

**Children Lost, Children Found: Literature, Education, and Memory in Transitional
Argentina (1982-2000)**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History and Women's Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2018

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“But why can't everyone have the memories? I think it would seem a little easier if the memories were shared. You and I wouldn't have to bear so much by ourselves, if everybody took a part.”

-Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

“Once, in my father's bookshop, I heard a regular customer say that few things leave a deeper mark on a reader than the first book that finds its way into his heart. Those first images, the echo of words we think we have left behind, accompany us throughout our lives and sculpt a palace in our memory to which, sooner or later—no matter how many books we read, how many worlds we discover, or how much we learn or forget—we will return.”

-Carlos Ruiz Zafón, *The Shadow of the Wind*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research for this dissertation was made possible by grants and funding from the Rackham Graduate School and the History and Women's Studies Departments of the University of Michigan. This dissertation is the fruit of many years of work and would not have been possible without the support and guidance of mentors, colleagues, and friends. My deepest gratitude to Paulina Alberto, in addition to reading and editing various drafts of this dissertation, she has provided the truest example of what it means to be an educator, scholar, writer, and empathetic human being. As my advisor, she has shaped my pedagogical praxis, guided my writing, and helped me overcome personal adversity. I am forever grateful. My thanks also extend to my committee members: Mary Kelley, Sueann Caulfield, and Ruby Tapia, whose scholarship has inspired me throughout the past several years, and whose feedback and conversations have supported my intellectual growth and guided this dissertation. Thanks to my colleagues with whom I've shared the joys and woes of graduate school, whose works have inspired me and whose conversations have enriched my scholarship, especially: Diana Sierra Becerra, Austin McCoy, Kevin Goodman, and Mickenzie Fasteland. Thank you to my family—Jane Maugeri, Brielle Maugeri, and Deborah Kennelly—who have supported me through this journey. Heartfelt thanks to my friends: Kate Harman, who has been a grounding force through this project; Chynna Broxton, for your constant encouragement, compassion, and kindness; Emily Tarafo for reading chapter drafts and enduring late-night conversation about transitional

Argentina from halfway across the world. Finally, thank you to Matthew, my partner, for being by my side.

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ABSTRACT

Research for this dissertation was made possible by grants and funding from the Rackham Graduate School and the History and Women's Studies Departments of the University of Michigan. This dissertation is the fruit of many years of work and would not have been possible without the support and guidance of mentors, colleagues, and friends. My deepest gratitude to Paulina Alberto, in addition to reading and editing various drafts of this dissertation, she has provided the truest example of what it means to be an educator, scholar, writer, and empathetic human being. As my advisor, she has shaped my pedagogical praxis, guided my writing, and helped me overcome personal adversity. I am forever grateful. My thanks also extend to my committee members: Mary Kelley, Sueann Caulfield, and Ruby Tapia, whose scholarship has inspired me throughout the past several years, and whose feedback and conversations have supported my intellectual growth and guided this dissertation. Thanks to my colleagues with whom I've shared the joys and woes of graduate school, whose works have inspired me and whose conversations have enriched my scholarship, especially: Diana Sierra Becerra, Austin McCoy, Kevin Goodman, and Mickenzie Fastland. Thank you to my family—Jane Maugeri, Brielle Maugeri, and Deborah Kennelly—who have supported me through this journey. Heartfelt thanks to my friends: Kate Harman, who has been a grounding force through this project; Chynna Broxton, for your constant encouragement, compassion, and kindness; Emily Tarafo for reading chapter drafts and enduring late-night conversation about transitional

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INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, a military dictatorship governed Argentina with repression, clandestine violence, disappearances, and silence. From 1976-1983, the regime that called itself *El proceso de reorganización nacional* waged what they called a *Guerra Sucia*, or Dirty War, against subversion in the nation. This historical moment was one of the most brutal in Argentine history. The dictatorship targeted workers' unions, intellectuals, and political dissidents, resulting in the disappearance, torture, and killing of approximately 9000 to 30000 people. Due to the clandestine policies of the military regime—secret torture centers, disposal of bodies in the river or mass graves, and the destruction of records—the exact numbers or identities of those who were killed will likely never be known.

The story of the Argentine *proceso* is fraught with tragedy, uncertainty, anger, sorrow, exhaustion, and fear. Yet I chose to begin my engagement with this subject with 'once upon a time,' a narrative framework almost exclusively linked with children's stories and childhood. How does this narrative juxtaposition shape our encounter with the subject of dictatorship—is it jarring, irreverent, or overly simplistic? Does it serve to distance us from the material by placing the dictatorship in a faraway land? Or do the words trigger an affective connection that moves the dictatorship closer to our own sense of self, situating it more firmly within our imaginative and affective landscape?

This dissertation examines the powerful relationship between childhood, historical memory, and national identity. During the transition back to democracy throughout the 1980s and 1990s, adults understood children as the inheritors of a violent past and as the potential

gateway to a more promising future. Whether that future could best be reached through protecting children as innocents or allowing them to engage directly with ‘mature’ themes was contested, creating a spectrum of ways that adults presented, and children absorbed, concepts relating to nation, history, memory, and trauma. Children played a vital role in the transitional period. Adults debated questions about memory, trauma, history, and nation at the same time that they challenged and refigured definitions of childhood and the role of children within the state. These adults, whether officials at the Ministry of Education or the UNESCO, children’s authors, teachers, parents, illustrators, or activists, articulated their concerns about a newly democratized state and their anxieties about a traumatic past through engagement with children and their conceptualizations of the role of “the child” within the dictatorship and the democracy.

During the transitional period, adults, anxious about the Argentine past, present, and future frequently turned toward children as touchstones for their anxieties. How had children been involved in the dictatorship? How aware were they or should they be about what had happened? How had children been harmed? How could children be protected from this legacy of violence? Should they be? What role did these children have to play in the future? What stories should they be told about the past?

This dissertation moves children from the margins to the center of national historical political narratives about the dictatorship and transition. It examines the ways in which various groups of adults sought to shape Argentine children’s engagement with the recent past. More broadly, it analyzes the relationship between adults’ creation of a “figurative” child as both hero and victim of the state during the transition, and the ways that distinct groups of adults shaped the experiences of actual children in that historical moment. Children’s authors, legislators, and activists defined the parameters of childhood along a scale ranging from direct engagement to

enforced ignorance. As they did so, they defined what it meant to be a child, and what Argentina should and could be. Adults understood children as an integral part of a nation moving from a traumatic past into an uncertain future. This dissertation offers the first comprehensive analysis of childhood and the “child” during this moment, through the books, policies, and media that defined their lives. It brings together, in innovative ways, broader histories of political repression, trauma, and human rights in post-dictatorship Argentina with histories of the child and of childhood education. In so doing, it sheds new light on broader socio-cultural tensions about nation, history, and memory.

Historiography

This analysis builds upon two main bodies of historiography: the history of the transitional period in Argentina, and the history of childhood in Latin America. The history of the post-dictatorship period in Argentina is a recently developed section of the historiography. The *proceso* government only ended forty years ago, and Argentines continue to negotiate its legacy politically and socially. The earliest works published on the *proceso* were written in the 1980s, and historians in the early 2000s are just beginning to consider the early democratic or transitional moment of the 1980s and 1990s. Our proximity to this moment poses a particular challenge: it asks us to question a series of historical events and circumstances that are deeply embedded and readily visible in the present. However, our proximity also allows us to access documents, such as legal proceedings, oral testimony, or media coverage, and provides a unique opportunity to craft nontraditional archives in order to understand neoliberalism, democratic discourse, and, in this case, children’s education, literature, policy.

Because this period is so recent, the historiography is still in something of an embryonic stage. The democratic transition of the 1980s and 1990s is more readily covered by political

scientists than historians; however, as we approach the forty-fifth anniversary of the military coup, historians increasingly consider the transitional period as a unique historical moment worthy of inquiry. Recent works typically fall into three categories: political histories, economic histories, and socio-cultural histories. In the immediate wake of the dictatorship, historians considered the presidencies and politics of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989) and Carlos Menem (1989-1999) from a primarily political perspective, with attention to transitions between their governments.¹ The economic collapse in 2001 prompted a historiographic shift towards the examination of economic policies in the post-dictatorship period and the continuities they shared with those of the *proceso*.² Historians paid particularly close attention to neoliberal policies with a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, considering gender, family life, consumption, working class movements, and cultural production.³ Following this, historians in the second decade of the 2000s have shifted their attention towards socio-cultural histories of

¹See, for instance: Colin M. Lewis, Nissa Torrents, *Argentina in the Crisis Years, 1983-1990: From Alfonsín to Menem* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1993); Andrew McAdam, Víktor Sukup and Claudio Oscar Katiz, *Raúl Alfonsín: La democracia a pesar de todo* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1999); Artemio Luis Melo, *El gobierno de Alfonsín: La instauración democrática argentina (1983-1989)* (Rosario: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 1995); Andrés Alberto Masi, *Los tiempos de Alfonsín: la construcción de un liderazgo democrático* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2014); Jorge Luis Calcagno, *La Construcción de la democracia: Raúl Alfonsín y los militares* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2013); María del Carmen Verdú, *Represión en democracia: de la "primavera alfonsinista" al "gobierno de los derechos humanos"* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta Ediciones, 2009); Stella Maris Ageitos, *Historia de la impunidad: de las actas de Videla a los indultos de Menem* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2002); Brenda Pereyra, Pablo Vommaro and Martín Armelino, *Movimientos sociales y derechos humanos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CICCUS, 2011); Claudia Feld, Marina Franco, *Democracia, hora cero: actores, políticas y debates en los inicios de la posdictadura*, 2015.

² The economic crisis of 2001 had a huge impact on the scholarship produced in the first decade of the twenty first century. Prompted by economic uncertainty, historians interrogated the economic and political past to understand the financial and social uncertainty of the present. Scholars placed neoliberalism at the center of their works and emphasized economic and political continuities between dictatorship and the democracy.

³ Julio Godio, *Argentina, luces y sombras en el primer año de transición: las mutaciones de la economía, la sociedad y la política durante el gobierno de Eduardo Duhalde (enero-diciembre de 2002)* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2003.); Cara Levey, Daniel Ozarow and Chris Wylde, *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis: Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Paul W. Zagorski, "Civil-Military Relations and Argentine Democracy: The Armed Forces under the Menem Government," *Armed Forces and Society* 20, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 423-37; Alfredo R. Pucciarelli, *Empresarios, tecnócratas y militares: La trama corporativa de la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina, 2012).

resistance and memory.⁴ In all the most recent work, scholars discuss the transition to democracy as an ongoing process and elucidate the socio-cultural, economic, and political transformations of that time.⁵ This change in periodization has paved the way for histories that focus on memory and truth commissions, asking how different groups in Argentina remember or recover from the dictatorship in its aftermath.⁶ Most scholarly work represents the transitional period as one in which a rhetoric of change masked structural continuities from the 1970s to the 2000s.⁷

My work contributes to the existing historiography in several ways. It fits within a more recent trend of periodization that considers the 1980s or 1990s as a unique historical moment.⁸

⁴ See, for instance: Louis Bickford, "Human Rights Archives and Research on Historical Memory: Argentina, Chile and Uruguay," *Latin American Research Review* 35, no. 2 (2000):160-182; Ana Laura Pauchulo, "Re-Telling the Story of Madres and Abuelas De Plaza De Mayo in Argentina: Lessons on Constructing Democracy and Reconstructing Memory," *Canadian Woman Studies* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2008/Winter 2009): 29-35; Elizabeth Jelin, "Subjetividad y esfera pública: El género y los sentidos de familia en las memorias de la represión/Subjectivity and the Public Sphere: The Place of Gender and Family in Memories of Repression," *Política y Sociedad* 48, no. 3 (2011): 555-569; Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, "The Politics of Memory and Oblivion in Redemocratized Argentina and Uruguay," *History and Memory* 10, no. 1 (Mar 31, 1998): 133; Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca más: La memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008).

⁵ 2006 marked the fortieth anniversary of the military coup that began el *proceso*, and this moment definitely influenced scholarship and interdisciplinary dialogue. It provided an opportunity to reflect critically upon the Argentine past and present, see for instance, Hugo Quiroga and César Tcach, eds., *Argentina 1976-2006: Entre la sombra de la dictadura y el futuro de la democracia* (Ediciones HomoSapiens, Rosario Argentina, 2006).

⁶ See, for example: Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca más: La memoria de las desapariciones en la argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008); Ana Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁷ Wendy Hunter, "Continuity or Change? Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Argentina, Chile, and Peru," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 453-475; Santiago Leiras, *El cono sur y sus líderes durante los años '90: Carlos Menem y Fernando Collor de Mello en perspectiva comparada* (Ciudad de Buenos Aires: Lajouane, 2009); Ana Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁸ Silvia Rodríguez Maeso, "Testimonios, discurso experto y comisiones de la verdad: El contexto de la denuncia/Testimonies, Expert Discourse and Truth Commissions: The Context of Denunciation," *Política y Sociedad* 48, no. 3 (2011): 587-602,631; Federico Guillermo Lorenz, "Argentina's Coup: Social Myth, Memory and History," *History Today* 54, no. 1 (Jan 2004): 17-19; Jerry W. Knudson, "Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983," *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 6 (Nov 1997): 93-112; H. M. Fraser, "'Los Desaparecidos': The Madres of the Plaza De Mayo and the Reframing of the Victims," *Canadian Woman Studies* 27, no. 1 (Fall 2008/Winter 2009): 36-39; Gabriel Di Meglio and Gustavo Álvarez, *Voces de la democracia: Los discursos que hicieron historia: 1983-2013* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2013); Graciela Montes, *El golpe y los chicos* (Buenos Aires: Gramón Colihue, 1996); A. Bruno et al., *Los derechos humanos en la democracia: Anexo, declaración universal de derechos humanos, naciones unidas, 1948* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1985); Louis Bickford, "Human Rights Archives and Research on Historical Memory: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay.," *Latin American Research Review* 35, no. 2 (2000): 160-82;; Paige Arthur, "How "Transitions" Reshaped

Indeed, I foreground my work on this moment as a transitional space in which various groups worked to negotiate the tensions between the state and society, democracy and dictatorship, adults and children, victims and victimizers. The uncertainty of this transitional moment allowed challenges in the way that people spoke and thought about themselves in relation to the state.⁹

My work posits that a focus on children (as historical subjects and as objects of historical analysis) offers a particularly revealing lens into the rhetorical tension and the construction of historical memory in the transitional period. Like the new social order under construction, children were imagined as human beings “in transition” toward adulthood, at times precariously unstable but also enormously malleable, and therefore promising paths toward the future nation. Children witness history, they experience contemporary events, inhabit a world built by politicians and institutions as much as their families. Adults help to make sense of these moments. They answer how and why questions to give children a sense of their place in the world. In a moment of political turmoil and national trauma, explaining how and why something happened or how and why something changed gives life to a new story about the nation, responsibility, and morality. The ways in which adults explained the dictatorship to children shaped the experiences of these children, but it also shaped the way that adults understood children in relation to the state, and the story of the Argentine nation as a whole. Looking at the

Human Rights: A Conceptual History of Transitional Justice," *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (May 2009): 321-367,562.

⁹Historians in the early nineties were far more interested in studying the Argentine dictatorships of the late twentieth century as a way to make sense of political violence and oppression within broader historical trends. They asked ‘why’ or ‘how’ such an episode was possible, rather than ‘what now’. In the mid-to-late 1990s, historians began to explore the post-dictatorship period as a distinct historical moment. This was made possible by temporal distance (1993 marked a decade since the dictatorship ended), and the peaceful transition between Raúl Alfonsín and Carlos Menem in 1989, which marked the first democratic shift of presidential power since the early 1900s. Historians, responding to the work of political scientists, referred to the post-dictatorship period as the democratic period and, like much of Argentine society, rhetorically drew a sharp dividing line between the two moments. Several authors crafted works that evaluated Alfonsín’s presidency, and, as the decade drew to a close, historians increasingly placed Alfonsín in a comparative perspective with previous governments as well as that of Carlos Menem. See: Quiroga, 2006; Novaro 2009; Wynia 1986; Nun, Grimson, 2006.

fundamental stories they told the youngest members of society illuminates the way adults envisioned the past, present, and future, and gives insights into the way that national narratives are shaped after political violence.

Like the history of the transitional period, the history of childhood in Latin America emerged in the 1990s.¹⁰ Historians built upon the cultural turn of the 1980s, the emergence of gender history, and histories of childhood in other regions of the world.¹¹ These scholars argued that children had long been a part of the history of Latin America, but often only entered into historical discourse as background figures. Thus, political histories might discuss children as wards of the state or the church; economic histories could examine them as workers; gender histories might discuss them as part of family life; or histories of race might examine the ways in which racially mixed or ‘pure’ children prompted the creation of new racial hierarchies. Children were certainly present in historical events and historical accounts, yet they were rarely the focus. Beginning in the 1990s, however, several historians of Latin America worked to place children at the heart of their analysis by focusing on the relationships between children and the state, the church, or their families.¹² Since children are, essentially the fulcrums of the state—they are mini citizens being groomed for a specific type of cultural and social belonging—examining the

¹⁰ Philippe Ariès is credited with writing the first foundational history of childhood in 1962. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962) paved the way for historians like Bianca Premo and Nara Milanich.

¹¹ Shifting the focus of scholarship to gender related issues necessarily included the examination of social norms regarding gender presentation (taught and enforced in childhood and adolescence) as well as an analysis of family life, women’s issues including reproduction, and the exploration of marginalized historical actors including children. An excellent work that focuses on gender but includes an excellent exploration of children’s issues is Ann Twinam’s *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹² Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority, & Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Tobias Hecht, *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society* (Madison,.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Ondina E. González and Bianca Premo, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

way that adults engage with, understand, and control children has yielded important insights into society, culture, and politics.

Historians in Argentina began to focus their studies on young people as historical actors and political subjects in the early twenty-first century. The most recent and exemplary histories of childhood examine teens and young adults as political actors during the mid-to-late twentieth century.¹³ This is a common focus among historians of Argentine childhood for several reasons: teens (especially during the 1960s and 70s) were almost uniformly literate; politically active teenagers were especially prominent during this turbulent historical moment; and teens often had some degree of financial and intellectual autonomy. Young children, by contrast, are often excluded from historical accounts, and not just those of the twentieth century. They are illiterate, ‘innocent’, and dependent upon adults monetarily, emotionally, and intellectually. I argue, however, that this position of dependence actually creates a rare opportunity to see how adults from different sections of society interacted with a relatively captive audience; they understood these powerless children as having the potential to shape the future of the state and worked to harness that potential.¹⁴ For this reason, my work builds upon Argentina’s excellent scholarship on young adults, but also takes it in new directions by shifting attention to younger subjects.¹⁵

My work seeks to intervene into the history of the transitional period and the history of childhood in several ways. First, it seeks to bring these emerging fields of historical inquiry

¹³ Histories of childhood often use ‘unique’ archives that include popular media, music, magazines, fashion, graphic novels, and literature. See for example: Valeria Manzano, "'Rock Nacional' and Revolutionary Politics: The Making of a Youth Culture of Contestation in Argentina, 1966-1976," *The Americas* 70, no. 3 (Jan 2014); Isabella Cosse, Karina Felitti and Valeria Manzano eds., *Los '60 de otra manera: Vida cotidiana, género y sexualidades en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010); Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁴ This particular aspect of my work is strongly influenced by Nara Milanich’s work on Chilean children in the nineteenth century. *Children of Fate: Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹⁵

together. Examining the ways in which adults in the 1980s and 1990s explained dictatorship, democracy, national identity, and Argentine history to children can give us tremendous insight into how adults understood the transitional period as an uncertain moment and vied for stories and official narratives that would match their political vision for Argentina's future. It reveals, in other words, how adults used their influence to craft a certain type of Argentine citizen in their image. Children's literature and educational materials are often overlooked as a viable source base, just as children are often overlooked as historical actors, but in the transitional period between dictatorship and democracy, Argentine children take on particular significance as the bearers of memory and the potential for a "democratic" future. Children's books and educational policy from this period show how authors, publishers, politicians, activists, illustrators, and teachers tried to define democracy and Argentina during a moment of extreme uncertainty. This approach can give us critical insight into the creation of a democratic state, the politics of childhood, and the construction of historical narrative and national memory in the wake of trauma. Second, and more broadly, while most recent scholarship discusses the transitional period as one of constant negotiation between continuity and change, few scholars have analyzed why there was such a sharp rhetorical divide between dictatorship and democracy. My work contributes to this by looking at the ways that authors, activists, and politicians in the transition discursively positioned dictatorship and democracy for themselves and for children, creating a sharp definition to help children make sense of the past and the present.

Education in Argentina

Before discussing children during the transition, it is important to understand one of the most crucial ways in which the state engaged with and controlled children during earlier moments in Argentine history: through education. Since the 19th century, the strongest link

between children and the state has been the Argentine Ministry of Education, established in 1884 under President Julio Roca. It was originally a branch of the Ministry of Justice and it was conceptualized as a form of social control—the Ministry of Justice also oversaw jails, reformatories, and asylums. Since then, the Ministry of Education, a branch of the Ministry of Culture, has been an active part of the Argentine government and the lives of Argentine children. The Ministry of Education’s ability to effectively legislate varied from one government to the next. Nineteenth-century liberals advocated secular education with state-selected curricula, while more conservative or traditional governments favored a reestablishment of catechism in schools.¹⁶ Privatization of education was another point of contention, the success of which had much more to do with the relative strength or weakness of the national economy than with the governing ideological principles of the day. The official educational policy of the nation shifted in response to each new regime, but the Ministry of Education continued to be an active government department throughout the twentieth century. Following the liberal model, education is centralized in Argentina: The National Ministry of Education sets the curriculum and general guidelines for public schools across the country, Argentina’s high literacy rate and free public education have been a point of pride for the nation, across a wide array of political affiliations, and citizens often cite education as a way in which Argentina stands apart from the rest of Latin America.¹⁷

¹⁶ María Inés de Torres, *La guerra de las palabras: Escritura y política en el Río de la Plata* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2008): 23-35. See also: Fernando Degiovani, *Los textos de la patria: Nacionalismo políticos culturales y canon en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Vitela Editora, 2007); Honorio Alberto Díaz, *Pensamiento liberal argentino: sociedad, estado y nación en Sarmiento, Alberdi y Mitre* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, 2009); Alejandro Herrero, *El Loco Sarmiento: Una aproximación a la historia de la educación común y el normalísimo en la argentina*. (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Universitario, 2011); Miguel Ángel de Marco, *Sarmiento: Maestro de América, constructor de la nación* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2016).

¹⁷ Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

The Ministry of Education continued its operations throughout the dictatorships of the 60s and 70s. Rather than shut it down or muzzle its officials, the different juntas of the dictatorship used the Ministry of Education to enforce nationalist educational policies and curricula, strict control of materials distributed, didacticism in the classroom, and traditional definitions of gender, family, and moral values.¹⁸ The Ministry of Education, in keeping with the dictatorship more broadly, reinforced a strong national educational policy; there was far less opportunity than in earlier moments for divergence or independence. Provincial ministries and individual schools had little room to develop or maintain programs separate from the state.¹⁹ Official policy on curriculum and pedagogy emphasized didacticism over independent thinking, memorization over interrogation.²⁰

These were the conditions of the education system in Argentina when the dictatorship officially ended in March of 1983. As with many other government administrations, the Ministry of Education experienced fluctuations in the immediate wake of dictatorship. Democracy was not a foregone conclusion with the election of Raúl Alfonsín. It is important to bear in mind the uncertainty, and even frailty, of democracy in the early 1980s. The transition to democracy needed to progress slowly; extreme social reform would likely cause another military coup (a very real threat during this moment), economic collapse, or worse. The negotiations between dictatorship and democracy, responsibility and reparation, denial and acceptance

¹⁸ *Formación cívica finalidad, Nueva Serie Divulgación, (9 set 1976); Resolución no. 712, Expte. No. 03151/76, (8 mayo 1980); Guías programáticas para 2º año del ciclo básico: Ciencias biológicas formación moral y cívica historia, 19, Nueva serie divulgación, (1980); Dirección nacional de educación primaria, Decreto 2449/1980, Boletín oficial, (19 nov 1980).*

¹⁹ *Dirección nacional de educación primaria, Decreto 2449/1980, Boletín Oficial, (19 nov 1980).*

²⁰ Compare, for instance, the change in official policy on pedagogy between 1976 and 1986: *Política educativa en democracia: El perfeccionamiento y la actualización profesional del docente: Prioridad de la política educativa en democracia, 03172, Dirección general de planificación educativa, (dic 1987); 'Política educativa en democracia' el perfeccionamiento y la actualización profesional del docente: Prioridad de la política educativa en democracia, (Diciembre 1987); Ministro de cultura y educación Prof. Ricardo Redro Bruera, Formación cívica finalidad, trans. Ministerio de cultura y educación, 1976).*

became part of the social and political landscape.²¹ Whether or not these discussions would become part of children's lives in an official capacity, how these subjects would be broached, understood, and what the "official story" of the period would be was largely (though not entirely) determined by the Argentine Ministry of Education. These questions went hand in hand with questions of pedagogy, curriculum, literature, history, psychology, and child development. How would children remember the 'Dirty War'? How would or *should* they be taught to remember this moment? What role would children play, specifically, in determining the future of a democratic Argentina?

Exploring Childhood in the Transition

During the transitional period, adults turned towards the transitional figure of the Argentine child to envision, shape, and create a new state. In this blurry middle ground, policy makers, educators, authors, and activists articulated conversations about memory and trauma.²²

Examining children's literature, education policy, and ongoing conversations between authors, teachers, and activists illuminates the distinct role that children played during the transitional period. Adults debated what children should be within the state, what information they should have, how much agency and which rights they had, who they could be, how they had been

²¹ See for example: Emilio Crenzel ed., *Los desaparecidos en la Argentina: memorias, representaciones e ideas, 1983-2008* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2010); Eugenia Allier and Emilio Crenzel eds., *The Struggles for Memory in Latin America: Recent History and Political Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Thomas C. Wright, *Impunity, Human Rights and Democracy: Chile and Argentina, 1990-2005* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Emilio J. Cárdenas, *El terrorismo como crimen de lesa humanidad: reflexiones sobre la impunidad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, Edivern, 2009); Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stella Maris Ageitos, *Historia de la impunidad: de las actas de Videla a los indultos de Menem* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2002).

²² Trauma Studies scholars, including Cathy Caruth, Kali Tal, and Susannah Radstone all argue for the ways in which transitional spaces serve as sites in which memory is constituted in the wake of traumatic political violence. See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Susannah Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics," *Paragraph* 30, no. 1 (2007): 9; Susannah Radstone, *Memory and Methodology* (New York: Berg, 2000).

harmful by the dictatorship, and how they could shape a democratic future. In their conversations about children, they helped define not only the idea of childhood, but a figurative child—a unique vision of what a child could or should be within the matrix of state and society. In building policies for that figurative child, writing books for that child, fighting for the rights of that child, they shaped the experiences of millions of real children and rewrote a national story to fit their needs. This coalition of adults presented various versions of Argentina’s past, created or reinforced new and existing historical narratives, and, in the process, crafted new definitions of national identity. They also stimulated conversations about recent political violence, Argentina’s future, and democratic praxis.

This dissertation will examine the continuities and changes in the conceptualization of the Argentine child and experiences of childhood during the transitional period. It is organized into six thematic chapters, each of which focuses on the ways in which a particular group of adults attempted to define the parameters of childhood and shape children’s relationship with the past, the future, human rights, and society.

Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of the Argentine Ministry of Education during the transitional period, considering the policies of Presidents Alfonsín (1982-1989) and Menem (1989-1999) as distinct phases. Alfonsín marked an ideological change from the dictatorship, but a continuity of infrastructure and materials. He advocated democratic praxis in classrooms as a way to generate democratic life in the country. He created a National Pedagogical Congress, asked citizens to inform educational policy, and called upon teachers to make fundamental changes in classrooms when official, legal changes were impossible. Menem changed the infrastructure of education with the Ley Federal de Educación in 1994. This law built upon Alfonsín’s work to generate conversation and envision reform. Menem had the benefit of a more

stable government in which he was actually able to make substantive changes. The Ley Federal defined the legal relationship between the Argentine child and the state and allowed children more freedom to determine their educational path. However, Menem's legal reform was stymied by his neoliberal economic policies, which made it difficult for individual schools, students, and teachers to implement these changes in substantive ways. Both administrations understood that the Argentine child was important, even necessary, to create a lasting democracy. Official Ministry of Education policy treated the child as a passive figure that needed to be protected, at the same time that it charged these children with the responsibility of changing society.

Chapter 2 considers how Ministry of Education policies translated (or not) into the works used by children in classrooms. It examines civic education guidelines and *manuales*, or the children's workbooks used in early childhood education. Chapter 2 begins with analysis of workbooks used during the dictatorship, since many of these works were used through the Alfonsín administration. The dictatorship used early childhood education to indoctrinate children into an authoritarian ideology, and the authors of the *manuales* alternatively conformed to censorship restrictions or worked to subvert them. Civic education policies also shed light onto the way that state officials understood children as proponents of state ideology. The dictatorship and the democratic governments of the transition understood children as fundamental to the success of their governments, and they used very similar language to discuss the role of children in Argentina, yet they desired completely different outcomes for these children. Chapter 2 examines how both the dictatorship and the democracy saw children as victims in need of state protection, and as advocates for the state itself. Chapter 2 explores the ways in which civic policy goals were translated textually for children as a way to incorporate them into dichotomous national projects. Children's workbooks were sites of indoctrination and

potential subversion during the dictatorship. During the transition little changed to official classroom contents, but pedagogy reforms transformed classrooms from authoritarian spaces to interactive ones. New pedagogy sought to give children agency and encourage democratic praxis.

Chapter 3 looks at activist groups—Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, and Hijos por la Identidad y Justicia y contra el Olvido y Silencio (HIJOS)—whose work was crucial to defining the Argentine child in the public eye during the transition. The first two groups, Las Madres and Las Abuelas, were critical in defining the figurative child during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy.²³ The chapter examines how and why, in their political rhetoric, these mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared strategically framed their grown children as *niños*, as innocent victims. They purposefully made the Argentine child synonymous with victimization, innocence, and vulnerability during the late-dictatorship and transitional period. Las Madres and Abuelas created programs that reached out to children, especially children who may have been disappeared. They also worked to incorporate children's voices and accounts into the media they distributed. They positioned disappeared children as timeless, even as their siblings and families grew up. The third activist group, HIJOS, was composed of the adult children of disappeared parents, whose role as activists was foregrounded on their identity as children. There was a generational difference in the interpretation of

²³ There is a great deal of scholarship that reflects on the role of Las Madres. The Las Madres foundation has written their own accounts of their work and experiences, and sociologists, historians, and political scientists have written about the role of Las Madres activism within Latin American. For some notable works, see: Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (University of California Press, 1999); Lynn Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below* (University of Texas Press, 2010); Ulises Gorini, *La rebelión de las madres: historia de Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Norma, 2006); Madres de Plazo de Mayo, *Las viejas: Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora cuentan una historia* (Buenos Aires: MAREA, 2014); Claude Mary, *Laura Bonaparte: Una Madre de Plaza de Mayo contra el olvido* (Buenos Aires: MAREA, 2010); Susana Dillión, *Brujas, locas y rebeldes: De anacaona a las madres de plaza de mayo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Letra Buena, 1994).

disappeared “children”: whereas the Madres and Abuelas represented their children as young, innocent, and victimized, HIJOS asserted their own agency as children of disappeared parents to take up the political struggles of their parents, whom they envisioned as agents. Las Abuelas and Las Madres created a passive vision of the Argentine child, at the same time that they saw children as the bearers of memory for the nation. HIJOS understood themselves as fundamentally political because they were children of the disappeared. The tension between passive and active child and its role within the nation is one that threads throughout this dissertation.

Chapter 4 focuses on the establishment of the “active” or “agential” child through the works of Graciela Montes. Graciela Montes, a translator and children’s author, wrote prolifically during the transitional period, and her works represent a unique approach to both childhood and history. Unlike Ministry of Education texts, which never touched upon the dictatorship, or other children’s texts published simultaneously, which tended to focus on light and fun themes, Montes directly broached political subjects for children. She particularly confronted the legacy of dictatorship and the presence of trauma and uncertainty in Argentina during the transition. Montes wrote about these subjects for young audiences at three different points during the democratic transition: first during the early transition (1986), in a series that explained political concepts to young children, second during the mid-transition (1992), as part of a series that explained Argentine history to that same group, and third during the late-transition (1996), in a standalone book published that directly explained the dictatorship to children who had been born after it ended. She gave children agency in her books and called upon them to directly confront the past, bear witness to the trauma of their nation, and move forward into the present and future, working to prevent similar atrocities. Montes understood her work for children as part of a

process of narrative reconstruction. In writing about the past, present, and future, Montes crafted a national story for Argentina in which the dictatorship was an aberration from a democratic past—a story that did not reflect reality but did serve a political purpose in investing her young audience in a progressive, democratic future that they would see as part of a broader sense of national belonging.

Chapter 5 considers the ways in which human rights organizations intervened into and evaluated progress in Argentina during the transition. It analyzes UNESCO reports on Argentine education and human rights standards during the dictatorship and the transition. It also examines the evaluations of domestic human rights organizations, particularly the Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (APDH). The APDH was founded in 1975 to advocate for human rights protections during the dictatorship. During the transition, the APDH became an outspoken force for the protection of human rights in Argentina. It was invested in not only protecting the rights of children, but also in making sure that children grew up informed of their rights and ready to fight to protect them. Finally, this chapter returns to the Ministry of Education, this time, examining the way that the Ministry of Education worked to teach children about human rights in the transition to democracy. Each of these groups worked to understand and change human rights policy in Argentina, and each group focused on children as a way to shape a more just state. The three perspectives—one external, one internal-activist, and one internal institutional—illuminate the ways different communities integrated human rights discourse with child education, and different understandings of the Argentine child as a subject and advocate of human rights.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines the rise of magazines in which professionals and authors of children's literature and pedagogues debated issues related to childhood and children's books. As

censorship laws lifted, there was a proliferation of children's media, particularly children's literature in Argentina. This, coupled with the growing discourse about children and their role as activist, victim, student, citizen, persecutor, gave rise to several publications in which adults openly discussed and debated what it meant to be a child and what it meant to write for them. This chapter examines two publications—*Piedra Libre*, which ran from the mid-1980s until the late 1990s, and *La Mancha*, which ran from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s—as key components of an ongoing conversation about childhood, children, literature, and the state in the transition. These publications exist on a continuum of transitional politics and transitional society. Examining them together illuminates the ways in which the figure of the child became a stable category over the course of the transition, one with which authors were able to directly engage in their works. These magazines also demonstrate adults' preoccupation with children, particularly children's role as agents of social change, and how this coalition of teachers, writers, illustrators, and activists envisioned the child as a transitional figure capable of affecting (with proper guidance) the turn towards a progressive democratic country. Finally, these magazines offer the perspectives of a group of adults who actively reflected upon the role of their work within society, particularly during the transition.

* * *

My dissertation thus examines the ways in which adults engaged with children during the transitional period in order to make sense of the Argentine past and present. In doing so, they shaped the idea of the Argentine child and the experiences of actual children. The recent past fueled how these adults envisioned children; it shaped their policies, their concerns, and their actions. As they worked to come to terms with the past and build a democratic future, these adults continually turned to children as the pillars and potential turning points of society. The

vast production of materials for and about children, despite several moments of crisis, provides unique insight into the important role that children played in the transitional period, as bearers of memory, future citizens, and political actors. Adults worked to control the national future through the stories that they placed in children's hands, through the stories they told about children, and through the ways that they tried to shape their lives. Their vision of the child evolved through the transition, moving from a passive figure in need of protecting, to an active and passive figure who had tremendous power, but needed guidance and protection to realize it. This dissertation offers a new lens through which to understand transition, trauma, and memory in the shift from dictatorship towards democracy. It also brings to the fore the figure of the young child as a crucial political actor at a moment in which in which their voices and experiences are very rarely heard. By examining as political a space typically considered 'apolitical,' we can gain new insights into the struggles over politics, history, gender, economics, family, and identity that went into shaping a democratic Argentina.

CHAPTER I

Protagonists in the Classroom: Defining the Democratic Child in Transitional Education Reforms

This chapter examines Argentine educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s as a way to understand the official discourse surrounding education and “the child” in Argentina. It looks specifically at the policies, curriculum, and intergenerational politics that defined this figure and its relation to democracy and memory. This chapter is also about the relationship between political institutions and transitions in Argentina and the lasting belief, through a century of political changes, in the power of a centralized education system. The chapter opens with a brief history of the Argentine educational system to establish a context for the transitional period. Education reforms in transitional Argentina can be divided into two phases with the Federal Education Law of 1993 marking the division between them.²⁴ The first period, from 1983 to 1993, featured very few changes to official educational policy. This cautionary approach was in keeping with contemporaneous political concerns about the fragility of the newly elected democratic government. This changed in the early 1990s as, under the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem, educational policy makers shifted their attention towards neoliberal reforms to modernize curriculum and redistribute financial burdens for educational policy.²⁵ A combination of economic restructuring, international pedagogical trends, and concerns that the educational

²⁴ “Ley Federal de Educación,” Pub. L. No. Ley 24.195 (1993).

²⁵ See Barbara Sutton, “Collective Memory and the Language of Human Rights: Attitudes toward Torture in Contemporary Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 202, vol. 42, no. 3 (May 2015): 73-91; Michelle D Bonner, “Defining Rights in Democratization: The Argentine Government and Human Rights Organizations,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2005): 55-76.

system had played a role in creating the silent majority that made the dictatorship possible motivated policy makers and society to pass the 1993 Federal Education Law and the policy revisions that followed.

This chapter argues that the Federal Education Law can be understood as a pivot of education policy, but, perhaps more importantly, as a moment in which the state defined the parameters of what it meant to be a child in democratic Argentina. In the Ley Federal, lawmakers defined the role of children, parents, educators, and the state in a project to establish and solidify a particular brand of Argentine democracy through education. Reformers, educators, and lawmakers discussed and responded to the law in a variety of ways, but, whether critical or supportive, they consistently adopted the “child” figure that the law created. The Federal Education Law established the official, state discourse about children and education in post-dictatorship Argentina. Authors, activists, and educators challenged, supported, and shaped this narrative throughout the 1990s.

An Overview of the Argentine Educational System, 1850-1976:

The educational reforms of the transitional period cannot be understood without first understanding the long history of education and educational reforms in Argentina, as well as the importance of education in Argentine national identity. Education in Argentina began during the colonial period. Jesuit missionaries in the Rio de la Plata took it upon themselves to educate Guaraní natives as part of a civilizing and moralizing mission. They also offered religious education to children. They established colleges and religious missions in Córdoba and Buenos Aires before the Spanish monarchy expelled the Jesuits from its colonies in the late eighteenth century. Even during the Jesuit tenure, there was conflict about education in the territory that

would become Argentina. Elites argued whether individual families, the church, or the state should provide education to children and what curriculum that education should entail.²⁶ By the time of the May Revolution, which began Argentina's fight for independence in 1810, children might go to a religious school where they would receive education from Catholic priests, attend one of the very few established state schools built and run on municipal funds, receive private instruction from tutors in the family home, or, most commonly, because of lack of availability, lack of finances, or lack of interest, receive no formal instruction.²⁷ The May Revolution and War for Independence (1810-1816), like many other nineteenth century conflicts, disrupted education throughout Argentina; some provinces fared better than others, but in general, the lack of resources made it difficult to establish or maintain schools and nearly impossible for children to attend. Liberal Bernardino Rivadavia, the first democratically elected president of Argentina, made some attempts at educational reform in the 1820s, most notably providing education for girls in Buenos Aires.

Caudillo (strongman) Juan Manuel de Rosas took control of Argentina in the 1830s, creating a conservative, Catholic, and repressive state. He tried to centralize power in himself as leader, destroy his political enemies, and eliminate any dissent. In order to establish his social order, Rosas maintained that education was the province of families. The only education that was available was conservative and Catholic. Many books were banned, and intellectuals were forced to flee the country.²⁸ Liberals (often in exile) wrote extensively on the ways in which Rosas' educational policies, censorship, and authoritarian didacticism was "barbaric," a term

²⁶ Jorge Troisi Melean, "Family Strategies against the Jesuits in Colonial Argentina: Catamarca, 1683-1767)," *Anuario del Insituto de Historia Argentina* 12 (2012): 123-145.

²⁷ Anne Proffitt Dupre, "Transforming Education: The Lesson from Argentina," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 34, no. 1 (January 2001): 11-12.

²⁸ Roberto Di Stefano, "El laberinto religioso de Juan Manuel de Rosas." *Anuario de Estudios* 63.1 (2006): 19-50; David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (University of California Press, 1995).

they applied. The artists and intellectuals Rosas targeted were appalled by his stance on education and on knowledge more broadly. The war between liberals and conservatives left deep scars in Argentina. It became, in many ways, part of the fabric of national politics in which conservative factions and more progressive ones vie for power.

Not surprisingly, educational reform became a hallmark of successive liberal governments from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The liberals who crafted the Constitution of 1853 gave individual provinces jurisdiction over the education of the children who lived there, but the provinces, ravaged by civil wars and by the rise of Buenos Aires' political and economic dominance, lacked the resources to provide this instruction. This meant that very few children received formal education until Buenos Aires joined the confederation of Argentine provinces unifying the country in 1861, and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento began a project to establish a federal education system. Though it has gone by many different institutional names and through many different iterations, the department of the Argentine federal government that would eventually become the Ministry of Education was established in 1864 as the Ministry of Religion, Justice, and Public Instruction.²⁹ Its early name indicates the task that it was envisioned to perform, not only as a means of giving information to the masses and teaching people to read, but as way to promote morality and control society.³⁰

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento is often lauded for his educational policies in Argentina. Sarmiento was a liberal thinker, writer, and politician. He was an outspoken critic of Rosas' regime and his most famous work, *Civilization and Barbarism*, is, in many ways, an argument for the importance of education. Sarmiento founded the Ministry of Education and was president

²⁹ Dupre, 11-12.

³⁰ Mark D. Szuchman, *Order, Family, and Community in Buenos Aires, 1810-1860* (Stanford University Press, 1988).

of Argentina from 1868-1874. Between 1862 and 1885, Sarmiento and his collaborator and presidential successor, Nicolás Avellaneda, passed a series of laws that made the building and funding of schools the responsibility of the federal government, made education free and obligatory, created institutes to educate teachers, and made it illegal to proselytize to children during school hours. Sarmiento was also instrumental in recruiting teachers from the United States to teach in Argentina, and recruiting teachers, especially women, from the Argentine population. Sarmiento created a Pedagogical Congress in 1884 to establish the rules, regulations, and roles of the Argentine Ministry of Education, which has shaped the lives of Argentine children for generations.³¹

Not all of these changes were met with open arms. Parents and communities in the provinces particularly chafed against the federal government's attempts to control curriculum, the inclusion of foreign women as teachers, and the removal of religion from schools. However, despite initial resistance, the reforms were largely successful. The literacy rate in Argentina almost doubled between the 1870s and the turn of the century, and by the mid-twentieth century, the country had one of the highest literacy rates in the world. The Ministry of Education that Sarmiento created in the nineteenth century survived changing regimes and political transitions throughout the early twentieth century.³² Instead of disbanding the ministry, different governments used its mechanisms of "distribution" to promote their ideologies, that is: they used classrooms to disseminate their ideologies and their vision of national identity to children. This

³¹ The Ministry has also experienced conflict. Proponents of secular education have clashed frequently with those that have advocated for religious education, the Catholic Church in particular. Each side has experienced success and setbacks throughout the history of state education.

³² Debates about immigration and the role of education in indoctrinating newcomers to the state and debates about socialist inclusion or exclusion in classrooms during the early 20th c. hasn't been well researched but is fascinating to consider.

was particularly clear in the military coup of 1943, which set a precedent for how the ministry would be used during subsequent moments of political upheaval.

The coup of 1943 ushered in an era of political conservatism and military authoritarianism, which would eventually create the space for popular movements and the rise of Peronism. The government did not disband the Ministry of Education. Instead, it suspended all teachers and school administrators until they could be evaluated, and the government could be assured of their loyalties.³³ When Juan Perón became president of Argentina, he used education as a way to bind the nation more intimately together under his populist mantle. Eva Perón, in particular, promoted the idea of education as a way to bring children into the national family. Many scholars have discussed the ways in which affective connections, as well as material ones, constructed and maintained the relationship between the Peróns and the people.³⁴ Educational policies instilled an affective connection with Papa Perón and Mama Evita in children. They constructed new schools, making education more readily available, and students had more motivation to attend, since education had become one of the ways that they could attain the “dignity” of life that Peronism promised them. Peronism gave children better access to education, but it also indoctrinated them into a very stringent political ideology. Peronist education reforms worked to align children with Peronist politics and forge deep and lasting emotional connections between children and Juan and Evita Perón.³⁵

³³ *Ibid*, 21.

³⁴ Isabel Cosse, *Estigmas de nacimiento: Peronismo y orden familiar, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de San Andrés, 2006). H. R. Cucuzza, H. R. and C. Acevedo, *Estudios de historia de la educación durante el primer peronismo, 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Los Libros Riel, 1997); Clive Foss, “Selling a Dictatorship: Propaganda and the Peróns,” *History Today*, 50 no. 3 (2000): 8–14. Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón’s Argentina* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003); Nicholas Fraser and Marysa Navarro, *Evita: The Real Lives of Eva Perón*, ((New York: W.W. Norton, 1981).

³⁵ Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve Historia contemporánea de la Argentina 196-2010* (Buenos Aires Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2010). Kindle Edition, location 3312-3356; Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

After a conservative military and civilian coalition ousted Perón, subsequent governments used the Ministry of Education to erase every trace of Peronist thought possible. In the 60s and into the 1970s, educational policy moved towards didactic instruction of authoritarian concepts. Although Peronist educational practice was authoritarian and didactic, it encouraged students to participate and envision themselves as active participants of society in a way that subsequent authoritarian regimes did not. The Ministry of Education, during the dictatorships of the 1960s and eventually the *proceso*, echoed a variety of its previous characteristics: it had elements of Sarmiento's desire to control and "civilize" unruly members of society, Perón's desire for state loyalty, the military regime of the 40s targeting of unwanted social elements, Rosas's desire for conservative principles and complete control. The Ministry of Education, under the military junta, attempted to create allegiance, docility, and a return to "traditional" values.

One of the most rampant threats to "traditional" values was the teenager. By the mid-twentieth century, there was a clearly defined category of "teenager" and an increasing number of these teens enrolled in secondary education. Politicians had a very real understanding and alarm about what these "children" could do to society. Their fears were generated externally by things like the sexual revolution and the growing activism of young people globally, and internally with the mobilization of young people fighting for social change.³⁶ The Ministry of Education's purpose turned towards stopping such activities in the present and preventing any further insurrection in younger children through more rigid pedagogic practices and enforcement of obedience.³⁷

³⁶ Andrea Andujar, *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009).

³⁷ Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, And Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

The Argentine military juntas did not disband or dramatically restructure the Argentine Ministry of Education during the dictatorship. They used the existing infrastructure to propagate their ideologies and repress critical thinking. It was precisely the idea of a blindly obedient, subservient, and uninquisitive child enforced by the dictatorship that so troubled democratic lawmakers in the 1980s. They expressed fear that the educational policies of mid-century had created the generation of Argentines willing to actively participate in the slaughter of their peers or willing to overlook similar violations. Raúl Alfonsín, the first democratically elected president of the transition, and his administration, many of them academics or from academic backgrounds, looked to the Ministry of Education as a place to lay responsibility for the wrongs that had transpired during the dictatorship and a way to correct course moving forward as a nation.³⁸ They used existing infrastructures to distribute and promote their ideologies. They redeployed the Ministry of Education to construct a democratic citizen. In the process, they created a unique view of Argentine national identity and history to make sense of the present.

National dialogue about justice and memory defined transitional Argentine politics. These issues pervaded society and necessarily affected the socio-political and cultural matrix in which educational reforms were shaped.³⁹ The Ley Federal defined the rights and responsibilities of every part of the educational community in Argentina, outlined curriculum guidelines for all levels of primary and secondary schooling, but notably did not mandate that children be taught about the recent past. The law made democratic and civic praxis the focal point of classroom activities and learning goals, but the historical contents of their education were deliberately vague. Educating these “protagonistas de la nación” did not require (legally)

³⁸ Romero, location 5082-5088.

³⁹ Michael Bernhard and Ekrem Karakoc, “Civil Society and the Legacies of Dictatorship,” *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (July 2007): 539-567; Silvia R. Tandeciarz, “Citizens of Memory: Refiguring the Past in Postdictatorship Argentina,” *PMLA* 122, no.1 (Jan., 2007): 151-169.

that they be taught about dictatorship in the classroom. Yet actual Argentine children did not grow and learn in a vacuum: they lived within a political matrix. *El proceso* impacted their lives in a variety of ways, and they existed across a range of developmental stages and scholastic levels. Educational reforms addressed the ways in which learning experiences should match developmental stages as a cumulative practice, but they considered children themselves too innocent to be exposed to the reality of the dictatorship in the classroom despite the fact that they were exposed to its lived reality and legacy outside of it. The law rhetorically defined children as the main characters in this new narrative of Argentine nationalism. Protagonist is one of the many roles given to children in transitional Argentine society. Adults positioned children as the inheritors of a fully formed nation (when it was very much still in flux) and established them as actors to be observed and guided on the national stage. The law impacted the lives of real Argentine children, but, in creating education policies, lawmakers generated and defined a figurative “Argentine child,” one who needed to simultaneously be exposed to democratic praxis and protected from historical reality.⁴⁰

Education under Alfonsín

⁴⁰ This was not the first time that the state had attempted to define or control the Argentine child. Indeed, one of the reasons that ministry of education was created was to control the movements of young people in urban centers (particularly Buenos Aires). Who is considered a child and what it means to be a child in Argentina changes from year to year, from regime to regime, along parameters defined by social norms and cultural changes. In Argentina, the earliest distinction between children was on the basis of socio-economic class and race: it was often only the children of wealthy families of criollo or Spanish or English origin that received an education. Children in the provinces and in Buenos Aires are often treated very differently by the state and thought of differently. Later, with the growth of the middle-classes, it was immigrant children who were distinguished from native born sons and daughters. In the late-twentieth century, during the dictatorship, as with many other elements of society, children were defined as obedient or subversive depending on a sometimes-arbitrary set of behavioral characteristics. Today, in Argentina, there are distinctions between children who attend private or public schools, between urban and rural children, native and immigrant children, and poor and wealthy children. Though there are distinctions in the way that that state interacts with these children, they are equivalent in legal terms.

Raúl Alfonsín made education central within his political platform in the early 1980s. This phase of educational reform featured large scale collaborative efforts in conjunction with small, subtle reforms; it blended idealism with gradual changes. These reforms were the result of a still fragile democratic system and a period in which government reform had to be approached with caution to maintain some semblance of stability. Education was, for Alfonsín, an Argentine politician, lawyer, and human rights activist, a necessary and important part of establishing democracy in Argentina, beginning *una nueva etapa* of civil life and national progress.⁴¹ “Con la democracia se come, se educa, se cura,” Alfonsín famously said in his 1983 presidential campaign, “with democracy we will eat, we will be educated, and we will be cured.” According to both Alfonsín’s political rhetoric and presidential policies, democracy would bring education to Argentina, but education was also necessary for bringing and maintaining democracy. Alfonsín faced challenges in realizing this feedback loop of intellectual opportunity and political idealism. As with most of his policies regarding justice, economics, and government reform, lingering military power, resistance from conservative factions within the government and civil society, and a period of uncertainty regarding change, stymied and complicated Alfonsín’s attempts to reform Argentine education.

Between 1983 and 1989, Alfonsín initiated several important educational programs. These included a Pedagogical Congress in 1982, a national literacy program, the restitution of university programs, and the reincorporation of students and professors who had been denied positions, removed from their facilities, or forced to flee the nation during the military dictatorship. Alfonsín advocated ideals that would, in theory at least, radically change the landscape of Argentine education. Though he had perhaps the most traction in university

⁴¹ Dominique Fournier, “The Alfonsín Administration and the Promotion of Democratic Values in the Southern Cone and the Andes,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31, no. 1 (Feb., 1999): 39-74.

reforms and his national literacy program, his administration was also responsible for critically examining and working towards new standards for primary school education nationwide.

Alfonsín called for a National Pedagogical Congress to “publicly debate the state of education.”⁴² The government reached out to students, parents, teachers, and people from all levels of the national community, asking them to participate in a series of *encuentros* that would culminate in a national assembly meeting. Alfonsín encouraged Argentines to draw upon their skills and experiences in order to give productive feedback and advice to the national government. In the short-term, this project was designed to aid Argentine children by correcting the damage that the dictatorship had wrought on the educational system, namely, that it had created in classrooms miniature authoritarian regimes. Classrooms were not a place for interaction, debate, or critical thinking, but rote memorization, blind-deference, and obedience. The Alfonsín government wanted to return to a classroom that would promote elements of democratic thought and practice. Long terms goals included educational reform to modernize pedagogical strategies and programs, revise curriculum, and democratize the nation by incorporating democratic practice into the educational community and the classroom.

The National Pedagogical Congress depended upon the willing participation of the entire nation: individuals from diverse age groups, professions, genders, and political affiliations. The process was designed to be a democratic and collaborative endeavor. Alfonsín hoped for a specific outcome: a democratic process for education reform. Alfonsín said in the Congress’ opening address:

⁴²“debatir públicamente sobre la situación de la educación. Se compone de una serie de encuentros en reuniones de grupos, asambleas de base y asambleas provinciales, que culminarán en una Asamblea Nacional. Esta va a reunir todas las conclusiones las debatirá y las expondrá como asesoramiento que facilite la función del gobierno en sus esferas legislativa y ejecutiva,” “Discurso pronunciado por el Presidente de la Nación, Dr. Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín, en el acto de apertura de la Asamblea Nacional, 1984,” FMM Educación. Accessed September 2015 <http://www.fmmeducacion.com.ar/Sisteduc/Segundocongreso/discurso1.htm>

With the reflection and proposals that we will make...we will be able to propose a more accurate vision of the state of education, which, undoubtedly will help the government in both the legislative and executive branches so that education will serve our aspirations and the needs of the nation. The very act of participating, reflecting and making proposals will facilitate the reconsideration of the problems of education and the search for solutions. In the local sphere, the same group that detects and analyzes the problems can implement immediate and feasible solutions.⁴³

He believed that some of the difficulty in Argentina was that people did not know how to exist or participate in a democracy and had never done so in some cases. Creating a space that required them to participate and creating an open social dialogue would go a long way towards solving the problem.⁴⁴ Alfonsín's plan was ambitious, and, as it turned out, overly optimistic.

The Pedagogical Congress was a survey of national perspectives on education. It allowed Alfonsín to test national opinion on educational reform before he attempted to propose or implement substantial change; it also allowed people to practice democracy and exercise their civil rights⁴⁵ As with other reform efforts, conservative factions stymied Alfonsín's attempts to make any significant change to educational policy, essentially disregarding his vision.⁴⁶ The Catholic Church in particular resisted the push to revise pedagogical standards and curriculum guidelines. Catholic leaders who participated in the congress eschewed Alfonsín's call for a secular and interactive classroom and instead stressed the power of the family as the primary

⁴³ "Con la reflexión y propuestas que hagamos sobre los distintos temas, podremos aportar una visión actualizada de la realidad de la educación que, sin lugar a dudas, facilitara la función del gobierno tanto legislativa como ejecutiva para que la educación sirva a nuestras aspiraciones y a las necesidades de la Nación. El sólo hecho de participar, reflexionar y hacer propuestas, favorecer el replanteo de los problemas de la educación y la búsqueda de soluciones. En el orden local el mismo grupo que detecta y analiza los problemas puede llevar a la práctica soluciones inmediatas y factibles." *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Luis Alberto Romero, Kindle location, 5085.

⁴⁵ Alfonsín's political approach was constrained by the fragile democracy with which he was working. Constant threats from the military and conservative factions that still held power across several sectors of the government and throughout the nation necessitate a cautious approach and incremental changes.

⁴⁶ They challenged his reforms in other areas as well. See Romero, 5053-5054.

educator of Argentine children. They advocated Christian values as the foundation of education and supported the continued use of didactic instruction.⁴⁷

During his tenure as president, Alfonsín had success in other areas related to education. He implemented a nationwide literacy program that raised Argentina's literacy rate to almost 98% and earned him a UNESCO prize.⁴⁸ He made significant strides in upper level education as well. During his presidency, he reached out to professors and students who had been forcibly removed during the dictatorship, attempted to bring them back, and worked to reinstitute the university as a place of learning, conversation, and intellectual rigor.⁴⁹ Indeed, it was through his successful university reform that Alfonsín was able to most directly affect the educational experiences of young children.

Between 1985 and 1989, Alfonsín passed several reforms that made changes not to the curriculum of grade school children, but to the university-level training received by the people who would teach them. These smaller-scale laws and outreach programs didn't radically change the educational system, but they did make small moves to integrate democracy, and the "newer" ideas that accompanied the democratic transition, into the classroom. Throughout the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Education made resolutions that affected university education, specifically the training and requirements necessary to teach. The dictatorship had targeted teachers who strayed too far from their proscribed teaching routes and created mechanisms for surveilling and policing teachers' behaviors. Few resources had been allocated to teaching teachers how to teach and even fewer were given to making sure that educators received ongoing training and support.

⁴⁷ Mariano Fabris, "La Iglesia Argentina en la historia reciente (1983-1989) *Diacronie Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 15, no. 3 (2014): 9; Juan Eduardo Bonnin, "From Discursive Event to discourse Événement: A Case Study of Political-religious Discourse in Argentina" *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 6 (2011): 680-684

⁴⁸ Romero, 5098.

⁴⁹ Romero, 5081.

Further, teachers were taught, primarily, to be in control of the classroom: not to encourage questions or dialogue or even to make sure that students were learning, but to make sure that they were orderly and disciplined.⁵⁰ This was not the type of teacher that Alfonsín envisioned for a democratic state. Resolution 1742, passed in October of 1988, established a commission comprised of “teachers, specialists and professionals in the educational area.”⁵¹ Changes were also made to the course of study for university students interested in teaching primary level education across the country.⁵² It required three years of intensive study, including the study of Latin American language and culture, pedagogy and psycho-pedagogy, language, theology, didacticism in the natural, social, and physical sciences, as well as the arts, and educational politics in Argentina. Resolution 351, passed in July of 1989, similarly established new university curricula, this time in Rosario, which required university students pursuing a degree in education to study the history of education, pedagogy, adolescence, alongside mandatory teacher training in the classroom.⁵³ By focusing on adults, these education reforms worked to undo the damage that affected those who had passed through, or been unable to access, education during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. It is important to note that the training that the government allotted to teachers helped to mobilize them and give them the skills and language necessary to affect change rapidly and on a daily basis. Democratic ideals powered these reforms which were designed to create an educated, literate public and train new educators (or retrain those who were already in classrooms) to incorporate democratic principles into their pedagogical praxis.

⁵⁰ Inés Dussel “Inclusion y exclusion en la escuela moderna argentina: una perspectiva postestructura” *Cuadernos de Pesquisa*, 34, no. 122 (2004): 305-335

⁵¹“Teachers, specialists and professionals in the educational area” “amendments to current teacher training plans update, and design research and monitor projects, preparing documents for the purpose of orienting the pedagogical actions to comply, study, and propose regulations that are deemed necessary for the implementation of the recommended educational reforms.” Resolución 3170. Buenos Aires, Argentina. Ministerio de Educación y Justicia. 3 December 1985.

⁵² Resolución 1742. Buenos Aires Argentina. Ministerio de Educación y Justicia. 31 October 1988.

⁵³ Resolución 351, Buenos Aires Argentina. 7 July 1988.

During this period, the Ministry of Education introduced *talleres*, or workshops, in both the Ministry and the classroom. On the administrative level, *talleres* were a way for specialists to converge and converse on the most salient and effective educational practices both at home and abroad. In high school classrooms, *talleres* were a way for students to select their own educational path. “The goal of the workshops,” indicated one 1988 Ministry proposal, “aims to try methodologies and work techniques that facilitate a more fluid transition between theory and practice and a greater self-determination of the student.”⁵⁴ The Ministry envisioned workshops as a way to help students elect their own path and follow it. On a more practical level, they were slow to implement and haphazardly begun. *Talleres* integrated a certain degree of self-determination into the lives of students in primary and secondary school: young children were able to decide what interested them and pursue their interests in a way that emphasized practical application as well as theoretical frameworks. It is important to note the difference in theory and practice of the *talleres* themselves. That is, there was no decree that mandated the inclusion of *talleres* in Argentine public schools during this period and their availability and offerings were greatly affected by school funding, available “experts” in given courses of study, and the resources for books and manuals at individual institutions. The teachers who collaborated on this project proposed that *talleres* should include a combination of intellectually based principles, as well as socio-productive and affective ones. Students would be broken into small groups of no more than fifteen, in which they would be able to debate, argue, interject, and have hands on experience in a field of study that most motivated them to learn. Each of these groups would emphasize the real-world application and social importance of the chosen field as a way to promote individualism and social inclusion. Students might, for instance, choose a track that

⁵⁴ “La propuesta de los *talleres* apunta a intentar metodologías y técnicas de trabajo que faciliten un pasaje más fluido entre teoría y práctica y un mayor protagonismo del alumno” “*Talleres*.” Buenos Aires, Argentina. 1988.

focused on the sciences, which would include classes that allowed them focus towards an end goal: being a doctor or engineer for example. We might consider *talleres* as letting students elect a “major” while still in high school. “El protagonismo” of the student was at the heart of *talleres*. Critical thinking and the power to be the protagonist in one’s own education was a relatively new concept, one which, as we shall see, went hand and hand with the establishment of democracy in Argentina.

Though the Pedagogical Congress did not yield the tangible results Alfonsín had hoped for, it did create rhetorical and ideological openings, which significantly impacted educational policy in Argentina. He emphasized collaborative decision making, democratic participation, and he created the beginnings of an educational community, which laid the groundwork for more lasting educational change in the 1990s. Alfonsín questioned the role of children within the state and the role of the state in the classroom. He invited Argentines from all walks of life, but particularly specialists in related fields, to envision a new educational system for a newly democratic nation. In the early 1990s, Menem and his administration selected and codified one particular vision of this, in the process defining childhood, children, and education for the rest of the century.⁵⁵

Education under Menem

Menem’s election signaled the start of a period of neoliberal reforms throughout Argentina.⁵⁶ Alfonsín had needed to constantly find a balance between his desire for reform and his need to maintain political and national stability. When Menem assumed the presidency in

⁵⁵ This is not to say that Menem did not face difficulty or public resistance during his tenure in office. Quite the contrary. See, for example, Laura Tedesco, “La ñata contra el vidrio: Urban Violence and Democratic Governability in Argentina,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 19, no. 4 (October 2000): 527-545.

⁵⁶ Romero, 7072.

December of 1989, the Argentina that he inherited was altogether more stable than it had been in 1983. Alfonsín had resolved, at least partially, many of the crucial and polemical issues that had caused tension in the early days of his administration. When Menem accepted the office, the threat of another military coup did not loom as large, and many citizens wanted a break from the oversaturation of grief and recrimination that pervaded the nation in the immediate wake of *el proceso*.⁵⁷ Historians and social scientists have researched and written extensively on the ways in which societies and cultures experience and process trauma after genocide. In some cases, the immediate post-generation tries to escape the trauma or seek a reprieve from the oversaturation of conversations about the past and present⁵⁸ Menem was not plagued by the constant fear of coup or transitional justice the way that Alfonsín was, and he was thus empowered to make bolder strokes and bigger reforms that built upon and discarded the work that Alfonsín had done in a variety of ways.

Menem's most successful and wide reaching educational reform was La Ley Federal de Educación, which was passed in 1993 and began to be implemented in 1994. This law restructured the Argentine educational system, made systemic changes to redistribute the academic year and levels of primary and secondary education, and further outlined curriculum requirements, funding plans, and the duties, expectations and rights of those involved in the

⁵⁷ At several points during Alfonsín's presidency there were fears of another military coup. A stable transition of power between Alfonsín and Menem, the pursuit of transitional justice (followed by a complete halt to transitional justice), and economic stability, made Menem's regime more stable. J. Patrice McSherry, "Strategic Alliance: Menem and the Military-Security Forces in Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 6 (November 1997): 63-92

⁵⁸ See for example: Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: Making and Unmaking the World* (Oxford University Press, 1985); Daniel S. Friedrich, *Democratic Education as a Curricular Problem: Historical Consciousness and the Moralizing Limits of the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Ana Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (New York: Springer, 2012); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, Memory* (Baltimore: JHU, 2016); Esther Lezra, "A Pedagogy of Empathy for a World of Atrocity" *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 36, no. 5 (2014): 343-371.

nation's educational system. The law defined the "educational community" as an alliance between parents, teachers, students, and other administrators involved in schooling. Lawmakers divided responsibility for education between the nuclear family, the nation, the provinces, social organizations, and teachers. The new law outlined "rights and responsibilities" of each and established the power of the federal government to create educational standards while simultaneously giving more freedom and responsibility to this "educational community" to determine the realization of these norms.

Menem's political platform was riddled with contradictions.⁵⁹ Neoliberalism and Peronism are economically and ideologically opposed, yet Menem actively engaged with both, rhetorically and politically, during his presidency.⁶⁰ He preached national unity and strength while eliciting foreign investments and loans.⁶¹ Educational policies under Menem mixed a language of centralization with an actual dispersal of power and fiscal responsibility.⁶² The Ley Federal officially brought all curriculum under the control of the federal state, so that the Ministry of Education would dictate the standards for students throughout the nation.⁶³ At the

⁵⁹ Pablo Gerchunoff and Juan Carlos Torre, "La política de liberalización económica en la administración de Menem," *Desarrollo Económico* 36, no. 143 (Oct.- Dec., 1996): 733-768; Ronaldo Munck, "After the Transition: Democratic Disenchantment in Latin America," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 55 (December 1993): 7-19; Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, "Luces y sombras en la democracia argentina. Las instituciones después de Menem," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 59, no. 3 (1997): 239-274

⁶⁰ Francisco Panizza, "Beyond 'Delegative Democracy': 'Old Politics' and 'New Economics' in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, no. 3 (Oct., 2000): 737-763; Delia Ferreira Rubio and Matteo Goretti, "Cuando el president gobierna solo. Menem y los decretos de necesidad y urgencia hasta la reforma constitucional (julio 1989-agosto 1994)," *Desarrollo Económico* 36, no. 141 (Apr.-Jun., 1996): 443-474; Ariel C. Armony and Victor Armony, "Indictments, Myths, and Citizen Mobilization in Argentina: A Discourse Analysis," *Latin American Politics and Society* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2005): 27-54.

⁶¹ Mirta Alejandra Antonelli, "Umbrales de una mutación. Retóricas, rituales y escenas del neoliberalismo en Argentina," *Guaraguao: Diálogo sobre tolerancia y violencia* 8, no. 19 (Winter, 2004): 55-66.

⁶² For more context about how this fits in with other national economic policies see: Kent Eaton, "La lógica de la delegación de poderes legislativos: la reforma de la promoción regional en la Argentina," *Desarrollo Económico* 42, no. 168 (Jan.-Mar., 2003): 499-518; Andrea E. Goldstein, "The Politics and Economics of Privatization: The Case of Argentina," *The Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 23, no. 45 (1998): 55-87.

⁶³ During the dictatorship the Ministry controlled curriculum but there were still some things that the provinces could control within reason.

same time, the Ley Federal gave the provinces the responsibility for paying for this education and left the details of educational content to individuals within the educational community. The language of centralization masked a dispersal of fiscal responsibility and opened the door for variance in classroom contents (and quality) throughout the nation.

The law reshaped the educational apparatus at the same time that it stipulated the ways that a democratic Argentina would be shaped in the classroom. Lawmakers sought to simultaneously transform educational structure and the future of Argentina. The language of the law was future-focused, and democracy was the ever-present keyword and guiding force. This is most evident in the points of the law that speak about the *deberes de los niños* (duties of the children). Lawmakers explicitly referred to children as “defenders of democratic institutions and the environment.”⁶⁴ According to the law, the goal of education was to shape Argentine children into “responsible citizens, critical protagonist, creators and transformers of society through love, knowledge and work.”⁶⁵ This language is repeated throughout the law, emphasizing the role of children as political actors within the state. Through the law, politicians incorporated contemporaneous national politics about memory and justice into new educational standards. Primary education was meant to “encourage the permanent search for the truth, develop critical judgment and evaluative habits and encourage the development of physical, intellectual abilities, affective volition, aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual values.”⁶⁶ Unlike previous educational laws in Argentina, this one placed the burden of action on children themselves. Earlier laws may have referenced education as a way for children to engage with the truth and develop morals, but none

⁶⁴ “defensores de las instituciones democráticas y del medio ambiente.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 9.

⁶⁵ “ciudadanos responsables, protagonistas críticos, creadores y transformadores de la sociedad a través del amor, conocimiento y trabajo.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 9.

⁶⁶ “Incentivar la búsqueda permanente de la verdad, desarrollar el juicio crítico y hábitos valorativos y favorecer el desarrollo de las capacidades físicas, intelectuales, afectiva volitivas, estéticas y los valores éticos y espirituales.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 10.

had positioned the search for truth or the development of critical justice as a fundamental goal of the educational process. The fact that the law mandated that as the essential goal of education and identified children as active protagonists of education and the nation is revolutionary (although later chapters will explore the extent to which this was actually implemented). The law gave children a particular social role, not only as future citizens, but as democratic saviors in the present. Lawmakers structured the educational system to prepare them for this role.

Educational reforms during the transition to democracy offer insight into what lawmakers, teachers, families, and society envisioned this national citizenry to look like. At the most basic level, Congressmen and Senators in the mid-1990s wanted a democratic Argentina; and they wanted a modern, democratic educational system to match (or create) that ideal.⁶⁷ Like the new constitution and the establishment of truth commissions, educational reform promoted a gradual break with the past and a purported pathway to a peaceful and economically stable future.⁶⁸ As with many reforms during this period, educational transformation was a balancing act between continuity and change, multiple governmental branches, and political parties. Lawmakers attempted to reconcile a vision of children as revolutionary, while reifying national stability within a democratic matrix. This involved a curious combination of theory and practice. Children ought to be taught to love the “cultura nacional,” but at the same time they needed to “to know and critically value our tradition and cultural patrimony in order to choose those elements that best favor integral development as a person.”⁶⁹ This was particularly challenging in Argentina, where the definition of nation had gone through multiple inventions and reinventions

⁶⁷ Ana Maria Mustapic, “‘Oficialista y diputados’: las relaciones Ejecutivo-Legislativo en Argentina,” *Desarrollo Económico* 39, no. 156 (Jan.-Mar., 2000): 571-595.

⁶⁸ Gabriel L. Negretto, “Negociando los poderes del presidente: reforma y cambio constitucional en la Argentina,” *Desarrollo Económico* 41, no. 163 (Oct.-Dec., 2001): 411-444.

⁶⁹ “conocer y valorar críticamente nuestra tradición y patrimonio cultural para optar por aquellos elementos que mejor favorezca el desarrollo integral como persona” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 124.

from its foundation through to the present. The Argentine nation, both real and imagined, underwent significant revision in this moment. Children were in transition as much as the nation itself, and the figure of the child as a “protagonist” tied their transitions together: the figurative child and the imagined nation were mutually constitutive and unstable. The law codified the “Argentine child” as a “protagonist” in the national narrative and placed the burden of responsibility on that child to define which version of their nation they would bring into being. Simultaneously, lawmakers and educators had to root this child in a new vision of the Argentine past that identified democracy as the core of national identity. During this moment, democracy was far from a foregone conclusion in Argentina, and children were not by any means easily contained or controlled, but the law positioned them in this way.

La Ley Federal de Educación reflected political and narrative tensions even as it worked to generate stability and give shape to a “new” Argentina. What values were considered constitutive of Argentina during this era? If we are to follow the language of this law, the most salient attributes included the valorization of democracy as an integral part of Argentine identity, past, present, and future; the importance of social cohesion, and dedication to the truth. The law clearly outlined these goals, beginning with the encouragement of active engagement in the classroom and the desire for inquisitive young minds.⁷⁰ It fell to teachers, parents, and children themselves to make this vision a reality. This is part of a broader, contradictory mix of centralization and decentralization that defined Menem’s presidency.

The first step was incorporating democratic values into the classroom, where the state was able to directly interact with children. Lawmakers emphasized the development of basic skills and social integration, using the classroom as a microcosm of society. Lawmakers offered

⁷⁰ Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 9-11.

children support and protection, outlined their rights, and held adults accountable for their well-being. They also placed enormous responsibility on the figurative Argentine child. Children in this system not only needed to participate in the state, they needed to bring that state into being. Parents and teachers were essential in helping them fulfill this role.

In codifying the “child” as a protagonist; lawmakers discursively positioned the child as a political actor in the present. Though as children they had not achieved the age of citizenship and held little applicable power, the law nonetheless rhetorically transformed children into political actors who necessarily needed to search for the truth and uphold and criticize the nation-state. Children were the fulcrum of democratic praxis and in many ways the most transitional element of Argentine society. If led correctly, lawmakers seemed to think, their transition from childhood to adulthood would aid and support Argentina’s permanent transition from dictatorship to democracy. They needed to have democracy imprinted in their earliest memories and learning experiences to follow them throughout their lives and shape Argentina’s national future.

According to the 1993 reform, the family was the “natural and first agent” of education in Argentina. As such, parents, guardians, and grandparents had substantial power in shaping a child’s initial learning experience and acted as a point of contact between children and information coming from the “adult” world. Within the new law, parents were given the right to be informed of their child’s progress, the ability to intercede or participate in their child’s education, either individually or through the organization of coalitions; and choose the educational institution their child would attend. They were also obligated to make their child attend school, support the educational reform and the development of their children within it, and

respect (and make their child respect) their education.⁷¹ The law tasked parents with participating and supporting the education and socio-affective development of their children particularly during their pre-school and primary education. One of the objectives of early education was to “strengthen the ties between educative institutions and the family”⁷² Likewise, primary education needed to “expand the social dimension of the family and civic-community relations, facilitating the development of a progressively autonomous and supportive personality, who appreciates the ethical values that govern life and coexistence and act according to them.”⁷³ Parents, to a certain degree, were tasked with overseeing their child’s empathetic development outside the classroom, this affective development could then be mapped into the classroom and onto the nation as a whole. The post-dictatorship concern with the development of empathy, reflection, and ethics is one that recurred.⁷⁴ Certainly this reflects ongoing questions about how something like *el proceso* could have happened and an internal critical eye to the mechanisms (or lack thereof) within the Argentine state that may have made it possible.

Indeed, though a turn away from didacticism in the classroom towards interactive classroom behaviors was certainly an attempt to modernize Argentine education, it can also be seen as a response to ongoing conversations about responsibility in the transitional period. The Law of Due Obedience, which pardoned participants in the *proceso* who had “just been following orders,” almost certainly influenced this move towards more conversation, expression,

⁷¹ Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 129. The government regularly reached out to parents through radio announcements, television, and the contact between parents and schools

⁷² “fortalecer la vinculación entre las instituciones educativas y la familia.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 123.

⁷³ “ampliar la dimensión social del plano familiar de la relación comunitaria y cívica, favoreciendo el desarrollo de una personalidad progresivamente autónoma y solidaria que aprecie los valores éticos que rigen la vida y la convivencia y actúe de acuerdo con ellos.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 123.

⁷⁴ For more information, see Chapter 3.

and especially questions in the classroom.⁷⁵ Many of these reforms were, in their own way, a response to *Nunca Más*, to make sure that the dictatorship truly would *not* repeat itself.⁷⁶ It stood to reason that soldiers, officers, and others responsible for the disappearances, deaths, and atrocities of the dictatorship had been educated in Argentina. They had learned a certain nationalism and willingness to follow orders without question to the point of committing atrocious violations of human rights. Educational reformers were concerned with eliminating whatever had gone wrong in the educational system. “Correcting” these “mistakes” was an ongoing process from the 1980s to the 2000s and continues today.

The reason children carried the burden of being “protagonists” was because, a new generation of lawmakers feared, previous authority figures, from parents to educators to the state, could not necessarily be trusted. When discussing educational policy during the transition we must consider the role of “responsibility” in two ways: responsibility as blame for the past and responsibility as a duty in the future. We might think of responsibility as accountability in terms of *el proceso*: who was to blame? Politicians, the military, bystanders, teachers, parents, the system itself were all possible answers and all received some portion of blame or at least suspicion.⁷⁷ Responsibility for the future, a sort of duty or onus, was discursively given to children—the main characters in this new Argentine story of democracy—with the aid of parents, teachers, and institutions that would guide them on their way. The distribution of responsibility in transitional Argentine society moved outwards, in terms of people and groups

⁷⁵ Questions about responsibility and reconciliation are still widely debated in Argentina. For more context in the 1990s see: Antonius C.G.M. Robben, “From dirty war to genocide: Argentina’s resistance to national reconciliation,” *Memory Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 305-315.

⁷⁶ Ana Ros discusses at length the ways in which post-memory and responsibility came to bear on the post dictatorship generation in her book, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁷⁷ John Conroy, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 243-245. Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

shifting the blame to others, and inwards, in terms of moving the duty for democratic establishment to specific actors, or figures, within the national imaginary.

Legislators assigned the responsibility for correcting these mistakes to the federal government. Through the educational reform, legislators tasked the Ministry of Education with consolidating representative democracy through educational policies and praxis. They further needed to strengthen national identity, consolidate national sovereignty, and ensure the freedom to both learn and teach. The Ley Federal also required the Ministry of Education to promote equality and eliminate discrimination in the classroom and, by extension, nationally. Part of this process involved the “overcoming every kind of discriminatory stereotype from didactic materials”⁷⁸ The Ley Federal made explicit the right of indigenous communities to preserve their cultural traditions and teach and learn their native languages in the classroom.⁷⁹ Most importantly perhaps was the attention that lawmakers paid to promoting social solidarity and coexistence in the classroom.⁸⁰ The creation of a *comunidad educativa* guaranteed the right of students to “integrity, dignity, freedom, knowledge.”⁸¹ The attention paid to all of these values, along with the promotion of the wellbeing of children more generally—physically, emotionally, legally—marked a turn towards a more open environment of support within and outside of the classroom. Lawmakers changed educational standards to meet those within Latin America and globally, but also to rectify any social conditions or indoctrination that may have resulted in complicity or active participation within the dictatorship. Students whose parents were able to

⁷⁸ “superación de todo tipo estereotipias discriminatorias de los materiales didácticos.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993):

⁷⁹ It’s worth noting that the Federal Education Law was being drafted and written around the same time as the new constitution. The drafting of the constitution took into consideration the inclusion of native peoples into the nation and as preexisting the state.

⁸⁰ For more information on discussions of race and class during the Argentine transition please see, Barbara Sutton, “Contesting Racism: Democratic Citizenship, Human Rights, and Antiracist Politics in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 6 (Nov., 2008): 106-121.

⁸¹ Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 108.

afford private education were able to give their children more resources, while students who enrolled in public school received, ostensibly, the same level of education, they had fewer resources—books, classroom construction, teachers, recreational equipment, classroom technology—at their disposal. As the economy increasingly faced difficulties into the late 1990s, these disparities became more apparent.⁸² One of the many contradictions inherent in the Menem era was the way in which his neoliberal government supported formal anti-racist reforms at the same time xenophobia and racism in Argentina spiked considerably.⁸³ Similarly, his education reforms to give children equal opportunities frequently deprivileged poor children, and placed the burden of cost on communities with little resources to support it.

In passing the Ley Federal de Educación, Congress added specificity and detail to the proposals and revisions of both the federal government and the senate. It was Congress that pushed to explicitly define the rights and responsibilities of every level of the educational process from the federal government to individual parents, teachers, and students. It also emphasized collaboration between these groups through the creation of a “comunidad educativa” which would consist of “directors, teachers, parents, students, former students, administrators and assistants, teaching and representative organizations and participants-according to their own choice and according to specific institutional projects—in the organization and management of the school unit and in all that they do to support and improve the quality of education, without affecting the exercise of managerial and teaching responsibilities.”⁸⁴ The collaborative nature of

⁸² The economic crisis of 1989 and ongoing economic tensions led to widening gaps between the wealthy and the poor, tensions which were only exacerbated by the 2001 economic collapse.

⁸³ Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gastón Gordillo, *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco* (Duke University Press, 2004); Emanuela Guano, “Spectacles of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires,” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (2002): 181–209.

⁸⁴ “directores, docentes, padres, alumnos/as, exalumnos/as, persona administrativa y auxiliar de la docencia y organizaciones representativas y participara—según su propia opción y de acuerdo al Proyecto institucional específico—en la organización y gestión de la unidad escolar y en todo aquello que haga al apoyo y mejoramiento

the reformed educational apparatus was in keeping with both the shift towards a more socially inclusive state and the neo-liberal decentralization of Menem's administration. Congress insisted upon measures to secure the physical well-being of children in an attempt to equalize social stratification and economic disparity. This fell under the purview of preserving the *dignidad* of children, providing them with scholarships, transportation to and from school, adequate in school nutrition, and a supportive environment with access to extracurricular activities.⁸⁵ In practice though, schools were often underfunded, with limited resources, and children had wildly different experiences depending on where they lived and to which socio-economic class they belonged.

Lawmakers and activists alike were concerned with the promotion and preservation of a dignified life from cradle to grave. The individuals behind the Ley Federal incorporated points from the International Conference on the Rights of the Child, CONADEP, and the Declaration of Human Rights both within the new Argentine Constitution and the reformed educational system. Essentially, they looked for ways to work these concepts into the existing Argentine educational system and to reform the system, wherever possible, to favor these concepts. Of course, they did so in a way that was contextualized specifically within national goals of advancement and solidarity. The treatment of the Argentine patrimony is almost contradictory at times within the law. Argentine citizens and statesmen struggled to reconcile and understand their past and present. In one section, the law called for students to be taught to respect and honor their nation, while in another it called upon them to actively critique national culture and discard those aspects of it which do not work.

de la calidad de la educación, sin afectar el ejercicio de las responsabilidades directivas y docentes.” Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 114-115.

⁸⁵ Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993):

Another way in which the law asked children to simultaneously respect and to question was in regard to the family. Respect for the role of parents and the nuclear family extrapolated onto respect for the national family, and the incorporation of parents as more active participants in the school system served to tie the national and nuclear family inextricably tighter. During the dictatorship, school texts and laws used the nuclear family unit as a paragon of state stability and called upon parents to police their children's behavior outside the classroom.⁸⁶ In the transition to democracy, the government required parents to participate more actively in the educational system. Parents were able to choose where their children attended school, were held accountable for their children's attendance, kept abreast of their children's progress, and encouraged to make sure that their children's needs were being met in the classroom and beyond. Likewise, the new educational law placed safeguards in place to make sure that parents would be held accountable for their children's wellbeing and progress as individuals and citizens.

The Ley Federal de Educación ostensibly worked to level the playing field for children throughout the nation: rich, poor, male, female, of indigenous descent or of European ancestry were all guaranteed education, and adjustments would be made to accommodate children with special needs. Lawmakers and educators were tasked with constantly working to improve and adapt pedagogy, in classroom technology, and national and international educational theory.⁸⁷ The law moved to counter the dictatorial "brain drain" and recover the "glorious" Argentine educational tradition of the past. Late-twentieth century education reformers followed Sarmiento's nineteenth century example: investigating the educational techniques and theories of other nations in Latin America and globally, borrowing and adapting those that seemed most successful, and using them to meet contemporary Argentine demands in education as they related

⁸⁶ Chapter Two, will look much more closely at examples of these texts and how they evolved over time.

⁸⁷ Ley Federal de Educación: Ley 24.195 (Buenos Aires, April 1993): 116.

to economic and social “progress”. They also borrowed from Sarmiento’s attempt to disrupt the “barbarism” of the past and present through the incorporation of “enlightened” educational reforms. Obviously, Sarmiento’s establishment of the Argentine Ministry of Education and the Ley Federal were separated by more than a hundred years of history and social change. However, lawmakers were certainly aware of the history and legacy that they built upon. Sarmiento featured in nearly all the text books for school aged children produced during the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s where he was almost universally depicted as a national hero, whose forward-thinking reforms changed the shape of the nation.⁸⁸

The law also imagined teachers in an ambiguous and at times contradictory way: as purveyors of education but also as individuals who needed to be reinstructed so as not to transmit older values. Teachers were similarly lauded as bearers of knowledge who tirelessly worked for the improvement of the nation and the individual. The Ley Federal both supported and contested this view point. Teachers in the transitional Argentina needed to be re-educated. Those who were already established in the profession, would have to be given appropriate training to be able to meet the needs and requirements of the new system. New teachers were to be given entirely different training. Reforms in teacher training, education, and pedagogy at the university level occurred contemporaneously with national and local reforms to change curriculum for pre-school, primary, and secondary education.

In reflecting upon the recent past, looking for explanations, a certain degree of responsibility was placed upon educators for their role in promoting a group mentality that

⁸⁸ Compare this treatment with, for instance, the way that Juan Manuel de Rosas was treated in textbooks of the dictatorship: Gonzalo de Amézola, “A ‘Necessary’ dictatorship: The ‘Age of Rosas’ in Argentine History Textbooks published between 1956 and 1983 and the Defence of Authoritarianism,” *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 5 (October 2007): 669-684; Honorio Alberto Díaz, *Pensamiento liberal argentino: sociedad, estado y nación en Sarmiento, Alberdi y Mitre* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, 2009); Mauricio Meglioli, *Una y otra vez, Sarmiento* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2016); Miguel Ángel de Marco, *Sarmiento: Maestro de América, constructor de la nación* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2016).

allowed for the dictatorship. As depicted in films like *The Official Story*, teachers were almost universally seen as the wielders of great power—their use of this power to either fight for the ‘truth’ at significant risk to their own personal safety or endorse the “official story” to the detriment of others was a moral quandary that many individuals faced in real life.⁸⁹ The number of disappeared persons who had worked as educators is staggering and did not go unnoticed. Teachers who worked through this period and into the transition were necessarily viewed as complicit with dictatorial policies, hence the need to, if not radicalize, then certainly revolutionize, their world view. New up and coming teachers would have to be educated to avoid the mistakes of the past; they would be given space to question the contents of their curriculums and trained to encourage their students to do so as well. Teacher reforms, like the Federal Educational Reform, emphasized emotional support and creative expression in the classroom. Conversation and discussion, it was thought, were essential to create critical and active citizenry in a participatory democracy. Though parents were given top billing as the “first agent” of education, teachers were given the bulk of the work in taking younglings and turning them away from the dark side. Transition period educators were given the right to unionize and make demands for their livelihoods, their professional environment, and on behalf of their students.⁹⁰ This right has been pivotal in the transformation and continued evolution of public education in Argentina as teachers’ unions have consistently rallied for change and

⁸⁹ For more information about how *La historia oficial* reflects contemporary social concerns and questions of memory, see: Fernando Reati, “Argentine Political Violence and Artistic Representation in Films of the 1980’s,” *Latin American Literary Review* 17, no. 34 (July-Dec., 1989): 27.

⁹⁰ Raúl L. Madrid, “Labouring against Neoliberalism: Unions and Patterns of Reform in Latin America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, no. 1 (Feb., 2003): 55-88; Maria Victoria Murillo, “Recovering Political Dynamics: Teachers’ Unions and the Decentralization of Education in Argentina and Mexico,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 41, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 31-57.

improvement.⁹¹ Teachers have come to occupy a significant role as the first and, in some cases, best advocates for the rights of children.

The law both enabled and restricted the provinces' input on educational policy; it also placed the burden of funding on local institutions, while allowing the Federal Ministry of Education to maintain control of curriculum guidelines and national standards. The law also empowered parents to choose where their children would be educated. Parochial and private schools were an alternative to public schools provided these institutions met the government approved standards.⁹² Lawmakers emphasized equality in the law: new requirements were supposed to supersede differences and level the playing field for Argentine children across racial, ethnic, gender, and economic lines. The ability to choose a private school where tuition and private donations meant better materials or higher paid teachers disrupted this plan.

The Full Stop Law was passed in 1986 and the Law of Due Obedience was passed in 1987. Essentially, the former put a stop to the prosecution of any high-ranking members of the military junta and the latter made it impossible for lower level members of the dictatorship to be prosecuted for their crimes because they had been following orders. These two laws sparked a conversation about morality, responsibility, and the role of individuals within the state, which persisted well into the 1990s and even today. These laws were one of the reasons that progressive adults emphasized the need for children to think freely, critically, and question those in power. They had to be able to make their own decisions, develop a moral compass that would lead them to pursue justice, not amnesty for war criminals.

⁹¹ M. Victoria Murillo, "La adaptación del sindicalismo argentino a las reformas de Mercado en la primera presidencia de Menem," *Desarrollo Económico* 37, no. 147 (Oct.-Dec., 1997): 419-446.

⁹² David A. Turner and Huseyin Yolcu eds., *Neo-liberal Educational Reforms: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

After the Law: Changes and Conversations of the late 1990s

The Ley Federal de Educación shaped the parameters of education and the national conversation about children for the rest of the decade. Legislators and educators implemented the stipulated changes to schools nationwide, a process that took several years, and followed the law with more rigorous curriculum reforms. Beyond changing the structure of the educational system, the law made important discursive and intellectual moves. As we have seen, it established the idea of children as protagonists and figuratively situated the Argentine child as the inheritor and progenitor of democracy. It also made the active collaboration of an educational community an integral part of learning. Lawmakers, teachers, parents, and students understood and experienced the impact of these legal discursive changes throughout the late 1990s. They shaped the interactions between adults and children, and the ways in which a new generation of Argentines children learned and grew up.

Antonio Salonia, a teacher and political activist who served as Minister of Education from 1989-1992, explained: “Decisive moments lie ahead. We must wait for educational decentralization to spread to the level of more autonomous and creative schools, which integrate the participation of educators, families, and communities.”⁹³ Much like the Argentine nation, and Argentine children, education was in a state of experiment and change. The full ramifications of the law were not immediately felt, but the conversations around it proliferated. Part of this proliferation came from the Ministry of Education itself, which provided supplementary pamphlets, books, legislation, and outreach to parents, families, and teachers. The newly “collaborative” nature of federalized education meant that each level of the

⁹³ “Quedan por delante etapas decisivas. Es de esperar que se profundice la descentralización educativa hasta el nivel de una escuela más autónoma y creativa, e integrada con ella, la participación de los educadores, de las familias y de la comunidad,” Antonio Salonia, *Educación y democracia participativa* (Buenos Aires: Ser Mas, 1997): 40.

educational community had a specific role to play in ensuring its success, or, at the very least, its functionality. The Ministry encouraged teachers, for example, to participate in *talleres*, to obtain new certifications, and undergo more rigorous specialization so that they would be better able to implement the changes in the classroom. *Zona Educativa*, an educational magazine published in the 1990s, described the changes being made:

The educational transformation modifies the organization of schools: such change is essential to generating a greater commitment and *protagonisim* of the actors involved, in order to develop projects and make the most appropriate decisions. Faced with this panorama, principals and teachers have the possibility of intervening to make changes, to increase the quality of pedagogical practice. But this transformation may not be visible from one day to the other: being a teaching-learning process must take training into account as a way to improve.⁹⁴

Teachers needed capacitation in the new pedagogy, the newest theories for teaching, training in how to conduct a democratic classroom and encourage student participation. It also meant learning about the new classroom contents, what they were, and how to best implement them. Pamphlets and other outreach materials like this one suggested that, without the collaboration of educators, the changes made to the educational system would undoubtedly fall flat. Indeed, one of the major tensions or polemics that came out of the law was the relationship between the vision of a democratic school, as proposed by Alfonsín and codified under Menem, and the translation of that imagined, or ideal, democratic classroom into a real community, in which a variety of socio-economic, political, and national tensions were being articulated daily. Integrating organizations, institutions, and individuals from the educational system of the dictatorship into the educational apparatus defined by the Ley Federal de Educación was not

⁹⁴ “La transformación educativa modifica la organización de las escuelas: el cambio se hace imprescindible para generar un mayor compromiso y protagonismo de los actores participantes, para elaborar proyectos y tomar las decisiones más convenientes. Ante este panorama, directivos y docentes tienen la posibilidad de intervenir para cambiar, para aumentar la calidad de la propuesta pedagógica. Pero esta transformación no puede reflejarse de un día para el otro: al ser un *proceso* de enseñanza-aprendizaje implica tener en cuenta la capacitación como forma de mejoramiento.” *Zona dirección. Suplemento de zona educativa* n. 25 (Julio 1998): 1.

always smooth and certainly didn't happen overnight. *Talleres* and *capacitación* for teachers were one way that the Ministry attempted to “bridge the gap” between one system and another.

The question of how best to instill the moral “values” on which the new pedagogy (and by extension, democracy) rested was the subject of debate throughout the “educational community,” debates which were strongly influenced by CONADEP and questions of responsibility and recovery. In conjunction with UNICEF Argentina, the Ministry of Education published a pamphlet entitled *Educación y formación moral: Documentos de apoyo para la acción y reflexión educativa*. Throughout this pamphlet—a collaboration by legislators, teachers, and psychologists—the authors refer repeatedly to the “presente coyuntura” and the “*crisis social*”:

The inclusion of moral education in the educational process seems to me of fundamental importance in and of itself and an urgent need at the present juncture... Society is going through a moment of serious cultural crisis, of relativization and the distortion of values... Education in the service of moral emancipation and personal autonomy must emphasize urgency in the foundation of fundamental virtues in the learner: only the cultivation of the virtue of prudence, which indicates what is inherently good and what is truthful will help the learner in such a permissive a society, in which seemingly anything goes and the ends justify the means...⁹⁵

Politicians tended to situate the transitional moment as a dramatic shift from dictatorship to democracy, defining these systems as diametrically and discursively opposed. The reality was much messier: unsettling, confusing, and difficult for adults, let alone children. How to overcome the violence and injustice of the past, which were so readily visible in the present?

⁹⁵ “La inclusión de la educación moral en el *proceso* educativo me parece de fundamental importancia en sí y de urgente necesidad en la presente coyuntura...La sociedad atraviesa un momento de grave crisis cultural de relativización y tergiversación de valores...La educación en orden a la emancipación moral y autonomía personal tiene que hacer hincapié con urgencia en la cimentación de las virtudes fundamentales del educando: sólo el cultivo de la virtud de prudencia que dicta lo que es bueno en sí y es conforme a la verdad inmunizará al educando en una sociedad tan permisiva en la que aparentemente todo vale y el fin justifica los medios...”, in *Educación y formación moral: Documentos de apoyo para la acción y reflexión educativa*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, UNICEF Argentina, 1993; 31-32

The solution that the authors suggested repeatedly was to inculcate young people with “fundamental virtues”, so that they would have a keen sense of right and wrong with no room for gray areas or moral relativism.

Nothing is more pernicious for the formation of students than the dichotomy between the perceived and lived in their environment... School should give priority to the exaltation of everyday heroism more than the sporadic, the critique of idols, the primacy of honesty over convenience, responsibility over spontaneous freedom, self-motivation over competitiveness, realistic substantiation over emotive epithets, testimony over preaching, positive transactions over rewards and punishments, motivated experiences over barriers and codes: in a word, the primacy of being over that of doing and appearing.⁹⁶

This is a long and daunting list of values, certainly difficult to instill, but their articulation gives us insight into what exactly it would mean for a child to act as a democratic protagonist in a nation where the parameters and experience of democracy were articulated, debated, and redefined every day. The emphasis placed on acts of everyday heroism, responsible liberty, and honesty were of particular relevance in this socio-political moment.

Legislators and teachers who grappled with the question of education and values almost universally gestured towards the idea that something was inherently wrong in the way that individuals who came of age during the dictatorship were educated. Several authors made the argument that it was the lack of moral education or the inability to think critically that made it possible for people to participate in a system of terror, torture, and mass murder. The educational reform emphasized truth and justice, and, in the ensuing years, pamphlets and

⁹⁶ “Nada hay más pernicioso para la formación de los educandos que la dicotomía entre lo preceptuado y lo vivido en su entorno... La escuela debe privilegiar la exaltación de heroísmo cotidiano más que el esporádico, la descalificación de los ídolos, la primacía de la honestidad sobre la utilidad, la libertad responsable sobre la espontaneidad, la auto exigencia sobre la competitividad, la objetividad sobre los formalismos, la sustantividad realista sobre la adjetivación emotiva, el testimonio sobre la prédica, las traficantes positivas intrínsecas sobre los premios y castigos, la vivencia motivada sobre las barreras y códigos: en una palabra, la primacía del ser sobre el hacer y aparecer.” Daniel Múgica, “Los educadores y su contexto social,” *Educación y formación moral: Documentos de apoyo para la acción y reflexión educativa*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, UNICEF Argentina, 1993; 31-32

workshops to teach teachers and parents how to educate their children to be responsible, moral citizens proliferated. The educational community, especially the federal government, with its power to centralize curriculum guidelines, made moral and civic education an essential part of children's social formation.

Isabelino Siede, a teacher and researcher who was active in shaping civic education in Buenos Aires during this period, wrote that, "we understand that it is the function of the school to offer an opportunity to recreate values in the process of learning them. That is, to intervene into cultural disputes providing specific ingredients of the school and including students in the process."⁹⁷ The Ley Federal de Educación jettisoned didacticism in the classroom.⁹⁸ Siede argued that it was impossible to separate schools from political practice, and that, rather than combat this affiliation, educators should acknowledge and even embrace the relationship between education and politics and their important role as intermediaries:

the school is the first public space in which students interact: from the first classes of primary school, they construct for themselves representations about the just and unjust, the same and different, what's theirs, what's alien and shared, along with many other relevant concepts for the insertion of students in the public sphere. This conviction is opposed to any attempt to depoliticize pedagogy, because we understand that education is public as long as it is conceived of as a political action. Therefore, the teacher is not the second mother, but the first public agent who sets a political contract with her students"⁹⁹

⁹⁷"entendemos que es función de la escuela ofrecer una oportunidad para recrear valores en el proceso mismo de conocer. Se trata de intervenir en las disputas culturales aportando ingredientes específicos de la escuela e incluyendo a los estudiantes en ese proceso" Isabelino A. Siede, *Democracia, educación en valores y desafíos de la época* (Buenos Aires: Amnistía Internacional de Argentina, 1997), 5.

⁹⁸ This is not a solely Argentine idea. Indeed, pedagogical practice throughout the west in the 1990s shifted towards interactive classroom environment. In terms of social values and civic morality more specifically, Argentina borrowed a great deal from Spanish curriculum and in classroom practices of these same subjects. The post-Franco period in particular was a fruitful resource for legislators and educators looking for ways to tackle big topics for small children. Laura Benadiba, "The Persistence of Silence after Dictatorships," *Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (2012): 287-297.

⁹⁹ "Esta convicción se opone a cualquier intento de despolitizar la acción pedagógica, pues entendemos que la educación es pública en tanto se concibe como acción política. Por eso, la maestra no es la segunda madre, sino el primer agente público que establece un contrato político con sus alumnos. Esta convicción se opone a cualquier intento de despolitizar la acción pedagógica, pues entendemos que la educación es pública en tanto se concibe como acción política. Por eso, la maestra no es la segunda madre, sino el primer agente público que establece un contrato político con sus alumnos" Siede, 4-5.

Rather than attempt to depoliticize children or schools, Siede argued that the political power of the educational system should be harnessed to teach children political practice, civic responsibility, and moral discourse. The Argentine child continued to be figured as the political agent of change, the protector and inheritor of democracy, but the responsibility for nurturing this “protagonista” was in the hands of educators.

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, federal educational policy shaped the educational experience of children—trying to fit them into the mold of the Argentine child—and defined the roles of each participant in the educational community. Defining those roles on paper and realizing them in the real world were distinct and difficult processes. In implementing the Ley Federal de Educación, those responsible for the formal education of children attempted to transform students into citizens and the classroom into a space of democratic praxis. If children were the protagonists of the nation, responsible, even in their early childhood, for establishing and preserving democracy, then teachers were meant to guide them on their quest, to help them develop values, moral virtue, and personhood, and prevent them from being led astray.

For the legislators who collaborated on the law and the various ministers, teachers, politicians, and researchers who implemented it, children were the protagonists, the heroes, and protectors of a nascent democratic state, yet also innocents who could not handle and should not be made to handle the horrors of the recent past. By opting not to teach the content of recent history and focusing on abstract moral values and pedagogical form, they overlooked or ignored the ways in which actual Argentine children were implicated in the lived experiences of *el proceso* and transitional politics. In some ways, despite their attempts to empower children as agents of the present and future, they imagined them as static, innocent, and ahistorical.

Conclusion

Educational reforms in the 1990s, as we have seen, started off slowly, but gradually gained momentum as the political turmoil and risk of dictatorial relapse lessened. The Ley Federal de Educación realized many of the ideological goals that Alfonsín had worked toward—pluralism, respect, and collaboration—within the neoliberal economic matrix that Menem established. The law reimagined and restructured the levels of education, the flow of the school year, and the participation of various sectors in the educational process. Discursively, it established the “official” figure of the Argentine child and placed an enormous responsibility its tiny shoulders. Following the implementation of the law—a gradual and ongoing process for much of the latter 1990s—legislators, teachers, researchers, and parents worked individually and collaboratively, with institutions such as the Ministry of Education, Amnesty International, and UNICEF, to discover and define the best ways to teach moral values and civic responsibility in the classroom. They foregrounded these conversations on the “protagonismo” of Argentine children. Debates about cultural patrimony versus appropriate national criticism flourished, as did conversations about the best way to include new learning techniques for active in-class participation and critical thinking skills. Adults neither debated nor denied the position of children as the inheritors and protectors of democracy. Instead, they reified that role, looking for ways to best help children realize their potential.

Though conversations about children and education were, at their core, about trauma, memory, and the legacy of dictatorship—whether explicit or implied—the Ministry of Education did not mandate the inclusion of the recent past in classroom settings. This is perhaps reflective of the unsettled nature of the national conversation about *el proceso*, and particularly children in relation to *el proceso* during the transition. There is an important distinction, an almost

impossible tension, between asking children to prevent the past from repeating itself, but not requiring that they learn the details of that past. It was not until 2002, with the establishment of *El Día Nacional de La Memoria por la Verdad y Justicia*, that *el proceso* became required teaching in classrooms throughout the nation.¹⁰⁰ During the transition to democracy, legislators and educators agreed that children needed learn morals, values, critical thinking, and participative democratic ideals. It was left to other authors and activists to create narratives explaining the recent past to the “protagonistas” of the nation.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that there were not ways in which children engaged with memory in their everyday lives outside of the classroom before this, but rather, that there was no requirement or official in classroom stance on their education about *el proceso* until this moment.

CHAPTER II

Civic Education, School Texts, and National Morality in Dictatorship and Transition

The previous chapter considered how official education policy changed in the transition to democracy. It examined several different mechanisms for change including the Pedagogical Congress and the Federal Education Law. This chapter considers what those official policies looked like in classrooms. It focuses on *manuales*—the workbooks used in early childhood education—civic education policy, and teaching guides in the dictatorship and democratic transition to understand how socio-cultural and political values were intended to be transmitted to children. *Manuales*, teaching guides, and civic education policy were designed by Ministry of Education protocol. They taught children about civic values, citizenship, and national identity and how gender, race, and class factored into national belonging. Who was part of the nation? How did a good citizen behave? What kind of nation was Argentina, and what were the roles of boys, girls, and the family in that state? Civic education policy and the contents of *manuales* used in classrooms offer us insight into how educational policy makers wished to answer those questions in the moment of transition.

Recent scholarship on childhood in relation to the state in Argentina falls into three main categories. A first trend is research that focuses on the relationship between education and liberalism in the nineteenth century. Collected volumes examine the ways that liberal thinkers conceptualized and established the educational system in Argentina. This scholarship provides an important framework for understanding the continuities and changes within the educational

system across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Because some of these works are collaborations that put Argentina into an international context, they further give insight into how Argentina fits within broader educational and pedagogical trends.¹⁰¹ The second is a relatively recent proliferation of scholarship on young adults in Argentina. The work of historians Valeria Manzano and Natalia Milanesio exemplifies this new scholarship. They examine the development of youth culture in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁰² They focus on youth as a category of analysis and examine the diverse ways in which young people interacted with the state and vice versa. Their work looks critically at the intersection of gender, generation, and politics. Milanesio and Manzano focus on young adults, principally teenagers and university students, whose cultural expressions, spending power, and activism shaped society and state responses. The work of historian Isabella Cosse best represents a third trend, which is a study of younger children and the relationship between families and the state in Argentina across a broader, and earlier, historical temporality. Cosse analyzes childhood and family in the age of Peronism and compares perspectives on education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰³ The latter two categories have been influenced by histories of gender and culture and the experiences of everyday people within the state.

¹⁰¹ Honorio Alberto Díaz, *Pensamiento liberal argentino: sociedad, estado y nación en Sarmiento, Alberdi y Mitre* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, 2009); Florencia Finnegan and Ana Pagano. *El Derecho a la educación en la argentina* (Buenos Aires: Foro Latinoamericano de Política Educativas, 2007); Alejandro Herrero, *El Loco Sarmiento: Una aproximación a la historia de la educación común y el normalísimo en la argentina*. 1a ed. (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Universitario, 2011);

¹⁰² Natalia Milanesio, "Gender and Generation: The University Reform Movement in Argentina, 1918," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (Winter 2005): 505-29; Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, And Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Luis Marcó del Pont, *Historia del movimiento estudiantil reformista* (Córdoba: Editorial Científica Universitaria de Córdoba, 2005); Andrea Andujar, *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009).

¹⁰³ Isabella Cosse, *Infancias--políticas y saberes en la argentina y Brasil: siglos XIX Y XX* (Buenos Aires: Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica, 2011); Isabella Cosse, *Estigmas de nacimiento: peronismo y orden familiar, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Universidad San Andrés, 2006).

More recently, scholars have begun to consider the role of education and the place of the child in Argentina during the dictatorship and the democratic transition. Much of this work is anthropological or literary, rather than historical. Hernán Invernizzi, Pedro C. Cerrillo and Gabriela Pesclevi have all published works within the past few years that examine children's books that were banned during the dictatorship. Their analyses help to create a context for the analysis in this chapter, which examines books that *weren't* banned by the dictatorship why their contents were considered appropriate in the socio-political vision of childhood held by the dictatorship.¹⁰⁴ There is also a new proliferation of scholarship that examines education in the dictatorship and in the transition in Argentina. This work has largely been written by education scholars and political scientists, who rigorously examine the trials and pitfalls of the educational system in Argentina during the dictatorship and the Menem administration. Their broad arguments about the educational system focus on the ways in which neoliberal politics affected schools and students and the theoretical shift towards more inclusive pedagogy.¹⁰⁵ These studies focus on a theoretical analysis of educational policy, which is important, but is often unmoored from broader historical and cultural contexts as well as classroom contents. That is: they consider the ways that neoliberal policy affected the school system, or the way that the dictatorship made intellectuals, particularly those in exile, reconceive the importance of

¹⁰⁴ Hernán Invernizzi, *Un golpe a los libros: represión a la cultura durante la última dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires Eudeba, 2003); Pedro C. Cerrillo, Cesar Sánchez Ortiz, *Prohibido leer: La censura en la literatura infantil y juvenil contemporánea* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, 2012); Gabriela Pesclevi, *Libros que muerden: literatura infantil y juvenil censurada durante la última dictadura cívico-militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ Claudio Suasnabar, *Intelectuales, exilios y educación: producción intelectual e innovaciones teóricas en educación durante la última dictadura* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2013); Daniel S. Friedrich, *Democratic Education as a Curricular Problem: Historical Consciousness and the Moralizing Limits of the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Horacio J. Sanguinetti, *La Educación argentina en un laberinto* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006); Alieto A. Guadagni and Miguel Ángel Cuervo, *En Busca de la escuela perdida: educación, crecimiento y exclusión social en la argentina del siglo XXI*. 1. ed. (Argentina: Siglo XXI, 2002).

interactive learning. This chapter places educational policy and pedagogy reforms alongside civic education goals and examines the ways that these changes manifested in classroom texts during both the dictatorship and the transition. Further, this chapter focuses on the ways in which policy makers, teachers, and officials in dictatorship and the transition used children to articulate and manifest their visions for the state, and in doing so created new ideas about childhood and the nation. It looks at a set of sources that are usually only examined by scholars working on the Peronist period: school texts for children. It also incorporates a gendered analysis of the sources and places them in the context of a comprehensive history of education in Argentina, something that scholars of education in the dictatorship have not done but is crucial for understanding the construction of national identity during this period.

Small children, with no economic acumen and little immediate social power, are often overlooked as a site of political change and historical inquiry. Though historians have begun to focus on childhood as a site of historical analysis in Latin America, they tend to most readily focus on young children in earlier periods of history and older children in more recent historical moments.¹⁰⁶ This chapter works to bridge the two bodies of work by focusing on a younger age group in a later period of history to understand the ways that adults and children interacted in this moment. A historical study of their experiences during this moment can shed light on the ways in which nationalism and other social values were crafted and maintained.

This chapter builds upon this scholarship and fuses together a variety of analytic approaches. It blends several of the recent scholarly trends on educational and childhood studies

¹⁰⁶ Nara Milanich and Bianca Premo have both written about the role of young children in the state, and state intervention in the lives of young children in the nineteenth century and the colonial period respectively. Likewise, Valeria Manzano, Isabella Cosse, and Natalia Milanese have done excellent historical research on young adults and teenagers and their socio-cultural engagement with the nation, economy, and politics in the latter half of the twentieth century.

of Argentina to further elucidate the ways in which education and children functioned and were envisioned during the dictatorship and transition. It examines media produced at the behest of the Ministry of Education during the military dictatorship that was designed to teach civic virtues and national belonging to the youngest members of Argentine society. Looking at books that were permissible to the dictatorship elucidates its vision for future citizens. A critical examination of the texts makes clear the ways that authors followed the government's direction or found ways to subvert official narratives through paratextual cues.

Manuales: Workbooks in Elementary Education

Manuales are a combination of workbooks and textbooks for children: multi-subject “manuals” typically used for children in primary school. They were and still are used for teaching reading, writing, mathematics, and the social sciences. They are also used to teach basic social skills or core values. One might think of *manuales* as a modern-day version of the school “primers” used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a book that is a hodgepodge of knowledge for children in the beginning stages of education with spaces for children to write or complete their instruction.¹⁰⁷ They share commonalities with workbooks used in some schools in the United States for children of an equivalent age during the same periods and into today.

Manuales typically act as an outline or touchstone for a class, especially for children who are

¹⁰⁷ Mo. O. Grenby, “Chapbooks, Children, and Children’s Literature,” *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 8, .no. 3 (September, 2007): 277-303; Daniel Trohler, Thomas S. Popkewitz, David F. Labaree, *Schooling and the Making of Citizens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Comparative Visions* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Thomas S. Popkewitz, Barry M. Franklin, Miguel A. Pereyra, *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling* (New York: Psychology Press, 2001); Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor *Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology, Objects, Routines* (New York: Symposium Books, 2005).

still in their earliest point of schooling, offering the core theme, topic, or concept of the day with minimal text and basic activities, that can be guided by the teacher or docent.¹⁰⁸

In dictatorship Argentina, *manuales* typically emphasized “traditional” values: rigid adherence to gender norms, national loyalty, and obedience. As discussed in Chapter One, the military junta chose not to disband the Ministry of Education or defund it (as was the case in other contemporary dictatorial regimes). Instead, they redeployed a bureaucratic system that had a long history in the nation for their own ends. The junta was not unique in doing this: successive political parties and regimes in Argentina had similarly redeployed the Ministry of Education to indoctrinate children into the current political ideology and belief system: Juan and Evita Perón’s educational outreach programs are perhaps the most famous and most starkly propagandistic.¹⁰⁹ The *proceso*’s educational outreach was less overt—there are no illustrations of Jorge Videla smiling up at children from the pages of their kindergarten workbooks—but their claim to be apolitical obfuscated a deeper adherence to political ideologies and their reproduction and emphasis. Early childhood education is important for cognitive development, and many psychologists agree that children’s experiences in their formative years can have lasting impacts on their psychological development, moral development, and affective connection to certain ideas.

Nationalism was a consistent part of early childhood education in Argentina from its inception in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ However, successive governments reached out to children

¹⁰⁸ *Manuales* always come as a set: a student copy and a teacher’s guide, which explains how the teacher should engage with the students or perform the activity described in the *manual*. Pedagogy texts from this period also almost universally explain how teachers should use texts in the classroom, paired with simple physical activity, games, or other tasks.

¹⁰⁹ Populists, fascists and popular outreach in that moment was in keeping with cult of personality and building loyalty.

¹¹⁰ Honorio Alberto Díaz, *Pensamiento liberal argentino: sociedad, estado y nación en Sarmiento, Alberdi y Mitre* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Matanza, 2009); Alejandro Herrero, *El Loco Sarmiento: Una aproximación a la historia de la educación común y el normalísimo en la argentina*. 1a ed. (Buenos Aires: Grupo

with particular visions of national belonging based on the government's set of concerns or goals. One of the *proceso*'s motivations was certainly a heightened concern about wayward youth, motivated in particular by the politicization of teens and the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Teenagers, in particular, were a concern for conservatives in the government and society more broadly. As Valeria Manzano and Andrea Andujar have demonstrated in their works on the evolution of youth culture during the 1960s and 1970s, young people wielded economic and social power and increased their involvement in politics and cultural change. As mentioned above, however, during the Argentine dictatorship and the transition to democracy, adults identified young children as key sites of intervention in order to shape their ideas, beliefs, and ultimately their civic participation.

Like the dictatorship, the governments of the transition used the education of young children as a means through which to define and shape nation and citizenship. They too worried about a generation of lost youth whose encounter with the educational system had resulted in brainwashing. Their attempts to counter what they perceived as harmful instruction included reshaping policy and changing classroom contents. However, policy and content changes were gradual during the transition. Economic and social instability were one reason for this. So was the lack of consensus on what democratic education would or should look like—that the government wanted consensus for its classroom content spoke to both the fear of a relapse into authoritarianism and a dedication to democratic praxis. The general goal of transitional education was to create a democratic citizen, to prevent another dictatorship, and to somehow

Editor Universitario, 2011); Aaron Benavot, Cecilia Braslavsky, *School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective: Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education* (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2007).

undo the intellectual, or even psychological, damage inflicted by the dictatorship's education policies.

Manuales taught children how to see their country and their relationship with it. The books produced for children during the transition reconstructed the national story, characters, and plot based on the guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Education. The dictatorship and transitional Ministries of Education described "civic education," using similar language. However, in practice, their definitions of civic participation were very different. Essentially, both governments agreed that children owed allegiance to their nation and that their actions should support their nation. They also agreed upon certain touchstones of national identity (the national anthem, the importance of the May Revolution, the flag), but they had very different ideas about how children should behave and what their national allegiance in spirit should be turned towards in action. *Manuales* from the 1970s and 1980s reinforced the "civic education" ideologies prescribed by the Ministry of Education in each period. They also supplemented those prescriptions through paratext or content. As the *proceso* progressed, the Ministry of Education increasingly moved towards overt authoritarianism in the classroom. By following the through line of national identity and the various deviations and reinterpretations of it, we can understand how writers of *manuales* challenged or redeployed Argentine nationalism as part of the democratization process.

Civic Education in Dictatorship

Starting in 1976, the *proceso*'s Ministry of Education made changes to civic education policy and content. They defined and revised their official stance on what citizenship entailed and how children should learn it. The first Minister of Education in the *proceso*, Ricardo Pedro

Bruera, established a trend that turned the educational system overtly towards conservatism and authoritarianism. To form good citizens who valued nation above all else, the Ministry of Education revised and revamped the parameters of civic education. New policy guidelines and content emphasized the role that children should play in Argentina and the importance of teaching small children civic values. In a public-address broadcast on the radio in April of 1976, less than a month after the coup that began the dictatorship, Bruera explained the significant role of teachers in children's education.¹¹¹ He explained that teachers were best able to negotiate the difficult space between neutrality and politics in the classroom. Further, it was the responsibility of teachers to help bridge connections between abstract concepts and students' lived realities. In his speech, Bruera meandered, speaking vaguely on certain topics and contradicting himself with regard to the political and apolitical nature of classroom environments. Ultimately though, he emphasized certain tenets that became central *proceso* educational policy.

The first of these was the reinstatement of "moral" values. Moral values are, of course, subject to interpretation and historical, socio-cultural context. During the dictatorship, educational officials strategically spoke of morals and moral education without defining the parameters or central concepts, as if they were universal. According to speeches by ministry officials, and materials produced by the ministry, Argentine educators, schools, and educational materials should foster moral development and moral consciousness. Ministry of Education officials assumed that their audience knew what "moral education" meant, and therefore did not need to elaborate on the specifics. Generally, they equated morality with tradition and set both of these as being diametrically opposed to recent and/or contemporary ideas about education, psychology, or even childhood. Several scholars have analyzed the ways in which dictatorship

¹¹¹ Ricardo Pedro Bruera, "Discurso Pronunciado por S.E. el señor ministro por cadena nacional de radio y tv. Radio Address, Buenos Aires Argentina, 13/4/76, 6.

officials conceptualized morality as the opposite of subversion and the ways in which children were understood as susceptible to corruption.¹¹² Indeed, children occupied a battleground in between subversive teens and innocent babies. They need to be claimed and educated before it was too late. The government encouraged parents and teachers to monitor the behaviors and movements of children.¹¹³ General Onganía and other members of the Argentine dictatorship saw children as particularly vulnerable to corruption.¹¹⁴ Dictatorship officials essentially defined morality as obedience to a set of rigid social structures and hierarchies. Moral behavior involved respect for those in authority, obedience to those of higher rank or status, and adherence to gender roles proscribed by patriarchal ideals.¹¹⁵ Though they lauded the educational system as a vaunted Argentine tradition, the values to which they most assiduously clung bore more of a resemblance to federalist ideals or even colonial structures of power and social hierarchies, than the nineteenth century liberal ideals upon which the educational system was founded¹¹⁶.

¹¹² Marina Franco, *Un enemigo para la nación: orden interno, violencia y "subversión", 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012); Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, ed., *Human Rights and Revolutions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

¹¹³ Cyrus Stephen Cousins, "General Onganía and the Argentine Revolution of the Right: Anticommunism and Morality, 1966-1970," *Historia Actual Online* 17 (Fall 2008): 65-79; Carolina Kaufmann, *Educación y dictadura: Relevamiento y selección de fuentes documentales sobre política educacional: Argentina 1976-1983* (Rosario, Argentina: FUMYAR Ediciones, Facultad de Humanidades y Artes, UNR, 2017).

¹¹⁴ Sebastian Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); David Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentiniens in the Dirty War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2013).

¹¹⁵ For information on the role of the church on this particular facet of dictatorship policy, see: Emilio Fermín Mignone, *Iglesia y dictadura: el papel de la Iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el régimen militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 2006).

¹¹⁶ Daniel S. Friedrich, *Democratic Education as a Curricular Problem: Historical Consciousness and the Moralizing Limits of the Present* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Cyrus Stephen Cousins, "General Onganía and the Argentine Revolution of the Right: Anticommunism and Morality, 1966-1970," *Historia Actual Online* 17 (Fall 2008): 65-79; Martín Aguirre Pérez, *Palabras de plomo: la violencia política y la lucha de clases en los 70s: un nuevo enfoque del conflicto histórico entre capital y trabajo por el reparto de la riqueza* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Cooperativas, 2013); Claudio Suasnabar, *Intelectuales, exilios y educación: producción intelectual e innovaciones teóricas en educación durante la última dictadura* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2013); Hernán Invernizzi, *Un golpe a los libros: represión a la cultura durante la última dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires Eudeba, 2003); Emilio Fermín Mignone, *Estrategia represiva de la dictadura militar: la doctrina del "paralelismo global"* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2006); Paula Fernández Hellmund and Mariano Millán, eds. *Organizaciones y movimientos sociales en la Argentina reciente (1966-2012)* (Bahía Blanca:

The second tenet of the *proceso*'s educational policy was the idea that education had somehow been stolen and corrupted: that previous governments had destroyed educational content, structure, and bureaucracy, and that the new government needed to somehow take education back, reinvent the system and reestablish social mores and tradition at the same time. Ministry documents and speeches produced from 1976 to 1983 repeatedly referenced the ways in which Argentine education had been ruined. Consider, for example, the radio and television address given by Bruera on 13 April 1976, in which he expounded upon the *proceso*'s educational reforms and goals:

Hence—assuming an intimate sense of what we understand by education—we will tirelessly struggle so that the school can fully resume its mission to educate, stripping itself of psychological fears and false relativizing presuppositions of liberation. We want to train men and women who are healthy, free and morally responsible; able to think...willing to work, because they have understood the meaning of the purpose of man on earth and because they have taken on the vital responsibility of realizing their own history and that of our society.¹¹⁷

He proposed that psychiatrists and socialists had, under the guise of freedom and liberty, led teachers, students, and the educational apparatus astray.¹¹⁸ He referenced the ways in which teenagers, in particular, were “acting out” in this era. Popular contemporary ideas had fundamentally destabilized education, creating what Bruera described as chaos and anarchy in

Ediciones del CEISO, 2014); Paula Guitelman, *La Infancia en dictadura: modernidad y conservadurismo en el mundo de Billiken* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006).

¹¹⁷ “De aquí porque—asumiendo un sentido íntimo de lo que entendemos por educación--, bregaremos incansablemente para que la escuela retome en plenitud su misión de educar, despojándose de temores psicologistas y de falsos presupuestos relativizantes—de liberación. Deseamos formar hombres y mujeres sanos, libres y responsables moralmente; capaces de pensar, porque han logrado su autonomía en el proceso que impone el desarrollo de la personalidad, dispuestos a trabajar, porque han entendido el sentido de la actividad del hombre sobre la tierra y porque han asumido vitalmente la responsabilidad de realizar su propia historia y la de nuestra sociedad.” Ricardo Pedro Bruera, “Discurso Pronunciado por S.E. el señor ministro por cadena nacional de radio y tv. Radio Address, Buenos Aires Argentina, 13/4/76, 6.

¹¹⁸ Bruera is not referencing a specific event or even person here. Instead, he obliquely seeks to criticize and condemn various sectors of the academy or professional sphere that the dictatorship associated with subversion: including psychologists and university professors, especially those in favor of the pedagogical scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s that argued for more freedom of expression in the classroom. For more information of the type of ideologies that he condemned see: Claudio Suasnabar, *Intelectuales, exilios y educación: producción intelectual e innovaciones teóricas en educación durante la última dictadura* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2013).

the classroom, which could be unleashed upon society more broadly. The Ministry described classrooms and students as uncontrolled, disorganized, and lacking appropriate respect for their elders and authority figures.

Bruera argued that previous administrations had given children too much freedom and the results, the Ministry of Education maintained, had been catastrophic; however, looking at the data, this was not the case. Argentine children did not experience any particularly radical changes to course content or curriculum in the 1960s or 1970s. Indeed, much of their engagement with what might have been considered “subversive” political ideologies or dangerous expressions of gender or sexuality happened beyond the curriculum or the set parameters of schooling. The administration feared that these new ideas would find their way into classrooms and schools.¹¹⁹ Preparing boys and girls to become responsible men and women with gender specific responsibilities was the only way to save the nation. There were, of course, contradictions inherent in this discourse, the first of which was the way that Bruera and others touted the importance of creating free thinking individuals with the large caveat that their free thinking fit within the restrictive parameters of the *proceso*’s moral framework, which was at once incredibly vague and strongly implied.¹²⁰

This leads us to the third main tenet of civic education discourse and policy during the dictatorship, which was the acquisition of liberty through discipline. To “return” to traditional values, Bruera argued, Argentina needed to abandon the newfangled notions that had so

¹¹⁹ Manzano, *The Age of Youth*; Gastón Julián Gil, *Universidad y utopía: ciencias sociales y militancia en la Argentina de los 60 y 70* (Mar del Plata, Argentina: EUDEM, 2010); Andrea Andujar, *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009).

¹²⁰ Emilio Fermín Mignone, *Estrategia represiva de la dictadura militar: la doctrina del “paralelismo global”* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2006); Patricia Funes, *Revolución, dictadura y democracia: lógicas militantes y militares en la historia reciente de Argentina en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2016); Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2013).

completely corrupted Argentine classrooms. To do this, he advocated a return to rigid discipline in the classroom as the only pedagogical approach necessary in Argentina:

It will have immediate priority in the action of the government of education, the restoration of order in all school institutions. Therefore, the only pedagogy that we advocate is that of effort. Learning necessarily means severe discipline, which does not admit negligence or ease.¹²¹

This restoration of order required that schools be treated as sites of shared labor: classrooms should be conceptualized as the workplace of, not only the teachers and administrators, but the students themselves.¹²² As such, students, teachers, administrators, and parents needed to collaborate to establish peak productivity. Discipline was the proposed way to keep the educational factory operating at maximum efficiency:

Learning necessarily means a severe discipline, which does not admit negligence or ease. Disengagement from the specific task of the classroom, evasions of work topics, wasting time, the non-compliance with schedules, closing the establishments as a way to solve possible problems, excessive breaks, and unnecessary interruptions, have constituted a style that all of us—parents, teachers and students—must collaborate to eradicate from our schools and our staff.¹²³

This style of teaching eliminated room for tailored education, freedom of expression, or dialogue between students and teachers.¹²⁴ What, for example qualified as an “unnecessary interruption,” “excessive free time,” or even “incomplete schedules” and what might be lost from

¹²¹ “tendrá primacía inmediata en la acción del gobierno de la educación, la restauración del orden en todas las instituciones escolares. Por tanto, la única pedagogía que propugnamos es la del esfuerzo. El aprendizaje significa necesariamente una severa disciplina, que no admite negligencias ni facilismos” Ricardo Pedro Bruera, *Discurso Pronunciado*, 5.

¹²² “El aprendizaje significa necesariamente una severa disciplina, que no admite negligencias ni facilismos. Los desencajes de la tarea específica del aula, las evasiones de los temas de trabajo, las pérdidas de tiempo, el incumplimiento de los horarios, el cierre de los establecimientos como modalidad para resolver eventuales problemas, los asuetos excesivos, y las interrupciones innecesarias, han constituido un estilo que todos—padres, docentes y alumnos—, debemos colaborar para erradicar de nuestras escuelas y de nuestros claustros” Bruera, 5.

¹²³ Bruera, 6.

¹²⁴ This is not surprising when we again consider that the dictatorship wanted to keep students from critically engagement or free thinking. Their fears about these subversive threats are better outlined in: Paula Guitelman, *La Infancia en dictadura: modernidad y conservadurismo en el mundo de Billiken* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006); Lisandro Cañón, *Terrorismo de estado y política educativa: argentina (1976-1983)* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Servicio de Publicaciones e Intercambio Científico, 2011).

student learning with the elimination of interruptions, breaks, or schedule variation? As most teachers or parents know, attempting to control a classroom or group of children is a consistent challenge that necessarily requires some flexibility in terms of content and execution. The Ministry eliminated opportunities for variation, elucidation, discourse, and interrogation, all of which fell under the category of “unnecessary interruptions,” and all of which, progressive educators believed, were crucial for developing critical thinking skills. Those qualities were not desirable to the Ministry of Education at this time. Children needed to listen and not speak, absorb information that could be of use to them as future members of the workforce, and uphold national tradition and values. The repeated call for classroom discipline and the references to classrooms as disorderly mirrored the way that the *proceso* government spoke about Argentine society more broadly.¹²⁵ The laxity of previous government necessitated social discipline, and the use of discipline in classrooms to create an obedient, respectful, and orderly space helped to legitimize the way that the government approached social control and trained students to accept modes of behavior that were, above all, homogenous and subservient to a higher authority. They trained children to not question those in power and to understand, almost instinctively, that disruptions in the classroom (or in the world) would, or even should, be punished. This policy trained them to expect severe disciplinary action and punishments for variation or perceived wrong doing, not just in the classroom, but in life, instilling a self-policing, internalized discipline.

The Ministry of Education often mixed all three of these tenets—return to “traditional morals,” taking back the classroom, and using discipline to control students and information—in

¹²⁵ Daniel Lvovich and Jaquelina Bisquert. *La cambiante memoria de la dictadura: discursos públicos, movimientos sociales y legitimidad democrática* (Los Polvorines, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, 2008); Sebastián Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

their conversations about and changes to the educational system. Bruera combined his ideas about student discipline, traditional values, and the reclamation of educational space in his 1976 radio address:

For the school to truly become the orderly and serene environment it should be, it will be necessary to return, although it seems superfluous to say it, to frequently forgotten notions of the acceptance of hierarchical situations and of compliance with the forms of reciprocal respect and basic norms of coexistence...deviation [from these notions] makes it clearly necessary – for the common good – to remove from the system teachers, students, and even establishments that fail to adhere to the above-stated criteria.¹²⁶

Not only did the Minister of Education combine these goals in nearly all the speeches in which he directly addressed education reform during el *proceso*, but they suffused informational pamphlets that were created for teachers by the Ministry of Culture and Education. These pamphlets and guides, used in classrooms and effectively obligatory, thus offer another particularly clear insight into these conceptualizations of citizenship and civic education. Their use was internally monitored in the way that much of Argentine society was monitored with the understanding that people who deviated from what was expected would be reported to the authorities and eliminated.

Ministry officials often subsumed civic education into other subjects in these “program guides,” which included outlines, lesson plans, and suggestions for teaching on certain subjects. Civics could be included in anything from geography (which has a relatively obvious correlation) to biology (with which it has a somewhat more opaque relationship), to its own separate unit. Regardless of what subject civic education was taught with, the guides for

¹²⁶ “Para que la escuela se convierta realmente en el ambiente ordenado y sereno que debe ser, habrá que volver, aunque parezca superfluo decirlo, a nociones frecuentemente olvidadas de aceptación de las situaciones jerárquicas y de cumplimiento de las formas del respeto recíproco y de las normas básicas de la convivencia. Esta exhortación que implica un imperativo ineludible del momento, no puede admitir tergiversaciones si por desviaciones eventuales llegase a ser necesario que totalmente claro—en resguardo del bien común—que serán separados del sistema los docentes, los alumnos e, inclusive, los establecimientos que no actúan según los criterios anteriores.” Bruera, 10.

teaching reveal how the Ministry of Education understood the relationship between children and the state, and the connections that they wanted students to make between themselves and their nation.

The Ministry of Education and Culture produced many of these pamphlets during the late 1970s. They offered guidelines for the instruction of civics and asked teachers to respond with comments on the ways in which these suggestions played out in classrooms. They reminded teachers that their role as educators was essential to the national reorganization project. Bruera had the Ministry of Education compile these pamphlets very quickly and get them into circulation as soon as possible to begin the students' civic formation. In the Ministry of Education's 1976 "Guías para la enseñanza de formación cívica en el ciclo básico la comunidad en que vivimos" the ministry advised teachers to teach students their role in contemporary Argentine society in comparison with other periods of Argentine history and with other cities in the world:

This guide, and others that we will send you as soon as possible, have been prepared as part of the...activity programmed to carry out the implementation of the Civic Training. It follows in each case the intentionality of the selected contents in each unit, explaining the sub-themes and accompanying some examples of activities as mere indicators of the methodology that is considered appropriate for the subject, and we do not doubt that each teacher will know how to improve and enrich with the infinite possibilities that the work of the classroom offers.¹²⁷

This guide advised teachers to educate children in their rights as citizens as well as their civic duties to the nation. Though the teachers had room for flexibility with how they specifically

¹²⁷ "Esta guía, y otras que le haremos llegar a la brevedad han sido preparadas como parte de la actividad total programada para efectivizar la puesta en marcha de la asignatura Formación Cívica. Sugieren en cada caso la intencionalidad de los contenidos seleccionados en cada unidad, explicitan los subtemas y acompañan algunos ejemplos de actividades como meros indicadores de la metodología que se estima apropiada para la materia, y que no dudamos que cada docente sabrá mejorar y enriquecer con las infinitas posibilidades que la labor del aula le ofrece." *Guías para la enseñanza de formación cívica en el ciclo básico la comunidad en que vivimos*, Buenos Aires, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1976, 4.

instructed children in these values, the teacher's guide reinforced the basic tenets of the *proceso*'s educational policies. The guide emphasized teaching children the primacy of the nation and obedience to the nation as key to national success. It also emphasized the ways in which children, as citizens, would confront certain national problems, and how they ought to respond to them:

Likewise, an attempt is made to obtain a real knowledge of the problems that every citizen must face, and exercise reflection and critical judgment on them, so that they acquire a true sense of their rights and responsibilities as a member of the community.¹²⁸

As part of their civic education, Argentine children participated in activities to discover how the city had changed over time, how their actions as citizens could effect change, and how they ought to respond to various situations. In this unit, the Ministry of Education positioned the city as a child's first interaction with a broader society and connected families, neighborhoods and cities to the nation. Children were asked to discuss with an older member of their neighborhood or family how life had changed within the past twenty-five or fifty years. They weren't asked to discuss politics, or the ideological ways in which the city had changed; instead they should focus their intergenerational dialogue on the visual and physical ways that the city had changed and the way that national heroes had been commemorated in monuments and street names.

At the heart of these early civic formation lessons in the *proceso* was the definition of "good" citizenship." Civic participation in daily life required knowledge of one's rights as a member of the community and the appropriate participation of a citizen in daily life. The underlying message in these documents was that all citizens were required to play a specific role in Argentine society, that "good citizens" performed that role, but that all citizens were not good

¹²⁸ "Asimismo, se intenta lograr un conocimiento real de los problemas que todo ciudadano debe afrontar, y ejercitar la reflexión y juicio crítico sobre los mismos, para que adquiera el sentido justo de sus derechos y responsabilidades como miembro de la comunidad" *Guías*, 5.

citizens. Participation in public life required that all of one's actions maintain the integrity of government function, that the city serve as the first place in which children exercised civic values, and that all of one's actions contribute to the progress of the city and ultimately the nation.¹²⁹ This guide emphasized the ways in which civic virtues encompassed cooperation, solidarity, justice, and respect for others at the same time that the government was actively targeting Argentine citizens during the highest point of violence in the twentieth century.

The participation and discussion required teachers to ask students what it meant to be a "good citizen" and what it meant to be a "bad citizen," and then ask how a neighbor should respond when confronted with a shared problem. The framing is important. Teachers weren't instructed to ask, for instance, what to do if they saw someone in trouble or what to do if a neighbor had a problem. Instead, they had to ask how a neighbor should respond to a *shared problem*. The ministry at once situated Argentina as a shared community in which everyone, at all social and governmental levels, should participate, and as a place in which only people who participated *properly* within the government's ideal parameters were entitled to citizenship and its protections. In a society in which neighbors were regularly disappeared or targeted, children were taught to concern themselves, not with the problem of an individual, but with problems that affected everyone, and that were, in theory, openly discussable, thus relegating other "problems" into the realm of unspeakable.¹³⁰

The dichotomy of moral citizen and subversive was at the core of dictatorship logics. That is: one only counted as a citizen in Argentina if one adhered to a set of somewhat arbitrary

¹²⁹ "Participación del ciudadano en la vida de la ciudad. Sus derechos como miembro de la comunidad. La participación en la vida pública. La probidad de todos sus actos en la función de gobierno. La ciudad como primera escuela para el ejercicio de las virtudes cívicas: solidaridad, cooperación, justicia y respeto por los demás. La acción del ciudadano para contribuir al progreso de la ciudad y por ende al de la Nación." *Guías*, 6.

¹³⁰ "una reflexión acerca de los valores permanentes de la familia argentina, para luego describir a nuestra sociedad sobre la base del análisis de los grupos que la componen considerados en su evolución histórica." *Guías*, 11.

standards of behavior. Even the suspicion of deviation from this set of standards meant that one no longer counted as a citizen, or a person. They could therefore be held as an enemy of the state. The dehumanization of individuals who behaved immorally or subversively is what made it possible for the regime to actively target, torture, and kill them; it's also what made it possible for bystanders to ignore, overlook, or endorse this type of violence. Behaving in a way that was considered amoral or subversive, they had violated the social contract, and therefore lost all their rights.¹³¹ These people were civically unfit to participate in society. They were unfit to raise children, or act in public. This logic was a powerful tool, and the dictatorship reinforced it at every opportunity, especially in these civic education guides for small children.

Teaching guides also emphasized the primacy of Argentine families as a cornerstone of nation and national identity. In a 1976 guide on teaching children Civic Formation with an emphasis on the Argentine Family, the Ministry promoted “a reflection on the permanent values of the Argentine family, in order to then describe our society on the basis of the analysis of the groups of which it is composed considered in their historical evolution.”¹³² Teachers needed to instruct children that the Argentine family was consistent across time. The Argentine family changed in certain ways, but certain core values, moral values, were consistent and were the foundation of Argentine society. These values included: “freedom, mutual consent and love as the basis of marriage; the stability of marriage; elevation of women and respect for their dignity; a sense of respect for the personal and social esteem of family relationships; valuation of private

¹³¹ Scholars who work on the “silent majority” analyze these themes with an eye to dehumanization and group consent. Please see: Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2013); David Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Graciela Fernández Mejjide, *Eran humanos, no héroes: crítica de la violencia política de los 70* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2013).

¹³² “Guías para la enseñanza de formación cívica en el ciclo básico la familia argentina,” Buenos Argentina, Ministry of Education and Culture, 4.

property of the family home.”¹³³ The family was the foundation of the “traditional” Argentine values that Bruera and his Ministry believed were definitive of the nation and its people.¹³⁴ Yet this definition of traditional “family” was one that they invented to suit their needs.

Teaching instruction for this subject included a diluted and controlled version of Argentine family history, in which colonial family values were located as the core family values. These values were the province of white Argentines, *criollos* and later immigrants from Europe. White Argentines were credited with independence, and national progress. Afro-Argentines and indigenous Argentines were described as existing in only colonial and pre-colonial times respectively, and even then, only in reduced numbers located in remote areas.¹³⁵ While the Ministry of Education attempted to erase and contain the influence of non-white Argentines, they worked hard to connect *criollos* and immigrants as part of a shared project of establishing moral values and social order. The historical narrative that the Ministry of Education presented posited that white European immigration in colonial times established social order through the creation of families based on religion and stable hierarchal values. Immigrants in the early twentieth century reinforced these values, which is why, the pamphlet argued, they did not disrupt the social order. Students were asked to consider how immigration upheld Argentine values and why—the answer being that immigrants and white Argentines shared a common set of socio-cultural, moral values that were established in individual families, in which everyone knew their appropriate role, which they transcribed onto a broader society. This narrative included

¹³³ “libertad, mutuo consentimiento y amor como base del matrimonio; estabilidad matrimonial; elevación de la mujer y respeto por su dignidad; sentido de respeto por la estimación personal y social de las relaciones familiares; valoración de la propiedad privada de la vivienda familiar,” *La Familia Argentina*, 5.

¹³⁴ Both Emilio Fermín Mignone, *Iglesia y dictadura: el papel de la Iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el régimen militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 2006); and Andrea Andujar, *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009) examine the role of the family and “family values” in relation to the state in Argentina during this period.

¹³⁵ *La Familia Argentina*, 5.

immigrants into a national narrative that was only made possible by the distance from the period in which immigrants were seen as nationally disruptive and morally degenerative.¹³⁶ It also overlooked completely the huge variety of family structures and familial experiences across time, place, and socioeconomic class.

Dictatorship officials implied that contemporary Argentine problems were rooted in the disintegration of family values and they asked children to identify social problems and family problems and the ways that they could help to rectify them. Further, the Ministry of Education drew connections between the Argentine school and the Argentine family: both were hierarchical structures that replicated culture and moral values. This attention to traditional morality was deeply intertwined with Catholicism, patriarchy, and colonial ideas about family obedience. Though Bruera spearheaded these policies in Argentina, subsequent ministers during the *proceso* built upon them.¹³⁷

Whereas the attempts to formulate civic education programs in the initial year of the dictatorship obliquely endorsed Catholic “values” as the moral foundation for Argentine society, subsequent governments more directly endorsed Catholicism as it related to marriage, obedience, and “respect.” As illustrated in [date] guidelines for moral and civic education through the teaching of high school biology, they maintained that contemporary social values in Argentina and the world were responsible for the corruption of Argentine society:

Social life not as a result of historical process or as a mechanical fact but as a moral task, fruit of the common effort of all the members of the community.

¹³⁶ See, for example: James A. Baer, *Anarchist Immigrants in Spain and Argentina* (University of Illinois Press, 2017); Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers* (University of California Press, 1998); Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Cornell University Press: 2004).

¹³⁷ We can see reflections from exiles on the increased militancy of educational policy in Claudio Suasnabar, *Intelectuales, exilios y educación: producción intelectual e innovaciones teóricas en educación durante la última dictadura* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2013); Daniel S. Friedrich also takes up this topic in his writing on democratic educational policy in *Democratic Education as a Curricular Problem: Historical Consciousness and the Moralizing Limits of the Present* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); we can also see this trend in any of the following books.

The person who is today threatened by materialistic and dissociative principles that disorient and displace her both in her inner life and in her social activities. For all of them resurge, with clear detail, the right of young people to moral education and the inescapable responsibility of educators.¹³⁸

Civic education emphasized protecting and promoting morals. The amoral nature of contemporary society had damaged Argentina and deprived children of their right to a moral education. This education was largely the purview of educators and families. The Ministry of Education was quick to state that they didn't believe that the rest of the world was amoral given their disassociation from religion and the nuclear family, however, they implied Argentine moral superiority at every turn. The Ministry proposed a return to "natural laws" based on social and familial hierarchies of power. They emphasized continuity of moral clarity and argued that their conceptualization of moral education was consistent throughout Argentine history, though it was not:

with the Argentine past which is also part of the European spiritual space and manifests itself in concrete foundational constitutional acts of the ethic-political being of the fatherland, vg. In the May Revolution, in the Congress of Tucumán, in the definitive will of archetypal national heroes such as San Martin and Belgrano and in the National Constitution.¹³⁹

They lauded the "heroes" of Independence and gave an altered version of these men as conservatively catholic and the revolution not as a departure from a colonial past, but a rebranding of Spanish and broader European values as Argentine values.

¹³⁸ "La vida social no como resultante de *proceso* históricos ni como dato mecánico sino como tarea moral fruto del esfuerzo en común de todos los miembros de la comunidad.

La persona que se encuentra hoy amenazada por principios materialistas y disociadores que la desorientan y desubican tanto en su vida interior como en sus actividades sociales.

Por todo ellos resurge, con clara nitidez, el derecho de los jóvenes a la educación moral y la ineludible responsabilidad de los educadores." *Ciencias biológicas, formación moral y cívica. Guías programáticas para segundo año del ciclo básico*, Buenos Aires: Ministry of Culture and Education, 28. Date??

¹³⁹ "con el pasado argentino que se inscribe también en el espacio espiritual europeo y se manifiesta en actos fundacionales concretos constituyentes del ser ético-político de la patria, vg. En la Revolución de Mayo, en el Congreso de Tucumán, en la voluntad definitiva de próceres arquetípicos de la nacionalidad como San Martin y Belgrano y en la constitución nacional." "Guías biológicas," 28.

They became increasingly rigid about morality. Children needed to learn to “do good and avoid evil.”¹⁴⁰ By the 1980s, the Ministry of Education required that students learn their civic responsibilities relative to their “obligations to god, obligations to themselves, obligations to others. To be and be perfect.”¹⁴¹ The ministry further required that students learn “the moral virtues their mode of acquisition, their importance, the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, strength, temperance. The middle just and the extremes. The vices.”¹⁴² They increasingly equated their “traditional” morality with a form of Christian extremism in which “virtues” were radicalized. The Ministry mandated that children develop “spiritual dispositions: nobility, sense of being spiritual, of equality, hospitality and vocation for freedom.”¹⁴³ They established Catholic values as definitively Argentine. The erased social change from the historical narrative, then removed any examples in which people organized, fought for change, or challenged authority. They emphasized continuity.¹⁴⁴

Children had to learn what was “Argentine” and what was not. For instance, they required that small children learn the difference between capitalism and Marxism, that they understand nation, state, and government as sacred. Finally, the Ministry mandated that children learn that the common welfare of a political society relied upon objective conditions, and that a virtuous coexistence relied upon authority. The authority of the state had a broad scope and few limitations. Citizens needed to remain vigilant and respect and protect authority in homes, at

¹⁴⁰“hacer el bien y evitar el mal.” “Guías biológicas,” 36.

¹⁴¹ “deberes para con Dios; deberes para consigo mismo; deberes para con los demás. Ser y ser perfecto” “Guías biológicas,” 36.

¹⁴² las virtudes morales su modo de adquisición, sus importancias, las virtudes cardinales: prudencia, justicia, fortaleza, templanza. El justo medio y los extremos. Los vicios.” “Guías, biológicas,” 37.

¹⁴³ “disposiciones espirituales: nobleza, sentido del ser espíritu, de igualdad, hospitalidad y vocación por la libertad.” “Guías biológicas,” 38.

¹⁴⁴ Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Graciela Fernández Mejjide, *Eran humanos, no héroes: crítica de la violencia política de los 70* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2013); Daniel Gutman, *Somos derechos y humanos* (Buenos Aires: Penguin, 2015).

school, and in the community. The idea of living together and working together towards a common goal in this case was turned towards exclusionism and extremism. They adhered to “traditional morality,” enforced structures of authority, and taught children to understand their role in a project to preserve the sanctity of the nation and prevent challenges to the state.

Though the Ministry emphasized virtuousness, their educational policies belied a more sinister reality in which nationalism was used to support a dictatorial regime from childhood. The adherence to the nation and the family was based in a history of the nation that was exclusively white, patriarchally structured, and authoritative. Children needed to learn their place in their family, their community, their school, and the nation in which attempts to disrupt or change the “status quo” were consistently overcome through national cohesion of “good” citizens working towards a common good. In this narrative, the elimination of subversive elements of society was a continuity with the past.

Teaching and Challenging Authoritarianism

During the dictatorship, *manuales* embraced the Ministry of Education’s ideas about civic education and the role of children in the nation. These texts emphasized nationalism, silence regarding political dissidence, and cautionary tales against misbehavior. They included political undertones that indicate the preoccupation with “subversion” so prevalent during this period. These books, in keeping with Ministry of Education guidelines, supported traditional gender norms, the nuclear family, and the preservation of the state, but they also offered opportunities for individual authors to subvert the official discourse through paratextual cues.

An example of this type of *manual* was *Aire libre*, written by Maria Elena Walsh, published by Editorial Estrada in 1976. Maria Elena Walsh is a unique example of a children’s

author who wrote within the Ministry of Education during the height of the dictatorship. Walsh is the most famous and celebrated Argentine children's author of the twentieth century. Some of her poetry and prose from this era directly confronted the dictatorship, and some of it was banned from print and circulation in Argentina. She also wrote books for use in schools that followed the party line but allowed spaces for interpretation and transgression. In *Aire libre*, Walsh narrated the experiences of a young boy named Luciano. She presented his story episodically, through text surrounded by and interspersed with illustrations.¹⁴⁵ The stories included within the book, the situations that Luciano experiences, and the topics he discusses are crucial in positioning the main character—and by extension the children reading or listening to the book—as citizens.¹⁴⁶ The overarching narrative places a significant emphasis on the way that Luciano's life relates to the nation. He is repeatedly defined by his position within his family, community, and the state, in a way that can be read as simultaneously complying with the state guidelines and contradicting them.

In chapter seven, "El patio," for instance, Luciano describes what is like to sit outside of his home: "I water and sweep the dirt courtyard of my house. This raises a very rich smell. This house is poor and small, but we love it very much."¹⁴⁷ This caption is accompanied on the opposing page by a lurid picture of the courtyard he describes, with flowers and a watering

¹⁴⁵ Most of these images are in lurid, even psychedelic colors popular at the time and still generally in vogue in children's literature as a way to promote engagement with the text and maintain interest in the story progression. Federica Dominguez Colavita, "The Current State of Children's Literature in Argentina." *Children's Literature* 7 (1978): 169-180.

¹⁴⁶ Maria Elena Walsh, *Aire Libre* (Editorial Estrada, 1976), 36.

¹⁴⁷ "Yo riego y barro el patio de tierra de mi casa. Se levanta un olor muy rico. Esta casa es pobre y pequeña, pero la queremos mucho." Walsh, 12.

can.¹⁴⁸ This simple description of his home, however, is connected to a larger home that the boy and his family occupy:

We also have another house, huge and beautiful.
I live there with all of you. This house is Argentina.
It is the motherland.
Is the dirt courtyard of my home also the motherland?
If you abandon it, if you don't take care of it, what will happen?
Nettles will eat it, the flowers will dry up, and vermin will invade it.¹⁴⁹

Walsh gives the collective national home precedence and significance. This chapter, which opens with the main character performing chores to care for his home, in the narrative that follows, places upon Luciano and the reader another more important task: caring for the nation. If children don't take care of *la patria*, if they abandon it, it will be left to ruin. This was something that both right wing and progressive members of Argentina agreed upon though they had oppositional views of what "not caring for the patria" entailed. The nation, Walsh maintained, must be protected and cared for much like the idealized image of the family garden. She tasked the child and the children reading this text with the care and maintenance of Argentina, a task which could be taken up in one way by conservative children and another by progressive ones.¹⁵⁰ The book goes on to discuss subjects such as the importance of saving money and working together, but the main narrative conflict surrounds the construction and destruction of a school in Luciano's town.

¹⁴⁸ Walsh, 12. "We also have another house, huge and beautiful. I live there with all of you. This house is Argentina. It is the motherland. Is the dirt courtyard of my home also the motherland? If you abandon it, if you don't take care of it, what will happen? Nettles will eat it, the flowers will dry up, and vermin will invade it."

¹⁴⁹ También tenemos otra casa, enorme y hermosa. Allí vivo con todos ustedes. Esa casa es la República Argentina. Es la Patria. ¿El patio de tierra de mi casa también es la Patria? Si lo abandono, si no lo cuido, ¿qué pasa? Se lo comen las ortigas, se le secan las flores y lo invaden las alimañas." Walsh, 12

¹⁵⁰ The following pages includes poem by B. Fernández Moreno further romanticizing the patio, which after the metaphorical connection made in "El Patio," further idealizes the beauty, perfection, and ephemeral nature of the nation itself. Walsh, 13.

In one chapter, adults, children, and the elderly in Luciano's community all work together to build a school. They construct it through collective collaboration: stone masons, priests, businessmen, teachers, everyone contributes building materials, funds, manual labor, helping in whatever way they are able. It is a communal project that echoes the process of national construction.¹⁵¹ Luciano's community is united by their shared project and their shared citizenship. They build a school, an institution that will further the reproduction of the nation and nationalist sentiments. Education is repeatedly lauded in the text as the primary goal of their project and an inheritance bequeathed to all Argentines.¹⁵² "Sarmiento would be so happy if he could see us! He would want to see the country covered with beautiful schools!" says Luciano's grandmother as they work together on their project.¹⁵³ In this text, Walsh positioned Sarmiento, as the father of Argentine education, in the narration as a benevolent figure, who represented liberal and democratic ideals.

Unfortunately, after all of the group's hard work and effort, the school is destroyed in the dead of night by mysterious assailants, to the sadness, disappointment, and rage of the community. The following chapter is entitled "¿Qué pasó?" and it is framed by an illustration of Luciano crying, with large tears falling from the margins. "I have been crying for a while, not only from sadness, but rather from indignation," he says, "I got to dad. He hands me his handkerchief. I see that he too has tears running down his cheeks. Beba whines, clinging to mom's skirts. The teachers are sad and silent. What happened?"¹⁵⁴ Luciano explains that "last night, some unknown people tore down all that we had built with so much love. They uprooted

¹⁵¹ Walsh, 41.

¹⁵² Walsh 42.

¹⁵³ "¿Qué contento se pondría Sarmiento si nos viera! ¡Él quería ver el país sembrado de hermosas escuelas!" Walsh, 41.

¹⁵⁴ "Hace rato que estoy llorando. No solo de tristeza, sino de indignación. Me acerco a papá. Me tiende su pañuelo. Veo que a él también le ruedan lagrimones por las mejillas. Beba lloriquea prendida a las faldas de mamá. Los maestros están tristes y callados. ¿Qué pasó?" Walsh, 51."

newly planted havens. They destroyed a wall that was already high. They stole the tools. They broke three sinks. What a disgrace!”¹⁵⁵ The hard work of the community, and by extension, the nation, was destroyed and disrupted by unknown terrorists in the night. Luciano and his father discuss this subject directly:

‘Why have they done this?’ I ask dad.

‘I don’t know, son...bad people...’

‘Or people who are unhappy,’ says the doctor.

‘Why, doctor?’ I asked.

‘Sometimes people are bad because they are unhappy, Luciano. Those that damaged the school undoubtedly did not have a good dad or a teacher that cared for or educated them. Do you understand?’

‘Yes, doctor, I understand, but it still hurts...’

And then grandmother gave us the battle cry.

‘Lift your hearts! Nothing will be accomplished with those long faces. We will start again!’

When the sheriff arrived, we all had a better face.¹⁵⁶

The explanations that Walsh gave for why the “gente mala” destroyed the school are interesting, especially given the fact that when this book was published there was increased resistance and

¹⁵⁵ “Anoche, algunos desconocidos destrozaron lo que habíamos construido con tanto amor. Arrancaron los paraísos recién plantados. Destruyeron un muro que ya estaba alto. Robaron las palas. Rompieron tres lavabos. ¡Qué desgracia!” Walsh, 51.

¹⁵⁶ “¿Por qué habrán hecho esto? —pregunto a papá.

--No sé, hijo...Gente mala...

--O gente que no es feliz—dijo el doctor.

--¿Por qué, doctor? —pregunté.

--A veces la gente es mala porque no es feliz, Luciano. Los que dañaron la escuela, sin duda no tuvieron un buen papá ni una maestra que los quisiera y los educara. ¿Comprendes?

--Sí, doctor, comprendo, pero igual me da mucha pena...

Y de pronto la abuela dio el grito de batalla:

--¡Arriba esos corazones! ¡Nada se consigue con poner cara larga!

¡Empezaremos de nuevo!

Cuando llegó el comisario, ya todos teníamos mejor cara” Walsh, 52.

protestation on the part of “subversives” and an increase in the number of disappearances on behalf of the government.¹⁵⁷ Walsh’s description of vandals and violence occupied a clever and polysemous position in which conservative readers would interpret the destruction of the school as being the work of urban guerillas and the more progressive elements of society could interpret it as state violence. Walsh exhibited an uncanny ability to provide a text that could be positively read by the left and the right. Consider the reasons she gives for the actions of the vandals: the people who did this did so because they were discontent.¹⁵⁸ They did not have good parents or a teacher who wanted to educate them properly.¹⁵⁹ The implication of this passage is that children, who are raised right, have good parents and a proper education will never perpetrate such an act. It could be read by the dictatorship as an endorsement of their moralization campaign, and by progressive teachers and parents as a reflection on the way that state violence had become possible. *Aire Libre* is one attempt to give to make sure that children understand the sadness and outrage that comes with such “senseless violence,” whether it comes from urban guerrillas or the secret police. More than working with the left or the right, it seems that Walsh might have just be working for the children, offering them support and ways to process atrocities they might see in their daily lives.

The next sequence explains more about the criminals. In the chapter “Los Ladrones” the culprits are apprehended: “last night the police caught the culprit red handed. They’re all in custody.”¹⁶⁰ When Luciano asks why they would want to destroy the school, his father explores several possibilities, “perhaps because they weren’t able to go to school when they were kids.

¹⁵⁷ Manzano, “Sexualizing Youth,” 435-460.

¹⁵⁸ Walsh, 52.

¹⁵⁹ Walsh, 52.

¹⁶⁰ “Anoche los descubrió la policía con las manos en la masa. Están todos presos,” Walsh, 53.

Maybe no one gave them a good example, who knows.”¹⁶¹ As in other moments of communal self-doubt and tragedy that occur in the book, its Luciano’s grandmother who offers an uplifting speech and an appeal to history:

‘You know what Sarmiento said?’ asked the grandmother.

‘What did he say?’

‘For every school that opens, a prison closes.’¹⁶²

Like Walsh herself, it is a woman who offers an explanation, who connects a contemporary event to history in order to help make sense of it. Walsh references Sarmiento throughout the book. Often lauded as a national hero, his name is used as a call to arms, an inspirational rallying cry. Sarmiento is used to represent order, progress, and particularly an emphasis on the importance of education in maintaining stability and a proper social hierarchy. Luciano’s grandmother harkens to a historical past and imagined utopia to help them move forward. They take up Sarmiento as a figure head for creating a more organized system and the reclaiming order within the nation after a tragedy.¹⁶³ In some ways, through this text, Walsh offers an idea, and a call, for how to fix the national “school” by returning to Sarmiento’s emphasis on education as a way to overcome “barbarism” and progress socially. In *Aire Libre*, it is the uneducated who commit crimes, and it is through education that responsible citizens are formed. This liberal ideology is ironically, if unsurprisingly, reinstated here through this educational text. Sarmiento’s

¹⁶¹ “Quizás porque ellos no pudieron ir a la escuela cuando eran chicos. Quizás nadie les dio buen ejemplo, vaya a saberse.” Walsh, 53.

¹⁶² Walsh, 53.

¹⁶³ It is important to note that Sarmiento is a complicated and controversial figure in the history of Argentina. He promoted normative homogeneity and a liberalism that claimed universalism while installing European values and privileging whites. At the same time, he had a radically egalitarian conceptualization of the right to access education and citizenship. He also saw education as a way of “improving” or equalizing people of different classes and ancestries, a move away from fixed ideas about biological inferiority of different groups. Education could “whiten” and “civilize” undesirable parts of the nation. Sarmiento’s legacy in Argentina is complicated, so it’s worth noting that in educational texts he is lauded as a national hero whose values should be embodied and aspired to.

policies emphasized nationalist inclusion and the illusion of equality within a hierarchy that clearly privileged various groups over others. In Luciano's world, things are organized along a strict hierarchy that privileges age, gender, education, nationalism, and order above all else.

The community does rebuild the school house and Walsh repeatedly discusses the benefits of cooperation in the face of vandalism and malcontent. Nationalism plays a significant role in the rest of the book as well. This is especially true of the pages that discuss the national symbols. In *Aire Libre*, these symbols serve as a gateway to solidify the nationalist points discussed throughout the book. In the chapter entitled "El día de la bandera," Luciano's sister Beba is playing with a flag when their father asks if she knows what it means. When she doesn't, he pulls a photograph of their family out of his pocket.

'What is this?' he asks.

'Mom, Luciano, and me,' answers Beba.

'But this is just a piece of cardboard,' dad replies.

'No, dad, it's us,' she tells him.¹⁶⁴

Here, Walsh discusses the difference between the image of something and the reality of it. This is a difficult concept to explicate for children. Walsh does so here tying, once again, the nation and the nuclear family. Papá explains to Beba what a flag represents by using a family photo. Beba contradicts her father's explanation that the photo is just a picture, for her, it is truly her family. Papá uses that to continue his explanation of national belonging.

'Of course,' says dad, "but you're quite big. I can't carry you over my heart, right? I'm only able to carry an *image* of you. Just as the flag is not only a piece of fabric, this is not only a piece of cardboard, right?'

¹⁶⁴ "--¿Qué es esto? —pregunta.

--Mamá, Luciano y yo—contesta Beba.

--Sin embargo, esto es sólo un pedacito de cartulina—contesta papá.

--No, papá, somos nosotros—le digo." Walsh, 61.

‘That’s right, dad.’

‘If someone deliberately damaged this photo, I would be very upset. Because this photo represents you. Because it is the image of the people that I care about most in the world.’¹⁶⁵

As Luciano’s father explains, he cannot constantly take his family with him, so he takes their image as a representation of those he loves most in the world. The picture of the family is not only a picture of the family, it is something much more. The flag also represents something that he cares about very much. In explanation Luciano’s father gives, he equates the nuclear and national family.

Papá continues on the next page, and connection drawn between family and country are even more blatant:

‘So, the flag is the photograph of the country?’ asks Beba.

‘No,’ says dad, ‘The flag is not the portrait, it is the symbol. That’s what we call it. When we wear our rosettes [buttons made of ribbons in Argentine colors] and we say that ‘we carry the country over our hearts.’

‘And it would be very heavy to carry the mountains and the pampas and the battle of San Lorenzo over our hearts!’¹⁶⁶

Papá clarifies that the flag is a representation of the love of the country that its citizens carry with them. As it would be difficult to carry Beba and Luciano in his pocket, it would be even more difficult to carry the pampas, the cities, and the (military) history of Argentina. A symbol is what you carry instead.

¹⁶⁵ “--Claro—dice papá—ustedes son demasiado grandes. No puedo llevarlos sobre mi corazón ¿verdad? Sólo puedo llevar una imagen de ustedes. Así como la bandera no es un pedazo de género, esto no es sólo un pedazo de cartulina, ¿verdad?

--Así es, papá.

--Si alguien dañara a propósito esta foto, yo me enojaría mucho. Porque esta foto los representa a ustedes. Porque es la imagen de las personas que más quiero en el mundo.” Walsh, 61.”

¹⁶⁶ “--¿La bandera es la fotografía de la Patria? —preguntó Beba

--No—dijo papá--. La Bandera no es el retrato, es el símbolo. Así se llama. Cuando nos ponemos escarapela decimos que “llevamos la Patria sobre el corazón”. ¡Y sería muy pesado llevar la cordillera, y la pampa, y el combate de San Lorenzo sobre el corazón!” Walsh, 62.

Luciano, though he does not participate in the conversation, listens carefully to the exchange between his father and his baby sister. When his father has finished his explanation, Luciano reflects on what he has heard and what he thinks. He says:

I kept thinking about it: now I understand better why General Belgrano created the symbol of the country. This piece of cloth represents our beloved land. With its mountains and rivers. With its people to defend her. With all of the brave men who died to defend her. With all the scholars who have contributed to its greatness. I think that Beba also understood. Because she put her little flag in a vase very carefully.¹⁶⁷

Luciano understands now that Manuel Belgrano created the flag to represent the country. A flag can encompass all the things that Argentina contains: mountains, rivers, the brave people who defended her, and everyone who has helped to create her. Luciano has also learned a valuable lesson about symbols and representations: flags and photos are important because they represent something much beloved and ought to, therefore, be treated with respect. These pages are accompanied with the national seal and the flag. Though community, family-- particularly the nuclear family -- and nationalism are intertwined and mutually reinforced throughout the book, Walsh inextricably connects the importance of the nation, patriotism and familial loyalty together in this section in particular for Luciano—and by extension the young students reading this text. Walsh maintains that symbol of Argentina and the nation itself are transcendental. Though her lauding of the nation is very much in keeping with civic guides outlined by the Ministry of Education, there is the possibility of interpreting it as counter to the regime. It is almost as if she suggests that children hold fast to the nation in a moment of darkness because Argentina, at its core, is not a nation of vandals, but a community. On the surface, these vandals

¹⁶⁷ “Yo me quedé pensando: ahora entiendo mejor ¿por qué el general Belgrano creó el símbolo de la Patria. Ese pedazo de género representa a nuestra tierra querida. Con sus montañas y sus ríos. Con sus gentes defenderla. Con todos los valientes que murieron por defenderla. Con todos los sabios que contribuyeron a engrandecerla. Creo que Beba también entendió. Porque puso su banderita en un florero, con mucho cuidado.” Walsh, 62.

can be read as the *montoneros* or other subversive groups, which is why this book was able to be published in schools, but there is space in the story for the reader to interpret, perhaps much later, the violence committed as acts of terror by the military.

Aire Libre teaches cooperation, education, literacy, family, in a way that links all of these themes with a very specific version of a traditional Argentine nuclear family. Walsh constructs this narrative with an eye to a symbolic and idealized Argentine nation. In every chapter and every encounter, it is not only the community or the family at stake, it is by extension the nation itself. The protection and care of these smaller models of the state are emphasized throughout the book. Luciano's interactions with his family, friends, and community are colored by their position within Argentina. The description of them is also influenced by the contemporary political climate of the 1970s. The reaffirmation of traditional gender norms and the nuclear family unit is in sharp contrast to the increased radicalization of youth movements in Argentina and the sexual revolution. Adolescents do not feature in the book at all other than as villains who undo the communal work that Luciano and his family have so clearly worked for. There is a marked emphasis placed on the importance of family over friends and on the nation above all things. The political environment in which this book was both written and published is evident in the way that the text tries to find continuities in a national narrative despite constraints. It attempts to keep these young children from following in the footsteps of their older siblings or their more radical parents by celebrating and emphasizing the importance of a conservative family and a romantic form of Argentina that is upheld and supported by a military junta and threatened by subversive leftists.

Like *Aire Libre*, *Dulce de leche: Libro de lectura para cuarto grado*, another *manual* published during the dictatorship, blends real and imagined worlds in its representation of

Argentina's past and present.¹⁶⁸ In doing so, it creates an integrated and idealized version of Argentine history with representations of current issues and events. *Dulce de Leche* was written by Carlos Joaquín Durán and Noemí Beatriz Tornadú. Durán and Tornadú the author of several children's books, educational texts, and works on educational theory. Both authors submitted to censorship mandates from the *proceso* government. Although the first version of this book was published in 1974, this section considers the 1978 edition whose narrative was controlled and shaped by the dictatorship. Unlike *Aire Libre*, where Walsh followed censorship guidelines, but allowed room for the interpretation of her narrative, *Dulce de Leche* complied explicitly with dictatorship mandates. *Dulce de Leche* does not follow any single character through the narrative. Instead, chapters are connected loosely. They cover topics such as books and the importance of reading, national figures and heroes, family life, television shows, national anthems, symbols, and poetry. Because the audience for this book is comprised of an older age group (children in their fourth, rather than second, cycle of study), the authors go into more detail with a more advanced vocabulary. The illustrated images they used to convey some subjects are interspersed with, juxtaposed against, and overlapped with photographic images.¹⁶⁹ The merging of the illustrated and photographic allows for a blending of realities and a claim of veracity regarding this version of Argentine national cohesion, identity, and history. This combination of images and text provides the opportunity to look at the ways in which ethnic and class differences are portrayed in the image of Argentina created for and provided to children in the midst of the Dirty War.

¹⁶⁸ Carlos Joaquín Durán and Noemí Beatriz Tornadú, *Dulce de Leche: Libro de lectura para cuatro grado* (1974; reprint, Buenos Aires: Estrada, 1978).

¹⁶⁹ Durán and Tornadú, 26-27.

One of the themes presented in *Dulce de Leche* is the relationship between the rural areas of Argentina with the city of Buenos Aires. The rural and urban dichotomy is one that has been prevalent in discourses of Argentine national identity and belonging since the nation's foundation in the nineteenth century, and arguably since the colonial period.¹⁷⁰ The capital has been positioned as the civilized center of the nation, whereas the rural countryside is situated as a pseudo-colonial outpost of the metropole.¹⁷¹ At the same time, there has been a tendency to romanticize the country. The conservative emphasis on the romantic pampas as a place in which the traditional is preserved and the true Argentine still exists despite the social and political upheaval in urban areas is something that has occurred repeatedly in Argentine history.¹⁷² The pampas are constructed as “foreign” and the people living there, particularly indigenous people, are represented as “other,” there is an effort to incorporate them into the national identity while maintaining traditional geographical and cultural divisions.

In the chapter, “Una Familia Nómada,” the text is accompanied by photographs of people working in the pampas. This two-page section of the book explores the life of Lucho, the youngest son of a nomadic family.¹⁷³ Beneath the photo of Lucho, collecting cotton with his parents, brothers, and grandparents the text explains more about his family's work: “they work in

¹⁷⁰ See: John Charles Chasteen, *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); and Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency during the Argentine State-Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853-1870)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁷¹ As reflected in many nineteenth century texts including, most notably, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism: The First Complete English Translation*, trans., Kathleen Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁷² See María Cristina Cacopardo, and José Luis Moreno, eds., *La familia italiana y meridional en la emigración a la Argentina* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1994); Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: la construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de cultura económica, 2001); José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁷³ Durán and Tornadú, 26.

temporary jobs. Jobs that last for only a while. Some of these tasks are: cutting sugar cane, harvesting peaches and apples and tobacco, pruning yerba mate, and the shearing.”¹⁷⁴ Lucho and his family are rural workers whose primary occupations include agricultural labor that varies seasonally. This text is framed by images of the family at work. On the following page, Durán and Tornadú explain more about why this work is important.

The first image shows Lucho’s older brothers as they tend to a tree whose roots are crumbling and sick. They will soon move on to a new region where they will harvest oranges. This is depicted in the picture beneath the text, which shows Lucho’s grandmother picking fruit from a tree.¹⁷⁵ Durán and Tornadú emphasize that Lucho’s family is “una familia unida,” a united family. Despite the fact that they travel more or less continually, wherever Lucho’s family goes they will go together as a unit because they “work planting the nation.”¹⁷⁶

This emphasis on the family as important and even central to the nation is something that *Dulce de Leche* shares with *Aire Libre*. In this book, there is a degree of romanticism that locates the traditional family in the rural countryside. Durán and Tornadú represented an idealized family unit that sticks together, while overlooking economic hardships, racial politics, and gendered relations that are so much a part of the lives of rural migrant workers in Argentina.¹⁷⁷ This representation also casts Lucho’s lifestyle as simultaneously foreign and essentially Argentine. This family is connected to the land. They are literally harvesting the motherland.¹⁷⁸ Though modern urban Argentina is problematic for the conservative regime, rural

¹⁷⁴ Durán and Tornadú, 26.

¹⁷⁵ Durán and Tornadú, 27.

¹⁷⁶ “trabajan cosechando la patria” Durán and Tornadú, 27.

¹⁷⁷ For more information, see: María Cristina Salazar, *Los esclavos invisibles: Autoritarismo, explotación y derechos de los niños en América Latina* (Tunja, Boyacá Colombia: Universidad Pedagógica y tecnológica de Colombia, 2006).

¹⁷⁸ Durán and Tornadú, 27.

Argentina, as it is idealized in this representation, is ultimately not. Durán and Tornadú encouraged young readers to emulate this aspect of rural traditionalism before it can be completely lost.

The authors revisit urban and rural tensions in the later chapter, “Dos Chicos.”¹⁷⁹ The text in this chapter is accompanied by illustrated images and tells the story of Julieta, a little girl from the capital, who travels with her parents to Tilcara, a city in Northwestern Argentina. While there, she meets and befriends Candelario, a local indigenous boy. Candelario knows many things that Julieta does not. For instance: “He knew when it was noon by the position of the sun. Julieta was guided by her wrist watch. Each one knew how to do things in their own way.”¹⁸⁰ He also shows Julieta the natural wonders of the country: “he showed his friend the colors of the mountains: pinks, purples, greys, and greens. They also discovered iguana eggs. After that they toured the Pucará de Tilcara. Julieta was amazed. Candelario was very proud of the place where he lived.”¹⁸¹ This tale embodies many of the tropes popular in travel literature: someone young and wealthy from the capital travels into the interior and reports on what he or she sees and experiences.¹⁸² The countryside is a beautiful natural paradise, but not a place to remain.

Durán and Tornadú write that “when it was time to return to Buenos Aires, Candelario appeared in the station. He had brought for Julieta mementos of the place: flowering basil, figs, prickly pear, and a bag of iguana eggs. He stretched out his hand and offered them to his

¹⁷⁹ Durán and Tornadú, 54-55.

¹⁸⁰ “sabía cuándo era mediodía por la posición del Sol. Julieta se guiaba por su reloj de pulsera. Cada uno sabía a su modo distintas cosas.” Durán and Tornadú, 54.

¹⁸¹ “mostró a su amiga los tonos de las montañas: rosados, violetas, grises y verdes. También descubrieron huevos de iguana. Después recorrieron el Pucará de Tilcara. Julieta estaba maravillada. Candelario estaba muy orgulloso del lugar donde vivía.” Durán and Tornadú, 54.”

¹⁸² Oscar Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900-1955* (University of Arizona Press, 2010).

friend.”¹⁸³ Julieta returns the eggs because it would be wrong thereby demonstrating that she is more “enlightened” and “moral”, but she accepts the other gifts.¹⁸⁴

At that moment the bell rang in the station and Julieta said: ‘I will send you postcards from Buenos Aires.’

‘And I will reply,’ Candelario promised.

When the train pulled out of the station the two children were happy. They had become friends forever.¹⁸⁵

The connection made between the two children generates closeness and camaraderie despite their geographical distance and cultural differences. The text that documents their relationship is accompanied by four illustrated images of Julieta and Candelario as they experience the rural countryside. In these images, Candelario is dressed in traditional indigenous clothing including hat, poncho, and sandals.¹⁸⁶ In the first image, he eagerly inspects the wrist watch proffered by Julieta as they sit on a hill overlooking the town. The second image shows the two children in the mountains looking at the setting sun. Candelario is leading Julieta by the hand and indicating the bright colors of the natural landscape, pointing to the distance as they are surrounded by cacti, brush, and brightly colored flora.¹⁸⁷ Julieta’s clothing in all of the images is very modern and indicative of middle class life in Buenos Aires. She wears a short dress and a bobbed hair cut with shoes and knee socks.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ “Cuando llegó la hora de volver a Buenos Aires, Candelario apareció en la estación. Había traído para Julieta recuerdos del lugar: albahaca florecida, higos de tuna y una bolsita con huevos de iguana. Estiró sus manos y se los ofreció su amiga,” Durán and Tornadú, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Durán and Tornadú, 55.

¹⁸⁵ “En ese momento sonó la campana de la estación y Julieta dijo:

--Te voy a mandar postales desde Buenos Aires.

--Y yo te voy a contestar—prometió Candelario.

Cuando el tren arrancó los dos chicos se sintieron felices. Se habían hecho amigos para siempre.” Durán and Tornadú, 55.

¹⁸⁶ Durán and Tornadú, 54.

¹⁸⁷ Durán and Tornadú, 54.

¹⁸⁸ Durán and Tornadú, 54-55.

The final two images show Julieta aboard the train waiting to depart for the capital. We see her from the back as she views the platform upon which Candelario is waiting with his gift of flowers and iguana eggs. The final image shows Julieta leaning out of the train window to accept the gifts being given to her by Candelario, although it is also possible that she is returning the iguana eggs so that they can be returned to their mother. Both children are smiling at one another at this moment of departure.

In the exchanges between these characters—one from the capital and one from the interior—it is the rural child who has the most to offer in terms of knowledge. Candelario teaches Julieta about the natural world and a “simpler” existence that the authors seem to be encouraging in the narrative. When the moment comes to leave, Julieta and Candelario agree to remain friends, and Julieta brings her memories of her time in the interior with her to Buenos Aires. This certainly reinscribes racial, ethnic, social, and economic hierarchies of power in Argentina. However, it also promotes the same romanticization of friendship, rural culture, and family that we saw earlier in *Dulce de Leche*. Julieta wants to preserve the natural iguana family. She does not wish to take away their children. Given the context of the disappearances that were so much a part of the Dirty War, this is ironic on some level. It is also a representation of the very real belief held by conservative elites that leftists, socialists, anarchists, and other organized resistance movements and ideologies were taking children and adolescents away from their parents and disrupting the family unit. It demonstrates the ways in which they understood themselves as enlightened with a superior morality that they believed justified their actions.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Mariano Narodowski, and Laura Manolakis, “Defending the ‘Argentine Way of Life’. The State and School Textbooks in Argentina (1884-1984),” *Paedagogica Historica* 38, no. 1 (2002): 301-310; Daniel Omar de Lucía, “Los socialistas y la infancia.” *Todo es historia* 30, no. 355 (February 1997): 44-55; Valeria Manzano, “Sexualizing Youth,” 433-461.

Like *Aire Libre*, *Dulce de Leche* idealizes the nuclear family, the community, and the nation, all of which are intricately linked together. Unlike Walsh, who followed a single character through a series of interrelated tales, Durán and Tornadú created a book that contained many, seemingly unrelated anecdotes. The images include photographs as well as illustrations, blending the borders of “reality” with the “imaginary.” *Aire Libre* developed a fictional community within Argentina, but *Dulce de Leche* localizes its characters in specific locations.¹⁹⁰ Like *Aire Libre*, it incorporates national literature (excerpts from *Martín Fierro*) and international authors (José Martí), and it also includes national symbols such as the flag and the anthem along with explanations of their meanings.¹⁹¹ Because the audience for this book is slightly more advanced, the authors are able to explore these topics in more detail; however, the strong trend of nationalism is consistent. Durán and Tornadú reinforced the importance of the nuclear and national family. Like previous authors, scholars, and political leaders, Durán and Tornadú positioned rural Argentina as something that is at once foreign and intricately part of the nation. They followed a traditional conservative paradigm that positioned the rural interior as a space in which the true Argentina could still be found despite national turbulence and uncertainty in the capital. In this narrative, the rural workers represent and protect the ideal family that stays together and works as one (much as the nation ought to do).¹⁹²

The authors did not include the racial and gendered politics inherent within rural/urban relationships—for instance, the fact that Lucho’s family likely did not have recourse to choose an alternative occupation. They would have experienced many problems as a result of their

¹⁹⁰ Durán and Tornadú, 54-55, 124-126.

¹⁹¹ Durán and Tornadú, 110, 127.

¹⁹² Further, in “Dos Amigos” we see that the child from the city, Julieta, has much more to learn from Candelario, who has a specific knowledge of the natural world and the wonders it contains: Durán and Tornadú, 24, 55.

social, economic, geographical, and ethnic position within Argentine society.¹⁹³ In the tale of Julieta and Candelario, the interior is a place to visit but not to stay. It is a paradise primarily because it is not something that Julieta experiences permanently. She will leave with souvenirs of her journey and a friend who is, in nearly every way, more disadvantaged in Argentine society than she is.¹⁹⁴ It is important to note that internal tourism is just as much part of the culture of the left as it is the dictatorship: consider Lucio V. Mansilla's visit to the Ranqueles or Che Guevara's motorcycle tour of Latin America.¹⁹⁵ Given the date of this book, we can put this aspect of Argentina history or even "culture," the travel narrative, into a particular context. If we consider the ways in which socialist movements of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, understood travelling to the interior as a means to "aid," foment revolution, or even promote social works projects, then this particularly harmonious and subservient view of the relationship between Buenos Aires and the interior is an attempt to return to older social hierarchies. Candelario is Julieta's tour guide more than her friend and this tale constructs the illusion of social equality. As with the other stories included throughout the book, in this chapter, the authors privilege national identity and cohesion at the expense of historical and socio-economic realities. It constructs a sense of national pride without including contemporary national circumstances.¹⁹⁶ This narrative choice generates national sentiments amongst burgeoning citizens to preserve the silence and eliminate challenges to the status quo. In this way, *Aire Libre* and *Dulce de Leche* further the national imaginary in

¹⁹³ Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 55-80.

¹⁹⁴ Though his gender position does allow for more privileges, Candelario is ultimately more disadvantaged by his position as ethnically indigenous and rurally positioned.

¹⁹⁵ Lucio V. Mansilla, *An Expedition to the Ranquel Indians: Excursion a Los Indios Ranqueles* (University of Texas Press, 2014); Ernesto Guevara, *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey* (Ocean, 2003).

¹⁹⁶ The fact, for instance, the political and economic politics of the junta disadvantaged the same people being praised and idealized in this text.

response to a very specific set of social considerations stemming from the conservative right to counter a leftist turn among Argentine youth.

In the early 1980s, authors reconceptualized historical events to suit authoritarian education goals for children. Both *Caminitos: Libro de lectura para segundo grado*, published in 1979, and *Buenos Aires: Cofre de sorpresas*, published in 1981, take a much more openly dogmatic approach to instilling “national” values in the youth of Argentina, stressing traditional gender roles, the importance of the nuclear family, and a cultivation of national pride.¹⁹⁷

Caminitos: Libro de lectura para segundo grado was written by Marta Esther Shwarz de Orce. Like *Dulce de Leche*, *Caminitos* does not follow a central character, but rather offers chapters that are loosely connected by similar styles in the illustrated images and the tone of the text.¹⁹⁸ The chapters emphasize national pride, manners, respect, and traditional gender roles. All of these themes are presented much more stringently than had been the case in earlier published works.

One of the first examples of this is the chapter that explains the role of the father in the ideal family unit. This section is entitled “Papá.” In the text a young boy goes to visit his father at work: “yesterday, I visited my dad in his office. He showed me his desk and his typewriter. He let me sharpen my pencil with a gadget. I know that other dads work in other places and other jobs. We children like to visit our dads because then we are able to imagine them better when we miss them.”¹⁹⁹ This text is mirrored on the adjoining page by an image of a young boy and his father in his father’s office. The father looks at the book that his son is showing him.

¹⁹⁷ Marta Esther Shwarz de Orce, *Caminitos: Libro de lectura para Segundo grado* (Buenos Aires: Estrada, 1979); Lelia C. O. de Hierro and Ida B. D. de Conti, *Buenos Aires: Cofre de sorpresas* (Buenos Aires, Kapelusz, 1981).

¹⁹⁸ *Caminitos* has been reprinted numerous times, each with a printing number of several thousand. The first printing was in 1962 and subsequent editions continued to be used in public schools in the city of Buenos Aires.

¹⁹⁹ “Ayer fui a visitar a mi papa a su oficina. Me mostró su escritorio y su máquina de escribir. Me dejó sacarle punta al lápiz con un aparatito. Sé que otros papás trabajan en otros sitios, en otras tareas. A los niños nos gusta visitarlos porque entonces podemos imaginarlos mejor cuando los extrañamos.” Shwarz de Orce, 16-17.”

The illustration is somber: it features muted colors and the sketch is also realistic rather than cartoonish in its depiction of individual people.²⁰⁰ In fact, these images echo the types of drawings and prints that were common in nineteenth century educational texts and novels.²⁰¹ The text does not encourage interaction.

This section is echoed later in the book when Shwarz de Orce discusses the home. Though there is not segment in the book that specifically discusses the role of the mother in the family, there is a chapter, “Casitas,” which mirrors “Papá” in its narrative structure and idealized image of parent and child.²⁰² In this case the illustration that accompanies the text is one of a mother and daughter embracing happily with flowers and a songbird framing the pair. Both figures are adorned with long hair, the mother faces away from the reader while the daughter smiles up off the page from her mother’s arms. The text is paired with these female characters who laud the family home.

“The snail carries its house so that it is able to take a nap, just to feel a little bit of sleep. The ant builds intricate labyrinths beneath the earth: they are its refuge and its home. The baker builds his home with mud and straw. The sparrows gather with their beaks lint, threads, feathers, sticks, to make their nest more comfortable. I have my house and in it a room with my bed; but my refuge and my nest are the arms of my mother.”²⁰³

Here Shwarz de Orce poetically emphasizes that the true embodiment of home is not the physical space but the representation of the home in “los brazos de mamá.”²⁰⁴ The space is naturalized

²⁰⁰ Shwarz de Orce, 16-17.

²⁰¹ MatthaisVom Hau, “Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers, and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru,” *Latin American Research Review* 44, no. 3 (2009): 127-154; Mark D. Szuchman, *Order, Family, and Community in Buenos Aires: 1810-1860* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

²⁰² Shwarz de Orce, 96-97.

²⁰³ “El caracol arrastra su casita para poder dormir la siesta, apenas siente un poquitín de sueño. La hormiga hace intrincados laberintos dentro de la tierra: ellos son su refugio y su casa. El hornero construye su vivienda con barro y con paja. Los gorriones recogen con sus picos pelusas, hilitos, plumitas, palitos, para hacer más comfortable su nido Yo tengo mi casa, y en ella una habitación con mi cama; pero mi refugio y mi nido son los brazos de mamá..” Shwarz de Orce, 96-97.

²⁰⁴ Shwarz de Orce, 97.

here by its equation with the homes that are found in the animal world. However, the gendering of space is not different from the types that we have seen in *Aire Libre* or *Dulce de Leche*, where mothers are the people whom children go to for comfort yet have few if any lines in the story. They are frequently off the page and only mentioned in passing.²⁰⁵ Here is the first instance of a mother figure having a prominent space in the narrative. However, in this context the mother remains voiceless and is celebrated only as the source of home and comfort. She does not exist outside the home. She is not located outside of that space. She remains faceless and characterless. This is a deliberate move considering the specific rebellions that occurred in Argentina at the time when this book was being written and published.²⁰⁶ Young women in the 1960s and 1970s were part of social change movements. They challenged traditional ideas about female sexuality, presentation, and role in society. Andrea Andujar's collected volume *De minifaldas, militancias, y revoluciones* expounds upon the myriad ways in which Argentine women challenged, subverted, or embraced with social expectations during the latter half of the twentieth century. To reduce the active, revolutionary, self-directed woman, to a faceless mother, is almost violent. It seeks to erase the agency of women for an entire generation of children.

This text further represents civic education values that emphasized protecting and promoting morals, in particular those of women. Though policy makers were concerned about men and boys, they stressed respecting the "dignity" of women and protecting them from disorientation and displacement. The sexual revolution, the presence of women outside the

²⁰⁵ The exception in these narrations about women in terms of power and authority seems to be the figure of the abuela. Grandmothers occur in several of these texts, particularly *Aire Libre* as voices of wisdom, reason, and strength. They are deferred to for their experience and strength in a way that young mothers are now.

²⁰⁶ For a particularly informative look at women during the dictatorship see: Andrea Andujar, eds. *De minifaldas, militancias, y revoluciones: Exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Ediciones Luxenburg, Buenos Aires, 2010).

private sphere and within society, prompted this backlash, with its moralizing Catholic overtones, to bring girls back to the family home and control their bodies and thoughts. Moral education was the only way to counteract these modern influences and return Argentina, particularly its women and girls, to their “traditional” roles. Texts like this were one way to incorporate these civic education goals into classroom settings. The Ministry proposed a return to “natural laws” based on social and familial hierarchies of power.

Shwarz de Orce directly discusses the importance of national pride. Like *Aire Libre*, *Dulce de Leche*, and others, *Caminitos* includes the national anthem, and explanation of the national crest and flag, with a short biography of Manuel Belgrano.²⁰⁷ She also includes within the text a six-page section—the longest in the book—entitled “República Argentina.”²⁰⁸ In this chapter she details the beauty and wonderful qualities of the nation directly and almost lyrically. She discusses natural beauty, the type that Candelario showed Julieta in *Dulce de Leche*:

I know a place where the sheep graze in large fluffy herds; the cattle graze, and the horses are spirited and run free through the green pampas, while in the tall mountains the eyes of the llamas watch as the condor flies past. I know a place with deserts and seas, fertile prairies and immense dykes and enchanted forests. A place where oil flows and salt and the soil hide copper, silver, sulfur, iron.”²⁰⁹

Argentina’s natural wonders are explored in detail. It is a place rich in resources: minerals, animals, and landscapes. There is a variety and a beauty to the land that Schwarz de Orce details with a sense of love, wonder, and pride. Images accompanying these descriptions show some of the features that she describes. She then goes on to praise the people who occupy the nation.

“men work freely, and the name of God is sacred. A place where children have schools and

²⁰⁷ Schwarz de Orce, 60-61.

²⁰⁸ Schwarz de Orce, 108-113.

²⁰⁹ “Sé de un lugar donde pace la oveja en grandes rebaños algodonosos; las vacas pastan, y los caballos son briosos y corren libres por verdes pampas, mientras en las altas montañas los ojos de las llamas miran pasar al cóndor. Sé de un lugar con desiertos y mares, praderas fértiles, diques inmensos y bosques encantados. Un lugar donde brota el petróleo y la sal y la tierra esconde cobre, plata, azufre, hierro.” Schwarz de Orce, 109-110. “

gardens. Speaking and singing sweetly to life. It is my country. It is yours. It is the country of all those that live in Argentina.”²¹⁰ Shwarz de Orce describes the value of hard work, the importance of religion, education, and the sense of pride inherent within the nation. All of these are tenets of the conservative element of Argentine politics, which emphasized, during this period especially, the sanctity of the nuclear family, the freedom of the Argentine people, religious conservatism, and education. This children’s book mirrors those values and gives them to young children as a way of furthering the military junta’s political goals through educational propaganda.

In 1981, Lelia C. O. de Hierro and Ida B. D. de Conti published *Buenos Aires: Cofre de sorpresas*.²¹¹ *Cofre de Sorpresas* tells the central narrative of a young boy named Luisito, who is taken on a magical and educational journey through Buenos Aires, past and present, by Barrilete, a magical talking kite. They spend a large portion of the book visiting the colonial period, looking at churches, old manuscripts, meeting historical figures, and learning games (which are gender specific).²¹² Luisito and Barrilete try to bring these idealized colonial memories forward into the present. Like *Caminitos*, this mirrors the junta’s desire to recreate an earlier idealized time in Argentine history where—in the national historical imagination—traditional roles were preserved, the nuclear family was sacred, and the city and its people were peaceful and idealistic.²¹³

²¹⁰ “Un lugar donde los hombres trabajan libremente y el nombre de Dios es sagrado. Un lugar donde los niños tienen escuelas y jardines. Donde se habla dulcemente y se canta a la vida. Es mi Patria. Es la tuya. Es la Patria de todos los que habitamos la República Argentina.” Shwarz de Orce, 113.

²¹¹ Lelia C. O. de Hierro and Ida B. D. de Conti, *Buenos Aires: Cofre de sorpresas* (Buenos Aires: Kapeluz, 1981).. For more information about other works by these authors please see Lelia C. O. de Hierro and Ida B. D. de Conti’s entries in La Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros website. <http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar>

²¹² Hierro and Conti, 18-19.

²¹³ Hierro and Conti, 18-19, 34-35.

Like all the preceding books, *Cofre de sorpresas* includes sections that explain national symbols. This book, however, features the longest and most detailed analysis so far.

Nevertheless, the most interesting chapters are those that document the present in Argentina and attempt to create and capture contemporary nationalism, particularly, “Año 1978: ¡Argentina!”²¹⁴ The representation given of the World Cup in Argentina in this book is in direct contrast to the reality of the situation at the height of *el proceso*.

The World Cup of 1978, hosted by Argentina and which the nation won, was a source of national pride. However, the World Cup occurred at the height of the Dirty War and garnered a significant deal of international attention for Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who protested the dictatorship outside of the games. The nationalism surrounding the World Cup thinly veiled the very real economic problems and the widespread disappearances in Argentina. In this book, however, none of these elements are captured. Instead, Hierro and Conti describe the historical moment as completely laudatory: “countless flags flapped in the wind...the neighborhoods of the city were transformed into one great flag that brought together all of the inhabitants with the single word, Argentina!”²¹⁵ The section includes inspiring photos of the games. The narrative emphasizes national heroism, meant to create national fervor among young readers. This is however one of the most blatant examples of oversimplification and willful silence surrounding the Dirty War. The authors include a contemporary event in the text, but (like the regime itself) choose to stress only the nationalistic resonance, excluding anything that did not fit into the mainstream account of what was happening.²¹⁶

²¹⁴Hierro and Conti, 125-126.

²¹⁵“Infinidad de banderas se agitaron al viento...los barrios de la ciudad se convirtieron en una gran bandera que unió a todos los habitantes con una sola palabra ¡Argentina!” Hierro and Conti, 126.

²¹⁶ There are many works that take up the way in which soccer was used as a distraction; one of the best analyses of the relationship between futbol and nationalism is: Pablo Albaceras, *Fútbol y patria: El fútbol y Las narrativas de la nación en la argentina* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2002).

Civic Education in Transition

In the transition, the government used very similar language as the *proceso* in its discussion of civic duty: social cohesion, working towards the common good, and the important role that children needed to play in helping protect and preserve the state. The transitional and democratic Ministries of Education were also deeply concerned with morality and instilling moral clarity in children. The language is incredibly similar, but the ideas driving them were quite different. That is to say, their conceptualization of morality differed greatly as did the methodology for instructing children in both morality and civic responsibility.

By the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Education designed their instruction policy and teaching guides to instruct children in democratic values through democratic practice. Unlike the dictatorship policy of didactic instruction with no room for variation, questions, or breaks, post-dictatorship educational policy emphasized that teachers make room in their classrooms for a plurality of opinions, questions, and practices. The Ministry instructed teachers to include space for children to form their own opinions based on the information they presented:

We want to train students in their critical judgment, their ability to select, it is necessary to put them in contact with the largest number of opinions, points of view and criteria, so that he can draw their own conclusions. Democracy is ideological plurality. It is necessary to make it alive at every moment of the process.²¹⁷

Teachers were encouraged to educate children by example, and through interactive dialogue.

The Ministry of Education still wanted children to learn about nationalism and their belonging to

²¹⁷“desea formar en los alumnos su juicio crítico, su capacidad de selección, es necesario ponerlos en contacto con la mayor cantidad de opiniones, de puntos de vista y de criterios, a fin de que él pueda elaborar sus propias conclusiones. Democracia es pluralidad ideológica. Es necesario hacerla viva en cada momento del proceso” Lilian Raquel Romero, *Educación cívica. Serie demandas de información educativa*. (Buenos Aires: Ministry of Education and Justice 1988), 10.

the state, but their citizenship was not based on necessarily being good or bad, but on respecting the lives of others. They emphasized the cultivation of empathy: “it is essential that Young people learn to love life, their lives, the lives of others.”²¹⁸

The transitional Argentine Ministry of Education presented a different narrative of continuity, in this case of republicanism, noting that this trajectory had been disrupted both in the recent past and more distant moments of history. To prevent Argentina from returning to the “such painful things like those that had befallen our country over the past few years,” teachers needed to help students internalize democratic values and learn about the ways in which these values had been destroyed.²¹⁹ The Ministry instructed that children learn about democratic values, and how those values had been disrupted. They had to understand democracy in relation to authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and fascism.²²⁰ They also had to learn about:

The coups since 1930, its protagonists, their characteristics, their continuities. Usurpation of the Constitutional Powers. Rejection of all Public Power and Extraordinary Powers (articles 22 and 29 of the National Constitution). The suppression of the freedoms, rights and guarantees established in our Fundamental Law. The pressure points that work to undermine democracy.²²¹

Under the *proceso*, the Ministry of Education emphasized the breadth of the government’s power; the transitional ministry emphasized its limitations. The *proceso* endorsed codes of honor and spiritual values as the highest moral authority; the transitional ministry emphasized republicanism as the height of moral authority. Both governments emphasized the importance of civic responsibility, but for the dictatorship that responsibility meant loyalty to the state above loyalty to its citizens, while the transition Ministry of Education wanted children to learn their

²¹⁸“se hace imprescindible que los jóvenes aprendan a amar la vida, su vida, la vida del otro.” Romero, 12

²¹⁹ “hechos tan dolorosos como los acaecidos en nuestro país en los últimos años.” Romero, 12

²²⁰ Romero, 12.

²²¹ “Los golpes del Estado desde 1930, sus protagonistas, sus características, sus continuismos. Usurpación de los Poderes Constitucionales. Arrogación de la suma del Poder Público y Facultades Extraordinarias (artículos 22 y 29 de la Constitución Nacional). La supresión de las libertades, derechos y garantías establecidos en nuestra Ley Fundamental. Los factores de presión, que atentan contra la democracia.” Romero, 14.

responsibility to one another as part of their loyalty to the state. Children had to remain vigilant and protect their fellow citizens instead of prioritizing their loyalty to the state at the expense of others. Human dignity became the central tenant of education during the transition.

The Ministry slowly changed its official policy in the transitional period, but there were ways in which education changed on a micro level. Teachers could apply the civic instruction manuals to their pedagogy in a variety of subjects. Instead of dictating to children and using discipline to control student's behaviors and responses, they could (and should, according to the Ministry), create dialogue and encourage students to formulate opinions and ask questions.²²² In terms of instruction in the specific subject of civic formation, teacher's *manuales* included recommended readings for children. These readings were selected to specifically help children grapple with ideas about human dignity, human rights, the human experience in general.²²³ They also required students to read selections of the national constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the most important component of civic education, according to the Ministry of Education, was the practice of democracy in the classroom and that children learn how to participate in society as free members, understanding the rights and responsibilities they had as individuals and as a group. Democratic praxis was incorporated into classrooms through civic education texts.

Teaching guides in the transitional period helped to supplement the contents of the *manuales* used during the same period. Yet because there was little consensus in terms of the *contenidos basicos* in the initial transition, many children used the same materials that were

²²² Romero, 14.

²²³ Some readings included: "Cómo veo el mundo" de Albert Einstein; la "Declaración sobre la libertad" de Pablo VI. "La dignidad" de José Ingenieros en "Las Fuerzas Morales", Ed. Meridión, Bs.As.,1955 "Contenido ético de la política" de Carlos Faytr "La Nación y su cultura" de Esteban Polakovicj "La separación de los Poderes en la Constitución" por Mario Justo Lópezjetc.

circulated during the dictatorship. Teaching guides and lesson plans produced during the transition were important, even essential, materials in helping children to engage with what they had been provided. The emphasis on dialogue allowed and encouraged children and teachers to question and criticize the contents of these *manuales* and reinforce others. In this context something like Walsh's book would have become especially useful. The Ministry of Education attempted to help and guide citizens under distinct governments to benefit the state. Though they used similar language to define these goals, the objectives were incredibly different.

We can see the ways in which changes and continuities in national stories were negotiated in the *manual*, *Cosas de Chicos 3: Libro de lecturas para la tercera etapa del primer ciclo (tercer grado)*, Things for Kids: Lesson book for the third period of the first cycle (third grade), written by Graciela Montes and Graciela B. Cabal. Montes and Cabal became, and are still considered, some of the most popular and widespread names in children's education and literature in Argentina. Both have published novels for young readers, children's stories, school *manuales* (they have collaborated several times), and texts on educational theory.²²⁴ *Cosas de Chicos* was published in 1985, two years after the Dirty War ended, by Kapelusz. This book is notable for the ways in which it simultaneously mirrors the patterns of nationalism and historical retelling seen in earlier texts published during the dictatorship and the ways that it departs from them in its less fervent presentation of these themes.

Like the other *manuales* analyzed above, *Cosas de Chicos 3* has the requisite section explaining the significance of the Argentine flag, seal, and anthem. Unlike the preceding books, however, it also includes a discussion set in a classroom, rather than the home, in which several students and their teacher discuss what the flag means to them. The conversation begins when a

²²⁴ Please see the "Montes" and "Cabal" entries in La Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros website. <http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar>

student named Susú asks, “““Isn’t it true, miss, that our flag is the most beautiful in the world? Blue and white, like the sky.” This sentiment is one which we have encountered numerous times.²²⁵ The conversation that follows, conversely, is markedly different for the way in which it considers the fact that nationalism is not unique to Argentina.

‘Of course, it’s the most beautiful,’ interjects Dani, ‘But the other day my cousin, he’s from Chile, he argued with me that his flag was better because it has a star.’

‘And so, what?’ shouts Tito, ‘Ours has a sun! And a sun is much better than a star.’

‘The same thing happens with the flag that happens with the mother,’ says the teacher, ‘to each person their mother seems to the best...and everyone is right!’

‘That is right,’ says Lola, ‘Because if our flag was a different color, we would love it just the same.’²²⁶

This conversation represents a significant intervention into the ways in which nationalism is discussed in educational texts. Argentine nationalism is not represented as the only kind, nor is it irrefutably the best. Instead, here nationalism is depicted as variant. Other children from other nations might have a similar sense of national pride, and they have valid reasons for that belief according to the teacher, Dani, and Lola. This introduces relativism, something explicitly denounced by the Minister of Education during the *proceso*. Significantly, the discussion in this excerpt happens within the classroom rather than within the home. It mirrors the type of conversation that could occur as a result of reading this passage, creating an interactive

²²⁵ “¿No es cierto, señorita, que nuestra bandera es la más linda del mundo? Celeste y blanca, como el cielo...” Graciela B Cabal and Graciela Montes, *Cosas de Chicos 3: Libro de Lecturas Para La Tercera Etapa Del Primer Ciclo (Tercer Grado)* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1985), 64.

²²⁶ “--Claro que es la más linda—interviene Dani--. Pero el otro día mi primo, el de Chile, me discutía que la bandera de él era mejor porque tiene una estrella.
--¿Y con eso? —salta Tito--. ¡La nuestra tiene un sol! Y es mucho mejor un sol que una estrella.
--Con la bandera pasa lo mismo que con la mamá—dice la señorita--: a cada uno le parece que su mamá es la mejor... ¡y todos tienen razón!
--Eso es cierto—asegura Lola--. Porque si nuestra bandera fuese de otro color, la querríamos igual.” Cabal and Montes, 64-65.

environment for learning and teaching. In this section, an adult facilitates the conversation, but she does not hand down ultimate rulings on the subject the way that we saw in *Aire Libre*, for instance. Further, in this exchange students bring outside knowledge into the discussion. They site conversations with their friends and family and use them as the starting point for and driving force behind the exchange.

This passage includes an argument, allowing for the expression of divergent viewpoints. In this narrative, Cabal and Montes still configure the nation as the ultimate mother figure, but they complicate that viewpoint as well. The children love Argentina as if it were their mother, but just as each child thinks his or her mother is the best, so do citizens think that their nation is the best. The relativism regarding national sentiment is extremely important and certainly new:

‘I think that the flag is like one’s land,’ says Pepe, ‘It’s been many years since my grandmother came to Argentina. But, when she sees the Italian flag, she starts to cry, because she says that she remembers her home, her brothers...’

‘Exactly, Pepe, because the flag represents the country,’ says the teacher, ‘That same thing would happen to us with our flag if we were in another country.’²²⁷

As in *Aire Libre*, Cabal and Montes use their characters to discuss of what nationalism means, but the conversation is comparative and situational; it extends beyond Argentina.

Like books that were published earlier, *Cosas de Chicos* includes a trip to the countryside as well as several discussions of Argentine history. There are, for example, sections of the text that explain how Spaniards took indigenous land away, the process of immigration, and the educational policies of Sarmiento. All of these sections conclude with a moral about national belonging: no matter the problematic nature of the past, we are all Argentina in the present. For

²²⁷ --A mí me parece que la bandera es como la tierra de uno—dice Pepe--. Mi abuela hace un montón de años que vino a la Argentina. Pero, cuando ve una bandera de Italia, se pone a llorar, porque dice que se acuerda de su casa, de sus hermanos...--Claro, Pepe, porque la bandera representa la patria—dice la señorita--. A nosotros nos pasaría lo mismo con nuestra bandera si estuviéramos en otro país.” Cabal and Montes, 65.

instance, after telling the tale of the Spanish conquest, Tito's great grandmother says, "Now there are no Indians or Spaniards. We are all Argentines."²²⁸ Another student recounts the story of his grandfather's immigration to Argentina from Italy. He concludes that "my grandfather calls me 'Bepo' and I call him 'nono.' He will always remember the place where he was born, but he says that now he is Argentine."²²⁹ Though in both cases there are clear traditions and distinctions that are retained from cultural and historical pasts, those are much less important than the adopted identity of Argentine citizen. There is no mention of the Dirty War in this book—which was the trend for concurrently published texts intended for schools—Cabal and Montes emphasized collective belonging and a celebrated a distant past, which was significant in the wake of such a social trauma. Montes and Cabal tried to recuperate the nation and national belonging, while encouraging participation to give children agency. They focus not so much on indoctrination as participation, mirroring the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

Conclusion:

The *proceso* government and the transitional government were both concerned with the moral education of the youngest Argentine. Though they used similar terminology to describe what they were working towards with the civic education of Argentine children, their actual goals were very different. There were some consistent trends between the governments; for example, Ministries of Education wanted Argentine children to value and uphold national values and protect/preserve the integrity of the state. For the *proceso*, this mean teaching children to

²²⁸“Ahora ya no hay indios y españoles. Todos somos argentinos.” There continues to be an elision of very really cultural complications in things like the Spanish conquest or immigration. Legal restrictions, violence, prejudice, and disadvantaging are all ignored in this retelling which focuses on creating a universal identification of Argentine. The Argentine identity is largely depicted as one that has overcome strife to resurge as a unified and proud nation. Cabal and Montes, 87.

²²⁹ ““Mi abuelo me llama “Bepo” y yo le digo “nono”. Siempre se acuerda del pueblo donde nació, pero dice que ahora él es argentino.” Cabal and Montes, 133.”

value the nation at the expense of its “bad” citizens. For the transitional government, it meant children needed to learn how to empathize with others and consistently critique and question those in authority. Civic education lessons and in class *manuales* presented these distinctive visions of the Argentine citizen and we can see how the vision of citizenship changed across time.

The dictatorship initially tried to return to “traditional” values, and, over time, it explicitly defined these values as Catholic, conservative, and based on the preservation of hierarchical power structures. Ministry officials and ministry materials emphasized discipline, loyalty, and obedience. During the transition to democracy, civic education emphasized participation, interaction, and discourse.

Both governments moved quickly to instill their values in children. Civic education pamphlets changed more quickly than *manuales*, but *manuales* exemplified the values expressed by the Ministry of Education in their civic education policy and guides. The changes and continuities reflected the social concerns about responsibility, national belonging, and values, and above all, reinforced the shared idea, across regimes, of young children as central to the project of rebuilding the nation.

CHAPTER III

Children Disappeared and Present: Activism and the Construction of the Figurative Child

From 1976 to 1983 the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (*el proceso*) resulted in the death and disappearance of an estimated 9,000 to 30,000 people in Argentina. The military government systematically targeted anyone suspected of “subversive” political leanings, including students, teachers, union organizers, and intellectuals. In one of the most violent and reprehensible projects of *el proceso*, members of the military junta stole children, born to leftist mothers in captivity, and placed them in the homes of right wing parents, to be raised as members of their ideological project. These children became central symbols of post-dictatorship political discourse and activism. Las Madres and Las Abuelas searched for these children throughout the 1980s and 1990s and to the present. In the process, they created a new definition of childhood in Argentina that broader groups of authors and activists would leverage to strengthen and define democracy and national identity. These children—whether or not they knew themselves to be the sons and daughters of disappeared parents—grew up, along with their siblings, in a world suffused by this discourse, which informed their experiences and their ability to articulate grief and longing, and eventually defined their political identities. Most of the disappeared included in the statistics are parents and adults who were disappeared, this dissertation is part of a new generation of scholarship that shifts the view to another group of disappeared and affected: disappeared children. Through their absence, disappeared children,

like their disappeared parents, have defined the parameters and identities of present children and young adults throughout the transitional period and into the present.²³⁰

Las Madres and Las Abuelas defined childhood in the transitional period around absence. These organizations, in their work against the military junta, created a figurative child that persists in Argentine history and culture to this day. This chapter will look at the ways in which this “child” was created in the outreach by Las Abuelas to Argentine adults and children throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It will then consider how Las Abuelas used this figurative or imagined child in their outreach to Argentine children during this period. In particular, it will look at three versions of the figurative child and consider its real-world counterpart. It will first examine Las Madres and the way that they talked about their disappeared children as children, though those children were often grown adults. It will consider the stakes in this representation and conceptualization. The chapter will then turn to Las Abuelas, whose membership and mission overlaps with Las Madres. Unlike Las Madres, Las Abuelas began their search for actual children, often babies or toddlers, but as time went on, even as those real children began to grow, Las Abuelas continued to depict those children as tiny, without agency, and lost. This representational strategy had long reaching social ramifications. Finally, this chapter will look at HIJOS, an organization formed by the adult children of disappeared parents. How did they understand their role as children and how did their activism as “children” reflect or counter the figurative child crafted by Las Madres and Las Abuelas? All of these activist groups engaged

²³⁰See for instance: Santiago Cueto Rúa, “HIJOS de víctimas del terrorismo de estado: Justicia, identidad y memoria en el movimiento de derechos humanos en Argentina, 1995-2008.” *Historia Critica* 40 (2010): 122-145; Ari Gandsman, “‘Do You Know Who You Are?’ Radical Existential Doubt and Scientific Certainty in the Search for the Kidnapped Children of the Disappeared in Argentina,” *ETHOS* 37, no. 4 (2009): 441-465; and Estela, Schindel, “El sesgo generacional del terrorismo de Estado: niños y jóvenes bajo la dictadura argentina (1976-1983),” In *Entre la familia, la sociedad y el Estado*, edited by Barbara Potthast and Sandra Carreras (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), 255-288.

with children, both figurative and real, in their project for justice, memory, and human rights. By examining how these narratives about children shaped these various actors' political experiences, I demonstrate the ways in which children—real and imagined, absent and present—shaped Argentine politics and culture in the late-twentieth century. By looking at disappeared children, this dissertation examines a group that was deeply affected by the absence of adults and the conversations and silences about disappearance and dictatorship. In addition, they were the first audience for a new national narrative of Argentine identity and became the site of democratic intervention and praxis in a way that disappeared adults simply could not. As such, these children, absent and present, existed at the crossroads of transitional politics.

Background

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo contributed to the end of the Argentine dictatorship through their fervent rallying for their missing children—young adults who had been targeted by the regime for their “subversive politics.” Marching around the Plaza de Mayo with photos of their children, they drew attention to their plight, to the junta's cruelty and danger. Las Madres deployed their “traditional” and accepted identities as mothers and housewives to protest the disappearance of their children, effectively using the language and logic of the regime to destabilize and invalidate its politics of traditionalism and nationalism.²³¹ Las Madres didn't label their movement as political; as a means of self-protection, they shunned that identity. Instead, they spoke of their activism as something that they *had* to do; it was only because the government had taken their children that they were forced to occupy public space in this way.

²³¹ Marysa Navarro, “The Personal is Political: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo,” in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, edited by Manuel A. Garretón Merino and Susan Eckstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 241; see also; Mabel Bellucci, “Childless Motherhood: Interview with Nora Cortinas, a Mother of the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina,” *Reproductive Health Matters*, 7, no. 13 (May, 1999): 83-88.

They thus reframed the narrative about what had happened during the *proceso*, and they made their very political movement into something that any mother would do.

Las Madres took the opposite position from the dictatorship, which had cast their children as dangerous, malicious, and violent; as enemies of the state. They instead referred to them as “children,” casting them as innocent and powerless. The reality of these “children” was, of course, not as extreme as either side positioned them: they existed along a spectrum of activism, agency, and innocence, as most people do. The madres thus strategically depoliticized their children, many of whom had been targeted because of their politics, and strategically removed agency from their grown children. Las Madres and Las Abuelas’ pursuit of justice continued to emphasize the disappeared as disappeared *children* first and foremost; every other identity—activist, organizer, citizen—was subsumed within or elided by their identity as a *niño desaparecido*. To figure their adult children as helpless and innocent was a way to endear them to the silent majority in Argentina who had turned a blind eye to the violence of the military regime. The government hadn’t targeted “subversives” but children, innocent people the state was meant to protect.

Las Abuelas was founded as a sister organization to Las Madres with a focus not only on finding the missing “children” of the dictatorship, but on the literal children born in captivity to disappeared mothers or kidnapped as part of the military’s program of disappearances.²³² Las Abuelas functioned initially very similarly to Las Madres. These grandmothers, through their presence in the central plaza of Buenos Aires, protested injustice, silence, and violence. It was a quiet, brave act of defiance. Las Abuelas continue their project today: “searching for the children of their children” and, as time goes by, their grandchildren’s children. At present, 119

²³² Marguerite Feitlowitz, *Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacy of Torture Revised and Updated* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 193, 228.

grandchildren have been “recovered” by Las Abuelas and “returned” to their birth families. Each new recovery is treated as a national celebration by Las Abuelas and their allies, a moment of triumph over the defunct regime and a familial celebration for individuals and the nation. These moments of celebration do not acknowledge the very real difficulties of identity “recuperation,” and the struggle of grown “children” to reconcile their lives and experiences with an imagined identity that had been lovingly crafted for them in their absence by grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles over the course of a lifetime.²³³ Often, grandmothers and the recovered grandchild appear on the news where they recount the story of how they found one another. The grandmother might remark upon the long struggle to find her grandchild and the power of hope. The grandchild will hug them. They comment on the ways in which the grandchild physically resembles his or her parents, and the organization makes a plea for individuals to contact las Abuelas if they have any doubts about their identities. There are rarely follow up interviews to see how the “children” feel about discovering who they are, or how they are able to integrate (or not) into their new families.²³⁴

During the dictatorship, Las Madres and Las Abuelas grappled with threats to their safety, legal hurdles, censorship laws, and a government that denied anything was happening. They also faced apathy and opposition from the majority of Argentine citizens.²³⁵ The military

²³³ The more difficult aspects of this transition and experience are captured by personal documentaries or feature films in Argentina rather than the news media or official press including *Cautiva*, Film, directed by Gaston Biraben (2003: Buenos Aires) a more recent film that depicts the struggle of a teenager whose identity was “recovered” using DNA testing.

²³⁴ Ari Gandsman, ““A Prick of a Needle can do no Harm”: Compulsory Extraction of Blood in the Search for the Children of Argentina’s Disappeared,” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (April 2009): 162-184

²³⁵ Sebastián Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Sebastián Carassai, *Los años setenta de la gente común: la naturalización de la violencia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2013); Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente: guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002); David M K. Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012).

regime destroyed most of their official records pertaining to the disappeared, and they disposed of bodies in ways that made it almost impossible to identify them before the advent of DNA technology. Military personnel burned bodies, buried them in mass graves, or dumped them, still alive but heavily drugged, in the Rio de la Plata, the broad estuary on which Buenos Aires sits.²³⁶

Given this, it's easy to see why the search for missing grandchildren has been difficult.²³⁷ Many of the children born in clandestine detention centers were placed in the custody of the junta's members or allies to be raised ideologically opposed to their birth families. For newly born children, birth certificates and records were falsified. Some children who were abducted alongside their parents were abandoned in orphanages, others were officially adopted by members of the military regime under laws that allowed for the legal adoption of "abandoned" children—parents who were "missing" after having been disappeared were considered to have abandoned these children.²³⁸ Sometimes captors left children behind when they sequestered parents, and these children were taken in by members of their biological families, typically grandparents, to raise.

After the dictatorship ended and democracy was re-established in Argentina, Las Madres and Las Abuelas continued their work more freely and more officially—helping to form official policy, pushing for legislation, acting in many ways as the unofficial conscience of the nation.²³⁹

In 1983, they helped establish a DNA bank against which anyone could test their blood and

²³⁶ Feitlowitz includes interviews with people regarding this technique in her book, *Lexicon of Terror*, 229.

²³⁷ Las Abuelas also worked to fight against impunity in Argentine society, but, as we will see, took a decidedly different approach than their grandchildren eventually would. For more information on Las Abuelas fight for justice see: Rita Arditti, "The Grandmothers of the Plaza De Mayo and the Struggle against Impunity in Argentina," *Meridians* 3, no. 1 (2002): 19-41.

²³⁸ Carla Villalta has done tremendous work analyzing the ways that the justice system in Argentina made the kidnappings into legal adoptions. See, "De secuestros y adopciones: el circuito institucional de la apropiación criminal de niños en Argentina (1976-1983) *Historia Critica* 38 (2009): 146-171.

²³⁹ Las Madres have intervened into the politics of the nation through interviews, organized protest, and the expansion of their organization beyond Buenos Aires and into the provinces of Argentina.

confirm their identity. They were instrumental in the foundation of the National Commission for the Right to Identity in 1992.²⁴⁰ The conversation that Las Abuelas began in the 1970s about the right to identity and the rights of children has flourished, and, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it became part of official policy and legislation in Argentina. The Abuelas' language about childhood has saturated the lives of children in Argentina, fundamentally shaping discourses about the ways children are connected to the state, to their families, and to their own selves. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, Las Abuelas reached out to their disappeared grandchildren through ads, pamphlets, books, and television programs (in addition to their continued physical presence in the Plaza de Mayo). During the Kirchner era, the Abuelas and Madres became something of a moral touchstone for the nation as the country took an official position on protecting human rights. As they reached out to children and the community, they created a lasting discourse about children in the transition to democracy.

Las Abuelas

One of the initial and most frequent ways that Las Abuelas reached out to Argentine society was through pamphlets and events dedicated to informing society about what had happened, demanding their missing grandchildren. They fought against the dominant national or historical narrative about what had happened during the dictatorship and repeatedly offered up their version of events, researching what had happened, explaining what they had discovered, and asking others to circulate that information widely. They made no claims to objectivity, but

²⁴⁰ See the website of the CoNaDI (Comisión Nacional por el Derecho a la Identidad) at www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/conadi/institucional.aspx. In addition to giving information about this subcommittee of the Commission for Human Rights in Argentina, the website features information on what to do if you have doubts about your identity and features numerous graphic images that illustrate the reunion of an elderly grandmother with a young grandchild.

they do claim to tell what really happened. In their “First example of children who have been disappeared and born in captivity,” (c. 1986) *las Abuelas* wrote a brief history of what happened in Argentina:

The military has made destruction, murder, and genocide their form of government, and they have made children a genuine spoil of war. These children, in their enormous majority are alive and these babies are growing up ignorant of their true families, and, in many cases, living—without knowing it yet— with the people who murdered their parents or the young people who, with their parents, were part of the heroic generation born in the 1950s.²⁴¹

Las Abuelas openly contextualized the military government as one that committed genocide; a strong, powerful statement when this pamphlet was produced, just after the return of democracy. Conflict over what had “really” happened during the “Dirty War,” whether anything had happened at all, was an intense national debate with many denialists ardently opposing this version of events. *Las Abuelas* also defined the role that these children played in the dictatorial regime: they were not children, or even people; they were the spoils of war, being raised in ignorance, even ideologically weaponized. They also spoke of the biological parents of disappeared grandchildren (the children of *las Abuelas* and *las Madres*) in the past tense and refer to them as being part of the “heroic generation born in the 1950s” without in any way indicating what, in particular, made that generation heroic. One might assume that it was their activism that made them heroic, but according to this pamphlet, it is only their victimization and tragic death that defines them. *Las Abuelas* figure the parents as martyrs (though it is unclear what belief they died for), and the children as objects. They are both passive agents who have

²⁴¹ “Las Fuerzas Armadas Argentinas han hecho de la destrucción, el asesinato y el genocidio su forma de gobierno, y han dispuesto de los niños como un auténtico botín de guerra. Estos niños, en su inmensa mayoría están vivos y estas criaturas que están creciendo en la ignorancia de su filiación real, y en muchos casos, conviviendo—sin saberlo aún—con los asesinos de sus padres o de muchachos que, como sus padres conformaron la heroica generación nacida en los años.” *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, “Primera muestra sobre niños desaparecidos y nacidos en cautiverio” (Buenos Aires, c. 1986) Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en Argentina (CeDInCI).

been acted upon by the state and the military, but do not have the power to affect change. Las Abuelas' children, and their children's children, in addition to sharing innocence, also share an inability to act. It is only Las Abuelas, the state, and presumably the citizens reading the pamphlet who have the ability to do anything. Las Abuelas defined their mission as finding these babies and restoring them to their rightful families. They distinguished between abducted children who were born free and abducted children who were born to young women in concentration camps. The latter had no memory of who they were, whereas the former had been cruelly ripped away but might be able to remember something about their past.

In another pamphlet produced in the same year, the Abuelas explained the benefits of a DNA bank in their project to recuperate lost children. Specifically, they discussed the mechanisms through which children had been disappeared, and how emerging scientific techniques could help them to overcome the myriad ways in which grandchildren had been taken and hidden:

Among the 30000 disappeared of all ages and social conditions, hundreds of babies were kidnapped with their parents or born in clandestine detention centers where pregnant young women were taken. Many of these babies were abandoned by the forces of repression in institutions so that they would be adopted, ignoring the claims of their families; other children were registered as the children of members of these same forces; or left in any place. They annulled in this way their identity disappearing them as free human beings and entering them into a condition of slavery, hidden from their legitimate family and all their rights.²⁴²

²⁴² Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, "Niños desaparecidos en la República Argentina" (Buenos Aires, c. 1984) CeDInCI: "Entre los 30000 desaparecidos de todas las edades y condiciones sociales, centenares de niños fueron secuestrados con sus padres o nacieron en los centros clandestinos de detención donde fueron conducidas las jóvenes embarazadas. Muchas de estas criaturas fueron abandonadas por las fuerzas de represión en instituciones para ser dadas en adopción ignorando los reclamos de sus familiares; otros niños fueron inscriptos como hijos propios por los miembros de esas mismas fuerzas; o dejados en cualquier lugar. Anularon de esa manera su identidad desapareciendo como seres humanos libres para pasar a una condición de esclavitud, privados de su legítima familia y de todos sus derechos."

Here, the fundamental crime against disappeared children was not the murder of their parents, but the denial of their true identities—yet another form of “disappearance.” This denial, Las Abuelas argued, was tantamount to slavery, a denial of all rights. Las Abuelas used this language deliberately. Slaves in Argentina had some rights, and it would have been more accurate for Las Abuelas to compare the loss of identity to a loss of personhood, rather than slavery. However, they chose to conjure the image of enslavement in their description of these disappeared children because it called to mind a brutally unequal power relationship in which parents lost rights over their children.²⁴³ Through this language, they implied that disappeared children were illegitimately owned by their military parents, which goes back to their early contention that military families saw these children not as people, but objects: the spoils of war. Though they weren’t used to produce resources, children were raised to perform the labor of cultural and ideological reproduction and violence. Their lack of knowledge of their origin was the shackle that bound them to their “parents” and it was only through learning who they “really were” that they could become free.²⁴⁴

The DNA bank opened new opportunities for Las Abuelas to identify with certainty children who had been legally adopted or whose identities had been, from birth, falsified.²⁴⁵ According to this pamphlet, Las Abuelas were able to locate twenty-five children in eight years only through “dramatic searching without pause,” visiting juvenile courts, relentlessly following whatever lead they had, and fighting against people who still opposed their narrative of the

²⁴³ Enslaved children could be bought and sold away from their parents. It was (and still is) part of the problem of child circulation in Latin America. See, George Reid Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1980)

²⁴⁴ It’s a powerful claim to make and it has an interesting relationship to the ways in which subversives who were disappeared for their politics were also ethnicized, that is, their politics were inscribed on their physical bodies, something that was in their DNA and one of the reasons that children needed to be taken from them.

²⁴⁵ Donna J. Guy, “The Shifting Meanings of Childhood and ‘N.N.’” *Latin American Perspectives*, 35, no. 4 (July 2008): 15-29; Michelle D. Bonner, “Defining Rights in Democratization: The Argentine Government and Human Rights Organizations (1983-2003)” *Latin American Politics and Society* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 55-76.

dictatorship. Las Abuelas hoped that the DNA bank would make it easier to find children and ensure that a similar denial of identity through state violence or individual malice would not be possible in Argentina, or elsewhere. They wanted this to serve as an example to the international community and other countries in Latin America who were dealing with a similar aftermath. As their grandchildren reached the age of majority, Las Abuelas also began a campaign that called identity into question. “Do you know who you are?” became a slogan of las Abuelas and they encouraged anyone who had doubts about their parentage, their biological relation to their families, to seek out DNA testing, so that they could know for certain who they truly were.

This was in some ways a groundbreaking early use of DNA evidence in the service of social justice.²⁴⁶ Argentina, like many other Latin American countries, has had a long and complicated relationship with science, which the state often used to define and control social identities.²⁴⁷ Though Las Abuelas were not necessarily using their DNA bank for a eugenics project, it is important to situate this relationship between genetic material, scientific evidence, and identity, within a broader history in which “science” has been used for violence. Although Las Abuelas subverted that history, using DNA evidence to counteract social violence, the biological essentialism of their claims to identity overlooks the ways in which people are socialized into who they are. The notion that you can find out who you “really are” through your DNA conflicts with contemporary understandings of race, gender, sexuality, and familial

²⁴⁶ Alex Stern, “Science in the Service of Human Rights: Argentina 37 Years After the Coup,” *Huffington Post*, March, 28, 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alex-stern/argentina-dirty-war-dna_b_2941724.html

²⁴⁷ Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (UNCP, 2006); Jorge Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas: higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1871-1914)* (B. Viterbo Editora, 1995); Gustavo Vallejo, *Escenarios de la cultura científica argentina: ciudad y universidad (1882-1955)* (Editorial CSIC - CSIC Press, 2007); Gustavo Vallejo and Marisa Miranda, *Políticas del cuerpo: estrategias modernas de normalización del individuo y la sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008).

relationships as socially constructed. In trying to undo some of the dictatorship's violence, they also created some violent or traumatic crises of identity for the children they sought to save.

Violence surrounded the birth of these children. At the behest of the government, doctors, police officers, or individual families directly or tangentially connected to the regime, forced pregnant women into makeshift concentration camps, police stations, and holding cells where they gave birth to children. They removed these children, killed their parents, and proceeded to raise these children to believe that Las Madres were "*las locas*," crazy women. Las Abuelas' appeal to these children was in some cases successful: people began to question their identities. Some young adults realized, for example, that there were no pictures of their infancy, that they didn't look like their parents, that there was a disconnect between themselves and their families.²⁴⁸ Some did go to get tested, some were reunited with their birth families. They then had to reconcile a lifetime of indoctrination with the fact that, not only were they "adopted," but they were raised by people who had murdered or been complicit in the disappearance of their birth parents: birth parents who may or may not have been murdered, birth parents about whom they might never receive closure, birth parents whose ideologies they were raised to oppose. In some cases, Las Abuelas, believing they had found a missing grandchild, were met with a person who did not want to take a DNA test, who did not want "*la prueba de la identidad*," and refused to participate. Though Las Madres and Abuelas intended to undo the damage of the dictatorship and reunite families separated by genocidal practices, in the process they utilized a biologically essentialist argument about identity that precluded the ways in which these children had been

²⁴⁸ Analía Argento, *De vuelta a casa: historias de hijos y nietos restituidos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Marea, 2008).

raised and the ways in which their upbringing and affective connections with their supposed birth families had impacted the formation of their identities.²⁴⁹

Ari Gandsman has argued that Las Abuelas' campaigns have raised questions about individual, personal identity, but also broader "existential doubt," about what it means to be Argentine in the post-dictatorship period.²⁵⁰ Las Abuelas' project has, at its core, the aim to destabilize identity, not only personal, but cultural and social, as part of a broader, ongoing national conversation about reconciliation and responsibility in the wake of trauma and genocide. In their campaigns, Las Abuelas implied that one's identity could be recuperated through a DNA test: that they could categorically prove filiation and "recover" a lost identity. In reality, the campaign forced the creation of a new identity built upon multiply-layered identities and ruptures; conflicts between the past and the present, between memories personal and political, between contradictory narratives. It created uncertainty in the face of what promised to be certainty. Disappeared children were often figured as static, but their real-life counterparts continued to live and grow. The recuperation of a teenager or adult would, at the very least, result in tension between the long-imagined reunion of a grandparent with a grandchild, and the unforeseen, jarring, realization of a fabricated identity and violent past for an individual who had been given no reason to doubt their parentage until prompted to do so.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Ari Gandsman, "The Limits of Kinship Mobilizations and the (A)politics of Human Rights in Argentina," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (July 2012): 193-214.

²⁵⁰ Gandsman, "Existential Doubt," 450-465.

²⁵¹ This idea of biological essentialism and doubt complicates the question of filiation in non-biological families in Argentina. However, not much academic work has been done on the ways in which Abuelas' discourse and DNA research has changed or challenged the politics of legal adoption in Argentina. During my research for the literature sections of my dissertation, I did find several books that talked about adoption, the legal kind, always in a positive way. It seems as though there is a disconnect between the relocation of children and the legal adoption of children, which is as it should be. That being said, it would be an incredibly interesting project to pursue looking at the way that this "national identity crisis" challenged the relationships between parents and children in Argentina more broadly. Another important element is the way in which DNA functioned as evidence of a crime having been committed. Proof of filiation to a disappeared person proved: first, that las Abuelas and las Madres were not "locas" that a crime of kidnapped and possibly murder had occurred, and, second, that the persons responsible were identifiable and could be brought to justice.

Las Abuelas deployed a politics of essentialism: the children they looked for were *children*, unchanging, fixed, frozen in time, no matter how much time actually passed. This strategy offered opportunities and limitations. In their outreach, the figure of the child could garner support in looking for grown children, or asking for help from common people, organizations, or the children themselves. However, it removed agency from the children themselves—in images and narrative they were always described as lost and in need of an adult to rescue them, even after they'd reached the age of consciousness or majority. This strategy also, in some ways, diminished the damage caused by the dictatorship: it presented the children as if no time had passed, when, in reality, it had been years. A common tactic Las Abuelas used throughout the 1990s, to appeal to adults and, increasingly, the children themselves, was to publish pamphlets with images of disappeared persons, the child, if an image was available, and as many details of the child's birth as possible. Think of the ways in which the faces of missing children used to be pasted on the sides of milk cartons in the US and multiply it. These children were never framed as orphans; the focus remained on their loss of identity and their kidnapping. Partially this was because the status of their parents continued to be unknown: disappeared status places a person somewhere between living and dead, held in a state of suspended animation until proven dead or until found alive and even then, having been disappeared remained a core element of their identity. Disappeared children occupied a similar discursive space. Las Abuelas typically gave names to their missing grandchildren, looking for them, seeking them out.²⁵² By the end of the 1990s, the language Las Abuelas used had changed: they didn't refer to their grandchildren as "criaturas" any longer, and, though their campaigns still reached out to adults in society who might be inadvertently harboring, or come into contact with

²⁵² Raising these children to be "good" Argentines was a key part of the military regime's plan to fight "subversion in society. Fleitlowitz includes examples of the language surrounding this in her book, *Lexicon of Terror*, 75-79.

a disappeared child, they increasingly appealed to the children themselves; the majority of whom, by the mid-1990s were old enough to read and potentially recognize themselves in grainy images of their biological parents. As they came of age, las Abuelas reached out to their grandchildren directly: they were no longer powerless but possessed the agency to look for their grandmothers if they so chose. They also had the ability to not seek out their grandmothers. They could deliberately avoid their call and continue with their lives. Their parents no longer hold them hostage, they weren't enslaved by their stolen identities; these children had the knowledge and access to find their way "home." That many of them didn't is perhaps one of the reasons that, though the Abuelas continued to reach out to their grandchildren directly, in all of their media outreach and their conversations they spoke and depicted their grandchildren as if they were still small children or babies being held captive. The duality of child as active and child as passive represents a deeper conflict between the imagined and the real, between hope and despair.

The images of children that Las Abuelas used in the 1990s as part of their posters, flyers, and media outreach featured young children, though their real-life counterparts were already teenagers approaching the age of maturity. This served a dual purpose: it elicited sympathy or support from the populace—the image and idea of young children being kidnapped and helpless prompted an emotional reaction—it also invited citizens to imagine children, not only the disappeared ones, as lacking their identities, as lost. Images, like the one in Figure 1, feature a child asking for help. This child is not, however, the protagonist of his own narrative. "My

grandmother is looking for me,” the text reads, “help her find me.”²⁵³

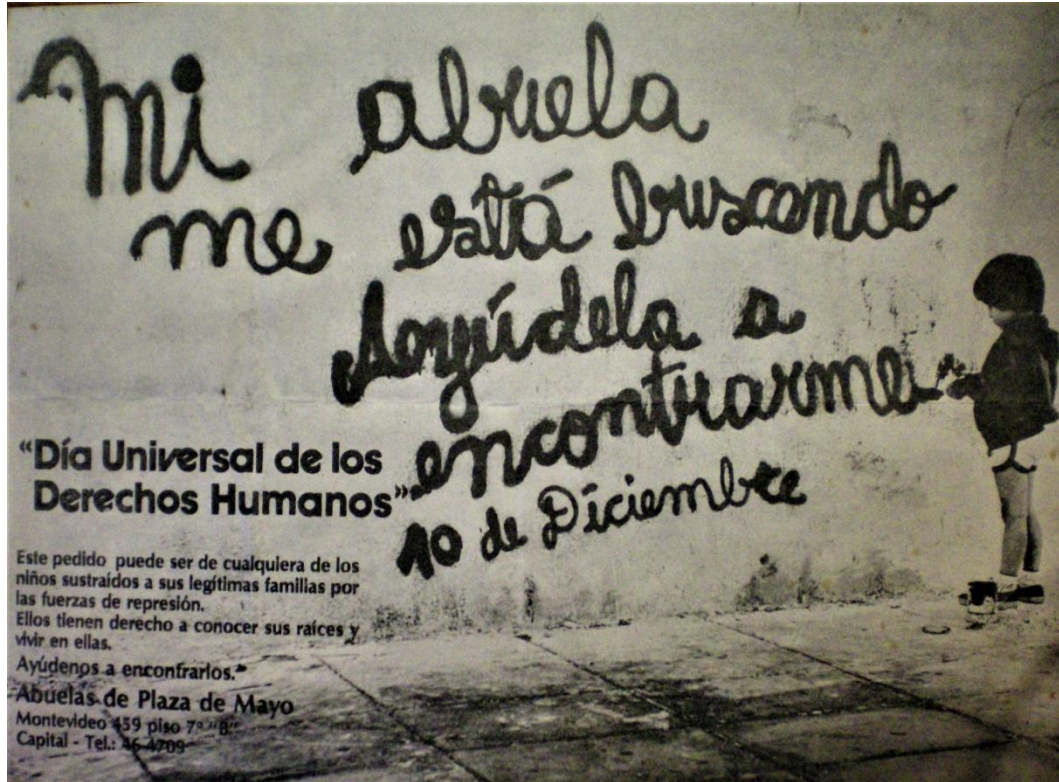


Figure 1. My grandmother is looking for me/Help her to find me/10 December Universal Day of Human Rights” This request could be from any of the children taken from their legitimate families by the forces of repression. They have the right to know their roots and live in them. Help us to find them”)

Like images of the disappeared, and attempts to legalize compulsory DNA testing, this removed agency from children to determine their fates or define their identities. Though initial campaigns by Las Abuelas necessarily placed the burden of searching on adults to find, locate, or identify missing children, later campaigns simultaneously asked adults to imagine young people with burgeoning sociopolitical agency as powerless, in need of rescue, and as capable of seeking out and finding their identities themselves. This contradiction, this dual placement, of children as

²⁵³ Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, “Mis abuelos me están buscando” (Buenos Aires, c. 1990) CeDInCI.

powerful and powerless, mirrors the position of disappeared persons as simultaneously absent and present, heroic and apolitical.

HIJOS

The children of the disappeared came of age during the 1980s and 1990s. Their experience and identities developed along a spectrum, but in the mid-1990s several of these “children” began to organize around their identity as the children of the disappeared. Literary theorist Ana Ros has beautifully discussed the ways in which post-memory and the trauma of dictatorship affected the lives of children of the disappeared who were not disappeared themselves; children who grew up with their grandparents or family members during the dictatorship and the transitional period.²⁵⁴ These children were raised with the ghosts of their parents, with varying degrees of knowledge about what was truly happening, or had happened, and with different degrees of activist engagement. Like their grandparents, these children searched for their missing parents and their missing brothers and sisters. This group was raised with the loss of their parents; that loss in many ways defined their childhoods and their personal identities.

The ability to embrace such an identity unfolded over time. During the dictatorship, acknowledging that one’s parents had been disappeared was not customary because of the general socio-political uncertainty around what was happening and the dangers such an acknowledgement could pose for that child. There were also certainly concerns for the psychological development of children and whether or not acknowledging the “truth,” whatever

²⁵⁴ Ana Ros, *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Kristi M. Wilson, “Building Memory: Museums, Trauma, and the Aesthetics of Confrontation in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 3, no. 5 (Sept. 2016): 112-130.

that might be, would be beneficial or harmful to their wellbeing, particularly when an acknowledgement of disappearance posed more questions than answers.²⁵⁵ During the transitional period, these children were raised in households where politics were increasingly discussed and the absence of disappeared parents was a verifiable presence.²⁵⁶ Some participated as children in outreach by las Madres and las Abuelas, penning letters or drawings for absent siblings that they'd never met. In the 1980s and 90s, las Abuelas published some of them as a way to potentially reach those siblings, to garner attention and sympathy from adults, and to raise awareness for the profundity of loss and absence and the way that it affected children.²⁵⁷

These materials help us to understand the lived emotional experiences of these children, and the way that Las Abuelas presented their stories and narratives to the public, solidifying a vision of the Argentine child and the disappeared during the transition. *Algún día...: poemas y prosa* is one particularly poignant example of outreach from the children of disappeared parents to their disappeared siblings through Las Abuelas. Published in 1990, this sixty-page *folleto* includes letters, poems, and reflections written from present siblings to their absent brothers or sisters. The overall tone of these letters is one of loss, longing, and uncertainty. The *folleto* includes a series of materials from different children and each child's notes are arranged in ascending chronological order. You can see the evolution of their relationship with or feelings toward their absent siblings. One of these children, Mariana, wrote to her brother "Rodolfo" in 1986: "When I found out about you I was filled with a profound happiness, but also I felt sad because you're not by my side. I'll tell you that my name is Mariana, your sister."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ For more discussion of this subject, see Chapter 4.

²⁵⁶ Ana Ros, 25-50.

²⁵⁷ Mariana Eva Pérez and Yamila Grandi, eds., *Algún día...poemas y prosa* (Buenos Aires: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 1990).

²⁵⁸ "cuando supe de tu existencia me invadió una profunda alegría, pero también me sentí triste por no tenerte a I lado. Te cuento que yo soy Mariana, tu hermana." *Algún día*, 15.

Introductions give way, in many cases, to wishes and waiting: “mom and dad aren’t here” and “I miss you a lot and I love you.”²⁵⁹

The organization of the book shows a progression of longing over the course of years. Mariana wrote her first letter to Rodolfo in 1986, the last in 1990. In her 1988 letter, she contemplates a reunion with her brother: “Sometimes I think: when we find each other, what will I say to you? I answer: I’m sure that we will look at each other and I (the weak one, the sweet one) perhaps I will burst into tears; then, after we look at each other like we can’t believe it, maybe I will give you a big hug and say, ‘my dream has come true’.”²⁶⁰ Tears, love, and an immediate connection are what Mariana wants. In 1990, four years after her first letter, Mariana writes: “I’ve been waiting for you for a while with my arms open. Many years, too many. Years of looking for your face in the mirror, of inventing your features looking at my own. Years of thinking that if I see you in the street I wouldn’t recognize you; or would I?”²⁶¹ Her earlier excitement has, over the course of four years, turned to sadness: “I anxiously wait for you, full of doubt and fears. Wanting you more each day with a profound and unalterable fondness. I have a place ready for you in my life and in my home. A mountain of things that I still haven’t told you, a mountain of kisses, of hugs, and of laughter to share. And a handful of stars that, when you come back I will give to you.”²⁶² Mariana’s life, her space, her thoughts are haunted by her brother. It is the type of haunting that is so characteristic of individuals who have survived

²⁵⁹ “mama y papa no están” “te extraño mucho y te quiero.” *Algún día*, 26.

²⁶⁰ “A veces pienso: cuando nos encontremos, ¿qué te voy a decir? Y contesto: Seguro nos miraremos y yo (la débil, la enternecida) quizá me ponga a llorar; luego, después de mirarnos como si no pudiéramos creerlo, tal vez te dé un gran abrazo y diga: ‘Se cumplió mi sueño.’” *Algún día*, 26.

²⁶¹ “Hace tiempo que te estoy esperando con los brazos abierto. Muchos años, demasiados. Años de buscar tu rostro en el espejo, de inventar tus rasgos mirando los míos. Años de pensar que si te veo en la calle no te reconocería; ¿o sí?” *Algún día*, 33.

²⁶² “Te espero con ansias, llena de dudas y de miedos. Queriéndote más cada manan, con un cariño profundo e inalterable. Tengo listo un lugar para vos en mi vida y en mi casa. Un montón de frases que todavía no dije, de besos, de abrazos y de risas para compartir. Y un punado de estrellas que, cuando vuelvas te las voy a regalar.” *Algún día*, 33.

trauma, large or small, and though Mariana herself was not taken, and did not witness murder or death, her life is still populated by the traumatic events that took her parents and her brother from her. Whether intentional or not, Mariana's letters are a plea to the readers to return her lost brother to her.²⁶³ In one letter from 1988, Mariana tells Rodolfo that their grandfather was placed in the hospital, that she had to stay with their grandmother Rosa because her grandmother Argentina had to care for him. There is a sense of urgency underlying that paragraph, the potential death of a grandfather for Mariana, and the clear message to the reader that Rodolfo, or children like him, needed to be found as quickly as possible so that they could meet their grandparents before they died of illness or old age.

It is unclear from the book itself how many of these letters, poems, and reflections have been edited by Las Abuelas or the editors of the volume, but the picture they paint can give us insight, if not into the lived emotional experiences of children of the Dirty War, then, at the very least, into the experience that adults, like those in las Abuelas, expected these children to have. Children of disappeared parents and children with disappeared siblings should feel a sense of longing, a sense of loss; they should accept the absence of their parents but a yearn to reunite with or meet their absent siblings. While it's likely that the sentiments expressed in this volume were genuine, their editing, preparation, and distribution for a particular audience helped transform them into an established or expectable kind of discourse / pattern of sentiment. The tone and terms of accounts written in *Algún día* (which includes letters and reflections from children besides Mariana) match those of later narratives given by children who recovered lost siblings in interviews with the press or documentaries chronicling the loss of disappeared persons or the recuperation of identity in Argentina, even those that were not necessarily

²⁶³ "llorando la injusticia del destino en esta página blanca." *Algún día*, 33,

provided and promoted by las Abuelas. Children, like Mariana, grew up with constant absence. It is easy to imagine children like her looking for their absent siblings in their own faces, or the faces of strangers on the street, resigned to the fact that their parents were not coming back, and hoping that their siblings would.

There is a duality in the book and in similar outreach attempts from las Abuelas that used the voices and images of children. It is difficult to tease apart the reality of childhood and the figurative child in Argentina. The genuine lived experiences of children, growing up without and missing disappeared family members existed alongside the figurative child. The narrative built by different groups about the experiences of children was often removed from reality and deployed as a discursive tool. In this case, children of the disappeared were used by adults as an incentive to pursue justice and continue the search for disappeared people. They were part of the socio-political and cultural movement for justice, at the same time they were removed from it by virtue of their age. They went through the school system alongside children of people who were complicit in the dictatorship and even potentially their own brothers and sisters. They grew up with Las Abuelas and their pursuit for justice, with carefully crafted ideas about their siblings, who did not know that they existed, and in a society that repeatedly emphasized the need for national recuperation over the pursuit of justice. As Ana Ros suggests, this environment affected individuals differently. Some children it pushed towards social justice pursuits, others it pushed away.

In the late 1990s, a group of the former gathered together to found HIJOS, or Hijos para la Identidad y Justicia y contra el Olvido y Silencio, to continue the work of their grandparents to find their missing siblings. Like Las Madres, HIJOS worked to bring the people who had perpetrated the Argentine genocide to justice and to memorialize and preserve the memory and

legacy of their parents. Though las Madres and las Abuelas have tended to depoliticize their disappeared children as much as possible, HIJOS, working in a different context and from a different subject position, have tried to honor or acknowledge the political legacy of their parents. Las Madres have been both praised and critiqued for their use of “traditional” feminine identity to protest the dictatorship.²⁶⁴ Their movement was built on the idea of political apolitics: that is, they claimed their actions, which were inherently political, were apolitical and simply a moral obligation based upon traditional national ideals. HIJOS have taken a drastically different approach. While their grandparents began their protests quietly walking around the Plaza de Mayo, HIJOS’ most famous and effective tactic has been the sensational/dramatic *escraches*.

An *escrache* is essentially a public shaming of a person or people involved in the dictatorship, typically someone who had been a higher-level member of the dictatorial regime or a supervisor of a concentration camp, and who escaped prosecution under the *Ley de Punto Final* or *Ley de Obediencia Debida*. They would publicize the address, go to the house, hang signs and photos, and loudly proclaim the crimes of the military official. HIJOS defined an *escrache* as “the method that HIJOS has chosen to denounce and bring attention to the impunity in our country. We are drawing attention to the perpetrators of genocide, one by one...you too can do it.”²⁶⁵ *Escraches* borrowed in some ways from earlier forms of Argentine public protest and shaming, particularly on the part of the working classes and students in the Peronist era, and again during the socialist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, where demands for change involved public reclamations against perceived injustice or violations.²⁶⁶ It was also a way of

²⁶⁴ Diane Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 186-205.

²⁶⁵ HIJOS, “Escráchelo usted mismo” (Buenos Aires, c. 1996) CeDInCI Archive.

²⁶⁶ Eduardo Elena, “What the People Want: State Planning and Political Participation in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005): 81-108.

inverting the power of silence during the dictatorship. The military junta emphasized the importance of conformity, homogeneity, and people were afraid to stand out, to be identified, or to have attention placed on them because of the consequences. To turn that fear against members of the dictatorship, by creating spectacle, loudly and repeatedly calling out the perpetrators of human rights violations, was a brilliant tactic. HIJOS made it impossible for perpetrators to fade into the background or to hide. They identified them loudly and publicly and subjected them to shaming.

To generate support, HIJOS distributed pamphlets, flyers, or placards to attract attention for their events, and for their organization in general. They used them to provide information and demand change. The CeDInCI archive (a repository of documents related to leftist activism in Latin America) in Buenos Aires has an impressive collection of these materials which, due the cheapness of their production and manner of distribution, were not necessarily well documented or preserved by the organization itself. These flyers and pamphlets, published and circulated during the mid-1990s, give insight into how HIJOS garnered attention and support, the language they used to describe themselves, their politics, their relationship with other activist organizations, and their parents. They also illustrate how HIJOS directly intervened into contemporary politics and positioned their work as a national and human rights issue. In one flyer, for example, HIJOS described their message and their objectives in deceptively simple terms that offer deep insight into the way that they understood themselves as children of disappeared persons. They describe themselves as

children of men and women who were kidnapped, tortured, murdered, disappeared, survivors of prisons, or had to escape into exile. Our brothers and sisters' identity was stolen, they were given to strangers, often times murderers. They are aberrations created by those people to instate an individualistic and ambitious system that still attacks us constantly. Understand us. A system that organizes misery and raises the banners of impunity.

We will never forgive this, because we won't forget. We don't believe in regret. We aren't interested in a RECONCILIATION OF PARTIES. We demand JUSTICE AND JAIL for the murderers. We don't want to share this society with these degenerates.

Our parents started this. Today, after many years without having them, we are able to say that they are alive. They are with us and we are proud of them. Their mothers are here: unbreakable, indestructible, indispensable.

Now we add ourselves, their HIJOS. We will take our place. We are ready, we are strong, we band together, we are together.

And so are all of you.
The fight never ended, it continues."²⁶⁷

HIJOS positioned themselves within a multigenerational legacy of activism and a quest for justice. As they came of age, they were able to embrace their identity as children of the disappeared. Here, they depict themselves as inheritors of memory and warriors for justice, who take a firm line on the prosecution of people involved in the dictatorship. Their parents are absent—likely dead, possibly in exile—but nevertheless present in the politics, memory, and activism of HIJOS. They do not use the word death or dead to describe their parents, in fact, though they list the horrible circumstances of their parents' disappearances, they emphasize that their parents are alive and with HIJOS in their search for justice, that it was their parents, not their grandparents, who began this political work. They recuperate their parents' ideologies in some ways. Though they do not call for a socialist revolution, they point to the problems within the government, particularly the corruption, that made possible the dictatorship and continued to perpetuate injustice and misery during the transition, particularly during the neoliberal years of Menem. If Las Abuelas described their grandchildren's parents as martyrs, HIJOS defined what their parents had died for and made it their mission to continue their work in society.

²⁶⁷ HIJOS, "La lucha nunca se abandonó, continua" (Buenos Aires, c. 1998) CeDIInCI.

HIJOS founded their organization in the mid-1990s and were able to develop a distinct form of political and social activism. By the 1990s, these young adults had seen Las Madres and Las Abuelas rigorously protest, they'd benefited from education that encouraged them to question and vocalize, they'd been able to read about what had happened, about history and politics. They'd been children when the CONADEP compiled the Nunca Mas report; they'd been children when the government passed the Full Stop Law and the Law of Due Obedience. They'd lived through political elections and a peaceful transition of power between presidencies. All of these factors informed HIJOS' choices and their politics. Two aspects of HIJOS' mission, in particular, distinguish it from the discourse of Las Madres and Las Abuelas. The first is the emphasis that HIJOS placed on rejecting reconciliation between political parties in the name of national solidarity. They demanded, not only justice, but jail for the people who murdered, kidnapped, and/or tortured their parents and stole their siblings. The HIJOS grew up in a transitional government that frequently sought to appease the population, including denialists and powerful members of society who had worked in collusion with the military regime. The 1980s and 1990s were a constant back and forth of official policy concerning personal responsibility for the so-called "Dirty War." These questions played out on all levels of Argentine society and continue to the present day. HIJOS identified their frustration with prevarication as an impetus for their organization, for forcing them to take a stand, to take their place in society. The second distinction is that they did not emphasize the search for or location of missing parents or siblings. It was definitely a part of their project and they did emphasize it in other pamphlets and *folletos* printed and distributed throughout the 1990s and 2000s, but here, it was barely mentioned as a goal. Instead, they looked for supporters in their fellow citizens to break the cycle of violence

and impunity within Argentina. Las Abuelas looked for siblings, HIJOS found their parents in their politics, and used that legacy as a mode of recuperation.

In keeping with this manifesto, HIJOS encouraged people to reject the continued presence of “murderers” and “perpetrators of genocide” in the government. They echoed earlier sentiments of Las Madres who asked, quite plainly, “Can you really grant amnesty to the people responsible for so much horror and suffering, which will last for generations?”²⁶⁸ Los HIJOS didn’t question, they demanded: “Don’t vote for genocides. Impunity will always repress and kill. Jail for the perpetrators of genocide and their accomplices.”²⁶⁹ In addition to organizing mass public shaming and protest marches, HIJOS also encouraged people to harass “genocidas” themselves. In the pre-internet age, they gave out the phone numbers and addresses of perpetrators of genocide, like Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz, who was freed from prison due to impunity laws “guilt free.” HIJOS encouraged people to follow a two-step, do it yourself, *escrache* plan. Step 1: “find him using the treasure map,” which included a list of the subway lines and busses necessary to arrive at his home. Step 2: act if you see him at his home. They offered a list of suggested activities including, “spit on him,” “stick him with a sign that says murderer, a piece of gum, or a wad of mucus,” “douse him with a bucket of cold water,” or “call him by his first name: MURDERER.”²⁷⁰ HIJOS’ mission with their *escraches* was to draw attention to both perpetrators of crimes (who enjoyed impunity and anonymity) and to the system that had consistently failed their victims; they also tried to create social unrest and unease to pressure the government to take action, and make life uncomfortable for the “genocidas” in the meantime.

²⁶⁸ Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, “¿Dónde están estos niños?” (Buenos Aires, c. 1985) CeDIInCI.

²⁶⁹ HIJOS, “Día nacional de la vergüenza miércoles 29 de octubre” (Buenos Aires, 1997) CeDIInCI.

²⁷⁰ HIJOS, “Escráchelo usted mismo,” (Buenos Aires, 1997) CeDIInCI.

In their notices for *escraches*, HIJOS indicated how people had escaped justice, what crimes they had supposedly committed, and what they were doing with their freedom. According to the pamphlets, military junta members worked within or around the government, or else shared their considerable talents with right wing, militant organizations.²⁷¹ HIJOS particularly objected to the continued presence of members of the military junta within the current government. They organized, for example, a march from the congress to the central plaza of Buenos Aires on the “National Day of Shame” to protest Antonio Domingo Bussi, the “torturer and assassin,” as governor of Tucuman.²⁷² The majority of the flyers that have been collected and preserved called for *escraches*, public shaming, and protest marches against impunity. The second largest grouping of flyers encouraged citizens not to vote for *genocidas* or murderers. One particularly powerful flyer, published in conjunction with the National Day of Shame, urged people not to “vote for the boots” (Figure 2). It featured an image of a military style boot, treads in the shape of a skull and cross bones, about to take a step, and, it’s implied, crush someone or something in the foreground. It’s one of the only flyers that uses color: a circle and line in red to cross out the boots. It entreats readers and passersby not to vote for military leaders or their accomplices: not to place them in positions of power where they can crush society.

In addition to government positions, HIJOS were concerned with the power of the police force in the city of Buenos Aires, and the way in which law enforcement had been mobilized to

²⁷¹ For more information on the reception of *escraches* in contemporary Argentine society, see: Susana Kaiser, “*Escraches*: Demonstrations, Communication, and Politics in post-dictatorship Argentina,” *Media, Culture and Society* 24 (2002): 449-516; Laura Beradiba, “The Persistence of Silence after Dictatorships,” *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (2012): 287-297.

²⁷² HIJOS, “29 de octubre,” (Buenos Aires, 1997) CeDIInCI.

kidnap, torture, and kill Argentine citizens during the dictatorship. They were concerned that the police could be, under similar leadership, mobilized that way again:

Or have we also forgotten that the police in the Province of Buenos Aires headed by Commissioner Campa and his aid Etchecolatz was responsible for thousands of kidnappings, tortures, rapes, robberies, murders, and disappearances and the kidnapping of children in various concentration camps like el Pozo de Banfield...Is it possible to have more safety with these murderous beasts, torturers, and thieves in the streets, who after torturing and raping their victims threw them alive into the Rio de la Plata? It is possible to have safety with thousands of unprosecuted persecutors of genocide? THE RESPONSE IS NO. AND FOR THIS WE ARE RESTARTING OUR PARENT'S FIGHT AND THE FIGHT OF THEIR COMPANIONS FOR JUST AND UNIFIED SOCIETY.²⁷³

Here, HIJOS condemned social injustice and directly linked their struggle in a post-dictatorship society with their parents' struggle in a pre-dictatorship one. They seek to highlight the continuity of injustice through the transition to democracy in Argentina; they position their fight as similar to their parents, and they position themselves as inheritors of their legacy of activism in the present. This echoes the way in which Graciela Montes framed the position of this generation in Argentine society.

Yet despite this narrative of continuity, in many ways their activism was a change from the past, both distant and recent in Argentina. They embraced and rejected their identity as children of disappeared parents. They didn't push, as their parents and their parents' *compañeros* did, for a fully-fledged socialist revolution, but for a genuinely democratic society and radically used and tested democratic freedom of speech in their escraches. Unlike their grandmothers, they positioned their agenda as decidedly political and refused to shy away from

²⁷³ "No Olvidamos," (Buenos Aires, c. 1996-97) CeDInCI: "No olvidamos o nos olvidamos también que la policía de la Pcia de Bs. As. capitaneada por el comisario Camps y su ayudante Etchecolatz fue la responsable de miles de secuestros, torturas, violaciones, robos, asesinatos, y desapariciones Y apropiaciones de niños en varios campos de concentración como el Pozo de Banfield...Puede haber más seguridad con estas bestias asesinas, torturadores, y ladrones en la calle, que luego de torturar y violar a sus víctimas las tiraban vivas al Rio de la Plata?...Puede haber seguridad con miles de genocidas impunes? LA RESPUESTA ES NO. Y POR ESO REINVINDICANDO LA LUCHA DE NUESTROS VIEJOS Y SUS COMPANEROS POR UNA SOCIEDAD JUSTA Y SOLIDARIA." HIJOS, 29 de octubre."

that. They also, significantly, recaptured or explicitly referenced the fact that their parents were part of a political or revolutionary movement. One of the inherent paradoxes of las Madres is their adherence to their children's identities as martyrs and victims of a genocide, while simultaneously avoiding or eliding the reasons for which they were targeted by the regime. Subversion was a broad category that was used to justify the disappearance of thousands, but the root definition was a nonconformity with some aspect of the military junta's definition of "traditional" Argentine identity. HIJOS, like their grandmothers, called for an end to impunity, justice, and memory in Argentine society. Unlike their grandmothers, they defined this goal and movement as political and made it clear that their parents fought for social justice, reform, and equality. They embraced their role as legacies of activism, but in doing so, they shaped and defined a new phase of political protest and social activism that drew on the past, but also blended together different strategies and traditions into something new.

Conclusions and Continuations:

Examining the relationship between children both imagined and real can help us to understand the ways in which children have been politicized and the ways in which the figurative child has, by its absence, shaped the lived realities of present children in the transitional period. The legacy of the dictatorship has shaped the maturation, politics, and identities of an entire generation of Argentines. In particular, children, through their absence and their presence, shaped activism, politics, national narratives, and identity in the transition to democracy. The experience of children during the transition to democracy was saturated by narratives for and about them. In many ways, the definition and experience of childhood in this moment was shaped by the absence and presence of the disappeared. The search for *niños desaparecidos*, Las Abuelas' search for their missing grandchildren, and the figure of these children, frozen in time,

powerless, simultaneously politicized and depoliticized children in the transitional period. Activist organizations, authors, and the children of the disappeared themselves have interacted with, challenged, and reinforced the parameters of this figurative child in a variety of ways.

In this chapter, I have considered the experiences of the children of the disappeared through their self-expression as children, and their activism as adults. The children of the disappeared grew up in the shadow of dictatorship; their lives and identities were fundamentally influenced by the absence of disappeared siblings and parents. In their adulthood, these children recuperated their parents' political legacies, accepted their own project as a political one, and continued to fight against social injustice. As we will see, the HIJOS were the first audience for authors like Graciela Montes, who radically confronted the legacy of dictatorship in her works for children who had been born in the dictatorship, children "who wanted to know what it's about."²⁷⁴ We will see the ways in which their political vision and Montes' aligned. HIJOS grew up to be the type of people that activists and supporters of democracy envisioned for Argentina: people who spoke out, who understood that democracy required vigilance and constant engagement. HIJOS, these children, profoundly affected by loss, transformed that loss into action, and that action has had tangible political results.

The relationship between the figurative child and his real-world counterparts is complex. Though HIJOS have been active for decades now, Las Abuelas continue to depict their missing grandchildren, the siblings of HIJOS, as small children. Las Madres continue to speak about their missing children, many of whom by this time might have been grandparents themselves, as children. The absence of the disappeared has created a tangible presence in Argentine politics, lives, and society.

²⁷⁴ "que quieren saber de qué se trata"

CHAPTER IV

Graciela Montes: Writing the Dictatorship into Argentina History through Children's Literature

Until now, this dissertation has focused on the state, textbooks, institutions and organizations. Now it will turn to examine an individual author to see how children's literature was part of these redefinitions. This chapter will look at three works by Graciela Montes as part of a historiographical and narrative project to engage with the dictatorial past and a way to construct a historical narrative for the democratic future. Montes is unique: she is an example of independent and politically savvy children's author. She occupied a space outside of the official state educational policy, but she was linked to it. Montes was involved in various parts of the educational process: writing *manuales*, working on education reforms, and collaborating with other authors. The works analyzed in this chapter represent an important shift in Argentina: Montes moved away from silence and the idea that children should be sheltered from the past. Instead, she advocated a policy of radical dialogue. She wrote for children about dictatorship and politics, and confronted the realities of political violence and social transition. Her works embraced Las Madres and Las Abuelas' politics in two ways: their call to vocalize and remember what had happened and their focus on children as a site of political violence and political change. These books are a response to *manuales*, which didn't change quickly enough, and educational policy, which encouraged democratic practice, but didn't describe the realities of

the dictatorship. Montes engaged with the figurative child and she moved further: using that figurative child to give real children important information and a political project of their own.²⁷⁵

Montes' style evolved throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This evolution related to shifting national politics during the transition, and the development of historical narratives about the dictatorship. Montes is unique as a writer during this moment: unlike many of her contemporaries, she directly confronted the dictatorship—its realities and its legacy—in her stories for children. As discussed in Chapter 2, schoolbooks (*manuales*) for children during the transition often avoided the dictatorship as a subject. This was partially because of political uncertainty on a national level and partially because of the slow process of changing educational policy. Montes, who collaborated with the Ministry of Education on some of those manuales, wrote her own series of books to supplement school texts, to offer a “truer” narrative for children and parents who wanted to talk about contemporary issues, those “que quieren saber de qué se trata.”

This chapter will examine *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* (1986), *Entre dictaduras y democracias* (1992), and *El golpe y los chicos* (1996). Each book was written and published during a different moment of the democratic transition. In these works, Montes dialogued with children about recent traumatic events, but also consciously worked to shape the national historical narrative about dictatorship and democracy in Argentina. In the first book, Montes wrote for children who were born during the dictatorship, while they were still quite young. In the second, she wrote for the same group of children at a later stage in their development and a

²⁷⁵ *El golpe y los chicos* was first published in 1996, a reprint was issued in 1997, both included several thousand copies. A new issue was printed in 2001 and again in 2011, both included several thousand copies. By all accounts, this book is considered a “classic” today. Though it was initially designed for private consumption, in the early 2000s the Ministry of Education recommended it for use in primary and middle school classrooms as a way to learn about and discuss the dictatorship.

later stage in the transition. The third book she wrote for children who had been born during the transition, and it is a glimpse into the way that she understood the importance of memory in post-generation Argentina. In all three of these books, Montes engaged with her child readers as well as the figurative child created by Las Madres and Las Abuelas. For Montes, writing children's literature was a political project, and she defined what she saw as the role of children in Argentine society. Like Las Abuelas, she charged children, from a very young age, with the responsibility of remembrance and civic engagement, this was crucial to build a democratic state and to both heal from and prevent another dictatorship. Unlike Las Abuelas, Montes has a much more active view of the child as a subject. She writes for and about children as agents who speak out, ask questions, think critically. She built upon the idea of children as central figures of Argentine society, but she changed them from passive to active.

¿Qué es esto de la democracia?

In 1986, the reinstated Argentine democracy was still in its infancy. It had only been three years since the dictatorship had ended, since CONADEP and *Nunca Más*.²⁷⁶ It was a year before the Law of Due Obedience and the Full Stop Law were passed. It was in this environment that Graciela Montes wrote and published *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* This book was aimed at children roughly between the ages of five and eight and was part of a larger series of books written by Montes and published between 1985 and 1986. This series included several titles: *The Rights of Everyone, What Do Laws Do?, How is Justice Made?, What are Political Parties?*,

²⁷⁶ Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas was an organization instituted by President Raúl Alfonsín. It was an attempt to collect data/information about disappeared persons and resulted in the *Nunca más* report which included detailed interviews with people who had been disappeared and tortured under the Dirty War as well as information about the perpetrators and estimations of the number of people who had been killed. *Nunca más* was compiled and published in 1984 and has become a foundational text in many ways for people who wish to learn about or have information about the dictatorship.

*What Does the President Do?, The Rights of Workers, and What Happens in the Provinces?*²⁷⁷

The books follow similar stylistic patterns as well as sharing the same author, illustrator, and publishing house (*Libros de Quirquincho*).²⁷⁸ The narrative frame of each is used to explain a socio-political concept (democracy, labor rights, human rights, laws, etc.) to children both in a national and international framework. All of these books are approximately thirteen to sixteen pages long and conclude with an interactive section of key terms and primary source examples. The structure of each is relatively similar as well, which makes it possible to use one as exemplary of the others.

¿Qué es esto de la democracia? begins with a question:

Lately, everyone talks about democracy, democracy here and democracy there. Not like before when nobody used this word. My dad and mom say ‘A few years ago we had a government that ruled through force and now we have a government that rules through democracy, a democratic government. But I still don’t get it: what is democracy?’²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ *Los derechos de todos, ¿Para qué sirven las leyes?, ¿Cómo se hace justicia?, ¿Qué son los partidos políticos?; ¿De qué trabaja el Presidente?; Los derechos de los que trabajan; and ¿Qué pasa con las provincias?*

²⁷⁸ Libros de Quirquincho was responsible for publishing this entire series of books in addition to the later *El golpe para los chicos*. These were not “mainstream” educational texts. This press was also responsible for publishing books detailing educational theory and practice regarding language for children particularly the disenfranchised and was the chosen publisher of Graciela Montes and Gabriel Garcia Bernal two noted children’s authors whose messages were decidedly leftist. In the mid-1990s, The press fell out of favor and out of circulation: the head of the press stopped paying authors, who then left the editorial and moved their works to other. That said, during the 1980s Libros de Quirquincho was an active and progressive publisher whose works included: Gabriel Garcia Bernal’s *Mujercitas ¿eran las de antes? : el sexismo en los libros para chicos*, Eduardo Hojman’s *Letras que dicen: una antología rock*, and Alejandro Rozitchner’s *Filosofía para chicos: diario de una experiencia*.

²⁷⁹ “Últimamente todas hablan de democracia, que

la democracia de aquí, que la democracia de allá.

Antes en cambio, nadie usaba esa palabra.

Mi papá y mi mamá dicen: “Hasta hace pocos años teníamos un gobierno por la fuerza y ahora tenemos un gobierno por la democracia, un gobierno democrático”. Pero yo sigo sin entender:

¿Qué es esto de la democracia?” Graciela Montes, *¿Qué Es Esto de La Democracia?* (Buenos Aires: Libros de Quirquincho, 1986).

The unseen narrator, who is not given a name, age, or physical representation, is clearly intended to be a child who is curious about concepts that s/he encounters but does not understand. This disembodied child asks another narrator, an adult, for an explanation of a concept. The images on the page that surround this text show a family watching television, featuring a political speaker and word bubbles connecting several individuals of various ages with the word “¡Democracia!” written inside. Democracy is clearly something that is filling this child’s world, and he wants to be informed. The adult narrator, who likewise lacks any overt identification with regard to class, race, or gender, does have a specific agenda in the way that s/he responds to the child’s continued inquiries. The narrative is constructed as a multi-generational conversation. It works to craft a dialogue between an adult, who has lived through the dictatorship and is actively experiencing the transition to a democratic government, and a young person, whose conscious experience of the world is just beginning to form during this dramatic and politically turbulent time.

Trauma Studies scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub have analyzed the expression and transmission of trauma between communities of survivors and across multiple generations.²⁸⁰ “One’s trauma,” Cathy Caruth argues in *Unclaimed Experience*, “is always tied to the trauma of another, the encounter with another and listening to another’s word. The experience of trauma necessitates listening to the voice of another—the speech delivered by the other’s wound.”²⁸¹ These wounds are often expressed sub-textually, between lines of text, through hyper-textual cues and metaphors. Though Caruth develops this point through the discursive analysis of adult literature and cinema, her argument is equally (if not more) relevant

²⁸⁰ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub, eds., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (NY: Routledge, 1992).

²⁸¹ Caruth, 1-15.

in the realm of children's literature, which is *predicated* on the formation of one's own self, at the same time it consistently constructs the child as a narrative other.²⁸² This genre is built around children as people in the process of crucial and lasting semiotic development as they engage with and adapt to the world.

In transitional Argentina, children occupied a unique space as both survivors of a national trauma and the inheritors of a traumatic past and present.²⁸³ Montes writes to process the trauma of the past for children, by making the "unknowable" past knowable to them, she encourages her readers to encounter and reencounter the traumatic wound of the dictatorship by reading her book, by discussing its contents, by rereading, researching, and investigating. In her books, *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* in particular, she leaves space for ghosts, for encounters with this tragic past and the traumatic present. She literally and textually disembodies the narrators of this story. They could just as easily be echoes of a parent and a child from the past, who haunt the present, as they could be a contemporary parent and child. It is only through their dialogue with one another, and the contemporary reader, that their past can be fully experienced or fully laid to rest: speaking to and of the past is the only way to lay to exorcise its spirit, in contrast to the silence that reigned during and immediately after the dictatorship.²⁸⁴

The narrative begins with the child's sincere comments and questions regarding a "foreign" political concept: democracy. The child knows that this word is new. People did not use it before, but now it is being deployed repeatedly and emphatically by politicians, parents,

²⁸² Children's literature is the site in which we first develop the narrative fictions that define our sense of self.

²⁸³ Silvia Bleichman, *No me hubiera gustado morir en los 90* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2006); Barbara Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis: Cultural Violence and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

²⁸⁴ Caruth, 63.

and other “grownups.”²⁸⁵ In choosing to depict the child this way, Montes acknowledges that children are, in fact, aware of the present political climate, even if they do not necessarily understand it fully. In this narration, children bear the responsibility of questioning the world around them—it is the child’s task to interrogate and interrupt prevalent narratives. Montes uses her book to make children aware of the political situation through her text, and she presents it in such a way that the parent or adult feels the need to explicate the situation. Her book offers the perfect opportunity to do this.

The adult’s response to the child’s question frames democracy in a very positive way. It is a “beautiful” word and it means “Government for everyone because we all are the people: all the men and all the women, it doesn’t matter what your profession is, or your way of life, or of thinking. In a democracy, nobody gets left out. We are all able to participate. And, when it is time to vote, we all vote, because in a democracy we are all equal.”²⁸⁶ This emphasis on inclusivity is part of the narrative project, which continually juxtaposes the exclusive politics of dictatorship and the participatory elements of democracy. It is also part of a radical democratic project to understand children as active and capable political subjects.²⁸⁷ Montes repeatedly connects dictatorships to rule by elites and democracy to ‘the people,’ to nationalism and

²⁸⁵ “Antes, en cambio, nadie usaba esa palabra.” Montes acknowledges here that children are in fact aware of the present political climate, even if they do not necessarily understand it in a concrete way. Montes, 2.

²⁸⁶ “gobierno del pueblo,” “‘gobierno de todos,’ porque todos somos pueblo: todos los hombres y todas las mujeres, no importa cuál sea nuestro oficio ni nuestra manera de vivir y de pensar...En una democracia no hay nadie que queda afuera. Todos podemos participar. Y, cuando llega el momento de elegir, todos elegimos, porque en una democracia todos somos iguales.” Montes, 3.

²⁸⁷ Compare the way that children were figured in the colonial project, or even nineteenth and twentieth century liberal regimes. The idea of children as political subject and actors as a *good* thing was incredibly radical. Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority, and Legal Minority in Colonial Latin America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006); Bianca Premo, *Raising an Empire: Children in Early Modern Iberia and Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 2007); and Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (NY: Penguin: 1979).

²⁸⁷ Public schools, with mandatory education policies, orphanages, public libraries, were made available and regulated by the state. Education of the populace was especially important to nineteenth century liberals, who focused on modernization and national progress. Nara Milanich, *Children of Fate: Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2010), Frederick Joseph Harvey Darton, *Children’s Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)

interaction more broadly. Participation is a privilege associated with democracy in this narrative; participation is also a responsibility.

As the story continues, the child attempts to rationalize or understand the concept of democracy. This is aided by the interspersing of images throughout the dialogue. Montes writes the child's voice with an intense earnestness: he attempts to understand this new concept in light of things that are familiar from his or her own life. In reference to the above quotation, for instance, the child replies, "You mean that in a democracy nobody wears a crown!"²⁸⁸ In Argentina, to say that someone "tiene coronita" implies that they are better than (or think they are better than) someone else. To say that no one wears a crown here is literal and indicates that no one is unduly favored in democracy. The adult narrator uses this as an opportunity to discuss monarchies in relation to democracies and complicate the fairy tale world with which the child is familiar.²⁸⁹ She explains that "What the stories don't tell you is that those who weren't kings or princesses or ladies or knights of the court, that is most of the people—farmers, artisans, servants—had rights to almost nothing."²⁹⁰

This exchange between the adult and child in the text is meant to simulate (and stimulate) the same sort of conversation between children and the parents/guardians reading the book with them, potentially aloud.²⁹¹ The images further facilitate this sort of engagement and interaction. The integration of text and image throughout a two-page spread allows for narrative immersion.

²⁸⁸ "¡Eso quiere decir que en una democracia nadie tiene coronita!" Montes, 3.

²⁸⁹ Reynolds, 10-19.

²⁹⁰ "lo que los cuentos no cuentan es que los que no eran ni reyes ni princesas ni dama ni caballeros de la corte, es decir la mayoría de la gente—los campesinos, los artesanos, los sirvientes—no tenían derecho a casi nada." Montes, 5.

²⁹¹ Children's literature continues to combine print and oral culture in a unique way especially when the audience may not yet be literate or only partially so. These books are meant to be learning experiences both on a basic linguistic level, but also on a political, cultural, and social one, having children absorb both lessons regarding spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary at the same time they absorb history, politics, and nationalist sentiment, formulating intricate connections and mental associations.

Further, the images, color scheme, and other stylistic choices, such as the relative ‘busyness’ of the page, indicate the tone of the narrative in explicit ways that would otherwise remain implicit. The tone is therefore easily readable even as it shifts dramatically from levity to gravitas at certain points in the narration. The simplified childlike vocabulary utilized by the child narrator and the more sophisticated, but relatable, tone of the adult also make the book more accessible. Montes structures this book as a conversation—the type of dialogue that is meant to encourage discourse. She naturalizes and encourages conversation around political topics; the exact type of conversation that had very recently been prohibited. Montes uses this book to recuperate political discourses and to give children a positive view of participatory democracy, curiosity, and dialogue. The works of authors like Montes were one of the reasons that HIJOS were able to develop their political consciousness as adults. They may have benefited from the kind of radical conception of political childhood championed by a small subset of influential writers like Montes.

The dialogue continues from the subject of monarchy to the history of feudal Europe, complete with humorous satirical drawings of kings, princes, and noblemen, as well as instructional cartoon diagrams that depict social hierarchies amongst elites.²⁹² It also includes relatable comments by the child narrator in response to the adult’s historical narrative: “And what if the king’s son was a selfish idiot and didn’t know how to rule?”²⁹³ “About the blue blood...did people really have blue blood?”²⁹⁴ and, with pride, “Those ones [kings, princes, dukes, etc.] *did* have crowns!”²⁹⁵ It is thus easy to imagine children having these responses in relation to this dialogue. But in attempting to “capture” the voice of a potential child reader,

²⁹² Montes, 6-10.

²⁹³ . “¿Y si el hijo del rey era un tonto y un caprichoso y no sabía gobernar?” Montes, 6.

²⁹⁴ “O de sangre azul... ¿Será cierto eso de la sangre azul?” Montes, 6.

²⁹⁵ “¡Esos sí que tenían coronita!” Montes, 7.

Montes also intentionally constructs the type of dialogue that she wants to generate through the reader's interaction with the text and the information that it conveys.²⁹⁶

Of course, the actual experience of reading is highly varied and subjective. The information disseminated through this text is filtered largely through the child's interaction with images and words, as well as his or her parent, guardian or teacher's specific political leanings and background. Given that this text is distributed privately (for sale at bookstores, rather than as part of a centralized curriculum and read by teachers), parental mediation would be a key component of the reading experience, since young children's reading is a collaborative activity. In *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, Perry Nodelman argues that picture books represent a semiotic project that involves the interactive educational experience of meaning making, which is shaped by and shapes the context of informational dissemination.²⁹⁷ This conceptual understanding of the picture book as being one of interactive learning in which visual material is interwoven and even integral to textual and language learning, illustrates for us the really important political work that Montes is doing here. That is, through her use of text and image, she crafts a conceptually transformative and immersive project of language and liberation. She is able to tap into children's emotions using color and humor, and pictures in motion, to make associations between concepts that the child may be learning about explicitly for the first time (like *el golpe* or *democracia*) and tying these words to emotional and discursive meaning produced by images and tone.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ As Chartier suggests authorial intention is always mitigated by the reader experience and the published text itself. However, this project is largely surrounding the author's political intention in the creation and structure of this text. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

²⁹⁷ Perry Nodelman, *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (University of Georgia Press, 1990), 42.

²⁹⁸ Reynolds, 1-19.

Like the parental figure, who would be aiding in the consumption of this textual information, the adult narrator is responsible for the majority of the dialogue in the text. However, it is the child's interjections, comments, and questions that are given more emphasis in the text itself. The child's contributions are printed in bold and a larger font size than those of the adult, which are smaller, plain text, tightly packed together. The stylistic emphasis is placed on the child's comments. They are the central focus of the page. This emphasis is noticeable even for the illiterate child. It also makes the text easier to see and access. In many ways, the adult narrator text reflects "adult" style history books, whereas the script used for the child's narration is louder, bolder, bigger, and set apart by images and large spaces. The child's observations are what provoke the adult's responses and lead the textual progression through a historical narrative of progressive liberation that begin in feudalism, carries through colonialism, moves through the French revolution, and into Argentine independence.²⁹⁹ As the adult narrates these events, some of which are new, the child again refers to concepts with which he is familiar. When referencing the French Revolution, for instance, he responds by saying, "We had a revolution too!" to which the adult replies, "of course, the 25 May 1810 (the date of Argentina's declaration of self-government)."³⁰⁰

It is, moreover, the child narrator who confronts the subject of dictatorship directly.³⁰¹ The adult explains the concept of Argentina as a democratic nation: "our governments are governments elected by the people: democratic governments."³⁰² In response, the child introduces page ten with "Not always. In my house, they always say that not long ago we had a

²⁹⁹ Montes, 4-9.

³⁰⁰ "Nosotros también tuvimos una revolución" and "Claro, la del 25 de Mayo de 1810." Montes, 8-9.

³⁰¹ This is the case in all the books in this series.

³⁰² "Nuestros gobiernos son gobiernos elegidos por el pueblo: gobiernos democráticos." Montes, 9.

government through force and not a democracy.³⁰³ The distinction of “my house” is incredibly telling both in the narrative itself and its broader historical and socio-cultural context. It implies that individual homes and individual families might (and likely did) have completely different narratives about the nation and about the recent past. This harkens to broader patterns of social relationships in Argentina and the ways in which children might discover much about their classmates or determine their social circle by what type of “home” or community that they belonged to, what type of beliefs they subscribed to, which were likely based on geographical location, race, and socioeconomic class. Politics via narrative were a marker of belonging to a particular “tribe” within the nation.

The child’s comment about what they say in his house suggests that he comes from a progressive home. It also suggests that the knowledge of the recent past is pervasive and accessible; it haunts the houses of survivors, society more broadly, and is referenced by the media, perhaps spoken in hushed tones by parents and other adults. The discursive decision to have the *child* introduce dictatorship into the conversation places emphasis on the role of the child as the figure responsible for interrupting the prevalent discourse of historical erasure related to the *proceso*. It encourages children to question adults, to seek explication, to bring up things that are confusing or troubling. Perhaps most importantly, this question leads to an example of what a conversation about dictatorship between adults and children could, or should, look like. The child’s comment challenges the adult and the historical legacy of the *proceso* directly. It forces the narrator/author—because in some ways the adult figure is a proxy for Montes herself—to acknowledge and elaborate upon the issue in a direct manner, which she does. She says:

³⁰³ “No siempre. En mi casa siempre dicen que hasta hace pocos años teníamos un gobierno por la fuerza, y no por la democracia.” Montes, 10.

That is true. In our country there were a few people—very few—who didn't want to live in democracy. They didn't want a government chosen by everyone, a government for everyone; they preferred a government that would govern for them, that gave them privileges. These people sometimes organize into armed groups, which are very powerful because they have armed forces. One day they bring out their bombs, their tanks, and their guns and take the government by force. They expel the people's representatives and the governments that the people elected and place themselves in power.³⁰⁴

This is a basic explication of what it means to have a military dictatorship come into power, simplified for the intended audience, but unambiguous in articulating the political stakes. Here and in other stories, Montes creates a sharp delineation between the few and the many: the few being the villains who persecuted the many righteous heroes or innocent victims. In reality, more than half of the population supported (overtly or tacitly) the dictatorship and its politics. Why this narrative choice? I argue that it is a way for Montes to write an ultimately triumphant narrative of Argentine history. It fits within her broader contextualization of Argentina as a democratic nation at its core and helps her to suggest that it was only a few members of the nation that were cruel, violent, or unjust. It encourages young readers to see themselves as part of a majority that supports rights and freedom and place blame on the leaders of the military junta. It completely elides the participation of ordinary citizens, including the teachers or parents of her young audience, in national tragedy.

This narrative turn also provides a point of entry for a discussion of some of the more complicated issues related to the *proceso*. The adult explains that what happened in Argentina is called a “*golpe del estado*” and further elaborates that a coup d'état is “a death blow to

³⁰⁴ “Es verdad. En nuestro país hay algunas personas—muy pocas—que no quieren vivir en democracia. No quieren un gobierno elegido por todos, que gobierne para todos; prefieren un gobierno que gobierne para ellos, que les dé privilegios. A esas personas se unen a veces grupos armados, que son muy poderosos porque tienen el poder de las armas. Un día sacan a relucir sus bombas, sus tanques y sus ametralladoras y toman el gobierno por la fuerza. Echan a los representantes del pueblo, a los gobernantes que el pueblo eligió y se instalan en el poder.” Montes, 10.

democracy. The people behind the coup said that they took power to save the country from a grave danger. They said that they were going to lead them—they were strong—because the true government was soft and weak. They said that they came to bring order and stability. They said many things.”³⁰⁵ The adult effectively frames the coup in terms of what has already been discussed regarding democracies. The child enters into the conversation with intensity. He says, “But what’s important is what they did.”³⁰⁶ He also observes that “nobody said anything because everyone was afraid.”³⁰⁷ These are moments where the child functions as a historical ghost with a keen and uncanny knowledge of a traumatic past. The child demands acknowledgment, explanation, and, in this case, successfully causes a confrontation with memory.³⁰⁸ The adult responds by describing the complicity of certain corporations, people who were unaffected and believed “la historia oficial.” However, “There were others who were not afraid or content: they were the ones who fought and protested, the ones who were on the frontlines, those who resisted. Many times, these people ended up in prison...or dead.”³⁰⁹

The dialogue continues on the following page. “And if many people fight?” the child asks, to which the adult responds: “When many people fight, the regime loses and has to go. And democracy returns.” She further explicates the ways in which returning to democracy after a period of dictatorship is very challenging. It requires constant work and daily struggle to once again become a participatory republic.³¹⁰ The conversation continues with the child asking,

³⁰⁵ “se llama un golpe. Un golpe de muerte a la democracia. Los golpistas dicen que toman el poder para salvar al país de un gran peligro. Dicen que van a mandar-ellos—que son fuertes—porque los gobiernos verdaderos son blandos y débiles. Dicen que vienen a poner orden. Dicen muchas cosas.” Montes, 11.

³⁰⁶ “Pero lo que importa es lo que hacen.” Montes, 11.

³⁰⁷ “Y nadie dice nada porque todos tienen miedo.” Montes, 11.

³⁰⁸ Caruth, 24.

³⁰⁹ “hay otros que no tienen miedo ni están contentos: son los que luchan y protestan, los que les hacen frente, los que se resisten. Esos muchas veces terminan en la cárcel...o muertos.” Montes, 11.

³¹⁰ “¿Y si los que luchan son muchos?” “Cuando los que luchan son muchos, los golpistas pierden y se tienen que ir. Ye vuelve la democracia.” Montes, 12.

“Even though sometimes they get really angry and yell a lot?”³¹¹ The adult responds: “It doesn’t matter because, even if there is some shouting and disorder, debate is good. In a democracy everyone has the power to say what they think. In an authoritarian government, there are never discussions. There is only order. Order and silence.”³¹² The child comes to the intended realization, guided by Montes’ writing: a link between authoritarian regimes, silence, and an absence of agency. The child concludes the section by saying that in a dictatorship, “no one is able to make a peep.”³¹³

Structurally, the pages that directly deal with the subject of dictatorship are different from those that precede them. From page ten to page twelve, the images are not comical or cheerful. They are stark and strike a very serious note. Unlike the other sections of the book, whose text is bordered by crowns, doves, comical kings, witty words, thought bubbles, and other light-hearted images, these pages offer bleak depictions, a lack of color, and empty margins. The text and a singular image become the primary focus.

On page ten, a tank takes up an entire half of the page. The tank’s canon transposes the space, intersecting page eleven, interrupting the text, and separating the adult’s response from child’s comment in a visually glaring way. It gestures to the separation of parent and child that was so much a part of the military dictatorship, a policy that may have been experienced by young readers themselves.³¹⁴ The violence here is represented as starkly gendered: the military figure driving the tank is male, standing in for the male figured government, whilst the figures running away are a mother and her two children (a boy and a girl), whom she shields with her

³¹¹ “¿Aunque a veces se enojen mucho y se griten?” Montes, 12.

³¹² “No importa, porque aunque haya gritos y un poco de desorden, la discusión es buena. En una democracia todos tienen que poder decir lo que piensan. En los gobiernos autoritarios nunca hay discusiones. Solo hay orden. Orden y silencio.” Montes 12.

³¹³ “Porque nadie puede decir ni mu.” Montes, 12

³¹⁴ Montes, 10-11.

arms as she tries to flee. The small family appears to be in significant danger of being crushed by the impending military vehicle. Superimposed over the tank are the years of every military coup in twentieth-century Argentina.³¹⁵ The canon of the tank overlays rows of people of various ages and genders on page eleven. These individuals are all depicted with sad or serious faces. This illustration is, in many ways, reminiscent of the pictures of the disappeared that so often were featured in the campaigns of *Las Madres*.

The starkest illustration comes on page twelve. There is a single image on this page, a sketch in black with a dash of red against a white background. In response to the accompanying dialogue that draws a distinction between dictatorship/silence and democracy/speech, is the image of a young girl drawn simply in a two-dimensional line sketch. Her mouth is covered with a red bandana, and her eyes are shown as wide and scared, which contrasts sharply with the “dotted” eyes featured on all the other human caricatures throughout the book. Whether this young woman is meant to represent a disappeared person or is a symbolic depiction of the silence created by authoritarian regimes, is unclear. But the accompanying child dialogue, which is printed on top of the silenced woman’s chest, reads “Porque nadie puede decir ni mu.” This suggests that this picture is a representation of both the conceptual and real physical silencing that occurred in Argentina as part of the *proceso*.³¹⁶

The interplay of text and image, as well as the ways in which they are spatially organized on the page, is integral to the interpretation of this book and the analysis of authorial intentions in creating this multi-generational discourse. The image of a young girl, silenced by a red kerchief, most readily calls to mind a parallel image of the older women who made up *Las Madres*, who weekly gathered in their white kerchiefs and, of course, represent the most outwardly vocal stand

³¹⁵ Montes, 10-11.

³¹⁶ Montes, 12.

against the dictatorship. Here is an example of the ways in which the illustrations, using visual repertoires in wide circulation, could generate meaning beyond the text. The juxtaposition of these two images, generationally distinct, but similarly gendered, invokes an important connection between women. Montes gestures towards matrilineal narratives as sites for the recovery of marginalized people and pasts. Women here function as the keepers of memory, the protectors of the small, and the silenced. The image of the silenced young women, brutalized by dictatorship, and physically incapable of speech directly contrasts with the older women of *Las Madres*, who were instrumental in bringing about the end of the *proceso* through their refusal to be silenced. The child narrator, disembodied, genderless, able to be read as both the ghost of the traumatic past and the potential for a democratic future, signifies a demand for explanation and responsibility from both the past and the present. The adult narrator of this book, who figuratively stands in for Montes herself, and, as such, can be read as female, is called upon to take up the space between the silenced young women and the vocal middle-aged *Las Madres* and give voice to both.

From the dictatorship, the text resumes its earlier narrative tone and goes on to describe the gradual incorporation of more and more people into democratic systems. The conversation concludes with the child deciding that his or her original point was very correct, “Because in a democracy no one wears a crown!”³¹⁷ Montes concludes the book with a section entitled, “To read with help,”³¹⁸ which further necessitates an exchange between adult and child. This section includes both a small segment of the Argentine constitution and several vocabulary words with accompanying definitions to help students understand the concepts covered in the text. Montes thus charges young readers with this responsibly: a responsibility that is almost herculean when

³¹⁷ “¡Porque en una democracia nadie tiene coronita!” Montes, 15.

³¹⁸ “Para leer con ayuda.” Montes, 16.

one considers that Argentina's history is not (as her book wants to suggest) a history of continual democracy ruptured by a late-twentieth century military coup. This reading experience is predicated on a revisionist approach to Argentine history for a progressive democratic project.

In 1992, six years after the publication of *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?*, Montes published another book in which she explored the legacy of dictatorship in Argentina. In *Entre dictaduras y democracias*, Montes combined history and narrative storytelling to engage children and to make another optimistic argument for continuity in Argentine history.³¹⁹ At forty-seven pages of tightly packed text, this book is directed at an audience of pre-teens or teenagers and subsequently features more advanced vocabulary and a more complex engagement with themes related to politics. Montes' intended audience was the same group for whom she had written *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?*: children who had been born during the dictatorship, whose parents were victims, survivors, activists, or bystanders. She attempted to engage with children who did not necessarily read her earlier work. At this point in their development, her audience did not necessarily require the intervention of an adult in their reading experiences or choices. This book represents a much more detailed, descriptive, and politically charged engagement with the legacies of Argentine dictatorship. It is part of a series that works to complicate historical concepts for children who were already actively enrolled in schools where they were receiving information regarding Argentine history and society at this point, mostly through texts that had been written during the dictatorship itself. In this book, Montes attempts to rectify, counteract, and supplement the 'official' narrative regarding the *proceso* that children received in schools (including absolute silence on the subject).

³¹⁹ Graciela Montes, *Entre Dictaduras y Democracias* (Buenos Aires: Gramón-Colihue, 1992.).

The title page of *Entre dictaduras y democracias* is telling for several reasons. Though the tale is “related by” Graciela Montes, she as narrator does not take credit for the information included within the story. Instead, she attributes the historical material to Lilia Ana Bertoni and Luis Alberto Romero, both noted historians of Argentina who have authored critical works on the construction and state-led dissemination of Argentina’s official historical narratives.³²⁰ Bertoni and Romero did not write the book but were consulted on the historical narrative and materials contained therein. This marks a deliberate decision by Montes to directly engage with contemporary historiographical developments. Montes intended her book for children, but she used it to intentionally craft a revisionist historical narrative the same way that historians like Bertoni and Romero were doing for adults. This book is a collaborative effort in which Montes represents a historical narrative that is drawn from the research of accredited sources, as well as primary source accounts. In lieu of multiple illustrations on every page, this book features scattered political comics drawn by Daniel Paz; these images are used to bracket and illustrate the text, as well as insert humorous elements into an otherwise bleak tale.³²¹ *Entre dictaduras y democracias* was published by Gramón Colihue, a noted educational press in Argentina, which is still active. This book was part of a series that explained historical moments to children, which was distributed by *Página/12*, a leftist newspaper founded in 1987 by journalists Jorge Lanata, Osvaldo Soriano, Horacio Verbitsky and Fernando Solowic, former members of the youth-led

³²⁰ Lilia Ana Bertoni is a professor of history at the University of Buenos Aires and has published several books and articles focusing on Italian immigrants and immigrant families in early twentieth-century Argentina, most famously *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas*, which is about the construction of national identity in the late 19th c and the use of schools, monuments, and the state in general to disseminate an official history. Luis Alberto Romero is also a professor of History at the University of Buenos Aires and researcher at the National Council of Scientific and Technological Investigations and has written some of the most complete histories of twentieth century Argentina. Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: la construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Fondo de cultura económica, 2001); Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012).

³²¹ Paz is a noted illustrator best known as a political cartoonist for *Página/12*.

resistance of the 1970s. The book was also endorsed by *El Clarín*, one of two mainstream periodicals in Argentina, renowned for its radical stance on political issues.³²² These details are far from irrelevant when we look at this book as a text and a historical artifact with a specific purpose and political agenda.

This book is structured in a scholastic format. The “chapters” are divided by topic, but follow a general progression from past to present, with an unfolding trajectory that, as the title suggests, leads from dictatorship into democracy. The book is part of a larger narrative developed by the preceding books in the series, all of which cover an era of Argentine history from pre-conquest/contact with the Spanish, through the colonial period, independence, the massive nineteenth-century immigration to the nation, undertaken by Italians and Spaniards primarily, and touching briefly upon Peronism and the governments of the early twentieth century. These books approach historical topics in very sophisticated ways, but often avoid historical moments that would be considered divisive in Argentina at the time of their publishing. For instance, though there is a book that details the politics and presidency of Hipolito Irigoyen, there is not a similar volume that discusses the rise of Juan and Eva Perón, two figures who continue to cause rifts within Argentine society, particularly fractioning within the “left.” Why then is there a volume that discusses dictatorship and democracy? One would argue that the very real political climate, still grappling with the recently toppled military regime and the newly instated democracy, called for this sort of work to supplement historical discourses happening in homes or schools. Montes used this book as an opportunity to craft another politically inclusive

³²² The founders of *Página/12* all have leftist leanings. One of the initial journalists of the paper was Eduardo Galeano, noted radical thinker and author of *The Open Veins of Latin America*, the principal dependency theory text. *Página/12* is largely considered to be the most left leaning and radical in Argentina.

narrative that charged young people with preserving democracy, encountering the past, and remembering it.

Picking up where the previous book in this series left off, Montes begins *Entre dictaduras y democracias* with the coup that deposed Juan Perón in 1955. Montes depicts the increasingly radicalized conflict between reformists and the military on the very first page: “In June of 1956, some militant Peronists attempted to lead an uprising in order to take back power. The response was terrible: the leaders of the rebellion, as well as many civilians, were shot in secret and disposed in a landfill.”³²³ Montes makes the villain and the hero of this story explicit from the outset. The military is cast as a violent brutalizing force that consistently strikes down attempts for liberty or equality in society. This is further established by the cartoon on the following page, which features a military person with an attached speech bubble that reads: “The 20 Peronist truths will be repealed, they will be replaced by the 20 gorilla (extreme anti-Peronist) truths...Namely...”³²⁴ The figure indicates an accompanying list, in which every enumerated “truth” is described as “BANG!!” a reference to the authors’ critique of military’s violent way of solving socio-political violence. The bang of a gun is the only way that anti-Peronists know how to solve problems or govern society.

The central focus of this book is the conflict between dictatorship and the struggle for democratic representation. In the following chapter, “*El tablero se acomoda*,” Montes discusses the divisions within the resistance and argues that “In the following years, until 1973, these parties [radicalized youth movements and leftist organizations] didn’t have much power, not

³²³ “En junio de 1956 algunos militares peronistas intentaron un levantamiento para recuperar el poder. La respuesta fue terrible: fueron fusilados no solo los líderes de la rebelión sino además muchos civiles, junto a un basural y en forma clandestina.” Montes, 3.

³²⁴ ““Quedan derogadas las 20 verdades peronistas, que serán remplazadas por las 20 verdades gorilas...a saber...” Montes, 4.

only due to the presence of the military, but also because it was very difficult to build a democratic system, as is to be expected since most of the population was outside of it...”³²⁵

Montes describes with vivid and accurate detail the complex relationship between youth resistance movements and Peronism, and the neo-colonial relationship with the United States that was so much a part of the military regime during these years.³²⁶ The specifics do a great deal to complicate the picture of the authoritarian government in a manner that remains accessible. By mounting ‘facts’ in support of her argument, Montes lent important weight to the specifically left-leaning tale that she tells.

Montes placed young people at the heart of her narrative: here the historical character of youth takes central stage in mid-to-late twentieth-century Argentine history and politics. Montes gestured towards the growing power of universities as

A space in which young people were able to engage with civics and politics. Student centers polemicized, criticized, painted walls, held sit-ins, and their actions, however brash or turbulent, eventually resulted in learning: they taught themselves how to live in a democracy, something which was difficult to replicate outside the university, in a society that continued to operate beneath proscriptions.³²⁷

Young people were the force for change, the people who took it upon themselves to formulate resistance movements, challenge the status quo, and, in university settings, preserve and develop that all-important democracy. Montes deliberately foregrounds youth culture and young people in this narrative as victims, activists, resistance leaders, and targets of repression. She

³²⁵“en los años siguientes, hasta 1973, estos partidos no tuvieron nunca mucho poder, no solo debido a la presencia de los militares, sino además porque resultaba muy difícil armar un sistema democrático como es debido, ya que la mayoría de la población quedaba excluida de él.” Montes, 6-7

³²⁶ Montes, 10-12.

³²⁷. “un espacio donde los jóvenes podían hacer su aprendizaje cívico y político. Los centros estudiantiles polemizaban, criticaban, pintaban paredes, hacían “sentadas” y sus actividades, aunque a veces parecieran algo ruidosas y turbulentas, resultaban a la larga pedagógicas: se ensayaba cómo vivir en un sistema democrático, algo difícil hacer fuera de la Universidad, en una sociedad que seguía asentada sobre las proscripciones.” Montes, 12.

deliberately expands upon Las Abuelas' narrative: but where they kept children passive, Montes depicts them as victims who need to retake their agency and have tremendous social power. Yet, even though she centers forceful and active students, and this is very different from the passive, apolitical vision presented by Madres and Abuelas, Montes too flattens them to meet her goals. Historians like Valeria Manzano, Isabella Cosse, and Natalia Milanesio have examined the ways in which young people, particularly teenagers, became powerful political and economic actors in the mid-to-late twentieth century in Argentina.³²⁸ Their socio-cultural power had to do with their daily engagement with each other, with the economy, with music, fashion, and the world more broadly. Neither Las Abuelas nor Montes considered these aspects of youth culture in Argentina: that it was not only their politics, but their daily engagement with the world that gave them the power to shape it. In this book, Montes describes young people as heroes and martyrs: people who fought and gave their lives for liberty and equality, not necessarily young idealistic teens, who liked the Beatles and wore short skirts because they thought it was cool. Here, she transforms these young adults into figures and removes them from the broader social networks in which they lived, reducing them to their politics, essentializing an entire generation. Removed from these specifics, these young people become ghosts in this story. They don't age: the young people to whom Montes consistently refers, if they had survived *el proceso*, would be the same age as her audience's parents, if not older, yet here they remain fixed in time. They function as narrative ghosts, whom Montes raises or conjures as inspirational, but also, relatable to her young audience. By time or death, the student revolutionaries of the past no longer exist in the

³²⁸ Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014); Natalia Milanesio, "Gender and Generation: The University Reform Movement in Argentina, 1918," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Winter 2005, 505-29; and Andrea Andujar, et al, *De minifaldas, militancias, y revoluciones: Exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009).

present, yet here, they continue to linger as a call to arms, a romanticized portrait of a unified struggle for freedom that she encourages her readers to continue.

Despite Montes' focus on young people as the primary site of activism and resistance, the most intense challenge posed to the social order had been from mobilized workers, not university students. This narrative choice is intentional. She is writing a history that draws a direct parallel between her contemporary readers and their youthful predecessors, and identifies their task, as young people, to unify in the face of oppression. By indicating the ways in which individuals in the past experienced oppression, she also allows for an empathetic experience. Young readers can generationally relate to the young revolutionaries of the past—they can subsequently place themselves, mentally or emotionally, in relation to the traumas of the past. They can make imaginative leaps, and in some ways, could use the text to hear or be haunted by their ghosts. They could also take this awareness into their own lives, giving life and voice to it. Montes reinforces both of these 'hauntings'—that of the revolutionary hero and the martyr—as she leads her readers through the various coups that transitioned power from one military regime to the next. She relates that elites saw young people as a site of subversion and danger.³²⁹ What the military saw as a danger, Montes emphasizes as a strength—she does this primarily to draw parallels between the young people formulating leftist resistance movements in the 60s and 70s and the young people reading about it in the early 90s, a time in which Menem's neoliberal politics began to hit their stride. She argues that young people, essentially, carry tremendous political power and political responsibilities—in the past, that task had been to overthrow military rule, in the present, that task is to preserve the “true nation” and restore democracy.

³²⁹ Montes, 16-20.

In addition to developing the triumphal moments of youth movements, Montes develops those junctures in which young people were particularly targeted, disadvantaged, and damaged. In particular, she discusses three major events that affected young people: *La Noche de Bastones Largos*, the *Cordobazo*, and the Dirty War. “*La Noche de Bastones Largos*” occurred in 1966 at the University of Buenos Aires. Students protested the coup and the repressive policies of President Onganía, and, in response, the police rounded up and beat them. Montes describes the event:

The result was a strongly authoritarian government, which repressed political parties and all political activities, censored the press and cracked down on all organizations that, according to a certain point of view, were seen as ‘leftist.’ Universities were invaded, and the students and professors were taken from their classrooms and beaten by the police in an event known as the ‘Night of the Long Batons/Clubs. [The name comes from the clubs that the police used to beat the subversives].³³⁰

In this event, young people, though mobilized, were not leftists. They were simply victims of a repressive regime, who became radicalized, and increasingly militant in response to government violence and repression. In “*La sociedad empezaba a reaccionar*,”³³¹ Montes writes:

The first sign that society was reacting was an event that took place on the 29 May 1969 in the city of Cordoba known as the *Cordobazo*. Thousands of citizens, mostly students and workers, took to the streets to express their rejection of the system; they occupied the city, manned barricades, and resisted the police for three days. The movement began inorganically [referencing the somewhat ‘unnatural’ alliance that was formed between upper middle-class students and lower-class workers] but demonstrated that society was willing to band together in order to actively resist the regime.³³²

³³⁰ “El resultado fue un gobierno fuertemente autoritario, que suprimió los partidos y toda actividad política, censura la prensa y reprimió toda actividad que, según su especial modo de ver las cosas, pudiese parecer ‘izquierdista’. Las universidades fueron intervenidas, y los estudiantes y los profesores fueron desalojados de las aulas a golpes por la policía en un episodio conocido como la “Noche de Bastones Largos.” Montes, 21.

³³¹ “Society began to react/fight back.” Montes, 20.

³³² “la primera señal de que la sociedad estaba reaccionado fue un episodio que tuvo lugar el día 29 de mayo de 1969 en la ciudad de Córdoba y que se conoce como el “Cordobazo...Miles de cordobeses, en su mayoría estudiantes y obreros, salieron a la calle a manifestar su repudio y terminaron ocupando la ciudad, armado barricadas y resistiendo a la policía durante tres días. El movimiento había sido inorgánico, pero había demostrado que la sociedad estaba dispuesta a agruparse y a resistir activamente.” Montes, 23.

The *Cordobazo* was a triumphal moment of resistance, at the same time, it led to a horrific crackdown on the people. She moves directly (and rapidly) from this episode through the brief return of Perón to *el proceso* itself. She situates young people at the center of her story of dictatorship, in this case, in their role as victims.

According to Montes, the military junta

had the declared aim of “bringing an end to subversion,” this referred not only to guerrilla movements, which were very weak and in decline, but also all forms of popular mobilization, protest, to recover or even to criticize. Their chosen method was, of course, terrorism... This system, engineered to systematically eliminate a segment of society was so successful and the majority of the surviving population, terrorized, has become accustomed to closing its eyes and ignoring everything.³³³

Montes directly confronts the dictatorship, the disappearance, the death, and torture. However, there are several sharp distinctions in how she represents it here. She takes the reader through a long and detailed account of all the military coups that preceded “*el golpe*” in 1976, which initiated *el proceso*. She brings readers into contact again and again with a traumatic past and draws connections between youthful martyrs and their contemporary counterparts—the readers themselves. By this point in the text, the reader has also encountered the political objectives of various groups and has had the “character” of youth in Argentina developed as idealistic, active, and ultimately victimized, which erases the more violently militarized aspects of their activism.

In *Entre dictaduras y democracias*, the dictatorship ends with the democratic election of Raúl Alfonsín, but Montes does not explain how or why that election was able to take place. The

³³³ “tenían el propósito declarado de ‘acabar con la subversión’, y con eso se referían no solo a la guerrilla, que ya estaba muy debilitada y en retirada, sino además a toda forma de movilización popular, de protesta, de reclamo o tan siquiera de crítica. El método elegido fue, por supuesto, el terror... Este sistema, pensado para eliminar sistemáticamente a una parte de la sociedad, fue tan eficaz que la mayoría de la población sobreviviente, aterrada, se acostumbró a cerrar los ojos e ignorarlo todo.” Montes, 29-30.

reasons that the dictatorship ended are not central to the narrative that Montes constructs. She chooses to maintain the focus on young people as “the heroic examples” who, as victims of the dictatorship, have no agency in the recuperation of democracy. The ghosts of the young people here can only be laid to rest when their mission is taken up, remembered and enacted by the new generation of young people, who have or need to inherit their legacy. Perhaps, the lack of discussion about the dictatorship’s end is a reference to the ways in which it hasn’t ended; the trauma continues to be part of the present, tasks remain incomplete, and certain elements of the past continue to linger and require confrontation through remembering and speaking.³³⁴

Structurally, the book concludes with a series of primary materials, which include photographs from the historical events that Montes mentions with explicative text beneath. It also includes “Huellas Para Aprender a Leer”³³⁵—literally, footsteps or traces for learning how to read. This is a collection of primary source texts, including poems, articles, and political tracts, as well as personal testimonies of dictatorship, and a full bibliography of books on the subject. This final section serves as a clear indication that the book is meant to serve as the launching point for the reader’s journey through these materials and this knowledge. Montes tries to inform the reader about the history of an extremely controversial period, draw connections between the past and the present, and conjure and speak to traumatic memories and a painful history. Montes also crafted a particular history to support a leftist-democratic project to politicize young people and incite their engagement and agency as political actors and keepers of historical memory. Historians were working on a similar project. They looked at the past in order to understand how the dictatorship had happened and where Argentina might go moving forward. Like the professional historians on whose work she relied, Montes looked at the

³³⁴ Caruth, 21, 63; LaCapra, 97.

³³⁵ Nodelman, 92-107.

Argentine past and wrote a story that focused on democratic continuity and dictatorship as a point of rupture. While many of these professional historians had a much bleaker view of the *proceso* and what it meant, Montes had a different historiographic intent. She wrote for children, not adults, and her narrative had a political purpose in shaping young citizens. Montes charges her readers with the task of remembering and retelling. It is up to them to bear witness to the past and embody that knowledge in their political engagement with the present.

This is a powerful stance for this particular age group, a group that included children of the disappeared, possibly disappeared children, children raised by parents with a wide array of political views and ideas about the dictatorship. Montes offers this book as a way for these children to connect and to engage, with each other, with themselves, and with society more broadly. In some ways, it mirrors the narrative of *Las Abuelas*—the disappeared are frozen in time, they are heroic martyrs—in other ways though, she distinguishes herself and her narrative by recuperating the identity of disappeared people as activists, and by connecting that activism to contemporary children and young adults, whom she invites to think for themselves and to continue this legacy of social justice.

El golpe y los chicos

In *El Golpe y los chicos* (1996), Graciela Montes combines narrative about the dictatorship and first- person accounts from children who survived the dictatorship, whose parents were disappeared, or who were disappeared themselves. She gives equal importance to both elements of the history: the narrative and the testimony. The history section is thirty-three pages long, followed by thirty-nine pages of testimonies. Structurally, physically, the book shares more commonalities with *Entre dictaduras y democracias* than *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* The

text is dense and direct. The history section includes wide left margins into which Montes incorporates sporadic quotations from the children's testimonies. The testimonies interject into the historical account written by Montes, but Montes doesn't interrupt the testimony. Both sections include occasional images, but unlike her two earlier books, this book uses only photographs. Unlike *Entre dictaduras* and *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?*, Montes' audience for this book is the children born after the end of the dictatorship: the generation after, who have no memories of the dictatorship itself, but grew up in the aftermath of conversations about dictatorships, democracies, memory, and responsibility.

This story is about a time “when we were all younger and many of those reading these pages hadn't even been born.”³³⁶ Montes includes herself as a “protagonista” in this history; these events happened to her generation, these acts affected her life. They are things that “vimos con nuestros ojos, que vivimos en nuestros cuerpos.”³³⁷ This is one of the reasons, she argues, that this story is difficult for her to tell. It is, however, something she needs to tell, and that her readers need to hear to ensure that the history won't repeat itself ever again.”³³⁸

Montes sets up the tension of national memory in Argentine during the transition: the debate between forgetting in order to move on, or remembering as a preventative measure:

Some people think that it is better to forget things that are bad or sad. Others believe that to remember is good; there are things that are bad and sad that won't happen again exactly because of that, because we remember then, because we don't erase them from our memory.³³⁹

³³⁶“cuando todos éramos más jóvenes y muchos de los que están leyendo estas páginas ni siquiera habían nacido” Montes, 4.

³³⁷ Montes, 4.

³³⁸ Montes, 4.

³³⁹“Algunas personas piensan que de las cosas malas y tristes es mejor olvidarse. Otras personas creemos que recordar es bueno; que hay cosas malas y tristes que no van a volver a suceder precisamente por eso, porque nos acordamos de ellas, porque no las echamos fuera de nuestra memoria.” Montes, 4.

As one can infer from the earlier two works in this chapter, Montes firmly supported the latter approach. The tone here is different though. In *El Golpe y los chicos*, she presents the story of *el proceso* to children who may be hearing it for the first time in order to bring them into a project of political remembrance. Unlike the audience for her earlier books, who lived during the dictatorship and the early transition, these children were born during the presidency of Alfonsín or Menem. Their Argentina had a new constitution, a neoliberal president, and a new educational law. This audience was slightly removed from the experience of the dictatorship, but they were growing up in a moment in which HIJOS' activism was growing and Las Abuelas' search for their missing grandchildren was becoming more accepted. Montes explained a past that the children might not know much about, but the legacy of which they would see traces of every day.

Montes defines *un golpe* as “a blow to democracy. A group of people, who have power through weapons, they occupy the government of a country through force. They take everyone prisoner: the president, the deputies, the senators, governor, the representatives that the people have chosen with their vote and occupy their place. They become dictators.”³⁴⁰ In addition to unlawfully and forcefully taking control of a democratically elected government, Montes argues that a coup involves the corruption of the government, “they make their friends mayors, judges, ministers, secretaries, so that everything stays in the family, they govern without caring about anyone.”³⁴¹ The military government of the dictatorship, Montes says, believed that they knew what was best for everyone, without actually having any idea. They used the weapons

³⁴⁰“una trompada a la democracia. Un grupo de personas, que tienen el poder de las armas, ocupan por la fuerza el gobierno de un país. Toman presos a todos: al Presidente, a los diputados, a los senadores, a los gobernadores, a los representantes que el pueblo había elegido con su voto y ocupan su lugar. Se convierten en dictadores.” Montes, 4.

³⁴¹ “a los amigos los nombran intendentes, jueces, ministros, secretarios... así todo queda en familia... gobiernan sin rendirle cuenta a nadie.” Montes, 4.

designated to protect the nation from outside attack in order to wage an internal war, not against subversion, but against *democracy*. Through the promise of putting in order a disorganized country, they were able to elicit support from certain social groups who “have no interest in democratic governments.”³⁴²

One of the most interesting aspects of Montes’ primer on *los golpes argentinos* is to rename and reframe the military coup from a war against subversion to a war against democracy. Montes situates the military government of *el proceso* within a longer, broader history of military coups in Argentina: Uriburu’s ousting of Yrigoyen in 1930, the coup against Castillo in 1943, the Military and Army’s combined overthrow of Perón in 1955, Frondizi in 1962, and Onganía in 1966. “¡Cinco golpes en 36 años!” she says, “Five coups in thirty-six years,” noting that all of these coups were not equal in their violence or their repressive politics, though all left the country worse than when they had taken control.³⁴³ Subversion was a word, she argues, used by the military to justify their policies and to garner the support of the civilian population. It was, however, a front, a façade to obfuscate their true purpose: to overthrow a democratically elected government, and create a corrupted system built on patronage and greed (as if such a thing had never existed in Argentina before).³⁴⁴ Montes tapped into a broader historiographical tradition that traced the origins of Argentine identity to liberal ideals and popular participation, in which Rosas and the military coups were aberrations. She suggests that the coup that began *el proceso*, like the other five coups of the twentieth-century, was an aberration in an otherwise democratic country. The assumption being that between these coups, democracy was the prevalent political system in Argentina, which was not necessarily the case. This is not a short

³⁴² “no tienen ningún interés en los gobiernos democráticos.” Montes, 5.

³⁴³ Montes, 5.

³⁴⁴ Montes, 7.

history of the dictatorship, but a broader conceptualization of the dictatorship within a longer history of democratic interruption. For the young reader, this does two things. First, it establishes coups as anti-Argentine. They are wars the military wages against the civilian population, typically headed by powerful people attempting to destroy freedom and discussion. The second thing that it does is to reposition anyone who fights against the dictatorship as a de facto champion of democracy. Subversion is the junta's word, and people who were considered "subversives" were in fact part of a democratic project.

According to Montes, *Los golpistas* were able to take power in large part because of social chaos and weak leadership and the complicit support of people who "always trusted that the "firm hands" would fix things."³⁴⁵ Tolerating different ways of thinking, Montes says, is more difficult than forming a faction and beating to death all those who exist outside of this faction (factions like the paramilitary league, la Triple A).³⁴⁶ Democracies are tolerant, military coups, the military, and dictators are not only intolerant, but violently opposed to different opinions of any kind. Montes defines democracy as "living with the other—sometimes with your adversary who is on the other side—and tolerating them. Fight, debate, confront each other, but tolerate them."³⁴⁷ This is more complex than the idea that "no one wears a crown," but does echo the ways in which Montes positions dictatorships as governments of silence and democracies as governments of speech, where yelling is good because it means that you are free to speak your mind.

From a discussion of la Triple A, Montes introduces *las guerrillas*: groups typically made of young people who wanted to have a revolution, who were upset about injustice in society, and

³⁴⁵ "confían siempre en que las "manos duras" arreglen las cosas." Montes, 8.

³⁴⁶ Montes, 9.

³⁴⁷ Montes, 10.

wanted to make a change.³⁴⁸ She places them in resistance to the government, motivated by social justice concerns, and ready to resort to violent means in order to change the system. The presence of radical guerrillas, like *los montoneros*, gave the *Fuerzas Armadas* a new language and a threat which they exaggerated to justify their policies and their need for a *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*. Everyone who disagreed with them became a “subversive” or a “guerrillero,” conjuring the image of a large military force instead of smaller organizations within the country.³⁴⁹ Anyone who wanted change became a subversive under this regime, and the *golpe* of 1976 was a regime to prevent change. Montes turns political dissidents into dreamers with a hazy ideology for change—she doesn’t explain their political goals—unlike *Entre dictaduras y democracias* she pays little attention to the formation of cross class alliances between workers, unions, and students. Her account of the revolutionaries has more in common with the narrative of Las Madres—the young people during this period, like many other young people in the world, just wanted a more equal society. When she discusses the “subversives” and describes their goals, she says that they wanted to “hacer la revolución” but she uses quotations as if to suggest that this was not their actual goal. Though she mentions that the *Triple A* referred to them derogatorily as “communists” and even mentions Che Guevara at one point, she doesn’t really delve into the ways in which militant leftist groups *did* want to revolutionize Argentina and Latin America; that they did believe in overthrowing the system in order to create a new, more egalitarian one. As in her earlier works, Montes positions democracies and dictatorships as opposites with no overlap. In order to fit socialists into this narrative in a way that encourages activism and political engagement in her young readers, she positions the “subversives” on the side of democracy, but in order to do that, she needs to posthumously edit their political aims.

³⁴⁸ Montes, 10.

³⁴⁹ Montes, 13.

She doesn't depoliticize them, so much as make their politics vague enough to fit within her definition of democracy and situate them as part of a broader narrative of continuous Argentine democracy interrupted periodically by *golpes de estado*.

After establishing the role of young militants in Argentina, Montes discusses the policies of the dictatorship. The military coup established prisons in Argentina to punish and control subversives, but, more than this, through their policies of fear and silence they turned the entire nation into a jail: "more than governing, they mandated, decreed, watched, censored, silenced, cut away, they made everything uniform...they decided...to terrorize citizens to death."³⁵⁰

During this moment, the state terrorized its people, not the other way around. Through practices of terror they were "able to paralyze the population and force them to make way for the process of kidnapping, torturing and murdering more than 30000 people including doctors, students, nuns, priests, archbishops, writers, politicians, judges, farmers, works, teachers, prisoners, scientists, artists, journalists, babies, children, and revolutionaries."³⁵¹ They enacted their plan violently and under the cover of darkness: the people in charge of the dirty work

They forcefully entered homes and they took—"suck up," they said—someone, many or all the members of a family. And, as they did that, they stole what they could, a television, clothes, pictures, money...They were armed to the teeth, even though they were taking a family that was just watching tv. To scare them, they often would announce themselves first by cutting the lights or an explosion...They beat the people they kidnapped, they tied their hands and covered their eyes before they took them (they, with this jargon "official" that they had, said that they "blocked them off"). Sometimes the neighbors heard them enter and there were even many who, through the peephole or between the cracks of blinds, saw them push the prisoners into a car...but generally these neighbors didn't tell anyone; the terror did its job and they were terrified.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ "más que gobernar mandaban, decretaban, vigilaban, censuraban, acallaban, recortaban, uniformaban todo...deciden...aterrorizar a muerte a los ciudadanos." Montes, 14.

³⁵¹ Montes, 15.

³⁵² "entraban por la fuerza en las casas y se llevaban—"chupaban", decían ellos—a uno, a varios o a todos los miembros de la familia. Y, de paso, robaban lo que podían, una televisión, ropa, cuadros, dinero...Iban armados hasta los dientes, aunque solo fuese para desbaratar una familia que estaba mirando la televisión. Para asustar, solían anunciarse antes con un gran corte de luz o con una explosión...Golpeaban a los secuestrados, los maniataban y les vendaban los ojos antes de llevárselos (ellos, con esa jerga "de oficio" que tenían, decían que los "tabicaban").

Montes describes the process of disappearance, notably including the ways in which this practice often happened at home, while a family was watching television or sitting together—a terrifying scene for a child to imagine. Making this passage even more powerful are the quotes of people who remember this happening to them included in the margins. “My mom didn’t sleep; she laid down with me in her arms, dressed. Any car that parked outside she thought they were coming to find her,” one remembers.³⁵³ “They opened the door and came in and I was there playing in that place...” recalls another. “They took everything, everything, everything, the things from school, toys, everything was lost,” says another.³⁵⁴ These quotes illustrate not only the ways in which people lived in fear, as Montes describes. She included, in particular, memories of things that children would notice or relate to: a scared mother, their toys being stolen, being interrupted while playing. They add to the picture that Montes paints of disappearance by adding an element of familiarity ruptured by terror, affectively, frighteningly, connecting with a young audience, making something foreign seem possible and even horrifying, and creating a space of connection between the past and present.

She then discusses the disappeared. People who were not seen after their kidnappings, people whose families and friends bravely and desperately searched for them. Sometimes they received help from “un juez valiente” who would produce a writ of habeas corpus for someone who “they thought was detained and didn’t appear.”³⁵⁵ She emphasizes the role of fear and silence in the disappearances of people, the police forces who claimed to know nothing, and the

A veces los vecinos los oían entrar y hasta habidos muchos que, por la mirilla de la puerta o por entre las tablitas de las persianas, hayan visto meter a los secuestrados a los empujones adentro de un auto...pero por regla general esos vecinos no contaron nada; el terror cumplía con su función y ellos estaban aterrados.” Montes, 15-16.

³⁵³ “Mi mama no dormía; se acostaba conmigo en brazos, vestida. Cualquier coche que estacionaba ella pensaba que la venían a buscar.” Montes, 15.

³⁵⁴ “Tiran la puerta y entran, y yo estaba ahí, jugando, en ese lugar...” ““Se llevaron todo, todo, las cosas de la escuela, juguetes, todo se perdió.” Montes, 15.

³⁵⁵ “se supone detenido y no aparece” Montes, 16.

junta who claimed to know nothing, and “the unfortunates had fallen into the pit of terror, the government of the Process had devoured them.”³⁵⁶ Montes doesn’t include testimonies of disappeared adults, but she does encourage her readers to read *Nunca más* at least once, and uses the information from the CONADEP report to describe the concentration camps that were hidden in plain sight. She uses the *Nunca más* report to summarize the experience of people who were disappeared:

Some of the hostages who were later freed or who managed to escape were able to tell the horrors that they lived through there. It was there that they were tortured so that they would give up the names of other dissidents who, in turn, would be "sucked up" and tortured. They were placed on a table or "grill" and beaten, pricked, mutilated, while they were asked questions that were incomprehensible to many. It was never clear what they wanted from them. First, they tortured and then they thought; or maybe they never even thought about it at all.³⁵⁷

Montes describes the policies of the dictatorship boldly and bluntly. She includes more details about torture and interrogation techniques than in any other of her writings on the subject. Partially, this is because of temporal distance from *el proceso*: it was less likely that her readers were directly related to people who had participated in or were victims of the military junta’s politics. It’s also part of the process of justice and memory, making sure that this first generation of the democracy understood the importance of maintaining that democracy. The only type of torture that Montes doesn’t mention is rape or sexual assault—she mentions violations exactly once—she seemed to deem it inappropriate for her target age group. Other forms of violence against women she doesn’t shy away from. Of the disappearance and torture of pregnant women

³⁵⁶ “los desdichados habían caído en el pozo del terror, se los había devorado el gobierno del Proceso” Montes, 16.

³⁵⁷ “Algunos secuestrados que fueron luego liberados o que lograron escapar pudieron contar los horrores que allí se Vivian. Allí era donde se los torturaba para que diesen los nombres de otros disidentes que, a su vez, serian “chupados” y torturados. Se los colocaba sobre una mesa o “parrilla” y se los golpeaba, se los picaneaba, se los mutilaba, a la vez que se les hacían preguntas que para muchos eran incomprensibles. Nunca estaba claro que querían de ellos. Primero torturaban y después pensaban; o tal vez ni siquiera hayan llegado a pensar nunca.” Montes, 17.

she writes: “sometimes they gave birth in a hallway, or on the torture table, among the laughs and jokes of their jailers, and then they were forced to clean the place on their knees.”³⁵⁸

After this section, she questions, as presumably do her readers, how something like this could happen. How could someone possibly think that torture was okay? How could a doctor or a priest be complicit within this system? She argues, essentially, that these people were not pathological or even sadistic, but cowardly: “Atrocious as it seems to us, they considered it simply their duty as subordinates, a job, and even a way to make a living ... they were too cowardly to refuse to commit a crime.”³⁵⁹ Her disgust is evident and a clear critique of the *Ley de Obediencia Debida*. She similarly critiques civilians who willingly looked away, who “preferred to look the other way” or who justified the disappearances or the appearance of bodies by saying “Por algo será.”³⁶⁰ She notes that enjoying life, going to dances or enjoying soccer, aren’t crimes, but using entertainment at the expense of human life is. She emphasizes again, the importance of memory, the importance of awareness, in preventing death and destruction. Her readers shouldn’t want to associate themselves with people who maintain willing ignorance.³⁶¹ They should want to identify with the young revolutionaries in their muted politics and dedication to democracy.

In this book, Montes explains more clearly than ever the combination of factors that ended *el proceso*. She first reinforces the idea that the junta waged a war, not against subversion, but against the nation. They didn’t just torture citizens, they destroyed the economy. Neoliberal politics made a few people rich but eventually “All of this apparent abundance was nothing more

³⁵⁸“a veces parían en un pasillo, o en la mesa de torturas, entre las risas y burlas de sus secuestradores, y luego se las obligaba a limpiar el lugar de rodillas.” Montes, 18.

³⁵⁹ “Por atroz que nos parezca a nosotros, lo consideraban sencillamente un deber de subordinados, una tarea, y hasta un modo de ganarse la vida...eran demasiado cobardes para negarse a cometer un crimen.” Montes, 20.

³⁶⁰ “preferían mirar para otro lado.” Montes, 21.

³⁶¹ Montes, 23.

than a painted carton. The easy money disappeared.”³⁶² Between economic devastation, clandestine violence, and fear, Montes says, “Todo parecía muerto, quieto.”³⁶³ Through censorship, the military destroyed public discourse, politics, lives, and livelihoods. If economic devastation was the first destabilizing factor, Las Madres were the second. After years of “going back and forth from one side to the other looking for their children, now they changed strategy, they made their reclamation public, they showed, they asked for accounts, “protested,” something that seemed forgotten in Argentina.”³⁶⁴ She connects Las Madres with an older Argentina, a forgotten one in which public protest was part of national identity. She also credits Las Madres with establishing human rights discourse in Argentina, “those rights that everyone has for the sole fact of being people that no one, no *golpista*, no torturer, no murderer, has the right to take away from us.”³⁶⁵ Their continued presence, their witnessing of the past and present forced change in Argentina and aided in the formation of other activist organizations. International attention pressured the Argentine government but the “derrota final” was the loss of the Malvinas War. As the government was weakened by internal and external forces, the power of the citizenry grew and “the magazines and newspapers had finally gotten rid of the silence and made revelations so terrifying that no one was able to continue pretending to not know.”³⁶⁶

Though simple, this account of the end of the dictatorship is the most complex and the most accurate that Montes gives across these three books. She looks at social, economic, and political factors and explains their interrelation. She doesn’t give all of the credit to Las Madres,

³⁶² ““toda esa aparente abundancia no era sino cartón pintado. La plata dulce se esfumó.” Montes, 24.

³⁶³ Montes, 25.

³⁶⁴ “peregrinado de un lado al otro en busca de sus hijos y ahora cambiaban de estrategia, hacían público su reclamo, se mostraban, pedían cuentas, “manifestaban”, algo que parecía olvidado en la Argentina.” Montes, 25.

³⁶⁵ “esos derechos que todos tenemos por el solo hecho de ser personas y que nadie, ningún *golpista*, ningún torturador, ningún asesino, tiene derecho a quitarnos.” Montes, 26.

³⁶⁶ “las revistas y los periódicos se habían quitado por fin la mordaza y hacían revelaciones tan espantosas que ya nadie podría seguir haciéndose el desentendido.” Montes, 30.

she doesn't say that the dictatorship ended simply because people began to speak; she explains the factors that made it possible for people to speak out and be successful. The last two pages of her history explain the return of democracy and the importance of memory. "We had to create memory to remember how to choose a deputy, a senator, a president..." which was the goal of her first series of books on political subjects, the series in which *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* was published, in which she helped to teach children civic values and concepts in the new democracy.³⁶⁷ Argentine society came back to life and they established CONADEP to preserve the memory of what had happened and to bring to light the horrible acts of the dictatorship. The last page is, more or less, a critique of Alfonsín and Menem's policies of pardoning and reconciliation. Though Alfonsín established CONADEP and brought to justice the commanders responsible for the dictatorship, he also gave into social pressures and coup threats and established the laws of *Punto Final* and *Obediencia Debida*. Menem did something even worse by pardoning the commanders.

Montes ends on a hopeful note, passing the baton into the hands of her young audience. Remembering the story, the history, is the only thing that can prevent something like this from happening again: "no unjust law, no crime, could or would ever erase our memory. While memory isn't erased, those responsible will continue to be responsible and those terrible things won't repeat themselves again. Never again will the bottomless pit of terror open to swallow us."³⁶⁸ Though Argentina still has problems, she says, she and her readers, the whole of society, can't ignore them. They have to fight injustice, corruption, all the legacies of the *proceso*.

³⁶⁷ "Tuvimos que hacer memoria para recordar...como se elegía un diputado, un senador, un presidente..." Montes, 32.

³⁶⁸ "ninguna ley injusta, ningún indulto, puede ni podrá borrar jamás nuestra memoria. Mientras la memoria no se borre, los culpables seguirán siendo culpables y esos hechos espantosos no volverán a repetirse. Nunca más se abriría el pozo del terror para tragarnos." Montes, 33.

Being present and confronting injustice, witnessing it, is what will help Argentina. She ends her story there, taking her narrative into the present. She wants the readers to experience the memory of the past through her book, and, in bearing witness to that past, become part of the democratic present.

The need to bear witness is the bridge that links the first half of *El golpe y los chicos* to the second. Here Montes has collected the testimonies and personal reflections of fourteen people whose parents were disappeared. As adults, they reflect upon what happened to them as children. Some of them were old enough to remember what happened to their parents or what happened to them, some were babies or toddlers and their reflections include stories about the stories that they were told. In a brief introduction to this section, Montes comments upon how difficult it must be to tell these stories, to share these memories in such a public way, but that these stories are important. They allow her readers to better understand “how, in those times, terror inserted itself in the lives of people, how it destroyed everything it encountered in its path.”³⁶⁹ Learning, Montes argues, is a good thing, despite the pain inherent in telling or hearing these stories, knowing what happened is the only way that people, like her readers, can avoid falling into the same traps and mistakes that previous generations have. They need to listen and remember so that “those terrible days won’t happen to us never, ever, but never again.”³⁷⁰

Though written by adults, the testimonies are accessible for children and the writers focus on their memories of growing up without their parents or parent in addition to their memories of the kidnapping of their parents. Most of the children were involved in activism in some way. The stories of children like Inés, María, Mariana, Juliana, and Antonio, whose parents were

³⁶⁹ “como, en esos tiempos, se metía el terror adentro de la vida de las personas, como destruía todo lo que encontraba a su paso.” Montes, 35.

³⁷⁰ “esos días terribles no nos va a suceder nunca pero nunca más.” Montes, 35.

disappeared when they were babies or toddlers are different from the stories of Lili and Eduardo who were in their teens, or Camila and Marcel, who were children. Some have vivid memories of their parents, some only the stories they were told. Several of the children have brothers or sisters who were born in captivity. All of them, however, reckon openly in their stories with the disappearance of their parents and how that disappearance affected and still affects their lives.

Juliana was only three when her parents were disappeared, but some things she remembers clearly: the two men who took her parents and took her, giving her *caramelos* on the way to her grandparents' home, and, later, going with her grandmother and her aunt whenever they went to declare her parents missing.³⁷¹ She struggled with her parents' disappearance—knowing her father was dead, but thinking that her mother would one day return, discovering later that her mother had given birth in Campo de Mayo but not knowing how she felt about her brother.³⁷² Like the narratives of *Las Abuelas*, *Las Madres*, and, later, *HIJOS*, the absence of disappeared parents and siblings is a tangible presence in the lives of the children left behind. In her historical narrative, Montes does not attempt to haunt her readers as she did in earlier texts, but in the latter half of *El golpe y los chicos* she forces her readers into a confrontation with the ghosts that children of disappeared parents live with every day, and she challenges them to feel a similar loss, the presence of an absence.

Inés experienced such an absence. Her father was disappeared, and his absence placed her and her mother into a position of waiting and fear. Her mother kept locks of her hair and the pictures that she drew in school, so that they could show Inés' father when he came back.³⁷³ Inés was raised with the idea that disappearance meant that her father was gone but would eventually

³⁷¹ Montes, 37, 39

³⁷² Montes, 38-39.

³⁷³ Montes, 40.

return. Her mother told her that her father was dead, but when they marched with Las Madres, their chants demanded the return of living *desaparecidos*. She was subsequently confused and devastated when the dictatorship ended, but her father didn't return: "and there I felt I did not understand. I just knew it was over and my dad wasn't coming back."³⁷⁴ One of her difficulties was having to explain to others, to classmates and friends who were ignorant of what was going on, what it meant that her father was disappeared.³⁷⁵

Pablo was six when his parents were taken. He was playing with his toys when men in suits entered his house: "I remember when they threw the door and entered, and I was playing there, in that place, and my brother was with my mom in the kitchen making pasta. They came in in suits. I was very impressed, until today I remember. I remember my mom's resistance, she did not want to be carried away. My mom was pregnant at that time. And, well, they took all three of us."³⁷⁶ They took his father and his father's associates, and Pablo and his brother ended up at his grandmother's house. They were passed from family member to family member until, at six years old, they went to live with relatives in Catamarca. The idea of disappearance was, for Pablo, and other children, difficult:

I ask my aunt and uncle, I say to them, are my parents coming back or are they not, and for the answer they gave me, I thank them, I thank them for it. It can be hard, but it did me a lot of good at the age of ten. They sat me down and said: 'Look, Ramiro, your parents were killed by the military.' And they left aside the term disappeared. It helped me a lot, the question of the disappeared is something very abstract. At twenty-three it's hard to understand, imagine at ten years old. You do not understand.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ "Y ahí yo sentí que no entendía. Solo sabía que se había acabado y que mi papa no iba a volver." Montes, 40.

³⁷⁵ Montes, 41.

³⁷⁶ "Me acuerdo cuando tiran la puerta y entran, y yo estaba jugando ahí, en ese lugar, y mi hermano estaba con mi vieja en la cocina haciendo los fideos. Entran personas de traje, de saco. Me impresionó mucho, hasta el día de hoy me acuerdo. Me acuerdo de la resistencia de mi vieja, no se quería dejar llevar. Mi vieja estaba embarazada en ese momento. Y, bueno, nos llevan a los tres." Montes, 42.

³⁷⁷ "pregunto a mis tíos, les digo si mis viejos van a volver o no van a volver, y ahí la respuesta que me dieron yo se las agradezco. Puede resultar duro, pero a mí me hizo muy bien a los diez años. Me sentaron y me dijeron: 'Mira, Ramiro, a tus viejos los mataron los militares'. Y dejaron de lado el termino desaparecidos. A mí me sirvió

Pablo grew up as the child of his aunt and uncle, who made sure that he remembered his parents, but who loved him as their own. The most difficult element for him to reconcile was the fact that his mother gave birth before they killed her, and that he might have a sister or brother living with a stranger.³⁷⁸

Camila was nine when her mom was taken, “so I remember everything, everything.”³⁷⁹ Her mother knew that the military was going to come for her, she was an artisan and a militant, and on the day of her disappearance she tried to keep Camila out of the house in order to protect her from what she knew was coming.³⁸⁰ Her mother was taken right in front of her, and, like Pablo, Camila ended up leaving the country to live in exile, in this case, with her father in Europe. She says that she couldn’t cry for almost fourteen years, that she felt nationless, and alone, but eventually transformed that into a “militancia” to help people.³⁸¹

Though each child’s story is different, there are some commonalities. They struggle, especially those who were young, to differentiate between events and dreams. They discuss dreams that they have of their parents returning, or the fuzzy qualities of their memories of their parents, unsure if they are memories or stories they have been told by relatives. Many of the children struggle, not only with the disappearance of their parents, but the knowledge of siblings born in captivity and possibly still living. They describe specific details or specific memories that they have very clearly etched in their minds, and they describe their relationship with their families before and after the disappearances of their parents. Most of the children reference their

muchísimo, la cuestión del desaparecido es algo muy abstracto. A los veintitrés es difícil de entender, imagínate a los diez años. No lo entendés.” Montes, 44.

³⁷⁸ Montes, 44.

³⁷⁹“así que me recuerdo todo, todo.” Montes, 53.

³⁸⁰ Montes, 53.

³⁸¹ Montes, 57.

parents' careers, but only some mention their militancy, though all were involved in the type of "change" that Montes mentions in the first half of the book. Many of the recollections involve stories of marches, reports of disappearances, or even habeas corpus petitions. All the accounts are legible to young readers, not just because of the accessibility of the language, but because of the knowledge they have gleaned from the first half of the book. Montes gives children enough information to make sense of primary source documents, and just as she integrates quotes from these interviews into her text, the children who bear witness in the second half of the book orient their personal stories around political milestones, dates, and points of reference that would be legible to children who had read the first half of the book. Like Abuelas narratives they are primary voices arranged by an editor/author to be intelligible.

El golpe y los chicos tells one story and many. Montes confronts and relates the violence and atrocities of the dictatorship for a young audience, and she does so directly in a narrative that rarely vacillates. She doesn't sugarcoat or skirt around harsh truths. She directly engages with the dictatorship and she made it possible for children to learn about it in a way that they otherwise wouldn't. She does not write a conciliatory book: she takes a firm stance on complicit bystanders, people who followed orders in the junta, and the *Fuerzas Militares*. She opposes the *Ley de Obediencia Debida y Punto Final*. As in earlier books, Montes contextualizes the *golpe* within a broader history of democracy, and she situates activists—both the radical leftists of 1960s and 70s and Las Madres—as part of a democratic project. Yet in the process, she enacts a project similar to that of Las Madres—she deradicalizes the activists of the 60s and 70s. She helps to link her readers with the activism of Las Madres, particularly the importance and political act of remembering. She gives her readers the role in society of remembering these events, events that happened before their births, in order to promote and protect justice and

democracy. Through the inclusion of first person testimony, both in the second half of the book and interspersed throughout her historical text, she bridges a link and stages a conversation between children readers and the children of the disappeared. She invites her readers to imagine themselves as the children of disappeared parents and siblings, to feel their fear, uncertainty, sorrow, and to let those feelings help to foment their politics. This is in keeping with the identity that HIJOS developed. It's in keeping with the radical stance that HIJOS would develop. In fact, they very much adopted a vision and political view that reflected the narrative presented by Montes in her books.

Conclusion:

Graciela Montes engaged with these children, both real and figurative, through her written works pertaining to *el proceso* from the 1980s to the 1990s. In *¿Qué es esto de la democracia?* and *Entre dictaduras y democracias* she wrote for the generation of children who were directly affected by the dictatorship, for children whose parents could have been disappeared, members of the junta, or ignorant of the goings on. *El golpe y los chicos* she wrote for the first generation born into the new moment of democracy. All three of these works present the history of *el proceso* and charge young readers with a project of remembering a dictatorial past and preserving a democratic present and future. In each text, Montes takes a slightly different approach in order to engage productively with her audience.

¿Qué es esto de la democracia? is intended for younger readers, who are just beginning to learn reading and writing. The narrative structure is meant to replicate, as well as stimulate, a conversation about history (national and international), encourage a multi-generational dialogue, explore the legacy of dictatorship, and develop the important project of recovering democracy as

a political tool. The narrative, interspersed with illustrations, is highly accessible. This account places specific emphasis on the dictatorship as a departure from a broader historical trajectory that celebrates a legacy of Argentine democracy. It places the task of protecting this democratic tradition on the child who is encouraged to question, ask, and explicate democratic concepts. It also incites speech, a conversation across generations and across time, through the child narrator's specific occupation of the space of the ghost of the past and political citizen of the future, who demands we speak to trauma in our present.

In *Between Dictatorships and Democracies*, Graciela Montes situated the Argentine child as full of potential political power. She reached out to children as a group that experienced developmental and social milestones at roughly the same time, regardless of their parentage or identity. According to Montes, these children were not being taught enough about the past, and needed to be viewed, informed, and understood as citizens and individuals. Unlike *Las Abuelas*, Montes placed responsibility on children, rather than adults, in crafting their own future, forming their own identities, and learning what they could about the past in order to make a better future. Montes' narrative indicates the pervasiveness of the figurative child created by *Las Abuelas*. In many ways, she writes for that child, as well as the comparative real children, in a way that empowered them, politicized them, and endowed them with responsibility. Montes forged a link between the figurative children and their real-world counterparts. In particular, she wrote about the dictatorship for the group of children whose parents could have been disappeared, who could have been disappeared themselves, seeing them as present in society and giving them information to potentially challenge other narratives about the past and about themselves.

In *El golpe y los chicos*, Montes wrote a clear and detailed account of the *proceso*. She reached out to children who were born after *el proceso* had ended. In the first half of her book,

she straightforwardly explains what happened in *el proceso*, how it happened, who it affected, what it did. She placed blame on the shoulders of people who sought power for themselves at the expense of others, people who were unwilling to see what was happening around them, and people who participated in the military regime. She wrote the history of Argentina as the history of a nation that is fundamentally democratic but frequently challenged by military coups. It is only through remembrance and dialogue, that the nation can return to life, preserve dignity of life, and prevent another coup from happening. She empowered children to remember, to protect democracy, to be unafraid to speak truth to power. The second half of the book includes the testimony of children, now adults, who survived the disappearance of their parents. She gave her readers sufficient knowledge to interpret these passages, and she encouraged them to form connections with these former children, to understand that their act of remembering, though difficult, is what her audience should aspire to. They should try to be like this generation, the children of the disappeared, who, through their bearing witness, have helped to preserve their parents' legacy.

Montes' wrote books that solidified a vision of democratic Argentina vis-à-vis the Argentine child. She advocated, and created opportunities, for direct engagement with the dictatorial path as a way to forge a democratic future. Her works also mark a shift in the discourse around children and the conceptualization of the child in Argentine society. She situated and spoke of the child as an active figure, she gave the child agency. Where Las Madres and Las Abuelas always spoke of the missing, apolitical, passive child, Montes wrote about an active child in order to give real children agency. It was this type of writing, and this type of reading, that promoted the type of politics that she wanted her audience (the children who would eventually grow up to include HIJOS) to embody in their adolescence and young adulthood.

These politics were progressive, democratic, based on memory, vigilance, and discourse. Her works responded to the conversations happening in the Ministry of Education about educational reform, educational texts, and pedagogical policy. Her works not only provided an alternative to silence, they generated discourse about the past and the future. She shaped a narrative of Argentine history that would create the possibility of social change, and in doing so, she cemented the figure of the child as an active participant in society essential for democratic transformation.

CHAPTER V

Human Rights Education in Argentina

Having looked at Ministry of Education reforms, official school texts, activist outreach, and the works of Graciela Montes, this chapter examines the ways human rights discourse for children developed in Argentina alongside and intertwined with shifting educational policy, new trends in children's literature, understandings of national belonging, civics, and activism that specifically focused on children.

Throughout the 1980s, discussions about human rights and education became foundational to the understanding of the Argentine child and, increasingly, Argentine children's conceptualization of self. Though we most often discuss the return to democracy and its importance to policy makers, we rarely discuss the ways in which these discussions shaped the worlds of children. The Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH), UNESCO, and the Ministry of Education and Justice not only reshaped the conversation about Argentine childhood, they created an entirely new set of experiences for the educational community as part of a project to place human rights education at the center of children's formation of self and the formation of a democratic state.

All three organizations looked to Argentine children as victims of the dictatorship and as potential saviors of the nation, but their three positions—external, internal activist, internal institutional—meant that they had similarities and differences in the way that they viewed human rights in Argentina. All three considered children as a disadvantaged group necessary for social

change and in need of protection. For all three institutions, education took a significant role in the pursuit of human rights. They understood that students and teachers were the way for Argentina to move forward as a nation. However, they would assess accomplishments and challenges very differently.

Scholars began studying human rights activism in Argentina as early as the mid-1980s. Most of the scholarship produced during the transition was written by legal scholars and political scientists who focused on human rights violations and accountability. More recent historical work about human rights in Argentina considers the evolution of human rights discourse during the transition, helping to contextualize the human rights concerns that affected children in particular.

Like many of the children's authors that this dissertation has analyzed, scholars who have studied this moment work to craft a narrative of Argentina that balances condemnation with hope. Thomas C. Wright has written several works that consider the social dissatisfaction with human rights tribunals in Argentina and Chile.³⁸² Emilio Crenzel, too, does important work to elucidate the ways in which organizations and policies to promote human rights in Argentina, particularly CONADEP, were contradictory, complicated, and undercut by state policies.³⁸³ Several scholars, Carlos Eroles, Maria Victoria Pita, and Pablo Vonmaro among them, analyze the relationship between social movements in democracy and their influence on human rights discourse in Argentina.³⁸⁴ Still more scholarship takes stock of human rights progress and

³⁸²Thomas C. Wright, *Impunity, Human Rights, and Democracy Chile and Argentina, 1990-2005* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

³⁸³ Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca más: la memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2008); Emilio Crenzel, "Dos prólogos para un mismo informe El Nunca Mas y la memoria de las desapariciones," *Prohistoria* 11, no. 11 (2007): 49-60; Emilio Crenzel ed., *Los desaparecidos en la Argentina: memorias, representaciones e ideas, 1983-2008* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2010).

³⁸⁴ Ian Ward, *Literature and Human Rights: The Law, the Language, and the Limitations of Human Rights Discourse* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Ricardo Luis Lorenzetti, *Derechos humanos, justicia y reparación: la*

pitfalls in relation to what came after, and evaluates Alfonsín and Menem within a broader historical human rights framework.³⁸⁵ Most of this academic work situates Argentina as unique and progressive at the same time that scholarship, particularly scholarship written by Argentine scholars, posits that this progress had limits, and was ultimately a disappointment. This chapter contributes to this scholarship by identifying and analyzing the narrative that human rights organizations constructed about Argentina as a victim and survivor of genocide, as a cautionary tale and an example specifically for children.

In transitional Argentina, discussions about human rights were intimately intertwined with ongoing conversations about memory, responsibility, and education. This chapter examines the way that UNESCO, the Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (APDH), and the Ministry of Education and Justice understood the relationship among children, teachers, education, and human rights during the 1980s. External institutions, like UNESCO, and internal organizations, like the APDH, understood that the dictatorship's educational policies violated Argentine children, but they had different understandings of the damage and different approaches to human rights education, children, and progress in Argentina. These groups alternatively understood children as victims of political violence or as part of the resistance to social injustice and human rights violations. This chapter considers their conceptualizations not

experiencia de los juicios en la Argentina: crímenes de lesa humanidad (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2011); Silvina Jensen, *Los exiliados: la lucha por los derechos humanos durante la dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2010); Brenda Pereyra and Pablo Vommaro, eds., *Movimientos sociales y derechos humanos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CICCUS, 2010); Sofia Tiscornia and María Victoria Pita, eds. *Derechos humanos, tribunales y policías en Argentina y Brasil: estudios de antropología jurídica* (Buenos Aires: EA, 2005); María del Carmen Verdú, *Represión en democracia: de la "primavera alfonsinista" al "gobierno de los derechos humanos"* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta Ediciones, 2009); Carlos Eroles, eds., *Democracia y derechos humanos: los desafíos actuales* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2009); María del Carmen Verdú, *Represión en democracia: de la "primavera alfonsinista" al "gobierno de los derechos humanos"* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta Ediciones, 2009).

³⁸⁵ María del Carmen Verdú, *Represión en democracia: de la "primavera alfonsinista" al "gobierno de los derechos humanos"* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta Ediciones, 2009); Stella Maris Ageitos, *Historia de la impunidad: de las actas de Videla a los indultos de Menem* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2002).

of the individual child, but the social child, that is: it examines the ways in which human rights activists saw all children, by virtue of their age and their mandatory schooling, as affected by the dictatorship's policies and as a means through which to affect social change.

UNESCO: Inside Out

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded as a branch of the United Nations in 1946 with a constitution ratified by thirty nations. As an organization affiliated with the United Nations, UNESCO is, as its name suggests, primarily focused on promoting democracy and peace through the preservation and advocacy of culture, education, and the sciences.³⁸⁶ Delegates formed UNESCO in the immediate wake of WWII and the horrors of that traumatic experience were very much in their minds as they founded the organization:

ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war; That the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races; That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern...³⁸⁷

At a moment of conflict and concern for the future of humanity, the delegates who formed UNESCO attempted to make sense of the issues that had led to WWII. They considered how best to avoid the international socio-political climate that allowed WWII to happen. Though “the

³⁸⁶ For more information, see: Eva Erman, *Human Rights and Democracy: Discourse Theory and Global Rights Institutions* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008); Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002).

³⁸⁷ UNESCO Constitution.

denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races” was responsible for WWII—shorthand here for fascism and Nazism—broader histories of imperialism and colonization were not considered as causes.³⁸⁸

A lasting peace, UNESCO founders posited, could be forged by propagating democratic principles throughout the world and promoting cultural exchanges between various nations. WWI and WWII taught them, it would seem, that fiscal and political alliances between nations were not enough to keep them from total war and a death count in the millions: “That a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.”³⁸⁹ Though it seems almost commonsensical today, the idea that peace would be founded on practices that did not inherently involve the subjugation or disenfranchisement of peoples—capitalism, liberalism, or colonialism, for example—at the time was a revolutionary idea. The UNESCO constitution was grounded in a historical moment fraught with questions of responsibility, political, economic, and cultural devastation, in a world populated with questions about genocide, war crimes, and new, terrifying potential for violent devastation on an enormous scale.

The grounding principles of the organization as expressed in the constitution were:

to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms

³⁸⁸ UNESCO constitution. Given the Cold War agendas of the US and the Soviet Union, it’s unsurprising that UNESCO founding documents didn’t locate imperialism and colonialism as reasons for all-out war. These nations certainly had their own agendas (past and present) to build their political acumen on a global scale.

³⁸⁹ UNESCO Constitution

which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.³⁹⁰

The attention to human rights, equality, and justice is powerful as is the connection that UNESCO founders drew between education, cultural promotion, and the pursuit of justice, especially in the wake of a traumatic and violent conflict. This connection is one that Argentine educators and children's authors would make thirty years later, and this shared vision is one of the reasons that UNESCO and the Argentine government formed a close relationship in the post-dictatorship period.

Argentina officially ratified the UNESCO constitution in September of 1948, almost an entire year after it was officially adopted. From the late 1940s onward, Argentina and UNESCO had a somewhat complicated relationship. The nature of that relationship has mostly had to do with different Argentine governments and shifting UNESCO interests in the world.³⁹¹ For the purposes of this dissertation, the most important facet of the relationship between UNESCO and Argentina is the shared discourse on human rights education during the transitional period and the features of Argentina that UNESCO found most salient at that historical moment. Foremost among these was the increased visibility of Argentina as a human rights actor on the global state.

UNESCO, as an international organization, reported on the state of education and human rights in Argentina with an outsider perspective. Though officials concerned themselves with human rights and education, their view of Argentina was always in relation to the rest of the world, especially the United States and US goals in Latin America. As such, their findings were typically positive, even when the situation in Argentina was not. During the dictatorship,

³⁹⁰ UNESCO Constitution.

³⁹¹ The priorities of national governments and the priorities of UNESCO are occasionally at odds in various places in the world. The support of an international organization like UNESCO is tantamount to validation from the international community for a nation's educational, cultural, or scientific performance. It is for this reason, as well as potential funding, that nations are willing to work with them.

UNESCO reports tended to find that Argentine literacy rates were better than most other “developing” nations, so they were doing well. And after the dictatorship ended, UNESCO looked at Argentina as an example of how the world should deal with human rights violations. CONADEP and Nunca Mas situated Argentina’s place in the global human rights community. According to UNESCO reports, Argentina came out of a dictatorship and successfully worked to correct the damage it had wrought.

In 1990s, UNESCO considered the efficacy of education and education reform in Argentina, and, invested as it was in the promotion of equality and justice on a global scale, evaluated the degree of inclusion and exclusion in Argentine schools. They ultimately advocated integrative pedagogy that reflected what some individual educators and authors were doing outside the Ministry of Education. UNESCO’s support of these pedagogical elements is one reason that stories like those written by Graciela Montes would become incorporated more readily into national education praxis and classroom settings.

UNESCO and Argentina maintained relations during the Argentine dictatorship of 1976-1983. The Argentine government adopted the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1978 and began the process of establishing sites in Argentina, including the Guarani Missions, los Glaciares National Park, and the Iguazú Falls, which were all inscribed in the early 1980s. The dictatorship also petitioned UNESCO for funds to research Civic Education and literacy in the nation during the dictatorship. This petition resulted in several reports compiled by UNESCO personnel who researched the state of education. One of these research reports, written by Edwin R. Harvey in 1979, reflected the financial and bureaucratic dimensions of education rather

than the socio-political controls that governed cultural production during the dictatorship.³⁹² Harvey described the creation of the “Process of National Reorganization,” as well as the research being done by new Secretariats and government research bodies. If cultural production in Argentina was about disseminating information to “evince respect for moral principles and the dignity of the human person and the family and should strengthen democratic convictions and international friendship and co-operation,” Harvey seemed to believe that legally and methodologically, the country was on track.³⁹³ His report does not mention censorship, state violence, or even concerns about intellectual or creative freedom. Indeed, if one were to take this document at face value, it would seem that Argentina should have earned the highest of accolades for its dedication to democratic freedom and artistic expression during the high point of the *proceso*. As historians, we know that this was not the case, and that despite what he says, Harvey’s report was compiled during a government crackdown on the freedom of the press, which he either did not see or genuinely believed was part of a socially progressive government’s attempts to maintain a broader history of national freedom.³⁹⁴

A possible explanation for Harvey’s report might lie in the role of the US within the United Nations, and in US Cold War Policy towards Latin America and Latin American dictatorships.³⁹⁵ Harvey, as an official of the UNESCO, a subdivision of the UN, a largely US controlled institution in the 1960s and 1970s, may have been encouraged to report positively on the state of affairs in Argentina. He may also simply have accepted the information provided to him by the Argentine state. In comparison with other Latin American countries at the same

³⁹² Edwin R. Harvey, *Studies and Documents on Cultural Policies: Cultural Policy in Argentina* (Santiago, Chile: UNESCO, 1979). Harvey was hired by UNESCO to participate in this research project. He was, at the time, a professor at the University of la Plata in Argentina.

³⁹³ Harvey, 9

³⁹⁴ Harvey, 10.

³⁹⁵ William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and US Cold War Policy Toward Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

time, Argentina was doing relatively well in terms of attendance, classroom materials, and literacy. The US during the 1970s considered withdrawing from UNESCO, viewing it as hostile to the United States, UNESCO officials working in Latin America may have compiled reports that were likely to appease US officials in order to maintain US involvement in the organization. Further, despite a push from within the US Congress for more attention towards Human Rights policy at home and abroad, the US administration patently rejected such changes.³⁹⁶ Subsequently, UNESCO officials may have taken a less rigorous approach in their evaluations of Latin American country policy. It is likely that Harvey's report was a result of these internal and external pressures to permit US Cold War foreign policy to continue.

In his conclusion, Harvey described Argentine freedom of the press and cultural production as a history of continuity in which Mariano Moreno's call for freedom of expression consistently inspired governments across time, including the contemporary military junta:

Argentine cultural policy has always recognized the sacred principles of intellectual freedom, which have inspired the major achievements of the national culture. This unyielding principle of the nation has been continuously upheld since the dawn of independence, when Mariano Moreno, Secretary of the First Government Junta, pleading in defense of the freedom to write, publicly declared the course to be followed and warned of the dangers of losing this freedom.³⁹⁷

It's difficult to tell whether Harvey was genuinely unaware of the lasting and painful ramifications of the military junta's policies, truly believed in their platform and governance, or maintained willful ignorance in the interest of preserving his social position. What is perhaps more important than the specific motivations Harvey may or may not have had is the way in

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁹⁷ Harvey, 92.

which this document reflects a vision of Argentina that was also presented in the nation's schools and populated contemporary discourses among the middle class.³⁹⁸

A better picture of the actual state of education emerged in reports conducted during the early 1980s when the military junta struggled to maintain control over society and the realities of the *proceso* were publicized on an international scale. *Implementación de un sistema de educación en las ciencias sociales*, published in 1983, reflected UNESCO research conducted over July and August of 1982. Visiting and researching a variety of schools in Buenos Aires, Jules Vaska summarized the current state of social studies education and the ways that it might be improved within the transitional state. He conducted his research right after the decision to hold democratic elections; as such, this document reflects a moment of change, and Vaska's language reflects the instability of the nation in that moment. He summarily describes Argentina as a nation that had recently been governed by a military junta, lost a war, had an external debt crisis, inflation, and uncertainty in terms of who actually was or could be in charge of distributing educational materials or information.³⁹⁹ In almost every way besides touting the prevalence of Argentine literacy, this document contradicts the picture Harvey painted only three years prior of Argentine information circulation, cultural production, and freedom.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, the

³⁹⁸ Please, see Chapter 2 for more information on the vision of family and social life presented to children in classrooms. For more information on the middle classes during the *proceso*, see: Sebastian Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Politics, Violence and Memory in the Seventies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); David Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentinians in the Dirty War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

³⁹⁹ It also emphasized a dramatic disparity between the amount of resources given to the study of science v. social science, a probably result of restructuring education during the dirty war years. "En 1982, era todavía seis veces superior el número de institutos de investigación de ciencias y tecnología (84) que de institutos de ciencias sociales (14). Esta situación particular también se refleja en las subvenciones que atribuye el CONICET a las instituciones de ciencias sociales." Harvey, 10

⁴⁰⁰ Of particular note is the way that this document references the Secretariat of Information and its relationship to both CONICET and the public.

phrase “Cuando en actualidad”—“when, in reality...”, is a refrain in this document, suggesting the disconnect between the official vision presented by the dictatorship and the reality of it.

Though the environment Vaska describes in this document is riddled with uncertainty—he often marked in footnotes his confusion about how certain government functions would be carried out given the political instability—his general prognosis was not fatal. Vaska argued that Argentina’s educational and informational infrastructure, which included libraries and schools, laid important groundwork for enlivening and enriching the social sciences and recovering from the dictatorship. Indeed, one of the biggest problems for social studies in Argentina, according to Vaska was that

The frequent political changes and military regimes that characterize Argentina's recent history have not generally been favorable to the development of the social sciences. Political power has attached secondary importance to political science, psychology, social anthropology and sociology, in comparison to the interest that has been generated by the development of science and technology. Some disciplines of the social sciences were even considered as potentially dangerous or subversive from the political point of view.⁴⁰¹

Vaska focused principally on university education and the state of social sciences more broadly, but the fear of these disciplines as potentially dangerous during the dictatorship certainly affected education for children and social attitudes towards these disciplines as a whole.⁴⁰² The return of democracy, he suggested, would only strengthen and revitalize channels that already existed.

Though Vaska critiqued the dictatorship’s muzzling of cultural production and the lack of social science study or research, he also commended Argentina’s established “network” for educational and social science purposes. He focused particularly on the availability of libraries

⁴⁰¹ “los frecuentes cambios políticos y los regímenes militares que caracterizan la historia reciente de Argentina no han sido en general favorable al desarrollo de las ciencias sociales. El poder político ha atribuido una importancia secundaria a las ciencias políticas, a la psicología, a la antropología social y a la sociología, por comparación el interés que ha suscitado el desarrollo de las ciencias y de las tecnologías. Algunas disciplinas de las ciencias sociales fueron consideradas incluso como potencialmente peligrosos o subversivas desde el punto de vista político.” Vaska, 23.

⁴⁰² See chapter 2 for more details.

and Argentina's long history of mandatory and free public education for children and young adults. To help correct the destruction of the social sciences, he recommended that Argentina strengthen already existing institutions, like the library, the university, and the governmental bodies that oversaw them, in order to make information more accessible to the public. He also encouraged increased communication between various organizations and collaboration between public and private research and educational institutions.⁴⁰³ His recommendation for increased communication between various sectors of the population, particularly amongst those pertaining to education, was reflected and implemented in the educational policies of Alfonsín's government.

Here, again, a group of individuals during the transition chose to rewrite the history of Argentina, crafting a narrative that suited their political ends. The history of Argentina has a particular cast of characters, key events, and qualities that different groups chose to use or discard at different moments. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, during the transition, various groups pulled out threads that either condemned Argentina or offered hope.⁴⁰⁴ The Ministry of Education and authors of official school texts crafted hopeful, positive stories that revolved around Mariano Moreno, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and an integrated, multiethnic Argentina. They did this under dictatorship and democracy; often using the same characters or events to promote different ideas about narrative cohesion in the service of different ideologies. Meanwhile, las Madres, las Abuelas, and HIJOS condemned the recent past and distrusted state apparatuses to effect change, but ultimately tried to bring forth what they believed was a "true"

⁴⁰³ Vaska, 36-40

⁴⁰⁴ It's important to note that there was a radically different view on Argentine history in this moment depending on the audience for whom the work was written. Children's books tended to focus almost exclusively on hope, meanwhile, historical scholarship written for adults, asking how the dictatorship could have happened, situated Argentine history in a much darker series of events in which authoritarianism, rather than democracy, was the grounding characteristic of history, the through line from colonial times to the present.

Argentina that was, in the case of the former, peaceful, and the latter, revolutionary. Graciela Montes blended together condemnation and hope in her children's books. She created a new narrative, one that at the time was unique, but has since become standard discourse: that the dictatorship was an aberration, a crime against the true spirit of Argentina. She wrote a history of Argentina that was progressive, forward-thinking, and democratic. Human Rights organizations looking in on Argentina during this moment also played with this narrative. Vaska situated his report within a hopeful narrative of Argentine history. He condemned the problems caused by the dictatorship but situated that political violence within a broader characterization of Argentina as home to free-thinkers, to the Revolución de Mayo, and a well-established educational system.

Reports from UNESCO during the 1980s and 1990s continued to reflect upon and report the state of education with a shifting focus towards children's education and pedagogical training. Their recommendations and recorded statistics on the prevalence and success of education traced the progress of the [year] Pedagogical Congress, the Educational Reform Law of [year], and its aftermath. These reports documented what UNESCO found to be Argentina's successes and failings as a "developing" nation in the post-dictatorship period with regards to the nation's recuperation of "culture," education, and human rights. As Argentina continued to focus on issues of responsibility and educational reform, UNESCO essentially evaluated its progress.

In the late 1980s, after the publication of *Nunca Más*, Argentina reached a new status in the international human rights community. The truth commission and the report changed human rights discourse on a global scale, and international human rights organizations viewed Argentina as an inspiration and example for other nations emerging from dictatorship. In this

context, UNESCO officials incorporated a laudatory tonality in their reports on Argentina. They held Argentina to higher standards, certainly, but they also focused on minute details of ways that the nation could change. For example, Dr. Hector Maskin's 1985 evaluation of human rights praxis in Argentina focused on the continuities and changes in Argentina's legal recourse for reporting, punishing, and preventing human rights violations. He spent much of his report discussing habeas corpus policy in Argentina and the ways in which the military junta of 1976 violated years of Argentine legal protections for its citizens. He lauded the increase in penal code amendments to strengthen historic protections against human rights violations. He encouraged the government to create new safeguards most especially by making it illegal for state officials to ignore habeas corpus writs upon penalty of jail time.⁴⁰⁵ Other reforms that he considered substantial included measures to protect women and families. Maskin considered the creation of new government secretariats to oversee the care of families especially reformist:

From December 1984 onwards, the following bodies and systems were set up or introduced: Special commission for the finding of missing children. Special commission for action on child neglect. Special commission for the protection and care of families at risk. National youth directorate. National directorate for women and the family. Family assistance units. Nutritional social welfare programme (for 600,00 children between 2 and 12 years of age). School meals.⁴⁰⁶

He also considered educational reforms to be part of Argentina's human rights practices in the 1980s. CONADEP and the Nunca Mas Report had given Argentina a salient place in the human rights community worldwide. In addition to coining the phrase "political disappearance" and completing the first state-report on political genocide, they had also held the first truly extensive

⁴⁰⁵ Hector Maskin, *Study of the measures adopted in the Argentine Republic to ensure the effective exercise of human rights by disadvantaged groups; Existing social and legal aid schemes: implementing measures and provisions for claiming benefit, Public information programmes, including information on the legal remedies available, with reference to both the legal system in force and future projects* (UNESCO, Paris, 1985).

⁴⁰⁶ Maskin, 26.

truth commission in the world. Kathryn Sikkink, a distinguished human rights scholar, argued in 2008 that:

The human rights innovations are so extensive that Argentine social movement activists and members of the Argentine government may be considered among the most important protagonists in the area of domestic human rights activism. Often, they were not emulating tactics they discovered elsewhere but were developing new tactics. On a number of occasions, they have then exported or diffused their institutional and tactical innovations. Argentina, which never was a passive recipient of international human rights action, has gone on to become an important international protagonist in the human rights realm, involved in actively modifying the international structure of political opportunities for human rights activism. This dynamism of the Argentine human rights sector is even more interesting and important in the context of active U.S. hegemonic opposition to the expansion of international human rights law, because it suggests that the advancement of human rights institutions may proceed even in the face of opposition⁴⁰⁷

As such, following and reporting upon the state of human rights education in Argentina became important internationally. Argentina was considered exemplary by the international community, it was possible that their educational policies for and about human rights, could, like their political and social practice, inspire policy change on a global scale.

Maskin's report builds upon this new image of Argentina in a global context. In a list of measures that Argentina had taken to implement human rights, he highlighted educational reforms such as the call for a pedagogical congress, teaching participation workshops, adult literacy teaching programs, educational assistance programs, the completion of work on the nation's library, and the creation of a national Plan for Culture.⁴⁰⁸ The creation of educational programs and protections for children were part of national reforms to help Argentina move forward as a nation, and they became part of international conversations about Argentina as a nation moving from dictatorship to democracy.

⁴⁰⁷ Kathryn Sikkink, "From pariah State to Global Protagonist: Argentina and the Struggle for International Human Rights," *Latin American Politics and Society* 20, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 1-29.

⁴⁰⁸ Maskin, 31.

UNESCO reports over the late 1980s and early 1990s found that, in general, students were more readily incorporated into classrooms, that literacy rates improved, and that problems that had been identified in the 1980s were being addressed by the Argentine government.⁴⁰⁹ UNESCO officials subsequently shifted their focus to educators: their training, and their relationship with students in classrooms, in particular how students from low income families or indigenous backgrounds were able to be incorporated (or not) into Argentine classrooms and develop a shared sense of culture. Arturo Hein indicated success in his report on Argentine education policy in the 1980s and 1990s. Though he maintained that the Ministry of Education and individual schools struggled to implement changes, he also indicated the ways that the government tried to respond to these difficulties.⁴¹⁰ “Educación para todos,” an outreach program, for example, tried to compensate for the lack of resources available to provincial students.⁴¹¹ This was a five-year plan to instill a love of learning in disenfranchised students by providing additional necessary monetary resources and books. Hein and others also pointed towards the need for more education for educators and better working conditions for them.⁴¹² Maria de los Angeles Sagastizabal reported on “cultural diversity” in education in Argentina. One of UNESCO’s primary areas of focus was “cultural diversity,” essentially the inclusion of different racial or ethnic groups in countries throughout the world (a concern generally foreign to Argentine officials and educators, given the nation’s historic self-image as homogeneous. Though Argentina did work in this period to penalize racism, and children’s authors included some characters who were nonwhite, the national narrative typically privileged the image of a

⁴⁰⁹ Economics influenced whether or not students stayed in school for their mandated years of education, so did increased resources and funding for education in the nation.

⁴¹⁰ Arturo Hein, *Balance de los últimos 20 años de educación en la Argentina y prospectiva hacia el siglo XXI* (Buenos Aires, UNESCO, 1999).

⁴¹¹ Hein, 19.

⁴¹² Hein, 45.

white Argentina or European decent and erased the history and reality of racial and cultural diversity.⁴¹³ What Sagastizabal identified as problematic about Argentine education was not a lack of federal programing to incorporate diversity into the classroom, but a disconnect between young students, teachers, and parents particularly in communities outside of Buenos Aires:

The cultural differences between the school and the family generate that distance, or cultural discontinuity, that operates as an element that contributes to "school failure." Hence the need to relieve the perception and knowledge that the teacher has of the environment in which he performs his work and how he conceives of that environment.⁴¹⁴

Though teachers and parents shared their vision of the child as a link between home and school, and, through their education and especially socialization in school, as a link between the home and the nation more broadly, their different visions of what school ought to do and the roles of parents and teachers in educating the child were at times in conflict.⁴¹⁵ The biggest need for improvement, then, was lessening the rural/urban divide and making sure that teachers could do their best work.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, UNESCO officials reported on the state of education and human rights in Argentina, frequently linking the two together. They showed continuity and changes in the educational system and evaluated the efficacy of new models to counteract old problems. In general, they viewed Argentina's educational reform a success, particularly once

⁴¹³ Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Benjamin Bryce and David M. K. Sheinin, *Making Citizens in Argentina* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

⁴¹⁴ "Las diferencias culturales existentes entre la escuela y la familiar generan esa distancia o discontinuidad cultural que opera como un elemento que contribuye al 'fracaso escolar.' De ahí la necesidad de relevar la percepción y conocimiento que tiene el docente del entorno en el que desarrolla su tarea y como concibe a la misma con respecto a ese entorno." María de los Ángeles Sagastizabal, *La Diversidad cultural en el sistema educativo argentino* (Santiago, UNESCO; 1995). Justa Ezpeleta reported similar problems 1989. She found the disconnect between teachers and students in generational gaps, lack of education, and changes in educational policy that made it difficult for teachers to retire. *Escuelas y maestros: condiciones del trabajo del docente en Argentina* (UNESCO, Santiago: 1989).

⁴¹⁵ Arturo Hein's report for UNESCO which includes interviews with over a hundred educators, shows a change from the type of disconnect that Sagastizabal describes, in the four years between her report, and his, it would seem that there was much more integration of teaching modules, and encouragement for engagement with children in classrooms and with the educational community.

they acknowledged that there had been a repressive military dictatorship (and not merely an economic crisis) from which the educational system needed to recover. They lauded Argentina's attempts to create legal recourse for human rights violations, including the rights of young children. For UNESCO, Argentina's progress was a powerful case study in the global context. Argentina had survived a dictatorship without a total government collapse, or a fall into a civil war, with most of their institutions intact. It had also compiled an extensive report on the violence and trauma that had occurred, in a way that could promote national healing without actually punishing the elites responsible. Then Argentina began a process of trying to prevent future human rights violations. For UNESCO this was a powerful example of how to proceed in other global contexts. It was a road map for dealing with similar situations.

UNESCO, as an international organization, reported on the state of education and human rights in Argentina with an outsider perspective. Though officials concerned themselves with human rights and education, their view of Argentina was always in relation to the rest of the world, especially the United States and US goals in Latin America. As such, their findings were typically positive, even when the situation in Argentina was not. During the dictatorship, UNESCO reports tended to find that Argentine literacy rates were better than most other "developing" nations, so they were doing well. And after the dictatorship ended, UNESCO looked at Argentina as an example of how the world should deal with human rights violations. CONADEP and Nunca Mas situated Argentina's place in the global human rights community. According to UNESCO reports, Argentina came out of a dictatorship and successfully worked to correct the damage it had wrought.

As an outside institution, UNESCO's view of human rights contextualizes the global view of Argentina in transition and indicates how internal and external concerns about human

rights differed. The first is UNESCO's positive view on Argentina human rights policy. In addition to a broader laudatory view the global community had of Argentina as a guiding example of human rights progress and transitional justice, UNESCO officials reflected positively on the work that Argentina was doing to prevent future genocides and political violence through educational outreach. At the same time, UNESCO's position as an international organization allowed it to point towards some problems within that educational system that local organizations didn't necessarily see or consider particularly important. UNESCO was concerned, for example with the difference in resources between Buenos Aires and the provinces, which was a traditional problem in Argentina, but was something that members of the left didn't focus much time or energy on until the mid-1990s. Likewise, UNESCO's focus on the importance of "cultural diversity" was not something that Argentine based human rights organizations were particularly concerned with.

APDH: Rights of the Child and Their Role in a Democratic Society

If UNESCO represents an outside force that evaluated and held accountable Argentine human rights progress, the APDH represents an internal institution that served a similar function but, in the 1980s and 1990s, held a very different view of Argentina's progress and the best way to provide rights to children. Since its foundation in 1975, the APDH has served Argentina as both a public and private institution. A group of activists, teachers, clergy, academics, union leaders, and socialists used the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a guiding principle to form an organization that would promote human rights in Argentina at the start of a bloody military junta. This organization was not a peace-time attempt to foster a more equitable society, but rather a war-time effort to stop egregious human rights violations. As

such, their initial actions involved collecting testimony from disappeared persons or their relatives and compiling a report which they presented to the OEA and the CIDH. They publicized reports of disappearances and human rights violations, formed international contacts, and worked with the United Nations. After the end of the dictatorship, one of the APDH's founding members, *Raúl Alfonsín* became president of the nation, and other members of the APDH and the organization as a whole contributed actively to CONADEP and the *Nunca Mas* report. The organization became an official consultant to the United Nations in 1995. It has also, since the early 1980s, focused its attentions and energies on the expansion and protection of human rights for Argentine citizens. The organization has started numerous programs to support mental health, women's rights, children's rights, education, and social equality more broadly. Since 1985, as part of a program for promoting human rights and education, particularly for children, the APDH has created workshops and materials dedicated to education in human rights and the promotion and protection of human rights for all Argentines.⁴¹⁶

Whereas UNESCO reported on progress over time with a somewhat detached air, the APDH has maintained constant vigilance since its foundation. The best way to promote human rights, according to their publications, is to constantly be on the lookout for violations of them. The organization, which was born with the *proceso*, has at its core a sense of urgency and fragility with regards to preserving and protecting democracy. Their outreach to children, parents, and educators throughout the 1980s and 1990s is proof of this. As an institution that is technically independent of the government but also participates with various government programs and offices, some of which it helped to found, the influence of the APDH's ideas about human rights, children's rights, and the best way to promote these through education can be seen

⁴¹⁶ The APDH is a nonprofit organization that is funded primarily from private donations and some subsidiaries from the government when the APDH collaborates in national or provincial projects.

in the publications of the APDH itself, the contents of the *contenidos básicos comunes*, and programs to incorporate democracy and civic ideas into Argentine classrooms.

In its earliest years, the APDH evaluated the state of Argentine education and found it lacking. In their 1978 *Hoy en la Argentina ¿Educación?*, an eleven-page pamphlet whose cover features a large red question mark that stretches from the top to the bottom of the page, the APDH enumerated all the ways in which education during the *proceso* was almost impossible. Children in Argentina, according to this report, were denied their right to education and teachers were denied their ability to truly teach their pupils.

Considering the educational reality of our country, we must ask ourselves to what degree these objectives, so clearly stated, are fulfilled. Without pretending to be exhaustive we will try to take stock of the current situation at its various levels in order to formulate, then, some conclusions about the right to education, on behalf of the students, and the right to teach without pressure, on behalf teachers. In order to judge the governmental attitudes that, presumably, seek to correct the 'inherited situations', we must take into account the high degree of development previously achieved by Argentine education in the Latin American and world arena.⁴¹⁷

The APDH's national narrative of Argentina reaches towards a past of "greatness." APDH officials contextualized education during the dictatorship within a broader history of Argentine education, which they saw, as many Argentines did, as forward thinking, well developed, and a point of national pride. Given this broader historical framework, denying children the opportunity to learn and teachers to teach was not only a violation of the human rights of both of these groups, and their rights as citizens of Argentina, but a violation of a hundred years of

⁴¹⁷ "Considerando la realidad educativa de nuestro país cabe preguntarse en que medida se cumple con estos objetivos, tan claramente enunciados. Sin pretender ser exhaustivos intentaremos un balance de la situación actual en sus diversos niveles para extraer, luego, algunas conclusiones sobre el derecho a la educación, por parte de los alumnos, y el derecho a enseñar sin presiones, por parte de los docentes. Para juzgar las actitudes gubernamentales que, presuntamente, pretenden subsanar las 'situaciones heredadas', se debe tener en cuenta el alto grado de desarrollo alcanzado anteriormente por la educación argentina en el concierto latinoamericano y mundial." APDH *Hoy en la argentina ¿Educación?* Buenos Aires, Argentina, c. 1978, 2.

history and cultural tradition.⁴¹⁸ According to this report, more children were leaving school due to a lack of resources, especially in the provinces, than had been the case previously. Coupled with the closure of universities, municipal control of schools, and the fleeing into exile of trained educators, the report found that the situation in Argentina was less than ideal for the formation of young people who would stay and work for the present and future of the nation.⁴¹⁹ Not only that, a lack of funding to schools and the lack of funding to students had begun to decrease the percentage of students who completed their education. The military junta denied children the right to learn, denied teachers the right to educate, and increasingly targeted educators as subversive figures to be captured and detained, curbing their ability to speak freely or provide interactive learning for their students:

It cannot go without mention a series of events that affected and affect the teachers of Argentina that are the layoffs, dispensations, arrests and kidnappings, which add up to several hundred and continue to occur, affecting recently several leaders of entities representing the sector.⁴²⁰

The APDH had a number of teachers amongst its founding members and petitioned for the return of various professors who had been sequestered by the military junta.⁴²¹ Some of these, like Alfredo Pedro Bravo, the APDH maintained, had been detained precisely for their teaching and dedication to education reform.⁴²² The lack of decent education procedure was harmful to individuals and the state. More than that, it was an investment in removing rights from generations at a time. Rather than outright destroying the education system, the Argentine

⁴¹⁸ *Proceso* era policy makers also harkened to this tradition of education and its relation to the nation state but did so to justify policies that limited expression in the classroom.

⁴¹⁹ *Hoy en la Argentina*, 4.

⁴²⁰ “no pueden dejar de mencionarse una serie de hechos que afectaron y afectan a la docencia argentina como lo son las cesantías, prescindibilidades, detenciones y secuestros, que suman varios centenares y se siguen produciendo, afectando últimamente a varios dirigentes de entidades representativas del sector.” *Hoy en la Argentina*, 7.

⁴²¹ APDH, *¿Porque sigue el profesor Alfredo pedro bravo sigue detenido?* (Buenos Aires, APDH, 1978).

⁴²² *Ibid.* Prof. Bravo was taken as he left a school in Buenos Aires where he was teaching a class for adult education.

dictatorship removed funds and disappeared teachers and changed the curriculum to make it difficult for citizens to be informed about the nation and the world more broadly.

The APDH called for a national discourse about education and education reform to find a solution to the problem facing the country:

The solution must arise from the exchange of opinions of all the sectors interested in the problems of education and the educators must be fundamentally involved, they are the wise knowers of the reality, who in the end, must enact any measure that is proposed.⁴²³

They prioritized the role of teachers in offering solutions for the educational crisis (which, they argued, affected all the other problems facing the country) and implementing those solutions. This is different from UNESCO's contemporaneous view of educational practice. Where UNESCO seemed to believe that Argentine education was doing relatively well—and in comparing Argentina's literacy rates and school attendance records with other nations at the same time, it was—internally, with a focus on Argentine history and policy across time, the APDH saw Argentine education in a state of crisis. The different perspectives—insider versus outsider—help us to understand the ways in which various groups understood the importance of education to the Argentine state v. the global community. Though the APDH and UNESCO both concerned themselves with the preservation and promotion of human rights and especially the role of education therein, in the case of dictatorship and transitional Argentina, they had different priorities in terms of acquiring those rights for all persons and different understandings of how children and adults fit into their projects for a democratic future based on justice and equity. UNESCO officials working in Argentina focused on the broader picture, how Argentina compared to other “developing” nations. The APDH straddled an at times precarious position

⁴²³ La solución debe surgir del intercambio de opiniones de todos los sectores interesados en los problemas de educación y fundamentalmente deben ser convocados los educadores, que son los conocedores sagaces de la realidad y quienes a la postre, deberán concretar cualquier medida que se proponga.” *Hoy en la argentina*, 6.

between private and public institution during the dictatorship, with members whose personal and professional lives were tied to the disappearances of persons and the ramifications of dictatorial educational policy.

After the elections of 1983, during the presidency of *Raúl Alfonsín*, himself a founding member of the APDH, the APDH worked with CONADEP to compile the *Nunca Más* report, founded projects and platforms to help spread human rights to marginalized groups, and began to work seriously on the educational reforms that they had proposed during the late 1970s. As early as 1984, the APDH organized a conference to discuss the state of education in Argentina and the state of human rights education more broadly. In a two-day conference that included contributions from teachers and educators, the APDH established dialogue between their organization, specialists in the field of education, human rights activists, and, especially students and teachers. They gave precedence to this last group not only as those best able to report upon the state of education, but also as protagonists of human rights and the democratic state. The APDH allowed teachers and students to set the agenda:

Of the two proposed themes "teaching" and validity of Human Rights, the majority wanted to discuss the second. And is not for nothing. After the cruel injury left by the leaders of the *proceso* in education, added to us by autocratic pressures of specific origin, what it calls the protagonists of the school...is to talk about the problem, to describe what's wrong, establish its limits and its prognosis.⁴²⁴

Students and teachers a year into the democratic transition gave priority to human rights vigilance in their evaluation of school practices. In their report on the event, the APDH maintained that this was due to the cruel and lasting damage the dictatorship had done to the

⁴²⁴“De los dos temas propuestos “enseñanza” y vigencia de los Derechos Humanos, la mayoría quiso discutir el segundo. Y no es para menos. Tras la cruel lastimadura dejada por las huestes del proceso en la educación, agregada a nos de presiones autocráticas de distinto origen, lo que llama a los protagonistas de la escuela—sus docentes y sus alumnos especialmente—, es hablar del diagnóstico, describir el mal, establecer sus límites y su pronóstico.” *Jornadas nacionales*, 1.

educational system and those who participated in it. It is interesting to note that here, even more than in their reports during the dictatorship, the APDH situates students, particularly middle school aged children, as protagonists, best able to diagnose problems and offer and implement solutions. The status of children and teachers as protagonists in the fight for human rights in Argentina continues throughout the report: professors and officials used this language repeatedly in their various speeches during the conference, and students and teachers included it in the resolutions that they drafted as part of their meetings. It's difficult to discern how much enthusiasm the students had for these meetings, but it is clear from the source material that they were involved while present at them. It's clear that the APDH discursively recruited students to their cause, but it's also clear that, whether recruited or not, at least some of the students responded positively.

The APDH premised their conference on the idea that children in Argentina had had their rights violated. Though disappeared children are usually discussed in materials produced in this same moment as those children whose rights had been most egregiously violated by the dictatorship, they were only mentioned once in the report of and transcripts from the APDH *Jornadas nacionales*. Instead, the APDH chose to focus on Argentine children and young people as a whole. The military dictatorship violated all of these children's rights by denying them the ability to learn and develop as children should. The APDH officials and affiliates positioned children as the protagonists of Argentine education *because* they had had their rights violated. They made the children advocates and agents because the previous government had made them victims:

The National Security Doctrine sought to destroy the political conscience of Argentines through misinformation, through the brainwashing of children and youth, and, to that end, an educational and cultural policy was developed, medieval obscurantism, repressive.

Dissent, intellectual freedom, and creative capacity were considered dangerous and subversive. Teachers and professors, because they hold the keys to knowledge and are responsible for delivering them to students so that they become men who own their destiny, became dangerous beings and were persecuted. Student militants and teachers paid with their lives for the aspiration of wanting to think.⁴²⁵

The military dictatorship systematically brainwashed children to essentially become integral cogs in the perpetuation of an autocratic machine. This occurred on every level of the educational system from preschool to university. The government removed educational funding, removed informed and well-educated teachers, and punished creative thinking in the classroom. The APDH expanded the definition of political violence to include, not only physical violence, or state terror, but brainwashing and the removal of agency from multiple generations of Argentine citizen. This discourse mirrors the ways in which Las Abuelas spoke of their disappeared grandchildren as “slaves” of the dictatorship; whose true identity and agency had been destroyed and taken.⁴²⁶ This discourse intensifies the indictment of the dictatorship as well as expanding the groups considered victims. The entire conference established the idea that the “lucha” for a democratic future would take place in Argentine classrooms, with teachers and students on the front lines of an intellectual and moral battle against the recent past.⁴²⁷

The APDH certainly wanted educational reform on a broader scale to counteract the damage done by the military dictatorship. They believed that this education should be based

⁴²⁵ “La Doctrina de la Seguridad Nacional pretendió destruir a la conciencia política de los argentinos mediante la desinformación, mediante el lavado de cerebro de niños y jóvenes y con ese fin se desarrolló una política educativa y cultural, oscurantista medieval, represiva.”

El disenso, la libertad intelectual, la capacidad creadora fueron considerados peligrosos y subversivos. Los maestros y profesores, por poseer las llaves del conocimiento y ser los encargados de entregarlas a los educandos para que estos se transformen en hombres dueños de su destino, se convirtieron en seres peligrosos y fueron perseguidos. Militantes estudiantiles y docentes pagaron con su vida la pretensión de querer pensar.” *Jornadas nacionales*, 8.

⁴²⁶ See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of Las Abuelas discussion of children in the dictatorship and their agency or lack thereof.

⁴²⁷ *Jornadas nacionales*, 8.

upon a human rights education, which should essentially become the foundation of the public education system in Argentina:

Education is an essential element to overcome the obvious limitations in our country: an education about Human Rights that analyzes, proposes and promotes pedagogical, curricular and methodological measures aimed at guaranteeing knowledge of the subject and, fundamentally, the formation of students in practice and respect for Human Rights.⁴²⁸

Though officials did not consider children complicit in the practices of the dictatorship in this document, there is a certain degree to which the authors and speakers referenced the need to correct the “brainwashing” that had already affected so many Argentine children. Many participants agreed that an education founded on civic responsibility and ethics through human rights discourse was the best way to both correct the damage done by the dictatorship and prevent a relapse into authoritarianism in the future. Most of the speakers in the Jornadas, including representatives from the Argentine Ministry of Education and Justice and the United Nations, framed the Argentine present as a constant battle against the past. In their narrative, the Argentine child became an active figure, and the only one able to fully move into the future and transverse temporal space. Teachers had to protect this child in an ideological battle with the recent past so that they could effectively become democratic citizens moving forward. The past constantly interceded into the present, but teachers had to help children move into the future: they’re the only ones who could. The imagery they use is arresting, not least because it helps us to visualize the ways in which adults were working through the political, socio-cultural trauma of the dictatorship and how they understood children within the matrix of trauma, recovery, and national identity.

⁴²⁸ “La educación es un elemento esencial para superar las notorias limitaciones existentes en nuestro país: una educación acerca de los Derechos Humanos que analice, proponga e impulse las medidas pedagógicas, curriculares y metodológicas tendientes a garantizar el conocimiento del tema y, fundamentalmente, la formación de los alumnos en la práctica y el respeto por los Derechos Humanos.” *Jornadas nacionales*, 11.

In the decisions reached by the various panels, children became more active. Teachers and students in subgroups discussed how human rights could or should be incorporated into Argentine classrooms at all the distinct levels of education. They examined how children at each level of the educational system had been denied their rights during the *proceso* and into the present, and how that could be remedied through human rights-based education. Even the very youngest Argentines had been affected according to these reports. Rights denied to preschool children included:

the non-obligatory nature of pre-school education, which causes: the insufficiency, in quantity and quality of kindergartens in rural and urban populations with scarce resources, the isolation and disarticulation of preschool education with respect to the other levels of the educational system...The insufficient knowledge of "what is a child" and "how is that child that is in front of us" ... The abuse of the child expressed in the imposition of methodologies that do not respond to their evolutionary age and in attitudes that re-express their freedom of expression.⁴²⁹

Students and teachers collaborated to offer solutions to these problems, some of which included: limiting the number of students per teacher, more training for teachers, more freedom of expression for children, more education for teachers about how children at each age learn and express themselves, mandatory preschool education, and finally a revamping of the contents of preschool education. Human Rights education for preschool children involved making sure that *teachers*, as the advocates for young children, were trained using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child, so that they would be able to see and report if these rights were violated, and begin to instruct children in their rights, so that the child could identify

⁴²⁹“la no obligatoriedad de la enseñanza preescolar, lo que provoca: la insuficiencia, en cantidad y calidad de Jardines de Infantes en las poblaciones rurales y urbanas de escasos recursos, el aislamiento y la desarticulación de la enseñanza preescolar con respecto a los restantes niveles del sistema educativo...El insuficiente conocimiento de “que es un niño” y “como es ese niño que se tiene delante”...El maltrato al niño expresado en la imposición de metodologías que no responden a su edad evolutiva y en actitudes que repinen su libertad de expresión.” *Jornadas nacionales*, 16.

violations of those rights. They also suggested the creation of a monitoring body to whom students and teachers could report rights violations. Human Rights education for the youngest citizens necessitated them understanding themselves as potential victims of human rights violations and constructing systems to protect them when those rights were almost inevitably violated.

These were the recommendations for the youngest fulcrums of the educational system, children who, as such, had not been in the system long enough to really absorb the authoritarianism of the dictatorship. For each subsequent level of the educational system, for each group that had been in the system under the dictatorship, the enumeration of violated rights grew, as did the list of suggested remedies for teachers and students, and suggestions to improve human rights education. According to the students and teachers at the Jornadas, Primary school children, for example, had been denied their right to a community. They had not been informed of their Human Rights (itself a violation), they had been taught fundamentally to participate in an imperial system in a dependent nation limiting their ability to live a positive and fully realized life.⁴³⁰ They needed to be taught their rights, taught what it meant to have rights, taught to think critically and creatively. They also needed to receive basic education in things like science and sexual education, which were largely absent or inaccurate during the dictatorship. The APDH also recommended that humiliating punishments be removed from the classroom, that children who were children of disappeared parents or dictatorship personnel receive psychological care, and that all children have their basic nutritional needs met. They also concluded that children should be educated in their rights, given freedom of expression, receive education from well

⁴³⁰ *Jornadas nacionales*, 18.

trained teachers who could nurture their individualism, and be taught to report violations of their rights at the earliest opportunity.⁴³¹

This was certainly an assault on conservative factions, a radical reclaiming of the political arena, and a redeployment of “thought”—considered a weapon and a crime by the *proceso*—as a tool of democratic reconstruction. The Jornada Nacional gives us important insight into how the APDH worked on a collaborative project for educational reform before even the national pedagogical congress was convened. The APDH pulled together a group of students, teachers, and policy makers to consider the damage done by the dictatorship and how to best correct that damage. They came up with a view of children as victims and agents, a gateway to a potential future that they intended to use. The plans that they recommended in this document were not directly implemented, but the ideas and discursive nature of the project did become an essential part of educational policy [and discourse?] moving forward through the 1980s and 1990s, laying important groundwork for human rights education, particularly as it pertained to young children.

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACION Y JUSTICIA: Making Human Rights Possible in Classrooms since 1984

The APDH affected human rights education in the Ministry of Education and Justice’s recommendations for Human Rights and democratic education, particularly before the passing of the National Education Reform Law. Though the Alfonsín government faced a lot of difficulty with overhauling the educational system, the Ministry of Education did work to make minor changes as they moved towards larger reform. Many of these smaller policies and

⁴³¹ *Jornadas nacionales*, 18-19.

recommendations were based upon the APDH's suggestions and responded directly to resolutions like the ones made in the *Jornadas nacionales*.

Consider, for example, the 1987 *Proyecto de formación del personal de educación para la renovación, reajuste y perfeccionamiento del Sistema y del proceso educativo* (Project of formation of educational personnel for the renovation, readjustment, and perfection of the System and educational process).⁴³² This document considers the role of teachers in founding and continuing democratic practice in the classroom, premised on human rights: particularly the right to self-determination and freedom of expression. The report, which was sanctioned by both the Ministry of Education and the Organization of American States (OEA) and written by María Saleme de Burnichon, considers the complex polemic facing teachers in Argentine classrooms. Maria Saleme de Burnichon was an Argentine scholar, teacher, and activist, who, in addition to studying and researching philosophy and education, was sequestered by the dictatorship alongside her family, and lived portions of her life in exile. Her reflection has the weight of scholastic acumen and personal experience. In this report she considered the responsibility that teachers bore to essentially educating a new generation in principles that they themselves had not necessarily experienced in practice: “we must look for the relation or disconnect between the signification and weight that the scholastic institution has in the formation of subjects that participate in an effective manner in the construction and organization of the country.”⁴³³

Teachers also needed to find ways to maintain authority in a room full of young children without replicating authoritarianism.⁴³⁴ In analyzing schools and teachers, Saleme de Burnichon, the

⁴³² María Saleme de Burnichon, *Proyecto de formación del personal de educación para la renovación reajuste y perfeccionamiento del Sistema y del proceso educativo* (Buenos Aires: Ministro de Educación and Justicia, 1987),

⁴³³ “tenemos que buscar la relación o disrelación entre la significación y peso que tiene la institución escolar en la formación de sujetos que participan de manera efectiva en la construcción y organización del país.” Saleme de Burnichon, 1.

⁴³⁴ By 1987, very few Argentine educators had experienced a fully democratic state in their lifetimes.

officials of the Ministry of Justice and Education, and the OEA tried to identify how authoritarianism and remnants of the dictatorship were propagated in classrooms and how to restructure and reimagine Argentine classrooms in order to create a more democratic society:

... since an examination of the school institution and its agents shows the persistence of structures and attitudes that, in theory, we consider widely overcome. We would not be wrong if we paid attention to authoritarianism in our educational system, both in its explicit forms (decrees, communications, curriculums) and in the implicit ones accepted by consensus and custom.⁴³⁵

The dictatorship established authoritarianism through decrees and laws, but also, and of concern to the APDH and the Ministry of Education and Justice, in classroom settings where the school was used, as it had been historically, to create a citizen that would reflect the values of the government. Saleme de Burnichon considered how teachers saw themselves, how adults saw teachers, and how both groups saw children as part of a national project in the transitional period.⁴³⁶ She argued that the best way to implement wide scale educational, and by extension social, change was to begin with educating teachers. Like the APDH, she figured education as a battle at which teachers stood at the front lines. Education in moral values, civics, linguistics, psychology, and human rights would become weapons in their arsenal. She considered the ways in which children had been ideologically weaponized to perpetuate authoritarianism. Though Chapters 4 and 5 discussed the ideological weaponization that the dictatorship perpetuated through the kidnapping of disappeared children, it is important to note that this type of weaponization was a goal that the dictatorship had for *all* children in Argentina. Because they attended school, they were socialized against revolutionary or ideologically progressive concepts

⁴³⁵ “...ya que un examen de la institución escolar y sus agentes muestra la persistencia de estructuras y actitudes que en teoría consideramos ampliamente superadas. No estaríamos equivocados si prestáramos atención al autoritarismo en nuestro sistema educativo, tanto en sus formas explícitas (decretos, comunicados, circulares) como en las implícitas acoradas por consense y costumbre.” Saleme de Burnichon, 1-2.

⁴³⁶ Saleme de Burnichon, 3.

and taught that these ideas were dangerous. They were not educated to think critically or make informed decisions.⁴³⁷ Though Saleme de Burnichon does not mention disappeared children, she does make a compelling argument for the ways in which all children had been victimized by the dictatorship.⁴³⁸ Like the APDH, she figured the child as both victim and as agent, a potential actor in the future and a contemporary actor in his ability to absorb and replicate social norms or practice either authoritarianism or democracy in the classroom.

Teachers were transmitters of values and conductors of knowledge. This is how Saleme de Burnichon believed they should function in society. However, she argued, other popular conceptualizations of the role of teachers, for example, as “second mothers”, educational apostles, and especially, as all-knowing, needed to be destabilized as part of education reform.⁴³⁹ Eliminating these ideas would create a classroom setting that could be consistent in its values, the full extent of which would include *inconsistency* and *uncertainty* because democratic practice—debate, discussion, interrogation—would necessarily cause variation.⁴⁴⁰ She argued for changing classrooms and schools from places of dogmatization to a places of transformation—an interesting distinction given that through the transmission of values schools are always at work transforming the ideologies or behaviors of children in one way or another. The paradox of dictatorship as static and democracy as transformative negates the ways in which dictatorial educational practice transformed ideologies, and it contradicts, in its own way, her earlier framing of children under dictatorship as weaponized. The dictatorship did not place Argentine education in stasis, but rather constantly worked to implement its ideologies through

⁴³⁷ See Chapters 1 and 2 for more information on the ways in which the transitional state viewed dictatorship educational policy and the values that the dictatorship wished to enforce through early childhood civic education.

⁴³⁸ Saleme de Burnichon, 10.

⁴³⁹ Saleme de Burnichon, 11.

⁴⁴⁰ Saleme de Burnichon, 12.

the educational system and its destruction. The idea that democracy equals transformation equals progress reflects broader global liberal politics and narratives about authoritarianism and democracy. Both the dictatorship and the democracy sought to model and manifest the form of knowledge acquisition that they believed in: one-sided v. multifaceted.

At the heart of Saleme de Burnichon's reform project was situating teachers as the transmitters of democracy and finding ways to maintain classroom authority without establishing classroom authoritarianism:

In this work of contributing to the construction of channels of understanding, recognition of mutual rights and obligations, there is a risk that the teacher assumes a modality inappropriately attributed to his role, which totally unbalances the precipitous social dimension: we refer to the authoritarianism already analyzed. In this climate, the teacher becomes the one who, since his depersonalization contributes to developing different types of authoritarian relationships: authoritarian school, authoritarian society, authoritarian state, authoritarian interpersonal relationships. It is up to us to ask ourselves: How can the teacher rescue for himself authority, not authoritarianism, enriching his role? The distance between authoritarianism and authority is the difference between omnipotence and respect for the other.⁴⁴¹

Discourse would create the necessary link, as would a view of children and educators as part of a shared project in the classroom to create a democratic society and democratic practice. Though Saleme de Burnichon suggested that there is a fundamental difference between transmission and transformation, the project that she described would require the transmission of democratic principles using transformative pedagogical practices.

⁴⁴¹ "En este trabajo de contribuir en la construcción de canales de entendimiento, reconocimiento de mutuos derechos y obligaciones, existe el riesgo de que el docente asuma una modalidad atribuida inadecuadamente a su rol, que descompensa totalmente la precipitada dimensión social: nos referimos al autoritarismo ya analizado. En este clima, el docente se convierte en aquel que, desde su depersonalización contribuye a acrecentar distintos tipos de relación autoritaria: escuela autoritaria, sociedad autoritaria, Estado autoritario, relaciones interpersonales autoritarias. Corresponde que nos preguntemos: ¿Cómo puede el docente rescatar para sí la autoridad, no el autoritarismo, enriqueciendo su rol? La distancia que media entre autoritarismo-autoridad, es la que media entre omnipotencia respeto por el otro." Saleme de Burnichon, 14-15.

In 1987, the Ministry of Education and Justice in conjunction with the Consejo Nacional de Investigadores Científicos y Técnicos (CONICET) introduced a plan to create an Instituto General de Perfeccionamiento y Actualización Docente, a body that responded to the APDH's call for better education for teachers in their *Jornadas nacionales*.⁴⁴² After a year of work, the Ministry published a record of their decisions and the implementation of said Instituto in *Política educativa en democracia: El Perfeccionamiento y la Actualización Profesional del Docente: Prioridad de la Política Educativa en Democracia*. The report recounted a restructuring of education for educators with a focus on what was lacking in teaching methods and outlined ways to oversee reforms to teaching. Where Saleme de Burnichon focused more on training new teachers, this document and the conferences behind it focused instead on overseeing and restructuring the educational system already in place, guiding teachers away from authoritarian practices, offering more training, and encouraging democratic praxis.⁴⁴³ Many of the suggestions made in the document responded directly to the teachers' rights violation that teachers and students enumerated in the *Jornadas nacionales* held by the APDH, and, like Saleme de Burnichon, this document emphasized the role of teachers in developing Argentine society. In the preface, Ministry officials said that: "In a democratic system, the teacher should assume that the school is a social institution organized in order to promote equal opportunities and educational possibilities."⁴⁴⁴ In promoting equality in the education system they hoped to

⁴⁴² CONICET is a subdivision of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation of Argentina, founded in 1958. It is an institution that promote research and advancement in science and various other fields of knowledge. They offer research grants and teaching grants.

⁴⁴³ El Ministro de Educación and Justicia, *Política educativa en democracia: El Perfeccionamiento y la Actualización Profesional del Docente: Prioridad de la Política Educativa en Democracia* (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1987).

⁴⁴⁴ "En un sistema democrático, el docente debe asumir que la escuela es una institución socialmente organizada para promover la igualdad de oportunidades y posibilidades educativas." Ministerio de Educación y Justicia, Secretaria de Educación, *Política educativa en democracia: El Perfeccionamiento y la actualización profesional del docente: prioridad de la política educativa en democracia* (Ministro de Educación y Justicia, Buenos Aires, 1987), 2.

promote equality in the classroom and even further in society as a whole. This marks a genuine attempt to implement some of the proposals of the APDH especially as they related to the difficulties facing teachers and what seems to be a consistent fear regarding authoritarianism in the classroom. Further, this is a concrete step to implement educational reform based on the belief that teaching teachers would improve the quality of education for young students and extend equal educational opportunities throughout the nation, thereby guaranteeing the right of children to learn. It stands out amongst these documents in that, instead of looking at education as a constant battle with the past, or the mobilization of children for the future, the creators of this document, including various national education directors and members of CONICET, understood education as something happening in the present and a battle that required intervention in this moment rather than a future one:

The creation of a National Institute for Teacher Improvement and Development, at the level of the Ministry of Education, allows us to create a program of improvement of a more systematic nature than those offered until now and more likely to have an impact on teaching practice and, consequently, in the quality of education.⁴⁴⁵

In applying APDH principles in the present and extending the view of the present as a broader temporal moment in which it was possible to engage, they made it their mission to affect and change teachers in the here and now rather than prioritizing the creation of a new generation of teachers (though that too would be important). They attempted to course-correct and oversee contemporary educators to implement changes.

Alongside the concern for teachers already in classrooms was the concern for students who had already had several years in the dictatorship's educational system. Adolescents were in

⁴⁴⁵ “La creación de un Instituto Nacional de Perfeccionamiento y Actualización Docente, en el nivel de la Secretaría de Educación, permite plantear un programa de perfeccionamiento de carácter más sistemático que los ofrecidos hasta el momento y con mayores probabilidades de ejercer impacto en la práctica docente y, consecuentemente, en la calidad de la educación.” *Política educativa en democracia*, 23.

crisis once again, according to this document, particularly preteens and teenagers, who were in the transitional period between childhood and young adulthood, and, as such, had the most potential to effect change in society. They were at a critical moment in their development, and officials wanted to incorporate their personal transitional moment into society's transitional moment.⁴⁴⁶ In particular, officials argued that revolutionizing the educational system and the formation of teachers was necessary to "To advance in the sense of making the concept of permanent education a reality, that generates in the teacher and in the student the awareness of participating in a learning process correlated with the advance and permanent growth of knowledge."⁴⁴⁷ The idea was to make both teachers and students part of a learning community that would continue to seek knowledge beyond the classroom.

To justify the need for these reforms, the Ministry of Education and Justice recounted the havoc that the dictatorship wrought on Argentine classrooms:

In a country that, like ours, comes out of a tragic period during which they tried to impose on society a model of education that forced the values necessary to strengthen the dominant authoritarianism (individualism, repression of critical consciousness, etc.) , a plan of improvement should include the discussion of topics that allow the teacher to reflect on the fundamental ethical values of the model of democratic coexistence, so that in his daily practice he not only forms the student academically, but rather aims to develop...a model of a self-critical subject, a collaborative and participatory subject ... From this perspective, the need to develop a teacher improvement project is justified, since this and the transformation of the educational system make up interrelated parts of the process of strengthening the human resources needed to consolidate a democratic culture within the heart of the education system.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ *Política educativa en democracia*, 29.

⁴⁴⁷ "avanzar en el sentido de hacer realidad el concepto de educación permanente, que genere en el docente y en el estudiante la conciencia de participar en un proceso de aprendizaje correlacionado con el avance y crecimiento permanente del conocimiento." *Política educativa en democracia*, 31.

⁴⁴⁸ "En un país que, como el nuestro, sale de un trágico periodo durante el cual se pretendió imponer a la sociedad un modelo de educación que impulsaba los valores necesarios para el fortalecimiento del autoritarismo dominante (individualismo, represión de la conciencia crítica, etc.), un plan de perfeccionamiento debe incluir la discusión de temas que permitan al docente reflexionar acerca de los valores éticos fundamentales del modelo de convivencia democrática, para que en su práctica cotidiana no solo forme académicamente al alumno, sino que apunte a desarrollar un nuevo modelo antropológico de sujeto de la educación; un modelo de sujeto crítico-autocrítico, solidario y participativo...Desde esta perspectiva se justifica la necesidad de desarrollar un proyecto de

To counteract the dictatorship, they needed to create a new political subject, and to do that they needed to reeducate the people who would officially educate those subjects. Like the APDH, this proposal considered teachers and students as part of a project to reform the nation. Though the proposal didn't mention human rights directly, the implication was that democratic and civic education would be, at its core, based on human rights. They emphasized community, solidarity, and cooperation as essential elements of their project to democratize Argentina through Argentine classrooms: "it will create a system that forms supportive and cooperative citizens who will make the project of building society their own as part of the collective activity destined to shape a more just and mutually supportive society."⁴⁴⁹

Revamping education for educators consisted of two parts. The first was basic reeducation in general subject materials: refresher courses in things like mathematics, language, and science. These were necessary to make sure that teachers across the country were equally prepared to inform their students on these subjects. The second element of teacher reform was more complex:

At the other extreme...the teacher starts as a social actor, as a subject that constructs and reconstructs his reality, who is open to reflect on his own experience and to propose viable alternatives that overcome his isolation or imply cooperative efforts. Of course, this model emphasizes the attitudes of teachers, the commitment to learn from their students and the institution and community in which they work.⁴⁵⁰

perfeccionamiento docente, ya que este y la transformación del sistema educativo conforman momentos interrelacionados del *proceso* de potenciación de los recursos humanos necesarios para la consolidación de una cultura democrática en el seno del sistema educativo." *Política educativa en democracia*, 32-33.

⁴⁴⁹ "estará creando un sistema que forme ciudadanos solidarios y cooperativos que hagan propia la empresa del desarrollo social como parte de la actividad colectiva destinada a perfilar una sociedad más justa y solidaria." *Política educativa en democracia*, 33.

⁴⁵⁰ "En el otro extremo (modelo al que se acerca la propuesta), se parte del docente como actor social, como sujeto que construye y reconstruye su realidad, quien está abierto a reflexionar sobre su propia experiencia y a proponerse alternativas viables que superen su aislamiento o impliquen esfuerzos cooperativos. Desde luego, este modelo hace hincapié en las actitudes de los docentes, en el compromiso con el aprender de sus alumnos y con la institución y la comunidad en la que se desempeña." *Política educativa en democracia*, 34.

Essentially, they wanted to reeducate teachers to be self-aware agents of change. Teachers would be taught to understand themselves as active subjects, which would further help them in their mission to promote democratic education and cultivate self-awareness in their students.

To implement these changes, the Ministry of Education and Justice proposed the creation of a variety of commissions to oversee the enactment of teaching policy and classroom praxis at the national, provincial, and municipal level. They also planned to create distance learning opportunities for teachers who couldn't be physically present (whether because of distance or finance) at modules designed to retrain them. Finally, the Ministry along with CONICET allocated funds to make more resources available to teachers for their training and so that they had materials in classrooms with which to teach.⁴⁵¹

What is most important about this proposal is the way in which it envisioned a democratic teacher and the way that its vision for education reform compared to and implemented the vision provided by APDH in *Jornadas nacionales*. Though the language of *Jornadas* was much more focused on human rights, the vision of teachers and students for how to correct human rights violations is almost exactly replicated in this official Ministry of Education and Justice proposal for education reform. Some of the same people worked as part of the APDH and the Ministry of Education. Both organizations also sought the opinions and input of teachers and scholars as they crafted policy and ideas for change. During the *Jornadas*, teachers and students asked for more self-reflection, collaboration, conversation, and discussion, more resources for better prepared teachers, and more material resources for children in the classrooms. They also asked for broader teaching reform. These principles are all included in

⁴⁵¹ Unfortunately, many of the materials available or provided were educational texts that were produced during the late 1970s, reprints of which still featured more “authoritarian” visions of race, gender, and citizenship. See Chapter 2 for more information.

this teaching reform, which devised ways to implement these suggestions in classrooms. The *Política educativa en democracia* emphasized education for teachers in civic engagement, which they situated at the absolute core of all other teacher training.⁴⁵² The APDH saw teachers as agents of social transformation, so did the Ministry of Education and Justice, who through small reforms attempted to create substantial changes to society.⁴⁵³

One way in which the Ministry of Education attempted to put into practice democratic principles related to the rights of children, especially their right to self-determination, was the creation of *talleres*, or workshops, which fostered practical skills and allowed students to design and pursue their own self-directed course of study. The goal of *talleres* was three-fold. First, they allowed for several types of learning: students who might not do well with traditional educational formats could excel at something they found interesting through nonconventional pedagogical processes. Second, they helped to solve the problem of overpopulated classrooms and overworked teachers. Ideally, *talleres* would allow smaller groups of students to work together on a project in a given subject under the supervision of a teacher, the school, and their peers. Third, and most importantly, *talleres* were designed to foster cooperation, democratic practice, and create an educational community.

In 1988, the Ministry of Education and Justice released a publication that helped to define *talleres* and offer guidelines and suggestions for their implementation in schools. Through the inclusion of *talleres* in the educational system, the Ministry of Education and Justice and the OEA worked to give students agency over their education while helping them to connect their

⁴⁵² *Política educativa en democracia*, 39.

⁴⁵³ This was a response to calls from teachers and students as well as activist organizations, education specialists, and policy makers, but it was also something of a stopgap measure, to start implementing social changes where possible, when a complete curricular overhaul was not yet possible due to political uncertainty and tension between conservative factions and the newly democratic government.

education with society and life outside of school: “The proposal of the workshops aims to try methodologies and work techniques that facilitate a more fluid passage between theory and practice and a greater agency of the student.”⁴⁵⁴ Giving students choices was one way to create democratic practice in the classroom—and ideally outside of it—it was also a way to strengthen an educational community by fostering relationships between classmates, students and teachers, and students and the community. They were a way to include young people into a larger society as active democratic members.⁴⁵⁵

Like teaching reforms—and there were more and more *talleres* for teachers throughout the 1990s—*talleres* in school offered students the chance to practice their civic education.⁴⁵⁶

Talleres were defined by:

Its elective character, which 'allows the student to choose according to their interests...The organization of the workshops presupposes greater freedom and privileges the eventual response to unforeseen demands, with a more flexible management of time and space.⁴⁵⁷

Consider the difference between this approach to teaching and the more prescriptivist forms used under the dictatorship or even in the early years of the Alfonsín government. Most of those documents included checklists for definitions that students needed to learn in each section of their education with few recommendations for how to impart that knowledge and no flexibility

⁴⁵⁴“La propuesta de los *Talleres* apunta a intentar metodologías y técnicas de trabajo que faciliten un pasaje más fluido entre teoría y práctica y un mayor protagonismo del alumno.” Adriana Haurie ed., *Talleres*, (Ministerio de Educación y Justicia, Buenos Aires, 1988), 1.

⁴⁵⁵ *Talleres*, 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Documents like *Educación cívica documento de apoyo* (Ministry of Education and Justice, Buenos Aires, 1984), of which there were many, outlined in at times excruciating detail the ways in which children should be educated in civics. On some issues—that children should learn about democratic function—the documents were identical, but in other ways they floundered to find consensus on how best to discuss civic responsibility or practice with kids and adolescents. *Talleres* were much more certain and offered a path to civic participation through in classroom self-determination.

⁴⁵⁷ “Su carácter electivo, que 'permite al alumno optar de acuerdo con sus intereses...sus criterios de selección de contenidos o temas, que no se ciñen, como en las áreas, a la secuencia epistemológica y lógica de las disciplinas. Esto implica “tomarse permisos” para recortar, extrapolar, insistir, etc. En cuestiones determinada. La organización de los *talleres* presupone mayor libertad y privilegia la respuesta eventual a demandas no previstas anticipadamente, con un manejo más flexible del tiempo y del espacio.” *Talleres*, 3.

for the students to choose their own path, follow their interests, or even ask questions. *Planes* and *Programas de Estudio* produced by the Ministry of Education in 1984 and 1985 are excellent examples of this. They include human rights in the curriculum, but only go so far as to include a paragraph of points that students would need to learn and absolutely no suggestions for how to impart that knowledge. It's a strange blend of old and new didactic strategy. One can see how interim conversations in the 1980s and collaborative meetings like the *Jornadas nacionales* and APDH helped to inform changes to educational practice.

Talleres offered guidelines and strategies for getting students to think critically, which could help students and teachers to connect on collaborative projects. Through *talleres*, students and teachers would experience communal learning. For instance, suggested subjects for students to investigate *talleres* based on the social sciences included: The Myths of the Twentieth Century; My Region: Beliefs, Myths, and Permanence; The Forms of Expression of the Twentieth Century; Rural Life and Urban Life; The Roots of Our National Identity and of Today; The Social Sphere.”⁴⁵⁸ Investigating any one of these subjects would necessitate community engagement and peer collaboration, the type of which the APDH had called for as early as 1979 in *La libertad de conciencia y del culto*:

Liberatory education consists of exercising critical judgment, on the capacity to choose what one considers best for oneself, changing ideas and developing personality with awareness of rights and duties, cultivating the spirit of human solidarity. Adopting this attitude, the education system will contribute to the formation of a creatively free and pluralistic society, in accordance with the current historical moment. For ourselves, for our posterity for all the men of the world who want to inhabit the Argentine soil.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ “Los mitos del siglo XX; Mi región: creencias, mitos y permanencias; Las formas de expresión del siglo XX; Mi ciudad: costumbres y tradiciones; La vida rural y la vida urbana; Las raíces de nuestra identidad nacional y el hoy; El espacio social.” *Talleres*, 11.

⁴⁵⁹ “La educación para la libertad consiste en ejercitar el juicio crítico a la facultad de elegir lo que cada uno considere mejor para sí mismo, cambiar las ideas y desarrollar la personalidad con conciencia de los derechos y deberes, cultivando el espíritu de solidaridad humana. Adoptando esta actitud, el sistema educativo contribuirá a la formación de una sociedad creativamente libre y pluralista, en concordancia con el momento histórico actual. Para

Talleres did not completely revolutionize the formation of Argentine citizenship or civic responsibility. They did not completely radicalize the educational system in Argentina. They were not implemented overnight in a vacuum, but rather gradually incorporated into an educational system fraught with funding issues, internal and external conflicts, and in a constant struggle between the past and future. However, *talleres* do represent a concerted effort to give children and adolescents agency in their education, a marked difference from previous educational policies. They were designed to foster educational communities and self-determination. One can tell that *talleres* mark a radical departure from the past, not only from a basic knowledge of Argentine educational history, but from the constant reassurances that pepper official Ministry of Education and Justice materials describing the formation and function of *talleres*.⁴⁶⁰ Officials encourage educators, students, and parents to embrace their fear because change is good, and fear can create communication, one of the repeatedly touted virtues of democratic society. No matter the subject matter that the *talleres* took up, the goal was “the development, the growth and the improvement of individuals as PEOPLE.”⁴⁶¹ In some ways this was the fullest representation of a move towards democratic praxis in the classroom. *Talleres* figured children as agents and then gave them the power to act, determining their educational goals, and realizing them.

Conclusions:

nosotros, para nuestra posteridad y para todos los hombres del mundo que quieran habitar el suelo argentino.” APDH, *La libertad de conciencia y del culto* (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1979), 7.

⁴⁶⁰ “En esta interacción permanente es posible llegar a sentir el temor que producen las situaciones nuevas. pero también el placer que se siente ante una conquista grupal o individual” *Talleres*, 6.

⁴⁶¹ “el desarrollo, el crecimiento y la superación de los individuos como PERSONAS.” *Talleres*, 9.

The conversation surrounding human rights in Argentina was transformative. It affected policy and caused change, not only in the ways that children were able to experience their education, but the types of education they were able to receive, and the ways in which yet another figure of the Argentine child was brought into being by the shared discourses of human rights organizations and the Argentine Ministry of Education and Justice. Each vision of the Argentine child (the one proposed by UNESCO, the APDH, and the Ministry of Education and Justice) was different, but all three shared a common position: the child as fulcrum of democracy.

UNESCO's view of the Argentine child was one of relative privilege. Looking from the outside in—or rather from UNESCO working inside Argentina and sending their view of the situation out to an organization that monitored education on a global scale—UNESCO officials concluded that Argentine children in the 1970s and 1980s had higher rates of literacy compared to their peers in other “developing” nations. They also had higher rates of completing school. Post-dictatorship education reports from UNESCO had a more critical view of the education system—officials saw a lack of funds and resources and the aftermath of a political conflict that hurt students. The human rights “violations” they saw were the lack of equality between provincial and urban students, the very rich and the very poor, whose chances in society were determined by their socio-economic conditions and not leveled by equal opportunities in education. Overall however, their view of Argentina, in comparison to the rest of the world, was largely positive as they considered the ways that Argentina's revolutionizing human rights practice could be implemented elsewhere.

The APDH had a radically different perspective. As an organization formed in Argentina during the height of the dictatorship, their largest concern was the restoration of democracy and

the protection of human rights. They saw the rights of children and the right to education as whole as being completely under attack. They believed that the ideological war waged by the dictatorship existed in the classroom and that teachers and students had an essential role to play in the battle between authoritarianism and democracy. Comparing UNESCO and APDH materials published in the late-1970s highlights the disparity in their views—the former saw relatively good statistics on attendance and completion of education, while the latter saw a devastating destruction of an educational system that had been the pride of Argentina for almost a century. One of the goals of the APDH in the post-dictatorship period was revising and revolutionizing the educational system to include mandatory instruction in human rights, teaching reform, and democratic praxis. They worked with students and teachers to identify the problems facing Argentine education and made suggestions for their correction. The APDH understood human rights as fragile and children as victims, perpetrators, and agents all at once. They constantly positioned human rights education as a battle against the past and called for the redeployment of children for a democratic future.

The Ministry of Education and Justice responded to the APDH in a variety of ways throughout the 1980s. Though the APDH wanted broad educational reform, the Ministry of Education and Justice was only able to make smaller changes in the 1980s. They focused their attention on what they believed to be the most effective ways to reform the educational system: changing the ways in which teachers were taught. The Argentine “docente” was given importance as the first responder to the crumbling educational system. These individuals, presumed to be women in almost all of the documents, were tasked with becoming democratic citizens in theory and practice, as well as teaching their students to understand themselves as democratic citizens. The APDH and the Ministry of Education and Justice shared their goal of

eliminating authoritarianism in the classroom and the latter organization attempted to complete this goal with new standards in teachers' education, reeducation for existing teachers, and giving more autonomy to students and teachers.

Though each of these institutions had an individual vision of the Argentine child and the role of Argentine education nationally and internationally, they did not exist completely independent of one another. The APDH and MoE in particular shared members and interacted with the same groups of teachers and students, albeit in different ways. UNESCO's reports were largely based on information compiled by the Ministry of Education or their evaluations of Ministry of Education practices and policies. All three groups were aware of the others and they built on one another, considered one another, and their discourses about the child, though diverse, continually returned to the role of child as an agent of change in Argentina, a force for democratic change, and ultimately a protector of human rights.

CHAPTER VI

Writing for Children and Writing the Child in Literary Magazines

Previous chapters of this dissertation have analyzed the changes and continuities in childhood education and media during the democratic transition. They've considered educational policy, school texts and civic education, children's literature about the recent past, activism organized around children, and the ways that human rights discourse positioned children in Argentina on the front line of the fight for justice. More than just an analysis of materials and policies produced for children, this dissertation analyzes the ways that disparate groups understood children and how the construction of the figurative child informed the experience of actual children. This chapter focuses on the ways children's authors worked to define the child as a stable and widely-understood figure. It examines literary and educational magazines published in the late 1990s to understand how specialists—particularly children's authors and teachers—understood, debated, and critiqued the changes that had been made to children's education and the trends in children's media. In doing so, it illuminates the ways in which the different threads and themes of childhood that have been examined in this dissertation—child as victim, agent, democratic savior, in need of protection, activist—merged together by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Children's literature in Argentina flourished in the wake of dictatorship. It's possible to trace the evolution of children's literature and its relation to both educational policy and ongoing conversations about memory and responsibility through specialized (or educational) magazines

published during the 1990s and early 2000s. In magazines like *Piedra Libre* and *La Mancha*, coalitions of authors, teachers, and activists generated conversations about what childhood was in Argentina during the transition and what children's literature did or should look like. They determined and debated a literary canon for Argentine children and explicitly discussed children and children's issues in relation to identity and social change.

What children were taught, what they learned, what they experienced would, in due course, become part of the national story. Authors were aware of this, just as human rights advocates, activists, and Ministry officials were. The ideas and materials, and especially media, that children experienced took on a powerful position within the culture—or at least in this specific sphere of cultural production. This chapter examines the ways in which authors, editors, and teachers, in particular, considered children's literature and children's culture of paramount importance as a way to shape and build a progressive, democratic Argentina.⁴⁶²

The magazines *Piedra Libre* and *La Mancha* were produced during the transitional governments—Alfonsín (1983-1989) and Menem (1989-1999)—alongside policy reforms that shaped children's lives and the removal of censorship laws that shaped cultural production. The authors and editors who created these magazines reflected on these social changes and influenced them as well. Most contributors to these *revistas* were teachers, writers, or librarians, and their experiences in these roles during the dictatorship shaped their contributions to Argentine children's literature and children's education policies. They were designed for consumption by specialists and teachers as well as families and children. It is worth noting that the titles of both of these magazines refer to the names of popular, self-directed, games for

⁴⁶² Silvia Bleichman, *No me hubiera gustado morir en los 90* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2006); Barbara Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis: Cultural Violence and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

children. *Piedra Libre* is what children refer to as the safe-space or “base” in a game of hide and seek; *La Mancha* is the name for tag.

Piedra Libre and *La Mancha* are particularly good examples of these types of progressive conversations and exchanges. *Piedra Libre* began publication in the initial years of Alfonsín’s transitional government. Its contributors included many children’s authors who published during the transition as well as educational experts, teachers, and librarians. *La Mancha* featured many of the same contributors but began publication in 1996 in the heart of Carlos Saul Menem’s neoliberal presidency.⁴⁶³ Because the contributors were frequently the same, and the intended audience was the same, these two sources allow us to see shifting opinions and continuities in the conceptualization of children, the definition of childhood, and the distinction of what children could or should do within the parameters of a democratic society across two very different political regimes. The magazines contained and shaped the ongoing conversations about education, reading, and the development of moral and national consciousness. They began, continued, and contributed to the important sociocultural conversations about what it meant to be a child, what it meant to learn and teach, and what it meant to live and grow in a participatory democracy. *Piedra Libre* was a first attempt at defining the problems in the educational system and the difficulties with learning in Argentina—problems which the various writers linked to child development and child reading. *La Mancha* focused less on problems in education, largely because of the reforms put in place by the Alfonsín government, and instead focused on building a defined canon of children’s literature.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ *Piedra Libre* is no longer in publication, but *La Mancha* made the transition to a digital publication and website called *Imaginaria* in 1999 and continued publication there until 2014.

⁴⁶⁴ See Chapter 1 for more information on official educational policy and policy trends during the transition to democracy, particularly the differences between Alfonsín and Menem.

Contributors to *La Mancha* maintained that creating a new literary canon for children or indeed a literary canon at all—some authors rather strategically argued that none had existed before—was a step towards democratization and an empathetic and egalitarian society. Here, as in the discourse of las Abuelas and las Madres, the child emerges as a transitional figure synonymous in many ways with the transitioning nation. Editors of *Piedra Libre* organized issues of the magazine around various aspects of this transitional figure, usually around ways through which children encountered and experienced the world. Individual articles considered how these experiences shaped children's lives and how adults could or should shape these experiences. Essentially, *Piedra Libre* began a trend. The editors began a dialogue about children's literature and education for a new democratic Argentina. They considered psychology and politics as well as the sociocultural role of children. *Piedra Libre* established that children's literature was important and served an important role in child development especially in a transitional nation. *La Mancha* then worked to define the literary canon, not just that children should read books, but which books they should read. They worked to further define what should be considered an essential part of childhood and who could be considered an expert in childhood and children's education.

The editors and contributors of *La Mancha* and *Piedra Libre* tried to define childhood experiences and shape them through their published works and their contributions reflecting on that work, and how children's literature featured into society and transitional justice. Their self-awareness makes for an interesting historical archive—authors mused philosophically about their writing, their position in national and global society, their role as authors. Their discourse influenced the cultural climate around childhood and education, and the contributors of these

magazines were self-reflective in the ways that they understood their project to shape childhood and shape their experiences in light of the transition.

This chapter engages with both scholarship on the transitional period and scholarship on literature in Argentina during this moment.⁴⁶⁵ Recent scholarship has begun to consider critically the ways in which Alfonsín and Menem represent distinctive phases in the democratic transition. While scholars like Marco Novaro give an overview of the process of dictatorship to democracy, Emilio Crenzel considers the struggles over impunity in that period, and more recent scholarship examines the external pressure of the military on Alfonsín's government and interprets Menem as part of trajectory of violence that has more in common with the dictatorship than the Alfonsín administration. Many of the works on this period focus on the politics of memory or the politics of transitional governance. This chapter is not a political history, but the contributors to *Piedra Libre* and *La Mancha* actively explored the effects of these two administrations and their policies on children, so it is important to consider the ways in which recent scholarship positions Alfonsín and Menem not as a continual transition, but as a move towards progressive politics followed by a sharp turn towards negative neoliberal policies.

This chapter also builds upon scholarship on literature produced in Argentina during this period. Fernando Degiovani, María Soledad Blanco and Lucas Andrés Perassi are literary scholars who have worked to unearth and analyze trends in Argentine literature, particularly in the late twentieth century. Their work focuses on adult literature, but they productively consider

⁴⁶⁵ Marina Franco y Florencia Levin, eds., *Historia reciente: perspectivas y desafíos para un campo en construcción* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2007); Jorge Luis Calcagno, *La Construcción de la democracia: Raúl Alfonsín y los militares* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2013); Marcos Novaro and V Palermo, *La dictadura militar, 1976-1983: del golpe de estado a la restauración democrática* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2011); Stella Maris Ageitos, *Historia de la impunidad: de las actas de Videla a los indultos de Menem* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 2002); Andrés Alberto Masi, *Los tiempos de Alfonsín: la construcción de un liderazgo democrático* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2014).

the way in which literature during the transition flourished, but often featured undertones of self-reflection and confusion, which they attribute to the recent political and social trauma of the dictatorship.⁴⁶⁶ The contributors to the magazines that will be examined here dealt with a similar fracturing, and their search for canon, their search for definable parameters to childhood, or meanings for society through their writing fits within this scholarship, while offering a new perspective, shifting the lens to adults working for a younger audience.

A broader field of scholarship beyond Argentina examines the parameters and purposes of children's literature, but from a purely literary perspective.⁴⁶⁷ Shelby Wolf has written groundbreaking scholarship on the experience of reading and writing for children, and Katherine Peterson's work illuminates the way in which children's literature can be experienced through and as part of childhood as a cultural space. I apply some of their theoretical work to the children about whom the contributors of *Piedra Libre* and *La Mancha* write. This chapter places these three fields in dialogue in a way that will add to scholarly understandings about childhood during traumatic political transitions in Argentina and beyond, and the role of children and children's literature more broadly within society more broadly.

PIEDRA LIBRE: A BASE FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The first issue of *Piedra Libre* was printed in 1987 by the Center for the Diffusion and Investigation of Children's and Young Adult Literature (CEDLIJ). The CEDILIJ was formed in

⁴⁶⁶ Fernando Degiovani, *Los textos de la patria: Nacionalismo políticas culturales y canon en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Vitela Editora, 2007); María Soledad Blanco and Lucas Andrés Perassi, *El fracaso: Una Mirada sobre la literatura argentina (breviario analítico de textos narrativos)* (Jujuy, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Jujuy, 2005).

⁴⁶⁷ Katherine Paterson, *The Invisible Child: On Reading and Writing Books for Children* (Dutton, 2005); Shelby A. Wolf, *Interpreting Literature with Children* (NY: Routledge, 2014); Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University); Henry Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

Córdoba in 1983 by a group of authors, teachers, and activists. Their goal was the recovery of intellectual rigor after the worst years of the dictatorship. They wanted to create a generation of literate and bibliophilic children and young adults through literature. The CEDILIJ's mission predated the Pedagogical Congress and the educational reforms that followed. This group of teachers and authors saw a need for change and created a nonprofit to fill the void. Child readers would require the support and instruction of knowledgeable, capable adults to succeed. To this end, the CEDILIJ began a series of outreach programs to help support teachers, librarians, and any other adults involved in education. One of these outreach methods was the creation of a quarter-monthly journal dedicated to issues around childhood and children's literature.

In the late 1980s, the CEDILIJ used *Piedra Libre* to begin an ongoing dialogue about childhood and, in particular, democratic childhood in Argentina. The contributors to the magazine straddled the adult world of transitional politics, as adults who were aware of what was going on around them, had lived through the dictatorship, and had in some cases come of age as adults during the dictatorship. They were also adults who had been involved either in the intellectual or creative community, sometimes both. They had a unique perspective on the government in transition because they had, as creators and teachers, chafed under the constraints of dictatorship censorship laws and oppressive politics, which not only affected their daily lives, but also their work as teachers, editors, authors, illustrators, and psychologists. The CEDILIJ presented its work as almost sacrosanct. Its members believed that children's literature was essential for the development of a healthy child, and, by extension a healthy society. Children's literature, in addition to providing basic knowledge, could also build empathy, which they considered to be an essential part of *Nunca Más* politics. The *Nunca más* report collected testimony from survivors of the military dictatorship's policy of torture and violence. The title,

which, of course, means “never again,” collected testimony partially to give voice to the atrocity that had occurred and partially to prevent similar things from happening again. The politics of *Nunca mas* included a concerted effort at various levels of society to prevent future episodes of political violence and genocide. Children and childhood education, particularly the promotion of critical thinking and empathy, were important parts of *Nunca Mas* politics. Because the contributors of *Piedra Libre* were so deeply tied into the world of childhood, their opinions and insights emphasized the ways in which they understood the role of the child, the role of the author, and the role of both together within a socio-cultural matrix of education and memory.

The magazine was a collaborative project. As we have seen in previous chapters, diverse groups defined childhood differently at different times. Some, like the Menem government, created a broad parameter for what children were owed and what they owed to the state. Human rights organizations defined children by what they had or what they lacked in a given society. Activist organizations, like *las Madres* and *las Abuelas*, created the most well-known, well-circulated, and well-established vision of the Argentine child, one which was, as we have established, built upon contradictions: the child as helpless, the child as savior, the child as static, the child as change. Most of those elements were not the result of unilateral group decision or an ongoing dialogue, but of political necessity and trauma. In a very different political setting, the authors of *Piedra Libre*, like the CEDILIJ, had the luxury of time and space to more fully consider what it meant to be a child from an intellectual standpoint. They proactively discussed and debated the parameters of childhood and childhood experiences in the articles of *Piedra Libre* from the late 1980s until the 1990s. The contributors discussed this definition in light of each issue’s particular theme, drawing on their personal and political knowledge and their various professional works. In doing so, they articulated contemporary visions for the child

through a variety of subjects, which offers a clear view of what concerned them, what inspired them, and what they understood their role was in relation to children and what children's role was in relation to the broader world.

The editors of this children's magazine, who were part of a broader progressive coalition of teachers, authors, and editors, published as part of a nonprofit organization dedicated to literacy and education. They figured children as imaginative little butterflies that adults should emulate. Each issue of *Piedra Libre* looked at a theme as it related to children, childhood culture, and especially children's literature. The first issue took up something frequently associated with childhood: play. The editorial team used play as a vehicle through which to begin to articulate their ideas of childhood, child culture, and particularly child literary practice. In the note from the editors, Perla Suez and María Teresa Andruetto tried to articulate their mission. They wanted to offer an interdisciplinary discourse about childhood and children's literature responding to a perceived lack of conversations about these subjects. Play was a vehicle through which to explore this "cultura infantil."

In the first article, Perla Suez positioned children as receptors and transmitters of historical knowledge and cultural production. In an article on the importance of play, Suez argued that, through play, children could absorb and replicate cultural and historical knowledge. Imaginative play, she argued, especially of the type that occurs without the use of toys, was almost a pure form of childhood culture and cultural transmission.⁴⁶⁸ Skipping games, singsong games, play with simple objects used to replicate elements of adult life tapped into the most important type of intergenerational transmission.⁴⁶⁹ As Suez says,

This Childhood Culture subsists under marginal forms that can be observed in the recesses of our primary schools...through them, children unconsciously reproduce

⁴⁶⁸ Perla Suez, *Piedra Libre*, no. 1 (May 1987): 7.

⁴⁶⁹ Perla Suez, *Piedra Libre*, no. 1 (May 1987): 7.

the forgotten gestures of their distant ancestors. In the concrete realization of gestures, songs, words or games, the children of our century recover the history, the culture, the essence of their people, built generation after generation.⁴⁷⁰

Suez and Andruetto position children as the receptors and transmitters of shared cultural knowledge, that is somehow at once ubiquitous and authentically national, but also forgotten and marginal. They are like a secret repository of a shared centuries-long history.⁴⁷¹ The idea of the contemporary child as a vessel for the spirit of the national past is reminiscent of the activist discourse about children during the dictatorship as both a living breathing human being and a symbolic representation of nation, politics, and the future. Suez and Andruetto position the child as similarly active and passive during this particular historical moment in which ideas about memory and national identity were engrained in the socio-cultural discourse in Argentina. The question of intergenerational transmission of identity and knowledge is an important one, as is the question of how children obtain, maintain, and eventually share that knowledge.⁴⁷² Suez and Andruetto connected the importance of play with the importance of children's literature. Both, they agreed, are forms of imaginative play.

⁴⁷⁰“Esta Cultura Infantil subsiste bajo formas marginales que se pueden observar en los recreos de nuestras escuelas primarias: la payana, los juegos de la sogá, Don Juan de la Casa Blanca cuantos panes hay en el horno, La Mancha, las hamacas, las escondidas, la raspa, las bolitas, los tejos y rayuelas, formas verbales mágicas--pisa pisuela color de ciruela--o absurdas--A peten samblé? Tucumán lení/mámame surtí buribu canye.

Por ellos, los niños reproducen inconscientemente los gestos olvidados de sus lejanos ancestros. En la actualización concreta de gestos, cantos, palabras o juegos, los niños de nuestro siglo recuperan la historia, la cultura, la esencialidad de su pueblo amasada generación tras generación.” Perla Suez, *Piedra Libre*, no. 1 May 1987

⁴⁷¹ Some of this runs parallel to the idea of intergenerational transmission of trauma. The idea, for example, that traumatic events can be passed from one generation to the next on a deep, almost biological level; that children can absorb and pass on the effects of traumatic knowledge and experience without having lived through the traumatic event themselves. I do not believe that Suez and Andruetto are attempting to make a connection to trauma studies here or even obliquely to the dictatorship, but there is a very clear conversation happening about the role of children as embodying, and even reenacting history, through their actions and their imaginative play.

⁴⁷² Child psychologist and education experts agree that most children in the world will at a certain age and with the proper encouragement, engage in these type of imaginative play, which suggests that they are on some level part of our development as creatures. There is obviously social variance in what types of games children play and how those game reflect social values particularly as they relate to power dynamics. Certainly, play is an important part of social development: it helps children develop cognitive, verbal, and social skills.

It is well known that any child is able to create a whole world with some words and some trinket: turn a broomstick into a swift horse, a bunch of rags into a doll or an orange into a ball.

Games are fossils of archaic practices, just like the folk tales that have formed part of the mythos of the people and after having been narrated in fun evenings by adults, have become the essentials of children's literature. They remain today, our children's patrimony, the ancient games of adults, tongue-twisters, storytelling rounds, remnants of agricultural rites, nuptials, funerals.

It is difficult to find a traditional children's game that lacks deep folkloric roots, because they constitute—through a form of unwritten memory—a way to conserve the remnants of anthropological material that is often multi-secular.⁴⁷³

Suez and Andruetto interpreted play as part of a broader socio-cultural role of the child as anthropological subject, historical receptor/transmitter. Play, like oral history, involves a retelling, re-inscribing, and reimagining from one generation to the next. To examine children's games is to excavate the deeper hidden pieces of social experience, and the processes of historical transmission. Play contains relics of older societies, which, far from being dead, are continually reenacted and resurrected daily. The gestures and rhythms of play hold the ghosts of previous societies, activities, and objects. Child's play, far from a simple or nonsensical diversion, is an anthropological cache of information about social evolution, cultural belonging, and interpersonal communication, between children, and between generations. The way in which children use language to build play and their imaginative spaces—a sort of subculture—forms an important link between children's literature, children's culture, and society.

⁴⁷³“Se sabe perfectamente que cualquier niño es capaz de crear todo un mundo con algunas palabras y alguna bagatela, hacer de uno palo de escoba un brioso caballo, de un montoncito de trapos una muñeca o de una naranja una pelota.

Los juegos son fósiles de arcaicas prácticas, tal como los cuentos populares que han formado parte de los mitos de los pueblos y después de haber sido narrados en divertidas veladas de adultos se han convertido en lo esencial de la literatura infantil. Quedan hoy como patrimonio de nuestros niños antiguos juegos de adultos, tomadillos, trabalenguas, ronda, resabios de ritos agrícolas, nupciales, funerarios.

Es difícil encontrar un juego infantil tradicional que carezca de profundas raíces folclóricas, porque ellos constituyen—mediante una forma de memoria no escrita—una manera de conservar restos de un material antropológico muchas veces multiseccular.” María Teresa Andruetto and Perla Suez, *Piedra Libre* no.1 May 1987.

Suez and Andruetto, in the first article of the first issue of *Piedra Libre*, positioned children as the bridge between the past and the future—through their simultaneous embodiment of both—and as the reenactors and revolutionaries of society as a whole. Play involved embodying the past through action, words, gestures, imagination, and, at the same time, it created an opportunity for children to imagine a world different from the one into which they had been born, or in which they were currently being socialized. As children absorbed and replicated social norms, they also had the opportunity to reimagine, through play, through their engagement with diverse forms of media, those same social norms. Andruetto and Suez emphasized this quality, this particularly transformative quality, as the element that adults should reencounter and replicate in their own lives. Adults could imagine their reality as being different within logical parameters, and they could use these imaginings to effect real change. Suez and Andruetto believed that children were not simply transmitters of historical culture but crucial players in the process of cultural regeneration. That is, children could insert their creativity, their imagination, their sense of possibility into adult society and, in that way, reinvigorate it:

If we want to recover childhood culture for everyone, if we want a school that is united with life and a childhood that inserts itself into the culture of the people in order to consolidate [national] identity, it become clear that it is us, the adults, who need to modify our habitual inertia, recuperate the imaginative without believing that with them our sense of reality is lost.⁴⁷⁴

In this way, Andruetto and Suez idealized the potential long-term social implications of imaginative play during childhood and the ability of children more broadly to envision a utopian world.

⁴⁷⁴“si queremos recuperar para todos la Cultura Infantil, si queremos una escuela que este unida a la vida y una infancia que se inserte en la cultura del pueblo a efectos de consolidar su identidad, resulta claro que es a nosotros los adultos a quienes nos corresponde modificar nuestra habitual inercia, recuperar lo imaginario sin creer que con ellos es pierde el sentido de la realidad.” Suez y Andruetto, 6.

They encouraged adults to rediscover play and reimagine the world. It was important, they maintained, to bring “cultura infantil” into everyday encounters. Childhood energy was active, and adults needed to activate their ability to think, to re-envision, to see something and ask, “why?” to imagine something and ask, “why not?” In order to integrate vital childhood experiences like play into the prevalent culture of adults, in order to bridge schools and society, recess and politics, adults needed to reencounter and embrace the transformative qualities of play in particular. The editors positioned the active, transformative elements of childhood culture against the “inertia” and stagnation of adulthood, but also made “child culture” something learnable and transmissible beyond its specific group. This maps onto the narrative of activists in the 1960s and 1970s, which positioned young people as uniquely able to imagine a new society whereas adults simply reinforced the status quo.⁴⁷⁵ There is obviously a difference between teens in the 1960s and children in the 1980s, but it’s important to notice the ways that these authors used the narrative position of one generation to speak about the next, particularly in terms of how they began to envision the role of this new generation in the transition. However, they end by calling on adults to open their imaginations, to absorb the lessons that children can teach them, and ultimately to embrace the children the once were: imaginative, hopeful, revolutionary.

Even though Suez and Andruetto discussed childhood play as uniquely creative, a living archive of historical culture and experience, and an act of transformative envisioning of the future, the reality that they seemed to interact with in the 1980s was significantly less than ideal. They wanted to find a way to foster a space for both children and adults to benefit from childhood experiences. Between the restrictive policies of the dictatorship, the lack of funding,

⁴⁷⁵ Andrea Andujar, *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2009).

and the lasting effects of authoritarian pedagogy, children had been discouraged from thinking creatively, asking questions, or engaging with different viewpoints, or even critically thinking about traditional views. The contributors to *Piedra Libre* worked to bridge the gap between the vision and the reality.

The authors saw literature as a way to invigorate the imaginative components of childhood. Literature could encourage imaginative play and play could invigorate literary experiences; the two coupled together could create a transformative praxis for children that could have broader social implications. Though the editors often spoke about the importance of reading and playing, they were explicit about the ways in which reading had been absolutely decimated by the dictatorship. Children during the dictatorship had, according to the editors and contributors, never encountered pleasure in reading, had never been encouraged to play, and had subsequently lost the ability to empathize.

In the first issue of *Piedra Libre*, Graciela Periconi, author, activist, and educator, painted a bleak picture of the state of affairs:

The students come from diverse middle schools with a particular shared experience in their education, they have experienced, in most cases, an expository literature—the kind which is found in Spanish-American and Spanish literature—with non-contemporary lessons, which are always outside of the area of interest of the student, who is an adolescent. We cannot ignore the beginning of this story, which has also been frustrating, since it began with primary school *manuales*, rigid, abrupt, fatally boring. This process, which began at 6 or 7 years old, was fortifying a consistent resistance to reading, to the understanding that the world can be looked at from fun, daring or crazy angles, that it's possible to enjoy reading.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁶ “Los alumnos proceden de escuelas medias diversos con una historia particular en su formación, pues han visto en la mayoría de los casos una literatura expositiva--la que cuentan los libros de literatura hispanoamericana y española--, con lecturas no contemporáneas y además siempre fuera del área de interés del alumno, que es un adolescente. A esta historia no le podemos obviar el comienzo, que también ha sido frustrante, pues partió de los libros de lectura de la escuela primaria, rígidos, extemporáneos, fatalmente aburridos. Este *proceso* que comenzó a los 6 o 7 años fue fortificando una consiente resistencia a leer, a comprender que el mundo puede mirarse desde ángulos divertidos, audaces o disparatados, a disfrutar con la lectura.” Graciela Periconi “Leer con placer,” *Piedra Libre* no. 1 (May 1987): 33-34.

According to this account, the educational system discouraged children from reading by completely ignoring children's desires, interests, or even psychological development. This was an attempt to narrow their view of the world. Literature, in other words, had been used in classrooms in a way that Periconi considered antithetical to its true mission. This use of "expositive" literature was part of a process to instill obedience and discourage those "essential" elements of childhood—creativity and play.

The juxtaposition of the imagined child who lived in a magical play world and the real child who lived in a monochrome dystopia was stark, and the real experiences of children in Argentina during the dictatorship and the transition likely fell somewhere in between those two visions. Their experiences also varied largely by their regional location, socioeconomic status, racial background, family structure, and political affiliation.⁴⁷⁷ So why did these contributors feel the need to talk about childhood in this dichotomous way? Partially to reconcile their own experiences with dictatorship, partially to justify the need to renovate and reimagine the experience of childhood, and partially because this paradoxical vision of the Argentine child as active and transformative, as well as passive and oppressed, was very much a part of the activist discourse about children and childhood in the dictatorship and immediate transitional period.⁴⁷⁸ These contributors helped to solidify this vision even as they tried to work through it. They also worked to forge a connection between play, creativity, and empathy, through a reinvention of children's literature. They needed to introduce children to reading that was not didactic and

⁴⁷⁷ Isabella Cosse, *Estigmas de nacimiento: peronismo y orden familiar, 1946-1955* (Universidad San Andrés, 2006); Isabella Cosse, *Infancias--políticas y saberes en la Argentina y Brasil: siglos XIX y XX* (Teseo, 2011); Silvina Gvirtz and Jason Beech, *Going to School in Latin America* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008); Colin M. Lewis, *Argentina in the Crisis Years, 1983-1990: From Alfonsín to Menem* (University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1993); Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality from Perón to Videla* (UNC Press Books, 2014).

⁴⁷⁸ See Chapter 3.

authoritarian or boring, but instead enjoyable and engaging. This would not only encourage their intellectual growth, but their moral and ethical development.

Periconi, like many other contributors to *Piedra Libre* over the years, looked to teachers in particular as a way to counteract dictatorial damage in classrooms in the most immediate way possible. As educators, they understood their role in society as transformative. I argue that we can read teachers as instruments of continuity and change within society. In transitional society especially, where the official standards or even expectations for curriculum development were in flux and contested, teachers had more space to think about ways to get their students to engage creatively and imaginatively with the world. Part of this involved getting children to learn how to play and how to experience the world through the lens of literature:

To introduce the student to pleasant and joyful reading, to initiate them into a wealth of conceptual, ethical and aesthetic discoveries through words, and finally the function of personal realization that literature contains because it leads to the discovery of one's own authenticity and of internal freedom. Every healthy educational act envelops and gives confidence, stimulates growth and "sustains" the scaffolding of the inner world of man.⁴⁷⁹

Getting kids to read meant that they would not only read, but actively reflect upon ethics, concepts, and personal realization. Literature would become a groundwork for a lifetime of introspection, engagement. Children's books might not be the be all and end all, conquering their inner freedom and their true authenticity, but education, and a literary education in particular, would help children to become more fully realized individuals capable of active participation in society. Self-reflexivity was of particular importance to these contributors; they

⁴⁷⁹“Instrumentar el alumno en la lectura placentera y gozosa, iniciarlo en una suerte de descubrimientos conceptuales, éticos y estéticos alrededor de la palabra y finalmente la función de realización personal que encubre la lectura literaria porque lleva a la conquista de la propia autenticidad y de la libertad interior. Todo acto educativo sano encierra y da confianza, estimula a crecer y "sostiene" los andamios del mundo interior del hombre.” *Piedra Libre* no. 3 (September, 1987): 35

wanted children to find their true centers, their moral cores, the type of certainty and deep gravitas that would keep them from being swayed away from *lo correcto*.

The creative team of *Piedra Libre* understood that imaginative play and reading were two paths to get children to that point. They subsequently gave time and attention in every issue to defining the ideals of childhood and the ways to make that vision a reality. They spoke about their idealized version of childhood as if it were a reality, even as they offered ways to change the situation in Argentina. It's a juxtaposition of the figure of the child and the reality, where adults transposed the former over the latter. *Piedra Libre*'s contributors conceptualized and reconceptualized dichotomies of childhood in every issue, positioning different versions against one another, and those clashes and overlaps of the definitions began to shape the parameters of childhood experiences and the definition of the transitional-democratic child.

Consider for instance the juxtaposition of the school child and the child who plays.

Humanitarian and author Gianni Rodari explained that:

There are two kinds of children who read: those who do it for school, because reading is their homework, their obligation, their work (pleasant or not, that is the same); And those who read for themselves, for pleasure, to satisfy a personal need for information (what are the stars? how do taps work?) or to put into action their imagination. To "play at": to imagine themselves an orphan lost in the forest, a pirate and adventurer, an Indian or cowboy, explorer or band leader. To play with words.⁴⁸⁰

He divides children into two categories based on their interactions with reading. Children who are obligated to read and children who seek out and enjoy reading for the information it provides or the sensory experience that it can provide. Imagination could become a vehicle for self-

⁴⁸⁰ "Hay dos clases de niños que leen: los que lo hacen para la escuela, porque leer es su ejercicio, su deber, su trabajo (agradable o no, eso es igual); y los que leen para ellos mismos, por gusto, para satisfacer una necesidad personal de información (que son las estrellas, cómo funcionan los grifos) o para poner en acción su imaginación. Para "jugar a": sentirse un huérfano perdido en el bosque, pirata y aventurero, indio o cowboy, explorador o jefe de una banda. Para jugar con las palabras. Para nadar en el mar de las palabras según su capricho." Gianni Rodari, *Piedra Libre* no. 2 (May 1987): 6.

exploration and satisfaction. Rodari clearly favored the latter, and he wanted to convert the former into the latter, primarily by rethinking the role of literature in children's lives, the types that they encountered, the way that it impacted them, but also, most importantly, the way that adults conceptualized reading and the ways in which adults brought literature into the lives of children. Literature and the experience of reading for pleasure offered children a variety of experiences, or circumstances, that they could incorporate into their imaginative play. All of these examples involved games of make-believe in which children imagined themselves as "other," willingly took on a new subjectivity and imagined diverse circumstances from a new point of view. This type of reading and this type of play encouraged empathy, the development of empathetic connection necessary for the foundation of a stable socialist society or a democratic state in which the participants understood that the welfare of others was important, that not everyone was the same, and that differences in viewpoints should not be punishable with violence or pain.

Contributors sought to repurpose and redeploy children's literature to encourage critical thinking and creativity. Imagination through literature helped personal development, and fantasy, in particular through books and through play, helped children to understand reality and shape it: "fantasy is an instrument to help us know reality...other instruments are the senses. Others, critical thought, science, etc. The hand has five fingers: why should the mind have only one. On the contrary, it has many."⁴⁸¹ Unlike children's literature of the past, which had been used as a tool of oppression and social control to recreate the ideologies of the ruling party, children's literature could and should instead be used to create children who would challenge the

⁴⁸¹ "La fantasía es un instrumento para conocer la realidad...Otros instrumentos son los sentidos. Otros, el pensamiento crítico, la ciencia, etc. La mano tiene cinco dedos: ¿porque la mente solo ha de tener uno? Por el contrario, tiene muchísimos." Rodari, 8.

status quo. It could and should also be something generated from within the culture of childhood, or at least, adjacent to it. That is: children's literature should be ubiquitous and incorporate elements that were native to childhood: imagination and play.⁴⁸² Creating the imaginative child who wanted to learn would require the intervention and continued work of teachers and authors to produce books that could structure imaginative words and be a source of play for children. Books should serve a similar function to games in the lives of children, offering them vehicles through which to make sense of the world around them. Books could also introduce children to the ways in which words could be used to play, words and constructed meanings could shape the world around them both symbolically and factually. In this way, the contributors argued, children's literature was dramatically different from adult literature: its role as foundational, and its role as symbolic meaning maker, rooted it more integrally into the lives of children. Books literally helped children begin to understand the world, make sense of it, and helped them to make sense of themselves. It was not just that children's books offered up information: learning to read, learning to attach symbols to sounds to words to meanings and creating emotional associations for those meanings is a foundational part of the ways in which personalities, mentalities, and identities form.⁴⁸³ The contributors of *Piedra Libre*, many of them authors, understood this and wanted to shape these encounters, these formations.

The contributors argued that children's literature should ostensibly be its own genre with its own purpose at the same time that they argued the role that children's literature should play for people of all ages. They also argued that grownups should not write down to children but

⁴⁸² Rodari, 8.

⁴⁸³ Perry Nodelman, *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (University of Georgia Press, 1990); Marina Warner, *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Leonard C. Marcus and Leonard S. Marcus, *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

approach them directly and honestly. In a moment of grief, contention, devastation, confusion, imagination was “necessary to believe that world would continue and make itself more human.”⁴⁸⁴ Contributors to *Piedra Libre* advocated a type of children’s literature that would traverse the boundaries of age: the qualities of children’s literature should, in their own way, be timeless. Adults of all walks of life could benefit from the influence of children’s literature, from the imagination, the play, the ability to think creatively. They didn’t advocate for the opposite perspective: they argued that some books and themes in adult literature should be kept separate from childhood. The contributors had different parameters for what was “inappropriate” for children than the authors of more “didactic” eras.⁴⁸⁵ While authors of the dictatorship believed that children needed to be protected from politics, sex, and anything that would infringe upon their innocence, contributors to *Piedra Libre* believed that children should have contact with those topics and themes in a controlled and moderated, but still honest, way. They might not advocate that children read a novel that involved sexualized violence, or sexual relationships between adults, but they did advocate books that would teach children about sex when parents deemed the topic ready and approachable. They worked through the idea that adults should adopt childlike wonderment, and children should become more filled with wonderment. They proposed a fusing of child and adult culture. They worked to blur the two realms: children could understand the world, be active citizens, and share the power of their imaginations with adults. These interactions help both groups imagine and create a better world. It was a delicate balance, at times contradictory, and it marked a continuity and a change with

⁴⁸⁴ “necesaria para creer que el mundo puede continuar y hacerse más humano.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 2 (May 1987): 19.

⁴⁸⁵ Claudio Suasnabar, *Intelectuales, exilios y educación: producción intelectual e innovaciones teóricas en educación durante la última dictadura* (Rosario, Argentina: Prohistoria Ediciones, 2013); Gabriela Pesclevi, *Libros que muerden: literatura infantil y juvenil censurada durante la última dictadura cívico-militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional, 2014).

previous regimes, where ignorance had been a political platform, and children had been indoctrinated into politics at an early age without knowing the reality of the political world or even having a conceptualization of the reality in which they lived. *Piedra Libre*'s contributors advocated early engagement with progressive politics, and an overt conversation about morality, responsibly, and citizenship. However, the idea of integrating this pedagogy was hazy at best. How should children engage, encounter, or make sense of this situation? How should adults present information? How should they tell this story, which would become the national story of Argentina's past and shape its future?

The contributors of *Piedra Libre* wrote the first draft of innovative ideas and policies for children's literature in the post-dictatorship era, and it's clear, like any good author writing a first draft, that they were getting all their ideas out in the open and trying to find their central story, work their way out and raising key questions. It's also clear that they understood their project as something that would affect the nation and the future. They understood their task as writers for children as a front line in the establishment of democracy in Argentina. What's less clear is how much they understood what they were doing as shaping the national memory: it's unclear in the early issues of *Piedra Libre* how much the contributors wanted to engage directly with the legacy of the dictatorship with children or how they should go about doing so in their written work, though the dictatorship—the contributors' experiences with it and awareness of it—is present throughout.

The contributors grappled with the relationship among history, literature, childhood and education over time. According to Gianni Rodari, literature is something that is part of and informed by historical events but also somehow transcends them. When he wrote about children readers in *Piedra Libre*, Gianni Rodari defined some "classic" children's authors—Lewis Carroll

and Robert Louis Stevenson amongst them—he argued that these authors had become canonized as hallmarks of children’s literature, not despite, but because of, their particular historical subjectivities:

None of these writers is exempt from ideology because each of them is the child of their own time and no one can grow, act, create outside the currents of great historical and social conflicts. However, for these authors, ideology enters as one of the constituent elements of their personality. It does not occupy the first place, nor the second, nor the third, in the imagination, which plays freely with its own visions, with words, with memory, with the details of experience. It remains, a principle element, that "direct contact" with what we have called "the child-who-plays."⁴⁸⁶

Instead of pontification or diatribe, the authors allowed their world view to be shaped and saturated by their circumstances, their experiences, such that it infused their writing at an almost molecular level. This diffusion of experience is one of the reasons that these children’s books had such longevity, she maintained. Instead of feigned objectivity in dogmatic literature, these authors allowed their experiences to populate their work and did not pretend to be other than they were: products of their time. Rodari presented this particular approach as the most successful method of connection with the “children who play,” and offered it as a successful example to children’s authors as the way to dispense with borders between adult and child literature. He encouraged authors to involve their present moment in their works, not directly necessarily, but by accepting and approaching topics, themes, or even the emotional impact of their moment. Didactic books meant to proscribe childhood experiences would ultimately be lost, she

⁴⁸⁶“Ninguno de esos escritores está exento de la ideología porque cada uno de ellos es hijo de su propio tiempo y nadie puede crecer, actuar, crear al margen de las corrientes de los grandes conflictos históricos y sociales. Sin embargo, en esos autores la ideología entra como uno de los elementos constituyentes de su personalidad. No ocupa ni el primer lugar, ni el segundo, ni el tercero, en la imaginación, que juega libremente con sus propias visiones, con las palabreas, con la memoria, con los datos de la experiencia. Permanece, como hecho principal, ese ‘contacto directo’ con lo que hemos denominado ‘el niño-que-juega.’” Gianni Rodari, *Piedra Libre* no. 2 (May 1987): 6.

maintained, because they did not broach a true engagement with the child that would last for his/her lifetime:

Precisely him, that “child that plays” is finally the true victor, because the book created for the “school child” don’t last, they don’t withstand the passage of time, social transformation, modifications of morals, or even successive revisions of pedagogy or of child psychology. The books born from the imagination for the imagination, however, remain and sometimes they even become better with time. They become ‘classics.’⁴⁸⁷

Rodari encouraged authors to be current with pedagogy, psychology, and social changes, with the continued understanding of the elasticity of these concepts. Like the experience of childhood in Argentina as a whole, children’s literature was a genre built upon transitions, changes, and needed to constantly grow alongside its audience.

Despite sharing very similar long-term political goals, the contributors at times disagreed about the role of authorial subjectivity in children’s literature. Jacqueline Held, in the same issue, took a similar stance about the subjectivity of authors:

Writing without trying to provide these messages does not mean not being committed or denying the validity of that commitment. I understand that no writer can escape his ideas about people, about the world, about society, but if he has passion for words—passion to write—he will be first, writer and whatever he is as a human, socially and politically, what he thinks of people, will always come through what he writes, even if he does not say it explicitly.⁴⁸⁸

Like Rodari, Held argued that authors could never remove their subjectivity from their work, however, she did not necessarily encourage a direct engagement with political views through

⁴⁸⁷Justamente el, ese “niño-que-juega” es finalmente el verdadero vencedor, porque los libros nacidos para el “niño-alumno” no permanecen, no resisten el paso del tiempo, las transformaciones sociales, las modificaciones de la moral ni tan siquiera a las conquistas sucesivas de la pedagogía y de la psicología infantil. Los libros nacidos de la imaginación y para la imaginación, sin embargo, permanecen, y a veces, hasta incluso se hacen más grandes con el tiempo. Se tornan en ‘clásicos.’” Rodari, 6

⁴⁸⁸“Escribir sin pretender aportar estos mensajes no significa no estar comprometido ni negar la validez de ese compromiso. Yo entiendo que ningún escritor puede escapar a sus ideas sobre el hombre, sobre el mundo, sobre la sociedad, pero si tiene pasión por las palabras--pasión de escribir--será primero, escritor y lo que él sea humana, social y políticamente, lo que él piense del hombre, pasar siempre a través de lo que escriba, aun cuando no lo diga explícitamente.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 2 (May 1987): 26

literature. Passing on moralizing ideas, didactic ones, was dangerous, as was writing “down” to children in such a way that they felt alienated. Here again we come up against a paradox in the way that that this group of authors and educators understood the relationship between children’s literature, childhood, and politics: namely, how explicit adult politics should be in children’s literature and which ideologies counted as “political.” The contributors all had “progressive” political leanings, all in favor of democracy in the nation, all in favor of programs that would benefit society. They definitely shunned authoritarianism, but their eschewing of didacticism is confusing, in that, by virtue of their project to interact with children on a personal and political level, their politics would necessarily be part of the stories they would tell. Above, Rodari and Held argued that a natural degree of subjectivity and historical, socio-political perspective was normal and even an important part of writing for children. It’s part of a policy of honesty that subjectivity naturally populates the world of imagination (both for authors and readers). However, the policy of honesty and the policy of not pontificating created a space of conflict for some of these authors: at what point did openness about political ideology become didactic?

The contributors grappled with creating literature that lacked moralizing overtones, but established morality. They struggled with the tension between idealized childhood and the reality of childhood, the materials that they wanted to create and the experiences that they wanted to craft, and the experiences and desires of children themselves. Consider Jacqueline Held’s rather meandering response to a question about what children readers should be like. In the midst of her answer, she veered into a tangent about what books she chose for her own children:

I am interested in books that sensitize the child without giving him closed and fully armed messages: in short, open books that present human life with the variables and subtleties with which it occurs in the reality of every day; books that

are a revelation, but a revelation made smoothly and under a form loaded with poetry.⁴⁸⁹

Here she, as an author and a mother, enshrined a particular type of children's literature that embraced complexity and represented life to children: carefully built revelations about the human experience that would build awareness in children without moralizing overtones. These types of books were difficult to find, and difficult to write, and so it fell to Held and other authors and parents to create these stories for children. Like Jacqueline Held, other contributors to *Piedra Libre* took a strong stance against "moralizing" children's books, at the same time that their project of progressive children's books, and deliberately open writing for children held at its center the desire to create a new moral center for Argentine children and the Argentina nation.

In its own way, this issue of *Piedra Libre*, in which the contributors explored the role of the imagination in children's lives, tells us much more about the ways that adults struggled to conflate and separate imagination and reality in their understanding of children's lives. Their writing about children's imagination as a way to create a new world says a lot about how they wanted to use their own imaginations with children as a vehicle for their conversation and their imaginings about the future and that present. As much as they talk about the need for children to develop the ability to imagine, or adults' lost ability to imagine, they seem to be grappling with their ability as a generation of writers, teachers, and editors, to imagine or create a better world. Their advice for the way to shape children's experiences was also advice for adults to use literature, especially imagination and play, to reconceptualize a world, perhaps to recover it. There is a degree to which this discursive positioning of "lost childhood" maps onto national

⁴⁸⁹"Me interesan los libros que sensibilizan al chico sin aportarle mensajes cerrados y totalmente armados: en fin, libros abiertos que planteen la vida humana con las variables y sutilezas con que se da en la realidad de todos los días; libros que son una revelación, pero una revelación hecha suavemente y bajo una forma cargada de poesía." *Piedra Libre*, no. 2 (May 1987): 28.

discourses about lost children, and the lost childhoods of children growing up during el *proceso*, and, though the contributors only point to the way that these children were deprived of cultural expression, or literary exploration, or the hallmarks of childhood (imagination, play, creativity) because of government politics, they don't directly address the emotional impact that these politics may have had. The discussion of idealized childhood alongside a discussion of how to address the ways that that reality didn't exist created a tension, or a void, in which these missing children exist alongside an imagined childhood that doesn't exist. Like Las Abuelas, these contributors balanced between children as active and children as passive members of society. Perla Suez articulated her vision and some of the tension between what adults expected of children and what they imagined for them:

One does not dream in a vacuum, or dream of nothing to escape or to isolate oneself the world in which we live. We are not in the world to dream outside of it.

Our dreams are built on the foundation of a social reality and the very human need to communicate and believe.

Sometimes, we dream that we are immortal for a second, no more, because we dream in and with the concrete world of which we are part. Our fictions become reality when we can give them to others and they overflow with real significance. But what is reality? Only what exists? And in that case, is there something that does not exist? Are both so different? Who, and based on what criteria, establishes the limits?⁴⁹⁰

She directed these questions to children's literature, transposed them on children's minds, but these are questions that the contributors and adults moving in these progressive, educational circles attempted to answer for themselves. Their work on imagination in 1987 was not about

⁴⁹⁰“No se sueña en el vacío, ni se sueña de la nada para evadirse o para aislarse del mundo que nos toca vivir. no estamos en el mundo para soñar fuera de él. Nuestros sueños se construyen en base a una realidad social y a la necesidad muy humana de comunicar y creer. A veces, soñamos que como inmortales por un segundo, no más, porque soñamos en y con el mundo concreto del cual somos parte. Nuestras ficciones se tornan realidad cuando podemos ofrecerlas a los otros y rebosan de significados reales. ¿Pero que es realidad? ¿Solamente lo que existe? ¿Y en tal caso, hay algo que no existe? ¿Una y otra son tan diferentes? Quien y en base a que criterios establece los límites.” *Piedra Libre*, no.2 (May 1987): 33.

fantasy, but about creating new realities and questioning authority, the status quo, the presented normal. They conceptualized children as challengers of the accepted norm through imagination. Literature was a way to give them the skills necessary to explore reality, to explore their place in it, but also for adults to process the world and think of ways to change it.

The contributors to *Piedra Libre* continued to establish, and occasionally explore, the tension between idealized childhood and real childhood, trying to bring the latter to the former. They also worked to establish the relationship among children's literature, childhood, and social change. This certainly began with the discussion of childhood play and imagination, but the contributors carried this theme through subsequent issues of the magazine, emphasizing and reemphasizing the ways that children should continually challenge society and the ways that children's literature in particular could teach children to engage critically with the world. In a subsequent issue, for example, Celia Bettolli conducted an interview with Pablo Medina, director of the Centro de documentación en la literatura infantil (Cedimeco). As a teacher and librarian, Medina was motivated to help create a bibliographical center in the Province of Buenos Aires with volumes of children's literature, as well as writing on related subjects, such as pedagogy, education, and theater. Medina subsequently had a great deal of insight, not only into the economics and politics of child readership, and the problems of book circulation throughout the nation, but the lack of books and the role of reading and literature for Argentine children. He also had deep belief in the importance of children's literature in society. He saw the specific difficulties of integrating reading into classrooms: namely a lack of books for children to read. Schools lacked books in general, and specifically, the types of books that represented the ideals that *Piedra Libre* had for children's books:

The archive, documentation, memory, the past gives us an idea of how this society works. After all, what we are looking for through literature, folklore,

history, is to know who we are, ethnically, socially, historically. Children's literature is not apart from that, that's the issue, it's as involved as everything else.⁴⁹¹

Medina placed children's literature at the heart of crafting Argentine history and identity with a deep awareness of the importance of narrative, storytelling, and self-awareness.

By 1991, the collaborators of *Piedra Libre* had created a consensus on childhood. Through their discussions and debates that had helped to establish a clearer understanding of childhood and established parameters for debate about the role of children and children's literature in Argentina. They were able to focus on the obstacles to creating a literate and involved public. Medina implied that it wasn't a lack of books being written for children, but a lack of books reaching children. His project, to create an archive of children's literature and collaborative projects to bring books to children in impoverished public schools in the greater Buenos Aires area were well conceived, but faced many challenges, particularly a lack of funding from the government, and difficult cooperation with Argentine presses. Nevertheless, these difficulties only served to reinforce Medina's convictions and focus his strategies:

Paths are opened. I have tried to take children's literature as another way of telling history, another way of telling life ... If there are no books, everything else is useless. What we have then is books for people to contact each other.

We exchange: we bring books and bring local literature. We have been able to build a good reservoir, we have made contact, and this kind of success has nothing to do with money, it has to do with the desire, with the desire to create a country where the book is present because the book can help us. If one reads, one reflects, if one reflects one can make constructive criticism, where there is criticism there is ability to participate, and participation determines an individual and social appreciation. The value of reading is that: it open worlds. And that's what I wanted to do.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹“El archivo, la documentación, la memoria, el pasado nos dan una idea de cómo funciona esta sociedad. Al fin y al cabo, lo que estamos buscando a través de la literatura, del folclore, de la historia, es saber quiénes somos, étnicamente, socialmente, históricamente. La literatura infantil no está al margen de eso, ese es el asunto, esta tan metida como todo lo otro.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 7 (May 1991): 20.

⁴⁹² “Se abren caminos. He tratado de llevar la literatura infantil como otra forma de contar la historia, otra forma de contar la vida... Si no hay libros todo lo demás no sirve. Lo que llevamos entonces es libros para que la gente se contacte con ellos. Hacemos intercambio: llevamos libros y traemos literatura local. Hemos podido armar un buen

He harkened back to earlier conversations about the importance of literature in fostering imagination and the importance of imagination in improving society. Medina, who by this point had lived and worked through the dictatorships of the 60s, el *proceso*, and the Alfonsín administration, didn't point to el *proceso* as the only cause of problems in Argentina education and children's literature. He directly blamed Menem for funding soccer instead of education. More and more contributors began to identify contemporary politics as particularly antagonistic to their cause and began to direct their advocacy of child agency towards, not simply the legacy of dictatorship, but the burgeoning neoliberal regime.

In the subsequent issue of *Piedra Libre*, award-winning author Silvia Poletti identified problems facing children's literature in contemporary Argentine society, principally a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose and its contents:

People underestimate children's literature because they do not know it, because they have a misconception of literature in general, because they think that literature should be only an evasion, a diversion, and not a deep formation of being. And children's literature, for them, is also a substitute for the school book and, a bit, the cartoon.⁴⁹³

She maintained that adults looked down upon children's literature, not because of its politics, but because of its purported simplicity and lack of depth. In 1985, the didacticism of children's literature or its superficiality would have been a critique made by the progressive *Piedra Libre* editors and contributors, but as they had worked to correct these issues, the continued

reservorio, hemos hecho contacto y este tipo de logros no tiene que ver con el dinero, tiene que ver con las ganas, con el deseo de conformar un país donde el libro este presente porque el libro nos puede ayudar. Si se lee se reflexiona, si se reflexiona se puede hacer crítica constructiva, donde hay crítica hay capacidad de participación y la participación determina una valoración individual y social. El valor de la lectura es ese: abrir mundos. Y eso es lo que yo quise hacer." *Piedra Libre*, no. 7 (May 1991): 22.

⁴⁹³ "La gente subestima a la literatura infantil porque no la conoce, porque tiene un concepto equivocado de la literatura en general, porque piensa que la literatura debe ser únicamente una evasión, una diversión y no una formación profunda del ser. y la literatura infantil, para ellos, también es un sucedáneo del libro de lectura y, un poco, de la historieta." *Piedra Libre*, no. 8 (September 1991): 5.

misunderstanding of children's literature as something silly and wasteful became frustrating to them. They had, as authors worked to write for the type of child that they imagined and invented: an innocent, engaged, intelligent, curious child, who required media that would nurture and challenge them to critically engage with the world. It was also a viewpoint that mimicked *proceso* era ideas about children's literature and children's media more broadly. The editors of *Piedra Libre* combated this view in their writing and their activism.

For our part, we opted for a conception of a book that...from the point of view of literature, captures life as it happens, with its tumults and hopes, with its afflictions and joys.

We intend that this issue of *Piedra Libre*, dedicated to encouraging reading, is incisive and provocative, facilitator and progenitor of experiences, articles, and literary comments. We feel, with many of our readers, that the magazine continues to be a pretext, a space for action, a forum for all those who, like us, need to share a conception of the book that goes far beyond our predictions.

The amazement and the search for our own paths is a right, as much as it is to fill one's lungs with fresh air. We want books that incite to make and unmake worlds, books that give everyone the right to imagine the unimaginable, so that both children, and us, can immerse ourselves in the language that intrigues us, the one we breathe, the one that actually involves all of us.⁴⁹⁴

They faced difficulty not only in creating a new genre of literature, a new group of young people through their writing, but getting adults to consider their work important. Again, they emphasized the relationship between imagination and change, the ways that children have a specific right to experience worlds through literature and develop their imaginative skills. Even

⁴⁹⁴ "Por nuestra parte optamos por una concepción de libro que...desde la literatura asuma la vida como ella transcurre, con tumultos y esperanzas, con aflicciones y alegrías. Pretendemos que este número de *Piedra Libre* consagrado a la animación a la lectura sea incitante y provocativo, facilitador y pregonero de experiencias, artículos, y comentarios bibliográficos. sentimos, con muchos de nuestros lectores, que la revista va siendo un pretext, un espacio para la acción, un foro de todos los que, como nosotros, necesitan compartir una concepción de libro que vaya mucho más allá de nuestras predicciones. El asombro y la búsqueda de propios caminos es un derecho, como lo es llenar los pulmones de aire fresco. Deseamos libros que inciten hacer y deshacer mundos, libros que den a todos el derecho a imaginar lo inimaginable para que tanto los chicos como nosotros podamos sumergirnos en el lenguaje que nos atañe, el que respiramos, el que de hecho nos tiene implicados." *Piedra Libre*, no. 8 (September 1991): 6.

as they called for the expansion of children's imaginations, they worked to build the imagination of adults and fight against prejudices against children's media and open themselves to its transformative properties.

Hand in hand with imagination and play was the introduction of humor and irreverence that came into play for the contributors of *Piedra Libre* in the ninth issue, published in 1999. The contributors to this issue, who included artists in addition to authors, editors, and teachers, focused on the ways in which children were predisposed to humor, particularly transgressive humor. Contributors aligned children's humor with "popular humor"—humor of the popular classes and particularly colonized or socially excluded people. They repeatedly pointed out that popular folktales involved a smaller animal or character overthrowing, outwitting, or otherwise humiliating a larger, more powerful creature, for the benefit of other small creatures. Ester Rocha identified this as a common trend of transgressive humor among marginalized or oppressed groups. This ties into their view of childhood culture as essentially anti-establishment, a repository of 'true' culture in the face of dictatorship, a subversive element of society that was targeted, but never truly eliminated by the *proceso*. She also identified childhood as a colonized space, something that other authors had suggested in previous issues but never so directly addressed. Rocha connected childhood humor with the trends she saw in folkloric humor, particularly narratives that pitted smaller, subjugated characters against larger, more powerful ones:

In the literature dedicated to children and adolescents, a significant number of contemporary writers have journeyed into the universe of the popular story and have achieved excellent recreations...other tinier characters that acquire relevance for their transgressive attitude have appeared in the humoristic stories of contemporary children's literature. Lice, fleas, bugs and hornets that escape from an established order to relocate and have not only voice but vote.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁵ "En la literatura dedicada a niños y adolescentes, un importante número de escritores contemporáneos ha incursionado en el universo del cuento popular y ha logrado excelentes recreaciones...en los cuentos de humor de la

She noted the ways in which children's literature embraced and replicated the literary trend of transgression and irreverence between two different classes of people. She particularly emphasized the way in which tiny creatures resisted, mocked or outsmarted bad leadership, in stories that resulted in them not only having a say in the fictional world, but a *vote*. These stories gave a model for democratic revolution and governance. She continued:

Why do children identify with these characters? Why does the spark of humor so easily catch in them? Is it not because children also fight for a space, for a participation that is promised to them when they "are big"?

These characters meet in assemblies to solve problems, to support each other, to determine their lives. These "new short madmen" break cycles of power to establish a more just order. The recipients of these stories repeat the old ritual and view reality laughing to themselves. The stumble, caricature, and mockery are bridges that allow them to recover their space⁴⁹⁶

It's a marked change in the way that adults affectionately figured children as "locos" as if a little bit of craziness was a good thing, rather than a threat to broader society. It marks a move away from the type of dictatorial thought that positioned Las Madres as locas, and the idea of being crazy as being the epitome of frightening and dangerous.⁴⁹⁷ Rocha identified this humoristic trend as a link to the Argentine past, a recuperation of tradition, but also a way to move forward. She understood children as part of society, but separate from it, and saw humor, especially the

literatura infantil contemporánea han aparecido otros personajes más pequeñitos que adquieren relevancia por sus actitudes transgresoras. Piojos, pulgas, chinches y avispones que se escapan de un orden establecido para reubicarse y tener no solo voz sino voto." *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 8

⁴⁹⁶ "¿Por qué los niños se identifican con estos personajes? ¿Por qué la chispa del humor prende tan fácilmente en ellos? ¿No será porque también os chicos pugnan por un espacio, por una participación que se les promete para cuando "sean grandes"?"

Estos personajes se reúnen en asambleas para resolver problemas, para ser solidarios, para decidir sobre sus vidas. Estos "nuevos locos bajitos" rompen círculos de poder para poner un orden más justo. Los destinatarios de estos relatos repiten el antiguo rito y ven la realidad riéndose. El traspié, la caricatura y la burla son puentes que les permiten recuperar su espacio." *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 10

⁴⁹⁷ This fear of "craziness" has been starkly present in Argentine reformist, social thought since the 1900s. See: Jonathan Ablard, *Madness in Buenos Aires: Patients, Psychiatrists, and the Argentine State, 1880-1983* (University of Calgary Press, 2008); Jorge Salessi, *Médicos maleantes y maricas: higiene, criminología y homosexualidad en la construcción de la nación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1871-1914)* (Buenos Aires: Viterbo Editora, 1995).

picaresque ability to make fun of, challenge, or reimagine power relations, as an integral part of the Argentine future. Authors who traded in humor, played an essential role by getting children to tap into their natural inclination towards subversion, they also taught and trained them in the ability to challenge authority, particularly unjust forms of authority: *los grandes* who pretended to know everything.

Cecilia Bartoli further emphasized transgressive humor as an essential part of Argentine culture and democratic practice. She made an important link between humor and imaginative play:

Irony, satire and so many other ways of creating that distance or rupture that establishes humor, they adopt varied expressions and characteristics that always include the idea of play. To the point that, in many cases, the humorous lies specifically in simply playing with language.⁴⁹⁸

In this way too, she connected humor to childhood as a natural extension of childhood behaviors. Like imagination, humor was supposedly something that was inherently a part of childhood but something that children specifically needed to learn. The contributors to this issue emphasized irony and absurdity as particularly important in challenging authority, and here, more than ever, emphasized the innate intelligence of children to understand and participate in humor.

Maria Teresa Andruetto identified three main principles of humor that were particularly relevant to and important within childhood: humor of the obvious, the absurd, and the ironic.

She saw these as

Three paths for criticism, three ways to laugh at ourselves, and others, each generation finds its place in the world by questioning everything that surrounds it. It is part of being young to question customs, social organization, governments, language, parental authority, values.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁸ “La ironía, la sátira y tantas otras formas de crear esa distancia o ruptura que instaura el humor, adoptan variadas expresiones y características que siempre conllevan la idea de juego. Al punto de que, en muchos casos, lo humorístico reside específicamente en el simple juego con el lenguaje.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 11.

⁴⁹⁹ “tres caminos para la crítica. Tres caminos para reírnos de nosotros. Y de los otros. Cada generación encuentra su lugar en el mundo a partir del cuestionamiento a todo cuanto la rodea. Forma parte del ser joven poner en duda

Imagination and play interacted through humor, through the ability to see the world differently, and to challenge authority and the rules of the world. She also, like the other contributors, identified humor as an essential part of childhood, one that children intimately understood, but one which authors needed to teach them in order for them to become critical citizens.

She suggested that literature could be a vehicle to introduce children to this particular form of critical humor. Literature for children had been for much of Argentine history overly seriously and didactic. Teaching children to laugh, to engage with the world, with a sense of absurdity “no es frecuente en los libros.”⁵⁰⁰ Helping students engage with humor would help them to become more critical citizens.⁵⁰¹ Like Rocha and Andruetto, children’s author Ricardo Mariño argued that:

Humor, for its part, works with another limit...duplicity, the other face, the unexpected that interrupts: a jump in the logical chain. The simulation of language presents unexpected moments of pleasure, an early childhood taste for nonsense which consists of making instrumental saying that which isn’t said.⁵⁰²

Children, he maintained had an innate taste for rupturing rules and logics, for challenging them, and for enjoying double meanings and things unsaid. In particular, all of these contributors, linked play, humor, imagination, and especially the capacity of children to use and develop these skills. Like HIJOS at the same moment, the authors positioned children as well situated to challenge authority and to bring about change. In earlier issues of *Piedra Libre*, the contributors

las costumbres, la organización social, los gobiernos, el lenguaje, la autoridad paterna, los valores.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 16

⁵⁰⁰ *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 17.

⁵⁰¹ *Piedra Libre*, no. 9, (May 1992): 17

⁵⁰² “El humor, por su parte, trabaja con otro limite y es lo definición, el dobléz, la otra cara, lo inesperado que irrumpe: un salto en la cadena lógica. la simulación del lenguaje presenta inesperados momentos de placer desde el temprano gusto infantil por el disparate que consiste en hacer que instrumental para decir no diga.” *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 22.

had emphasized repeatedly the importance of imagination for children to create and realize new worlds; here, they argued that imagination, coupled with linguistic play through literature and building on oral traditions, could essentially make it possible for children, to not just imagine new worlds but discursively bring them into being. Mariño in particular drove home the relationship between humor and transformation, which he based on the definition of humor as being naturally subversive:

Every humorous fact is related to the presence of knowledge (a law) and a quick operation to momentarily collapse that law. Humor is a development that follows from learning, such that it already appears with the first vestiges of "knowledge." A very small child laughs when his father pretends that he is going to scold them. The man makes the same gestures and says the same words as when he really scolds them, and yet the child realizes that it is before a representation, a parody, something laughable. With the minimum use of language, a three-year-old child laughs at the substitution of content...In fact, there is humor from the first rudimentary aspects of language.

The limits passed by humor have to do with the revelation of an unsuspected face of things, a subversion of the known.⁵⁰³

If play gave children the ability to understand the world and themselves within it, humor offered them the chance to directly challenge reality. Children, Mariño argued, had an innate ability to comprehend humor, to understand jokes made at the expense of the current order. It was important to foster this capacity within them and to give them examples, through literature, of this type of humor, the kind which resonated with their sense of the world.

The contributors began to define childhood as a stable entity that functioned within society as part of it and children as active participants *Piedra Libre's* contributors wrote about

⁵⁰³ "Todo hecho humorístico se relaciona con la presencia de un saber (una ley) y una rápida operación de momentáneo derrumbe de esa ley. El humor es una elaboración posterior a un aprendizaje, de modo que ya aparece con los primeros vestigios de un "saber". Un niño muy pequeño ríe cuando su padre finge que lo va a retar. El hombre hace los mismos gestos y dice las mismas palabras que cuando lo reta de verdad, y sin embargo el niño capta que está ante una representación, una parodia, algo risible. con el mínimo manejo del lenguaje un chico de tres años reí ante la sustitución de contenidos...En rigor, hay humor desde los primeros rudimentos de lenguaje. Los límites traspasados por el humor tienen que ver con la revelación de una faz insospechada de las cosas, una subversión de lo conocido." *Piedra Libre*, no. 9 (May 1992): 22.

children and for adults working with children. They tried to understand the role of children within transitional society, the role of adults in shaping childhood experiences, and the people that these children would be. They strategically toggled between two visions of childhood: the idealized childhood as a space of pure creativity and the reality of childhood in Argentina, where many children had been discouraged from the types of creativity that the contributors considered essential to the childhood experience. Contributors alternatively spoke of these two childhoods as one, in one moment talking about how adults needed to embrace their childhood characteristics and the next talking about the ways in which Argentine children had no idea how to play or imagine. They did this primarily as a way to point out areas for reform. By the early 1990s, though, the contributors had started to settle their discussions about childhood and work within an established set of criteria that they determined as part of the childhood experience: namely imagination, play, and the role of literature as an intermediary between the adult world and childhood.

LA MANCHA: CHASING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

By the late 1990s, the definition of childhood and the parameters of childhood experience, like the nation itself, began to morph away from the fraying open ends of the dictatorship and more into the defined parameters of democracy, yet one that took place under a neoliberal regime. The contributors of *La Mancha*, a magazine that focused on childhood and children's literature starting in the late 1990s, were thus able to build on this established vision of childhood to talk directly about children's literature: not just what it should or could be (because the contributors of *Piedra Libre* had exhaustively discussed it), but what it was and how it could change and develop further.

La Mancha thus focused much more heavily on children's literature than on the concept of childhood. Many of *Piedra Libre*'s former contributors wrote for *La Mancha*, but *La Mancha* had a board of directors in addition to an editor, Eric Domergue, whose brother had been disappeared when he was a child and who had become a children's author by the 1990s. This board was comprised entirely of children's authors, including Graciela Cabal, Laura Devetach, Ricardo Mariño, Graciela Montes, Graciela Perez Aguilar, Gustavo Roldan, Silvia Schujer, and Ema Wolf. *Piedra Libre* used childhood as a lens to understand children's literature and society, *La Mancha* used children's literature to look at childhood and society more broadly. They essentially worked on the same subjects, but their point of entry was different. *Piedra Libre* began with childhood culture and worked its way outward into a conversation of literature as it related to children, and children as they related to society. *La Mancha* launched its conversation from children's literature as a way to contemplate shifting dynamics of childhood and society. They asked similar questions from a different point of view and with very similar philosophical and political goals. *La Mancha* integrated more work from children's authors, and its contributors also worked to incorporate children's literature and reviews of children's literature, as well as overviews of children's literature as a field.

Like *Piedra Libre*, issues of *La Mancha* were typically organized around a certain theme. Both magazines, like the children's books they write about, divide page space between text and image. Typically, pages in *La Mancha* include several columns of tightly packed text, interspersed with images and illustrations. The magazine opens with a statement from the editors, includes several articles written by authors or teachers on a given theme, includes reprints or excerpts of children's literature, profiles of different writers, and, on occasion, letters from readers or interviews with commentary. It's very busy magazine, with lots of space for

interaction. The issues of *Piedra Libre* were dedicated strictly to a theme, whereas for the contributors of *La Mancha*, the theme was more casual. By the time *La Mancha* began publishing, *Piedra Libre* had already done very important work conceptualizing and debating the role of children within Argentine society and the role of literature and education in their lives. The contributors to *La Mancha* had more flexibility to play with those ideas because they'd already been established. They had the space to return to the topics that *Piedra Libre* had already taken up, and it also allowed them to explore new subjects.

La Mancha also focused entire issues to the role of play in childhood, but the way it did so was distinctive. Consider Ricardo Mariño's return to the "child who plays" in the second issue of *La Mancha*. He reminded the readers that play was an essential part of childhood, but also an essential part of writing. He referenced the importance that famous and acclaimed authors, like Pablo Neruda, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Paul Sartre, had placed on child reading and equated the task of children's authors and the work of these literary giants. He harkened back to the idea of play as representation, play as a form of discourse, and the use of imagination to create new realities on top of existing ones:

One could point out similarities between the action of the child who creates a fiction when playing and that of the writer who also, when creating a written fiction, plays—if the child plays to "live" that fictitious situation, the most refined game of the writer would have obligatorily a recipient because every narrative is supposed to. The writer plays at writing and gives to the reader, not the spectacle of the game itself, but rather the possibility of playing at living through the characters of the story.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁴se podrían señalar similitudes entre la actividad del chico que crea una ficción al jugar y la del escritor que también, al crear una ficción escrita, juega...si el chico juega para "vivir" esa situación ficticia, el más refinado jugar del escritor tendría obligatoriamente un destinatario porque toda narración lo supone. El escritor juega al escribir y destina al lector, no el espectáculo de el mismo jugando, sino la posibilidad de jugar a vivir en los personajes del relato." *La Mancha*, no. 2 (November 1996): 26.

Literature acted as a vehicle for a reimagining of the world and the contributors continued to draw connections between play and writing, not only in the ways that literature could aid in play, but the ways in which the act of writing was also an act of imaginative play, something that the authors of *Piedra Libre* referenced obliquely without outwardly establishing this connection. The editors of *La Mancha* more directly considered the ways that adults occasionally struggled with their ability to conceptualize or understand childhood:

We adults usually form images of children: we see them as loving angels, naive and sexless or as primitive creatures difficult to control. In the middle of those extremes there are nuances. Our representations do not always coincide with reality, with those children that we see in the streets, in houses, in schools, and in all the places we travel daily... it is worth remembering that we live with children.⁵⁰⁵

They acknowledged the difficulties that adults had in imagining childhood and children. It was difficult, they maintained, for adults to conceptualize children as fully realized people, and often this was what complicated the relationship between adults with children's literature and with children more broadly. It's what made it especially difficult for authors to engage with children in the classroom. Indeed, many contributors identified the greatest problem facing children's literature as the difficulty in incorporating literature into classrooms. In this, the project identified by the contributors of *Piedra Libre*—to create literature that was not didactic or authoritarian—ran counter to the types of reading that old guard teachers and educational policy wanted for children in the classroom.

The contributors of *La Mancha* argued that though literature had flourished in the 1980s and 1990s, the difficulty that literature had in the classroom was a result of Menem's financial

⁵⁰⁵ “Los adultos solemos formarnos imágenes de los niños: los vemos como ángeles amorosos, ingenuos y asexuados o como criaturas primitivas difíciles de controlar. En el medio de esos extremos hay matices. no siempre nuestras representaciones conciden con la realidad, con esos niños que vemos en la calle, en las casas, en la escuela, y en cada lugar que transitamos a diario...convendrá recordar que convivimos con niños.” *La Mancha*, no 9 (July 1999): 3.

policies. Graciela Montes, an active contributor to *La Mancha* and a member of the board of directors, was particularly aware of the ways in which children's literature had evolved historically throughout the 1980s and 1990s. She was a key part of the movement as a writer, teacher, and a liaison with the UN and the Ministry of Education. Teachers had in many ways opened the path for children's literature to flourish. They were on the front lines, working to challenge didacticism and fill the void for children:

I move now to the sphere of recent events that we have been able to register lately. It was the school that opened the doors to literature. A broad gesture, seductive and dazzling, especially in its first stage—the most generous version. It happened in the 80s, when reading seemed hopeless. First a few, and then many, more and more schools decided to embark on a path that some pioneering teachers—I think of the Maestro Iglesias, Olga and Leticia Cosettini—had always been proposing: the stories of imaginary worlds opened unsuspected areas, it multiplied pleasant encounters with the book.⁵⁰⁶

Female teachers turned writers were some of the pioneers in children's literature, and their work was prolific and creative and filled a void. At the same time, this type of literature posed a challenge to the educational policies of the Menem administration, which, on paper, encouraged children to practice freedom of expression, but in actuality placed enormous financial burdens on teachers and students leaving little room for exploration or creativity in the classroom. Ofelia Seppia, a teacher, described the problem as:

The main activities that the school develops to "teach reading" revolve around questionnaires, summaries, underlining techniques and, in the best cases, the recognition of different types of discourse; the evaluations are "comprehension tests". That is, reading has a purpose; memorize data and demonstrate what you have learned.

⁵⁰⁶“Me traslado ahora a la esfera de los acontecimientos que hemos podido registrar últimamente. Fue la escuela la que le abrimos puertas a la literatura. Un gesto amplio, seductor y deslumbrante, especialmente en su primera etapa—la versión más generosa—. Sucedió en los años 80, cuando la lectura parecía desahuciada. Primo unas pocas y después muchas, cada vez fueron más las escuelas decididas a embarcarse en un camino que algunos maestros pioneros—pienso en el Maestro Iglesias, en Olga y Leticia Cosettini—habían venido propiciando desde siempre: los cuentos los mundos imaginarios abrían zonas insospechadas, había que multiplicar los encuentros placenteros con el libro.” Graciela Montes, “Ilusiones en conflicto”, *La Mancha*, no. 3 (March 1997): 5

These texts for the students are closed and finished because what the questionnaire wanted is satisfied, which skews the reading and prevents [the students from] seeing other things, other possible questions, and inhibits the process of elaboration. This way of reading and working favors fragmentism: books are read in pieces, controlled by pieces, and the overall meaning of the text is not addressed.⁵⁰⁷

Children's literature had expanded, but restriction of the educational system, particularly the economics of it had delayed its incorporation into classrooms. The goal of teaching children to read was basic competency, not to create the child who reads for pleasure that *Piedra Libre's* editors had so wanted to foster. Working to establish additional spaces for children to encounter literature—libraries for instance—was a project that many of these authors and teachers pursued actively. They also stressed the importance of teachers as gatekeepers to education, to broader society and culture, particularly through their role as alphabetizers. Even if the financial or situational constraints of the Menem administration made it difficult for teachers to incorporate the newest books in their classrooms, in teaching children to read, and in telling them stories, they gave children keys to a broader literary world.

The contributors to *La Mancha* understood teachers to be an important part of children's experience of the world. They were some of the most important mediators of children's reading and their subsequent engagement with society and culture. *La Mancha's* contributors further acknowledged the role of teachers as advocates for children. In the fourth issue of *La Mancha*, the editorial board opened with a statement of solidarity with the nation's teachers. Titled "preserva y triunfarás," the children's authors of *La Mancha* stood with the nation's teachers,

⁵⁰⁷“las actividades principales que la escuela desarrolla para "enseñar a leer" giran en torno a cuestionarios, resúmenes, técnicas de subrayado y, en el mejor de los casos, al reconocimiento de distintos tipos de discurso; las evaluaciones son "pruebas de comprensiones". Es decir, la lectura tiene una finalidad; memorizar datos y demostrar lo aprendido. Estos textos de los alumnos son cerrados y acabados porque así lo predetermino el cuestionario, que sesga la lectura e impide ver otras cosas, otras preguntas posibles e inhibe el proceso de elaboración. Este modo de leer y trabajar favorece el fragmentarismo: se lee por pedazos, se controla por pedazos y el sentido global del texto no es atendido.” Ofelia Seppia, “Sentidos y contrasentidos,” *La Mancha*, no. 4 (July 1997): 29.

who had been striking on behalf of their students, particularly the lack of funding to provide poor children meals in public school:

The teachers of our country have chosen not to eat. In this way they defend and protect their students who, if they do not eat, it is because they have nothing. We stand by you in your resistance. Like them, we demand a greater educational budget, we defend the public school, we are ready to fight against the arrogance of the powerful and the approval of the conformists. Our demands may not come to disturb the ears of the perverse, but they will leave open the path to dignity. That road is already free. It is a matter of moving forward, and no one knows the value of perseverance as much as teachers. The writers that work for children feel the need to express solidarity with this effort that today, finally, garner the recognition of the whole society.⁵⁰⁸

The authors here do something important. Not only do they align themselves with teachers as equals and colleagues, people who share an important project of teaching young children. They also situate teachers as political actors, who understand, better than anyone, the value of perseverance. This relates to their day to day work as educators in the classroom, but to the role of teachers within Argentine society as advocates for children and as bearers of memory and truth in the face resistance and oppression.

The contributors of *La Mancha*, like the contributors of *Piedra Libre*, and the Ministry of Education, emphasized the relationship among teachers, children, and books. In the sixth issue of *La Mancha*, published in 1998, Graciela Montes wrote about the changing nature of the children's literary matrix. This is a topic that the authors of *La Mancha* returned to repeatedly, emphasizing the ways in which the field of children's literature had been revolutionized since the 1980s. In issue 6, Montes emphasized the important role of "mediators" in children's literature.

⁵⁰⁸ "Los maestros de nuestro país eligieron no comer. De ese modo defienden y protegen a sus alumnos que, si no comen, es porque no tiene qué. Nosotros los acompañamos en su resistencia. Igual que ellos, reclamamos por un mayor presupuesto educativo, defendemos la escuela pública, estamos dispuestos a pelear contra la soberbia de los poderosos y el beneplácito de los conformistas. Nuestros reclamos tal vez no lleguen a molestar las orejas de los perversos, pero dejarán abierto el camino a la dignidad. Ese camino ya está libre. Es cuestión de seguir adelante, y nadie conoce tanto el valor de la perseverancia como los maestros. Los escritores que trabajamos para los chicos sentimos la necesidad de solidarizarnos con este esfuerzo que hoy, por fin, alcanza el reconocimiento de toda la sociedad." Editorial Board, "Preserva y triunfarás," *La Mancha*, no. 4, (August 1998): 3

That is, in addition to the authors, illustrators, editors, directors, booksellers, and others, one of the most important pieces children's literature was the role of the teacher and the librarian in connecting children with books:

These specific mediators include the scholastic institution, in the very first and traditional instance, but also, very innovatively, a series of engines or stimulators of reading that, in the early stages, were completely spontaneous. Many of them belonged in turn to the school institution—librarians and grade teachers who appreciated reading, and then language teachers who specialized in this field—but were not confused with insubordination itself. They did not fulfill an institutional role (not all the teachers nor all the librarians were stimulators of reading), but they carried out a personal enterprise, a type of own determination.⁵⁰⁹

Montes distinguished teachers from the educational system, and their work guiding children as being a pursuit to which they were specifically called. It's an important distinction. Montes' view of teachers, of their role as revolution, guiding, and ultimately working on the frontlines of education mirrors the language of Alfonsín's Pedagogical Congress, of the reforms discussed in Chapter 1. In that moment, authors, activists, and policy makers understood teachers as an important part of derailing the damage of the dictatorship. Here, Montes sees them performing a similar role, but against the damage being wrought by neoliberalism. She's not the only contributor to *La Mancha* to make this connection or to position children as advocates for children and the mediators and advocates between children and society especially through books.

The contributors of *La Mancha* understood that teachers could bring books into children's lives. In issue 4, Gustavo Bombini described the field of children's literature as follows:

⁵⁰⁹ “estos mediadores específicos incluyen a la institución escolar, en primerísima y tradicional instancia, pero también, muy novedosamente, una serie de motores o estimuladores de la lectura que, en los primeros tiempos, fueron por completo espontáneos. Muchos de ellos pertenecían a su vez a la institución escolar—bibliotecarios y maestros de grado que apreciaban la lectura, y luego profesores de Lengua que se fueron especializando en este terreno—, pero no se confundían con la insubordinación misma. No cumplían un rol institucional (no todos los maestros ni todos los bibliotecarios fueron estimuladores de la lectura), sino que llevaban a cabo una empresa personal, una especie de elección propia.” Graciela Montes, “El campo editorial o de como el público se ensancha y el negocio engorda,” *La Mancha*, no. 6 (March, 1998): 8.

Thinking about the eighties, with the return to democracy, forces us to recognize times of innovation, decidedly optimistic gestures in which there was no doubt: it was about putting into circulation a new canon, a new writing, a new aesthetic and a small, but rapidly growing field: a real Parnassus of new writers and others who could again go to the ring, a cohort of excellent illustrators and a promising publishing market. Reading and writing workshops, reading spaces in the school, in the library and in the classroom, book fairs, presentations, visits of writers became part of new rituals of the school, in the library and in the classroom, book fairs, presentations, visits of writers became part of new rituals of the school in which literature was the protagonist, the honored, the revered.⁵¹⁰

Writing fifteen years after Alfonsín's election, Bombini (and the other contributors of *La Mancha*) could see the changes to the field more clearly than the writers of *Piedra Libre*. The 1980s and 1990s were a time in which children's literature flourished and the children's literature community grew exponentially. There was more variety, more accessibility, more creativity, and authors were able to write about everything from the silly to the serious for young audiences. He writes not only about the proliferation of books, but the growth of community around books for children, the increased collaboration between people in the field.

The contributors of *La Mancha* at different moments discuss the role of canon and the creation of a literary canon for children in Argentina. Generally, they seem to eschew the constrictive nature of a literary canon. However, in their writing, their contributions, and their collaboration, they created a set of authors, editorials, and illustrators that crafted the books from the era that have most readily stayed in circulation. Further, their inclusion of "classic" works in the pages of *La Mancha* cemented their place as "must reads" for Argentine children and

⁵¹⁰“Pensar en los ochenta, con la vuelta a la democracia, nos obliga reconocer tiempos de innovación, gestos decididamente optimistas en los que no había dudas: se trataba de poner en circulación un nuevo canon, una nueva escritura, una nueva estética y un pequeño, pero rápidamente fortalecido campo: un verdadero parnaso de nuevos escritores y de otros que podían otra vez salir al ruedo, una cohorte de excelentes ilustradores y un mercado editorial prometedor. Talleres de lectura y escritura, espacios de lectura en la escuela, en la biblioteca y en el aula, ferias del libro, presentaciones, visitas de escritores pasaron a formar parte de nuevos rituales de la escuela, en la biblioteca y en el aula, ferias del libro, presentaciones, visitas de escritores pasaron a formar parte de nuevos rituales de la escuela en los que la literatura era la protagonista, la homenajeadada, la venerada.” Gustavo Bombini, "La literatura en la máquina de la reforma," *La Mancha*, no.7 (August 1998): 27

families. For example, in issue 7, Ricardo Marino discussed the creation of canon and issued a statement of the field of children's literature. He identified children's literature as a field that was still growing:

In my opinion, the field of children's literature is still in its constitutive stage, in which much of the efforts are directed to its own legitimacy: it is still necessary to demonstrate that the texts that compose this [subfield] belong in the category of literature and that function within a "market" A quick look at the evolution of the genre in the last two decades will show that there is ground gained in both directions: authors of children's literature are frequently included in surveys, congresses or meetings on Literature; sometimes newspapers dedicate some space (although marginal) to commentary on books for children, the bookstores assign differentiated spaces, the publishers have special collections and in the "consulted" ranking of the Book Fair, authors of this genre appear mixed among the of books "for adults".⁵¹¹

According to Marino, it would seem that the contributors of *La Mancha* had accomplished or seen accomplished the desires of *Piedra Libre*: creating children's books that were considered worth reading by children and adults and earning recognition of the importance of themes and creativity in children's literature for society more broadly. He acknowledged the important role of collaboration and the importance of children's literature as a field.

Laura Devetach returned to the notion of child culture in issue 8 of *La Mancha*. *Piedra Libre*'s contributors had looked at this particular aspect of childhood through the lens of play, but Devetach turned her attention to the ways in which stories exist and circulate as part of childhood culture and then inform the ways that stories are written. Her piece is both a reflection on the circulation of children's verbal games and the cues used in storytelling, and a verbal game itself.

⁵¹¹ "En mi opinión, el campo de la literatura infantil se encuentra aún en su etapa constitutiva, en la que gran parte de los esfuerzos están dirigidos a su propia legitimación: todavía hay que demostrar que los textos que lo componen pertenecen al orden de la literatura y que funcionan dentro de un "mercado" Una rápida mirada atenta a la evolución del género en las dos últimas décadas demostrara que hay terreno ganado en las dos direcciones: frecuentemente se incluye a los autores de literatura infantil en encuestas, congresos o encuentros sobre Literatura; a veces los diarios dedican algún espacio (aunque marginal) al comentario de libros para chicos, las librerías asignan espacios diferenciados, las editoriales tiene colecciones especiales y en el ranking de "consultados" de la Feria del Libro aparecen autores de este género mezclados entre los de libros "para adultos" Ricardo Marino, "El terreno donde crece la literatura infantil," *La Mancha*, no. 7 (August 1998); 13.

She seamlessly connects Argentine nursery rhymes, children's game chants, and storytelling frames into a long string of text, and then asks readers to contemplate the idea of a "textoteca," what she describes as "the texts that we carry inside ourselves."⁵¹² One's textoteca is built during one's earliest childhood, and continues to be built throughout one's life, through one's sociocultural experiences. Like play, the textoteca is a process of cultural acquisition that occurs in childhood, that is uniquely crafted in that moment, but which, Devetach argues, can and should be continually developed and used in adulthood and throughout life:

And with the children who discover their textoteca, what happens? They get curious and ask questions. Of all the questions I received during meetings in schools, the most repeated that I noticed are: "Where do the stories come from?", "Are you wrong to write?"

They address precisely two central themes, the origin and the instrument of writing.

I try to answer them in the most straightforward way, since the answer is not easy, nor is there only one.⁵¹³

Devetach's reflection on the textoteca illustrates the primary difference in approach between *Piedra Libre* and *La Mancha*. They both considered the relationship between children and society and culture, but they asked different questions of the sources. Devetach and other contributors of *La Mancha* weren't necessarily interested in the ways that childhood culture could help shape the adult world, but how children, through their acquisition of literature, could conceptualize the world, engage with culture, and go on to tell their own stories, which, in turn could be transformative.

⁵¹²"Esto sucede cuando reparamos en los textos que llevamos adentro, combinado de mil maneras diferentes. ¿Tenemos conciencia de los textos que llevamos adentro? Cada uno de nosotros fue construyendo una textoteca armada con palabras, canciones, historias, dichos, poemas, piezas del imaginario individual, familiar y colectivo. Textotecas que se movilizan y afloran cuando se relacionan entre sí." Laura Devetach, "El vaivén de los textos o de donde salen los cuentos," *La Mancha* no. 8 (March, 1999): 42

⁵¹³"Y con los chicos que descubren su textoteca, ¿qué pasa? Se ponen curiosos y hacen preguntas. De todas las preguntas que recibí durante encuentros en escuelas, las más repetidas que registre son: "De donde salen los cuentos?", "Te equivocas al escribir?"

Abordan precisamente dos temas centrales, el origen y el instrumento de la escritura.

Trato de responderles de la manera más aproximada, ya que no es fácil la respuesta, ni hay una sola." *Ibid*, 43.

Both magazines grew along with political changes, economic market changes, and technological innovation. They represent shifting ideas about Argentine nation, culture, and childhood identity. They emphasized particularly the literary child and the various philosophical, even existential, questions that pertained to children as transitional in life and within a transitional nation. *La Mancha* reflects a more stable democratic state and its contribution focused less on defining childhood or children more broadly and more on engaging with children as a stable figure and defining the limits and expectations of their engagement with Argentine society.

Conclusion:

Piedra Libre and *La Mancha* allow us to reflect upon the changes that occurred in the educational system and the field of children's literature during the democratic transition in Argentina. They also allow us to understand the ways in which authors and teachers living at that time understood the transition as a process and as part of their recent history. *Piedra Libre* was published during the early transitional years. As such, its contributors asked big questions about the role of children within Argentine society and culture. They were concerned with cultural acquisition and child agency. *La Mancha*, whose publication began during the mid-1990s, focused more on the ways in which children's literature evolved and was evolving as part of a democratic society. The contributors of *La Mancha* did not muse as much on what children were, or how they functioned, but instead looked specifically at the ways that literature changed to meet those needs and the ways in which teachers and authors needed to fill a void left by neoliberal educational policies.

Piedra Libre and *La Mancha* were written and published throughout the entirety of the transitional period. Authors and editors worked on these issues during the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s; Graciela Montes contributed to these magazines while she was writing the works analyzed in Chapter IV. These magazines were in circulation during the rise and evolution of human rights discourse, the activism of Las Abuelas, Las Madres, and HIJOS. The works analyzed in this chapter subsequently traverse the others. The contributors and directors of these magazines developed their discussion of childhood, children, and their importance to society alongside all of the discourse about children and the figurative Argentine child. This chapter illuminates the ways in which these authors took those discourse, debates, and conceptualizations and worked to synthesize and solidify a vision of the Argentine child, particularly the child reader. They also worked to understand child culture and the ways in which aspects of childhood could be used by adults to transform the state.

Taken together, the two magazines show the ways in which discourse around children—their role in society, their agency, their consumption of media—changed during the transition. The contributors of these magazines understood children as agents, who needed guidance, but who also possessed a unique culture, which held pieces of a re-emerging Argentine identity. Further, they saw children as being able to contribute something unique and beneficial to society. As transitional figures themselves, they could help make the democratic transition a success. The contributors of *La Mancha* saw the child as stable, after *Piedra Libre* had done much work to define it. They were able to engage specifically with that child's needs and they worked to meet them or point at the ways in which children's intellectual and social needs could be met through literature. Both of these magazines understood children as pivotal to Argentina's future

and that child became the inspiration for their work as authors attempting to shape society into a progressive, collaborative, democratic state.

CONCLUSION

Once upon a time...there was a transition in Argentina. In the wake of political violence, adults looked to children as a way to build a better future for their nation. Different groups saw the dictatorship in different ways. Progressive politicians, activists, teachers, and authors wanted to understand how it had happened and how to prevent something like it from happening again. They attempted to shape the transformation of the state and that of its youngest members by crafting policies and narratives that would simultaneously make sense of the past and shape the future. They wrote stories for children in classrooms and at home, for each other, and for the state, and, in writing these stories, they shaped the narrative about the dictatorship, the democracy, and the experiences of children in the grey area between the two. In writing these stories, they shaped the national history of Argentina, the national memory of the dictatorship, and the figure of the child in relation to society and the state.

As in other pivotal moments of state transformation (Sarmiento's presidency or the Peronist era), childhood became a salient point of debate and national concern during the transition. Distinct parts of the educational community intervened into the lives of children and considered what it meant or could mean to be a child in Argentina. In the process, these groups created a figurative Argentine child, a figure with which contemporary Argentines still engage. At the start of the transition, adults saw children as victims and passive members of society that needed to be protected from the past, from the truth, from the tumultuous nature of the present, and from the elements of the dictatorship still present in society. As the transition progressed,

adults figured the Argentine child as both active and passive. The dictatorship had victimized young people within society and, through authoritarian educational policies, nationalist propaganda, and violence made them agents of authoritarianism. Politically progressive adults in the transition viewed children with a mix of fear and hope. Their ultimate goal was a democratic and egalitarian Argentina and in order to reach it they needed to reeducate the children who had been educated during the dictatorship and guide children who were beginning to enter the system. These adults saw the potential of children as agents in the transitional matrix. They could reify dictatorship, or they could become the guardians of justice and liberty in society. It was up to adults to guide them away from the mistakes of the past. Adults drew inspiration from children's imaginations, their potential, and they strove to incorporate those qualities into their writing for children and their vision for Argentine society.

The transition of children into adulthood mirrored the transition of Argentina into democracy. Both were guided and shaped by the intervention of adults. Both were shaped by narratives about the nation and the role of its citizens. The transition to democracy and the transition of children into citizens overlapped in education, children's literature, teaching policies, and the conversations that adults had about human rights, responsibility, and children's experiences under dictatorship. Through the Ministry of Education, human rights organizations, activist outreach, and children's books, adults shaped the Argentine narrative to fit the perceived needs of both the nation and its children in their moment of transition.

At the turn of the century, Argentina experienced a new type of transition. In 2001, Argentina defaulted on its international loans, throwing the country into an economic and political crisis. Even as it faced this calamitous moment, however, Argentina did not fall under military rule again. Instead, Argentina had five presidents in the span of one week and

maintained democratic leadership and the legal transition of power. Over the next decade, Argentina worked to rebuild, to move forward. But this moment of crisis and the response to it confirmed the end of the transition into democracy that began with the 1983 election of *Raúl Alfonsín*. The economic crisis began the Kirchner era. Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) were leftist populists. They identified strongly with Latin America's turn to the left during the early twenty-first century, anti-dictatorship activism, and human rights policies. They worked to undo many of the neoliberal politics of the dictatorship and Menem era and pursue justice for the nation.

The Kirchner administrations worked to further the narrative of Argentina as a champion of human rights at home and in the world. Involved in the Peronist activism of the 60s and 70s themselves, Néstor, and later Cristina, politically aligned themselves with human rights organizations, establishing firm ties between the government and *las Madres and Abuelas*, and helping to transform *las Madres and las Abuelas* discursively from *las locas* to the moral conscience of the nation. In addition to stabilizing the economy and building infrastructure, the Kirchners supported the activist narratives and politics related to justice and memory in Argentina. Under Néstor Kirchner's presidency, congress successfully repealed the Full Stop Law and Law of Due Obedience, making it possible to prosecute former members of the military dictatorship. Fernández de Kirchner continued this work. The two supported human rights policies and helped establish government institutions dedicated to protecting and preserving human rights. Cristina formed a close political relationship with *Las Abuelas*. She supported their bill to require mandatory DNA testing for anyone suspected of being the child of disappeared parents; she commemorated *Las Madres and Abuelas* (and DNA itself) on the Argentine peso.

The conversations that adults in transitional Argentina had about memory, identity, and childhood have shaped the political landscape of Argentina in the twenty-first century. They've shaped how the people of the nation understand themselves. The decisions that they made, the paths that they chose have transformed the national narrative about the past and present.

Educational policy makers, teachers, children's authors, activists, and human rights organizations have continued to reach out to children about the dictatorship and democracy, building upon the conversations that began during the transition and establishing certain narratives about the state and history that have become an integral part of national identity.

All of the groups covered in this dissertation have shaped the contemporary consensus on what to teach children about the dictatorship. The Ministry of Education has adopted the vision of Las Abuelas and La Madres, who have taken on a powerful role within the state and become a point of pride for Argentina in the broader world.⁵¹⁴ Children are encouraged to learn about the dictatorship and its aftermath, to understand its place in Argentine history, a historical narrative that essentially does what Graciela Montes did: positions the dictatorship as an aberration in a broader history of Argentine democracy. Children's authors have begun to write about not just the dictatorship, but activism, and the political and economic consequences of *el proceso*. They tell the story of a democratic Argentina that was taken over by a group of greedy, power hungry people, in which they position activists, particularly female activists, as the heroes of the national story. Teachers have taken up the mantle as activists who advocate for their students. Students have organized themselves in protest of injustices. New movements have built themselves upon a foundation established by Las Madres, Las Abuelas, and HIJOS. The socio-politics of transitional Argentina shaped the lives of children who lived within that moment.

⁵¹⁴ As of 2018, this is still true. Ministry of Education narratives about *el proceso* the were formed in the Kirchner era are still in use. Given the current presidential administration's policies, that may not continue to be the case.

In 2002, Argentina's Congress passed a law that defined how a new generation of children would learn about the past. They designated March 24th as *El Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y Justicia*, a name that borrowed from the politics of HIJOS, las Madres, and Abuelas. According to the Argentine government, this day is designed to:

...build collectively a day of reflection and critical analysis of recent history. In schools it is proposed as a day in which the children and young people, along with the directors, teachers, and all of the members of the local and educational community understand the reach of the grave economic, social and political consequences of the most recent military dictatorship and involve themselves actively in the defense and vigilance of the rights and guarantees established by the Constitution and the democratic political regime.⁵¹⁵

This marked a huge change in Argentine educational policy. It officially brought narratives of dictatorship into classrooms for the first time. Specifically, it brought children, even young ones, into contact with the subject of dictatorship in an official capacity, moving the dictatorship and its legacy from a subject to be discussed with familial discretion or self-directed reading, to a subject with which *all* Argentine children needed to engage. This law used the mechanisms of the Ministry of Education and the language of both the Pedagogical Congress and the Ley Federal de Educación to introduce children to something that had been unspoken and avoided by official educational policy.⁵¹⁶

The Ministry of Education began to introduce narratives about the dictatorship for children in classrooms in a controlled way. They adopted an official narrative and created a

⁵¹⁵“... construir colectivamente una jornada de reflexión y análisis crítico de la historia reciente. En las escuelas se propone como un día para que los niños y los jóvenes, junto con los directivos, docentes y todos los integrantes de la comunidad educativa y local comprendan los alcances de las graves consecuencias económicas, sociales y políticas de la última dictadura militar y se comprometan activamente en la defensa de la vigencia de los derechos y las garantías establecidos por la Constitución Nacional, y del régimen político democrático” “24 de marzo: Día de la memoria por la verdad y la justicia.” Argentina.gob.ar, March 1, 2018. <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/24-de-marzo-dia-de-la-memoria-por-la-verdad-y-la-justicia>.

⁵¹⁶ By 2002, any child in public school would have been born in democracy, one of the reasons why it would have been possible to have a space in which to officially discuss this dictatorship. It would not have caused unnecessary trauma or ruffled the feathers of parents who were still associated with the military regime

prescribed way to teach it, and a designated day on which to engage with it as a subject. The government created a contained space to discuss the past. Like a truth commission, Día Nacional de la Memoria created a space to confront the past and cordon it off from the rest of the year to prevent a continuous reencounter with the unknowable trauma of the past.

The narrative that they presented in the Day of Memory was one that mirrored those that Graciela Montes created in her transitional stories for children. Activities and stories for children during the Day of Remembrance echo the conversation between the child and adult narrator in *El golpe y los chicos*. The Ministry of Education's suggested activities for the youngest students included asking their parents and family members how old they were during the dictatorship, or to share a memory of what it was like to live during that time. They also suggested asking the students to consider the importance socially and politically of public spaces; openly discussing the difference between a dictatorship state and a democratic one; clearly defining what censorship meant; encouraging students to value the concept of identity; and conceptualizing memory and justice as a means of reparation.⁵¹⁷ These activities were designed to help children learn important skills in maintaining a democratic state. They were also designed to reinforce a narrative of history in which the true Argentina worked to protect human rights and democracy, in which children were the ultimate protectors of human rights and democratic practice in the nation. These activities required intergenerational dialogue, investigation of the past and present, and activities in which children were able to, in a safe environment, encounter the past and garner practical experience in how to identify and prevent human rights violations or authoritarianism. The Ministry of Education has continued to incorporate education about the dictatorship more readily into classrooms, and, in doing so, they

⁵¹⁷ "Actividades. Primer Ciclo | Educación y memoria – 24 de Marzo Día de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia." Accessed July 17, 2018. <http://educacionymemoria.educ.ar/primaria/254/a35/actividades-primer-ciclo/index.html>.

have continued to reinforce the need for constant vigilance, combining the goals of the transitional Ministry of Education with those of activists, human rights organizations, and children's authors.

Madres, Abuelas, and HIJOS

Las Madres and Las Abuelas have continued their fight against impunity. They continue their outreach to the Argentine public, and have, since the transitional period, become institutionalized and legitimized in Argentine history and society (although they are by no means yet unanimously accepted as heroes). Their work has had wide reaching effects at home and abroad. Three of the points in the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child were authored by las Abuelas.⁵¹⁸ Working through transnational networks, Las Abuelas and las Madres established a genetic bank for testing DNA of Argentine citizens; they were fundamental in strengthening and redirecting the role of the Department of Human Rights in Argentina. They were also responsible for the creation of the *Comisión Nacional por el Derecho a la Identidad* (Conadi), which provides resources for people who question their filiation. They've transformed the civil code regarding adoptions in Argentina, making it possible for all adopted children to be able to learn "who they truly are" and making it possible for adoptions to be annulled. As they reach the end of their lives, las Abuelas have also created an information bank with articles and interviews so that any children who find their families later will have access to stories and memories.

The most controversial of the Abuelas' achievements is the law they sponsored, requiring anyone suspected of being a stolen child to have their DNA tested against the national genetic

⁵¹⁸ Articles 7, 8, and 11.

repository. This move was perhaps born out of desperation—as las Abuelas get older, they worry that they won't find their missing grandchildren in their lifetimes—it may have just been part of a broader move to forcibly identify children with legal authority, taking advantage of the political conjuncture of their goals and the Kirchner administration.

In the dictatorship and the transitional government, when missing grandchildren were toddlers and infants who couldn't identify themselves as having been taken, who had no conceptualization of selfhood or familial belonging, these moves were necessary for finding and “saving” small children, who were truly without any type of agency at the time. Today, however, these grandchildren are in their thirties and forties, grown adults with the ability to choose not to seek out their biological families or question their origins as they see fit, whether their identities were “stolen” or not. In a move to undo the damage of a dictatorship that stole the identities of a generation of children, las Abuelas and other progressives have used positivist biology to remove the agency and possibly shatter the identities of a group of children who have grown into adulthood with one identity and made the decision to not question who they “truly” are or have answered the question with the name they were given by the people who raised them. The figurative child: lost, wounded, unable to make decisions or find its way home, continues to influence perceptions and policy.

The figurative child as a missing figure has powered las Abuelas and las Madres through the dictatorship, transition, and now democracy. Though their real-world counterparts grow up, the figurative, disappeared child remains static and suspended. Las Abuelas figure their missing grandchildren as young children in images and outreach, even alongside actual footage of adult grandchildren reunited with elderly grandparents. As las Abuelas and las Madres become part of Argentina's national narrative, it's interesting to note the ways in which the figurative child is

beginning to gain a figurative grandmother in texts for children. The figure of the grandmother has transformed into a woman who is at once loving and tough as nails, a detective, someone who does not want to be politically active, but who does so out of necessity and transforms the political landscape with the force of her love. Las Madres too have become national symbols who interact with the figurative child. The white kerchief and the walk around the Plaza de Mayo have become symbolic of Argentina at home and in the world, a touchstone related to nation and to identity. The narrative that they used to tell their story, the mothers of lost children who emerged on the political scene to search for their missing children, has stuck. Their narrative echoed Eva Perón's discourse about the role of women in politics. She maintained that she was called to politics for something larger than herself. In her case, it was Perón. For Las Madres, it was their children. In both cases, female political power and energy were the result of external circumstances that compelled them to leave behind their designated sphere of home and family for a greater cause that in turn caused profound changes to the nation.

This particular form of female political agency has been taken up most recently by a new generation of Argentine women who, in a nod to Las Madres and Las Abuelas, take to the streets with kerchiefs on their heads. *Ni Una Menos* is a political movement to fight against violence towards women that has expanded into a battle to legalize abortion in Argentina. The politics of *Ni Una Menos* borrow at once from Las Abuelas, Las Madres, HIJOS, and even the disappeared generation of the 1970s, whose fight for social justice lives on through activism that works to empower and protect women. *Ni Una Menos* is a movement primarily organized by young women who are fighting for the dignity of life of all women. Its organizers intentionally refer back to the legacy of female activist organization and cast themselves as the successors of their grandmothers in their fight for justice in contemporary Argentina. The election of Mauricio

Macri, a conservative business man and former mayor of Buenos Aires, in 2015 has caused a political swing to the right. Neoliberal economics, oppressive police presence, and bending of the constitution have provoked public outcry from working and middle-class families, as citizens make troubling, but telling, comparisons with between Macri and the dictatorial past. In this context, the intergenerational female activism of *Ni Una Menos* is even more powerful.

Books about Dictatorship

During the transition to democracy, adults crafted several narratives about nation and history. Each of these narratives represented a different view of Argentina's past, Argentina's future, and the role of children between the two. During the transition, childhood was a space for adults to explore what it meant to survive a dictatorship, to begin a democracy, to understand tragedy, or to imagine a better future. As politicians, authors, policy makers, illustrators, teachers, and activists talked about children, thought about children, wrote for children, imagined children, they created a figurative child, several different versions of the figurative Argentine child, which in turn influenced the policies and stories about and for children in the democracy. The Ministry of Education understood that education was an essential tool for establishing and maintaining a dictatorship or a democracy. They tended to teach nationalist stories through *manuales* and pedagogy that would encourage a specific type of civic practice without actually teaching students about what was happening around them. Activists understood children as alternatively passive and active. Las Madres called for the return of their missing "children" whom they cast as innocent and apolitical; Abuelas called for the return of their missing grandchildren whom they portrayed as victims and without agency, even as those children grew into adulthood. HIJOS saw themselves as inheritors of a political legacy; they defined their

experience of childhood as active, aware, and saw the “child” (both themselves and their parents) as possessing political agency, and uniquely capable of effecting change. Human rights organizations simultaneously positioned children as victims and agents. Their rights were under attack, and they needed to be the most aware citizens in a society. It was up to them to learn how to practice, preserve, and protect human rights, especially in a nation like Argentina, where so much violence had occurred and so much work had been done to overcome what had transpired. Finally, authors figured the child as transformative, imaginative, an ideal version of what the nation, and they themselves, could be. The child was uniquely capable of envisioning and realizing change, and adults could help promote that change by offering children narratives that helped them to explore and expand their vision of the world. Graciela Montes, as an author, exemplified this vision in the works in which she positioned the child as uniquely capable of holding memory and using that social memory to change society.

The figurative Argentine child has become synonymous with memory and imagination, cultural preservation and social change. In recent years, Graciela Montes’ *El golpe y los chicos* has become a quintessential book for children learning about the dictatorship, and a new generation of children’s authors have begun to write for children about the experience of dictatorship in Argentina. These new stories encapsulate all of the versions of the Argentine child for its contemporary counterpart—they intentionally draw on the Abuelas and Madres, HIJOS, human rights, education. María Fernanda Maquieira’s *Rompecabezas*, published in 2013, for example, tells the story of the dictatorship from the perspective of a young girl growing up with her grandmother during the peak of el *proceso*.⁵¹⁹ Using the voice of a child to narrate the experience shifts agency to the child, as she navigates the space between childhood and

⁵¹⁹ María Fernanda Maquieira, *Rompecabezas* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara Juvenil, 2013).

adulthood and the spaces between the “official” story and the reality of life in the dictatorship. In writing in the first person, Maquieira invites contemporary children to imagine what their counterparts thought, felt, and perceived during the dictatorship. She forges an affective connection between two generations and invites contemporary children to empathize with others and be suspicious and investigative of their surroundings.

A children’s book by Carla Baredes and Ileana Lotersztain, *Abuelas con identidad: La historia de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo y los nietos restituidos* embraces the narrative of las Abuelas about their missing grandchildren as lacking agency and as destined to return to their birth families.⁵²⁰ There are two major changes in the way that this book presents the history of the dictatorship and transition. First, the authors of this book identify Menem as a continuity with dictatorship. They declaim him as a perpetrator of social violence for his impunity laws. The authors of this book also draw a distinction between disappeared grandchildren who were adopted by families who were unaware of their origins and those who were raised by *los militares*. This distinction is quite new for las Abuelas’ public discourse about disappeared grandchildren and it is transformative in the way that it leaves room for affective connections between adopted parents and the children that they raised. They also include several stories of children who did not want to be restored to their family of origin. These stories end with the “children” being forced to face the truth via a court ordered DNA testing and being restored to their family, eventually becoming happy about their forcible reunions. They also include two stories in which the children sustained relationships with their appropriators in addition to their biological families. Though these stories support las Abuelas’ policies of forcible DNA testing and the primacy of returning to one’s “true” (re: biological) identity, they also represent the

⁵²⁰ Carla Baredes and Ileana Lotersztain, *Abuelas Con Identidad: La Historia de Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo y Los Nietos Restituidos* (Buenos Aires: Iamique, 2012).

complexity of these cases and the difficult experiences some of these children had with discovering who they “truly” were. Through it all, the grandchildren are imagined as children, even when they were presented as already having a spouse or children of their own. They are pictured as children in the text and referred to as children before anything else. It is their fundamental defining characteristic, and the authors invite contemporary child readers to empathize with these missing children and to support las Abuelas’ quest to find them.

As we move into another transition in Argentina, between the Kirchner era and Macri’s presidency, it’s important to keep looking at the role of children in Argentine history and society. The stories that adults tell about and for them are transformative: they shape the national narrative, the experiences of children, and the fundamental ways in which children understand themselves in relation to other citizens and the state. The public outcry against Macri’s neoliberal politics, the outcry for the return of disappeared people, the organization and wide reach of *Ni Una Menos*, suggest that children in Argentina have learned some of the lessons that transitional era adults wanted them to learn: the primacy of human rights, the fragility of democracy, that citizens need to constantly hold the state responsible, that it is possible to imagine a more equitable society and that through remembering the past, one can try to create a better future. Hopefully, Argentine children today will continue to learn these lessons and practice them in the streets.

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