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# Because I Said So: Constructing Identities in Argentina's Dirty War

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# Because I Said So:

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Constructing Identities in Argentina's Dirty War

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## I. Introduction

Historically, Argentina has been conflicted over how to run the country as can be seen by dramatic changes from dictator to military government to democracy. Some scholars argue that the first military coup in 1930 marks the point in history that derailed Argentina from its path to democracy, which they did not see again until 1983. From 1976-1983 an oppressive military regime took control of the country and made this time period notorious as the Dirty War. An estimated 4,000-30,000 Argentines died, went missing, or were exiled during this period.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, when the government was restored in 1983, President Menem pardoned the 200 accused in order to forget and “heal the wounds”.<sup>2</sup> Many were outraged at the pardons calling it a sham and further disconnecting the public from their government. As of 2006, the pardons were made unconstitutional and the defendants faced trials in the international courts for their crimes against humanity. By 2011, defendants were still receiving sentencing for committing thousands of accounts of torture. The defendants were convicted of 86 crimes at the end of the 2011 trials; some counts included arbitrary detention, torture, and murder of dozens of people in a secret military detention center located in Buenos Aires.<sup>3</sup> Today, Argentina’s government is disheveled and has a low approval rate and Argentines are constantly protesting their government. Historical context is important to analyze the politics of the Dirty War and

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<sup>1</sup> Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina's "Dirty War": An Intellectual Biography* (Austin: University of Texas, 1991): 177.

<sup>2</sup> "Menem Pardons 'Dirty War' Accused," *The Glasgow Herald*, October 8, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Marcela Valente, "A Year of Progress in Argentina’s Human Rights Trials," *Covering Activism and Politics in Latin America*, December 30, 2012, <http://upsidedownworld.org> (accessed February 12, 2013).

how it became the coup to end all coups in Argentine history. The residual effects of the military's reign of terror are still present today with ongoing trials and the public manifesting distrust through protests and other forms of radical media.

In order to grasp the implications of the Dirty War it is important to look back into history to show the war was a climax of longtime political tensions. Building a historical context will allow for a fuller understanding of the tensions and customs that were adapted historically to deal with government disputes. Their historical patterns are rich in information as to how the Dirty War was able to happen in 1976. History shows how and when certain things emerged, such as class conflict and military interventionism, and how they become normalized through patterns which eventually developed into their own discourses.

## I. The First Coup

Historically, Argentina's upper-class had achieved an oligarchy until universal male suffrage laws were passed in 1912.<sup>4</sup> This shifted the power monopoly to the larger middle class Radicals which threatened the elite who had enjoyed previous years of political power. In 1928 Hipolito Yrigoyen returned to office as a Radical president through popular vote after the suffrage was passed. Lieutenant General Jose Uriburu and General Augustin Justo overthrew Yrigoyen in 1930 which marked the "rise of militarism in Argentina".<sup>5</sup> From this point on there was a "virtual pendulum between civilian and military regimes".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Norden. *Military Rebellion in Argentina: Between Coups and Consolidation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996: 22.

<sup>5</sup> Goldwert, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Norden, 2.

From 1930 until the 1970s, over twenty-one different administrations took office, some by force and others by electoral fraud. The average life of an administration was less than two years.<sup>7</sup> Each official democratically elected government was interrupted by a military coup. The first coup veered them off the track to democracy and created a pattern that allowed for other coups to take over when they felt necessary. This pattern becomes further amplified and polarized upon Peron's entrance into office. During these years each new government weakened Argentina's congressional, judicial, and economic systems. This began to change the way the public understood the government as they realized it had no longer been acting toward the public's best interest, rather, politicians were all playing a power game, and as a result the public began to disregard laws, political parties, and institutions. The country had fallen into a state of disrepair and the climax of this conflict is known as The Dirty War--"the coup to end all coups."<sup>8</sup>

## II. Peron's Polarization

General Juan Peron is an important actor in the class divide whom acts on behalf of the middle class and causes a significant increase in the political polarization. His popularity creates a new political stance, Peronism, which has a controversial place in Argentine history. Peron won the 1946 elections and entered on the Labor Party ticket. Due to the fact Peron entered his candidacy on the Labor Party ticket he was very labor centric which differed in stance from many other military officers whom were anti-labor. Peron enacted and enforced previously ignored labor laws and worked to protect middle and lower class laborers "So far as labor was concerned, Peron's rule represented a golden age, the General Confederation of Workers (GCT)

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis, 3.

<sup>8</sup>Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002):126.

grew from a little more than half a million in 1945 to some three million by 1951 mainly forming new unions to protect unskilled workers”.<sup>9</sup> Access to health care was made a universal right by the Workers’ Bill of Rights in 1947 and he increased average real wages 35%.<sup>10</sup> Through Peron’s drastic workforce changes he effectively “won the allegiance of the working class” at the expense of the support from many elites.<sup>11</sup> While his efforts were commended by the masses, he created some strong opponents along the way. The class gap was widening and Peron tried to close the gap with increased wages and employment and by making the nation less reliant on international trade. The GCT organized strikes on many employers who failed to grant benefits or honor new legislation which resulted in increasing tensions between large employers and Peronists. For the elites, improving working conditions increased tensions and political hate for Peron. The shift of creating industrial workers from previous rural areas where the people were treated as slaves also caused animosity towards Peronism.<sup>12</sup>

Europe had drastically declined their Argentine imports they had previously depended on, which, when coupled with the extreme droughts of the 1950s, damaged Argentina’s agricultural sector which devalued the peso and led to overall economic decline.<sup>13</sup> The economy was on the decline and inflation was on the incline. As the economy was on the decline Peron’s wife, Eva, became sick and died at the age of 33. Peron had tensions with the Church, but after Eva’s death, the church refused to patronize her for her charity and Peron responded by expelling the priests and forbid religious processions.<sup>14</sup> The Church then began with mass demonstrations aided by

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Francis Dufty. *The Sociology of the Blue-collar Worker*, Leiden: Brill, 1969: 137.

<sup>11</sup> Goldwert, 88.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Goldwert, 115.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 8.

the army to try and oust Peron from his office.<sup>15</sup> By September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1955 he took refuge on a Paraguayan boat claiming diplomatic asylum.<sup>16</sup> By 1960, Peron had settled in Spain in exile.<sup>17</sup>

Peron served two consecutive terms and his “mobilization of the working class had an enduring effect on Argentina’s political system over the next four decades”.<sup>18</sup> Even after he was overthrown, Peronism as a political movement was able to survive, their mass following alone was enough to make them something to be dealt with, not to mention the fact that Peronists voters make up the largest and most coherent voting bloc, about 30-40%.<sup>19</sup> The late 60s mark the emergence of the Argentine guerilla that sought to liberate the nation and sacrificed their life to the revolutionary cause.<sup>20</sup> Guerilla warfare broke out as a reverberation of the political crisis after overthrowing Peron.<sup>21</sup> After 18 years of exile, numerous military and civilian governments, two more coups, banning Peronism altogether, and finally allowing Peronism to be a party again, Peron was reelected to office in 1973 with 62% of votes.<sup>22</sup> He died one year after his re-election and was replaced by his second wife, Isabel who was naïve in politics and had a high disapproval rating with the public.<sup>23</sup>

### III. The Coup of 1976

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<sup>15</sup> Frank Smitha. "Argentina, from Juan and Eva Peron to the Disappeared." *Argentina, from Juan and Eva Peron to the Disappeared*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch24u.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, 8.

<sup>17</sup> “Peron deposed in Argentina,” The History Channel website, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/peron-deposed-in-argentina> (accessed Mar 25, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Mark Sullivan. "Argentina: Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations." *CRS Report for Congress*. Library of Congress, 2006 Oct. 12. Web. 25 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21113.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> Goldwert, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Sullivan.

Lewis, 51

<sup>23</sup> Mark Sullivan

With Isabel Peron as President, the economy was spiraling into a downfall. Workers increased their wages and absenteeism through strikes, prices rose, and inflation was steadily increasing and eventually reached nearly 1000 percent.<sup>24</sup> “By Christmas there was a widespread support in the military, among businessmen and even among politicians for removing Isabel from office”.<sup>25</sup> The military proceeded with a full takeover led by General Jorge Videla, Admiral Emilio Massera, and Brigadier-General Orlando Agosti. They announced the new government in March 1976 they had an array of support from the Radical Civic Union to the Communist Party.<sup>26</sup> The morning of March 24, 1976 the military junta gave a manifesto to justify their coup. In it they said the Peronist government had lost all of its ethical and moral standing and could no longer lead the nation. It blamed all their economic problems on the regime and stated that in order to solve the national crisis they had to make the hard decisions others had avoided. They proceeded to say they would uproot subversion and promote economic development so as to eliminate its causes. “With absolute firmness and devotion to service. From this moment on, the responsibility assumed requires the severe exercise of authority in order to definitively eradicate the vices affecting our country” these words lay like a heavy cloud over Argentine’s until only they saw for themselves what the junta really meant.<sup>27</sup> The junta remained in power until 1983 and sustained their power through massive social and political repression.

## **II. Literature Review**

Many scholars have analyzed this conflict from a political, economic, or ideological standpoint. In doing so they take a reductionist stance on the conflict by singling out its components, for example the military or the economy, and they make conclusions about how the

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<sup>24</sup> Lewis, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, 123.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, 126.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, 130.

group or object contributed to the war. An example of this type of work is Deborah Norden's (1996) book about military rebellion which focuses primarily on the military and their ideologies. She works to show how the military interventionism hurt Argentina's ability to achieve democracy and stabilize their economy. Her piece is useful in understanding Argentina's political atmosphere by focusing on how certain policies or types of governments caused reactions from the military which responded with counter movements in order for the military to establish hegemony. Similar to Norden is Lewis (2002) who writes from a political stance about the military and guerilla warfare. Lewis analyzes both sides of the conflict by drawing conclusions based on each groups' ideology which is useful to give insight to the discourses each group upholds. He demonstrates how each competing ideology is interventionist-based which results in violent uprisings over how the country was to be run. Goldwert's (1978) book works to create a political and historical context leading up to the Dirty War. He shows the role both the Church and military play in polarizing the nation and focuses a large part of the history on Peron, a huge factor in amplifying the polarization of cultural identities of the country to the point of the military coup of 1976. This piece is very important to historically contextualize and understand how the Dirty War was a part of a larger chain of events and how the tumultuous politics created economic degradation.

The aforementioned pieces are largely cause and effect of how one group's actions triggered another's reaction and what series of events led up to the war. While these works are valuable in creating a timeline of the series of events that led up to the Dirty War as well as understanding the underlying ideologies, they are limited in what they can provide when it comes to conflict resolution. These works are reductionist in nature because they are reducing the conflict to its components rather than interweaving the pieces to see how they are in conversation with one

another or competing for space within a certain discourse. In being reductionist, these works fail to bring the entire system into account which is important when dealing with conflict resolution because you must look at the processes within an entire system to see what type of social realities are being created as well as identifying means for less violent social realities.

In terms of conflict resolution, the main scholars' works I will be focusing on are Gergen, Burr, and Foucault. They are important when it comes to conflict resolution because of their contributions to the theory of social construction. Social construction focuses on analyzing social processes which results in a more relational perception of the world versus and individualistic one because we are shifting meaning from within an individual to what is created between relationships, this concept is further explained below. Vivian Burr (1995) discusses language as a site of construction because everything we think about is explained through language and discourses which give us a frame of reference through which to interpret the world.

### **Historical Significance and Implications**

It is important to understand social construction in a number of ways in order to understand the implications of it. Social construction is a theory about theories in other words, a metatheory, which helps us to take a critical look and reflect on the paradigms in which we participate. We can understand how social construction is situated in the historical timeline by associating it with postmodernism and contrasting it with modernism schools of thought. Modernism marks the shift from the Dark Ages to the Enlightenment. No longer did one have to rely on nobles and royalty for knowledge but the common man was assumed to be able to use reason in order to gain knowledge and make decisions. This shift in understanding created an emphasis on the individual and autonomy. It located understanding in the mind of an individual, where 'reason'

could happen. This way of understanding the world privileged certain discourses over others; it moved towards science and reason as the only means of truth making. By saying science and reason are means of producing truth you are denying any validity to other discourses that create meaning for people which contradict science. For instance, by privileging science you are discrediting discourses, such as religion, which go about describing reality in a very different way but nonetheless work to create a reality for those who participate in the discourse. So, why privilege one discourse over another when they are all different ways of talking and navigating through a social reality? By discrediting a discourse it creates polarization between groups that identify with different discourse and creates means for trying to defend and debate one another's beliefs. If we were to understand discourses as ways to describe reality rather than asserting truthfulness at another's expense we would be able to approach those with different discourses less defensively.

The idea of the mind resulted in the belief that everything that is essential to us as a human is within ourselves, within our head. This creates an understanding of yourself as "contained" where the essence of yourself, your mind, is within, and is kept protected by your container, your body. This way of meaning making privileges consistency and defending your ideas and beliefs as they are what makes you who you are. Modern psychology has made this idea of the mind, its foundation. When you see a psychiatrist you subject yourself, through confession, to their knowledge so they can evaluate you and how well your mind works. Mental diseases and chemical imbalance language has become rampant in our medical world. We have more mental diseases and diagnoses now than we have ever had in history, so is it that people are changing or has our way of understanding this paradigm influenced an epidemic? The idea of the mind as the motherboard to who you are and what you understand creates a negative approach to others. If

what is true to us is within us than any outside influence has negative connotations. We approach another with caution, for we are unaware if they benefit or negate our belief which is necessary to know in order to decide to start a relationship. If it is negative to change the way you think because that makes you who you are then you must not engage with anyone who doesn't support your way of thinking and the consequences of that are dire for humans who are inherently social beings. As demonstrated by the Dirty War conflict, intense isolation between political groups and a determination to destroy the "other" as a threat to your beliefs resulted with this logic of individualism and the idea of being self-contained.

Individualism, which is used interchangeably with Modernism, has heavily influenced our methods of research as well. If science is the method for truth seeking, then empirical research goes hand and hand with science. The goal is to weed out "untruthfulness and bias" in order to achieve a truth<sup>28</sup>. Along with that, reductionism and linear thinking is the main method for problem solving or making conclusions. The social constructionist would argue that everything is biased because it comes from a particular subject acting within certain discourses and cultures. In playing into hegemonic power by believing something is a "truth" and "in [our] efforts to abandon all voices save one, there is an enormous suppression of potential<sup>29</sup>." Social constructionism critiques these taken for granted beliefs. We rarely critique or are aware of the very paradigms we are participating in and why. For instance, do we ever wonder why we say "Hi" at the beginning of conversations, it could be any word really that would construe a greeting but as a society we've chosen "Hi", "Hello", and "Hey" as conventional ways to greet someone, with different twists based on your relationship to whom you're greeting. If I were to

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<sup>28</sup> Kenneth J Gergen. *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009: 56.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth J Gergen. *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009: 56.

greet my friend as “wassup girlfriend!”, it’s implied through that greeting that we are in fact close friends, because I haven’t chosen one of the conventional greetings that would show I was either in a more reserved setting or was an acquaintance with the person. In looking at this language and how we participate in such conventions we can reflect how we use our language to create meaning with one another. Postmodernism, which marks the time period of and is used interchangeable with Social Construction, is concerned with deconstructing the taken for granted discourses that we are a part of to understand how we participate in constructing our own realities with others, and we do so through focusing on the relational processes among humans. Social construction recognizes that we must live within discourses to navigate and create meaning, but also recognizes that no one discourse is the “truth” because this silences other discourses that have valid ways of understanding the world. Rather than locating meaning in an individual’s mind, the constructionist would argue we create meaning in conversation. When you speak with someone the conversation is in flux and constantly unfolding as one participant adds another link in the conversation. Everything said during a conversation is built upon a previous statement and meaning is negotiated between participants, rather than in their mind and translated to conversation. If meaning was in everyone’s head, how would we ever be able to understand one another because we can never get into someone’s head? With the idea that meaning is created in relationships we can begin to look at the processes, conventions, and language used in conversation and how it is put to use. This way of looking at the world allows us to be self-reflexive, to understand discourses as emerging through social practices that often eventually become normalized. For example, we originally saw something like homosexuality classified as a mental disease and that was the norm during that time period to try and “cure” someone of homosexuality because it was seen as a disease which needs to be cured. Later, as

we know our perception of homosexuality as a culture changed and it was taken out of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Homosexuality hasn't changed, just the way we understand it as a culture and have talked about it have changed. From calling it a disease to calling it a lifestyle by relabeling homosexuality it has different implications for how to approach it. By analyzing discourses we can begin to see what someone is trying to achieve with their language. By understanding that discourses emerge for certain purposes, we can look at their utility. This shifts our focus away from individualism which asserts one discourse, science, as truthful. Once we assert something as an ultimate truth it limits the ways in which we are able to discuss and participate in that discourse. Social construction begins to question what we are doing and what sort of world our interactions are creating. When did certain things, like the idea of science and reason emerge, and what was the purpose of that, and why do we continue to uphold it? In seeing everything as emerging from social relationships, we can understand how it may be useful at one point, but we can also reflect on whether or not to maintain certain discourses. By using this perspective in Argentina's Dirty War, we will begin to look at the discourses of the military junta to understand how they marginalized "subversives" and who those subversives were. Likewise, we can analyze works from the public and social organizations that represents the public in the aftermath of the war to see how they understood their government and constructed it as an "evil". By understanding the conflicting discourses that led to a mass extermination of a chunk of Argentina's population we can see justifications that the military upheld for the killings and reasons the public felt helpless in the face of the mess. In understanding the social processes that allowed for such violence to occur, we can see how the public, government, and military all played major roles in allowing for the tragedy, and in

understanding how it emerged we can suggest alternative discourses to live by which allows for a more peaceful coexistence and future.

### **Bringing meaning to conversation**

If conversation is the site of meaning making and discourses are the overarching conventions established for language, then we can see how one is able to navigate understanding with language. Wittgenstein uses the concept “language games” to explain the phenomenon of established conventions for certain ways of speaking that are designated for certain ‘forms of life’<sup>30</sup>. When in conversation, the direction of it and fluidity is constantly in flux. One utterance builds upon another, and the choice in one response directs how the next utterance can be made. If you stay within the accepted conventions of the game, you create understanding, if you were to step out of such conventions—for example, you begin to bark and wave your arms—meaning is lost because it is no longer relevant to the social norms. The idea of language games shows that we socially construct and recognize specific ways to talk and act which are useful in understanding and accomplishing tasks together. Another part of this construction we must realize is that things are only acceptable because of the way we’ve coordinated in relationships, such as greetings are for when you first introduce yourself versus in the center of a conversation. For instance “rules” like syntax and grammar aren’t the truthful way to write a paper, but are accepted because we have agreed that is the proper way to write so it’s understood properly.

Similar to the way that “truth” is constructed through privileging a discourse, knowledge is socially constructed because we must live within certain paradigms in order to feed into them. If

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009): 17.

you are to participate in one of these paradigms you must accept the proposals and the way of talking within said paradigm. An example is a biologist talking in terms of biological processes and terminology versus a physicist who will use very different terms to describe the same processes. If you are to talk in a certain way, you are assuming that the person you are speaking with understands the premises and values that you hold. If a person refuses to step into such a circle then you cannot mutually construct knowledge, such as a scientist trying to convince a priest of science over religion. They aren't participating in the same language games and therefore cannot construct a cohesive reality together.

Vivian Burr (1995) also makes contributions to the pool of knowledge on social construction. Like Gergen, she discusses language as a site of construction because everything we think about is explained through language and discourses which give us a frame of reference for which to interpret the world<sup>31</sup>. She explains that knowledge is historically and culturally contingent and that for each culture there are a number of discourses available to interpret the world. Social construction moves away from the idea of a self-contained individual and instead says the person is fragmented and changing in social life. This is a shift from modernist psychology which operates under the discourse of individualism and asserts that people are unique combinations of psychic material. Burr talks about how this idea relates to the assumption that humans are consistent and coherent in their attitudes, motivations, and emotions. We place value on consistency and to be deviant from that behavior is to be untrustworthy in your stances. But what if we could find value and understand another person's beliefs and still keep our own? What if we saw it useful to connect and understand a multiplicity of people in order to enrich the multiplicity of meanings in your life? Gergen (2009) talks of the notion of a multi-being which is

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<sup>31</sup> Vivian Burr, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 3.

coherent with the fact that it is very difficult for us as humans to always maintain consistency in every situation because we are built of a multitude of relationships<sup>32</sup>. Gergen's notion of multi-beings is that we have multiple ways of being that come to fruition within our relationships. For instance, we act differently around our friends versus parents or in a social versus professional setting. The capacity to be a multi being should extend into our dialogue where we can choose to focus on a multitude of different things within the relationship- something that bonds or separates the two- and this will determine how the relationship is built.

Another reason we chose to reject the notion of a multi-being from a modernist standpoint is because we believe it interferes with agency and our ability to make our own decisions. While we believe we have agency somewhere inside of us, the choices we make are an outcome of underlying structures of ideas. To live within an ideology refutes any idea of agency because you must follow the beliefs and structures of that ideology. Agency can be thought of in the sense that a person is capable of critical historical reflection and able to exercise choice with respect to the discourse and practices it takes up for use. In this sense problems are no longer individual but societal, as the choices for an individual stems from societal practices, beliefs, and institutions. This reconstructs a person as the sum of the total of subject positions in the discourses they occupy, and this is always in flux. Likewise, people can change their options available by seeking out different and new discourses.

As discussed previously, meaning emerges in social processes that are negotiated through our interaction and we employ positioning, acceptance, or resistance in order to create such meaning. "It is not the individual who pre-exists the relationship...but patterns of relationship and their

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009): 112.

embedded meanings that pre-exist the individual<sup>33</sup>.” This statement shows that if we were self-contained individuals who created meaning within ourselves we would not be able to negotiate meaning in relationships because everyone’s would be different—since this is not the case and we are able to understand each other in many conversations meaning must come from elsewhere. We act within larger coordination of relations that are pertinent to our society. Language structure helps two participants construct what is real by their negotiated understanding of the definitions of the words used in their conversations. Likewise, language structure helps to situate ourselves with or without a certain group as well as within or outside of a situation. We negotiate through asking of questions and clarification which allows us to continue constructing a cohesive reality through conversation. These necessary contexts are created by how we navigate through a conversation and develop meaning and understanding for each participant. So rather than trying to get into another person’s head, as most modernists strive for, or to determine their underlying motives for what they are said, we shift to looking at interaction and try to understand what we are making with our language. Social constructionists live in a world where their meaning is brought to fruition through relational processes rather than that of the mind. Through this notion, nothing is “real” unless it is socially constructed-- this doesn’t mean there is no reality, but instead people understand and define their reality based on speaking and acting from a particular standpoint. How it ties into identities---cultural identities.

### **Foucault and Power Relations**

Foucault is important to mention here because he looks at how power is constructed from a relational standpoint. Foucault’s concept of ‘disciplinary power’ is the type of power that

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<sup>33</sup> Gergen, K, M. *Social Construction A Reader*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003: 148.

manages to control society efficiently and without force<sup>34</sup>. This type of power is able to hide its own mechanisms in rhetoric such as ‘progress’, ‘knowledge’, and ‘truth’ which it constructs in order to oblige people to submit to power and discount other discourses for which to live by. Disciplinary power came about in the 18th century when populations grew and they felt a need to manage the masses through some political system. In his studies he noted a method of disciplinary power is the role of the confession in power relations. Foucault describes confession as the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth. This form of confession has brought itself to a central role in the order of civil and religious powers. For example you confess your sins to a priest or confess your crimes in the court of law. Foucault says that the power relation comes from the fact that you do not confess in solitude but instead confess to a partner who requires this said confession and then takes the confession to either appreciate, intervene, judge, reconcile, forgive, or punish. In this type of relationship the confessor has a special relationship to their confession whereas it either burdens or liberates them, and in confessing they are at the will of whom they are confessing to. The person confessed to takes on the role of evaluating the confession as form of truth being revealed. Foucault explains the act of confessing as a rhetorical device to evoke power structures on either a micro or macro scale. During his analysis of the act of confessing from a interpersonal standpoint he shows the crucial roles the confessor and the listener have in the confession as well as from an institutional level where we place ourselves as subjects in certain contexts from which we need to reveal the truth to someone we place as a higher power than us.

Another scholar who has contributed to the notion of power, knowledge, and truth as dangerous is Derrida who proposed that the concept of reason is “massively suppressive” and

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<sup>34</sup> Michel Foucault. “Power and confession”, In *Social Construction A Reader* (pp. 47-49). Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003: 47-49.

when closely examined the “sense of reason will collapse”. He shows that arguments create binaries, for example something only “is” because it is in comparison to something that “is not”, in arguments the “is not” is being discounted in light of the “is” but without the “is not” there would be no concept of the “is”. Due to such binaries and distinctions it allows for a theoretical hierarchy. Gergen wants to remove any authority from one school of thought and instead “put them all into orbit and scrutiny” which he believes is possible through social constructionism, which would redefine scientific knowledge as a byproduct of social processes not instead a quest for the ultimate truth which gives it un-scrutinized authority<sup>35</sup>. This part of social construction allows us all to be equal players and to take a self-reflective part in the conventions in which we participate in. Likewise it emphasizes everyone’s backgrounds and cultures and looks at a way in which we can navigate a world in which the multiplicity of realities can be maintained versus trying to weed out certain discourses in order to assert one.

Social construction is important for theoretical grounding because it provides an opportunity for conflict resolution. Specifically it looks to analyze the processes of a social reality, like how a cultural identity emerges, to understand what types of discourses are surrounding these, how they are affecting participants and whether or not alternative discourses would be more useful in terms of nonviolence. Social construction theory will be applied to the Dirty War as an example of a case study of this process in action to lay the groundwork for other social change and progress efforts. In using Argentina as a case study for this type of practice it will add to the resources available for conflict resolution.

### **III. Research Question**

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<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009): 20.

My question is: *How can we draw on participants' fluctuating and multifaceted way of being in order to coordinate less conflicting and violent cultural identities?*

It is important to study conflicts such as this because my research ties into the larger concept that we are all participating in the creation of the realities in which we live in by acting and speaking within our chosen discourses. Discourse analysis, applied with social construction theory, will be used to analyze the ways in which the Dirty War was fueled by the discourses of each group, how these discourses served to construct a certain cultural identity, and the consequences of such identities. This research is important to understanding conflict resolution and how to maintain cultural standards in an increasingly globalized world. By determining conflicting discourses, I can effectively analyze if there are more effective ways of sustaining less conflicted identities and realities. To do so, I will conclude what the discourses and expectations are within conflicting groups and what are ways that they can coexist in the country and create common goals. Other countries are recovering from or experiencing a repressive government themselves (i.e. Chile, Burma, Bolivia, Egypt, and Israel) and this work helps to add to the resources available for dealing with conflicts. Along with that, my hopes are that this work will inspire others to come up with novel ways to approach other ongoing or unresolved conflicts in order to provide more resources on the matter.

#### **IV. Research Design and Methodology**

I am using discourse analysis to analyze the discourses that shaped the power struggles of Argentina's Dirty War. Discourse analysis is important when analyzing power struggles because, for such struggles to exist, there must be competing discourses. This approach will allow us to analyze and make distinctions about the implications of Argentina's discourses and hegemonic

order. In order to make suggestions on conflict resolution we must analyze how certain power relations come to fruition and achieve hegemony through their discourse. Discourse analysis will show how everyone plays a part in power roles and we can analyze such roles to make conclusions of how the conflict escalated and how they can create less conflicting discourses by which to shape their cultural identities. The dichotomies created by discourses of “us” and the “other” will be applied to political party factions and how they marginalized the other group and name them as deviant.

If conversation is the site of meaning making and discourses are the overarching conventions established for language, then we can see how one is able to navigate understanding with language. In seeing everything as emerging from social relationships, we understand how it may be useful at one point, but we can also reflect on whether or not to maintain certain discourses. By using this perspective in Argentina’s Dirty War, we will begin to look at the discourses of the military junta to understand how they marginalized “subversives” and who those subversives were. Likewise, we can analyze works from the organizations that represent the public in the aftermath of the war to see how they understood their government and constructed it as an evil. By understanding the conflicting discourses that led to a mass extermination of a chunk of Argentina’s population, we can see justifications that the military upheld for the killings and reasons the public felt helpless in the face of the mess. In understanding the social processes that allowed for such violence to occur, we can see how the public, government, and military all played major roles in allowing for the tragedy, and in understanding how it emerged we can suggest alternative discourses to live by which allows for a more peaceful coexistence and future.

I will analyze the government's propaganda, speeches, and quotations taken from trials that they used to justify their actions of mass extermination in their country which will serve as primary data sources. Feitlowitz's (1998) work, which is a compilation of the terror language used by the military in the Dirty War, will be used to select quotations by the military throughout the regime so I can analyze the discourses of the military junta and how they asserted their "truth" and hegemony at the expense of the majority of their own population. This, as well as accounts from soldiers who had to commit torture will help us to understand the values of the dominant discourse and how it sustained itself. These will be sources for the discourses of the oppressors. To construct the discourses of the oppressed I am drawing on movements from H.I.J.O.S and Las Madres y Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo which embody the justice seeking and narrative reconstruction of their past that had been denied to them by the government. These grassroots organizations spurred huge political movements and public involvement over reclaiming their history and sharing their narratives. That, coupled with poetry from Juan Gelman will serve as central discourses of the personal accounts of the oppressed and illustrate how this work of art speaks to and represents the oppressed.

The first limitation that I experience when executing this model is the fact that many of my resources are in their native language, Spanish. While I am at an advanced level for Spanish and lived in Argentina for an extended amount of time, there are some nuances in the language I do not understand as well as some sentences that do not directly translate. Another limitation is the fact that I am trying to encompass an entire cultural system with limited time and space so the pieces I choose to represent the system are at my discretion and there is a larger body of work available that could be drawn on for the discourse analysis. For my purposes, I make informed selections on the better known, most poignant literature to represent the cultural identities.

## V. Argument and Evidence

<u>Dehumanizing Speech: The Oppressors</u>	<u>Humanizing Speech: The Oppressed</u>
Subversive criminal	that communion between human beings we experienced the same things and we felt that we were engaged
the responsibility assumed [by the armed forced] requires the severe exercise in authority in order to definitively eradicate the vices affecting our country	we must create a counter contribution to the reconstruction of the social identity of our people
we who believe in a pluralistic democracy are fighting a war against the idolaters of totalitarianism	we rewrite ourselves in order to survive
As the government controls and destroys the guerilla, the action of the antibody will disappear...this is just the natural reaction of a sick body.	with the hood on, I became fully aware of my complete lack of contact with the outside world
there are important details but it is difficult for me to talk about them. I think about them and I repress them. They were undressed while being unconscious and when the flight commander gave the order, depending on the location of the plane, the hatch was opened and they were thrown out naked, one by one. . .	If he confines himself to contemplation of it [exile], he'll lose his hunger, he'll lose track of himself, of his roots, he'll forget his mother, he'll become an automaton, always in search of news.

In looking at the table above I am labeling the discourses of the oppressors as “dehumanizing” while the discourses of the oppressed is “humanizing”. Just by briefly looking at the table you can contrast some of the quotes that will be further analyzed below. This contrast shows that the discourses were competing with one another, one discourse was asserting that you must kill the subversives because they are not considered citizens, or even humans, while the other discourse works to gain recognition outside of the “subversive” discourse in order to show their place in Argentine society aside from the military conflict. Further analysis will show how each group was able to achieve this affect through their language.

## **The Discourses of the Oppressors**

Discourses of the oppressors are represented through testimonials, military materials and handbooks, the press, and most important speeches delivered to the public by the Junta. First we will explore the language of the military dictators that paved the way for the following of the entire military force as well as the complicity of most of the Argentine public. It is important to realize while they hid behind rhetoric and justified their actions through their speeches, the public played a role in taking what they said at face value amidst a time where people were disappearing weekly.

### **Vice Metaphor**

In 1976, General Videla delivers a speech about his newly formed government where he says, “from this moment on, the responsibility assumed [by the armed forces] requires the severe exercise in authority in order to definitively eradicate the vices affecting our country”.<sup>36</sup> What is important to note here is his efforts at objectifying the “vices” which he is really referring to as people, people that will be killed so that the country can be what he believes to be as organized. In fact, the Junta was careful to not call this a revolution, because that is what Argentina is used to in the past with the chaos and the impulsiveness, instead this was named the National Reorganization Process (the Process), to show it was an organized plan to bring structure to the Argentines, or at least that’s what the government wanted the people to think.<sup>37</sup> At first the coup was well received even making headlines in newspapers that said the coup “would bring Argentina the civilized reparation that it deserved”.<sup>38</sup> Videla continues with his speech to justify

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<sup>36</sup> Lewis, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Marguerite Feitlowitz. *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998:22.

<sup>38</sup> Feitlowitz, 7.

the Process he has planned, which is a “sacred responsibility” to get rid of “subversion” and he promises Argentina would join the “concert of nations”.<sup>39</sup> In drawing upon Argentina’s religious ties he is associating the Process with a godly cleansing of the nation. He justifies the cleansing by saying it will bring Argentina within the concert of nations, more specifically he is referring to the US and Great Britain whom were world powers at the time and had ideal economies compared to Argentina’s suffering one. This promise of a restored economy equivalent to the status of Britain and the US’s gave the people incentive to oblige. Again, drawing upon religion is the statement “the aim of the Process is the profound transformation of consciousness” which Videla uses as a form of disciplinary power, because if this is God’s will, then how do you refute it?<sup>40</sup> For a nation with a battered social history and economy, the promise of a social cleansing for a “profound transformation of consciousness” and a prosperous economy was what the public wanted to hear and wanted to achieve more than anything. In believing his statements, the public submits to the torture and oppression that is to follow.

### **Illness Metaphor**

Similar to the language of Videla is a quote from Rear Admiral Cesar Guzetti who uses a disease metaphor in the newspaper *La Opinion* 1976 to justify the Process that is undergoing in Argentina.

The social body of the country is contaminated by an illness that in corroding its entrails produces antibodies. These antibodies must not be considered in the same ways as [the original] microbe. As the government controls and destroys the

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<sup>39</sup> Feitlowitz, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Feitlowitz, 19.

guerilla, the action of the antibody will disappear...this is just the natural reaction of a sick body.<sup>41</sup>

By using this metaphor, Guzzetti is going along with Videla's pattern of objectification. If you objectify the enemy, then you can justify their killing because they are dehumanized and do not have the basic rights or privileges of other humans. Furthermore, by depicting the country as diseased and being rapidly taken over by a spreading infection, he creates a crisis that needs to be absolved through extermination. The way you fix a sickness is to get rid of it, and that's what the regime planned to do. Yet what they didn't say was this sickness was not in fact so abstract, but were Argentine people.

### **Denying Citizenry**

When Videla goes about describing the enemy, he uses selected rhetoric to not only objectify the enemy but to keep it as abstract, and therefore as broad, as possible. Consider the following statement, "the repression is directed against a minority we do not consider Argentine...a terrorist is not only someone who plants bombs, but a person whose ideas are contrary to our Western, Christian civilization...he should not even be considered our brother..."<sup>42</sup> This statement shows that Videla is trying to distance the public from their deemed enemy, because he knows the enemy is partly the public and in order to justify the killings he makes a statement that these people aren't even Argentine, nor their brother, and in that sense they are not human and deserve what comes to them. He is creating a binary of the enemy versus defender, us and them, Argentine versus and evil, and lets the public know that, in this time of battling such evil, they play a role in determining which side to support. In his speeches he is

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<sup>41</sup> Feitlowitz, 33.

<sup>42</sup> Feitlowitz, 24.

instilling a fear of this ominous other in the Argentines so that they will throw their support to the regime.

### **Orders Given and Taken**

An important relationship within the discourses of the oppressors is within the military; the ones giving orders and those taking orders which marked the divide for those with power who justified the killings and those who were actually committing the torture and murders. In a speech given by Videla to the Navy Mechanics school, which is known as the “largest and brutal concentration camps ESMA”, he states “we who believe in a pluralistic democracy are fighting a war against the idolaters of totalitarianism...a war for freedom and against tyranny... here and now, a war against those who favor death and by those of us who favor life”.<sup>43</sup> He creates the dichotomy of us and them and shows that they are the will of good versus evil. He speaks in terms of war, even though their methods are to go out and kidnap subversives rather than defending in battle, and shows that this is a battle of ideology a repressive ideology versus a liberating one meant for the good of the nation. This is the way he gives support and justifications to those who go and conduct the torture.

The following statement is taken from Scilingo, who had participated in the “Death Flights” where many detainees were captured, drugged or killed and dropped out of a plane into the ocean. Scilingo states “there are important details but it is difficult for me to talk about them. I think about them and I repress them. They were undressed while being unconscious and when the flight commander gave the order, depending on the location of the plane, the hatch was opened and they were thrown out naked, one by one. . . . As I was quite nervous about the

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<sup>43</sup> Feitlowitz, 25

situation, I almost fell and tumbled into the abyss. . . . I stumbled and they grabbed me.” His interviewer notes afterwards that Scilingo was “convinced that his task was vital to save Argentina from communism.”<sup>44</sup> Here it is important to see the perspective of those committing these tortures and crimes against humanity for the junta and their take on it. They were told this was an honorable process; a process for their nation meant to cleanse the society of subversive forces. While the lower ranking soldiers dutifully obliged, they were just as traumatized as the public in many ways. In following orders and not questioning the reasoning behind Videla’s justification, they fueled the binary of “us and other” and chose to become and represent the “us” side, maybe because they felt it was right, maybe because the military was their identity and that was how to confirm it, or maybe because they were too scared to do anything else but oblige because they knew the power the military had.

### **Concentration Camp Slang**

Other jargon used by the military in concentration camps is important to examine in order to understand their perspective. For instance, taken from a table in the secret 380 page military manual made by Army Chief Roberto Viola in 1976 it states what terminology can and cannot be used by the military.<sup>45</sup> The table is set up in columns of words to not use and across from it is the proper word to use instead. Rather than saying ‘guerilla’ they were supposed to say ‘armed bands of subversive criminals’ and rather than saying ‘guerilla taken prisoner’ they were ordered to say ‘captured delinquent’.<sup>46</sup> This is another example of hiding behind abstractions. Rather than calling someone a guerilla, a distinct Argentine revolutionary, they could say subversive criminal, encompassing whomever they deemed necessary. Also rather than saying taken

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<sup>44</sup> Antonius Robben. "How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of Argentina's Dirty War." *Cultural Critique* 59.1 (2005): 120-64: 120.

<sup>45</sup> Feitlowitz, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Feitlowitz, 50.

“prisoner” it was a “captured delinquent”. To take someone prisoner implies you are responsible for that person and engaged in the act of imprisoning, however if you say “captured” it is more passive. By saying “captured delinquent” it’s as if you have taken hold of an enemy in battle, rather than kidnapping them from their bedroom in the dark of the night for torture and ultimately death. Another implication of “captured delinquent” is that they are captured based on their actions and deserve to be captured, by capturing such a delinquent the military was only doing their national duty. Other important words used by the military in concentration camps are discussed below. The same terms inside the camps, have taken on meanings and connotations of their own aside from original definitions. Now these connections and words float around Argentina’s language and their terrorist associations remain. Words like “persuasion”, “interrogation”, “treatment”, and “intensive therapy room” were euphemisms for torture or the torture room.<sup>47</sup> A soldier would tell the detainee they were going to be persuaded or get treatment, but the prisoner knew that meant torture until death or another day shackled in prison. Using such euphemisms not only distanced the torturers from the tortures they were committing, but lightened the reality for the prisoners and what they were going to face. Other euphemisms are “operation” for kidnappings and the most famous “desaparacido” (the disappeared), instead of saying people were murdered and dead.<sup>48</sup> To say someone is murdered implies there is a murderer, someone responsible for the death. But to rather say they “disappeared” relinquishes responsibility and it is as if that person disappeared naturally. By using such euphemisms the torturers hid in language to soften the blow of the omnipresent torture and oppression.

## **Denial as Repression**

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<sup>47</sup> Feitlowitz, 50

<sup>48</sup> Feitlowitz, 50 and 56.

Videla also used denial in order to control the public's perception and repress what was going on in Argentina during the years of the Dirty War. In 1977, in response to human rights questions from British journalists, Videla says "I emphatically deny that there are concentration camps in Argentina, or military establishments in which people are held longer than is absolutely necessary in this...fight against subversion..." and again in 1978 he makes the statement, "In Argentina, political prisoners don't exist. No one is persecuted or constrained on account of his political ideas."<sup>49</sup> By publicly denying any existence of political prisoners and concentration camps he is showing that he is not afraid to confront the public with something that you later find out is a complete lie. In making such statements, he is keeping foreign journalists at bay while calming Argentine's anxieties over what is really happening in their country. As people are disappearing and the government strongly denies any ties it leaves Argentina in a state of ambiguity: do you turn a blind eye in hopes that you and your family will be unharmed, or do you fight the repressive rhetoric with personal stories that say the opposite of what they claim?

### **The Discourses of the Oppressed**

The representations of the oppressed that I have chosen represent a broad range of those affected by the Dirty War and their narratives that represent such. Juan Gelman was exiled from Argentina during this period, where his son and his son's pregnant wife had "disappeared" along with the majority of his former friends and colleagues. His poetry embodies an artistic expression of exile and how it affected his concept of identity. He is famous for his poetry so its reverence with society shows that he told a story they connected with and felt represented by.

### **Silence and Repression**

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<sup>49</sup> Feitlowitz, 28.

First, there is a theme of silence in Gelman's poetry. The silence is representative of the oppressive and repressive control of the military dictators to hide the torture and murders occurring. "Here we too are silent actors. We have a soft shine, tenderness dirty with dried blood, like kids, a lot of silence around us".<sup>50</sup> The "us" and "we" Gelman refers to is all those affected by the violence and trauma of the Dirty War. He is attempting to have a relational representation of the tragedies. By using the metaphor that they are like kids he is showing the sense that they were helpless, like kids, in defining their stories or histories as the military did so for them during the regime.

In the orchestra section they prefer a sound film. Who made this film? On this side of the screen, our side, you can hear the dead letting go of their lives little by little like the sighing of dreams, the screams of torture, the shuffling of people in prison; injustice is a hellish roar under the clatter of military boots. Over on the other side pale ghosts are seen passing by, and no piano announces them.<sup>51</sup>

Again is the notion of silence, where all the experiences and narratives of the oppressed were tried to be kept silent and denied by the military. "Injustice is a hellish roar under military boots" depicts his sense of fear instilled by the military. He is showing that they were under the roar of military boots, as if the military was too big of an entity to reckon with and instead you submit to the injustices. By the line 'no piano announcing them' he refers again to the repression and the fact that many of the disappeared haven't been identified. When no piano announces

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<sup>50</sup> Juan Gelman. "Unthinkable Tenderness." *University of California Press*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Mar. 2013: XVII.

<sup>51</sup> Gelman, XVII.

your death it speaks to the fact that the military denied not only killing the prisoners, but denied their identities.

In my country Carlos would use the straw of a broom to kill the dictator so that he'd last longer. Paco will give his life so that things won't go on as they are, whatever future used to burn in our memories, the past was a continent that someday will be discovered.<sup>52</sup>

In reminiscing about his colleagues he is evoking the narrative of the oppressed by stating they would do anything, even give their lives, to fight the injustice opposed on them by the military. He is remembering them in terms of revolutionary heroes who fought an oppressive regime, whereas that regime deemed them subversives not worthy of basic human rights. What Gelman is neglecting to point out through being absorbed in his personal discourse of being victimized, is that complacency emerges from such a narrative because being victimized allows for little account of social change because it is as if there is nothing that can be done to resolve this. "The past was a continent that someday will be discovered" is an important statement too, considering a continent is the largest identification of a landmass the continent of a hidden past shows how vast and expansive the repression was. It also speaks to the fact that there are many things unsaid and uncovered as an aftermath of the Dirty War because many of the oppressed are so fearful or scared to share their accounts of what happened.

### **Discourse of Exile**

Another important and unique perspective that Gelman provides is that of an exiled citizen. Since he was exiled during most of the war, he had to live vicariously through the news stories while all his love ones were being directly affected and his homeland was in chaos.

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<sup>52</sup> Gelman, XX.

He who contemplates exile is absorbed by it. He will be able to talk about exile, but never about himself. If he confines himself to contemplation of it, he'll lose his hunger, he'll lose track of himself, of his roots, he'll forget his mother, he'll become an automaton, always in search of news. Then the worse happens—he stops desiring.<sup>53</sup>

He talks about the discourses of exile and how in trying to come to terms with such he has become absorbed by it. In trying to identify what exile means to him it becomes a part of his identity at the expense of his own. This is a paradox about many of the writings in the aftermath of the Dirty War; how do they create a language to come to terms with what happened while simultaneously allowing their identities to be more than just a victim of such repression for the rest of their lives?

We do not line up outside the dream factory. We line up outside the country. We are in a dream factory—eating, sleeping, loving are like dreams; every day we manufacture these dreams and through them we go on to the next dream or day.<sup>54</sup>

The dream factory is reminiscent of a sort of limbo or purgatory that oppressed are left in. After having their story told for them, their accounts denied, the perpetrators pardoned, and no process of coping they have been left to try and reconcile their histories without any language to do so. It is important to have language to describe and come to terms with their memories and histories so that they can begin to seek out new ways to construct a cultural identity conducive to the future they desire. Without the language available to describe what had happened or the necessary outlets to do so they are left in this purgatory like dream state between what they

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<sup>53</sup> Gelman, XX.

<sup>54</sup> Gelman, VIII

remember and what society is told to remember. Gelman is reconstructing his narratives through this art form and giving language where it has been denied.

### **The Mothers and Grandmothers**

Another important perspective of the oppressed is that of the mothers. Many times during the regime they captured pregnant ‘subversives’ for prisoners. Many of these women did not survive and their babies were sold to “proper” couples, usually from the military or police.<sup>55</sup> Since 1977, the Grandmothers and Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have searched for these missing children through silent protest and demonstrations.<sup>56</sup> The Plaza de Mayo is where the presidential house, Casa Rosada, is located and in demonstrating in the plaza they were bringing what the military had tried to keep silent to the public sphere. They would march wearing white handkerchiefs over their heads to signify their loss of a loved one to the war; many times they would hold pictures of their lost family members and wrote “¿Donde estan?” (where are they?) on them.<sup>57</sup> These protests were significant in re-positioning the mothers’ identities during this time period. They were denied their motherhood by the government taking their babies but through these protests and demonstrations they reclaimed and re-narrated their identities. These mothers have protested every week and continue to do so to this day for the justices of their lost family members.

Hebe de Bonafini, president of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo describes the beginning of the organization as:

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<sup>55</sup> Feitlowitz, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Feitlowitz, 68.

<sup>57</sup> Feitlowitz, 36.

We were completely alone. But mothers who came, the new ones were added every day, a lot came with fear because one was not too easy to get close to a group you do not know, both in times of terror. It was not easy. But all mothers had a great need ... What attracted us all, the beginning was that community, that communion between human beings we experienced the same things and we felt that we were engaged.<sup>58</sup>

This is important because it shows that through this movement it not only gave the mothers the identity that was denied to them but gave them a place and community to be a part of. Contrasting this with Videla's statements that the subversive had no place in Argentine society, the mothers responded by created such a place as well as reinstating their identity as a mother, not a subversive. The fact that they were able to attract such a following shows that the oppressed were looking for such an outlet to narrate their stories and come to terms with what was happening, even though the government told them it was not.

### **The Children Taken**

Even more important is the results from this movement and the mothers who decided to share their stories which inspired others to come out from hiding and share their accounts of the torture and missing family members. By shifting the repression from private space to the public sphere they were no longer denied the atrocities that occurred but were able to be related to by others who had similar experiences. In response to the protests of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo a new human rights organization called H.I.J.O.S. was founded. Hijos in Spanish means children and this group represents the children of the Dirty War that may have been separated from their biological families. This organization also seeks to confront the

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<sup>58</sup> Hebe de Bonafini. "Asociación Madres De Plaza De Mayo." *Asociación Madres De Plaza De Mayo*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.madres.org/navegar/nav.php?idsitio=5>>.

torturers of them or their family members through public graffiti and shaming. From their website they have an article called “What is Identity?”, which explains their concept of identity and how it pertains to the work they have taken on.

Because we see that there are kids who have a very similar story, that have almost the same things. They know what is happening to us and the feelings we go through. We discovered that our life was marked by common things that had and have to do with the 70's with our older generation, with the organizations to which they belonged. We set out to know our history, our identity from the experiences I went through each one, taking into account the time and the individual processes. We decided to start take testimony, record statements by history. It was a way to break the silence of many of our families...Today there is much talk of the missing, but not why they disappeared, what they wanted, what they dreamed, why they were fighting...we must create a counter contribution to the reconstruction of the social identity of our people. Based on this, we went to work and developed a project linked to the historical reconstruction. One of the tasks undertaken is taking testimony not only to our fellow militants but also of the 70 organizations. What we want is to make a critical recovery (rather than idealized) of the past, to use as a tool for change in the present. History is not a dead letter.<sup>59</sup>

These children have no recollection of the history that they are so deeply enmeshed in yet they still feel the connection to the tragedies and an urge to reconstruct a multi-vocal history, not just one the military chooses to tell. In their efforts they have worked with the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and rather than choosing to distance themselves from this

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<sup>59</sup> "Que Es La Identidad." H.I.J.O.S, n.d. Web. 9 Apr. 2013. <[http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=140&Itemid=401](http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140&Itemid=401)>.

victimized identity they become a part of it as well. The children's efforts are important because it shows that although the Dirty War is in their past, the aftermath is very much in the present and the coping process has only barely begun. These children are compelled to bring justice to their nation because of the lies they grew up with and now they are old enough to question such injustices and participate in the work themselves.

The next portion is testimony from prisoners of the concentration camp. Their stories are important because these are the very few stories of the survivors who have insight to the language of torture. Laura S, a human rights lawyer and surviving sister of a desaparecido writes about the Capucha, a hood that shackled prisoners were forced to wear throughout the day "with the hood on, I became fully aware of my complete lack of contact with the outside world. There was nothing to protect you, you were completely alone... For me, capucha is a place, and that place meant torture and ultimately death for people I loved very, very much. And someday, I'm going to have to explain that to my kids."<sup>60</sup> In this statement she is demonstrating how she was dehumanized and objectified by this process. It showed the brutalities they faced to be dehumanized in such a manner. This was important for the guards because they had to separate themselves from the victims in order to justify their actions and commit such torture. Today's dilemma is that after surviving such torture and objectification they are thrown back into the very society that denied them with no means of coping or reconstructing their identities to be re-humanized. Going along with this notion Mario Villani, a four year prisoner who spent time in five concentration camps states: " 'You don't exist' was a favorite of theirs from the inside".<sup>61</sup> This shows that by being in a concentration camp it was as if you were already deemed dead so the guards could do as they wished. Once again it goes along with objectifying the other in order

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<sup>60</sup> Feitlowitz, 54.

<sup>61</sup> Feitlowitz, 82.

to justify the torture that ensued. Another scholar, author, and concentration camp survivor, Nora Strejilevich writes “we lost a version of who we were and we rewrite ourselves in order to survive”.<sup>62</sup> This is very telling to the identity of the repressed and the fact that they use performance based, in the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and artistic based, in the case of Juan Gelman, forms of communication in order to rewrite and tell their stories that were denied to them and in doing so they create a space and relationships for others to come forward and share their stories as well.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The military evoked tactics of disciplinary power to hide their crimes and get the public to oblige. Promises of prosperity and godliness for support in fighting a subversive enemy that isn't even Argentine, or human for that matter, is the rhetoric they hid behind to justify a mass extermination and torture of the population. The oppressed are now faced with grappling with such atrocities amidst public inaction and after the fact that they have been objectified. The relationship between the groups is largely characterized by distrust, which leads to polarization. From the beginning, class polarization was present and amplified through several coups and the emergence of Peronism. After such mistrust emerged it was amplified through their language of ‘us’ and the ‘other’, the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. By creating such polarization and fear of the ‘other’, these discourses fed into and amplified certain identities which led to the point of violence and a determination to destroy the other. The nature of this relationship was conceived and maintained by attack and counterattack.

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<sup>62</sup> Cynthia Cohen, et al. "Fire in the Memory." *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*. Oakland, CA: New Village, 2011: 157.

In the aftermath of such violence, Argentina must go on as a country that houses both of these identities. During the violent times they created a dichotomy and now they must go on together amidst their conflicted past. If language constructs our realities than the way we relate to one another determines the nature of our relationship and who we identify with as people. If the opposing language used in each discourse created conflict by marginalizing one group, it is useful to look at ways to create a new language that encompass and humanize those that claim an Argentine identity rather than saying one group is more Argentine or deserving of human rights than another. By allowing for both of the historical narratives to be told it will give both groups their say in history and therefore their place in Argentina's history and culture. Transformative dialogue is a useful way to approach a conflicted situation. Transformative dialogue thrives on efforts towards mutual coordination, something that can be achieved through conversation<sup>63</sup>. Transformative dialogue creates the opportunity to reduce distances and polarities by opening up possibilities for other conversations based on similarities rather than defending their differences. Rather than trying to see who is right and wrong and instead seeing each relationship as valuable in representing a certain culture and tradition then we can create different possibilities for our future such as a more unified Argentine identity. Transformative dialogue broadens the spectrum to consider ways we are all participating in a system, which will also help us to critically reflect on outcomes we dislike and concurrently make changes to the traditions we uphold for different outcomes<sup>64</sup>. The Dirty War is an important case study to apply such an approach which can be transferred to other efforts of conflict resolution. A way to go about such dialogue would be to allow the victims to confront their torturers or oppressors, to give language and develop understanding of the trauma both sides have to live with. As can be seen by lower ranking

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<sup>63</sup> Kenneth J Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009):111.

<sup>64</sup> Kenneth J Gergen, *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009):112.

soldiers' testimonies, those who committed torture are scarred in similar ways to those whom experienced it. By coming to terms with the fact they share similarities it will reduce polarity. The oppressed are now able to begin to cope with such atrocities through artistic and performance based communication which gives outlets for expressing emotions and experiences that had not yet been given language. In opening up such outlets it has allowed for other Argentines to come forward and share their stories. In doing so they are allowing for a multi-vocal history and identity to be rewritten, rather than one that privileges a certain discourse. This type of communication is extremely important in reducing conflict because it dissolves the subversion of the oppressed by giving them means for expression. Centers such as the Bereaved Family Forum, which is created for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which allows for families to come together from either group and engage in facilitated dialogues about the grief they have both experienced as result of this conflict is a useful resource for Argentina's Dirty War conflict. It suspends the debate of "right" and "wrong" and tries to understand how violence and conflict became possible and invites one another to listen to each other rather than being combative. These facilitated dialogues allows both groups to humanize and connect with one another apart from their conflicted identities and fosters nonviolence practices to conflict resolution.

In the time of terror the main thing that gained the most support from both identities was the promise of prosperity for Argentina. While both sides want to maintain control in ways that conflict, what is similar and an opportunity for transformative dialogue is that they both want Argentina to have economic and social prosperity. By focusing on resources available to achieve such prosperity with the integration of both identities working together rather than against one another it will provide means for which they can open up a discussion and see the other in a different light. Most importantly is that while they have created conflicting cultural identities is

the fact that they are all Argentine and share a history, country, and political system. After experiencing such a period of violence, it can be said that many Argentines desire to create an atmosphere where such discourses do not create a power struggle. In shifting their goals from achieving hegemony to achieving an encompassing Argentine identity that does not result in violence they can mutually coordinate to create a nonviolent identity versus trying to destroy one another.

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