Department of Political Sciences

Master's Degree in International Relations

Chair of Comparative History of Political Systems

The never-ending story: *la grieta Argentina*

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2023/2024

alla mia famiglia,
immensa fonte di gratitudine.

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List of Abbreviations

AAA - Alianza Anticomunista Argentina

ADEPA - Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas

ARPRA - Asociación de Radiodifusoras Privadas Argentinas

CALC - Cumbre de la Unidad de América Latina y el Caribe

CC-ARI - Coalición Cívica ARI

CCD - Centros Clandestinos de Detención

CGE - Confederación General Económica

CGT - Confederación General del Trabajo

CONADEP - Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas

CTA - Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina

ERP - Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo

FAP - Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas

FAR - Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias

FARCO - Foro Argentino de Radios Comunitarias

FIG - Falklands Islands Government

GOU - Grupo de Oficiales Unidos

IACHR - Inter-American Human Rights Commission

IMF - International Monetary Fund

ISI - Import-substituting industrialization

LSCA - Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual

OAS - Organization of American States

PRO - Propuesta Republicana

SIE – Servicio Informaciones del Ejército

SOA - School of the Americas

UCR - Unión Cívica Radical

UOEE - Unión de Obreros y Empleados del Estado

Introduction

The term "*grieta*" was first coined by Jorge Lanata, an Argentine journalist who, during the 2013 Martin Fierro Awards, introduced this concept as an "irreconcilable division" that extended beyond politics into families, friendships, and workplaces. According to him, this metaphorical rift was the country's most detrimental issue, because this divide, spurred by political ideologies, media influence, and social perspectives, continued to fragment the nation's social fabric, turning political disagreements into an all-encompassing cultural phenomenon that permeates nearly every aspect of daily life. From that moment, this journalistic definition, intended as the growing polarization within Argentine society and politics, started and continues to be one of the most frequently used terms on television panels when politics are dramatized, and promptly, to put an end to this issue became a persistent theme in campaign propositions. While this polarization was identified during the Kirchner presidencies, therefore representing the long-standing conflict between *Kirchneristas* and *anti-Kirchneristas*, *grieta*'s roots run much deeper, extending into Argentina's political, social, and economic history.

For this reason, trying to further define this concept seems appropriate, especially in a historical context, by attempting to frame it in crucial moments of Argentine history. Indeed, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the deepest roots of *la grieta*, which, despite its recent creation, seems to have been grounded in the country's history since long before 2013. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the research question: How have historical events - particularly the rise of Peronism, the dictatorship, and the most recent socio-economic crises - shaped the polarization encapsulated by the term "*la grieta*" in modern Argentina?

The analysis begins by examining the emergence of Juan Domingo Perón's populism in the 1940s, which is deemed to be the groundwork for what would later be called *grieta.* Since its inception, the Peronist movement promptly activated a dual mechanism, establishing a

context in which the people either entirely aligned with or dissociated themselves from it. The extent of the polarization was evident in a multitude of contexts, including the street demonstrations of Perón's supporters and the importance attached to silencing opposition by Peronism in all its forms. Additionally, the veneration of the movement's supporters for Eva Perón and the efforts made by Peronism's rivals to erase her memory were notable aspects of this polarization.

The thesis then shifts to the most brutal period that the country lived: the Dirty War, the campaign that the military dictatorship in Argentina ran from 1976 to 1983 against everybody they believed to be political opponents, focusing on the human rights violations committed by the dictatorship and the resistance movements that emerged during those years. While undeniably significant moments in the country's history, equally important are the periods before and after the dictatorship: the former, marked by guerrilla warfare and instability which undermined democratic institutions, and the latter, characterized by deep divisions over how the democratic transition should be managed. The scars left by this period created new rifts that, still today, affect political discourse and national identity.

Finally, the thesis examines the re-emergence of the divisions addressed in the previous chapters, focusing on the Kirchner presidencies and the revival of populist policies. The Kirchner couple's return to Peronist principles further polarized the nation, reawakening old tensions that had previously been temporarily set aside but not fully resolved. Indeed, Argentina only began to confront its historical past in 2003, with the reopening of the trials of those responsible for the Dirty War and the historical revisionism of the Falklands-Malvinas War, whose narrative had been largely overshadowed by the proponents of the war, namely the military juntas. Clearly, this did not occur without consequence and further fragmentation. Additionally, the resurgence of Peronism in its contemporary form, *Kirchnerismo*, contributed to the exacerbation of the political, economic, and social cleavages that had long plagued

Argentina, precipitating a series of political processes that did not ultimately lead to the long-awaited national reconciliation.

The research draws on a wide range of sources, encompassing both scientific literature and primary sources such as speeches and official documents.[1] In terms of scientific literature, the theoretical framework is shaped by the insights of scholars such as Gino Germani, who offers a sociological perspective helpful to examine the emergence of Peronism and its impact on the Argentine working class[2]. Alongside Germani, Ernesto Laclau's analysis constitutes a significant contribution to the study of populism and the ideological construction of political identities.[3] Furthermore, Loris Zanatta's commitment to Argentinean history, particularly that of Peronism, has played a pivotal role in the re-definition of class relations within the context of the movement.[4] The work of Antonius Robben is similarly noteworthy: his analysis of liminality helps elucidate the unresolved traumas of dictatorship and repression, which continue to impede Argentina's capacity for healing, due to a persistent tension between the need for collective memory and the desire to transcend the trauma.[5]

In addition to this theoretical foundation, the thesis makes extensive use of primary sources, including political speeches, government documents, and media publications. The speeches of Juan Domingo Perón, as well as those of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, constitute key primary materials, exemplifying the rhetoric that consolidated the bond with "their" people while estranging other social groups. Furthermore, an analysis of Argentina's polarized history would be incomplete without consideration of the critical role played by testimonies collected after the period of the Dirty War. The CONADEP report, "*Nunca Más*", an official government

[1] In this work, all quotations will be presented in the original language. Should this be in a language other than English, a translation, made by the author, will be provided in the footnotes.
[2] See Gino Germani, *Estructura Social de La Argentina: Analisis Estadıstico.* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1955); *La Sociedad En Cuestión*. (Buenos Aires: CLACS, 2010).
[3] See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*. (London: Verso, 2005).
[4] See Loris Zanatta, *Eva Perón*, una biografia politica. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009); *Il Peronismo*. (Roma: Carocci, 2008); *Perón Y El Mito de La Nación Católica*. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1999).
[5] See Antonius Robben, "Disappearance and Liminality. Argentina's Mourning of State Terror." In *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality*. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016).

document, along with numerous other works of testimony-based literature, have played a pivotal role in documenting the experiences of victims and survivors. For instance, Horacio Verbitsky's "*El Vuelo*" reveals the practice of death flights, while Daniela Padoan's "*Le Pazze*" presents poignant testimonies from the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo.* Also, the analysis of the media plays a crucial role in this work, as they are of primary importance for *la grieta*, by both shaping and being shaped by it. This is particularly evident in the case of newspapers such as *Critica,* and *La Nación.*

Spanning approximately eighty years, focusing only on those moments considered essential to capture the essence of *la grieta*, this thesis argues that the phenomenon is not a contemporary anomaly but rather the culmination of decades of unresolved political, social, and ideological conflicts. By tracing the origins of these divisions and employing a multifaceted approach, including historical, political theoretical, international legal, and political communication analysis, the thesis aims to demonstrate how Argentina's historical legacy continues to inform its present-day polarization, thereby rendering reconciliation a daunting challenge.

Chapter I

Perón and Peronism (1943 – 1955)

Neither was strong enough to destroy the other,
nor humble enough to live with the other.
This situation literally ruined the country.

(Manwoo Lee, Argentine political instability)

This first chapter will examine a seminal era in the history of modern Argentina: the period that goes from the ascendance of Juan Domingo Perón to the *Revolución Libertadora*. It will focus on specific moments and events which are deemed instrumental to an understanding of the origins of the country's social divisions, such as the stormy years during which Perón rose to power; the 17th of October 1945, the day on which the people showed him their support; the authoritarian choices that followed his election; the death of his wife, Eva Perón. Despite what it may appear, what follows will neither be a purely historical account nor an explanation of Perón's populism, as these topics have already been extensively and meticulously covered in academic literature. The rationale for this approach is that the objective is not to evaluate the legacy of Juan Domingo Perón, but to examine the context that led to the emergence of the *grieta*. Consequently, the chapter will explore the prominent role in this story of symbols, rituals and, most of all, identity shaping.

I.I The rift that Perón widened

The Argentine society, even before Perón's welcoming (or rejection), was already deeply fractured. Therefore, the debut of the Colonel, as new actor on the political scene, did nothing but highlight all those internal contradictions within the country that had for years been contributing to fuelling what was to be perhaps the deepest *grieta* in Argentina's history.

From the coup d'état by General José Félix Uriburu in September 1930 that deposed President Hipólito Yrigoyen, an era known as the *Década Infame* swept through Argentina. Several factors contributed to General Uriburu's coup, including the global economic crisis, Yrigoyen's advanced age, the governing party's division, the conservative reaction to social conflicts and the spread of revolutionary ideologies, and an anti-democratic and anti-liberal intellectual climate coming from Europe.

The period which followed, characterised by political instability, rampant corruption and electoral manipulation, lasted until the 1943 military coup by the *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* (GOU), a group within which Perón distinguished himself from the very first day. The Infamous Decade saw Argentina's export-oriented economy, particularly with Europe, suffer as a consequence of the Great Depression of 1929. However, the country was able to recover more quickly than others thanks to the complicity with Great Britain enshrined in the 1933 Roca-Runciman Agreement, which secured Argentina a set part of the British meat market and removed taxes on Argentine cereals. Hence, the process that followed was that of import-substituting industrialisation (ISI), which aimed to reduce dependence on foreign goods by promoting local manufacturing[1]. Indeed, this strategy led the country to transform its economy: while remaining the breadbasket of the world in those years, the Argentine industrial production

[1] Ricardo Donato Salvatore, "Stature Growth in Industrializing Argentina: The Buenos Aires Industrial Belt 1916 -1950," *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 1 (January 2009): 70 - 92, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2008.02.002; Alejandro Grimson, *Racialidad, Etnicidad Y Clase En Los Orígenes Del Peronismo, Argentina 1945* (Hamburg: Kompetenznetz Lateinamerika, 2016), https://www.desigualdades.net/Resources/Working_Paper/WP-Grimson-Online.pdf.

surpass the agricultural one in the following decade. Initially spontaneous, Argentina's emerging industrialization benefited from increased governmental economic intervention, gradually replacing earlier generations' faith in free market principles.

During this time, another process developed at an accelerating pace in tandem with import-substituting industrialisation: the increasing internal migration. A popular destination for European migrants at the turn of the century, this time Greater Buenos Aires began to welcome Argentines from all over the country. According to Gino Germani's estimates, the annual influx of internal migrants grew exponentially from 8000 in 1914–36 to 72,000 in 1936–43, to 117,000 in 1943–19472; this resulted in another increase in the total number of the inhabitants of the capital, which counted 4 million in 1943, compared to only 1 million in 1910. Buenos Aires now offered an expanding urban area, full of factories and public spaces, where the middle class just arrived from the pampas of the country came to settle and find new job opportunities in the emerging industries. It is crucial for the analysis to consider that the newly arrived population of the city lacked any form of guidance from the government or organisation at the trade union level[3]. This was due to the fact that there were only two workers' unions in Buenos Aires, which were relatively exclusive, and Parliament was consistently reluctant to consider their demands, failing to comprehend the rapid changes occurring within society.

In the context of public institutions, several alterations were occurring simultaneously. Indeed, although Uriburu's authoritarian projects did not gain the necessary support, and power passed to the moderate Agustín Justo, the subsequent political system undermined democracy, resulting in a loss of legitimacy and trust. Justo, who was elected president in 1932 with a conservative coalition, capitalised on the dominant radical party's proscription. With the radicals' return to the ballot box in 1935 and the election of Roberto Ortiz in 1937, electoral

[2] Gino Germani, *Estructura Social de La Argentina: Análisis Estadıstico.* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1955).
[3] Manwoo Lee, "Argentine Political Instability: A Crisis of Simultaneous Quest for Authority and Equality," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 11, no. 4 (October 1969): 558–70, https://doi.org/10.2307/165336.

fraud became more widespread. This increased the gap between real democracy and the ideal, resulting in an unbridgeable divide, as Loris Zanatta describes in his book on Peronism, affirming that Argentine society had stopped processing the changes that were taking place in the country's society, culture and way of life as if it had been locked into a mechanism in which the people no longer recognised themselves[4].

Therefore, the Argentine political system of the 1930s was distinguished by structural fragility and a lack of party coherence. The largest party, the *Unión Civica Radicál* (UCR), was internally fragmented, with factions and particularisms. Conservatives, on the other hand, were driven by local interests, only concerned with the needs of the upper class, and lacked a unified organisational framework. Understandably, the rising social dynamics of the 1930s started to erode the control of conservative elites, resulting in a schism between the political system and the people. Plus, it should be considered that many European immigrants had not adopted Argentine citizenship yet, and this factor widened a lot the representation gap. In brief, as affirmed by Lee "Argentina was not underdeveloped economically or culturally, but only politically"[5]. Hence, the void was promptly supplied by the political elites' expanding support for the armed forces and the Catholic Church, seen, at that time, as the strongest pillars of the country that could create a new order. Self-describing themselves as the most people-oriented and democratic corporations of all, as opposed to the élite defenders of unbridled liberalism and the winds of communism, the church and the armed forces became the spokespeople of the country's most nationalist sentiments and the desire for community and *argentinidad.*

With an ideology fundamentally limited to the general concept of nationalism, the Argentine army stormed into the *Casa Rosada* (without much difficulty, as President Castillo had already cleared the building) on 4 June 1943. From that moment, the military government started to eradicate all traces of the liberal Argentina that had proved inadequate to cope with

[4] Loris Zanatta, *Il Peronismo* (Roma: Carocci, 2008): 20.
[5] Lee, *op. cit.,* 558–70.

the numerous changes that were occurring during the years of the Infamous Decade. Therefore, all ministries were staffed with military personnel, and the parliament and political parties were dissolved. Furthermore, many freedoms, such as those of the press and association, were abolished. The military regime also imposed religious education in public schools, while encouraging the expulsion of communists and other "undesirable elements" from trade unions, colleges, and government[6]. Without being able to agree on the kind of nationalist mould to give the country, the army did, however, know what the government would be: not liberalist, the recently defeated ideology, and not communist, the danger averted; it also knew who its enemies were: the United Kingdom and Freemasonry, for obvious reasons.

As for the rest, everything remained unclear and ill-defined. And this is where Juan Domingo Perón, a colonel who later became the right-hand man of the Minister of War, General Edelmiro Julián Farrell, came in. Perón was unwilling to repeat Uriburu's mistake of building a nationalistic military regime around quasi-fascist elites. Being a voracious student of Argentine history, he understood that ultranationalists in the army could not maintain power for long without significant public backing. Hence, Perón rose to power from 1943 to 1946 by uniting the urban population behind an army regime, "converting it from a military to a majoritarian dictatorship"[7], so by adapting an army ultranationalism to political and social circumstances in Argentina. This resulted in a series of measures that, while pleasing to one section of the population, aroused as much discontent in as many sections of the community.

Perón was soon put in charge of the National Department of Labour and Social Security (which he then renamed Secretariat). From this point onwards, he began to cultivate his relationship with the urban masses, which, at that time, as previously discussed, had been subjected to significant neglect and lacked guidance from institutions. Therefore, championing

[6]Enrique Peruzzotti, "Peronism and the Birth of Modern Populism," *Journal of Inter-Regional Studies: Regional and Global Perspectives* (Tokyo: Waseda University, 2019).
[7] Marvin Goldwert, "The Rise of Modern Militarism in Argentina," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (Durham: Duke University Press, May 1968): 189–205, https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-48.2.189.

their demands, he strategically began to build a solid popular base for his support. From October 1943, Perón initiated a series of pivotal labour reforms that laid the foundation for the growth of Peronism, enacting comprehensive legislation that formalised workers' rights: a range of social security benefits, such as retirement pensions, disability payments, maternity grants, and unemployment insurance, were introduced; plus, legislation ensured safer and healthier settings, and the workday was limited to a maximum of eight hours, with a weekly restriction of 48 hours. Furthermore, Perón introduced paid vacations, family summer camps, and designated paid public holidays. A minimum wage policy was implemented to guarantee a basic standard of living for all employees; additionally, collective bargaining rights were enhanced, enabling employees to negotiate more favourable working conditions through their unions. Also, to resolve disputes between employers and employees specialised labour courts were established, ensuring timely and equitable resolution of worker claims. Perón implemented programmes to enhance their health, constructing hospitals and clinics, and providing inexpensive housing. Lastly, he also encouraged the implementation of vocational training programmes to enhance the skills and employability of workers, as well as adult education programmes to facilitate career advancement[8]. As he clearly affirmed, his objective was:

> *mejorar el nivel de vida de los trabajadores, pero sin tolerar el conflicto social [...] No daré carta blanca a los agentes de la destrucción y la agitación, que con frecuencia ni siquiera son argentinos, sino extranjeros. Tengo los asuntos obreros totalmente controlados, y no por la fuerza sino por la conciliación ... No crea usted que somos*

[8] Judith Teichman, "Exploring the Origins of Polarizing Populism: Insights from the Peronist Struggle over Rights," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 0, no. 114 (Amsterdam: October, 2022): 67, https://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10882 ; Leslie Bethell, *Historia de América Latina* (Barcelona: Crítica Barcelona, 1990): 48 – 59; Zanatta, *Il Peronismo,* 37.

anticapitalistas. Nada de eso. [Pero] el capitalismo internacional está muy equivocado si cree que puede vencer al espíritu nacional de Argentina que este gobierno encarna.[9].

In a climate of working-class frustration, (which, according to Emilio Ocampo, is one of the three basic elements of populism, along with a charismatic personality who proposes himself as the solution to the first element and an emotional involvement of a large part of the electorate)[10], Perón's arrival on the stage occurred at an opportune time; his success on behalf of urban lower-class groups earned him their support and, as Smith affirms, "even devotion"[11]. Effectively, the level of devotion was clear when, less than a year after the reforms were introduced, José Vicente Tesorieri, secretary general of the *Unión de Obreros y Empleados del Estado* (UOEE), and Alcides Montiel, secretary general of the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT), gave a speech in San Martín Square. The crowd in front of them responded by supporting the military government and loudly invoking Perón, in a unified and cohesive manner, just as he had hoped[12]. It soon became evident that Perón was not only managing to build the basis of his consensus, but also, in a sense, "taming" it. To ensure that the working class did not vent its frustrations in communism, the trade union movement had to develop within the state itself, becoming part of it, because "*Si no llevamos a cabo de la Revolución*

[9] Cabildo, November 11, 1943: "to improve the workers' standard of living, but without tolerating social conflict, [without giving] carte blanche to the agents of destruction and agitation, who are often not even Argentinians, but foreigners. I have the workers' affairs totally under control, and not by force but by conciliation [...] Don't think that we are anti-capitalists. Nothing of the sort. [But] international capitalism is very mistaken if it thinks it can defeat the national spirit of Argentina which this government embodies." The Cabildo was previously a municipal council. During the period of Perón's presidency, the term "Cabildo Abierto" came to signify a popular assembly, which, in theory, was intended to facilitate public involvement in governmental decision-making processes, and, in practice, to foster consensus.

[10] Emilio Ocampo, "What Kind of Populism Is Peronism?," in *Serie Documentos de Trabajo,* No. 732 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones UCEMA, 2020). For more information on Peronist populism, see Emilio Ocampo, "Las Raíces Psicológicas Y Culturales Del Populismo Argentino," in *El Populismo En La Argentina Y El Mundo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones UCEMA, 2018).

[11] Peter H. Smith, "Social Mobilization, Political Participation, and the Rise of Juan Peron," *Political Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (New York: March 1969): 30, https://doi.org/10.2307/2147045.

[12] Zanatta, *Il Peronismo*, 47 - 52.

Pacífica, el pueblo mismo tomará el camino de la Revolución Violenta […] Y la solución de todo el problema es la justicia social para con las masas"[13].

Nevertheless, not everyone agreed: the political and economic elites did in fact frown upon such fundamentalist speeches to the people, fearing a veiled incitement to class struggle, which Perón wanted to avoid at all costs; additionally, they were very critical of his interventionist policies and efforts to empower labour unions. In response, Perón was also openly critical of them, declaring that those who were against him complained about the fact that he did not focus on moral principles and his sermons were always about pay and working conditions because, on the contrary, moral values compared to what he wanted to fight, were priceless. Having reached that point, such declarations aroused either complete revulsion on the part of the businessmen or total fascination on behalf of the popular sectors, a symptom that the polarization around the figure of the colonel was increasing day by day.

Effectively, rural producers, manufacturers, and merchants (whom Perón defined as a "tentacular oligarchy") played their part in the temporary fall of Perón. These groups, disillusioned by the revolution, which instead of bringing order promoted social agitation, lost faith in Perón's ability to reconcile capital and labour, especially since the costs of his social reforms were borne primarily by them. Members of the *Sociedad Rural* and the *Unión Industrial*, seeing the regime's demise as imminent, pushed Perón into the abyss in the hope of overturning his reforms. Objections from professionals, intellectuals, and the middle class, as well as the waning support of his military colleagues and the Catholic Church, all pointed to Perón's declining popularity. Left and right were united in the idea that Perón should be

[13] Cited in Darío Cantón, "El Ejército En 1930: El Antes Y El Después," in *Historia Integral de Argentina*, (Barcelona: Planeta,1970): 11: "If we do not carry out the Peaceful Revolution, the People themselves will take the path of Violent Revolution [...] And the solution to the whole problem is social justice for the masses." This statement effectively encapsulates the corporatist project pursued by Perón, who sought to organise society into corporations based on economic and professional sectors. Inspired by Mussolini's fascist model, which he had the opportunity to analyse during his two years in Italy (1938-1940), he tried to create his own model of corporatism. The objective was to harmonise the interests of these groups through state control and mediation, with the aim of reducing social conflicts and promoting social justice. For more information, see Kerry Bolton, *Peron and Peronism* (London: Black House Publishing, 2014).

deposed. In summary, Perón walked a minefield every day. On the one hand, he had to smooth over the more conservative and pro-Nazi corners within the military regime; on the other, he had to address the needs of the masses to prevent them from resorting to alternative means outside the state apparatus to satisfy their demands. Plus, the regime, which still lacked parties and democratic organs, seemed less and less suitable for the climate of victory of the democratic powers of the Second World War; in fact, the Argentine situation was no longer acceptable to the United States, which severed all relations with the country for a while. As Zanatta pointed out, the revolution then had to beat a retreat, lifting the state of siege, and handing over to civilians most of the ministries that had previously been occupied by the military[14].

Despite these pressures, and the realisation that his days were numbered, Perón did not passively accept his fate; he kept on attracting unions and workers, intensifying his social policies, accelerating the transformation of the CGT into the only state-recognised union, and vigorously supporting strikes and workers' demands. Knowing that he was losing allies and that time was running out, Perón framed the conflict as a struggle between the people seeking social justice and a self-serving oligarchy controlled by foreign powers. Although he still invoked papal encyclicals and a corporative vision of state protection of social equilibrium[15], he increasingly mobilised the workers, urging strikes and praising their virtues with demagogic rhetoric. In short, Perón risked everything and went to widen, metaphorically speaking, the now open *grieta* with his own hands. At the same time, a great number of trade unions (which totalled approximately 70,000 people) realised the possibility of losing their leader-saviour and began to make their voices heard and planned a street march on July 12, under the motto "in defence of the improvements obtained by the workers through the Ministry of Labour and

[14] Zanatta*, Il Peronismo*, 47- 52.
[15] Perón was influenced by the social doctrines of the Catholic Church, particularly papal encyclicals such as Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum" (1891) and Pope Pius XI's "Quadragesimo Anno" (1931), which promoted a model of corporatism that emphasised social justice, the dignity of labour and the need to harmonise relations between workers and employers through the mediation of the state. For more information, see Loris Zanatta, *Perón Y El Mito de La Nación Católica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999).

Social Security". On that occasion, the hymn "*ni nazis ni fascistas, peronistas*" was heard for the first time. Additionally, some signs arose that read "*Perón Presidente*"[16]. This moment marked the official beginning of an identification which is still alive today. The unexpected success of the power of Perón's supporters reached its climax on 17 October 1945 when the working class rallied to his rescue, transforming itself from a piece of the puzzle into the dominant force within the emerging Peronist movement.

I.II *El día de la Lealtad* and the support of the *descamisados*

In 1945, the government was now increasingly divided between Perón's opponents, led by General Eduardo Avalos, and supporters, whose strength had been somewhat underestimated by everyone. At the beginning of September, Buenos Aires hosted euphoric celebrations for the end of the Second World War; given this situation, it also seemed time to end the military regime in Argentina. On September 19, all political parties called for a March *de la Constitución y la Libertad*, which gathered approximately 200,000 people from the National Congress to *Plaza Francia* in the north of the city. After that, the opposition immediately intensified their demand: the transfer of power to the Supreme Court of Justice, expressing the government's "unconditional surrender" idea. Unfortunately for the opposition, the army had no intention to take this step, considering it as a humiliating defeat for the institution. Consequently, getting rid of Perón, the most controversial element, was apparently the best solution.

On October 9, Avalos forced Perón to resign from several government offices, and three days later the populist leader was imprisoned on the island of Martín García. It appeared that "Peronism" had collapsed under attack, and that President Farrell would soon satisfy the primary demands of the Liberal "constitutionalists" by naming a date for elections and handing

[16] Félix Luna, *El 45: Crónica de Un Año Decisivo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1971), cited in Grimson, *Racialidad.*

over power to a transitional government led by Supreme Court judges. However, that "victory", as Zanatta suggested[17], was ultimately a Pyrrhic one. The effort to overthrow Perón collapsed just as it appeared to be on the verge of victory. Internal disagreements within the Liberal coalition slowed down Supreme Court President Juan Álvarez's efforts to form a transitional administration after his fall. Also, additional disagreements erupted between coalition leaders and the troops: although the army, led by Ávalos, had finally yielded to pressure, and dismissed Perón, they were unwilling to take additional moves that would signal the entire collapse and end of the 1943 revolution. Resistance to the proposal to transfer over the government to the Supreme Court emerged quickly inside the army, owing to concerns about potential reprisals as well as a refusal to give up its new powers in both government and the economy. A stalemate was formed and maintained until events took a dramatic and decisive turn on October 17, a day which will be known worldwide as *El día de la Lealtad*, when thousands of workers marched to the centre of Buenos Aires demanding Perón's release.

In the preceding days, the political opposition enjoyed the celebrations and the employers quickly demonstrated what the country would be like without Perón. As an example, the first fortnight of October was paid deducting the holiday of the 12th, a deduction that was not due because of a Perón-imposed regulation. When confronted with the workers' demands, the corporations responded: "*Se lo cobran a Perón*"[18]. From the opposition's strong stance on the matter, it can be deduced that it was not only Perón who was constantly highlighting the difference between "us" and "the others", fuelling a divisive rhetoric typical of populism, but that even those who would define themselves as anti-Peronists, never missed an opportunity to distance themselves from Perón's actions and express their disappointment. This leads to the

[17] Zanatta, Il Peronismo, 47.
[18] Alejandro Grimson, "El 45: los orígenes del peronismo en una sociedad racista y clasista", in *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?: De Perón a Los Kirchner, El Movimiento Que No Deja de Conmover La Política Argentina* (Buenos Aires: XXI Editores, 2019): "Charge it to Perón".

umpteenth confirmation that the thesis that Peronism was born and nurtured largely from anti-Peronism[19] is a reliable one.

On October 17, the multiple tensions reached their peak, and approximately 200,000 people gathered in *Plaza de Mayo* to demand the return of Perón. He finally arrived at 11 p.m. and began a speech to the crowd, addressing them as "*trabajadores*". A meticulous choice, which reconfirmed the leader's commitment to portraying himself as the saviour of his people, their messiah. However, given the broad discussion of the various forms of opposition to Perón, it is crucial to ascertain who was included in this designation, or rather who felt included, the sense of belonging to Perón's group of *protégés* perhaps being more important than their identity or origin. A starting point could be an analysis of the words of Martinez Estrada, an Argentine writer, on that day:

> *El 17 de octubre Perón volcó a las calles céntricas de Buenos Aires un sedimento social que nadie habría reconocido. Parecía una invasión de gentes de otro país, hablando otro idioma, vistiendo trajes exóticos, y sin embargo era parte del pueblo argentino […] Sentimos escalofríos viéndolos desfilar en una verdadera horda silenciosa con carteles que amenazaban con tomarse una rechoncha terrible*[20].

The white and European élite, who had long been the patrons of Buenos Aires, was stunned and confused as if they did not understand where these people, so different from them, who, like them, called themselves Argentines, came from. Even, some claim that élites were looking at

[19] Grimson, *El 45.*

[20] Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *Que Es Esto?* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue SRL, 2005): 55 – 56: "On 17 October Perón poured into the streets of downtown Buenos Aires a social sediment that no one would have recognised. It looked like an invasion of people from another country, speaking another language, wearing exotic costumes, and yet it was part of the Argentine people. […] We felt chills as we watched them parade in a veritable silent horde with signs threatening to take a terrible revenge."

them "*con la misma aprensión con que vería a los marcianos*"[21]. This confusion will be then demonstrated when, without really knowing how to define the crowd of Perón's supporters, people, radios, and newspapers began to use terms, both old and new, such as *hordas, turbas, masas, lumpenproletariat, malevaje, malón, chusma, obreros, descamisados, negros, alpargatas,* or *tribu*[22]. Various newspapers, representing different ideological perspectives, were unable to identify a definition for *los trabajadores* who had come to protest in the *Plaza de Mayo* on the Day of Loyalty using only words of contempt for a new phenomenon whose importance was not intended to be understood. As an example, *Orientación*, a communist newspaper, identified those masses as small, un-cohesive and insignificant sectors, and asserted that they lacked even class consciousness. Another daily anti-Peronist newspaper – *Crítica* - wrote on the afternoon of the 17 October that "the multitudinous and imposing columns [...] have been transformed into scattered groups that walk the streets with a weary pace"[23]. They are "isolated groups that do not represent the authentic Argentine proletariat"[24]. *Crítica* was not entirely wrong, because he did accurately capture the diversity and fragmentation of that group of individuals who had collectively taken to the streets in protest of their leader's return. But the newspaper, with the same claim stated in its name, neglected the in-depth analysis of the components of *las masas. La Nación*, another daily newspaper, went on to criticise *los trabajadores,* saying that they were not real workers, they were not real patriots, in short: they were not. But who were they? As previously stated, those who were unable to categorize the workers into a single homogeneous group were correct in their assertions. Consequently, despite initial expectations to the contrary, individuals with disparate characteristics were able to form a unified political entity.

[21] Luna, *op. cit.*, 271: "with the same apprehension with which they would view Martians"
[22] Grimson, *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?*
[23] *Crítica*, October 17, 1945, cited in A. Grimson, *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?*
[24] *Crítica*, October 17, 1945, cited in A. Grimson, *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?*

Heterogeneity was first and foremost expressed in the wage gap. Primarily, the classic inequality between skilled and low-skilled workers was even increasing by 1945, due to the significant heterogeneity of industry, of workers in the more complex services, and others living in conditions of economic hardship. Additionally, there were significant disparities in working conditions between sectors, with those in the telephone or railway services (where unions were well-established) enjoying more favourable conditions than those in large meat-packing plants; also, among the most concerning fields of work, the situation in the sugar cane industry in the province of Tucumán was among the most worrying ones.

The second aspect to be considered is undoubtedly the geographical diversity of Argentina, a country that is not only vast in area, but also characterised by very different landscapes, which, as a result, have developed populations with ethnic and phenotypic differences: therefore, these differences have also generated labour diversity. The Quebrachales, the vineyards, the sugar fields, and the metropolis of Buenos Aires were all situated at considerable distances from one another. As an example, in the Chaco, native people and outsiders coexisted, and lived together but in different conditions: indeed, a handful of solid employees coexisted with most workers in the foreign enterprises under conditions of extreme exploitation; diverse labour groups also spoke Guaraní and other indigenous languages[25].

Lastly, to gain a fuller understanding of the composition of the masses in the square on 17 October, 80 years later, it is necessary to consider several statistical data points. While it is true that internal migrants played an important role in driving change during the years of Perón's ascent to power, it is also evident that they did not act in solum. According to Germani,"[Peronism] *fue un movimiento que expresó, sobre todo, a la gran inmigración interna, originaria de áreas todavía tradicionales y compuesta de personas que por primera*

[25] Torcuato Di Tella, *Perón Y Los Sindicatos. El Inicio de Una Relación Conflictiva* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2003): 115.

vez se hallaban en contacto real con la sociedad nacional" [26]. This was an exaggeration. Indeed, the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area of 1947 had only 17% of internal migrants[27], which came mostly from the "Pampean provinces" (Santa Fe, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, La Pampa), while less than a half were from the northwest. Plus, thanks to Darío Cantón and Luís Acosta, who analysed 1946 electoral rolls to find trends in the Peronist vote based on social stratification dimensions and the migratory or non-migratory nature of the population, it can be affirmed that only 20% of the working-class people were internal immigrants (Germani believed this percentage was closer to 73%). Secondly, it was demonstrated that only 15.3% of all internal migrants in the Federal Capital and 9.9% in the Conurbano were "autochthonous" migrants—born in the ostensibly more "backward" districts[28]. The evidence, here, demonstrates that the individuals who participated in the largest popular mobilization in Argentine history represented diverse sectors of the working population, hailing from various geographical regions, including the city capital, the surrounding suburbs, and the most remote areas of the country. Thus, as the anthropologist Alejandro Grimson cleverly stated:

> *La mayoría de las descripciones de aquellos meses hicieron hincapié en lo que resultó más disruptivo y sorprendente: la pobreza, las ropas, los rostros morenos. Los relatos se concentraron en la condena moral de la incultura y el interior, pero poco y nada se dijo sobre los sacos y los sombreros, ni sobre los trabajadores sin ascendencias indígenas*[29].

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[26] Gino Germani, "Encuestas en la población de Buenos Aires. Caraterísticas técnicas generales de las enquestas"in *La Sociedad En Cuestión*, *(Buenos Aires: CLACSO,* 2010): 310: "Peronism was a movement that expressed, above all, the great internal immigration, originating from still traditional areas and composed of people who for the first time found themselves in real contact with national society."

[27] Germani, "Encuestas", 310.

[28] Darío Cantón, Luis Roberto Acosta, and Jorge Raúl Jorrat, *Una Hipótesis Rechazada*, (Buenos Aires: Librería Hernández, 2013): 37

[29] Grimson, *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?:"* Most descriptions of those months emphasised what was most disruptive and surprising: the poverty, the clothes, the brown faces. The stories concentrated on the moral condemnation of the uneducated and the hinterland, but little or nothing was said about the sacks and hats, or the workers without indigenous ancestry."

Indeed, as Hugo Ratier clarifies:

> *No solo el cabecita[30] hizo el 17. Hubo mucho rubio, mucho hijo de gringo, mucho porteño en sus cansadas columnas. El llamado al antagonismo contra los "negros" fue un recurso más para dividir a la falange proletaria. Recurso que es difícil hallar explicitado públicamente. Circulaba más bien por los subterráneos del rumor, del chiste político, vivo siempre en la expresión oral[31].*

Hence, rather than being transformed into discrete political identities, this heterogeneity characteristic of the popular was encapsulated in a single identification that allowed for the conceptualisation of all workers as being opposed to the bosses and the oligarchy. Another entire thesis could be constructed on the various defining terms ascribed to Perón's supporters, in order to find the most appropriate one. Of these, the term that was employed with the greatest frequency by those external to the movement, yet also most adopted by those within the movement itself, was particularly noteworthy. The term *descamisados*, immediately used by the opposition to denigrate those who would become Perón's future electoral supporters in 1946, was adopted by them and became the defining feature of their identity.

In 1945, Buenos Aires was renowned for its formal dress code. During the Day of Loyalty, the sight of individuals in shirts without jackets was therefore a notable deviation from the established norms. While most of the participants wore shirts, the lack of jackets was particularly noteworthy in the city centre. Buenos Aires residents, named *Porteños*, accustomed

[30] The Spanish term *cabecita negra* was used during those times to disdainfully describe indigenous people.
[31] Hugo Ratier, *El Cabecita Negra: Una Reedición Necesaria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2022): 54: "It was not only the little black head[31] that made the [1]7th. There were plenty of blondes, plenty of gringo's sons, plenty of porteños in its tired columns. The call for antagonism against the "negros" was one more device to divide the proletarian phalanx. A device which it is difficult to find expressed publicly. It circulated rather through the underground of rumour, of political jokes, always alive in oral expression."

to formal attire such as dark suits, ties, and hats, were unfamiliar to the sight of industrial workers from the outskirts. Almost certainly, the city's inhabitants had never seen such a spectacle. Immediately, the term *descamisados* started to be used ironically in publications such as the Socialist Party newspaper, *La Vanguardia*, which mocked the events by describing the participants as "*murgas carnavalescas con sus muchachones descamisados y elementos del hampa*"[32]. Although some demonstrators were attired in jackets, the term definitely served to emphasise the uniformity of their attire, thereby representing them as a homogeneous group of impoverished individuals. The term attained further political significance when Perón reclaimed it, associating it with the French sans-culottes[33].

On 14 December, during an electoral campaign event, he encouraged his followers to wear their shirts with pride, thereby transforming the term into a symbol of Peronism. Perón itself waved his shirt like a flag, to communicate that he was the first *descamisado*[34], affirming that while "the others" may define the Peronists as shirtless riffraff, they believed it was more honourable to have their hearts in the right place under a simple shirt than beneath a fancy jacket. From that moment on, during speeches, leaders would transform these actions into rituals, and often removed their jackets to show solidarity with the *descamisados.* Eva Duarte, later Eva Perón, the leader's wife and a key symbol of her husband's movement, played an important role in all this. Indeed, she too never missed an opportunity to emphasise that all workers, regardless of their dress, could be considered *descamisado* if they identified with the people's cause. It now seems clear to what extent and how the term has become a central symbol of Peronist identity, representing the transformation and triumph of whoever felt marginalised.

[32] La Vanguardia, October 23, 1945. Cited in A. Grimson, *¿Qué Es El Peronismo?:* shirtless carnival groups and criminal elements.
[33] Grimson, *Racialidad*.
[34] Mariano Ben Plotkin, *El Día Que Se Inventó El Peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2007).

I.III Managing the Opposition

Apparently, those who felt represented by Perón's values, whatever they referred to themselves, were the majority of the voting population, because on 24 February 1946 he received 55% of the votes and his coalition won 66% of the seats in Congress and almost all of them in the Senate. Perón's candidacy was mainly supported by two groups: the Labour Party, founded on 24 October 1945 by trade union leaders who advocated nationalisation and income redistribution, and the *Junta Renovadora*, a moderate faction of the Radical Party, from which it dissociated, with political and administrative experience and a patronage network that was useful in the provinces, where the unions had little influence. Additionally, Perón garnered support from various other groups, including traditionalist provincial elites, young nationalists, and remnants of Argentine fascism. His campaign was characterised by rallies, incidents, and strikes, with a strong conviction among Perón's supporters that the country was facing a pivotal decision between populism and oligarchy, and an equally strong belief among his opponents that the choice was between democracy and fascism.

The campaign was unconsciously further intensified by Spruille Braden, the U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, and in general by his country, which was attempting to interfere in the elections with the intention of thwarting Perón. A few days before the elections, on 11 February 1946, the U.S. State Department published the "Blue Book", a report which alleged the existence of a covert national plot to dominate other Latin American countries and initiate a global conflict, in addition to the military government's connections to Nazis and Axis powers. Moreover, a significant part of the report was dedicated to various allegations against Perón for the orchestration of these plans [35]. Conversely, the latter exploited this interference to portray the election as a battle between Argentine and external enemies, represented in the

[35] Soledad Altrudi, *Of Personalities and Democratization in U.S. Public Diplomacy: The Case of the Blue Book on Argentina* (Philadelphia: USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School, 2015), https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/useruploads/u25898/BestStudentPaper2015_1.pdf.

country by the opposition party *Unión Democrática*. Therefore, using the accusations to his advantage, Perón swiftly disseminated posters across cities, urging voters to choose between him and Braden. He also published a counter-report, titled "The Blue and White Book", which referenced the colours of the Argentine flag, to present his own narrative in response to Braden's plea.

The elections were clearly an important factor of political legitimisation for Perón, allowing him to officially break away from the authoritarian regime established by the military dictatorship of 1943. After the Infamous Decade, it was indeed crucial to prove that the new populist regime had been democratically desired and elected by the people. Indeed, on multiple occasions he triumphantly declared that the days of election fraud were now over, citing past violations of the population's right to vote. From the moment he was elected, seeking to maintain and expand his support base, Perón invested considerable time and money in electoral matters: as an example, in September 1947 the law granting women the right to vote was approved. Then, the population that resided in the so-called "national territories" was granted the ability to vote as a result of a statute that altered their political status to that of provinces, marking another significant turning point. The "provincialization" happened in three stages for different parts of the country: the first ones were La Pampa and Chaco in 1951; Misiones followed in 1953; and Neuquén, Río Negro, Formosa, Chubut y Santa Cruz in 1955. Both programmes significantly increased the number of voters in Argentina and enhanced Peronism's electoral performance in subsequent election cycles.

Having demonstrated his commitment to the proper functioning of the electoral system and his concern for its legitimacy, Perón then began to implement strategies to consolidate his supremacy. Indeed, in 1948 the regime began to implement major changes, starting with electoral reform: in August he proposed a comprehensive constitutional reform plan with the declared aim of incorporating social rights into the Argentine constitution. The plan, presented

to the Chamber of Deputies on 13 August 1948, called for a Constitutional Conference with full power to revise the Constitution, without specifying which amendments would be discussed. The UCR strongly opposed the reform, arguing that this method was designed to bypass parliamentary debate and give unchecked power to the convention, potentially compromising the integrity of the republican structure of government. They believed that Perón's real intention was to expand the powers of the presidency and potentially secure an indefinite term in office. Despite these objections, the proposal was approved and Perón's disciplined party, which had the necessary majority, organised a campaign to elect representatives to the Constitutional Convention. Using his plebiscitarian appeal and a majoritarian electoral system, Perón's supporters won an overwhelming majority at the convention. The reform was then approved without significant debate or opposition.

The new Constitution, entered into force in March 1949, included a great number of social rights, in line with Perón's public justification for the reform; however, it also opened the prospect of the possibility of illimited re-elections of the President, who would now be directly elected by the people. It is important to highlight that the electoral system changed even further, passing from an incomplete lists system introduced with the Saenz Peña's law of 1912, to a winner-take-all system. Additionally, the president's powers were greatly expanded, as has often been the case with this type of reforms in history; he was given exclusive power to submit the national budget, determine the size and composition of the ministries, and exercise emergency powers without prior legislative approval[36]. Moreover, he had the power to pass laws even if they were partially vetoed. Lastly, the reform also removed Congress's pre-existing power to summon cabinet ministers and the requirement for ministers to submit annual reports to Congress. The impact of the reform was widely evident when in the 1951 election, Peronists

[36] Gabriel L. Negretto, "Constitution-Making and Institutional Design. The Transformations of Presidentialism in Argentina," *European Journal of Sociology* 40, no. 2 (November, 1999): 193 – 232, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003975600007451.

obtained 90% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Additionally, the electoral power of opposition parties was further reduced by other techniques, such as gerrymandering[37], especially in the city of Buenos Aires, between1951 and 1954. In conclusion, such a system developed clearly indicates that although the government was elected through a democratic process, an authoritarian modus operandi emerged and consolidated. What seemed to be happening, then, was a replacement of the liberal doctrine of limited government by an unlimited (but still democratically elected) one[38].

Even the judiciary, which is supposed to be the most independent organ of the State (although the extent to which Argentina's Supreme Court has ever been fully independent is always open to debate[39]), did not escape the control of Perón. When he took office as constitutional president on 4 June 1946, he delivered a speech before the Legislative Assembly, talking about justice and its interpretation, declaring that:

> *Pongo el espíritu de justicia por encima del Poder Judicial, que es requisito indispensable para la prosperidad de las naciones; pero entiendo que la justicia, además de independiente, ha de ser eficaz, y que no puede ser eficaz si sus ideas y sus conceptos no marchan al compás del sentimiento público. Muchos alaban en los tribunales de justicia su sentimiento conservador, entiendo por ello que defienden lo tradicional por el sólo hecho de serlo. Lo considero un error peligroso, tanto porque puede poner en opresión a la justicia con el sentimiento popular, cuanto porque a la larga produce un organismo anquilosado. La justicia, en sus doctrinas, ha de ser*

[37] The practice of manipulation of electoral district boundaries to favour a regime's party where it has a low voter turnout. For more information, see Walter Little, "Electoral Aspects of Peronism, 1946-1954," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 15, no. 3 (August 1973): 267–84, https://doi.org/10.2307/174967.
[38] Enrique Peruzzotti, *Peronism and the Birth of Modern Populism*, Journal of Inter-Regional studies, (Tokyo: Waseda University, 2019).
[39] Lee J. Alston and Andrés A. Gallo, "Electoral Fraud, the Rise of Peron and Demise of Checks and Balances in Argentina," *Explorations in Economic History,* 47, no. 2 (April 2007): 179 – 97, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2009.09.002.

dinámica y no estática. De otro modo se frustran los anhelos populares y se entorpece el desenvolvimiento social con graves perjuicios para las clases obreras. Estas, que son naturalmente, las menos conservadoras en el sentido usual de la palabra, al ver como se les cierran los caminos del derecho, no tienen más remedio que poner su fe en los procedimientos de la violencia[40].

Criticising the conservative nature of the judiciary, Perón hinted in a few sentences what he intended to do, seasoning the whole thing with a hymn to a power close to society, and aligned with public sentiment. Aiming therefore to avoid stifling popular will and impeding social progress, during his first months of mandate Perón lobbied for the dismissal of four out of five Supreme Court judges: Sagarna, Nazar Anchorena, Ramos Mejía y Repetto, and Juan Álvarez. Judge Tomás D. Casares, who had immediately and openly supported Perón from his victory, was the only one not to be accused. At the end of August 1946, with the support of 104 deputies and 47 members of the opposition, the Chamber of Deputies impeached the justices because of their actions during the 1930s and their aptitude to overpower the populist will. The removal of the judges was unanimously approved by the Senate and made effective in April of the following year.

It was not only in the institutional context that the opposition was silenced. In fact, Perón engineered a plan to completely overthrow the Argentine media sector and put it at his disposal. To better understand the issue, it must be remembered that as soon as he began to be known, the leader had all the media against him, except for *La Época*, the newspaper that at that time represented the population of the 17th of October mobilisation. His disadvantage was made clear also when during the electoral campaign for the 1946 elections, almost no national media made room in their pages for the Peronist political activities, preferring reporting on *Unión*

[40] Ignacio Cloppet, *Los Avances Del Peronismo Sobre La Corte Suprema*, August 10, 2020, https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2020/08/10/los-avances-del-peronismo-sobre-la-corte-suprema/.

Democrática's political news, and even when it did so, it was to focus on scandals or defections within the Peronist movement.[41]

In this context, alternative voices in the media were subjected to a series of repressive measures as soon as Perón had the power to do it: the government took over the distribution of newspapers and exerted various forms of pressure on journalists and opposition media. This happened simultaneously with a financial crisis in the newspaper industry, exacerbated by the war's impact on newsprint supplies and Peronist policies that increased labour costs, and with the emersion of a Peronist loyal media apparatus, strongly consolidated in five years. The Journalists' Statute of 1944 laid the groundwork for these changes, placing the Argentine newspaper industry on a new legal footing and asserting that the commercial aspects of the press were a constant threat to its cultural and informational mission. It was also during this period that an increasingly large section of Argentine society, previously unrepresented in the media, found its voice through Perón's efforts. Undoubtedly, it can be affirmed that the consolidation of Perón's power over the media was boosted by the 1949 reform. Indeed, the need to maintain morality and public order could be used to justify this new Constitution, which increased government control over the press. Finally, with the law on his side, Perón's grip was reinforced and allowed him to stifle criticism and control the public narrative with the media empire that he built in a few years[42].

Hence, State-sponsored media started to launch a relentless propaganda campaign to undermine the opposition and alternative media and reshape the media landscape, in even easier ways after the elections of 1946 thanks to the utilization of state resources and of the influence gained. Some of the opposition newspapers were totally acquired, such as *Democracia*, *El Laborista*, *Noticias Gráficas*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, and *Crítica*, as well as several regional

[41] Mirta Varela, "Le Péronisme et Les Médias: Contrôle Politique, Industrie Nationale et Goût Populaire", *Le Temps Des Médias* 7, no. 2 (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2006): 48, https://doi.org/10.3917/tdm.007.0048.
[42] James Cane, "The Die Is Cast," in *The Fourth Enemy: Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955.* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

papers. A particular fate befell *La Prensa*, the opposition newspaper par excellence: it was firstly charged with tax evasion and instigating riots, and then sold to the CGT (the now largest Argentina's labour union) in 1951. After the CGT took control of the journal, it ceased to be a critical voice and began to function as a platform for Peronist propaganda, and this is easily noticeable simply by reading the title of the first number of the journal under its new administration "[…] because of the decision taken by five million workers, *La Prensa* is today resuming its activities". Clearly, this case has become emblematic, being *La Prensa* one of the most influential newspapers of the opposition.

As Cane discusses in his book, which addresses the role that the major commercial newspaper media played in the movement's evolution, by 1950, it was evident that the unstructured pluralism of early Peronism was evolving into more ritualised forms of political engagement. These were supported by the bureaucratic and formulaic endorsement of Perón, Eva Perón, and the Peronist state via the quasi-official media apparatus. Despite assertions to the contrary, Perón and his associates had effectively established a highly regulated media business, intending to foster a consensus rather than providing a platform for the expression of public opinion[43].

I.IV The destiny of a body: Eva's death.

To better understand the various divisive elements within the Peronist regime, here it will be examine one of the most symbolic and powerful events of that years: the death of Eva Perón; the loss of Evita. There are two reasons for this choice. Firstly, it is purely logical and chronological: although she was a fundamental pillar in the life of the regime, it will be seen how her death was equally important in the nation's history. Secondly, it was deemed

[43] Cane, op. cit.

appropriate to leave space for what is arguably the most remembered and/or discussed element of Peronism today, decades after the events took place.

On July 26, 1952, Eva Duarte de Perón[44], passed away because of cervical cancer at the age of 33. National mourning was declared for one month and it was made possible for anyone wishing to pay a last farewell to Eva for 15 days to go to the mortuary chapel, as so many people wanted to see their *Santa Evita* for the last time[45]. The funerals went down in the history of the country as either one of the most touching or one of the kitschiest moments of Argentine social history, as Zanatta cleverly affirms[46]. The huge celebration was not only due to the fact that she was the President's wife, but because of the powerful symbol of social justice that she had become for the working class in a few years. Effectively, she advanced their interests by leveraging her influential role as First Lady[47]. One of her most notable achievements is the establishment of the *Fundación Eva Perón*, which provided significant assistance to underprivileged communities in need of shelter, healthcare, and education, also furnishing food and clothing, and constructing schools, hospitals, and senior housing. Through her passionate advocacy, she strengthened the relationship between the Peronist government and the labour movement, and solidified her reputation as a defender of the working class. Evita was also a staunch advocate for women's rights: indeed, she played a pivotal role in the 1947 Argentine law that granted women the right to vote; plus, she fought to further integrate women into politics, forming the Female Peronist Party. The importance of her figure was acknowledged

[44] Born into a humble family in a small Argentine village, she moved to the capital at the age of 15 with the aspiration of becoming an actress, where she eventually succeeded in radio. During a charity event for the victims of the 1944 earthquake, Evita met the man who would become her husband a year later. She rapidly ascended to a prominent position in her husband's presidency, becoming as popular as Perón. Indeed, Evita was regarded as a symbol of hope by the less fortunate due to their shared background. Perón was known to confide in her, discuss issues with her, and sought her support and that of her allies from the outset of his presidency. This was likely due to his recognition of the influence his wife could exert over his supporters. For more information, see Jill Hedges, *Evita: The Life of Eva Perón* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021); Loris Zanatta, *Eva Perón, una biografia politica* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009), 52 – 56.

[45] Felipe Pigna, *Evita. Jirones de Su Vida* (Madrid: Grupo Planeta Spain, 2012): 304–6.

[46] Zanatta, *Eva Perón,* 17.

[47] Paula Biglieri, "Peronism and Its Legacy*"*, in *Research Handbook on Populism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024): 85 - 6.

by everyone, even by opposition newspapers such as *La Naciòn*, which, on the day following her death, recognised that "*Conmueve hoy profundamente al país la muerte de Eva Perón […] Y mientras la inmensa masa de sus partidarios la llora, su alejamiento definitivo no puede dejar indiferente al resto de la sociedad, tan amplio lugar ha ocupado ella en la existencia argentina de los tiempos recientes*"[48].

Hence, it seems understandable that the death of the woman known as *la Jefa Espiritual de la Nación*[49], announced on the radio through a communiqué, gathered more than 2 million people in the streets to attend the funeral, and her body was later displayed in a glass coffin at the CGT headquarters in Buenos Aires. Perón wanted his wife's mummified body to be in a monumental Memorial to the *Descamisado*, in honour of Evita's strong bond with the working class, but the project was never brought to completion and her remains were held at the CGT, where she was basically worshipped. With the coup d'état of 16 September 1955 to depose Perón, the military regime, firstly guided by General Eduardo Lonardi and then by Pedro Eugenio Aramburu[50], initiated a campaign of "de-Peronization", aiming to erase all traces of Peronism from Argentine society. Evita was probably one of the most persistent ones: for this reason, her body was stolen from the CGT, and for many years its location remained a secret. The most plausible reason for this action was the fear that the supporters of Peronism would try to steal it and use it to foment revolutions all over the country. Historian Felipe Pigna claims that Aramburu wanted to give the corpse a "Christian burial" in a location that would not draw too much notice, through the army's secret agency. But an ardent opponent of Perón, Carlos Moori Koeing, the chief of the Army Intelligence Service (SIE), defied orders by trying to

[48] La Nación, July 27, 1952: "The death of Eva Perón deeply moves the country today [...] And while the immense mass of her supporters mourn her, her definitive departure cannot leave indifferent the rest of society, so large a place has she occupied in Argentine existence in recent times."
[49] The spiritual leader of the nation is one of the most popular nicknames attributed to Eva Perón.
[50] His attempt at a more moderate and conciliatory approach to Perón's supporters, adopting the motto "ni vencedores ni vencidos", was frowned upon by many of his military colleagues and he was forced to resign. He was replaced by Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, another army general, who pushed for the de-Peronisation process.

conceal the body of Evita in several locations throughout Buenos Aires before bringing it to his office. Subsequent reports affirmed that Moori had become literally obsessed with her body[51].

When the theft was made public in 1957, a multitude of hypotheses arose concerning its nature and the potential destinations of the body. The truth is that with the help of the Catholic Church, the "operation transfer" was implemented and the body was brought to Italy. Upon the arrival of Perón's body by ship in Genoa in April 1957, it was registered under the false name of Maria Maggi de Magistris, an Argentine widow believed to be of Italian descent. Following this, the remains were relocated to Milan, where they stayed for the following fourteen years. Meanwhile, hypotheses about the place of the body were the catalyst for journalistic and artistic initiatives in Argentina throughout the 1960s and 1970s: examples are the countless investigative articles, books such as Tomás Eloy Martínez's "Santa Evita"[52], based on his earlier articles on the case, and film productions such as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's 1968 film "The Hour of the Furnaces"[53]. Despite not being solely focused on Eva, it made frequent allusions to *la Jefa* and used her legacy and likeness to symbolise resistance and national pride. Additionally, the event of the stolen body provoked the ire of the *Montoneros*, a left-wing Peronist political-military organisation which, after having been incubating anger and the desire for revenge for so many years, in May 1970 abducted Aramburu and subjected him to a revolutionary court-martial, ultimately executing him as an act of revenge for crimes committed against the Peronists during the period of de-Peronization, first and foremost the desecration of Evita's body[54]. After this event, General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, the army's strongman, and the advocate of the *Gran Acuerdo Nacional*[55], installed himself into the *Casa*

[51] Pigna, *op. cit*, 324 - 9.
[52] Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita*, (New York: Knopf, 1995).
[53] *La Hora de Los Hornos* (Argentina: Grupo Cine Liberación, Solanas Productions, 1968).
[54] Laura Ehrlich and Sandra Gayol, *Las Vidas Post Mortem de Eva Perón: Cuerpo, Ausencia Y Biografías En Las Revistas de Masas de Argentina*, *Historia Crítica*, no. 70 (October 2018): 111–31, https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit70.2018.06.
[55] The Great National Accord was a carefully coordinated shift to democracy that encompassed elections and a new constitution. But the strategy failed and Perón returned to power in the 1973 elections.

Rosada. Lanusse himself admitted that the disappearance of Eva's body was one of the Revolution's lowest moments, albeit pointing out that the body was removed not only to protect it from public heat, but also from public wrath[56]. Therefore, Argentina's new de facto president initiated negotiations with Perón, who was in exile in Spain, for the return of the corpse of his ex-wife: this led to the exhumation of her remains from the cemetery in Milan and to the transfer to Spain. Lastly, in 1974 Eva Perón finally returned to her land, thanks to the order of Perón's successor and new wife, Isabel Perón, and was interred in the Duarte family tomb in the Reolecta Cemetry of Buenos Aires.

It is worth analysing this mysterious story from two points of view: firstly, from that of the anti-Peronist regime; and secondly, from that of the population attached to the *Abanderada de los Humildes*[57]. To begin with, it is acknowledged that, historically, Argentine politics has been characterised by a considerable degree of controversy and intrigue. However, it is not a common occurrence for the remains of a political opponent to be stolen and kept hidden for over a decade. This is a clear indication of the extent to which the militants of the *Revolución Libertadora* were fearful of any indication of approval for the previous regime. This was demonstrated by many actions taken, such as the demolition of the presidential residence at the corner of Austria and *Libertador*, known as the *Palacio Unzué*, to prevent it from becoming a Peronist pilgrimage site; the same fate befell Eva's former home on Teodoro García Street. Additionally, the last dream of *la Jefa* was the construction of the most well-equipped and largest children's hospital in South America, which began on a 94,000-hectare plot in the *La Paternal* neighbourhood, on Warnes Street. The "liberators", seeing it as a potential monument to Evita's work, decided to halt it. Lastly, the Decree-Law 4161 of March 9, 1956, represented probably the extremes of the situation: mentioning Perón or Evita, using terms like "Peronism",

[56] Alejandro Agustín Lanusse, *Mi Testimonio*, (Buenos Aires: Lasserre Editores,1977): 247.
[57] The Standard-Bearer of the Humble, another nickname which highlighted the strong bond she had with the working class and the humblest people.

"Peronist", "Justicialism", "Justicialist", "third position", or even the abbreviation "P.P[58]", possessing any "photograph, portrait or sculpture of Peronist officials or their relatives", or any symbol of Peronism, were all deemed crimes, punishable by prison terms ranging from thirty days to six years[59]. In a context where a photograph was considered dangerous, one might reasonably conclude that a body would be perceived as even more dangerous according to the *Libertadores*.

These reflections bring the discussion to its second and final point: regardless of one's political affiliation, there was a consensus that Eva Perón's contributions to Argentinean history were significant upon her passing. A dead body that was as much a topic of conversation as a living one was undoubtedly a sign that Evita had entered the collective memory of at least half the country. This has been demonstrated, as has already been mentioned, by the extensive body of literature and all the art forms that have paid homage to her from that time to the present day. Nowadays, a wide range of academic disciplines, from gender studies and Latin American cultural studies to political science and history, have studied her life and legacy in great detail. Furthermore, to mark the 60th anniversary of her death, twenty million copies of a 100 *peso* banknote featuring her portrait were printed in Argentina. Seventy years later, in 2022, Martínez's novel *Santa Evita* has been transformed into a television series. Her life narrative is still a potent illustration of her lasting impact on Argentina and its people.

The end of this initial chapter invites some concluding reflections. Firstly, it has been demonstrated that Perón "fit" perfectly in that historical context of Argentina. While it is accurate to conclude that the social, political, and economic circumstances in the country were instrumental in his ascent, it would be erroneous to suggest that Argentina would have continued a similar trajectory with an alternative leader. Indeed, Perón's charisma and rhetoric

[58] *Partido Peronista*
[59] Pigna, *op. cit.*, 324 - 9.

served to bridge what Ocampo defined "frustration gap"[60] within Argentine society, making the working class feel for the first time valuable and above all, emotionally involved. Secondly, it was noted that the more Perón established himself, the more a real movement was being created, the Peronist movement, with which people either proudly identified or distanced themselves with revulsion. It would be naive to assume that these developments occurred by mere chance. The introduction of new rituals, the manner of interacting with the public, and the portrayal and subsequent treatment of those perceived as "the others" were all techniques refined by Perón's populist regime with the explicit intention of widening the *grieta* between the two sides. Thirdly, this extremization of the issue was further confirmed by the aftermath of Evita's death, which plunged the country into a situation of chaos and insecurity.

The period just analysed marks the beginning of a history of division that endures to the present day, aggravated by a dictatorship that profoundly destabilised Argentina from the middle of the 1970s onwards.

[60] Ocampo, "What kind of Populism is Peronism?".

Chapter II

The rise and fall of the Dictatorship (1973 – 1990)

The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory.
Destroy its books, its culture, its history.
Then have someone write new books,
manufacture a new culture, invent a new history.
Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was.

(Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting)

The Argentine democratic breakdown of 1976 is a highly illustrative moment of a persistent and enduring fracture in the political landscape, characterised by a climate of uncertainty and pervasive tension. This story is certainly peculiar, because although there were a multitude of circumstances that collectively contributed to the culmination of events now widely known, Argentina had just as many elements that could have worked in its favour, allowing democracy to endure. For example, during the 1970s, not only the country had the highest literacy rate in Latin America[1], but as Adam Przeworski et al. note, no democracy had collapsed with a GDP per capita higher than Argentina's in 1975[2]. Furthermore, the Peronists and the Radicals were progressing towards a path of reconciliation, characterised by the Radicals' acceptance of the Peronists as legitimate participants in the elections. This contributed to the stabilisation of the democratic process, which was further legitimised by the 1973 electoral victory. Additionally,

[1] Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 4.
[2] Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development : Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 97.

even many business groups, which had supported the previous dictatorship, appeared to be amenable to accepting democracy.

Then something broke, and events precipitated. The increasing violence from both left-wing guerrillas and right-wing death squads fueled a sense of chaos and instability, which undermined the democratic institutions, making it easier for military leaders to justify their takeover, which was called "*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*"[3], in the name of restoring order. This period represents a critical transitional momentum in Argentine history, as the events of the decade, such as the *Proceso* and its human rights violations, the emergence of opposition movements and the trial of the officers, laid the groundwork for the political and social dynamics that would emerge in the 2000s, years in which the country continued to navigate the complexities of its past while striving for a more unified future.

II.I The Gentlemen's coup

From the *Revolución Libertadora* until 1973, and consequently, during Perón's exile in Spain, Argentina was characterised by a persistent alternation between democratic governments and military regimes; the re-establishment of democracy in the country was not achieved until 1973. This was brought about by the election of Héctor Cámpora, a centre-left Peronist candidate, which resulted in the establishment of Argentina's fifth democratic regime of the 20th century. The long-awaited return of a "stable" government did not, however, correspond to a moment of stability for the country, which was far from at peace. It is evident that the prevailing atmosphere of pervasive political unrest across the majority of Latin America, coupled with the winds of the Cold War and the subsequent involvement of the United States (more or less extensive, as in this case) in the internal affairs of South American countries with the objective of eradicating any trace of communism, must be taken into account. Nevertheless, as Marguerite

[3] National reorganization process.

Feitlowitz asserts, Argentina has been particularly prone to self-destruction[4]. At that time, Peronism was experiencing a significant level of diversification: effectively, the heterogeneity of the *descamisados* during his first mandates, as analysed in the previous chapter, was amplified, and led to such a fragmentation of support for Peronism in the period before the *Proceso* that its most extreme and radical factions came into conflict[5].

To begin with, it must be pointed out that the last period of military dictatorships bequeathed the short-lived Cámpora's regime (from May to July 1973) a powerful emergence of revolutionary leftists: the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR), a Marxist-Leninist group that merged with the *Montoneros* in 1973, the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), a guerrilla group with revolutionary and Marxist objectives and not strictly Peronist, and the already known *Montoneros,* were among the most numerous groups, as well as the *Juventud Peronista*, from which the group of the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP) was born. The violence perpetrated against Aramburu, as previously outlined, was merely one episode among numerous similar acts carried out by the *Montoneros* armed group and numerous others throughout the years preceding Videla's dictatorship[6].

Despite the pressure and the circumstances, Perón initially openly declined to disavow the armed revolutionary left in 1972, but within two years he felt that the guerrilla groups of the extreme left had crossed the line, and as assassinations increased instead of decreasing, even eliminating important figures from Perón's entourage such as CGT General Secretary José Rucci. At that point the returned leader's approach changed completely, leading him to

[4] Feitlowitz*, op.cit.*, 4. Moreover, according to Mainwaring and as it will be demonstrated, the collapse of Argentina's democratic structures was not so much due to "purposeful machinations of leaders" as in many countries, but more to a "widespread sense of a power vacuum". For more information, see Scott Mainwaring, "Democratic Breakdown in Argentina, 1976," in *When Democracy Breaks: Studies in Democratic Erosion and Collapse, from Ancient Athens to the Present Day* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 254, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197760789.003.0009.

[5] For more information on the victims and the actions committed by both the extreme right and the extreme left, see Juan Bautista Yofre, *1976. La Conspiración* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2016): 20 – 37.

[6] Aldo Marchesi, "La Partida Decisiva de La Revolución En América Latina"," in *Hacer La Revolución: Guerrillas Latinoamericanas, de Los Años Sesenta a La Caída Del Muro* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2019): 139 – 189; Leslie Bethell, *Argentina since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 314 – 27.

denounce the ERP, defined as "criminal terrorists"[7], in January 1974, and the *Montoneros* during the Labour Day on May 1 of the same year in *Plaza de Mayo*.

Nevertheless, an analysis of this tumultuous period would be incomplete without consideration of the other side of the coin which precipitated the descent of Argentina into complete anarchy during the early 1970s. Indeed, it is worth understanding that the radicalisation of the left resulted in the concomitant development of right-wing extremism. The most notable example is the formation of the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina's* death squads (AAA or Triple A), subsidised by the state and coordinated by José López Rega, an important character of the period analysed since he served as First Perón's Private Secretary for a brief period during his presidency until his death (from October 1973 to July 1974), and he then assumed the role of Minister of Social Welfare under María Estela Isabel Martinez de Perón, Perón's third wife. Defined as "Rasputin" or "*el brujo*"[8], he provided support to the radical right in their opposition to their adversaries, employing a range of legal (and not) strategies. As for the former, during the presidency of Isabel Perón, a series of measures were enacted[9] that effectively reverted Argentina to an authoritarian system[10]. As an example, in September 1974, Congress approved a national security law which significantly simplified the procedures for detaining individuals and prohibiting strikes, intervening in trade unions, and restricted freedom of the press.

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[7] Liliana De Riz, "De la movilización popular al aniquilamiento (1973– 1976)," *in Argentina: 1976: Estudios en torno al golpe de estado,* (México City: El Colegio de México, 2007): 41.

[8] Rega's interest in the practice of astrology, occultism, and spiritualism led to the development of this nickname. It was said that he consolidated his authority within the government and influenced political decisions by using his expertise of astrology and occultism. In fact, the term captured the general public's and other politicians' impression that López Rega had a mystical or nearly magical effect over President Isabel Perón, which made many view him as a cunning and deceitful person. For more information, see María Sáenz Quesada, *La Primera Presidente* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2016): 86 – 88.

[9] Adam Scharpf, "Ideology and State Terror: How Officer Beliefs Shaped Repression during Argentina's "Dirty War,"" *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 2 (2018): 206–21, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48596166.

[10] Mara Loveman, "High-Risk Collective Action: Defending Human Rights in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina," *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 2 (September 1998): 477–525, https://doi.org/10.1086/210045.

The declaration of a state of siege in November 1974, following the assassination of Alberto Villar, a pivotal figure in the AAA, facilitated the freedom to act as Isabel Perón and Rega saw fit. As is widely acknowledged, the declaration of a state of emergency allows for the suspension of constitutional guarantees at various levels: this is precisely what occurred in Argentina during the autumn of that year, further implementing the actions allowed by the national security law. Additionally, several provinces were subjected to military intervention, specifically those where the ERP had most followers. These were Catamarca and Tucumán, the latter of which was subjected to military intervention twice. There, with the second operation in 1975, remembered as *Operativo Independencia*, the first detention centre was constructed, becoming a symbol of the prelude to what was to happen the following year[11].

Regarding non-legal actions, right-wing radicals engaged in activities that were not less extreme than those of their opponents. A case in point is the Ezeiza massacre, which occurred on 20 June 1973, when right-wing extremist forces stationed at the airport with rifles opened fire on Peronist leftists who had gathered to welcome the return of Perón from exile in Spain[12]. Although the massacre, which resulted in the death of 16 individuals and injuries to hundreds more, cannot be attributed to the AAA (which was established shortly thereafter), it would nonetheless be unsurprising, at this point of the analysis, to discover that it was orchestrated by López Rega.

In a nutshell, the rivalry between the Peronists of the far-right and those of the far-left had led the country into a real guerrilla war characterised by murders, kidnappings, and theft on both sides[13], on the verge of civil war. María José Moyano's analysis and Scott

[11] Quesada, *op.cit*., 295 – 7.
[12] Marina Franco, " La "Seguridad Nacional" Como Política Estatal En La Argentina de Los Años Setenta," *Antítesis* 2, no. 4 (2009): 865.
[13] Scott Mainwaring, "Democratic Breakdown in Argentina, 1976," in *When Democracy Breaks: Studies in Democratic Erosion and Collapse, from Ancient Athens to the Present Day* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 237–76, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197760789.003.0009.

Mainwaring's subsequent readjustment of the tables have enabled the calculation of the number of crimes committed during a period of what was expected to be democratic stability.

	GUERRILLA OPERATIONS	COLLECTIVE VIOLENT PROTESTS	RIGHT-WING VIOLENCE	TOTAL
THEFT OF ARMS	107	-	-	107
ATTACKS ON PROPERTY	251	75	64	390
SEIZURES OF BUILDINGS	143	265	37	445
BOMBINGS	812	129	264	1205
KIDNAPPINGS	140	49	458	647
HIJACKINGS	1	-	-	1
DEATHS	481	42	1165	1688
TOTAL	1935	560	1988	4483

Source: María José Moyano, Argentina's Lost Patrol : Armed Struggle, 1969-1979 *(New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1995), 56, 78, 81 – 2; readapted by Mainwaring, op.cit,, 258; edited by the author.*

These numbers are significant because they demonstrate that, despite not being comparable to the levels of violence and terror that were perpetrated during the following dictatorship, the murders, kidnappings and generalised atmosphere of fear that characterised the period analysed were not exclusive to the *Proceso*, but rather were present prior to it. In this context, the bourgeoisie began to employ the services of bodyguards to ensure their personal safety, while businesses funded both factions to avoid any potential for conflict.

Social disorder was not the only problem facing Argentina: the economy was also going through a period of great instability. Despite the initial successes of the Social Pact promoted by Cámpora, which sought to stabilise the economy through wage increases and price freezes, inflation and wage pressures made the plan unsustainable in the long run. In addition, the oil

crisis of 1973-1974[14] aggravated the situation, leading to a deterioration in the terms of trade and a growing budget deficit, which could not be remedied by incoherent economic policies and state intervention: on the contrary, hyperinflation and economic disorder only increased[15].

Considering the prevailing circumstances, it was evident that the population was not satisfied with the way the brief governments, and above all that of Isabel Perón, were addressing the situation. Indeed, it was perceived that her administration was characterised by "*caos primordial*", which rendered it such an unsuitable regime that any alternative would have been a preferable option for Argentina[16]. For this reason, there were several attempts to remove her from power from 1975 onwards. It is not difficult to envisage that a state which has become accustomed to resorting to strong-arm tactics – and therefore coups d'état and military juntas' governments – whenever something proves ineffective, may be more inclined at that moment to consider a further change of regime.

By the time of Videla's coup, democracy was supported by only one significant political party, the centrist Radicals (UCR), which constituted the main opposition group. However, the UCR had, at that time, a relatively weak position, and subsequently declined in influence. As regards the rest, the maintenance of the democratic state appeared to have lost the support it

[14] The 1973-1974 oil crisis had a huge impact in global history. It began in October 1973 when member states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an oil embargo against nations that had supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War, resulting in a drastic reduction in oil supplies and a substantial increase in global oil prices. Additionally, using energy as a political weapon to exert pressure on western countries, the crisis led to a shake-up of the geopolitical balance of power and, at the same time, encouraged greater international cooperation on energy security policies. For more information, see Giuliano Garavini, *Rise and Fall of Opec in the Twentieth Century.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 216 – 247; Kyu Lee, "The 1973 Oil Crisis: Three Crises in One—and the Lessons for Today," Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University SIPA | CGEP, October 16, 2023, https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/publications/the-1973-oil-crisis-three-crises-in-one-and-the-lessons-for-today/.

[15] For more information on the Social Pact and its consequences, see Robert Ayres, "The 'Social Pact' as Anti-Inflationary Policy: The Argentine Experience since 1973," *World Politics* 28, no. 4 (July 1976): 473–501, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010064.

[16] Guillermo O'Donnell, "La Cosecha Del Miedo," (México: Nexos 61, 1983): 51–60; Hugo Vezzetti, "Memoria E Imaginación Histórica: Usos de La Figura Del Genocidio ," Alternativas - revista de estudios culturales latinoamericanos (Center for Latin American Studies, 2021), https://alternativas.osu.edu/es/issues/autumn-5-2015/essays/vezzetti.html. As the latter author explains in this article, O'Donnell, an Argentine political scientist, was neither pleased nor an advocate of Videla's regime. However, in his article, he highlights that the previous autarkic situation had become unsustainable for the population.

once enjoyed. The other significant actors were either opposed to democracy (such as the aforementioned forces) or apathetic and acquiescent towards it (including the majority of the Peronist Party, and initially several business groups and leaders)[17]. Understandably, as Mainwaring observes, if the major actors are either antagonistic or uninterested in democracy's survival, it will be extremely challenging for it to endure[18]. This was partly due to the fact that Peronism had become so fractured that even Perón, before his passing, was unable to maintain cohesion among his supporters. In fact, after breaking with the *Montoneros*, he clearly lost the support of the extreme left; he subsequently endorsed Rega's actions, thereby becoming complicit in the activities of the AAA. With Isabel, the situation did not improve because no one was pleased with her actions: the radical right and military, eager for power, were dissatisfied with her policies, as were the left and centre. Moreover, her actions, sometimes in support of the working class, sometimes against it, were increasingly inconsistent, and this led to a virtual vacuum of support around her[19]. Her entire entourage, starting with the ministers, tried to make her understand what was about to happen and suggested alternative ways of escaping the tragedy, such as negotiating with the trade union leaders or the commanders of the armed forces. But, as Paul Lewis pointed out, "it was too late – and besides, they didn't believe her."[20]

In such an atmosphere of intolerance, on the night of 23 March 1976, the Argentine military initiated a strategic mobilisation, seizing control of key infrastructures and detaining prominent political figures, including President Isabel Perón, who was placed under house arrest. The country was informed of the appointment of the new administration at approximately

[17] Daniela Padoan, *Le Pazze. Un Incontro Con Le Madri Di Plaza de Mayo* (Milano: Bompiani, 2019): 53; Mainwaring, *op.cit*., 265
[18] Mainwaring, *op.cit*., 265.
[19] Mainwaring, *op.cit*., 239.
[20] Paul Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals. The "Dirty War" in Argentina* (Westport: Praeger, 2002): 127.

3:00 A.M. by the junta, constituted by General Rafael Videla (chief of the army), Admiral Emilio Massera (chief of the navy), and Brigadier Orlando Agosti (chief of the air forces)[21].

In the night, further communiqués were released, warning against the following: the use of private aircraft or boats without authorisation; strikes; anti-government posters or propaganda; and street demonstrations. By the morning of the day after, the military had declared a state of siege, dissolved political parties and assumed control of the government with General Videla as president; then the junta proceeded to close all banks and freeze all accounts at the earliest opportunity, and the stock exchange was closed. The premises were taken over by military personnel, who proceeded to declare the dissolution of Congress. The federal government's departments, the labour unions, the province and local administrations, and the CGT and *Confederación General Económica* (CGE) were all taken over by intervenors. Notable Peronists such as Lorenzo Miguel, Juan Manuel Abal Medina, Raúl Lastiri, Julio Broner, Julio González, and all current and former cabinet ministers of Isabel Perón were detained. As former President Cámpora sought refuge at the Mexican Embassy, so too were other former governors who espoused Peronist beliefs[22]. It often happens that during dictatorships, Montesquieu's theory of the division of powers is set aside: the dictatorship of the juntas was no exception, and what was created was a single "poder ejecutivo-legislativo-constituyente"[23] wherein the judiciary, which is traditionally regarded as the most effective check on absolutism and the protector of individuals, was entirely dismissed and reconstructed,

[21] These Argentine officers, along with numerous other figures from subsequent military dictatorships, shared a common background at the U.S. Army "School of the Americas" (SOA), originally situated in the Panama Canal Zone and founded in 1946. The school's objective was to equip military and security personnel from Latin American countries with the requisite skills and expertise. The SOA played a pivotal role in fostering anti-communist networks among the future leaders of authoritarian regimes in countries, such as Chile (with General Augusto Pinochet) and Panama (with General Manuel Antonio Noriega). For more information, see Ariel Carlos Armony, "Producing and Exporting State Terror. The Case of Argentina," in *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005): 312 – 3.
[22] Lewis, *op.cit*, 127.
[23] "executive-legislative-constituent power". Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *Nunca Más: Informe de La Comisión Nacional Sobre La Desaparición de Personas*, (1984): 508– 9.

with the inclusion of individuals who were first required to swear allegiance to the junta and its objectives.

The self-proclaimed "*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*" announced on the same day of the coup:

> *Llega a su término una situación que agravia a la Nación y compromete su futuro. Nuestro pueblo ha sufrido una nueva frustración. Frente a un tremendo vacío de poder, capaz de sumirnos en la disolución y la anarquía, a la falta de capacidad de convocatoria que ha demostrado el gobierno nacional, a las reiteradas y sucesivas contradicciones demostradas en las medidas de toda índole, a la falta de una estrategia global que, conducida por el poder político, enfrentara a la subversión, a la carencia de soluciones para el país, cuya resultante ha sido el incremento permanente de todos los exterminios, a la ausencia total de los ejemplos éticos y morales que deben dar quienes ejercen la conducción del Estado, a la manifiesta irresponsabilidad en el manejo de la economía que ocasionara el agotamiento del aparato productivo, a la especulación y corrupción generalizadas, todo lo cual se traduce en una irreparable pérdida del sentido de grandeza y de fe, las Fuerzas Armadas, en cumplimiento de una obligación irrenunciable, han asumido la conducción del Estado. Una obligación que surge de serenas meditaciones sobre las consecuencias irreparables que podía tener sobre el destino de la Nación, una actitud distinta a la adoptada*[24].

[24] Jorge Rafael Videla, Emilio Massera, and Orlando Agosti, "Proclama del 24 de marzo de 1976": "A situation that offends the Nation and compromises its future comes to an end. Our people have suffered a new frustration. Faced with a tremendous power vacuum, capable of plunging us into dissolution and anarchy, with the lack of convening capacity demonstrated by the national government, with the repeated and successive contradictions shown in measures of all kinds, with the lack of a global strategy that, led by the political power, would confront subversion, with the lack of solutions for the country, the result of which has been the permanent increase of all exterminations, with the total absence of the ethical and moral examples that should be given by those who lead the State, to the total absence of ethical and moral examples that must be set by those who exercise the leadership of the State, to the manifest irresponsibility in the management of the economy that caused the depletion of the productive apparatus, to the widespread speculation and corruption, all of which translates into an irreparable loss

It is crucial to elucidate how the newly established military government presented itself to the public. The organisation in question, as it can be ascertained from the proclamation, sought to re-establish order within the Argentinean state. This entailed the cessation of the country's prevailing frustrations, speculation and corruption, and the re-establishment of stability and an ethic of action within the government. Jorge Luis Borges, a renowned Argentine writer of the period, who was similarly disillusioned with the turbulences within his homeland, promptly asserted that the military junta was, in fact, a government of gentlemen. This led to the coup being subsequently labelled "*El golpe de los Caballeros*"[25]. However, the gentlemen initially omitted to say in their statements that they would have launched a campaign of repression against perceived opponents, marking the commencement of a brutal dictatorship.

II.II A silent repression: The Dirty War

From the inception of the new dictatorship, the military junta started an operation of repression towards anyone arbitrarily defined as a potential subversive enemy, which would last until 1983, and that is today historically documented as *Guerra sucia*[26]. As Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde[27], Argentina started to have a double track action: officially acting in "the highest interests of the nation"[28], although the constitution was not officially abolished, a permanent state of emergency was declared. Assuming that a state of emergency was deemed to be constitutionally

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of the sense of greatness and faith, the Armed Forces, in compliance with an unrenounceable obligation, have assumed the leadership of the State. An obligation that arises from serene meditations on the irreparable consequences that a different attitude than the one adopted could have on the destiny of the Nation." Available at: https://elhistoriador.com.ar/proclama-del-24-de-marzo-de-1976/

[25] Borges gave this definition to the coup during an official lunch with Videla in the summer of 1976. Additionally, he will reconfirm his support to the junta in the prologue of his book of poems, *La Moneda de Hierro,* published that same year. He only openly opposed the regime later, when he realized what it was doing to the people. For more information, see Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 7; Jorge Luis Borges, *La Moneda de Hierro* (Buenos Aires: Emecé editores, 1976).

[26] Dirty War.

[27] In a journalistic column called "Secret Argentina," James Neilson compared the country to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. For more information, see Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., *17* – 8.

[28] Speech by General Jorge Rafael Videla (Buenos Aires, April 5, 1976) cited in Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, *The Politics of Antipolitics : The Military in Latin America* (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 1978): 162.

valid, any civilized nation of the time provided, both in its Constitution and in charters and international agreements it had signed, for the respect of certain constitutional guarantees, such as the right to life and the integrity of the person, even and especially in abnormal times. However, no guarantee was respected, and soon people started to disappear.

As precisely the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (CONADEP)[29] describes, the choice of the victims was made in a "semantic delirium"[30], given the random manner in which people were picked. The individuals in question included sensitive youths who had visited shantytowns intending to assist the residents, as well as Marxists or Leninists, nonpartisans, materialists, and atheists. "Subversives" were also the "enemies of Western and Christian values[31]" and individuals who desired a social revolution. All of them, including trade

[29] The National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons was established on 15 December 1983 by Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín, in the immediate aftermath of the return to democracy in Argentina. The Commission was composed of legal experts, human rights and academic representatives, and journalists and writers, chaired by the renowned Argentine intellectual Ernesto Sabato. The Commission was established with the objective of investigating instances of enforced disappearance that had occurred during the period of military dictatorship, and of collating testimony and evidence pertaining to cases of individuals who had been forcibly disappeared. The Commission's work was concluded with the publication of the report "Nunca Más" in 1984. This document provided a comprehensive account of the atrocities perpetrated by the regime and constituted the basis for legal proceedings against those who had been responsible for violations of human rights. For more information, see p.27.

[30] Sandra Mcgee Deutsch, Ronald Dolkart, and Sandra McGee Deutsch, *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: Sr Books, 1994): 1.

[31] It was not uncommon for the military junta to make references to Christian values in their rhetoric. Certainly, at the inception of the dictatorship, the Church had welcomed the regime, taking into account the pervasive perception of an imminent "communist threat" throughout the Latin American region. This was corroborated by the fact that, on the day of the coup, Adolfo Tortolo, Archbishop of Paraná, convened with the junta and that same day exhorted his fellow citizens to collaborate "in a positive way" with the military government. Thus, the military junta lost no opportunity to emphasize its mutual support for the Church and its values. It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest that the Church's stance on the regime was unanimous. For example, bishops and cardinals expressed approval of the military government, while other segments, including priests and the closest to the poor, openly opposed the regime, denouncing human rights violations. Notably, Jesuits Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics were abducted in May 1976 and subjected to torture by the regime. This prompted the Vatican to intervene at the end of October that year to halt the situation. The circumstances surrounding this affair have always remained shrouded in mystery, because as the two Jesuits and Horacio Verbitsky, a renowned Argentine journalist and author, claimed, the responsibility was attributed to Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who was then serving as the Provincial Superior of the Argentine Jesuits. Bergoglio would later become known globally as Pope Francis. As argued by the latter, at that time he was fighting (silently) to protect people from torture by the military junta, yet he never publicly denounced the regime's actions. In a statement released in 2010, Pope Francis indicated that, like the population, he had gradually come to comprehend the full extent of the regime's actions. In conclusion, there is currently no evidence to suggest that Pope Francis was directly involved in the atrocities committed during the dictatorship. For more information, see Massimiliano Ferrara, "Papa Francesco E La Dittatura Argentina" (Limes, April 10, 2013), https://www.limesonline.com/limesplus/papa-francesco-e-la-dittatura-argentina-14667820/; Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis : The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015): 89 – 121; Horacio Verbitsky, *El Silencio: De Paulo vi a Bergoglio: Las Relaciones Secretas de La Iglesia Con La ESMA* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2005): 51 – 61.

union leaders advocating for a modest wage increase, young men who had previously been associated with a student center, journalists advocating against the dictatorship, psychologists and sociologists with questionable backgrounds, young pacifists, nuns, and priests who had introduced the teachings of Christ to impoverished communities, were considered dangerous. Furthermore, individuals with connections to any of the aforementioned groups were also subjected to abduction and torture in clandestine camps of detention (*Centros Clandestinos de Detención* – CCD)[32]. Effectively, also Videla in 1978 affirmed that a terrorist is "not just someone with a gun or a bomb but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization[33]". In this context, Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean's famous phrase (the then governor of the province of Buenos Aires), said during a dinner among officials in 1977, appears less hyperbolic than might have been assumed: *"Primero mataremos a todos los subversivos, luego mataremos a sus colaboradores, después a sus simpatizantes, enseguida a aquellos que permanecen indiferentes y, finalmente, mataremos a los tímidos"[34]*. He was not exaggerating.

According to CONADEP's report, the victims of the armed forces (predominantly individuals in their twenties and thirties)[35], could be apprehended mostly at night in their homes (62%), on the streets in broad daylight (24,6%) or in their place of work (7%)[36]. In such instances, the military would proceed to subdue the individual, place a hood over their head, and subsequently seize any item that could be stolen or otherwise destroy it. The victims' rights were nullified from the moment of the kidnapping. They were isolated from the outside world, imprisoned in unknown locations, subjected to extreme torture, and kept in the dark about their

[32] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*.,10, 29 – 33.
[33] The times (London, 14 January 1978) cited in Marysa Navarro, "The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1989): 245.
[34] Ministerio de Educación de la Nación, *Pensar La Dictadura, Terrorismo de Estado En Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2010): 37.
[35] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*., 382.
[36] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*.,34.

immediate and intermediate fate. They could have been shot, burned to ashes or cast into a river, where they would have drowned[37].

The brutality of the kidnappings, if possible, was aggravated by the decentralized command structure of the grid system, giving area officers considerable discretionary power to apprehend suspected subversives. This positioned them at the vanguard of counter-subversive operations: consequently, each officer effectively became a de facto "warlord"[38] within the zone under their control, with the capacity to establish their own penal system and administer justice. The system became so ramified and intricate that also for the central power it would have been difficult, if it had wanted to, to demand the freedom of an individual[39]. Therefore, each chief had another, and so on, and each had the power to arbitrarily deport whomever he wished, without being accountable to anyone for the fate of the prisoner.

Additionally, also local police were empowered to order the kidnapping of any individual without prior notification or authorization from superior authorities, resulting in the emergence of a "system of order without law"[40] wherein it was impossible to ascertain the source of an individual's orders. Consequently, the lack of communication from generals to area officers resulted in a breakdown of the chain of command, which in turn permitted any kind of violation. The most illustrative example is that of Adriana Landaburu, the daughter of a previous Air Force minister, Brigadier Major Jorge Landaburu, who was kidnapped in June of 1977. In response to her father's immediate request, General Videla promptly contacted three commanders-in-chief, asking them to initiate an investigation; even Admiral Massera provided his parents with a telephone assurance that the Navy was not involved in her disappearance. However, despite the efforts of two of the junta's most prominent figures, the whereabouts of

[37] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*., 9.
[38] Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (Madison: University Of Wisconsin Press, 2002): 26.
[39] Timerman, op.cit., 26.
[40] Guy Gugliotta, "Argentina's Dirty War" Alicia Patterson Foundation, August 10, 1985, https://aliciapatterson.org/guy-gugliotta/argentinas-dirty-war/.

Adriana remained unknown. It was only after the release of the CONADEP report that her presence at ESMA was acknowledged. She was subsequently executed, along with numerous other individuals, at sea[41].

The disappeared, now estimated to number approximately thirty thousand, effectively became ghosts[42]. When the authorities were asked about the whereabouts of missing relatives, they were unable to provide an answer, citing a lack of knowledge of their identity and/or absence from prison records. In reality, if they survived the kidnapping or deportation, the "subversives" were taken to CCDs, which were presented as regular military installations, security facilities, or simply not presented at all. The most known (today) are the *ESMA* (Navy Mechanics School), *La Perla, El Vesubio* and the *Club Atlético*. Upon arrival, prisoners were frequently subjected to physical and psychological torture to intimidate them or elicit confessions or information. The captives were bound, shackled, and perpetually hooded, enduring severe beatings, humiliation, and insults. Pregnant women were also raped, while some prisoners were forced to watch as their own children were tortured. Still other women suffered the fate of childbirth in the basement of the CDDs, following which they were murdered, and their babies were abducted and adopted either by the military or by people close to them who wished to have a child[43]. Additionally, on a regular basis, everyone endured simulated executions and electric shocks to the most vulnerable areas of their bodies, as well as being subjected to physical beatings, waterboarding, and psychological abuse[44]. For instance,

[41] Navarro, *op.cit*., 248; For more information on the "Flights of the Death", see p.17.
[42] In addition to the inherent difficulty of collecting data on the actions of a regime that operated in obscurity, another reason why this estimate is an approximate number is that many families, for fear of the consequences, did not report the disappearance of their relatives. Furthermore, in other cases, the disappeared individuals had no relatives who could report their disappearance.
[43] In Padoan, *op.cit*., 303, a former ESMA prisoner recounts that the centre "turned into a kind of concentration camp for pregnant women. [...][In the navy hospital] they had a list of family members of navy people who, unable to have children, would go on a waiting list to take the children of pregnant prisoners". For more information, see Elena Basso, "DNA: I Figli Rubati Dei Desaparecidos" (La Repubblica, July 2022), https://www.repubblica.it/podcast/storie/dna/stagione1/.
[44] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*., 29 – 59. According to CONADEP's estimates, around 340 deportation centers were built throughout the country.

at the ESMA, one of the largest CDDs, prisoners were immediately subjected to lengthy interrogations and torture in the building's basement. Then, they were taken to a small, windowless cabin on the bottom floor of the building, where they lived in inhumane circumstances, which included being blinded, nude, shackled, and starved. This caused the captives to feel totally abandoned by society and to lose hope in other people, as a result of a desocialization process that severely damaged their social life and, as a result, rendered them, if allowed to return to external life, incapable of participating in politics.

It is paradoxical that although the death penalty was applicable during the Dirty War years, no one was executed as a result of a judicial sentence. In fact, at least on the surface, the death penalty was considered a simple deterrent for the population from serious crimes. However, as is well known, thousands of people were executed, and none of them went through the courts first[45]. As the CONADEP highlights: "*Técnicamente expresado, son homicidios calificados. Homicidios respecto de los cuales nunca se llevó a cabo una investigación profunda y jamás se supo de sanción alguna aplicada a los responsables. En conclusión, el régimen que consideró indispensable alterar nuestra tradición jurídica, implantando en la legislación la pena capital, nunca la utilizó como tal*"[46]. The *tradición jurídica,* simply, no longer existed, because also for those fortunate individuals who were released after months or years there was no trial, as they had never been formally charged with any offence.

In this terrible chapter of Argentine history, in which people who had already become ghosts died by shooting, burning and drowning, the country's armed forces are particularly remembered for the atrocities that came to be known as the "Flights of Death". This practice involved the anaesthetization of the victims both before boarding the aircraft and once in the

[45] Padoan, *op.cit*., 51 – 2.
[46] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*., 295 – 6: Testimony by Jorge Luis Eposto: "Technically speaking, these are aggravated homicides. Homicides for which no thorough investigation was ever carried out and for which no punishment was ever known to have been applied to the perpetrators. In conclusion, the regime that considered it essential to alter our legal tradition by introducing capital punishment into legislation never used it as such".

air: asleep, they were stripped naked and thrown into the Atlantic or the Río de la Plata[47]. It is important to clarify that all this information was made known a posteriori: CONADEP, in particular, initiated a comprehensive data and testimony-gathering process that resulted in the final report only in 1984. One account, for instance, describes the observation of a plane repeatedly heading towards the sea each night:

> *Todas las noches salía un avión de transporte Hércules del campo de aterrizaje de la base de Campo de Mayo; lo reconocí por ser un tipo de avión muy conocido e inconfundible que se dirigía siempre para el mismo rumbo sureste. La hora de salida era entre las 23 o 24 horas […] regresando aproximadamente entre la 1:00 y 1:30 de la madrugada en un vuelo que no excedía de una hora de duración. El vuelo diario del avión, que excepcionalmente dejaba de verse o escucharse, era objeto de comentario entre el personal del Hospital de Campo de Mayo, diciéndose que llevaba la gente que era tirada al mar*[48].

The evidence on this specific practice was corroborated and elucidated in exhaustive detail by the Air Force officer of the period, Adolfo Scilingo. In 1995, he proffered a voluntary confession to the journalist Horacio Verbitsky, who subsequently chronicled the entire history in his publication, "*El Vuelo*". He recounted the events of the "death flights" with a degree of objectivity and matter-of-factness, asserting that he participated in the flights simply because he believed in the government, which was justifying the activities as part of a "war" against

[47] Armony, *op.cit*., 319; Horacio Verbitsky, *El Vuelo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta Argentina, 1995): 14.
[48] Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, *op.cit*., 310: "Every night a Hercules transport plane left the landing field at the Campo de Mayo base; I recognized it as a well-known and unmistakable type of plane that always headed in the same south-easterly direction. The time of departure was between 23 or 24 hours [...] returning approximately between 1:00 and 1:30 in the morning in a flight that did not exceed one hour in duration. The daily flight of the plane, which exceptionally was no longer seen or heard, was the subject of comment among the staff of the Campo de Mayo Hospital, saying that it carried people who were thrown into the sea".

subversion. Therefore, his narrative was less concerned with the moral implications of his actions and more focused on following orders and taking part in what he regarded as a legitimate military operation[49]. More than the lack of his sense of guilt, the continued freedom of individuals such as Scilingo in 1995, represents an astonishing anomaly within the wider historical context. In the years following the downfall of Argentina's dictatorship, the country's civilian population demonstrated an unwavering commitment to pursuing accountability for past human rights violations. Regrettably, such conduct was not taken by the following governments.

II.III The movement of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*

It is crucial to stress that the reconstruction of the fate of the regime's victims was only possible thanks to the information-gathering processes that were carried out after the dictatorship had come to an end. Consequently, during the years in which people were missing, the last news that was available on them was that which dated back to the time of their kidnapping. From that point onwards, no further information could be obtained regarding the missing relatives. The uncertain and blurred life and fate of the *desaparecidos* placed them in a state that the cultural anthropologist Antonius Cornelis Gerardus Maria Robben called "biliminality"[50]. Indeed, as he underlines, the liminality of the disappeared involved a dual state of existence: they were neither dead nor alive, and they were excluded from civil society if they were alive or denied a transition to the afterlife if they were dead. While the first aspect of liminality relates to their human status, the second relates to their role as social beings within their families and communities. Even their captors, considering the prisoners to be socially dead, were implicitly recognising this liminal status, attributing to the *desaparecidos* the term "*traslado*"[51] as a

[49] Verbitsky, *op.cit.*
[50] Antonius Robben, "Disappearance and Liminality. Argentina's Mourning of State Terror," in *Ultimate Ambiguities: Investigating Death and Liminality* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016): 102.
[51] "Transfer".

euphemism for death. Conclusively, upon arrival at the clandestine detention centres, the disappeared were structurally and socially dead, removed from society and subject to execution at any moment[52].

In the meantime, families requested information from the relevant authorities and visited the prisons to ask if the missing relatives were being held there, but they were unable to receive any answers; *habeas corpus* were disregarded, and the judiciary was complicit in what was happening[53]. The authorities, in addition to denying any knowledge or responsibility for the kidnappings, frequently advised the relatives of the victims against filing writs of *habeas corpus* or reporting the kidnappings, asserting that doing so would put the lives of the missing people in further danger. Indeed, relatives of victims who persisted in seeking information and assistance were threatened with abduction, and some of them were taken. Nevertheless, abandoning the search and accepting the missing person's fate were considered unacceptable as they were perceived as killing the missing by declaring them dead in the absence of tangible evidence[54]. Furthermore, the optimism that the people missing were still alive was further supported by the occasional return of kidnapped hostages who had been held in secret for months or even years[55].

All the "*porte* […] *chiuse in faccia*"[56], month after month, made some mothers of the *desaparecidos* understand that they had to find another way to be listened. One of them, Maria Adela Antokoletz, recalls that she sought assistance from various sources following the

[52] Robben, *op.cit*., 102 – 4.
[53] Thanks to the legal assistance of Dr. Genaro Carrió, the head of the country's Supreme Court of Justice at the time, Jacobo Timerman, the founder of the newspaper *La Opinión*, was the only prisoner under Argentina's military government to successfully get a habeas corpus hearing, through which he obtained his release. In the following years Timerman wrote a book, *Prisoner without a name, cell without a number,* which is today an important personal testimony of the happenings under the Dirty War.
[54] This is presumably the reason why, when in August 1979 the junta announced that it would have promulgated a law which would have permitted a parent of a missing person to ask a judge to declare dead a person disappeared between November 1975 and the date of enactment of the law, the Mothers and many others organizations objected, and law was finally rejected. For more information, see Navarro, *op.cit.*, 255.
[55] Robben, *op.cit*., 109.
[56] Padoan, op.cit., 7: all rejections, denials and indifferent looks the mothers received when asking about where their sons were.

disappearance of her son Daniel on 10 November 1976. She filed a writ of *habeas corpus*, approached the police, and even contacted the Amnesty International delegation visiting Argentina that month. Furthermore, she sought counsel from her parish priest, who referred her to his bishop. The bishop furnished her with a letter of introduction to the Curia, and she was subsequently directed to see Monsignor Grasselli. While awaiting his attention in his crowded office, she encountered Azucena Villaflor De Vicenti, there for Antokoletz's same reason, who would then become the first leader of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. In a recollection from July 1987, Antokoletz recalls that De Vicenti told her "We are wasting our time here. This is not where we will find our children. We need to go to the *Plaza de Mayo* and speak with Videla, because he doesn't know what is happening"[57].

It soon turned out that another dozen women felt the same way, and this gave the bravery to fourteen mothers of missing children, to gather publicly, after various meetings inside the churches of the Capital City, in *Plaza de Mayo*, in front of the Presidential Palace, on April 30, 1977, to manifest for their loved ones. It was a Saturday, but the square was empty: therefore, they decided to change the day of the meeting to get as much visibility as possible, and the next appointment was fixed for the Friday of the following week. On that occasion, when there were already twenty of them, a woman suggested changing the day another time, because Friday was an unlucky day: from the following week, those women would meet every Thursday at 3:30 pm in the square[58]. Thursday became a regular weekly occurrence, and as time passed, the number of mothers present grew, and the group attracted not only other mothers and relatives but also supporters and human rights activists. As a result, the number of people who gathered every Thursday to demonstrate reached hundreds. The women assembled in a circular formation around the plaza, each wearing a white headscarf embroidered with the name of their

[57] Navarro, *op.cit*., 250.
[58] Navarro, *op.cit*., 250.

disappeared son and the date of his disappearance; around their necks they hung a photo of them, along with the caption "*¿Dónde están*?[59]" Silently, they marched[60].

What was happening was something completely unique, because the most natural of the movements, that of the Mothers, was the first one the openly challenge the regime: no one since the establishment of the dictatorship in 1976 had dared to do so, neither political groups nor humanitarian organisations. They had officially broken the dogma of disappearance as an instrument of repression, making it instead the reason for their battles. Evidently, their movement was distinct from all others, as its primary objective was to advocate for motherhood: indeed, these women were not guided by any specific political or moral principles; according to their vision, they were simply bringing "motherhood out of the domestic closet"[61]. Consequently, it can be argued that the success of their actions (or even the impetus to openly oppose the regime) was largely due to the authenticity of the movement and to the highest of interests: finding their children. Therefore, fear was relegated to a level of secondary importance, because, as they affirmed, the desire to know where their sons were was stronger than their fear and pain. In this way, fourteen mothers created the movement of "*Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo"*[62], the most important form of opposition to the Argentine dictatorship.[63]

The Madres were occasionally accompanied in their protests by the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*[64], another group that was initially part of the *Madres*, which combined the search for their daughters with the search for their grandchildren, who were born during their mothers' imprisonment and illegally adopted by officers. Determined to find their grandchildren, from 1977 the *Abuelas* were relentless in their pursuit of establishing the identities of the stolen

[59] "Where are they?"
[60] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 3 - 4; Naomi Klein, "Entirely Unrelated. How an Ideology Was Cleansed of Its Crimes," in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2007): 144.
[61] Fernando J. Bosco, "The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions, and Social Movements," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 2 (June 2006): 343. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2006.00481.x.
[62] "The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo".
[63] Navarro, *op.cit*., 258.
[64] "The Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo"

babies, even resorting to the risky tactic of following and monitoring potential suspects. In her book, Daniela Padoan recounts that some were even able to "*intrufolarsi nelle case dei nuovi genitori, fingendo di chiedere lavoro come domestica*" in order to investigate[65].

Immediately, the Mothers were targeted as "madwomen" or "*las locas de la Plaza de Mayo*", because, as Marguerite Feitlowitz, an American writer, remarks, the characteristics of lucidity, vigour, and independence that are typically associated with optimal health were no longer applicable in the context of that years. Effectively, the concept of health was reframed in accordance with more elevated ideals such as "faith", "cooperation", "personal responsibility" and "maturity". This led to the notion of health being defined as "proper social adaptation", which implies conformity, passivity, and acquiescence: attributes that the *Madres* were tired of[66]. At the same time, it has to be said that the underestimation of the Mothers' influence and their "political invisibility"[67], provided them with the necessary time and opportunity to organise themselves and a considerable window of opportunity for action. Indeed, they were acutely aware that, as women, they would not be taken seriously by the police and that any significant action against them would be unlikely. This was a key reason why men who wanted to accompany them on marches were often told by the *Madres* to leave[68]. As a matter of fact, in the initial stages of the protests, the authorities only detained them for a brief

[65] Padoan, *op.cit*., 303 – 6: "sneak into the homes of the new parents, pretending to ask for work as a maid". With the help of Víctor Penchaszadeh, an Argentinean geneticist living in exile in New York, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the *Abuelas* were able to put together a team of experts who studied their case and modified the paternity test formulas to establish grandfather-grandson relationships. Later, the fight of the *abuelas* was made easier by advances in science and DNA testing, as well as by the National Bank of Genetic Data, created in 1987, which collects blood samples from family members of the stolen children and carries out analyses on young people to determine whether or not kinship ties are present. The site will be open until 2050 and will allow anyone, including those whose grandparents have died, to confirm their identification at any time. To date, 133 children, now adults, over an estimated number of 500, have been identified, For more information on the *Abuelas,* see Giovanni Sabato, *Come Provarlo? La Scienza Indaga Sui Diritti Umani.* (Bari: Laterza, 2010): 3 – 35; Elena Basso, "Argentina, Le Nonne Di Plaza de Mayo Ritrovano Il Nipote 133: L'abbraccio Con Il Padre Sopravvissuto a Roma," la Repubblica (la Repubblica, July 28, 2023), https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2023/07/28/news/argentina_nonne_di_plaza_de_mayo_ritrovano_nipote_133_santucho_resistenza-409295681/.

[66] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 38 – 9.

[67] Navarro, *op.cit*., 258.

[68] Jean Pierre Bousquet, *Las Locas de La Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: El Cid Editor, 1983): 47.

period, typically no longer than a few hours, before releasing them, while permitting the movement to grow and gain always more visibility.

The group, under the direction of Azucena Villaflor De Vicenti, devised a collective *habeas corpus* petition, and on 28 June 1977, a delegation submitted writs on behalf of 159 individuals. Soon afterwards, Patricia Derian, the U.S. State Department's human rights coordinator, during a visit to Argentina, on 7 August, requested a meeting with De Vicenti. Subsequently, Terence Todman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, arrived in Buenos Aires, and as he met with General Videla at the *Casa Rosada*, the *Madres* initiated a demonstration, which resulted in the arrest of approximately 100 women[69]. As time passed, they commenced collaboration with other organisations, including the Movement of Relatives of the Disappeared, which comprised both men and women seeking information about their missing loved ones. On 14 October, approximately 300 individuals, primarily women, assembled in front of the Congress building while a delegation presented a document to the junta, signed by 24,000 individuals, demanding investigations into the disappearances and the release of all detainees. The police dispersed the demonstrators with tear gas and warning shots, arresting 150 individuals who were released the following day[70].

At that point, the power that the movement of *Las Madres* started to be felt, and the military junta proceeded from just considering them as madwomen to perceiving them as a source of potential danger that had to be silenced. One day, to work on a letter that would be released on 10 December, Human Rights Day, a group of Mothers and members of the Movement of Relatives of the Disappeared convened in a church. There, nine women, including French nun Alice Domont, were abducted by a gang of men who had arrived in two Ford

[69] Navarro, *op.cit*., 251 – 2.
[70] Navarro, *op.cit*., 252 – 3.

Falcons[71], and two days later, Azucena Villaflor and another French nun, Renée Duquet, were kidnapped from their houses and subsequently disappeared. Notwithstanding, the group demonstrated resilience in the face of intimidation and persisted in their efforts to draft the letter and publish it, while never missing the usual Thursday appointment[72].

Throughout much of 1978, the military junta was dedicated to the preparation of the FIFA World Cup, which resulted in a lack of attention to the protest movements. However, once the football world championship was over, on 28 December the police forcibly removed approximately one thousand women from the *Plaza de Mayo* and prevented them from returning for the following two Thursdays. Despite the harassment which persisted throughout 1979, the *Madres* maintained their presence in the plaza but were compelled to relinquish it for a significant portion of 1980. During this period, as in the beginning, the group used to meet in churches on Thursday afternoons, and there it decided to formalise the organisation, electing Hebé Pastor de Bonafini as their first president. Under her guidance, the group joined other human rights organisations to raise awareness about the plight of the disappeared in Europe and the United States. Additionally, in September 1979 the Inter-American Human Rights Commission[73] made a three-week tour of Argentina, visiting cemeteries, a detention camp, and detainees, apart from hearing denunciations from private citizens and human rights organisations. During that period, Buenos Aires saw the formation of lines of up to 3,000 people gathered outside the Organization of American States' (OAS) building to provide testimonies,

[71] Green Ford Falcons were, as the psychologist and anthropologist Eduardo Pavlovsky termed them, the "death-mobile", due to their status as a symbol of terror: the sight of one indicated a highly probable kidnapping. The rationale behind this utilization of the Ford Falcons cars can be attributed to the fact that, in exchange for supplying this vehicle, the junta provided Ford with another service the removal of trade unionists from the assembly lines. This was a consequence of the precedents set by Ford in the early 1970s. For more information, see Karen Robert, "The Falcon Remembered ," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 39, no. 3 (November 2005): 12; Klein*, op.cit*., 130 – 1.

[72] Navarro, *op.cit*., 252 – 3.

[73] The Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IACHR) is an autonomous organ of the Organization of American States (OAS), born in 1959, which aims to promote and protect human rights in the American continent. For more information on IACHR's visit of 1979, see Patrick William Kelly, "Argentina and the Inter-American System," in *Sovereign Emergencies Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 245 – 71, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316678749.008.

and there was nothing the military junta could do. To limit the damage, they distributed posters reading "*Somos derechos y humanos*[74]" throughout Buenos Aires and released a book offering their own account of events[75].

As time progressed, the actions of the Mothers were having an increasingly significant impact, influencing not only the domestic situation within the country but also the international standing of the military junta and its relations with the United States. Therefore, the government managed to reduce the number of disappearances by 1980 to enhance its international reputation; however, this clearly did not address the issue of the already *desaparecidos*. The junta moved towards democratisation in an attempt to attract more people to its political cause, but it was precisely at that time that *Las Madres* became more militant. As an example, on 10 December 1982, Human Rights Day, they staged an extraordinary 24-hour march without the necessary police authorisation. The march began at 3.30 pm on Thursday and continued through the night until the following afternoon. The Mothers remained in the square, walking slowly and stopping from time to time on benches as hundreds of other supporters joined them. Following the conclusion of the march, participants proceeded to engage in a demonstration along the avenue that extends from the *Plaza de Mayo* to the Congress building. The demonstrators carried large banners and posters displaying images of their children or grandchildren and demanded their return and the punishment of those responsible[76].

The dictatorship was approaching its demise. Indeed, the military junta was facing significant challenges from multiple fronts, particularly from the international context, which denounced the persistent human rights violations that had been occurring for years. Additionally, the military defeat following the Falklands-Malvinas War[77] precipitated a

[74] "We are right and human"
[75] Navarro, *op.cit*., 254.
[76] Navarro, *op.cit*., 255.
[77] On 2 April 1982, the junta sent an expeditionary force to occupy the Falklands-Malvinas, a group of windswept islands off the coast of southern Argentina, in an attempt to regain sovereignty over the islands in dispute with the

substantial legitimacy crisis for the military government, further eroding the already limited popular support. Consequently, popular protests and mobilisations against the dictatorship increased in 1982: trade unions, students and other civil organisations organised mass demonstrations demanding a return to democracy. At that point, tacitly admitting defeat, in 1983 the military junta, led by General Reynaldo Bignone[78], called democratic elections; after all that the Mothers' movement had stirred, managing to bring the issue of the *desaparecidos* to the centre of the democratic question, not even a party, as Marysa Navarro recounts, could afford not to address this issue in the election campaign[79]. Elections were finally held on 30 October 1983 and ended with the victory of Raúl Alfonsín, who became president and officially took office on 10 December 1983, marking the return to democracy in Argentina.

II. IV The struggle of recollecting memory and the age of impunity

With the slogan "Democracy or Anti-Democracy"[80] and his pledge to pursue legal investigations into actions perpetrated by the military regime, Alfonsín, with the UCR, garnered 51.7% of the votes and won against his principal opponent, Italo Luder, from the *Partido Justicialista*, who obtained a percentage of 40.1. Alfonsín's slogan was designed to highlight the stark contrast in stance between himself and Luder, concerning the way to legally treat those responsible for the dictatorial regime and the actions perpetrated during the Dirty War.

United Kingdom. The dispute had been going on since 1833, when the United Kingdom occupied the islands and forced the Argentine authorities, who had been there since 1820, to leave. One side claimed the territory, arguing that the British occupation was an act of usurpation, while the other defended its sovereignty based on the self-determination of the islands' inhabitants, who considered themselves to be predominantly British. England responded to the attack by sending a large naval task force and promptly retook the islands. For more information, see chapter 3.

[78] Regarding the succession of the juntas, as Navarro explains "The junta headed by General Videla remained in power until March 1981, when it was succeeded by a second junta, composed of General Roberto Viola, Admiral Armando Lambruschini, and Brigadier Omar Graffigna, commanders in chief of the army, navy, and air force respectively. In 1982 they were replaced by three new commanders in chief of the armed forces, General Leopoldo F. Galtieri, Admiral Jorge Anaya, and Brigadier Basilio Lami Dozo, who presided over the Falklands/ Malvinas debacle. […] Argentina's defeat forced Galtieri's resignation and led to the withdrawal of the navy and the air force from the junta. On 2 July 1982 General Reynaldo Bignone became president [under the fourth junta with Cristino Nicolaides, Rubén Oscar Franco, and Augusto Jorge Hughes] and began to actively prepare the return to civilian rule." Navarro, *op.cit.*, 243.

[79] Navarro, *op.cit*., 258.

[80] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 15.

It should be noted that before the conclusion of the dictatorship in April 1983, the Military Junta published a document entitled *Documento Final de la Junta Militar sobre la guerra contra la subversión y el terrorismo*[81]. There, it was reaffirmed that the "errors and opprobrium" committed found their justification in the benefit of the nation. Consequently, during the electoral campaign, Luder asserted that, under constitutional requirements, the self-amnesty that had been enacted by the military services prior to their departure from the government should be upheld[82]. Evidently, the majority Argentine people could no longer renounce the truth, so they brought Alfonsín to power. Nevertheless, his tenure as president left a bitter taste in the mouths of many citizens: indeed, that period was characterised by a widespread perception that those responsible for human rights violations had not been adequately punished, and that there had been a lack of justice for the victims and their families. Therefore, the years following the end of the dictatorship, and that continued with the presidency of the Peronist Carlos Saúl Menem, are commonly recalled as "the Age of Impunity"[83].

As one of his first actions as president, Alfonsín established the CONADEP with the objective of collecting testimonies from individuals who had been subjected to abduction and torture, as well as from their relatives and friends, and other witnesses who were willing to come forward. The commission was also tasked with locating children who had been abducted and taken from their parents or guardians, and in the event of their recovery, transferring their authority to the courts and child welfare agencies. Additionally, it was CONADEP's responsibility to inform the legal system of any attempt to obscure, delete, or destroy material related to the investigation[84]. Initially set to operate for six months, the commission's mandate

[81] Final Document of the Military Junta on the War against Subversion and Terrorism.
[82] Lorena Balardini, "The Long Struggle for Accountability in Argentina. The Role of Civil Society's Activism and State Actors.," *Centro de Estudios Legales Y Sociales - Universidad de Buenos Aires*, May 2014: 5.
[83] Feitlowitz*, op.cit*., 3.
[84] Balardini, *op.cit*., 5 – 6.

was extended to a year due to the vast scope of its task: by the end of that period, CONADEP had documented the cases of 8,960 *desaparecidos*[85], and the members of the Commission argued that more time would have allowed them to gather additional information, and probably the number of the victims would have been higher. The Commission's original report, titled "*Nunca Más!*[86]" consisted of 5.000 pages, which then became around 500 for the public, and was released in 1984.

With the extensive evidence gathered by CONADEP, Alfonsín declared that the nine former commanders of the first three military juntas would face charges and trials. Despite significant political opposition, he sought to have the military's Supreme Tribunal conduct the trials, believing this would signal the institution's willingness to assume responsibility and uphold a new moral standard. When the military refused, the ex-commanders were instead tried in civilian court, with proceedings beginning on April 22, 1985. The trial, which lasted five months, captivated the nation as witness after witness recounted harrowing testimonies. General Videla appeared detached, showing no sign of his bleeding ulcer, while Admiral Massera was visibly agitated, asserting his accountability but denying guilt[87].

On December 9, 1985, Videla and Massera were sentenced to life imprisonment, the most severe penalty. Videla was convicted of crimes including 83 homicides, 504 illegal detentions, 254 instances of torture, 94 aggravated robberies, falsifying 180 public documents, four property usurpations, 23 forced labour cases, one extortion, two kidnapping-for-extortion cases, seven child abductions, and seven cases of torture leading to death. Similarly, Massera was held accountable for 83 homicides, 523 illegal detentions, 267 instances of torture, 102

[73] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 15.
[86] "Never Again!"
[87] During the trial, he argued: "I am not here to defend myself. No one has to defend himself for having won a just war. [...] If we had lost it we would not be here - neither you nor we - because the high judges of this House would long ago have been replaced by turbulent people's courts and a ferocious and unrecognisable Argentina would have replaced the old fatherland". For more information, see Sergio Ciancaglini and Martín Granovsky, *Nada Más Que La Verdad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1995): 203.

aggravated robberies, 201 falsifications of public documents, four property usurpations, 23 forced labour cases, two kidnappings for extortion, 11 child abductions, and seven cases of torture resulting in death[88]. The remaining seven former commanders received sentences ranging from four and a half to seventeen years, and four top-ranking officers were cited for further investigation[89]. The trials of the ex-commanders were among the most carefully organized and closely watched of the century, characterized by eloquent arguments. Other military and police personnel were also convicted in federal courts across the capital and provinces: for example, in August 1986, Colonel Ramón Juan Alberto Camps, who led the Buenos Aires Provincial Police and Central Detective Squad, was convicted of 600 homicides and sentenced to 25 years in prison[90].

Despite the realization of the trials, some argue that the overall impact was diminished due to Alfonsín's decision to limit the scope and duration of the prosecutions. Indeed, his primary goal was to restore democracy and ensure its future, amid a delicate balance with an unrepentant military. Even as the trials unfolded, military personnel who had committed abuses were being promoted. In essence, Alfonsín feared the destabilizing effects of prolonged prosecutions, and on February 14, 1984, slightly more than 3 months after the beginning of his mandate, he enacted a controversial law, named "*Ley de Obediencia Debida*[91]", which permitted lower-ranking personnel to claim they were just "following orders"[92]. While exceptions were made for acts such as torture, rape, murder, and robbery, kidnapping, which facilitated other abuses, was not included[93]. This legislative measure was met with considerable opposition from human rights organisations, who perceived it to represent a significant

[88] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 15 – 6.
[89] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 15 – 6.
[90] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 15 – 6.
[91] Due Obedience Law.
[92] Michael Asplund, "Accountability in Argentina. 20 Years Later, Transitional Justice Maintains Momentum ," *International Center for Transitional Justice* (New York, August 2005): 3, https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Argentina-Accountability-Case-2005-English.pdf.
[93] Feitlowitz, *op.cit*., 16.

regression in comparison to the legal proceedings conducted against those responsible for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime in the second half of the 20th century[94].

In December 1986, Alfonsín passed another law, named "*Punto Final*[95]", which set February 23, 1987, as a deadline for all trials related to the Dirty War. According to a 1988 study by the *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* (CELS), an Argentine non-governmental organisation founded in 1979 dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions in the country, approximately 400 repressors benefited from the Due Obedience Law, while 450 torturers or enforcers were tried before the deadline, leaving hundreds of cases unresolved[96]. The preface of the report, entitled "*Culpables Para La Sociedad, Impunes Por La Ley*", commences with a sentence that succinctly encapsulates the prevailing sentiment among the Argentine population at the time: "*La libertad y la paz solo son posibles con la verdad y la justicia*[97]". Therefore, it seems comprehensible that although the government appeared to be forthcoming about the disappearances and the other atrocities that occurred during the seven years of dictatorship, its primary objective was to restore order within the country. However, the population's primary concern was not order but justice and clarity, which would enable them to resume living in a country where they could feel safe.

[94] Indeed, the Nuremberg trials did not permit the justification of "following orders". Instead, they affirmed the principle of individual responsibility, according to which individuals can be held accountable for their actions even if they are acting under the orders of superiors. The Nuremberg (and also Tokyo) trial set an important international legal precedent, affirming that "Crimes against international law are committed by men, not by abstract entities, and only by punishing individuals who commit such crimes can the provisions of international law be enforced". For more information, see Amnesty International, "Argentina. The Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws and International Law" (London, 2003): 17 - 18, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/amr130042003en.pdf; Gary Komarow, "Individual Responsibility under International Law: The Nuremberg Principles in Domestic Legal Systems," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (January 1980): 21–37, https://doi.org/10.1093/iclqaj/29.1.21; Robert H. Jackson, "Opening Statement before the International Military Tribunal," in *Yearbook of the International Law Commission, 1951*, vol. 2, A/1858, paras. 57 and 59, United Nations, 1951.

[95] Full Stop Law.

[96] *Culpables Para La Sociedad, Impunes Por La Ley* (CELS, 1988).

[97] "Freedom and peace are only possible with truth and justice".

Oscar Camilión, a diplomat under Videla and Minister of Defense from 1993 to 1996, during an interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz, affirmed that "A nation creates itself not just with what remembers, but with what it forgets"[98]: on this wavelength, Menem, Alfonsín's successor, who assumed office in July 1989, in that same year and during the following one, issued two general pardons, resulting in the release of hundreds of individuals who had been formally accused, and dozens of those who had been found guilty: General Videla and Admiral Massera were among those pardoned.[99] Menem frequently affirmed that his decision was based on his assertion that since he was subjected to torture during the previous administration, because of his Peronist affiliation, he believed to have a moral right to grant his pardon[100].

Accentuating a new rift, this time between those who wanted to remember and those who wanted to forget, the new democratic governments demonstrated a striking lack of responsiveness to the fundamental truth needs of the Argentine people. In addition to the unsatisfactory trials, the issue of the *desaparecidos* remained unresolved because, although the Commission had declared in September 1984 that the disappeared should be considered dead, no one knew where their remains were. It was rare to find a body of a *desaparecido*, but sometimes it had happened. As an example, in 1982, thanks to an anonymous tip, the family of a disappeared trade union leader called Miguel Angel Sosa was informed that he had been secretly buried in a cemetery outside Buenos Aires: his exhumation revealed around other four hundred unidentified bodies[101]. Over the years, and especially after that Alfonsín took office, more exhumations were planned and executed.

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[98] Interview with Marguerite Feitlowitz in May 14, 1990, reported in her book *A lexicon of terror*. Camilión also run, using this slogan, for the Chamber of Deputies in 1983, but he lost.
[99] Feitlowitz*, op.cit*., X; Robben, *op.cit*., 114.
[100] Even the Church, which has historically espoused the Christian tenets of forgiveness and reconciliation, was not unanimous in its endorsement of Menem's indults. Internally fractured again, in 1990 during an Episcopal Conference the Church determined that despite the importance of reconciliation, the past had to be dealt with in a transparent and responsible manner, without downplaying the seriousness of the crimes committed during the dictatorship. For more information, see Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, "Democracia: Algo Más Que Una Palabra," 1990, https://episcopado.org/assetsweb/documentos/1980-1999/1990-5Democracia_74.htm.
[101] Mauricio Cohen Salama, *Tumbas Anónimas: Informe Sobre La Identificación de Restos de Víctimas de La Represión Ilegal* (Buenos Aires: Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense : Catálogos Editora, 1992): 60 – 2.

Nevertheless, not all relatives were in favour of searching for the bodies of their loved ones. While this may appear to be an irrational decision at first glance, a closer examination reveals that it was the result of a considered decision by some of the Mothers, who distanced themselves from those who wanted to end the liminal situation of the missing bodies of their children, as well as gathering evidence of state terrorism, leading the movement to split into two groups: the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*[102] and the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora*[103]. The first group argued that reburials might result in collective amnesia and the demobilisation of the human rights movement at the national level. They perceived the exhumations as a government strategy to accept the presumed demise of the disappeared and depoliticise their ongoing search. However, there was another motivation behind this decision: the discovery of a missing body indicated the potential involvement of a murderer, who, however, risked not being punished if trials were not started in time, due to the 20-year statute of limitations for murders in Argentina[104]. It was therefore preferable to maintain this state of liminality while awaiting the emergence of a figure firmly committed to punishing the perpetrators, regardless of their rank within the military junta.

Effectively, as Robben observes, the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* was "prescient", because during the Age of Impunity, as the name suggests, numerous individuals convicted benefited from amnesty laws introduced by Alfonsín and Menem's pardons[105]. This new activism on the part of the majority of the Mothers, which might appear to be at odds with their previous militancy during the period of dictatorship, effectively brought an end to the social liminality in which they had been situated. Indeed, Bonafini, affirming that "my children

[102] Plaza de Mayo Association.
[103] Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Founding Line.
[104] The reasons behind the opposition to the searching of the *desaparecidos'* bodies can be found in the pages of Padoan, *op.cit*., 72-78. The book is a recollection of interviews with some of the *Madres*, Bonafini included. In a passage of the book, the latter affirmed: "the forced disappearance of people is a permanent crime that never expires; that is why we Mothers do not accept the death of our children, and that is why the governments, and not only Alfonsin's but also Menem's, who went so far as to offer a lot of money, are so interested in making us accept the death of our children. They want to put an end to it, but as long as we are there, they cannot do it."
[105] Robben, *op.cit*., 113 – 4.

have given birth to me"[106], acknowledged the political awakening that this had prompted in her and the other *Madres*, leading them to form beliefs that were no longer solely shaped by their motherhood, but also by the aspiration to contribute to the future of a nation that would "never again" forget its past.

Upon reaching the conclusion of this chapter, it is imperative to draw some conclusions. In a scenario of complete anarchy in the first half of the 1970s, it happened that the only group motivated to restore "a sense of order" was that of military officers, while those who had previously fought so hard to gain an identity had lost it, too busy fighting amongst themselves. In such a state of chaos without rules, the necessity of fighting for democracy was overlooked and arguably deliberately side-lined. In any case, from the rift that emerged between the left-wing guerrilla groups and the right-wing death squads, only the military junta ultimately arose victorious, thrusting the country into a state of liminality from which, as has been demonstrated, only some of the Mothers of the *desaparecidos* sought to emerge. As Argentina returned to democracy, the difficulties of confronting past atrocities while attempting to reconstruct a divided society became evident. Indeed, there was considerable divergence of opinion regarding the fundamental objectives of the resurgent democratic Argentine: for some, the imperative was confronting the past and recollect memory, while for others, the intention was to move on from it. However, this "wavering" on the direction to take has further complicated efforts to bridge societal *grietas*, delaying the healing process, and leading the country to continue suffering from the aftermath of the Dirty War even at the advent of the new millennium.

[106] Matilde Sánchez, *Historias de Vida: Hebe de Bonafini* (Buenos Aires: Fraterna/ Del Nuevo Extremo, 1985): 74.

Chapter 3

The reappearance of old rifts? (2003 - 2024)

Perhaps this war will pass like the others
which divided us leaving us dead,
killing us along with the killers
but the shame of this time puts its burning fingers to our faces.
Who will erase the ruthlessness hidden in innocent blood?

(Pablo Neruda, Selected poems)

Discussing the 2000s in this last chapter is not an accidental choice but has two reasons. The first, very structural, is the desire to give a constant cadence to the chapters, not characterising historical moments that necessarily follow one another, but creating a continuity between the periods studied; the second, on the other hand, concerns the history itself, because the years immediately following the end of the military regime were mainly characterised by the efforts of human rights organisations such as the *Madres* and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* for the reopening of the trials against the military, while the government concentrated its energies on other things, such as completing the democratic transition, without immediately understand that healing certain fractures was essential to its purpose. Officially, Argentina's reckoning with the past did not begin until 2003, with the victory of the *Frente para la Victoria* (FpV) coalition, made up of the PJ and other leftist and progressive political forces, and the start of Néstor Kirchner's presidency, with the reopening of the trials of those responsible for the Dirty War. This was not the only process that was restarted, as the Kirchners, and especially Cristina Kirchner, spent much of their presidency fighting for the historical revisionism of the Falklands-

Malvinas issue, whose narrative had been undermined at the time by the war launched by the dictatorship. In the end, *Kirchnerismo* did much more: above all, it reopened the rift between Peronism, which in the new century has been transformed into its *Kirchnerista* version, and the opposition, triggering a cycle of events that seems to have left Argentina at this crossroads.

III.I Transitional justice for national reconciliation

For an extended period, the pursuit of national "reconciliation" has effectively (almost totally) precluded the possibility of holding those responsible for the atrocities of the Dirty War to account. Nevertheless, the concept of reconciliation has never been a realistic prospect. Indeed, when considering this topic, as Mirna Goransky affirms, it can be imagined as a context in transition following a civil war, or at the very least a situation that has resulted in the fragmentation of civilised society along opposing factions. However, despite the numerous fractions that have marked Argentine history, the Dirty War cannot be considered one of the situations mentioned. Indeed, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the military junta and guerrilla groups were on an equivalent level of power because as it has been demonstrated, the military had effectively assumed control of the state apparatus, precluding any possibility of opposition. The evidence from the period of repression substantiates this assertion. Consequently, although the term "Dirty War" was widely used to describe the years of military dictatorship, there was no "war", and today it is broadly accepted that the Argentine case consisted unequivocally of a form of State Terrorism[1].

It is now widely acknowledged that the rift in Argentine society existed between those who sought to forget the past and expeditiously conclude the democratic transition and those who believed that the processes initiated with the "*Juicios a las Juntas*"[2], which were suspended in the late 1980s and 1990s, were to be reopened to achieve this goal. The second position was

[1] Mirna Goransky, "Dictatorship Trials and Reconciliation in Argentina" (Florence: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher, 2018), http://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/89-goransky.
[2] "Junta Trial".

corroborated by Kathryn Sikkink and Carrie Booth Walling, who recalled that "all moves towards accountability for past human rights violations have happened after transitions to democratic or semi-democratic regimes"[3]: hence the name "transitional justice", attributed to the long phase the country went through following the reopening of trials in the 2000s of perpetrators of atrocities committed by the junta dictatorship.

In September 2003, the Argentine Congress declared the laws of "*Obediencia Debida*" and "*Punto Final*" null and void. Subsequently, in June 2005, the Supreme Court reaffirmed their unconstitutionality, thereby permanently establishing the possibility of prosecuting crimes committed during the dictatorship period. The official reopening of the trials was the result of a combination of factors that had been present since the 1990s. Primarily, the 1994 constitutional reform, which conferred constitutional status upon international treaties, played a pivotal role in achieving the 2005 objective; furthermore, the unwavering commitment of human rights organizations, which, with some escamotages, enabled the initiation of few but important legal proceedings against some of the military responsible for human rights violations. In addition, Néstor Kirchner's administration, dedicated to human rights, facilitated the removal of judges reluctant to prosecute these cases and provided support for the reopening of trials: actions in line with his rhetoric of uncompromising opposition to the recent past.[4]

The initial catalyst for the judicial revolution was the 1994 constitutional reform, which introduced substantial alterations, including the establishment of new social and environmental rights, the formation of the Council of the Judiciary to select and discipline judges, the acknowledgement of the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, and the integration of international human rights treaties, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the

[3] Kathryn Sikkink and Carrie Booth Walling, "Argentina's Contribution to Global Trends in Transitional Justice," in *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century. Beyond Truth versus Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 305.
[4] Aníbal Pérez Liñán, "Liderazgo Presidencial Y Ciclos de Poder En La Argentina Democrática," *Buenos Aires: Revista SAAP* 7, no. 2 (November 2013): 389 – 99.

American Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment[5]. The latter modification thus conferred constitutional status upon these treaties, thereby requiring that they be enforced by Argentine courts and precluding their contradiction by ordinary legislation.

Particularly focusing on what the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights declare in cases of egregious human rights violations, it can be noted that both agreements specify the obligation to uphold and protect rights that are acknowledged for the benefit of all those who fall under their jurisdiction.[6] The interpretation applied to the clauses of these conventions is fundamental because it has been established that, in addition to the general ones, specific obligations are imposed in the event of serious or systematic violations. These obligations are designed to compensate the victim for losses, punish the offending parties, and implement institutional changes to prevent such atrocities from occurring again. Moreover, the Argentine Supreme Court held that the precedents established by the entities responsible for interpreting the treaties provide a fundamental framework for understanding the responsibilities and obligations that arise from them[7]. Consequently, the capacity of domestic law to excuse or overlook violations of fundamental human rights has been constrained by constitutional obligations that have been assumed and acknowledged before the international community. The Supreme Court has made it evident that:

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[5] República Argentina, Constitución Nacional, art. 75, sec. 22 (1994). Available at https://www.congreso.gob.ar/constitucionNacional.php

[6] United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 2.1. United Nations, December 16, 1966. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ccpr.pdf; Organization of American States. *American Convention on Human Rights*, Article 1.1. OAS, November 22, 1969. https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/Basics/3.AMERICAN%20CONVENTION.pdf.

[7] CSJN. *Horacio Giroldi, on the appeals, award of April 7, 1995,* cited in María José Guembe, "Reopening of Trials for Crimes Committed by the Argentine Military Dictatorship," *Sur. Revista Internacional de Direitos Humanos* 2, no. 3 (December 1, 2005): 120 – 37.

"As a rule, laws of amnesty have historically been used as tools for social appeasement with the declared purpose of solving conflicts remaining after armed civil struggles were ended. […] However, and inasmuch as every amnesty tend to induce "forgetfulness" of gross violations of human rights, they are contrary to the ruling of the American Convention on Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and become therefore, constitutionally intolerable.[8]"

Already in 1992, the IACHR determined that the Argentine amnesty laws, along with the pardon issued by President Carlos Saúl Menem for crimes committed during the dictatorship, were in contravention of the American Convention[9], but the advent of a constitutional obligation to comply with international conventions led to a further expansion of the legal opportunities available; as Kathryn Sikkink has observed, the degree of openness within the domestic legal environment permitted groups committed to human rights to maintain these issues on the political agenda.[10] Moreover, the Inter-American Convention against the Forced Disappearance of Persons, ratified by Argentina in 1995, gave rise to the establishment of an extra-regional framework for opportunities: indeed, according to the Convention, in the absence of any information regarding the victim, disappearances are considered as persistent or

[8] CSJN. *Simón Julio Héctor et al. with reference to the illegal deprivation of liberty, etc.,* award of June 14, 2005. Case no. 17768, cited in Guembe, *op. cit*., 117.

[9] IACHR reports are not considered legally binding, but undoubtedly its opinions are generally considered very relevant in the international context. Therefore, this established a framework for regional legal opportunities that human rights advocates may utilize to reintroduce the amnesty laws case to the Inter-American system in the event that domestic legal proceedings fully collapsed. For more information, see Leonardo Filippini, "La Corte Suprema Argentina Y La Convención Americana Sobre Derechos Humanos: Análisis Jurisprudencial.," (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Palermo, 2004).
It should also be noted that the IACHR conducted its first significant national report in 1979, following an on-site investigation in Argentina. Since its inception, the IACHR has consistently highlighted concerns regarding the regime's human rights violations. The study was instrumental in drawing global attention to the human rights violations occurring in Argentina at the time. For more information, see Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina," 1980, https://cidh.oas.org/countryrep/Argentina80eng/toc.htm.

[10] Ezequiel González Ocantos, "Persuade Them or Oust Them: Crafting Judicial Change and Transitional Justice in Argentina," *Comparative Politics* 46, no. 4 (July 1, 2014): 485, https://doi.org/10.5129/001041514812522725; Kathryn Sikkink, "The Transnational Dimension of the Judicialization of Politics in Latin America" in *the Judicialization of Politics in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan , 2005): 263–92.

ongoing crimes[11]. From this perspective, it can be argued that disappearances are exempt from amnesty laws because the latter grant amnesty for crimes committed only within a specific time frame. Additionally, according to the Convention, governments should prosecute those who "commit" disappearances, without regard to statutes of limitations. Following the implementation of the Convention, attorneys and judges began utilizing its clauses and justifications to circumvent amnesty rules.[12]

Legal "loopholes" were found not only in international law but also in the domestic one, by groups of human rights activists: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the CELS, in particular, had highly active and innovative legal teams that worked to advance human rights trials, even after the enactment of amnesty laws. As an example, it was soon used by the *Abuelas*' lawyers the fact that amnesty rules did not apply to instances of child abduction, because this crime was perceived as "an offense that could not be the result of superior orders"[13], and the possibility of seeking punishment was not impeded. By the mid-1990s, their legal strategy was beginning to yield results, although initially, the majority of those convicted were adoptive families and lower-level military personnel. However, on 9 June 1998, Videla was placed in preventive detention by Federal Judge Roberto Marquevich for his crimes of kidnapping infants and falsifying official records;[14] although he was released in less than a month, his detention proved that the Due Obedience law was giving effective room for investigation, but at the same time showed the paradoxical situation according to which, while it was feasible to launch inquiries into the whereabouts of the *desaparecidos*' children, it was not possible to do so for the *desaparecidos* themselves.[15]

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[11] Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons, art. 3. Organization of American States, June 9, 1994. https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/Basics/inter-american-convention-forced-disappearance-persons.pdf.
[12] Sikkink, "The Transnational Dimension of the Judicialization of Politics in Latin America", 274.
[13] Lorena Balardini, "The Long Struggle for Accountability in Argentina. The Role of Civil Society's Activism and State Actors.," (CELS, 2014): 14.
[14] Sikkink, "The Transnational Dimension of the Judicialization of Politics in Latin America", 279.
[15] The paradox mentioned will be an important argument supported by the HROs for the nullification of amnesty laws. For more information, see page 9; Balardini, *op. cit*., 11; González Ocantos, *op. cit*., 488.

Meanwhile, overseas, various Argentine military officials were being prosecuted under the principle of universal jurisdiction[16]. Judicial courts in France, Italy, Spain, and Germany initiated trials for crimes committed against their citizens during Argentina's dictatorship.[17] In 1999, Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón charged ninety-eight Argentine military officials with genocide and terrorism and requested their extradition, which, however, was denied by the newly elected President Fernando De la Rúa. The previous year, Menem declared that Argentina would not support these extraditions as they would infringe on the country's sovereignty; under De la Rúa, this stance was formalized with a Presidential Decree of 2001, which rejected all extradition requests for Argentine nationals, affirming that those people had already been tried.[18] Just like his predecessor, Menem, also this President and his successor, Eduardo Duhalde, consistently declined to permit the extradition of Argentine nationals accused of human rights violations to be tried in foreign jurisdictions, perpetrating the impossibility of conducting any trial. Exceptions were rare, as the trial of Ricardo Miguel Cavallo, who was extradited from Mexico to Spain, and Adolfo Scilingo, who voluntarily traveled to Spain to testify and was subsequently imprisoned there. Moreover, in this period, the Argentine Supreme Court invalidated the trials in absentia held in Europe, reinforcing the government's refusal to cooperate with foreign courts.[19]

Despite the obstacles of an Age of Impunity that at times seemed to be eternal, the growing international pressure and the legitimacy gained from these foreign prosecutions contributed to the annulment of the amnesty laws. While De la Rúa was engaged in efforts to prevent the reopening of the trials, significant developments were occurring within the national

[16] This principle allows states to prosecute serious crimes like genocide and crimes against humanity, regardless of where they occurred or who was involved. For more information, see Yana Shy Kraytman, "Universal Jurisdiction – Historical Roots and Modern Implications," *Brussels Journal of International Studies* 2 (2005): 94–129.
[17] Rebecca Lichtenfeld, "Accountability in Argentina: 20 Years Later, Transitional Justice Maintains Momentum," (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, August 2005): 4 – 5.
[18] Balardini, *op. cit*., 15.
[19] Lichtenfeld, *op. cit*., 4 – 5.

and international judicial systems. In 2000, a complaint was initiated by the *Abuelas* and CELS for the *Simón* case: it concerned the kidnapping of a couple and their 8-month-old daughter, Claudia Poblete, by Julio Simón and other personnel with links to the military, who transferred the infant to the custody of a military officer, who was known for registering babies as his own during the dictatorship. Simón was found guilty of the crime of kidnapping a minor, which, as it is known, was not covered by the amnesty legislation. Conversely, because of the existence of the Due Obedience Law the prosecution of the accused for the unlawful detention, torture, and forced disappearance of the parents, was precluded.[20] The two NGOs seized the opportunity presented by the investigation into the disappearance of Claudia Poblete, to draw attention to the inconsistency between the prosecution of child abduction and the lack of legal recourse for the disappearance of the parents. Therefore, they requested Gabriel Cavallo, a judge of the Federal Court for Criminal and Correctional Matters, to assume responsibility for this case. To persuade him, they presented a substantial body of legal principles and international case law as evidence, and finally, in March 2001, Cavallo resolved to assume responsibility for the Simón case. Immediately Cavallo ruled that Alfonsín's laws were unconstitutional, suggesting the urgency of declaring them invalid: this was due to their gravity, being the laws deemed to be tantamount to crimes against humanity.[21] Similarly, Cavallo argued that the amnesty laws were also in contravention of the American Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which had been given constitutional status in 1994.[22]

The repercussions of this decision were swiftly evident when, a few days later, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights reached a verdict in a case that had been open since 1995. The *Barrios Altos* case concerned the massacre of 15 civilians by a death squad in Lima, Peru,

[20] Gisela Ferrari, "The Simón Case— a Decisive Chapter in the Argentine Struggle for a New Beginning," *The International Association of Constitutional Law*, July 2020, https://blog-iacl-aidc.org/constitutional-landmark-judgments-in-central-and-south-america/2020/7/14/the-simn-casea-decisive-chapter-in-the-argentine-struggle-for-a-new-beginning.
[21] Guembe, *op. cit.,* 121 – 2.
[22] Guembe, *op. cit.,* 121 – 2.

in 1991, during the presidency of Alberto Fujimori, whose government had enacted amnesty laws in response to the crime. The court ruled that the amnesty laws were invalid, and the case became a landmark judgement for this matter, since it established that states cannot use amnesty to shield serious human rights violations from justice.[23] Based on this judgement, in November 2001, the Federal Chamber of Appeals upheld a ruling declaring that deeming the Full Stop and Due Obedience laws unconstitutional was "not an alternative, [but] a duty".[24] This resulted in a cascading effect, with an increasing number of tribunals adopting the same decision.[25]

The National Congress played a pivotal role in the repeal of the amnesty laws. Left-wing legislators introduced the proposal and commenced the session, while the Radical Party adopted a nuanced position, with only a minority of members expressing support. Nevertheless, former President Alfonsín endorsed the nullification, distancing himself from the decisions taken during his presidency. The Peronist Party itself largely encouraged the initiative: President Kirchner expressed his support and, in addition to contributing to the ongoing debate, signed decree 579/2003, which ratified the Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. In 2003, Congress passed the law that granted constitutional status to the Convention and subsequently annulled the amnesty laws. Subsequently, the Supreme Court, on 14 June 2005, in the framework of the *Simón* case, found these laws unconstitutional, citing the *Barrios Altos* case, adding that the principle of non-retroactivity was not applicable in the case of criminal law, even following the opinions of the UN Human Rights Committee, according to which "Gross violations of civil and political

[23] IAHR Court, *Case of Chumbipuma Aguirre and Others v. Peru*, judgment of March 14, 2001, cited in Guembe, *op. cit.*, 123 – 5; Clara Sandoval, "The Challenge of Impunity in Peru: The Significance of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights," *Essex Human Rights Review* 5, no. 1 (2008); Jorge Contesse, "Case of Barrios Altos and La Cantuta v. Peru," *American Journal of International Law* 113, no. 03 (July 2019): 568–74, https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2019.28;
[24] Balardini, *op. cit*., 11.
[25] Guembe, *op.cit*., 123 – 5.

rights during military rule should be prosecutable for as long as necessary, with applicability as far back in time as necessary to bring their perpetrators to justice"[26].

Since that point, more than 3,000 trials have been opened to bring former military and police officials to justice, resulting in more than 1,000 convictions of people involved in human rights violations during the dictatorship.[27] The process is constantly evolving, and even after 2005, for the first decade of the new millennium, human rights activists continued to advocate for personnel changes within the judiciary, initially bringing to light the judicial delays in key cases, such as those regarding ESMA. Finally, the impeachment efforts and subsequent public pressure led to the removal of judges who were perceived as unsympathetic, particularly within the Court of Cassation in 2011, transforming the organ into a more supportive environment for the prosecution of crimes committed during the dictatorship.[28]

The lengthy process has also resulted in a modest advancement, or at the very least, a proposal for further advancement, within the international arena, due to the tenacity of Judge Carlos Rozanski, who in 2006 sentenced Miguel Osvaldo Etchecolatz, a pivotal figure in Argentina's dictatorship, to life imprisonment for six murders, six instances of unlawful imprisonment, and six counts of torture. Claiming to act "in the interest of the construction of collective memory", Rozanski argued the importance of making it clear that these were "crimes against humanity in the context of the genocide that took place in Argentina"[29]. He then proceeded to argue that the term "genocide", as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of December 1948[30], should be

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[26] Human Rights Committee, *Final Observations: Argentina*, November 3, 2000, U.N. document CCPR/CO/70/ARG, para. 9, cited in Human Rights Watch, "Reluctant Partner: The Argentine Government's Failure to Back Trials of Human Rights Violators," Refworld. Global Law and Policy Database, January 2006, https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/hrw/2006/en/31672.

[27] These results make it the country with "more transitional human rights trials than any other country in the world" and which has "enjoyed the longest uninterrupted period of democratic rule in its history." For more information, see Sikkink and Booth, *op. cit*., 434.

[28] Ocantos, *op. cit*., 494 – 6.

[29] Federal Oral Court No. 1, Case NE 2251/06, September 2006, cited in Klein, *op. cit*., 122.

[30] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," approved December 9, 1948, www.ohchr.org.

expanded to include the targeted destruction of political groups.[31] Despite the absence of amendments to the Convention, the significance of Rozanski's judgement remains undiminished. Indeed, the judge made a valuable contribution in terms of ensuring that the memory and impact of these events remained alive and relevant.

It is not possible to quantify the extent of personal and social healing and reconciliation that has occurred as a result of the trials of military leaders. However, it seems plausible that, insofar as the term "reconciliation" is understood to imply the strengthening of democratic principles and the rule of law, the trials have indeed fostered a broader and more structural reconciliation.

III.II The Falklands - Malvinas dilemma

In the framework of this thesis, the 1994 constitutional reform is not only relevant for the recognition of the constitutional status of international treaties and the reopening of trials against the military: indeed, the reform appears to be useful once more in this section insofar as it serves to reaffirm the importance attached to the Falklands - Malvinas Islands, being this issue an integral aspect of continuity in Argentine foreign policy, and the "*causa nacional Argentina por antonomasia*"[32]. This can be clearly noticed from the Constitution, which reads:

> "*La Nación Argentina ratifica su legítima e imprescriptible soberanía sobre las Islas Malvinas, Georgias del Sur y Sandwich del Sur y los espacios marítimos e insulares correspondientes, por ser parte integrante del territorio nacional. La recuperación de*

[31] It is important to note that the United Nations General Assembly initially incorporated the term "political groups" into its 1946 definition of genocide, but the term was subsequently removed in 1948 due to the influence of Joseph Stalin. Indeed, Stalin sought to preclude the classification of his political purges as genocide, a strategy endorsed by other leaders who sought to maintain the prerogative to target political opponents without incurring international repercussions. For more information, see Beth van Schaack, "The Crime of Political Genocide: Repairing the Genocide Convention's Blind Spot," *The Yale Law Journal* 106, no. 7 (May 1997): 22 - 59, https://doi.org/10.2307/797169.

[32] Vicente Palermo, "Falklands/Malvinas: In Search of Common Ground," *Political Insight* 3, no. 1 (March 28, 2012): 18 – 19, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-9066.2012.00093.x; Vicente Palermo, *La Alegría Y La Pasión* (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2015): 245 - 6: "Argentina's national cause par excellence"

dichos territorios y el ejercicio pleno de la soberanía, respetando el modo de vida de sus habitantes, y conforme a los principios del derecho internacional, constituyen un objetivo permanente e irrenunciable del pueblo argentino."[33]

Before analyzing this article, it seems reasonable to provide a concise overview of the Falklands-Malvinas issue. The Falklands-Malvinas are composed of two principal islands, Gran Malvina and Soledad, in addition to approximately two hundred islets, commonly referred to as the Georgias and Sandwich Islands. The archipelago is located in the South Atlantic at a latitude of 52°, approximately five hundred kilometers from the Argentine continental shelf. The Islands were first sighted by European explorers in the early 16th century, with Spanish and Portuguese navigators subsequently contributing to their mapping. The initial recorded landing occurred in 1690, with English captain John Strong, and from that moment, Spain, France, and Britain advanced competing claims to the islands. In 1764, France established the first settlement, naming the islands "Îles Malouines", but the following year the territory was ceded to Spain. Meanwhile, Great Britain also established a settlement in 1765, and in 1833 it asserted control over the islands, expelling the Argentinean settlers and establishing a military presence. Argentina, which had inherited Spanish claims to the islands at the time of its independence, continued to contest British control but lacked the requisite naval power to challenge it effectively, and the dispute remained essentially diplomatic throughout the 20th century. [34]

[33] República Argentina, *Constitución Nacional*, 1994, Primera Disposición Transitoria: "The Argentine Nation ratifies its legitimate and non-prescribing sovereignty over the Malvinas, Georgias del Sur and Sandwich del Sur Islands and over the corresponding maritime and insular zones, as they are an integral part of the National territory. The recovery of said territories and the full exercise of sovereignty, respectful of the way of life of their inhabitants and according to the principles of international law, are a permanent and unrelinquished goal of the Argentine people."

[34] Raúl Suevos Barrero, "Conflictos Latentes: Malvinas versus Falklands", *Revista Ejército* 973 (May 2022): 70 – 6.

However, geopolitical tension increased significantly following the Argentine military dictatorship's decision to launch an invasion of the Falklands on 2 April 1982, utilizing military action as a means of evading its domestic political marginalization and disrepute.[35] The third military junta, led by General Leopoldo Galtieri, miscalculated the British response, assuming that the considerable distance and perceived decline in the strategic importance of the islands would deter a military reprisal. However, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher swiftly organized a military response, supported by United States' logistical and intelligence assistance: in early May 1982, she initiated the formation of a task force to recapture the islands through the utilization of naval and air operations, advancing in a methodical and discernible manner, thereby demonstrating superior equipment and training. Characterized by intense fighting, the conflict saw the sinking of the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano by a British submarine, and significant losses for the Argentine forces. On 14 June 1982, the Argentine military surrendered, thereby concluding the conflict after 74 days of fighting. Conclusively, while the conflict resulted in the consolidation of Thatcher's position in the UK, for Argentina the defeat ultimately precipitated the collapse of the Junta dictatorship.

Following the conclusion of the Falklands-Malvinas War in 1982, Argentina underwent a period of profound introspection, enabling the nation to prioritize domestic concerns, including the restoration of democracy and economic reconstruction. However, the pivotal reference to the matter within the constitution foreshadowed, as a premonitory sign, the eventual resurgence of discussions surrounding the Islands, this time, as announced in the Constitution, in compliance with international norms and thus avoiding further armed conflict, acting only by diplomatic means: this was precisely what Kirchners, Néstor and Cristina Fernández, Presidents of Argentina respectively from 2003 to 2007 and from 2007 to 2015, tried to do.

[35] Agustín Ferraro, "Recensión de Sal En Las Heridas. Las Malvinas En La Cultura Argentina Contemporánea", *Madrid: Revista de Estudios Políticos* 139 (2008): 252.

But why so much effort for the Islands? The initial and most fundamental response is founded upon legal principles, particularly those pertaining to territorial integrity. This stance asserts that the islands are integral to Argentine territory due to their geographical proximity and historical continuity. Conversely, Britain advances the principle of self-determination of peoples, citing the 2013 referendum in the Falklands, organized 30 years after the war, by the Falklands Islands Government (FIG), in which the local population expressed their desire to remain a British overseas territory. [36] Additionally, as Davide Borsani notes, Argentina's renewed efforts in the 2000s to reclaim the Islands were shaped also by other factors. From a national perspective, the government viewed the issue as a means of uniting the public and deflecting attention from the decline in popularity that occurred following Cristina Kirchner's re-election in October 2011, which was attributed to the economic challenges confronting the country.[37] Furthermore, from a regional perspective, the recovery of the Malvinas could serve to reinforce Argentina's position as a leading figure within Latin America, particularly considering the advances made by Brazil (Argentina's historic rival for South American leadership) on the international stage.[38] Lastly, the oil reserves discovered in the vicinity of the islands in 2010 represented a substantial economic incentive, offering the potential for transforming Argentina's economy and attaining energy independence.[39]

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[36] To the question "Would you like the Falkland Islands to retain their current political status as a UK Overseas Territory*?*" 99.8% of the Islands' inhabitants answered in the affirmative. For more information, see Klaus Dodds and Alasdair Pinkerton, "The Falkland Islands Referendum 2013," *Polar Record* 49, no. 4 (May 22, 2013): 413 – 6, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0032247413000326.

[37] For more information on the economy under the Kirchner years, see Pierre Salama, "Economic Growth and Inflation in Argentina under Kirchner's Government," *SSRN Electronic Journal*26, no. 75 (2011), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2140229.

[38] It is worthy of note that between 2014 and 2016, Brazil hosted two significant international events: the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.

[39] Davide Borsani, "The Falklands/Malvinas after the Referendum: Why the Islands Matter," *ISPI - Istituto per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale*, 2013; since the discovery of oil reserves in the vicinity of the Islands, the development of these resources has been confronted with a multitude of challenges. The Sea Lion field, a significant discovery in the North Falkland Basin, represents a pivotal point in these endeavors. The project is progressing, with Rockhopper Exploration and Navitas Petroleum anticipating a final investment decision by the end of 2024. This could result in the commencement of oil production by 2026, contingent upon the approval of the Falkland Islands Government. The success of this project could have significant economic implications, although geopolitical tensions with Argentina represent a persistent challenge. For more information, see Melisa

The combination of these factors resulted in a markedly more assertive posture towards the United Kingdom regarding the Islands during the Kirchners years, and particularly under Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's tenure. This included the implementation of assertive international lobbying initiatives, the utilization of forthright rhetoric, and the pursuit of persistent actions designed to destabilize pivotal sectors of the Islands' economy, including communications, shipping, tourism, and most notably, oil and gas exploration. As an example, at the *Cumbre de la Unidad de América Latina y el Caribe* (CALC) in Cancún, Mexico, in February 2010, President Kirchner utilized the floor solely to address the Falklands-Malvinas dispute. She criticized the power imbalances within international organizations like the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, which, according to her perspective, perpetuated double standards that favored powerful nations.[40] Kirchner and then-Chancellor Jorge Taiana were used to deliver speeches of this kind, often highlighting how historically dominant countries can disregard UN resolutions, while weaker nations are compelled to respect them.[41]

A considerable number of such kind of speeches can be documented during Cristina Kirchner's presidency. In 2012, as the 30th anniversary of the Falklands conflict approached, Cristina Kirchner intensified her criticism towards the UK, accusing it of "militarizing the

Čavčić, "Sea Lion Ready to Roar as 'next Big Thing' Once Falkland Islands Gives the All-Clear," Offshore Energy (Offshore Energy, July 8, 2024), https://www.offshore-energy.biz/sea-lion-ready-to-roar-as-next-big-thing-once-falkland-islands-gives-the-all-clear/; Maurizio Stefanini, "Falkland Malvinas: Questa Volta C'entra Il Petrolio," Limes (Limes, February 23, 2010), https://www.limesonline.com/rubriche/altre-americhe/falkland-malvinas-questa-volta-c-entra-il-petrolio-14725879/.

[40] Klaus Dodds and Matthew Benwell, "More Unfinished Business: The Falklands/Mal- Vinas, Maritime Claims, and the Spectre of Oil in the South Atlantic.," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 578, https://doi.org/10.1068/d2804cm.

[41] In 1965, the United Nations addressed the matter with Resolution 2065, adopted by the General Assembly. This resolution recognized the existence of a dispute over the sovereignty of the Islands between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The resolution thus urged the two parties to engage in negotiations with a view to finding a peaceful solution, taking into account both the provisions of the UN Charter and the wishes of the people of the islands, while also respecting the rights and claims of either side. Furthermore, the Special Committee on Decolonization has also periodically urged the two countries to resume negotiations, maintaining the principle of Resolution 2065 as the basis for dialogue. For more information, see United Nations General Assembly, *Question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)*, Resolution 2065 (XX), December 16, 1965; Klaus Dodds and Matthew Benwell, "Argentine Territorial Nationalism Revisited: The Malvinas/Falklands Dispute and Geographies of Everyday Nationalism", *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (November 2011): 5, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.09.006

South Atlantic" and escalating efforts at the United Nations in response to oil and gas exploration around the islands. UK Prime Minister David Cameron, in turn, denounced Argentina's actions as "colonial"[42] and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to supporting the self-determination of the Falklands' residents: essentially, both parties accused the other of engaging in the same behaviors. Another noteworthy altercation took place during the G20 summit in Mexico in June 2012, during which Cameron declined to engage in a discussion about the Falklands with Kirchner, citing the forthcoming referendum on the islands and urging respect for the outcome. This encounter served to illustrate the UK's criticism of Argentina's refusal to acknowledge the referendum's legitimacy, while Argentina remained frustrated by the UK's unwillingness to negotiate sovereignty over the islands.[43]

These examples illustrate the extent to which the Kirchners' governments have sought to reposition the Falklands-Malvinas issue at the core of both Argentine foreign policy and public discourse. As straightforward as it may appear on paper, the presidents were confronted with a significant and unavoidable challenge: "*¿cómo despegarse de las denostadas Fuerzas Armadas que también articularon su gesta a esa reivindicación*?"[44]. Effectively, the memory of the 1982 war was a significant aspect of a multifaceted context in which Argentina was striving to reform its political and social structures, and the primary challenge for the Kirchners' governments was to reconcile the nationalist assertion regarding the Malvinas with the vehement condemnation of the military dictatorship that had promoted and conducted the war. Indeed, although the Falklands-Malvinas War was a patriotic cause, it was ultimately linked to

[42] British commentators and politicians frequently portray Argentina's stance as aggressive and irrational, contrasting it with Britain's approach, which is assumed to be rational and mature. For more information, see Victoria Basham, "Telling Geopolitical Tales: Temporality, Rationality, and the 'Childish' in the Ongoing War for the Falklands-Malvinas Islands," *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 11 – 8. https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1014698.

[43] Klaus Dodds and Alasdair Pinkerton, "The Falkland Islands Referendum 2013", *Polar Record* 49, no. 4 (May 22, 2013): 414, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0032247413000326.

[44] Camila Perochena, "Una Memoria Incómoda. La Guerra de Malvinas En Los Gobiernos Kirchneristas (2003-2015)," *Anuario de Historia Regional Y de Las Fronteras* 21, no. 2 (June 2, 2016): 189, https://doi.org/10.18273/revanua.v21n2-2016007: "How can we dissociate ourselves from the reviled armed forces, which also articulated their heroic deeds to this claim?"

the military dictatorship in place at the time. Therefore, this association rendered the Malvinas cause a "*memoria incómoda*"[45], that proved challenging to reconcile with the human rights policies promoted by the Kirchners.

To overturn this view, disentangling the cause of the Malvinas from the period of the dictatorship and placing it in a broader historical context spanning several hundred years, especially Cristina Fernández de Kirchner engaged in historical revisionism, adopting a rhetoric that integrated the cause of the Malvinas into policies of "memory, truth and justice"[46], while associating the war to the broader circumstances of human rights violations during the dictatorship.[47] The idea that she tried to convey was that the dictatorship did not start the war to fight colonialism, but only to assert its power: therefore, the conflict was instrumentalized, and the sense of patriotism for the islands was entirely unrelated to the situation.[48] This attitude can be deduced from a passage during a speech paying homage to *las Madres* and *las Abuelas*:

> "*Pero todos los aquí presentes sabemos que la historia, la política, no es algo que empieza cuando uno llega, cuando llega un gobierno, pudimos llegar a este instante en la República Argentina precisamente por la tarea de mujeres que con un pañuelo blanco en la cabeza enfrentaron lo que nadie se había atrevido en la República Argentina, la dictadura más sangrienta que tuvo lugar.*"[49]

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[45] Perochena, *op. cit*., 175: "inconvenient memory"
[46] Perochena, *op. cit.*, 184.
[47] While Néstor Kirchner initially emphasized a patriotic and nationalist narrative, honoring the soldiers as heroes and later recognizing the war as a crime of the dictatorship, Cristina Kirchner framed the war more explicitly in the context of memory, truth and justice, integrating it into a broader historical struggle against colonialism and aligning it with the human rights agenda at the heart of her administration. For more information, see Perochena, *op. cit*., 180 – 4.
[48] Dodds and Benwell "Argentine Territorial Nationalism Revisited: The Malvinas/Falklands Dispute and Geographies of Everyday Nationalism", 6; Perochena, *op. cit.,* 186.
[49] "But all of us present here know that history, politics, is not something that begins when one arrives, when a government arrives, we were able to reach this moment in the Argentine Republic precisely because of the work of women who, with a white scarf on their heads, faced what no one had dared in the Argentine Republic, the bloodiest dictatorship that took place.": Nicolás Bermúdez, "La Construcción Kirchnerista de La Memoria," *Linguagem Em (Dis)Curso* 15, no. 2 (August 1, 2015): 238 - 9, https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4017-150202-0315.

Although the speech in question does not directly address the matter, it does, however, indicate the importance attached by the President to historical perspectives based on long-term considerations and the significance of memory in this regard. Consequently, anniversaries, symbols and speeches assumed considerable importance during Cristina Kirchner's presidency.

Just like Perón, a highly influential figure for Cristina, her speeches were characterized by emotional appeal and charismatic rhetoric, aimed at resonating with the hearts of ordinary people, mobilizing the masses, and fostering a strong sense of community. Thus, she cultivated a cult of personality, presenting herself as a maternal figure who would guide the nation towards progress. This approach mirrors the path of Eva Perón, whose iconic status as *Santa Evita* also drew on her emotional connection with the Argentine people. Both were able to capitalize on their charisma to mobilize the masses, acting as interpreters of the aspirations of the working and disadvantaged classes, and employing a direct and accessible style of communication, challenging the formal linguistic barriers between the government and the public.[50] However, while Eva embodied the devoted wife of Juan Perón and acted as the *Abanderada de los Humildes* in an era marked by nascent Peronism, Cristina established herself as an autonomous leader, an icon of contemporary female power, in a democratic and more globalized Argentina.

A notable instance of Cristina Kirchner's approach towards the memory of the Islands was the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the war in 2012, in *Ushuaia,* in *Plaza Malvinas*, where the president underscored that the decision to invade the Malvinas had not

[50] The easiest example is given by Cristina's speech following her election as President, which read: "To conclude, I would like to call on all the men and women of my country, the young people, the citizens, those who voted for us and those who did not, because today we are representing the interests of all, I would also like to do so from my convictions [...] we are members of a generation that believed in ideals and convictions and that even in the face of failure and death we did not lose our illusions and strength to change the world. Perhaps we are a little more modest and humble. In those years we dreamed of changing the world, now we are content to change this country of ours, our home*"*, cited in Bermúdez, *op*. *cit*., 237; for more information on Cristina Kirchner's populism, see "Los Gobiernos de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015): La Retórica Populista En El Conflicto Con Los Conglomerados Mediáticos," in *La Democratización de La Comunicación La Construcción de Sentido En La Política Pública de Los Gobiernos de Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2022).

been a choice of the Argentine people, but an act of the dictatorial regime to consolidate its power. This speech represented a significant departure from the prevailing official narrative, which treated the 1982 war as an isolated episode of patriotism.[51] Moreover, the climax of this new approach to memory management was the opening of the Malvinas Museum in 2014, situated within the former ESMA, the symbol of the repression perpetrated by the dictatorship par excellence. This decision was no coincidence because it highlighted the intention to integrate the memory of the war with that of human rights violations, thereby situating the Malvinas cause within a broader historical narrative that commenced with the islands' discovery. The Museum, structured in four phases (life, passion, death, and resurrection), represented the cause of the Malvinas not as a simple matter of territorial sovereignty, but as part of a long history of resistance against imperialism, which had to reach its conclusion with their "resurrection" during the Kirchner presidencies. With a "messianic"[52] attitude, the ESMA, symbol of death and torture for many years, had been finally transformed into a symbol of rebirth.

Despite various efforts to challenge the narrative established by the dictatorship, repositioning the Falklands-Malvinas War as a struggle against imperialism, the contradictions and internal tensions within the collective memory remained. This resulted in a persistence of conflicting memories, among those who supported Cristina's version, those who had not been entirely convinced and continued to associate the Islands with the events of 1982, and those who disagreed with the choice of attaching so much importance to what seems to have been the main focus of foreign policy for years and years. This divergence in perspectives is particularly evident among younger Argentines, many of whom do not identify with the national project to

[51] The decision to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the war in Ushuaia was not accidental. Indeed, Plaza Malvinas, located in close proximity to the city's port, served as a focal point for the vessels engaged in preparations for the conflict in 1982. For more information, see Klaus Dodds and Matthew Benwell, "Argentine Territorial Nationalism Revisited: The Malvinas/Falklands Dispute and Geographies of Everyday Nationalism", 7.
[52] Perochena, *op. cit.*, 187.

reclaim the Islands. For some, the issue of the Malvinas is seen as distant and irrelevant compared to more pressing concerns in their daily lives. While older generations and residents of regions like Ushuaia may experience the Malvinas question more intensely, national surveys and various opinion polls – although often fragmentary and methodologically opaque – suggest that for a large part of citizens, the issue holds secondary importance, with many believing that there are far more urgent matters that need attention.[53]

III.III *El relato Kirchnerista*

While it is possible to posit that some of the rifts that emerged in the previous century were beginning to heal by the 2000s, it is important to note that this was not a universal phenomenon. Indeed, the ascendance of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner saw not only the advent of justice and historical revisionism but also the resurgence of populism, a phenomenon which, during Perón's days, had deeply divided the Argentine population. Since their entry into the scene, although clearly in different historical contexts, a similar pattern of action can be identified. As is widely acknowledged, Néstor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, following the catastrophic economic, social and political crisis of 2001, which precipitated an institutional collapse. Presenting himself as the saviour of a country in ruins, Kirchner promised a new beginning based on social justice and economic revival. In his address to the legislative assembly on the occasion of his election, Néstor Kirchner made the following remarks:

[53] Agustín Ferraro, "Recensión de Sal En Las Heridas. Las Malvinas En La Cultura Argentina Contemporánea," *Madrid: Revista de Estudios Políticos* 139 (2008): 254; Klaus Dodds and Matthew Benwell, "Argentine Territorial Nationalism Revisited: The Malvinas/Falklands Dispute and Geographies of Everyday Nationalism", *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (November 2011): 7, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.09.006; cfr. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, "Más del 80 por ciento de la población argentina respalda el reclamo de soberanía sobre Malvinas", *Cancillería Argentina*, April 2, 2023, https://cancilleria.gob.ar/es/mas-del-80-por-ciento-de-la-poblacion-argentina-respalda-el-reclamo-de-soberania-sobre-malvinas: according to this other poll, over 80% of the Argentine population supports the nation's claim to sovereignty over the Islands. Besides, it is also true that the omnipresence of references to the Malvinas in Argentine public life begins in Argentine schools and is particularly evident on the anniversary of the war. In primary and secondary schools, Argentine children are reminded of the "lost" national territory through the teaching of history and geography, and the visits of veterans of the whoi recount their testimonies, further encouraging an emotional connection to their experiences and the broader cause they were fighting for.

"Ningún dirigente, ningún gobernante, por más capaz que sea, puede cambiar las cosas si no hay una ciudadanía dispuesta a participar activamente de ese cambio. Desarmado de egoísmos individuales o sectoriales, las conciencias y los actos deben encontrarse en el amplio espacio común de un proyecto nacional que nos contenga, un espacio donde desde muchas ideas pueda contribuirse a una finalidad común."[54]

It is evident that from the moment he assumed the presidency, Néstor Kirchner made his populist approach evident, emphasising the active participation of citizens and the necessity of unifying the population around a shared national project, thereby overcoming individual or sectorial selfishness.

The "opportunity" to save his people was given by the events of the end of 2001: in December, Argentina precipitated into one of the most catastrophic crises in its history, characterized by an economic and social collapse that had profound roots in the policies of preceding years. For instance, the implementation of the "Convertibility Law" in the 1990s, which tied the Argentine peso to the US dollar in a parity relationship, initially stabilised the economy, reducing inflation and promoting apparent prosperity. However, as time passed, this system proved unsustainable, as the rigidity of the currency parity stifled the economy, preventing the adjustment of prices and exports, while the public debt grew disproportionately, bringing the country to the brink of collapse.[55]

[54] Casa Rosada. "Discurso del Señor Presidente de la Nación, Doctor Néstor Kirchner, ante la Honorable Asamblea Legislativa." *Casa Rosada*, 25 may 2003. https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/archivo/24414-blank-18980869: "No leader, no ruler, no matter how capable, can change things if there is no citizenry willing to actively participate in that change. Disarmed of individual or sectorial egoisms, consciences and actions must meet in the broad common space of a national project that contains us, a space where many ideas can contribute to a common goal."

[55] Sebastian Edwards, "The Mother of All Crises Argentina, 2001-2002", in *Left Behind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 143–62; Cara Levey, Daniel Ozarow, and Christopher Wylde, *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis : Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 24 – 34.

The despair of a hungry and impoverished population gave rise to looting at supermarkets, particularly in the provinces of *Mendoza* and *Entre Ríos*, reaching an alarming peak in the *Conurbano bonaerense*, the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, where a significant proportion of the country's impoverished population resided. To provide a bigger picture of the situation, it should be noted that on 3 December 2001, the government introduced the "*corralito*"[56], a measure that significantly restricted the ability of individuals in Argentina to make bank withdrawals, effectively preventing them from accessing their savings. This measure provoked a strong reaction from the middle class, who felt betrayed after having placed their trust in the stability of the economic system.

In the context of widespread discontent among the urban poor and the middle classes, on 19 December demonstrators took to the streets in a unified display of protest, particularly called "*cacerolazo*", which implies making noise by hitting pots and pans.[57] These protests were also characterized by many lootings and acts of violence, mainly by marginalized and desperate groups trying to survive in a context of extreme social degradation. In attempting to exert control over the situation, then-President Fernando De la Rúa declared a state of siege on the same day. However, this measure had the opposite effect, inciting a wave of indignation that prompted an even greater number of people to take to the streets. On 20 December, the situation further deteriorated: the police resorted to unprecedented brutality, even attacking the *Madres*, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of individuals, confirming, in the eyes of public opinion, the government's inability to manage the crisis: for this reason, De la Rúa had no choice but to leave the *Casa Rosada* that same day, by helicopter. After his resignation, three

[56] Mario Wainfeld, "Caída Del Gobierno de Fernando de La Rúa: La Ley de Gravedad", in *Estallidos Argentinos* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2019).
[57] The "pot-banging" founds its origins in Chile in December 1971, when groups of Chilean women took to the streets banging pots and pans in protest against food shortages and the economic policies of the Allende government. For more information, see Tomás Gold, "Conceptualización E Historia de Los Cacerolazos En La Argentina Reciente (1982-2013)", *Postdata. Revista de Reflexión Y Análisis Político* 23, no. 2 (October 2018): 453 – 89, https://www.redalyc.org/journal/522/52272567004/html/.

interim presidents quickly followed: Ramón Puerta, Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, and Eduardo Camaño, until the appointment of Eduardo Duhalde, who remained in office until the election of Néstor Kirchner in May 2003, and under whose presidency Argentina finally abandoned the peso-dollar parity.

It was crucial to acknowledge the 2001 crisis to contextualize the emergence of the Kirchners, who, due to these events, were able to position themselves as the nation's saviors, as it happened with Perón. This is exemplified by the pervasive references to the 2001 crisis in Néstor's speeches[58], almost as if to remind and emphasize the contribution he was making to the country. Enacting a "twenty-first century Peronism for a globalizing world"[59], Néstor and then his wife, Cristina, significantly expanded social transfers, services and pensions. On one hand, he expanded the scope of the pension system to encompass workers who had previously been excluded from the formal labour market, and by the conclusion of his tenure, managed to make the system almost universal. On the other hand, in 2009, Cristina further extended existing social benefits by introducing the Universal Child Benefit and a conditional cash transfer programme, which provided coverage for 30% of the population under the age of eighteen. Furthermore, both leaders initiated a comprehensive programme of nationalisation of state-owned enterprises that had been privatised during the 1990s. Néstor nationalised the main water utility and the national post office, while Cristina dealt with the nationalisation of the pension system, the main national airline and the country's largest oil company. These policies resulted in a notable increase in the government's revenue requirements: while in 2002 they constituted 23% of GDP, by 2012 they had almost doubled, reaching 40%.[60] Moreover, the implementation

[58] Damián Fernández Pedemonte, *Grieta Entre El Relato Y La Conversación* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2023): 19.
[59] Christopher Wylde, "State, Society and Markets in Argentina: The Political Economy of Neodesarrollismo under Néstor Kirchner, 2003-2007", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 4 (March 3, 2011): 449, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-9856.2011.00527.x.
[60] Erdem Aytaç and Ziya Öniş, "Varieties of Populism in a Changing Global Context: The Divergent Paths of Erdoğan and Kirchnerismo," *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 47 – 8. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041514813623137.

of targeted macroeconomic and industrial policies, including the maintenance of a stable and competitive exchange rate and the provision of support to the manufacturing sector, led to a revitalization of the country's economy, even if it continued to struggle against persistent inflation.[61]

The impact of Néstor and then Cristina on the country was undoubtedly significant; and their communication had an even greater effect. Indeed, as postulated by Ernesto Laclau, one of the most important Argentine political theorist who worked on populism, it is understood to be a form of communication rather than a socio-political category.[62] This approach characterizes populism as a form of discursive construction that articulates a plurality of popular demands and unites them against a hegemonic power. Under this perspective, the leader, conceived as a "*significante vacío*"[63], is responsible for gathering these demands, forming a bloc and drawing a line with the opposing one.[64] Following the death of her husband, Néstor, in October 2010, Cristina Kirchner, who had begun her presidential term in December 2007, further consolidated this populist "*relato*"[65], assuming the role of a leader who embodied the

[61] Wylde, *op.cit*., 443.
[62] Cecilia Beatriz Díaz, *La Democratización de La Comunicación* (Editorial Biblos, 2022). 3 – 20.
[63] An "empty signifier" in Laclau's theory of populism, is a term or symbol that lacks a fixed meaning but acquires meaning according to the context and demands of a political movement. This signifier, like the concept of "the people", serves as a unifying device for disparate social demands, enabling disparate groups to identify with it despite having different goals. It serves as a unifying instrument, yet remains adaptable and flexible, responding to the nuances of political dynamics. For more information, see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005). 67 – 124.
[64] Laclau's populism is based on three preconditions: the articulation of popular demands, their unification in a stable system of signification, and the creation of an internal frontier separating the "people" from elitist power. These three elements fit perfectly with the characteristics of Kirchnerismo, which succeeded in co-opting social movements and unifying different causes under a common political project. Form more information, see Laclau, *op. cit.*, 102. It must be acknowledged that Laclau's is just one of many theories on populism. As an example, Cas Mudde, with his ideational approach, defines populism as a *thin-centered ideology* that operates on a rigid moral distinction between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite". For more information, cfr. Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541 – 63, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x.; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); For more information on other theories on populism, see Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[65] The term "relato" regarding the Kirchners has been used by various critics, journalists, and political analysts to describe the narrative constructed by the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner to justify and legitimize their policies. This narrative refers to the worldview that the Kirchners promoted, characterized by the division between an oppressed "people" and oppressor "elites" or "corporations". The concept became central to the discussion of their political and communicative approach.

hopes and struggles of the people against the elites, particularly the media, which were considered constant enemies of her government.

Cristina Kirchner's actions in her struggle against her principal adversary could find its explanation, once again, in the country's happenings during the Argentine dictatorship. Indeed, the *Ley de Radiodifusión* 22.285, enacted in 1980, aimed to reinforce the state's control over the media, and led to the emergence of a few dominant media oligopolies. This control persisted even after the return to democracy, with the privatization policies of Menem, contributing to the further consolidation of media power and the strengthening of groups like *Clarín*, a popular media conglomerate that includes newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and telecommunications companies.[66]

However, the actual root of Cristina's outburst against the media was the dispute she had with them in 2008 regarding the "*crisis del campo*", especially with the *Clarín* group and *La Nación*.[67] That year the government implemented Resolution 125/08, which increased withholding taxes on soya and sunflower exports and introduced a mobile system for them. This measure was intended to redistribute the extraordinary profits made by farmers during the commodities boom, but it provoked strong opposition from the agrarian bourgeoisie, leading to 123 days of protests and roadblocks. On this occasion, the media sided with the agrarian protests and were accused by the government of fomenting discord and representing the interests of the economic elite against the government's redistributive policies. Thus, it was this confrontation that actually marked a fundamental change in the way the administration and the media

[66] María Soledad Segura, "La Sociedad Civil Y La Democratización de Las Comunicaciones En Latinoamérica," *Íconos - Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 18, no. 49 (May 19, 2014): 84 – 90, https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.49.2014.1272.

[67] For more information on the "Farm crisis", see Gonzalo Sanz Cerbino, "La Rebelión Del Campo. Historia Del Conflicto Agrario Argentino," *Revista de La Universidad Bolivariana,* 9, no. 26 (2010), https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-65682010000200025.

interacted, particularly with the *Clarín* Group, with which Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had previously enjoyed a friendly relationship.[68]

In any case, it is true that a large proportion of the population was calling for a review of media regulation. The Argentine socioeconomic crisis of 2001, another tipping point of the country's history, reignited calls for a more equitable and inclusive media: social organizations, popular sectors, community media, and aboriginal peoples – all rendered invisible by media discourse – gathered around the *Coalición por una Radiodifusión Democrática*[69]. Founded in August 27, 2004, its initiatives resulted in twenty-one points (one for each year after democracy was restored until the organization's founding) around a plan of action for their goal, commonly known as *Iniciativa Ciudadana por una Radiodifusión Democrática.*[70] The actions undertaken were duly noted and subsequently conveyed to the President, who was presented with the *21 Puntos Básicos por el Derecho a la Comunicación.*[71] In a bid to lend greater credibility to her campaign against the prevailing media, Cristina Kirchner pledged to address the issue, and on August 27, 2009, she announced that the *Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual* (LSCA) bill would have been sent to Congress, declaring that:

> *Conceptos como libertad de expresión, como libertad de prensa, como derecho a la información, deben ser concebidos e interpretados en su correcta dimensión. Porque libertad de expresión no puede convertirse en libertad de extorsión. Porque libertad de prensa no puede ser confundida con libertad de los propietarios de las grandes empresas periodísticas: libertad de prensa, libertad de expresión, derecho y acceso a la*

[68] Marina Hernández Prieto and María de la Peña Pérez Alaejos, "Análisis Del Proceso de Elaboración, Sanción E Implementación de La Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual 26.522. El Desinfle de Un Ideal," *Communication & Society* 30, no. 2 (2017): 131–47, https://doi.org/10.15581/003.30.2.131-147.
[69] "Coalition for Democratic Broadcasting"
[70] "Citizens' Initiative for Democratic Broadcasting"
[71] "21 Basic Points for the Right to Communication"

información están en cabeza de todos y cada uno de los ciudadanos que conforman este bendito país que son los verdaderos propietarios de estos derechos.[72]

The proposed legislation imposed stringent limitations on the number of broadcasting licences that could be held by a single media conglomerate, to prevent the formation of media monopolies and ensure a more equitable distribution of ownership across different entities, even offering robust incentives to produce local and national content, prompting media outlets to create programming that reflected the cultural identity and diversity of Argentina. Furthermore, the LSCA designated a portion of the broadcasting spectrum for use by non-profit organisations and community groups, thereby guaranteeing that those voices, often underrepresented in the mainstream media, had access to the airwaves. Approximately six weeks after its initial presentation, and following intense debates at the institutional level, the legislation was passed by both legislative chambers between September and October 2009.

Predictably, the LSCA was supported by civil society groups such as the *Foro Argentino de Radios Comunitarias* (FARCO) and the *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA) for its potential to democratise media ownership and reduce media concentration, and also the Catholic Church publicly expressed its opposition to any kind of manipulation of information in favour of the few, therefore supporting the law and becoming a powerful actor that the government managed to wrest from the opposition. On the other hand, the legislation met with strong opposition from *Grupo Clarín* with no surprise, as well as the *Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas* (ADEPA) and the *Asociación de Radiodifusoras Privadas Argentinas*

[72] Excerpt from the presidential speech of August 27, 2009, cited in Serguei Komissarov, "Breve Cronología de La Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual," *Questión. Revista Especializada En Periodismo Y Comunicación* 1, no. 52 (December 22, 2016): 182: "Concepts such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the right to information must be conceived and interpreted in their correct dimension. Because freedom of expression cannot become freedom of extortion. Because freedom of the press cannot be confused with freedom of the owners of the big newspaper companies: freedom of the press, freedom of expression, right and access to information are in the hands of each and every one of the citizens that make up this blessed country, who are the true owners of these rights."

(ARPRA), which argued that the LSCA threatened freedom of expression and could lead to excessive government control over the media.[73] The opposition from the aforementioned groups, particularly *Clarín*, resulted in a significant postponement of the law's implementation, especially considering that the case ultimately reached the Supreme Court, where the LSCA was ruled constitutional October 29, 2013, stating that "*No se encuentra afectado el derecho a la libertad de expresión del Grupo Clarín, en tanto no ha sido acreditado que el régimen de licencias que establece la ley ponga en riesgo su sustentabilidad económica*".[74]

Conclusively, from the rehabilitation of the LSCA to the commencement of Mauricio Macri's presidency, which resulted in the dismantling of significant portions of the law, a period of slightly over two years elapsed. During this time, the law was not fully implemented, and the resulting changes were largely imperceptible. However, as accurately observed by Marina Hernández Prieto and María de la Peña Pérez Alaejos, this was not perceived as a defeat for the Cristina Kirchner government. Rather, the entire "battle" was viewed as a strategic victory, as evidenced by the discourse that emerged from this context: the government had positioned itself as "el defensor de los problemas sociales, los medios comunitarios", asserting that "*no se aplicó la ley [...] porque las corporaciones se impusieron sobre [su] democratización*." Indeed, as many observers have noted, the sustained effort to challenge the media, which persisted until the conclusion of Cristina Kirchner's tenure, served as a compelling illustration of the populist governments strategic advantage in defining an adversary. [75] By the end of her second term,

[73] Prieto and Alaejos, *op. cit*., 138 – 141.
[74] Mariela Baladrón and Diego De Charras, "Una Mirada Sobre La Sentencia Que Confirmó La Constitucionalidad de La Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual (LSCA) En Argentina," *Chasqui. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación*, no. 127 (December 1, 2014): 40, https://doi.org/10.16921/chasqui.v0i127.2292: "Grupo Clarín's right to freedom of expression is not affected, since it has not been proven that the licensing regime established by law jeopardizes its economic sustainability".
[75] Prieto and Alaejos, *op. cit*., 144. The full excerpt reads: What did the government gain? The conflict, which was profitable for it in political terms, building the discourse of "I am the defender of social problems, community media, etc.; and I have the corporations in front of me". That is the discursive construction. If you ask within Kirchnerism why the law was not applied, they will say that because the corporations imposed themselves over the democratization of the law: now if you analyze, in reality there is a combination because it was convenient for the government to have that adversary until the end of the term."

how this strategy had become emblematic of Cristina Kirchner's administration became evident, allowing Arnoldo Gómez to talk about the "*la realidad [que] se impone al relato*": while publicly championing social justice and democratization, the government simultaneously engaged in actions that served to consolidate its own power, often at the expense of the very ideals it professed, such as the incomplete implementation of policies like the LSCA.[76]

Other examples of this conduct include the previously mentioned work plans and subsidies, initially presented as support tools for unemployed workers but eventually transformed into temporary measures without truly creating stable employment. Also, pensions and child allowances, which were implemented to improve family economic support, in the end served to maintain an electoral base among precarious workers, who represented a large portion of the population. Indeed, while it is true that these measures improved conditions for some segments of society, they concurrently failed to resolve labor precariousness, keeping millions of workers in unstable situations. Moreover, this precariousness was exacerbated by rising inflation, which eroded the purchasing power of these benefits and made the supposed improvements less impactful.[77]

Thus, while Kirchner's government could claim real achievements, the underlying "double discourse" became evident, as the administration presented itself as a defender of the people while strategically navigating the political landscape to maintain control. This approach highlights the complexities and contradictions inherent in Kirchner's populist model, where the rhetoric of social justice often clashes with the realities of governance and power consolidation.

III.IV A divided nation, another time

A substantial overview on the years of the Kirchners' governments seems needed here. In fact, it is known that the term "*grieta*" was born in this very context, when the journalist Jorge Lanata

[76] Arnoldo Gómez, *El Proyecto K. La Nueva Hegemonía Y El Ascenso Chino* (Madrid: Editorial Agora, 2013): 208: "The reality [which] prevails over the narration":
[77] Gómez, *op.cit*., 211 – 14.

first introduced the new term at the 2013 Martin Fierro Award Ceremony on August 5[78], referring to the extreme political polarisation in the country between the *Kirchneristas* and the *anti-Kirchneristas*, groups that the Argentine sociologist Mauricio Moltó defines as "*mutualmente excluyentes*"[79]. As Moltó explains, these groups interpret social, political and economic reality in such a way as to always blame the other side for the nation's problems. The practical effects of the moral degeneration of "the other" is what prevents "us" from overcoming the challenges of the present and creating a better society, regardless of which side of the *grieta* the observation is made from, and thus which position is taken.

As expected, Lanata blamed the political elite, particularly Presidents Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, as the main cause of the divide. In his landmark 2013 speech, he directly criticised their administration, accusing them of deliberately fomenting divisions in society and systematically portraying dissidents as traitors to their country. But as their mandates came to an end, the rift did not disappear; on the contrary, as this difference became entrenched, it seemed more and more impossible to reconcile, as the polarisation of both sides increased and the level of *anti-Kirchnerismo* escalated. This is exactly what Lanata expected, as he indeed affirmed, saying that "*creo que incluso va a trascender al actual gobierno, el gobierno en algún momento se irá […] y la grieta va a permanecer, porque la grieta no es política, es cultural, es una grieta cultural en sentido extenso, tiene que ver con cómo vemos el mundo*".[80]

Over time, therefore, the differences between the two sides have widened as new political figures and hot-button social issues have emerged. Moreover, the issues that are now

[78] "Jorge Lanata 'Tenía Razón' La Grieta Es Moral," YouTube, (May 30, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/source/POZIkfiZJSY/shorts?bp=8gVCCjYSJwoLUE9aSWtmaVpKU1kSC1BPWklrZmlaSlNZGgtQT1pJa2ZpWkpTWRoLUE9aSWtmaVpKU1koj7SV4L-B0KZs.

[79] Mauricio Moltó, "'La Grieta' En El Congreso. Análisis Exploratorio Y Propuesta Metodológica Para Indagar Sobre La Polarización Política En Los Debates Legislativos En Argentina," *Revista Enfoques* 19, no. 35 (2021): 65–89.

[80] Julia Zullo, "La Polarización Como Metáfora. El Uso de La Grieta En Dos Periódicos Argentinos," *ALED* 21, no. 1 (July 8, 2021): 6, https://doi.org/10.35956/v.21.n1.2021.p.4-22: "I think it will even transcend the current government, the government will eventually leave [...] and the rift will remain, because the rift is not political, it is cultural, it is a cultural rift in a broad sense, it has to do with how we see the world."

considered to be the root causes of the split go beyond simple political differences and include things like economic hardship, corruption and democratic institutions, which interact with one another. A major source of conflict is related to economic policy. Indeed, the prioritization of social programs, subsidies and economic intervention is strongly associated with *Kirchnerismo*; whereas, its opponents criticize these measures as unworkable and detrimental to long-term financial stability. There are also differences in the degree of government involvement in different areas: for example, *Kirchneristas* tend to favor greater state involvement, especially in areas such as energy, transport and telecommunications, while *anti-Kirchneristas* favor more deregulated and market-oriented policies. Both groups have been the focus of corruption allegations, although the *Kirchneristas* have faced more scandals and investigations. The divide is exacerbated by differences also in foreign policy and international relations. *Kirchnerismo* has adopted a confrontational stance towards certain international organizations and countries, while *anti-kirchneristas* place more emphasis on cooperation and diplomacy. Finally, political leaders on both sides use divisive rhetoric and communication strategies that exacerbate existing hostilities and widen the public divide.[81]

Time has shown that *Kirchnerismo* was only the beginning of a rift. It should be noted that the bipolar swing for the presidency before Mauricio Macri[82] took office was highly asymmetrical, with one party showing more electoral stability than the other: the PJ never received less than 38 per cent of the vote, while support for the UCR fluctuated between 52 and 2 per cent. Third parties or coalitions were in second place throughout this period, but the

[81] María Isabel Kalbermatten, "Depicting 'La Grieta': The Role of Political Satire and Humor in Argentinean Polarization," in *Communicating Political Humor in the Media* (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2024), 275 – 8.
[82] Since 1983, numerous political entities have attempted to disrupt the Peronist-Radical duopoly. However, the majority of these efforts have only achieved transient success, particularly in Buenos Aires, before succumbing to organizational challenges and an overreliance on their founding leaders. These parties frequently ceased to exist after forming alliances with the PJ or UCR, thereby losing their status as viable alternatives. However, this pattern was altered in 2007 when the PRO, led by Mauricio Macri, secured victory in the Buenos Aires mayoral election and subsequently expanded its presence nationwide, thus avoiding the fate of previous third parties. For more information, see Andrés Malamud and Miguel De Luca, "¿Todo Sigue Igual Que Ayer? Continuidad Y Ruptura En El Sistema de Partidos Argentino (1983-2015)," in *Los Sistemas de Partidos En América Latina, 1978-2015* (Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2016): 30 – 3.

UCR's exceptional survival, due to its entrenchment in the provinces and municipalities, contrasted with the virtual elimination of some or the organizational limitations of others. Then, reaching 37 per cent in the first round of presidential elections in 2015, Peronism was defeated in the runoff against the broad coalition *Cambiemos*, headed by Macri and formed by PRO, UCR and Coalición Cívica ARI (CC-ARI).[83]

The name of Macri's coalition suggests the contribution of a breath of fresh air to Argentine politics, no longer focused on conflict, but on stabilization of the economy and building a "*Nueva Normalidad*".[84] Nevertheless, an analysis of the economic data from 2015 to 2019 reveals that the objectives set out by Macri were never achieved. During this period, the GDP contracted by 1.7%, real wages declined by 14%, and the proportion of wages in GDP decreased from 44.5% to 35.9%; moreover, the nominal exchange rate increased by 300%, and the amount of dollar debt doubled. Despite a few encouraging outcomes in 2017, the overall downturn of the economy remained unchecked. In the aftermath of the 2017 legislative elections, Macri's administration endeavored to implement a series of labor, tax, and social security reforms. However, it encountered considerable opposition, particularly concerning the latest mentioned ones, resulting in large-scale demonstrations.[85]

This lack of willingness to compromise among political groups was clearly visible during the 2018 budget debate, deeply influenced by the prevailing political challenges of the time. It was characterized by a climate of high tension and verbal conflict between the various political blocs, indicating that the *anti-Kirchneristas* did not present themselves as significantly different from their opponents, even in the context of the political debate. Indeed, in that circumstance, the use of rhetoric of "us" versus "the others", proved to be mutual. The opposition was accused by the government of having provided false information to Congress

[83] Malamud and De Luca, *op. cit*., 44 – 5.
[84] Gabriel Vommaro and Mariana Gené, "Argentina: El Año de Cambiemos," *Revista de Ciencia Política* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2017): 231–54, https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-090x2017000200231: "New Normality".
[85] Moltó, *op. cit.*, 79 – 80.

for an extended period during the preparation of earlier draft budgets, while *Kirchneristas* and other opposition parties launched a vigorous attack on the *Cambiemos* adjustment of the budget, which only supported financial speculation, calling it "timba".[86]

Therefore, during the parliamentary debate, both *Cambiemos* and opposition members delivered impassioned speeches. A first example is what was told by Axel Kicillof, from the FpV:

> *"La gente fue y votó una cosa; pasaron las elecciones, se sacaron la careta y trajeron un mundo completamente distinto […] Tenían preparadas las leyes, pero se lo ocultaron al electorado para conseguir el voto. Fue una estafa electoral […] Tenían planeada esta estafa, que el presupuesto viene a perfeccionar […] Recuerdo bien que cuando ustedes eran nuestra oposición decían que teníamos el déficit más grande del mundo, de la historia, del continente, de los libros de texto, de la ciencia ficción."*[87]

Without any filter, Kicillof was able to articulate his position with remarkable clarity. From his perspective, the ruling party had knowingly lied to the people just to win, presenting itself one way and acting another. The budgets, he argued, had effectively spoken for themselves. The deputies of *Cambiemos* did not avoid the confrontation: this is exemplified by a speech delivered by a UCR deputy, Luis Pastori, which was markedly distinct from the preceding address but equally impactful:

[86] Moltó, *op. cit*., 80 – 2. The term "timba", a Cuba music genre, was used disparagingly.
[87] Honorable Cámara de Diputados (HCD). *Debate parlamentario del "Presupuesto general de la administración nacional para el ejercicio fiscal correspondiente al año 2018"*. Buenos Aires: Congreso de la Nación Argentina, 2017, https://www2.hcdn.gob.ar/secparl/dgral_info_parlamentaria/dip/debates/leyes_27000.html: "People went and voted for one thing; after the elections, they took off their masks and brought a completely different world […] They had the laws prepared, but they hid them from the electorate to get the vote. It was an electoral swindle […] They had this swindle planned, which the budget comes to perfect […] I remember well that when you were the opposition you said we had the largest deficit in the world, in history, in the continent, in textbooks, in science fiction."

> *"Será muy difícil que coincidamos con el kirchnerismo, pero quiero manifestar que hasta me congratulo de no coincidir. Me preocuparía que el miembro informante del dictamen de minoría hubiera apoyado el proyecto de presupuesto para 2018 que estamos presentando. Nuestra visión es diametralmente opuesta a la forma, filosofía y técnica con la que presentaba los presupuestos el gobierno que nos antecedió. Así que menos mal que no coincidimos."*[88]

As anticipated, this excerpt is distinct from the preceding ones in that it is "*quieter*", yet also markedly more incisive. Pastori's statements are characterized by irony, and after his remarks, he also declared his gratitude for not having the support of the *Kirchneristas*: an effective rhetorical strategy for underscoring his profound political disdain for them.

Such examples could fill an entire volume, demonstrating that in the historical context of Argentina's *grieta*, it seemed more important to set oneself against "others" than to think about what is best for the country.[89] Indeed, it could be argued that, regardless of which political party was in power, the difficulties (especially the economic ones) and the voters' dissatisfaction remained persistent. The electorate, like a flag in the wind, was constantly shifting its support. To illustrate this simplification, in 2019 the Argentine electorate was called to the polls, and, at that point not surprisingly anymore, *Kirchnerismo* emerged victorious. On October 27, 2019, Alberto Fernández, with the coalition *Frente de Todos*, which united the PJ, the *Partido de la*

[88] Honorable Cámara de Diputados (HCD), *op. cit*.,: "It will be very difficult for us to agree with Kirchnerism, but I would like to state that I am even glad that we do not agree. I would be concerned if the informing member of the minority opinion had supported the 2018 budget bill that we are presenting. Our vision is diametrically opposed to the form, philosophy and technique with which the government that preceded us presented the budgets. So thank goodness we don't agree."

[89] Mauricio Moltó has done a meticulous job of analyzing the speeches regarding the budget law for the year 2018 that well emphasizes what was stated. For more information, see Moltó, *op. cit.,* 83 – 4.

Victoria, and other leftist groups, and with Cristina Kirchner as Vice President[90], won the elections, garnering approximately 48 percent of the vote and defeating Mauricio Macri.

From the time of Macri's election, Argentina had entered an era marked by numerous attempts to move away from the legacy of a challenging economic situation and reform it by reducing public spending, cutting subsidies, and opening the economy to the international market. However, the implemented policies had a detrimental impact on a significant portion of the population, resulting in increased poverty and unemployment, as well as an economic crisis that further deteriorated the quality of life for many Argentines. The rising public debt, high inflation, and devaluation of the peso further exacerbated the economic crisis, leading to a deterioration in living conditions for many Argentines. The measures taken by Macri, such as the reduction of energy subsidies and the cutting of government spending, were perceived as unfair and contributed to the intensification of social discontent.[91]

To counteract the austerity policies implemented by Macri, Fernández's election campaign placed significant emphasis on a critical analysis of his predecessor's policies (the pattern of accusations of incompetence against the previous government reappears). Therefore, portraying himself as a unifying figure capable of transcending the societal divisions campaign, Fernández promised a return to a more inclusive and interventionist economic model, which would prioritize the protection of welfare and workers' rights.[92] However, from the early stages of his presidency, Fernández was confronted with three significant challenges: firstly, the need to control the highest inflationary crisis, largely caused by the debt accumulated with the

[90] As Candelaria Garay and Emilia Simison clearly explain, "While Cristina Kirchner had the most votes among Peronist leaders, she needed the support of more moderate voters to return to power. Alberto Fernández, a politician known for his negotiating skills and, in turn, for having belonged to various opposing currents of Peronism over time, was seen as capable of mobilizing the moderate voters necessary for electoral triumph". For more information, see Candelaria Garay and Emilia Simison, "Argentina 2022: Desafíos Profundos Y Continuidad Política," *Revista de Ciencia Política* 43, no. 2 (August 1, 2023): 145, https://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-090x2023005000112

[91] Leonardo Nóbrega, Marcia Rangel Candido, and Rafael Rezende, "De Mauricio Macri a Alberto Fernández: O Que Esperar Da Alternância de Poder Na Argentina," *Boletim OPSA - Observatório Político Sul-Americano*, October 2019: 10.

[92]Nóbrega, Rangel Candido, and Rezende, *op. cit.,* 10.

International Monetary Fund (IMF); secondly, the impact of the pandemic and its aftermath; and thirdly, the increasing political polarization, exacerbated by Cristina Kirchner's numerous accusations of corruption and the attempt on her life in 2022.

With the assistance of Minister of Economy Martín Guzmán, the Fernández government endeavored to negotiate a revised agreement with the IMF, aiming to restrict the conditions demanded by the organization. Nevertheless, these measures caused significant internal divisions within both the opposition and the central government. Within the latter, the faction related to Cristina Kirchner was against an agreement that would have involved the implementation of austerity policies, while other members, such as Sergio Massa, who would later be nominated Minister of Economy in July 2022, proposed a more pragmatic approach, playing a pivotal role in ensuring the internal political support for the approval of the agreement with the IMF, with the result that the markets were stabilized and control was maintained over the key economic areas. Nevertheless, the Fernández administration was marked by a notable surge in inflation, a persistent challenge for Argentina. In other words, in January 2024 – shortly after Milei assumed office – the country exhibited an annual inflation rate of 254.2 percent and a monthly inflation rate of 20.6 percent. Consequently, as reported by *La Nación* on February 15, 2024, Argentina was the country with "*la suba de precios más elevada al mundo*".[93]

Fernández's years were also marked by one of the world's strictest and longest quarantines, imposed due to Covid-19 pandemic. In this climate, socio-political divisions did not prove helpful. Every public concern, including vaccination campaigns and quarantine policies, demonstrated how difficult it was to find answers that would appease the majority of the population, given the strength of the opposing *Kirchnerista* and *anti-Kirchnerista*

[93] Garay and Simison, *op. cit.*, 147 -152; Marco Olivetti, "Argentina: Il Populismo 'al Quadrato' Di Javier Milei Alla Dura Prova Dei Fatti," *Federalismi.it* 4 (2024): 7 – 8: "the highest price increase in the world"

coalitions.[94] Subsequently, the relaxation of social isolation policies initiated by the Covid-19 global pandemic facilitated the recuperation of the economy. However, low salaries and inflationary pressures contributed to the persistence of high poverty rates, which reached 39.2% in 2022. To provide support to the most vulnerable and to control inflation, numerous initiatives were implemented. One such initiative was the "*Programa Nacional de Inclusión Socioproductiva y Desarrollo Local Potenciar Trabajo*"[95], which gave social organizations a greater role in the labor programs which were implemented in place of local governments. This was done to address the claim made by these movements that local governments had previously controlled the execution of employment programs.[96] But despite the efforts, the demonstrations persisted, with certain regional organizations, such as the *Movimiento Evita* and the *Corriente Clasista y Combativa* (CCC), demanding greater authority over social services. The issue was that the social protests not only undermined the government administration but also highlighted fractures within the government coalition, despite Alberto Fernández's government's best efforts to quell them.[97] As with the economy, divisions were found to exist both within and outside the government.

The legal proceedings against Vice-President Cristina Kirchner, predominantly concerning the allocation of public works contracts during her tenure, undoubtedly constituted "the cherry on top": the culmination of the precarious circumstances previously delineated. One of the most prominent cases in August 2022 was "*Vialidad*", in which the prosecution sought a 12-year prison sentence for Cristina Kirchner in addition to her permanent ban from holding

[94] Magdalena Lisińska, "Political Polarization in Times of Crisis: La Grieta and Its Impact on Argentine Democracy during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Politeja* 19, no. 6(81) (February 24, 2023): 123 – 38, https://doi.org/10.12797/politeja.19.2022.81.06.
[95] For more information on the plan "Potenciar Trabajo", see Valentina Lihué Ledda, "El Programa Potenciar Trabajo En Argentina (2020-2023): Dimensiones Y Reconfiguraciones de La Política Pública Más Controversial Del Último Tiempo," *Revista de Gestión Gubernamental* 51 - 64, no. 3 (June 2023).
[96] Candelaria Garay, "Los Movimientos de Desocupados En El Conurbano: Protesta, Política Social Y Política Partidaria," in *El Conurbano Infinito: Actores Sociales Y Políticos, Entre Un Estado Ilegal Y Un Estado Ausente* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2017), 145–75.
[97] Garay and Simison, *op. cit*., 153 – 9.

public office. The judicial system was accused by Cristina Kirchner of engaging in "lawfare", which she defined as "*una distorsión en la aplicación de la ley ejecutada por jueces al servicio del poder político-económico-mediático que persigue opositores al modelo de apropiación inequitativa*".[98] This term is used to describe the covert use of the legal system and legislation to target political opponents while presenting these actions as part of an effort to combat corruption.[99] Cristina Kirchner and her supporters in Argentina have argued that the trials against her were a concerted effort by media, political, and economic forces to undermine her political reputation and the Peronist movement, rather than a fair trial. Effectively, the events had the impact desired by the opposition, and the verdict sparked street mobilization in the following days, including *cacerolazos* by those who agreed with the verdict and encampments by his followers, notably *Juventud Peronista* and *La Cámpora.* On 1 September 2022, in a climate of a culture of hatred perpetrated by both sides, Vice-President Cristina Kirchner even risked her life in an assassination attempt that failed only because the bomber's gun did not fire.

Given the array of challenges confronting the Peronist administration, it is not surprising that it entered the presidential election at the end of 2023 with diminished vigor.[100] Its candidate, Sergio Massa, was ultimately unsuccessful, with Javier Milei securing approximately 56% of the vote. Representing an anarcho-liberal platform, Milei and his relatively new party, *La libertad avanza*, took advantage of the climate of disillusionment in which the Argentine people

[98]Cited in Catalina Smulovitz, "Del 'Descubrimiento de La Ley' al 'Lawfare' O Cómo Las Uvas Se Volvieron Amargas," *Revista SAAP: Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Político* 16, no. 2 (October 2022): 231–59. "a distortion in the application of the law executed by judges who are beholden to political, economic, and media powers that seek to discredit opponents of an inequitable model".

[99] The fight against corruption is commonly seen as a "value issue" that does not cause partisanship among voters because it is assumed that most of the voters, regardless of their affiliation with a political party, are against corruption activities. However, a lot of the anti-corruption initiatives that their opponents label as lawfare are very contentious because they employ forceful and unconventional legal strategies. As these campaigns acquire traction, the battle against corruption stops being a worthwhile endeavor and turns into a topic that has the potential to create or exacerbate partisan divides. For more information, see Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., *Prosecutors, Voters and the Criminalization of Corruption in Latin America: The Case of Lava Jato.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)

[100] For more information on the confidence in Government during Fernández's presidency, see the Torcuato Di Tella University's Index of Confidence in Government, https://www.utdt.edu//ver_contenido.php?id_contenido=1351&id_item_menu=2970.

found themselves, ready to do anything to achieve radical change, and imposed a populism, undoubtedly opposite to what was now understood as such in Argentina, to detach the nation from its past.

Between rallies with a chainsaw in hand, shock statements against the state and in favor of maxi amnesties for tax evaders, Milei is constructing his political career by distancing himself from the political landscape of the past two decades and proposing a radical system change, starting with the economy, opposing state intervention, and promoting economic liberalism and the dollarization of Argentina. However, Milei should caution that also his approach, different in what it proposes but the same and more radical than ever in his opposition to the previous establishment, may prove ineffective in solving Argentina's complex problems if there is an unwillingness to mediate and compromise. Indeed, this would not bring to the narrowing of the *grieta* in Argentina, as a country with great opportunities but also many difficulties, which probably needs a different approach.

Over the past two decades, Argentina's political leaders - Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, Mauricio Macri, Alberto Fernández and now Javier Milei - have promised to lead the country out of political and social divisions. The Kirchners placed a strong emphasis on memory and human rights, Macri sought to reform the economy with more liberal policies, and Fernández faced the challenge of managing a post-pandemic crisis and internal political struggles. However, nobody of them truly tried to mitigate internal political conflicts. On the contrary, there was a tendency to engage in it with those perceived as the "others" to achieve superiority.

Undoubtedly, Javier Milei now represents a hyper radical break with the past, with a platform that challenges the entrenched Peronism of previous administrations. Nevertheless, political polarization and economic instability are persisting, suggesting that while each leader has promised to seek solutions, their actions have only reinforced the divisions they inherited. No circle, other than the search for justice in the aftermath of the dictatorship – and even this is

now being questioned, as the government is currently exercising historical revisionism to claim that the victims of the dirty war were not as many as reported[101] – has been completed, and the country has continued to sink deeper into its usual fractures. As Argentina now moves forward under Milei's leadership, the question remains whether his unconventional approach will bridge these divisions or widen them. As things stand, however, it is certainly difficult to see this as the right path to reconciliation.

[101] This year, on Remembrance Day in Argentina, 24 March 2024, the government of Javier Milei released a controversial spot in which it downplayed the number of victims of the dictatorship, claiming that "there were not 30,000" *desaparecidos*, causing outrage among human rights organizations. Vice-President Victoria Villaruel reiterated the message, tweeting #NoFueron30000, also calling for reparations for the victims of terrorism in the 1970s. This position has clearly triggered immense controversy, as it downplays the seriousness of the crimes of the military regime. For more information on the spot, see "El Mensaje Del Gobierno Por El 24 de Marzo," YouTube, March 24, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93piMrxKYYI.

Conclusion

The persistence of *la grieta* in modern Argentina reflects the nation's enduring struggle with its political, social, and ideological divisions. As this thesis has shown, this rift did not emerge solely from the conflicts "started" in the Kirchner era but has been developing over decades. This indicates that the situation is not merely a reflection of contemporary political dynamics; rather, it is the product of a series of unresolved conflicts that have their roots in Argentina's history. From the rise of Peronism in the 1940s, which divided the country along lines of class and political ideology, to the military dictatorship's brutal repression in the 1970s, Argentina's history has been marked by deep-rooted animosity and conflicting visions of national identity. Therefore, Jorge Lanata's metaphor of *la grieta* aptly encapsulates the societal divide that continues to plague Argentina, reaching far beyond political affiliations and affecting the very fabric of relationships. Recently, in 2023, Lanata wrote an article, entitled "'*Que los cumplas infeliz': los 10 anos de grieta y hasta cuándo vamos a seguir así"*[1] to illustrate its endurance: this is the rationale behind the continued necessity for discourse on this matter.

Undoubtedly, the Kirchner presidencies, by reviving the populist rhetoric of Peronism, reawakened the historical divides. As *Kirchneristas* advocated for state intervention and social justice, their opponents decried what they saw as corruption, economic mismanagement, and the erosion of democratic practices. These tensions not only reinforced existing divisions but also created new fractures, as media influence, economic crises which nobody seems able to solve, and questions about how to manage national memory, fueled further polarization. As this work has attempted to demonstrate, tensions did not end with the Kirchners, because the succession of events – including the rise of the neo-liberal right wing under Macri, the return

[1] Jorge Lanata, "'Que los cumplas infeliz': los 10 años de grieta y hasta cuándo vamos a seguir". Clarín, April 13, 2023, https://www.clarin.com/opinion/-cumplas-infeliz-10-anos-grieta-vamos-seguir_0_7BgBBbF8JD.html : "May you have a miserable birthday": 10 years of division, and how long will we continue like this"

to power of the left with Fernández, who was accompanied by Cristina Kirchner as vice-president, and the recent rise of Milei's anarcho-capitalism – has served to accentuate the already existing polarization rooted in Argentinian history.

Considering the aforementioned evidence, it appears that the government leaders are not attempting to resolve *la grieta*; rather, they seem to be exacerbating it. Their actions suggest a conscious perpetuation of a polarized view not only of politics but of society as a whole. This imposition of an oversimplified and binary model of reality, where the political arena is framed in terms of two irreconcilable halves, limits the potential for dialogue, compromise, and national unity, reinforcing the very divisions it seeks to describe. Hence, while politicians are preoccupied with mutual accusations of incompetence, they fail to acknowledge the diverse and complex needs of Argentineans, which stem from problems that seem structural and independent of those in government. At the same time, however, only those in that position have the power to put an end to this.

In conclusion, should there be a willingness to attempt to bridge the gap, it would be essential to engage with the historical legacies that have contributed to its formation and that continue to shape the country's political and social landscape. Moving forward, Argentina must confront these unresolved issues to build a more inclusive and united future: only by addressing the underlying causes of this division Argentina can hope to heal the rifts that have so profoundly marked its history and identity.

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