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THE POLITICS OF MEMORY:
A STUDY OF THE FORMATION AND INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC MEMORY OF
THE MILITARY REGIME IN ARGENTINA

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Croft Institute for International Studies and the Sally McDonnell
Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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ABSTRACT

ALEXANDRA AZEMA RODRIGUEZ: The Politics of Memory: A study of the formation and influence of public memory of the military regime in Argentina
(Under the direction of Dr. Holly Reynolds)

[This study investigated the influence of various political and non-political factors on public memory of the period of military regime rule in Argentina from 1976 through 1983. The sources utilized in the study mainly include scholarly works, in addition to several news articles, poll data, and a series of films concerning the subject. The study found that the development of public memory of this particular political event has been influenced by a complex array of interest groups. Each group utilized a unique set of methods and mediums to convey its preferred account of the period of regime rule. The interest groups include the government of Argentina, the military of Argentina, and several Argentine civil society and human rights organizations such as the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS, among others. Some of the methods and mediums utilized include film, print and broadcast news sources, public demonstration, and other sources of printed literature. The study concludes that though the political entities of the government and the military initially held the most influence over public memory of this time period, changes in technology and information sharing over the years have allowed the general public as represented by civil society and human rights groups to incorporate its perspective into current public memory as well.]

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Introduction

A well-known proverb states, “History is written by the victors.” This idea has some merit. Leaders and governments for a variety of reasons often choose to present the version of events most beneficial to their political motives over that which may be more accurate. Though the obvious explanation for this is one of self-preservation, legitimacy, and maintenance of power, such tactics have also been employed to strengthen national morale or even to unify a disjointed populace.

Countless examples of this kind of manipulation of public memory exist. For instance, Japan and China have completely different official accounts of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), though in reality it had the same process and outcome. However, each country has incorporated this war into its history as a means of promoting national identity, a goal best accomplished by manipulating the details to portray each nation in the best possible light (Schirokauer 1982). This kind of information control can also be seen in post World War II Germany, though to a very different effect. The German education system today is saturated with information pertaining to the Holocaust – so much so that some students may actually become apathetic about this notorious aspect of their nation’s history. In its overzealous attempt to prevent history from repeating itself, the German government might be at risk of alienating rather than uniting citizens over this topic (Geisler 2005).

However, it is clear that governments are no longer the sole force in the development of public memory. As technology increasingly allows information to be shared, other interest groups and individuals have acquired the resources necessary to contribute to public understanding of an event. Several media outlets have been vital in this transition, including official news sources (national and international, print and broadcast), various nationally sponsored publications, personal memoirs, the internet, film (documentary and dramatic), and various sectors of the arts, (visual and theatrical). These media are transforming the way history is understood around the world, and it is important that they appear in any modern study of public memory.

This study investigates the different forces and factors at work in the development of contemporary public memory of the Argentine military regime (1976-1983). It seeks to discover the kind of impact both governmental and non-governmental organizations have had on public memory through two specific case studies. The first involves the establishment of a memorial at the Argentine Navy Mechanics School, or ESMA complex, the most notorious torture site operated by the regime; the second explores the film industry and factors surrounding production of Argentine military regime-related material, both during and after the period of regime control. The project hopes to understand the influence of different political actors on public memory through the tools they utilize and the final outcome of certain controversies. It also hopes to illustrate the complex nature of public remembrance of certain highly politicized events in a given nation's history.

Chapter 1: The Case of Argentina

Some background information is needed to fully understand the politics involved in the development of public memory of Argentina's military regime. This chapter will provide a brief history of the events leading up to the military regime and of the period of regime rule itself. It will also discuss the three most influential leaders and administrations that have governed Argentina since its return to democracy in 1983. Finally, this chapter will include a review of the available resources on the subject of the politics of memory in order to effectively contextualize the specific case of Argentina within this area of study.

In 1976, President Isabel Peron was overthrown in a coup led by the Argentine military after ruling for several months following her husband's death in 1974. The military immediately declared its intention to eliminate the leftist guerrilla movements such as the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) and the Montoneros, as well as any citizens perceived to be sympathetic to the rebel cause. In the military's quest to eliminate the communist threat through a carefully calculated program known as the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (or El Proceso), it succeeded in kidnapping, torturing, and murdering thousands of Argentine citizens in what is now casually referred to as the nation's "Dirty War." This period came to an end shortly after the military failure in the Malvinas Conflict in 1982 with the democratic election of President Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989) (Romero 2002).

During the El Proceso, there were several hundred clandestine prisons throughout the nation. Most were local police stations or military bases, and nearly all served as sites of torture and death for thousands of citizens. Among these centers, the ESMA complex in downtown Buenos Aires, home to the Naval Mechanics School, was the most notorious. The immense size of the complex and its location in the country's largest and capitol city made it ideal as headquarters of the counterterrorism operation the military had undertaken. Within the confines of ESMA, thousands were tortured brutally through the use of electric prods, beatings, simulated drowning, and countless other inhumane methods first institutionalized by the French in Algeria (Robin 2003). Thousands of citizens were also murdered and buried in ESMA, and thousands more were flown from the complex out to sea where they were thrown into the ocean from planes (Verbitsky 1996).

The shift from military regime to democracy was accompanied by a series of transformations across many aspects of everyday life in Argentina. This was a direct result of the elimination of the culture of fear that pervaded citizens' lives over the previous eight years. Argentines began putting considerable pressure on the government to acknowledge the atrocities of the regime and to provide information about those who had disappeared during the military regime. The government, in response, established the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP) in 1983, a fact finding organization whose published report *Nunca Más* stated publicly for the first time the extent of the atrocities committed by the armed forces (Barry 2001).

However, Alfonsín's administration also encountered pressure from all branches of the armed forces hoping to be exculpated from any crimes committed during El

Proceso. Shortly after the release of *Nunca Más* many members of the military regime were tried for their participation in human rights violations enacted by the military. The number of trials grew very quickly, and in the face of rising military unrest and threats of another coup, the government enacted the first two of a series of amnesty laws that would exonerate a majority of the military's members regarding any illegal activities (Hunter 1998). The *Ley de Punto Final*¹ and *Ley de Obediencia Debida*² were widely greeted with disapproval by the general public, and Alfonsín relinquished his office a few months early as an unpopular and unappreciated president (Duhalde 1999).

Carlos Menem succeeded Alfonsín as president, and he brought with him a radically different approach to handling the subject of the military regime. He requested the impossible in asking the public to “forget” the entire period, as it would only prolong the hurt and shame of the nation. From his election in 1989 through his resignation in 1999, he abused some of the powers of his office in attempting to repress public discussion of the subject, particularly through many major newspapers and television stations. Additionally, Menem extended amnesty to the few high-ranking officials of the military regime that had been tried and convicted of human rights violations by granting them pardons, much to the dismay of surviving victims and families of the disappeared (Duhalde 1999). In one of his least popular acts, Menem attempted to have ESMA, the center of torture and death for thousands, demolished and replaced by a unity park as a sign of reconciliation with the military (Faiola 1998). Shortly after Menem left the presidency, Argentina's economy went into a dramatic recession as a result of the

¹ This law effectively ended all trials, investigation, and persecution against anyone involved in the political violence of the military regime up to the restoration of democracy on December 10, 1983. The law excepted junta leaders and those accused of the torture and/or disappearance of minors.

² This law acted as a complement to the *Ley de Punto Final* and stated that military members could not be held accountable for actions committed while carrying out orders from a superior officer.

immense national debt incurred under both Alfonsín and Menem. Inflation grew to an unmanageable level, and an almost complete freeze of the bank system led to riots in December 2001. This economic crisis temporarily overshadowed discussion of the military regime and other, related subjects.

President Nestor Kirchner was elected to help guide the nation back to political and economic stability. During his time in office from 2003 to 2007, President Kirchner oversaw both the repeal of the amnesty laws, which were declared unconstitutional, and the establishment of ESMA as a national memorial site in remembrance of the victims of El Proceso (BBC 2004). As a former detainee of the regime, Kirchner has been a leader in the movement for justice in this particular chapter of Argentine history. His identification with the general public on this issue made him quite popular among many, and though his wife Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is his current successor as President, it is unlikely that Kirchner's political career is over. Understanding the history of both the regime and Argentina's subsequent transition to democracy is central to this study because it highlights the ever-changing nature of the politics of memory. With each new administration come new players and new issues to be resolved.

The politics of memory have been the subject of a great deal of research throughout the second half of the 20th century (particularly after World War II). Historians have focused considerable attention on various factors affecting public memory; among these, a few have been given special consideration. The subject of public monuments and memorials has been discussed at length because those structures occupy a unique position as physical embodiments of memory (Huysen 2001). Similarly, historical films hold a great deal of sway in that they are able to dramatically

recreate certain events and reach large numbers of people, significantly affecting audience perceptions of the experience (Banasik and Pennebaker 1997). Finally, public education is notable in that it mandates the learning of a specified set of material for the citizens of many countries, giving governments some control over the public memory of some events (Belli, Bischoff and Schuman 1997). This study will mainly utilize the information gathered on the subjects of monument and film as they apply to public memory of the years of military rule in Argentina.

An understanding of the general study of the politics of memory throughout the world is needed to understand the politics of memory in the case of Argentina. The idea of public memory as a division of history is relatively new, having emerged only within the last fifty years. Up to this point, the study of history was associated with the cold, hard, objective explanation of past events (Pennebaker and Banasik; Klein 2000). However, limiting the study of history to this perspective rarely produces a perfectly accurate account of the past. After World War II, as colonialism began to disappear and worldwide instances of political oppression and genocide became more widely recognized and discussed, the idea of public memory emerged as a means of gaining a different and therefore more complete account of certain historical events (Schudson 1995; Klein 2000).

Since this period, the study of politics in public memory has expanded considerably. There are several key ideas associated with the development of public memory. They include the physical embodiment of public memory in the form of film, dance, monuments, etc. (Connerton 1989; Schudson 1995; Huyssen 1997; Igartua and Paez 1997; Klein 2000); the study of memory as a shaper of both individual and national

identity (Anderson, 1983; Connerton 1989; Conway 1997; Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer 1999); the role of commemorating in the public memory of a given political event (Frijda 1997; Jelin and Kaufman 2002); and finally the implications of the passage of public memory from generation to generation (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997; Conway 1997; Schuman, Belli and Bischooping 1997; Baumeister and Hastings 1997). Each of these subject areas has been the focus of a great deal of research, particularly since the 1970s. An understanding of the ideas presented by these researchers will be vital to understanding the public memory of Argentina's military regime and its reflection in history today.

This study will be broken down into the investigation of Argentina's most notable public monument to the victims of the military regime and the Argentine film industry's portrayal of the period of regime rule. It is fitting then, that the embodiment of memory in the form of such creations as film and monuments play such a central role in the more general field of study of the politics of memory (Connerton 1989; Schudson 1995; Huyssen 1997). Historians involved in the study of memory as a shaper of history agree that these outlets serve as physical evidence of the vital role memory plays in the development and study of history (Connerton 1989; Schudson 1995; Huyssen 1997; Igartua and Paez 1997; Klein 2000). Prominent examples of this phenomenon of memory embodied include the memorialization of German concentration camps, as well as filmic representations of both World War II and the War in Vietnam (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997; Klein 2000).

Similarly, the act of public commemoration has become vital to the study of the politics of memory. Commemorations, like monuments or film, serve as a kind of

embodiment of public memory of an event. However, they are different because while monuments and film run the risk of becoming forgotten figures, once viewed and never returned to again, commemorative ceremonies serve to “keep alive” the memory of that event, usually on an annual basis (Connerton 1989; Frijda 1997). Also, because commemorative ceremonies usually involve the participation and support of a community, they serve as unifying experiences as well (Connerton 1989). The annual day of remembrance of the 1976 military coup in Argentina is usually accompanied by a public march and is indicative of the kinds of activities noted in the more general study of commemorating as an aspect of the politics of memory (Jelin and Kaufman 2002).

Additionally, the study of memory as perceived history has uncovered the powerful link between memory and identity. Individuals tend to incorporate significant life experiences not only into their own personal memories, but also into their perception of self (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer 1999). Therefore, people essentially see themselves as a product of their experiences. This is clearest in those who have experienced a particularly traumatic event, such as war veterans or concentration camp survivors (Klein 2000). This sense of self is often passed on to subsequent generations, and this kind of identity with a given event is woven into the fabric of a given nation (Connerton 1989; Conway 1997; Anderson 2006). This kind of unified public memory and identity is evident in Argentina, where the military regime was relatively recent, and closure has still not been reached for many citizens (Jelin and Kaufman 2002).

This question of memory as identity leads back to the question of historical accuracy: is it better for younger generations to incorporate this secondhand memory into their understanding of their nation’s history, or would an objective curriculum better

serve them? The generational implications of public memory are the most interesting and divisive within the subject. For example, the age group most affected by notable political events is that of 17-25 year olds. It is at this age that an individual is most likely to incorporate an event into his memory of history, and eventually pass it on to his children (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997; Schuman, Belli, and Bischooping 1997). Additionally, about twenty-five years after such an event, it is this generation that is most likely to fund the establishment of public monuments (films, art exhibitions, etc.), and it is this group's children who are likely to promote the establishment of these monuments (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997). This generational connection leads to a disconnect in the historical understanding of these two generations and all the others of a given nation with regard to a specific event (Conway 1997; Baumeister and Hastings 1997). This element of age importance can be clearly seen in Argentina, particularly within the film industry, as will be illustrated later in Chapter 3 of this study.

Utilizing these resources, this study hopes to establish definitively the players involved in the politics of memory as the military, government, and civil society groups led by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. It expects to discover that though the government and military have been extremely influential in developing the public memory of the military regime, in recent years civil society groups have gained an advantage over those groups. This is partially because the government under Kirchner has contributed a great deal to the cause of these groups, but it is also a result of the inarguable nature of the evidence presented by victims and their families. The outcome of the ESMA memorial controversy illustrates this point very well, as does the nature of the film industry over the past twenty-five years since the fall of the regime.

Chapter 2: ESMA as Contested Space

For thousands of Argentine citizens, the ESMA complex represents both the physical pain of torture and the emotional pain of loved ones lost. Its prominent location in central Buenos Aires makes it an unavoidable landmark for many. However, as naval headquarters ESMA was essentially guaranteed to remain a prominent feature of the city. In January 1998, amidst declining popular support and increased calls for the repeal of amnesty laws first passed by President Alfonsín and later strengthened by his own administration, President Menem announced plans to demolish the ESMA complex leaving only one of the twenty-five buildings. The remaining space would be converted into a “unity park,” a green space that would represent reconciliation between the military and civilian society in a post-military regime era. The park was intended to serve as closure for all of Argentina, eliminating the need to repeal the amnesty laws and reopen the wounds left by the period of regime rule.

Menem’s proposal was met with widespread outrage, as evidenced by the wave of protests in cities throughout the country. Survivors of torture at the hands of the military, along with victims’ family members were horrified at the thought of a park honoring military-civilian relations and ignoring the extensive suffering perpetuated at the hands of the military in that location (Clarín 1998; La Nación 1998)³. They appealed to the justice system to prevent the execution of Menem’s decree, and in October of 1998 a court

³ See Appendix A.1

declared the decree unconstitutional in a decision that was later upheld by the Supreme Court (Clarín 1998; La Nación 1998)⁴.

It was at this point that various groups became involved in deciding what should replace the ESMA complex, which the military would soon vacate for a new facility in a different province. After much debate over the merit of the buildings as historic sites, the city of Buenos Aires in June 2000 agreed to convert the complex into a museum of memory. In December 2002, a proposal for the Space for Memory Institute was approved, and on March 24, 2004, the 28th anniversary of the military coup, President Kirchner officially ceded control of the space to various human rights groups charged with the maintenance and preservation of history and memory (APDH 2007).

Players

The role of the politics of memory in understanding the period of the Argentine military regime is most visible in certain instances of controversy surrounding regime-related subjects. The most widely publicized of these events is that involving the Naval Mechanics School, most commonly known by the acronym ESMA. The complex, which consists of over twenty buildings and is situated on a large grassy plot in the middle of Buenos Aires, was headquarters for the navy, the branch of the military most deeply involved with the atrocities committed by the regime (Rosenberg 1992). Additionally, the most notorious of the torture sites utilized during that period is housed within the complex, making it the source of a great deal of pain and discontent for many citizens.

⁴ See Appendix A.2

During the mid-1990s, around the twentieth anniversary of the coup that installed the regime, many citizens began to demand that ESMA be taken from the Navy and converted into a space of public memory (Goni 1996). Those most invested in this effort were surviving victims and family members of *desaparecidos*, often through organized civil society groups like the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS, a group of victims' children (Kaiser 2005). This conglomeration of like-minded groups presented its idea by appealing to both the government and the public through written requests, marches, attracting news coverage, art exhibitions, and independently published propaganda. The military, however, was by no means readily compliant with this plan, and its officials also applied pressure to the government to prevent its implementation in a variety of ways, including public boycotts and threats of a riot (Goni 1996). The government itself played a central role in the controversy during the presidencies of Carlos Menem and Nestor Kirchner in that the interests of each administration were served over those of the general public. By studying the tactics, mediums, actions, and reactions employed by each of these three general forces concerning the fate of the ESMA complex, the politics involved in the establishment of memory are clearly discernible.

Civil society groups are the political force that first brought the ESMA debate to the attention of the public. These groups' persistence in seeking official acknowledgement of the fate of the *desaparecidos* and justice for all victims of the regime helped keep the issue alive in the minds of citizens, even after twenty years. Through a variety of continued public displays, these civilians were able to bring their grievances with the ESMA complex to the government, along with their wish that it be removed from the control of the navy and designated for appropriate memorial use (Barry

2001). This request would prove difficult to fulfill as it became clear that civil society represented only one aspect of the various forces working to understand the role of ESMA and thereby the entire period of the regime in history.

The most influential of these civil society groups are the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a community of women whose children and grandchildren are among the missing. The organization is notable for its longevity, having been established within the years of regime control and remaining active through the present (Barry 2001). The Madres have become an extremely powerful organization, with thousands of members and an extensive network of supporters. They have been leaders in seeking justice for the human rights violations committed under the regime, and their cooperation with similarly-minded groups, both local and international, has proven vital to the search for answers. This group illustrated the importance of civil society in its contribution to the ESMA debate, and established itself as a formidable opponent to the protection of the complex as a military institution, particularly in the face of President Menem's complicity with military interests (Feitlowitz 1998).

Despite its weakened post-regime state, the military remained a very powerful player in Argentina. Though the military had been pared down considerably under President Raul Alfonsín's presidency immediately following the regime collapse, it certainly was not an organization to be ignored. Alfonsín's administration suffered through various revolts and even coup attempts which the military utilized to demonstrate its discontent with the prosecution of officials for crimes against humanity (Duhalde 1999). The administration's eventual passage of the amnesty laws *Ley de Obediencia Debida* and *Ley de Punto Final* in 1986 served to quell military discontent, though they

infuriated the general public. This struggle coupled with a severely weakened economy proved too difficult for the president. Alfonsín's early departure of office illuminates the difficulty of striking a balance between the two opposing factions (Romero 2002).

Additionally, with the election of President Menem the military enjoyed a marked increase in power and respect, as the new administration pardoned the few already tried for their crimes during regime rule and extended amnesty to all those still awaiting trial (Kaiser 2005). The Navy's assumption that it could maintain control of the ESMA complex was not unfounded, considering Menem's interest in the military as a political support group compounded the influence it could potentially exercise as an organization (Feitlowitz 1998).

Finally, it is clear that the government itself has served as a faction in the ESMA controversy. Each administration's response to the ongoing battle between the military and certain civil society groups coupled with its political agenda simply served to add more facets to the already complicated debate. Menem and Kirchner exemplify this in that their respective decisions regarding the fate of ESMA line up very nearly with their personal political ideologies and opinions on the period of the military regime in general.

Carlos Menem was elected as a Peronist with leftist ideals; however, his background as a conservative businessman proved difficult to shed once he was elected president. Upon taking office, Menem took the precedent Alfonsín had established in passing the *ley de obediencia debida* and the *ley de punto final* to another level in pardoning those military officers already tried and convicted of crimes committed under the regime, though he had some legitimacy in these actions in that he was supposedly jailed and tortured by the military during the regime. It is possible his motivation in this

action was prevention of further military rebellion, but it is more likely he wanted the political support of the military, which remained a powerful entity despite its pared down budget and general authority (McSherry 1997; Feitlowitz 1998). Menem gradually lost public support not only because of the passage of these new amnesty laws, but also because of a failing economy aggravated by his plan of complete privatization of national industry. As his popularity waned, Menem sought out some of the more extreme right-wing entities, like the military and various conservative business leaders, for help shoring up his political career. This is evidenced by his attempted censorship of critical news sources and civil society groups through the use of public threats and scare tactics (Feitlowitz 1998). His plan to convert the ESMA complex into a unity park representing reconciliation between society and the military was one of his last and least successful efforts as president, and he was voted out of office amid wide civil unrest and economic turmoil (Valente 1998).

Nestor Kirchner did not immediately succeed Menem as president of Argentina; instead, he followed both Fernando de la Rúa, who resigned the office amidst the burgeoning economic crisis, and Eduardo Duhalde, who was appointed interim president during the economic crisis of 2001 (Romero 2002). Though he was relatively unknown upon his election to the presidency, Kirchner quickly made a name for himself as a proponent of justice and as a force against corruption. His denunciation of military actions during the period of regime rule, as well as his appointment of more left-wing judges to many of the upper courts led to the eventual repeal of the amnesty laws as unconstitutional and to the overturn of the pardons bestowed by Menem (Gray 2004). Kirchner's background as a left-wing radical can be clearly seen in his decisions

regarding the period of regime rule, and it is widely known that his participation in the Peronist Youth organization led to his arrest and interrogation by the military (Valente 2004). As president he enjoyed considerable popularity, particularly among the civil society groups like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and HIJOS, who have found in him an ally in their efforts to find truth and justice for loved ones victimized by the regime. His support of the ESMA memorial plan helped to solidify this public support, as well as his position as a leading voice against the military and its actions throughout the Dirty War.

Methods and Media

Now that the major political players involved in the ESMA debate have been introduced, it is necessary to discuss the different methods and media each used to influence the outcome of the situation. There is considerable overlap in several of these between the three players; however, each group has managed to utilize its unique set of tools to the best of its ability. Various forms of media are the most abundant of these; they include print and broadcast news sources, books and memoirs, the theatrical and visual arts, and film. In addition to these media, the use of public education for the formation of ideas is certainly a method by which some groups have been able to manipulate public thought. Finally, public displays in the form of moments of silence, marches, and days of remembrance are also vital instruments employed by all three players. The methods developed by the players involved in the ESMA controversy are as important to understanding the politics of memory as the players themselves, and they are the aspect that kept the issue moving towards a resolution.

News coverage in the forms of print, broadcast radio, and television is the most abundant and commonly used medium of the government, military, and civilian groups. During the regime itself, the military controlled virtually all of the news outlets in the nation, allowing the truth about regime tactics to be obscured for an extended period of time. As the military regime collapsed, journalists, as some of the most targeted professionals, were eager to expose its wrongdoings under the administration of Alfonsín (Goodsell 1983). Later Menem, concerned with his diminishing control, tried again to control the nation's news sources through threats and censorship, though he was not especially successful (Feitlowitz 1998). The civil society groups also found an ally in many newspapers, radio, and television stations, mainly because many of the individuals involved with such operations were so closely linked with the left and, therefore, the disappeared (Feitlowitz 1998). The ways in which the players employed news sources in the ESMA controversy illustrate a desire to manipulate public opinion and memory through the release of selective information.

Military manipulation of news sources was the initial factor in the development of public memory of the regime period. In maintaining control of Argentina's major media outlets, the military was able to distribute false and/or incomplete information to citizens regarding its actions. Regime leaders did everything in their power to eliminate journalists who insisted on printing any information contrary to that officially specified through forced disappearances. By creating a culture of fear within the news industry, during the period of regime rule, the military was able to control public understanding to some extent, and therefore to shape what would become the memory of many Argentine citizens (Di Tella 1997). Finally, in its attempt to maintain control of the ESMA complex

in the face of rising public opposition in the late 1990s, the military appealed unsuccessfully to the public through various news sources in an effort to depict the happenings at ESMA as vital to the maintenance of security in Argentina at the time (Robin 2003). This is clearest in notorious Captain Alfredo Astiz's Tres Puntos interview, in which he defended all of the military's activities and refused to apologize for his participation (Clarín 1998; La Nación 1998)⁵. The military's early repression of news sources helped to shape early public memory of the regime period, and eventually led to the loss of news sources as an effective tool for the military altogether.

Since the fall of the military regime in 1983, only the government under Menem used the media as a way to manipulate public knowledge in the sense that the military did when it was in power. Throughout his term, Menem repeatedly threatened various news outlets, sometimes in very general terms, sometimes in more specific terms. In 1993, for example, he responded to a series of critical articles by forming a commission to discover "journalistic delinquency" (Feitlowitz 1998). These threats continued to appear, and in 1997 he went so far as suggesting violence was an appropriate response to "uncontrolled" journalism (Feitlowitz 1998). This expectation of "self-censorship" did little to shape public thought concerning the period of regime rule or to change opinion on the future of the ESMA complex (Ferreira 2000). In reality, it only served to further alienate the public and strengthen the resolve of civil society groups in their fight to regain the control they had tasted under Alfonsín.

Civil society groups had a considerable advantage in the use of news sources to promote their cause. Unlike the military and the government, these organizations had no means or motivation to forcibly control news content (Kaiser 2005). Instead, they were

⁵ See Appendix A.3

able to form an alliance with these outlets because of shared interests. The civil society groups sought to gain recognition and justice for the crimes committed against innocent individuals under the regime, partially through the conversion of ESMA into a memorial monument to the victims (Clarín 1998)⁶. The journalism community also had an interest in this conversion, as over 93 of the missing were journalists and writers willing to speak out against the regime (Di Tella 1997). Civil society groups were able to count on positive news coverage of protests, marches, meetings, and other justice-seeking endeavors because they knew that if they were willing to take risks for their cause, the journalists would as well. For this reason, even in the face of threatened censorship the interests of civil society and of the journalism community itself were well represented, particularly in the case of the ESMA controversy, in which civilian discontent with Menem's initial plans was widely discussed and published.

The arts proved to be of particular use to civil society groups in the ESMA controversy, though not for either the government or the military. Visual art exhibits and theatre productions were influential both within Argentina and in developing international interest in the history of that nation's "dirty war." Plays, operas, photography, and more general art exhibits have been used by human rights groups, civil society groups, and oppressed artists to advance understanding of their cause. Art has traditionally been an important medium through which controversial subjects may be presented discreetly, and this is true of the period of regime rule in Argentina and the subsequent ESMA controversy as well (Lira 1997).

Exhibits of the visual arts are the most common art form used to memorialize the period of the military regime in Argentina today. Though there are many interpretive

⁶ See Appendix A.1

works of various mediums, photographic exhibits, which consistently draw on pictures of victims in both normal life and in captivity, are the most prevalent (Hirsch 1999). This type of artistic depiction is powerful in its realism; it is easy to see both the humanity and suffering in pairs of pictures illuminating simultaneously moments of joy and moments of immense pain. Displays include pictures spanning from pre-regime years to present day archeological digs and exhumations, representing all phases of regime rule and its repercussions. These exhibits are found in museums throughout Argentina and also in several international museums with strong emphases on human rights, and they serve to maintain awareness of the events that have transpired in Argentina over the past thirty years (Schlotterbeck 2007).

These exhibits have been helpful for civil society groups in their efforts to gain control of ESMA for a number of reasons. Primarily, many exhibits are facilitated in large part by these groups, who provide the photographs, their histories, and any other hard-won information pertaining to those depicted, illuminating the inhumanity behind the atrocities committed and the need for retribution. Also, many exhibits, such as one known as *Identidad*, have more specific purposes. The exhibit presents the photographs of pairs of missing parents with a mirror in between, in an attempt to assist the ongoing search for missing children (Schlotterbeck 2007). This brings to public attention the continuous nature of the atrocities committed all those years ago. By gaining the ability to recreate through art the lives of the victims in an exhibit within ESMA, the very place those lives were taken, would be an enormous victory for these groups.

Theatrical arts have also been used to tell the stories of both the victims and the civil society groups who have fought to preserve their memory. The first play produced

concerning the period, Information for Foreigners, was written by Argentine playwright Griselda Gambaro, who had actually written it in 1971. The play, which foretold of the state terror to come, was not translated, published or performed until after 1985 when she felt it was safe. It remains one of the first works to draw international audiences into the crisis in Argentina (Feitlowitz 1998). More recently, the opera Estaba la Madra opened in La Plata, Argentina as a tribute to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The opera tells the story of four mothers devastated by the loss of their children at the hands of the state and of their perseverance in seeking the truth (McCarthy 2007). The opera is yet another example of the persistence of civil society groups in keeping alive the memory of the victims – the goal they hoped to accomplish through the establishment of ESMA as a memorial site.

In the controversy over who should control ESMA, public displays by the government, military, and civil society stand out as one of the largest contributing factors in the outcome. It was these public displays that led to a majority of the news coverage and even some of the theatrical and artistic displays presented by each side in defense of its perspective. Marches, protests, and days of remembrance all fall into this category, and examples of each can be seen in on the part of each of the three interest groups.

Because the military was long under the impression that it enjoyed unconditional immunity, overall it put up very little fight in the ESMA controversy. The Navy's assumption that ESMA would never be taken lay in the fact that after the revolt of the *carapintadas* in 1987 under Alfonsín's government, Menem essentially pandered to the military's expectations (Romero 2002). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the initial discussion of what was to become of ESMA. Though it eventually became clear

that under no circumstances could the facility remain in the hands of the Navy, Menem's proposal of a unity park as a symbol of civilian-military reconciliation was far from inoffensive (Feitlowitz 1998). It was only after the massive public backlash against the idea that the military realized there was cause for concern, at which point nothing could be done to curb public outrage and demands for its conversion into a memorial space in honor of the victims, those whose very existence had been repulsive to the military in the first place.

Shortly after the repeal of the amnesty laws in 2003, including the *Ley de Punto Final* and *Ley de Obediencia Debida*, it became apparent that ESMA would in fact become a space of memory and a symbol of shame for the military and the nation. The only public demonstration the military would perform in response to the humiliating loss of ESMA was a boycott by a small group of officers at the removal ceremony of the portraits of dictators Jorge Videla and Reynaldo Bignone from the military school (Valente 2004). The arrogance of the military throughout its control of the government and in subsequent years ultimately facilitated a relatively smooth transfer of the ESMA complex from military to civilian control. The military's unwillingness to acknowledge the power of civil society groups and popularly elected government ultimately cost the Navy the battle for ESMA.

The government's uses of public demonstrations with regards to the ESMA controversy are considerably more diverse than the one performed by the military after the last revolt of the *carapintadas*. This is largely contingent on the differences of opinion between Menem and Kirchner, the two leaders involved in the debate. Menem's most public display was his deliverance of a decree stating the ESMA complex would be

demolished and in its place a unity park symbolizing reconciliation with the military would be established on January 6, 1998 (Faiola 1998). He developed the idea largely without outside input, and it seemed to be more concerned with maintaining military support than gaining civilian approval. Conversely, Kirchner's public displays were more numerous and much less arbitrary, as they reflected popular opinion. For example, his decision to turn over the ESMA to the civil society groups and human rights organizations was accompanied by a large public rally near the grounds of the complex (Gray 2004). Kirchner also held a public ceremony to remove the portraits of two of the regime's dictators from their places of honor in a military school. Finally, Kirchner declared March 24, the anniversary of the 1976 coup National Day for the Remembrance of Truth and Justice (Brodsky 2005). These public gestures executed by the government reflect the mindsets of each president, as well as his intentions in the matter of the ESMA controversy.

From the time of the establishment of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the most recognizable civil society group in Argentina, public displays have been the most popular and effective means of making a point. The weekly protests of the mothers and the grandmothers, which continue through the present, set the precedent for many future demonstrations, particularly with regards to the period of regime rule (Barry 2001). Civil society involvement in the ESMA controversy was no exception. Before Menem announced his proposal of a "unity park," these groups were already holding marches and protests demanding that at least one of the former torture sites be designated as a victim memorial (Goni 1996). Upon hearing the decree that ESMA would be designated as a symbol of reconciliation between society and the military, those same groups held still

more marches and protests to express their outrage at the injustice of the idea (Faiola 1998). The groups held faithful marches every March 24 until it was declared a day of memory, and they rallied when Kirchner transferred ESMA to their control as a museum of memory. The persistence civil society groups and human rights organizations demonstrated in their various public displays proved impossible to ignore, and the presence of ESMA as a memorial to its victims illuminates the overwhelming influence of perseverance en masse.

The publication of various books and memoirs by all the political players in the development of public memory are vital to this study. Primarily, the government's publication of the results of CONADEP's findings in the book Nunca Más in 1986 gave the public its first glimpse of truth into the workings of the regime (CONADEP 1986). Subsequently, the memoirs of survivors and family members of the disappeared served to further expose the horrors of life under military control and the constant fear that paralyzed the nation. Finally, the confessional memoirs of various military officials confirmed everything that the government commissions and victim memoirs had stated while giving details yet undisclosed (Verbitsky 1996). These publications figured dramatically into the shaping of public opinion of the dirty war and also in the ultimate fate of the ESMA complex.

When President Alfonsín established the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, he could not have predicted the repercussions its publication would cause. CONADEP collected depositions from as many surviving victims of the regime as possible, publishing a volume dense with recollections of torture and all manner of human rights violations. The book, which is today required reading for all

high school students (Feitlowitz 1998), became the basic reference source for the true nature of the military regime. Nunca Más gave civil society and human rights groups a first sign of hope that one day the truth would be fully exposed and justice for the victims would be served. In terms of what would eventually be the ESMA controversy, Nunca Más became one of the most important shapers of public opinion of the military regime, and it further promoted solidarity among the general public and the more involved members of civil society organizations.

In the spirit of CONADEP and Nunca Más, survivors and family members of the disappeared began to publish accounts of their own personal experiences. With such an abundance of first-hand testimonies corroborating the factuality of the atrocities committed by the regime, international attention became more pronounced, and skeptics within Argentina were faced with overwhelming evidence that their military leaders were in fact guilty of the crimes with which they were charged (Timerman 1981; Actis, Aldini, Gardella, Lewin, and Tokar 2001). Much like CONADEP's publication, these memoirs simply provided more evidence upon which civil society groups could strengthen their case against the military in the fight for control of the ESMA complex.

The published confessions of military officials, beginning with that of Admiral Scilingo in journalist Horacio Verbitsky's The Flight in 1995, dealt the ultimate blow to the military's claim over the ESMA complex. His confessed involvement in the torture and murder of so many Argentine civilians, many based in ESMA, gave the civil society groups the information they needed to demand justice (Verbitsky 1996). Their desire to claim this justice in the form of a public space of memory was ultimately fulfilled in the 2004 transfer of the compound. Though the process was not immediate, it is clear that

the confirmation by military members of the specific methods of torture and murder employed by the regime dramatically increased the chances of justice against the perpetrators of this violence.

The final mechanism utilized, more effectively by civil society than the government and military, is film. The film industry provides a canvas upon which any group may paint its preferred image. Also, because films have the ability to influence large numbers of people, they are an essential aspect of any modern study of the politics involved in the development of public memory (Belli, Bischooping, and Schuman 1997). The second part of this study deals strictly with this medium. With regards to the ESMA controversy specifically, however, film is an interesting and essential aspect of the study. Several popular films and documentaries including La Historia Oficial, La Noche de los Lápices, and Prohibido, among others proved influential in public opinion of both the period of regime rule and its use of clandestine torture centers like ESMA. These films ultimately contributed to the cause of civil society and human rights groups through their negative and graphic portrayals of the centers and practices perpetuated within them.

The controversy surrounding the fate of the ESMA complex can be seen as a microcosm for the operation of the politics of memory involved in public remembrance of the Argentine military regime. In establishing the various entities involved and studying the methods they employ to gain a desired outcome in the ESMA debate, the political underpinnings and repercussions of such an issue become clearly visible. The ESMA complex, which was declared a memorial space in honor of the victims by President Kirchner of March 24, 2004, can be taken as a metaphor for the regime and its actions. The arrogance of the military and incompetence at governing were eventually

overcome by the perseverance of a well-organized society, a fact that is reflected in the bitter public memory of a repressive regime and the subsequent failure of a government's justice system.

Chapter 3: Film as Contested Space

The film industry provides a very different but equally demonstrative example of the politics of memory at work. Within the context of the representation of the period of regime rule, film acts as a kind of contested space in the same way the ESMA complex did. However, a somewhat different set of players and factors are at work. The players involved essentially include those involved in the movie-making process and, to some extent, the government (España 1994). The factors utilized by these players include participant backgrounds, project funding sources, years of production and release, and messages conveyed. Though it seems like a much less complex instance of the politics involved in the development of memory, film's unique ability to reach large parts of a population and its immense impressionistic powers qualify it as an important case study on this subject (Banasik and Pennebaker 1997).

Within Argentina, the government is particularly connected to the film industry because it provides a considerable portion of its funding (Falicov 2007). The main implication of this monetary connection is that the Argentine government can and does significantly influence the content of films produced and released (Foster 1992). This information is critical to this study of the effects of politics on the development of public memory through film. The fact that the various phases of film production in Argentina coordinate almost perfectly with changes in leadership is telling of the intrinsic link shared by government and film in that country, and provide a fascinating aspect of the influence politics holds with regards to filmic representations of remembered events.

Under the military regime, very few Argentine films were made because the military rarely granted funding approval and because a large part of the artistic community was disappeared, exiled, or in hiding (Foster 1992; Falicov 2007). Conversely, during Alfonsín's presidency there was a large scale renewal within the artistic community, as evidenced by the significant increase in the number of films produced and released in Argentina, most of which had a local focus (Foster 1992; Falicov 2007). Yet another clear change is visible during Menem's tenure, though it is as reflective of his radically different economic policy as it is of his political ideology. During this period there was a shift from films that focused specifically on Argentina to films with more universal, popular messages like those of Hollywood (Falicov 2007). Most recently, a new generation of filmmakers has returned to the more local/independent films in another rebirth similar to that seen in the years immediately after the fall of the military regime (Falicov 2007).

Each film discussed in this chapter is categorized by the time period during which it was released. The films were chosen because of their direct portrayal and/or discussion of the military regime and its implications on Argentine society. It is interesting that a majority of the films utilized in this study were either produced under Alfonsín or Kirchner during the two periods the film industry was most open and locally centered, as opposed to under the military regime when few movies were produced at all, or under Menem, when the subject of Argentina's military regime would hardly have produced a "blockbuster" type movie.

Two types of film, documentary and dramatic, will be examined in this part of the study. The documentaries represent the non-fiction film category while their dramatic

counterparts represent the fictional. Through the examination of three documentaries and three dramatic films concerning the events of the Argentine military regime, this study will illustrate the manipulative nature of film, the influence of those who make it, and its effects on public memory in the case of Argentina.

When discussing film in terms of public memory, one of the most common questions raised is that of historical accuracy. However, this question is at odds with this study of the politics of memory. Clearly, no perfect memory of a given historical moment exists, as several diverging perspectives are inevitably present (though many share a basic skeletal framework, the details are often divergent). A better question for this chapter, then, is one of content and perspective, an idea presented by Marcia Landy in her study of historical film (Landy 2001). How does each film represent the events of the military regime, and for what purpose? Additionally, how do industry and the goal of attaining profit affect these portrayals? In analyzing these six films, this study will illuminate the importance of this specific kind of media as an influence on national memory.

Dramatic / Fictional

Dramatic, or fictional, film is an often contested medium of historical explanation. Though film is perhaps the most versatile and expressive of the forms of media utilized by various interest groups in shaping public memory, it is also one of the least trustworthy because of its carefully calculated nature (Kaiser 2005). Examples of historical films that have greatly impacted the memory of the events they depict are numerous and include Oliver Stone's JFK and Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List. Each

of these movies has made a lasting impression on audiences throughout the world, and they have become widely accepted as truthful depictions of the assassination of the American president and of the Holocaust, respectively (Igartua and Paez 1997). Additionally, because dramatic films are usually produced by commercial studios, there is an added expectation of box office success. This circumstance lends itself to the traditional failings of media – the journalistic idea that “if it bleeds, it leads” can often be applied to the movie industry as well as to those of print and broadcast news sources – and encourages less than factual interpretation of events (Lapsley and Westlake 2006). Despite these shortcomings, dramatic film is one of the most popular sources of historical interpretation and is helpful in understanding the political shaping of memory in Argentina.

The first film this study will investigate is No habrá más penas ni olvido, or Funny Dirty Little War. The film, which is based on a satirical novel, was released in 1983. Héctor Olivera directed the film, and his own production company, Aries Cinematográfico Argentina, provided funding for the project. The movie was one of the first to address the period of regime rule negatively, and it did so only in an indirect manner through the use of satire. This work is significant in both content and in the fact that it was publicly released in such close proximity to the fall of the military regime. The entities involved in this production are indicative of those typically present during this period, and it is therefore a good representation of the kinds of forces at work in the politics of memory within the film industry.

No habrá más penas ni olvido is set in a small Argentine town in 1974. The film begins with Suprino, the local leader of the right-wing faction of Peronists, discussing

with Guglielmini, the province mayor, his desire to remove Ignacio Fuentes, the local mayor from office. Suprino sets out to accomplish this goal by insisting that Fuentes fire his assistant Mateo, who is suspected of being a Marxist. Fuentes, who is a left-wing Peronist, refuses to obey these instructions on principle and barricades himself and his few supporters in his office in preparation for an ideological battle. The police chief is then called in to enforce the orders given by Suprino and approved by Guglielmini, and the minor ideological conflict begins expanding into an armed battle. A student group then kidnaps the police chief in an attempt to curb the attack on Fuentes, but they only serve to further aggravate the situation, which at this point has become a civil war. By the end of the film, the town is in ruins, several participants from both sides have been killed, and the whole situation only served to dramatically polarize the citizens (Olivera 1983).

The movie is an obvious metaphor for the chaos leading up to the military coup of 1976 and a harsh criticism of its senselessness. Though the actual coup removed President Isabel Peron, a right-wing Peronist, from office, the military junta shared a similar, if more aggressive mindset, and carried out a majority of its violence against left-wing Peronists the Monteneros and other left-leaning factions (Romero 2002). In depicting the escalation of these events as overzealous and extreme, Olivera was able to condemn the military for the coup itself and for its subsequent actions against Argentine citizens. In negatively portraying the perpetrators of the regime, Olivera's work helped to pave the way for future films with similar and more direct messages that could more dramatically shape public memory of the period.

On a more in depth level, Olivera was sending a message critical not only of the military regime but also of the extreme leftist groups whose provocations led to the escalation of military tactics, and of the citizens who did nothing to curb and sometimes added to the violence. Olivera implies this through his depiction of the situation, which becomes a civil war not only because of the actions of one side but because of the actions of all parties involved. If Suprino and Guglielmini represent the right-wing military and Peronist sectors, and Fuentes and Mateo represent the Montoneros and other left-wing guerrilla groups, then the other citizens depicted including the students and pilot embody the remainder of the population. Olivera's film insinuates that on some level everyone is responsible for the events that occurred under the military regime.

As director of No habrá más penas ni olvido, Héctor Olivera had a great deal of personal influence on the movie's content. Olivera, who was fifty-two at the time of the film's release in 1983, had lived through all of the most chaotic periods of Argentina's twentieth century history. Having lived through five coups, two of which installed military juntas as heads of state, the military regime of 1976 to 1982 was not much of a surprise to Olivera. It was these prior experiences that taught Olivera not only how to survive in such a culture, but also how to maintain a successful career under such repression. His production company, which he founded in 1956, was one of the few to remain in tact and in business throughout the regime's presence (Landini 1993). The movie's indirect and humorous approach to condemning military actions illustrates Olivera's understanding of the finesse needed in criticism of such forces.

The year of this film's release is also extremely significant to its role in the development of public memory of the regime. In September of 1983 when the film was

released, the last military leader Reynaldo Bignone was still technically in power, though the regime had basically fallen and Raul Alfonsín would take power within months (Romero 2002). This explains the fact that the film is set in 1974 before the military junta took power, and its indirect (though thinly veiled) criticism of the regime. Considering that the movie was made and released completely under regime authority makes it a groundbreaking work for its controversial content. It also illustrates the loss of power the regime faced following the loss of the Falklands War and its waning ability to control the nation through terror, and therefore its weakened state as a player in the politics of memory.

The second film, which was also directed and funded by Héctor Olivera and Aries Cinematográfico Argentina, is La noche de los lápices. The film, which was released in 1986, graphically portrays one of the most notorious acts of the regime in the kidnap and torture of high school students. The movie, which is also based on a book of the same name, is important in that it presents a much more open, powerful, and serious criticism of the actions of the military. This stronger portrayal of the period is a reflection of the political atmosphere of the time, which was one of outrage and a demand for answers from President Alfonsín's administration. The story has affected the Argentine population forcefully, and has had a great influence on public memory, especially that of younger generations (Kaiser 2005).

La noche de los lápices opens with the introduction of seven students involved in organizing a protest for lower bus fares. Though they are initially successful under the government of Isabel Peron, it is soon made clear that the new military regime will not allow such "leftist" activities. Shortly after the coup, the students' high school dance is

raided by military officials on horseback, and it is not long after that six of the seven are kidnapped in the middle of the night. Pablo, the seventh, is taken only days later and discovers that his friends are being tortured and held by the military, just as he is. After a scene in which tango music is played loudly to mask Pablo's cries while being tortured with an electric prod, he is reunited with his friends. They keep each others' spirits up through song, exercise, and the occasional stolen touch, though their emaciated frames and filthy clothes betray the harsh conditions of detainment and torture. Meanwhile, the mothers of the students approach the local police, military, and clergy members in search of answers they will never obtain. Eventually, Pablo is released from prison and is able to tell their story (Olivera 1986).

The movie presents an extremely violent and graphic portrayal of one of the darkest aspects of the military regime's actions. The indiscriminate detainment and torture of minors is only one of the many truly obscene steps taken by the military in its efforts to squash any possible voice of dissent. This film's representation of youthful hope and idealism of the students paired with the ruthless violence and soullessness of their torturers creates a devastating image of the regime and its twisted motivations. Its release in 1986 is illustrative of the much more open dialogue allowed under the administration of Alfonsín. Olivera utilizes this expanded freedom in this much more derisive representation of the military. This movie's effect on the population, particularly on students of subsequent generations, has helped to maintain a sense of outrage and solidarity against the possibility of any such conduct in the future (Kaiser 2005).

Olivera's message in this movie is considerably more direct than in No habrá más penas ni olvido. While his inclusion of the students' protests implies that they are not

completely guiltless in their provocation of the military, his use of graphic imagery and frank depiction of the students' suffering also indicates that the punishment did not fit the crime. Olivera was able to sharpen his criticism of the military's role in the atrocities committed during this period in this film, partially because of its later release under a more democratic government, and partially because of the continuing exposure of new information concerning the regime and the extent of the atrocities committed (Feitlowitz 1998).

The final dramatic film this study chose to examine is La Historia Oficial. The movie, which was released in 1985, is the most recognizable of the films concerning the period of regime rule in Argentina in that it achieved both widespread popularity and critical acclaim. Luis Puenzo, who worked in advertising throughout most of the period of military rule, directed the movie, which was his first full length film following the fall of the regime (Garcia Oliveri 1993). Puenzo's long time production partner Historias Cinematograficas Cinemania funded the project, which proved a very successful venture. In some ways, the film excused the ignorance of so many Argentine citizens who refused to stand up to the regime, creating less of a sense of guilt in its viewers and creating broader appeal. The movie is relevant to the study of the politics at work in the development of public memory because it reached both national and international popularity as a representation of the period, and it also reflects the open dialogue experienced under Alfonsín's new democratic administration.

La historia oficial follows the story of Alicia, a schoolteacher and wife of Roberto, a prominent Argentine businessman in the immediate aftermath of the regime. The couple has an adopted daughter, Gaby, who is now five years old and was born

during the period of military rule. As Alicia's students begin speaking out against the school's mandatory history books that were "written by assassins," and as she is reunited with an old friend who was tortured and exiled by the military, she begins to question the circumstances surrounding her daughter's secretive delivery. Because her husband will not give her any answers, Alicia becomes more and more embroiled in the search for her child's identity with the help of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo, as her husband becomes increasingly distant and paranoid about his past involvement with both the military and foreign business interests. Upon meeting the woman who may be Gaby's grandmother, Alicia introduces her to Roberto, who becomes enraged. When he believes Alicia has taken Gaby, he brutally beats her. Alicia leaves devastated, having lost her husband and child but knowing the truth (Puenzo 1987).

Luis Puenzo's experiences contributed significantly to the content of this project. Having formed his own production company in 1968, Puenzo was already well-established in the film industry by the time the military took control of the nation. Like so many involved in the arts industries, Puenzo recognized the potential danger of such a career at that point in time, as is reflected by his decision to work strictly in advertising during those years. La historia oficial is his first foray into the movies following the collapse of the regime, and his subject matter was expectedly controversial and critical.

Again, the release year of 1985 is telling of the reclaimed freedoms being exercised under the newly founded democracy. However, unlike Olivera's La noche de los lápices, La historia oficial is neither extremely violent nor does it condemn the nation's citizens for their seeming complicity as the former film does (Kaiser 2005). La historia oficial is significant in that it is a much more watchable movie in the sense that

there are very few graphically violent scenes; yet it is an extremely critical depiction of the time period, one that most Argentine citizens have seen and incorporated into their memories (IMDB 2005).

The most interesting aspect of this film is its underlying message of forgiveness and sympathy for those who did nothing to stop the atrocities. The movie almost condones Alicia's ignorance of her daughter's origins, and in the process condones the portion of the Argentine populace that claims unawareness of regime's actions at the time. Even the woman claiming to be Gaby's grandmother sympathizes with Alicia not as a kidnapper but as a fellow victim (Kaiser 2005). This less critical approach is one not frequently seen in many dramatic recreations of the period, and it is evidence of another, if less popular, point of view of the era.

The two different perspectives illuminated by *La noche de los lapices* and *La historia oficial* are indicative of the ongoing struggle to definitively memorialize this part of Argentina's history. The brutality of the first film coupled with the softer, more empathetic tone of the second represent the ideological divide inherent in the development of public memory of the period of regime rule. The differences in the two films' portrayals of the era serve as a reminder that there are at least two sides to the story of the military regime, and aspects of both must be incorporated into the national understanding of this time period.

It is important to note that all three dramatic films were released within ten years of each other and essentially serve as reproductions of the time period they depict. The movies act as a kind of teaching device through which the Argentine population could better understand the actions of the military regime and begin to come to terms with the

long-term repercussions of the period of military rule. The dramatic films released in such close proximity to the fall of the military regime are a reflection of the fear and growing outrage the Argentine citizens experienced during this era.

Documentary/Nonfiction

Documentary film is best defined by Bill Nichols in his book Introduction to Documentary in the following way:

Documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a *representation* of the world we already occupy. It stands for a particular view of the world, one we may never have encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us. We judge a reproduction by its fidelity to the original – its capacity to look like, act like, and serve the same purposes as the original. We judge a representation more by the nature of the pleasure it offers, the value of insight or knowledge it provides, and the quality of the orientation or disposition, tone or perspective it instills. We ask more of a representation than we do of a reproduction. This is certainly the case with documentary film.

This definition categorizes documentary as nonfiction film that incorporates both fact and opinion to illustrate a specific viewpoint (Barsam 1973; Nichols 2001). Unlike dramatic films, documentaries are less frequently produced by commercial studios and therefore do not hold the same expectations of economic success. However, this certainly does not ensure the production of more “accurate” films, as is indicated in the above definition (Nichols 2001). Documentaries present consistently one-sided

perspectives because of the almost complete creative control of their initiators and directors (Ellis and McLane 2005). Documentaries are a necessary aspect of the discussion of the politics of memory in the film industry in that they have the ability to convey completely uncensored and undisguised sociopolitical messages while maintaining the flexibility of film as a medium.

The first documentary this study investigated is Prohibido. This film, which was released in 1997, interviews various members of the artistic community and shows actual regime footage illustrating media control and repression of the arts. Andrés Di Tella, an Argentine citizen of mixed Indian and European descent, directed the movie. The Patagonik Film Group, one of the biggest production companies in the nation, funded and produced it near the end of Menem's second term as president, amidst growing national tension and dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Prohibido includes interviews of members from many sectors of the arts community. These individuals include the head of the Teatro San Martín under the regime, as well as two theatre directors who refused to work for the state under the regime; journalist Jacobo Timerman, whose memoir detailing his detainment first alerted the international community to the atrocities of the regime; Norma Aleandro, the lead actress in La historia oficial, who was exiled under the regime; intellectual Mario Villani, one of the most well-known survivors of ESMA and the regime; visual artists including both a photographer and a painter; and two radio personalities who were stripped of control of their shows. The film illuminates the repression experienced by artists and intellectuals under the regime, and ends powerfully by detailing the concrete effects on the arts community in terms of disappearances. They are as follows: 93 journalists and

writers, 8 actors, 4 filmmakers, 6 musicians, 23 psychologists, 3 painters, 600 teachers, and 2000 students. The documentary provided a scathing criticism both of the repression experienced and the lack of justice in response (Di Tella 1997).

Di Tella is an elusive figure. He was born in the late 1960s to an Indian mother and an Argentine father and became involved in film in the late 1980s. Though he does not seem to have been immediately affected by the period of regime rule, it is clear that his early experiences as a filmmaker during the open phase under Alfonsín's administration had a great effect on him (Di Tella, Firbas, and Monteiro 2006). Though the documentary was never a blockbuster by any means, it reached a considerable number of people, and Di Tella's perspective as a member of the arts today is clear in his evident sympathy with the repressed artists and intellectuals profiled in his movie.

The fact that this documentary was released in 1997 makes it particularly interesting, as it is the only film in this study produced under the Menem administration. Menem, who repeatedly threatened various media outlets about speaking out against the military regime, experienced a sharp decline in both popularity and power during the last three years of his second presidential term (Romero 2002). Additionally, its funding by such a major production company lent the documentary a success it would not have enjoyed had it been privately funded. This film is significant in that it illustrates Menem's gradually slipping control over public discussion of the regime, and, thereby, its development in memory.

The underlying message presented through the voices of the artistic community is one of defiance and outrage. This is certainly reflective of the immense losses that particular group experienced under the military regime. Interestingly, the artists seem

less concerned with the loss of those willing to speak out than with the loss of their identity under the regime. Many were forced into exile, and thereby stripped of not only their artistic identities within their community, but also of their national identities as Argentine citizens. Norma Aleandro expressed this sentiment particularly well in telling the story of her refusal to denounce Argentina in order to become a Spanish citizen. These individuals' discussion of the military regime reveals the importance of community, whether on a national, local, or even smaller level.

The second documentary included is Los Rubios, director Albertina Carri's personal quest to discover the truth about her parents, who were disappeared by the military regime when she was three years old. Unlike Prohibido, Los Rubios was independently funded and recorded entirely by Carri herself and a few other classmates. The documentary was released in 2003, the first year of Kirchner's presidency, and was nominated for several independent film awards. It is one of the first documentaries to address the questions and concerns of the victims' children – an orphaned generation – as opposed to the victims themselves. This documentary deals with the complete absence of memory among these individuals, as well as their need to recreate one.

Los Rubios immediately reflects the intensely personal nature of the director's goals in making the documentary. The film employs another actress to play the role of Albertina Carri as Carri herself looks on and narrates. The students visit the former home of Carri, her two sisters, and her disappeared parents. They interview former neighbors, family members, and old family friends about the appearance, character, and history of Carri's parents. As Carri tries to create a memory of her parents, she finds that this may never be possible, as all anyone seems to remember are tiny, uncorroborated snippets and

anecdotes. For example, the title of the film comes from the first interview with a former neighbor, an old woman who insists the whole family was blonde, though this was actually not the case. Carri's documentary highlights the frustrations of this generation, who have been completely robbed of their parents and memory by the regime (Carri 2003).

Albertina Carri was three when her parents were taken, too young to have formed any truly vivid memories. She and her sisters moved from Buenos Aires to the country, where they were raised by an aunt and an uncle on a ranch. Carri's interest in understanding her parents, their motivations, and the ideology in which they believed strongly enough to risk their lives for is understandable, as is her frustration at not finding straight answers (Carri 2003). The 2003 release of the film is also reflective of the fact that under Kirchner the military regime is finally being addressed freely and without repercussion, and justice is slowly nearing, both in the repeal of the amnesty laws and the acknowledgment and memorialization of the victims. Carri's documentary is reflective of this new question of memory development facing a generation only indirectly, if deeply, touched by the presence of the military regime.

This documentary illustrates the imperfection of human memory in a profound way. Because Carri has virtually no memory of her parents she must rely on information from others. Her inability to create a definitive idea of her parents' characters through this gathered information indicates that no perfectly accurate memory exists. In some ways this can be seen as a metaphor for the larger purpose of this study: many different forces influence the creation of a memory, and understanding these forces and their motivations is the only way to gain insight into the people (or events) of the past.

The last documentary utilized in the study is called Encontrando a Victor. The film, which Victor's daughter Natalia Bruchstein directed, is similar to Los Rubios in that it is the story of a parentless child seeking to form a memory of the father she never knew. This documentary was also independently funded and was released in 2005, though by a Mexican production company rather than an Argentine one. This production is also intensely personal, and asks questions similar to those of Carri, though with some marked differences. The film is significant in its address of the senselessness of the violence perpetrated by the regime.

Unlike Carri in Los Rubios, Bruchstein asks the more pressing question, "Why didn't Victor leave Argentina, and why didn't he consider the effects his decision to fight for his ideals would have on me, his child?" In asking these questions, Bruchstein expresses anger at her murdered parent not seen in Carri. Upon asking her mother what could have motivated her father to throw his life away for his ideals, Shula responds, "We wanted a more just world for you." This sentiment is particularly poignant in this documentary because of the extreme circumstances of Bruchstein's family. The military regime killed Bruchstein's father, paternal grandfather, her father's brother, two sisters, and their husbands. Natalia left Argentina with her mother, paternal grandmother, remaining aunt, uncle, and cousins for Mexico shortly thereafter. Bruchstein's documentary interviews never extend outside her family, but then there really is no need, as her family has experienced as much loss as any other at the hands of the military (Bruchstein 2005).

Encontrando a Victor is short but extremely powerful in its message of gratuitous violence and loss. Bruchstein was an infant when the military killed her father and a

majority of his family. She spent most of her life in Mexico, far removed from the reality of the aftermath of the regime in Argentina. Her frustration is understandable, as it seems that a peaceful life in Mexico would have been the obvious alternative to the losing ideological fight her father and relatives chose instead (Bruchstein 2005). Finally, the documentary's very recent production is illustrative of the broadening sense of memory evident in Argentina after only a few years of a more stable democratic process; this can be seen in the official institution of a day of remembrance, the conversion of ESMA into a memorial, and in projects like Bruchstein's. This film is important in the development of public memory in that it also holds the public responsible for not responding in more reactive and productive ways to the violence carried out by the regime.

Bruchstein's film comes nearest to those of director Olivera in terms of holding the entire population accountable for the extent of the atrocities committed by the military. She portrays her parents and relatives as almost selfish in their insistence on antagonizing the military. Though it is hard to ignore her mother's response that they simply wanted a better world for their children, Bruchstein makes it clear that in some ways a parentless world is as chaotic as an undemocratic one. The perspective of this younger generation is vital to a complete understanding of the time period, as they were in many ways as deeply affected as their parents by the military regime, but with the benefit of interpreting events in hindsight.

It is interesting to note that these three films also share similar release dates. The documentary film seems to be the preferred coping method of a new generation of Argentine filmmakers. In each documentary, the goal was not to explain the period of the military regime, but to investigate the underlying motivations and reactions of

individual citizens to the regime. The fact that both Carri and Bruchstein utilized this medium in searching for definitive information about their disappeared parents indicates the continued presence of the influence of the military regime and the ongoing efforts to come to terms with it.

A few observations and conclusions can be reached with regards to the politics of memory based on the analysis of these six films. First of all, the government stands out as a clear player in the filmic reproduction of materials concerning the development of memory of the dirty war. This is evident in the three dramatic films, which were all released either at the absolute end of regime control, when military officials had effectively been stripped of all power, or under the administration of Alfonsín, who was forced to allow considerably more freedom of expression in the immediate aftermath of the regime collapse and the nation's return to democracy. It can also be seen in the absence of filmic expression from 1989 to 1999, the period during which Menem held office. Menem's blatantly pro-military stance, as well as his effectual censorship of various forms of medium are clearly reflected in this relative absence of film, excepting the documentary Prohibido which was produced during his decline in popularity. Finally, the more recent documentaries Los Rubios and Encontrando a Victor are reflective of the much more open and democratic direction the country has taken in its post-2001 economic crisis years, mainly under the leadership of Kirchner.

In addition to these reflections of the political climate's influence on the film industry, the types of films most common in each period represent the changes the nation has undergone in its understanding of the military regime period and its subsequent development of memory. It is telling that the three dramatic films were released in the

years immediately following the collapse of the regime. This illustrates the incomplete knowledge the population faced because of the military's repression of information, and therefore its inability to develop a complete memory of the period. These dramatic films helped Argentine citizens to process the period of regime by artistically recreating it, and also helped to fill in some of the gaps of information. Similarly, the more recent documentaries show that the population has shifted from that phase of unknowing disbelief to one of questioning the cause behind the regime. It is clear that a unified perception of the regime has been reached, and that now it is necessary to understand how it ever happened in the first place.

It is evident that the film industry is a major component of the development of public memory, and as such it is subject to the political factors surrounding that issue. Both documentary and dramatic film share important roles in the processing and understanding of the Argentine military regime, and they cannot be discounted as an example of the politics of memory at work in this study.

Conclusions

This study of the politics of memory in relation to the period of regime rule in Argentina is admittedly complex and has not always yielded black and white answers. Through examination of both the ESMA memorial controversy and the use of film as contested space in the development of public memory, this study has established several of the major players affecting public memory of the regime, as well as the tools they utilize to form a specific image of the past. The various motivations of each player and the level of influence they were able to attain make this topic an extremely dynamic, interesting, and unpredictable one.

One of the most intriguing aspects of working with this theme has been discovering the evolutionary nature of the politics of memory. Both the ESMA controversy and the film studies illuminate this facet of the subject in their own respective ways. The ESMA controversy, for example, has been a relatively recent manifestation of the politics of memory at work. For over twenty years after the coup, the idea that ESMA may be taken from the military and handed over to the survivors of its abuses was completely out of the question. It was only with the passage of time, the gradual uncovering of truths about the regime, and the relentless efforts of civil society and human rights groups that the idea was able to become a possibility and eventually a reality. Even with the return of democracy, particularly under President Menem, citizens had to fight against the repression of memory of the regime, just as they had at one time fought literal repression under it.

The same can be said of the film industry, which began shaping public memory of the regime first in its indirect criticisms and representations of the period, and later through much more direct and biting depictions. Even this medium had to fight against continued censorship of memory materials under Menem, however, and was not able to truly embrace the debate surrounding memory of the regime until very recently.

Similarly, the influence levels of the players have gradually shifted over time as well. The military, which obviously began in complete control of public understanding through its terrorizing tactics and strict control of information, has become essentially non-existent in the shape of public memory of the regime today. Though military members and officials who took part in the regime have occasionally had the opportunity to voice their opinions and perspective in various broadcasted, printed, or documentary interviews, their explanations are consistently treated with scorn and resentment. The recent overturn of the amnesty laws instituted under both Alfonsín and Menem serve to strengthen the idea that it is not the military that deserves mercy, but an injured public that deserves justice.

The government, whose hand is evident both in the study of film and in the ESMA controversy, also seems to have lost some of the inarguable sway it once held over the population. With the disgraceful end of Menem and the economic collapse, the image of the government has suffered considerably within the past ten years. The abuses of power committed by the new “democratic” administrations of Alfonsín, Menem, de la Rúa, and even to some extent Duhalde have been much less tolerated in recent years as the public has become consistently more vocal about its concerns and expectations. Menem’s inability to follow through with his planned conversion of ESMA into a ‘unity

park' is evidence of this trend, as is Kirchner's decision to heed public interest in converting that site into a memorial museum to honor the victims.

Finally, the increasingly publicized voice of the Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, HIJOS, and the numerous other civil society and human rights groups cannot be ignored. It is clear that as power has shifted away from first the military and then the official government, it has become much more concentrated in the hands of these and other unassociated citizens. This is significant in that a democratic government should reflect the interests and mindset of its people, and this ideal has become much more of a reality in recent years with this change of focus.

However, it also hints at the idea that these groups now hold a privileged position as a player in the politics of memory. It seems possible that because of the immense injustices suffered by these groups that it is now unallowable to argue with their position. The emotional intensity of their message has become so powerful that their perspective is more important and accepted than that of even the most objective historians. This situation reflects the core issue of the development of public memory: the inability of a society to remember a given trauma objectively.

The study of the politics of memory is a necessary aspect of understanding not only the public memory of Argentina's military regime, but also of history as a whole. The idea that "history is written by the victors" may not be completely accurate today, but it is certainly true that history has a great deal to do with the perspective from which it is written. The different kinds of film associated with the military regime in Argentina, as well as the controversy surrounding the fate of the ESMA complex, are simply two

examples among millions that accurately display the complexity involved in both the development of public memory, as well as that of history itself.

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Appendix A.1

*This appendix consists of primary source news articles regarding President Carlos Menem's decree that ESMA be converted to a unity park and the subsequent public backlash. They were available in the online archives of both the *Clarín* and *La Nación*, the two most prominent newspapers in Buenos Aires.

DEBATE ABIERTO: SORPRESIVO ANUNCIO DE MENEM

Demolerán la ESMA y colocarán un monumento por la unión nacional

El Presidente lo dijo al informar que la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada será trasladada a Puerto Belgrano

- Recibió críticas desde la oposición y de organismos de derechos humanos

JAVIER CALVO

Una fuerte polémica estalló ayer después que el presidente Carlos Menem anunció una sorpresiva decisión: la demolición del edificio de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), donde funcionó el principal centro de detención ilegal de la última dictadura militar, y la creación en ese lugar de un parque y un monumento símbolo de la unión nacional. La inesperada iniciativa fue rechazada y criticada por varios dirigentes de la oposición y por todos los organismos de derechos humanos. La jugada presidencial se produce en momentos en los que dentro del PJ ha resurgido la disputa por la re-reelección presidencial, auspiciada por el ultramenemismo y que ya comenzó a escribir su primer capítulo en la Justicia. La decisión también se conoce apenas 24 horas después que un grupo de diputados del Frepaso presentó un proyecto para que sean derogadas las leyes de punto final y obediencia debida, que eximieron de proceso a más de un millar de represores. Esa idea, que generó tensión dentro de la Alianza, fue calificada ayer por Menem como deleznable. Menem anunció la firma del decreto por el que la ESMA será trasladada a la base naval de Puerto Belgrano en una conferencia de prensa que ofreció ayer, al mediodía, en la Casa Rosada. Según la palabra presidencial y el texto de los fundamentos del decreto, esta decisión tiene un valor simbólico innegable, sustentado en el afán por dejar atrás las antinomias y asumir las lecciones de la historia reciente, expresando plenamente la voluntad de conciliación de los argentinos. En el lugar, símbolo de la represión desatada en los años de plomo, se creará un parque para recibir a jefes de Estado que visiten el país. Desde el Gobierno, también se admitió la posibilidad de que los familiares de la víctimas de la dictadura rindan allí un homenaje a los desaparecidos. El lugar va a permanecer, no podemos llevarnos la tierra y lo único que se hace es trasladar la ESMA. El lugar va a continuar ahí y podrán rendir homenaje, cosa que no pueden hacer ahora, muchos de los familiares de quienes fueron víctimas de ese proceso que ustedes saben, explicó el Presidente, adelantándose a las posibles críticas de los organismos de derechos humanos por su idea de unión nacional. Con el argumento de buscar la reconciliación -el mismo que utilizó para justificar los indultos a guerrilleros, ex comandantes y carapintadas-, Menem dijo que allí se creará un monumento o un símbolo a la unidad nacional. En el decreto se establece destinar al uso público los terrenos que actualmente ocupa la ESMA (sobre la avenida Del Libertador casi General Paz, en el barrio de Nuñez) y erigir en dicho espacio libre un símbolo de la unión nacional como único propósito, lo que representa un compromiso ético de convivencia democrática y respeto a la ley. También, Menem propuso la utilización del predio, una vez remodelado, para la recepción de visitantes ilustres. Ese lugar lo vamos a utilizar para hacer las recepciones a personalidades que nos visitan, como lo tienen otros países, dijo. A la hora de las precisiones, el ministro de Defensa, Jorge Domínguez, sostuvo que la Escuela de Guerra Naval -lindante con la ESMA- va a continuar donde se encuentra, por ser un edificio histórico. En tanto que el resto del terreno se va a parquizar y se construirá un monumento como símbolo de la convivencia democrática y la voluntad de conciliación de los argentinos. Ese emblema consistirá en un mástil con una bandera argentina. En la oposición, la propuesta de Menem provocó sorpresa y rechazo, aunque los principales referentes de la Alianza prefirieron el silencio o hablar por boca de otros dirigentes. Así, el radical Fernando de la Rúa derivó al secretario general partidario, Jesús Rodríguez, la reacción de la UCR. Además de criticar la idea de Menem, irónicamente el ex diputado Rodríguez se preguntó si a la inauguración del monumento serán invitados los ex comandantes y los carapintadas indultados. Mientras para Federico Storani la

propuesta es un absurdo. Con mayor dureza se expresó el diputado frepasista Juan Pablo Cafiero, uno de los impulsores de la derogación del punto final y la obediencia debida. Para el legislador, el monumento en la ESMA me suena más a provocación que a una propuesta de unidad nacional. Igual, las mayores críticas partieron de los organismos de derechos humanos, abroquelados en un férreo rechazo a la idea del monumento, aunque surgieron divergencias a la hora de definir qué harían con la ESMA: La APDH consideró que la iniciativa es un golpe bajo, burdo y torpe y la calificó de acto de insania. Para Hebe de Bonafini (Madres de Plaza de Mayo) se trata de un divague de Menem, que está trastornado por la re-reelección. A su criterio, la ESMA debe mantenerse como una muestra del horror vivido. Nora Cortiñas, de la Línea Fundadora de Madres, opinó que la iniciativa muestra una falta total de sensibilidad y constituye una provocación. Para Cortiñas, el lugar de la ESMA es y será el de campo de secuestro y tortura. Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas calificó la decisión de Menem de horrorosa, y agregó: No hay reconciliación sin verdad y justicia. Estela Carlotta (titular de Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) también expresó su rechazo y propuso que el lugar se destine para un hospital infantil o de resguardo a chicos abandonados. La Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre aplaudió que se demuela la ESMA, pero para que se instale un espacio de memoria. En tanto el SERPAJ dijo que esto es trágico y demuestra que para Menem la ESMA sigue siendo un lugar utilizable. Quien se confesó desinformada del tema fue la nueva subsecretaria de Derechos Humanos, Inés Pérez Suárez, al sostener que no escuché los testimonios que dio el Presidente, pero me parece que debe ser una decisión acertada.
(<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/01/08/t-00211d.htm>)

Jueves 8 de enero de 1998

[Noticias](#) | [Archivo](#) | [Jueves 8 de enero de 1998](#) | [Política](#) | [Nota](#)

Mudarán la ESMA a Puerto Belgrano

Lo anunció ayer, imprevistamente, el presidente Menem

El presidente Menem anunció ayer que el edificio de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), todo un símbolo del proceso militar que gobernó el país entre 1976 y 1983, será reciclado y que en el predio que ocupa en la Avenida del Libertador, en el barrio de Núñez, se levantará un monumento a la unidad nacional.

El jefe del Estado expresó que la ESMA se trasladará a la Base Naval de Puerto Belgrano, cerca de Bahía Blanca.

El sorpresivo anuncio de Menem se interpretó como una respuesta a la iniciativa de diputados del Frepaso para que se dejen sin efecto las leyes de obediencia debida y de punto final, por las que beneficiaron a militares acusados de violaciones de los derechos humanos.

"Con el monumento a la unidad nacional pretendemos hacer referencia a un valor simbólico innegable y al afán por dejar atrás antinomias de una historia reciente", explicó Menem ayer, en una conferencia en la Casa Rosada. También se anunció que los familiares de personas que perdieron la vida en la ESMA podrán visitar el edificio y rendir homenaje a las víctimas.

Un pasado que siempre vuelve

La idea del presidente Carlos Menem de reciclar el edificio de la ESMA para crear un espacio verde y levantar un monumento a la unidad nacional no fue enteramente suya.

Desde hace más de un año se manejaba en la cúpula de la Armada la posibilidad de trasladar la Escuela, que durante décadas representó la innovación académica, pero que en los últimos veinte años se convirtió en un símbolo del terrorismo de Estado y de la represión ilegal.

La imagen de la ESMA está hoy mucho más asociada a la del centro clandestino de detención que funcionó en su seno entre 1976 y 1982 que a la de sus aulas, donde se formaron generaciones de mecánicos navales.

Su nombre también está ligado a una causa judicial por violación de derechos humanos, en la que en 1987 la Cámara Federal les dictó la prisión preventiva a diez oficiales de la Armada y a dos integrantes de la Prefectura Naval, que poco después quedaron en libertad por ley de obediencia debida.

Fue para aventar definitivamente esos fantasmas del pasado que los altos mandos de la Armada, encabezados por el almirante Carlos Marrón, imaginaron la alternativa de deshacerse del edificio de la ESMA.

El Presidente hizo suya la idea y se reservó para sí el momento del anuncio y la modalidad.

El momento elegido

La ocasión elegida por Menem no fue casual: dio a conocer la iniciativa un día después de que varios diputados del Frepaso presentaran un proyecto para derogar las leyes de punto final y obediencia debida sancionadas en la época de Raúl Alfonsín y que tan mala repercusión causó en el radicalismo.

Esas diferencias evidenciadas en el seno de la Alianza intentarán ser aprovechadas por el oficialismo para poner en tela de juicio la aptitud de la oposición para constituir una efectiva coalición de gobierno. Y el anuncio presidencial sobre la ESMA no hace más que instalar en la sociedad un debate sobre nuestro pasado, que también puede ser interpretado como una manera de sembrar cizañas en la oposición.

No por nada Menem juzgó ayer como "deleznable" el proyecto presentado por los frepasistas, a quienes consideró "empeñados en reabrir heridas".

En la óptica menemista, la idea del monumento a la unidad nacional en reemplazo de la ESMA sería un tercer elemento de pacificación tras la repatriación de los restos de Rosas y los indultos a las juntas militares.

La perspectiva histórica

En la ciudad alemana de Nuremberg, antiguo bastión del nazismo, se conserva intacto el gigantesco estadio donde Hitler se dirigía a las multitudes; hoy es para los alemanes y para los turistas que lo visitan un símbolo del holocausto. En el sector oriental de Berlín hay un museo donde está representado lo peor de la guerra, a metros del Check Point Charly, el punto fronterizo en el cual los alemanes del Este protagonizaron innumerables intentos para escapar del régimen comunista.

El general Franco hizo construir a fines de los años '50, a pocos kilómetros del Monasterio de El Escorial, un monumento a los 300.000 caídos en los dos bandos que se midieron en la Guerra Civil española.

Destinar el edificio de la ESMA a recepciones para jefes de Estado extranjeros, como lo sugirió el presidente Menem, podría implicar un intento por echar un manto de olvido sobre los trágicos sucesos del gobierno militar, a juicio de las entidades de derechos humanos, que preferirían que se conserve como un monumento que refleje lo que no debe volver a pasar.

Los pueblos tienen distintas maneras de enfrentar sus duelos y de asumir su pasado.

Lo único cierto hasta ahora es que estamos ante una cuestión cuyas profundas heridas difícilmente se cierran con una simple decisión administrativa o un decreto presidencial.

Fernando Laborda

ESMA: el Gobierno toma previsiones

Informes de inteligencia que traslucían la posibilidad de protestas callejeras de sectores de ultraizquierda, desmanes y hasta intentos de copamiento, seguidos de represión policial, ante la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, el último gran símbolo de los días más oscuros del gobierno de facto de 1976-1983, fueron decisivos para que la administración de Carlos Menem diera el aval final para el traslado de ese centenario cuerpo académico a Puerto Belgrano.

El incremento en la violencia callejera comenzó a evidenciarse, al menos para quienes realizan tareas de inteligencia en la Argentina, en octubre último, cuando un grupo de jóvenes destruyó buena parte de las vidrieras de la avenida Santa Fe, en las cercanías del predio ferial de la Sociedad Rural, en Palermo, donde el presidente Menem brindó una comida de honor a su par norteamericano Bill Clinton.

El traslado de la ESMA, que costará tres millones de dólares, y que permitirá abrir a la comunidad uno de los santuarios de la tortura, como quedó constatado en el juicio federal a las juntas militares, no fue definido en las últimas horas, aunque su anuncio oficial se concretó poco después de que los diputados aliancistas Alfredo Bravo y Juan Pablo Cafiero propusieran derogar en el Congreso las leyes de obediencia debida y de punto final, sancionadas durante el gobierno radical de Raúl Alfonsín.

La primera persona en hablar públicamente sobre la reubicación de los entes académicos de la Armada fue el propio jefe de la institución naval, almirante Carlos Marrón, al inaugurar, en Puerto Belgrano, en marzo último, el año de actividades militares. En aquella oportunidad, Marrón anunció a sus marinos la intención de racionalizar el área educativa naval, pero no brindó precisiones sobre cuáles iban a ser los institutos que se trasladarían o cerrarían, con excepción del liceo ubicado en Salta.

Desde marzo último, con el aval presidencial, se sucedieron los estudios de factibilidad para cumplir con esos objetivos, los que prácticamente estuvieron cerrados hace un mes.

Instrucciones en el desayuno

Fuentes del área castrense y del Gobierno comentaron anoche a *La Nación* que el Presidente decidió el lunes último, por la mañana, que debía acelerarse la confección de varios proyectos para su envío al Congreso.

En un desayuno que compartió en la Casa de Gobierno con el jefe de Gabinete, Jorge Rodríguez; los secretarios general de la Presidencia, Alberto Kohan, y de Control Estratégico, Miguel Solé, Menem "instruyó" a sus colaboradores a tener listos para esta semana las siguientes propuestas:

- Penalización de la profanación de cadáveres y sepulcros.
- Traslado de la ESMA a Puerto Belgrano y parquización del actual predio para erigir un monumento para la "pacificación nacional".
- Disminución del IVA para el sector agropecuario.
- Construcción del "pentagonito", edificio inteligente en Villa Martelli para albergar a las Fuerzas Armadas y a Defensa. Ayer se conoció el decreto por el cual se autoriza un endeudamiento público por 396 millones de pesos por 12 años para esa edificación y la adecuación de los edificios militares para albergar a parte de la Justicia.

Malos recuerdos

Pudo saberse que los funcionarios debieron trabajar contra reloj para presentar anteanoche a Menem los proyectos listos para su firma y, además, para que pudiera anunciarlos públicamente en el mediodía de ayer en la Casa Rosada, en la primera conferencia de prensa que brindó tras la derrota justicialista del 26 de octubre último.

Voces confiables negaron en forma tajante que, especialmente el nuevo destino de la ESMA, pueda considerarse una respuesta a la actitud de los diputados aliancistas Bravo y Cafiero.

"La intención del Gobierno es terminar con los malos recuerdos, y la ESMA es uno de los monumentos lacerantes para quienes tuvimos que soportar los duros días de la década del 70 y hoy seguimos transitando por la Avenida del Libertador", se sinceró un allegado al Presidente.

Esa fuente, que privilegió la decisión de trasladar la ESMA por sobre los otros anuncios, no dudó en sostener que "ésta no es una respuesta a la Alianza, que no ofrece nada pero que quiere destruir todo lo que se hizo, sino que es la mejor muestra de que Menem gobierna y mantiene intacto el poder, más allá de los resultados electorales".

En Balcarce 50 se recordó que, aunque es el proyecto definitivo, no fue el único que se generó dentro del Gobierno para reconvertir la ESMA "de un lugar de muertos y desaparecidos en un lugar de vida". Se evocó una idea del Ministerio de Educación, cuando era conducido por Jorge Rodríguez, sobre la posibilidad de convertir ese solar en una escuela de maestros.

María Elena Polack

(Link permanente: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/84896>)

COMENTARIO CONCENTRACION FRENTE A LA ESCUELA DE MECÁNICA DE LA ARMADA

Movilización de las Madres

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo marcharon hacia la ESMA

- Rechazaron la decisión presidencial de levantar allí un monumento a la reconciliación nacional
- Y anunciaron una campaña internacional de repudio

El miércoles fueron palabras y ayer el repudio a la decisión de Carlos Menem de demoler la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada se tradujo en una marcha. Un grupo de Madres de Plaza de Mayo realizó un acto de protesta en las puertas de la ESMA, el mayor símbolo de la represión durante la última dictadura. En medio de un espectacular operativo policial que agrupó más efectivos que manifestantes, la protesta se desarrolló sin incidentes y a ella se sumaron más de un centenar de militantes de partidos de izquierda y piqueteros, que marcharon luego por Núñez y Belgrano. Tras la habitual ronda de los jueves alrededor de la Pirámide de Mayo, una treintena de Madres encabezadas por Hebe de Bonafini se dirigieron en micro a la ESMA, sobre la avenida del Libertador casi General Paz, en el barrio de Nuñez. Pasadas las 17 y después de los cánticos de rigor -hostiles hacia militares y policías-, Bonafini inició el único discurso de todo el acto. A lo largo de unos 15 minutos, la titular de la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo anunció el comienzo de una campaña internacional del organismo para impedir la demolición del edificio de la ESMA. La campaña consistirá en el envío de un documento a todas partes del mundo para rechazar la iniciativa presidencial -dijo Hebe de Bonafini- y para cuya difusión también se utilizará la red informática Internet. Según Bonafini, las Madres se opondrán con sus cuerpos, si es necesario a la demolición de la ESMA proyectada por el Gobierno, cosa que no vamos a aceptar ni a permitir. La propuesta es que el edificio de la ESMA se mantenga abierto y con libre acceso para toda la gente, para que pueda escribir en las paredes qué piensa de esto, dijo Bonafini. Para sustentar esta idea, la titular de las Madres puso como ejemplo lo que se hizo en Europa con los principales campos de concentración nazis tras la II Guerra Mundial, convertidos la mayoría de ellos en museos de la memoria. Menem se cree que es un rey y está rodeado de bufones y cortesanos, y también de algunas doncellas, como la subsecretaria de Derechos Humanos (Inés Pérez Suárez), quien dijo que no sabía nada de esto, disparó Bonafini. De espaldas a la ESMA y separada de las rejas del predio por un vasto cordón policial, Bonafini habló desde la vereda de la avenida del Libertador, flanqueada por la treintena de Madres que la acompañaron. Cada una de ellas llevaba un cartel con la leyenda Reconciliación + Pacificación +

Reparación = Impunidad. Bonafini sólo una vez se dio vuelta y apuntó sus palabras hacia el frente de la ESMA: cuando recordó a los desaparecidos y, en especial, a las Madres secuestradas en la dictadura. Los dichos de Bonafini tuvieron como involuntarios oyentes a los 150 policías -entre ellos, efectivos mujeres y de civil- que integraron el impresionante operativo de seguridad alrededor del acto. El despliegue incluyó carros de asalto, camiones celulares, unidades hidrantes, patrulleros, autobombas, una veintena de motos piloteadas por agentes provistos de lanzagases lacrimógenos y hasta un helicóptero. En ningún momento se produjeron enfrentamientos, pero el despliegue policial generó intranquilidad entre los manifestantes, por lo sucedido en la última marcha de las Madres a la Escuela de Mecánica. La protesta, el 24 de marzo de 1995, terminó con una generalizada represión contra las Madres, seguidores y periodistas. Ayer el momento de mayor tensión se vivió al término del acto. Unos cincuenta piqueteros desocupados del Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez (que cortaron recientemente la ruta 36 en el conurbano) y militantes del Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores, Patria Libre y de la agrupación Venceremos marcharon con las Madres por el medio de la avenida del Libertador, hacia la estación Belgrano del ferrocarril. La alarma también en este caso sólo quedó en eso. No se produjeron enfrentamientos entre manifestantes y policías.
(<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/01/09/t-01701d.htm>)

DEBATE ABIERTO: EL MONUMENTO A LA UNIÓN NACIONAL

ESMA: el Gobierno salió a rechazar las críticas

El gabinete respaldó la decisión presidencial de demoler el edificio de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada

- La iniciativa fue cuestionada por opositores y organismos de derechos humanos

Lejos de amilanarse ante las voces de rechazo que levantó la iniciativa del presidente Carlos Menem, el Gobierno reafirmó ayer la voluntad de demoler el edificio de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) y transformar el lugar en un monumento a la conciliación, símbolo de la unión nacional. La iniciativa, que recibió la crítica de algunos dirigentes de la oposición y el completo rechazo de todos los organismos de derechos humanos, ocupó un pasaje de la reunión de gabinete de ayer, la primera entre Menem y sus ministros en lo que va del año. El secretario general de la Presidencia, Alberto Kohan, al finalizar el encuentro en la residencia de Olivos, descartó la posibilidad de que el Gobierno revise la decisión del Presidente y, todavía más, negó que el proyecto hubiera recogido como respuesta un rechazo generalizado. No veo una ola de rechazo -dijo Kohan-. Sólo he visto un rechazo de algunos sectores que más allá de la conciliación nacional, que es un objetivo de los argentinos, está el hecho de que quede un monumento recordatorio de lo que tristemente pasó ahí, para que no olvidemos la historia. En la ESMA funcionó el principal centro de detención y tortura de la última dictadura militar. Según los testimonios que recogió la Justicia en 1985, durante el juicio a los comandantes del Proceso, alrededor de cinco mil personas pasaron por la ESMA, donde fueron torturadas y, en muchos casos, asesinadas. Si bien el Gobierno ratificó la voluntad de Menem como propia -en los hechos, el traslado de la Escuela de Mecánica a la base naval de Puerto Belgrano forma parte del programa de reestructuración de la Armada, como adelantó Clarín-, Kohan pareció ayer imprimir un módico giro a una iniciativa que sorprendió por su oportunidad y audacia. A una pregunta sobre la posibilidad de que se instale, a manera de los museos del Holocausto, un museo para la memoria en el predio que ocupa la Escuela de Mecánica, Kohan respondió: Se ha pensado en un monumento para la memoria. Aunque menor, el giro de Kohan intentó presentar de otro modo la decisión presidencial, para despojarla de su impronta conciliadora, que fue precisamente lo que generó el rechazo de los organismos de derechos humanos. Bajo el supuesto de la búsqueda de una reconciliación nacional, el Presidente justificó los indultos a los comandantes de la dictadura, guerrilleros y carapintadas que dictó en diciembre de 1989 y 1990. Entre los cuestionamientos más firmes al proyecto de Menem, la Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos calificó la idea como un golpe bajo, burdo y torpe y un acto de insania. Menem fue miembro de la APDH -se lo incorporó durante su detención en las cárceles de la dictadura- hasta julio de 1994, cuando fue expulsado, según el término que emplea la Asamblea, por reivindicar la lucha antilibertadista. Kohan recurrió ayer a otros justificativos especialmente sensibles a los justicialistas. Trazó un paralelo entre la ESMA y los fusilamientos de militantes peronistas en la ex penitenciaría de la avenida Las Heras, a manos de la Revolución Libertadora, en 1955. La cárcel luego se destruyó, se hizo un parque con un monolito recordatorio... (Pero) ninguno de los justicialistas olvidamos que allí se fusiló, por ejemplo, al general Valle, recordó. El secretario de Interior, Jorge Matzkin, contribuyó a

esa vuelta de discurso. En diálogo con Radio Mitre, Matzkin sostuvo que lo que pretende el Gobierno es levantar un monumento del nunca más a las violaciones a los derechos humanos en la Argentina. Matzkin, ex titular del bloque de diputados del PJ, dijo que la propuesta de Menem tiene un sentido totalmente distinto que el proyecto del Frepaso y de la Alianza, que apunta a volver atrás con las viejas heridas. Aludía así a la intención del diputado Juan Pablo Cafiero y otros cinco legisladores del Frepaso de derogar las leyes de Punto Final y Obediencia Debida, que desprocesaron a más de mil militares y policías involucrados en la represión ilegal, una iniciativa que sacudió los cimientos de la Alianza. Dijo Matzkin que como justicialistas fuimos críticos de esas leyes impulsadas por el gobierno de Raúl Alfonsín en 1987, pero las acompañamos por entender que formaban parte de una propuesta de pacificación en el marco de aquellos tiempos. Menem se habría servido finalmente de un programa de reestructuración de la Armada para dar un golpe de efecto de alcance impredecible. Según el proyecto, adelantado a este diario por fuentes del Ministerio de Defensa, en el lugar que ocupa la ESMA se levantará un gran mástil con una base importante pero muy simple, sin bajorrelieves, en el que se izará la Bandera argentina como único símbolo de unidad nacional. La zona será parquizada y eventualmente se la utilizará como lugar de recepción abierto a jefes de Estado que visiten el país.

(<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/01/09/t-01601d.htm>)

Viernes 9 de enero de 1998

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Insiste el Gobierno en mudar la ESMA

Según Matzkin, se trata de un nuevo "Nunca más"; duros conceptos de Ragmar Hagelin para con el jefe del Estado.

"Pretende ser un "Nunca más" a la violación de los derechos humanos en la Argentina", redondeaba ayer el secretario del Interior, Jorge Matzkin, como mejor justificativo a la iniciativa presidencial de erigir un monumento para la "reconciliación nacional", en el predio que ocupa la ESMA convertido, durante los años de la represión, en el centro clandestino de detención y tortura más tenebroso del país.

El anuncio de Menem de "extirpar" de la anatomía porteña un edificio que, por los hechos ocurridos en sus entrañas, se convirtió en sinónimo de terror y muerte disgustó a los familiares de desaparecidos durante la última dictadura militar.

La frase más conmovedora partió de Ragmar Hagelin, padre de la adolescente Dagmar Hagelin, baleada y secuestrada en la vía pública por el ex teniente de fragata Alfredo Astiz. "Menem -dijo- no aprendió ni con la muerte de su hijo Carlitos todo el dolor que los familiares de los desaparecidos sentimos", contestó desde Estocolmo a una llamada de Radio del Plata.

Las críticas al proyecto, en ocasiones durísimas, se dispararon ayer como un efecto dominó. Sin demora, el Gobierno se abroqueló detrás de las "buenas intenciones" de una iniciativa que, según varios funcionarios, "no apunta al olvido, sino a recordar lo que allí sucedió".

Por su parte, los legisladores porteños del Frepaso Abel Fátala, Eduardo Jozami, Raúl Fernández, María Elena Naddeo y Fernando Finvard presentaron ayer un proyecto por el que solicitan a la Procuración General de la Ciudad que comience los trámites tendientes a la restitución del predio que hoy ocupa la ESMA. "Al ser ésta trasladada a Blahía Blanca desaparecen las razones por las que en 1924 la Municipalidad le hizo esa donación a la Marina para construir un establecimiento educativo", sostienen los legisladores.

"No se dará un paso atrás"

El primero en tomar el guante fue el secretario general de la Presidencia, Alberto Kohan, quien apenas finalizada la reunión matutina del gabinete en Olivos, dijo: "Más allá de la conciliación nacional, que es un objetivo de los argentinos, está el hecho de que quede un monumento recordatorio de lo que tristemente pasó ahí".

Kohan fue el que se encargó de subrayar que no habrá "pasos atrás" en la orden presidencial para trasladar la ESMA a Puerto Belgrano. Del ministro de Justicia, Raúl Granillo Ocampo, se conoció una arista ejemplificadora: "De ninguna manera apunta al olvido, sino que sintetiza que allí se han producido cosas terribles, que no deben volver a repetirse".

Fue el ministro de Defensa, Jorge Domínguez, el que prefirió pulsar con los críticos al Gobierno al calificar de "retrógados" a quienes piensan que "un monumento de unidad nacional es una manera de reivindicar la represión ilegal".

Pero, inmediatamente, Domínguez buscó salir del terreno de la controversia para descansar en expresiones casi domésticas.

"Es bueno -sostuvo- que los vecinos del tétrico edificio, donde se torturaba y asesinaba gente, puedan disfrutar de un parque."

Domínguez no se privó en sus fundamentos de recurrir a la historia partidaria. Recordó, así, que "el Partido Justicialista es el que más ha sufrido la represión; sus militantes, sus hombres; quien no ha sido perseguido ha sido encarcelado, como es el caso del presidente Menem".

Otro tanto hizo Kohan cuando comparó las torturas de la ESMA con "los fusilamientos de militantes y militares peronistas por la llamada Revolución Libertadora, en 1955".

Rechazo unánime

Desde los organismos de derechos humanos, la noticia provocó honda repercusión y voces muy críticas, en especial porque consideraron que demoler la ESMA es un intento vano de pretender "demoler la memoria".

La titular de Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, Estela Barnes de Carlotto, consideró que el presidente Menem "trata de conformar a un pequeño grupo de genocidas" y adelantó que las Abuelas se muestran contrarias a la demolición "de ese lugar donde imperó el horror; es como borrar la historia".

No obstante, la señora de Carlotto propuso que el edificio de la ESMA se destine a un fin social, "como hospital, un lugar para la investigación científica, un hogar de niños, un hogar de ancianos... Algo positivo para las necesidades del pueblo".

También inflexibles se mostraron las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, que expresaron que "no puede haber reconciliación en un país en el que no hay Justicia".

Desde el espectro político, Federico Storani consideró "absurda" la idea de trasladar la ESMA y que cree ver en ese proyecto "un intento del PJ de "alejarse del eje del debate sobre temas como la re-reelección, los episodios de corrupción y las irregularidades denunciadas en la privatización de los aeropuertos y en la confección de los DNI".

El Gobierno creyó una estrategia oportuna instalar el tema ESMA a menos de 24 horas de que la oposición había presentado en sociedad su proyecto para derogar las leyes de obediencia debida y punto final. Pero el terreno le ha resultado ríspido.

Astiz

"Sólo falta que nombre a Astiz como cuidador del parque y que se realice un desfile de honor en reivindicación de los ex comandantes que él indultó", disparó ayer Cristian Caram, vicepresidente de la

Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la flamante Legislatura porteña. Tras considerar "ridícula" la iniciativa presidencial, Caram adelantó que en la próxima sesión pedirá "que la Legislatura repudie esta acción del Gobierno. Pretende instaurar -dijo- un monumento a la unidad nacional, pero, en realidad, es una representación de la impunidad generalizada".

Protesta de las Madres

Un centenar de manifestantes, encabezados por la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo y por piqueteros del Movimiento de Desocupados Teresa Rodríguez, se concentró ayer en el barrio de Núñez, frente al edificio de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) para rechazar el proyecto de construir en ese lugar un "monumento a la reconciliación", tal como impulsa el presidente Menem.

El acto tuvo su eje frente a la entrada principal de la ESMA, sobre la Avenida del Libertador, en el barrio porteño de Núñez, donde la presidenta de Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Hebe de Bonafini, anunció una campaña internacional para evitar la construcción de ese monumento.

Durante el desarrollo del acto, que comenzó con una marcha por las inmediaciones del lugar, no se registraron incidentes.

Cuando la manifestación se desconcentró, unos 50 representantes del Movimiento Teresa Rodríguez, que se habían retrasado para asistir al acto, se unió a las madres y, unos a pie y otros en ómnibus, marcharon por el carril del medio de la Avenida del Libertador durante unas diez cuadras.

"De pie"

Bonafini propuso que la ESMA quede "de pie y abierta para que el pueblo escriba en sus paredes, de adentro y de afuera, lo que piensa y lo que siente", y anticipó que las Madres de Plaza de Mayo se opondrán "con sus cuerpos, si es necesario" a la demolición de la tristemente célebre unidad militar.

Un fuerte dispositivo policial, compuesto por un centenar de uniformados, una veintena de oficiales vestidos de civil, carros de asalto, camiones celulares y unidades hidrantes, además de patrulleros, autobombas, motocicletas conducidas por agentes que portaban gases lacrimógenos y hasta un helicóptero, custodió el desarrollo de la manifestación.

Junto con los piqueteros arribó al lugar un reducido grupo de manifestantes del Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST) y de la Corriente Patria Libre.

(Link permanente: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/84973>)

Appendix A.2

*This appendix consists of primary source news articles regarding an Argentine court's decision to overturn President Menem's ESMA decree. They were available in the online archives of both the *Clarín* and *La Nación*, the two most prominent newspapers in Buenos Aires.

FIGURE 1

La ESMA no podrá ser demolida

El juez en lo Contencioso Administrativo Ernesto Marinelli declaró inconstitucional un decreto del Poder Ejecutivo que dispuso la demolición de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), uno de los principales centros de torturas y desaparición de personas durante la dictadura militar. De esta manera el juez dejó en firme una medida cautelar que había sido pedida por dos madres de desaparecidos, Laura Bonaparte de Bruschtein y Graciela Palacio de Lois, al trascender la decisión del presidente Carlos Menem de demoler la ESMA para convertirla en un espacio verde. A esa solicitud de las dos madres se les sumaron los diputados Alfredo Bravo y Jorge Rivas, las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Línea Fundadora) y el defensor del Pueblo de la Capital, Antonio Cartañá. En los fundamentos de la sentencia el juez Marinelli afirma: Sería mejor que hubiera allí un espacio libre o un espacio verde si ello significara que no tuvieron lugar los hechos que, empero, sabemos que ocurrieron. Pero el problema con la historia, como con la verdad, se ha dicho y con acierto, es que no tiene arreglo. Además el magistrado le otorga a la ESMA el carácter de patrimonio cultural y no puede ser destruido por los gobernantes de turno, aunque aclara que lo sucedido en ese edificio en las épocas de plomo no se trata de hechos vinculados con la virtud. Laura Bonaparte, una de las demandantes, calificó de brillante el fallo del juez que impide la demolición de la ESMA. Estaba en mi deseo que fuera un fallo que sentara un precedente importante sobre la base de una sentencia firme, dijo. Por su parte, la otra demandante, Graciela Lois, se mostró reconfortada por la sentencia de Marinelli. En tanto, el diputado socialista Rivas anticipó que el próximo lunes presentará un proyecto de ley para transformar a la ESMA en un museo de la memoria. Al Gobierno le queda ahora la posibilidad de apelar la sentencia del juez Marinelli. (<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/10/17/t-02002d.htm>)

Sábado 17 de octubre de 1998

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Prohíben demoler la ESMA

El juez en lo contencioso administrativo Ernesto Marinelli declaró ayer la inconstitucionalidad del tercer artículo del decreto presidencial 8/98 que disponía demoler la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), uno de los centros clandestinos de detención durante el último gobierno de facto, para convertir el solar en el Monumento de la Pacificación Nacional.

Con su fallo, el magistrado dejó en firme una medida cautelar que había sido confirmada por la Cámara en lo Contencioso Administrativo, por la cual se había rechazado una apelación del Gobierno frente a una demanda iniciada por representantes de agrupaciones defensoras de los derechos humanos, legisladores y el defensor del pueblo metropolitano, Antonio Cartañá.

Marinelli consideró que la ESMA "forma parte del patrimonio cultural de la Nación", como la "Casa de Tucumán y las cadenas de la Vuelta de Obligado" y que se busca "su preservación para memoria de las generaciones futuras". Su mantenimiento implica "evitar que se borren las huellas que puedan permitirles conocer dónde estuvieron detenidos sus familiares, cómo pasaron sus últimos días y dónde están sus cuerpos".

Las medidas cautelares fueron presentadas por los diputados Alfredo Bravo y Jorge Rivas; por María de Antecoletz, René Epelbaum, Carmen Cobo y Graciela Colombo (Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora); por Graciela Lois y Laura Bonaparte, y por el defensor del pueblo porteño, Antonio Cartañá.

El juez admitió que la preservación del edificio de la ESMA permitirá "resguardar elementos probatorios que eventualmente pudieran conducir al esclarecimiento de las circunstancias en las que se produjeron las desapariciones de Ricardo Omar Lois, Santiago Brunschtein, Aída Leonora Brunschtein de Saidon, Irene Brunschtein de Guinzberg, Víctor Brunschtein, Adrián Saidon, Mario Guinzberg y Jacinta Levi.

(Link permanente: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/114496>)

Appendix A.3

*This appendix consists of primary source news articles regarding Naval Officer Alfredo Astiz' defense of the military's conduct during the period of regime rule and the consequences of his public statements. They were available in the online archives of both the *Clarín* and *La Nación*, the two most prominent newspapers in Buenos Aires.

LA REACCIÓN DE LA OPINIÓN PÚBLICA A LA ACCIÓN DEL GOBIERNO, LA OPOSICIÓN Y LOS ORGANISMOS DE DERECHOS HUMANOS

Astiz fue repudiado y le dieron 60 días de arresto en una unidad militar

El marino reivindicó el secuestro y la tortura como método de represión

- Fue sancionado por orden de Menem
- Podrían destituirlo o darlo de baja
- También fue denunciado ante la Justicia

Una ola de indignación y repudio se desplomó ayer en respuesta a las declaraciones del capitán de fragata retirado y símbolo de la represión ilegal durante la última dictadura, Alfredo Astiz, quien reivindicó la desaparición y la tortura como metodología represiva y se declaró aún en condiciones de matar, tanto a un político como a un periodista. El jefe de la Armada, almirante Carlos Marrón, por pedido expreso del presidente Carlos Menem, sancionó ayer al marino con sesenta días de arresto, la máxima pena que está facultado a aplicar, y dispuso su cumplimiento inmediato en el arsenal naval Azopardo, con asiento en Azul. Según fuentes de la Armada, el arresto que se aplicó a Astiz es de máxima rigurosidad, llamado arresto de camarote en la jerga del arma. Tiene las vistas y las llamadas telefónicas restringidas y solo puede salir 15 minutos por día para tomar sol. También a instancias de Menem, la Armada instruyó un sumario contra Astiz para determinar la posibilidad de que se apliquen medidas más severas, que podrían llevar a la destitución (pérdida del grado) o la baja (pérdida del estado como militar). Yo soy el hombre mejor preparado técnicamente en este país para matar a un político o a un periodista. Pero no quiero, dijo Astiz en un reportaje aparecido ayer en la revista Tres Puntos. Afirmó además, en otros pasajes de la entrevista, que el jefe del Ejército, Martín Balza es un cretino. ¿Cómo va a decir que hay órdenes que no hay que obedecer?. Todos los días vienen camaradas a pedirme que encabece un levantamiento, fue otra de las definiciones, y agregó: No nos sigan acorralando, porque no sé cómo vamos a responder. Alias El Niño o Angel Rubio, jefe de uno de los grupos de tareas que actuó de la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), Astiz fue beneficiado en 1987 por la ley de obediencia debida que exculpó de los delitos de violaciones a los derechos humanos a los cuadros medidos e inferiores de las Fuerzas Armadas. Fue acusado del secuestro y asesinato de la joven sueca Dagmar Hagelin y también de la desaparición de la fundadora de la organización Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Azucena Villaflor. En 1990, un tribunal de París lo juzgó en ausencia y lo condenó a cadena perpetua por el secuestro y desaparición de las monjas francesas Alice Domont y Leonie Duquet. Fue pasado a retiro de la Armada en diciembre de 1995. Las declaraciones del marino conmocionaron ayer al Gobierno y a la oposición y dieron lugar a la extendida repulsa de los organismos de derechos humanos. La cuestión Astiz dominó un largo pasaje de la habitual reunión de gabinete en Olivos. El ministro del Interior, Carlos Corach, calificó de espantosas las declaraciones de Astiz e informó que el Gobierno daría intervención a la Procuración General de la Nación para que determine si el marino incurrió en delito. Muchas de ellas (por las declaraciones) evidentemente implican la comisión de delito de acción pública, dijo el ministro. El procurador general, Nicolás Becerra, instruyó al fiscal Germán Moldes para que analice una acusación contra Astiz. Moldes adelantó a Clarín que analizaba anoche una denuncia penal por la presunta comisión de los delitos de apología del crimen, amenazas e intimidación pública y la participación de eventuales cómplices y encubridores. En esa misma dirección, fuentes de la Armada consultadas ayer por este diario señalaron que Astiz podría haber sido instigado por el ex almirante y miembro de la primera junta militar (1976-81), Emilio Massera, bajo el doble supuesto de perturbar a la actual conducción de la fuerza y distraer la atención sobre sí mismo, en momentos en que acaba de ser procesado, con pedido de captura internacional, por la justicia española en una causa por la desaparición de ciudadanos de ese país. Desde el Gobierno, en cambio, se especulaba con que Astiz habría actuado como instrumento de un sector de la Armada en respuesta a la reciente decisión de Menem de demoler el edificio de la ESMA y levantar en su lugar un monumento de reconciliación nacional. El jefe del Ejército, uno de los principales aludidos por Astiz, dijo a la par que no tiene intenciones de responder a los agravios del marino. Se trata de un oficial de otra fuerza y las medidas que se van a tomar las tomará la Armada, dijo Balza. Fuentes del Ejército

descartaron que Balza promueva un Tribunal de Honor contra Astiz, ante el supuesto de que será sancionado por la Armada. Al menos tres denuncias contra Astiz ingresaron ayer en la Cámara Federal porteña. El legislador del Frepaso, Aníbal Ibarra, reclamó la inmediata detención de Astiz y lo denunció por apología del crimen, amenazas e intimidación pública. La Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos acusó al marino de conspirar contra el orden constitucional y Franja Morada lo denunció por promover un levantamiento militar. En el Congreso, el bloque de diputados del PJ, que encabeza Humberto Roggero, solicitó al procurador general que investigue a Astiz por la presunta comisión de los delitos de apología del crimen, sedición y atentado al orden constitucional. La diputada del Frepaso, Nilda Garré, presentó un proyecto de resolución en el que solicita al Poder Ejecutivo la baja y destitución de Astiz, y un segundo en el que pide que informe si se han iniciado investigaciones para individualizar a grupos que reclaman una sublevación.

(<http://www.clarin.com/diario/1998/01/16/t-00201d.htm>)

Viernes 16 de enero de 1998

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Conmoción por las declaraciones de Astiz

En las próximas horas será encarcelado en el penal militar de Azul; podría ser destituido por el Presidente; el gabinete trató la repercusión que produjeron sus declaraciones

Las escalofriantes declaraciones del capitán de fragata Alfredo Astiz, en las que admitió ser el hombre mejor preparado para matar a un político o a un periodista, haber sido entrenado por la Armada para destruir y que sabe quién asesinó a la adolescente sueco-argentina Dagmar Hagelin, generaron profunda conmoción tanto en el país como en el exterior.

El ministro del Interior, Carlos Corach, solicitó de Nicolás Becerra, titular de la Procuración General de la Nación, que investigue las posibles acciones legales por iniciar frente a los dichos de Astiz.

En forma inmediata, Becerra le ordenó al fiscal ante la cámara federal Germán Moldes que hoy haga efectiva una denuncia.

Varias asociaciones de derechos humanos, particulares y legisladores del oficialismo y de la oposición presentaron ayer en diferentes tribunales denuncias en contra del militar por los delitos de intimidación pública, violación de la ley de la democracia y apología del delito.

Alfredo Astiz fue beneficiado por las leyes de punto final y de obediencia debida y no podrá ser juzgado nuevamente por delitos que se le imputaron en 1984.

Una delegación de 30 Madres de Plaza de Mayo intentó ayer entregar en la Casa Rosada un petitorio dirigido al presidente Carlos Menem para reclamar el arresto del militar, pero no fue recibida por el primer mandatario.

Por sus declaraciones aparecidas en la revista "trespuntos", al cierre de esta edición Astiz continuaba bajo arresto domiciliario, en espera de ser trasladado al penal militar de la localidad bonaerense de Azul, cosa que ocurrirá en las próximas horas.

Astiz podría ser destituido por el presidente Carlos Menem y perdería así su condición de militar, dejando de percibir sus haberes como marino retirado, según confirmaron a *La Nación* altas fuentes militares y de la Casa de Gobierno.

Desde la Armada dijeron: "El almirante Carlos Marrón le aplicó dos meses de arresto, pero solicitó a

Menem un aumento de la pena, que podría ser de seis meses de cárcel más la destitución".

La pena aplicada inicialmente por el jefe naval a Astiz es la máxima prevista por el Código de Justicia Militar para quienes hagan declaraciones públicas sin solicitar el correspondiente permiso.

Sin embargo, la conducta de Astiz también se encuadraría en una tipificación delictiva de mayor gravedad por haber implicado en sus dichos a las Fuerzas Armadas, al presidente de la Nación y a jefes militares.

De acuerdo con ese código, será Menem, en su carácter de comandante en jefe de las Fuerzas Armadas, el encargado de tomar la decisión y de ordenar la medida.

En cuanto a los delitos que prevé la justicia militar para estos casos, los voceros explicaron que se trataría de "sedición" con el agravante de "irrespetuosidad".

Las dudas

En la Armada fueron cautos ayer cuando se los consultó sobre los dichos de Astiz. Muchos, que no quisieron revelar sus nombres, dijeron que estaban extrañados con las declaraciones y hasta no faltaron quienes pusieron en duda la veracidad del reportaje.

La única persona que se atrevió a hablar sin pedir que no se la identificara fue Juan Aberg Cobo, amigo de Astiz, que dijo: "No hablé con Alfredo. Lo único que sé es que se le atribuyen algunas declaraciones. Nada de eso se compadece con lo que siempre, a lo largo de estos años, yo he hablado con él. Y además con la posición, la conducta que él ha seguido durante 20 años".

La Nación entrevistó a Cerruti, que sostuvo que Astiz le pidió que no publicara la nota. "Uno no va a charlar con Astiz -dijo la periodista-, charla con amigos. La verdad es que un señor que trabajó en inteligencia tantos años, que se jacta de tener toda la información, no se puede sorprender de que salga publicado. Sería creer en un nivel de ingenuidad que Astiz no creo que tenga."

El contacto entre Cerruti y Astiz fue realizado por el capitán de navío (R) Aurelio Martínez, conocido como "Za Za", a quien la fuerza también le aplicó ayer 30 días de arresto efectivo.

Martínez fue director nacional de Migraciones durante la gestión de Julio Mera Figueroa al frente del Ministerio del Interior, tiene sólidos contactos con el menemismo y actualmente milita en las filas de Ramón "Palito" Ortega.

Astiz fue jefe de uno de los grupos de secuestradores que actuó en la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA).

El 8 y el 10 de diciembre de 1977 el militar secuestró, entre otras personas, a Azucena Villafior de Devinenti, Esther Ballestrino de Careaga, Patricia Oviedo y a las monjas francesas Alice Domon y Leonie Duquet.

Por el crimen de las religiosas, Astiz fue juzgado en ausencia en París y condenado a prisión perpetua, razón por la cual no puede salir del país.

El militar fue beneficiado con las leyes de punto final y de obediencia debida durante el gobierno de Raúl Alfonsín, que envió al Congreso los proyectos presionado por las Fuerzas Armadas, cuyos cuadros se resistían a ser juzgados por los crímenes cometidos durante los años de la represión por un tribunal civil.

Se rindió sin combatir, al frente de un grupo comando de la Infantería de Marina en Puerto Leith, Georgias del Sur. Había sido enviado allí para custodiar a un grupo de operarios argentinos que desguazaban una vieja factoría ballenera británica. Este hecho encendió la mecha de la Guerra de las Malvinas.

En tiempos democráticos, Astiz fue agredido en más de tres oportunidades por sobrevivientes de la ESMA

y por jóvenes que lo consideran un símbolo de los años oscuros de la historia argentina.

Repercusiones

Las repercusiones nacional e internacional, tanto política como de grupos de derechos humanos, fueron inmediatas.

A más de un político le llamó la atención que las declaraciones hayan sido publicadas cuando está en pleno debate la demolición de la ESMA y la derogación de las leyes de punto final y de obediencia debida.

El jefe del Ejército, general Martín Balza, dijo: "No tengo intenciones de responder a ningún agravio, ni a hacer ninguna consideración sobre el epíteto que dicen que hizo sobre mí", y reiteró que la fuerza está "arrepentida" de la represión ilegal en la dictadura.

La Legislatura de Buenos Aires, en sesión extraordinaria, lo declaró "persona no grata" por sus conceptos. El ministro del Interior, Carlos Corach, y el secretario general de la Presidencia, Alberto Kohan, también repudiaron sus expresiones. El jefe del Estado Mayor de la Armada, almirante Carlos Marrón, se sumó a los rechazos con un comunicado.

En el Frepaso consideraron que las declaraciones de Astiz fue un mensaje para esa fuerza.

"No olvidemos -dijeron off the record- la composición de nuestro partido. Para Graciela (Fernández Meijide) la cosa fue muy clara: prácticamente le dijeron matamos a tu hijo."

Sorpresa y silencio en el Gobierno

Reacción: Menem sancionó con 60 días de arresto a Astiz y a Aurelio Martínez, el intermediario de la nota, con 30.

Sorprendido por la entrevista al "ángel rubio" de la última dictadura militar, el Gobierno buscó ayer calmar la inquietud pública desde dos frentes distintos: sancionar con la pena más alta posible al capitán de fragata (R) Alfredo Astiz, que pasará los próximos 60 días detenido, y mantener silencio en forma oficial o extraoficial.

A pesar de esa estrategia de discreción, *La Nación* supo anoche que Astiz no fue el único sancionado por sus fuertes declaraciones. Idéntica medida (prisión por 30 días) le fue impuesta a otro retirado, señalado como el "intermediario" entre el entrevistado y la periodista de la revista "trespuntos" Gabriela Cerruti.

El otro sancionado, para sorpresa del Gobierno, fue el capitán de fragata (R) y ex funcionario del Ministerio del Interior cuando lo ocupaba Julio Mera Figueroa Aurelio "Za Za" Martínez. Siempre será recordado en la Casa Rosada como el director nacional de Migraciones que debió abandonar su cargo en medio de un escándalo cuando trascendió que se le había otorgado el pasaporte argentino al reconocido traficante de armas sirio Monzer Al Kassar.

Tras la reunión de gabinete nacional (de la que también se informa en la página 10), el presidente Menem y sus más estrechos colaboradores partieron a Anillaco, con lo cual se generó en el ámbito oficial un curioso silencio de radio sobre la cuestión.

En Balcarce 50, minutos antes de que su esposo, Jorge Castells, se convirtiera en subsecretario de Coordinación Técnica del Ministerio del Interior, la subsecretaria de Derechos Humanos, Inés Pérez Suárez, contestó con un escueto "no puedo responder" a la pregunta sobre si el Gobierno sabía de antemano sobre la existencia del reportaje.

Fuentes oficiales admitieron que no sabían "nada" de la entrevista, hasta el punto de sostener que "esta vez Astiz se le escapó a la gente de inteligencia", que aparentemente controla los desplazamientos del marino.

"Sabemos que hubo preocupación en la embajada de los Estados Unidos en Buenos Aires y que fue ampliamente difundido el reportaje en Europa", sostuvieron allegados al ministro Jorge Domínguez.

Lo único que hasta anoche parecía no tener una respuesta clara era qué objetivo persiguió Astiz no sólo al aceptar la entrevista, sino en responder en términos tan descarnados y crueles a los interrogantes planteados.

María Elena Polack

En la Armada reinó la incredulidad y hubo rostros de estupor

Confirmada la entrevista, el jefe naval le pidió a Menem que le subiera la pena

Gestos de incredulidad y extrañeza fueron la reacción inicial de miembros de la Armada que leyeron ayer mil y una veces los dichos del capitán de fragata Alfredo Astiz.

Desde que la cúpula de esa fuerza confirmó, muy temprano, la existencia de la entrevista aparecida ayer en la revista "trespuntos", la suerte del militar quedó en manos del presidente Carlos Menem, que podría llevar la pena impuesta hasta a seis meses de arresto y su destitución de las Fuerzas Armadas.

Como comandante en jefe de las FF.AA., el jefe del Estado es el único facultado en este caso para aumentar la sanción de dos meses de arresto que, ayer, el jefe de la Armada, Carlos Marrón, le aplicó a Astiz.

El capitán de fragata sería recluido en las próximas horas en una prisión militar de la localidad bonaerense de Azul luego que la conducción naval confirmó que el marino, acusado de graves violaciones a los derechos humanos durante la última dictadura militar, se reunió con una periodista.

El arresto de dos meses aplicado inicialmente por la Armada a Astiz es el máximo dispuesto por el Código de Justicia Militar para este tipo de conductas.

Sin embargo, fuentes militares dijeron ayer a *La Nación* que Marrón le habría pedido a Menem un aumento de la pena para Astiz. "Si el Presidente considera que el caso es realmente grave, la sanción podría llegar a un máximo de seis meses de arresto con destitución", explicaron las fuentes.

Con la destitución, Astiz perdería definitivamente el grado militar y los derechos a percibir haberes como tal.

Al mismo tiempo, ayer en la Casa de Gobierno se afirmaba que la posición del jefe del Estado sería esta vez irreductible.

"Hasta aquí llegamos con este caso", habría reaccionado el Presidente cuando percibió la dimensión de un nuevo escándalo, que tuvo al cuestionado militar como protagonista, según dijeron fuentes del Ministerio de Defensa.

De todas formas, al margen de una decisión política, que en este caso específico surge como prioritaria, la justicia militar dispuso ayer la apertura de un sumario en el que se analizarán detenidamente la veracidad y el alcance de las declaraciones de Astiz. Tras ello, se determinará el encuadramiento exacto de su conducta.

"Lo que hizo, lo tenemos confirmado", dijeron ayer fuentes castrenses. "Hay que ver si lo que dijo es lo que apareció publicado", agregaron.

El ministro de Defensa, Jorge Domínguez, se puso en contacto con Marrón desde temprano para conocer detalles de lo ocurrido. Poco después, el Gobierno exigió "una sanción ejemplar" y se acordó que la Armada diese a conocer su posición en un comunicado.

En ese texto, el jefe naval expresó que la Armada rechaza "terminantemente y categóricamente los términos expuestos (por Astiz)", y afirma que esa fuerza "continúa actuando con vistas al futuro, dejando atrás antinomias y recogiendo la lección de la historia reciente, contribuyendo así a la convivencia democrática y el respeto a la ley".

Además del delito de "sedición" que surgiría de los dichos de Astiz referidos a una sublevación, se lo sancionaría por "irrespetuosidad" -otra figura del código de justicia militar- por las afirmaciones sobre el presidente Menem y el jefe del Ejército, teniente general Martín Balza.

Juan Castro Olivera

El traslado al arsenal naval de Azul

AZUL - Aunque las versiones fueron variando con el correr de la tarde, fuentes consultadas por *La Nación* aseguraron que el capitán de navío Alfredo Astiz era trasladado anoche hasta esta ciudad y que quedaría detenido en el Arsenal Naval Azopardo de esta localidad, en la que el marino tiene familiares.

Los oficiales de guardia se negaron a brindar información amparándose en órdenes brindadas por sus superiores, y desconocían si hoy se podría entregar algún parte para la prensa.

Igualmente, se pudo conocer que a pesar del traslado del cuestionado marino, las autoridades navales no habrían dispuesto un refuerzo de las condiciones de seguridad de este destacamento.

Lo que si se puede asegurar es que Astiz no ocupará un calabozo en su carácter de detenido, sino un chalet similar al que alojó a María Estela Martínez de Perón cuando estuvo detenida en esta unidad.

La vivienda forma parte de un complejo destinado a albergar a los oficiales de mayor rango que se desempeñan en el arsenal; está ubicado lejos de las barracas de los conscriptos y rodeado por una cancha de golf y una amplia pileta de natación.

Viejas cadenas pintadas de verde unen las cabezas de enormes proyectiles de casi un metro de altura que delinear el acceso al Arsenal Naval Azopardo, lugar donde Astiz permanecerá detenido durante los próximos sesenta días.

La unidad militar está ubicada a unos 35 kilómetros de la ciudad de Azul, precisamente a la vera de la ruta 80 y a 10 kilómetros del paraje conocido como Estación Pablo Acosta.

A una distancia similar se encuentra el conocido Ministerio de los Monjes Trapenses, reducto donde años atrás recaló el presidente de la Nación, Carlos Menem, para participar en un retiro espiritual.

El predio del Arsenal Naval Azopardo es lindero con Fanazul, una dependencia creada durante el primer gobierno de Juan Domingo Perón en 1946 como Fábrica de Explosivos de la Marina y hoy está bajo jurisdicción de Fabricaciones Militares.

El lugar ganó espacio en los medios hace dos años, cuando un accidente hizo volar parte de los depósitos de esta fábrica.

Ambos predios exhiben una prolijidad absoluta en sus espacios verdes, abundante vegetación compuesta por viejos pinos y algunos tiros de vieja data que transformaron en astillas los vidrios de la garita de guardia.

En los alrededores, amplias sierras se elevan sobre los campos cultivados, conformando uno de los paisajes más bellos de la zona.

Calma e indignación

Mientras tanto, a 35 kilómetros del Arsenal Naval Azopardo, los habitantes de Azul vivían con calma, pero también con cierta indignación este momento que ponía a la ciudad otra vez en los medios y como consecuencia de un hecho nada grato.

La novedad del traslado de Astiz los sorprendió apenas pasada la hora de la siesta, un ritual que en verano es cumplido incondicionalmente por los habitantes de la ciudad.

"Cada vez que aparecemos es por un problema; primero porque vuela el arsenal, después por la jueza que estuvo en Sierra Chica y ahora este asesino" se lamentaba Elena Ríos, que aprovechaba la calurosa noche para dar un paseo por la plaza San Martín, ubicada frente al palacio comunal.

Aníbal Aranda coincidió con ese pensamiento y consideró que la detención de Astiz "debe ser de por vida, como se había dispuestos antes de la ley de obediencia debida y los indultos".

Para Dante Luna, propietario de un polirrubro céntrico, las declaraciones de Astiz "ofenden a todo el pueblo argentino" y afirmó que la responsabilidad de este tema "es de quienes dejaron en libertad a los militares".

Opiniones del mismo tenor llegaron durante toda la tarde por los teléfonos de las radios locales, que ayer recibieron decenas de llamados donde los oyentes expresaban su disconformidad sobre el traslado de Astiz hasta esta localidad.

Fuentes consultadas adelantaron que en el Concejo Deliberante de Azul se manejaba ayer la posibilidad de elevar un pedido a las autoridades de la Armada Argentina para que Astiz no sea alojado en ninguna dependencia ubicada en jurisdicción de Azul.

Además, organizaciones vinculadas con la defensa de los derechos humanos discutían ayer la posibilidad de realizar una manifestación pública frente al Arsenal Naval Azopardo para repudiar la presencia de Astiz en esta localidad.

Por Darío Palavecino
(Enviado especial)

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