the reader to consider/view them while reading. I believe the drawings are powerful, even without an explanation. As such, I let them speak for themselves in terms of their content – although I will contextualize them, as mentioned above, to allow for the reader to view them as parts of a larger whole. I will conclude my dissertation by summarizing key aspects of my argument in each chapter followed by a visual outline of the theoretical threads uniting the chapters.

3. Who is a Child/Adolescent? What are Childhood and Family?

Various definitions of the concepts of child(ren), adolescents, childhood, and family – taken from studies conducted by Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, Rosario Panez, and David Archard – serve as the general framework for my dissertation. Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, in their *Introduction to Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children and Adolescents in Film*, create a set of general assumptions in order to
analyze films with child(ren) and adolescent protagonists because, as they explain, “the definitions intersect and integrate legal, social, and biological perspectives, thus their exact meaning is slippery” (3). I utilize their definition of the word childhood, which they define as the “. . . period of life from birth to 18 years of age; but while adolescents are often referred to as children, the reverse is not as common” (3). The words teenager, teen, and adolescent are used by Rocha and Seminet to indicate children older than 13 while the words child(ren) and childhood are used either to mean the “preadolescent phase” or “the age range from infant to the end of adolescence” (3). Rocha and Seminet also refer to the United Nations Children’s Fund’s definition in order to further clarify the term: “. . . the term childhood is very broadly defined to cover the span of life from infancy through puberty up to the threshold of adulthood, which they [UNICEF] stipulate as anyone 18 years of age or older” (3). My dissertation will employ a similar terminology.

As a model for analyzing children’s creative output and for its basic historical background on childhood, I use Psychologist Rosario Panez’s work *El lenguaje silencioso de los niños: un estudio peruano sobre los Derechos del Niño desde su producción creativa*. Her study briefly traces historical perspectives on children in the Western world from Antiquity to the contemporary period, which has derived many of its views on children from legislative and human rights’ work implemented post-WWII and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She employs a methodology that allows children to speak through their own creativity. Her approach is informative in that it not only sheds light on our own viewings of archival images, but it also gives children agency. Most literary and filmic productions, including the works analyzed in this study, have been produced by adults. Although they deal with the theme of children/childhood, they are to a certain extent the “memories” of childhood reflected through
the experiences of adulthood. As such, it is important to acknowledge the difference between representations of children/childhood by adults and representations produced by children.

Panez’s study addresses the ongoing work on Children’s Rights and reminds the reader that many of our perceptions on the protected status of children/childhood and their place within the family sphere are recent phenomena dating from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth century. I believe it is necessary to acknowledge this shift in the perception of children because representational strategies and other reasons for the use of child protagonists may be informed by reformations of the imaginary of the family over time and influenced by the work of international bodies like the United Nations, organizations such as the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, and other groups in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Finally, David Archard’s work on children, including *Children: Rights and Childhood*, has greatly informed my dissertation’s various perspectives on childhood and family. His work explores various authors with views on education or childhood – e.g. John Locke’s writings on education (1632-1704) and Philippe Ariès’ seminal text *L’Enfant et la vie familiale sous l’ancien régime* (1960), – works on Children’s Rights, the role of parents and the state, defining and understanding abuse, and other important topics pertaining to children, Rights, and childhood.

### 3.1 Children, Childhood, and Rights

In his critique of Ariès, Archard differentiates childhood from children. This differentiation is useful for understanding some Western categorizations of these terms, possibly influential in the representations to be analyzed.

Even so, something more is indicated by speaking of ‘childhood’ rather than simply ‘children’. The former is an abstract noun which denotes the state of being or the stage at which one is a child. Its use dictates a certain formal and sophisticated grasp of what and when it is to be a child, one that abstracts from the particularities of individual children. (Archard 21)
Archard further supports his argument by creating another distinction between the idea of a society’s “awareness” versus its “concept” of “children” or “childhood.”

A society could have an ‘awareness’ of the ‘particular nature’ of children without possessing a ‘concept’ of childhood. Ariès’s thesis derives some plausibility at least from the fact that there did develop, from about the sixteenth century onwards, a more elaborate, explicitly stated and abstract appreciation of what is involved in being a child. (21)

In other words, although a given society did not or does not define or view children as Western contemporary society does, this variance did not or does not indicate a lack of “awareness” of the difference between children and adults.

Archard’s discussion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is useful for its analysis of the various types of Rights, e.g. participation Rights (children as subjects or agents) vs. protection Rights (children as patients or objects) or liberty vs. welfare Rights, expressed in the Articles (especially Article 3.1 and 12.1) and their reflection upon contemporary views of children and childhood (60, 64-68, & 92). He argues that “adolescence” is a pivotal stage for “the modern conception on childhood” (34). In fact, for Archard, the terms “infancy” and “adolescence” allow for two distinct manners of comprehending childhood:

On a broad understanding, childhood is a comprehensive term for the stage extending from birth to adulthood. Infancy, adolescence and whatever other terms may be available to a culture constitute sub-divisions of that period. On a narrow rendering of the term, childhood is the stage after infancy but before adolescence. The ‘child’ proper is sandwiched between the helpless infant and the young person on the threshold of their majority. (34)

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13 Ariès originally uses the term sentiment in French, which is translated as “concept.” Archard informs the reader that this term connotes “awareness” and “feeling,” and he seems to view it as a weaker term than its translation into English as “concept” would imply (21). He claims, “A society which has a sentiment of childhood is both conscious of children as a distinct group and possessed of a certain attitude towards them as a group” (21).
The attainment of speech has often been a key point of transition between stages and is traced by Archard to its use in categorizations/stages of childhood in Roman law (under Justinian) (34). I find the idea of speech, in addition to our contemporary use of age, intriguing as a transitional marker because speech may be related to current ideas on “competence” or “capability” that are presently linked to age as it is used to gauge maturity (concepts also discussed by Archard). If speech is tied to certain levels of competence, what does this indicate for the phantom child Santi, whose speech is limited or halting, in *El espinazo del diablo*? What do the above-mentioned categorizations based on age reveal about children and their possession of various degrees of Rights (or complete lack thereof, e.g. when Cristina/Sofía is appropriated as an infant in *Cautiva*) accorded to adults that give them further agency under positive law?

Proceeding with the assumption that age and speech in contemporary society are tied to the granting or denial of certain Rights, considered basic Human Rights for most adults, I question the use of these categorizations in situations of extreme violence or states of exception. For example, what happens when positive law is disrupted and these categorizations break down in situations of violence, war, dictatorship, and their aftermath? Does age lose its relevance, along with articulate speech, when violence comes to claim the guardians and adults who determine the Rights administered for children? In such extreme circumstances, is it still possible to adhere to artificially constructed boundaries, dimensions, and divisions, and should this even

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14 For more on children and speech, see Erin Hogan’s dissertation “La patria es la infancia: The Vocalization and Ventriloquism of Spanish Civil War and Postwar Children in the Cine con niño and Nuevo cine con niño (1973-2010),” which discusses the term infant or *infantia*.
be relevant when human beings categorized as children or adolescents must become competent in activities like warfare, normally reserved for adults, in order to survive?\(^\text{15}\)

3.2 Family

Another important concept to explore, precisely because the answer seems so evident, is the idea of what a family is. According to Archard,

It is important, first, to stress that there is no such things as \textit{the} family, as a single, historically unchanging kind of social unit. There always has been a diversity of familial forms. It is clear, however, that most who presently speak of the family have in mind a particular, and so it is often argued, particularly modern variant. This has at least the following distinguishing features: a membership normally restricted to parent(s) and child(ren), and a clear distinction between its sphere of activity and the rest of society, especially as concerns work. (159)

It would seem contemporary society retains much of the core ideals of the bourgeois family that gained dominance around the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. In the overall scheme of the imaginary of the family in the Western world, the model family – based loosely on the expectations of the bourgeois family – consisted of a father, a mother, and children. Depending on class (working, bourgeois, etc.), the expectations of these roles could be interpreted in various manners, but generally the rules of alliance and gender roles remained constant. According to Michel Foucault in \textit{The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction}, the bourgeois or aristocratic family (the upper classes) were where the “conventional” family as a model was first experimented with and then applied to the other classes. This imaginary and ideas related to a “conventional” or “ideal” family are challenged in the works addressed in my dissertation because they are either broken down/cease to function, in which case other groupings form for the protection of the children, or in situations where the family unit remains

\(^{15}\) “To summarise [sic], any conception of childhood will vary according to the ways in which its boundaries are set, its dimensions ordered and its divisions managed. This will determine how a culture thinks about the extent, nature and significance of childhood” (Archard 35).
intact, e.g. Lilith’s family in *Wakolda*, they do not guarantee an absence of violence or the formation of “abnormally” violent situations that over time become the norm.

**3.3 The Home and State: Private or Public**

Although the twentieth century saw the rise of women’s and children’s liberation movements, notably in the 1960s-1970s, that regarded the family as an oppressive institution, the general notion of a family unit consisting of a mother-figure, a father-figure, and children – currently either the children of both parties or children from previous marriages or adoptions – is still a popular conception. The traditional nuclear family, although displaying a more diverse mix of roles and genders in the twenty-first century, appears to have guarded the notion of itself as a private sphere, separate from and in contrast to the public sphere of the State. Archard reveals that familial privacy, seen as an integral part of the twentieth century (and I would include the twenty-first century) Western family, is “historically and culturally very specific” (171).

The phenomenon of the private nuclear family, a self-contained household of kin only, living within its own well-defined space is a peculiarly twentieth-century and Western one, a compound of various changes – social, economic, demographic, cultural and even architectural. Families in previous times, and in other societies, have enjoyed a quite significantly smaller degree of privacy. (171)

In his discussion of State and family, which recognizes the division into public and private spheres, Archard emphasizes that the question of what role the State should take to protect children is complex. Not only does it depend on how the State itself is seen, but it depends on what he calls “the ‘liberal standard’ [as it] prescribes the proper relations between state, family and children, and in some form is presently the most influential account of how the law should govern families within liberal democratic societies” (153). The “liberal standard” provides

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*16 “Feminist critiques of patriarchy assumed enormous importance and, in this context, the family was identified as an oppressive institution. But the family could be seen as oppressing not only women but children” (Archard 70).*
parents with the rights to autonomy and privacy and clearly delineates when the State can breach these rights. “Autonomy here means the freedom to bring up children as they [the parents] see fit; privacy means the absence of unconsented intrusion upon the family’s domain” (154). The “liberal standard” should function in this way in a normal state of affairs, one regulated by positive law, and mediate relations between families and the State. As the works in this study clearly demonstrate, however, this is not always the case.

The works I have chosen provide examples of situations in which the structure of positive law has broken down and the autonomy and privacy of the family are destroyed, e.g. *El espinazo*, or instances where positive law remains but the private domain of the family allows for the perpetration of questionable acts, e.g. medical experimentation in *Wakolda*. In the former case, the State is either the perpetrator of violence, has been dismantled through war, or has intervened in the family sphere through an extension of its Right to be *parens patriae*.17 In the latter instance, the State retains its role defined under the “liberal standard,” but the family’s domain is breached by an “expert” who intervenes under a type of “therapeutic medical model” (a modern method of “policing families”).18 Whatever the case, children – as some of the most vulnerable members of society due to the connection of Rights to age, speech, and the like – are abandoned and exposed to the violence of experts, the State, and their guardians.

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17 “A longstanding influential doctrine holds the state, in succession to the monarch, to be *parens patriae*, ‘parent of the nation’, and thus responsible for the upbringing of its youth” (Archard 154).

18 According to Archard, “Two writers in particular – Christopher Lasch and Jacques Donzelot – have drawn attention in their different ways to what they view as the emergence of a peculiarly modern Western form of ‘policing families’. This consists less in explicit state intervention into the life of the family than the subtle and pervasive intrusion of experts, involving, to use Donzelot’s own phrase, government *through* families as opposed to the government of families. A therapeutic medical model stipulates a norm of familial ‘health’ which, by means of professionals, insinuates into the ‘private’ life of families. These professionals fill the quasi-official occupations of doctor, psychiatrist, lawyer and social worker” (155).
4. Why Child or Adolescent Protagonists?

One inquiry of my dissertation revolves around possible reasons for what could be a strategic use of child protagonists to revisit periods of violence. At present, there is a large category of films and texts that utilize child protagonists to represent traumatic memories related to dictatorships and other violent events. Erin Hogan, in her dissertation “La patria es la infancia: The Vocalization and Ventriloquism of Spanish Civil War and Postwar Children in the Cine con niño and Nuevo cine con niño (1973-2010),” addresses the prevalence of child protagonists in (Civil War, Post-Civil War, Post-Francoist) Spain and describes it as “staggering.” She remarks, “In fact, I identify fifteen child-starred films in seventeen years (1993-2010) with similar characteristics. This collection of features depicts children who grow up during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) or the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-75)” (Hogan 1). She labels these films nuevo cine con niño, i.e. “child-starred, retrospective films” with the above-mentioned characteristics (1). The same phenomenon appears to be occurring in Latin American cinema.

Rocha and Seminet provide several reasons for this continued use of child or adolescent protagonists. Of the reasons pertinent to this study, the following most interest me. First, in an inversion of roles, children and adolescents provide a unique lens through which the film or text can critique or observe the actions of adult figures or society (4-6). Second, young children, “... hypothetically untainted by ideology, are cast to revisit history” (4-6). Third, in opposition to the common representation of young children in films, “... teen focalizers are used to analyze and question society, therefore calling attention to anxieties about the future” (4-6). Finally, “the myth of childhood” or children’s culture is employed as a backdrop for adult fantasies about the future and the competition among ideological preferences in many societies with repressive
military regimes (4-6). I observe many of these reasons in the films and texts selected for my dissertation.

I expect to discover that children and adolescents provide the viewer/reader with a distinct perspective, one that may clarify the often-blurred lines surrounding memories of trauma and violence in times of war and oppression. The contemporary imaginary of childhood can be metaphorically enabling in that it provides a division between the world of children (often painted as fantastical and free of ideologies) and the world of adults (often viewed as imbued with strife, politics, and complications). This division of worlds or constructs of childhood, which I will discuss in Chapter 1 through the metaphor of the kingdom of adulthood and the kingdom of childhood, might serve to filter violent events – making them either incredibly more violent or leaving them in the background where they are lost in the world of adults. The works I have chosen explicitly present the effects of adult choices and state politics on children, demonstrating that perhaps the world of children is not so distinct from that of adults. Children are instead stripped of Rights and left to bear the consequences of the violence around them. They are wounded and left to defend themselves. In light of this observation, I expect to discover that child protagonists create a sort of “shock value” in that extremely violent events occurring to children in contemporary society have the means to capture the viewer’s/reader’s attention, to force the envelope so to speak in order to move an increasingly numb audience/readership beyond its overfamiliarity with images of cinematic violence and sensationalism in the media. Certainly, there are many other possibilities for the use of child/adolescent protagonists and the culture of childhood, but principally, they appear to bring attention to acts of violence, their traumatic aftermath, and the need to transition from mere catharsis and/or violence for the sake of violence to literary/filmic/visual productions that reproduce images of violence coupled with
childhood for a purpose. One of the fundamental objectives of this study will be to explore what exactly this purpose might be.

5. Key Lines of Inquiry

In addition to childhood, children, and family, the concepts of extreme/systemic violence, trauma, and memory are integral components to this study. I treat them as interconnected, multidirectional concepts because of the historically proven transmission of violence perpetuated in different temporal and/or spatial planes from one person, one child, one nation-state, one entity to another. I deal with trauma and memory as intrinsically linked to/with violence. Violence seems to continue regardless of the killing of one’s enemies, of the end of wars, of the signing of peace treaties, or even of the passing of time itself. The recycled nature of violence leads me to question if trauma and (traumatic) memory might not inadvertently, in certain situations, become other manifestations of violence, i.e. morphologically distinct forms of a deceptively non-violent form of violence, as (traumatic) memories are reproduced, replicated, transported, and translated to other times and places through the mediums of film, literature, testimony, and visual arts. What then does it mean to reproduce or represent the (traumatic) memories of violent actions and events, and is the seeming compulsion to do so in the twenty-first century related to Trauma Studies’ idea of a return to the place of trauma in order to depart from it?

In my opinion, the films, texts, and visual images analyzed in this study pose difficult to answer questions. In fact, the very representation of violence through the traumas and memories of children/adolescents leads to even more disturbing questions. Is it not a perpetuation of violence against children to transmit memories of it? As previously mentioned, does the focal lens of childhood create an over-simplification of a complex subject matter, or does it clarify
often muddled issues? If it does bring clarity, does the use of children’s experiences of violence also lead to the (re-)establishment of empathy in a heavily disillusioned audience/readership, or will it always be tainted by the adult minds writing, directing, narrating, and re-speaking the stories of childhood? These questions are all concerned with violence, memory, and trauma as intertwined concepts, which is why I have chosen to define and discuss their varied theoretical backgrounds as I apply them in my analyses.

5.1 Memory and Multidirectionality

My dissertation extensively utilizes the concept of multidirectionality as many of my selected works are steeped in either transnational movements or a circulating violence. I employ Michael Rothberg’s definition of this term from Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization. I agree with his presentation of multidirectional memory as both collective and shared memory yet different in that it draws attention to other aspects of remembrance.

Multidirectional memory is collective memory insofar as it is formed within social frameworks; it is shared memory insofar as it is formed within mediascapes that entail ‘a division of mnemonic labor.’ Yet the concept of multidirectional memory differs from both of these others because it highlights the inevitable displacements and contingencies that mark all remembrance. (Rothberg 15-16)  

He also considers that “while a given memory rarely functions in a single way or means only one thing, all articulations of memory are not equal; powerful social, political, and psychic forces articulate themselves in every act of remembrance” (16). Furthermore, Rothberg’s analysis of multidirectional memory is optimistic in that this concept can be used as grounds for justice, and he even states that “. . . – this study [his study] seeks to emphasize how memory is at least as

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19 The quotation continues, “Collective memory is multilayered both because it is highly mediated and because individuals and groups play an active role in rearticulating memory, if never with complete consciousness or unimpeded agency” (Rothberg 15-16).
often a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity; indeed multidirectional memory is often the very grounds on which people construct and act upon visions of justice” (19). The archive of multidirectional memory is transversal, and I utilize the concept in this study to analyze areas where I believe it intersects with empathy, justice, and other types of memory.

I will also employ, among other theories on memory and time, the dialogue between Berber Bevernage and the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch. In his study *L’irréversible et la nostalgie*, Jankélévitch distinguishes between the “irreversible” and the “irrevocable” natures of time, both aspects of “the same temporal process” yet referring to two very different “experiences of the past.” In *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice*, Bevernage appropriates Jankélévitch’s distinctions between these definitions in his defense of “the ethical significance of the notion of the irrevocable,” among other things (Bevernage 6). He supports the irrevocable over the irreversible, in which a “temporal distance’ between the present and the past” is central, when he asserts that the irrevocable

... offers a great opportunity to criticize the irreversible time of history and to scrutinize the viability of an alternative chronosophy that would challenge the conception of the past as a ‘dead’ matter that is absent or distant and leave some intellectual space to take seriously the idea of a ‘persisting’ or ‘haunting’ past. (4-5)

Thus, considering Bevernage’s defense of the irrevocable past, I suggest that radical violence, trauma, and memory, in their demonstrated multidirectionality in the films and texts to be analyzed, not only travel across physical space but also through time or perhaps across time due

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20 “The irreversible, a having-taken-place (*avoir-eu-lieu*) that should primarily be deciphered as a having-been (*avoir-été*), refers to a transient or fleeting past. The irrevocable, a having-taken-place most often associated with the having-been-done (*avoir-fait*), in contrast, is stubborn and tough. People experience the past as irreversible if they experience it as fragile and as immediately dissolving or fleeing from the present. They experience the past as irrevocable if they experience it as a persistent and massive depository that sticks to the present” (Bevernage 4).
to the “persisting” or “haunting” aspect of their natures that enables them to transition from one time and place to the next.

Because memory belongs to more than the realm of theory and Memory Studies as an academic discipline, I have included several case studies from Cognitive Psychology that demonstrate the complexity and multidirectionality of memory in praxis. A well-known scholar, A.D. Baddeley, in *Essentials of Human Memory*, defines memory in the following manner:

> Memory does not comprise a single unitary system, but rather an array of interacting systems, each capable of encoding or registering information, storing it, and making it available by retrieval. Without this capability for information storage, we could not perceive adequately, learn from our past, understand the present, or plan for the future. (19)

Memory, like the bodies in which it functions, is a complex entity involving multiple processes with far reaching effects in that it is capable of influencing the perception of past, present, and future states in which one has lived, is living, or will live.

In light of the multidirectionality of violence and memory, I would like to rethink the purpose of current literary and filmic works on the Argentine military dictatorship, the Argentine connection to the Holocaust/WWII, and Latin American representations of violence during the Spanish Civil War. For example, what are the transnational implications of the traumatic legacy of the Spanish Civil War as interpreted by directors like del Toro, who leaves out much of the history and instead focuses on the circulation of extreme violence in an orphanage? Or, in what ways do the shock waves of the political practices and doctrines of WWII Germany and the Holocaust, in their relocation/return to Latin America, continue to reverberate in contemporary representations of violence? My dissertation does not propose to cover these time periods in detail as the focus is not on the history of a specific region – although historical context is vital for understanding the formation of a recycled violence – but rather on the nature, effects, and
contemporary representations of violence, trauma, and memory as characterized and/or witnessed by children in these historical periods and their radiation out to other times and places.

5.2 A Modernizing Violence

Roberto Briceño-León in *Sociología de la violencia en América Latina* states that there are many forms of violence. My use of the term stems from his basic definition of physical and psychological violence based on a sociological model. In addition to his categorization of *nueva violencia* as something connected to the civilizing process, he defines interpersonal violence (direct or physical) as “. . . el uso o amenaza de uso de la fuerza física sobre otros o sobre uno mismo” (Briceño-León 275). Psychological violence, on the other hand, is defined as something . . . que no se expresa en actos sino en palabras que agreden y hieren, abochoran o humillan. Pero, también, la violencia psicológica puede ser silente, muda de palabras pero plena de significados, en las miradas y los gestos, en el desprecio y la ignorancia del otro que no lo toca, sino que lo invisibiliza (Del Olmo 1976; Galtung 1990). (275)

As such, violence does not always involve physical force. It can also silently harm from a distance (e.g. psychological warfare).

My analyses are also informed by the research of Uruguayan (Spanish/Basque) sociologist Gabriel Gatti, whose views on radical violence follow in a similar vein to Briceño-León’s *nueva violencia*. Gatti attributes the violence of the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone to an exacerbated modernity.21 His hypothesis is that “la desaparición forzada de personas no es barbarie sino modernidad exacerbada . . .[,] una radicalización del proyecto moderno” (Gatti 97). He postulates that the two differences from the previous civilizing plan, as proposed by Sarmiento and others, are the detention center and the figure of the disappeared. For Gatti, the

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real paradox is in the civilizing machine’s destruction of its perfected product – the “individual-citizen” formed by the civilizing process and the creation of the modern individual (*la psicologización* and *la psique civilizada*) (96). Gatti postulates, “Los frutos perfectos de la modernidad son los que van a ser despedazados por la maquinaria que fue su condición de posibilidad” (98). This destruction by the contemporary State, the machine, is seen in the Argentine military dictatorship’s destruction of its citizens, the fruit perfected by the civilizing plan. It is also evident in the Francoist practices of labor/internment/prison camps (an elaborate prison system created for the losers of the Civil War), redistribution or appropriation of Republican children, and other similar re-education projects.

As evinced in Briceño-León’s and Gatti’s studies, violence is filled with ambiguities. It does not always appear violent but is often socially acceptable or tolerated in the name of the eradication of the other (e.g. Post-Civil War Spain). Its perpetrators may continue to thrive in a culture of impunity (seen in *Wakolda*). In instances where the abnormal becomes the norm, daily violence is converted into just another fact of life. Violence is sensorial and psychological in that it can be a memory written on the body – as a bruise, a wound or perforation, a scar – just as it can be etched in the mind – as a traumatic memory, a phantom image haunting the brain, an unconscious reenactment of the violence suffered or perpetrated. The complex nature of violence is, thus, also demonstrably multidirectional and polymorphous.

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22 Another contemporary example of violence and its perpetrators continuing to thrive in a culture of impunity is represented through the reenactment of the mass-killings by Indonesian former death squad leaders in Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 documentary *The Act of Killing*.

23 Violence as the norm is represented by the continual violence that envelopes the private lives of the children it touches in Guillermo del Toro’s films *El espinazo del diablo* and *El laberinto del fauno*.
6. Trauma Studies and the Connectivity among Violence, Trauma, and Memory

In the theoretical field of Trauma Studies, the relationship between violence, trauma, and memory (based on my interpretation of them) may be considered within the following schema. First, some type of violence or stimuli perceived as threatening, occurs to a human body and/or mind (either directly or vicariously). The result of this event, violent or otherwise, is somehow traumatic for the victim (and at times the perpetrator as well) and so the body and mind react to the traumatic or belated memory imprinted at the sub-conscious and/or conscious level of cognition. Finally, this (traumatic) memory, if reconstructed and reintegrated within the framework of the person’s perceived experience, has the potential to be a positive and illuminating experience.\(^\text{24}\) If the (traumatic) memory is not willfully reconstructed and purposefully reintegrated into narrative memory, it may remain an elusive phantom – a belated trauma known after the fact – and so come to constitute a trauma that may trap the victim in a repetitive cycle, such as a compulsive (uncontrollable) reenactment of the event.\(^\text{25}\)

The trauma/perforation/wound is often considered the effect caused by violence or some sort of stimuli perceived as threatening or dangerous. In my opinion, in Trauma Studies, trauma often results in a frozen, belated, or haunting event that traps the subject in a moment; whereas, Memory Studies often treats trauma or traumatic memory as an illuminating event that can or

\(^\text{24}\) Van der Hart, Brown, and Van der Kolk provide an overview of Janet’s therapeutic approach to traumatized patients in their article “Pierre Janet’s Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress” in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1989. The reformation of a traumatic memory into a positive memory was practiced by Pierre Janet when he attempted to manipulate traumatic memories at the turn-of-the-century (19\(^{th}\)-20\(^{th}\)). This concept has also been refashioned in contemporary Memory Studies and found again in the idea of *post-traumatic growth*. As for PTG, Steve Taylor analyzes the association of turmoil and trauma with positive states (the idea of *post-traumatic growth* or PTG) in his article “Agony to Ecstasy: The Positive After-Effects of Turmoil and Trauma.”

\(^\text{25}\) From Trauma Studies: Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*; Sigmund Freud’s texts *Moses and Monotheism* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; and Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart’s “The Intrusive Past: the Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.” Ed. Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (pp. 158-182).
will eventually be resolved through the processes of truth and justice. These two approaches are represented in many texts and films throughout the world; in fact, the mutilated text/film can mirror the mutilated bodies and minds it presents, e.g. films or texts with non-lineal narratives or fragmented structures. Why then, if violence and trauma are detrimental, should one reproduce their memory in text or film and so resend violence, trauma, and memory into another’s life? Why retransmit them? Just as violence harms in touching, just as trauma is a weeping wound crying out for a witness (Caruth), so too is memory a transmission of violence and trauma that reaches out for an audience, for the validation of a subjective pain in doubt (Scarry), and for the hope of a reconstructed memory to overcome the mark of violence and the haunting of trauma. Memory in much the same way that it can destroy/deconstruct hopes can also create/construct them. Although often fallible and a subjective reconstruction (Bjork), it is versatile and allows violent acts to be rewritten in ways that provide healing and continuity. Memory is no panacea; it is often contested (Loftus), yet with memory comes the possibility of escaping or confronting the ghosts of traumatic violence and of setting them free, or at the very least of changing one’s course in relation to them. I integrate the above-mentioned schema on violence, trauma, and memory in my analyses, along with various theories on spectatorship and witnessing.

6.1 Spectatorship

In this study, violence, trauma, and memory are also tied to spectatorship and witnessing. I posit that films like *Cautiva* are politically charged based on re-worked theories of

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28 For further information, see Loftus, Miller, and Burns’ “Loftus post-event misinformation paradigm” (1978) and E. Loftus’ “The Reality of Repressed Memories” (1992).
spectatorship, among other reasons. I utilize Jacques Rancière’s study *The Emancipated Spectator* and its discussion of the implications of emotional and political mobilization. Rancière also touches upon the evolution in the expectations of spectators:

Forty years ago, critical science made us laugh at the imbeciles who took images for realities and let themselves be seduced by their hidden messages. In the interim, the ‘imbeciles’ have been educated in the art of recognizing the reality behind appearances and the messages concealed in images. And now, naturally enough, recycled critical science makes us smile at the imbeciles who still think such things as concealed messages in images and a reality distinct from appearances exist. The machine can work in this way until the end of time, capitalizing on the impotence of the critique that unveils the impotence of the imbeciles. (48)

Many poststructuralist theoreticians have paved the way for examining the preoccupation with taking the realm of images for reality, mainly Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra (the image devoid of reality) (1981) that has passed into a contemporary disenchanted consensus that *integral reality* (2005) is “more real than the real” one used to oppose to imagery, behind which, by the 1980s, the real eventually disappeared anyways leaving only simulacra.29 If there is no longer the overt distinction between real and imaginary (the world of images), between ordinary reality and virtual reality, if there is only *integral reality*, and the education of the spectator has not led to an enlightened viewer in perhaps the way the militant film directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino envisioned (educated does not seem to equal enlightened), then all that remains is the smug acknowledgement that the educated person is wise to the tricks of the film trade. As such, there is only the disbelief/disillusionment of the intellectual or else the questioning of the new educated imbecile who continues to believe in the distinction between

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29 “What happens to the world when it is freed from truth and appearances? It becomes the real universe, the universe of integral reality. Not truth, nor appearance but integral reality. If the world in the past leaned toward transcendence, if it fell on occasion into other rear-worlds (arrières-mondes), today it is falling into reality” (Baudrillard n. pag.).
appearances and reality. Where then has this transition from uneducated to educated spectator taken the viewer?

In their 1969 manifesto on “Third Cinema,” Solanas and Getino regarded the films of the cinema of liberation or Third Cinema as films “... opening towards a cinema outside and against the System, ...” or as films that, in addition to their use as a “pretext for gathering an audience” and the “ideological message they [films] contain,” were more effective than other forms of communication in their presentation as a living document and a naked reality (43-44). In the era of revolutionary and militant cinema, the reality outside of the System was seen as divergent from and opposed to the reality inside of the System, and in the exposure of the image of reality as it differed from ordinary reality, in the education of the spectator, the expectation was that the viewer, armed with knowledge, would be propelled to action in order to expose the deceitfully beautiful yet false images of the System as the monstrous yet true images of violence, poverty, and exploitation existing in ordinary reality.

Today, this hypothesis, although it has proven quite resilient, is less alluring in contemporary film theories. There now also exists an understanding that “there is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to political action” (Rancière 75). If there is no reason why the education of the spectator should galvanize him/her to action, then why does the post-dictatorship market insist on releasing so many films dealing precisely with

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30 Jean Baudrillard goes a step further than Guy Debord’s “The Society of the Spectacle” in that he declares, “We have lost everything: the spectacle, alienation, distancing, transcendence, abstraction – everything that was defending us from the onset of integral reality, of the immediate realization of a world with no reprieve. With the disappearance of the simulacrum as such, a later stage in the process of simulation has been reached, namely the simulation of a real more real than the real, the simulation of a hyperreal” (n. pag.). My analysis does not adhere to the disappearance of the spectator but rather to the evolution of the spectator to that of a witness to a particular type of memory and/or “postmemory” film.
such a similar, yet distinctly posited, question? According to Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, “Latin American productions engaging children and adolescents in a manner critical of the authoritarian past have continued unabated up to the present moment [2012]” (10). What, then, is the purpose of propagating the violent and traumatic memories of child victims and their families and friends to a spectator who isn’t necessarily going to act in any particular manner, if she/he even acts or reacts at all?

Once the antagonistic forces of the military and its machinery of “forced disappearances” are presumably uncovered and surmounted (early 1980s), or at least assimilated into a newly forming democratic society, social and political life ease into a period of transition in which neoliberal policies dominate. However, the violence of the dictatorship and its resulting traumas do not disappear into the past. They continue to linger as phantom presences in the present day democratic system. In the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Argentina, there continues to emerge a new political debate, partly in response to these phantoms, that is often situated within the old binary system of political modernisms in its framing of memory versus forgetting, yet it is no longer a matter of “I remember” or “I forget” the events of a dictatorship/government that did or did not impact/benefit “my” world. It is rather a matter of the complicated interplay of these two concepts as they spiral into other matters, like a prism splitting a ray of sunlight into the multiple colors that form a rainbow; matters such as “whose memory?” and “which version of which story?” now take center stage. As private memories become public stories and debatable concepts, the private as political is again increasingly

31 Definition of neoliberalismo: “Modelo político económico que promueve la no intervención del Estado en materia social y económica cediendo ese lugar al mercado. Obteniendo como resultado la concentración de la riqueza en pocas manos y una gran mayoría de la población en absoluta exclusión social” (Kirchner et al, PDF, “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” 21).
relevant. As art (i.e. film, literature, children’s drawings) reconstitutes/recreates and displays the traumatic memories of the quotidian during the military dictatorship, the political can no longer deny its entrance into and continuing connection to the private sphere. The spectator/viewer/witness of films – whether at home or in the theater – becomes, in contemporary Argentina (and internationally), *privately political* in witnessing the traumas of disappearance and appropriation just as, in the past, the perpetrators of these crimes acted as political agents, representative of the State, in the private lives of citizens.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière declares that the spectator is situated at the center of the debate between art and politics (2). There was a movement in the discourse of political modernism in 1960’s film theory for the spectator to be roused to an active participation as opposed to a passive one (Solanas and Getino’s *Third Cinema*), and in this switch from observer to active participant, the theater is envisioned as stripped of its spectators and instead endowed with action (spectators are also actors). Around forty years after this proposition, Rancière states that, although “we no longer live in the days when playwrights wanted to explain to their audience the truth of social relations and ways of struggling against capitalist domination,” there is still the drive to cross the gap separating the spectator’s passivity from their potential activity (11-12). He postulates that emancipated spectators have transitioned from pure binary oppositions, from passive or active, to become instead “both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them” (13). As such, in my opinion, active versus passive participation is converted into a matter of perspective; it becomes a question of whose story one participates in and of whose story one watches or witnesses.32 In this transition from either/or to

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32 For example, we are all actors in our own life stories, yet we often passively observe the life stories of others. We may also actively interpret the life stories of others, even as we watch and witness them from a distance.
both (actor/spectator, active/passive), one also views the progression from the overt political films produced by Solanas and Getino to other films by directors such as Biraben and del Toro, films that could be labeled political – for reasons other than those mentioned previously – in that they draw attention to a pertinent issue by tapping into the distant spectatorship of national and international communities (as groups of individuals) and the active interpretation of the story being witnessed (often someone else’s story but perhaps also a story with which one can identify or empathize).

6.2 Witnessing

In the twenty-first century, witnessing, its connection to trauma and testimony (e.g. verbal/written/image-based), and the manners in which one perceives the act of bearing witness have evolved in a continually multiplying collection of discourses by theorists and “witnesses” that attempt to define what it means to witness or to bear witness. With such a plethora of definitions, many stemming from Witness Literature that often includes Holocaust and Trauma Studies, it is difficult to decide which definition, if any of them, best encapsulates the act of witnessing.

Three elements of witnessing particularly pertinent to this study, analyzed by Didier Fassin and Michal Givoni and related to humanitarian aid or Human Rights, are connected to suffering, failure, and reconstructions. Didier Fassin, in “The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” speaks of humanitarian concern as having preceded psychological analysis and so it is founded more in a “politics of suffering” than a “politics of trauma” (539). Suffering is a more effective tool for winning the support of others in humanitarian causes than is the sight of violence or violent
perpetrators alone. However, the documentation and communication of suffering is not sufficient. Michal Givoni, in “Witnessing/Testimony,” provides examples (from groups like Médecins Sans Frontières) of humanitarian witnessing that failed. He informs the reader,

In light of these events [the 1990’s failure of UN forces in Rwanda and Bosnia, manipulation of humanitarian aid in Zaire, etc.], witnessing in its traditional senses as active presence, monitoring, documentation, and reporting was deemed an insufficient and inadequate response to mass suffering. (Givoni 163)

The contemporary idea of witnessing, in the humanitarian instance or framed by Human Rights, has also seen the transition of focus move from the one with direct experience, the traditional “first-hand witness” and/or victim, to the observing witness – “second-hand testimony by parties” in humanitarian agencies for example – who reports on the atrocities she/he sees happening to others (others = the traditional first-hand witnesses) (162).  

This shift relates to Givoni’s claim that witnessing has transformed into a “standardized and constructed action.”

While establishing witnessing as the primary ethical configuration of the age of globalization, and while allocating the public an active and essential role in its actualization, transnational humanitarianism at the same time also completed the transition of witnessing into a standardized and constructed action. (162)

I believe the idea of witnessing as a “standardized and constructed action” applies to films like Cautiva and El espinazo del diablo because they are indeed reconstructions of memories – whether fictional with a historical backdrop (e.g. the nurse’s memories, a fictional testimony, of

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33 “The discourse of mental health – which is based here on an everyday experience – does indeed reveal a reality that seems more familiar to the Western reader of humanitarian testimony: a vulnerable teenager engenders a more consensual empathy than a provocative or violent adolescent. At the same time, it substitutes a suffering subject to the martyr subject, replacing the politics of justice proclaimed by the martyr with a politics of compassion that has the sufferer as its object. It prefers the affect of the later to the gesture of the former – an affect that links the victim and his audience, unlike the gesture that often divides them. Humanitarian subjectification blurs the image of violence – or rather, through the offices of psychiatrists and psychologists, requalifies it as trauma” (Fassin 543).

34 Here Givoni is quoting Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman’s text The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood.
the adolescent protagonist’s birth in *Cautiva*, based on the actual practice of appropriation) or historically-grounded works/objects seen as factual (e.g. the Argentine/Dutch archival drawings) – and standardized in terms of the films’ forms. However, to this standardization and construction of witnessing, I add the additional element of empathy (a connection between viewer and viewed) facilitated by children’s suffering, a suffering that creates empathy instead of ire at unjustified rebellions against authority figures or society. Children as witnesses (e.g. in *Witness Literature/Film*) are also utilized to represent other facets of witnessing such as a failed witnessing, the passive witness, the witness as victim and bystander, the possibility of witnessing as violent, and many other aspects (based on my readings), but there is also the question of children serving as filters for memories of a violent past.

To address the possible violence against subjectivity, in the case of the adolescent protagonist in *Cautiva* for example, my dissertation also employs terminology taken from the philosopher Kelly Oliver’s theoretical framework on witnessing and subjectivity, which are vital components for analyzing violence and representations of it. In the Introduction to *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Oliver connects witnessing, subjectivity/othered subjectivity, and trauma in that “while trauma undermines subjectivity and witnessing restores it, the process of witnessing is not reduced to the testimony to trauma. So, too, subjectivity is not reduced to the effects of trauma,” yet trauma and (othered) subjectivity are still intricately linked because trauma is directed at one’s identity.

One important implication of this thesis is that those who have been othered suffer from traumas directed at their subjectivity, traumas directed at their identities and sense of themselves as agents. In other words, oppression and subordination affect their victims at the level of their sense of themselves as subjects, at the level of subjectivity. (7-8)
The ties among witnessing, subjectivity, and spectatorship are evident in many of my selected works, and I propose the creation of new connections and categorizations of these concepts as they relate to children in my chapters.

6.3 Violence Enacted against Memory: The Cases of Argentina and Spain

In addition to bodies and minds, violence can also be enacted against memory. This violence often affects those members of society whose memories and stories/histories are undesirable because they do not support the official narrative or History. The Republicans in Spain and los/las desaparecidos/as in Argentina are groups whose memories were dismantled, deconstructed, mutilated, and scattered (during Francoism and the Argentine military dictatorship). These groups became fragmented members, bodies with or without names (per Gabriel Gatti), and their distorted memories were rewritten in the state-sponsored process of reconstruction.

In place of a constructive tool, the written word can become a weapon to murder memories and, in so doing, to obliterate ideas. It gathers up the scattered and dismantled pieces of traumatic memories, lives, and bodies, and it rewrites them; it refashions stories much the same way one might rearrange the furniture in a room. “Official memory” can replace individual memories, be they traumatic or mundane, by reconstructing/rearranging them; the architects of the “official history” utilize the weaknesses (that are also strengths in that memory is flexible and adaptable) inherent in the body’s cognitive system – the reality that, as demonstrated in experiential data, all memories are reconstructions and may become distorted with time. Bjork, Dunlosky, and Kornell emphasize that the human memory is not like a “typical recording

35 It is important to mention that many books were written in exile, by Spanish authors such as Rafael Alberti, that included memories of Spain (a nostalgia for the lost homeland) or testified to the violence perpetrated during the Civil War, by authors like Ramón J. Sender, Manuel Azaña, and Arturo Barea among others.
device”; one cannot just press “play” and cause the information to stream out like magic. Instead, memory follows an “inferential and reconstructive” pattern:

The retrieval of stored information or procedures from human memory is a fallible process that is inferential and reconstructive – not literal. Research dating back to a classic study by Bartlett (1932) has demonstrated repeatedly that what we recall of some prior episode, often confidently, can actually be features of the episode combined with, or replaced by, features that derive from our assumptions, goals, or prior experience, rather than from the episode itself. When we remember the past, we are driven, if not consciously, to make our recollections fit our background knowledge, our expectations, and the current context. (Bjork, Dunlosky, and Kornell 16.4)

Thus, violence is not so difficult to enact against memory, and this facility is evinced in Cautiva when the female protagonist’s life story/history is rewritten by her appropriators. The impact of violence and trauma on memory and identity is also facilitated by impunity.

Argentine psychiatrists Lucila Edelman and Diana Kordon speak of memory and its ties to identity and ideas. Just as Yosef Yerushalmi stated that the twentieth century is full of “asesinos de la memoria,” Edelman and Kordon make a direct connection between the 1976-1983 Argentine dictatorship’s attempts to, during and post-dictatorship, prevent the reconstruction of events related to disappearances, other questionable government/military actions, and the like. In short, the dictatorship repeatedly attempted to murder memory because it was linked to ideas and, thus, ideologies. “El objetivo del poder totalitario fue siempre el mismo: impedir la reconstrucción de los acontecimientos. Es decir, privar la posibilidad del recuerdo” (Edelman & Kordon 18).

Francoism in Spain also attempted to murder the stories/histories of the losing side by constructing its own myths, memories, and national celebrations. According to Paloma Aguilar,

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37 See Por-venires de la memoria. Efectos psicológicos multigeneracionales de la represión de la dictadura: Hijos de desaparecidos.
in *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, the Spanish Civil War became the “founding myth” of Francoism in that its legitimacy was tied to the “necessity” of its actions during the War, to the “inevitability” of conflict, and to its well-merited victory. Memory, as it was reconstructed, served Francoism as a process or tool of socialization. Aguilar notes,

> It is a matter of observing how the war was remembered; not so much what was actually remembered about it (factual memory), but what values and lessons were linked to this memory (memory as a function) and why (process of socialisation). These questions may be resolved by researching the years that preceded the Transition, the historical awareness of the Spanish, the process of Francoist socialisation and its reflection in political culture, and the values associated, either directly or indirectly, with the memory of the war. (25)

The refashioning of the memory of the Civil War was processed in much the same way that the Argentine military dictatorship reconfigured society through its Process – it employed a very specific lexicon. The Civil War was described as “. . . a ‘war of liberation’, a ‘glorious crusade’ against the communist, separatist and godless forces that supported the Second Republic which, for many years, had been the cause of Spanish decadence” (132). It seems that violence enacted against memory follows similar rhetorical strategies. The lexicon employed by the Argentine military dictatorship is reminiscent of Spain’s.

### 6.4 The Production of Trauma and a Surplus of Memory

The themes of violence, trauma, and memory have been widely discussed in recent literature, film, and visual studies in many parts of the world – from post-Apartheid South Africa to many post-dictatorship countries in South America such as Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay. There has been a debate among the implementers of post-conflict resolution strategies as to whether one should advocate a model of restorative justice (the South African model) or retributive justice (the Argentine model). Which model, discussed by Claire Moon in her article
“Healing Past Violence: Traumatic Assumptions and Therapeutic Interventions in War and Reconciliation,” better provides for healing and reconciliation while preventing a return to violence – restorative justice leading to amnesty (often associated with the terms *olvido* and impunity) or retributive justice leading to punishment or sentencing (often associated with the terms *memoria* and justice)?

Aguilar states that “forgetting” and “wiping the slate clean” were emphasized during the Spanish transition to democracy so that reconciliation and consensus could be built. This process included a “forgetting of the resentments of the past” while keeping the “lessons of history without stirring up the past, in order to be able to build a future of democratic peace and harmony together” (269). Spain has since slightly deterred from its model of restorative justice as judges and other parties have attempted to pursue justice in certain cases. However, whatever the country’s future course of actions, it too has experienced a surplus of memory following a long period of violence against it.

Restorative justice and retributive justice have both been analyzed and defended. Is the truth-telling therapy that emerged out of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission the key to a collective “cure” post-dictatorship or post-conflict, or is truth elided from justice merely a recipe for future violence (Moon 82)? If therapy is pursued on a national level, as with restorative justice, what are the implications of “. . . the emergence of a new order of therapeutic states” (86)? In terms of violence and memory, should the system, reformed or otherwise, that created a myriad of violent memories be given the power to cure its citizens of the pathologies resulting from traumatic experiences sustained during its watch, or is this new therapeutic state

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38 Many books on the memory of the Civil War and Francoism were published during the Transition. As such, the reference to “forgetting” is not an actual forgetting, but one based on the establishment of an amnesty to enable the government to transition from Francoism to a democracy.
merely another transformation in the many-faced perpetrators of state-sponsored violence (from eugenics and criminology in turn-of-the-century Argentina to the dictatorships of the 1960’s-1980’s)? These pertinent questions have no easy answers. They are still pending, and in the meantime, the multiplication of traumatic memories and their dissemination post-conflict/post-traumatic event continues to thrive in the local and global memory marketplaces.39

As such, it becomes increasingly evident that violence, trauma, and memory are demonstrably intertwined when one considers that an individual’s memory and its traces can be deconstructed in the “unmaking” of the victim’s world.40 Elaine Scarry, in her extraordinary analysis of Amnesty International court cases and testimonies in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, establishes a connection between the voice and the making/unmaking of the world, whether a personal or holistic world, as the voice not only called the world into being (in many religious texts such as the Bible), but it is also associated with interrogation, a key component of any information gathering process, and paired invariably with torture.41 Scarry posits,

Physical pain is able to obliterate psychological pain because it obliterates all

39 For more information on the memory market, see Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne, eds., article “Time is Money: The Memory Market in Latin America,” their Introduction to *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America* (pp. 1-40).

40 This “unmaking” can be better understood by considering the relationship between absence/presence. For example, if one analyzes the deconstruction of presence, it would be helpful to ask: How does one make a tangible presence absent if absence is also a material reality? One possible response is found in Argentine author Ricardo Piglia’s novel *La ciudad ausente*, which presents absence as a material reality: “–La ausencia es una realidad material, como un pozo en el pasto” (152). Although a well or pit is an empty space, the lack of something, it also affects the shape of the land around it and so is a material reality just as trauma is both an absence and a material reality/presence in that the creation of a perforation effects and is felt in/by the spaces/people/relations surrounding the trauma.

41 “The interrogation is, therefore, crucial to a regime. Within the physical events of torture, the torturer ‘has’ nothing: he has only an absence, the absence of pain. In order to experience his distance from the prisoner in terms of ‘having,’ their physical difference is translated into a verbal difference: the absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world. Across this set of inversions pain becomes power” (Scarry 37).
psychological content, painful, pleasurable, and neutral. Our recognition of its power to end madness is one of the ways in which, knowingly or unknowingly, we acknowledge its power to end all aspects of self and world. (34)

Memory, through pain, is deconstructed; it is converted into traumatic memory.

6.5 Narratives of Belated Experiences

In post-dictatorship and post-conflict societies, it is possible to view the surplus of memories on the market as narratives of belated experiences, related to the haunting of trauma. According to Caruth, it is the surviving of trauma, the living after something horrible yet fully unknown at the moment of its occurrence, or the aftereffects that are unbearable. Caruth uses the following terms and images to describe this survival or awakening after the moment of trauma has passed: A “double telling” (or “. . . the inextricability of the story of one’s life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness”), the crying wound, and the burning child.42

Edelman and Kordon, in their analysis of transgenerational trauma in post-dictatorship Argentina mentioned above, tie memory to identity, mourning, and silence (21). Memory, even when altered, is connected to identity, and it is not an easy task to force another person to exchange their life, body, skin, thoughts for those of another; it is an unnatural transformation. Although memory at its core is a reconstruction, identity as composed of memories is not so malleable because it is socially constructed, grounded in culture, in gender, in time and place. The individual body and the social body, as communal memory or a collection of individual histories that can be independent of the official state discourse or history, are linked to names

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and countries, to religions and spiritualities, to mores and habits, loves and hates, families and communities (heterogeneous discourses, histories, identities – versus a homogeneous national identity). It is no simple task to reconstruct a person, a well-grounded identity, and for this reason, torture is used as the tool for the “unmaking” of a personal world tied to identity and attached to specific thoughts and belief systems. Memories must be murdered and reborn; bodies must be tortured and disappeared. They must both be “unmade” in order to be made again, remade into the desired image of the perpetrator/dictator/State. Memories are symbolic; they represent a person’s life and what she/he believes in, of, about. As symbols, memories are dangerous because they can reflect ideologies, and the Argentine dictatorship was a war on ideologies, as was Francoism, in which citizens were also viewed as combatants. Thus, in warring against ideologies, the system also warred against memories and identities. It is no surprise then that post-dictatorship, post-murder of countless memories and the deconstruction of innumerable identities (the severing of body+name+identity), personal testimonies – the memories of victims, their families, and their perpetrators – flourished. There was and still is a bubbling spring of reclaimed memories, a resurrection so to speak of ailing ideologies, a recuperation of bodies and names, a recognition of pain (felt or caused). Memory – in Argentina, Spain, other Latin American countries, and post-conflict nations – has become a marketplace.

43 The Junta in Argentina viewed ideas as dangerous. “‘Civilians are also warriors,’ the generals asserted, ‘ideas a different form of weapon.’” (Hollander 46-47).

44 In light of Gabriel Gatti’s definition of el desaparecido, she/he is also a presence manifest in absence (in his/her absence). The person or no-person (nomen nescio = desconozco el nombre) has fallen into a hole, an intermediary place in which they become a body separated from its name, a name isolated from its history/story, an identity lacking its papers of citizenship, etc.. Identity is unmade instead of negotiated, an annihilation of self, yet as it is not scientifically possible for something to become nothing (physics/chemistry); a presence remains hidden in the person’s absence. It is like a black hole that manifests its presence in that it affects/bends/alters the matter around it; one sees its influence but not the actual thing itself. It is an invisible vortex.
Ironically, the social environment in the Southern Cone, and post-Francoist Spain, has moved from the propagation of a single, homogeneous national memory – that memory so painstakingly reconstructed by the dictatorship from the murder of its citizens’ memories – to that of an increasingly cacophonous market place in which the “goods of memory” are displayed and consumed (Bilbija and Payne 5). The idea of memories as goods on a market has dual connotations; it can be disturbing to think of patrons consuming violent memories in much the same way they would watch a popular Hollywood production (does this cheapen memories?), yet it can also be enlightening to analyze the effects of post-conflict discourses on not only their own members but also internationally, in terms of human rights movements (exposure spreads awareness in this instance). Either way – whether positive, negative, or degrees of both – it could be claimed that there is a current over-saturation of memory. The murder/deconstruction/forced reconstruction of memory strangely, after a period of incubation, served as a catalyst for the generation of multiple memories. The violence enacted against memory acted much like the regenerating heads of the mythological Lernaean Hydra, and each time one was severed from the serpent’s body, several more sprang up in its place. As such, instead of a dearth of memory, one is now facing a surplus of traumatic memories on the market (Bilbija and Payne). One can choose to forget the past and move forward into the future (associated with olvido), thus potentially ignoring these memories. Inversely, one can elect to remember the past so as not to repeat it in the future or to seek justice or recognition for atrocities suffered (associated with memoria), thus recognizing these mutilated memories for what they really are – narratives of belated experiences or a surplus of crying wounds.
PART 1, CHAPTERS 1 & 2: Violence, Family, and the Private Sphere

CHAPTER 1

The Violence within and the Violence without: Reina Roffé’s “La noche en blanco”

1. The Kingdom of Childhood and the Kingdom of Adulthood

Children, in many contemporary societies, still inhabit that place between infancy and adulthood where they are permitted to act out their dreams. In the temporary, figurative landscape of Never, Neverland, they are allowed beliefs in fantasy, spirits, sprites, and make-believe, but upon reaching a certain moment determined by age and competency in the Western world, they are obligated to transition into the seemingly permanent, crushingly literal landscape of Ever, Everland where work, ideologies, concrete beings, and no-nonsense stories reign. On a metaphorical level, I am proposing these two separate kingdoms represent the contemporary childhood/adulthood dichotomy fashioned during the Enlightenment and Victorian Era. Before this construct of childhood was created, children were often treated as either property or miniature adults.45 Once the kingdoms were separated, they each developed distinct rules. For example, fashioned as asexual beings, children were cut-off from associations with sex and adult past-times. Michel Foucault, in his study of sexuality, traces this separation to the Enlightenment period, “The sex of children and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been

45 See Rosario Panez’s El lenguaje silencioso de los niños: Un estudio peruano sobre los Derechos del Niño desde su producción creativa for a brief introduction to views on childhood and children over time.
deployed” (30). Of the various concepts surrounding the current definition of childhood and other developmental theories about children, some have remained in circulation since the Victorian Era and others have evolved post-atrocities of World War II, and especially since the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Archard). Prior to these eras, children and adults lived in circumstances where they intermingled on a daily basis without the sharp distinction between adults and children of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Panez informs the reader that children were viewed as possessions in Antiquity, and parents and/or owners (of slaves) wielded the power of life and death over them (patria potestas in Roman law, also mentioned by Archard and Macleod whom I discuss below). Children were often offered up as sacrifices to gods, bought or sold as slaves, and killed or abandoned if deemed necessary or beneficial for the family (Panez 43). The Middle Ages did not bring about an improvement in conditions for children; they continued to be bought, sold, hired out as servants, or killed. There was the notion of the “niño malo o demoníaco” in that the child was associated with human nature’s innate inclination towards evil or the darker side of human beings that had to be contained and disciplined (43). It seems that many of the notions surrounding children stemmed from a misunderstanding of their developmental states, i.e. they were held to adult standards when they did not yet possess the abilities of adults. For example, children were often seen as miniature adults (niño como adulto en miniatura), and this classification meant that they were assigned adult responsibilities, work, and moral obligations.

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47 See David Archard’s *Children: Rights and Childhood* for a detailed study of the development of the concept of childhood and how this pertains to Children’s Rights, or lack thereof.

The kingdom of adults reigned supreme, and as such, many of the adult-like behaviors, violence, and working conditions of children considered shocking in contemporary Western societies would not have been so in the past.

Panez mentions various other notions surrounding the child that developed from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries: The amorphous or “unformed” child who had to be molded into an adult (15th C.); the child as a “nuisance” who was given to an outside wet nurse at birth so that adults could continue with their own activities and agendas (15th-18th C.); the child as a blank slate (John Locke’s *tabula rasa*) who must be educated (17th C.); the “natural” child who is born with a tendency towards virtue until corrupted by society (derived from Jean Jacques Rousseau), the child as a mixture of good and evil who must be guided to the good (Immanuel Kant), and the “productive” child who was expected to work and contribute to the family income (18th C.) (73-75). Perhaps with the exception of Rousseau and Kant, many of these notions seem like foreign concepts in contemporary society where childhood has become a privileged terrain to be protected.

In line with Foucault’s study of sexuality, the main shift in contemporary views on children and childhood seems to occur around the time of the Enlightenment, with further shifts during the nineteenth century that laid the foundation for definitions evident in legislation, film, literature, and society today. For example, in the nineteenth century, there were several conflicting schools of thought that oscillated between a mythification of childhood (connected to adults’ nostalgia for the past) and a strict control over the child’s life (associated with Puritanism) (Panez 62-63). Of these two, I believe the mythification of childhood as a lost kingdom remains today (evident in popular cinema) as do the twentieth-century notion of the child as the center of the family (in a privileged position of care) and other ideas of the child as a
competent being, a participant or active agent, and a social subject (notions developing out of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) (74-75).49

In their Introduction to *The Moral and Political Status of Children*, David Archard and Colin M. Macleod state that two ideas stemming from the history of moral and political philosophy still influence our current thinking on children.50 In their argument, like Panez, they cite other important intellectuals whose arguments have shaped Western views on children and childhood, such as Aristotle, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Immanuel Kant. Based on Aristotle’s work, they claim, “The first idea is that children are simply the property of their parents. Or if not precisely a thing to be owned, none the less the child is, in some sense, an extension of the parent” (Archard & Macleod 1). In contemporary terms, one could say that children, instead of property, may be considered an extension of their parents. “The second idea is that children are proto- or incomplete adults. They are not yet possessed of the powers and capacities that characterize human beings proper” (2). This idea, which differs from that of the miniature adult mentioned by Panez, is based on “Aristotle’s view of the child as an unfinished human being” and may have negative consequences, in the authors’ opinion, in that “they [children] are seen as ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being.’ Furthermore, the passage into maturity is essentially one from inadequacy–vulnerability, weakness, dependence, ignorance, passivity–into

49 Archard and Panez both speak of the development of Children’s Rights. Panez informs the reader, “La ‘Declaración de los Derechos del Niño’ es aprobada por la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas el 20 de noviembre de 1959. Treinta años después, el 20 de noviembre de 1989, en la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas se lleva a cabo la ‘Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño’ a fin de que éstos sean respetados por cada uno de los Estados parte, lo que revela una toma de conciencia del mundo occidental del niño como ‘sujeto social’. La evolución de la noción de niño a través de la historia y el reciente reconocimiento jurídico de sus derechos permiten inferir que los mismos no son suficientemente conocidos ni respetados por toda la población” (Panez 106).

50 Archard and Macleod claim, “When philosophers of the past have talked about children it has not been in any organized or concentrated fashion, and their scattered comments have not offered any systematic, positive characterization of the status of the child and of childhood” (1).
the achievements of age—security, strength, independence, knowledge, and agency” (2).

Although many of the current views on children have developed out of the above-mentioned ideas, the advancement in Children’s Rights is distinctly modern (Archard & Macleod).

However, I would argue that legislation and Rights have not changed the division of the kingdoms. Distinctions propagated during the Victorian Era remain relevant and in circulation contemporarily, manifest in Panez’s discussion of the Victorian Era:

La era victoriana se caracterizó por una fiera noción de la pureza infantil, tomándose una serie de medidas para controlar a los niños. Se revisaban sus lecturas, prohibiendo aquellas consideradas atentatorias contra la moral. Los niños eran vestidos buscando cubrir todas las partes de su cuerpo. (62)

The Victorian Era’s influence is evident in the twenty-first century’s proliferation of “child-appropriate” images, games, clothing, film-ratings, and other associations. Children are sheltered for various reasons and the burden of adulthood is reserved for a specific legal age that the System deems a sign of competence (Archard). But, is this hyper-distinction a realistic distinction? Protection can be vital for children’s well-being, but as mentioned previously, should age, competency, and attainment of speech—sometimes arbitrary factors—be the defining elements that separate the kingdom of childhood from that of adulthood when the two landscapes interact on a daily basis? Perhaps, in certain circumstances, children should fight to defend themselves—without signifying a return to the notion of children as “miniature adults.” Perhaps they should be allowed to step outside of the kingdom of fantasy to strike back when they are experimented on, exposed to adult warfare, sent to concentration camps, deprived of their identities, and sexually assaulted. It becomes evident in the works discussed in my dissertation that the kingdom of adults doesn’t respect its limits, and I would argue, especially in normalized states of exception, it is time children are permitted to take roles other than those traditionally offered to them in the twenty-first century. This study addresses various
representations, whether traditional or departures from the norm, of the notions surrounding the kingdoms of adulthood and childhood, particularly considering the excesses and drastic consequences of violent dictatorships and civil wars, the abuse of medical/scientific experts allowed to penetrate the familial circle, and even parents’ lack of care within the private sphere of the home (or the orphanage as an extension of the lost home). In such tragic situations, the restrictions the kingdom of childhood imposes on its members become evident; instead of protecting children, these cultural and societal constructs keep them ignorant of the violence surrounding them and possible strategies of resistance to it.

Among the works chosen for my dissertation, three of them have female protagonists, and one has mostly male. Of the three dealing with young females, the novel Wakolda most questions this designation of roles while the film Cautiva comes in a close second. In Roffé’s “La noche en blanco” or “Sleepless Night,” however, the young girl is the most entrenched in the kingdom of childhood, with potentially deleterious effects. The young child has a limited understanding of her prior experiences or other reference points for the events taking place, and she consistently oscillates between knowing and not knowing during her “almost” sleepless night. She is literally still cloaked in the myth of a security that will cease to exist. “La noche en blanco” is the story prior to her awakening. I, thus, begin my analysis with a “pre-” – the moment before the kingdoms collide.

2. The Violence within and the Violence without

Sephardic-Argentine author Reina Roffé’s short story “La noche en blanco” or “Sleepless Night” is, on the surface, the story of a young girl whose mother suddenly disappears in the night moments after she leaves the child with an elderly stranger across the hall. The old woman is led to reflect on her own traumatic past as she spends the night awake with the young girl who, by
morning’s light, may have no one to shelter her from the terrors of the State or the dangers of the street because it seems the old woman will again flee the violence and pain within herself and without her apartment walls. The storyline partly unfolds through a superficial dialogue between a sixty-two-year-old woman, whose name remains anonymous, and a young girl named Alicia, whose age is not mentioned. However, much of the traumatic imagery and historical information is conveyed by an omniscient narrator in the third person. The old woman’s internal monologue also proves to be an effective strategy for accessing the external world as the violence remembered within brings the violence experienced without, in the outside world, into stark relief.

Through Alicia’s brief interaction with the old woman, Roffé constructs an indirect comparison between France and Argentina at two different historical periods in time, both dominated by violent state doctrines or politics that promoted systemic purges of undesirable and divergent “Others.” This juxtaposition of the two chronological periods divulges much deeper issues at stake – such as representational inquiries regarding the association of the traumatic memories of the Holocaust with other historical periods of extreme violence. My analysis posits that a transnational exploration of the repetition of violence – what I term a “recycled” violence, the traumatic memories engendered by it, and the appearance of the Holocaust as a historical/cultural referent for the Argentine military dictatorship are buried at the heart of the story. The 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship practiced several repressive methods, principally forced disappearances, that can now be traced back to practices utilized by the Nazis in the 1930s-1940s, including during the World War II German occupation of France.

After World War II, a considerable number of top and middle rank Nazi officers, war criminals, and the like fled to Argentina. According to Marguerite Feitlowitz, the Argentine
Intelligence Service/Secret Service was revamped by former Nazis; many with desirable expertise deemed useful to Western block countries at the advent of the Cold War. Feitlowitz also states that, in Argentina, “torture was often performed beneath portraits of Hitler whose recorded speeches were blasted through the halls. More than one concentration camp doctor was known as ‘Mengele’” (57). As demonstrated in Feitlowitz’s statement, a violence connected to the Holocaust is later recycled by the Argentine military dictatorship. I investigate several interconnected transatlantic methods of violence revealed in Roffé’s text through a web of complex associations, including the persistent use of methods derived from the German’s Nacht und Nebel or Night and Fog, between an old woman’s traumatic past in Vichy France (1940-1944) and a young girl’s trauma-in-the-making in Buenos Aires during the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983). My analysis attempts to expose the “recycling” of violence – visible in both the private and historical spheres of the story – and its transnational connectivity through the lens of transgenerational trauma.

The old woman’s inner musings position the reader on the fringes of a violent act somewhere in the Southern Cone in a city that resembles Paris. This textual clue indirectly places the reader in Buenos Aires. The comparison between cities gradually surpasses the superficial level of architectural similarities in Roffé’s text as two time periods identifiable by their mirrored violence come into focus. As the story progresses and further evidence is given regarding the time period of the sleepless night – e.g. Alicia reads a newspaper article that mentions President François Mitterrand (French President 1981-1995) and the old woman makes references to “disappearances” and “war,” – the surety that the diegetic world is the Argentina of the early

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51 On a structural level, Buenos Aires is often compared to Paris because of its streets and buildings constructed by the Generación del Ochenta (1880) and the Generación del Centenario (1910) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – areas modeled after Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s architectural designs in Paris.
1980s augments. These terms would then allude to the last period of the Argentine *Guerra sucia* or Dirty War – in which the State warred against an internal “enemy” – that utilized the practice of forcibly causing people to disappear and censored or suppressed information regarding *los desaparecidos* whom they labeled *subversivos*. Feitlowitz defines the term *desaparecido/a* as “the concept of individuals made to vanish [which] originated with the Nazis, as part of the doctrine of Night and Fog” (59). This practice made individuals simply disappear into the “night and fog” – no trace, no evidence, and thus no provable crime.

2. A Radiating Violence, an Innocent Child, and a Belated Trauma

“La mujer del A los había visto llegar. Casi siempre lo hacían a la medianoche, no a esa casa de apartamentos, sino a cualquiera, en cualquier barrio, en cualquier parte de la ciudad. Sólo aquellos que eran buscados, a veces los veían llegar; los demás no querían ver ni oír nada” (Roffé 17). **And yet, the old woman answers the door and allows the young child to enter and stay, thus implicating her in another’s tragedy. She both sees and hears.**

Roffé’s short story commences with the delineation of *la mujer del A*, the child Alicia’s mother, and *la puerta del B*, where *la vieja* or the old lady lives. As a dialogue is established between the old lady and the child, the plot bifurcates. The result is a narrative consisting of two parallel temporal spheres – Alicia’s present in Argentina and the old woman’s past in France – each with their own life story, traumatic events, countries, wars, and familial tragedies. As such, the reader is provided with a privileged access to distinct histories of a radiating violence across time as they convene in the old woman’s living quarters. The most prominent aspects of the description of the woman in Apt. A, aside from the information later provided by her daughter, is her sighting of “them” (first paragraph of the story) followed by a subsequent rush to Apt. B (second paragraph of the story). She initially sees “them” arrive. They appear ubiquitous as they might arrive anywhere at any time. Yet, “they” are non-existent as only those they came for sometimes saw them. All others, potential witnesses perhaps, preferred not to see or hear (17). In
the second paragraph of the story, two men – recognizable types to the woman in A – get out of
the car, and this action spurs the woman to action. She wakes her soundly sleeping child and
promptly rushes to ring the doorbell – “tres timbres breves, firmes, alarmantes” – at Apt. B (17).

As she waits for an answer, mere seconds, the sound of the elevator descending heightens
the tension as she clings to her daughter. When the door is opened by the old lady, the woman
from Apt. A utters her first and last words in the story: “-Pase lo que pase, no salga, no llame a
nadie. Quédese con la nena nada más por esta noche” (17). In response, the old woman backs up,
moves to the side, and the child finds herself alone with her in Apt. B: “Su madre había
desaparecido” (17). Thus begins a night of quietly efficient violence, foreshadowed by the past
participle desaparecido – a word now loaded with implications – as the worlds of Apt. A and
Apt. B converge. The woman in Apt. A is made to disappear, the young girl is left puzzled but
seems to believe her mother will return, and these two events serve as a catalyst for the
resurgence of the old woman’s turbulent past as she quietly mumbles, not once but twice, “-Si
esto no es una guerra…” (18).

When the young girl is brought from Apt. A to Apt. B and again when she is first left
without her mother in a new apartment with a stranger, she repeats, “¿Qué pasa?” (17). The
young girl’s disorientation and confusion – likely stemming from her present lack of knowledge
concerning the implication of the events occurring outside Apt. B – provides an intriguing
textual representation of the belated nature of trauma. The old woman and young girl wait
expectantly, frozen in unison while events unfold just outside the apartment, unsure of what will
happen next.

Después de esto, ambas, la niña y la vieja, formaron dos siluetas fijas, pétreas,

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52 The English translation of the old woman’s remark is more emphatic. She states, “This is a real war” (Roffé
“Sleepless Night” 112).
It is hardly felt by those outside of Apt. A, and although the old woman – with her side comment about war – appears to know the full truth of the matter, the young girl initially resorts to denial when she boldly contests the old woman’s remark: “La niña, después de beber un sorbo, dijo desafiante: -Acá nunca hubo una guerra. La vieja, a la vez, saboreó su elixir, chasqueó la lengua. -Me lo dijo la maestra, en el cole -se ratificó la niña” (18). Although the violence that claims her mother affects Alicia indirectly, i.e. through the loss of her parents, she has yet to fully register it, still frozen and expectant, still denying the existence of a “war.” The violence that comes for her mother almost passes her by due to her mother’s rapid intervention and the old woman’s willingness to open the door. Ironically, through the young girl’s unexpected yet temporarily permitted presence in the old woman’s apartment, the aftereffects of this sinister violence (i.e. Alicia alone, deprived of her parents, and in need of care) spill over into the small space of Apt. B. Despite her seeming innocence or ignorance of the significance of the events unfolding in the background, Alicia exhibits a keen emotional sense of them when she asks “¿Qué pasa?”. She has simultaneously seen and not seen, witnessed and not witnessed, the events surrounding her mother’s forced disappearance. As silence returns to the apartment complex, it swallowed up the sounds that had marked her mother’s departure, sounds that had only subtly existed in the background: “El silencio persistía como antes de los ruidos que, de cualquier forma, habían sido discretos” (18). The moment of violence almost seems to have been imagined.

Alicia also intuits the old woman’s knowledge of events she knows nothing about when she forcefully states there was never a war. With this defensive statement, she asserts a degree of control by denying events she does not yet fully understand. Unfortunately, this sense of
“something” happening and her denial of a “war” will not prevent the chain of events that has been set in motion this night. It does, however, reveal Alicia’s underlying resistance in a situation beyond her control. In *Children: Rights and Childhood*, Archard states, “Indeed, talk of the child’s essential innocence is in danger both of being mythic and, ironically, of being sexualised” (105). Although Archard is discussing children/adolescents and the right to sexual choice when he makes this comment, I believe it is pertinent to representations of children as innocent beings in other contexts. For example, literary representations of children as vessels filled with a unique and “essential innocence” can entrap them in passivity and the sort of ignorance that prevents them from choosing, i.e. making an informed choice based on knowledge of some object, activity, event, or the like. Archard also discusses John Locke’s views on the child as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate, i.e. the human mind at birth is free of innate ideas, viewpoints, etc. Locke, if he did indeed mean to frame knowledge and rationality as incremental as suggested by Archard, would fall in line with contemporary restrictions for children and Children’s Rights based on age, competence, and the like (3). This proposition is supported by his discussion of Locke’s *Thoughts* where capacities are tied to age. Archard comments, “It is not just that children broaden the range of their experiences and thus have more to reason about; it is that their abilities to reason grow as they mature” (5). I agree with this statement in terms of age-related development, but Alicia’s movement between understanding and not understanding could be tied simultaneously to competence related to age, her mother’s withholding of the painful knowledge of her father’s true fate (hence her lack of full knowledge), and/or the belatedness of traumatic memory (demonstrated in her knowing/not knowing, also a present lack of full knowledge).
I want to focus more on a trauma studies reading of the child protagonist’s lack of knowledge and experience, which could explain why she denies the old woman’s claim of a “war” yet fights to remain alert/awake throughout the night. Textual examples of her battle against sleep demonstrate a child on the verge of a traumatic awakening.

→ “Será mejor que duermas [dijo la vieja]. -Ya no tengo sueño -dijo la niña…” (18).
→ “La niña empezaba a relajarse. Bostezó largamente y se estiró con un suave ronroneo de gato. La vieja aprovechó para decirle: -Creo que deberías dormir. -No, no voy a dormir nunca más en la vida -contestó muy resuelta y volvió a simular que leía el diario” (19-20).
→ “¿Estás intranquila? [dijo la vieja] -Un poquito, un poquito bastante [dice Alicia]” (21).
→ “-Yo no voy a dormir nunca más en la vida -contestó Alicia con un hilo de voz. Se había recostado envuelta en la manta y luchaba por mantener los ojos abiertos” (23).

Based on these instances, I would argue Alicia is demonstrably intuitive emotionally and unwilling to sleep, yet on the cusp of some tremendous realization that has not yet come. In choosing to describe Alicia as innocent or ignorant, I am thus referring not to the idea of an un tarnished or exquisite quality inherent in her as a child but rather, as mentioned above, to her initial innocence/ignorance of the (traumatic) moment when violent men come to take her mother away (especially in contrast to the old woman’s knowing talk of wars). As such, Alicia’s character represents an innocent child, thus far protected by the kingdom of childhood, presently innocent in that she is still processing her mother’s sudden departure/disappearance and still unaware of the full significance of her father’s disappearance years earlier, evident in her description of the circumstances in which he disappeared.

When the old woman questions Alicia regarding her father – ¿Cuánto hace que desapareció? – Alicia explains,

Mamá y yo estábamos en la playa, cuando volvimos papá se había ido. Yo era chiquita, pero me acuerdo. Había un despelote en la casa, todo tirado. Entonces, regresamos a la playa, pero no a la misma, sino a otra, y después nos fuimos a las sierras. (22)
Eventually, the young girl and her mother return to the city, believing it safe. But, as this sleepless night shows, not without drastic consequences. The woman in Apt. A recognizes the men coming for her, likely due to her prior experience with (full knowledge of) her husband’s disappearance. The narrator reveals that the men Alicia’s mother saw arrive were unmistakable: “Del coche bajaron dos hombres, eran inconfundibles” (17). Although the mother recognizes the men, the child quietly sleeps. At the outset of the story, the girl is depicted as lacking the alertness of one anticipating disaster, one like her mother with the full and terrible knowledge of Alicia’s father’s forced disappearance – a knowledge her mother possibly never shared with her daughter, instead keeping her safely entrenched within the kingdom of childhood (knowing her father was gone yet not knowing his absence was the result of forced disappearance). Alicia now waits in Apt. B with the old woman who, like her mother, realizes precisely what is taking place outside her door. The old woman’s thoughts reveal her understanding of the dangers and risk,

Ya se habían cobrado una víctima de la familia, el padre de la niña, para qué iban a querer otra. Fue un error, un exceso de confianza arriesgarse así, poner en peligro a la pequeña y comprometerla a ella, que no quería saber nada más de batallitas. (my emphasis) (23)

Alicia’s present innocence/ignorance of the dangers surrounding her, of the process of forced disappearance practiced by the military dictatorship, tragically represents a delayed knowledge regarding her parents, one with the potential to later haunt her. It also makes the story an indispensable case study in the belated arrival of trauma – a belatedness further magnified by the old woman’s very present traumatic memory of a past violence that continues to haunt her.

In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, literary theorist Cathy Caruth’s analyses of Sigmund Freud’s works on trauma speak of the actual moment of trauma as being missed, and it is only in its “belated” arrival that one realizes that one saw too late (i.e. the
post-realization of the now unavoidable tragedy). Said in other words, “. . . trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth 4). In another analysis on Freud, Lacan, and the ethics of Memory in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth defines trauma and traumatic experience as follows:

In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing, of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (91-92)

In this way, the belatedness of trauma refers to a delayed knowledge of the traumatic event, one that arrives after the fact. I believe Alicia demonstrates a delayed knowledge of the traumatic in her not knowing what has happened. She first wonders this aloud, then remains awake until sleep overpowers her. In regards to the old woman’s memories of a war, Caruth describes the surviving of trauma or the aftereffects of it – *the living after something horrible yet fully unknown at the moment of its occurrence* – as unbearable. I view the old woman’s knowledge of war and suffering (seen as an “unbearable” survival in her later comments) as evidence of her understanding of the particular violence that befalls Alicia’s mother directly and the potential for

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53 See the section “Narratives of Belated Experiences” in my “Introduction to Critical Theories . . .” for more on Cathy Caruth and the belated arrival of trauma. This concept is also discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

54 In the introductory chapter to *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth discusses the symbolism of the parable of the wound and the voice utilized by Sigmund Freud. In her analysis, trauma (or the wound) is tied to the unknown, belatedness, and haunting. I utilize her interpretation of the wound and the voice that cries out from it in my Chapter 4 analysis of *El espinazo del diablo*. 
it to befall herself and Alicia – “Fue un error, un exceso de confianza arriesgarse así, poner en peligro a la pequeña y comprometerla a ella . . .” (23).

I would argue that the old woman’s knowledge could help her shelter Alicia from (or educate her in the workings of) an external world fraught with dangers: “Lo sabía, lo había vivido primero con sus padres, luego con los hombres que fueron sus amantes y también en la rue des Saussaies [the street where the old woman was taken to be interrogated and tortured]” (22). Yet will she do so? Roffé may be indirectly implicating bystanders and other civilians as necessary good Samaritans who are left without excuse. This call to assist others is given added weight by the proximity of apartments A and B. In a large urban center, two victims of a similar violence are literally next door to each other, and in the middle of an extraordinary night, the woman from Apt. A reaches out and leaves her child with the stranger in Apt. B in the desperate attempt to save her (yet she, herself, does not ask to stay).

Roffé’s uses of space, physical (i.e. two apartments on the same passageway) and metaphorical (i.e. the traumatic/emotional histories of Apt. A & B), bring about a convergence of distant periods of violence in the night, yet it is unclear whether the old woman will answer the long-term call for responsibility for the “other.” Lethally efficient “men” drastically alter the course of Alicia’s and her mother’s lives in much the same way the old woman’s life was once radically redirected with the appearance of other “men” smelling of English tobacco – “casi cuarenta años atrás, cuando llegaron con su blanca, impoluta piel quienes la fueran a buscar, allá, en la France de la France, en París” (20). She remembers the other “men,” the Gestapo, and the deadly consequences of their having come for her: “¿Dónde la habían llevado primero? Tenía los recuerdos superpuestos. Quizás a la rue des Saussaies, allí interrogaban, allí la Gestapo sumergía a las mujeres en una bañera, antes y después de las preguntas, eran tan pulcros” (20). Alicia and
her mother’s present circumstances trigger a series of flashbacks for the old woman. She once had children of her own, both dead, and a partner, also deceased. Although a stranger, she could relate to the violence being directed against Alicia’s mother and choose to take the child under her wing. The War claimed her family, leaving only her and a gaping wound in her heart caused by their loss, which she then unsuccessfully attempted to cover up with whirlwind romances, travel, and the over-consumption of cigarettes and liquor. She recalls never regaining the weight she lost during the war and in the German concentration camp ("Su piel se le pegaba a los huesos") because she was too consumed by her frenetic escape from the traumas of her past (21). Her rail-thin body, dependent on alcohol and cigarettes, and diminished appearance attest to the toll her pain-ridden past has taken on her over time.

Unfortunately, her efforts to escape the past only led her back to the distinctly terrible and all too familiar violence of state-sponsored terror in a Paris-like city. This city, Buenos Aires, has now begun to pain her like Paris did during the War. On a symbolic level, the old woman’s memories expose similar traumatic/emotional histories among herself, Alicia, and Alicia’s mother. These histories of radical violence increase the women’s proximity (more than physical now). The circularity of forced disappearance and torture is again unearthed, again touches former victims (even 40 years later), again harms the most vulnerable: Mothers (separated from their young by illness, hunger, and forced disappearance), the elderly, and children, including orphans-in-the-making like Alicia. In the old woman’s flashback to her past encounter with the Germans in Vichy France, the reader witnesses the repetition over time of a horrible violence – methods of
terror resurrected by other “men” in Argentina, men who are also public agents of a national reorganization process and who likewise invade the micro-sphere of a private residence (Apt. A) with violence and impunity.

4. The Micro-Sphere of the Private as a Reflection of the Macro-Sphere of the Public

The old woman’s traumatic memories, as they travel with her to another country and time, testify to the reoccurrence of an analogous violence. Due to this repetition of traumatic memories and violent methods, it becomes evident that the so-called “processes of reorganization” experienced by the old woman, first in France and later in Argentina, birthed vicious, self-propagating methods of terror. The frightening aspect of these processes lies in an organized violence (whether legalized or extrajudicial) that eventually transcends the State itself, i.e. borders neither limit nor halt extreme violence. The old woman’s experiences show that effective, violent methods are recycled. The drastic consequences of enforced “reorganizations” of society are made visible by the horrific systems and practices they spawn: Concentration camps/secret detention centers and acts of forced disappearance for those deemed beyond reform or outside of the sphere of the desirable/model citizen body. These policies are even painfully evident in the smallest of spaces (ones supposedly safe from the controlling reach of institutional power) – that of the old woman’s apartment and internal musings, both of which reflect the long-term effects of state-sponsored violence on private lives.

The practices of the Argentine military dictatorship come into sharp focus through the old woman’s memories of the Germans in Paris because her violent past provides context for and illuminates the increasingly sinister portrait of Alicia’s present world, including parallel histories of soldiers/men arriving unannounced in the night, the torture and/or forced disappearance of undesirable members of society (militants like the old woman and possibly Alicia’s mother),
extrajudicial killings or operations, and concentration camps/detention centers. For example, the
operation to “kidnap” Alicia’s mother is reminiscent of the German’s Nacht und Nebel in that
she is made to vanish into the night – a deed facilitated by the lack of concrete
information/misinformation or “fog” surrounding her disappearance (people knew and yet didn’t
know). The men’s unannounced arrival also employs elements of surprise and disorientation –
both methods honed in the German’s earlier success with the Blitzkrieg or Lightening War. The
text is richly layered with words loaded with significations. Although the story, with the
exception of the first half a page, consists of a conversation between an elderly woman and a
young girl, the narrative contains many words either overtly referring to violent events or
alluding to them: Interrogation(s), operation, real war, Gestapo, questioning, concentration
camp, military gangs over Paris, the Resistance, the Second World War, disappear(ed) (as a
reference to Alicia’s father and mother), a kind of torture, persecution, genocide, fanaticism,
dictators and their assassins along with many other references to traumatic events and death.

Prior to this night, the old woman’s life in Buenos Aires had revolved around her own
needs and wants, hidden and seemingly safe in a small apartment from the terrors of the outside
world: “Ahora se hallaba consumiendo serenamente, sin tiempos, sin fugas, de esa vida íntima
construida entre las cuatro paredes de su apartamento que contenían la medida exacta de su
deseo: cigarrillos negros, brandy, buena lectura . . .” (21). That is until the world found its way
into her refuge in the form of a young girl and her endangered mother. The old woman, although
presently secluded, is cognizant of the lessons of the past; she remembers the methods employed
in Vichy France, which could be said to have experienced a state of internal siege in that the
Vichy government collaborated with the Germans and created its own national process of
“regeneration,” akin to a reorganization. Historically, France was occupied by Germany in mid-
1940 and divided in two: Vichy France and German-occupied France (with a small section annexed by the Greater Reich).  

Although Paris was in the German-occupied zone, its government was in the town of Vichy, and it was also referred to as Vichy France. Initially, Vichy France was a free zone, a status aided by its collaboration with the Germans. The French administration headed by Marshal Pétain, who was granted full power of governance, oversaw to a certain extent much of France. He converted the French Republic into an authoritarian regime that stressed “National Regeneration,” terminology strikingly similar to Argentina’s “National Reorganization Process” or El Proceso under the military dictatorship. According to Havi Dreifuss, France’s national slogan of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity] was converted into *Travail, Famille, Patrie* [Work, Family, Country] in Vichy France – strangely reminiscent of Germany’s emphasis on “work makes free” or *Arbeit macht Frei*, which was the slogan displayed over the entryways of many concentration camps. 

Dreifuss also states that anti-Semitism and other racially (and politically) charged policies were quickly implemented so that in France, and Western Europe in general, positive law became a tool for the Authoritarian State. Legislation was passed to facilitate practice, i.e. as a complement to Germany’s wide-spread practices of deportation to concentration camps, forced disappearances, torture, experimentation, and systematic mass murder. These practices are reflected in the old

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56 Information obtained from “The Holocaust – An Introduction (I): Nazi Germany: Ideology, the Jews, and the World,” an educational module or course created by Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem (established 1953), Israel’s official memorial/museum for the victims of the Holocaust.

57 Before genocide was legally defined, the term *mass murder* was often employed. The word “genocide” was not coined until 1944 by Raphael Lemkin who strove to define it in legal terms. His quest was finally fulfilled when the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in December of 1948. When it took effect in January of 1951, the Nuremberg Trials had already concluded.
woman’s memories that, although part of a fictional story, represent the painful realities of those who were denied humane treatment in occupied and Vichy France (1940-1944).

In Roffé’s short story, the collocation of the old woman’s memories with the behind-the-scenes forced disappearance of Alicia’s mother is yet another instance in which there is opportunity to consider the informative potential of the multidirectional aspects of traumatic memory or, otherwise stated, “. . . collective memory beyond a competitive, zero-sum logic” (Rothberg 178-179). Michael Rothberg’s analysis of a French documentary film from 1961 that addressed both the Nazi genocide and decolonization is demonstrative of the possibilities for one traumatic period to illuminate another.58 In other words, one traumatic memory has the potential to serve as a catalyst for another memory; in lieu of a competition where there are winners and losers, there are instead collective experiences.

Recognizing the multidirectionality of memory encourages us to pay close attention to the circulation of historical memories in encounters whose meanings are complex and overdetermined, instead of proceeding from the assumption that the presence of one history in collective memory entails the erasure or dilution of all others. (179)

In line with Rothberg’s reasoning, I propose that placing traumatic memories of the Holocaust and Vichy France alongside of the Argentine military dictatorship’s tragic reuse of the practice of forced disappearance does not have to result in competing histories. It can instead illuminate the shared diegetic experiences of the old woman and Alicia’s mother while lending weight to the ethical imperative of the Good Samaritan to care for Alicia, i.e. the obligation (or Biblical injunction) to assist neighbors in need, whether known or unknown.

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58 Rothberg postulates, “The juxtaposition in Chronicle of a Summer [French documentary film] of the memory of the Nazi genocide and the history of decolonization provides an opportunity to rethink the ‘unique’ place that the Holocaust has come to hold in discourses on extreme violence” (my emphasis) (178-179).
In *Poder y desaparición: Los campos de concentración en Argentina*, Pilar Calveiro mentions the societal tendency to *not* want to see, to choose *not* to see: “No obstante, una buena parte de la sociedad optó por no saber, no querer ver, apartarse de los sucesos, desapareciéndolos en un acto de voluntad” (151). As previously quoted, Roffé’s text also broaches this rejection of the ethical imperative to assist the other in need: “Sólo aquellos que eran buscados, a veces los veían llegar; los demás no querían ver ni oír nada” (Roffé 17). Calveiro’s analysis of a communal state of schizophrenia during the dictatorship (in secret detention centers/camps as well as in society) manifests how contradictory and ambivalent beliefs and modes of being and doing could co-exist (151). She partly attributes the lack of aid, by civilian members in society, for those who were forcefully disappeared to a normalization of the repressive apparatus.

La normalización de la tortura en relación con los presos comunes primero y los políticos después permitió que nadie se escandalizara por algo que ya era, aunque desagradable, moneda corrente. La necesidad de exterminar a la subversión, que se inscribía en una lógica guerrera bastante difundida, también era una verdad admitida en amplios sectores de la sociedad. (153)

Immersed within the pervasive logic of the dictatorship, many bystanders felt the forcefully disappeared person must have committed some crime to deserve the violence befalling them (a strategic way of interposing distance and detachment toward the victims of this practice) (154). In Roffé’s story, however, the old woman knows state violence is arbitrary. She realizes Alicia’s mother will be gone for more than one night, if she returns at all. Historically, the Nazis and the Argentine dictatorship did more than kidnap or murder; they attempted to wipe out the existence of the “other.” According to Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,

The Nazis, with the precision peculiar to them, used to register their operations in the

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59 Calveiro is a scholar, Argentine concentration camp survivor, and human rights activist.

60 The normalization of violence and the bureaucratic routinization of the methods that facilitate this violence was initially discussed by Hannah Arendt.
concentration camps under the heading ‘under cover of the night (Nacht und Nebel).’ The radicalism of measures to treat people as if they had never existed and to make them disappear in the literal sense of the word is frequently not apparent at first glance, because both the German and the Russian system are not uniform but consist of a series of categories in which people are treated very differently. (Arendt 442)

The goal of the obliteration of “offending” members from society was connected to the official state process of reorganization – per Calveiro, “. . . un proyecto que pretendía desaparecer de una vez y para siempre lo disfuncional, lo desestabilizador, lo diverso” (154). As terrorized bystanders, Calveiro calls society the first prisoner: “A ella [la sociedad] se dirigía en primer lugar el mensaje de terror; ella era la primera prisionera” (154). She allows for the wide-spread application of terror’s consequent effects of self-preservation and assignment of blame to its “victims” because the schizophrenic mechanism of the camp also functioned outside of it (156). Although understandable and a medically diagnosable reaction in cases of extreme fear, I would nevertheless argue that the paralysis of fear does not negate the ethical responsibility of an entire population, whether terrorized or not, and it does not silence the imperative to assist. Fear and terror certainly complicate the ability to assist, but I do not believe it dissipates. In Roffé’s short story, the old woman still opens the door into her private space, even knowing the implications of assisting an outsider. The old woman tells Alicia, “Si te dejó [la madre de Alicia] acá es porque confía en mí” (Roffé 22). It is an intriguing thought that Alicia’s mother, an unknown neighbor, would trust the old woman to watch her daughter. The question is thus not whether the door opens when it could have remained closed but rather how long the old woman will choose to assist – for one night as she agreed to or for a lifetime if necessary. The answer remains ambiguous. In addition to this call for empathy and aid from bystanders, which the old woman initially answers, the comparative nature of Roffé’s story raises many other questions of traumatic representability.
5. Questions of Representability

If Rothberg’s stance on multidirectional memory is applied to Roffé’s short story, what is gained in terms of representability between the two periods of violence when points of interconnectivity and interrelatedness are stressed over traumatic differences? Is it still a possibility that the violence of the Argentine military dictatorship is swallowed up by the long shadow of the Holocaust, an event that is often viewed as unique and unparalleled in time? Does Roffé’s work, in its demonstrable use of multidirectional strategies, enhance the representation of the traumatic? Although I have proposed that distinct, traumatic memories can be illuminating in a text like Roffé’s, it is still important to address the unique place the Holocaust has come to hold in traumatic discourses.

In “La noche en blanco,” the old woman is herself a survivor of torture and concentration camps who recognizes the congruence between the past and present. As a survivor and victim of the Holocaust, she can feasibly form connections between her past experiences and her present circumstances. Her internal monologue is concerned mostly with Paris, not the camps themselves – although she mentions the hunger, her loss, and a period of torture by the Gestapo in Paris. The old woman’s traumatic memories of detention and torture are composed of sensations or corporal memories. These sensorial representations of an unrepresentable and unspeakable terror fall in line with the fragmentation associated with traumatic memories. The old woman’s internal monologue reveals, “De los detalles no guardaba memoria, sólo sensaciones: la escandalosa galería de ecos, la visión arrebatadora de los subsuelos percuididos de sangre, un ritmo vertiginoso de cascada, cayendo, retornando, y la clausura de sus labios hinchados de apretarlos” (22). These corporal memories arise upon the old woman’s encounter with the recycled violence of forced disappearance, an echo of a past violence traveling down the halls of history and re-
entering her life. This familiar violence is more than a personal haunting of past traumas; it becomes real again with the presence of Alicia in her apartment. It reminds her (of her own), “Sesenta y dos años de un siglo que sumaba hambrunas, persecuciones, genocidio, fanatismo, necedad, delirio. El mundo era eso: una factoría incesante de estupidez y horror” (22-23). The old woman’s traumatic experience spans from the Holocaust to the Argentine military dictatorship revealing a trajectory of violence that highlights the world’s continued production of stupidity and horror – a like terror providing common ground. Regardless of the commonalities of violent methods and traumatic memories, the representability of the Holocaust and other traumatic events, which are often tied to the Holocaust as the exemplum of the unspeakable, continues to be problematic for many theorists and historians.

In Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust, Joshua Hirsch explores problems and opportunities created by representations of the Holocaust (as historical, individual, and familial trauma) in cinema. Although his study focuses on film, I view his concepts as applicable to other types of literary or pictorial representations. In his introduction to Afterimage, Hirsch recaps many of the initial debates on the limits of Holocaust representation – from Theodor Adorno to Berel Lang, Elie Wiesel, and Andreas Huyssen – and explores the feasibility of each argument. Hirsch recalls that “debates among philosophers and critics on the limits of Holocaust representation date most notably to 1949, when Theodor Adorno wrote his now famous dictum, ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’” (Hirsch 4). Nevertheless, there was and is poetry after Auschwitz that is a testament to the impulse to speak, even after the black hole of trauma has taken one’s voice.61 These debates are far from closed cases; they are instead still provoking

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61 Paul Celan, a Holocaust survivor and poet, was born Paul Ancel in 1920 in Czernowitz, Bukovina. He lived through extremely trying circumstances in the 1930s-1940s due to anti-Semitism and the events of WWII. Although he survived slave labor (the camps), although he lived when his parents were killed, although he had a
further debates, evinced by a return in contemporary literature and film to the Holocaust as a cultural or historical referent. This return to the Holocaust, which resounds in and informs the diegetic present of “La noche en blanco,” is yet another example of a reopening of the debates on the representability of traumatic events.

Hirsch explores the various limitations of key debates on representability by addressing the implications of the Holocaust as “the exception” and the idea that witnesses’ memories are connected to essential truth.

The assertion of absolute unrepresentability, while appealing as a response to the terrible sense of otherness that seems to characterize the Holocaust, implies both a rule of representational transparency to which the Holocaust is the exception, and an assertion of an essential truth of the Holocaust known only to witnesses. (Hirsch 5)

Hirsch discounts the ability to access essential truth through the discourse of the witness as it is utilized in historical representations. He further emphasizes the limitations of historical representation by invoking semiotic laws of representation.

All historical representation is, rather, limited in at least three ways: by signification (the ontological difference between the reality and the sign, including the memory-sign), by documentation (limited documentation of the past), and by discourse (limited framing of documents by the conventions of discourse). (5)

I would argue the limitations mentioned by Hirsch also apply to literary representations because they too may be shaped by signification, documentation, and discourse. In my opinion, there is a great difference in viewing the two parallel diegetic stories in Roffé’s text in light of Hirsch’s statements regarding the limitations of historical representation versus other Holocaust theorists like Elie Wiesel, known for his claim that the Holocaust is unique and unrepresentable. If one

wife, a son, and a successful career, at the age of 49, he committed suicide by drowning himself in the Seine in Paris (1970) (Felman and Laub 26). “Aschenglorie hinter” was published in Celan’s 1967 poetry collection Atemwende or Breathturn and deals with the horrors of the WWII camps.

Hirsch declares, “Following Hayden White and others, on the other hand, I would argue that no historical representation gives access to essential truth, not even the memories of witnesses” (5).
follows Wiesel’s line of thought, then the old woman’s trauma in “La noche en blanco” could be considered unique in a way that the young girl’s trauma-in-the-making could not be, i.e. its authenticity could not be validated by the same criteria. A claim of uniqueness and unrepresentability would situate the Holocaust and the Argentine military dictatorship in a position of competition that, as competing traumatic memories, might privilege one over the other. If, however, we adhere to Hirsch’s line of reasoning, then the two parallel histories of trauma may be seen as historical or literary representations limited in many of the same respects yet flexible in their interactions, more in line with Michael Rothberg’s multidirectional memory.

Rothberg, in addressing what he deems a flawed conceptual framework for analyzing the relationships among memory, identity, and violence, demonstrates the difference between competitive memories and multidirectional memories.

Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private. (Rothberg 3)

In cases like Roffé’s short story, as previously stated, defining memory in this way facilitates equative comparisons between devastating events. Although multidirectional memory can provide room for new perspectives vis-à-vis traumatic experiences, there are no easy answers to questions regarding the representability of trauma or the comparison of the Holocaust with other mass traumas. I posit that asking questions, like the ones listed below, will allow for a more complex and nuanced picture of many traumatic events to emerge as commonalities, as well as differences, are discussed.

*If the Holocaust is incomparable, why is it often used as a historical, cultural, or literary referent when discussing other traumatic events? Is this referencing positive, negative, both, or neither?

*Does the Holocaust lend weight or credibility to other traumatic discourses when it is
invoked in the same textual space? Does there have to be a hierarchical relationship where traumas are concerned?

Many scholars in Holocaust Studies, Genocide Studies, and Witness Film/Literature have attempted to think through such issues; yet, regardless of the answerability of these philosophical quandaries, intellectuals like Michael Lazzara strongly support the attempt to represent/to testify of the seemingly unrepresentable and non-addressable natures of private and mass historical traumas.63

Yo avanzaría la hipótesis de que el reconocer las imposibilidades del testimonio no debe ser considerado como una derrota sino como un desafío; no como un llamado al silencio, sino como un llamado a las armas, un punto de arranque para realizar actos de revisionismo histórico (si tomamos este término en su sentido más positivo). La noción de lo imposible pone en primer plano, a la fuerza, la urgente necesidad en las sociedades post traumáticas de dar testimonio de manera insistente e incesante, debido a la magnitud y el carácter inagotable del desastre. (Lazzara 240)

I propose that Roffé’s text, whether intentionally or not, does just this. Through an old woman’s traumatic memories, her interactions with a vulnerable young girl and her endangered mother, and the juxtaposition of two historically violent periods of time, the text addresses the intersectionality and the multidirectionality of private and mass historical traumas. This multifaceted approach permits a more in-depth analysis of traumatic experiences that would otherwise appear distant in time and space.

Another key question – whose historical details won’t be discussed in detail here – would be that of Argentina’s ambiguous role during WWII as a (supposedly) neutral party until the very last instant.64 From a historical vantage point, Argentina’s claim of neutrality – demonstrated by

63 See Michael Lazzara’s Prisms of Memory: narration and trauma in the transition of Chile for more on the idea of the impossibility of testifying but the necessity of speaking.

64 Or Argentina prior to World War II, in the 1920s for example or even before, as a haven for Germans, Fascists, and National-Socialists . . .
Carlos De Nápoli to be an overt support of Nazi Germany in certain cases – facilitates the apposition of the two distinct time periods with similar practices of violence. De Nápoli paints Argentina as maintaining a contradictory, perhaps false, neutrality: “En cualquier caso, por respeto a la verdad debe decirse que cuando el campo de Auschwitz fue liberado, el 27 de enero de 1945, la República Argentina aún no había declarado la guerra al Tercer Reich” (268). Not only had the country not declared war on Germany by this late period in the War, but they received – according to De Nápoli, with the full knowledge of the Allies, the Red Cross, and the Vatican – their war criminals with open arms. He vividly contrasts this warm welcome of the victimizers with the painful experiences of the skeletal victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau as they stumbled out of the camps upon their liberation:

Mientras los espectros tambaleantes que habían sobrevivido a torturas, vejaciones y mil privaciones salían del campo de Auschwitz-Birkenau, sus victimarios y verdugos entraban clandestinos a la Argentina –en submarinos o barcos, con ayuda del Reich, el Vaticano, los Aliados o la Cruz Roja, poco importa–, el país que los recibió con los brazos abiertos y les otorgó protección, prebendas y prerrogativas. (268)

De Nápoli’s description of what I will call Argentina’s past “non-neutral” neutrality, i.e. a neutrality that in practice was not truly neutral but more of an expedient political act, provides a chilling parallel for the old woman’s terrible experiences with the Germans in France and her later knowledge of other violent “men” in Argentina. For example, had the Argentine “men” who came for Alicia’s mother been trained by former Nazis or Gestapo? Historically, during the military dictatorship, it was a frightening and often actualized possibility.

6. Experience Contrasted with Innocence: The Known and the Unknown

In “La noche en blanco,” the transgenerational aspects of traumatic experience come into sharp focus as the old woman remembers her dead children as a pain she carries within her. They
had died before the soldiers came for her, unlike Alicia’s mother who still had a child to worry about, and so she had guarded no hope of living. Their death had been a perverse relief.

Era extraño sentir alivio, pero la muerte les había evitado cosas todavía más tremendas; un alivio que la acompañó luego, durante todo aquel tiempo en el campo de concentración, donde esperaba lo peor, donde iban a parar los casos difíciles, peligrosos, como el de ella, una francesa que no soportó despertarse con el ruido de las cuadrillas militares sobre París. (Roffé 20)

Her children’s absence burns within her, yet in my opinion, she utilizes this wound as a shield to protect her from becoming emotionally invested in Alicia. Although the old woman is perhaps more aware than most of the purport of the belated arrival of trauma and its subsequent haunting, she allows herself to side-step feelings of guilt with the excuse that she is too old and sick to do more. She remembers, in a statement reminiscent of Primo Levi’s Muselmann or the living dead of the camps, “Se le habían ido uno detrás del otro, en cadena, su compañero y los hijos. Y ella, también ida, un muerto viviente” (24).65 The death of her children spared them from horrors she considers worse than death, yet Alicia is very much alive and very much present: “Ninguno de sus pequeños había alcanzado la edad de Alicia. Una desgracia con suerte, se consoló, porque había cosas más tremendas que la muerte” (24). I believe the traumas of the past may cause the old woman to flee the young girl’s trauma-in-the-making. The short story is ambiguous in regards to the old woman’s final decision, but whatever her motivations, she continuously attempts to maintain physical and emotional distance between Alicia and herself.

Although the night begins with the physical closure of distance and the triggering of painful memories, I would contend it ends with the reestablishment of the old woman’s

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65 For survivors of Holocaust concentration camps such as Primo Levi, the survivor is not a true witness precisely because she/he somehow survived. In Survival in Auschwitz, Levi pictures true witnesses as the “drowned” or the dead (Levi’s Muselmänner), those who are without speech, and these speechless ones make those with speech speak out for them (120).
emotional barriers. For example, the old woman’s initial closure of physical distance occurs soon after Alicia arrives, but it’s motivated by practical concerns. She moves near the girl on the sofa to verbally engage her for information about her family: “¿Cómo te llamás? -se animó a decirle. La niña no respondió” (18). She then goes to sit beside her and asks if she knows how to read (Alicia is hiding behind a newspaper). Alicia stammers as she attempts to read the caption underneath a photo. This leads the old woman to read it for her, and the name Alicia cannot pronounce – François Mitterrand – triggers memories of Paris and the War. The old woman wonders how Alicia’s mother could believe it would only be for one night. She had never believed that when they came for her. “Que le tuviera a la nena nada más por esta noche, le había dicho la mujer del A, una desconocida, con quien hasta apenas una hora atrás no había cruzado más que el saludo” (20). If the mother’s statement is taken literally, then the old woman is fulfilling her end of the bargain, which began when she gave her consent by moving to the side as Alicia’s mother placed the child inside her apartment. Yet, in light of the information the old woman obtains throughout the night, such as the absence of other family members to take care of Alicia, one could imagine an intervention of sorts taking place, especially based on the woman’s past loss of her own children.

As mentioned previously, in addition to the death of the child’s grandparents, the old woman discovers Alicia’s father “disappeared” four years earlier in a similar, unexpected, and violent fashion to that of her mother. The old woman reflects that “los dictadores y sus sicarios” had been in power for five years, which means (in the diegetic timeline of the story) Alicia’s father was forcefully disappeared around the beginning of the military dictatorship (1976-1983)

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66 [The old woman thinks] “. . . había cosas más tremendas que la muerte. El dolor, la orfandad, el desamparo, la mentira, y lo que pensaba hacer con esa pobre criatura asustada” (my emphasis) (Roffé 24).
and her mother closer to the end (23). The repression of the dictatorship must have hounded Alicia and her mother for years; as such, her mother’s forced disappearance was not an isolated incident. The old woman intuits the long-term persecution of Alicia’s family and asks, “-No se quedaban mucho tiempo en un mismo lugar. [Alicia] -Mamá decía que era mejor mudarse. Casa nueva, vida nueva” (22). The old woman knows because she too had suffered, but despite her traumatic knowledge, she oscillates between empathy for a child, alone like herself, and avoidance of accepting long-term responsibility for another woman’s child.

For me, Alicia represents another potential traumatic loss; if the old woman maintains her distance, she cannot lose what is not hers, what is not intimately known. Even when Alicia’s eyes fill up with tears, the old woman “. . . tampoco esta vez pudo abrazarla” (23). The old woman’s thoughts about what she will do with Alicia also make her feel guilty: “Los pensamientos la incomodaron en el recodo del sofá donde permanecía al acecho de la niña sin poder tocarla” (24). In contrast to the old woman’s maintenance of her emotional and physical barrier, as the night progresses, Alicia views the old woman as more of an abuelita – a diminutive that, in my opinion, is more endearing and approachable – and less of a serious old woman (24). When she tells her this – when Alicia closes the emotional distance between them with the word abuelita, – the old woman, conmovida or touched/moved emotionally, physically moves away from the couch. I find it plausible that her maintenance of distance is a strategic maneuver to alleviate her guilt. It also allows her to preserve the emotional barrier necessary for her imminent departure, i.e. she may be facilitating her choice to return to Paris alone.

Luego, se levantó y fue hacia la mesa para servirse una copa y ponerle distancia a las emociones. Si amanecía con buen tiempo, se dijo, haría lo que tenía que hacer. Entonces, se dirigiría con paso seguro (aunque a Seguro se lo llevaron preso) a una agencia de viaje y compraría un pasaje a París, ya era hora de regresar a casa. (my emphasis) (24)
Instead of permitting empathy to flourish based on their traumatic histories, i.e. the old woman lost her family and Alicia has likely lost her last family member, I believe the old woman avoids opportunities to physically comfort Alicia so that she will not establish a bond (she says emotions are dangerous) with the young girl that will only cause her further pain – especially if it is broken by a subsequent return of the *quietly efficient violence* she remembers all too well.

Similar to the collective numbness mentioned by Calveiro that affected multiple sectors of Argentine society during the dictatorship, the old woman had once felt brave despite her fear, yet in the aftermath of traumatic experience, she no longer wants to care. “Pero ahora se prefería cobarde, quieta, en calma, indiferente, se prefería ahí donde estaba, habitando su espacio interno, su recinto enlutado” (22). The moment Alicia enters her apartment, the old woman no longer has the option to hide. The outside world intrudes into her zealously guarded inner space in the guise of a child. She can no longer ignore the events occurring outside of her little corner because Alicia, possibly newly orphaned, is a reminder that another war has come to her door. The old woman thus resorts to the self-preserving behavior to flee (entertaining fantasies of herself back in Paris), and while watching Alicia and considering her options, she struggles to avoid the emotional commitment and social responsibility that Alicia represents. As previously mentioned, Roffé’s text manifests this oscillation between physical and emotional proximity and detachment through the old woman’s physical movements and internal monologue. Once the old woman has engaged Alicia in conversation and ascertained that there is no one besides herself to care for the child, she considers abandoning the carefully constructed intimacy of her apartment. If Alicia is alone and remains with her, i.e. if she adopts her, then the old woman will no longer be alone, and it seems she desires this (being alone) most of all: “Ella y sus miasmas, sus manias, ella y nada más que ella” (21). The old woman’s emotional and physical spaces have been invaded by
the unexpected arrival of a girl who could make her care again. To avoid the responsibility of keeping a child, one dangerously connected to parents the dictatorship forcefully disappeared, connected to another state repression, she plans to reenter the public space outside of her apartment, but far from Argentina, back to her former home – now free of war and perhaps cleansed by time. In place of the images of snipers killing civilians in post-WWII Paris, images triggered by Alicia’s arrival, she visualizes a romanticized public space (one in which she seems to be alone).

To reach this idealized space, of escape and avoidance, it is imperative she not feel. The old woman wrestles with herself, “Porque algo tenía que hacer” (24). If the child is innocent/ignorant of the full import of trauma, then the old woman is overly experienced in the ways of the world, overly traumatized by the atrocities of WWII and the deaths of her family, and overly resistant to forming new bonds of kinship. I posit the old woman’s memories allow for a comparison to be made between the traumatic loss of her children (the haunting of a still present past) and Alicia’s not-yet-experienced loss of her parents (the unknown diegetic present/future). Will Alicia eventually understand her loss and identify as a child of desaparecidos, or will she too evade her past by leaving for another, less painful city? Just as there are many past events alluded to in the narrative, so too are there many potential questions left unanswered. For guidance, the reader has only the phantoms of the past or the traumatic memories of an old woman and a young girl’s trauma-in-the-making.

Thinking herself full of experience, the old woman faults Alicia’s mother for her lack of caution in returning to the city too soon: “Era evidente que su madre había vuelto a la ciudad
creyendo que los dictadores y sus sicarios, instalados en el poder desde hacía cinco años, empezaban a aflojar” (23). As previously mentioned, the old woman believes she would have acted differently and so lays claim to a greater degree of experience than Alicia or her mother possess. Yet, is this really true? The old woman admits to having lied to her children (although likely to reassure or protect them from painful realities), and it seems she will do the same to Alicia to avoid revealing the painful truth that her mother may never return. The old woman tellingly hesitates when she tells the girl her mother will return tomorrow (25). How can this statement be true when the reader knows that, earlier in the narrative, she thought to herself, “¿Cómo pudo [la madre] creer que sólo sería por esta noche?, pensó. Ella, en cambio, nunca había creído que iba a ser por una noche, . . .” (20)? She also lies to herself in that she wants to believe she is too old and sick to be able to assist. However, it seems she is still young enough to return to Paris and enjoy the city’s liquor and cigarettes – an old granny partaking of life in Paris.

Due to her occasional untruthfulness (with herself, her children, and now Alicia), how can the reader rely on her judgment? The old woman’s character is, in many respects, a classic, unreliable narrator. She played games with the meaning of the “true truth” or “¿De verdad, verdadera?” with her children and continues this practice with Alicia, who asks her if it is the true truth when the old woman says her mother will return tomorrow (22, 25). When I refer to her as an unreliable narrator, I am not casting her traumatic memories or painful knowledge in a doubtful light but rather considering that the version of the truth she tells Alicia is one she does not believe to be true. It is likely the old woman does this to protect the young girl, just as Alicia’s mother did when her father “disappeared,” but in telling untrue truths, she is further entrenching the girl in the kingdom of childhood. Is she truly safer disconnected from the knowledge of the kingdom of adulthood? She still sees and hears the events occurring around
her, regardless of comprehension. However, what purpose would it serve to tell the young girl that her initial, amused reaction to the old woman’s word game, “-Claro . . ., la verdad siempre es verdadera,” may cease to be true after this night (22)? Would knowledge (come too soon) make her wise?

The old woman is not as wise as she professes to be because she too was taken away – to be tortured and then to a concentration camp, – and she was also unable to intervene and save her family, just like Alicia’s mother. In the diegetic present of the short story, she thinks, speaks, and sees from a place of knowledge, a full knowledge of the moment of trauma that she too missed upon its arrival. Her very excess of knowledge exposes the disproportionate imbalance between an adult who fully knows and an anxious child who vaguely senses danger and so feels the need to remain awake/alert. The old woman’s decision to leave – if she goes through with it – will be one made with the knowledge of what may happen to Alicia. As the old woman speaks the untrue truth about Alicia’s mother, “Su rostro tenía el color de los cirios, de esa larga noche en blanco. -¿De verdad, verdadera? -dijo la niña antes de dormirse” (25). After Alicia finally falls asleep with the false knowledge that her mother will return tomorrow, the old woman remains awake and distant. Her comments indicate that she knows she is lying. In the story, it is plausible that her experience could help Alicia, but her children are dead so it appears to no longer matter whether the “true truth” is true or a lie. She comforts herself with the fact that they never lived long enough to learn the truth can be a lie (25). The old woman could change this for Alicia by adopting and caring for her, by speaking the truth and intervening beyond one night, yet based on her avoidance of physical contact (and emotional engagement) with Alicia, it seems she may choose to become who/what she believes herself to be – a living dead person who prefers to remain dead inside instead of experiencing the pain of feeling again.
As the experience of the old woman demonstrates, the full import of trauma will eventually come to be known and in knowing, there may be an acknowledgement of a lack of knowledge in the past, of a knowing too late to alter the course of events. Will Alicia one day regret not understanding that her mother wouldn’t come back, that she didn’t say goodbye, that she didn’t know her father had been made to “disappear,” or that the old woman was considering a return to France despite her uncertain fate? In Roffé’s ambiguous text, these hypothetical questions represent, for me, the “what ifs” of a future knowledge of the missed moment of trauma that will nevertheless be powerless against the “inalterability” of the narrative of trauma in that full knowledge arrives too late. In other words, the belated arrival of trauma or the full realization of the traumatic occurs post-factum, in some future moment in which knowledge can no longer swing the balance in one’s favor. For example, Alicia may someday realize her parents were forcibly disappeared, but it will be too late to change a thing. A past moment cannot be altered simply because it is already “past,” regardless of the arrival of a “realization” of it in the present (i.e. realizing something terrible after the fact does not provide one with the power to return to the past and alter events).67 In this future belated arrival, there is nothing more than a haunting of the past to come – Alicia’s potential diegetic future mirrored in the old woman’s internal dialogue. In the present of the narrative, this future knowledge is not known; it does not exist for Alicia. The omniscient narrator’s description of Alicia upon her arrival in the old woman’s apartment reflects her perplexed state (as if she just missed something and knows it, but what?).

67 See Cathy Caruth’s analysis of trauma in Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History for more on the belated arrival of trauma, a concept I also discuss in depth in Part A of Chapter 4. As previously quoted, Caruth argues that “… trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4).
“La niña, ahora de pie en la habitación única del B, se restregó los ojos y bostezó con la boca muy abierta; luego, se volvió hacia la puerta como buscando algo, a alguien. Su madre había desaparecido. De nuevo, se restregó los ojos y, dirigiéndose a la vieja, dijo: - ¿Qué pasa?” (17).

This is one reason, I postulate that the story, through its child protagonist’s present innocence (her knowing and not knowing), reflects the paradoxical temporal nature of traumatic belatedness. She quite literally misses the exact moment of her mother’s disappearance.

I find “La noche en blanco” to be as much about Alicia’s loss as it is about the old woman’s. Alicia is a quietly suffering child protagonist whose image is shaped by and conveyed to the reader through the musings of a worldly older woman. Although she appears outwardly daring when she contradicts the older woman’s statement about a war, when she fights to stay awake, or when she teases the old woman by imitating her accent, she is worried or anxious (feelings that I believe show foreboding for an unknown future). Alicia, “Festejó una y otra vez con esa risa su atrevimiento, su picardía. Luego, se calló, miró hacia el techo, volvió a reír, se arrebujó en la manta, tiritó súbitamente y se le llenaron los ojos de lágrimas” (22). She claims nothing is wrong, but she senses there is. After all, why would her mother leave her in the middle of the night with a strange old woman? Perhaps child protagonists, in a story like Roffé’s, clarify ideologically muddled periods in time. Alicia’s presence as an innocent bystander or unknowing witness allows for an alternative view of the practice of forced disappearance. She is portrayed as devoid of political awareness or leanings in the story, yet state-sponsored violence claims her family, leaving her alone. I believe the young girl, on a symbolic level, represents the hidden costs, the collateral damages of enforced reconfigurations of society. The old woman’s child had also not been a direct victim of the Nazi occupation, but he, in mourning his murdered father, refused to eat and eventually died.

Qué extremos, qué tercos son los niños, dijo para sí la vieja, tan raros con su cándido
dramatismo, como aquel hijo suyo que se negó al alimento, que se dejó ir, cuando los sicarios, los francotiradores, esa peste que se reproducía por generación espontánea, le volaron la cabeza a su padre. (24)

The old woman’s son was another secondary victim of violence. In my opinion, Roffé’s juxtaposition of suffering, of past and present histories of violence, of age and nationality, of knowing and not knowing, serves to highlight the similarities, instead of different traumatic memories in competition, between the old woman’s traumatic experiences during an already established and recognized period of unpardonable extreme violence – the Holocaust – and another period – the Argentine military dictatorship – in the process of being established and recognized for its recycling of the also unpardonable extreme violence of disappearance and appropriation.68 This type of narrative strategy may also produce a potentially needed simplification of the complex issue of guilt versus innocence (categorizations that often mean nothing) during violent and politicized periods. Calveiro emphasizes the ambiguity of the category “subversive” during the military dictatorship: “El Otro que construyeron los militares argentinos, que era preciso encerrar en los campos de concentración y luego eliminar, era el subversivo. Subversivo era una categoría verdaderamente incierta” (90). Following this same line of thought in her argument, Calveiro concludes, based on remarks made by General Videla regarding subversives and terrorists during the dictatorship: “En suma, dada la vaguedad del concepto, cualquiera podía entrar en la categoría de subversivo e, incluso, en la de terrorista” (91-92). Radical violence is seen to equally and arbitrarily mark the guilty and the innocent, the

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68 Many theorists argue whether the violence of the Argentine military dictatorship can be considered a genocide (killings were based on political groups or ideologies, which has been termed politicide). Daniel Feierstein provides a provocative juxtaposition of reorganizations of society under the Nazis and Argentina’s military juntas and argues that genocide is a social practice or a form of social engineering in *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Juntas*. 
young and the old, whether stemming from an invading outside force or an internal reorganizing force (evident in the diegetic past and present of the story).

7. Seeing does not Equal Understanding

Roffé’s literary representation of the child protagonist as having been present, possibly having seen or heard, but not necessarily having “understood” is evocative of cases of “failed witnessing” in Witness Studies. For example, Michal Givoni states that humanitarian witnessing has been deemed a failed witnessing, i.e. the act of simply witnessing atrocities from the standpoint of human rights organizations, who “witness” to promote accountability from perpetrators, the international community, etc., does not prevent them (163). Otherwise stated, the documentation and communication of suffering is not sufficient. I would argue witnessing fails in this instance because it does not answer the imperative to assist (when possible), as previously discussed, or affirm the responsibility of bystanders. I would also include the deaf-mute children in Etel Adnan’s *Sitt Marie-Rose* as key examples of a failed witnessing. The deaf-mute children are bystanders who witness a violent murder they lack the power and agency to stop. Although poignant examples of a literal failed witnessing (they literally cannot speak or hear), they also prove that literal seeing is not connected to agency or understanding. The children “see

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69 Michal Givoni, in “Witnessing/Testimony,” provides examples (from groups like Médecins Sans Frontières) of humanitarian witnessing that failed: “In light of these events [the 1990’s failure of UN forces in Rwanda and Bosnia, manipulation of humanitarian aid in Zaire, etc.], witnessing in its traditional senses as active presence, monitoring, documentation, and reporting was deemed an insufficient and inadequate response to mass suffering” (163).

70 *Sitt Marie Rose* is a novel about the Civil War in Lebanon. It was first published in 1978 in French and includes an exploration of the effect of the Civil War on the relationships of several protagonists from the Christian and Muslim sides of the conflict. *Sitt Marie Rose* is a teacher at a deaf-mute school with ties to social services at a Palestinian camp, an unacceptable betrayal in the eyes of the Christian men who hold her hostage in her own classroom. The novel is divided into two sections, “Time I” and “Time II,” with most of the novel devoted to the second half that narrates the murder of Sitt Marie Rose from the perspective of several protagonists, including the deaf-mute children and the perpetrators of her murder, one of whom was once a close friend and romantic interest.
“everything” when Sitt Marie-Rose is murdered (Adnan 82). From the perspective of the death-mute children, Adnan relates,

They’ve [the perpetrators have] forgotten all about us, but we see everything. . . . She’s [Marie Rose has] been drowned! In blood. Perhaps one day speech and sound will be restored to us, we’ll be able to hear and speak and say what happened. But it’s not certain. Some sicknesses are incurable. (82)

The failure to see does not mean they did not literally see what took place (or possibly hear in Alicia and the old woman’s case). The failure is instead tied to seeing as understanding, to the belatedness of traumatic knowledge. As previously stated,

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing, of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (Caruth, Trauma: Explorations in Memory, 91-92)

I posit that understanding, i.e. seeing/knowing, may also be complicated by the powerlessness or lack of agency of certain child witnesses (based on a full understanding of prior experience, age-based competency, variances in abilities as with the deaf-mute children) that prevent the child from answering the imperative to assist. In Alicia’s case for example, I have argued that she lacks a full understanding of her prior experiences, e.g. her father’s forced disappearance, based on various factors. As such, the traumatic failure to see/know applies to her character, which also connects her almost sleepless night to traumatic belatedness.

Erin Hogan discusses child witnesses in the Introduction, “The Child’s Vocal Scales of Subjectivity in the Nuevo cine con niño,” to her dissertation.71 Her research confirms the scholarly trend of placing child witnesses on a scale that situates them on the opposing end of the spectrum from active agents – a position that, in my opinion, furthers their vulnerability and

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71 “La patria es la infancia: The Vocalization and Ventriloquism of Spanish Civil War and Postwar Children in the Cine con niño and Nuevo cine con niño (1973-2010).”
maintains them as passive, acquiescing subjects. Hogan states, “I suggest that studies focusing on the spectatorship of children present an understanding of the child as a witness rather than as participant, agent, or dissident” (3). Instead of spectatorship, Hogan utilizes vocalization to analyze subjectivity and its repression in two categories: *cine con niño* and *nuevo cine con niño* (3). Her analysis of children in Spanish cinema includes several representations of child witnesses who might be classified as passive recipients in terms of spectatorship, yet utilizing Hogan’s theory of vocal scales, they instead operate with varying degrees of passivity/agentiality or subjectivity. The equation of child witnesses with passivity, as opposed to active agency or varying degrees of both, is a viewpoint held by many theorists that could be challenged by a demonstration of child witnesses or protagonists who are both witnesses and active agents – a dual role seen in films like *Cautiva* and *El espinozo del diablo* (discussed later). However, I believe the young girl in Roffé’s short story falls more in line with the traditional category of the passive child witness and could even be placed at the farthest end of the spectrum in that Alicia represents a failed witnessing (remember – failure is not a fault in this case; it is tied to the belated arrival of trauma).

This lack of understanding leaves “full agency” pending some future moment that may or may not benefit Alicia. Her body is present in the same building when violence is enacted against her mother, but the effects of this distant witnessing remain invisible (due to traumatic belatedness). The young girl’s body is exposed but unknowingly, so subtly its bareness almost doesn’t exist. It is a *vicarious wounding*, and its circumstances are still hidden in shadow. The environment in which these “men” operate and the dictatorship’s culture of concealment of the horrors it propagates systematically covers up the victimization of children like Alicia, among other victims. Its *modus operandi* lies in the premise that if it isn’t known or visible, no harm
occurred. If the child isn’t physically wounded, she’s not in danger. If she belongs to the opposing side, to a “subversive” mother, her private sphere is no longer private, and interventions, even if extreme, are permitted. Calveiro’s work, in addition to el dispositivo concentracionario and the rationalization of kidnappers and torturers during the Argentine military dictatorship, also examines the process of victimization. Once a person was labeled subversive, this categorization covered over all manner of sins committed in the name of saving the nation. Reiterating Calveiro’s statement, “El Otro que construyeron los militares argentinos, que era preciso encerrar en los campos de concentración y luego eliminar, era el subversivo. Subversivo era una categoría verdaderamente incierta” (90). In Roffé’s text, because the State deems it necessary to conduct an operation to “take/remove” Alicia’s mother (from her home and society), her child is exposed to radical violence within her private sphere. The kingdom of childhood does not and cannot protect her from societal “reorganizations” or classifications, not when exceptions and emergencies are justified and naturalized daily. Violence spider webs out, and there is nothing but uncertainty when impunity reigns. One day, the child may know this, but knowing won’t change a thing (traumatic knowledge does not literally change the past).

The consequences of Alicia’s missed moment have yet to be determined, but perhaps that lack is also the point. The unknown and untold aspects of the story are the necessary absence (trauma as a wound is also a perforation/hole/absence) that point the reader to forced disappearances in Argentina (also present absences) and their continuity with the violent practices of the past.72 The cyclical nature of trauma and violence demonstrate that the unknown,  

72 According to Caruth, in medical terminology, trauma is also a physical wound, e.g. an open flesh wound – a meaning that stems from the Greek definition of trauma (on which the English and the German versions are based), which originally referred to an injury inflicted on a body. It later came to also signify “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). This association with wounds – as well as missed moments in time (due to trauma’s belatedness) – ties trauma to “absence” (a still unknown trauma is unknowingly present).
the belated, and the failed aspects of the young girl’s present witnessing will likely resound in what I will call the future “memoryscape” or landscape of memories of someone else’s “missed” moment (i.e. when violence is again recycled, this process has the potential to repeat itself *ad infinitum*).

In conclusion, the reader does not know if Alicia will be appropriated by citizens loyal to Videla’s brutal dictatorship, if she will truly be abandoned by the old woman, or if she will survive to grow up as another traumatized victim of state terrorism, as reclusive as the old woman after the loss of her loved ones. Whatever the circumstances and wherever she grows up (in the hypothetical diegetic future), I propose that on a symbolic level the young girl represents the unique perspective of the child witness and of the innocence/ignorance that is somehow tied to the belated arrival of trauma. In line with traumatic belatedness, the naivety of the moment when violence strikes is potentially what leaves a deep and lasting impression on the mind – hence the persistence of traumatic memory. The perforation/trauma is such that it remains hidden until some also unknown time when it makes its presence known for certain, and this knowing after the fact is terrible, haunting (as suggested by Caruth) – like the memories of the old woman’s children who she thinks are perhaps better off dead than living to know. Alicia, unlike the old woman’s children, may live to experience the belated arrival of the traumatic disappearance of her parents, but the reader can only hypothesize about her memories and actions in the diegetic future. As the third generation, Alicia is vicariously exposed, in a different location and time than the old woman, but it is, nevertheless, the same scene and victimization: Men who arrive in the darkness of night, their peculiar smells, the fear and desire “not to know” in the air, the efficiency of violence preceding forced disappearances. The repetition of violence across generations – through the old woman, Alicia’s mother, and Alicia – takes on a necessary
and unexpected complexity in Roffé’s text as paths converge on a night in which a former and a very present trauma are concurrently remembered, experienced, and not known.

The literary critic Graciela Ravetti envisions a much happier ending for both the old woman and young girl in her analysis of childhood and travelling as critical metaphors at work in Roffé’s collection of short stories. In “Infancia y viaje en Aves Exóticas, de Reina Roffé,” she proposes the old woman saves Alicia by taking her to France:

. . . atravesar el océano para que la niña quede fuera del alcance de los brazos de hierro de la dictadura y para que la anciana vuelva a su lugar de origen, aquel donde se inició su odisea, el puerto seguro donde podrá, nuevamente, ejercer el papel de madre dadora, de beneficiadora. (Ravetti 70)

However, I have argued that opposing forces are at work, ones that expose a rupture or trauma-in-the-making, and in lieu of a scenario of post-traumatic growth as the night unfolds, an ancient pain or surplus of traumatic memory for the old woman is unveiled that may prevent Ravetti’s positive resolution from coming to be. Regardless of the hypothetical final resolution of the story, I believe it provides an effective example of the ways in which the interconnectivity and interrelatedness of traumatic experiences can enhance representability in addition to the complex mechanisms of emotional detachment and desire “not to see” at work in Argentine civil society. The story also provides a compelling reason for the use of child protagonists in reconstructing past stories of violence – because their actual or assumed lack of experience neatly highlights the shadowy passing of a traumatic moment known too late.
CHAPTER 2

Cultures of Impunity and the Child’s Body as a Battlefield in Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda*

If the advent of the twentieth century was a heady mixture of the fear of change – from countries to cities, from moonlit nights to electric lights, from the sound of feet to the motorized vehicle – it was also filled with the hope for progress – in technology, industry, and quality of life. This simultaneous sentiment of fear and hope, ushered in by modernity and its positivist tendencies, was evident in science and medicine, particularly aspects like eugenics, concerned with the bettering of the race (manifest in the discourse of nation building). In the *Collins English Dictionary*, eugenics – a term coined by Victorian Scientist Francis Galton of Britain in 1883 – originates from the Greek words meaning well-born. Eugenics as a modern science was widely studied and practiced at the turn of the twentieth century, including in North and South America, and as the concept developed, it became entangled with theories espousing master races, genetic superiority, and pure blood. In certain aspects, these theories were not new in the European context, or even in the rhetoric of former Spanish colonies like Argentina, where *pureza de sangre* and other concerns with ancestry and religion were centuries old.\(^\text{73}\)

Lucía Puenzo’s novel *Wakolda* (2011) is laced with references to the horrid mistreatment of the indigenous peoples and nineteenth-century Argentine concerns with race and blood.\(^\text{74}\)

Antes de ser diezmados, los aborígenes conformaban una tercera parte del total de los

\(^{73}\) Spain’s age-old preoccupation with contamination from Jewish or Muslim blood, including its post-Jewish expulsion (1492) and post-Muslim expulsion (1609) concern with Old Christians versus New Christians (*conversos* and *moriscos*) that shaped its cultural identity and national preferences in profession, is one example of an anti-Semitic strain of Christianity in Europe that may have informed pogroms and other prevailing attitudes or cultural stereotypes (a vilification of the internal “Other”) in the twentieth century. Many who adhered to this line of thinking would later employ science and medicine to propagate other twentieth-century horrors in the name of racial purity (instead of one based on religion).

\(^{74}\) Argentine concerns with race and blood, as opposed to German ones, are less evident in the film version titled *The German Doctor* (2013), directed by the author Lucía Puenzo.
Leading Argentine intellectuals and statesmen, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) and Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884), of the nineteenth century set a precedent for eugenics tendencies before the term (1883) and its science were even created. The idea of the superiority of the White Race or European blood extended throughout nineteenth-century Argentina culminating in the genocide of the indigenous peoples – from Juan Manuel de Rosas’ Desert Campaign [Campaña del desierto] (1833-1834) to the Conquest of the Desert [Conquista del desierto] (1870s-1880s). In my opinion, from the nineteenth century onward (and arguably before), there existed fertile soil for eugenics’ policies and the twentieth-century movements of Fascism and National-Socialism, also concerned with race. It could be claimed that eugenics reached its peak in Nazi Germany’s world of concentration camps and advocacy of experimentation in the name of progress and an amelioration of genetics. In this chapter, I explore how political and social cultures of impunity coupled with complicity – in addition to politics and ideologies permissive of genetic/scientific experimentation – enabled war criminals (from various countries), a decade after the conclusion of the Nuremberg Trials (1945-1949), to live “semi-normal” lives in Argentina, which in truth is only one of many destinations that harbored WWII criminals in exchange for possible “intelligence and/or anticommunist” expertise. I demonstrate, on historical and diegetic levels, how these politics and ideologies

75 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) is best known for his literary work Facundo. He served as the seventh President of Argentina and was a member of the Generation of 1837 (G37), a group of influential intellectuals in Argentina. Juan Bautista Alberdi (1810-1884) helped establish the Generation of 1837 in Buenos Aires and later went into exile for a time due to his stance against Juan Manuel de Rosas. He supported European immigration to populate the country and influenced the Constitution of Argentina of 1853.

76 Gerald Steinacher reveals the following in Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice: “The underground escape routes used by National Socialists were not only discovered by the Americans, but soon came
were tied to the same ideas and cultures of impunity that fueled the concentration camps and legal expulsion of those classified as racially inferior during colonialism and later World War II and, disturbingly, left even children and infants open to experimentation and murder. The improvement of race and genetics through medicine and science evolved from modernity’s circulation, on a global-scale, of nationalistic tendencies and idealistic racial and social hierarchies to actual genetic manipulation for the betterment of society – a popular justification for all manner of evils perpetrated in the name of progress and science. In the quest to better race, I argue that the child’s body as it approaches adolescence is especially symbolic because it represents the possibility for change – growth, sexual development, traits that will be taken into adulthood – and as such, it became a literal battlefield upon which the genetics of the future could be tried and tested. The symbolic importance of the prepubescent stage is palpable in *Wakolda* as the young female protagonist’s body is subjected to forceful hormonal manipulations to correct her under average height while there is still time.

A persuasive mix of fact and fiction, Puenzo’s novel takes the reader beneath the surface of placid, small-town life in Bariloche, located in the South of Argentina. Her fictional representation of the impish child Lilith’s encounter with Dr. Josef Mengele (called José in the novel) and his easy infiltration of her family sphere as a paying guest, a medical expert, and an investor highlights the ways in which an underlying culture of impunity facilitated his predatory/criminal behavior in Argentina.⁷⁷ The main characters in the novel include Lilith and

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⁷⁷ When referring to the character/antagonist Puenzo created in *Wakolda* based on the historical Dr. Josef Mengele, I will refer to him as Dr. Mengele/José or just José while I will refer to the historical figure as Dr. Mengele.
her two brothers, her mother and father, Dr. Mengele/José, Nora (a Holocaust survivor of experimentation by the doctor), a Mapuche family in the desert, and José’s network of Nazi sympathizers in Argentina, among others. The diegetic time of Wakolda is 1959. The story begins when a young girl, Lilith, and her family encounter an educated German on the road to Patagonia. This man is Dr. Mengele/José, infamous for his medical experiments as a Nazi concentration camp doctor.

Historically, Dr. Mengele remained a fugitive for decades in Latin America until his death by drowning in Brazil in 1979, but he initially spent time in Argentina. According to Uki Goñi, in his investigative work The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina, Dr. Mengele’s passage to Argentina was arranged by German-Argentine Nazi rescue operative Carlos Fuldner, who also enabled the “safe passage to Argentina of major war criminals such as Adolf Eichmann, Josef Mengele [already mentioned], Erich Priebke, Josef Schwammberger and Gerhard Bohne” (110). Although the horrors of concentration camps seem tucked safely in the past and appear as distant and removed from Bariloche as the Atlantic Ocean is wide, Puenzo’s novel reinforces my supposition regarding recycled violence (on both historical and diegetic levels) – namely that atrocities do not fade with time but are transported with monstrous men like Dr. Mengele, one of many who fled Europe via the infamous ratlines. Gerald Steinacher’s informative work Nazis on the Run: How Hitler’s Henchmen Fled Justice, defines the ratlines or post-WWII escape routes as follows, “In spy jargon, ‘ratlines’ refers to prepared routes along which refugees or agents can be smuggled in or out of enemy territories. They are a standard part of the secret operations of any major country” (159-160). The fictional Argentine family traveling to Bariloche, however, is neither aware of these secret networks nor
of the criminal in their midst covering over his notorious past (when necessary) by presenting his medical work as legitimate and beneficial.

_Wakolda_ revisits the medical experimentation of the Holocaust on children and the impunity enjoyed by Nazi war criminals – in particular, Dr. Mengele/José – in Argentina as it also explores the depths to which obsessions and complicity can take people. I theorize that the recycling of violence is often connected to racial policies/politics and ideologies on both a temporal and a spatial level. Although I will not discuss each example in depth, it is pertinent to mention that Puenzo’s novel displays multiple trajectories of recycled violence over time and space.

1) From Argentina’s nineteenth-century internment and genocide of the indigenous peoples to the ultimate impunity of German concentration camps in the twentieth century,
2) From Argentina’s nineteenth-century propagation of European blood to Mengele’s medical experimentation in Argentina post-WWII,
3) And, finally Argentine complicity with or support, by some, of war criminals and national-socialist and fascist ideologies that sustains a culture of permissive impunity (from the 1930s to the recent military dictatorship).

Each of these transnational and trans-temporal trajectories of violence also reveals individual instances of complicity and suffering in the diegesis: From Lilith and Dr. Mengele/José’s mutual obsession based upon either violence or love/infatuation to the Mapuche family’s and Nora’s survival of state-sponsored extermination projects. In short, this chapter is an analysis of historical tragedies that, as they are retold in a fictional novel, bring to light the multitudinous ways in which biopolitical strategies connected to failed extermination projects continue to control and harm the same or similar victims in their quotidian lives, thus demonstrating the insidious infiltration of the mundane (and the naturalization of violence) by the very elements that once defined the exception. In my analysis, I view recycled violence over time as concomitantly a precursor to and a propagated result of the indistinguishability of the space of
the camp from the space of the everyday. Thus, violent methods beget other violent methods. I argue that the trajectories of violence (the macro-sphere) mentioned above are amplified in Puenzo’s novel because they resurface in the private space of the household (the micro-sphere) when the normalized exception of the camp emerges in the Argentine family’s home, nurtured over time by Dr. Mengele/José’s influence as it feeds the pre-existing obsessions of those around him. Guardians fail to guard, ethically questionable yet unpunished practices resurface, and the ends again justify the means; it is in this aberrant space that medical experimentation on children again becomes feasible, and even viewed as necessary.

The Connectivity of Violence and Cultures of Impunity

As mentioned, *Wakolda* elucidates trajectories of transnational and trans-temporal violence through a fictional reconstruction of the war criminal Josef Mengele’s time in Argentina, which was accommodated by networks of Nazi sympathizers, advocates of his medical research, and family money. In Goñi’s historical investigation, he discloses, “The luxurious town houses and elegant curved streets of the Palermo Chico neighbourhood disprove the notion that Hitler’s helpers were somehow condemned to a life of squalor during their long postwar Argentine exile” (xi). He also reveals, “Mengele came from an affluent family and was well received by the German community in Argentina” (280). The doctor, under the alias Helmut Gregor, was even able to conduct business meetings for his family’s firm with his father in Argentina as late as 1953 or 1954, and most importantly he had opportunity to pursue his passion

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78 As I discuss later in the chapter, Giorgio Agamben theorizes that the space of the quotidian has become indistinguishable from the space of the (concentration) camps. Agamben states that “the state of exception, which used to be essentially a temporary suspension of the order, becomes now a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by that naked life that increasingly cannot be inscribed into the order. The increasingly widening gap between birth (naked life) and nation-state is the new fact of the politics of our time and what we are calling ‘camp’ is this disparity. To an order without localization (that is, the state of exception during which the law is suspended) corresponds now a localization without order (that is, the camp as permanent space of exception)” (42-43).
for genetics (289). In Nazi rhetoric, advocated by Dr. Mengele, eugenics became more than “the study of methods of improving the quality of the human race, esp [sic] by selective breeding” (“eugenics,” Collins English Dictionary). It became deeply tied to Germanic or Nordic supremacist racial hierarchies and honor that were, in turn, dependent upon blood. Dr. Mengele – or the Angel of Death as he was nicknamed in the concentration camps – practiced pseudo-curative manipulations in his quest to perfect the imperfect or to ameliorate race (with the Aryan Master Race viewed as the highest expression of race) and in opposition to an “Other” (e.g. Jews, Roma/Sinti, other non-Aryans, those with growth abnormalities or classified imperfections, etc.) deemed to be unassimilable into, and a genetic tainting of, the Master Race. According to the information provided by the Jewish Virtual Library’s definition of “Concentration Camps”:

In November 1943, Dr. Josef Mengele became the chief physician of Birkenau. Mengele wanted to ‘prove’ the superiority of the Nordic race. His first experiments were performed on gypsy children supplied to him from the so-called kindergarten. Before long he expanded his interest to twins, dwarfs, and persons with abnormalities. (“Medical” Experiments section, para. 2)

In Wakolda, Dr. Mengele/José, obsessed with disposing of racial impurities, reflects the discourse of eugenics embedded in Nazi rhetoric in his statement, “La sangre es honor. . . . La mezcla impurifica la sangre y destroza la memoria” (Puenzo 106). This logic proposes that not only are honor and purity of blood tied to endogenous sexual relations (within desirable races to further create only these races), but racial mixing is also attributed to the destruction of (genetic) memory. José’s disdain for the indigenous people who shelter the family in the desert (en route to Bariloche) stems from his belief in their racial inferiority, further exacerbated by interracial mixing. As José observes the Mapuche family and Lilith’s parents in the desert, he thinks, “Una raza genéticamente degenerada por el veneno de la mezcla, inoculado por más de dos mil años
en su sangre…” (36). He considers intermixing a racial sin: “El pecado cometido en contra de las leyes de las sagradas armonías estaba ahí, estampado en sus caras y en sus cuerpos: imborrable. Una cloaca gentium, punto de reunión biológica de los bastardos del mundo” (36-37). It is safe to say that if given the chance, Dr. Mengele/José’s line of reasoning – informed by the discourse of eugenics and Nazi propaganda – would end in definitive genocides against the mixed races of Argentina, the indigenous peoples, and races like the Jews brutally murdered during WWII. By interlacing the Argentinians’ genocide-oriented mistreatment of the indigenous peoples with the doctor’s experiments in concentration camps (both historical instances over half a century apart in time) and on the child protagonist Lilith, I propose that Puenzo’s novel demonstrates the effects of the persistence of racial rhetoric and permissive impunity in Argentina.

Dr. Mengele/José’s violence is also tied to more than his experimentation in concentration camps. In the novel, violence occurs through the doctor’s cruel interactions with the people around him. For example, he financially hurts the Mapuche family through an inanimate object – a doll that Lilith received in secret, in exchange for her European one Herlitzka. In this secret exchange between Lilith and Yanka, they are pictured as negotiating a hard deal/trade, Lilith with her pirate’s soul and Yanka her worthy adversary.

¿Me la cambiás? [dice Yanka, embarazada en el desierto]. Lilith miró a Herlitzka (perfecta hasta en la sutura) y a Wakolda (deforme, pero poderosa) [hecha por un machi o brujo]. . . . Lilith tenía alma de pirata, se le hizo agua la boca al pensar en el botín que se llevaba. –Está bien. Te la cambio.Como todo pirata, hubiera querido engañarla a último momento para llevarse las dos, pero Yanka era una digna adversaria. (Puenzo 61)

Ironically, not even an indigenous doll received in trade is safe from José’s blade. One day, Lilith discovers a stitched up wound on the doll’s belly (pregnant with treasure) and realizes the doctor sliced her belly open to steal its hidden treasure, which he found when Lilith innocently pointed out the lump in her delirium. At the end of the novel, as Dr. Mengele/José flees, he does
so with the stolen treasure. I see this theft as symbolic of the stolen livelihoods and dismembered others he left behind him. Much as he did in Germany, he harms more than just the bodies around him. He also robs others of their treasures and lives.

Dr. Mengele/José brings to Argentina his documented penchant for experimenting on twins – concealed by his work with cattle and hormone injections to produce twin calves (purportedly to double production for the Argentine meat industry) – and children like Lilith – connected to his fascination with dwarves as she is extremely small for her age and so outside of the Nazi’s established norms. José’s initial observation of Lilith playing in the parking lot of a hotel with two other children is tied to his previous experimentation in concentration camps.

[Lilith] Hubiera sido un espécimen perfecto (rubia, blanca y de ojos claros) de no ser por su altura. Visiblemente pequeña en tamaño para su edad, pero con miembros de medidas normales para ser llamada una enana y demasiado grandes para ser incluida en los parámetros liliputienses, . . . (Puenzo 12)

In place of a young girl, José’s measuring eyes see a perfect lab specimen. His fascination with scientifically converting the abnormal (his racially altered perception of it) into the normal (exemplified by Aryan genes) is further reinforced by José’s internal confessions, “Eran las ratas de laboratorio que más lo fascinaban: perfecta, de no ser por un defecto imposible de tolerar” (12). From the beginning, he is a man who perceives defects and measures specimens. He is not concerned with the effects of his experiments on human beings, and Puenzo paints a vivid portrait of the racially obsessed manipulator hidden beneath a cultured veneer:

Pero antes de entender que no era más que un sueño, las imágenes de esa primera vida en la que todo era posible quedaron ensombrecidas por la certeza de que su victoria era la punta del iceberg . . . (hasta modelar genéticamente a los ciudadanos de una nación entera), aunque hasta ahora no hubiera más que pieles laceradas, gangrenas y amputaciones. No en vano habían invertido millones en él. Por la pureza de la sangre y de los genes. Porque ésa era la verdadera guerra: pureza o mezcla. (10)
A parallel emerges between the doctor’s first life – that of a concentration camp doctor fueled by the ideological justification of racial purity – and his second life in Argentina – where he is surrounded, as previously mentioned, by “mixed” races he deems inferior. The doctor’s first life in Germany becomes evident through his internal monologues, which are overrun with disgust for mixed races, impulses to murder simply for being interrupted, and advice to himself to wait for the right moment. Sadistic inner thoughts contrasted with a groomed and immaculate outer appearance make the respected doctor even more sinister.

In addition to “marking” Dr. Mengele/José as a polished yet predatory criminal, I believe the novel exposes Argentina as a post-WWII haven for the eugenic policies of the Nazis, which in truth have roots in colonialism. In the short term, this twentieth-century climate of impunity could be traced to pro-Nazi and pro-fascist high ranking officials and policies implemented during the 1930s and 1940s – especially during World War II when certain officials maintained secret ties with Nazi Germany and denied Jews entry visas and passage – as well as a purposeful indoctrination of Germans in Argentina by Berlin. Goñi mentions Germany’s efforts and Argentina’s apathetic stance towards them: “While the Foreign Ministry archives still hold many of the cables in which he [Argentina’s ambassador, Eduardo Labougle, to Berlin during the 1930s] correctly warned of the growing Nazi threat and the effort by Berlin to indoctrinate German citizens in Argentina, others have ‘disappeared’ down some dark government channels” (35). Although the novel takes place in 1959-1960, long after the war, the politics and ideologies that supported many of Germany’s ideals were not expunged during Juan Perón’s presidencies (1946-1952, 1952-1955, and later 1973-1974) or even in the years that followed his death (especially 1976-1983). Most importantly, a long hidden yet effective legacy of the war years, the escape routes or ratlines set up by certain key war criminals fleeing Allied justice and their
contacts in Argentina, including Perón and the Catholic Church, permitted and aided men like Dr. Mengele in their relocation to Latin America. According to Goñi, at the end of WWII, “. . . neutral Spain had become the main safe haven for fugitive Nazis and their French and Belgian collaborators fleeing from the liberated European nations” (65). After the War ended and the Allies began to prosecute former leaders and soldiers of war crimes in Europe, specifically in Nuremberg, Argentina became a safer haven. Goñi states,

For over five decades, the rescue structure organized by these men [Fuldner, Lesca, and Daye], in association with Perón and aided by highly-placed Catholic Church dignitaries, remained secret. . . . Over the course of the next five years its operations would move from Madrid to Buenos Aires, then to Sweden and Switzerland and Italy. . . . (65)

In addition to escape routes, strategic state-related positions/employment opportunities were also available to former Nazis as they were recruited and incorporated into Argentina’s Information Bureau, Armed Forces, and other technical fields where their “expertise” – i.e. military intelligence, knowledge capital, and skills in political repression – could be utilized.

These escape routes not only permitted war criminals to resettle in safer areas but they also provided the means for extremely violent people and their methods, connected to the ultimate impunity of concentration camps, to transport their crimes with them. In order to provide a link between the ultimate impunity of concentration camps and the permissive impunity existing in twentieth-century Argentina, I first provide several key political and cultural concepts circulating around concentration camps (born in a colonial context) and the construction of the “Other” that facilitated the recycling of violence in Argentina (displayed in

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79 The Nazi rescue structure was organized by Pierre Daye of the fascist Belgian Rexist Party (its parliamentary leader), Argentine-French SS secret service agent Charles Lesca, and Argentine-German former SS captain, Himmler agent, and main Nazi rescue operative for Perón Carlos Fuldner among others (Goñi 65, 110).
Puenzo’s novel). I next explore how the overt physical “marking” of bodies in concentration camps (e.g. physical violence, medical experimentation) was often preceded by a literary construction of difference (in both the German Reich and Argentina). In Argentina, this differentiation of “types” was formed in a literary context – through newspapers, novels, poems – at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century and up through the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. This literary imaginary, which certainly could have reinforced the permissive impunity enjoyed by men like Dr. Mengele, “othered” certain groups and propagated the idea of a pure/tainted or healthy/diseased national body – persistent rhetorical strategies utilized to justify various acts of atrocity before and after the Dirty War.

In addition to cultures of impunity at the local and national levels (i.e. civil impunity), there is also the question of individual impunity. It is ironic that the child victim is also the temporary accomplice of the monster preying on her. Lilith’s complicity with Dr. Mengele/José’s medical treatments is based on an infatuation with him – he is a fascinating and dangerous man – in addition to her strong desire to fit in with her peers, to not be bullied because of her small size, yet her complicity is also coupled with the intoxication of impunity – her own brand of rebellious experimentation with danger and secret plots. Although his sharp observations of the family (e.g. he records their physical measurements in a book) are discovered

80 Permissive in comparison to the complete impunity existing in the concentration camp universe of the Holocaust. Pilar Calveiro also argues that the concentration camp logic (and I would argue culture of ultimate impunity) later resurges in the secret detention centers and camps of the Argentine military dictatorship.

81 The rhetoric (official propaganda) utilized “to other” the Jews, as well as the organization of groups in the Nazi racial hierarchy, is discussed by Havi Dreifuss and Na’ama Bela Shik in their course The Holocaust – An Introduction (I): Nazi Germany: Ideology, the Jews, and the World through Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem on Coursera (30 March 2016).

82 For more information on the rhetoric of the Dirty War, see Marguerite Feitlowitz’s A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture, Revised and Updated with a new Epilogue (2011).
early on by Lilith, she chooses to remain silent to facilitate her interactions with the doctor and to allow him to “treat” her with growth hormones, a treatment Lilith and her mother believe to be in her best interest. Puenzo’s fictional representation of Lilith serves as a perfect foil to Dr. Mengele/José; the young girl is a mischievous, devilish pixie herself and her penchant for the illicit and exciting places her within the sphere of control of a man accustomed to altering the bodies of those around him at will. It is intriguing and disturbing that Dr. Mengele/José identifies these impulses in her and recognizes her “twin soul” as well as the significance of the name Lilith that “quiere decir monstruo de la noche” (Puenzo 22). Yet, as Dr. Mengele/José himself ponders, it means much more than monster of the night. Lilith is the “demonio de la oscuridad, diablesa libidinosa habitada por la rebeldía, la tentación, la transgresión y el deseo...” (22). As Lilith is in certain ways a willing victim of the doctor’s predatory manipulations, this description suits her, yet it is also troubling in that she is still a young girl hovering on the border of adolescence and sexual awakening. Furthermore, it is disturbing in a Lolita-esque sense that she is fascinated by a man attracted to her for her abnormality and youthful stage in life. For example, Puenzo’s description of the interaction between Lilith and José as he stitches up her doll is sexually charged.

Lilith se acercó hasta pararse a centímetros de él, tan cerca que más de una vez la rodilla de José rozó su pubis al hacer girar la muñeca para vendar el pie a la pierna. Compersenetrada en su rol de enfermera, sostuvo a Herlitzka [her European looking doll] sin que le temblara el pulso. Lilith sintió su aliento en la cara, amargo y agrio como el olor del tabaco que fumaba su padre cuando creía que nadie se daba cuenta. (50)

She is literally on the threshold between a child and an adult, seen by Dr. Mengele/José as the stage when genetic manipulation and change are still possible. She is really a fetish for him; he obsessively wants to remedy her almost “imperceptible” deformity (22-23). Despite Lilith’s flirtation with danger, Puenzo continuously shows her youthfulness contrasted with the doctor’s
experienced and purposeful predatory behavior, cold indifference to lesser races, and calculated desire to alter those around him. As such, her temporary complicity may be a symbolic “spreading of her wings” as she matures. This hypothesis is backed by Lilith’s final thoughts at the end of the novel. In a flash-forward to her future self, she confesses that her complicity with José, once she understands what it symbolized, will later become her most shameful secret.

El amor es un acto que no puede realizarse sin un cómplice, le había dicho [Mengele/José] antes de llegar al búnker patagónico del Führer. No entendió la frase hasta años después. Pero tampoco la olvidó. Algún día la certeza de haber sido su cómplice iba a torturarla mucho más que todos sus otros secretos. (Puenzo 216)

Lilith’s character is intriguing because she borders on knowing she is making risky choices (showing signs of agency) yet seems to not fully realize that death is the common end-game of José’s experiments. She reveals that she didn’t fully grasp José’s allusions to an accomplice until years later. Lilith’s character thus lacks a full knowledge of the consequences of her rebellion in addition to adequate experience to play Dr. Mengele/José’s dangerous game.

Counter to Lilith is the beautiful survivor Nora Eldoc, a former child victim of his experiments at Auschwitz, whose present quest and former history with the doctor provide a chilling context for the situation in which she finds Lilith. Nora’s character is based on an actual child victim of Dr. Mengele who reportedly re-encountered him as an adult while visiting her mother, also a Holocaust survivor, in Bariloche. Per the famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, the details of the encounter are not known, but Nora was in fact found dead in the mountains soon after their paths crossed. (See footnote for Wiesenthal’s version of Nora’s re-encounter with Dr. Mengele in Bariloche).83 Puenzo adopts and embellishes upon the unknown aspects of

83 From Simon Wiesenthal’s Memoirs (re: scene in Wakolda where Miss Eldoc meets Dr. Mengele/José), in a chapter titled “The Man who Collected Blue Eyes”: “Mengele was not certain that his brand-new Paraguayan passport would protect him [in 1959/1960]. He thought it might be safer to leave Buenos Aires. He went to Bariloche, a beautiful resort in the lake district of the Andes, where many wealthy former Nazis have elegant villas
Nora’s encounter with the doctor. In so doing, the doctor’s robbing of lives becomes factually and diegetically visible. Due to a sterilization procedure performed by Dr. Mengele/José while at Auschwitz, Nora will never have children of her own. Puenzo’s version of her reveals the angst of a stolen life, and in Nora’s tangled and desperate hunt for justice, revenge becomes an obsession. She possesses a full traumatic knowledge of Lilith’s precarious situation, i.e. of the depths to which Dr. Mengele/José will go in his medical experimentation and of his monstrous lack of empathy for his victims (experiments ending in painful deaths are the norm for him). It is also telling that she escapes death from experimentation at Auschwitz only to be re-victimized and killed in another culture of impunity. Nora’s presence in Bariloche provides a bridge between Dr. Mengele/José’s experimentation in Germany and his continued practice of it in Argentina. The two female characters thus unite time periods, connecting World War II and Argentina in 1959-1960, and as their paths cross Dr. Mengele/José’s, the transnational and trans-temporal nature of violence increasingly resounds in the novel as another female child is affected by his machinations. Finally, my analysis suggests that Lilith, the doll Wakolda, and the Mapuche family in turn connect the diegetic present with José to the past injustices suffered by the Argentine indigenous tribes. I believe these encounters further evince survival as proof of “failed extermination projects”: Nora lives to be an adult (until her re-encounter with Dr.

-and large estates. Bariloche is conveniently close to the frontier of Chile, another favorite refuge of many Nazis” (159). Wiesenthal continues, “A mysterious incident occurred in Bariloche. (I cannot give the source of my information, but I can vouch for its reliability). Among the tourists in Bariloche at the time was a Miss Nora Eldoc from Israel, who was visiting her mother. The two women had been in Auschwitz, where Miss Eldoc had been sterilized by Dr. Mengele. It was mere coincidence that she came to Bariloche at a time Mengele was there. She was then forty-eight, still attractive, and had many friends in town. One evening, in the ballroom of a local hotel, she suddenly found herself face to face with Mengele. The local police report does not say whether he recognized her. Mengele had ‘treated’ thousands of women in Auschwitz. But he did notice the tattooed number on her lower left arm. For a few seconds the victim and the torturer stared at each other silently. Eyewitnesses later testified that no word was said. Miss Eldoc turned and left the room. A few days later she did not return from an excursion into the mountains. The police were notified. Several weeks later Miss Eldoc’s bruised body was discovered near a crevasse” (Wiesenthal 159).
Mengele/José), Lilith survives to later feel shame over her complicity, and the Mapuche family, although impoverished, continues to live in the South of Argentina.

**Concentration Camps: The Ultimate Impunity**

I contend that the cultures of impunity and complicity existing in the Argentina of 1959-1960, although influenced by the policies and politics of the 1930s and 1940s, reach further back in time. These cultures stem instead from the colonial projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – i.e. to the genocides of the indigenous peoples in Argentina, Spanish colonial policies, and Wilhelmine rule in German South West Africa, now Namibia, to name a few – that birthed paternalistic, hierarchical, and racist views. This connection is resonant in the novel’s plot and name – *Wakolda*. Although much could be said about each individual instance of colonialism and mass murder, I have chosen to focus on certain notions circulating around twentieth century cultures of impunity and concentration camps, mainly the “othering” of certain peoples, as they pertain to the Argentine case. The twentieth century begins with multiple expressions of ultimate impunity that are later supported by cultures of permissive impunity in countries like Argentina. One pertinent instance of ultimate impunity, due to its influence on other genocides, is the concept of “total annihilation” birthed in German South West Africa, expressed in the Herero and Nama genocide, and recycled in the concentration camps of the Nazi Reich. Historian Benjamin Madley discusses the transference of methods from the German colonial project to Germany proper and the experience many infamous Nazi leaders – such as Hermann Göring, Eugen Fischer, and Franz Ritter von Epp – gained from the Herero and Nama genocide in his tellingly titled article “From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe.” Madley convincingly argues,
Wilhelmine rule in South West German Africa was not the sole inspiration for Nazi policies in Eastern Europe, but it contributed ideas, methods, and a lexicon that Nazi leaders borrowed and expanded. Language, literature, media, institutional memory, and individual experience all transmitted these concepts, methods, and terms to the Nazis. (430)

He also mentions that the Germans were not the first to use concentration camps – the British used similar camps as did the Spanish in colonial settings.

Giorgio Agamben reiterates this claim in Means without End: Notes on Politics, “Historians debate whether the first appearance of camps ought to be identified with the campos de concentraciones [sic] that were created in 1896 by the Spaniards in Cuba to repress the insurrection of that colony’s population, or rather with the concentration camps into which the English herded the Boers at the beginning of the twentieth century” (37). However, both cases differ from the mass murder of the Herero and Nama tribes because German colonial policy solidified camps as a means to a very specific end.84 It is differentiated from other colonial atrocities by a defined policy of Vernichtung or annihilation. It is also a pivotal point or “transitional case” between the violence of colonial mass murder and that of the Holocaust (430).

It is pertinent to mention that the violence perpetrated against the African tribes was facilitated by imagery in literature. Colonial literature played a key role, as it did in Argentina (e.g. the civilización vs. barbarie dichotomy), in the establishment of difference between an “Othered” and animal-like African and a cultured German citizen: “Colonial literature transferred violent, racist concepts to Germany, thus eroding resistance to brutality and providing

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84 Although it seems the camps were employed after the annihilation order was rescinded due to domestic pressure in Germany, they were in reality a continuation of this order or “a new phase of the genocide” as they allowed for the isolation and extermination of the tribes (Madley 445). Madley reveals that von Trotha established two types of camps: Ones tied to death and others linked to work that led to death (446). He claims that these camps, particularly colonial Namibia’s death camp at Shark Island, differed from the Spanish and British examples because they “operated for the purpose of destroying human life. Thus, it served as a rough model for later Nazi Vernichtungslager, or annihilation camps, like Treblinka and Auschwitz, whose primary purpose was murder” (446).
ideas and methods that the Nazis later expanded” (437). I argue both cases are visible in 
Wakolda – from the aftereffects of colonialism to that of the Holocaust. In addition to colonial 
literature, race laws, stratification of colonial societies, and often the imposition of the culture 
and language of the hegemonic class, the implementation of policies designed to contain, set 
apart, and subdue inferior races, dissidents, political enemies, or insurgents was also a common 
colonial practice.85 One example, previously mentioned, of a policy designed to contain and 
separate the population from possible insurgents, created and employed in a colonial context, 
was the Spanish Reconcentration Policy (reconcentraciones) utilized by General Weyler of 
Spain during the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). Another slightly earlier example of 
the use of containment areas is that of the Argentine camps for indigenous tribes (1879), which is 
mentioned in Wakolda. A pertinent question for future study would be how the Argentine case 
fits into this genealogy of camps.

In a conversation amongst guests at the Bariloche hostel, Puenzo recreates in dialogue the 
Argentine version of concentration camps where Patagonian indigenous peoples (such as 
Mapuches, Ranqueles, Pampas) were contained for various reasons, e.g. to facilitate forced 
relocations to advance the economic agenda of the elite (for the appropriation of indigenous 
tribes’ lands for the cattle industry) or to separate indigenous men and women and so impede 
births (to genetically phase them out). Many perished from hunger and other ailments due to 
these state-sponsored policies of mistreatment and exclusion. Lilith’s family claims not to have 
known or heard about these camps. Could this be true, or is ignorance really a desire “not to

85 According to Madley, “Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany was rife with discussion 
concerning the perceived dangers of miscegenation and the notion of racial struggle. In German South West Africa 
these ideas became German law for the first time. Concurrently, Germans in colonial Namibia coined new racist 
concepts and introduced them to metropolitan Germans while amplifying others already in circulation” (438). One 
example of a race law in German South West Africa that was again used in Nazi Germany was the 1905 law 
banning Rassenmischung or race mixing (438).
know,” which could also be tied to complicity? A French guest at the hostel informs the family and Dr. Mengele/José who is strangely described as partly smiling, partly incredulous (while thinking that finally the French guests aren’t lying or inventing stories).

Después de la campaña y la derrota indígena entró en acción la policía de frontera: cada vez que detectaba a una familia indígena la deportaba a otro territorio. . . Se habla de entre diez mil y veinte mil indios que pasaron por esos campos de concentración. Si hasta tuvieron que habilitar dos cementerios especiales en el 79, eso le da una idea de la magnitud de lo que pasó. La otra política era impedir nacimientos en el grupo. Separaban a las mujeres de los hombres, a los niños de sus padres, les cambiaban el nombre. . . . (Puenzo 129-130)

This use of concentration camps in 1879 on an internal “Other” in Argentina predates that of the infamous reconcentraciones in Cuba, where large numbers of people also perished due to containment policies and hunger. 86 Both cases attest to mass murders perpetrated through containment policies used as biopolitical methods of control.

Discussed by Samantha Power in “A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide, the term “genocide” was not coined until 1943-1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew whose family was killed during WWII. Yet, many instances that had been deemed “mass murder” prior to the term would have been better categorized as genocide due to the purposive and systematic nature of the elimination of certain groups such as the indigenous tribes in North America, which informed the policies of nineteenth-century Argentina. 87

86 A pertinent future research question could relate to the Argentine camps’ connection to future biopolitical strategies/state policies and/or camps in other countries. For example, are there any authors/theorists/historians who have connected the 1879 Argentine use of (concentration) camps for indigenous tribes to later biopolitical strategies/state policies or official political rhetoric popular in Argentina pre- or post-WWII - perhaps even links to the Spanish use of reconcentraciones in Cuba (1890s) as a result of camps in Argentina?

87 According to David Viñas in Indios, ejército y frontera, “‘Los Estado Unidos del Norte –había dicho Roca en su proclama del 18 de abril de 1879 al poner en marcha su campaña–, una de las más poderosas naciones de la tierra, no han podido, hasta ahora, dar solución a la cuestión de los indios, ensayando todos los sistemas, gastando anualmente millones de dólares y empleando numerosos ejércitos. Vosotros vais a resolverla, en el otro extremo de América, con un pequeño esfuerzo de vuestra labor.’ La conquista militar argentina fue iniciada, así, con una lúcida visión de lo que implicaba el modelo norteamericano en su lucha contra el indio a fines del siglo XIX, de qué
indigenous peoples in Argentina certainly coincides with the legal definition of genocide, as does the destruction of the Jews and other groups in Germany in the 1930s-1940s, delineated in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Genocide is defined as follows:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: A. Killing members of the group; B. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; C. Deliberately inflicting on the group the conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; D. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; E. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (Power 57)

The contiguity between noxious biopolitical strategies in Argentina and Germany is particularly evident in Puenzo’s positioning of Dr. Mengele/José, a major perpetrator of genocide in twentieth-century Germany, as a distant witness to the genocidal crimes perpetrated against the nineteenth-century indigenous peoples. Both sites emerge as cultures of ultimate impunity, which, in Argentina, I postulate transitions to a twentieth century culture of permissive impunity.

Madley presents historical documentation of the Holocaust’s ties to colonialism’s practice of “othering” that provides chilling context for the novel’s multiple trajectories of violence. Dr. Mengele had historical ties to Anthropologist Eugen Fischer – known for his “research” conducted on children of mixed-race at a German South West African concentration camp (Madley 456). Fischer worked and maintained correspondence with Dr. Mengele’s graduate school advisor Othmar von Verschuer (456). Both Fischer and von Verschuer at one time or other headed Fischer’s Kaiser Wilhelm Institute from which Dr. Mengele received

significaba ese proyecto y de cuáles eran los parecidos y las diferencias en una alusión al contexto continental” (14).

88 Puenzo’s reference (in the guests’ conversation) to the Argentine camps for indigenous peoples encompasses definitions A. through E. of genocide.
training, assistance obtaining grant monies, and to which he sent his research specimens – the internal organs, eyes, and other parts from his disease-infected and murdered subjects at Auschwitz (456). If Dr. Mengele is considered a human conduit for the recycling of violence perfected in a colonial and a WWII context, it could be argued that he exported medical experimentation and eugenic-based studies began on children in SW Africa to Argentina – with the Nazi genocide serving as an intermediary between the time periods and continents.

In a sense, the Argentine government’s clearing of land it deemed “vacant,” which was in fact peopled by multiple indigenous tribes, to gift it to the new political and economic Argentine and European elite or family oligarchies also harkens back to Argentina’s former colonizer Spain’s treatment of the Jews in the 1492 expulsion. That is, they were ironically permitted to sell their land but not to take the money from its sale with them into exile; hence, they were really free to take nothing with them. The indigenous in Argentina could also take nothing with them, not even the self-determination of their own lives – if and when they were allowed to live.89 David Viñas in Indios, ejército y frontera highlights documented instances of the distribution of people and land in Argentina as if they were payment given out to the victors:

“Generosa distribución de ‘chinitas’ para criadas de antecocina o de patio. Y bonos de tierra en premios a oficiales, suboficiales y tropa” (19). Although the genocide of the indigenous tribes in Argentina is distinct in most aspects from that of the Jewish expulsion, it is pertinent to mention the expulsion as an establishing foundation for the colonial process of “othering” that was necessary to justify the segregation/expulsion of an “internal” group and that could have

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89 Madley refers to this progression, which also pertains to the Argentine case, from the theft of property and livelihoods in colonial Namibia to the eventual stealing of lives: “However, the theft did not stop at land and cattle. First, thousands of surrendering Hereros, and later Namas, were seized. Then they were taken, often in railway cattle cars called Transport, to death and work camps where their lives were stolen” (446).
informed European religious anti-Semitism and later colonial thinking in the Americas – even up to nineteenth-century Argentina’s own practice of “Othering” its indigenous peoples. Viñas even mentions that if one reads official documents and literature published in order to defend certain military campaigns, such as la campaña al río Negro, against the indigenous tribes (and for various other reasons), a problematic commonality comes into focus: “... que la campaña al Desierto representa ‘el necesario cierre’, ‘el perfeccionamiento natural’ o ‘la ineludible culminación’ – en su extempo sur más lejano – de la conquista española de América inaugurada en el Caribe” (46). As such, a line could be traced from Spain’s “othering” and expulsion of the Jews to Spanish colonial policy (also based on “othering”) to the Argentine Desert Campaign (a continuation of the policy of “othering”).

Jon Stratton provides an interesting analysis of the rationale and discourse surrounding “othering” in a Jewish/colonial context as he discusses the Spanish use of reconcentraciones in Cuba in his work titled Jewish Identity in Western Pop Culture: The Holocaust and Trauma Through Modernity. In a chapter, tellingly titled “It Almost Needn’t Have Been the Germans: The State, Colonial Violence, and the Holocaust,” he links colonial violence and the “othering” of the Jews in Europe – with the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain serving as the exemplum (of the expulsion of an internal Other) – to the Holocaust, which utilized aspects of colonial violence (e.g. racial laws and policies) to exterminate an internal Other. Stratton claims, “In destroying a people thought of in Europe as both Same and Other, or perhaps, not-Other and Other, the Nazis brought to Europe the practice of extreme violence only used in the modern world on those who were being Othered. The consequence was the fundamental unsettling of the modern European order” (3). In other words, violent practices used against an external Other in colonial contexts were employed on a European Other, and in so doing, the surety that
Europeans held “... the moral and ethical high ground in any contact with non-European peoples—including the legitimacy of those peoples’ utter despoliation and destruction” was called into question as they eliminated a European Other (3-4). Fundamental principles of the Enlightenment, i.e. reason, science, and progress (“the undermining of modern certainties”), were, in the violent destruction of the internal Other or “the Othered of the West,” upset from their place of moral certainty (3-4).

This link between colonial violence as a means of incorporating the non-Western Other (or the Jewish internal Other) into a binary system of categorization – Same and Other – that either expelled the offending other from the national body or used it for its own purposes, e.g. forced labor, slavery, paternalist relations, was characteristic of modernity. Stratton places this “modernizing” violence within the same line of development as the prior violence utilized against the indigenous people in the Americas, Africa, and other non-European contexts. He associates it with a violence, to paraphrase his words, that exists beyond the limit of the Same, of Europe, and of civilization (2). Stratton continues,

This is the violence that destroyed the indigenous peoples of that continent appropriated as America, the violence meted out to the indigenous people of what we call Australia, to the Africans of King Leopold II’s Congo, to the Herero and, to a greater or lesser extent, to all those peoples designated as non-European/non-“white” who underwent the colonizing process of being Othered and incorporated into the Eurocentered global order. (2)

This particular example of the connection between colonial violence and the Holocaust again includes the Herero nation, whose genocide, as posited above, marks the genesis of the employment of concentration camps for a specific purpose – one tied to a systematic

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90 Stratton states, “What I am describing is how violence that moderns thought of as extreme was the empirical force that incorporated peoples outside of this order of representation into this system structured in the form of Same and Other. This violence marks the entire period of modernity” (2). Also see sociologist Gabriel Gatti for more on the idea of a “modernizing violence.”
enforcement of “total annihilation” or Vernichtungsbefehl.\textsuperscript{91} This violence could also be viewed in light of Giorgio Agamben’s state of the exception as rule, which could be applied to the colonial realm and eventually the Holocaust as the exemplum for the internal state of exception applying to the internal Other.\textsuperscript{92} Agamben even defines the camp as “. . . the space that opens up when the state of exception starts to become the rule. In it, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law” (\textit{Means without End} . . . 38).

Even though many of these events appear distinct, spatially and temporally distant from each another, they are connected by methods of violence that are recycled in new locations and moments in time.

In his work, \textit{Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction}, Adam Jones postulates, “A comparative and global-historical approach to genocide allows us to perceive important connections between campaigns of mass killing and group destruction that are widely separated in time and space” (123). He also utilizes the Herero genocide as a key example for his argument as he continues, “Scholarship on the genocide against the Hereros provides an excellent example. It is increasingly acknowledged that it paved the way, in important respects, for the prototypical mass slaughter of that century – Nazi mass murder . . .” (123). In much the same way that the

\textsuperscript{91} See Adam Jones’ work \textit{Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction} for more on the links of various Nazis to the Herero genocide in colonial Namibia (e.g. Hermann Goering, builder of the initial Nazi concentration camps, and Eugen Fischer, in charge of the institute supporting Dr. Mengele’s experimentation at Auschwitz, among others) (123). Benjamin Madley also addresses many of these connections in his work.

\textsuperscript{92} According to Giorgio Agamben, in \textit{Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life}, “The exception is an element in law that transcends positive law in the form of its suspension” (17). As positive law is suspended and the suspension of rule gives rise to the exception, bare life is increasingly vulnerable to being killed, even more than in its “inclusive exclusion” before this suspension. See Chapter 3, “The Personal as Political and an Empathetic/Violent Witnessing in Gastón Biraben’s \textit{Cautiva},” for an in-depth explanation of Agamben’s concepts of bare life and the state of exception as the rule.
Herero genocide informed the Nazi mass murder, Puenzo’s novel demonstrates how the Nazis brought their methods – further perfected in the concentration camps of the 1930s and 1940s – to Argentina where their ideologies and methodologies were incorporated into the Argentine government and, in my opinion, later reach full fruition in the forced disappearances of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. 93 Ironically, Viñas relates the indigenous genocide to the military dictatorship when he questions, in his analysis “Roca y el ejército argentino en 1879,” “O, quizá, los indios ¿fueron los desaparecidos de 1879?” (12). Although Puenzo’s *Wakolda* is situated in the South of Argentina in 1959-1960 in an environment that, on the surface, is neither in a state of war nor overtly propagating legal policies of segregation, it re-creates the Argentine culture of permissive impunity that assisted the transnational movements and actions of a man, Dr. Mengele/José, whose ideological core was rooted in a system devoted to total annihilation and in which he was free to utilize or dispose of human life as he pleased, i.e. those lives deemed unworthy of being lived (*lebensunwerten Leben*).

A telling example of this blending of cultures of impunity occurs when Dr. Mengele/José attempts to persuade Lilith’s father to allow him to treat her with growth hormones. José first shows him photos of his work with animals, seemingly benign. Her father, Enzo, replies that animals are not the same as his daughter, which leads the doctor to bring out his oldest photos – those of children in white robes who, although smiling, have a look in their eyes that makes Enzo uncomfortable. Enzo asks who these children are, “–Pacientes –dijo José, con la impunidad que todavía tenía por el velo de secreto que rodeaba todo lo que había pasado en esos años–” (Puenzo 93). What he doesn’t say, but instead remembers, is that these children upon being selected for

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93 See my argument in Chapter 1 that connects some of the Nazis’ methodologies of violence (in WWII) with those of the Argentine military dictatorship.
his experiments again received food and were allowed to bathe. Due to a culture of permissive impunity, he is able, through calculated deception and cloaked in the benevolent mantle of an educated doctor, to pursue his obsession with genetics – often believing he is still master of the concentration camp. He even momentarily forgets where he is when Enzo walks away from him.

“A punto de gritarle que no había terminado con él, recordó que no era uno de sus subordinados. Se maldijo a sí mismo: . . . Apenas podía mantener una conversación con miembros de las razas inferiores sin tratarlos como subordinados. No había hecho otra cosa durante años” (94).

Although no longer in a place of ultimate impunity, the permissive impunity present in Argentina allows him to forget that he must now manipulate others, instead of overtly claiming bodies and lives as he once did, to obtain his narcissistic scientific desires. Through the doctor and his movement between cultures of impunity, shaped here by Puenzo in literature, the reader becomes aware of overlapping commonalities between multiple violent periods. By showing how one period of violence informs or bleeds over into another, I believe the novel indirectly confronts the scholarly tendency to privilege the traumatic experience of the Holocaust by establishing the shared traumatic experiences (e.g. the camps and systematic perpetration of genocide) between the genocide of the Argentine indigenous peoples and the annihilation of the Jews and others during WWII (as previously mentioned).94

Argentina: A Permissive Impunity

Argentina was among those countries in the Southern Cone preoccupied with the bettering of its citizens. This concern was reflected in literature, such as Manuel Gálvez’s

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94 For more on the debates among Holocaust scholars as to the representability of the Holocaust and Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memories (instead of competitive memories), see “Questions of Representability” in Chapter 1.
Historia de arrabal (1922), warning its readers of the dangers of certain types of people. In spite of their seemingly ordinary outward appearance, prostitutes, homosexuals, immigrants, and even single women were dangerous and contaminating elements if allowed to exist within the spaces inhabited by those designated as “normal” or “respectable” citizens of society. From the eugenic viewpoint of the Argentine Modern State, when respectable society allowed those intrinsically “marked” as aberrant to comingle or cohabitate with respectable members of society, the “normal” elements were in danger of contamination. If a mixture of worlds is to be avoided, the question then becomes one of identification: How does one identify someone who is “Other” when they appear – as Gálvez’s wholesome, beautiful, and youthful Rosalinda does – so sweet and safe? The troubling task is to be able to differentiate between those destined to a life of corruption from those who contribute and belong to the citizen body. In order to do so, novelas such as Gálvez’s demonstrated how the environment and the familial/social circles of one like Rosalinda displayed her as “marked,” exposed her habits and daily companions as health concerns, and inevitably sealed her fate as a prostitute (in-the-making). Gálvez’s text is one example of many; there is also the influential work of Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), a principal supporter of Fascism in Argentina, who shaped national perceptions through his poetry, short stories, and essays. Literature thus guided the nation as a cultural tool of hegemonic power relations by providing its desirable citizens with analyses that converted deceivingly innocent-looking children and adolescents into tainted adults based on genetic determinism.

95 Manuel Gálvez’s novel Historia de arrabal illustrates spaces and subjects that influence the prostitute Rosalinda’s formation and designate her as “Other” – a method of constructing difference. In analyzing novelas like Gálvez’s, written in 1922, one begins to envision the key role of literature in the formation of the twentieth-century Argentine nation’s imaginary of fringe subjects like Rosalinda. Many works confirmed and propagated the image of women like her as marked for failure and destitution despite their normal appearance.
The moral lesson conveyed in this type of literature at the turn of the century is that the insertion of such characters into the discourse of the Nation only assists undesirable others in climbing the social ladder for the betterment of themselves and to the biologic determent of the Nation. These aberrant types of non-citizens do not have the amelioration of Argentine society in mind but rather seek to accumulate, then scandalously waste, the wealth bestowed upon them. Such novels and plays demonstrated that appearances are deceiving, and no matter how reformed society believes certain types to be, it errs in giving them the opportunity to enter better circles. The message is that bad blood overrules every attempt to convert or reform outsiders, and the Nation’s resources and energies are wasted on beings incapable of intelligence and reasoning.

With literature of this sort in circulation decades before WWII, it is no surprise that it should foment a culture of permissive impunity in Argentina, a culture that has demonstrably aided criminals like Dr. Mengele to blend in and prey upon certain “othered” types for his medical experiments. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, Puenzo’s novel inverts this literary creation of “marked” subjects and instead “marks” the criminal underneath the smooth veneer of a medical doctor who also racially “marks” his subjects of interest for disposal or alteration. For example, when Dr. Mengele/José first arrives in Bariloche, he immediately schemes to be able to stay in the family’s hostel in order to observe their peculiarities (imperfections he considers the consequences of racial mixing): “La desazón que sentía desde el comienzo del exilio, la pérdida del sentido, la desesperanza. . . todo se había evaporado de pronto: no iba a perderse la oportunidad de vivir en ese zoológico” (Puenzo 71). And again, when he contemplates the perfection of the dolls he invests in with Lilith’s father, Enzo, who designs dolls and other inventions to make them seem more real, e.g. beating hearts, moving limbs and eyes:

[Piensa José] Pocas veces en la vida algo lo había complacido tan rotundamente en un primer intento. Los éxitos solían llegar después de decenas de intentos frustrados, cuando
ya tenía los tímpanos aturdidos por los gritos de dolor de sus criaturas. Esta vez, por el contrario, había sido tan fácil. . . . (156)

As José’s past histories of predation are exposed through his interactions with the family and Enzo’s projects, I believe Wakolda also indirectly challenges both the paradigmatic binary relationship of traumatic experience and the sexual agency of children. Traumatic experience is tied to the animate and inanimate in Wakolda. In addition to human subjects like Lilith, José technically experiments on dolls of European and indigenous’ races (as does Lilith, blurring the lines between victim and accomplice), with much greater success than in his work on humans, and this parallel between “working on” animate subjects and inanimate objects could be considered sacrilegious when connected to the Holocaust. Secondly, the novel upsets sexual boundaries by paradoxically making the childish Lilith concomitantly the older man José’s twin soul and a young girl experiencing her first sexual infatuation, i.e. Lilith is José’s mischievous equal yet no match for his sexual depravity and criminality, which I will later discuss in detail. As such, Puenzo adheres to traditional categories while bending them.

However, it is perhaps easier to subvert literary traditions, of “marking” or otherwise, from a twenty-first-century vantage point of failed racial utopias and a clear view of the proverbial road to hell – one paved with (falsely claimed) good intentions that soon twisted into unspeakable horrors.96 Early twentieth-century Argentina (influenced by eugenics-based policies pre-WWII), on the other hand, was still preoccupied with eliminating contaminating elements and preserving traditional family and gender roles. The tendency in literary discourse was to explore, analyze, and catalog these “abnormal” and “marked” subjects. The compulsion to identify outside, nonconforming, and contaminating bodies is clearly seen in not only Gálvez’s

96 I’m referring to the common saying “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” when I say this.
Historia de arrabal but also in José González Castillo’s *Los invertidos* (1914) and other earlier texts such as *En la sangre* (1887) by Eugenio Cambaceres. The pseudo-scientific manners in which these fringe or border subjects were created in literature served either to generate or reinforce readers’ fears, thus ensuring the continued expulsion of these “marked” bodies from a normalized, genetically untainted, model citizen body.

In addition to the interest in eugenics – with an increasing focus on the superiority of certain races as the 1930s progressed, – there was also a return to the nineteenth-century ideals of family, gender roles, and honor in warfare for the Nation through the influence of the Italian fascists and the German national-socialists in Argentina. In *Los orígenes del fascismo*, Leticia Prislei mentions the influence of the press, particularly the newspaper *Il Mattino d’Italia* (1930) in Buenos Aires, and other authors in Argentina who contributed to the imaginary of the model family, wife, and home propagated by Fascism. The fascist State would be a populist one (un

97 Castillo’s *Los invertidos* was a 1914 play that exposed the “normal” as abnormal. A rich doctor, loving father, and husband is shown to really be a homosexual by night (also a good example of “vampirism,” a view connected to homosexuals’ nighttime activities). He has been lovers with his best friend for years, then one night his wife discovers his true nature and kills him to save the family honor. *En la sangre* (1887) by Eugenio Cambaceres also exposed the seemingly “normal” as aberrant. A man from a tainted family is given the opportunity to be educated. He then mingles in circles above his own and is able to seduce and marry a respectable and well-off woman. Although he is now free to circulate in patrician clubs and neighborhoods, his bad blood/genes eventually surface or become evident in his dishonest dealings and cruel nature. The novel demonstrates how bad blood, even when given the opportunity to improve itself, will in the end bring destruction to those around it.

98 Leticia Prislei states, “Del mismo modo, la familia está en el centro de las preocupaciones del fascismo y se reiteran los escritos de los escritores acerca del modelo de hogar que se debe constituir. En ese sentido *Il Mattino* inaugura en 1933 una sección que titula ‘La mujer, la casa y la familia’ y difunde un decálogo destinado a las mujeres que resulta una síntesis reveladora” (48). This return to core values was placed in opposition to democratic, market-based consumerism in countries like the United States, and it would become a vehicle for the mobilization of working-class citizens and the militarization of societies like Italy, Germany, and eventually Argentina (Prislei). Prislei also comments on the distinctiveness of the military nation’s establishment on youth organizations in order to inculcate a sense of discipline and military ethic: “Las características de la nación incorporan otro elemento distintivo al ser definida como ‘nación militar’, distinta de la nación en armas del liberalismo y algunos teóricos del socialismo, puesto que implica asentarla sobre las organizaciones infantiles, juveniles y las camisas negras adultos, a partir de crear una conciencia basada en el sentido de la disciplina y la ética militar” (53).
país popular) in that the State consists of the people (pueblo) (Prislei 53). If the State equals the people, then the people must be worthy of the State – genetically untainted and living in a pre-determined fashion approved of by the State. Thus, it could be posited that the social mores and corporal/genetic expectations undergirding the cultures of impunity evident in Wakolda were first imagined in literature (the Generation of 1837 onwards), then embraced in politics and many intellectual circles (geneticists, anthropologists, doctors) through a propagation of desirable versus undesirable images in quotidian life.

With such trends in literature and politics, it becomes clear why the country might have been a logical choice for many fascists and national-socialists/Nazis fleeing Europe. There were already established organizations and ties to government, literary circles, and businesses in place; it was merely a matter of utilizing those networks to accommodate men like Dr. Mengele. Puenzo clearly shows the ease with which José temporarily takes up residence in Bariloche thanks to a vast network of contacts at his disposal – sympathizers who are willing to accommodate a man considered a pioneer in the field of genetics instead of the calculated predator he is. Soon after arriving in town, he ponders the invitations he has received from the townspeople without even giving his address out:

La vida social de Bariloche era activa y próspera, todos le aseguraron que con un mínimo de reserva podría vivir ahí el tiempo que quisiera, sin preocuparse. Ofrecieron conseguirle un lugar seguro para que pudiera seguir con sus investigaciones, y un consultorio médico si quería volver a la práctica. (Puenzo 94)

José is still surrounded by the untouchable aura connected to the distinguished expert he was purported to be in Nazi Germany and so he is treated as a guest of honor in Bariloche’s social

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99 Another variant of this populist spirit would later be seen in Peronism, and although Puenzo’s novel takes place years after Perón is exiled to Spain, it is precisely the routes of escape facilitated and supported by Argentine governments during the 1940s that brought fascist and national-socialist war criminals to Argentina.
circles. As Lilith secretly observes his interactions with the townspeople, Puenzo utilizes her point of view to construct Dr. Mengele/José as an expert who is also an arrogant showman before a captive audience: “Detuvo la bicicleta para observarlo [a José], y no se movió ni al ver que Tomás [el hermano de Lilith] seguía de largo sin esperarla. José era el único que hablaba; miraba a los que lo rodeaban a los ojos, como un encantador de serpientes” (97-98). Lilith even notices the reverent fear with which he is treated, “Apenas gesticulaba, hacía largas pausas en las que nadie se atrevía a acotar ni una palabra. Hasta el mozo se había detenido a escucharlo” (98). The complicity of the awe-struck townspeople combined with the town’s culture of impunity pave the way for Dr. Mengele/José’s medical experimentation to proceed unabated.

I contend that complicity and impunity serve as precursors to further crimes against humanity. Dr. Mengele/José is a prime example of a serial perpetrator who, left unchecked and unpunished, repeats his crimes. Puenzo artfully describes him as a hungry predator observing the happy family inside the hostel: “Eran [los miembros de la familia] la imagen de la felicidad. José rodeó la casa despacio, como un predador hambriento” (103). He circles the house while Lilith, ironically, is arguing with her father in favor of allowing Dr. Mengele/José to treat her. She’s convinced that she should be able to do as she pleases with her body; however, she cannot yet grasp the past violence that Dr. Mengele/José carries with him, the hidden predator beneath the cultured exterior. In fact and in fiction, he commits the same crimes (of medical experimentation) on different children as he changes locations and his actions are facilitated by networks of national-socialists (among whom he is a legend), cultures of impunity (Argentina/Latin America), and a lack of justice post-WWII (outside of the Nuremberg Trials
Impunity is permitted when it serves a purpose, and, in turn, justice is not pursued in every instance but only when advantageous or necessary. I believe Puenzo reflects historical impunity on a macro-level by “marking” the criminal and the ordinary civilians who assist him on the micro- or individual level in the diegesis. In his first encounter with the family, before undertaking the long drive with them through the desert to Bariloche, Dr. Mengele/José is “marked” as a man obsessed with racial purity. He is internally irritated that a racially inferior mix should have created perfect genetic specimens (José labels her father a *homo-siriacus*, her mother a *homo-arabicus*, and the children *homo-europeans*). While observing the family, he catalogues them as he would have his former subjects in the concentration camp, then connects this classification to his years of genetic research: “No era la primera vez que observaba el mismo fenómeno: la genética de dos individuos mediocres podía combinarse para traer al mundo especímenes perfectos. La combinación lo irritaba, desafiaba sus teorías de limpieza” (Puenzo 26-27). Through Dr. Mengele/José’s internal dialogue, the ultimate impunity of concentration camp experimentation and Nazi racial theories are tied to the recycling of this same violence in the South. Dr. Mengele/José remembers, “Durante más de una década había intentado demostrar la clasificación completa y fiable de la genética humana, así como la dimensión del daño creado por genéticas desfavorables” (27). The Nazi doctor has not changed. He is still intent on proving his genetic theories and will test them out on another family given the chance. Dr. Mengele/José is a contradiction – considered a violent perpetrator by many and a scientific genius by others. Puenzo marks the medical expert and those who assist him as the truly aberrant. She enables the

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100 I say “lack of justice” because many of the Allied countries, painted as heroic and unsullied by the destruction of the Jews and other undesirables, were aware of the escape routes utilized by war criminals and in some cases took advantage of the “knowledge” these fugitives were assumed to have of the Soviet Union or other areas they deemed “contaminated” by Communism. See Gerald Steinacher for more information.
reader to observe the violence perpetrated on the local level by “experts” – i.e. from the nurses and doctors on the property next to the hostel (cosmetically altering the faces of Nazis in secret) to doctors like Dr. Mengele/José (stealthily studying humans while posing as a veterinarian) – revered for their medical knowledge and, regardless of the means they utilize to obtain it, sheltered by cultures of impunity.

Dr. Mengele/José is a prime example of a medical expert who is also a sheltered criminal. He is financially secure, with or without work, and although cautious, he proceeds with tranquility until little by little detectives from the Mossad, along with other victims seeking justice, begin to trace his steps (70, 131). In this way, Puenzo also demonstrates the transition from Dr. Mengele/José’s operation within Argentina to his gradual necessity to remain on the move, to encounter other Latin American countries where he isn’t as well known, as she foreshadows his historical situation. It is also pertinent that permissive impunity is breached by active pursuit from without. Dr. Mengele/José’s criminal actions become increasingly difficult to execute as he is hunted by outsiders and forced to flee the once safe haven of Argentina. Puenzo makes this forthcoming change evident through an omniscient narrator who tellingly reveals,

No podía imaginar entonces que iba a ser un perpetuo fugitivo, sin paz hasta el día de su muerte. . . . La primera [a cazarlo]: un comando de sobrevivientes de Auschwitz, en un hotel de la triple frontera. La segunda: en la selva del Alto Paraná, a cargo de un aventurero dedicado a asesinar nazis en los años de posguerra. (96)

I believe the pursuit of Dr. Mengele/José by outsiders divulges a potential escape route from victimizers and their support bases. Cultures of impunity, practitioners of exclusion and violence, and their practices of “Othering” must be exposed, their flaws laid bare under the harsh light of accountability from without. Of course, intervention is an incredibly difficult task due to questions of national sovereignty and other such political norms that guard a nation against attack from other countries, but intervention from without can also come from individuals (an
extreme case would be Simon Wiesenthal the Nazi hunter). Once positive law backs what was
once an exceptional measure, once certain violent practices are normalized or institutionalized,
judging them from within or without becomes tricky. Daniel Feierstein points out this legal
quandary in his study on genocides, *Seis estudios sobre genocidio. Análisis de las relaciones
sociales: otredad, exclusión, exterminio*.

If the norms sanctioned are what used to be the extreme or the exception, then how does one
decide at what point the normalized exception is once again an exception? This juridical
quandary had to be addressed post-WWII in Europe, post-military dictatorship in Argentina, and
will again be tackled in new instances of normalized violence. In returning to a system of checks
and balances post-war, post-dictatorship, or period of exception and requiring justice (not the
same as revenge) no matter how difficult it may be to ascertain what or whom to hold
accountable, cultures of impunity might be cut off at the root (or, at the very least, their growth
stunted) before they further foment other acts of violence for which no one will be held
accountable. Darkness and secrecy (i.e. lack of knowledge, lack of accountability, lack of justice,
lack of transparency) provide fertile soil for criminality and violence. The fictional and historical
Dr. Mengele, still unpunished and unaccountable, enjoys and benefits from Argentina’s culture
of impunity for a season, just as he once took advantage of the ultimate impunity of German
concentration camps, but the winds of change arrive when he least expects it – marked first by
Adolf Eichmann’s capture and extraction to Israel to stand trial and next by an unexpected encounter with a former female child victim of his.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{The Child’s Body as a Battlefield: A Twisted Violence and a Complicit Violence}

In \textit{Wakolda}, José is at first a stranger, and as Lilith is told not to speak to strangers, although she knowingly does so anyways, she breaks a parental prohibition the moment they meet. José carefully transitions from an outsider to an integral part of the family. The violence he intends can only be conducted cautiously, even in a culture of permissive impunity, because it involves children and new born infants. In the novel, José’s character is fashioned as a master manipulator who plots and plans each move with precision and patience. As previously mentioned, his fictional encounter with Lilith blurs traditional sexual and ethical boundaries in that predator and prey become entwined in a deadly game of mutual fascination. The youthful Lilith is at once accomplice and victim. The older, worldlier José is simultaneously a cultured man and a sadistic monster. He claims to be a veterinarian and an anthropologist (as cover), but he persistently gravitates towards his preferred vocation of treating humans (50).\textsuperscript{102}

To be able to observe and offer medical services to the family who intrigues him, he carefully approaches them with the equivalent of six months of rent, desperately needed to defray their start-up costs, to stay at their newly opened hostel (83). After establishing himself as a guest, he stealthily observes the family, incorporates their measurements and anatomy into his infamous sketchbook (also full of patients from his work in concentration camps), and schemes

\textsuperscript{101} Both instances are based on historical events.

\textsuperscript{102} “[José] Ya tenía varios potenciales clientes, terneros, vacas, embarazadas con problemas de anemia . . .” and “Lo que nadie decía es que, además de vacunar al ganado, por unos francos suizos muchos de ellos aceptaron vender muestras de sangre de sus mujeres e hijas embarazadas. José había vuelto a las estadísticas, no podía ocultar su buen humor” (Puenzo 120 & 122-123).
up ways of continuing his experimentation – on Lilith and eventually the twins he suspects her mother is carrying. José’s main advantage is his expertise, which allows him to intervene when Eva feels weak during her pregnancy. His success in aiding her with iron supplements in turn paves the way for Lilith’s treatments. He gradually becomes a medical authority figure in the eyes of Eva, and as the mother figure, she has the power to permit or deny access to her private family sphere. Eventually, as Dr. Mengele/José makes himself indispensable to the family, even the children are entrusted to his care.

In older traditions stemming from the idea of the monarch as ‘parent’ or ‘father,’ instead of experts, the State has often been viewed as a secondary authority figure in the lives of children – e.g. from nineteenth-century orphanages or children’s homes to the twenty-first-century foster child system in the US or other decisions taken in the name of *parens patriae* (literally parent of the nation). However, it is also telling that legislation specifically protecting Children’s Rights in Britain and the United States dates from the end of the nineteenth century. Archard reveals that prosecution at this time had to be carried forth under laws protecting animals – a fact many would find shocking in contemporary society (154-155). He states, “A significant and often noted fact is that the first prosecution for child cruelty around this time had to be brought under laws protecting animals, since none existed specifically for the protection of children” (155). If the parent or guardian did not offer protection for children, the State could not always be counted on to intervene on their behalf. In Lilith’s case, the State is noticeably absent. Her mother and father are presented as the decision makers and authority figures of their “private” family

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103 According to Archard, “That a state should assume some responsibility for the well-being of its children seems obvious. That, historically, the state has seen fit to do so is also true but to widely differing degrees. A longstanding influential doctrine holds the state, in succession to the monarch, to be *parens patriae*, ‘parent of the nation’, and thus responsible for the upbringing of its youth” (154).
sphere. It, consequently, follows that once José gains their trust, he is free for a time – especially during the extreme state of crisis or emergency brought about by the dangerous weather, flu epidemic, and premature birth of the twins – to experiment at will on Lilith and her new born siblings.

It is also true that, whether in conjunction with state policies or independently of them, experts of all types have influenced the family from within. From Foucault’s study of sexuality and its use as a tool for controlling the family to contemporary how-to books for parents, the twentieth and twenty-first century family sphere has been studied and shaped by experts. Archard speaks of powers apart from the State’s that can be wielded over the family: “Power may be exercised over individuals and families by agencies other than those of the state, and by means other than the legal-coercive ones associated with the state” (155). He continues, “This consists less in explicit state intervention into the life of the family than the subtle and pervasive intrusion of experts, involving, to use [Jacques] Donzelot’s own phrase, government through families as opposed to the government of families” (155). In a way, Dr. Mengele/José (no longer backed explicitly by the State but a firm adherent to the Nazi State’s rhetoric) is guided by a type

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104 Archard describes the distinction between “private” and “public”: “In the first place, the significance of the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’, and the respective boundaries of each, are not things which were laid down once and have then remained constant ever since. Rather, the distinction itself owes much to the emergence, from the sixteenth century onward, of the modern, sovereign nation-state and a corresponding movement to define a countervailing sphere safe from its encroachments. The legitimating practices of the market, especially in the nineteenth century, were critical in sanctioning the separation of public law from the law of private transactions; and it is historical developments in the form of the family which have contributed to its acquiring the status of a paradigmatically ‘private’ institution” (156).

105 Due to the internal state of crisis in the house after the premature birth of the twins, Lilith becomes further separated from her parents: “Para mayor seguridad habían decidido dividir la casa en dos: el ala izquierda era la de los enfermos, y ahí mudaron a Lilith y su hermano menor, junto con los dos huéspedes mendocinos que habían sucumbido a la epidemia. El ala derecha fue reservada para la parturienta y las prematuras, además de Tomás y Enzo (que no mostraban síntomas de la enfermedad)” (Puenzo 179).

106 See Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. 129
of “therapeutic medical model [that] stipulates a norm of familial ‘health’. . .” in his treatment of the Argentine family.\textsuperscript{107} He employs medical models, x-rays, and statistics to prove that Lilith is below average size for her age but believes that there is still a chance for her to grow if treated:

“[A Eva] Le mostró libros, fotos, estadísticas, la envolvió con una florida oratoria y no detuvo hasta arrancarle un sí. Enzo se negó durante días, hasta que su propio médico les confirmó que la propuesta del alemán estaba lejos de ser una locura” (121). Dr. Mengele/José bases his diagnosis and treatment of Lilith on past experiments (still concealed and unpunished) conducted on children in concentration camps, and he is supported by another local doctor or medical expert in his proposed treatment, which adds to his credibility. His experiments in camps were conducted under a State that strictly controlled the racial make-up and sexual decisions of the family through experts and government policies/laws.\textsuperscript{108} In Bariloche, Dr. Mengele/José’s actions are in line with his former trajectory, but in place of the Nazi Reich as parental figure and the ultimate impunity of a concentration camp, he skillfully operates within a culture of permissive impunity and utilizes medical expertise to bypass the parental authority figures guarding the private sphere of Lilith’s home. Once this is accomplished, he gradually converts the inch they’ve allowed him into a long, pain-filled mile.

Dr. Mengele/José still views the moments before adolescence as filled with potentiality, and medical interventions become equated with genetic battles that force change in the direction he dictates. In a sexually tinged encounter that skirts around feelings of pleasure and disgust,

\textsuperscript{107} As previously discussed in the Introduction, “A therapeutic medical model stipulates a norm of familial ‘health’ which, by means of professionals, insinuates into the ‘private’ life of families. These professionals fill the quasi-official occupations of doctor, psychiatrist, lawyer and social worker” (Archard 155).

\textsuperscript{108} For more on the Nazi State and the policies/laws used to control the reproduction (or forced sterilization) and racial make-up of families and individual lives, see Havi Dreifuss and Na’ama Bela Shik’s online course, The Holocaust – An Introduction (I): Nazi Germany: Ideology, the Jews, and the World and testimonials on the University of Southern California’s iWitness website.
José seduces Lilith with his knowledge of the mating and birthing cycles of lightning bugs. In this interaction, he tellingly reveals that the best part of their life cycle is the nymph stage because it is “su mejor momento” – after this, it becomes an adult, mates, and dies (Puenzo 120). Lilith suddenly asks him how much more she could grow. She grasps José’s veiled analogy – although likely not the sexual gesture of putting his finger into the hole between her hands to extinguish the bug’s light and leaving it there. She realizes that she, like the lightning bug’s nymph stage, is at her best moment: “José sonrió, no planeaba que fuera tan fácil. –Con un poco de ayuda. . . bastante [respondió José]” (120). His interactions with and seduction of Lilith is later exposed to parallel that of his work with children in camps as Nora remembers her time spent with him in the camp – memories that replay in her mind when she meets Lilith and re-encounters Dr. Mengele/José.

Nora’s experience with Dr. Mengele/José was even more twisted and severe as their interactions occurred without any type of mediation or protection for her or her family. The Nazi State, and Dr. Mengele/José as its agent, acted as Sovereign/Father as it invoked the right of patria potestas over those it deemed racially, medically, or otherwise unfit for the Nation and who were therefore denationalized and stripped of all Human Rights. Nora met Dr. Mengele/José in a place where the unthinkable became a daily reality. Her body became the camp doctor’s possession to experiment on at will, also at a time when she was full of “potentiality.” The concentration camp and its culture of ultimate impunity facilitated the most unequal and atrocious of power relations – that of the naturalization of supreme domination of one being over another based on race/genetics through the categorization of humans into the sub-human or non-human. Medical experimentation on a body classified as sub- or non-human was of little consequence if the “body” was deemed unworthy of life. Worth was then temporarily re-
assigned only through its utility in experimentation. The body, as a non-entity, becomes a tool in the hands of a monster like Dr. Mengele/José, who transitions with ease between the bodies of children like Nora and Lilith to Enzo’s dolls. Agamben describes the concentration camp as a 

zone of indistinction.

The people who entered the camp moved about in a zone of indistinction between the outside and the inside, the exception and the rule, the licit and the illicit, in which every juridical protection had disappeared; moreover, if they were Jews, they had already been deprived of citizenship rights by the Nuremberg Laws and were later completely denationalized at the moment of the ‘final solution.’

(Agamben Means without End… 39-40)

Agamben’s description of the space of the camp reveals how exposed (adults and) children like Nora really were.

Inasmuch as its inhabitants have been stripped of every political status and reduced completely to naked [also translated as bare] life, the camp is also the most absolute biopolitical space that has ever been realized – a space in which power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation. (emphasis Agamben’s) (40)

In the camp, Nora was truly reduced to nothing but her body – pure, naked life [nuda vita].

Puenzo places emphasis on this bareness through the omniscient narrator’s description of her and Lilith as they search for and encounter José at the hostel: “No tenia [Lilith] idea de que a la extraña [Nora] que caminaba con paso tambaleante a su lado el mismo hombre le había triturado la infancia casi a su misma edad” (Puenzo 204). Nora recognizes José instantly. He hasn’t changed, and her desire for revenge quickly converts into terror. She remembers that, in comparison to her brother, she had been weak and without a tolerance for pain until she was placed in Dr. Mengele/José’s hands, yet somehow, she had resisted longer.

In Puenzo’s story, Dr. Mengele/José senses Nora’s recognition of him. After Lilith takes her to choose a doll, she meets him again during the twins’ baptismal celebration. He takes the upper hand by forcing her into a dance that allows him to draw her into a verbal duel as he
speaks of the blond dolls and premonitions of death. She, like Lilith, feels a twisted sense of fear and excitation: “El contacto de su piel con la de José le produjo una oleada de emociones en las que había de todo (enredada en medio del asco, el miedo y la rabia reconoció la misma excitación que él le provocó las primeras noches que pasaron juntos)” (209). As previously mentioned, Nora, unlike Lilith, possesses a traumatic knowledge of the irreparable harm Dr. Mengele/José can cause. Her body was completely open to his experimentation in a way that Lilith’s is not because Nora was held captive in a concentration camp. She was sterilized by Dr. Mengele/José at fifteen (much as her historical counterpart was), and his theft of her body’s reproductive abilities forever robbed her of having her own children (211). Although she lived to adulthood, she never really broke free from him because her obsession with finding Dr. Mengele/José to enact revenge controlled her life. Once actually confronted with the doctor, she becomes embroiled in the mixed emotions he inspires, and her body again becomes a battlefield on which he wages a decisive victory – her death. Nora, like the Mapuche family in the desert, is proof of a failed extermination project, and as such, her body – the evidence – must be definitively wiped out. Her interaction with José proves that obsessions end in violence – once disguised as love and finally exposed as death, permitted under the law of patria potestas (a power here usurped by the medical/scientific expert).

**Obsessions: Violence and Love**

This same oscillation between violence and love fueled by obsession is evident in José’s interactions with Lilith. His plans would have been interrupted were it not for her tacit silence. The twisted violence intended by him is made possible by her initial infatuation, overt complicity, and the family’s tangled web of obsessions. In a sense, he requires an accomplice, and his intended victim willingly fulfills this role. José acknowledges the necessity of complicity
when he quotes a poet who once said “. . . el amor es un acto que no puede realizarse sin un cómplice” (Puenzo 134). As previously mentioned, Lilith at first doesn’t grasp his meaning and so asks, “¿Quién es el cómplice?”, to which he replies, “Vos” (135). The degree to which Lilith’s complicity with José is fully informed and purposeful is difficult to ascertain because, despite her actions, she seems to have missed the full implications of her rebellion until years later. It is relevant that she could have alerted the family to the unusual drawings and measurements she discovers in Dr. Mengele/José’s room, yet she remains silent. The heady mixture of fear and excitement enthralls her (105). What other purpose could Lilith’s compliance with a questionable man serve besides the fulfillment of her own desires? Why else would she choose to endure treatments and pain? By the time she wants him to leave, she no longer has the bodily force to make him and so strangely submits until an act of fate – the separate arrival of Nora Eldoc and Mossad agents in town – liberates her when it forces José to flee (182). Yet, her desire for him to leave, when it occurs, exists concomitantly with her wish for him to stay: “Se detuvo [José] a mirarla por última vez… Abrazaba a Wakolda, desencajada. Sonrió, incrédulo: a pesar de todo, su pequeña mascota de circo lo quería” (216). The interactions between José and twelve-year-old Lilith, who he first believes to be eight years old, are complex. They trespass the boundaries between love and abuse and dip into the terrain of obsessions and fetishes – from the depths to which a young girl’s first sexual fascination will take her to Dr. Mengele/José’s twisted mix of sexual attraction to an adolescent with the body of a child on which he heartlessly experiments.

Puenzo depicts José as perversely aroused by Lilith’s daring and devilish nature, which leads her to extremes. At their first encounter, she even reaches up and sticks her finger on the small space between his front teeth to demonstrate he isn’t perfect either. This audacious action surprises him (no other woman has touched this small crack), and instead of angering him, it
strangely excites him. He sees within Lilith something ancient, a mischievous spirit playing with danger. Lilith is described as rubbing the wet fingertips of her thumb and forefinger together, spreading the stranger’s saliva on her hand without the slightest worry: “La acción, lejos de irri
tarlo [a José], lo excitó de una manera inesperada, con más virulencia que los últimos encuentros sexuales que había tenido con un par de empleadas de la empresa farmacéutica en la que trabajaba” (24). I believe Puenzo connects Dr. Mengele/José’s obsession with the construction of genetic perfection to a sexual fetish with the irresistibly abnormal. He is simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by the young girl he decides to treat. More than a lab specimen, she is a living work of art for him. After he measures her height one last time, José remarks, “– Podemos decir que sos mi obra –. . .” (216). His experimentation is his art, in much the same way as Lilith’s father tinkers with inventions for his dolls. Puenzo’s connection between the doctor’s obsession with corporal manipulations and Enzo’s with doll making provides ample space for conjecture. Is Lilith drawn to a man who obsessively attempts to alter her body like her father does with his life-like dolls? If so, it is only a natural progression for her to latch onto the first man who repeats her father’s obsession to the extreme, feeding her need to rebel yet allowing her to remain within her comfort zone.

Lilith, like José, is a contradiction. She is a mix of naïveté and cunning – enticed by her first sexual awakening and the adventure of keeping a secret so big it consumes her. She too is fascinated by the process of reconstruction, dismembering her doll so that she can repeatedly repair it – an interesting parallel to Dr. Mengele/José’s procedures on humans. The surgery performed on her doll is the act that first piques her interest in José’s skillful stitching. His expertise establishes the closeness needed so that he can eventually move from working on her doll to experimenting on her with growth hormones – the needle piercing her flesh also
becoming a ritual she observes with enthrallement, as if he owned her body. In her fevered state, Lilith is described as telling Dr. Mengele/José to leave – although they both know this won’t happen because he is medically treating the twins – and yet she continues to be fascinated by the experimentation on her body: “Lilith lo dejó levantarle la enagua, como si su cuerpo le perteneciera a él y no a ella. Le gustaba ver cómo la jeringa atravesaba su piel” (182). The twisted bond between José and Lilith begins to resemble the abusive relationship of an amorous couple. He strikes and calls it good for her (the pain from the injections is considered a good sign; Nora later tells her pain is never good); she simultaneously submits to him as a form of rebellion against what she should do, i.e. tell others of the pain he causes her, and because she is transfixed by the expert knowledge he wields over her body. His attention to her smallish body is intoxicating for her, like flattery from a lover, and although pain follows, she tolerates it for longer than her own will may have allowed due to Dr. Mengele/José’s skillful distraction of her parents before the twins’ birth and, most importantly, her mother’s urgent need for his expertise with the premature infants after their birth.

Returning to the question of the role Lilith’s parents play, or fail to play as protectors – Enzo, before capitulating to Eva’s desires, reminds Lilith that she is a minor, which means that her parents get to decide what to do with her body; it is not her decision as she assumes (103-104). Ironically, although Lilith discusses the growth treatments with her parents, she has already agreed to meet with the doctor. From the outset, she proceeds to do as she pleases with or without her parents’ approval (105). Lilith operates without her parents’ knowledge (prior to their complicity), and her rebellion opens the door for Dr. Mengele/José to establish a closer relationship with her. It is paradoxically Lilith who unabashedly entrusts him with the “potentiality” of her still-developing body, despite sensing “... algo hambriento en su mirada,
algo que le hizo pensar en los cuentos de vampiros. Pero aunque le dolía [a Lilith] no le pidió que la soltara” (107). Her fascination and obsession are greater than the pain he brings her.

As such, in addition to shades of impunity and complicity, I view Puenzo’s novel as a case study in obsessions: Dr. Mengele/José’s obsession with genetics and experimentation, Eva’s with the premature twins’ survival, Enzo’s with his inventions and dolls, Nora’s with revenge, and Lilith’s with José and the growth of her body. Obsessions overshadow the doctor’s interactions with the family, and as everyone acts in their own self-interests, the children’s bodies he so desperately desires for experimentation become increasingly available to him. He consistently manipulates each member of the family, starting with Eva’s concern for her pregnancy. He presses her until she eventually consents to receive hormone treatments (to fortify the unborn): “Eva apretó la bolita de algodón. Confía en él [José]. Hacía dos semanas que se sentía mejor gracias a las vitaminas. Había empezado a encariñarse con el alemán, que no podía ser más dulce con sus hijos” (121-122). Lilith receives these treatments next, but this decision seems to be tied to the bullying she suffers at the German school because of her small size. The harsh treatment of the school children possibly makes both Eva and Lilith more open to Dr. Mengele/José’s treatments because his expertise appeals to their own desires – Eva’s to protect her children and Lilith’s to grow to a “statistically” normal size for her age, to fit in and belong. Even her brothers crave the doctor’s attention (often aided by the doctor’s candies he doles out, a practice also connected to the camps), but it is Lilith whose interest becomes an obsession that allows Dr. Mengele/José’s experimentation to reach extremes: “Esa primera pulsión erótica la tenía fascinada: la mirada del alemán sobre su cuerpo la derretía” (122). José clearly fulfills his desires by manipulating the obsessions and desires of those around him.
José’s calculated investments in Enzo’s creations momentarily distracts him with the fulfillment of his own obsessions. Lilith’s father also consistently capitulates to his wife’s desires; what Eva decides goes. Although the doctor uses his money and influence to buy Enzo’s confidence, it is Eva (coupled with Lilith’s rebellion), as previously mentioned, who first opens the door to her children’s bodies. At one point, she shamefully confesses her desire to Enzo for Dr. Mengele/José to remain in the house; both parents are now overtly complicit but stay their course to obtain what they desire. After their birth, the twins become an obsession that overshadows Eva’s care for Lilith (erroneously considered sick solely from the flu epidemic), who is now quarantined in the other wing of the house: “Habló [Eva] sin mirarlo [a Enzo] y en susurros (como si le diera vergüenza confesarlo). Habló con la vista fija en la menor de sus bebas. Dijo que no le importaba quién era. Lo quería ahí, al lado de sus hijas” (178). As the novel progresses, the family’s various obsessions are interwoven into a complex tapestry of deceit, silence, and fear that ends in Dr. Mengele/José’s skillful orchestration of the household, especially after its plunge into a state of crisis at the twins’ perilous birth (a normalized exception develops in the small space of the household).

Dr. Mengele/José’s final checkmate is seen in the level of total control he gradually gains over each family member – a control based on medical expertise and desperation that permits him to treat the twins and the sick household as he desires, i.e. a temporary return to a culture of ultimate impunity based on the household’s state of emergency. After manipulating the family’s circle of trust, he takes the game to the next level and secretly does as he wishes with the newborn twins – allowing one to teeter on the edge of death while he fortifies the other, practices that stem from his experimentation in the camps. Even when they discover he may be dangerous, it no longer matters because their obsessions have taken them all to the edge. I believe the
family’s state of crisis also demonstrates how isolation facilitates extreme power relations.

Isolated by a snow storm and in the absence of other doctors, Dr. Mengele/José is again given the reins of power over life and death. The only thing that saves the family is José’s need to flee, his instinct for self-preservation. Pressure is exerted from without the household, and his hold on them is broken.

**Survival as Proof of Failed Extermination Projects**

In *Wakolda*, the resurfacing of violence perpetrated in cultures of ultimate impunity in a culture of permissive impunity demonstrates how the genocidal will that aimed to alter and perfect continues unabated into the present. In addition to the child’s body as a battlefield for experimentation as a means to genetic superiority, I argue Puenzo adds weight to the connections among camps born in a colonial context to those utilized in WWII to ones yet to come (posterior to the diegetic present of the novel – during the military dictatorship). The *remnants/descendants* of the unpunished genocide of the indigenous peoples come in contact with the as-of-yet unpunished *perpetrator* of genocide and medical experimentation in Germany on the very land systematically cleared of its indigenous peoples in Argentina as Dr. Mengele/José courts yet another child victim.109 Lilith’s survival, like Nora’s before she again comes in contact with the doctor, of medical experimentation parallels that of Cumin’s family’s living in the desert (over a century after Argentina’s attempt to wipe out the indigenous tribes). Both are proof of failed extermination projects.

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109 *Due to a torrential rain storm, José and Lilith’s family briefly spend a night with a Mapuche family while traveling through the desert. This night not only brings suspicions to light among the three groups – Dr. Mengele/José, Lilith’s family, and the Mapuche family – but the atrocities of the past committed against the indigenous tribes resurfaces (e.g. among three of the boys as they read a comic book that turns out to be about the conquest of the desert).*
I argue that *survival as failure* develops in a positive sense as failure in this context implies extermination that fails to end in death. Although survival in Trauma Studies can be traumatic, I believe it is also proof of *resistance*. Cumín, the fearsome father figure in the Mapuche household, questions his son Nahuel’s statement that “they” didn’t do anything to me, –¿Vos te creés que exterminar a todos los pueblos indígenas no fue un plan? ¿Sabés qué decían? Que primero iban a exterminar a los nómades y después a los sedentarios. . . Pero acá estamos, tenemos raíces y tierra y nadie nos exterminó. Somos la prueba viviente del fracaso de un proyecto. (Puenzo 55)

This statement, in addition to proof of *resistance*, historically reflects and diegetically foreshadows that of the infamous quotation by General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, governor of Buenos Aires Province in 1977 (during the military dictatorship), who also outlined a systematic plan of annihilation: “First, we are going to kill all of the subversives, then their collaborators, then their sympathizers, then the indifferent, and finally the timid” (Hollander 79). The nineteenth-century Argentine nation and twentieth-century Nazi Germany too targeted the most defenseless of all. These varied extermination plans aimed at the heart of being – meting out death based on existential grounds. Agamben ties this death sentence based on biology to a blurring of public and private in the space of the camp that he postulates instated modernity.

If one was a Jew in Auschwitz or a Bosnian woman in Omarska, one entered the camp as a result not of a political choice but rather of what was most private and incommunicable in oneself, that is, one’s blood, one’s biological body. But precisely the latter functions now as a decisive political criterion. In this sense, the camp truly is the inaugural site of modernity: it is the first space in which public and private events, political life and biological life, become rigorously indistinguishable. (Agamben 121)

Whether the camps utilized in an Argentine colonial context to contain the indigenous tribes, the camps employed in the Third Reich to eliminate “undesirables,” or permanent states of emergency/exception – potentially continuously existing in quotidian life (per Agamben) – the placement of the body at the center of the regulation of life (through politics, medicine,
education, and the like) has relocated the *geographically centered battlefields* of the past to the *biologically centered battlefield* of the present. In this instance, survival becomes more than a victory, more than a continuation of life (perhaps even more than the subsequent trauma); *survival becomes a reclaiming of the private* that has been subsumed in the political.

In speaking of recycled violence and the evolution of cultures of impunity, I am not postulating that their policies and practices are mere continuations of the colonial endeavor, but rather that they paved the way for the body to again be exploited outside of cultures of ultimate impunity, outside of the space of the camp – and perhaps inside of the legal disciplinary system as quotidian exceptions become rules.\(^{110}\) Although a fictional account, Puenzo’s novel brings the historical exploitation of bodies to light as a child, in her own private family sphere, is still subject to manipulation and experimentation. This precedent will reverberate throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the body is continually found to be located at the center of power, perhaps even deeper than Foucault could have imagined. Agamben’s insightful statement continually unfolding as

the state of exception, which used to be essentially a temporary suspension of the order, becomes now a new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by that naked life that increasingly cannot be inscribed into the order. *The increasingly widening gap between birth (naked life) and nation-state is the new fact of the politics of our time and what we are calling ‘camp’ is this disparity.* To an order without localization (that is, the state of exception during which the law is suspended) corresponds now a localization without order (that is, the camp as permanent space of exception). (42-43)

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\(^{110}\) Agamben theorizes, “To see the great totalitarian experiments of the twentieth century only as the continuation and execution of the last tasks of nineteenth-century nation-states – that is, of nationalism and imperialism – is to misunderstand completely the nature of such experiments. There are other, more extreme stakes here, because it was a question of turning into and undertaking as a task the factitious existence of peoples pure and simple – that is, in the last instance, their naked life” (*Means without End...* 139).
The camp now expressed in quotidian life through democides, politicides, genocides, and other visible and invisible “acts of killing” or -cide of our times – this is the new rule.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{111} Democide includes genocide, politicide, and mass murder – R.J. Rummel, \textit{Death by Government} (1997) – while politicide is “Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr’s term for mass killing according to political affiliation, whether actual or implied” – \textit{Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction} (Jones 28).
Memory, Identity, and Justice

In Gastón Biraben’s 2005 film *Cautiva*, the female protagonist undergoes a unique type of trauma. She is not harmed physically herself, yet she is deprived by her surrogate parents/appropriators of her real identity and of a connection to her biological family. Her traumatic loss occurs within the historical and political context of the 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship whose radical scope of intervention in all spheres of public and private life left indelible marks on many. Cristina’s/Sofía’s trauma occurs through a deprivation of her identity over which she had no control. *Cautiva* connects the private sphere, including biological life, with the public arena of government practices and policies as it brings the spectator back to the political debate on memoria/olvido through a historically-guided and justice-oriented reconstruction of the fictional protagonist’s identity. In this chapter, I posit that restored/reconstructed memories are powerful because they symbolize the rearming of memory for the protagonist Cristina/Sofía who slowly transitions from a position lacking in agency and influenced by a culture of oblivion to one of agency informed by memory and the restoration of identity.112

*Cautiva* is really a film about stolen lives, falsified identities, and the abduction of infants facilitated by the murder of memory, which is then rewritten. Cristina/Sofía discovers through

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112 The duality of her circumstances is evident in her continued preference for the name Cristina. Since she is known by both names throughout the film, I have chosen to refer to her as Cristina/Sofía once she is notified of her biological identity and when speaking of her in general terms. Otherwise, she is Sofía in the detention center/hospital (pre-appropriation) and Cristina while living with her surrogate parents/appropriators (post-appropriation).
the judicial system that her parents, her name, her age, and her family do not correspond to her birth identity. Her biological mother gave birth to her in a clandestine detention center during the match between Argentina and the Netherlands at the 1978 World Cup Final in Argentina, and she was appropriated/kidnapped soon after. Both of her parents (desaparecidos) were detained and disappeared/murdered during the 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship. Sofía was given to a couple loyal to the dictatorship and renamed Cristina. In the film, she must come to terms with her birth identity and family. Cristina/Sofía’s story, though fictional in the film, is highly pertinent as appropriated children, now adults, are still being identified and contacted/recuperated by their biological families, usually through organizations like Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.

Theoretical Contextualization: Film

Over the past half a century, the theories and concepts of film’s role in society and the spectators’ relation to it have transitioned from the urgent necessity to militarize and galvanize the passive, uneducated spectator of militant cinema to an equally distant yet equally active spectator and interpreter of post-dictatorship films.113 In The Emancipated Spectator, Jacques Rancière sums up the relation between film’s role in society and the spectator best in his analysis of the emancipated spectator who has transitioned from pure binary oppositions, from passive or active, to become instead “both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them” (13). Although militant cinema and post-dictatorship films are decades apart in time,

113 This possible evolution or transition is discussed in the research paper I developed thanks to the Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (Summer 2014). The paper is titled “From the Educated Spectator to the Witness: The Personal as Political and a Violent Witnessing.” The first part deals with “Memory, Identity, and Justice in Gastón Biraben’s Cautiva” and includes background information on film theories during the 1960s in Argentina and spectatorship.

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they are both concerned with false realities, with the uncovering of truth, and with the polymorphous forms of the stories and images peopling one’s memories.\footnote{A good example of militant cinema in Argentina is Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s 1968 film \textit{La hora de los hornos} (\textit{The Hour of the Furnaces}) while Gastón Biraben’s 2005 film \textit{Cautiva} (Captive) is an example of contemporary post-dictatorship cinema.}

I aim to demonstrate that \textit{Cautiva}, part of a broader movement of films belonging to the era of post-dictatorship memory and \textit{postmemory}, could be considered a contemporary example of an emotionally-charged political film.\footnote{Marianne Hirsch postulates, “Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (103). This concept will be further elaborated upon later in the chapter.} I recognize that many film theorists would not place \textit{Cautiva} in the same category as the overtly political films of the era of militant and revolutionary cinema; it is, nevertheless, imbued with politics – especially, \textit{biopolitics}. Based on a combination of Film and Witness Studies’ theories, I also posit that Rancière’s idea of an evolved spectator may be reframed as a \textit{witness} in post-dictatorship film, a witness who is implicitly called to empathetically connect with – or at the very least to bear witness to – the trauma of another in films like \textit{Cautiva}. In the move from the call for an educated and active spectator to a viewer who bears witness to traumatic events/memories, I believe one encounters the locus of Leonardo da Vinci’s intersecting pyramids (in terms of spatial systems and perspective) in cinema – from the viewer’s eye to the glass pane to the objects behind it.\footnote{In Chapter 2, titled “Narrative Space," of Stephen Heath’s \textit{Questions of Cinema}, Heath situates the terms screen and frame within the evolution of spatial systems, from painting and optics to the modern notion of cinema: “Notions of screen and frame are fundamental in the elaboration of the perspective system. Leonardo da Vinci writes: ‘Perspective is nothing else than seeing a place (or objects) behind a pane of glass, quite transparent, on the surface of which the objects behind that glass are drawn. These can be traced in pyramids to the point in the eye, and these pyramids are intersected on the glass pane.’ The pane is at once a frame, the frame of a window, and a screen, the area of projection on which what is seen can be traced and fixed; from the Quattrocento on, the ‘pane’ delimits and holds a view, the painter’s canvas as a screen situated between eye and object, point of interception of the light rays . . .” (Heath 33-34).} In a world filled with technology, I
envision their intersection occurring on the movie screen (or television) instead of a pane of glass. This encounter (or point of intersection) is not a bearing witness to the conditions of an Argentine reality already known to exist in the twenty-first century. As such, it does not follow in the footsteps of social documentary practiced by filmmakers like Fernando Birri or his predecessor Joris Ivens, who felt that a film could bear witness to the conditions of reality and so permit the spectator to attest to the evidence of some event (e.g. the effects of neocolonialism) obscured or distorted in other more standardized film productions.¹¹⁷ Neither is the witnessing occurring in Cautiva the naïve faith in documentary as a source of “testimony,” criticized by Solanas and Getino in La hora de los hornos (1968).¹¹⁸ It is rather a different type of bearing witness, not a revelation of the truth – although the truth of past traumas is revealed in many scenes – but more of a validation of trauma enabled by a filmic link of witnesses.¹¹⁹

My theoretical goal is to demonstrate, through in-depth analyses of key scenes in Cautiva, that this point of intersection, which joins the gaze of the viewer with the viewed, serves as a vital connection between the multifaceted, contemporary viewer and the filmic action that is no longer restricted to the realm of imagery/fantasy as a concealment of reality but pertinently situated in the reconstruction of the memory of the quotidian (the personal as political). Throughout the chapter, I posit that the link between viewer and viewed in Cautiva is part of a process involving 1.) the witnessing of a trauma (torture, disappearance, and the

¹¹⁷ See Birri’s short film Tire dié or Throw Me a Dime (1960), which shows the hard life of slums in Argentina.

¹¹⁸ Dr. Greg Cohen discussed many of the film theories of political modernism(s) extensively in his UCLA course “Global Political Modernisms: Cinema, Politics, and Theory in the Global Sixties” (Winter 2014). Much of the information for this paragraph was taken from course notes as well as Emilio Bernini’s article “Politics and the Documentary Film in Argentina during the 1960s.”

¹¹⁹ Joshua Hirsch in Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust discusses a concept similar to my vision of a filmic link (or chain) of witnesses.
deprivation of identity), 2.) the restitution of sense (restoration of empathy, identity, and justice) to acts devoid of sense, and 3.) the retelling of a familiar story (the tragedies of the dictatorship and the appropriation of children) that, however familiar it may be, is still just as pertinent today as it was in Luis Puenzo’s iconic film *La historia oficial* (1985).

My hypothesis that *Cautiva* demonstrates the reconstruction of a broken identity and the surmounting of the traumatic for the spectator who bears witness to Cristina’s discovery of the falsity of her constructed life is based upon a diagram created by Sociologist Gabriel Gatti. The relationship among the traumatic, the fragmentation of identity, the surpassing of trauma, and the resulting reconstruction of identity/restoration of sense and equilibrium is broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>Identidad quebrada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>catástrophe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superación del trauma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reconstrucción de la identidad rota</td>
<td>restitución del sentido. (Gatti 119)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the protagonist’s case in *Cautiva*, the traumatic rupture in her identity occurs as an adolescent, 15-16 years into the formation of her identity as Cristina. I believe this additional element of vulnerability and angst, potentially key in the creation of empathy, adds to the film’s implicit critique of the practice of appropriation and disappearance during the dictatorship. In addition to the filmic viewer as external witness, I consider the diegetic element of a child/adolescent witness who, as both victim and protagonist, calls into question the implications of, what I have termed, an empathetic and/or a violent witnessing.

I begin the chapter with Giorgio Agamben’s theoretical work on bare life and the state of exception as rule, both integral to my analysis of appropriation in the film, then I provide a brief

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120 Gabriel Gatti. *Identidades desaparecidas: Peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada*. 147
overview of organizations like the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Both the film’s reconstruction of the memory of the quotidian and its connection to trauma seem to be clearly linked to bare life in a state of exception as well as to the restoration of identity (facilitated by the Madres and Abuelas) and witnessing. I have chosen to examine the structure of the diegesis in detail because it contextualizes my analyses of selected key scenes or sequences related to the above-mentioned concepts. These scenes emphasize the role of the spectator as witness and/or feature the child/adolescent protagonist as victim/witness. The first set of scenes I selected involve Cristina, the second the Judge’s office, the third Cristina/Sofía’s first return “home” after the Judge’s revelation, and the fourth the basement testimonial and flashback scene. Between the third and fourth set of scenes, I provide background information on international Human Rights and other legislation pertinent to the deprivation/restoration of identity and justice in the film. In conclusion, after the fourth set of scenes involving the nurse and her testimony, I propose new categories of witnessing – principally a violent witnessing – and discuss the potential creation of a fortified empathy.

The Connection to Politics and Witnessing: The Personal as Political – Body, Law, Family, and State

Proceeding from the supposition that the spectator of memory and postmemory films is both viewer of and witness to selected reconstructions of memories, I am interested in analyzing what is being witnessed or reconstructed in Cautiva. The main protagonist, Cristina, indirectly experiences events that occurred before, during, and immediately after her birth through eyewitness testimony, photographs, legal documents and a blood analysis/science. In these instances, she is connected to the memories of the past through what Marianne Hirsch refers to as postmemory. In “The Generation of Postmemory,” she postulates, “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to
the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (107). In other words, postmemory is connected to memory based on the emotional depth of its transmission and its connection to the “reconstructive” aspects of memory. Hirsch continues, “But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (107). Although Cristina did not grow up with these memories, she is connected to them as an adolescent through people and (memory) objects around her. The film thus reconstructs events from a postmemory perspective while also narrating the first-hand account of traumatic events from a memory perspective, one tied to others’ memories as well as the adolescent protagonist’s own.

In her analysis of the film, titled “Iconic Fictions: Narrating Recent Argentine History in Post-2000 Second-Generation Films,” Veronica Garibotto highlights Cautiva’s emphasis on “. . . the tension between documentary and fiction that is crucial for understanding the film’s ideological implications” (178).

Cautiva is a fictional film set against a backdrop of recreated historical events – the Argentine military dictatorship and its appropriation of children – and so it might be defined as a fictional production with documentary elements. As summarized by Garibotto, it is essentially the story of a fifteen-year-old girl who is “. . . forced to leave during school hours to see a judge who tells her that her parents are in fact her adoptive parents and that her biological parents disappeared in 1978, during the military dictatorship” (178). Garibotto

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121 It does not, however, follow in the footsteps of director Albertina Carri’s groundbreaking, and autobiographical, documentary/drama film Los Rubios (The Blonds) (2003), which alternately employs the actual protagonist/director and an actress to explore the traumatic stories of the director and her parents (a documentary film with elements of fiction or a drama with factual elements).
continues, “The rest of the film is an account of how the teenager gradually learns about her real parents, discovers recent Argentine history and finally comes to terms with her new identity” (178). This insertion of the personal into the political is possible for multiple reasons. Among them, one finds the placing of biological life at the center of the modern State that, in the Argentine case, is confronted by the forceful advocacy of the organizations Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, e.g. their political militancy, forensic investigations, and refusal to mourn.

**Bare Life and States of Exception**

Several of Giorgio Agamben’s theoretical concepts underpin key aspects of this analysis because they facilitate an understanding of the conditions of bare lives within the state of exception. The central thread of this chapter is the consequences of children being fully exposed to the state abuse of power; translated into Agamben’s terminology, the “full exposure” of children’s bodies and minds is equivalent to bare life as it exists under the state abuse of power, which is enabled by a state of exception. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben situates bare life at the center of modern politics, or the locus of sovereign power, by connecting it to the “inclusive exclusion” or that which is “included solely through an exclusion” (10). He asserts,

The Foucauldian thesis will then have to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of zoê [bare life] in the polis [ancient Greek city-state] – which is, in itself, absolutely ancient – nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of State power. Instead the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoê, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. (Agamben 9)
He then succinctly ties the “inclusive exclusion,” the state of exception, and bare life together:

“At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested” (9). If bare life is at once excluded – and therefore also unprotected – and included – and therefore also managed, controlled, and subject to law, – its habitation within a liminal zone, in which the exception may quickly become the rule, allows the political (represented by the State or dictatorship) to invade and claim the personal (Agamben’s bare life or Foucault’s biopower).

Agamben claims, “The exception is an element in law that transcends positive law in the form of its suspension” (17). As positive law is suspended and the suspension of rule gives rise to the exception, bare life is increasingly vulnerable to being killed, even more than in its “inclusive exclusion” before this suspension. In the state of exception there is no distinction between violence and justice, and when the exception becomes the rule, bare life is doubly subject to the violence within and without the State, to both the violence that posits and the violence that preserves law, to being killed by anyone (but not sacrificed) without penalty (8-9, 40). Here, I would emphasize once more the compounded impact of extreme violence in situations lacking legal recourse, especially dangerous in the case of children.

Insofar as it is sovereign, the nomos [law] is necessarily connected with both the state of nature and the state of the exception. The state of exception (with its necessary indistinction between Bia [violence] and Dikē [justice]) is not external to the nomos but rather, even in its clear delimitation, included in the nomos as a moment that is in every sense fundamental. (37)

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122 The exception and the rule are connected in that: “The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it. The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension”; Agamben continues, “The exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule” (18).
If there is also no longer a distinguishable figure in contemporary society associated with Agamben’s *homo sacer* (the man who can be killed but not sacrificed), then it is perhaps because, as he posits, everyone is now *homines sacri* or sacred men.

**AGAMBEN’S REPRESENTATION OF THE STATE OF EXCEPTION AS THE RULE (38)**

> If one wanted to represent schematically the relation between the state of nature and the state of law that takes shape in the state of exception, one could have recourse to two circles that at first appear to be distinct (Fig. 1) but later, in the state of exception, show themselves to be in fact inside each other (Fig. 2). When the exception starts to become the rule, the two circles coincide in absolute indistinction (Fig. 3).

For Agamben, “Bare life is no longer confined to a particular place or a definite category. It now dwells in the biological body of every living being” (140). The implications of this move from the specific to the general, from the sacred man as distinguishable to everyone as sacred men, are that the average person – man, woman, child – is “capable of being killed to an unprecedented degree,” just as before the specifically designated man, the *homo sacer*, was capable of being killed without punishment. 123

In addition to the wider application of the *homo sacer* designation, I would also include the implications of the State exerting the ancient power of the father (his *vitae necisque potestas*)

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123 “If it is true that the figure proposed by our age is that of an unsacrificeable life that has nevertheless become capable of being killed to an unprecedented degree, then the bare life of *homo sacer* concerns us in a special way” (Agamben 114).
over the lives of its subjects (87-89). If the State is now the equivalent of the sovereign who
wields the power of the father over his children or the one who decides which life may be killed
without punishment, which “life [is] unworthy of being lived” (*lebensunwerten Leben*), then this
same State as sovereign and father is able to extend its power into the private lives of its citizens
and to rule on matters pertaining to death (of the detained-disappeared parent), life (the
appropriation and re-placement/re-classification of the babies of subversives), and the re-
organization of the family and society through the family (modern *biopolitics*; e.g. the
integration of medicine and politics seen in Chapter 2) (136-137, 143). This inclusion and
exclusion of the personal, of bare life, in the political sphere may also be extended to the
fictional story narrated in *Cautiva*. The seizure or appropriation of infants, like Sofía/Cristina,
during the Argentine military dictatorship and their subsequent redistribution is a prime example
of the dangers to which bare life is exposed as it exists in the state of exception (or even outside
of it in the current “age of biopolitics” where life can cease to be “politically relevant”) (142).

Contrary to our modern habit of representing the political realm in terms of citizens’
rights, free will, and social contracts, from the point of view of sovereignty only *bare life
is authentically political*; and, it is the sovereign or State who can decide on the political
relevancy of bare life. (106)

In my opinion, the theoretical concept of bare life illuminates the act of appropriation (*bare life
as the authentically political*) by demonstrating the practice and resulting consequences of the
regulation by the State of the most personal part of a person (of one’s body, identity, and
localization in life). Cristina/Sofía represents the barest life of all because she is appropriated

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124 “If it is the sovereign who, insofar as he decides on the state of exception, has the power to decide which life
may be killed without the commission of homicide, in the age of biopolitics this power becomes emancipated from
the state of exception and transformed into the power to decide the point at which life ceases to be politically
relevant” (Agamben 142).

125 Como ya dijimos, en la Argentina, fue el Estado el que violó ese derecho [el Derecho a la identidad], poniendo
en evidencia que debía ser explicitado para que se lo considere un derecho humano fundamental, y por lo tanto
post-natum. As a new born, she is utterly defenseless and doubly deprived of a connection to her biological and social histories (i.e. identity, familial milieu, differing ideologies), of her very memories, including those of her biological family, which are manipulated and dramatically altered to insert the ideologies and life histories of her surrogate parents.

**Las Madres and Las Abuelas**

I would now like to focus on the “personal as political” as it pertains to the way Argentine civil society contested and intersected the legitimation of the extra-judicial law of the state of exception. These movements, despite the risk of death to their members, were central to the recuperation of the disappeared, their appropriated children, and the reinstatement of identity. They were founded in the private sphere and successfully brought the personal back into the political realm in the search for their disappeared and appropriated loved ones. In the era of biopolitics, in a country overwhelmingly dominated by state terror and complicit in the taking and transfer of lives, Madres de Plaza de Mayo was and is still instrumental in investigating, disputing or protesting, and legally pursuing the Argentine military dictatorship’s personnel and accomplices and reconstructing scattered evidence related to the detention-disappearance of their children (bare lives deemed politically irrelevant). Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, branching off from the Madres, has spearheaded the search for their appropriated grandchildren. In their politicization of their children’s and grandchildren’s bodies, they draw attention to the State apparatus, its culpability, and ability to be punished. I would like to emphasize that they invert

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pase a ser responsabilidad de los estados el garantizarlo” (Kirchner et al, PDF, “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” 28).
the entrance of the political into their private homes and personal lives by bringing their lives and homes back into the realm of politics.\textsuperscript{126}

During the 1976-1983 Argentine military dictatorship, divergent forces were labeled subversives and included such groups as communists, socialists, \textit{montoneros}, labor and union activists, and student groups.\textsuperscript{127} They were viewed and opposed as civilian enemies within the Nation. As Nancy Hollander informs the reader in \textit{Love in a Time of Hate: Liberation Psychology in Latin America}, during the dictatorship the ruling Junta advocated a type of warfare against their own citizens – an ideological and a physical warfare: “‘Civilians are also warriors,’ the generals asserted, ‘ideas a different form of weapon’” (47). State terror and torture in the dictatorships of the Southern Cone developed into not only a violence perpetuated against individual bodies but also a calculated psychological warfare against anyone who dared to think differently from the established order. Hollander states, “Subversives were defined in broad terms to include anyone or any group whose aims were considered ‘inconvenient’ to the existing system” (90-91). In \textit{Cautiva}, the protagonist’s biological parents, who take center stage as she reconstructs her identity, are classified as civilian subversives. Terminology of this sort contributes to the construction and classification of the enemy – opposing camps in ideological struggles often involving confrontations between a military government and leftist ideologies (or other ideologies it labels subversive). Categorizations and confrontations are not recent phenomena in Argentina, or even Latin America. For example, in \textit{Memory of the Argentina [sic] Disappearances: The Political History of Nunca Más}, Emilio Crenzel mentions “. . . the country

\textsuperscript{126} A great example of this insertion of the personal or intimate into the public sphere is the Mothers’ choice, which serves as a visual political statement, to wear their children’s cloth diapers as head coverings or scarves.

\textsuperscript{127} The well-known 1986 film \textit{La noche de los lápices}, directed by Héctor Olivera, provides an example of the dictatorship’s abuse of students.
[Argentina] had a long and intense history of coups and political violence dating back to 1930, when the constitutional government of Hipólito Yrigoyen was overthrown. However, the 1976 military dictatorship ushered in a new era” (8). For Crenzel, this new era instituted enforced disappearance within clandestine operations or under cover of secrecy. I would also add the unprecedented level of violence directed against the civilian population – some actively militant, others only students and liberal thinkers. For Kirchner et al, the act of forced disappearance also includes appropriated children:

Está caracterizado por: La privación de la libertad de personas por parte de agentes de las fuerzas de seguridad o grupos que actúan con su apoyo, seguida de la negativa a reconocer dicha privación, tras un cautiverio con torturas en un paradero oculto (centros clandestinos de detención), y con el posterior asesinato y desaparición del cuerpo. . . . Los efectos de la desaparición forzada perduran hasta que no se resuelve la suerte o paradero de las personas, prolongando y amplificando el sufrimiento que se causa a familiares o allegados. Estos últimos, y especialmente, por su vulnerabilidad, los niños que puedan serstraídos de padres afectados, son considerados también víctimas de este crimen. (PDF 21)

Thanks to the efforts of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, this history of violence is being converted into histories of restitution and reparations.

According to Berber Bevernage, in History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice, “the Madres de Plaza de Mayo came into existence in 1977 when, shortly after the military coup and the start of the first wave of disappearances, a group of mothers convened in order to organize the search for their sons and daughters and give voice to their protest”

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128 This history of military coups and violence in Latin America resounds in the diegesis and background stories, first, of militant documentary films and, later, in films with a more traditional form like Cautiva.

129 The act of forced disappearance is defined in the educational module “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” composed by various authors (Kirchner et al) and associated with the Asociación Civil Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and el Ministerio de Desarrollo Social in Argentina.
The group gradually transitioned from a place of secrecy or the private sphere to a public, and highly political, location – in front of the presidential palace. Due to increased persecution of the organization during the 1978 World Cup (a key event in Cautiva associated with Cristina/Sofia’s birth), based on accusations of an “anti-Argentina campaign,” the Madres returned to meeting in secrecy until 1979 when, backed by an international network, they established a “legally registered association” (30-31). The Madres tirelessly continued their public protests throughout the remaining years of the dictatorship, the transition to democracy, and, even today, they remain a strong presence in Argentina and the human rights arena. What began as an organization of mothers searching for their children expanded to include the Abuelas and their quest to locate and reclaim their appropriated grandchildren, a pursuit that eventually led to the legal protection of one’s right to their identity in Argentina. In “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” Kirchner et al mention the entrance of both organizations onto the political playing field, despite great personal risk, as one followed by pressure applied by the international community to investigate allegations involving the Argentine military’s widespread abuse of human rights (22). Thus, thanks to international political pressure and the denunciations of both the Madres and Abuelas regarding the disappearance and appropriation of their children and grandchildren, many families have recuperated the remains of their loved ones,

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130 The context of this statement is Bevernage’s discussion of the resistance against the irreversible time of history and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo’s stance on death – evinced in their slogan: aparición con vida or living appearance.

131 Regarding the right to one’s identity, Kirchner et al state, “El Derecho a la identidad, es introducido en la Convención de los Derechos del Niño [in 1989], a instancias de las Abuelas” (PDF, “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” 28).

132 The educational module “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad” defines both groups as follows: “Así fue como aparecieron las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, que reclamaban por la aparición con vida de sus hijos secuestrados y las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, que luchaban por recuperar a sus hijos y nietos desaparecidos, denunciando los crímenes de la dictadura a nivel nacional e internacional” (Kirchner et al, PDF, 22).
obtained knowledge of the events leading to their demise, and/or located their appropriated grandchildren. As such, before *Cautiva*’s diegesis even begins, it is already highly politicized due to its content and historical situation.

**The Rearming of Memory: Analyses of Relevant Sequences and Legislation**

Due to the relevance of the diegesis, mise-en-scène, and certain camera shots that further emphasize the pain-staking process of the reconstruction of memory and restoration of identity undergone by the female protagonist, I have chosen to discuss several scenes or sequences in detail. I aim to create a general framework, revolving around Cristina as she becomes Sofía, as contextualization for certain scene analyses, including the Judge’s office. In my opinion, it is important to explain in detail Cristina/Sofía’s moments of crisis, confrontation, and gradual movement towards the restitution of her identity. The process of reconstruction is pain-staking and relevant in present day Argentina where appropriated children are still being located.

*Cristina*

*Cautiva* recounts a fictional story of disappearance and appropriation against a historically accurate yet deeply personal backdrop. Perhaps this is the reason the director begins the film with a child’s picture of a family, an image of happiness and stability flashed before the camera moments before the director’s name, Gastón Biraben, appears in captions on the screen. The drawing is followed by two establishing sequences that situate the viewer/witness in the middle of two distinct worlds, two identities, and two memories. The first sequence uses archival footage from the 1978 World Cup Championship game between Holland and Argentina. The initial shot of this soccer game is framed in the shape of a square; like a television within the film frame itself, one views a square within a square. As the viewer/witness enters the world of 1978, Argentina has just scored the winning goal, and the crowd is repeatedly chanting the word
“gol.” As the camera pans over the cheering spectators, certain figures are isolated from the masses with the use of captions; General Videla, Almirante Massera, and the U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger are identified in this way.

The first sequence dissolves into the second in the transition from the scene of victory of the 1978 World Cup to Cristina Quadri’s *quinceañera* celebration, identified by the caption “Alrededores de Buenos Aires, 1994.” Everyone is celebrating and dancing a waltz; the scene of the party provides the viewer/witness with the ideal image of a happy family surrounded by friends and loved ones in a beautiful and seemingly safe home. There is only laughter and contentment, sentiments confirmed in the next few shots showing the mother, Adela de Quadri, father, Pablo Quadri, and Cristina sleeping peacefully in their own beds after the party. Soon after, the viewer/witness begins to experience a slight nagging sensation when Cristina is seen with her mother in the doctor’s office. Adela, strangely, appears fidgety and nervous. They are told Cristina must do a blood test as a checkup post-appendectomy. There is an extreme close-up shot of the needle as it pierces Cristina’s vein to draw blood – a shot I believe sets the stage for the importance of biological histories/families – then a slow pan up to her face. The next few sequences involve Cristina and her mother at home. She questions her mother regarding religion, her own birth, her mother’s sensations during it, and other like inquiries, and although these questions seem harmless, something in her mother’s attitude and seeming discomfort alert the viewer to possible underlying issues.

The next sequence takes place in a classroom at a Catholic school where Cristina is witness to a confrontation between a classmate, Angélica, and the teacher over a legal matter. Without prior background information, this conversation might seem irrelevant until later events reveal more of Argentina’s political situation, but to the viewer/witness with prior historical
knowledge, this scene introduces the concept of differing memories of the military dictatorship/government as well as various legal matters that occurred in 1985 and 1989. As the teacher discusses the government and its various powers, she asks the students when the president can act in special circumstances without Congress’s participation. Angélica blurts out “el indulto” or pardon after which the teacher looks at her with a very stern expression and repeats the idea of presidential pardon. Angélica continues to challenge her in regards to the Argentine president’s decision in 1989 to pardon Jorge Videla, Emilio Massera, Leopoldo Galtieri, and other leaders of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, although they were found guilty in the 1985 Trial of the Juntas.133

The viewer/witness is not given these specific facts, but rather vague references to the 1989 pardons and other clues that an informed viewer/witness would be able to interpret. Angélica’s statements highlight the culture of impunity that continued to exist in the democracy established post-dictatorship. Cautiva’s was released in 2005, and it is possible many viewers would have been aware of the controversy surrounding the presidential pardons. The diegesis is situated in the mid-1990s and so the presidential pardons would have been even more recent events for the protagonists. For the less informed viewer of the twenty-first century, the girl’s defiant attitude and her designation of the teacher as a hypocrite – a word she spitefully calls her as she is forced to leave the classroom – should call attention to a hidden polemic concerning the legal system and politics in Argentina.

These differing viewpoints of the past – tensions between official narratives and personal memories – and the prevalence of terminology utilized during the dictatorship are further

133 “En 1989 las juntas militares fueron indultadas por el entonces presidente, Carlos Saúl Menem, quién completó así el nefasto cuadro de impunidad” (Kirchner et al, 2008, PDF, “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” p. 23).
emphasized in the next scene as Cristina and her friend, Susana, are smoking in the girl’s bathroom. Susana believes that Angélica deserved the punishment she received. She considers her guilty by association; her parents were subversives so she must be a subversive. Cristina’s ignorance regarding the *Guerra Sucia/Guerra de los Comunistas* (term used by Susana) is increasingly evident as the conversation continues. She constantly refers to the *Guerra de las Malvinas* (the Falklands War) when Susana is instead referring to the military dictatorship/government (in Susana’s case, the term government would be used). Cristina mentions the word *desaparecidos*, but Susana corrects her by employing the term *subversivos*.

The differing and distorted memories/versions of the same story are evident in Cristina and Susana’s conversation, which again would be familiar to the informed viewer/witness and more of a mystery to the uninformed (e.g. their terminology and Susana’s stance against the earlier version presented by Angélica). After Susana expresses surprise that “they” [her parents] didn’t tell Cristina anything, there is a cut to a book with the words “Europe in Crisis” written on it and classical music playing in the background. This cut from the conversation in the girl’s bathroom to Cristina’s homework emphasizes the focus on distant crises and events (i.e. international events) in her family/school circles and less of a focus on the recent past (i.e. local events) – displayed in Cristina’s surprising ignorance about the military dictatorship/government.

In the classroom sequence, as well as in Cristina and Susana’s conversation, a politics of oblivion – the erasure and rewriting of past events to construct an official version – is evident. The tactics and terminology of the military dictatorship are still at work in settings like the Catholic school and Cristina’s family circles. Perhaps for these reasons, there is a certain didactic approach in the implicit education of the viewer/witness who, along with Cristina herself, is exposed, in watching the film, to a different set of memories of the military
dictatorship/government. This stance solidifies as the film progresses; although several versions, mainly those of memoria and olvido, are given, and the viewer is not directly instructed to take a stance as in many political films of the past (e.g. films in militant cinema or revolutionary cinema). It is first hinted at in the sequence in the Mother Superior’s office when Cristina is called in from class to meet with her. This sequence occurs soon after Cristina is shown studying in her room at home, then interacting with her parents and godparents in the living room, and immediately follows a sequence in the classroom the next morning in which she notices the empty desk of the student who challenged the teacher.

The Mother Superior’s office exudes a claustrophobic sense of control and confinement as Cristina is shown sitting in a small area surrounded by figures of legal and religious authority. There, she is introduced to the Secretary of the Police and a female psychologist, both of whom are delivering a Judicial Order. Cristina must appear before the Judge who sent the summons and is forbidden to speak with her parents before doing so. This Judicial Order is relevant because it represents a step forward in the Madres’ and Abuelas’ struggles against the culture of impunity that continued to operate in the post-dictatorship democracy; they are challenging, through the Judicial System, the politics of oblivion that aided in the creation of falsified histories like Cristina’s. For me, the Judicial Order symbolizes knowledge or the rearming of memory. A Federal Judge, who during the dictatorship may have been involved in legalized “abuses” against the State’s own citizens (appropriation, disappearance), and the state power he wields have been harnessed against the former practices of the same State. Cristina has now been removed from her initial position of perceived safety and security at home to a place of questioning and uncertainty as she is summoned before the Judge.
In the following sequence, which takes place in Judge Barrenechea’s office, the viewer is indeed situated within the role of witness to the unfolding of a trauma as Cristina’s known world is about to unravel. The Judge requests to view her identification card, and although she hands it to him, she continues to demand to speak with her parents. Prior to the Judge’s revelation, he prefaces it with the following telling remark: “Todavía sos chica pero ya no sos una nena. Creo que es hora de que conozcas la verdad.” Although she is young, she is no longer a child, and it’s time for her to know the truth. This initial revelation of the truth eventually splits off into multiple versions of the same truth, multiple memories of the same event. In this instance, the truth is sustained by scientific evidence – a blood analysis performed in the U.S., France, and Argentina. In 1981, the Abuelas had a team of North American scientists develop a test to help determine the true identity of appropriated children. This test is called the Índice de Abuelidad, and it uses the blood of family members and grandparents in order to reconstruct the genetic map of the disappeared so that their appropriated children can be identified in their absence (Kirchner et al, PDF, 28). Cristina’s true identity is revealed through this test.

She is not who she believes herself to be; Cristina has different parents, a different name, and a different age. Cristina’s initial reactions are ones of denial and a necessity to return to the security of the parents who raised her. Through the Judge, she learns that her biological parents were architects kidnapped by the Armed Forces in 1978, and she was named Sofía Lombardi at birth. According to the Judge, she is not the only person/child to whom this has happened, so she
is not unique in this respect, but the revelation of her true identity is so traumatic and surreal that Cristina initially resorts to denial.\footnote{134}

As a result of the Abuelas fight for the legal recognition of the Right to one’s identity, those like Cristina/Sofía have the Right to a full restitution of their true identity, including access to their biological families and social histories. The reconnection to Cristina/Sofía’s biological family is evinced in the involvement of Cristina/Sofía’s biological grandmother who has been searching for her for many years and who is brought in by the judge almost as soon as Cristina/Sofía arrives. Cristina/Sofía is unprepared for this type of life-changing revelation. When her biological grandmother identifies herself as her “abuela, la mamá de tu mamá,” she panics and flees the room.

The education of the viewer/witness to Cristina’s trauma continues as she is equally educated regarding her own case, that of appropriation, and the implications of the lack of correspondence between her current identity on the one hand (familial ties, age, name) and her birth identity on the other. Judge Barrenechea mentions that because she was taken \textit{without the consent of her birth parents, her biological family can justly claim her now}; this is the basic definition of appropriation in the film (equivalent to a kidnapping disguised as a falsified adoption) and the consequent rational for the reclamation of children like Cristina/Sofía. According to Kirchner et al, the act of appropriation had ideological reasons and the deprivation of identity was purposeful:

\begin{quote}
Durante la dictadura, los militares consideraban que la ideología que trataban de exterminar en los desaparecidos podfa transmitirse a través del vínculo familiar, por eso se apropiaban de sus hijos e hijas y los entregaban, en su mayoría, a familias de militares. Anular, borrar su identidad tenía como objetivo que no sientan ni piensen como sus padres, sino como sus enemigos. (27)
\end{quote}

\footnote{134 It is estimated that 400 plus children were disappeared and/or appropriated during the military dictatorship (Kirchner et al, PDF, “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad,” 22).}
This is Cristina/Sofía’s story. She was appropriated and given to a policeman whose political views lined up with those of the dictatorship; she was a part of the spoils of war.

Adoptive Parents or Kidnappers

After Cristina/Sofía is recuperated by the Judge, she is sent home with her biological grandmother to explore her new identity and family. She spends an unsettled night full of strange dreams in her grandmother’s home before returning to her surrogate parents’ house. The discrepancies between the memories/stories of Cristina’s surrogate parents and her biological family slowly become evident as the scene, which begins with an establishing shot outside the house with the Judge and other officials, slowly unfolds inside the house that Cristina, before she also knew herself to be Sofía, always believed to be her home.

As she enters the kitchen, her surrogate father, Pablo, rushes to embrace her. Both parents then commence to barrage her with questions. Her surrogate mother Adela’s concerns are related to food, hygiene, and cleanliness while Pablo’s are accusatory and confrontational in regards to the Judge and “those kind of people.” There is an immediate establishment of sides, “us” versus “them,” and as the scene develops the Judge and her biological family are increasingly vilified. Pablo is arrogant and threatening. He is worried that the Judge placed a microphone on Cristina/Sofía, accuses him of creating the “mess” they are in, and claims they [the Judge et al] don’t know who they are dealing with, which causes one to wonder who exactly Pablo, a retired federal police officer, is or was. He commands Cristina/Sofía, “Háblame de esta vieja” or “Talk to me about this old woman.” As Cristina/Sofía reveals minimal information about Elisa and her current location and instead begins to ask questions of her own – such as why don’t they [Pablo and Adela] just do blood analyses, – the aggressive attitude of her surrogate father abruptly transforms into one of confidentiality, heartbreak, and salvation. They didn’t lie
to her; they were waiting to tell her when she was older. She may not have been the baby in the picture showing a pregnant Adela, that baby was a still-born, but she was lovingly taken into their home soon after an officer called to inform them of an abandoned baby who needed a home. Her surrogate parents subtly change the story they’ve been telling her entire life. Instead of confessing their dishonesty, they insert new fragmentary elements of truth. What results is not a story of appropriation but of salvation and good intentions. They reveal, when she confronts them, that March 20, 1979, isn’t her true birthday but rather the date when they found her. These half-truths allow them to retain their role as benevolent and loving parents. In an attempt to maintain a position of neutrality, her surrogate mother repeatedly states – in this scene and throughout the film – either that they didn’t know or never wanted to find out. This scene demonstrates the complex web of deceit surrounding Cristina/Sofía and her origins. Once she discovers the existence of her biological family, her biological parents are again disappeared or erased; according to her surrogate parents, she was abandoned, and they didn’t know. The violence enacted against her biological parents and Cristina/Sofía is not in the recent past; it is an integral part of the family and culture in which Cristina was raised. Impunity and a lack of justice allow Pablo to remain threatening while Adela takes refuge in her claims of ignorance.

Cristina/Sofía’s adoption, not appropriation according to Pablo and Adela, becomes one of convenience and caring; her surrogate mother had trouble conceiving, and her parents wanted a child. It is viewed as a positive intervention, not a cruel kidnapping. They provided her with a comfortable home, even when her “original parents” left her in a train station – in an abandoned train no less – and they gave her a “place in this world.”

The discrepancy in income and material wealth is evident between the houses, neighborhoods, and schools on Cristina’s surrogate parents’ side of town and that of her biological parents.

135 If the legal system had not intervened,
Cristina/Sofía would have still been living in the midst of a fabrication – a different ideological viewpoint from that of her biological family and a parental love based on the concealment of her true heritage.

Through the state-sponsored deprivation of identity – including disappearance, torture, appropriation, and lack of accountability – during the military dictatorship, the ties among family, bodies/bare lives, community, and the role of the State were distorted and rearranged. Individual, familial, and social histories were rewritten/overwritten by an official history, memories killed and reborn, children appropriated and redistributed; impunity and the state of the exception became the rule, and bare lives were caught up in a catastrophe (the abnormal as the norm) in which the disruption and deprivation of identities proliferated. All of these factors led to a permanent state of trauma for many in Argentina, and these broken links of identity are first reconnected for Cristina/Sofía and her biological family in the Judge’s office. If it is the place where sense is slowly restored, then her initial return to her surrogate parent’s house is the place where the true brokenness of identity is discovered as Cristina/Sofía’s doubts augment with each question her surrogate parents do not fully answer: Why did her “original” parents abandon her?; who are they?; when was she found?; which train station was she found in?; maybe the Lombardis left her?; and the blood test?.

This seed of doubt is initially planted in the Judge’s office. The revelation of discrepancies in her life history and her subsequent panicked reaction (when she flees the

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136 Gabriel Gatti, in “El lenguaje de las víctimas: Silencios (ruidosos) y parodias (serias) para hablar (sin hacerlo) de la desaparición forzada de personas,” discusses three levels of disassociation between facts and feelings: trauma, el acontecimiento, y, en el límite de lo pensable, la catastrophe (92). With trauma, the destabilization is profound but provisional; with el acontecimiento, the destabilization is profound and intense; and, with catastrophe, there is a stable instability, the permanent exception, the abnormal as the norm, a perpetual mourning (92). Forced disappearance is an example of a catastrophe while another example might be los sin papeles or undocumented people.
courthouse) are part of a cycle, involving the restitution of a past deprivation of identity (through the intervention of the judicial system), that I propose includes a necessary moment of trauma (the type of awakening that occurs with post-traumatic growth) that, in time, should lead to a restitution of sense – the disjunction between her known identity and her recently discovered one and the dramatic conflict between the two that will hopefully result in a process of negotiation, as opposed to a denial of any particular identity. When referring to acts of appropriation, it is possible to speak not only of a Right to one’s true identity, but also, in my opinion, to the corresponding right to the restitution of sense to acts devoid of sense (Gatti). As evinced in Cautiva, post-dictatorship, matters pertaining to memory/forgetting, identity, and justice take center stage. The recuperation of appropriated children like Cristina/Sofía and the reinstatement of identity through reconstructed memories – by archaeologists, archivists, forensic anthropologists, and psychologists (per Gatti) – are considered basic Human Rights that were discarded as the bare lives of undesirables (lebensunwerten Leben), and therefore non-citizens or not true Argentines, were homines sacri disposed of by the State as it wielded the father’s vitae necisque potestas (to use Agamben’s terms).

This continuing recovery of identities is centered on family (Cristina’s biological grandmother assists in the restitution of sense) and genetics (the results of blood analyses are presented to Cristina). In Identidades desaparecidas: Peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada, Gabriel Gatti discusses this recovery/reinstatement:

137 Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the negotiation that occurs among one’s various identities in the Napantla state in her seminal work Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.

138 Gabriel Gatti in Chapter 4 of Identidades desaparecidas: Peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada: “Me fijaré ahora en una suerte de práctica síntesis de esta militancia en pro del sentido. Es la ejercida por el entramado de organizaciones que gravita alrededor de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, representativo de la progresiva entrada en juego en estas narrativas del sentido de una retórica que, al hablar de identidad, lo hace alrededor de un doble eje, la familia y la genética” (123).
Así es, las narrativas del sentido gestionan la catástrofe intentando reponer lo que ésta deshace, apuestan por re-unir cuerpos y nombres; por re-hacer la alianza de un sujeto con las cadenas de filiación que lo hacen tal; por re-componer individuos devolviendo sentido a la conexión de esas personas con sus inscripciones como miembros de un Estado [. . .]. (85-86) 

He emphasizes not only the reunification of bodies and names, of the remaking of ties of affiliation, of the re-composition of individuals and the return of sense to their connection as members of a State but also the mandate for memory in these narratives of sense. 

Estas narrativas, hoy aún dominantes, aunque sean más propias de períodos de transición, de salida de guerras y de dictaduras, están marcadas por un mandato: el de la memoria. 

140 Es complejo, nada unívoco, polisémico, pero suele confundir memoria con verdad y objetividad [141]. (86)

Appropriated children, like Cristina/Sofia, who are taken and lovingly raised by couples loyal to the dictatorship must eventually call into question the motivations of their surrogate parents when their love (a beautiful image on the surface) is revealed to be based upon a web of lies and deceit (a violent reality concealed beneath a beauteous image). Kirchner et al highlight the lie in which appropriated children live as a result of a concealment of the truth: “Así es que se sometió

139 “En fin, procuran devolver lo que fue sometido a vapuleo al estadio ex ante: si la desaparición segó, el trabajo de los tenedores de esta narrativa trabaja en dirección contraria” (Gatti 86).

140 I have included Gatti’s footnote, number 33, as it offers pertinent information regarding the reconstruction of memory in Argentina and Spain. “Este mandato no se manifiesta necesariamente en lo inmediato de la salida de un régimen de silencio. Así, mientras que en la Argentina este proceso de búsqueda de verdad comenzó a darse, aunque a trompicones, a la salida misma de la dictadura 1976-1983, en Uruguay las cosas circularon más lentas, aunque menos que lo que lo están haciendo en España, en donde aún hoy, nada menos que rondando la treintena los años pasados desde la muerte de Franco y algo más de la setentena los pasados desde el final de la Guerra Civil, se siguen construyendo, y no sin polémica, la memoria de esta guerra y de los muertos, desaparecidos y represaliados durante el franquismo” (Gatti 86).

141 Gatti’s footnote, number 34, emphasizes the import of memory in Argentina. “No es el objetivo de este libro el análisis de las políticas de la memoria y su relación con la vulneración de los derechos humanos. Sobre esto existe una vasta literatura científico social, hasta el punto de que se habla de una ‘explosión de memoria,’ de una ‘cultura de la memoria.’ . . . No obstante, entiendo que al menos para la Argentina, memoria no es solo un lugar de interés científico social; es también el tópico en torno al que se estructura un verdadero universo, muy cuajado ya tanto en lo académico (Fundación Memoria Abierta, Núcleo de Estudios sobre Memoria) como en lo institucional (Día Internacional de la Memoria, Archivo de la Memoria, Paseo de la Memoria)” (Gatti 86).
al niño a vivir en el marco de una gran mentira, ya que los apropiadores al ocultar la verdad, se manejaron frente a él como si nada hubiera pasado” (30). In the process of the reconstruction of the factors – including the remembered (artificially created) and forgotten (purposefully omitted) memories woven by her surrogate parents – that led to the deprivation of Cristina/Sofía’s biological identity, there is a restoration of sense to the confusion of memories (neither objective nor true) that make up her life’s story, but such a restoration does not indicate an erasure of the initial trauma or perforation in her life or psyche.142

Kirchner et al acknowledge the double trauma experienced by appropriated children – the transgression that is the act of appropriation occurs in a state of transgression as law:

Arrancados de su identidad y de su historia personal y familiar, fueron sometidos a una doble situación traumática: La desaparición de sus padres y la propia desaparición, sumergiéndolos en un proceso de ocultamiento y enajenación. En este tipo de actos se desconoció toda ley, la transgresión se hizo ley y la perversión fue la modalidad del vínculo. (30)

Cristina/Sofía’s reality is stripped away to reveal painful truths; her identity and memories are not her own. Her surrogate parents are not who they claim or seem to be. They are shown to be either aware of her origins or passively complicit in the system of appropriation that circulated the children of the disappeared. Cristina/Sofía’s “original” parents did not abandon her willfully; society and civilians/citizens like Adela and Pablo abandoned them and robbed them of their freedom, political rights, lives, official existence in society, and offspring by remaining silent and profiting from their loss – in this case the loss of a newborn child. The official memory is shown to be based on forgetting and ignorance; Pablo and Adela’s memories (representative of the official history) exclude the initial abandonment of former members of society.

142 “Pero se corre un riesgo: desnaturalizar, convertir esas figuras en otra cosa, hacer del exiliado o el preso ciudadanos plenos o del desaparecido sujeto complejo, sin fisuras. Ni catástrofes. Y no lo son” (Gatti 87).
(Cristina/Sofía’s biological parents), who were once considered citizens with Rights, and instead focus on the outcome of the process, on the “raising” of children instead of the “taking” of them, and on the future instead of the current effects of a past injustice still lingering in the present.

Confronting the claim of ignorance and the denial of the responsibility of the civilian population, Susana Kaiser suggests that “30,000 personas no desaparecen porque un grupo de militares crueles decide tomar el poder” (109). Instead, “el terrorismo del Estado y las violaciones masivas a los derechos humanos necesitan del apoyo de la población civil, ya sea por colaboración directa o indiferencia cómplice. Amplios sectores de la sociedad colaboraron con – y se beneficiaron de – la dictadura militar” (109). Wide-spread terror also accounts for civilians’ reluctance, refusal, or desire not to see/know. In 

Poder y desaparición: Los campos de concentración en Argentina, Pilar Calveiro discusses the wide-spread fear in the civilian population and the conversion of the terrifying into the norm; the quotidian was infused with it. She also mentions the theory of the two demons where two opposing camps in society were at war with each other, manifest in the antagonist Pablo’s “us” versus “them” stance (151 & 163).

La repetición de lo aterrador lo convirtió en banal. Al trivializar lo sucedido en los campos, se apuntalaba uno de los objetivos del poder concentracionario: normalizar el asesinato y la desaparición, inscribirlos como un dato en la memoria colectiva, que los podía reprobar, pero desde el sustento explicativo de los dos demonios. Aquellos dos demonios malvados que se destruyeron entre sí y que nada tenían que ver con la sociedad argentina, la verdadera, la buena, la que está en contra de toda violencia, la que nacía entonces a la democracia. (163)

The testimony of survivors was key to fighting against the argument of the two demons and against the trivialization of the memory of violence, which becomes evident in the necessity of the nurse’s testimony for Cristina/Sofía in sequences I later analyze.

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As previously posited, in Cristina/Sofía’s recuperation of memory and identity, there is not the overt declaration of politics or ideologies one encounters in many of the political films of the 1960s, but rather the film is political in its implicit recognition of the culpability of her surrogate parents, Argentine citizens who ignored the circumstances in which the infant they cared for was brought to them, and its stance concerned with the pursuit of justice and the Right to know oneself. Both justice and the recognition of essential Rights protecting the integrity of one’s personhood (in the public or political arena as well as the private sphere) are key to the rearming of memory. I turn now to human rights legislation pertinent to this argument.

*Identity and Justice*

In “The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man” – adopted by the Ninth International Conference of American States in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1948 and signed by Argentina, – mention is made of one’s Right to the recognition of one’s juridical personality and civil rights, the preservation of health and well-being, the inviolability of the home, the protection of the family, of mothers and children, and of private and family life (Organization of American States, PDF). The United Nations, in December of the same year, adopted “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” a document that also addresses “the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law” (article 6), freedom from torture or other inhumane and cruel treatment (article 5), freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile (article 9) as well as the special protection of motherhood and childhood (part 2 of article 25). Based upon my prior analysis of Agamben, these basic human rights can be viewed as suspended in a state of exception become the rule during the military dictatorship and Cristina/Sofía’s biological parents, considered threats to the security of the State, as severed from their rights as
human beings and citizens. As *hominens sacres*, they were able to be killed without their death being labeled homicide, and their offspring, Sofía, was left open to redistribution within the State (the biopolitical regime as sovereign and in control of life and death). Agamben postulated that “the state of exception thus ceases to be referred to as an external and provisional state of factual danger and comes to be confused with juridical rule itself” (emphasis Agamben’s) (168).

Taken a step further, the state of exception become the rule may morph into what the national-socialist jurists labeled a “state of willed exception” (*einen gewollten Ausnahmezustand*) (168). I believe it is in such a state that Sofía is taken from her biological parents and transferred to surrogate parents. Sofía’s identity is erased so that she can become Cristina. The deprivation of her identity and lack of knowledge of it/cover-up, under the military regime, is not considered a crime due to the categorization of her parents as subversives. Per Calveiro, “El Otro que construyeron los militares argentinos, que era preciso encerrar en los campos de concentración y luego eliminar, era el subversivo. Subversivo era una categoría verdaderamente incierta” (90).

Post-dictatorship, however, with the re-establishment of the democratic system and the transition out of a “state of willed exception,” the deprivation of identity and redistribution of bare life are once again devoid of sense, and the judicial system assumes the task of the recuperation, restoration, and preservation of Human Rights, among them the Right to one’s identity.

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144 It has been noted that the juridical basis for internment [in camps] was not common law but *Schutzhaft* (literally, protective custody), a juridical institution of Prussian origin that the Nazi jurors sometimes classified as a preventive police measure insofar as it allowed individuals to be ‘taken into custody’ independently of any criminal behavior, solely to avoid danger to the security of the state” (Agamben 167).

145 Remember that appropriated children are included in Kirchner et al’s definition of enforced disappearance.

146 I also mention the ambivalent categorization of the term “subversive” and Calveiro’s work on *el dispositivo concentracionario* or the functioning of concentration camps in Argentina in Chapter 1.
Cautiva’s diegesis is situated during/posterior to the transition from a state of exception to a state of Rights, but this progression is threatened by the previously mentioned presidential pardons (Laws of Pardon, 1989 & 1990) and other amnesties.\footnote{Per Ana Forcinito in “Testimonial Narratives in the Argentine Post-Dictatorship: Survivors, Witnesses, and the Reconstruction of the Past,” “This mark [the official role of witnesses in the Argentine transition] only stays as such, it can be argued, since then this gesture is superimposed by the history of impunity that starts in 1986 with the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws and the Laws of Pardon of 1989 and 1990” (80).} Despite the challenges of restoring Cristina/Sofía to her biological family in a culture of impunity, Judge Barrenechea operates with the tools of the State at his disposal. Cristina/Sofía also has the Right to know her identity as a minor (her surrogate parents’ authority is overridden in the film). How is this possible given the general culture of impunity? The Judge’s legislative tools and Cristina/Sofía’s Right to know her biological identity are both connected to the establishment of La Comisión Nacional por el Derecho a la Identidad [The National Commission for the Right to Identity] or CoNaDI, which functions under the Secretary of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Nation in Argentina.\footnote{For more information on the creation and functioning of CoNaDI, see pages 28 and 30 of Kirchner et al’s “Sobre derechos humanos y derecho a la identidad.”} According to Michelle Bonner in Sustaining Human Rights: Women and Argentine Human Rights Organizations, “to assist the identification of family members and side-step legal proceedings, the state established the National Commission for the Right to Identity (CONADI) in November 1992 as a direct result of a meeting between the Grandmothers and President Menem in July 1992 (interview, Claudia Carlotto, Buenos Aires, November 2, 2000)” (124).\footnote{Claudia Carlotto is the commission’s technical director and the daughter of the president of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Bonner 124).} Since 1992, around the time frame of the film’s diegesis, the commission has been charged with several objectives, among them the
fulfillment of the State’s obligations in ratifying the *Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño* (thus, assuring the Right to one’s identity). Article 1, part b and c, of CoNaDI’s objectives clearly states that the commission will spearhead the search for, and the restitution of the identities of, those born of disappeared mothers or during captivity and that the commission will intervene in all situations in which a minor’s Right to their identity is harmed: “b) impulsar la búsqueda de hijos e hijas de desaparecidos y de personas nacidas durante el cautiverio de sus madres, en procura de determinar su paradero e identidad; [and] c) intervenir en toda situación en que se vea lesionado el derecho a la identidad de un menor” (CoNaDI). Due to the establishment of a clear legal framework in which to aid those appropriated during the dictatorship, or other cases in which a minor’s identity is threatened, the Judge is able to utilize the tools of the State – the same State that once assisted in the deprivation of identity – to aid in the restoration of the Right to one’s identity. Cristina/Sofía, as an appropriated minor, is legally removed from the sphere of her surrogate parents’ authority to enable the restoration of her original biological identity.

*Cristina/Sofía: An Identity in Transition*

In the subsequent sequences the Judge’s revelation of the truth (and Cristina’s flight from the courthouse), the version of the truth held by her biological family and the legal system, is challenged by the multiple versions with which she is confronted. The chain of traumatic events that began in 1978 with the disappearance of her biological parents and her appropriation now constitute Cristina/Sofía’s personal trauma. The film returns to the original place of trauma –

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150 See CoNaDI’s functions and purpose at [http://www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/conadi](http://www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/conadi).

151 The full text of CoNaDI’s objectives and the *Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño* is on their web site: [http://www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/conadi/institucional/normativa.aspx](http://www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/conadi/institucional/normativa.aspx).
symbolized by the 1978 soccer match between Holland and Argentina, or other matches seen or heard in the background whenever Cristina/Sofía’s birth is being discussed – to discover the moment of crisis, unknown at first, and to bear witness to the history of the trauma as its effects continue into the diegetic world of 1995.\footnote{In the film, soccer matches in general are connected to Cristina/Sofía’s birth. For example, a soccer match plays in the background in the bar/pub scene where Cristina/Sofía and Angélica first discuss their mutual traumas.}

In Cristina/Sofía’s case, the truth does not come alone; it is followed by the idea and implementation of justice.\footnote{I also demonstrate truth’s connection to justice in my analysis of El espinazo del diablo in Chapter 4.} Because the appropriation of infants/children was not included under the Full Stop and Due Obedience laws, it is a legal loophole through which the Judge can pursue a restitution of identity for Cristina/Sofía and a reconnection to her biological family. However, due to a strong culture of impunity during the 1990s, justice cannot yet be obtained for her disappeared parents. This exclusion of the act of appropriation from the Full Stop and Due Obedience laws is mentioned by Estela de Carlotto, leader of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, in the film Botín de Guerra [Spoils of War] (2000), which is a documentary directed by David Blaustein that deals with the fight of the Abuelas to recuperate their appropriated grandchildren. The exclusion likely arose out of a need for the perpetrators to protect themselves from this very accusation, yet it ironically gave the Abuelas a way around the amnesty laws, enabling them to prosecute those involved in the system of appropriation. After her flight from the courthouse, Cristina/Sofía is returned to Judge Barrenechea’s office. While her grandmother again presents her with pictures of her biological parents and familial anecdotes, her surrogate parents are confronted in a separate room about the falsification of her birth certificate. They are also
presented with the results of the blood analysis, which demonstrates with a 98% certainty that she is the daughter of two *desaparecidos*.

Despite the emotional angst experienced by Cristina/Sofía, she is sent home with her biological grandmother to explore the identity and life that were stolen from her and her birth parents. After the initial moment of denial and disbelief dissipates with her growing awareness of the incongruence of the stories told by her surrogate parents and with the mounting evidence in favor of her biological family’s version of the truth, what I will call a *dual witnessing* occurs. The viewer bears witness to Cristina, now also known by her birth name Sofía Lombardi, as she searches and bears witness to the traumatic events of her parents’ disappearances (through photographs, stories/testimonies, legal documents, etc.) and the story of her birth. With the aid of objects from the past imbued with significance and the eyewitness testimony of the nurse Marta and others, Cristina/Sofía (now firmly a part of both worlds – surrogate and biological) bears witness to the belated traumas of her biological family and of her own, hitherto unknown, past as the viewer/witness simultaneously learns about or is reminded of the resounding implications, and thus continued relevancy, of the country’s disturbing past.

In this sense, that of bearing witness, I disagree with Veronica Garibotto’s statement that the fictional photographs viewed by Cristina/Sofía, and her response to these pictures, are more a proof of her identity and a means of developing “her teenage subjectivity rather than a resource for examining the past or for witnessing by adoption the memories of the first generation. [For Garibotto] In *Cautiva* the adolescent gaze, enabled by the use of fiction, interrupts the indexical connection that is necessary for a successful process of intergenerational re-enactment and postmemory” (183). Because the film utilizes multiple avenues for the reconstitution of Cristina/Sofía’s identity, for the restoration of sense, and for the re-exploration of the country’s
disturbing past and its persistent reach into the present, I postulate that the adolescent gaze not only encounters the truth of the traumatic past in photographs and testimonials, but it also serves as a critique, whether intended or not, of how one bears witness to the trauma of others.

Although the photographs are of fictional characters and the viewer/witness is aware of the diegesis as a fictional construct, I believe that witnessing is still possible considering the story’s connection to historical events (identifiable by the spectator). The film enables a witnessing of the reconstruction of memories representative of (standing in for) other memories (as expressed in documentaries and other mediums seen as factual) belonging to “real” people who were disappeared and/or appropriated during the military dictatorship.

Alicia Kozameh, kidnapped in Argentina before the coup in 1975 and a political prisoner until 1978, in her work 259 saltos, uno inmortal (2003), analyzed by Ana Forcinito, speaks of the “reinvention” of the preexisting as “fantasy,” yet this reinvention is a necessary compromise for memory is neither fully present nor fully past “but precisely in the ‘in between’: an unstable zone of contact and separation (Forcinito 84-85).” Forcinito states, “This compromise is located, for Kozameh, in the possibility of the reconstruction or ‘reinvention’ that memory offers to the bridge between past and present, and between experience and narration” (85). I propose that Cristina/Sofía’s story is also a reinvention of a familiar story, a cross between lived experience and narrated fiction, and the witnessing of her trauma is no less authentic simply because she represents a fictional character. The personal itself (individual + familial + communal memories) is a mix of fiction and nonfiction and its ties to the political (personal + social + official state

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memories) are convincingly demonstrated in *Cautiva* as one transitions from one level of witnessing to the next (from the viewer to Cristina/Sofía to the testimonies of others).

In her article “The Remembering of Forgetting: Recovered Memory and the Question of Experience,” Marita Sturken analyzes the controversial aspects of recovered memories (also reconstructed stories) as they illustrate the possibility of true elements in stories to contain falsities and false elements to contain truths. This contradictory quality is referred to as the “true/false dichotomy.” According to Sturken, “It is at the juncture between a story that is ‘true to life’ and the devastating potential of ‘true’ stories to be ‘false’ and ‘false’ stories ‘true’ that this debate [on recovered memories] must be resituated. To move beyond the true/false dichotomy means to think of these memories along a continuum” (106). She converts FBI Agent Lanning’s proposed “continuum of possible activity” into a “continuum of cultural memory, spanning from actual experience to remembered experience, with the understanding that these locations are impossible to measure” (106).155 In line with Sturken’s “continuum of cultural memory,” I propose the viewer or spectator as witness may also choose to view these memories/stories along a continuum – in lieu of confining them to a binary relationship where they must be either true or false, documentary or fiction, memory or postmemory.

I would also situate the testimony of the nurse Marta, given to Cristina/Sofía near the end of the film, within the “continuum of cultural memory.” It too is located between the nurse’s actual experience – buried in the traumatic past – and her remembered experience/memory – unearthed, again present, and reconstructed in memory – that she recounts to Cristina/Sofía in a

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155 “To say that recovered memories are part of cultural memory means, among other things, that the question of their origins and their relationship to experience must necessarily be thought of as a complex mix of narrative, displacement, shared testimony, popular culture, rumor, fantasy, and collective desire. All recovered memories are part of cultural memory; even those that are not derived from specific instances of abuse are still elements of the memory landscape that we inhabit. To remember something is an experience” (Sturken 106).
basement. This subterranean space is reminiscent of the one in which Cristina/Sofía’s mother was held captive as she gave birth, then subsequently deprived of her own flesh and blood. It is important to note that the nurse’s testimony is later held in doubt by Pablo when Cristina/Sofía confronts him about her biological parents, armed with the knowledge of the nurse’s testimony (memories of a first-hand witness), thus demonstrating the paradoxical position of the witness (i.e. juridical bearer of truth/eyewitness testimony vs. unreliability of the victim) and the necessary yet unreliable narrative of trauma. Marta’s testimony, although a narrative Pablo attempts to cast in doubt, is tellingly also one he cannot deny. It is a necessary catalyst for Cristina/Sofía in breaking out of her surrogate parents’ web of half-truths and love based on deceit. In my opinion, the basement testimonial scene exhibits the link among truth (beyond the true/false dichotomy), justice (restitution of identity and sense), and witnessing (reestablishment of empathy and/or awareness of the other’s trauma) in addition to the complex manners in which all three may be perceived. Although the nurse is unable to remember certain details, her voiced memories still allow Cristina/Sofía to reclaim many of the gaps in her own life history that were taken from her when she was an infant. Forcinito, again in an analysis of Kozameh – this time in *Nosotras, Presas políticas*, – emphasizes that gaps in memory do not discount its force and “reliability:”

Again I want to underline that the questioning of memory and the acceptance of what she [Kozameh] calls ‘unbridgeable gaps’ does not erode the reliability of the witness account. On the contrary it affirms that the narration of facts can serve to the prosecution of repressors or to reconstruct the conditions of life and the violations of human rights suffered as by [sic] political prisoner but is never a complete narration. (Forcinito 97)

The nurse’s testimony represents a first-hand or eyewitness account; she, as a witness, is an integral part of the Argentine re-democratization process that utilized, and continues to utilize, testimony and human rights organizations to reconstruct memory (80-81). “The juridical role of
the witnesses in the postdictatorship was and is still linked to the notion of truth and justice and to the accusation of Human Rights violations in prisons and clandestine camps” (83). I would argue that, as the nurse bears witness to Cristina/Sofía and Angélica in an obscure basement, she figuratively returns to the place of the original trauma – also an enclosed, seemingly subterranean space where sounds metallically echo through the corridors – in order to situate the traumatic events of Sofía’s appropriation and of her parents’ disappearances within the history of the trauma, to make these memories of violence and injustice more than isolated and unrelated events in the past (Caruth). As the nurse imparts her memories, the belated trauma is communicated to second-hand witnesses – the bearers now of both postmemory as well as of their own memories and individual traumas – who, in turn, are witnessed by the viewer. This link of witnesses allows the isolated trauma to be disseminated into the sphere of the social. The private is again brought into the realm of the political. Just as the political invaded the lives of private citizens during the dictatorship, so now does the private reclaim the public spaces of the community. Violence that was enacted in the figurative darkness of desired ignorance and the literal darkness of covert operations and secret detention centers/camps is now revealed to multiple witnesses who will no longer be able to claim ignorance. Cristina/Sofía, Angélica, and the viewer(s) bear witness, through the nurse’s testimony, to the traumatic past of Sofía’s entrance into this world, her mother’s mistreatment, and their subsequent disappearances – one of them appropriated into a family with the right ideologies and the other elected to disappear.

156 I discuss Cathy Caruth’s idea of returning to the place of trauma in order to depart from it extensively in the first part of Chapter 4.
There are several establishing shots before the crucial sequences involving the nurse’s testimony, the flashback to Sofía’s birth, and the disappearance of both Sofía and her mother. Several of them are extreme long shots and show beautiful, white, classically constructed buildings that seem to situate the viewer in the heart of Buenos Aires. The last establishing shot is of Cristina/Sofía approaching the outer door of a large building where she rings the bell and enters. She descends a set of stairs into a basement where Angélica greets her with a cryptic statement: “Viniste. ¿No te siguieron? ¿Te fijas?”. As Cristina/Sofía assures her that no one followed her, the nurse emerges out of the shadows in the basement and speaks to Cristina/Sofía. I consider Angélica’s preoccupation with having been followed, along with the nurse’s statement that she doesn’t trust anyone but that Cristina/Sofía has to know this, a sign of a culture of impunity, regardless of a democratic system and legislation protecting the Right to one’s identity. The women’s distrust alerts the viewer to potential dangers, even when meeting in secret underneath the streets of Buenos Aires. Those who were most victimized during the dictatorship and witnesses to these injustices must still carefully watch themselves. I believe

157 Screen shot taken from Gastón Biraben’s film Cautiva.
Marta’s statement is also demonstrative of the paradoxical nature of testimony – the impossibility yet necessity of it; the nurse is distrustful/fearful, but Cristina/Sofía must know.

Despite their worries, the basement seems to exude a reassuring pro-memory stance as posters/pictures with telling slogans/words are visible behind both the nurse and Cristina/Sofía as they make their initial connection and, again, as they sit at the table while the nurse testifies. The first set of posters/pictures, behind the nurse, reveals the words “Sí/NO,” along with other illegible text, in big red letters and, behind Cristina/Sofía, the word “Justicia” runs in a vertical line down the wall to the viewer’s right of her. The second set of poster/pictures is visible as the women sit at the rough-hewn or battered table. The nurse is seated facing the camera, establishing the centrality of the eyewitness and her narrative, while Cristina/Sofía and Angélica are seated to either side of her. The poster/picture behind the nurse shows the figure of a pregnant woman, with the fetus visible in her womb, and a person kneeling in front of her (seen in the picture above). The letters, again in red, declare, “LA VIDA Y LA JUSTICIA.” As the nurse begins to speak, the camera gradually zooms in, showing an ever-closer shot of her face (close-up), as the belly of the pregnant woman (extreme close-up) on the poster/picture becomes the prominent image visible behind her. In addition to this image, there is another one behind Angélica, as she sits to the viewer’s right of the nurse at the table, which only shows fragments of words in red and black ink. The words in black appear to read “. . . QUE NO VUELVA A SUCEDER,” which I believe implies that appropriations and forced disappearances will not reoccur if the truth is removed from the dark basements of the past and brought into the light of memory and justice. The basement’s walls are rough or unfinished, and although a normal lighting scheme (likely standard three-point lighting) seems to be utilized, the room is lit by only a single, bare bulb. The single visible source of lighting adds to an atmosphere of secrets being
uneartned in the darkness as memories of violence are brought into vivid focus underneath the hot, exposed bulb.

Marta begins by introducing herself and provides pertinent background information to both the viewer and the girls at the table: 1) Her name, position, and location – Marta, a nurse, in the delivery room late at night in the hospital at Olmos, a penitentiary; 2) the date – everyone was celebrating the Argentine victory in the 1978 World Cup soccer match; 3) the common practices of the time – patients often came in with no clinical history and were called N.N.; and, 4) the connection to her mother – Marta received her as she was brought in on a gurney with no paperwork. The vividness of Marta’s memories of Sofía’s birth is substantiated by the distinctness of the above-provided information and could be considered a “flashbulb memory” (a term in cognitive psychology) in that she recalls the memory as if it were a picture, fresh and detailed, in her mind.\textsuperscript{158} While Marta tells Cristina/Sofía about the patients called N.N. and says “that’s how your mother was brought in on a gurney,” the metallic squeaking of wheels is heard; the sound from the about-to-occur flashback spills over into the current scene right before a dissolve from a close-up of Cristina/Sofía’s face to a blurred shot of a ceiling and lights, superimposed on her face for an instant. This first shot of the flashback scene appears to be a point of view shot of her mother looking up at the ceiling as she is wheeled through dingy corridors on a gurney. In this interesting transition from the diegetic present to the flashback

\textsuperscript{158} Are traumatic memories flashbulb memories? I would argue “yes” and “no.” On one hand, no, they aren’t in the traditional sense since they are often fragmented. On the other hand, yes, they are in that they are vivid and sometimes very detailed in their enactment, conscious or not, and are connected to strong subjective feelings. Traumatic memories are also connected to corporal memory (reactions to sensations the body remembers), which is obviously strongly subjective in terms of what one feels or doesn’t feel. See the following case study for more on flashbulb memories: Schmolck, H., E.A. Buffalo, and L.R. Squire. “Memory Distortions Develop Over Time: Recollections of the O.J. Simpson Trial Verdict After 15 and 32 Months.” *Psychological Science* 11.1 (January 2000): 39-45.
narrating the nurse’s testimony, Cristina/Sofia merges into her mother’s precarious position the night she was born. The flashback begins by linking mother and daughter, past and present, and the spaces they inhabit – the corridors and lights whizzing by in Olmos with a basement and its single, bare bulb.

In the flashback sequences, the atmosphere is evocative of a gothic mise-en-scène. Low-key lighting (e.g. in film noir or gothic films) appears to be used in certain shots, and there is often a stark contrast between dark and light in the corridors. The greenish hue of the shots (either due to the lighting or some other technique employed) creates a feeling of dismay and decay. The corridors seem horribly dingy, and in addition to the lighting, several weird angles are utilized in the first four shots. These extremely brief shots – of the ceiling, an upside-down view of a man pushing the gurney, an extreme close-up of Sofía’s mother’s blindfolded and bruised face as she cries out in pain, another female guard looking back at the camera or over her shoulder at the patient – set the stage for the fifth, which is a long shot of the corridor as the gurney is pushed by several guards, three men and one woman, towards the camera and past it. The blurred shot of Sofía’s mother as the gurney passes by, in addition to the shots of the guards from unexpected angles, generate a strong feeling of disorientation, claustrophobia, and dinginess.

When the gurney stops at a locked gate, the clanking of keys echo in the corridor as a guard approaches to open it. In my opinion, certain sounds, such as squeaking wheels, the clanking of keys, the mother’s moans and outbursts of pain, Sofía’s cries as she enters this world, seem amplified and overwhelm other sounds or even dominate some shots. Sounds associated with captivity, pain, and the birthing process are the most noticeable, and this ominous and disorienting atmosphere is further enhanced by other close-ups and extreme close-ups used
during the birthing scene. For example, there is one extreme close-up of the mother’s pregnant belly – right before, during, and after she pushes the baby out – that particularly parallels the image of the picture/poster first seen behind the nurse in the basement. This fragmented image of fecundity, the pregnant belly as the female body’s shelter for and connection to the fetus/life, serves to link the two sequences and to emphasize the taking, instead of the giving, of life and justice at Olmos.

Marta and another nurse receive the gurney after it passes through the locked gate and another set of double doors. After they wheel the patient into the delivery room, Marta is recognizable, and there is a close-up shot of her face as her voice is heard in a voice over from the basement sequence. During her reconstruction of the scene, Marta states, “At that moment I didn’t know who she [Sofía’s mother] was” and, later, “We were not allowed to talk to them [these kinds of patients].” Not only is Sofía’s mother’s identity unknown, as an N.N., to the nurse, but she is also obligated to give birth blind-folded and without communication. The birth is observed by a severe looking woman, who is also noticed by Marta but remains unidentified. This mystery woman is shown several times standing with a crucifix hanging on the wall behind her – perhaps a reference to the earlier shot of Cristina in bed looking up at a crucifix before she asks her surrogate mother about the virgin birth and being pregnant with her. There are also several shot reverse shots of her and the nurse, with and without Sofía’s mother visible. Thus, the birthing scene’s aura of disorientation, confinement, and desperation is reinforced by shot selection as well as amplified sounds of pain followed by the silence that accompanies the pleading questions of Sofía’s mother – “Is it a girl or a boy?” This enforced silence is finally broken by Marta in the delivery room when she carefully answers the broken-hearted mother in a barely audible whisper, “It’s a girl.” Words she only dares to say after the newborn is taken
down the hallway and the mystery woman has left the N.N.’s delivery room. I believe that the traumatic events of this night, although fragmentary images (visual experiences) and isolated sounds at times, are strongly connected to the nurse as eyewitness and to the testimonial voice that bears witness – both as external diegetic sound and voice over in the flashback sequences.

Post-delivery, there is a shot of a woman carrying the newborn baby, Sofía, in the same direction the mystery woman exited earlier. Sofía’s mother is then taken back through the locked gate and returns into the maze of corridors from whence she came. Only this time, her womb is empty, and the sound of the 1978 World Cup announcement that Argentina is the champion is heard (external diegetic sound) along with the voice over of the nurse who continues to bear witness to Sofía’s mother’s tragic loss as a detainee. A long shot of the corridor shows Sofía’s mother, still blindfolded, being wheeled in one direction while the woman carrying Sofía, still crying, is seen walking in another direction. Marta knows the infant was named Sofía Lombardi because Sofía’s mother whispered it to her as the nurse returned her to a small, cramped room. Sofía’s mother begs Marta to bring her daughter to her, which the nurse is unexpectedly able to do due to an order to keep the infant healthy. When Sofía breast feeds for the first time, there is an extreme close-up of her mother’s bruised face before a point of view shot of Sofía’s face and mouth as she finds her mother’s nipple and begins to drink. There are several shot reverse shots of mother and daughter as they meet for the first and last time in the most intimate and destitute of scenes – a mother feeding her child despite her own deprived and precarious state. The nurse shares a tender moment in a confined and violent place, and although she doesn’t realize it at the time, the events she witnessed will enable Cristina/Sofía, sixteen years later, to reconnect with her disappeared mother’s memory and love.
When the nurse returns to check on Sofía’s mother, she is gone. All that remains of her presence are blood-stained sheets, and a message scrawled on the wall by the bed: “Agustín Lombardi, Sofía was born. I love you. Leticia.” Sofía’s mother transgresses the code of silence enforced in the detainment centers by writing her daughter’s name (confirming her existence as Sofía) and declaring her love (claimed to be non-existent by her appropriators) on the walls that confined her. Leticia makes the same claim in confinement that the Madres and Abuelas made in front of the presidential palace; she claims Sofía through love and family ties. The nurse communicates Leticia’s love and does so by also breaking the code of silence, which she does twice – when she speaks to Leticia post-delivery and again when she shares the story of Sofía’s birth to her. As Marta finishes her story, the flashback sequences end, and there is a shot of Cristina/Sofía’s face with tears forming in her eyes. The memories of the moment mother and daughter spent together are now passed on – from Leticia to Marta to Cristina/Sofía (as well as to Angélica, as she listens at the table, and the viewer/witness watching the film). These memories are powerful and can be used to confront the falsifications and fabrications constructed to keep Cristina/Sofía captive, just as her mother once was.

After hearing about her birth and disappeared mother, Cristina/Sofía delves deeper into her past. She asks Marta about her father. The nurse claims he was also held in a secret detention center. She asks if he was in La cacha or the Cave, and as the nurse confirms the information Cristina/Sofía received from Angélica’s investigations, she continues to press for more details. She wants to know if he ever found out she was born, and although the nurse can neither confirm nor deny it, she believes he must have known, that someone must have told him. Cristina/Sofía pushes further. She wants to know who took her, and she takes out pictures of her surrogate family and godparents to see if the nurse recognizes them. Although Marta doesn’t know who
appropriated her, she does recognize one man in the pictures, Cristina/Sofía’s godfather, Jorge Macías, her surrogate father’s best friend, eerily called the “Glow-Worm” by the nurse when she remembers he was one of the bad cops. Marta’s testimony, as previously stated, provides Cristina/Sofía with not only memories of her disappeared parents but also with the information necessary to confront her appropriators. Armed with these memories, Cristina/Sofía is now fully exposed to the violence of the theft of her identity and to the disappearance/murder of her parents. The nurse’s testimony, in restoring memories and truth, converts the opening scene of the film from one of familial happiness and normalcy to one in which her godfather, a torturer or bad cop, and her surrogate parents, appropriators, preside over the celebration of the date of her appropriation, not the date of her birth as she was told. This revelation is a violent blow, but it also spurs Cristina/Sofía to action.

A Violent Witnessing

Sofía, appropriated post-natum from her parents, is never given a choice. She is not even capable of choosing, and I argue her vulnerable developmental stage amplifies the deprivation of her identity and the violence enacted against her. She is gifted by the system of appropriation to new parents and renamed Cristina without choice or awareness. I consider a post-natum among the most defenseless of human beings, a bare life even barer than that of her detained-disappeared mother, Leticia, and as such, the nurse’s testimony is based upon what I will term a violent witnessing (for the protagonist Cristina/Sofía) of the tragic events that not only occurred to Sofía’s pregnant and bound mother but also doubly so to her newborn (Sofía) as she possessed neither agency nor cognizance.

As such, a violent witnessing signifies the arrival of a past trauma, in its inherent belatedness, in the present moment as the discovery of its existence, previously unknown, breaks
into one’s consciousness through the act of witnessing, which is violent due to its arrival post-construction of an alternate identity. It is the post-witnessing of the destruction of one’s own subjectivity (subjectivity as it is tied to one’s “original” identity or self – biological family, name, age) at an occasion prior to the development of knowledge and/or agency that constitutes a violent witnessing. Kelly Oliver, in her Introduction to Witnessing: Beyond Recognition, offers a different framework for witnessing. She connects it to “address-ability” and “response-ability” and states that “subjectivity is the result of the process of witnessing” (7). Oliver posits that witnessing precedes recognition. The situation of subjectivity as a result of witnessing inverts the traditional psychoanalytical model, which her proposed model does not fit, in which subjectivity follows recognition (e.g. Jacques Lacan’s mirror phase). Oliver’s model begs the question of the implications of subjectivity as a result of witnessing. She would also disagree that one can witness the destruction of one’s own subjectivity because the destruction of subjectivity breaks the chain of witnessing to oneself, as well as the ability to witness in general.

Oliver postulates that the internal witness requires an external witness; “subjectivity develops through address and address-ability from and to others” (88). Extreme subordination hinders the inward turn of self (the internal witness and subjectivity) through the destruction of the possibility of a witness (88). True annihilation is thus the loss of the capacity to witness to oneself and thus from the inside (e.g. Primo Levi’s Muselmann) (89). One’s identity ceases to exist. Witnessing may then be viewed as a taking back of the night. It takes two people and is a joint or shared responsibility (90). The viewer/witness views and/or hears the sharing of testimony and responsibility in Cautiva. Witnessing enables a reinvention of experience, and this reinvention is transformative (93). Although shame is felt in re-experiencing one’s own oppression, one’s own being made into an object, it is necessary for reinserting subjectivity into
one’s traumatic experience. For Oliver, “witnessing enables the subject to reconstitute the experience of objectification in ways that allow her to reinsert subjectivity into a situation designed to destroy it” (98). Although I agree with Oliver on many points, in the case of the protagonist in Cautiva (and appropriated children in general), I am proposing something quite different.

The destruction of subjectivity for the protagonist Cristina/Sofía’s is tied to a violence perpetrated against a human being with neither a fully developed cognizance nor agency (an infant or child). This violence is then discovered and witnessed post-factum (at a time posterior to the actual traumatic act/event) when another subjectivity has already developed, i.e. when Cristina discovers and witnesses at sixteen years old her prior identity, Sofía, and the existence of her biological family, both taken from her at birth. I theorize a clashing of subjectivities and identifications occurs as the two worlds meet – the discovery of a traumatic violence against one’s self and the shock of its belated arrival – that, if resolved, will lead to the restitution of sense and the restoration of identity, a hypothesis in agreement with Oliver’s reinsertion of “subjectivity into a situation designed to destroy it.”

Memory is Powerful

Cristina/Sofía’s crisis peaks near the end of the film when she confronts her surrogate parents or appropriators. From this moment on, armed with memory, she transitions from her former position of ignorance to one of knowledge as she challenges her appropriators’ version of the truth. Her surrogate mother/appropriator, Adela, continues to profess her ignorance while her surrogate father/appropriator, Pablo, reacts violently when she asks him if he tortured her biological parents. Pablo asserts it was a war that you win or lose, and he didn’t want to know about her parents. Instead of assuming responsibility for their participation in the system of
appropriation, her appropriators again emphasize their benevolent role in loving and raising her. In their eyes, from the perspective of their fabricated version of events, her biological parents were not considered capable of caring for her, and her only options of survival were an orphanage, the street, or their home. They do not consider or present their actions as criminal; the flashbacks and eyewitness testimonies do so. Her surrogate mother/appropriator repeatedly insists they didn’t know, but the nurse’s testimony demonstrates their participation, through ignorance (whether active or passive) and Pablo’s best friend (if not Pablo himself), in the system of appropriation – even if their full knowledge of events remains debatable. In a moment of realization, Cristina/Sofía emphatically declares, “No quisiste saberlo.” As previously stated, this witnessing of the original trauma and confrontation of her appropriators, the refutation of their version of the truth (associated with the politics of olvido), is possible due to an intervention of the Argentine justice system on behalf of Cristina/Sofía and her biological family. The presentation of a new set of memories (associated with the politics of memoria), a result of carefully collected evidence newly enabled by the Judicial System and positive law, helps guide her gradual departure from her appropriators and reintegration into, but not her final decision to stay with, her birth family.

The experience of the traumatic, in Cautiva, is illuminating for it ends neither in frozen or repetitive reenactments of the traumatic event nor in an insurmountable silence, but with the possibility of reaching an external audience through acts of testifying (by characters such as the nurse, representing memory, and Angélica, representing memory and postmemory) and of witnessing (by Cristina/Sofía and the viewer) that lead to an unveiling of the truth (of concealed memories, of falsely constructed ones, and of the advancement of justice for the families of the disappeared). Historical events represented and transmitted through the personal trauma and loss
of Cristina/Sofía and her biological family allow for the reintegration into societal memory of histories of unresolved traumas from the military dictatorship/government. In this way, through its engagement with the viewer as a second-hand witness (the viewer’s inclusion in the chain of witnesses), the film elevates personal memories to shared, communal memories (the multiplicity of personal/familial memories that make up national identity). The film’s treatment of memoria, and the political stance of olvido demonstrated by the stories of Cristina/Sofía’s surrogate parents/appropriators, emphasizes collective and shared aspects in addition to serving as a tool for justice.

Biraben’s film in its presentation of Cristina/Sofía’s biological family’s traumatic experiences and memories does eventually side with those perspectives involving memory and justice. In this respect, I would like to emphasize that the final captions at the end of the film silently speak volumes. As the camera pans out from Cristina/Sofía standing on her aunt’s deck and moves into an extreme long shot of the house before panning over Buenos Aires, captions, literally written over the cityscape and night sky, inform the viewer of the estimated number of desaparecidos, the lack of justice for those responsible due to protective laws created by subsequent democratic governments (the culture of impunity operating in the film’s background), the unknown fate of many hijos de desaparecidos (74 had been identified in 2005), and the continuing search for more.

Although the film is certainly not the only memory or postmemory film to address the abuses and legal excesses of the military dictatorship/government, it is unique in the following sense: “Cautiva presenta facetas de esta temática como ningún film de ficción lo habfa hecho,

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159 This idea falls in line with Marita Sturken’s previously quoted stance on memories: “All recovered memories are part of cultural memory; even those that are not derived from specific instances of abuse are still elements of the memory landscape that we inhabit. To remember something is an experience” (Sturken 106).
especialmente los detalles de cómo operaba el macabro sistema en todos los niveles y las grietas que permitieron aportar datos para que los jóvenes apropiados recuperan su identidad” (Kaiser 115). Kaiser also stresses that “esto último es importante porque la búsqueda continúa y cuanta más gente cuente lo que sabe hay [sic] más posibilidades de recuperar nietos” (115). In a story reported on by Mariano Castillo on CNN, online under the “World” section, on August 10, 2014, Estela de Carlotto, the leader of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, was reunited with her grandson after decades of searching (n. pag.). He is listed as the 114th person to be identified by the group, and thanks to DNA testing, his relationship to Estela, similar to Cristina/Sofía’s blood analysis in the film, was confirmed with a 99.99% certainty (n. pag.). This article, along with other more recent ones, is proof of the importance of the subject matter addressed in Cautiva. In reading news articles like Castillo’s, it becomes clear that the violent acts, disappearances, and appropriations of the military dictatorship have not remained safely buried in the past but continue to resurface.

In addition to the captions at the end of the film, there are also many other subtle clues inherent in the film’s mise-en-scène. The Judge’s revelations and the nurse’s testimony illuminate Cristina/Sofía’s past, which also alters her perception of the physical space around her, before and after the meetings. For example, while riding the bus, Cristina/Sofía also sees quotations by H.I.J.O.S., a group formed by the former children of desaparecidos, written on a wall, and she is witness to one of the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo’s many marches and prominent displays of the photos of the disappeared. These words, pictures, groups, and events might not have meant anything concrete to her before her own traumatic experience, but after the

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160 Susana Kaiser. “Escribiendo memorias de la dictadura: Las asignaturas pendientes del cine argentino.”

161 The full news article can be found under the “World” section on CNN.com.
restitution of her biological identity and the restoration of memory/sense to the culture of impunity or olvido surrounding her, the cityscape has changed for her – not only because she lives in a different neighborhood but because she is now cognizant of the signs and symbols of memoria. Cristina/Sofía (and potentially the spectator/viewer as witness) has transitioned outside of herself, outside of her isolated existence situated in the politics of olvido, and into a new type of knowledge/memory of the past.

The Implications of a Child/Adolescent Witness: A Violent Witnessing and/or an Empathetic Witnessing

The Purpose of a Memory/Postmemory Film like Cautiva

In line with my analysis of Cautiva, I propose that the viewer/witness serve as the new spectator of post-dictatorship memory and postmemory films. From this perspective, in the instance of the Argentine post-dictatorship process, films such as Cautiva are contemporary examples of the political films of the 1960s. In place of a movement for an overt didactic approach to politicize the viewer, there is rather a dissemination of empathy and a call for truth and justice (a process in which education may still occur) in the witnessing of another’s traumatic experience. We, the audience, the individual theater goer, the casual viewer, the political activist, the foreigner, the national or local, the interested or disinterested party, are witnesses of a spectacle/film imbued with significations, and although the explicit call to arms may no longer be present in most contemporary films, that is not to say that the implicit call to bear witness does not exist. I argue it is ubiquitous. The shift from a revolutionary and militant cinema to a cinema of memory is not as drastic as one might first think. The approach is less concerned than the movements of the 1960s with subversion of form and content and more aware of the necessity of the identification of the viewer with the action occurring on the screen.
(the restoration of sense and empathy). The viewer is given opportunity to move from a doubt of the other’s pain and trauma to a certainty of it (although, as mentioned in my Introduction to Critical Theories . . ., there is no guarantee of any movement or change in attitude).\footnote{162 “To have pain is to have certainty; to hear about pain is to have doubt” (Scarry 13).} An implicit call to action, to a validation of the other’s suffering, can be just as compelling – if not more so today, with the Western world’s emphasis on individual choice – as an outright mandate to choose a certain viewpoint. I theorize that in the twenty-first century, the spectator of memory and postmemory films bears witness.

Post-participation – whether the spectator/viewer/witness chooses to act or not act upon the knowledge presented to them outside of viewing the film – is no longer necessary because the activity occurs in a watching (seeing, hearing, reading) that is really a witnessing of the history of the trauma, one that enables a departure from the isolation imposed by the traumatic event and a reintegration into the fabric of societal memory. Thus, the act of watching a memory/postmemory film is modified, and the act of spectatorship is interwoven into the act of witnessing or bearing witness to a trauma, once confined or obscured in the darkness of state secrets, that now circulates freely in the social sphere. The personal once again touches the public and the political.

Taking the connection to witnessing I have proposed into consideration, I believe that Cautiva, through its utilization of a child/adolescent protagonist who undergoes a traumatic experience of her own, avoids an idealized view of a child/adolescent protagonist untainted by ideologies. Although Cristina/Sofía does not initially adhere to a particular ideology, her past, present, and future are continually shaped by the competing ideologies of the people around her. In the legally initiated discovery of the fabricated memories constructed by her appropriators, she
(as a trauma victim and witness) is better able to analyze and question Argentine post-dictatorship society, and in the process, to reveal possible anxieties about the future development and direction of memory and justice in the country. With legal (e.g. the Right to one’s identity) and political (e.g. the personal as political, bare life, and biopolitics) undercurrents coursing throughout the film, it is difficult to agree with Garibotto’s conclusion: “Rather than a successful means of historical exploration, in post-2000 iconic fictions, the configuration of a teenage subjectivity can be the exact opposite: the basis for converting the 1970s into a static mandate that precludes further interpretation” (185-186). She prefaces this statement by emphasizing that one of her arguments is for “the need to reconsider the effectiveness of a child’s or a teenager’s perspective” and then continues with the assertion, “A teenage perspective makes it possible to elude a consideration of larger political causes” (185). And, “a teenage perspective enables an archaic language and an inclusion of coming-of-age rituals which result in an enhancement of iconicity” (185). Although I agree with the possibility of eluding “larger political causes” in that the film does not demonstrate an overt political stance (rather it contains an implicit one) through its adolescent protagonist, Cristina/Sofía, I disagree with the use of an adolescent, in this case connected to memory and postmemory perspectives, as an ineffective critique of Argentine post-dictatorship society. As Cristina/Sofía’s own crisis is related to a deprivation of identity, she is very much connected to current political and legal debates that extend back to the violation of Human Rights during the military dictatorship. In my opinion, the use of a child/adolescent protagonist as witness does include the possibility of further interpretation of the military dictatorship, in addition to the current legal and political debates that arose out of a necessity to safe-guard against such abuses in the future, such as the regression to a culture of impunity and the state of exception as rule.
A Reactivation of the Public by the Personal and a Fortified Empathy

If one employs *Cautiva* as an exemplum of the implications of a child/adolescent protagonist in film, then the widespread use of children in post-dictatorship literature and film could be related to the construction of a new type of witnessing performed not only by the traditional first-hand witness or victim but also by the second-hand observer who may be both the bearer of memory/postmemory and the viewer/spectator of films (and/or reader of novels). In this instance, the observer witnesses suffering to fulfill the ethical obligation to bear witness, an obligation that can now be carried out in a forum simultaneously public and private. I propose that film, in such a forum, would provide the technological link between viewed (visual/audio communication, performance, reconstruction of memories) and viewer (the spectator/observer/witness) in terms of John Durham Peters’ at home witness and witnessing as framed by Oliver’s address-ability and response-ability.163

In Marianne Hirsch’s discussion of postmemorial work in “The Generation of Postmemory,” she explicitly states that her central argument is that it “. . . strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (111). This revival of more distant memorial structures by the personal and the familial would then suggest that the individual structures of memory could possibly persist as part of the larger cultural archive, even when those directly involved have passed away. Hirsch states, “Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of

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163 For John Durham Peters, in his article “Witnessing” (2001), “witnessing is an intricately tangled practice. It raises questions of truth and experience, presence and absence, death and pain, seeing and saying, and the trustworthiness of perception – in short, fundamental questions of communication” (Peters 707). Witnessing is, thus, connected to communication, performance, and the combination of both as they unite in the era of technology in which each person is an at home witness (708).
postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial
descendants are gone” (111). Part of the purpose for propagating these violent memories in the
Latin American, as well as the international, memory markets would be to transfer the personal
back into the political sphere. Once within the public domain, the reconstructed personal
memories of many have the potential to be reintegrated into the national archive as new official
memories, as renewed links and bonds between community members, and as a means of
revitalizing a waning public empathy that, over time, often decreases with an over-
familiarization of the subject matter or a numbing of the senses due to an overexposure to
violence and trauma. Through the mediums of film and literature, I would argue that the personal
is witnessed by the viewer/reader and becomes a shared memory. In agreement with Hirsch’s
statement,

The growth of the memory culture may, indeed, be a symptom of a need for inclusion in
a collective membrane forged by a shared inheritance of multiple traumatic histories and
the individual and social responsibility we feel toward a persistent and traumatic past –
what the French have referred to as ‘le devoir de mémoire.’ (111)

In my opinion, this sharing of memory occurs in Cautiva – through testimonies, photographs,
and shared experiences.

In light of the continued responsibility (one I believe exists despite a potential
desensitization to widespread violence and trauma) towards an overwhelming “persistent and
traumatic past,” I propose that children/adolescents like Cristina/Sofía – as the most vulnerable
population in terms of the violation of legal Rights, still progressing physical and mental
development, economic underdevelopment, etc. – figure highly in many memory and
postmemory films as a means of revitalizing empathy. Child/adolescent protagonists also serve
to demonstrate how children (whether free of ideologies or not) are still influenced by the
competing ideologies surrounding them, i.e. the death of family members, their appropriation as
infants, the personal and political histories they inherit. It is possible that children/adolescents are more closely tied to a “politics of suffering,” and it is precisely their suffering that elicits the desire to witness not only the violence of the perpetrators or the abuses of the political system but the emotional distress of the vulnerable.

If one hypothesizes that a violent witnessing can also be experienced by the viewer as witness in a different, less traumatic way, as more of a “shock” to the senses, then perhaps the witnessing of children’s/adolescents’ traumas, as opposed to that of adults’ traumas, is more of a violent witnessing because children are viewed as lacking in agency, as passive bystanders, as ideologically untainted and thus underserving of the violence falling upon them. I argue that children, as vulnerable subjects, add the additional element of an empathy fortified against the numbness of overexposure (my emphasis). Considering this potential connection between child/adolescent protagonists and a fortified/reinforced empathy, it is perhaps no surprise that many films mentioned by Garibotto as falling outside of the third stage’s main category (films produced by the second-generation after the year 2000), such as Cautiva, return to the use of a child’s or adolescent’s perspective (a key feature of the first stage/post-dictatorial cinema) and a pre-1990s format (Garibotto 177).164

164 According to Garibotto, “My intention has been less to create a normative baseline for the evaluation of contemporary films than to argue for a reading of post-2000 cinema as a site of political negotiation – a reading that is vanishing after more than 30 years of this recurrent topic in Argentine cultural production” (185). She continues, “. . . I am trying to argue for a reading of second-generation cinema as a site of ideological confrontation – a confrontation that entails crucial implications for the contemporary political situation. Iconic fictions reveal the existence of two tendencies at odds in contemporary Argentina (and in contemporary representations of Argentina): a commodification of the recent past (where the 1970s are an invariable static referent that serves as a background for cultural creation) and a politicized reading of that commodification (where the 1970s are still a terrain for examination)” (185).
In conclusion, I believe that Cristina/Sofía, as a child/adolescent protagonist, demonstrates multiple facets of witnessing.\textsuperscript{165} She is a more forceful figure as an initially impotent child/adolescent witness who, when empowered by the legal system and knowledge of her past, transforms into an active agent. As an impotent child/adolescent witness she might inspire a greater empathy from the audience, but the affect she might arouse is not exclusively based on the unalterable traumas of her past. I have argued that she is instead a witness who transcends the traditional role of the child/adolescent observer in that she is both observer/second-hand witness and victim/first-hand witness, both child/adolescent witness/bearer of postmemory and witness of/participant in her own memories. Cristina/Sofía is a protagonist for whom sense is restored in witnessing and a witness who in turn propagates sense to the filmic witness, thus perpetuating a chain of witnesses or levels of witnessing connected by the restoration of sense.

\textsuperscript{165} I discuss this topic in greater detail in a research project titled “The Implications of Contemporary Witnessing: Children as Witnesses,” developed for a special seminar in Comparative Literature on Witnessing (Spring 2014).
CHAPTER 4

Children: Bodies of Unexpected Resilience, Resistance, and Unforeseen Justice

This transnational study looks specifically at hauntings and wounds in Guillermo del Toro’s *El espíntazo del diablo* (2001) and its intersections with representations of the traumatic in archival children’s drawings. It examines reconstructions of extreme violence facilitated by normalized exceptions, particularly during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983), in both a fictional context and a factual one. The archival drawings illustrate the violence perpetrated against the child artists’ families and were produced in exile for a human rights organization in the Netherlands protesting the military dictatorship’s vicious abuse of power. I view the drawings as a revisiting of the moment of trauma and as a cry for justice (in line with Cathy Caruth’s analysis of the wound and the voice in Part A), which I believe intersects with del Toro’s representational strategies in *El espíntazo*.

I argue children’s physical bodies and the memories they bear or the pain they communicate – whether literal wounds, psychological ones, or wounds transmitted through drawings – symbolize their capacity for unexpected resilience, resistance, and justice. In both Guillermo del Toro’s fictional interpretation of violence during the Spanish Civil War and the Argentine/Dutch human rights campaign – a campaign in which children were simply instructed, “Hagan dibujos sobre la situación en Argentina” – the child protagonists and artists are witnesses who testify of concealed violence (Eugenia Moyano, email interview, Oct. 16, 2016). In fiction and in fact, children serve as intermediaries and advocates.

I want to clarify that, although the child artists were asked to make drawings about the situation in Argentina, per my correspondence with Eugenia Moyano, they were not told specifically what to draw. As such, I consider their choice of how to represent the situation in
Argentina to be one based on free will and, in my argument, choice is tied to agency. The child artists, though very young, possessed a “full traumatic knowledge” of the violence which forced their families to flee Argentina. For me, this stance positions the children in both El espinazo and the human rights campaign as agents capable of choosing based upon a full knowledge of the traumatic. I recognize that many scholars may disagree with my choice to juxtapose representational strategies and/or purposes of a fictional interpretation of the Spanish Civil War with archival drawings, and I want to emphasize that my intention is to place them in dialogue with each other, not to suggest that the Spanish Civil War or the Argentine military dictatorship were the same. They are distinct historical events but that does not mean re-constructions of violence pertaining to either period cannot follow similar strategies or pursue similar purposes.

The first section of this multipart chapter utilizes theories on trauma, witnessing, and film to explore del Toro’s representational strategies that include both child protagonists and physical open wounds. The second part addresses archival children’s drawings as they relate to a strategic “showing” of the traumatic wound – a “showing” designed to remind others of the imperative to assist/intervene in situations of extreme violence. Kelly Oliver’s theories on witnessing, subjectivity, and response-ability/answer-ability as well as Daniel Feierstein’s work on genocide as social practice inform my “discussion,” not analysis, of these drawings, which I posit serve as a form of resistance against the violence of the dictatorship that was experienced by the child artists themselves.\textsuperscript{166} Jacques Rancière’s “intolerable image” versus the “intolerability of the image” in addition to Gabriel Gatti’s “restitution of sense,” as these concepts apply to witnessing

\textsuperscript{166} I use the term “discussion” because I would like to discuss the drawings in a historical and theoretical context without analyzing them as an art critic would analyze a painting. I have included the drawings within the text of the chapter for the reader to consider/view them while reading. I also believe the drawings are powerful even without an explanation; as such, I let them speak for themselves in terms of their content.
and trauma in film and drawings, are also key theoretical components in this discussion. In conclusion, I connect Parts A and B by contrasting representational strategies of the traumatic in fictional drawings and archival ones. I believe the artistic representations in both instances may be connected to the above mentioned “showing” of the wound, an appeal to/for justice, and, particularly with the diegetic drawings, catharsis.

Part A
Representational Strategies of the Traumatic in El espinazo del diablo

¿Qué es un fantasma?

Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet, in their Introduction to Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children and Adolescents in Film, group El espinazo within a category of films that present “the trend depicting the war years and the Franco dictatorship” from the perspective of children and adolescents. They claim, “First, preadolescent children are much more frequently cast in filmic narratives constructed on historical memory and trauma. . .. The desire to understand the past and justify the lives of the victims of state violence has inspired a number of films that revisit the past through the gaze of the child” (4). Rocha and Seminet describe the film as presenting the viewer with “. . . child protagonists pitted against a cruel character that represents the nationalist ideology of the period. Characterized as a transnational film par excellence, El espinazo takes place in an orphanage that acts as a ‘microcosm for the conflict taking place outside’ . ..” (11). The traumatic events occurring within the orphanage thus mirror the conflict without, i.e. the struggle between the Republicans (loyal to the Second Republic) and the Nationalists (led by General Francisco Franco) outside of the

Part A is based on a research paper, developed Winter of 2014, titled “Children as Sites of Trauma, Memory, and Justice in Guillermo del Toro’s El Espinazo del Diablo.”
orphanage and between the teachers and young boys (supporters of the Republicans) and Jacinto and his thuggish accomplices (the Nationalist band) within.\textsuperscript{168} This study will focus on the war within and the wounds resulting from the betrayals and murders committed by the antagonist Jacinto who was once an orphan himself.

In her study on children, allegories, and nostalgia in Argentine post-dictatorship film, \textit{El niño en el cine argentino de la postdictadura (1983-2008): alegoría y nostalgia}, Sophie Dufays states that films utilizing this perspective often do so to convey a “melancholic vision of history and language.” Dufays posits, “En muchas obras cinematográficas contemporáneas, la percepción infantil resulta ser un medio adecuado para transmitir una visión melancólica de la historia y del lenguaje” (49). This vision may be transmitted through “. . . la desfiguración monstruosa de la alegoría [que] opera a partir de la escenificación de una percepción infantil” (demonstrated by Dufays in her analysis of \textit{La ciénaga}) (49). I am not treating \textit{El espinazo} as an allegorical film, although it has certain elements that could be classified as such, but I do view it as a film that harnesses a child’s viewpoint to highlight a very specific set of violent circumstances under the harsh, yet illuminating, light of good versus evil.

The viewer first witnesses the body of the wounded child in the initial establishing sequence. The sequence is a series of five shots, connected by the voice over of Dr. Casares and a dissolve from the fourth to the fifth shot, exploring the meaning of a phantom:

\begin{quote}
DR. CASARES. ¿Qué es un fantasma? Un evento terrible condenado a repetirse una y otra vez. Un instante de dolor, quizás. Algo muerto que parece por momentos vivo aún. Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo, como una fotografía borrosa, como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{168} For more information on the Spanish Civil War, see Paloma Aguilar’s work \textit{Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy}.
The voice over is repeated at the end of the film with an additional line revealing the Doctor’s own connection to phantoms. The film’s narration, mostly lineal and chronological, except for several flashbacks, is united by the repetition of the beginning voice over, paired with a new set of shots or a new sequence, at the end. The initial establishing sequence begins with a slow zoom in on a darkened doorway [“¿Qué es un fantasma? Un evento terrible condenado a repetirse una y otra vez.”], then cuts [sound of the cargo doors opening] to the underside of a plane as the cargo doors open and a bomb drops into a rain filled sky illuminated by various explosions and fires on the ground below. The shot ends with the closing of the cargo doors, and the next one starts with the image of a wounded child (later identified as Santi) lying on the ground [“Un instante de dolor, quizás.”]. His head has a large gash that is bleeding out onto the ground as another boy (later known to be Jaime) touches the wound, bloodying his own fingers and face in the process, and cries [“Algo muerto que parece por momentos vivo aún.”]. The fourth shot is of a murky body of water with an initially unknown object that appears to be sinking [“Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo, . . .”]; a boy’s face is finally distinguished [“. . . como una fotografía borrosa, . . .”] as his body is seen descending deeper into the water while the camera moves up and outside of the water to show the older boy from the third shot, still crying, as he gazes into the body of water, now visibly a cistern [“. . . como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.”]. The fourth shot is connected to the fifth, and final shot in the sequence, as the cistern scene dissolves into another murky fluid with difficult to distinguish objects floating in it. These objects are eventually identified as fetuses with exposed spinal cords or spina bifida, an allusion to the devil’s backbone from which the film derives its name. A soft, nondiegetic music is heard as the fetuses float in and out of view enhancing the viewer’s emotional response.
to witnessing open wounds on the most fragile of bodies – the unborn or newly born and newly deceased fetuses or infants.

This initial sequence firmly establishes *El espíntazo del diablo* in the imagery of trauma: 1) The darkened doorway or entrance into the traumatic, the unknown, and death; 2) the bomb or harbinger of death (condemned to repeat itself over and over again); 3) the moment of trauma or the wound of the child; 4) the place of trauma or the scene of the crime and its concealment; and 5) finally the exposed trauma/perforations/open wounds on the bodies of fetuses. With these images and Dr. Casares’ question/response in mind, the viewer then delves into del Toro’s traumatic world as the images, pieces to a larger puzzle, are explored and slowly fitted together to form a more cognizant picture of the moment of trauma. The viewer – as witness to Carlos’ journey, Santi’s pain, and Jaime’s initial inability to speak of the crime – gradually returns to the place of trauma with the protagonists as justice is restored through natural and supernatural means to an unjust series of aggressions and acts spearheaded by Jacinto, called the loneliest of them all (of the orphans). This restoration of justice is evinced in the final sequence, a sequence I will return to later. For now, it is sufficient to view the imagery of trauma and to ponder the meaning of the phantom and its connection to affect and trauma.

**Re-creations of Violence: The Initial Wounding**

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth speaks of the wound and the voice in her introductory chapter. In it, she argues that trauma is first an injury

169 Caruth appropriates the symbols the wound and the voice from Sigmund Freud’s analysis of a story, recounted by Tasso in the epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, about the knight Tancred who accidentally wounds his beloved Clorinda. She informs the reader, “The actions of Tancred, wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unknowingly, seemingly by chance, wounding her again, evocatively represent in Freud’s text the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (2).
inflicted on a body and later evolves into “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). It is also an unassimilated event that extends beyond a simple violent act.

Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (Caruth 4)

The wound and the voice that cries out from it are tied to the belatedness of trauma, its unassimilated nature, and its being not known at the moment of wounding; for these reasons, the “missed” trauma may return to haunt those who survive the initial wounding.

What the parable of the wound and the voice thus tells us, and what is at the heart of Freud’s writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that 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)

Per Caruth, the not known, or belated nature of trauma – posited by Sigmund Freud in Moses and Monotheism – is also connected to the act of leaving that could be outlined in the following manner: Unfall (Accident) → unassimilated at the moment of the event → departing from the trauma → period of latency (22).

El espinazo del diablo revisits the violence of the Spanish Civil War through a return to the place of trauma or the Unfall (a concealed murder in the film). As demonstrated in the sequence detailed above, this trauma is the result of an unresolved violence that will be seen to return and haunt the place of its occurrence. Throughout the film, hauntings take the form of phantom presences displaying open wounds. These undead or phantom spirits – the murdered child Santi and Dr. Casares (at the end of the film) – haunt the orphanage while the unborn are

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170 Caruth explains, “As the repeated infliction of a wound, the act of Tancred calls up the originary meaning of trauma itself (in both English and German), the Greek trauma, or ‘wound,’ originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body” (3). The wound, in its repetition, is thus a “double wound.” Perhaps this double wounding also refers to a wounding of the body and the mind.
represented as preserved fetuses who literally present the viewer with open wounds that are the result of the developmental congenital disorder spina bifida or split spine. Eerily, the unborn compose the main ingredient of Dr. Casares’ tonic, a drink sold in town to fund the orphanage. Consequently, wound-bearing fetuses are literally ingested for the monetary sustenance of the orphanage.

Due to the abundance of open wounds and hauntings in the film, I view the use of wounded phantoms as a literal return to the figurative haunting of trauma in Trauma Studies. I argue that the idea of trauma as a wound inflicted on the body, a perforation, is given materiality in the abject appearance of the phantom child Santi and the open wound on his forehead. Yet, in del Toro’s gothic illustration of wartime violence, the abject that produces repulsion is unexpectedly re-appropriated as a warning of future violence to come and as a cry for justice for an unknown past violence. I postulate that Santi and the other orphan children are converted into sites of memory (symbolically) and (literal agents of) justice, a justice founded in natural law and the supernatural – both of which must serve the victims in the absence of positive laws and guardians/adults to protect them. In short, I focus on the child’s body as a source of trauma, justice, and memory – all three of which, as I will demonstrate through detailed sequence analyses, are manifest in the materiality of violence grounded in the appearance of the phantom presence of the child and his representation of an unresolved trauma that must be brought into the light through a return to and a subsequent departure from the original place of trauma. In my opinion, just as the voice over of Dr. Casares, framing the beginning and ending of the film, both questions and responds to the apparition of the traumatic, so too must the viewer.

Caruth refers to two basic trends on trauma theory: Adult trauma and childhood trauma. The curious distinction between them is that adult trauma is often focused on outer violence
while childhood trauma is more associated with inner fantasies (131). The difference in del Toro’s film is that Santi, although a phantom, appears more than an inner fantasy; he also bears the marks of an outer violence that takes on physicality in his labored breathing and profusely bleeding head wound. As I will demonstrate, Santi’s pain circulates through an aching of the senses and a presentation of a grotesque, all too real violence, a brutality that causes the spectator to cringe. For me, the use of affect is striking, and it is a necessary shock in that it is a call for justice. This justice is brought to Santi through the intercession of the main protagonist, Carlos, who will witness and know the site of the unknown trauma – unassimilated but not unwitnessed by Jaime, an older boy at the orphanage who is present at the time of Santi’s murder yet remains silent (a behavior I consider representative of a post-traumatic period of latency). I believe this site is literally located in Santi’s body, in his head trauma or wound. From this corporeal stance on trauma, the haunting of the traumatic becomes more than a figural wounding of the mind; it is also a boy and his wounded and slain body, numerous children and their injured or murdered bodies, and many adults and their mutilated or murdered bodies (teachers and helpers are also killed) – all peopling the landscape of Civil War Spain. To know the trauma of the first murdered child, as well as the children and teachers killed in the explosion, I posit the viewer is called to return to the site of violence with Carlos, to the open wound, to bear witness and in bearing witness to bring justice to Santi’s and the orphan children’s bodies, to reestablish equilibrium and sense, and to reincorporate the traumatic memory back into narrative memory by knowing the belatedness inherent in the original moment of trauma.171

The Diminishing of Distance: From Repulsion to Solidarity

As posited above, the wound acts as a testimony of unresolved violence in the manners in which it is presented to Carlos and the viewer. In her analysis of the film, Adriana Bergero argues that the abject circulates attempting to diminish the distance between it and the living: “En la escena gótica-film de horror y para el estupor de los vivos, el monstruo abyecto se constituye como un otro inconveniente que circula ansioso por acercar distancias con los vivos” (442).172 Throughout the film, the attempt to establish contact and diminish distance occurs first on Santi’s part and finally on the part of Carlos. To better demonstrate this gradual movement from repulsion to solidarity, i.e. from sight to touch and from repulsion to empathy and understanding, I believe it is important to analyze the sequences in which this occurs fully.

Santi first appears to Carlos in the daylight. He is viewed from a distance, and the contact is based on *sight* alone. He is not yet known to be a phantom presence or a wounded child. He is only seen from afar as a boy. As Carlos enters the kitchen where he glimpsed the unknown child, the mise-en-scène situates the viewer in a seemingly safe yet subtly menacing environment as the camera provides the viewer with a brief shot of Santi’s shadow retreating down a set of stairs and a hanging rack filled with sharp looking scissors. Contact is not made as some other boys come over to converse with Carlos; his investigation is terminated, and he returns outside to play. The viewer, but not Carlos, is then privy to a shot of Santi’s face through a dirty window. Insects are flying around him, and he appears destitute. Carlos is still unaware the boy he saw is a phantom, but the viewer is now cognizant of the figure’s abnormal, grotesque appearance. Santi’s second contact with Carlos is through Carlos’ *physical connection* with his former sleeping area (bed

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number 12), and he responds with a murmur when his name is spoken aloud (sound).\textsuperscript{173} Carlos sees Santi’s shadow again, but this time the shadow reaches out to him as Carlos asks him who he is. Santi proceeds to knock over the water pitcher at the end of the bed, and as the water spills onto the floor (perhaps an allusion to the cistern) his retreating footprints are visible on the wet floor. Santi’s attempt to establish contact is again interrupted by the approach of the other orphans. Carlos is bullied into going to the kitchen for more water and artfully forces Jaime to go with him when he challenges his cowardice. I posit the excursion to the kitchen reestablishes the lost contact and leads to a series of events that allow the phantom to drastically decrease the distance between him and Carlos.

When the boys fill their pitchers, Jaime finishes first and quickly retreats outside. As Carlos waits for his pitcher to fill, there is a camera shot of him filtered by a pair of menacing looking scissors. The shot moves into an extreme close up of the handles of several pairs of scissors hanging on the rack with a blurred view of Carlos in the background; the rack suddenly crashes down onto the floor, and Jacinto, who is nearby with his girlfriend Conchita, is alerted to the presence of someone in the kitchen. He comes dangerously close to discovering Carlos but, after an unsuccessful attempt at opening the hidden safe with a stolen key, he leaves, locking the door behind him. This sequence is intriguing because the perpetrator returns, along with Carlos, to the room above the original scene of the crime (the kitchen is above the cistern room), one he approaches with impunity as he attempts to rob the orphanage.

Santi approaches Carlos again with a whisper of his name (sound). The camera follows Carlos, alternating between shots in front of and behind him, as he descends the stairs into the cistern room. A shadow runs by. The viewer next sees a brief close up shot of Santi’s wounded

\textsuperscript{173} Carlos pronounces the name “Santi,” carved on the wall by the bed.
and decaying face. Santi appears behind Carlos; as he touches Carlos’ arm, he screams and disappears (touch and sound). Santi has crossed the barrier; he has transitioned from sight to sound to physical contact or touch. He also leaves a trace of the blood from his wound in the air; blood that is touched and rubbed between Carlos’ fingers, testing its materiality, in a close up shot. A voice off of Santi is heard, “Muchos van a morir.” He sounds as if he’s struggling for breath, but his words are still perceived as a threat, not yet a warning, and so Carlos flees. Santi attempts to follow him, and he ascends the stairs while Carlos is struggling to squeeze outside of the locked door, opened only enough for his little body to pass through. There is a shot of Santi’s legs moving towards Carlos as he struggles to reach the pitcher he left inside. Santi may have breached the physical distance separating him from Carlos in the cistern room, but in my opinion, he is still far from effectively communicating with him. His abject appearance repulses instead of inspiring pity. The absence of sense and empathy appears to be firmly in place.

Despite his fear during the night, Carlos returns to the cistern room, to the place of unknown trauma, and as he crouches by the cistern (like Jaime before him in the initial sequence), he questions the phantom. Is he the “one who sighs”? Does he live below? Carlos touches the water and beseeches the phantom to listen to him. His attempt to reestablish contact fails again as Jaime and other boys from the orphanage enter the room. Jaime threatens him with a knife – as if he stands in place of Jacinto, re-creating the crime scene with a different set of characters. Carlos reacts by throwing a stone at him, knocking him into the water (like Santi before him). The other boys panic and say he doesn’t know how to swim. Carlos jumps in after him to save him (as opposed to Jacinto who purposefully tossed Santi’s wounded body into the water). As he searches the water for Jaime, there is a close up side profile shot of Santi underwater watching Carlos rescue Jaime. His face is pale, and the skin underneath his eyes is
cracking. The viewer is again privy to knowledge Carlos and the other boys don’t possess. I argue this game of approaching and establishing distance continues for a while longer as Carlos does not yet understand what Santi is struggling to communicate to him because he is still partly afraid, still repulsed by the phantom’s abject appearance.

When the other orphans tell Carlos about Santi and his disappearance the night the bomb dropped from the sky, they suggest Carlos should ask the bomb where he is. In light of the orphans’ advice and the bomb’s appearance immediately posterior to the traumatic event of Santi’s death, the bomb is symbolically connected to Santi’s disappearance/murder. I argue it represents the repetition of the traumatic, the event condemned to repeat itself time and time again. When Carlos listens to the orphans’ advice and questions the bomb regarding Santi’s location, the bomb appears to supernaturally respond to this inquiry as a piece of ribbon attached to it breaks free and floats into the kitchen (leading Carlos back to Santi and the crime).

Carlos again attempts to communicate with Santi by asking him to speak with him as the camera displays a shot of Santi with his back to Carlos. As he slowly turns around to face Carlos, there are dirty particles floating in the air around his body, and the wound on his forehead is cracked like a spider web or skin when it’s been in the water for too long. There are dark circles underneath his eyes, and the combination of his repulsive appearance along with his continued threat/warning that many will die again causes Carlos to flee. The phantom again pursues him. In the following sequence, Carlos’ fear peaks as he struggles to distance himself from the intolerable image of Santi’s increasingly grotesque body. As Santi follows him inside the main building, his skeleton is now visible through his clothing/skin, and his wound bleeds profusely, flowing upwards in a steady stream as if he were still underwater. His abject appearance both repulses and cries out for attention. His wounds signal the manner of his death (head trauma and
possibly drowning) and point to the scene of the crime (a body of water). Santi’s body is frozen in the traumatic moment of his death, and as his body testifies to the violence suffered, so too does it inspire fear. In spite of his initiation of the contact with Santi, Carlos panics and hides in the linen closet.

After the culmination of his fear and panic in the hallway scene, Carlos comes to the realization that Santi is the “one who sighs.” Jaime still won’t speak of the events he witnessed, but Carlos is beginning to piece together the fragments of the puzzle. Violence again erupts when Jacinto realizes the teachers are fleeing the school – and likely taking the gold bars he so desires with them. He decides to threaten the director, Carmen, and demands the gold hidden in the orphanage. Dr. Casares defends her with a rifle, and as everyone watches, Jacinto is expelled from the grounds. He quickly returns in secret to take revenge, and after he blows up part of the school along with the only mode of transportation (the nearest town is a day’s walk away), many more orphans die. Based on this disastrous turn of events, it becomes evident that Santi’s words were a warning, not a threat. The teachers, Carmen and Alma, are also killed in the explosion leaving only Dr. Casares, who is severely wounded, and Conchita.

The Transnational Desaparecido/a and Shades of the Intolerable

Gabriel Gatti, in his work Identidades desaparecidas: Peleas por el sentido en los mundos de la desaparición forzada, speaks of the forced disappearances of people as catastrophes that occurred in the terrain of sense and especially affected identity and language (85). Santi’s trauma is not necessarily in the traditional arena of the disappeared, in the Southern Cone sense, (although he is believed missing or considered a runaway before the act of his murder is discovered), but it does share some common characteristics when viewed through

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174 See Gatti’s Chapter 3, aptly titled “Los militantes del sentido: Ruinas, cuerpos, archivos, memoria.”
the lens of the more universal description of a *desaparecido* – discussed by Gatti and further demonstrated in *Escombros*’ broad definition, entitled “Hoy, también es un desaparecido,” outlined on a poster presented in Gatti’s work (228). Essentially, *el desaparecido modélico* (again, in the Southern Cone sense) has evolved into *el desaparecido transnacional* which in turn has been re-appropriated in *el desaparecido local* (221). In Santi’s case, the re-appropriation of *el desaparecido local* could be located in the figure of the wounded orphan, a defenseless child made more vulnerable by his exposure to the violence of the Spanish Civil War and those like Jacinto who would take advantage of the dismantling of the traditional structures – parents/guardians, formal systems of law, the State, etc. – that customarily serve as sources of protection outside of states of emergency, in this case civil war. Gatti’s elaboration upon the evolution of the term *desaparecido* also includes a restitution of sense to an act, *desaparición forzada*, that dismantles the links of identity, family, community, and language (85). The act represents the absence of sense. I propose that del Toro utilizes representational strategies (i.e. hauntings and open wounds on the bodies of orphans) and the language of affect – or more specifically the emotions of horror, fear, and pain, along with the pursuit of justice – to restore sense to the broken body of a child (Santi) and the trauma that marks it. By considering the language of affect as a restoration of sense in the film, I believe Gatti’s proposition that one’s reaction to absence, emptiness, a lack of sense, is to fill it with sense or *llenarlo de sentido* provides an intriguing rationale for the use of horror or the gothic to revisit the traumatic past (88).

The term *desaparecido/a* has evolved into a referent for those terrible, exceptional situations that pose problems of referentiality: “En fin, diría que hoy el desaparecido cataliza las hablas de la lengua de lo ausente del sentido. Es la referencia para pensar en lo fuera de serie, las
situaciones estrañalarias, anormales, dolorosas, todo aquello que ha sido excepcional, que produce problemas” (emphasis Gatti’s) (229). Gatti describes the term’s broad applicability as if it were a form of catachresis or substitution for that which has no name or place.

In del Toro’s film’s exhibition of the child’s wounded body, of the bloody wound itself, the intolerable image fills in as a metaphor, a concept, a visual language to demonstrate an environment defined by a void of sense and empathy that creates a fertile ground for the propagation of violence and, in the displaying of the intolerable image, to fill this vacuum with an overabundance of sense and emotion. In the orphanage, the ties linking the children to their families and communities have been broken by war and death; they are fragments of a larger whole that has been dismantled by the violence of the Spanish Civil War. In such an environment, so full of pain, the phantom child returns to remind Carlos that his wounds are crying out. I believe Santi’s body serves as a testimony of the materiality of the traumatic violence he suffered, and his wounds shock the desensitized viewer/witness into feeling.

The child’s battered body, along with the bodies of the other wounded and dead orphans, is visually intolerable in its all too real depiction of reality. I propose the graphic nature of the wounded body in El espinazo falls under Jacques Rancière’s analysis in The Emancipated Spectator of the “shift from the intolerable in the image to the intolerability of the image” (84). With this shift in mind, one could say that the bloody body of the child could certainly be “... deemed too real, too intolerably real to be offered in the form of an image” (83). Rancière emphasizes,
This is not a simple matter of respect for personal dignity. The image is pronounced unsuitable for criticizing reality because it pertains to the same regime of visibility as that reality, which by turns displays its aspect of brilliant appearance and its other side of sordid truth, constituting a single spectacle. (83-84)

Although the wounded bodies of the orphans, in general, and the abject appearance of Santi, in particular, may provoke the aversion of the viewer’s gaze, just as it initially evokes Carlos’ fear and desire to flee, I theorize that “the intolerability of the image” is displaced/reverts to “the intolerable in the image” in that the purpose of displaying such brutality is precisely to remove the traumatic event from its state of isolation and to restore sense to the absence of sense. I would further argue that this reincorporation of the history of the trauma and the restoration of sense occur in the situating of the intolerable image within the sequence of events that made it intolerable, not in its situation as an isolated event that would possibly lead to its intolerability. The intolerability of the image is displaced by “... the construction of the victim as an element in a certain distribution of the visible. An image never stands alone. It belongs to a system of visibility that governs the status of the bodies represented and the kind of attention they merit” (99). The abject appearance of Santi’s wounded body, in this instance, is intolerable, but the open wound serves the purpose of drawing one’s attention to the original, unknown moment of trauma.

The Reconstitution of the Traumatic and the Pursuit of Justice

In the aftermath of the tragic explosion caused by Jacinto, amidst the ruins of the school, Jaime finally speaks of the murder he witnessed. There is a flashback to the cistern room as Jaime verbally revisits the scene of the crime. As the puzzle pieces are connected in Jaime’s revelation, I believe the viewer is also given the opportunity to piece together the fragmented shots from the film’s initial sequence: 1) Jaime comes out of hiding, after Jacinto pushes Santi into a pillar and wounds his head, and bends over Santi to touch his bleeding forehead, and 2)
Jaime comes out of hiding again, after Jacinto weighs down Santi’s body and throws it into the water, to crouch in front of the cistern and cry. The bomb falls out of the sky as Jaime leaves the scene of the trauma and walks into the courtyard. Carlos and the viewer – through the testimony of the witness Jaime and the approach of the phantom Santi and his wounded body – have now returned to the original place of the trauma and witnessed its occurrence. As such, the history of the trauma is no longer unknown. The trauma and the injustice of the violence that gave rise to it are clearly seen. Armed with the knowledge of the traumatic, Carlos can approach Santi without fleeing, without aversion to his repulsive appearance, because he recognizes and hears the crying wound.

The next time Carlos asks Santi what he wants, he stays to listen. Santi reveals that he wants Jacinto. As he makes this revelation, he again touches Carlos’ face as he fades away and commands him to bring Jacinto to him. Carlos finally understands, and he does more than understand, he offers to help. Carlos transitions from a reactive stance to a proactive one in regards to the phantom presence as he recognizes that the lack of justice must be filled with justice, the lack of empathy with emotion, and the absence of assistance with action, yet he does not act alone. Jaime also realizes that his fear must be replaced with courage as no one will fight for him and the other orphans; they must fight for themselves.

The Doctor is now also a phantom, but he is a phantom guardian fulfilling his promise to the boys to never leave the orphanage, to not leave things half-finished as he spent his life doing, and so, besides the phantom spirits, there is no longer anyone but Jacinto and the orphans inside the orphanage.\footnote{Conchita was killed by Jacinto on the road to town as she attempted to seek assistance, and the two thuggish men who came to search for the gold with Jacinto deserted him, thinking he believed in gold that didn’t really exist.} After filling his pockets with gold bars, Jacinto is confronted by Carlos and
Jaime. They lure him into the cistern room where the other boys are waiting armed with sharpened sticks. Although Jacinto laughs at the sight of little boys armed with skinny sticks, his laughter is shortly converted to pain as Jaime takes the first shot, stabbing him underneath the arm. As the boys use superior numbers to their advantage, they continually pierce Jacinto’s body with their sticks until he is close enough to be shoved into the cistern. Santi is now free to claim his justice, a death for a death, as he drags down the already weighted-down Jacinto (heavy from the gold bars) into the depths of the cistern. The children, standing in front of the water with their bloodied sticks, have revisited the place of trauma and assisted the phantom presence of Santi in the implementation of justice. Not only has the history of the trauma been resituated within the broader narrative of the orphans’ stories, but justice has been restored to an environment devoid of it. As demonstrated, the orphans don’t passively wait for time to heal Santi’s wound, or their own, but they instead choose to answer the cry of the phantom for vengeance.

Berber Bevernage speaks of the continuation of past crimes into the present in *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice*. He employs a key phrase from Michael Ignatieff’s *Index on Censorship* concerning the “subversive nature of atrocious pasts” to augment his argument (13):

> The problem with the past and the reason that it continues to torment, according to Ignatieff, is precisely that it is *not* past: ‘Crimes can never be safely fixed in the historical past: they remain locked in the eternal present crying out for vengeance.’ (Bevernage 13)

Just as Bevernage and Ignatieff posit, Santi’s trauma, the crime committed against him, did not remain in the past, but his wounded body, “locked in the eternal present,” returned to haunt the orphanage until Carlos and the orphans heeded his cry for vengeance, revisited the scene of the crime, and actively assisted Santi in his request for justice. This restoration of sense, empathy, and justice is evinced in the film’s closing sequence, entitled “Punishment Fits the Crime” in the
scene selections, whose final shots are again connected by Dr. Casares’ question/response regarding the status of the phantom. After a dissolve from a shot of the Doctor’s dead body, there is again a zoom in on a darkened doorway [“¿Qué es un fantasma? Un evento terrible condenado a repetirse una y otra vez.”], except for this time Santi is visible, standing on top of the water in the cistern [“Un instante de dolor, quizás.”]. The room where the explosion occurred is next visible, full of broken stones and fragments of other objects [“Algo muerto que parece por momentos vivo aún.”], before the shot dissolves to one of Jacinto’s dead body floating in the cistern (in place of Santi’s body). The next shot is of the pictures of Jacinto’s parents and childhood he found in the safe (as he was searching for the gold) floating on top of the water [“Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo, . . .”]. The scene dissolves once more to a very brief shot of the bomb in the courtyard, then again dissolves into the main doors of the orphanage opening out onto the road to town as the boys depart [“. . . como una fotografía borrosa, . . .”]. As Carlos looks back at the orphanage [“. . . como un insecto atrapado en ámbar.”], the Doctor’s phantom presence, still carrying the rifle, slowly emerges from the shadows to stand in the doorway and watch the boys leave. To his initial question/response, the Doctor adds an additional line, “Un fantasma, eso soy yo.” Thus, in place of the darkness, the portent of death, the unknown wound, the victim buried in silence and covered by murky water, and the exposed wounds of the fetuses, the viewer is now presented with images of a violence met by vengeance (Santi standing on the water, not sinking in it, and the room filled with rubble), of the bomb as a messenger of death – but this time in terms of an image that announces and points to the wrongful murder of Santi, – and of a restoration of the protection and boundaries of natural law by the supernatural (Santi and the Doctor as phantom spirits) and the orphan boys (active agents of justice who answer the imperative to assist).
There is no happy ending or air-tight resolution in *El espinazo del diablo*, but there are necessary restitutions. There is no guarantee that the orphans make it to town or that they find the nurture and assistance they so desperately require, but they have survived and overcome the violence in the orphanage by transitioning from the sidelines of the battle to its forefront in their decision to assist Santi whose trauma, along with their own, is recognized and brought justice. Although it may seem shocking to call Jacinto’s death justice instead of murder, it is also an act that occurs in an environment of ultimate impunity, one in which there is no formal or legal system or surviving guardians to which the orphans can appeal. Regardless of whether they had answered the cry of the phantom child or not, they still would have had to resort to a defensive violence in order to survive Jacinto’s greed and brutality. In the film, the lines between justice and vengeance blur due to the exceptional circumstances existing in the orphanage; the orphans are given no other recourse to survive than to meet violence with violence or be killed.

Unfortunately, there will always be other traumatic events and other injustices to be confronted, ones where decisions are not clear-cut. The microcosm created by del Toro is only one example of a possible response to the cry of the child’s wound, to the apparition of the traumatic, and to the unresolved and unanswered violence of the victim. The film leaves the viewer with the initial question of “¿Qué es un fantasma?” – partly answered by the Doctor’s confession of being a phantom himself (the guardian spirit) and partly demonstrated through the different shots chosen for the beginning and closing sequences (images of the wound crying out for justice and images of that justice). Yet, how is this apparition of the traumatic in the form of the wounded child as phantom also converted into a site of memory if a traumatic memory is viewed as a belated, missed, or unintegrated event in Trauma Studies?
In an unresolved trauma, in a wound left to bleed, the trauma remains a solitary activity that is not addressed to anyone. As discussed in previous chapters, Bessel Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart contrast narrative memory with traumatic memory. They postulate,

Thus, in contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function. (163)

The haunting of the wounded phantom child is removed from its initial state of repetition of the traumatic event through Carlos’ contact with Santi and his empathy and aid. In delivering Jacinto to the phantom child, justice is not served alone; memory is reconstructed and restored along with it. The memory of Santi’s trauma is no longer his alone; it is no longer latent in Jaime’s mind, hidden by fear and silence. By linking the initial sequence of the traumatic with the closing one in the film (i.e. Dr. Casares’s question/response regarding the status of the phantom described above), I have demonstrated how traumatic memory transitions from a place of isolation, the initial place of the trauma in the cistern room, the initial head wound received by Santi, to a common knowledge and shared narratives between Carlos and Santi, Carlos and Jaime, and then Carlos and the other orphans. The memory is reconstructed and reintegrated into social memory, and this memory now resides in Santi as he stands on the water above the cistern, in Carlos as he leaves the orphanage, and in the bodies of the orphans as they take away the scars of their encounter with violence and the memory of justice delivered to the wounded child.

Although trauma requires integration into narrative memory to be communicated to another,

. . . for the sake of testimony and for the sake of a cure. . .[,] the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others’, knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall. (Caruth 153)

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176 Bessel Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart. “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.”
I argue *El espinazo* avoids this potential loss of “precision and force” of the traumatic in its use of the intolerable image. The trauma is first perceived as an open wound on the forehead of a child and only later takes the form of a haunting/phantom, then sounds, words, contact, and eventually a story – the testimony of Jaime to the violence he witnessed. Thus, in the film, the wounded child’s body serves as the initial site of trauma, the final delivery of justice to the perpetrator of violence, and the site of memory in its evolution from a traumatic to a narrative form. The use of the intolerable image along with a restoration of sense and empathy enables the film to retain the force of the initial trauma in order to elicit an overabundance of emotion that enables Santi to move beyond his isolation. In this way, trauma and memory are tied to the site of violence, to the child Santi’s body, and in *El espinazo*, they are converted into the agents and companions of justice.

Transitioning from the film to the archival drawings, I would ask if this same type of conversion occurs with drawings. I suggest it is pertinent to consider whether an image of violence created by a child, isolated from the original sequence of events that gave rise to its expression in the first instance, requires a verbal or written narrative (e.g. an interview of the drawing’s author or descriptive captions) or a reconstruction of the traumatic past (e.g. the creation of other related drawings that would provide context) to avoid falling into the “intolerability” of the image. In contrast to del Toro’s film, is a drawing, much like a photograph/an image, still powerful whether it is de-contextualized or re-contextualized? In her essay on “Cuerpos políticos/Body Politics,” Diana Taylor references Fernando Gutiérrez’s photograph “Cosas del río,” her friend (viewing the photo) Mario Bronfman’s connection to exile, and the photograph’s de-contextualized images that were nonetheless powerful in their
symbolism ("the photograph’s radical power of de-contextualization") – objects, separated from their forcibly disappeared owners, found in the river (22).

Photography, the art of de- and re-contextualizing, can isolate and freeze the moment, much in the way that violence ruptures our present from our past and freezes time in a simple before/after. These naked, abandoned ‘things’ are out of place in this photograph, in this exhibit, just as their owners are out of place at the bottom of the river. The violent separation of each object, bracketed off from the rest, also invokes the pain and isolation of exile, the life lived out of place. The photograph unsettles–showing simultaneously too little and too much. (Taylor 22)

I believe that the children’s drawings, much the same as the photographs, also show too little and too much, but the power of these images remains undeniable. They evoke an emotional response even when standing alone, and emotion draws the viewer in – counteracting a potentially disinterested or distant stance. They serve as a silent witness of the child artists’ traumatic pasts and validate pain – potentially with or without a narrative attached to them. In Part B, as with my analysis of del Toro’s film and the situation of the traumatic within a narrative of sense (narrative memory + the restoration of sense), I have chosen to contextualize the drawings – based on information obtained from an interview with one of the artists as well as historical facts collected from the Archive – to avoid falling into any categorizations of violence for the sake of violence. I will now transition from fictional works created by adults to archival drawings created by children, exiled and affected by the all too real violence of the Argentine military dictatorship.

Part B
Drawings: Literary/Filmic Representations and the Historical Archive

Catharsis and an Appeal to/for Justice

If literary and filmic representations are indeed a reflection of, i.e. informed by, the historical moment in which we live, then it should reveal new facets of both fiction and the historical archive to juxtapose the two (as one informs the other). For example, what could be
discovered if the drawings made by the character Jaime (after he witnesses the murder of Santi) in the fictional film *El espíritu del diablo* and the non-fictional children’s drawings utilized in the Netherlands to bring attention to the plight of *detenidos/desaparecidos* in Argentina were juxtaposed? I hypothesize that fiction and the archive can complement each other, in lieu of fictional works distorting or distracting from the actual act of bearing witness to violence. This section discusses and contextualizes archival children’s drawings before considering these same drawings’ potential functions alongside that of fictional children’s drawings.

In this discussion, I posit that both acts of creation are differing means of returning to the place of trauma and that literary/filmic fiction serves a purpose parallel to that of artistic representation, whether utilized as catharsis (i.e. a means of “working-through” the traumas of one’s past or present), an appeal to/for justice (through the exposure of acts of violence), or both. In terms of catharsis, Carol Gardner, a long-time employee at the non-profit South Coast Hospice in Coos Bay, Oregon, informed me that art is often used as therapy for children (email, Feb. 28, 2017). She said their former Light House Program, a support/grief group whose purpose was to assist children who had lost a loved one or experienced a traumatic event they were unable to adequately express with words, employed art, collages, crafts, and games (email, Feb. 28, 2017). In the Light House Program instance, as with Jaime’s diegetic drawings, art may be viewed as a purposeful return to the place of trauma to aid healing or as a “coming to terms” for a grieving or traumatized individual. Art may also be used to bring attention to acts of violence committed by governments, groups of people/organizations, and individuals. The latter

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177 The website for the South Coast Hospice in Coos Bay, Oregon, is www.schospice.org.

178 Another pertinent example of traumatic intervention strategies for children (and families) is the Palestine Trauma Center (PTC-Gaza) at http://en.ptcgaza.com/.
purpose was the goal for the genesis of children’s drawings, part of a collection donated in 2014 by the daughters of Alicia Raquel Puchulu de Drangosch. I discovered eight drawings in this collection at the Archivo Nacional de la Memoria [National Archive of Memory] in Buenos Aires, Argentina.179

In addition to my proposition that Jaime’s drawings in El espínazo be considered for their potential cathartic properties and their signaling/showing of a hidden crime (the unpunished crime of Santi’s murder), which I will discuss later in the chapter, I suggest the children’s drawings from the Puchulu de Drangosch archive be viewed as artistic publicity for Human Rights. This would also situate them as the signaling/showing of a reprehensible crime (forced disappearance) in addition to a call for intervention. It is possible the concept of art as catharsis may also be relevant to the archival drawings since the children who participated in the project were Puchulu de Drangosch’s grandchildren and niece (ranging in age from 5-9 years old), all of whom had experienced the violence of disappearance and appropriation firsthand prior to fleeing Argentina (Moyano, email interview, Oct. 16, 2016). However, since Moyano said they were asked to draw pictures about the situation in Argentina, the work of catharsis, if applicable, and Human Rights are performed simultaneously. Whatever their function or purpose, I propose the archival drawings demand an accounting.

I turn now to my discussion of the archival drawings and will later return to consider fictional and non-fictional drawings together. In view of these visual calls (fictional and non-fictional) for an outside recognition of the existence of injustice and violence, I have chosen to consider the archival drawings within the context of genocide as a social practice (Feierstein),

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179 In the summer of 2015, I received a travel grant from Ben and Rue Pine, through the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UCLA, to conduct research in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
which I will discuss in detail later, and witnessing as it is linked to response-ability and address-
ability (Oliver). As Kelly Oliver analyzes Felman and Laub’s seminal 1992 work on the
Holocaust in her chapter titled “The Necessity and Impossibility of Witnessing,” she describes
the necessity of bearing witness from the inside (declared impossible when the addressable other
is abolished, as occurred in concentration camps) to the re-establishment of subjectivity (90). In
turn, witnessing and subjectivity are connected to justice and require another person (who will
respond and be responsible) to claim it. Oliver argues,

Yet in order to reestablish subjectivity and in order to demand justice, it is necessary to
bear witness to the inarticulate experience of the inside. This is not the finite task of
comprehending it; this is the infinite task of encountering it ([Felman & Laub] 268). It is
the tension between finite understanding linked to historical facts and historically
determined subject positions, and the infinite encounter linked to psychoanalysis and the
infinite responsibility of subjectivity that produces a sense of agency. Such an encounter
necessarily takes us beyond recognition and brings with it ethical obligation. We are
obligated to witness beyond recognition, to testify and to listen to testimony—to encounter
each other—because subjectivity and humanity are the result of witnessing. That is to say,
subjectivity and humanity are the result of response-ability. (90)

The drawings, for me, have the potential power of expressing the inexpressible (to bear witness
to the inarticulate experience of the inside) – connected to subjectivity (requires the possibility of
a witness for Oliver), response-ability (the ability to respond), ethical obligations (in line with the
imperative of the Good Samaritan discussed in Chapter 1), and justice. For Oliver, “Response-
ability is never solitary” (unlike the traumatic narrative addressed to no one) (91).180 The
drawings, when viewed as symbolic expressions of “the inside,” request and require an audience
who will be ethically responsible.

Subjectivity as the ability to respond is linked in its conception to ethical responsibility.
Subjectivity is responsibility: it is the ability to respond and to be responded to.

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180 As previously discussed, Bessel Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart postulate, “Thus, in contrast to narrative
memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social
component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In
contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function” (163).
Responsibility, then, has the double sense of opening up the ability to respond–responsibility–and ethically obligating subjects to respond by virtue of their very subjectivity itself. (Oliver 91)

With these hypotheses in mind, let us now turn to the histories surrounding the archival drawings.

**Historical Context**

The drawings in the Puchulu de Drangosch archive were imprinted on postcards that were mailed by COSOFAM or the *Comisión de Solidaridad con Familiares de Desaparecidos en Argentina* [Commission of Solidarity with Family Members of those Disappeared in Argentina] and others in the Netherlands to the President of the Supreme Court of Justice, D. Adolfo Gabrielli, at the Palace of Justice in the Argentine Federal Capital and possibly to other unknown recipients. According to Aníbal Calvo, an employee at the *Archivo Nacional de la Memoria* in Buenos Aires, these types of postcards were commonly produced to be sent to judges, military personnel or their spouses, priests, and other Argentine authority figures or their family members by parties sympathetic to human rights work and/or overtly against the military dictatorship (email, Jan. 7, 2016). Calvo informed me that campaigns of this sort were used to pressure authorities from abroad, and it is possible that other sets of postcards were mailed from the Netherlands (email, Jan. 7, 2016). Eugenia Moyano, Puchulu de Drangosch’s granddaughter, informed me that “el COSOFAM era un comite de solidaridad de familiares de desaparecidos/detenidos por la dictadura. Lo que yo sé [Eugenia] es que fue fundado en el exilio (en Holanda) para divulgar lo que estaba ocurriendo en la Argentina de Videla” (email interview, Oct. 16, 2016). She was 8-9 years old at the time the drawings were created and was aware they were to be made into postcards, although she didn’t know if they were part of fundraising activities for the organization or if they were mailed to other organizations like the United
Nations (email interview, Oct. 16, 2016). Moyano describes COSOFAM’s activities as centered around exposing the dictatorship and fundraising to support their work.

El COSOFAM buscaba constantemente formas para que en Europa (y el mundo) se sepa [sic] de las violaciones de derechos humanos en Argentina. Se organizaban actos de solidaridad con música por artistas exiliados, proyección de películas, oradores, huelgas de hambre, manifestaciones, etc. (email interview, Oct. 16, 2016)

Per Calvo (as well as the information on the back of the postcards), it is now clear these postcards were mailed to a Judge and so fall under the categorization of “exposing” the dictatorship.

In the Catálogo de Fondos Escritos/Audiovisuales/Fotográficos [Catalogue of Written/Audiovisual/Photographic Collections] of the Archivo, the description of the Puchulu de Drangosch archive informs the reader that Puchulu de Drangosch lost many family members, either killed or forcibly disappeared by the military government, and that her daughter’s house, where she was living, was forcibly raided and seized [el allanamiento de los domicilios de sus hijas]. She was eventually forced to flee the country to ensure her own safety and that of her family. Puchulu de Drangosch initially fled to Brazil, then traveled to the Netherlands where she remained in exile. Once in the Netherlands, she founded and was president of COSOFAM. The Catalogue states the collection donated by her daughters contains 51 items related to the work done by COSOFAM – including publications, letters, testimonials, photographs, lists of victims of the dictatorship, and more.

A child’s drawing is imprinted on the front of each postcard while the back displays writing in Spanish and Dutch inquiring as to the whereabouts of either disappeared/missing children/adolescents (6 postcards) or pregnant women (2 postcards) kidnapped by the Argentine government. I believe these drawings are important for their demonstration of the violation of basic Human Rights, generally accorded to human beings based on their humanity, and for their
use of a child’s perspective to represent personal instances of violence. It is pertinent to mention that, although the grounding of Human Rights on one’s humanity is a common assumption (one used in Panez’s argument discussed below), it has failed to hold true in many instances, particularly the mass refugee crises connected to WWI and WWII, initially discussed by theorists such as Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Arendt argues that the rights of man (i.e. humans), with the growing problem of statelessness, were found to be tied to established governments, not the individual man/woman.

The Rights of Man, after all, had been defined as ‘inalienable’ because they were supposed to be independent of all governments; but it turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. (Arendt 291-292)

In her analysis “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” Arendt is no longer certain that Human Rights in the twentieth century can be based on humanity because they are tied to government and national origins: “The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (296). If this is the case, in what space does the Argentine child exercise his/her Rights in exile, described above by Diana Taylor as “the life lived out of place” (22)? In my opinion, it is possible the creation of COSOFAM created a new space outside of the contested Argentine government (from inside the territory of the Netherlands, governed by a different established government) that served as an artificial extension of national origins from which the *exiled human* (man, woman, child) could continue to lay claim to fundamental Human Rights. COSOFAM only existed while the dictatorship functioned; once its goal was achieved, once the dictatorship ceased, so too did the organization’s purpose (Moyano, email interview, Oct. 16, 2016). As such, I find it plausible the space created by the organization functioned as a
temporary satellite institution from which the opinions and actions of its exiled members could retain their saliency, demand responsibility, and fight for justice/rightful restitution.

In order to situate Children’s Rights within the wider domain of Human Rights, Psychologist Rosario Panez describes them as premised on children’s “human condition”: “De acuerdo al pensamiento de Occidente, los derechos del niño son aquellos que le corresponden por su condición humana” (21). She does so without directly broaching the question of statelessness and its corresponding loss of Rights. Although, where indigenous communities are concerned, these could be valid concerns, ones that I believe she is aware of in her study. Despite her definition’s apparent simplicity, her study is an interesting correlative for its representation of children’s perspectives on Rights. In addition to artistic works from 11,539 children from various regions in Peru and quantitative and qualitative analyses of their creative works, her work also includes a brief overview of perspectives on children throughout history. The study, much like the case of the archival Argentine/Dutch postcards, requested children create an artistic work – e.g. drawings, paintings, collages, poems, stories, or songs – about a chosen Right – e.g. the Right to life, the Right to one’s identity, the Right to receive protection and love, etc. (154-155). Like the Argentine/Dutch children’s drawings, her project gives voice to overlooked and exploited young subjects. Although a literary work like Roffé’s “La noche en blanco” and a film like El espinazo are important for their representations of particular characters (Alicia and the old woman in the former example and Carlos and Santi in the latter) during certain key times and places (the Argentine military dictatorship and the Spanish Civil War), I argue that fictional works should not replace the historical archive but should rather complement it by giving voice

181 Rosario Panez’s psycho-anthropological study on Children’s Rights: El lenguaje silencioso de los niños: Un estudio peruano sobre los Derechos del Niño desde su producción creativa.
(as Panez does) to voiceless, yet not faceless, representations of violence preserved in archives. My aim is not to speak for the child artists but to bring attention to drawings that might have otherwise remained preserved (as historical materials) in the archive after their initial purpose in the human rights campaign was fulfilled. I would like to present these drawings to a new audience through this study.

Archival Drawings and Descriptions

Among the eight drawings/postcards discovered (displayed below), six of them were connected to demands to know the whereabouts of “kidnapped” (forcibly disappeared/missing) children and two were tied to “kidnapped” pregnant women. The text on the backs of all eight postcards begins with the phrase, “Con todo respeto, pero con todo dolor, queremos saber: . . .” [Respectfully, but with much anguish/grief/pain, we want to know: . . .], which is then followed by one of two questions. For the postcards concerning “kidnapped” children, the demand is typed in all capital letters and reads, “DONDE ESTAN LOS NINOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO” [Where are the children kidnapped by the Argentine government?]. For those postcards referring to “kidnapped” pregnant women, the demand reads, “DONDE ESTAN LAS MUJERES EMBARAZADAS SECUESTRADAS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO” [Where are the pregnant women kidnapped by the Argentine government?]. The demand is then reiterated in Dutch and followed by a list of three names on each postcard with either the ages of the children/adolescents or the number of months the women were pregnant. In both cases, the emphasis is on the children/adolescents and fetuses. Several committees or supporting entities are listed on the postcards: CO. SO. FAM. (COSOFAM), A.F.U.D.E.,

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182 IMPORTANT NOTE: Pictures of the archival drawings were obtained with the permission of the Archivo Nacional de la Memoria in Argentina and cannot be reproduced for monetary gain or without authorization.
Nederlandse Kinderraad [Netherlands Council for Children], Komitee Twee [Committee Two], Kerk en Vrede [Church and Peace], I.F.O.R., Stichting Oecumenische Hulp [Foundation for Ecumenical Assistance], Kerken en Vluchtelingen [Churches and Refugees], and N.C.O. respectively.

ARCHIVAL CHILDREN’S DRAWINGS
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NINOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 1.

Bettina Tarnopolsky 15 years old  Argentinian
Víctor Trevino 18 years old  Argentinian
Horacio A. Ungaro 17 years old  Argentinian
“DONDE ESTAN LAS MUJERES EMBARAZADAS SECUESTRADAS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 2.

Adriana Gatti 8 months pregnant
Susana Stritzler 8 months pregnant
Valeria Belaustegui Herrera 2 months pregnant
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NINOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea V. Hernadez [sic] Hobbas</td>
<td>3 years old</td>
<td>Uruguayan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simón Riquelo</td>
<td>1 month old</td>
<td>Uruguayan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Rutilo Artes</td>
<td>9 months old</td>
<td>Peruvian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NINOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 4.

Clara Anahí Mariani 3 months old Argentinian
Gabriel Matías Cevasco 1 year old Argentinian
Paula Eva Logares 2 years old Argentinian
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NIÑOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 5.

Hagelin Dagmar 17 years old Swedish
Fabián H. Logiuratto 14 years old Argentinian
Juan Angel Hughes 15 years old Argentinian
"DONDE ESTAN LAS MUJERES EMBARAZADAS SECUESTRADAS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO"
Colección COSOFAM. Set 6.

Gabriela Carriquiriborde  6 months pregnant
Lucía Ester Molina      4 months pregnant
Lucía C. Marroco       3 months pregnant
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NINOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 7.

Mario Eugenio Gatica 1 year old Argentinian
Felipe Martin Gatica 4 months old Argentinian
Jorgelina Planas 4 years old Argentinian
“DONDE ESTAN LOS NIÑOS SECUESTRADOS POR EL GOBIERNO ARGENTINO”
Colección COSOFAM. Set 8.

Leonora Zimmerman 17 years old Argentinian
María Zimmerman 18 years old Argentinian
Manuel C. Cuevas 14 years old Argentinian
Disappearance as More than Murder: The Obliteration of Existence

Kelly Oliver (mentioned above and in Chapter 3) connects the process of witnessing to address-ability and response-ability. Building on Dori Laub’s idea of an “inner witness” or addressable other, Oliver postulates in “Introduction: Beyond Recognition,”

To conceive of oneself as a subject is to have the ability to address oneself to another, real or imaginary, actual or potential. Subjectivity is the result of, and depends on, the process of witnessing—address-ability and response-ability. Oppression, domination, enslavement, and torture work to undermine and destroy the ability to respond and thereby undermine and destroy subjectivity. (17)

I propose that the drawings function, in the above discussed context, as a means for children to address themselves to others and for human rights organizations through children to work against the forces of violence – the annihilation of social relations and existence itself. In *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Juntas*, Daniel Feierstein speaks of disappearance as more than murder in that it is an obliteration of one’s existence. As a means of resisting the obliteration of the Other and as a reclamation of existence, the drawings attest to a violence that “disappeared” people. I postulate they are a tool employed to counter-act the process of annihilation and reestablish subjectivity through a confirmation of address-ability and response-ability by (as previously posited) “. . .bear[ing] witness to the inarticulate experience of the inside” (Oliver 90).

If civilizing discourses are really discourses of exclusion, a making invisible of those in plain sight, then the dictatorship took this a step further by attempting to render invisible non-conforming citizens, conveniently labeled subversives or nonreformable members (a manner of rendering them non-citizens, and thus without the Rights guaranteed citizens by their government), through their “disappearance” (i.e. an initial Othering of people that later develops in certain places into forcibly disappearing the Othered). Arendt analyzed the contradiction
inherent in barbarous acts that arise and are sustained by the ubiquitous spread of civilization.\textsuperscript{183}

Discussing denationalization post-WWI and statelessness in Europe, Arendt theorized,

The trouble is that this calamity arose not from any lack of civilization, backwardness, or mere tyranny, but, on the contrary, that it could not be repaired, because there was no longer any ‘uncivilized’ spot on earth, because whether we like it or not we have really started to live in One World. Only with a completely organized humanity could the loss of home and political status become identical with expulsion from humanity altogether. (297)

The reorganizing discourse (el proceso de reorganización nacional) of the dictatorship, bolstered by the underlying civilizing discourse of the Nation, created categorizations or artificial boundaries as a means of isolating and Othering, a process that facilitated genocide as social practice.

In his work on genocide, Feierstein – based on other pre-existing typologies of genocide – applies various definitions of genocide to events in Argentina. He explores “. . . the ways in which annihilation has been used to destroy and reorganize social relations” and propagates a model of genocide that views “. . . genocide not only as a latent potential of modernity but as [what he terms] a specific technology of power” (1). For Feierstein, “A technology of power is a form of social engineering that creates, destroys, or reorganizes relationships within a given society” (1). He continues, “It influences the ways in which different social groups construct their identity, the identity of others, and the otherness of the Other, thus shaping the way that groups can relate to themselves and to one another” (1). By closely tying together genocide and social reorganization, genocide (in addition to its legal definition) emerges as a social practice in historical and sociological discourses (14). To push for the adoption of the Genocide

\textsuperscript{183} Franz Borkenau, at the beginning of WWII, also analyzed totalitarianism as more than an aberration or barbarism. He too tied it to an “authentic fruit of modernity” (Feierstein 91). Gabriel Gatti’s take on this idea is discussed in Chapter 3.
Convention, Raphael Lemkin argued for the exclusion of political groups, an exclusion that has now problematized the prosecuting of genocide in cases like Argentina where persecution is often tied to political groups or “doing” instead of existential reasons or “being” (as with the Jews, Roma, et al during WWII) (32).¹⁸⁴ One of Feierstein’s proposals is for a “new classification of the social practices of genocide.”¹⁸⁵ I argue that the archival drawings, when seen as a response to a reorganizational process tied to annihilation as a tool and form of social engineering, become more than isolated incidents of violence, more than de-contextualized images, and instead take on new meaning as a “haunting” of the disappeared victim. They demonstrate the resilience of the “memory” of the disappeared and appropriated of the dictatorship, a memory that continues to resist discourses of exclusion.

Pilar Calveiro posits that trivialization is one form of forgetting. I believe the drawings have the potential to fight against the trivialization and normalization of violence by reminding those in positions of power (or connected to them) during the dictatorship that even children had witnessed Argentine state-sponsored violence, and they had not forgotten.

El olvido adopta muchas formas; la trivialización es sólo una de ellas. La memoria es una forma de resistencia al olvido que, en el caso de los campos de concentración, comenzó por los testimonios de lo que había ocurrido y se ligó de inmediato con la búsqueda de los vestigios, de los restos que daban testimonio de la masacre colectiva. (Calveiro 163)

During the military dictatorship, many of these facts were known and not known (such as the existence of camps) by an Argentine populace paralyzed by fear, and so it was important to

¹⁸⁴ “The term ‘genocide’, as coined by Lemkin, is a hybrid between the Greek root genos (family, tribe, or race) and the Latin suffix -cide (killing), but its exact meaning and translation into other languages remain controversial” (Feierstein 12).

¹⁸⁵ Feierstein claims, “This classification makes the destruction and reorganization of social relations more visible by establishing continuity between the ‘reorganizing genocide’ first practiced by the Nazis and its more complex version—complex in terms of the symbolic and material closure of social relationships—later applied in Argentina” (7).
continually point to crimes the State was still in the process of concealing. Calveiro states, “Los militares habían hecho un gran esfuerzo por ocultar o hacer desaparecer los restos de sus víctimas. No sólo habían desaparecido a las personas sino que después desaparecieron a los desaparecidos” (163). Drawings, in this case, testify to a violence that sought to annihilate by further disappearing/destroying already disappeared lives and bodies. The drawings are a powerful reminder that the children/adolescents and women forcibly disappeared in Argentina may be out of sight, but they are certainly not out of mind/memory. Their names are known. They are neither forgotten nor trivialized, and their traumatic pasts demand restitution because in the absence of justice, cultures of impunity foment the recycling of extreme violence (as demonstrated in Chapter 2).

**Fiction Meets the Archive: Recreations of Violence or Catharsis**

At least two of del Toro’s films, *El espinazo del diablo* and *El orfanato*, employ children’s drawings to “show” hidden violence and unresolved injustices – the child protagonist Jaime in *El espinazo* and Simón in *El orfanato*. This theme of the traumatic past/phantoms haunting the present is represented in *El orfanato* [*The Orphanage*] (2007), directed by J.A. Bayona with del Toro as an executive producer, in a similar manner to *El espinazo* – i.e. it utilizes a child’s drawing to represent unseen children haunting a former orphanage (another surrogate home for vulnerable children), also the scene of an unknown, past crime. There are

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186 I also discuss the wide-spread fear of the civilian populace who knew and yet didn’t know in Chapters 1 and 2. Concerning the paralysis of civil society, Calveiro claims, “El campo de concentración, por su cercanía física, por estar de hecho en medio de la sociedad, ‘del otro lado de la pared’, sólo puede existir en medio de una sociedad que elige no ver, por su propia impotencia, una sociedad ‘desaparecida’, tan anonadada como los secuestrados mismos” (147).

187 My initial research findings on the comparative study of children’s drawings in del Toro’s films and those from the Archive in Buenos Aires were first presented at the ACLA Annual Meeting at Harvard University in 2016.

188 Screen shots of Jaime’s drawing and Santi, the wounded phantom, are displayed at the end of the chapter.
many other films that utilize drawings, such as the child’s drawing of family in *Cautiva* (in the opening shot) and the doctor’s macabre sketch book in which he measures and studies human bodies in *The German Doctor* (based on *Wakolda*), but for the sake of brevity, I will conclude this chapter by considering Jaime’s drawing of Santi’s murdered/wounded body in *El espinazo* and its potential intersections with the archival drawings on a theoretical level. As discussed in Part A, del Toro’s representation of the traumatic is revealed through the haunting of the wounded child Santi; drawings made by Jaime also help Carlos uncover Santi’s violent death. Fictional representations of children’s drawings as signaling or unveiling (hidden) crimes is a shared characteristic with the above discussed archival drawings. As consistently manifested in the works chosen for my dissertation, crimes do not disappear with time. Wounds cry out for restitution, not truth telling. When truth comes, it bears witness to the bearers of justice who utilize it to right wrongs.

Due to the continuous haunting of the traumatic in *El espinazo*, it is possible to consider (traumatic) memory concomitantly an effect of violence and a reaction to it with reconstructions of this memory serving as stages in the recovery process – a traditional trauma studies’ reading mixed with a more positive dash of PTG (posttraumatic growth). I have argued that fictional recreations of traumatic memory (post-violent event) – through the mediums of film, literature, testimony, and drawings – avoid becoming gratuitous showings of violence when they are in line with strategies of witnessing, the building of empathy, the conversion/transition of the discourse of trauma into the discourse of social memory, catharsis as a “working through,” and other similar strategies. Instead of mere violence for the sake of violence, the hauntings, wounds, and drawings in del Toro’s films are, as previously posited, at once cathartic in purpose, a means of restitution, and a direct and forceful pursuit of justice. In *El espinazo*, the reproduction of violent
events serves a cathartic purpose as the drawings create a way for Jaime to revisit the site of Santi’s death, of which he had not yet spoken. Del Toro’s fictional haunting and the wounds that mark the phantom in the diegetic present are enhanced by Jaime’s drawing that points to the victim of violence. Evident in *El espinazo* and the archival drawings, I believe it is telling that children draw what they see, even when they cannot speak of it (or have not yet spoken of it). *The drawings visually speak for the victims in that they unveil the unseen and unresolved traumas of the past.* This uncovering of the past allows for restitution to occur as the isolated trauma is again situated within a chain of events and narrative.

\[
\text{child artists} \leftrightarrow \text{phantoms} \leftrightarrow \text{unknown trauma} \\
\downarrow \quad \quad \quad \uparrow \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \text{(diegetic & archival) drawings} \\
\rightarrow
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The idea of haunting as a means of revealing past violence with the clear intent of pursuing justice is particularly evident in *El espinazo*, and Jaime’s drawing of Santi’s murder becomes a tool for natural law. With the archival children’s drawings, the use of visual recreations of unresolved past violence is also utilized for the pursuit of a just recognition of wrongs committed, although within the framework of positive law and human rights work in exile. The archival drawings, as a call for response-ability (as mentioned, including the ability to respond and ethical obligations) and address-ability, pursue justice through COSOFAM’s propagation of interventionist strategies and demand for accountability on the part of the Argentine State for the “missing” bodies connected to the names listed on the postcards, which are also directly addressed to a Judge. Conversely, in *El espinazo*, natural law and the supernatural assist the victims in the absence of positive laws. Jaime’s drawing visually marks the crime and works in tandem (as the narrative progresses) with the phantom Santi to entreat Carlos and the other orphans to avenge his wrongful death. As the orphans answer the call for
justice, their bodies, repositories marked by violence, carry traumatic memory forward to a final reckoning in which the traumatized child’s body, brutalized or monstrous to view, is also the weapon/force that claims justice.\textsuperscript{189}

As for the archival drawings, I have not currently located a document at the Archive stating that any action was taken on the part of the Judge in question, but it is possible a record exists. This would be an intriguing line of inquiry to follow for any upcoming studies, and I suggest a thorough investigation be conducted in the future. I do know that several of the names listed on the postcards were well-documented cases of appropriated children, e.g. Carla Rutilo Artes (on Set 3) and Clara Anahí Mariani (on Set 4). There is an interview of Carla Graciela López Rutila, located in 1983 (recuperated in 1985) by Las Abuelas, on YouTube.\textsuperscript{190} Some of the facts vary among websites, including the spelling of her name (either Carla Rutilo Artes or Rutila Artes). However, in both instances, Carla is disappeared in Bolivia with her mother and was born in Peru.\textsuperscript{191} It is possibly the same Carla listed on the postcard. As for Clara Anahí Mariani, she is still listed as missing, along with both of her parents, on the Abuelas’ website.\textsuperscript{192} Her grandmother, Maria Isabel “Chicha” Chorobik de Mariani, was the founder and second president

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{189} As previously mentioned, throughout \textit{El espinazo}, the attempt to establish contact and diminish distance continually replays. This same attempt to establish contact occurs in \textit{El orfanato}, but the difference lies in the living child’s response to the phantom presence. For some reason, the boy Simón, who initially doesn’t know he has HIV or that he is adopted, is not afraid of the phantom boy wearing a sac-cloth on his head; he instead invites him home to play, an action that unleashes an entire chain of events with irrevocable consequences.

\textsuperscript{190} The YouTube video is titled “Nietos n°3 (TV Pública 15/08/2012): Carla Graciela López Rutila.” The site is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0-X9FgjSKE.


\textsuperscript{192} Clara Anahí Mariani case under “Niños desaparecidos junto a sus padres” on the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo website: https://www.abuelas.org.ar/caso/mariani-clara-anahi-3.
\end{footnotesize}
of the Abuelas. There is also a human rights organization founded by her grandmother and Elsa Pavón in 1996 called La Asociación Anahí.  

Returning to my discussion of the diegetic drawings, if Jaime’s drawing is considered a cathartic act for the witness and a means of restitution for the victim, could one go a step further and posit that the production of contemporary films about past violent events is a demonstration of societies effectively dealing with their violent pasts? If these artistic acts are not cathartic but a propagation of violence through other means, does this signal a continuation of repression underneath a mantel of benevolent democracy, which would make films like *El espinazo* mere fictions devoid of any real cathartic power to heal the traumas of the past? When a direct and forceful pursuit of justice is added to the idea of reproducing violence as catharsis and a means of restitution, it would seem to cancel out a continuation of repression as the repressors would likely not seek to punish their deeds. Yet, does a forceful pursuit of justice equate with revenge (not the same as vengeance as a form of justice under natural law)? I would say no; justice in del Toro’s film is connected to truth.  

In conclusion, I have shown that *El espinazo*, a fictional film, and the archival drawings, belonging to the domain of Human Rights, utilize children to demand a response and an accounting/justice. Their drawings “show” the crime. Children become the bearers and transmitters of traumatic memory through hauntings, wounds, and/or drawings. This does not mean that children as the portents of justice must also mete out justice, but in del Toro’s film, they do. The weakest and most oppressed, orphan children trapped in a state of exception and effected by extreme violence, become the agents of restitution and justice, just as the Argentine

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193 La Asociación Anahí website: https://asociacionanahi.org/asociacion-anahi/.
children in exile in the Netherlands actively participate by bearing witness of the inside.

“Response-ability is never solitary” (Oliver 91).

CARLOS DISCOVERS JAIME’S DRAWING OF SANTI’S MURDER
(El espinazo del diablo)

CARLOS ADDRESSES SANTI
(El espinazo del diablo)
Concluding Remarks

In my dissertation, I have analyzed representational strategies revolving around extreme violence and child/adolescent protagonists in films, literature, children’s drawings, and legal/political discourses in contemporary Latin American culture from an interdisciplinary approach. The mobilizing potential of representations of child or adolescent protagonists affected by extreme and systemic violence and oppression are key components to this research project that has revealed ways in which children can represent/become sites of memory and justice through acts of witnessing, empathy, and the universal claim of natural law. Although many of the works selected incorporate transnational scenarios, I have predominantly focused on depictions of a violence in circulation in Latin American works that utilize representations of children in extra-juridical, politicized, or abnormal environments.

The historical periods contextualizing this study included the connectivity of the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) to the violence of WWII in Reina Roffé’s “La noche en blanco” (Chapter 1), the impact of the circulation of genocidal violence in Argentine South Patagonia in 1959-1960 in Lucía Puenzo’s novel Wakolda (Chapter 2), the emerging repercussions during Argentina’s transition to democracy (1990s) of the military dictatorship’s practices of appropriation and forced disappearance as well as critical questions raised regarding memory and justice in Dir. Gastón Biraben’s Cautiva (Chapter 3), and the symbolic haunting of an orphanage during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) along with the radical use of children who fight in self-defense and in the name of justice for the phantom child in Mexican director Guillermo del Toro’s film El espinazo del diablo (Chapter 4). The chapters do not follow a chronological trajectory but rather a continuum connected to the child/adolescent protagonists’ capability/understanding and degrees of agency in terms of answering the cry of the wound – i.e.
possessing a “full knowledge of the traumatic” (as with the child artists in Ch. 4, Part B) and participating in the pursuit of memory, justice, or the fight against violence and repression.

Ch. 1) from a lack of full knowledge mixed with emotional intuition, Ch. 2) to an ambiguous, at times seemingly complicit, yet partial knowledge, Ch. 3) to the development of knowledge through the rearming of memory and the restoration of identity, Ch. 4) to drawings, operating in the realm of Human Rights, that “show” the wound or attest to hidden violence from a place of exile and, finally, to a physical or corporal pursuit of justice.

I began with an Introduction to Critical Theories on Violence, Trauma, Memory, and the Child/Childhood, including examples of recycled violence, chapter outlines, Rights and the family, proposed lines of inquiry, and a demonstration of the interconnectivity of violence, trauma, and memory (taken from multiple disciplines). I believe the intersecting areas among these concepts have facilitated in-depth analyses of representational strategies employing child/adolescent protagonists from non-traditional perspectives, such as my analysis of cultures of impunity involving trajectories of violence, centered in biopolitics, that radiate out from global projects of Modernization to WWII and beyond in Argentina. The first part of this study, Chapters 1-2, titled “Violence, Family, and the Private Sphere,” extensively focused on analyzing instances of what I term “recycled violence” within the private (purportedly safer) sphere of the home. This repetition of violence is demonstrated in “La noche en blanco” (Chapter 1) and in Wakolda (Chapter 2) in their trans-temporal and trans-spatial return to the pain and horrors of the Holocaust or to other unresolved past genocides or periods of extreme violence still reverberating in the present moment. The second part, titled “The Personal as Political and an Empathetic/Violent Witnessing in Gastón Biraben’s Cautiva,” delved into theories on spectatorship, witnessing, positive law (protecting the Right to one’s identity in Argentina) coupled with the filmic reconstruction of identity, and the reactivation of empathy. I concluded
with Chapter 4, which I subdivided into two distinct yet complementary parts: Part A, on the child protagonists of Guillermo del Toro’s *El espinazo del diablo* and representations of the traumatic; and Part B, on archival drawings that “show” the violence of the Argentine dictatorship to an international audience. I finished Chapter 4 by discussing potential intersections between the fictional/diegetic drawings in del Toro’s film and those of the archive.

**Conclusions from Chapter 1**

In Chapter 1, I utilized the kingdom of childhood and the kingdom of adulthood to metaphorically address the contemporary childhood/adulthood dichotomy that may keep children from taking active roles of resistance in extreme circumstances. The child protagonist Alicia in the “La noche en blanco” is contrasted with a knowledgeable and wounded older woman whose internal dialogue reveals a similar violence between the German occupation of France during WWII and the Argentine military dictatorship. I argued that this transgenerational comparison effectively conveys the intersectionality and multidirectionality of private and mass historical traumas in the text, which I believe allows for a needed complexity and nuanced analysis of traumatic experiences over time. In Chapter 1, I also viewed the child protagonist as on the verge of a traumatic awakening, innocent yet emotionally intuitive, which permits a reading of the text as representative of the belated arrival of trauma.

The juxtaposition of the Holocaust and the Argentine military dictatorship also raised questions of traumatic representability and of the Holocaust as a cultural and historical (seemingly omnipresent) referent in contemporary works. I postulated, in agreement with Rothberg and Hirsch, that traumatic memories do not have to be in competition but that one traumatic experience can illuminate another, thus enriching current conversations on post-conflict resolution strategies and the building of empathy among different groups of people.
Roffé’s physical and metaphorical use of space supports my stance on the circulation of recycled violence. I postulated the old woman’s proximity, initial willingness to open the door when Alicia’s mother is in distress, and temporary permission for Alicia to stay the night bring center stage the ethical responsibility and imperative of the Good Samaritan to assist, when possible, bystanders and other civilians. However, I believe the text is ambiguous as to whether the old woman will accept the long-term responsibility of caring for another based on her own traumatic experiences that perhaps influence her determined maintenance of physical and emotional distance from the young girl throughout the night. Finally, Roffé’s child protagonist is tied, in my argument, to a failed witnessing, due to her having seen and not seen (connected to understanding/full knowledge of the traumatic; not failure as a fault) the moment of her mother’s forced disappearance – another reason I view the text as reflective of the belated nature of trauma.

Conclusions from Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I argued that the normalization of methodologies of extreme violence is manifest in the twentieth-century shift from the geographically centered battlefields of the past to the biologically centered battlefields of the present. I postulated that the multiple lines of historical violence seen in Wakolda are amplified in Puenzo’s novel because they resurface in the private (supposedly protected) space of the household when the normalized violence of Nazi concentration camps reemerges in the Argentine family’s home.

I began by distinguishing between what I label an ultimate impunity and a permissive impunity. In my argument, an ultimate impunity is tied to various colonial projects, their process of “Othering,” and concentration camps. One very pertinent instance of ultimate impunity, due to its influence on other genocides, is the concept of “total annihilation” birthed in German South
West Africa. The violent methods and practices developed from these projects and containment areas/camps are transferred to Argentina (among other countries) where they mix with pre-existing sentiments on eugenics and other popular ideologies and politics to foment a culture of permissive impunity, seen in the diegesis in the South of Argentina in 1959-1960 and historically in investigative works like Uki Goñi’s. I posited that a culture of permissive impunity facilitates the recycling of violence and the continued practice of questionable methods by violent perpetrators like Dr. Mengele.

In addition to shades of impunity and complicity, I argued Puenzo’s novel is a case study in pathological obsessions and the piercing violence engendered by them. The doctor’s interactions with the family revolve around these overpowering desires (in the diegesis), which he uses to obtain what he desires. As the household members act in their own self-interests, the children’s bodies he so desperately desires for experimentation become increasingly available to him. I postulated that his desire to alter Lilith, as if she were a work of art, is based upon a twisted violence (first perfected in his concentration camp experimentation on Nora and other children), which is facilitated by Lilith’s complicity. The degree to which Lilith’s complicity with José is fully informed and purposeful is difficult to ascertain, but it is relevant that she could have alerted the family to the unusual drawings and measurements she discovers in Dr. Mengele/José’s room instead of remaining silent.

I also addressed the necessity of justice post-dictatorship, post-war, or post-state of normalized exception so that the cycle of violence does not continue ad infinitum. I argued, in returning to a system of checks and balances and promoting justice no matter how difficult it may be to ascertain what or whom to hold accountable, cultures of impunity might be countered before they further encourage other acts of violence for which no one will be held accountable.
The fictional and historical Dr. Mengele, still unpunished, benefits from Argentina’s culture of impunity for a season, just as he once took advantage of the ultimate impunity of German concentration camps. The consequences of a lack of transparency and justice are seen not only in Dr. Mengele’s/José’s continued experimentation in Bariloche, but also in his re-encounter with his former victim Nora Eldoc and his encounter with the Mapuche family in the desert, whom he considers unworthy of life.

In conclusion, although survival in Trauma Studies can be traumatic, I believe survival is also proof of resistance. In instances where ideological and racial/genetic battles are waged from a biopolitical perspective – i.e. the body as a literal battlefield, as was the case in concentration camps – survival becomes a reclaiming of the private (i.e. the body) that has been misappropriated as a political tool.

Conclusions from Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I situated the film Cautiva within the theoretical realm of Agamben’s bare life as it pertains to the deprivation of identity and redistribution of appropriated children – represented by the adolescent protagonist Cristina/Sofía in the film, – the political discourse on memoria/olvido, and hypotheses on spectatorship and witnessing. In Gastón Biraben’s film, I postulated that the recuperation of identity is connected to the rearming of memory – facilitated by the Madres, Abuelas, and positive law post-dictatorship. Due to the circulation in the film of state-sponsored methods of biopolitical control, cultures of impunity fostering reconstructed versions of the truth, and other ideological undercurrents (both pro-dictatorship, opposed to it, or professed ignorance of its violent abuses of power), I viewed Cautiva as a contemporary example of an emotionally-charged political film (emotional in the sense of empathy building). In terms of spectatorship and witnessing, I theorized that the spectator may be reframed as a
witness in post-dictatorship film, one called to empathetically connect with or bear witness to the trauma of the “Other” in films like *Cautiva*. Bearing witness in this sense is a validation of the traumatic and is enabled by what I consider a filmic link or chain of witnesses (from the eyes of the spectator/viewer/witness to the screen to the protagonists in the film itself who may also witness events).

I conducted detailed filmic analyses of scenes/sequences I considered key to the restitution of Cristina/Sofia’s memory and the restoration of sense, and these sequences in turn provided context for my argument concerning what I term a *violent witnessing*. My hypothesis was that a violent witnessing entails the arrival of a past trauma (inherently belated) in the present moment as the discovery of its existence, previously unknown, breaks into one’s consciousness through the act of witnessing. Witnessing in this instance is violent because of its arrival post-construction of an alternate identity. Hence, a violent witnessing can also be a *post-witnessing* of the destruction of one’s own subjectivity (one’s “original” identity or self – biological family, name, age) at an occasion prior to the development of knowledge and/or agency. Although potentially a violent process, I argued that if resolved (i.e. if Cristina comes to terms with/integrates her identity as Sofia), this rupture in one’s perceived identity may lead to the restitution of sense and the restoration of identity (a reintegration of all aspects of self).

I later theorized that a violent witnessing, in another sense, may also be experienced by the spectator/viewer as witness in a different, less traumatic, way. This violent witnessing as a sensorial shock is potentially facilitated by the witnessing of children’s and adolescents’ traumas, as opposed to that of adults’ traumas. In line with this argument, I postulated that children, as vulnerable subjects, add the additional element of an *empathy fortified against the numbness of overexposure*. In this scenario, a child/adolescent protagonist is necessary for a revitalization of
empathy, one resistant to the incessant barrage of violence, when revisiting past periods of violence.

In conclusion, I posited that Cristina/Sofía, as a child/adolescent witness, demonstrates multiple facets of witnessing. Her depiction as an initially impotent child/adolescent witness is necessary for the creation of a fortified empathy, then, as she is empowered by the legal system and knowledge of her past, she undergoes a violent witnessing that leads to her transformation into an active agent in her own life and memories.

**Conclusions from Chapter 4**

In Chapter 4, divided into Parts A and B, I theorized that children’s physical bodies and the memories they bear or the pain they communicate demonstrate their capacity for unexpected resilience, resistance, and justice in both a symbolic and a literal sense. The child protagonists in this section develop a fuller understanding or knowledge of the traumatic, exercise the most agency, and are the most attentive to the cry of the wound (when they respond to the imperative to assist) than protagonists in other chapters.

In Part A, I analyzed filmic representations of the traumatic, manifest through hauntings and open wounds in Guillermo del Toro’s *El espinazo del diablo*. In terms of affect and theories on decontextualized images of violence falling within the realm of “intolerability,” I situated the wounded bodies of the orphans and the abject/grotesque appearance of Santi the phantom within a narrative that restores sense and answers the call of the phantom for justice. As such, I argued the wounds/images of violence in the film should be categorized under the “intolerable” image (Rancière) in that the purpose of displaying such brutality is precisely to contextualize the traumatic event and to restore sense (a purposeful contextualization of brutality vs. a sordid display of it or decontextualized graphic violence).
The traumatic event is gradually placed within a sequence of events as Carlos moves from a position of repulsion to one of solidarity with Santi. I provided a detailed filmic analysis of scenes/sequences that reveal the physical and emotional interaction between Carlos and Santi (from an absence of sense and empathy to a plethora of sense and empathy) as Carlos transitions from contact based on sight alone to sound, then physical contact or touch. In my analysis, I uncovered an inverse relationship between distance and understanding, i.e. as Carlos’ physical distance from Santi decreases his understanding of the traumatic increases. Armed with understanding and empathy for the phantom and the realization that there is no one to fight for them, Carlos and the orphans make the decision to fight for themselves, and in the process, they obtain justice for Santi.

In Part B, I discussed archival drawings that illustrate the violence committed against the child artists’ families. I considered the drawings a symbolic and strategic “showing” of a reprehensible crime (forced disappearance/appropriation in Argentina) in addition to their connections to witnessing, ethical obligations, and justice (based on Kelly Oliver’s work). Utilizing Daniel Feierstein’s work on genocide as a technology of power (i.e. a form of social engineering), I argued the drawings could be a means of resisting the obliteration of the Other and as a reclamation of existence. In this instance, they attest (still linked to testimony and bearing witness) to the Argentine state-sponsored violence that “disappeared” people. In other words, children addressed themselves to others (the outside) through drawings, which I saw as a tool employed in the process of counter-acting annihilation (of social relations and existence itself) through a reestablishment of subjectivity (in the confirmation of address-ability and response-ability). The archival drawings, when seen as a response to a reorganizational process tied to annihilation as a tool and form of social engineering, become more than isolated incidents.
of violence, more than de-contextualized images, and instead take on new meaning as a “haunting” of the disappeared victim. They demonstrate the resilience of the “memory” of the disappeared and appropriated of the dictatorship, a memory I postulated continues to resist discourses of exclusion.

In conclusion, I connected Parts A and B by contrasting shared representational strategies of the traumatic in *El espinazo del diablo* and the archival drawings. In my opinion, fictional recreations of traumatic memory – through the mediums of film, literature, testimony, and drawings – avoid becoming gratuitous showings of violence when they are in line with strategies of witnessing, the building of empathy, the conversion/transition of the discourse of trauma into the discourse of social memory, catharsis as a “working through,” and other similar strategies. Evident in *El espinazo* and the archival drawings, drawings visually speak for the child victims in that they uncover the unseen and unresolved traumas of the past. In this way, children, through hauntings, wounds, and/or drawings, become the bearers and transmitters of traumatic memory.

**Final Thoughts on the Role of the Witness and Narrative**

Witnessing in Trauma Studies may be considered concurrently active and passive in that the witness fulfills the role of listening, of seeing, and of validating the other’s traumatic experience.\(^{194}\) The idea of a transition from solitary, traumatic memory to shared social memory through the conversion of these memories into narrative partially answers the question of why there exists the impulse to reproduce the violence and injustice of the military dictatorship (or

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\(^{194}\) Although these concepts were introduced in the Introduction, it is important to reiterate the importance of listening as it pertains to traumatic and social memory. It allows a trauma, frozen in the uncontrollable subconscious, to be integrated into the controllable narrative of conscious memory (evident in pioneering psychoanalyst Josef Breuer’s “talking cure,” a term coined by his patient Anna O.).

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any other number of terrible events like the Spanish Civil War). Not only does the reconstruction of traumatic memories aid in the search for appropriated children, like the female protagonist Cristina/Sofía in *Cautiva*, and the pursuit of justice, but it also allows for a departure from the isolating nature of the traumatic through the potential creation of an empathic connection that facilitates such a transition. Unlike in *Cautiva*, this departure from the moment of trauma is not yet possible for the child in “La noche in blanco,” but this does not mean that a vicarious witnessing by the reader cannot occur. As for Lilith in *Wakolda*, the novel implies that her memories of complicity, and likely the painful experiences of the hormone treatments, remained her shameful secret into adulthood. Is a vicarious witnessing also possible here, or is the establishment of empathy key? Perhaps neither. Perhaps the exposure of recycled trajectories of violence and the wounded child is what matters most. Therefore, this departure from the traumatic occurs in only two of the four texts and films analyzed, and it is taken the farthest in *Cautiva* and *El espínaço del diabo*. Del Toro’s film is unique in that its boy protagonists demonstrate the most corporal agency; aided by the phantom child, they return together to claim justice in the name of the victims.

Caruth’s introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* emphasizes the importance of listening in terms of its vital role in allowing the survivor to depart from the event of trauma, of listening as witnessing or bearing witness to the history of the trauma (11). Caruth postulates that the survivor must depart from the trauma and does so by leaving the “isolation imposed by the

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195 In “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” Van der Kolk and Van der Hart explain, “Janet distinguished narrative memory from the automatic integration of new information without much conscious attention to what is happening. This automatic synthesis, or habit memory (which contemporary writers like Schacter (1987) call implicit memory), is a capacity humans have in common with animals. Ordinary or narrative memory, however, is a uniquely human capacity” (160).

196 Another line of inquiry to pursue would be that of justice and complicity. Is justice only claimed when its victims are free of complicity, or is complicity irrelevant where justice is concerned?
event: that the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the
listening of another” (11). In other words, memories of extreme violence may be transferred
from the solely personal sphere (isolated) to the social sphere (reintegration into shared
narratives) through “the listening of another,” which I believe is possible in film, literature, and
drawings. I see this possible departure as follows:

INDIVIDUAL \rightarrow COLLECTIVE

ISOLATED \rightarrow SHARED

Trauma \quad Memory
Speechless \quad Testimony
Bearing Witness/
Witnessing

DOUBT OF PAIN/TRAUMA \rightarrow CERTAINTY/VALIDATION OF IT

In his article “Witnessing,” John Durham Peters analyzes the etymology and significance of the
term “witness,” and in so doing he relates the witness to 1) the agent, 2) the utterance, and 3) the
audience – all three components of a “basic communication triangle” (709). In this way,
witnessing is also tied to performance and the era of technology in which each person is now an
at home witness; it is what John Ellis, quoted by Peters, labels a “domestic act” (708).

Summary of the Theoretical Threads/Concepts in this Study

- Chapter 1: Belatedness of the Traumatic and the Multidirectionality of Violence
- Chapter 2: Circulation of Violence Facilitated by Cultures of Impunity; Biopolitical
  Strategies seen as Key
  - Ch. 1 and Ch. 2 manifest a lack of justice. Without it, cultures of impunity
    facilitate further crimes, and there is no restitution of sense, only the recycling
    of violence. The imperative of the Good Samaritan may still be answered, but
    circumstances make it difficult.
• Chapter 3: Witnessing the Reconstruction/Rearming of Memory and Identity (aided by positive law); Sense Restored to Acts Devoid of Sense

• Chapter 4: Part A, Apparition of the Traumatic Serves Justice (aided by natural law); Sense Again Restored; Part B, Drawings, a “Showing” of the Wound in Pursuit of Outside Recognition (Call for Responsibility) and Justice
  o Ch. 3 and Ch. 4 manifest justice connected to truth and restoration. The truth does not arrive alone; it is a precursor to justice and sense. A fortified empathy, testimony/witnessing, acceptance of responsibility for the other are key companions to justice.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to mention that having nearly completed this study, I read the last page of Pilar Calveiro’s *Poder y desaparición* . . . and was surprised to see that her final thoughts and suggestions were on the recycling of a power that disappears. I believe her last paragraph speaks of what I have tried, in part, to do in this study.

Sin embargo, el poder muta y reaparece, distinto y el mismo cada vez. Sus formas se subsumen, se hacen subterráneas para volver a aparecer y rebrotar. Creo que un ejercicio interesante sería intentar comprender cómo se recicla el poder desaparecido. Cuáles son sus desintegraciones y sus amnesias en esta posmodernidad. Cómo reprime y totaliza, aunque se manifieste en el individualismo más radical. Cuáles son sus esquizofrenias, y cómo se nutre de las falsas separaciones entre lo individual y lo social. Cómo conservar la memoria, encontrar los resquicios y sobrevivir a él. (Calveiro 169)

I have attempted to understand in some small way the recycling of a violence that annihilates existentially, of one that works on and through the body (the body as a battlefield), and I have approached this task through representational strategies utilizing child/adolescent protagonists in transnational contexts involving either a normalization of violent practices or states of exception.

I hope I have shed some light on an incredibly complex and herculean (I do not say sisyphian because I do not think it is to no avail) task and that this study has revealed not only pain and
senseless violence but also strategies of resistance and just restitution (truth tied to justice). To counteract cultures of impunity and the normalization of violence, we must move beyond the discourse of trauma and post-conflict resolution strategies (the mopping up post-tragedy) – although vital and necessary tasks – and actively seek manners of undermining their development as social practices. Perhaps armed with a full knowledge of the traumatic, we can mitigate for some the next phase of the insidious recycling of violence.
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