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# Between Exclusion and Empathy: Knowledge and Sentiments of Jewish Youth in Buenos Aires about the "Jewish Community" in Argentina's Collective Memory of the Dictatorship (1976-1983)

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**ABSTRACT**

Argentina has been considered a vanguard in engaging collective memory to confront violations of human rights during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. However, this memory often omits the experience of the Jewish community during these years, although its members faced increased persecution in military detention centers. Conflicting perspectives from within the Jewish community as well as the recent politics of President Javier Milei further complicate contemporary memory. Given these dynamics, how do current Jewish youth in Buenos Aires understand and relate to collective memory? What do they perceive as the most important aspects and outcomes of different forms of remembering? Semi-structured qualitative interviews with Jewish youth in Buenos Aires illuminate both the shortcomings and prospects of Argentine national memory.

*Keywords:* Argentina, Dictatorship, Transitional Justice, Memory, Youth, Judaism, Education, Denialism

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout my academic career in International Studies and Human Rights & Humanitarianism, the concept of memory has appeared in many contexts. In every situation, nation, or community I study, memory seems to occupy a different space. It can be fixed or evolving, tilt towards the past or the future, and represent strength or apprehension. Beginning in early 2023, this thesis grew out of a desire to understand how memory functions in the context of today's Argentina.

A number of factors encouraged this research. First, Argentina has a rich and widely recognized relationship with transitional justice and has dedicated significant resources to the creation of collective memory. Transitional justice refers to the mechanisms, including memory, that states employ to respond to and emerge from periods of violent conflict or widespread violations of human rights. Second, Argentina has a robust history of open immigration policies that facilitated the growth of the current Jewish population of approximately 180,000 that resides largely in Buenos Aires. Notoriously, in the years after WWII, these open policies also allowed nearly 10,000 Nazi sympathizers and war criminals into the country. Third, two bombings in the 1990s of Jewish spaces—the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and the Israelite Mutual Association of Argentina (*La Asociación Mutual Israelita de Argentina,* AMIA) in 1994—indicated intricate national dynamics in relation to the Jewish community. Many memorials to the victims of these attacks exist throughout the city today.

***Fig. 1.*** Murals to the victims of AMIA bombing, Facultad de Medicina, Buenos Aires (photo by author).

***Fig. 2.*** Mural and statue to the victims of the AMIA bombing, Barrio Once, Buenos Aires (photo by author).

The existence of such sites suggests that Argentina has been both willing and able to include narratives of the Jewish community in its collective memory. However, throughout my research and time in Argentina, it became clear that this targeted form of memory only exists in relation to the attacks in the 1990s. Despite the immense resources Argentina allocated to transitional justice and the creation of collective memory about the dictatorship, it was uncommon to find Jewish narratives included in memory about this period.

Notably, specific groups of people do receive increased attention at spaces of public memory. For example, at both the Memory Park ("Parque de la Memoria") and the Ex-ESMA museum site,

pregnant women are discussed in detail. The harsher treatment they received in dentition centers is featured on plaques, signs, and postings. Despite the similarly cruel treatment of the Jewish community, they receive no such special attention. Witnessing this, I questioned why some groups are highlighted more than others, and why the Jewish community is not presented in collective memory of the dictatorship.

While the inclusivity of transitional justice mechanisms is critical in academic literature, I further wondered to what extent the Jewish community in Argentina would *want* to be included in collective memory. That is, I questioned if what *I* initially perceived as a gap in memory is even important to those whom it impacts the most. From there, this project assumed its ethnographic character and methodology; how do Argentine Jews (Jewish Argentines) feel about the way that their community is represented in a supposedly national collective memory?

Initially, understanding the diversity of what is referred to in literature as "the Jewish community,"[1] I hoped to speak with leaders from different Jewish organizations, synagogues, and spaces. However, the Memory and Justice Workshop at the 36th Annual Multinational Meeting of Women and Dissidents (*El Encuentro Plurinacional de Mujeres y Disidencias*) in Bariloche, Argentina in October 2023 changed the course of this project. During the workshop sessions,

[1] There is significant discussion about the use of the term "community" in reference to Jews. Marcelo Dimenstein explains that social sciences research presupposes a level of unity among Jewish communities (2006). Dimenstein asserts that homogeneity within the group cannot be assumed, given the religious, cultural, and political diversity and even conflict. Because of these vast differences, Dimenstein proposes the use of the native anthropological category to describe Jews. During my research, I have read different authors who choose to use quotation marks when they write "the Jewish community" to acknowledge the reductive problem of the concept and to adhere to Dimenstein's idea of the native category (Kahan, 2014; Schenquer, 2014). In this instance, I also use quotation marks to indicate attention to this academic discussion. However, after this point, I do not use quotation marks. This is merely an aesthetic decision to facilitate reading; it does not mean that I do not recognize the diversity of Jewish people or the difficulty of defining the group in academia. For more information on this, see Dimenstein, M., "Some Reflections on the Use of the Term 'Community' to Refer to Jews," paper presented at the "Encuentro de intelectuales jóvenes judíos," Asociación Mutual Israelita de Argentina, August 2006.

women from all over Argentina shared about everything, from their experiences during the dictatorship to their fears about the upcoming presidential election. Regardless of their age or background, many expressed concern over the current state and uncertain future of collective memory. Hearing testimony from members of the organization the Grandchildren of the Plaza de Mayo (*Les Nietes de la Plaza de Mayo*)—the newest iteration of the social movement the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo)*, which I discuss later—I recognized both concern and hope for future generations. This prompted the questions: to what extent is collective memory relevant when memories are no longer first-hand? How do current, younger generations in Argentina relate to these narratives? What is at stake as memory changes or, in the case of Milei, is intentionally changed?

As I heard more perspectives, it became clearer that archival research alone would be insufficient to approach these questions. I wanted real-time answers from people who lived the realities of being Jewish in Argentina, of learning about their nation's complex history, and of watching it develop in a pivotal election year. To determine the efficacy and establishment of memory as a mechanism of transitional justice, I turned my efforts towards learning from Jewish youth in Buenos Aires.

I was surprised by my conversations and findings from my interviews. While I imagined at least some Jewish youth would be engaged in processes of collective memory, I did not expect them to relate as passionately as they did to the subject. I did not anticipate many to link their educational backgrounds so closely to the current national political context. Nor did I expect that their views about memory would have larger implications about inclusion and exclusion within

Argentine society as a whole. Despite my expectations, my interviewees' strong emotional responses, deep feelings of connection to the Jewish community, and profound expressions of care and concern for Argentine society indicate both the timeliness and importance of this research.

This project is both a culmination of and prelude to my research on the condition and significance of collective memory of the dictatorship. Engaging with the Jewish community in particular raises questions of intersectionality and belonging. Do young Jewish people see their perspectives and desires reflected in the goals of Jewish community organizations? Are they freely able to identify as both Jewish and Argentine? Conducting research and interviews during the presidential election in late 2023 only heightens the relevance of these questions. Ultimately, through this project, I aim to question the outcomes of transitional justice efforts to create memory and gauge their levels of inclusivity and accessibility to the Jewish community at a time of particular national and global uncertainty. Do young Jewish Argentines (Argentine Jews) feel adequately represented in national collective memory about the dictatorship? Where, how, and what did these individuals learn about the role of the Jewish community during this time? Does this generation still believe in the importance of collective memory of the dictatorship, and if so, to what extent should it highlight specific group experiences?

***Chapter Overview***

Chapter 1 begins with information on the current state of Argentine politics, highlighting President Javier Milei's campaign rhetoric surrounding the dictatorship. I then turn to the historical context of the dictatorship itself, such as the rise of the Armed Forces and the enforcement of their political ideology. This chapter also details my research and interview methodology, as well as the ethical considerations central to this project.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical frameworks that undergird this project. I discuss memory studies as an academic discipline and as a critical mechanism of transitional justice. This discussion includes the ideas of the distinction between memory and history, memory politics, and collective memory. I augment these foundations of memory with the concepts of denialism and youth, which relate to aspects of memory such as "remembering to forget" and "postmemory," respectively.

Chapter 3 explores the history and construction of collective memory in Argentina. Following the analysis of Daniel Lvovich and Jacqueline Bisquert, I outline four distinct periods of memory: "the theory of two demons" from 1983-1986, "the past that didn't happen" from 1987-1995, "the memory boom" from 1995-2003, and the Kirchner years or "State memory" from 2003-2007 (2008). Through this lens, I trace the legitimacy, controversy, and trajectory of national memory.

Chapter 4 includes analysis of the experience of Jewish desaparecidos under the Armed Forces and what I refer to as the two "sides" of the Jewish community during the years of the dictatorship. Using testimony from a variety of sources, I provide evidence corroborating the "special victimization" of Jewish people in clandestine detention centers. With this understanding, I turn to the responses of different Jewish actors to state violence. On one hand, journalist Jacobo Timerman decried the regime's antisemitism and used his international audience to amplify the plight of Jewish individuals. On the other, prominent Jewish community organizations focused on societal or "visible" acts of antisemitism in Argentine society, and preferred to keep the Armed Forces' discrimination a national issue. The different visions about the cause and nature of antisemitism complicate understandings of and relationships within the Jewish community.

This examination leads to Chapter 5, which discusses the idea of the "cosmopolitanization of memory" and the expanding use of the Holocaust as a prism through which to understand state violence and antisemitism (Levy, 2010). After outlining the basic framework of cosmopolitanization, I discuss how the Holocaust came to be a measure of morality for societies across the globe, not just Eastern Europe. Finally, I address the use of the Holocaust specifically in the Argentine context, highlighting resonances between the Armed Forces' and Nazi ideology and practices.

The last chapter, Chapter 6, introduces my fieldwork and interviews with Jewish Youth in Buenos Aires. I divide the analysis of my data into three sections. The first includes my interviewees education and experiences learning about the dictatorship, the Jewish community,

and, when applicable, the connections between the two. The second section investigates how these young people feel about their education: whether or not they think it is adequate, who they believe education should come from, and if they perceive that education about memory is still a priority in Argentine society. The final section reveals what my interviewees believe the role of memory to be, including its tangible impacts on exclusion and empathy among Argentinians.

My concluding analysis reinforces the statements and sentiments of my interviewees and explores the insight they offer about national collective memory, education, and inclusion. Comprehensive education about both the Argentine dictatorship and broader Jewish and world history is useful for and wanted by Jewish youth in Argentina. I argue that a lack of education facilitates the growth of denialist narratives and can undermine the present-day impacts of the dictatorship. I also maintain that my interviews confirm the importance of teaching and accepting diversity and diverse historical experiences. By exposing young people to the adverse effects of discrimination, and specifically antisemitism, it can increase empathy for and understanding of all groups' experiences, not just the Jewish community. Additionally, I discuss the impact of teaching memory and intersectionality on Jewish youths' feelings of belonging and relationship with Argentine citizenship. Separating the Jewish experience from the Argentine experience results in a fragmented sense of identity, or the feeling that one must prioritize one identity over another.

My conclusion also includes a brief discussion of the current political context in Argentina and the complications that continue to arise for the Argentine Jewish community under President Javier Milei. Milei's professed connections to Judaism and his political stances and allies

escalate uncertainty for the Jewish community, at a time when antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments are at a global high. Although not a principal aspect of this project, contemporary politics are critical to the field of memory studies and further develop the need for future research on the subjects of collective memory, the Argentine Jewish community, and global tolerance and belonging.

# CHAPTER 1:

## Background

### *The Argentine Dictatorship*

> We liberals have been accused of aberrant things, of [being] *fachos*,[2] fascists, Nazis… things that have nothing to do with us. We value the vision of memory, truth and justice. Let's start with the truth. There were not 30,000 missing, there were 8,753.
>
> —Now-President Javier Milei, as cited in *Infobae*, 2023, my translation[3]

On October 1, 2023, only weeks before his election to the presidency of Argentina, then-candidate Javier Milei took the stage in the first presidential debate, immediately making—or undoing—history. He bluntly endorsed the popular denialist claim that narratives of collective memory largely exaggerate the number of people disappeared (*los desaparecidos*) during the dictatorship. With this incendiary comment, Milei joined the growing tide of people who deny or justify the state violence perpetrated by the Argentine military dictatorship between 1976-1983. Masquerading as a pursuit of "truth," this type of denialist rhetoric seeks to reframe state terrorism as justified acts in a national war against subversion. Such denialism undermines state and societal efforts to recount and remember the abuses of human rights that characterized Argentina's most recent military dictatorship.

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[2] "*Fachos*" is common slang, also used to indicate people who support fascism.

[3] A number of the academic sources cited throughout this project and all of my interviews are in Spanish. All sources are cited in their original language and all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Days after the debate, Argentina celebrated 40 years of democracy since the fall of the Armed Forces in 1983. In these last four decades, the State and its citizens have actively promoted the forms of memory and accountability that the growing tide of denialism now contradicts. Although widespread, narratives of collective memory are not unanimous; many social groups and voices continue to be amplified more than others.

Any discussion of President Milei or present-day memory of the Argentine dictatorship demands historical context. On March 24, 1976, the sixth and most recent military coup in the country's 20th-century history seized power. Military commanders of the armed forces—Jorge Rafael Videla of the Army, Emilio Eduardo Massera of the Navy, and Orlando Ramón Agosti of the Air Force—ousted sitting President María Estela Martínez de Perón, gaining control of the government. Videla, Massera, Agosti, and their followers rejected Peronist ideology,[4] introduced in the late 1940s by Juan Perón and upheld by his wife, María Estela. The Armed Forces[5] justified their reign as a battle against the perceived threats of Peronism, communism, and other ideologies deemed counter to military authoritarianism. Thus, the self-proclaimed "National

[4] Juan Peron came to power in the Argentine government in 1946, after a decade of corruption and electoral fraud by an oligarchy of wealthy landowners and military leaders. As the head of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, Peron recognized rising dissatisfaction among the working class and feared the outcomes of widespread discontent. Heeding workers' desires, he approved a law that guaranteed compensation for terminated employees and supported policies such as retirement, social security, minimum wage, and year-end bonuses. While in power, Peron forced the government to comply with the comprehensive labor laws and protect unions and unionized workers. Extremely popular in the mid-1900s, this radical workers' rights policy is part of what is known as Peronism. It also includes laws that legalize divorce and eliminate religious education in public schools, which is widely controversial. Peronism remains an active political ideology in Argentina and has since seen various waves of support, disapproval, and conflict in national politics.

[5] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms "Armed Forces," "regime," and "junta" interchangeably to refer to military forces ruling Argentina during the dictatorship.

Reorganization Process"—"The Process"[6]—emerged as the coup pursued control over the social, cultural, and economic realities of the country.

The coup occurred within the context of several United States operations and policies in Latin America. First, U.S. Military Operation Condor, a system of military intelligence and surveillance within and among countries including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay encouraged mistrust and intolerance of citizens, activism, and education. Second, the U.S. National Security Doctrine permitted and supported policies that aimed to eliminate the threat of communism during the Cold War.[7] Under these conditions, fueled by the United States' crusade against the Soviet Bloc, the Argentine military presented themselves as the saviors of a country in chaos. Promising to safeguard the nation's security and install their "Process" of organization, the regime quickly became oppressive (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 16). Under the guise of protection, government officials implemented systematic practices of targeting individuals considered disloyal or destructive to the regime. Dissidents and intellectuals soon became "subversives"—the main enemy in the national "fight against subversion"—and the main victim of systematic state terrorism.

[6] In discourse about the dictatorship in Argentina, it is common to refer to reorganization policies and the regime together as "*El Proceso*." Following this example, I use "The Process" in a number of translations to refer to the dictatorship and its political dimension.

[7] There are numerous connections between the United States policy of the National Security Doctrine and the repression of the Argentine Armed Forces. These connections are frequently discussed in academia and were highlighted during my personal visit to the Ex-ESMA space on September 2, 2023. The fear in the United States of communist ideology during the Cold War allowed for practices of surveillance and repression of citizens by their own state (Pontoriero, 2022). These practices—legitimized by the United States—were later implemented in Argentina by both the Argentine state and the United States (McSherry, 2002; Pontoriero, 2022). At Ex-ESMA, a former site of detention and abuse, emphasis was placed on the mimicry of Western interrogation and torture techniques. For further information, refer to "Tracking the Origins of a State Terror Network: Operation Condor" by J. Patrice McSherry or "*La represión militar en la Argentina* (1955-1976)" by Esteban Damián Pontoriero.

State violence during this period was extensive, as military leaders aimed to eliminate any opposition to the regime's economic, political, and social ideology. However, the definition of opposition itself was extremely broad. Curfew laws, bans on communication and social gatherings, and pressure to remain silent about state crimes impacted everyone. With detention centers in public areas and kidnappings occurring on the streets, violence was both visible and uninhibited.

When the dictatorship ended in 1983, the state created the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) to investigate crimes and assist in the reemerging project of democracy. The CONADEP report, revised in 2003, remains one of the leading sources of information about the regime. According to this report, throughout the seven years of the dictatorship, the regime directly targeted and disappeared thousands of people (CONADEP 2003[1984]). While the CONADEP report itself cites 8,961 *desaparecidos* rather than 30,000, the latter number is widely supported by human rights organizations, family members of the disappeared, and social movements in Argentina. It is a symbol of the struggle against state terrorism and of the unknown number of lives lost due to lack of transparency and the deaths of so many young people. Notably, the Center for Legal and Social Studies (*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales,* CELS), the Argentine League for the Rights of Man (*La Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre,* LADH), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have all used and endorsed this figure.

Victims of the regime were not only pursued for their presumed links to communist or Peronist policies, but also for their work and hobbies. Professionals, intellectuals, students, and activists

of all kinds became military prey. State persecution included kidnappings, torture, and disappearances from the streets, victims' homes, and their workplaces or places of study (CONADEP 2003[1984], 11).

Violence was not, however, limited to active citizens. To fully eliminate ideologies contrary to the Armed Forces', the dictatorship also appropriated over 500 children, often relocating the youngest to the homes of military families and those that supported the regime (CONADEP 2003[1984], 11). The people and children kidnapped by military forces are commonly remembered as "the disappeared" (*los desaparecidos*). With no evidence of their capture, certification of their death, or body to bury or grieve, *los desaparecidos* now exist only in memories of life before the dictatorship, or in what Alejandro Baer describes as "the metaphysical realm of memory" (2017, 29).

The thousands of *los desaparecidos* were detained and tortured in clandestine detention centers throughout the country. The CONADEP report cites that there were at least 340 camps, often visibly located in schools, community buildings, and police stations (CONADEP 2003[1984]). Despite their public visibility, the regime methodically denied the existence of the centers as well as having information about their locations and the people detained inside of them.

In detention centers, *los desaparecidos* were systematically stripped of their identities and cut off from connections to the outside world. The CONADEP report describes that since attempts were "made to fracture the identity of the captives…and their bodies and spirits were tormented beyond imagination," entering the camps "meant in all cases CEASING TO BE" (2003[1984],

11, *emphasis in original*). Physical and psychological destruction characterized both the spaces and the intentions of the camps. As state violence escalated in scale, and with no information about the cause or location of detention, an unnamed sense of danger and fear pervaded Argentine society.

In October 1983, facing an economic crisis, the military lost power and the dictatorship ended. Unpopular within the military and delegitimized by the loss of the *Malvinas* (Falklands) War, de facto President Reynaldo Bignone was forced to hold elections. With a peaceful transition of power to Raúl Alfonsín, the processes of societal regrowth and democratization began. Since then, although not without obstacles, Argentina has implemented many social and political practices in its pursuit of democracy. A critical aspect of this practice is an active commitment to creating public and collective memory about state violence and the abuse of human rights perpetrated by the regime.

Although calls for accountability and regrowth are widespread, it is difficult to find consensus on just *how* to advance these efforts. Throughout the country's process of recreation, there have been numerous iterations of collective memory. The diversity of experiences, desires, and policies regarding the dictatorship complicates the dissemination of a single narrative of the dictatorship. Despite the complexities, Argentina's pursuit of transitional justice is now conceptualized under what is known as the process of Memory, Truth, and Justice (*el proceso de "Memoria, Verdad y Justicia"*).

Since the 1990s, those in favor of commemoration and accountability have largely succeeded in creating spaces and policies that substantiate the harms of state violence. The CONADEP report and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team *(el Equipo Argentino de Antropologia Forense)*—the first human rights forensic anthropology team—provide publicly accessible information about state crimes (Baer, 2017, 33). Parks, museums, and memorials throughout the country provide spaces to remember the dictatorship. Public trials of military officials and perpetrators continue to have immense impact on combating impunity. These efforts to rebuild justice and peace are now globally recognized as a blueprint for efforts at transitional justice (CONADEP 2001; Sikkink and Walling, 2006).

Throughout the dictatorship and the creation of collective memory, the role of "the Jewish community" has remained quite complex. Under the Armed Forces, Jewish citizens faced heightened violence in detention centers. At the same time, immense fractures within the highly diverse Jewish community precluded a unified response to the regime. These fractures revolved around the character of the regime's antisemitism and the use of Holocaust references to describe its violence. Due in part to these conflicting viewpoints, there is little knowledge and no consensus about the experiences of Jewish individuals, both within the Jewish community and society as a whole.

The 2023 presidential election, coinciding with the fourth decade of democracy, only further complicates the narratives of memory and belonging. In tandem with the Jewish experience, this project also addresses the concept of denialism (*negacionismo*). As demonstrated by far-right President Javier Milei and his vice-president, Victoria Villarruel, the popularity of denialism has

increased since the end of the dictatorship—and especially in the final months of 2023 (Centenera 2023; Rosemberg 2023). Proponents of denialism reject certain facts that are central to the public narrative of memory and the process of Memory, Truth, and Justice (Centenera 2023). This project combines the histories of the Argentine dictatorship and the Jewish community to highlight the knowledge, sentiments, and political sensibilities of the current generation of Jewish youth.

The young people interviewed for this project occupy a unique space in the national project of memory. Not only did they come of age amidst immense political instability, but they are part of one of the first generations to live in a fully democratized Argentina. The intersection of their identities—principally as young and Jewish—is challenging to navigate in terms of the past, present, and future in Argentina. Because of this complexity, it is critical to pay attention to how and where these young Jewish individuals learn about the role of their "community" during the dictatorship, as well as how they feel about their representation in narratives that ostensibly belong to everyone. Without research and knowledge, the dangers of marginalization, omission, and denialism expand as the lived memory of the dictatorship and state violence fade.

### *Methodology and Ethical Considerations*

To answer my research questions, this project focuses on analysis of interviews I conducted with young Jewish individuals from a variety of Jewish communities and spaces in Buenos Aires. I conducted all interviews over a period of two months in October and November

2023. I found participants through personal and academic connections in the city, and aim to represent the greatest variety of spaces, communities, and perspectives possible. Ultimately, I completed eleven semi-structured interviews during this time frame. The interviews I use characterize only a fraction of the diversity of knowledge and feelings that young Jewish individuals in the city possess, compelling future research.

It is important to highlight the timeframe during which these interviews took place. The year 2023, and October and November in particular, mark a unique moment in terms of the global political context of Judaism and antisemitism. The presidency of far-right politician Benjamin Netanyahu, the October 7th attack on Israel, and the onset of the war between Israel and Hamas all complicate relationships and experiences with and among Jewish people across the globe. These developments generate controversy and discomfort about and throughout Israel and its supporters. Since all of my interviews took place after October 7th, the uncertainty and emotional turmoil of this particular moment are relevant to the experiences of my Jewish interviewees.

Regardless, all interviews were completely voluntary and took place in person in public spaces throughout the city of Buenos Aires or in spaces of organizations to which the respondent belongs. During the interviews, I gave everyone the option to speak in Spanish or English. Everyone chose Spanish, although some used a combination of the two, or *Spanglish*. Each interview followed the same structure; I asked each participant the same basic questions.[8] Examples of the questions include: where and how did you learn about the dictatorship? Do you remember if your educator or the unit mentioned the Jewish community? Do you think this topic

[8] Interview questions in English and original Spanish are included as appendices.

is being discussed or should be discussed in Argentine society? Do you see any connections between this topic and current politics and if so, what are they?

During my research and interviews, I remained aware of ethical questions and my own positionality. My identities as an international student, American, academic, and young Jewish person influence the way I worked and, therefore, the ethics of my research. Despite my work in Buenos Aires, I am not Argentine and cannot be fully versed in Argentine cultures or perspectives. I also aimed to heed the role of the United States in promoting state violence during the Argentine dictatorship and those in surrounding nations. Further, although my identity as culturally Jewish helped me to build relationships with local contacts and interviewees, it does not mean that I can conflate my experience with that of Jewish youth in Argentina. My awareness of these contexts enhanced my goal of investigating *if* a problem exists, rather than assuming or problematizing a cultural norm.

The ethics of the interviews themselves were also paramount. The first consideration was that the topics can be difficult to hear, think about, and discuss. For this reason, I did not cover the specific details of the disappeared in my interviews; when these topics emerged, I limited what I shared about mistreatment and torture. Further, during our conversations, I paid attention to people's verbal and physical cues to ensure they were comfortable with each topic we explored.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked for permission to record and watched for signs of discomfort. I also informed each interviewee that they could ask me to stop at any time. Similarly, I explained to each person my intentions and objectives with their information (for my

study abroad project and this thesis) and outlined my anonymization processes. I also informed each person that they could ask me not to use any part of their interview for my project at any time during or after the interview, up to publication. However, no issues with content or recording arose. All these ethical considerations followed the recommendations and requirements of the School for International Training and Macalester College's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

To protect the identities and perspectives of the people with whom I spoke, I do not use their real names in this analysis. Instead, I include only a coded name for each interviewee. Details about people's lives—Jewish backgrounds, histories, schools, jobs, etc.—remain the same because they contribute to individuals' responses and how they think about and relate to the topic. While all interviews are used in my analysis, I include the majority of quoted evidence from my conversations with Mariana, Andrea, Eleonora, and Valerie, whom I introduce in more depth at the beginning of chapter five.

After each interview, and again after all of them, I transcribed and analyzed the content of our conversations. Given the scope of this project, my principal methods of analysis included inductive coding and data saturation; I highlight patterns or repetitions within my data that emerged without the bias of a predetermined hypothesis. Consistent with the diversity of the "Jewish community," each person had a very different experience and knowledge base—this variety helps illuminate the complex issues that arise with collective memory. However, similarities in their opinions and views became clear. For example, particularly in the section that concerns interviewees' feelings about their learning, everyone discussed different emotions and

perspectives on belonging to the Jewish community and Argentine society. In the end, though, a majority indicated the need to expand education about Jews during the dictatorship and create more recognition of Argentine Jewish or Jewish Argentine identity.

# CHAPTER 2:

## Navigating Memory Studies

### *Memory and Transitional Justice*

This project relies on the framework of memory studies and transitional justice. Memory studies emerged in academia in the late 20th century and focuses on the use of memory as a tool to both remember and engage with the past. It is well-established as a tool for transitional justice—the processes of reconciliation and pursuit of justice that may follow periods of national conflict and violence. As a mechanism of justice, memory studies explores the complicated aspects of memory in a variety of contexts, but is frequently applied specifically to the Argentine example (Jelin, 2012; Svampa, 2013; Kahan, 2014; Baer, 2017; Zaretsky, 2021). In its current iteration, memory studies is both a theory and a practice that reflects the realities of transitional justice, identity politics, and narratives of sociopolitical inclusion and exclusion (Murphy and Whigham, 2023; 353; Assmann, 2023, 1).

To think critically about political realities, memory studies highlight the distinction between history and memory. Elizabeth Jelin describes that memory and history are neither identical nor interchangeable, although there are a variety of connections between the two (2012, 75). While history attempts to reconstruct the past primarily through hard facts, memory approaches the

same task through a more subjective terrain. Memory is based on experiences, symbolic frameworks, and personal feelings that extend beyond the dimensions of history and fact (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 8-9; Baer, 2017, 33).

These subjective dimensions make memory challenging to define, yet the difficulties of this are central to memory studies. There is, and likely cannot be, a single definition of memory (Jelin, 2012, 17). The temporal context in which memory is created greatly impacts narratives of the past and how memory is operationalized as a political and social tool. Personal, political, and societal realities determine the emergence and acceptance of memory in any given moment. Despite constantly changing contexts, Jelin characterizes memory—and the feelings it evokes—as "stubborn;" (2012, 2). A near-permanent fixture in Argentine society, it "does not resign itself to remain in the past, [but] insists on its presence" in both the present and the future (Jelin, 2012, 2).

Societal realities and aspirations shape memory. Memory remains omnipresent not only within individuals, but within entire communities. In a community setting, the work of memory becomes collaborative. Through cooperation, *collective memory*, a central concept in memory studies, emerges. *Collective memory* indicates a group's, community's, or society's common understanding about the past, present, and future that impacts its overall goals and identity. Argentina is one of many societies that has a collective past and memory deeply rooted in its national identity. Despite its importance in the idiosyncratic context of a society, collective memory is often expressed in terms that transcend specific group norms. A product of shared experiences, it often assumes an international character. Both impacted by and impacting an

increasingly globalized world—a process termed “recursive cosmopolitanism” by Daniel Levy (2010)—national memory becomes intrinsically interconnected to the outside world (Levy and Sznaider, 2002; Baer, 2017, 36).

Collective memory does not form by chance. Instead, it emerges through a living process that requires active involvement and personal and group agency (Jelin, 2012, 14). Collaborative or confrontational, many actors are present in spaces that create and affirm memory. Since memory is extremely subjective, each actor comes with distinct perspectives and goals. In Argentina, the principal actor in memory formation was often the state (Baer, 2017, 33). However, social movements and individuals have also aimed to control narratives of memory and their impact on people's knowledge and feelings. At different points in the country’s history, these actors’ goals have either clashed and cooperated. As the field of transitional justice demonstrates, in situations that concern the memory of violence or violations of human rights, the narratives and objectives of collective memory carry increased weight. In Argentina, building collective memory includes assigning the “responsibilities, recognition, and institutional justice” critical to the pursuit of ethical and moral restoration of society (Jelin, 2012, 11). The wide variety of actors and goals associated with memory, and their distinct relationships with guilt and progress, makes memory political.

The politicization of collective memory does not stem from the difficulty of constructing an accurate version of the past in and of itself. Rather, it emerges from competing experiences with the past and the ways of transmitting those experiences (Baer, 2017, 49). Since the state has a stake in the collective attitudes of society, it is often one of the most vocal actors involved in

creating and transmitting collective memory. This holds true in the Argentine context. At various political moments since 1983, the state conveyed its conceptualization of the dictatorship in distinct ways (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008). However, Baer observes that although the state's role remains strong in creating memories of the dictatorship, the field of memory production has expanded to include other increasingly important players (2017, 33). Primarily social organizations or movements, these other actors "compete," often against the state, to promote their conceptions of the past (Baer, 2017, 33).

In Argentina, there is a strong tradition of social movements' involvement in constructing memory about state violence. As I discuss in chapter two, at various moments since the end of the dictatorship, social organizations have assumed active roles in promoting different ideas of memory.[9] Natasha Zaretsky explains that since 1983, social movements have mobilized numerous times to respond to what they perceive as impunity and injustice with increased calls for collective memory (2021, 2). At these points in the process of transitional justice, social actors wanted a collective memory that more strongly denounced the dictatorship and continued impunity for its perpetrators. This type of ideological struggle exemplifies the potential difficulties in creating and operationalizing collective memory in modern politics.

[9] From workers' rights movements in the mid-twentieth century to current political demonstrations, social movements in Argentina have immense legitimacy and organizational power. A significant part of this legitimacy is attributed to the formation of the group *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* during the dictatorship. Composed of mothers and grandmothers whose children and grandchildren were disappeared by the Armed Forces, *Las Abuelas* protested military violence and secrecy, demanding information about their family members. Their demonstrations, marching silently in the plaza, continue to this day, as not all of their family members have been found. Finding exceptions to laws that protected perpetrators, these tactics decreased military impunity and gained significant national and international recognition (Sikkink and Walling, 2006). The organizations' symbol, a white headscarf, or *panuelo*, is now a part of the Plaza de Mayo, and other colors are used to represent different political and social movements. Notably, new generations of *Las Abuelas—Las Madres* (mothers) *de la Plaza de Mayo* and *"Les Nietes"* (grandchildren) *de la Plaza de Mayo*—now continue the work of demanding information about their loved ones and fighting against impunity.

With such a variety of actors and perspectives, there are naturally numerous manifestations of collective memory, especially in Argentina (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 11). Many of these transitional justice efforts are public, such as commissioned reports on state violence, trials of perpetrators, and sites and memorials to the victims of the regime. Regardless of the mechanism, as I discuss in chapter 2, the idea that there are various ways to demonstrate and disseminate versions of the past is critical to the framework of memory studies.

The academic field of memory studies includes all of these concepts: memory as distinct from history, the various perspectives involved in creating memory, collective memory, the politics of memory, and its actors and manifestations. It is complex and highly politicized—not all actors can "win," not everyone can feel adequately represented by each iteration of collective memory. This project is rooted in the complexity of memory. Using this framework, my research considers the knowledge and feelings of a specific group about its representation in the current version of collective memory of state violence in Argentina. Through interviews with members of Buenos Aires' Jewish community, it focuses on how Jewish youth perceive the current state of collective memory and its implications for the inclusivity of Argentine society as a whole.

### *Denialism and "Remembering to Forget"*

Two other important concepts emerge in Argentine memory studies, or the study of how to build a future informed by the past. The first is the concept and reality of denialism. As a theoretical framework, according to Mario Ranalletti, the concept of denialism is dedicated to

denying facts and manipulating the past for political gains (2010, 161-162). In his view, it is "an ideological system disguised as a 'true' scientific approach" to minimize, undermine, or vindicate the regime's abuses of human rights.

While often perceived as a political or social movement *against* memory, I approach denialism as its own form of memory politics. Although it runs counter to the work of collective memory as it is understood through the lens of transitional justice, denialism is and of itself an iteration of memory. John-Paul Himka and Beata Michlic offer a compelling framework for this view (2013). They discuss "remembering to forget" as one of the three main forms that memory can take in a society (2013, 10). This iteration of memory is common in countries or communities with "dark pasts" to confront. Proponents of remembering to forget view memory activism "as an unjust insult on national history and memory and as a threat to the nation's identity and future" (Himka and Michlic, 2013, 11). In Argentina, discomfort with or fear of a controversial past engenders the desire to move on, move forward, or think differently about the nation's violent history. Through this lens, denialism becomes another form of memory, synonymous with "remembering to forget." It is not a campaign against collective memory itself, but another version upheld by those who do not subscribe to past and present iterations.

In Argentina, this denialism drives those who reject the history of the dictatorship as told in the government's public reports. Since the end of the military regime—and during its control—the most common argument of denialists has been that state terrorism during this time was part of a "war" against guerrillas or subversive elements. Many international reports of the dictatorship—including Wikipedia—refer to the years of the Argentina dictatorship as the "Dirty

War," diminishing the extreme character of state-sponsored violence. Echoing the United States' National Security Doctrine, denialist beliefs reinforce the narrative that the regime's acts of violence were justified by their goals of eradicating communism and threats to national order (Zaretsky, 2021, 4).

Since 1983, the amount of denialist discourse in Argentina has increased, although it historically did not have much popular support (Ranaletti, 2010, 161). However, denialism has been reaffirmed and legitimized more than ever in recent years. For example, in November 2017, the Minister of Culture of the City of Buenos Aires and director of famous opera house, *El Teatro Colón*, Darío Lopérfido, stated that "there were not 30 thousand disappeared in Argentina" (Infobae, 2017). Narratives like Lopérfido's endorse the number 8,000 *confirmed* in the CONADEP report as representative of the extent of the regime's violence. They also maintain that the 30,000 figure was invented for political reasons, such as promoting criminal trials and spaces dedicated to collective memory. However, as mentioned earlier, human rights organizations view this number as a gross underestimate, due to the lack of transparency and knowledge about *los desaparecidos*.

President Javier Milei publicly upheld this narrative during the first presidential debate in October 2023. However, Milei went beyond the numbers, affirming that the dictatorship's "war" was against "terrorists" who also committed crimes, affirming the most popular claims of denialists. It remains to be seen whether denialist discourse will grow in the months or years to come in Argentina. This uncertainty dictates the need to understand how collective memory of the dictatorship functions today, with special attention paid to groups marginalized in the

creation of a shared past. Therefore, this research includes the social and political issue of denialism and its recent growth.

***Youth and "Postmemory"***

The third concept with which this project engages is youth. As a framework, this idea is important for its current centrality in Argentina's political climate, its generational links, and its correlation to the idea of "postmemory" (Hirsch, 2012). The academic significance of youth has increased in recent years. Pablo Vommaro argues that beginning in the sixties, young people began to occupy greater space in social economic, political, and cultural life (2012, 14). This expansion generated interest within scientific and academic communities about the position and power of youth in society and politics. In turn, social-science research demonstrated and legitimized the growing influence of young people in socio-political spaces. This demographic gained both symbolic and real power though these developments.

As academic interest increased, the problem of how to define "youth" as a sociopolitical category emerged. Vommaro explains that "youth is a dynamic, sociohistorical, and culturally constructed notion," and, as such, is difficult to define (2012, 17). Generations naturally indicate differentiation by age category. However, Vommaro suggests that the current youth is better understood in terms of relationships, "rather than age-related or biological" distinctions (2012, 17). In other words, the definition of youth focuses on relationships among themselves, with other generations, and to the sociopolitical world in which they live. Further, within each new

generation of youth, there is a common experience that unites or animates their sensitivities and worldviews (Vommaro, 2012, 20). This set of experiences is unique to each generation and differentiates it from the ones that precede or follow.

In this project, a number of generational distinctions exist within the Jewish community. These include, but are not limited to, temporal distance from the dictatorship, the attacks on Jewish spaces in the 1990s, and the current electoral cycle and growth of denialism. That is, a person who experienced the dictatorship first-hand has different memories than the current youth, who have narratives and stories of those years. Although these differences are a natural part of society, they have important implications for each generations' knowledge of history and priorities for the future.

The temporal distance of today's youth from the dictatorship invites discussion of what Marianna Hirsch calls "postmemory" (2012). Departing from conversations about the children of the Holocaust,

> "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up (Hirsch, 2012, 5).

In this way, postmemory engages the complex web of trauma, politics, and reconciliation that affects generations raised alongside transitional justice mechanisms. It also introduces the element of self-identification and belonging into conversations of collective memory. While members of the "postgeneration"—and the generations after—did not experience trauma firsthand, they may be inclined to identify with those who did. This simultaneous distance from and interrelation to the past complicates the function of collective memory. The intricacies of

"postmemory" are critical in the Argentine context, as today's youth—members of generations after—grapple with their relation to their family's and their country's pasts. Incorporating this concept amplifies the need to study youth and memory together.

The relative political involvement of youth is another way to approach the subject of youth. This generation's relationship with today's political world also differentiates them from their predecessors. Vommaro explains two of the most common understandings of youth engagement with politics. On one hand, youth political participation is characterized as "rebellious, with transformative and disruptive potential" to change society (2012, 16). On the other, young people who do not engage in politics are vilified as "apathetic, disinterested, and unparticipative" (2012, 17). These opposing views are conveniently accepted in political rhetoric and are evoked in my interviews. However, they are reductive and demand investigation. This project addresses only a fraction of the possible perceptions held by Jewish youths regarding a specific policy and practice regarding their community. Ultimately, youth as a theoretical framework enables increased attention to this generation and a lens through which to view different perspectives on and experience with memory among current young Argentine Jews (Jewish Argentines)[10].

From memory politics to collective memory and "remembering to forget" to "postmemory," this chapter explores a variety of approaches to and iterations of memory. It also engages how these forms of memory are applied broadly to societies and in discussions of denialism and youth. Despite their broad application, all of these versions of memory are clearly at play in the

[10] Following the example of Raanan Rein's 2010 *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Diaspora*, this distinction further reflects the diversity of Jewish perspectives. Deciding which aspect of identity, Jewish or Argentine, to use as a noun and which to use as an adjective may carry descriptive importance, depending on the individual.

Argentine context. I now turn to the construction of the various iterations of collective memory that have existed in Argentina since the end of the dictatorship.

# CHAPTER 3:

## The Construction of Memory in Argentina

Since the end of the dictatorship in 1983, Argentina has employed many social and political methods to strengthen democracy (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008; Baer, 2017). In this endeavor, both the state and civil society have promoted a variety of transitional justice mechanisms. Many of these mechanisms, including the search for and publication of information, the ongoing trials of perpetrators of violence, and the various forms of collective memory, have gained international recognition in the field of transitional justice and human rights (Levy, 2010, 581-582; Sikkink, 2011; Zaretsky, 2021, 2).

In each of these ongoing projects, memory is vital. Narrative understandings of the nation's past shape the formation and operationalization of justice mechanisms. Inclusion in these narratives has important implications for citizens' access to human rights. Or, as Elizabeth Jelin explains,

> Debates about the memory of repressive periods and political violence are often raised in relation to the need to build democratic orders in which human rights are guaranteed for the entire population, regardless of class, 'race,' gender, ideological orientation, religion, or ethnicity (Jelin, 2012, 11).

In this chapter, I trace the origins and iterations of collective memory, emphasizing some of each iterations' outcomes for human rights in the country. I follow four periods of memory in Argentina, outlined by Daniel Lvovich and Jaquelina Bisquert (2008). These periods span the

years from the end of the dictatorship in 1983 to the end of Néstor Kirchner's presidency in 2007. As a whole, these distinct periods help to contextualize the current state of collective memory and highlight the various struggles between state, military, and social actors to determine the character and breath of national collective memory.

### *The "Theory of the Two Demons"*

According to Lvovich and Bisquert, the first period of memory began in 1983, when dictatorial powers lost control of the government and Raúl Alfonsín won the first democratic presidential election after the dictatorship (2008). With just over fifty percent of the popular vote, Alfonsín had a challenging task. His administration faced two imperatives: to restore faith in democracy and at the same time to maintain a relationship with the military sector, which retained members and supporters of the military regime. Lvovich and Bisquert explain that:

> Regardless of whether the government's proposal for justice was limited by the need to maintain a harmonious relationship with the military sector, it was also based on the need to endow the refounded democracy with a framework of legitimacy around the defense of fundamental rights and the condemnation of state terrorism (2008, 43).

Searching for a balance between the two objectives, Alfonsín's state narrative focused on "the theory of the two demons." This largely denialist theory supported the idea that Argentine society was caught between two evils during the dictatorship: the far-right and the far-left (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 13). Identifying two opposing sides, this theory upholds the regime's claims that the military was defending the country from guerrillas and leftist communists. It maintained that the dictatorship was instead a war, which concealed the truth

about state violence and terrorism. The "theory of the two demons" corresponds to the internationally popularized name for the dictatorship: the "Dirty War."

Also under the Alfonsín administration, in December 1983, the military approved self-amnesty by passing the Law of National Pacification (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 28). This law guaranteed amnesty for all actions at all levels of the military between March 1976 and June 1983—all the years of the regime. The "Full Stop" Law and the Due Obedience Law were passed soon after, in 1986 and 1987, respectively. The former established a statute of limitations for military actions, the former guaranteed immunity for all military officials below the colonel rank. Together, these laws are known as the Impunity Laws.

Naturally, these laws received significant pushback. As the government doubled-down on impunity, *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*, their next generation *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, and their supporters increased their marches and strengthened their calls for information, justice, and memory. Their activism had little effect under President Alfonsín, the laws of impunity remained. Ultimately, apathy, rather than balance, characterized the first period of state-sponsored memory from 1983-1986.

***The Politics of Remembering to Forget***

After the end of the period of military pacification, Argentina entered its next period: the years of the politics of forgetting. The end of Alfonsín's presidency and the beginning of Carlos

Saúl Menem's exemplify this policy. Like Alfonsín, Menem, the Peronist candidate in the 1989 election, maintained a strong relationship between his presidential administration and the military. He approved pardons for military personnel who had violated human rights during the dictatorship, further absolving the military of responsibility (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 28). With these pardons, he prevented the public from creating a space to acknowledge or even learn of the military's crimes. As he erased any path to truth and justice, Menem also expressed the social need to "close the wounds of the past" (51) and "'turn the page' on history and move forward" (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 48).

The notion that society could just "turn the page" demonstrates a rushed and reductive vision of reconciliation. With the expectation that Argentine society could merely proceed as normal, progress not only meant forgetting, but also forgiving perpetrators. By promoting impunity and minimizing society's pain, these policies towards memory excluded the experiences of victims and their families, depriving them of the ability to remember and heal. Lvovich and Bisquert describe that during this period, until 1995, "the use of the memory of the dictatorship in the public sphere seemed irremediably condemned to a marginal place" (2008, 57).

***The "Memory Boom"***

Despite the bleak outlook on collective memory in the early 1990s under President Menem, 1995 brought a different governmental and social attitude towards memory and justice. Lvovich and Bisquert name this period, 1995-2003, the "memory boom" (2008, 59). At the

beginning of the period, several events revitalized social consciousness of the dictatorship and renewed the fight for the end of impunity for perpetrators and a more representative collective memory of state-sponsored terrorism.

First, President Menem attempted to promote two state violence perpetrators to high military positions.[11] Second, the "confession" of the military officer Adolfo Scilingo in an interview about his participation in military "death flights"[12] reinvigorated public outrage. These successive acts renewed attention to the causes of trials, impunity, and memory. Lvovich and Bisquert explain the sharp impact of Scilingo's confession: "Not only did new confessions emerge, but the issue gained renewed importance in the media, fostering the development of a heated debate" (2008, 59).

This heated debate engaged various interests and perspectives. While some agreed with the increase in confessions by military personnel, others found them to be disappointing, a hollow display with no real consequences (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 59). The confessions prompted public demands for non-performative government action and access to more information about the disappeared. These developments helped create "favorable conditions for the condemnatory memory of state terrorism to gain new presence in the social sphere" (Lvovich and Bisquert,

[11] In 1994, President Menem affirmed the promotions of Antonio Pernías y Juan Carlos Rolón, known perpetrators of torture during the dictatorship, to be captains of a military frigate. When the approval went to the Senate for confirmation, the promotions were denied, despite the Due Obedience Law that guaranteed their immunity (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 59).

[12] Death flights, *vuelos de la muerte*, were a common tactic of extermination by the Armed Forces. Coded as prisoner "transfers," planes dropped *los desaparecidos* into the sea, thus eliminating all evidence of the crime—and the existence of the prisoner (CONADEP, 1986, 221-222). This tactic was confirmed by testimonies of participants like Adolfo Scilingo as well as physical evidence recovered in Uruguay, the other side of the *Rio de la Plata*. Scilingo's interview testimony is documented in Horacio Verbitsky's book, *El Vuelo* (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 59).

2008, 70). In other words, they renewed public energies and desires to create comprehensive and accessible memory, in what Lvovich and Bisquert call the "duty of memory" (2008, 64).

Beginning with the formation of the organization Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetfulness and Silence *(Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio, H.I.J.O.S.*) in March 1996, there was a rapid growth of public spaces and cultural productions focused on memory. Cultural events of all kinds—documentaries, art, plaques, etc.—conveyed information and emotions about memory. Spaces dedicated to memory also emerged, notably the Memory Park (*El Parque de la Memoria*). The construction of this public space was approved by the government on July 21, 1998, due to the work of human rights organizations. The park continues to be one of the "most significant spaces for collective memory, as an emblematic site that encourages reflection and the reworking of pain, marks, and wounds caused by a dark and violent past" in Argentina ("*Parque de la Memoria*"). Ultimately, the variety of cultural productions from this period revitalized the struggle for justice, most often through projects of collective memory.


***Fig. 3.*** Names of *los desaparecidos*, Memory Park, Buenos Aires (photo by author).

***Fig. 4.*** Statue to *los desaparecidos*, "*To think is a revolutionary fact*," Buenos Aires (photo by author).

***President Néstor Kirchner and State-Sponsored Memory***

The last period of memory described by Lvovich and Bisquert includes the years 2003-2007, during the presidency of Néstor Kirchner. Human rights policies characterized Kirchner's government; the administration took many measures to promote both memory and the social organizations that supported it. One of Kirchner's most important steps was the nullification of the infamous impunity laws, the Law of Due Obedience, and the "Full Stop" Law in 2003 (Lvovich and Bisquert, 79, 2008, 79). Further, on June 14, 2005, the Argentine Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional. These acts reversed decades of impunity enjoyed by the

military and reaffirmed the importance of criminal trials. Naturally, this generated discomfort, if not animosity, from the Armed Forces towards the Kirchner administration (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 79). The military's hostility only further demonstrated the need for accountability.

President Kirchner went beyond nullifying the impunity laws. In 2004, he also endorsed the recovery of the space of the Navy Mechanics School (*La Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, La ESMA*), the largest clandestine detention, torture, and extermination site in Argentina.[13] Transforming the former ESMA (Ex-ESMA) into a space that exposes acts of state violence further reduced impunity and the policy of forgetting that had existed since 1983 (Lvovich and Bisquert, 2008, 79-81). Free to the public, this space promotes memory and learning about the dictatorship, focusing on the Kirchner government's narrative of human rights.

Similarly, in 2006, Kirchner enacted a Congressional law that made March 24—the day of the military coup in 1976—a national holiday (Lvovich and Bisquert, 79, 2008, 86). The National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice (*Día de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia*) provides an annual space and time for public memory. This holiday is an important day for education and recognition of the dictatorship.

In addition, Kirchner commissioned a reissue of the "Never Again" (*"Nunca Más"*) report, including a new prologue by Eduardo Luis Duhalde, the Secretary of Human Rights for his

[13] In Argentina, this site is known as the Ex-ESMA, to indicate its transformation from detention center to museum. Notably, in September 2023, the year that marked forty years of democracy in Argentina, the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Ex-ESMA Memory Museum a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2023).

administration (Lvovich and Bisquert, 79, 2008, 89). Duhalde's prologue seeks to break with the past of impunity and justifications for state violence evident in the original (Baer, 2017, 41). By shifting the state-sponsored information away from the "Dirty War" narrative, the prologue provides a new awareness of the dark past (Crenzel, 2007). Rededicating Ex-ESMA, the 24 of May, and the "Nunca Más" report demonstrate Kirchner's goals of promoting an enduring, accurate, and condemnatory public memory.

Undoubtedly, the visibility of state violence that increased during Kirchner's government was a necessary shift from the "theory of the two demons" and the policy of forgetting. Kirchner's memory policies began to engage "postmemory." Nearly two decades after the end of the dictatorship, policies created during this time would impact future generation's understandings of state violence, impunity, and transitional justice. Naturally, the Kirchnerist view of the dictatorship and human rights did not pass without controversy. Lvovich and Bisquert describe the tensions that arose with the increase in denunciatory public memory:

> The construction of spaces [of memory] clearly exposes the problems—political, didactic, ethical, aesthetic—of choosing one of the disputed versions of memory and turning it into a guide for a narrative that will become the hegemonic representation of the dictatorial past, given the state support it has (2008, 83).

Creating spaces, reports, and even holidays means having control over the narratives that they convey. With this power to shape public narratives, memory becomes politicized. It is important to note that while the Kirchner years of human rights policy departed from the previous policies of forgetting, they, too, maintained a hegemonic vision of memory. Lvovich and Bisquert explain that narratives of collective memory promoted in public spaces by the Kirchner government were portrayed as *the* way to remember and symbolize the dictatorship (2008, 14). Kirchner's forms of

public memory certainly represented a wider variety of experiences—particularly victims' experiences—than prior iterations. However, it still excluded many perspectives from participation in its creation and cathartic powers.

One of the perspectives not well included in the creation of memory was that of the Jewish community. Despite the well-documented "special victimization" of the Jewish community in multiple reports on the dictatorship, there is still little public discourse about Jews during the dictatorship. There is also little representation of the Jewish community in public spaces built during this time. This gap in collective memory and the changing political realities require an understanding of Jewish experiences during the dictatorship and of how Jewish youth conceptualizes their representation in this (ostensibly) national project. The next chapter describes the circumstances of the Argentine Jewish community under the regime. It also addresses the different perspectives and tactics adopted by Jewish actors to combat what they perceived as the most pressing forms of antisemitism at play in Argentine society.

# CHAPTER 4:

## The "Jewish Community" During the Dictatorship

"The Jewish community" occupies a complex space in Argentina, particularly within the history of state violence against students, academics, and activists. By the beginning of the dictatorship, a large Jewish population had already immigrated to Argentina and integrated into local culture. Taking advantage of Argentina's open immigration policies, Jewish immigration occurred in two waves. The first wave, in the early 20th century, was largely a response to antisemitism and pogrom violence in Eastern Europe. World War II and the Holocaust drove the second wave of immigration in the 1940s. While many initially lived in rural areas, through processes of industrialization and urbanization, the majority settled in city centers, like Buenos Aires.

Antisemitism prior to the dictatorship is well-documented and often cited in works that discuss the Jewish experience under the Armed Forces (Tarica, 2012; Dobry, 2013; Kahan, 2016; Baer, 2017). Under the government of María Estela Martínez de Perón, the administration deposed by the Armed Forces, there was a significant increase in antisemitism (Dobry, 2013, 35). Hate crimes and attacks on public Jewish spaces like cemeteries multiplied during these years, intensifying fear within the community. Although evident before the coup, antisemitism under the Armed Forces is significantly less straightforward.

Many studies and publications since the end of the dictatorship in 1983 have addressed the question of state-sponsored antisemitism. While scholarly conclusions vary, each author affirms the complexity of antisemitism during the dictatorship. Estelle Tarica discusses the difficulty of characterizing the degree of discrimination that existed during and within the military regime (2012, 90-91). Fear and violence permeated Argentine society, and individual Jewish actors responded differently to these conditions. Their divergent responses generated the widespread lack of consensus.

While no single narrative of antisemitism emerges, there is evidence of discrimination against Jewish individuals. Two of the most well-known accounts of this violence include the section on antisemitism in the CONADEP's "*Nunca Más"* report ("Never Again") and the report commissioned by the Center for Social Studies of the Delegation of Israeli Associations of Argentina (*Centro de Estudios Sociales de la Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas*, CES-DAIA) in 1984. Testimonies from Jewish survivors of the secret state detention centers provide further evidence into what the CONADEP report calls "special treatment" of Jews (2000, 27).

The question of how to understand and condemn state-sponsored violence and the special victimization of Jews is central to this project. In this chapter, I use testimony to illustrate the experience of Jewish *desaparecidos* in clandestine detention centers. I then describe the two conflicting "sides" of the Jewish community that vied for national and international support in their efforts to combat state violence. On one "side," author Jacobo Timerman used international

human rights terms and analogies like the Holocaust to globally condemn the regime. On the other, the Jewish community organization, the Delegation of Israeli Associations of Argentina (*La Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas*, DAIA) rejected the use of the Holocaust analogy, preferring to keep Argentine antisemitism a national issue.

### *The Experience of Jews in Clandestine Detention Centers*

The first factor to consider in understanding antisemitism during the last Argentine military dictatorship is the presence, treatment, and experiences of Jewish persons disappeared by the regime. It is essential to clarify that Argentine state violence and disappearances did not target Jewish people for simply being Jewish (Tarica, 2012, 91; Dobry, 2013, 23; Kahan, 2016, 312). This fact facilitates a quick interpretation that the regime was not antisemitic. However, it does not mean that Jewish people were not impacted—intensely and disproportionately—by military control.

In 1976, the Jewish community constituted 1% of the Argentine population. Yet, during the dictatorship, Jews represented between 5% and 13% of the disappeared. The report commissioned by CES-DAIA cites 794 official disappearances of Jewish individuals—8.86% of the total population disappeared (2019, 24). However, other sources estimate the number of Jews disappeared could be as high as 1,500 (Dobry, 2013, 23). The overrepresentation of Jewish people kidnapped and disappeared stems from the general overrepresentation of Jewish

individuals in professions, spaces, and social and political organizations targeted by the Armed Forces.

Although important for contextualization, the number of Jewish disappearances alone do not demonstrate the regime's antisemitism. Rather, the treatment of Jewish individuals in state detention centers highlights this discrimination. Both the CONADEP and the CES-DAIA reports contain extensive testimony and vivid detail about the antisemitic nature of state detention centers. The former includes an entire section dedicated to antisemitism. It cites testimony that "Jews were punished simply because they were Jewish" (CONADEP, 1986, 71) and describes that "all kinds of torture were applied to Jews, but especially those that were extremely sadistic and cruel" (CONADEP, 2003[1983]). The latter report continues, explaining that "dozens of testimonies illustrate this 'extra' suffering" of Jewish victims through the "special treatment" of Jews (2019, 27). The report lists five different ways in which antisemitism appeared both during abduction and within the clandestine camps:

> a) Antisemitic actions at the time of abduction or detention;
> b) Specific forms of torture and humiliation of Jews during their stay in concentration camps;
> c) Use of Nazi language, phraseology, or symbolism;
> d) "Special" interrogations of Jews;
> e) Illicit seizure of property: extortion (CES-DAIA, 2019).

These violations intended to degrade, dehumanize, and torture the disappeared, both Jewish and non-Jewish (Nunca Más, 1986, 25). The report and many other expositions provide numerous examples of each mechanism. They include, but are not limited to:

1. Negation of identity. An unnamed survivor of the detention center *"El Atlético"* ("the Athletic Club") in Buenos Aires described an experience that reflects the Nazi practice in concentration camps like Auschwitz. He testifies that as he was abducted, he was told that "your name is no longer your name; be careful, never say your name. Your name is Z-65" (CES-DAIA, 2019, 25).
2. Increased abduction. Juana Meller de Pargament recalls that as military police robbed her home, they saw Israeli stamps in her passport. They asked if anyone was Jewish; she responded that they were. Noting that there were Jews in the home, they "severely beat her son…and they took him" (CES-DAIA, 2019, 28).
3. Nazi symbolism and language in detention centers. Jacobo Timerman reported that during the kidnapping of known Jews, the Armed Forces joked about Auschwitz and the gas chambers (Timerman, 1981, 132-133). They also distinguished themselves and their impunity from the Nazis, affirming that, "Hitler lost the war. We will win" (Timerman, 1981, 50). Similarly, other testimonies from "*El Atlético*" center highlight the frequent use of phrases like "Heil Hitler" and the depiction of swastikas on chains and handcuffs (CES-DAIA, 2019, 30).
4. Enhanced torture techniques. In his testimony for the Nunca Más report, Daniel Eduardo Fernández described the practice of "the rectoscope," during which "a tube was inserted into the anus of the victims, or into the vagina of women, and a rat was released inside the tube. 'The rodent looked for an exit and tried to get in by biting the victim's internal organs.'" (CES-DAIA, 2019, 28). This technique

> echoes the Nazi and Armed Forces use of the term "*Judenrat*" to dehumanize Jewish prisoners.

The physical and psychological torture of Jews in detention centers was notably more violent and severe (CONADEP, 1986, 67-72). The disproportionate torture of Jewish people in state detention centers complicates the idea that the regime was not antisemitic. With these numerous, public testimonies, it becomes difficult to assert that the Armed Forces did not discriminate against Jews simply because Jews were not targeted for their Jewish heritage or ethnicity.

***The Two Faces of the Jewish Community***

The second factor that complicates the narrative of the Jewish community during the dictatorship is the position of Jewish actors themselves. The cultural, political, and social diversity of the Jewish community cannot be overstated. However, Laura Schenquer argues that there were two different narratives by different Jewish actors that resounded—and conflicted—more strongly than others during the dictatorship (2014, 1). Her view places "secular Zionists" at odds with "religious-liberals" (Schenquer, 2014, 2). While I find that these fractures cannot be separated neatly by neither religiosity nor ideology, the two sides formed "ideological rifts that divide[d] the Jewish community" (Tarica, 2012, 89; Schenquer, 2014).

Jewish journalist Jacobo Timerman heads one of these two viewpoints. Timerman and his national and global followers endorsed the efficacy of applying international human rights

terminology and the Holocaust as a prism through which to view the situation in Argentina. Academic literature applies a variety of terms or metaphors to explain the contextualizing application of the Holocaust. In this project, I use "prism," rather than "lens" or "trope," since it connotes the wider variety of outcomes derived from the application of Holocaust references. As a metaphor, the idea of a "prism" underscores the variety of facets of the dictatorship that can be either highlighted or underplayed, depending on the perspective. In the Argentine context, the prism refracts the intentions of the user: bringing international attention to the Armed Forces' violations of human rights, creating a touchpoint by which to connect with the Jewish diaspora, or, conversely, providing a rationale behind limiting the dictatorship to the scope of national politics. Timerman aimed for the former; he maintained that amplifying the connections between "the Process" and the Jewish genocide would raise worldwide awareness and concern about Argentine state violence.

The Delegation of Israeli Associations of Argentina (DAIA) represents the other side. The DAIA commissioned and published the report on Jewish disappearances, and was (and remains) one of the most visible organizations in the Argentine Jewish community. As the popular face of Argentine Jews, especially in Buenos Aires, the DAIA walked a strict political line. Professing their attempts to manage public antisemitism, the organization preferred to keep domestic issues domestic. The DAIA, at least publicly, did not echo the grievances nor Holocaust references of Timerman and his followers.

Conflicts between Timerman and the DAIA simmered throughout the dictatorship, peaking at times as political narratives shifted. Attempts by both sides to silence or discredit the other

complicate the emergence of a singular Jewish response to the regime and memory of it. The following two sections outline Timerman's and the DAIA's rhetorics and perspectives, highlighting their direct ideological clashes.

### *Timerman and the "Jews of Silence" Narrative*

Jacobo Timerman was a major figure in Argentine journalism both before and during the dictatorship. Born in Ukraine, he immigrated to Argentina with his family in 1928 at the age of five. Beginning in 1971, Timerman founded and wrote for the center-left newspaper *La Opinión*. Inspired by Paris' *Le Monde, La Opinión* was highly political, critical, and factual. The "highly provocative" newspaper critiqued what Timerman repeatedly refers to as both "the Fascists" or "the terrorists of the Left and…the Right" (Timerman, 1981, 20-23, 80). Despite his distaste for both political extremes in Argentina, Timerman's perspective on the junta was clear from the beginning. He describes *La Opinión* as "the only daily newspaper concerned about the disappeared" and asserted its commitment to maintaining standards of access to factual information (Timerman, 42, 1981). Between 1971-1977, its reputation resulted in frequent sanctions. During these early days of the dictatorship, however, the newspaper continued to publish news and criticisms of the Armed Forces, including writs of habeas corpus to the courts from the families of *los desaparecidos* (Timerman, 1981, xiii).

On the night of April 15, 1977, Timerman was arrested (kidnapped)[14] by the regime with charges of state subversion. The Armed Forces cited Timerman's supposed connection with the case of David Gravier, a Jewish banker accused of financially supporting the guerrilla opposition movement. After his arrest, Timerman was interrogated and tortured in three different clandestine detention centers, including Puerto Vasco, for months (CONADEP, 1986, 238). He was then kept under house arrest for nearly two years before being deprived of Argentine citizenship and exiled to Israel in 1979. He was later cleared of all subversion charges by the Argentine court.[15]

Exiled in Israel, in 1981, Timerman published his internationally recognized memoir *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*.[16] The book provided a widespread platform for Timerman to describe his detention and torture experiences. It also became a means through which he amplified his perception of the virulent antisemitism of the Armed Forces. Despite the politicization of *La Opinión* and the false claim of his connection to the Gravier Case, Timerman maintained that he had been kidnapped, at least in part, for being a Zionist and a Jew (Tarica, 2012, 93). Throughout his book, Timerman recounts multiple interrogations—during both torture and court sessions—in which he is questioned about his Zionism and religious background

[14] Many sources that discuss Timerman's arrest prefer the word "kidnapped," since his disappearance resembles that of individuals who did not have criminal accusations, and since he was later cleared of all charges.

[15] Controversy exists over how and why Timerman was released from the clandestine detention centers. Although he was acquitted for his alleged involvement with the Gravier case by a military court in October 1977, some authors, like conservative journalist Nissim Elnecavé, believe that Timerman's Jewish identity aided in his release. In this view, international attention, if not pressure, from Israeli and American governments may have played a role in acquitting Timerman. On September 19, 1979, the Argentine Supreme Court of Justice responded to a writ of *habeas corpus* on Timerman's behalf and immediately freed him. Notably, Timerman's was the only writ accepted by Argentine courts during the dictatorship.

[16] Originally written in Spanish as "*Prisionero sin nombre, celda sin número*," Timerman's book was immediately translated to English and published in the same year.

(1981, 30, 73, 110-113). To him, his captors' preoccupation with these aspects of his identity indicated their ulterior motive for his arrest (1981, 72).

In the detention centers, Timerman's Jewish identity became anything from a source of derisive humor to justification for harsher treatment. As he describes examples of antisemitism, his language directly and indirectly reflects the Holocaust and Nazi rhetoric. He repeatedly refers to military agents as "Nazis," (30), recalls Hitler's ideology (52), and references WWII extermination tactics such as gas chambers (54). Correlating the Argentine dictatorship to the Holocaust in these ways is central to Timerman's rhetoric.[17] As I discuss in chapter four, this tactic helped to engage the broader international community; it also put him in conflict with both the Armed Forces and other Argentine Jewish actors.

Comparing the dictatorship to Nazi Germany, Timerman expressed his outrage that the internationally condemned atrocities of the Holocaust could be repeated, unimpeded, in the Argentine context (Tarica, 2012, 93). Maintaining that although Argentina harbored conditions that bred antisemitism, he asserted that "the Argentine Jewish community [was] not about to defend itself" against the threat (Timerman, 1981, 79). He feared escalation of antisemitism and even the thought of another Jewish genocide, writing that "everything that happened once can happen again" (1981. 78).

[17] Timerman was neither the first nor the only actor to describe and disseminate information about the special victimization of Jews under the Armed Forces. The 1976 report "Testimony of the Clandestine Camps in Argentina" by Amnesty International and the report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 1979 also cited the especially harsh torture and treatment of Jewish prisoners (Kahan, 2014, 133). Notably, these reports emerged in the early years of the dictatorship. They also carried significant political weight, given the international character and recognition of the organizations.

These strong concerns led him to publicly disagree with the tactics to combat antisemitism that Jewish community organizations, like the DAIA, supported. Timerman accused the DAIA of practicing the same dangerous silence that allowed the violence of the Holocaust, implicitly insinuating a level of complicity with the regime (1981, 51). Notably, Schenquer describes that other religious rabbis in Argentina were also concerned by the DAIA's silence (2014, 2). Unlike these rabbis, though, as I discuss in the next section, Timerman belittled the organizations' battle against "visible" acts of antisemitism, as they ignored the special victimization of Jews in clandestine detention centers. He disparagingly deemed the DAIA as "Jews of silence"—or those who refuse to condemn or spread information about antisemitism (Tarica, 2012, 93). In Timerman's view, "Jews of silence" are complicit, if not culpable, in both WWII and the Argentine dictatorship.

Timerman decried the organization's attempts to mitigate concern over the regime's violence. DAIA representatives maintained that antisemitism in Argentina could not be compared to that of the Holocaust. Timerman believed that emphasizing the severity of WWII minimized the extent of violence and discrimination by the Armed Forces. He insisted that the horrors of the Holocaust were in fact comparable and ought not undermine what was happening to people—and particularly Jews—in local detention centers. In his book, he laments that, "I was never able to understand how the horrors of the Holocaust could diminish the significance of the violation of Jewish girls in clandestine Argentine prisons" (1981, 1401-141).

Because of his internationally recognized journalism and eventual exile to Israel, Timerman garnered name recognition that helped legitimize the use of the Holocaust as a prism through

which to view the Argentine dictatorship. In particular, Holocaust references in *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* formulated and disseminated a common language with which to condemn the Armed Forces. I discuss the spread of these references and their use in the country in more depth in the next chapter. On one hand, Holocaust references had a unifying effect. Baer explains that, since the Holocaust was widely known by the 1970s, the use of this prism helped illuminate the atrocities of the Argentine dictatorship and draw international attention (2017, 49). On the other hand, allusions to the Holocaust could be immensely polarizing. Tarica describes Timerman's rhetoric as both "combative" and "alienating" (2012, 93). Many, like the DAIA, believed that these references exaggerated the character of the Armed Forces and reflected negatively on Argentine Jews. Ultimately, while Timerman gained notoriety internationally, his harsh commentary about national Jewish institutions forged a rift within Argentina's Jewish community.

### *The DAIA's National Narrative*

The Delegation of Israeli Associations of Argentina (*la Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, DAIA*) is a fixture of Argentine Judaism. As the Argentine affiliate to both the Latin American Jewish Congress and World Jewish Congress, it is the officially recognized representative body of the Jewish community, both nationally and internationally. It is understood as an umbrella organization for other Jewish groups and as "the voice" of the Argentine Jewish community, at least since the 1960s (Tarica, 2012, 90).

Despite its broad reach, the DAIA is not, and has never been, politically neutral. Indeed, in and of itself, the idea that there can be one "voice" of such a large and diverse population of Argentine Jews (Jewish Argentines) is controversial. However, since its inception in the 1930s, the organization has had a tendency towards political conservatism and a clear right-leaning stance (Tarica, 2012, 90). Despite this reputation, the DAIA has historically professed distance from both state and local politics, while at the same time, maintaining a deep relationship with all levels of Argentine politics. This delicate, if not unattainable, balance renders much of the DAIA's political involvement contested and contradictory.

These fissures and contradictions expanded throughout the dictatorship. Due to both Timerman's accusations and its own actions, the DAIA's relationship with the regime was extremely complex. While Timerman raged against the regime's antisemitism, the delegation took a different stance. In the years leading up to the coup, during María Estela Perón's presidency, public acts of antisemitism increased. As these were left largely unpunished, Jewish support for the Peronist government waned. So, when the military took control in 1976, there was relief, if not hope, among the Jewish community for what was to come under the promised process of "national reorganization" and order. Emmanuel Kahan explains that, for this reason, "the takeover of power by the Armed Forces on March 24, 1976, found widespread acceptance among the various actors of the 'Jewish community'" who anticipated increased national order (2014, 129). At the beginning of the dictatorship, authorities and Jewish actors believed that the regime's violence "could take on a utilitarian meaning to demand recognition of particular interests from the Armed Forces"—in this case, the interest in combating antisemitism in Argentine society (Kahan, 2014, 131). This initial acceptance of the regime created a perception

that the DAIA was sympathetic towards the Armed Forces, causing confusion, if not mistrust, of its political allegiances and opinions.

That is not to say that the DAIA supported the military dictatorship. Rather, the delegation preferred to use their political capital to sway the regime to combat antisemitism. Emmanuel Kahan identifies that there were "two distinctive forms of manifestation of antisemitism: one of a public nature and the other of a clandestine nature" at play in Argentina (Kahan, 2014, 125). Instead of condemning "clandestine" antisemitism as it appeared in testimonies of *los desaparecidos*, Jewish authorities like DAIA focused on the visible acts of antisemitism (Dobry 2013, 36; Tarica, 2012, 95; Schenquer, 2014). Delegation president Mario H. Gorenstein's article published in Argentine newspaper *Nueva Presencia* on December 26, 1980, exemplifies this discourse. In the article, Gorenstein explains that "the preaching of crude hatred is carried out through various publications that reappear from time to time on newspaper and magazine stands" (2). The article highlights antisemitic publications and the number of attacks on Jewish spaces in the months prior as the principal forms of antisemitism in Argentine society. Gorenstein expresses an imperative to combat these forms of discrimination; four years into the dictatorship, however, and the article does not address the Armed Forces or *los desaparecidos* at all.

Although Timerman would critique the large-scale disregard for the clandestine discrimination, the DAIA fought against acts of defamation and anti-Jewish rhetoric. Their tactics were most often political; in some cases, DAIA leadership even worked directly with the Armed Forces to advance Jewish policy and enforcement interests (Schenquer, 2014, 4). A notable example is the DAIA's success with combating the *La Milicia* publication. As Gorenstein mentioned, before and

during the regime, several national publications freely circulated antisemitic materials. The Milicia editorial in particular published a variety of pro-Hitler and Nazi rhetoric, including the use of the swastika symbol (Dobry, 2013, 37). Under its own version of "the fight against subversion," the DAIA petitioned the regime to ban this type of publication. Although the government did not criminalize the discourse itself, on September 3, 1997, the National Executive Power enacted Decree No. 1887. This decree banned the distribution, sale, and circulation of Milicia editorial editions (Kahan, 2014, 137). In this instance, the DAIA's public policy clearly had a tangible impact. However, according to Timerman, its efforts were both misplaced and insufficient. Its success in the battle against the Milicia neither incited further confrontation of clandestine antisemitism nor absolved it of guilt for what Timerman decried as complicity with the regime.

Despite its vocalization against visible acts of hatred, the DAIA remained silent in the face of allegations about the regime's antisemitic nature and Timerman's analogies to the Holocaust. From the outset of the dictatorship, the DAIA denied accusations of its silence. In the same 1980 *Nueva Presencia* article—titled "We are not second-class citizens" ("*No Somos Ciudadanos de Segunda Categoria*")—DAIA President Gorenstein asserted its opposition to silence. He writes that "more than once we were reproached for excess sensitivity, but the immense tragedy of the Holocaust has taught us that it is preferable to sin by excess than to silence aggression, no matter how innocent it may seem" (1980, 2). In this statement, Gorenstein claims that the DAIA had been critiqued for being overly involved in the national fight against antisemitism. Clearly professing the DAIA's dedication to combatting antisemitism and evoking the Holocaust in a different context, Gorenstein sought to undermine Timerman's accusations.

At the same time, however, the DAIA maintained an assertion of the "normality" of (Jewish) life under the military regime (Tarica, 2012, 96). The idea that many Argentines continued life as normal throughout the dictatorship is not unique to the Jewish community. Following this narrative, Gorenstein argued that "Anti-Semitism is not only a Jewish issue" but rather a symptom of a society fighting against the pathology of bias and discrimination. Once again, this rhetoric ignored special victimization of Jews by the Armed Forces and aimed to downplay the existence of antisemitism in Argentine society.

As Timerman strengthened his castigation of the DAIA, the organization only amplified its position. It cast suspicions on Timerman's reasoning behind antisemitic actions (the Armed Forces' admiration for Nazi Germany, discussed further in chapter four) and called his characterizations exaggerated (Tarica, 2012, 95). Indeed, Gorenstein went as far as to write that "not all anti-Semitism inevitably leads to the gas chamber. Not all anti-Jewish prejudice is generated by Nazi roots" (Nueva Presencia, 1980).[18] Directly contradicting similarities between the Armed Forces and Nazi Germany and highlighting the outsized severity of WWII further sought to undermine references to the Holocaust.

Timerman was not the only voice that spoke out against the DAIA. Criticism also came from the international community, as the DAIA worked actively to prevent international Jewish organizations from advocating for kidnapped Jews without their direct approval or guidance (Tarica, 2012, 96). Refusing to defend Jewish desaparecidos or their families and using the

[18] As cited on page 56, Timerman responded directly to the DAIA's contradictions of parallels between the dictatorship and the Holocaust by affirming that nothing should diminish the significance of the Armed Force's violence towards Jewish youth in the detention centers.

Holocaust to downplay Argentine state violence enhanced the DAIA's appearance of sympathy towards the regime, both nationally and internationally (Tarica, 2012, 90). To save its reputation within and outside the country, the DAIA questioned Timerman's motives and claims, such as the nature of the regime and the connections with the violence of the Holocaust. The ideological battle deepened fissures within the local Jewish community, becoming a cycle of mistrust and antagonism. It complicated international intervention, as no consensus emerged over the nature of or solution to antisemitism in Argentina. Overall, the combative relationship between Timerman and the DAIA helps demonstrate the complex dynamics and roles of Jewish actors and authorities during the dictatorship.

This chapter concerns Jacobo Timerman's and the DAIA's approaches to confronting antisemitism during the dictatorship. While parts of these approaches include evocations of the Holocaust in the Argentine context, I now turn entirely to this idea. The next chapter discusses the theory of "recursive cosmopolitanism," or the way that international histories, narratives, and ethics are incorporated in local contexts. With this framework, I discuss the use of Holocaust references to understand Argentine state violence and how this understanding impacts the current iteration of collective memory.

# CHAPTER 5:

## Cosmopolitan Memory and Holocaust Narratives

The internal debate over the use of the Holocaust as a prism through which to view and understand the Argentine dictatorship engages a broader question about what Daniel Levy calls "recursive cosmopolitanization" (2010). Cosmopolitanization of memory is central in Levy's discussion of the expansion of transitional justice and the global human rights regime in the 20th century (2010). It refers to the way in which global normative expectations are incorporated into local sensibilities and memory practices (Levy, 2010, 579; Baer, 2017, 34). The outcomes appear in the dynamic, "distinctive forms that collective memories take in the age of globalization" (Levy and Sznaider, 2002, 87). In this conception, *recursive* is used to characterize the process as both reciprocal and ongoing; international sensibilities impact the Argentine experience and vice versa. In this chapter, I briefly discuss how the Holocaust evolved from an isolated event to an international "measuring stick" for good versus evil (Levy and Sznaider, 2002, 95; Himka and Michlic, 2013). Next, I explain how this reference has been mapped onto Argentine narratives of the dictatorship. I then turn to its significance in establishing national forms of memory that are now internationally recognized as both cosmopolitan and recursive.

The Holocaust is a prime example of cosmopolitanization of memory. While it does not hold the same meaning for everyone, it becomes significant through its incorporation into individual

contexts and communities. Levy and Sznaider observe that in the immediate aftermath of WWII, "the Holocaust was not perceived as a timeless and deterritorialized" measure of morality as it is understood today (2002, 95). Instead, its moral character emerged throughout the post-war years, influenced by a growing variety of transitional justice mechanisms. Gradual, specific international developments increased the prevalence of this frame of reference.

Levy and Sznaider identify media representation of the Holocaust in the 1960's-1980's as foundational in establishing its status as a global ethical boundary (2010).[19] During these years, technological advancement facilitated globalization and access to information. This development allowed communities around the world improved access to international trials of Nazi criminals. For example, in 1960, after living freely in Argentina for ten years, Nazi Officer Adolf Eichmann was captured by Israeli Secret Service forces in Buenos Aires. He was taken to Jerusalem, where he stood trial for crimes against humanity and was sentenced to death. Both controversy over his arrest in Argentina and the trial itself garnered significant global interest.

Witnessing the evidence and judicial decisions against perpetrators in turn increased the visibility of violations of human rights, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, namely genocide.[20, 21] With greater media attention, "a large public was increasingly sensitized to the evils of genocide

[19] Notably, this time frame coincides with Timerman's arrest by the Armed Forces as well as his publication of materials that correlated the Argentine regime with the Nazis and the Holocaust, such as *Prisoner Without A Name, Cell Without a Number* in 1981. In this way, Timerman's media presence is important to the cosmopolitanization of Holocaust memory in Argentina.

[20] The term "crimes against humanity" was applied in 1945 in the context of the Nuremberg trials of leaders of Nazi Germany. It is now codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and is recognized as part of the "vocabulary of universal human rights" (Baer, 2017, 35).

[21] Similarly to "crimes against humanity," the term "genocide" was defined and codified after WWII. Coined by Polish Jewish refugee Raphael Lemkin, it is now outlined in the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

and the moral responsibility not to stand by and witness the murder of innocent civilians" (Levy and Sznaider, 2002, 98).

Two concepts contributed to this sensitization and the acceptance of the Holocaust as a moral framework. I discuss the impacts of uncertainty about the future of global ideologies and the innocence of victims on the use of Holocaust narratives. Both intrinsically connected to collective memory, these ideas enabled the possibility of a common ethical framework. The post-war years marked a shift in the world order. Precedent set by the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946) and treaties such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) offered the foundations for a new, ethical understanding among the international community. These legal processes demonstrated desire by various parts of the world for justice and clear moral codes.

Levy and Sznaider argue that "in an age of uncertainty and the absence of master ideological narratives," the Holocaust came to represent an available moral certainty (2010, 93). Given the media attention to transitional justice mechanisms throughout Europe, namely the Nuremberg Trials, condemnation of the genocide provided a common language for the emerging understandings of human rights and crimes against humanity. Delineated categories of 'good' and 'evil' conceived a collective enemy and established frameworks of responsibility for both citizens and the state (Levy and Sznaider, 2002, 101). In this way, the immense uncertainty and evolution in the years following WWII contributed to broad acceptance of the moral truths and imperatives represented by the Holocaust.

Additionally, agreement about the absolute innocence of Holocaust victims enabled the incorporation of global moral narratives. As the Holocaust became a metaphor for "radical evil," it came to provide a reliable means to evaluate the "evil-ness [sic]" of other acts (Baer, 2017, 35). Naturally, the existence of a common measuring stick—and a common enemy—has important implications for politics and transitional justice. However, Baer argues that in this context, "there is something else at stake when complete innocence is declared—something directly connected to the notion of human rights" (2017, 35). This "something" is a normative understanding of perpetrators' inherent criminality that demands acceptance. That is, when victims' innocence is included in narratives and judgments of abuses of human rights, it amplifies society's recognition and condemnation of the crime. It also informs the speed, intent, and character of justice mechanisms. For this reason, ultimately, a generalized understanding of culpability promoted by mass media helps local and international communities to clearly delineate good versus evil. The widespread dissemination of this collective understanding didn't even begin to emerge until decades after the Holocaust. However, its gradual development is critical because, as Baer explains, "when you succeed in universalizing the dimensions of a political crime, then you can continue to live on as a collective" (2017, 32).

Although Levy and Sznaider focus their attention on collective memory of the Holocaust in Germany, the United States, and Israel, their conceptions of cosmopolitan memory map neatly onto Argentina. Both uncertainty and the innocence of victims appear plainly in this national context. During the dictatorship, hesitation about the regime's social and political character precluded a singular moral framework for understanding its violations of human rights. Military propaganda effectively generated moral confusion. Some citizens maintained hope for the

stability promised by the Armed Forces' "Process of National Reorganization," while others feared the leftist political forces villainized in the regimes' "theory of two demons."

Amidst national turmoil, the prism of the Holocaust provided stark contrast and a clear answer to any uncertainty about the regime. Holocaust references, as Jacobo Timerman used them, aimed to justify opposition to the regime. Correlating the Armed Forces with the Nazis demonstrated a need or intent to provide moral clarity to the Argentine public. While the regime labored to keep its actions clandestine, by 1976, information about the Holocaust was largely accessible. Using details about Nazis practices helped to highlight otherwise hidden or quieted military crimes (Baer, 2017, 28). For example, both Nazi Germany and the Armed Forces vilified an internal enemy and separated victims from mainstream society and politics. Viewing the regime's actions as parallel to Nazi crimes undermined the regime's propaganda. Through the lens of the Holocaust, Argentine disappearances were not merely an unavoidable part of the country's project of reorganization, but an abuse of human rights by a military dictatorship.

The innocence of victims of the Armed Forces is also paramount in the Argentine context. The original *Nunca Más* report, as well as its new edition by Eduardo Duhalde, emphasize the innocence of *los desaparecidos*. The Commission noted that the majority of victims were "innocent of terrorism or even of belonging to the guerrilla combat forces" (CONADEP, 2003[1984], 9-10). If *los desaparecidos* were not, as the regime claimed, fighters in a national ideological battle, the Armed Forces' abuses could not be justified under the auspices of war. Since victims' innocence impedes perpetrators' impunity, it became a tool for social

organizations to advocate for transparent collective memory and other transitional justice mechanisms.

The concepts of uncertainty and innocence clearly provide rationale behind the use of the Holocaust as a prism through which to view the Argentine dictatorship. However, these conceptual references are not the only evidence of correlation. Critically, the Armed Forces themselves connected their regime to that of the Nazis. In fact, Baer argues that

> the Argentine military junta, which crystallized a tradition of Argentinian right-wing nationalistic ideology, never hid its admiration for the Nazis…Argentina had a unique relation with the Holocaust because the perpetrators themselves presented their acts as 'an active memory of the past of Auschwitz.' (2017, 29).[22]

As discussed in the section about treatment of Jewish people in the clandestine camps, this evidence further indicates that Nazi symbolism and antisemitic commentary was intentional. The Nunca Más report corroborates this perspective. It cites police chiefs and commanders as "ideologues" who frequently recommended and commented on "the works of Adolf Hitler and other Nazi and Fascist authors" (1986, 67). With instructions from the top, Nazi rhetoric increased throughout the Armed Forces. This frequent, unconcealed reverence and antisemitism substantiates the relevance of the Holocaust to the Argentine junta.

Given international sensibilities, Jacobo Timerman, narratives of victims' innocence and the Armed Forces themselves, references to the Holocaust naturally increased within a broader Argentine society. Towards the end of the dictatorships, "human rights activists, writers, artists, filmmakers, scholars and victims" subscribed to this reference (Feierstein, 2014; Baer, 2017, 29).

[22] In this quote, Baer is citing Federico Finchelstein, from his 2014 book, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina.*

In academic reports, national press, works of art, and everyday life, these actors began to characterize the regime's practices as "analogous to the crimes committed against the Jews by the Nazis" (30).[23]

While many of these cultural works highlighted the special victimization of Jewish people or evoked religious symbolism, many did not. References to the Holocaust were instead applied more generally, as part of the national quest for justice. Indeed, Kahan and Schenquer explain that the reference "spread beyond the Jewish experience as a symbol of the fight against forgetting, tied to it never being repeated and by virtue of the demand for justice" (2016, 144). In this specific context, as it has internationally, the Holocaust assumed a universal moral character. It was accepted, at least in part, as the "measuring stick," for the right and wrong of the Armed Forces and provided a means through which to condemn the regime. That is, global calls for "Never Again" of the Holocaust echoed Argentina's "*Nunca Más"* disappearances, oppression, and impunity.

Similarly, Feierstein argues that the Holocaust became "a pattern for understanding the Argentine experience, for transmitting it and inscribing it in a historical tradition" (2014, 586). Identifying with others' extreme experience helps one to make sense of their own. The vocabulary used to condemn Nazi crimes facilitated the practices of enumerating and denouncing those of the Armed Forces. As global knowledge of terms like "genocide" and "crimes against humanity" spread, so did their usage in national contexts. An apt example of cosmopolitanization, through

[23] For more information about specific cultural works that included references to or reflected the Holocaust, see Liliana Ruth Feierstein's *'A Quilt of Memory': The Shoah as a Prism in the Testimonies of Survivors of the Dictatorship in Argentina*.

the globalization of the collective memory of the Holocaust, these references were mapped onto the Argentinian experience.

While cosmopolitanization of the Holocaust is critical to understanding its use in Argentina, the *recursive* aspect of Levy and Schenquer's definition is equally important. Just as WWII came to play a role in Latin American transitional justice efforts, Latin American mechanisms reverberated internationally. Kathryn Sikkink and Carrie Booth Walling highlight Argentina specifically for its impact on global transitional justice and human rights practices (2006).[24] They call Argentina "an instigator of particular new mechanisms" and praise its "potential for global human rights protagonism at the periphery of the system" (2006, 301). The reciprocity of development in transitional justice and collective memory between Argentina and the global human rights regime evokes the ongoing and reciprocal nature of cosmopolitan memory.

Further echoing Levy and Schenquer's recursive cosmopolitanization, Sikkink and Walling discuss "transitional justice occurring within a domestic and international political and legal opportunity structure" (2006, 301). In this process, they note the creation of "insider-outsider coalitions" by activists and leaders who recognize the viability of international examples in national contexts (2006). In Argentina, working within the bounds of these coalitions, Jacobo Timerman is one of those activists (Sikkink and Walling, 2006, 319).

[24] For more information about Argentina's impact on the global human rights regime, see Kathryn Sikkink's *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics*. Here, Sikkink is primarily concerned with impunity and the global impact of criminal trials of military personnel. However, I perceive her characterization of Argentina's example as apt for other mechanisms of transitional justice as well, such as collective memory.

By amplifying Holocaust references, Timerman was able to incorporate global understandings of human rights and transitional justice into national narratives. He "learned how to keep international avenues of justice" open and viable (Sikkink and Walling, 2006, 316). While Holocaust references helped to solidify language that condemned the Armed Forces, they also engaged the international community. Using the Holocaust as a prism through which to understand and escalate the Argentine dictatorship facilitated condemnation of the regime. It also increased international recognition of the abuses of human rights and helped establish Argentina as a global innovator in transitional justice. In this way, the cosmopolitanization of Holocaust memory allowed Argentina to become a major force in the human rights regime. Ultimately, although the Holocaust did not mirror the Jewish experience in Argentina, it was incorporated into the national cosmopolitan memory of the dictatorship as a "measuring stick" for the morality of good versus evil. The next chapter turns to analysis of my interviews, including how instruction and knowledge about the Holocaust affects Jewish youth's conceptions of Argentine state violence.

# CHAPTER 6:

## Interview Analysis: Young Jewish Perspectives

The periods of memory defined by Lvovich and Bisquert end in 2007. However, memory itself does not stop; it remains imperative in the public consciousness. There is neither a single vision for nor manifestation of memory; indeed, it changes with each new generation and sociopolitical shift in Argentina. The evolving nature of memory has tangible impacts on Argentine society and therefore demands investigation. Today's youth—the generation who grew up during President Kirchner's human rights regime and who are shaping their political consciousness in the 2020s—is central to the current iteration of collective memory. This demographics' knowledge about the dictatorship and feelings about that knowledge have important implications for the future of collective memory. To answer these questions about institutional instruction about the dictatorship, perceptions of representation in national memory, and the importance of collective memory, I turned to the source and conducted eleven interviews with young Jewish individuals in Buenos Aires.

Each interviewee broadened my perspective significantly. Naturally, their unique Jewish identities and upbringings influence their responses to interview questions. Their varied backgrounds with Judaism and perceptions of Argentine history demonstrate a fraction of the diversity of the Jewish community in the country. I consider these backgrounds essential to my

analysis of their responses, and include this information as it becomes relevant throughout this section. As shown below, a majority of my respondents are already engaged with some form of Jewish, academic, or even memory work. Such previous experience may differentiate them from the broader population of Argentine Jewish youth. That is, comparatively, they likely have more exposure to and knowledge of this history than the majority. Regardless, their backgrounds are significant in examining their knowledge (or lack thereof) about the Jewish community and collective memory.

***Table 1. Interview Participants***

| **Pseudonym** | **Age** | **Self-determined religious identity** | **Organization Affiliation** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mariana | 23 | Culturally (partially religiously) Jewish | Worker at IWO Foundation of the Jewish Research Institute |
| 2. Andrea | 22 | Culturally Jewish | Guide at the Anne Frank Museum |
| 3. Eleonora | 21 | Not Jewish | Amnesty International Argentina volunteer, guide at the Anne Frank Museum |
| 4. Valerie | 24 | Culturally Jewish | Sociology student at the University of Buenos Aires |
| 5. Gabi | 25 | Religiously Jewish | Law student at the University of Buenos Aires |
| 6. Elsbeth | 25 | Religiously Jewish | Archival worker at the IWO Foundation of the Jewish Research Institute |
| 7. Tomás | 18 | Culturally Jewish | *No permission received to include information* |
| 8. Jessica | 27 | Culturally Jewish | Historian at the Holocaust Museum of Buenos Aires |
| 9. Gerry | 18 | Religiously Jewish | Youth Madrichim (Jewish teacher) Program |
| 10. Mia | 22 | Culturally Jewish | *No permission received to include information* |
| 11. Tato | 20 | Culturally Jewish | Guide at Ex-ESMA |

Each of the eleven interviews inform my analysis; I include direct quotation from five of my respondents. Throughout my conversations, many similar ideas, perspectives, and experiences emerged. I highlight patterns and overlaps among the interviews as evidence of consistency and reliability within my sampling group. While I use each interview to analyze and identify common sentiments, I focus most heavily on direct quotations from Mariana, Andrea, Eleonora, and Valerie. I highlight these four for their depth of knowledge and the strength of their emotional reactions during our conversations.

Their diverse backgrounds and relationships with Judaism make each of the interviewee's responses very different. However, what they describe falls into three categories of analysis. First, they all discuss their education about the dictatorship and the Jewish community. Second, they share their feelings about their education and what they know about collective memory. Third, they all feel strongly about the importance of learning about the dictatorship in today's society. In this chapter, I explore each of these three categories. Although broad, they help outline the backgrounds and perspectives of Jewish youth in Buenos Aires—members of the next generation to assume the responsibility of memory in an increasingly politicized and polarized national and global context.

***Education about the dictatorship and "Jewish community"***

In my interviews, I asked directly about how and what each person learned about the dictatorship and specifically about the role of the Jewish community during that period. Their responses reflected both parts of the question separately.

*The Dictatorship as a Whole*

Regarding their education about the dictatorship in general, most interviewees agreed on several points. At least five participants, including Mariana, Andrea, and Eleonora, confirmed that their education on the topic began around the fifth or sixth grade. Fewer, like Valerie and Mia, mentioned that they recall units in primary school. Most of the instruction takes place at the beginning of the year because it corresponds to the National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice, the holiday on March 24th. Almost all interviewees discussed the transmission of memory in the context of history classes and lectures. Interestingly, only Gerry mentioned approaching the topic in Ethics courses. Regardless of the class, although some interviewees remember learning pieces about the dictatorship, the majority agreed that apart from the national holiday, institutionalized instruction on the subject is insufficient.

Andrea described that in her private, culturally-Jewish school, students only touch on the topic "superficially" and do not delve "into the details of the rights violated" by the regime. She asserts that her school 'does not make [people] aware of the dictatorship,' and if it does, it's only

for a test, once. She focused on the fact that learning for exams is not real learning and linked this to the small amount of time her school allocates to the topic. She also emphasized that although her school "was not a space for activism," the issue of the dictatorship "was highly politicized." Political disagreements, perhaps involving actors like parents or the school board, on what and how to teach in schools made approaching the topic difficult. In this sense, to appease or pacify the majority, the politicization of education about the dictatorship contributes to its superficial teaching.

Mariana recounts a similar experience in her private, Jewish secondary school. She describes that she and her classmates also did not learn many details or hard facts about the dictatorship. Instead, they heard more about the dictatorial "Process" and its economic or political significance—meaning they teach about this period in what she calls "a very 'soft' way."[25] That is, Mariana (and Elsbeth, Eleonora, Gabi, Andrea, and Gerry) are underwhelmed by their institutional instruction about the dictatorship. Mariana feels as though she would have wanted to—and could have handled—learning more in-depth information about state violence. Compared to Giuliana, however, Mariana learned early. Growing up in the city of Corrientes in western Argentina, Giuliana described that before moving to Buenos Aires in middle school, she "had no idea that people had been disappeared" by the regime. This aspect of the dictatorship was simply not taught in her school, although she recalled learning about the regime's politics. Despite her move, Giuliana did not attribute her new knowledge to more expansive school curricula, but to her social connections in Buenos Aires' Jewish communities.

[25] As an example of *Spanglish*, Andrea used the word "soft," in English, to mean superficial or to indicate that her schoolmates might have learned only specific or tailored information about state terrorism.

Notably, Valerie reported a different experience learning about the dictatorship. She explained that, for her, “school was the main transmitter of Argentine history.” She recalled starting discussions about the dictatorship as young as 1st or 2nd grade in her secular elementary school. Although she affirmed her “satisfaction” with her education, Valerie qualified that it was largely her own personal interest that drove her learning. In her school’s elective workshops, she chose classes that discussed the dictatorship or allowed her to research it on her own. She also remembered that from a young age, she constantly questioned her parents about Argentine history. While Valerie’s perspective differs from her peers, it indicates that much of her education about the dictatorship required a level of self-motivation.

Apart from Andrea’s and Mariana’s perceptions of a lack of in-depth teaching on the dictatorship, some highlighted superficial education as particularly pronounced in Jewish or private schools. Eleonora notes that although she was aware of the dictatorship before the fifth or sixth grade, her instruction varied considerably when she switched from a Jewish school to a secular one. At her secular middle school, she received more information about the dictatorship in general than in her first Jewish school. Eleonora explains that she believes she learned more in the secular school because Jewish schools often “focus on one type of memory and not the other.” She explained that she learned about the history of World War II and the Holocaust before learning about the Argentine dictatorship. For her, this was “very peculiar” because “the Shoah (Holocaust) [is] more distant in time and in geography than the dictatorship.” Still, despite her Jewish school's emphasis on Jews during the Holocaust, there was not the same focus on the role of the Jewish community throughout the Argentine dictatorship. This focus also did not exist in

her secular school—this topic emerged in more detail as I asked each person about their education about the Jewish community specifically during these years.

*The Jewish Community During the Dictatorship*

During our discussions of their education about the Jewish community during the dictatorship, each respondent addressed the idea in two parts. Each person separated the parts of the question, first answering about the dictatorship and then about the Jewish community. In some cases, I had to ask again about the latter. Mariana describes that this is because, in her experience, knowledge about the Jewish community "comes separately" from knowledge about Argentine history. The history of the Jewish community and that of Argentina are not taught together. Mariana claims that this contributes to the fact that "Jewish and Argentine, [are] not together... they are separate identities." Because of her education at a Jewish school, she "didn't understand the history of the world but the history of the Jews." Her feelings about the separation of these histories demonstrates a fraction of her strong sense of isolation, both within her school curriculum and everyday life. She finds that she must identify with or focus on only one aspect of her identity at a time. This notion echoes Elsbeth's assertion that "Jewish education, Jewish life, is not at all connected to Argentine life." As I discuss in the final section, these feelings of isolation and separation have significant implications for the future of the Argentine Jewish community (or Jewish Argentina), especially in today's political climate.

Although Mariana's description was the most incisive, others also described a lack of instruction about the Jewish community during the dictatorship. Andrea also asserts that “in school curricula, they don't specifically approach the topic of being Jewish during the dictatorship. It's not touched upon enough, not even among Jews.” Tato and Jessica echo this idea. Tato stated that “the truth is, no, we didn’t talk about [the Jewish community] when we learned about the dictatorship in general.” Likewise, Jessica explained that “it doesn’t matter if we go through Jewish education, we still don’t know” enough about the role of the Jewish community during this time. Instead, she was taught that “the dictatorship only wanted freedom from economic oppression” and witnessed “teachers punish students who ask things about history and about the dictatorship.” Not only does Jessica’s experience convey inadequacy of instruction, but it demonstrates active pushback against discussing the Jewish community under the Armed Forces in educational spaces.

Although she was satisfied with her education on Argentine history, she recalled that she “didn’t learn absolutely anything” about the Jewish community during the dictatorship in school. She explained that schools “don’t touch [the subject], just like they don’t touch dissidence” in their curricula. Their clear responses reflect an educational shortcoming: reluctance to approach topics of religion and intersectionality. They also indicate an important difference in how Jewish and secular schools teach about Judaism, the dictatorship, and the connections between the two.

Despite the lack of formal education about the Jewish experience, Mariana, Andrea, and Valerie are all familiar with the topic. Mariana explained that since her family was politically involved, she was introduced to these topics at a younger age. Her time working at the IWO foundation

also provided access to historical documents and critical conversations about the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. Andrea's familiarity is more recent—she only began to engage more deeply through working at the Anne Frank Museum. As we talked, both Mariana and Andrea noted learning that although the regime did not target Jews for being Jews, there was significant antisemitism within the clandestine detention centers. Or, as Andrea explains, "there was specific hatred against Jewish people... basically, if you are an activist and Jewish, they hit you twice."

Mariana and Andrea focused on the violence against and torture of Jews in the detention centers, rather than on the visible acts of antisemitism cited by the DAIA. In fact, neither mentioned anything about the role of the DAIA (during the dictatorship), Jacobo Timerman, or the use of the Holocaust as a prism through which to view state violence. It could be that they know more about the links made between the Holocaust and the Argentine dictatorship than they communicated during the interviews. However, it is interesting to note that even the guides from the Anne Frank Museum didn't automatically connect the two eras. During my visits to the Anne Frank Museum, I explored the room dedicated entirely to memory of the Argentine dictatorship. From my perspective, given that the room exists in a space devoted to memory of WWII, the links between the Holocaust and dictatorship are clear. However, the fact that neither Andrea nor any of the other guides I interviewed even mentioned this room indicates a disconnect between the two events. The importance of violence against Jews in the detention centers took precedence over connections to the Holocaust and knowledge of the perspectives driving these references.

Given her background with her sociology thesis, Valeria has a greater understanding of the connections between the Holocaust and the Argentine dictatorship, as well as the political dynamics within the Jewish community. To her, the relationship between the events "is very clear…and very interesting." She noted the systematic elimination of specific ideologies by the Armed Forces and echoed an understanding of the special victimization of Jews. Notably, Valerie was the only interviewee who discussed the complexity of interactions between Jewish organizations. She discussed the DAIA in depth, even taking issue with their "super apolitical stance." She also announced that she "should read more about Jacobo [Timerman]" and his significance in the DAIA's report about the regime. All of Valerie's knowledge on this subject comes from her personal interest in the subject due to her thesis and her family's "militant political history" in the 1970s.

Although Mariana, Andrea, and Valerie are all aware of the history of antisemitism in the state detention camps, not everyone has the same knowledge base. My discussion with Eleonora was distinct from the others. When recounting what she knows about the Jewish community during the dictatorship, Eleonora confessed, "Honestly, not much... I never asked, I have to look... I know about the LGBTQ community, but not about the Jews." Despite working at the Anne Frank Museum, she had never specifically learned about how the regime treated the Jewish community. Clearly thinking deeply about how to answer the question, she continued:

> I learned about the oppression that the Jews suffered with the Shoah, the Holocaust… it's always escaping from discrimination... I learned about that, but I never linked it to "the Process" of the dictatorship and repression and the mechanisms of violence that happened here... Well, maybe I saw something once...

Eleonora is politically informed, socially involved in the Jewish community, and very attuned to the intersectionality of her identity. She even considers her education about the dictatorship and WWII minimally sufficient, although they came from different places. For this reason, she found it very strange that she had never encountered the intersection between the Holocaust and the dictatorship, in neither her secular nor her Jewish school. The scarcity of instruction contributed to Eleonora's feeling that if she wanted to know more about the experience of the Jewish community during the dictatorship, she would have to do it herself. This reflects Valerie's experience learning through work on her thesis, as well as six of my other interviewees, who cited their exposure to the topic from their work in other Jewish cultural or educational spaces.

Similarly, as we discussed the role of Jewish community organizations and institutions in this instruction, Mariana lamented that "we cannot access that information in many cases." When they are able to access information, it is already curated, and only in available specific spaces—what she calls "educational circles outside the mainstream" like the IWO Foundation where she works. Although dedicated to history and information, these spaces are rarely frequented, especially by peers from her age group. As a result of this marginalization, Mariana feels that she is forced to "build the complete image, or the most complete one she can," of her community on her own. Filling the gaps left by the educational system places the burden on students or families, inevitably leaving many unaware. Blind to the existence of such a narrative, lost for spaces for conversation, or too busy with schoolwork for independent research, she perceives that many (Jewish) students are not introduced to the plight of the Jewish community during the dictatorship. Andrea and Eleonora echoed this sentiment, noting that their education about the topic was inadequate (for the former), if not absent (for the latter). This perception

materialized throughout my conversations; this experience held true for at least eight of the eleven interviews.

It is important to note that schools are not the only institutions that lack instruction on this topic. Andrea pointed out that the schools' work is "really difficult" and that they should not leave all instruction to schoolteachers. She noted that spaces like religious schools, extracurricular activities, and families can help spread information. In these instances, since the results of teaching methods and curricula vary so greatly, it is important to consider what, how, and why these spaces teach what they teach. Some spaces, like the Anne Frank Museum or the IWO Foundation, are intentional with their information. Andrea described that she learned the majority of what she knows from the curated rooms in the Anne Frank House. Other spaces are not as intentional or comprehensive. As Mariana explained, based on her experience, "if your house is not politicized, you will not know about the history of Argentina." That is, despite decades of efforts towards societal collective memory, she feels as though the burden of finding information about the Jewish community during the dictatorship rests solely on individual students and families.

Despite varying levels of knowledge, there was a consensus among interviewees that, although there is not enough teaching about the Jewish population during the dictatorship, there is a desire to learn and share information. Eleonora affirmed to me that although she could "not contribute much about the Jewish community during the last dictatorship" during the interview, she "will make it [her] task" moving forward.

***Feelings About Education and Memory***

After discussing their knowledge bases, I asked each interviewee to speak on how they feel about their experiences with instruction about the dictatorship and the Jewish community. I imagined there would be a level of standardization of education and memory, so the specific school or background would not have as great of an impact on their knowledge. I also supposed that each person would feel differently about their experiences. Although everyone learned about the dictatorship formally for the first time around fifth or sixth grade, there was no standardization in how they felt about their curricula or its importance.

Mariana, Andrea, Eleonora, and Valerie all expressed a myriad of strong emotions about memory. Although all of their thoughts and experiences are insightful and valid, I focus only on the strongest or most common feelings present throughout all the interviews. In particular, I highlight the common sentiment that the memory of the dictatorship is no longer a priority in Argentine society.

*The Role of the Jewish Community in the Creation of Collective Memory*

More explicitly than the others, Mariana strongly believes that the Jewish community in Argentina was not part of the construction of the public narrative about memory. She clearly stated that "Jews did not participate in the creation of the memory of the dictatorship." This statement is striking for two reasons. First, as she spoke, she used the verb *'no participamos'* (we

did not participate) instead of *'no participaron'* (they did not participate), verbally including herself in both past generations of the Jewish community and the formation of memory. This also suggests that she views the process of creating memory as alive and accessible to her generation. Despite *theoretical* access to the cultural production of memory, through this statement, she conveyed a deep sense of exclusion, in both the past and the present.

Second, this idea shows that she did not learn, at least deeply, about the roles that Jewish authorities and actors played and continue to play in the production of memory. Mariana did not indicate that she knew anything about the ideological battles between Jacobo Timerman and the DAIA that shaped how the Jewish community would be remembered. She also did not mention or know about the AMIA Jewish Community Center's annual remembrance event or The Association of Relatives of Jewish Disappeareds' (*La Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos)* present day efforts of memory. Notably, apart from Valerie and Andrea, none of the interviewees even mentioned larger Jewish community institutions like the DAIA or AMIA. This lack of knowledge indicates shortcomings of both past and present collective memory. Despite her work experience, Mariana was not introduced to deeper dynamics of the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. She also is not aware of or included in current practices of collective memory. While I cannot suggest responsibility or blame from these interviews alone, the gap between available resources and some Jewish youth's knowledge begs further research into the accessibility and efficacy of collective memory.

Regardless of these gaps, Mariana knows more than others about the role of the Jewish community in issues of memory. She described Rabbi Marshall Meyer, an American rabbi

appointed to the CONADEP by President Alfonsín, and his role in creating the report. According to her, Rabbi Meyer "provided the only representation of the Jewish community in the formation of memory." While having a rabbi on the commission indicates at least basic representation from the Jewish community in the Commission, Mariana expressed frustration at Rabbi Meyer's American identity. Although the rabbi was a founding member of the Jewish Movement for Human Rights, she exclaimed that of course, Jewish representation "had to come from another country (the United States!) to be part of the conversation." Input from and about the Argentine Jewish community could not authentically come from an American who did not face the same dangers during the dictatorship or have the same context as the local community.

Mariana's underwhelm with Rabbi Meyer's involvement in CONADEP also motivated her conclusion that "in the few roles we participated [in the creation of memory], we did it in isolation from society." Once again, she used "we" as she spoke of building memory. Although she semantically includes herself in these processes, she does not feel as though her Jewish identity is adequately represented in collective memories of the dictatorship. Her sense of exclusion derives from Rabbi Meyer's superficial representation, the overall lack of participation by other Jewish actors, and what she identifies as a separation between the Jewish and Argentine aspects of her identity. This important distinction becomes even more relevant in the next section.

Despite the obstacles to representation that Mariana identifies, she is neither disillusioned nor resigned. Instead, she offered her vision of a way forward. She indicated that a more comprehensive memory is necessary: that "we need to think of Argentina as part of the world in

relation to the Jewish community, not just in Argentina as a country with Jewish citizens impacted by policies." She hopes to develop a more globalized awareness of Jewish histories, cultures, and forms of belonging in Argentina society. Mariana believes that recognizing Jewishness as an established experience within the category of Argentine citizenship would broaden the scope of people included in the nation's history as well as its future.

*The Imperative of Unity Within the Jewish Community*

Mariana, Andrea, and Eleonora all recognize the importance of creating social and political spaces that involve and represent Argentine Jews (or Jewish Argentines). However, they also perceive that for this to happen, the Jewish community itself must first unite. Mariana expressed that there is little unity among Jewish communities in Buenos Aires; this dissonance reflects the tensions that arose during the dictatorship and the problems with the Kirchner administration's hegemonic memory project. She mentioned that "if you express something different from the mainstream, outside non-leftist or non-militant spaces, you are ostracized." Or, as she explains, popular organizations "expel us." In her experience with political, Jewish spaces, there is only one perspective accepted—the extreme left. According to her, these spaces are highly politicized, plagued by the contradictions of Argentine politics, Zionism, and the relations between Israel and the United States. In a constant state of tension and unease, they can isolate people who do not express the same political perspective or Jewish-Israeli cultural identity.

Mariana also expressed that she herself feels "expelled" from mainstream Jewish narratives; she prefers less political spaces. If Jewish youth feel distant or even rejected from the Jewish community, they will not be motivated to create or enhance the memory of their community, Mariana explained. Furthermore, if the next generation of the Jewish community cannot find themselves or their sociopolitical perspective reflected in the popular narrative of their communities, the potential formation of a coherent Argentine-Jewish or Jewish-Argentine identity is further limited.

While Mariana illustrates the emotional discontent that comes from the exclusion of Jewish narratives, Andrea demonstrates the reason behind this exclusion. Andrea stated that for meaningful change to start, "first, Jews have to start including Jews in the conversation." This evokes the idea of the power that the DAIA and the AMIA have over the community and the hegemonic representation of it in collective memory of the dictatorship. From her perspective, "there is no recognition on the part of Argentine Jewish authorities"—the DAIA and the AMIA—of the experience of Jews during the dictatorship. She critiques that these organizations "do not mobilize for March 24," the most important holiday in memory of the dictatorship—and the annual reason for teaching it in schools.

Although expressed as a fact, this statement is not true. For example, the Jewish community center AMIA has an annual event in memory of the victims of the dictatorship and the DAIA promotes education efforts about March 24. The fact that Andrea is not aware of these events indicates that these organizations' efforts do not reach all Jewish youth. While I do not know the origins of this disconnect between Jewish authorities and some Jewish citizens, it should be

questioned. In the context of today's political climate and the exclusion Mariana outlined, it is critical to promote education and connection.

Despite her criticism of the DAIA, Andrea admits that she does not blame the authorities for what she perceives as a lack of action. She continued, listing the reasons *why* she believes Jewish organizations do not hold events—or at least not enough events—about the dictatorship. She views the long history of antisemitism and persecution of Jews as the reason behind the weak programming. From the European pogroms to the Holocaust to antisemitism during the time before the dictatorship, "there is a lot of denial to admit that we were victims again" in Argentina. "It's very hard to admit that you are being persecuted;" in the context of the regime, "it's easier to assume that it happened to 'them'"—others—because of their identity and activities apart from being Jewish. She believes that Jewish authorities prefer not to address antisemitism during the dictatorship out of reluctance to feel pain associated with the past and persecution for religious values. This idea demonstrates the contradictions of memory studies; while memory can provide space to heal, it can also reopen wounds.[26] For Andrea, denial, not in the form of denialism, but in the sense of reluctance to address the past, is a primary obstacle to cohesive, inclusive memory in Argentine society.

[26] The reluctance to feel pain associated with past violence echoes a notion about the experience of bystanders involved in transitional justice processes. For more information on bystanders and the political expediency or the potential self-interest involved in downplaying events such as the dictatorship, see Chapter 6, "Bystander States" of Stanley Cohen's 2001 book: *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering.*

*The Changing Priorities of Argentine Society*

In each interview, I asked if the person felt that the issue of Jews during the dictatorship is something people talk about, both inside and outside their social circles. In their responses, each person reflected that this topic does not receive much time or space in any of their circles. They also all expressed that the priorities of the Argentine state and public have moved away from the project of memory in recent years.

For example, Eleonora feels that "people actively talk about the Shoah [the Holocaust] and Israel, but not about the things of the dictatorship." To be sure, spaces and organizations dedicated to discussing Argentine history, Judaism, or even the history of Jews exist. Regardless, people do not frequently approach the topic outside of these dedicated spaces. This reticence could come from a lack of knowledge, fear, the pain it causes, or merely apathy among youth. For Mariana, it's the latter. She described that "people who care about both things [the dictatorship and Jews] talk." People who care about these topics belong to spaces that already consider intersectionality, identity politics, and memory integral to democracy. Most frequently, they are politically leftist, the same spaces and people rejected by the political mainstream.

However, according to Mariana, those people are few and far between. They represent the few young voices involved in politics, a group that almost "no longer exists now." Mariana feels that young people have become less engaged in politics—she lamented, "youth don't know anything about politics, they don't want to know anything about history, they don't know about the dictatorship," and they have no interest in learning about the Jewish community in particular.

Unlike during the time of the dictatorship, Mariana perceives a lack of activism in young people; her perspective reflects one of the two popular refrains of youth studies that Vommaro cites. Although she herself clearly does not fit into the category of apathetic youth, she made it very clear that she and her friends from the IWO Foundation are the anomaly, not the norm.

Once again, Andrea's perspective can be used to qualify or develop Mariana's strong opinion. Although she agrees that youth do not typically discuss memory of the dictatorship, Andrea attributes this absence to a larger societal problem. She believes that the project of memory, although intense in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, has been forgotten in recent years. She explained that

> in [the year] two thousand and forward, we said, it's done, we already have consensus, young people can study [history] in school, they don't need us to focus on that. But it's a lie, it's a big lie... There were two decades, from two thousand until now, where they did not focus on memory. There were more important things, yes, but there was a point where we assumed it's enough...everyone already thinks that [the dictatorship] was bad…

As robust as the initial work on collective memory may have been, Andrea believes that this work never ends. To 'finish' such a project would mean losing the work already done. It would mean an increasing lack of knowledge and sensitivity among current and future generations. Saying "it's done" is not an option. Although her tone was not one of hopelessness, she admitted that she believes "if there were a dictatorship today, society wouldn't be much better than in 1976." Spoken as Argentina celebrated its fourth decade of democracy, this profound comment carries extra weight. Relatedly, her exasperation at the lack of active work on memory pairs with her perspective on current political trends: what she perceives as the recent growth of denialism.

## *The Role of Education About Memory in Present-Day Argentina*

During my interviews, I questioned if each person believes that memory about the Jewish community carries weight in today's society and if they connect memory studies to current political discussions. Like before, their answers fell into two categories. First, they perceive that memory studies helps defend against denialism. Second, they argue it promotes a greater sense of community and empathy within and among Argentine citizens.

### *Protection Against Denialism*

Mariana, Andrea, Eleonora, and Valerie all have a good understanding of the concept of denialism. Mariana, Andrea, and Valerie explained denialism specifically as it applies to the Argentine context; Eleonora mentioned its more global, generic, or academic form. Each person's emotions about and conceptualization of denialism differed. Regardless, they all arrived at the same conclusion: education directly impacts denialism and what they perceive as its recent proliferation.

Eleonora has a broad perspective on denialism. She explained that, in Argentina, "denialism…has to do with something more structural, at a global level." From her perspective, denialism reflects a global trend of regression towards a less open and informed world. She sees this backslide clearly in contemporary Argentine politics, and believes that its impacts go beyond the field of memory. She stated that those who subscribe to this form of memory today are

"denialists…of many, many things." In addition to their denial of the number of victims and the reasoning behind their victimization, this group also negates the existence of discrimination and the concept of *machismo*. They also deny the notion of intersectionality, the importance of caring for it in politics, and any idea remotely associated with the political left. Antithetical to progress, Eleonora believes that this group "talks in a completely 'vintage' way." That is, their form of memory reflects beliefs and realities from a bygone political era. This discourse promotes a regressive ideology—that Mia bluntly calls "disinformation"—that my interviewees believe should not have space in Argentina in the 2020s.

Compared to Eleonora, Andrea is more concerned with the current political conflict between denialist and transitional justice-oriented forms of memory. From the beginning of our discussion about denialism, she expressed anxiety about President Javier Milei and his Vice-President, Victoria Villarruel. She explained that Vice-President Villarruel "doesn't deny it [the dictatorship], she vindicates it." The vice-presidential candidate uses language that reflects "the theory of the two demons," and, according to Andrea, "she knows where the bodies of the disappeared are."[27] Clearly, this discourse promotes an alternative way of remembering the regime—the way the Armed Forces themselves wanted to be remembered. In this context, denialist narratives run counter to expressions of collective memory that seek to increase access to information and eradicate impunity. For Andrea, discourse that promotes the dictatorship as a war against subversives extends beyond ignorance and constitutes malice.

[27] There is no publicly available evidence to corroborate this claim. However, it is widely known the Vice-President Villarruel supports the "Dirty War" narrative of the dictatorship. She frequently insists that leftist political movements' violence constitutes crimes against humanity, and has gone as far as to assert that society was "better protected" under the junta (Llarul, 2023).

In the context of these types of statements, Andrea explains that "Argentine denialism is not about morality, it is about numbers." Milei cites 8,000 disappearances instead of 30,000; for Andrea, it does not matter. Eight thousand people dead or disappeared would still be too much, "one person alone would be too much," but Argentine denialism is only "numeric." She emphasizes this moral fallacy in these discourses; pointing out that it is not the number of disappeared people, but the fact that people were disappeared by the Argentine state, that matters. Continuing, she criticized the evil, amoral character of people who adhere to this narrative and cited a decrease in society's ethics as the main cause of its growth in popularity.

Valerie also noted the moral aspect of denialism. However, she approached the topic differently, from a perspective that mirrors the idea of "remembering to forget." Valerie described her feeling that

> The link between education about memory and denialism is very clear, it's about disputes over power and how to tell about the memory of the dictatorship…for me, the growth of denialism has many resonances with how we decide to convey the facts of this period…it's a problem.

With this explanation, Valerie clearly understands denialism to be another form of memory, rather than a campaign against it. She recognizes that rhetoric like Milei's accepts that the dictatorship happened, but demonstrates an attempt to shift narratives surrounding the State's role in national violence. Specifically, she acknowledged that in Argentina, "we have a problem that we hid for a long time: that the disappeared were disappeared because of their political background." Versions of memory like the "theory of two demons" concern her, because not only does it obscure the nature of the violence, but it villainizes political participation. Valerie's intuition that denialism is just "another manner of explaining" the dictatorship highlights the importance of understanding the nature and objectives of this type of rhetoric.

Each person agreed, in one way or another, that the rise of denialism is connected to a lack of knowledge, teaching, and learning about the dictatorship and specifically the role of the Jewish community. In this view, both a general lack of education about the Jewish community and the Jewish community itself are at fault. While this deficiency is evident in schools, Andrea also discusses a shortcoming at home. She described that "there are many parents who are deniers... I always assumed that 30-year-old people were very progressive... I have now realized that they are not." This realization reflects the changes in Argentina's priorities over the last twenty years. Ignorance about the dictatorship, let alone support for its vindication, facilitates the expansion of denialism among both 30-year-olds and the younger generation.[28]

While Andrea focuses on the home, Eleonora and Mariana continued to emphasize the broader lack of institutional education on memory. Eleonora invoked her perception of a recent decline in instruction, mentioning that "Denialism begins to appear when the focus on the construction of collective memory is lost... in this case, it [is] a setback, it's not casual." Again, she uses the idea of regression, but in this case, she linked it more strongly with insufficient education. She also emphasizes the weight denialism carries in Argentina's current socio-political realities.

Mariana also expressed the belief that denialism spread through the lack of knowledge and education, but she added another impact. She lamented that as denialism increases, the importance of collective memory may decrease. Once memory falters, it could create a cycle that

[28] Andrea did not fabricate the growth of denialism in Argentina. In fact, beginning at least 8 years ago, numerous news sources have cited the increased presence of denialists. For more information, see The Guardian's 2016 "Blaming the victims: dictatorship denialism is on the rise in Argentina" by Betsy Reed and the Buenos Aires Heralds' "Analysis: The shadow of denialism, 40 years into our democracy" by Lucía Cholakian Herrera in 2023.

functions to erase or undermine decades of work on collective memory, exposing society to the dangers of selective memory or, worse, forgetting. Mariana, Andrea, and Eleonora all see education as an essential and necessary step to protect against the regressive slide incited by denialist ideologies.

*Creating a Sense of Community and Empathy Among Argentine Citizens*

Across the interviews, the most important point regarding the role of education and memory about Jews during the dictatorship was the role it plays in establishing space for Jews in Argentine society. Collective memory impacts feelings of citizenship and belonging. Depending on the context, it can strengthen empathy and connection among people with diverse backgrounds or solidify boundaries between groups who disagree. In the Argentine context, given the robust history of social movements and advocacy against impunity, collective memory is praised as a means to enhance unity (Jelin, 2012). Through my interviews, I aimed to investigate if Jewish youth perceive these assumed implications for belonging as positive. Does this group feel that the history of the Jewish community during the dictatorship should be taught? Or do they find such specificity unnecessary, or even divisive? As I asked these questions, each person's answer was thoughtful, taking into consideration not only their experiences, but the potential experiences of others.

Both Valerie and Andrea acknowledged that such a specific topic might not interest everyone, especially outside the Jewish community. Valerie in particular was careful to note that her

sociology research is very niche, and that it stemmed from personal connection to and interest in the topic. However, she clearly expressed that teaching about Jews during the dictatorship is "super necessary to be able to combat and dismantle" narratives that disregard the Jewish experience in Argentina. For her, this specific knowledge is important for how Argentina creates and relates to its present realities.

Notably, Tomás had a unique perspective on this question. While he himself indicated interest in and knowledge about the Jewish community, he does not find it necessary for everyone to have the same understanding. He believes that educating the broader public about the Jewish experience during the dictatorship is neither possible nor realistic. Since both the dictatorship and Holocaust "already happened," he does not see a point in forcing students to learn about the past of a topic they do not find interesting. However, he emphasized that while the factual history of these events may not be important, their social and economic implications are. He appeared proud that his secondary school taught about different global communities and focused on society and culture. Like the others, though, he was adamant that while "nearly impossible to learn about all communities," cultures, and intersectional identities, it is a critical part of education.

Aligning more closely with the majority, Andrea does not advocate extensive or repetitive curricula, but does believe that education changes people's outlooks. Despite a potential lack of innate interest, she believes that if all Argentinians learned about the experience of different identity groups, "many people would see the dictatorship differently if they knew about the brutality... against certain groups." Although she did not provide details on exactly *how* they

would see it differently, she noted that explaining the heightened violence against Jews may help highlight discrimination and antisemitism in Argentine society. Awareness of past prejudices does not only affect historical memory, but has real implications for a modern Argentina—one in which antisemitism and discrimination still exists. Andrea shared that she often feels ostracized because of her Jewish identity, and that "it hurts when non-Jewish people assume that she is different" because of her religion. Her personal experience with and awareness of discrimination likely informs her careful word choice to include all "certain groups" in collective memory, not just the Jewish community.

Eleonora also considered intersectionality in her responses, highlighting the diverse identities that constitute Argentine society. She believes that "visibilizing" specific groups, such as Jews, helps "recover the concept of a more intersectional [Argentine] society." To her, learning about the special victimization of Jews during the dictatorship

> is good because we are talking about an increase in discrimination against everyone, and [learning] helps people say, 'well, I care about this other [person] too,' not just people who look and think like you.

Notably, these ideals reflect "postmemory" in the sense that interpersonal and intergenerational connections impact personal identity. Continuing with this idea, Andrea concluded by affirming that Argentines need to work towards creating, partially through memory, a society in which "We are each other, and together we are one. Our homeland, too, is one; united as a collective."

An expanded perspective on the dictatorship and a broader understanding of intersectionality are not the only outcomes of learning and memory. Giuliana clearly explained what she perceives as

another impact of memory. As we discussed if the special victimization of Jews should be taught in schools, she said:

> [we] must teach it, but [we] must teach it in general, not only in Jewish institutions and schools. If it doesn't happen, or only happens in Jewish schools, [we] continue to separate society, isolate Jews, and make the possibility of Argentine Jewish or Jewish Argentine identity impossible.

Clearly, she carries the weight of the isolation she feels for being Jewish. She also shares the pain Andrea experiences for being perceived as different because of her religion. Understanding, or at least being aware of, the role of the Jewish community during the dictatorship can generate the sensitivity required to create space for people who identify as both Jewish and Argentine.

Mia and Andrea agree that education and memory foster empathy and improve interpersonal relationships. Mia proposed that the more you know about other experiences, the more you "have to accept" those experiences and the people influenced by them. Making a similar point, Andrea brought up how her identity impacts how she conceptualizes the regime and its censorship and violence. She explained that

> What distresses me is... I realize that if I were in '76, I would really be a target because I'm leftist, I'm Jewish, I'm a university student, so I'm all three little groups, and it's painful sometimes when you want to bring [your identity] into the conversation, it's like, "well, yes, okay, it happened to the Jews too," but it's not to the Jews too, it's the Jews specifically.

Andrea acknowledges her identity and her privilege of growing up in an Argentina where she can assert her background without fear, unlike the Jewish community during the dictatorship. However, she still indicates that the Jewish experience is undermined when it comes up in conversation. Her tone saying "well, yes, okay" was not one of concession or acceptance, but more of a hurried way to move past the topic without truly discussing it. For both of these reasons—her current privilege and people's reluctance to talk about the Jewish community—she

sees education about the Jewish community specifically as critical to creating an inclusive society. She expressed that empathy increases with understanding about people with experiences different from yours, especially during a period of pain like the dictatorship. She explained that, when you learn,

> you will understand that there are specific sensitivities that you may not see or feel, but that other people do, and that you carry into other aspects of your life. It makes you a better person, a better teacher, a better employee…But knowing things, even if they have nothing to do with who you are as a person, makes you know how to treat people differently... and treat people better. Period. It doesn't matter if you're Jewish or not Jewish... treating people better comes from knowledge... And at the end of the day, it's the only thing that matters.

This strong statement perfectly encapsulates many of the ideas that Mariana and Eleonora also express. It highlights the reason why it is necessary to teach—or teach better, according to Andrea—the experience of Jews during the dictatorship: to increase feelings of solidarity and empathy throughout all Argentine society.

# CONCLUSION

The complexity of Argentina's sociopolitical history and the construction of collective memory about its past are well integrated into national society. Since the end of the civic-military dictatorship in 1983, Argentine society has engaged actively with transitional justice and the project of remembering state abuses of human rights. Integrating experiences of violence into societal collective memory, they become a mechanism through which to demand that "never again" will there be violence, state terrorism, or impunity for these crimes.

Despite a seemingly unified goal of collective memory, the field of memory studies demonstrates that broad engagement with the topic does not equate to ease or agreement about its implementation. Instead, widespread participation means an ever-greater variety of perspectives on how and what to include in collective memory. The diversity of experiences during the dictatorship is further complicated by questions of intersectionality and specific identity groups. When certain groups are—necessarily—highlighted in conversations about Argentina's past, it begs questions about the groups in the present and future as well. The Argentine Jewish community occupied an extremely complex space during the dictatorship, mirroring its intricate socio-political position today. For this reason, this research engages questions about what Jewish youth know about the Jewish community during this dictatorship and how they feel about their communities' representation in national collective memory.

The variety of perspectives, actions, and discourses of Jews during the dictatorship reflects the diversity of the community itself. Internal debates about the antisemitic nature of the regime, how to confront anti-Jewish sentiments in society, and the (in)adequacy of responses from Jewish authorities during the dictatorship only begin to illuminate this diversity. However, these debates provide important context about how today's Jewish youth perceives the role of their community during those years.

All of my interviews serve to demonstrate where and how Argentine collective memory functions today. Across all my conversations, there was a feeling that formalized education about the dictatorship has been limited or superficial. It is even less comprehensive, if not inadequate, when specific groups, like the Jewish community, are the topic of conversation. Further, the interviews reveal that stories—of the dictatorship and the Holocaust and of society and Jews—are taught and even conceptualized separately. Differences in curricula between Jewish and secular schools may account for the perception of separation between lessons about the dictatorship and the Jewish community in Argentina. Through my interviews, it became clear that students in Jewish schools, like Mariana and Andrea, felt content with their knowledge about Jewish history and WWII, but were not satisfied by their formal education about the dictatorship. The opposite was true for students who attended secular schools, like Eleonora, who believes that her secular school teaches about the dictatorship well, but does not adequately cover the history of Jews in general or during the military regime. Notably, all were dissatisfied by a perceived lack of correlation between the events.

Although formal educational experiences vary, all interviewees eventually became aware of both the national history of state violence and the Holocaust. However, these lessons largely came from different spaces, units, or years in school. Many of my respondents described the need to draw connections between those stories, histories, and experiences for themselves. Occasionally in this pursuit, a few of my interviewees had access to the support of their families or spaces dedicated to memory, like the Anne Frank Museum. More commonly, however, depth of knowledge about these intersections came from a personal interest in the topic. Ultimately, this section of my interviews reveals—and a majority of interviewees themselves agree—that connections between the Argentine dictatorship and the long history of antisemitism will not be made without a specific interest in memory or a community or family actively involved in history and politics. It also demonstrates the utility of the distinction between memory and history—although many have a broad understanding of memory, some lack the specific information and details that would be taught in history curricula.

Despite the limited information available in institutional settings, the vast majority of my respondents believe that it is necessary to teach and learn about intersectional group identities. In some interviews, participants like Andrea stated this directly. In others, like my conversation with Eleonora, the idea emerged more indirectly. Her commitment to "learn about the Jewish presence during the dictatorship," since she has not before, demonstrates this belief. Further, while some people, like Tomás and Valerie, acknowledge the nicheness of the topic, all ultimately uphold the importance of heeding intersectional identities and seeking education about people whose backgrounds differ from your own.

Many of my interviewees, like Andrea, Mariana, Eleonora, and Valerie, correlate education about the Jewish community during the dictatorship to tangible outcomes in modern society. They all feel that the lack of connection—or synthesis—of Jewish and Argentine histories limits sensitivity to others and promotes the growth of denialism. Indeed, Andrea affirmed that she wants schools to teach memory that includes the Jewish community because knowledge increases empathy among people of all backgrounds. Similarly, Mariana asserted that this type of education can help confront the rise of denialism and create a less isolating space for the political participation of Jewish youth. Valerie added that formal education about Jewish experiences during the dictatorship may even help to create or expand space in Argentine society for people to identify as both Jewish and Argentine (Argentine and Jewish).

Ultimately, my interviews reveal three important characteristics of memory, the Jewish community, and Argentine citizenship. First, they indicate that instruction about the Argentine dictatorship and World War II is both essential for and desired by young people. All of my interviewees expressed gratitude for what they did know about the topic, or concern for the reason behind their lack of knowledge. From a broader political perspective, to do anything less than teach—and connect—national and international histories of violence and discrimination is to accept denialism, or the practice of remembering to forget. Ignorance about these events undermines Argentina's efforts to install a national collective memory and can facilitate negation of the dictatorship's lasting impact on society. It enables the spread of misinformation or biased narratives, like the Armed Forces' own "theory of the two demons" and "Dirty War" premise. Historically, rather than erasing public memory of violence, periods that accept these perspectives have resulted in vindication, impunity, and policies like the "Full Stop" Laws. In

contrast, expanding or standardizing curricula about the dictatorship and the Holocaust will provide students with a greater understanding of how the past impacts the present and decrease the spread of denialist memory politics.

Second, my interviews confirm the importance of highlighting specific groups and intersectional identities in history curricula. Without mindfulness of diverse identity groups' circumstances in the past, it is impossible to be sensitive to their experiences in the present. Such diligence is particularly important for Argentina's Jewish community, that experienced complex and compounded victimization throughout the military dictatorship. Teaching about this topic is understandably difficult, given the intricacy of the Jewish community's role throughout these years. However, discussions, albeit difficult ones, about this topic equip students to engage in conversations about identity. As many respondents identified, both spaces of collective memory and Jewish spaces can and should be responsible for raising these questions.

Third, this project indicates a strong correlation between education about memory and young Jewish Argentines' (Argentine Jews) feelings of citizenship and belonging. Many of my interviewees feel that there is a lack of connections drawn between the dictatorship and the Holocaust, and between political discrimination and antisemitism. This separation of knowledge results in broader societal separation. As Mariana, Andrea, and Eleonora explain, they do not feel as though there are many spaces that accept, let alone encourage, the intersection of Jewish and Argentine identities. They yearn to find, expand, or build a space within Argentine society to be Jewish and within the Jewish community to be Argentine. Whether this stems from ignorance about the Jewish experience in Argentina, the fissures within the Jewish community itself, or the

politicization of collective memory demands further research. Regardless of its cause, accommodating intersectional identities and creating spaces for everyone within the umbrella of Argentine citizenship requires an active acknowledgment of national and international history. The lack of a sense of belonging among Jewish youth should prompt investigation about the exclusivity of the political and community powers that shape Argentine society and create collective memory.

The small number of interviews included in this thesis does not diminish the strength of the feelings and opinions expressed during them. That is, although this project reflects only a small fraction of possible perspectives from Jewish youth, it indicates an increased need to listen to and understand a wider variety of experiences. The diverse and strong feelings about education and ignorance, memory and denialism, and exclusion and belonging that emerged from these interviews indicate a gap in Argentine society and collective memory. Future research involving more young people and perspectives can help fill this gap.

Further research on this topic could take many forms. The first avenue could develop an understanding of what appears to be the newest period of memory in Argentina. The majority of my respondents were in school and came of age after the end of the Kirchner Administration. State-sponsored memory is taking a new form, and the human rights regime does not the same influence nationally or internationally. The current generation's form of memory is also not intrinsically linked to cosmopolitanism or Timerman's views on the Holocaust. For these reasons, how and what Argentine students are learning today marks a new stage in the evolution of memory, moving beyond the period of Kirchner's memory politics described by Lvovich and

Bisquert. The fact that the newest period of memory is yet to be identified in academic studies reflects what many of my respondents perceives as a decrease in interest in the subject. The goals, actors, and moral character involved in the dissemination of memory in the 2020s demand increased attention.

The divergence of the present form of memory relates to the use of the Holocaust a prism through which to view the Argentine dictatorship. Seen as a measure of ethics, the cosmopolitanization of the Holocaust can either facilitate or complicate feelings of representation and belonging within existing narratives of the junta. Scholarship on these cosmopolitan understandings suggests that connections between the two historical events would be emphasized in educational curricula. However, my interviews demonstrate that this is not the case. Not only is there no instruction about how the dictatorship and the Holocaust interact, but the events are taught completely separately. Further research should investigate the causes of this separation. It should also seek to understand the differences between public versus private and religious versus secular school curricula. These questions could ultimately lead to an evaluation of the extent to which Holocaust narratives are valuable to the current iteration of collective memory in Argentina.

Comprehensive, representative collective memory still eludes greater Argentine society and Argentine Jewish spaces. To understand societal divisions and their impacts, continued research should engage the orientation and availability of Jewish political spaces, and the current efficacy and inclusivity of leading Jewish community organizations, like the DAIA and AMIA, of their representation of Argentine Jews (Jewish Argentines). It should also aim to further engage

orthodox Jewish communities or young people who are not otherwise involved in Jewish or educational spaces.

The need for continued research about the Jewish community in Argentina is only increasing with its current politics. Between the completion of my interviews and the publication of this paper, the national and international political context for Jews has shifted drastically. President Javier Milei's actions and policies compound these shifts for Argentina's Jewish community. In the months since his election, President Milei has cultivated a complex relationship to Judaism. After declaring to a right-wing Italian news source that "I'm a Catholic, but I practice Judaism a little bit," Milei traveled to Israel. An already contentious decision due to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, his actions on his trip exacerbated the controversy. In a speech during his visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Tel Aviv, President Milei equated the terrorist group Hamas to Nazis, and declared that neither can be tolerated. He also visited the Western Wall, where he engaged in the chant "*Am Yisrael Chai"* ("the people of Israel live"). These displays of apparent solidarity with the Jewish community raise questions about his political motives and affiliations, like camaraderie with Israel's right-wing Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. From the outset of his candidacy, Milei's connections with Judaism have been met with skepticism, if not condemnation, from Argentina's Jewish community. He has already received a letter from a coalition of over 5,000 Jewish Argentines (Argentine Jews) condemning his political use of the religion and its tenets.

President Milei's actions regarding the Jewish community are particularly jarring in relation to his national politics of denialism. Condemning what he views as a connection between Nazism

and Hamas undermines his denial of the dictatorship as state violence. With this statement, he accepts the premise of the same state violence and antisemitism that he refuses to acknowledge within Argentina itself. Expressing "*Am Yisrael Chai"* in Israel calls into question his vindication of the Armed Forces, who included Zionists in their "battle against subversion." These recent political developments intensify the need for research about the Jewish community in Argentina: the space available for a Jewish identity within the understanding of Argentine citizenship, the knowledge of its experiences during the period of state violence, and the connections between past and present forms of discrimination and antisemitism. Purely denying or vindicating Argentina's violent history, as President Milei encourages, will not make society forget state violence or simply undo the nation's history with antisemitism. Nor will it make people forgive. In this context, Milei's simultaneous denial of the dictatorship and engagement with Judaism only serves to further muddle and politicize the Jewish experience in Argentina. This, in turn, distances the nation from a future that uses the past to only increase respect and sensitivity for all Argentines.

President Milei and his political rhetoric evoke additional research questions. As his presidency evolves, it will be critical to monitor his stances on both the Jewish community and the Argentine dictatorship. These stances are confusing, and at times seemingly contradictory. Himka and Michlic's conception of "remembering to benefit" may be useful in evaluating President Milei's actions. Remembering to benefit" describes a scenario in which memory is used as a political tool to gain favor among certain citizens (2013, 10-11). Their understanding is particularly relevant in the context of Holocaust cosmopolitanization, given that Himka and Michlic initially apply the term in the context of Eastern Europe's post-war relationship to Israel

and Western Jews. Overall, in a unique political moment, Milei's Administration is ripe for research about his political goals and his relationship to both the Jewish community and national collective memory of the dictatorship.

President Milei's denial of the dictatorship and my interviewees' reactions to this form of memory also call into question word denialism itself. President Milei's rhetoric aligns closely with "remembering to forget," yet he does not reject the occurrence of the dictatorship outright. Instead, he cites the 8,753 number and upholds "the theory of two demons." Since he does in fact validate that the dictatorship occurred, it is difficult for critics to decry his rhetorical as pure denialism. Identifying this alternative form of memory as "denialist" is imprecise and may ultimately decrease his opposition's ability to counteract narratives that minimize the dictatorship. Alternatively, recognizing these perspectives for what they are—a form of memory distinct from widespread collective memory—may be critical to confronting Milei's harmful rhetoric. Subsequent research should develop the impact of the theory of denialism itself and the viability of alternative forms of conceptualizing and combatting depreciative memory.

Ultimately, both the historical and current situation of the Jewish community in Argentina can be better understood through the lens of collective memory of the dictatorship. As a critical site for reconstructing the past and forging the future, this collective memory can be a mechanism that facilitates or hinders the processes of identification, knowledge, and understanding. The last forty years of democracy in Argentina demand that memory be used to facilitate these goals. As it has done since 1983, Argentine society can and should continue to redefine collective memory, expanding to include the unique experiences of each group in society. Only by creating

narratives that allow each person to take part in and see themselves reflected within the collective memory of the dictatorship does memory fulfill its purpose: to use the understanding of past pain to imagine and create a future without the possibility of repetition: to demand "Never Again."

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# APPENDICES

## Guía de Entrevistas

### Introducción

1. ¿Puedes contarme un poco sobre ti?
    a. ¿Estás estudiando y estudiaste en universidad?
        i. ¿Cuál? ¿Qué estudias?
2. ¿Cuál es su experiencia o relación con la comunidad judía? ¿Hasta qué punto te identificas como judío?
3. ¿Dónde y cómo se enteró de la dictadura en Argentina?
4. ¿Aprendía alguna información del rol de la comunidad judía durante la dictadura? ¿Dónde y qué?
    a. A ver: ¿qué sabe sobre la comunidad judía durante la dictadura?

### Narrativos

5. ¿Es la memoria de la dictadura en relación con la comunidad judía algo que te parece hablan la gente como vos?
6. ¿Cree que su educación sobre este tema fue suficiente?
    a. ¿Por qué aprendió o no aprendió sobre eso?
7. ¿Después de pensar en dónde, qué, y cómo aprendía sobre las personas judías durante la dictadura, cree que hay una amplia representación de la comunidad judía en las narrativas públicas de la dictadura? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
8. ¿Mientras piensas y hablas sobre estas temas, como te sientes sobre tu experiencia?

### Más especifico

9. ¿Qué/sabes sobre el concepto de negacionismo?
10. ¿Crees que lo que está pasando en Argentina o el mundo impacta, que o como enseñan sobre este tema?
11. ¿Ha visitado algún sitio público conmemorativo de la dictadura? ¿Cuál?
    a. ¿Recuerda si vió alguna información sobre personas judías allá?

### Conclusión

12. ¿Tenés algunas recomendaciones para mí?
    a. ¿Hay algunas preguntas que debería preguntar o no preguntar?
    b. ¿Hay alguien más a quien te parece puedo entrevistar?
    c. ¿Hay alguna cosa que te parece que debería leer?

**Interview Guide [translated]**
**Introduction:**

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
    a. Are you currently studying or have you studied at university?
        i. If so, which university did/do you attend, and what are you or did you study?
2. What is your experience or relationship with the Jewish community?
    a. To what extent do you identify as Jewish?
3. Where and how did you learn about the dictatorship in Argentina?
4. Did you come across any information about the role of the Jewish community during the dictatorship?
    a. If so, where and what?
    b. So, what do you know about the Jewish community during the dictatorship?

**Narratives:**

5. Do you think the memory of the dictatorship in relation to the Jewish community is something that people like you talk about?
6. Do you believe your education on this topic was sufficient?
    a. Why did you learn or not learn about it?
7. After reflecting on where, what, and how you learned about Jewish people during the dictatorship, do you think there is a comprehensive representation of the Jewish community in public narratives of the dictatorship?
    a. Why or why not?
8. As you think and talk about these issues, how do you feel about your experience?

**More Specific:**

9. What do you know about the concept of denialism?
10. Do you think what is happening in Argentina or the world affects how or what is taught about this topic?
11. Have you visited any public memorial sites of the dictatorship?
    a. If so, which ones?
    b. Do you remember seeing any information about Jewish people there?

**Conclusion:**

12. Do you have any recommendations for me?
    a. Are there any questions I should or shouldn't ask?
    b. Is there anyone else you think I should interview?
    c. Is there anything you think I should read?