

“Do You Know Who You Are?” Radical Existential Doubt and Scientific Certainty in the Search for the Kidnapped Children of the Disappeared in Argentina

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Abstract During the Argentine military dictatorship (1976–83) up to 30,000 people disappeared. Included among them were an estimated 500 children who were handed over to families related (or with close ties) to security forces. *The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo* formed to discover their fate. During the 1980s, the *Grandmothers* used newly available genetic technologies as a means of verifying the identities of potential grandchildren to reunite them with their biological families. In the 1990s, custody was no longer an issue because the children were legally adults. Forced to change their strategy, they embarked on public campaigns directing those with “doubts about their identity” to contact the organization. This article provides an ethnographic analysis of these public campaigns to advance theoretical perspectives on the nature of embodied truth and the transformation of individual concerns regarding personal identity to collective doubt regarding national identity and belonging. [identity, human rights, genetics, history, politics, memory]

A young man wakes up, rises out of bed, and heads into the bathroom. As he splashes water onto his face from the sink to stir himself from slumber, he glances up at the mirror and is startled to confront someone else’s reflection staring back at him. An off-screen narrator announces: “Mariano doesn’t know that Pedro exists. Pedro exists, and his grandmother is searching for him.” Using the 19th-century image of the double, the message is: Mariano is not the person he thinks he is.

This television commercial first aired in the year 2000 as part of a publicity campaign launched by *Las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (*The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo*),¹ a prominent Argentine human rights organization that emerged in response to the actions of the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983. The military dictatorship used the pretext of a “dirty war” against armed guerilla groups to eliminate political dissidents. Up to 30,000 civilians disappeared.² Included among the disappeared were children kidnapped alongside their parents and infants born in the clandestine detention centers where their pregnant mothers had been held. Although their parents were killed, an estimated 500 of these young children and infants were handed over to military families or those with close ties to them along with forged birth certificates so that they could be raised as their own.

The primary objective of the *Grandmothers* is the recovery of their kidnapped grandchildren.³ After the fall of the dictatorship in 1983, through anonymous tips and their own investigations, the *Grandmothers* located those they believed to be their missing grandchildren but were unable to prove their identities to the satisfaction of an often-hostile legal system. Working with geneticists in the United States, they developed an “index of grandpaternity” that was able to ascertain the biological identity of the grandchildren in the absence of the parents (King 1992; Owens et al. 2002; Penchaszadeh 1992). In 1987, a National Genetic Data Bank was created to store DNA samples from family members. These samples could be compared with potential grandchildren to reunite them with their biological families. During this period they succeeded in locating and reuniting over 50 grandchildren with their biological families, at times through arduous custody battles.

By the mid-1990s, custody was no longer an issue because the children in question were legally adults. The *Grandmothers* realized that they would have to modify their objectives accordingly. Influenced by arguments emerging out of the adoption rights movement, they believed that their missing grandchildren would have a natural, inchoate suspicion that the people who raised them were not their biological parents. Prompted by this suspicion, their grandchildren would harbor a desire for information regarding their origins. The *Grandmothers*’ new strategy was to enhance the profile of the organization through public campaigns that attempt to direct “those with doubts about their identity” to contact the organization. These campaigns include the media advertisements like the commercial described above. Such campaigns have yielded positive results. For example, within five days of its first airing, the aforementioned commercial prompted over 240 people to contact the organization. They all believed they were possible children of the disappeared.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the *Grandmothers* expanded their public campaigns to include cultural activities. They sponsor artistic competitions and organize festivals, conferences, and other events, inviting collaborations with artists, writers, musicians, actors, and even social scientists. These collaborations are all organized around the general theme of identity. They address both the specific problematic of the children of the disappeared and other consequences of the military dictatorship but also “identity” more broadly conceived. For this reason, I was told numerous times that the *Grandmothers* are “identity promoters” in Argentina. Their campaigns not only diffuse information but also aim to, in their own description, “promote discussion about the issue of identity in the fields of artistic expression.” Their festivals provide performance spaces for theater and music while artistic competitions are judged by a jury composed of members of the *Grandmothers* alongside professionals in their respective field and result in public exhibitions. Competitions have involved everything from photography, choreography, tango lyrics, short films, dance, nonfiction, and even architecture and design. Events have no fund raising purpose. Attendance is free. Although many of the works directly specifically address the dictatorship and the situation of kidnapped grandchildren, this is not a prerequisite for submissions. For example, the call for submissions for the *Tango por la identidad* (“Tango for Identity”) competition describes the requirements as follows: “the sole subject matters for lyrics is

‘Identity,’ understood in individual or socio-cultural terms (who we are as a people and as a society).”

The *Grandmothers*’ campaigns not only target young people who already have doubts about their biologically identity but also aim to actively generate doubt. This article addresses this apparent paradox. Although the *Grandmothers* promise the resolution of doubt through the use of genetic technologies of certainty, their campaigns promote forms of existential doubt that cannot be resolved through these technologies. I argue that these campaigns do not simply aim to generate doubt about individual biological identities but intend to raise much larger questions about national belonging. Drawing on literature in cultural politics and identity, I argue that the search for and recovery of the children of the disappeared highlights the construction of a postdictatorship subject in Argentina.

Although specifically directed at those with “doubts about their identity” to contact the organization, the *Grandmothers*’ public campaigns transform doubts about individual identities into collective doubt about national belonging. In addressing this, I examine how an organization that formed out of the dictatorship with the specific goal of locating and recovering their disappeared grandchildren has become what has been called “a national reference point” not only to the events of the military dictatorship but also for matters of identity broadly conceived. They accomplish this through their public campaigns and in their institutional discourse that parallels the process that children of the disappeared go through as they recover their biological identities (and discover their “biological truth”) to the collective identity of all Argentines coming to terms with the actions of the dictatorship. The individual and embodied truths of these individuals (their own “certainty of knowing who they are”) become the foundations for the construction of the country’s collective historical truth about the dictatorship. In such a way, children of the disappeared who have recovered their identities are transformed into cultural models for Argentines to follow. In the process, a human rights NGO’s search for biological family members is transformed into a search for national belonging.

Methods

Research for this article was conducted in Argentina over 14 months between 2003 and 2005. Fieldwork for an ethnographic study of the search for and recovery of the children of the disappeared consisted of three main components. First, I conducted 37 interviews with family members of the disappeared, human rights group workers, mental health teams, and jurists. The second component of my fieldwork was archival research at human rights organizations, newspaper archives, and university and professional libraries. Finally, I attended numerous human rights events and activities. The majority of these events were public. In total, I attended 42 events that were sponsored by the *Grandmothers*, including numerous talks and presentations, three conferences, four expositions, and their yearly music and theater festivals.

“Do You Know Who You Are?”

“Do you know who you are?” This is the question the *Grandmothers*’ campaigns explicitly pose. Individuals with “doubts about their identity” are directed to contact the institution. “Do not remain in doubt,” these campaigns exhort young people, asking them to fundamentally question their social reality. Like the advertisement described above, audience members are informed that the most-taken-for-granted knowledge they have about themselves—their name, their age, and their parents—may be fraudulent. Not only are their parents not their “real” parents but also they have also deliberately concealed this information from them. This secret may directly or indirectly implicate them in the disappearance and murder of their biological parents.

As of June 2009, 97 grandchildren have recovered their identities (incl. eight in 2008). Although it is difficult to generalize about their experience, I cite the case of Horacio, located in 2003 who I interviewed a year later, to give an example of what this process entails. Horacio differs from most of the located grandchildren in that he is one of only a handful of grandchildren who speak openly about his experience, but his story is representative of the process that many went through.⁴ “Before coming to the *Grandmothers*, I grew up with a family where I had doubts that they were really my family,” he opened our interview. His life story, as he recounts it, is structured by doubt.

I grew up with them for 23 or 24 years, thinking that I was their son, their biological son, because this is what they told me. And, well, from adolescence, I always doubted my parents were really my parents because physically we were not very similar. But it wasn’t just height or looks. More than that, it was how I was. I was an extremely sociable person. They were nothing like that. They were very closed off, very different, and very conservative and provincial people.

According to Horacio, his doubt was not merely a product of physical difference. He felt he did not fit in with his family. These doubts nagged him over the years and finally culminated in his conviction that the people who claimed to be his parents were not.⁵

When Horacio finally went to the *Grandmothers* to have his biological identity genetically confirmed, he was firmly convinced that he was a child of the disappeared. He had even correctly surmised the identity of his biological parents by searching a photographic database of disappeared parents on the *Grandmothers*’ website. A striking family resemblance led him to that conclusion. The eventual genetic confirmation of his biological identity required him to not only take up a new first and last name but also a new date of birth as well in which he lost over one year of his life as he discovered his real date of birth was 1976 and not 1977 as his falsified birth certificate attested.

Unlike some of the more contentious cases of located grandchildren, Horacio immediately seized on his new identity. He made almost a complete break with his past life, rupturing contact with almost everyone he knew from his old life except his girlfriend and went to work for the *Grandmothers*. He reasoned that everyone in his family and in his neighborhood

knew of his origins but had kept that information secret from him. Although they were not directly implicated in the actions of the military, he blamed the people who raised him for lying to him about his origins.

The Adoption Rights Movement and a New Strategy

In the press conference announcing his restitution, Horacio declared: “A real man does not exist without his real identity.” As literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman (2002) has noted, underlying an individual’s concern for being “real” is a desire for authenticity. Before Horacio discovered his biological identity, he was living an inauthentic existence. That “people need to know who they are” is an oft-repeated phrase of the *Grandmothers*’ discourse. It is the guiding assumption of their campaigns and has two unspoken claims: first, individuals have not only a desire but also an intrinsic need to know their biological origins and, second, their “real identities” are located within their biological origins. These premises originate out of developments in genetics in the late 20th century; a more direct influence is the adoption rights movement in North America and Europe in the 1970s that argued for the rights of adopted children to know their biological identities.⁶

A tenet of the adoption rights movement is that in the course of adopted individuals’ lives, a need to know their biological identities will emerge and they should have unfettered access to such information.⁷ Although arguments from the adoption rights movement influence the *Grandmothers*’ institutional discourse, the relationship in Argentina is reciprocal. In direct response to the question posed by the *Grandmothers*’ campaigns—“do you know who you are?”—an NGO called “Who we are” (*Quienes Somos* n.d.) formed in Argentina in 2002 to help individuals—in their own words—“recover their biological identity.”⁸ The stories they recount in media coverage of the group and on their website are complementary to the *Grandmothers*’ featuring falsified adoptions, cradle robberies, and black market babies, and form part of a larger global narrative encompassing both licit international adoption and illicit child trafficking where babies flow from poor countries with high birthrates to rich ones with low ones.

Once their grandchildren reached the legal status of adults, the *Grandmothers* saw a parallel in the Argentine case with adult adopted children world wide who attempt to locate their biological parents. The *Grandmothers*’ assumption was that their kidnapped grandchildren would do the same as these adopted children. However, the difference in the Argentine case was that the majority of their missing grandchildren would not know they were adopted. Most grandchildren who had been located in military homes had been told that they were the biological children of the people who kidnapped them. The purpose of the *Grandmothers*’ public campaigns was to help them question what they may have taken for granted, to actively promote and generate doubt where it did not yet openly exist. For example, when the *Grandmothers* first met with actors who started the annual *Teatro X La Identidad* (Theater for Identity) festival, they told them their motivation for collaboration: “Young people pay more attention to you actors. We need to sow (*instalar*) doubt” (Amorin

2001:16). The first play written for the *Grandmothers* was, not coincidentally, called *A Propósito de la Duda* (“A Propos of Doubt”). “Sowing doubt” is a central strategy of the *Grandmothers*’ public campaigns, one that was reinforced with my interviews with the individuals responsible for them.

Manufacturing Doubt

The *Grandmothers*’ promotion of doubt through their campaigns and their use of genetics to resolve these doubts needs to be situated in the larger context of how genetic technologies are used globally to resolve doubts about kinship, paternity in particular. During my fieldwork in Argentina, a debate erupted in the media over the introduction of “home paternity kits” that allow fathers to verify whether their children are really their own without going to a blood center or DNA laboratory. These technologies are considered more controversial than prior ones because their accessibility and ease enable doubting dads to verify their paternity without their partners’ knowledge or consent. Like in the *Grandmothers*’ campaigns, having doubts and uncertainties about the biological identity of one’s child is considered a negative state of being. Genetics is viewed as the only means to positively resolve such doubt. As one male Argentine journalist stated in an article on the topic: “To know that your son is yours is the only irrefutable truth that a man needs in life” (Peker 2004:48). Similar to the *Grandmothers*, the paternity testing literature also speaks of doubt produced by a lack of family resemblance between children and parents. Although the *Grandmothers* ask, “do you know who you are?” paternity tests play on the question, “do you know who your child is?”

The promotion of doubt through the promise of its resolution reveals how technologies of certainty themselves generate conditions of uncertainty (Fonseca 2004).⁹ Paternity tests are sold by encouraging doubts about paternity. In the process, they manufacture the very doubt that their products offer to resolve. The *Grandmothers*’ campaigns encourage young people to doubt that their parents are really their parents. They attempt to create doubt about relationships where no doubt previously existed. Paternity testing has been criticized for causing more harm than good by generating unhealthy or negative forms of doubt and for prioritizing genetic over social or psychological relationships (Kaebrick 2004). These technologies can create suspicion in couples and encourage men’s fears that their children are not really theirs. As I show, the doubt that the *Grandmothers* are promoting is a different kind of doubt; one that generates conditions of self-reflection and self-contemplation intended to extend beyond individual cases of the disappeared grandchildren and is meant to encompass all of Argentine society. To accomplish this, they shift focus from the individual to the collective: from the biological identities of children of the disappeared to the collective identity of Argentines.

“Identity is For Everyone”

Mariana Perez, a child of the disappeared who grew up with her biological grandmother and who located her brother in 2001, wrote a text for *Teatro X La Identidad* (Theater for Identity), the *Grandmothers'* annual theater festival. It was publicly read during both theater and music festivals I attended in 2004.

To be a young disappeared person is to not know who one is. It is to believe that the person one calls mother is mother and the one called father is father. It is to be born between 1975 and 1980 . . . It is to believe that if there are no photographs of your pregnant mother or of yourself when you were a baby, it's simply because they didn't take those photographs. It is to not look much like the rest of your family. Up to this point, couldn't you be a young disappeared person? Couldn't almost all of us?

The question is puzzling. How could “almost all of us” be a child of the disappeared if it means fulfilling the criteria she gives above? Although all of the above is true for children of the disappeared, this obviously does not include “almost all” Argentines. I argue that this rhetorical sleight of hand is not accidental. The slippage between the specificity of the cases of kidnapped children of the disappeared to the universality of the “all of us” is a deliberate strategy.

Two slogans accompany all of the *Grandmothers'* publicity materials. The first states straightforwardly, “if you have doubts about your identity and think that you are a child of the disappeared, get in touch with the *Grandmothers'*” followed by their email and telephone number. The other declares more ambiguously the following: “If you have doubts about your identity or think that you are a child of the disappeared, get in touch with the *Grandmothers'*.” Why the “or”? Having “doubts about one's identity” in the broadest possible sense is generically applicable to everyone. However, believing one could be a child of the disappeared is demographically confined to a tiny subset of the population. The “or” implies that the *Grandmothers'* want the doubt they are promoting through their campaigns to apply to everyone. They want to raise the question of Argentine identity. This slippage comprises a major component of the institution's discourse on identity. For example, a social scientist speaking at a conference on identity I attended in April of 2004 sponsored by the *Grandmothers'* paraphrased a child of the disappeared as saying “our case is not so different as everyone else's. Sure, we went through something messed up (*algo jodido*) but, well, everyone does.” He used the quote as a catalyst to discuss the search for one's identity more generally. His point was the kind of existential or identity crisis that children of the disappeared go through when they discover their biological identities is only an extreme version of a process that he believes everyone goes through.

During the course of my fieldwork, I was repeatedly told by family members and human rights organizations that the *Grandmothers'* are a “reference point” in Argentina. One member of the organization told me that the *Grandmothers'* were “reference points for identity in Argentina.” In explaining what she meant by this, she gave examples of how the *Grandmothers'* were providing a space for the construction of a collective Argentine identity.

At two of the *Grandmothers'* events, I saw the mayor of Buenos Aires give a speech. On both occasions, he declared that, "the *Grandmothers* are an obligatory reference point in a society with few reference points." He then proceeded not only to speak about their role in pursuing justice against the dictatorship but also their role in developing the global "right to identity."

The *Grandmothers'* role in the creation of the "right to identity" is their most oft-cited accomplishment. This right was formally recognized and enshrined in Article 8 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989. The article was, in part, because of the lobbying of the *Grandmothers* (Arditti 1999; Pierini 1993). It obliges states to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity (name, nationality, and family relations) and to provide assistance and protection in reestablishing the right if it is violated. In the words of the *Grandmothers'* promotional literature explaining it: "The right to an identity is the right to know who you are. The right to a name, a nationality, a history."

As defined by the United Nations, the "right to identity" is a juridical identity circumscribed on a biological identity. The *Grandmothers* not only use the concept in this sense but also employ it as a multiple signifier. In discussions, they acknowledge identity to be a "broad term" and employ it in distinct ways with overlapping meanings. Rather than conceive of identity in a narrow legalistic sense, the *Grandmothers* employ the term in its broadest possible meaning. Their use of identity corresponds with the concept's popular as well as academic usage. In particular, the *Grandmothers* are aware of their role in providing public forums that are meant to open a constructed space for the forging of identities (Lave and Holland 2001).

During interviews, many members of the organization insisted that the "right to identity" was "for everyone." This is a public claim. For example, in an interview with a local newspaper, the president of the governmental organization that processes cases of disappeared grandchildren expressed annoyance that this right is often understood only in relation to the children of the disappeared: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? These three questions will continue being foundational for human beings. If whoever among of us cannot calmly and truthfully respond to them, then it would be impossible for them to live" (Mariani 2003:3).

This final assertion is puzzling. Obviously, many people cannot truthfully respond to these questions yet manage to live. This statement is intended as a normative one, rather than an empirical one. One of the main tenets of moral philosophy is, in the opinion of one of its leading contemporary proponents, Harry G. Frankfurt, "we really cannot live without truth. We need truth not only in order to understand how to live well, but in order to know how to survive at all" (2006:36). Frankfurt explains this statement by arguing that truth is intimately related to self-knowledge. In such a formulation, refusing to live with the truth means refusing self-knowledge. The *Grandmothers* have been confronted with a handful of cases of presumed children of the disappeared who refuse self-knowledge by refusing to have their

biological identities verified. These children of the disappeared assert their right not to know who they “really” are.

Juliana is a child of the disappeared who was raised by her grandparents. She is searching for her kidnapped brother alongside the *Grandmothers*. Unlike most cases with no clear leads, Juliana had evidence suggesting her brother was in Paraguay. Juliana journeyed to Paraguay to meet with her possible brother to try to convince him to carry out a genetic confirmation of his identity. She eventually convinced him to meet. She describes their encounter:¹⁰

It was such a strange sensation to open the door and be able to see him . . . I knew there was a possibility he was my brother, but I couldn't really think that he was my brother. The only thing that could confirm this was a blood test.

The uncertainty of their status framed their interactions. She told him: “If you are my brother, more than anything, I want to hug and kiss you. But I don't know if you are him. The hug is not the same if you are or not.” According to Juliana, he responded as follows:

He said to me that because he was studying medicine, he considered himself a humane person (*humanitario*) and he was going to help me. He was going to do the test but not at the present moment, because he had some things to resolve first. But if he did go through with the test, he would do it only as a favor to me, because I was the one who had the identity crisis and not him.

Some time later, she returned to Paraguay for a second meeting.

When we spoke of the matter of the test, he said that he did not have the time to travel to Buenos Aires. I told him it was unnecessary. We can end the doubt between us. I brought everything that's needed. Faced with this, he said no. He said, “it is not a matter of time or that I'm scared of a needle prick. My fear is that the day that I have the results that it's going to change me completely.” I understood what he was saying but I responded, “you can stay here, living here; you don't have to come with me.” He said: “I wouldn't, but I'm referring to something else when I say my life would change.”

In their conversations, Pablo revealed to Juliana that he had long suspected he was a child of the disappeared. He said that Bianco had informed him at a young age that he was not his biological son. Why, then, would Pablo refuse to have confirmation of his identity when he admits tacit knowledge of what the test will confirm. Pablo's predicament baffles many. “How can somebody not want to know who they are?” This is the question posed repeatedly not only by members of the organization but also by others as well whenever the topic came up in casual conversation. The problem arises out of the organization's assumption that all people need or want to know “who they are” biologically and that they will be unable to live in perpetual doubt.

The Moral Authority of Scientific Knowledge

In 2007, after 20 years, Pablo finally agreed to have his biological identity confirmed. It was revealed that Juliana was not his biological sister; he was the child of another disappeared couple. In initially refusing to have his identity confirmed, Pablo gave two contradictory explanations. The first is that he was secure in his identity (it was “her identity crisis,” not his). He argued that he did not need to know because he had no doubts about who he was. However, he ultimately admitted that he was afraid of the profound consequences that knowledge of his biological identity would entail: “My fear is that the day that I have the results it’s going to change me completely.” In this sense, Pablo’s refusal is not a rejection of the moral authority and power of scientific knowledge; rather, it reveals his belief in it. That genes have the power to reveal secrets is part of the popular ideology of contemporary genetics (Konrad 2003; Novas and Rose 2000). These secrets—the mysteries of our origins—are seen to provide truth. This genetic truth is a pure and fundamental truth held to be of a higher order than other truths. As a result, these secret truths are instilled with the power of personal transformation with profound consequences for conceptions of individual and collective identities and ideas of belonging. Pablo’s statement that he is afraid that his life will change with genetic confirmation of his identity indicates this. Although Pablo admits to knowing that Bianco is not his biological father, he will only feel the consequences of this knowledge with a genetic confirmation.

This reveals what Carl Elliott and Paul Brodwin (2002) have argued; genetics now have priority over other forms of identity demarcation. This prioritization is evident in the *Grandmothers*’ work. The *Grandmothers*’ literature speaks of a tacit knowledge or implicit suspicion individuals have that they are children of the disappeared. Like Horacio, they speak of a lack of family resemblances, an internal, intuitive feeling or implicit knowledge they have that they are not who they were raised as. When I asked Horacio how I could be certain that my parents were really my parents when I never had biological confirmation of our relationship, he responded by tautology: “When you know, you know. You feel it inside.” During the press conference announcing the restitution of his identity, Horacio stated,

I invite all young people who have doubts about their origin to come to the *Grandmothers* because we all have the right to know who we are. I had something inside of me that said to me that I should search for something more and I am sure that everyone who has gone through the same thing as me also feels it.

However, this feeling of “something inside of me” is insufficient. Intuitive knowledge must be confirmed genetically. Intuitive knowledge can be deceptive, and genetic technologies can resolve doubt. Yet, in the words of Elliott and Brodwin, “If people idealize genetic data as rock-solid evidence of origins, they will face a difficult dilemma when genetic tests run contrary to their preferred self-image and beliefs about the past (2002:141). For example, Alba is searching for her niece, the daughter of her disappeared sister. She recounts the following story: “We had hopes that a girl was the daughter of my sister. All the information we had said yes but the test said no. I’m living through a moment of great

frustration. It pained us deeply. We were almost convinced.”¹¹ When discussing these similarities, she says they were found in “her physical resemblance, her way of being—how she speaks, the gestures. She looks very similar and she is similar in spirit but, well, the tests tell us the truth.”

The *Grandmothers* have lobbied to make genetic identification of presumed children of the disappeared compulsory in cases in which they refuse. In these cases, the *Grandmothers* have argued that they have an obligation to know who they are whether they want to or not (Gandsman 2009). The *Grandmothers* argue that coercion by adoptive parents is the only way to explain their possible grandchildren’s refusal to find out who they are. It is not possible that they do not want to know the truth because it is assumed to be a truth that everyone needs to know.

Truth and Uncertainty

This conception of truth is a truth that is not only located within the body but also can be extracted from it. Didier Fassin and Estelle d’Halluin (2005, 2007) have recently analyzed how the French state marshals evidence to establish the truth of a traumatic experience for asylum seekers. The testimonies of refugees are looked on with suspicion and doubt; the truth of their experience needs to be verified by physical and psychic traces in a “new system of proof wherein the body and mind are made to attest to violence endured” (Fassin and d’Halluin 2007:302) that includes trauma experts and medical evaluators. Within this new system, the body “is the place in which individuals’ truth about who they really are is experienced” (Fassin and d’Halluin 2005:597). In a similar vein, the truth of the existence of the children of the disappeared can only be ascertained through genetic evidence. Although this conception of extractable truth finds its present manifestation in genetics, it is not new. It is a conception of truth that forms part of Western epistemological tradition. In *Torture and Truth* (1991), classicist Page Dubois traces the roots of Western juridical constructions of truth to the widespread use of torture to extract confessions from slaves during the classical Greek period.¹² The idea of truth that is hidden, that is a secret, is historically linked to the practice of torture. Many have commented that the pervasive and horrific torture of the disappeared by the Argentine military can be linked to their construction of an enemy (e.g., Dubois 1990). The truth of an invisible enemy in the body politic could only be found through the torture used to extract information or confessions.

In drawing this comparison, I am not equating the *Grandmothers*’ tactics with the dictatorship. Compelling full-grown adults to be genetically identified without their consent allowed right-wing Argentine editorialists and television commentators to point out what they saw as an ironic contradiction. They accused the *Grandmothers* of acting like the dictatorship by embracing compulsory measures. This position is without merit. The tactics of the *Grandmothers* are not the same as the dictatorship and setting up any kind of moral equivalence between the two is offensive. I only wish to draw out the underlying conception

of truth. That they are similar only signals that both the military dictatorship and the human rights organization that formed as a result of its actions emerge out of the same epistemological tradition.

The military dictatorship's actions also resulted in the production of radical uncertainty. The disappearing of political dissidents was a means of producing uncertainty among family members desperately trying to ascertain the whereabouts of their missing family members. Unidentified groups of men entered individuals' residences and took them off to an unknown destination at gunpoint. The government denied involvement. A notorious quote by the military dictator Jorge Videla made to a foreign journalist described the disappeared as being neither "alive nor dead . . . simply disappeared." The uncertainty of this status was a major source of suffering for family members of the disappeared during the dictatorship as they attempted to ascertain their fate. Many family members believe that this production of uncertainty was a deliberate tactic by the military dictatorship. It was aimed at paralyzing family members from taking any action.

Even after the fall of the dictatorship, uncertainty still existed whether the disappeared were alive or dead. It was often a long and difficult process for family members to finally accept that their loved ones had been killed. As one grandmother told me, "[the military] planned for us to suffer eternally until the last day of our lives." For many, this uncertainty was far worse than knowledge that they had been murdered. This is why one of the other goals of the *Grandmothers* is to locate and identify the bodies of the disappeared through exhumations, forensic analysis, and genetic identification.

All taken-for-granted aspects of social life were thrown into question by the dictatorship. In suggesting that the *Grandmothers* campaigns are projecting the doubt and uncertainty that they themselves were made to feel, I do not wish to be misunderstood. The doubt that the Grandmothers are promoting through their campaign is not the doubt and uncertainty imposed by state terror. The doubt and uncertainty provoked by the dictatorship was meant to terrorize family members. The *Grandmothers'* doubt is meant to provoke introspection and self-contemplation. The *Grandmothers* view the experience of doubt and uncertainty about oneself as not just a necessary but also as a positive experience. It is viewed as part of a process that all people should go through. To quote from the *Grandmothers'* promotional literature: "To be a disappeared child is to *not even suspect who you are*. To suspect, to question, to find out is already to begin to stop being one." Or, as the *Grandmothers'* message from the year 2000 states, "We can doubt many things but no man should be left with doubt over whether it is good or bad to say to a young person who are their biological parents and grandparents." To understand why they view this existential doubt as a fundamentally positive experience, one needs to describe the experience of members of the organization after the loss of their children.

Loss and Self-Transformation

All human rights groups appeal to universals. One of the universals that the *Grandmothers* employ is that of parental grief; the loss of a child as the most painful experience that any human being can go through. “Children who lose their parents are orphans but no word exists for parents who lost a child.” This is heard frequently among family member groups in Argentina but is also used in other contexts. In looking at the psychological effects of such suffering among family member groups in Argentina, the discourse of trauma is occasionally used but I found that family members are as likely to describe their experience as facing a “limit situation.” A “limit situation” is a concept developed by existential philosopher Karl Jaspers in the early 20th century. In existential philosophy, a limit situation refers to a crisis a person faces that is caused by the prospect of one’s own death or mourning the loss of a loved one. Faced with such a situation, they discover that they have been living inauthentic lives and must find the means to live more authentically and discover within themselves the power to do so. Its specific usage in this case originates out of the work of Victor Frankl.¹³ Frankl was a Holocaust survivor who, in his most famous book, the worldwide bestseller *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1997), wrote about how he was able to meaningfully reconstruct his life after his experience in concentration camps.

The narratives of many family members follow a similar trajectory. They speak of their intense grief and struggle to overcome (*superar*) the loss of a child. They accomplished this through a process of self-transformation in which “ordinary” women become public activists fighting not only for their children but also for more general issues of social justice. Their individual life histories become the basis for collective action. Their individual concerns are transformed into collective ones. The life histories of many family members of the disappeared are marked by such a transformation. In the words of one grandmother, “grief or suffering sometimes destroys you but sometimes it creates you. It created me.” The search for their children was the only motivation to stay alive after the disappearance. According to Elsa, when she got news of her daughter’s disappearance, she became very ill with a fever. She was in bed for 15 days—“then I realized that if I died, the children would be lost forever.” When she made this realization, her fever diminished as she embarked on the search for her daughter and her granddaughter.

Personal development and self-transformation frames the individual and collective narratives of the *Grandmothers*.¹⁴ According to their own life history narratives, most had been apolitical housewives or schoolteachers at the time of their children’s disappearance. Their self-transformation only occurred after initial feelings of uncertainty in the aftermath of the disappearance. When their search began, many speak of a feeling of overwhelming confusion and doubt; of not knowing where to look and of feeling alone in the world. A common metaphor is that of putting together the pieces of a puzzle. The search for the missing family member became a kind of existential quest. The initial search is the search for the missing children and grandchildren. This later becomes a search for information about what happened to their children after their disappearance. Ultimately, there is a search for justice and accountability. Middle-class housewives and teachers uninvolved and uninterested in poli-

tics became internationally renowned human rights activist struggling for justice for not only their children but also for more general issues of social justice. The statement quoted above that “suffering created me” hints at a born again rhetoric. This is clearly delineated in many family member narratives as a “new person” emerges postdisappearance.

This “new person” can also be seen to connect the parent with the political project of their disappeared children. As part of their leftwing utopian revolutionary aspirations, the disappeared were attempting to “create the new man.” In that sense, the transformation of parents of the disappeared, as they relate it, is not only a personal one but also a political one. In the process, the classic equation of children learning from their parents is reversed as parents learn from their disappeared children; a lesson only learned postdisappearance. According to Vilma, “It was difficult for me to understand my son, but he taught me many things. Everything I know now and who I am now, he taught me. I’m another person. I’m not the same as before he disappeared. I’m a different person, and I think in a different way. He taught us—me and my husband—many things.”

Children of the disappeared who were not kidnapped by the military and therefore raised by their biological family also use a “born again” discourse of self-transformation. They speak of becoming a different person after finding information out about their parents. This process begins when they embark on a quest for information about their parents as well as a search for their remains. This involves seeking out companions and old friends of their parents who can provide them with information. Many say that this search is what made them who they are as human beings today—that embarking on the search was part of a transformative experience. This is particularly true of many children of the disappeared who were not told the truth by their biological relatives about what happened to their parents. For example, one daughter of the disappeared had been told by her relatives that her parents had died in an accident. When she was a teenager, she found out what really happened to them. On finding this out, she says: “It changed everything for me. I don’t feel like I continued being the same person. I was a very limited person. I don’t think I’m the same.” Much like in Christian notions of being “born again,” the idea of rebirth is intimately connected with the process of searching for and eventually finding “the truth.” Once again, the underlying belief in truth having transformative power is present here.

However, this truth is different than a genetic truth. Much like their use of identity, the *Grandmothers* invoke multiple conceptions of truth. First, there is truth as scientific evidence, a genetic truth held to be objective and independent. For recovered children of the disappeared like Horacio, their genetic truth becomes a personal and subjective truth; an embodied truth. The *Grandmothers*, meanwhile, also employ a conception of truth different from that of a scientific truth. This is the “speaking truth to power” truth of the political left often found in the social sciences. This is not a truth that is constructed. Meeting with human rights groups in December of 2003 to pass a decree authorizing the creation of a National Archive of Memory, President Nestor Kirchner stated that Argentina was “at a turning point—we can continue living with doublespeak and hypocrisy or we continue advancing decisively in the construction of our truth.”¹⁵ When I heard him say this, it struck

me as an odd statement. Here was the president of a country speaking of the “construction of truth” like a philosopher of science. As my fieldwork progressed, I realized that the rhetoric he was employing came from the language of human rights groups. In Argentina, human rights organizations and their supporters frequently use a constructivist language in reference to truth and collective memory (Jelin 2003). There are constant appeals to “making memory” in the same sense that the social science literature uses it.¹⁶ Truth is constructed out of the testimonies of family members and survivors. It is notable that although human rights groups talk about memory in terms of its construction, right wing groups and defenders of the military use a differing conception of memory to contest human rights groups. They accuse human rights groups of advocating “partial,” “distorted,” or “half” memories, a view that assumes collective memory to be a spontaneous social given.

This emphasis on memory in human rights discourse, and not history, plays an important role. As opposed to history, memory is a means of subject formation. Individuals possess memory. An individual’s self-identity is predicated on memory to give a sense of continuity between past and present. The frequent invocations of memory by human rights groups in Argentina can be seen as part of a directed, agency driven process of subject formation. “We are people with memory,” I heard several times at Argentine human rights rallies. More than slogans, these appeals to memory are driven by a desire to shape or create subjects.

These subjects, “people with memory” are people who are interested in “who they are” and “where they came from.” Those who do not want to know these things are the ones who do not question who they are. They do not doubt. The process of doubt involved in the kind of identity formation that the Grandmothers are promoting is predicated on this modern conception of identity.¹⁷ In it, identity is conceived of as a kind of quest, as something one must search or strive for. This is similar to the view set forth by Zygmunt Bauman (2004) who calls identity “a task.” As a task, identity is conceived of as a process that requires an individual’s cultivation. One must work on one’s identity. To ask the question “do you know who you are?” assumes individual autonomy. It assumes individuals have a choice in the matter. Identity need not be posed as a question if it did not presuppose multiple and conflicting possible answers. To know who one is implies the achievement of self-knowledge. The question presupposes a person who is interested in who he or she is, who cares about where he or she came from. “Knowing who one is” is both a process and a condition. Knowing oneself is also being oneself. A view of identity as a task simultaneously hints at a view of identity as a moral responsibility.

Aporia: Unresolvable Doubt

This is a task without end. The search for identity is considered a continuous lifelong process that never reaches certitude. Identity as invoked by the *Grandmothers* is meant to be a task for everyone. In their words, “a society needs to define its identity. To construct it is the obligation of everyone.” It is a task not just for people whose lives were directly affected by the dictatorship through the disappearance of family members. A common refrain from the

Grandmother's events and publicity materials states unequivocally, "so long as there is one single person with a stolen and falsified identity, everyone's identity is in doubt." This is a revealing statement because, although it is not acknowledged by the organization, this doubt will never be resolved because not all of the children of the disappeared will be found. Of the estimated 500 cases of missing children of the disappeared, only roughly 270 concrete reports exist. Various reasons account for the discrepancy. The *Grandmothers'* estimates are predicated on their assumption that some families did not know that their disappeared family member was pregnant at the time of the disappeared and that not all disappearances were reported.

Even among documented cases, only three-quarters have enough family members who have donated blood to the national genetic data bank to create a genetic profile of the missing grandchild that could positively lead to a match. As a result, it is feasible that a number of children of the disappeared have come forward but have not been identified. This was confirmed to me when I questioned individuals at the *Grandmothers* about this. Geneticists who work at the National Genetic Data Bank also acknowledged this. For example, a member of the group who works in the *Grandmothers'* investigative team told me of a young person who they believed was a child of the disappeared based on the date of birth and the member of the armed forces they were raised by. However, the genetic proof did not yield results. Without this proof and, with it, the "truth" a person cannot be considered a child of the disappeared. The individual lives in a permanent state of limbo. On the basis of their own figures, it is only possible to locate half of the estimated children. "Everyone's identity" will be forever in doubt.

However, when the *Grandmothers'* campaigns attempt to raise doubts about the identity of all Argentines, they are not asking them to question their biological identities. Although a doubt about an individual's biological identity may be resolved with certitude by genetic technologies, doubts about one's identity in the broader sense can never be resolved with corresponding exactitude. At the same time, the *Grandmothers* encourage links in their institutional discourse between these forms of doubt. In another talk at the *Grandmothers'* conference on identity I attended, a popular political cartoonist declared: "Couldn't we say that Argentina is a yet-to-be recovered grandchild?" The entire hall burst into applause. The analogy clearly resonated with them.

That this comparison resonated with the audience is a sign of the effectiveness of the *Grandmothers'* rhetorical strategy in encouraging links between the situation of their grandchildren and the situation of all Argentines. The *Grandmothers'* creatively emphasize the ambiguities inherent in the concept of identity to relate the situation of their kidnapped children to everyone. Within this dynamic, children of the disappeared who have recovered their biological identities are seen to wrestle with issues that everyone faces, only in a more profound way. As one text used in the annual theater festival states: "This cycle of theatrical works tries to give a hand in this search for the truth and, moreover, tries to show that this does not just have to do with 500 individuals. We are all captives of this lie. It is all of society that should be asking itself about its true identity." Or, in the words of one actor: "The work

of the *Grandmothers* has to do with all of us. To know who I am, from where I come from, what is the history of my country, to be able to plan a more just society for my children and my grandchildren, this is a work that is my business.”

In 2004, one of the major historical triumphs of the human rights movement occurred as the military dictatorship’s most notorious concentration camp known as the ESMA (*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*) was transferred by presidential decree from military control to the city of Buenos Aires to be turned into a Museum of Memory. At the public act formalizing the decision, the president of the country and the mayor of Buenos Aires gave speeches alongside a young man named Juan Cabandié. Cabandié is a child of the disappeared who had been born in the ESMA who had been located two months earlier. In his speech, his first public address, he embraced the institutional ideology of the *Grandmothers* almost verbatim. He told the crowd: “I spent a long time searching and, two years ago, without any strong evidence, I put a name to what I was searching for. ‘I am a child of the disappeared,’ I said.” Juan then drew a parallel between his situation and that of all Argentines. In what was described by one newspaper as “the words that defined the day,” Juan told the crowd: “truth is absolute freedom.” He was referring to his individual situation but also to the entire country coming to terms with the actions of the military dictatorship. He likened discovering his biological identity to the creation of the Museum of Memory. “This is the beginning of the truth thanks to a correct political decision, but it is not enough until it goes down to the core. Truth is freedom and just as we want to be completely free, we need to know the whole truth.” In other words, just as he needed to know the truth about himself and his identity, Argentines also need to know the truth about what happened during the dictatorship. Juan, whose doubts about his identity were resolved, represents a path for the rest of the country to follow. A journalist later made this link explicit in an interview with Juan.

Neither individuals nor nations can survive without a clear view of the past. Says Juan Cabandié: “The best thing about having found the truth is that I now know who I am and where I come from. I know what I will say to my children; I can now construct an identity” Perhaps one day, with the new memory museum, Argentinean society will be free to make the same claim (Mascarenhas 2005).

Children of the disappeared are thus not only important cultural symbols of the dictatorship’s actions but also represent cultural models that provide a template for action (Holland and Quinn 1987). That the *Grandmothers* organization is centered around the concept of identity makes sense within this context. As Holland and colleagues (1998) argue, identity provides a basis for agency; it is a prerequisite for action. Identity provides “a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being” (Holland et al. 1998:5). The *Grandmothers* use a language organized around the concept of identity to motivate all Argentines to engage in political action. Their goal is not to motivate them to search for their biological identities as in the cases of children of the disappeared, but, rather, to find their identities as political actors. To follow in Juan’s path is to reject the dictatorship and embrace the *Grandmothers*’ cause and the goals of the human rights move-

ment. After his appearance at the ESMA, Juan becomes the most visible of the *Grandmothers'* recovered grandchildren, a media figure and political actor in his own right. He gives frequent interviews in the press and makes numerous appearances at the *Grandmothers'* events. He eventually runs for political office. In 2005, León Gieco, a legendary figure of the country's *rock nacional* movement sometimes described as the country's Bob Dylan, released a song called "*Yo soy Juan (el ultimo aparecido)*" (I am Juan [the last appeared]) about Juan's restitution. As the title implies, Gieco sings the song from Juan's perspective, a first person account of the experience of a child of the disappeared. The music video for the song plays with this convention by intercutting footage of Juan lip-synching Gieco's lyrics with Gieco lip-synching excerpts of Juan's speech in the ESMA.

As a cultural model, Juan's life history provides a template for other Argentines to follow. Reuniting with his biological family and breaking with the military family that raised him is likened to Argentines breaking with the dictatorship and supporting the human rights movement. For Argentines to reclaim their identities in the language of the *Grandmothers'* requires that they care about what happened during the military dictatorship and come to terms with their recent past. A country's quest for an identity is modeled after an individual's. His genetic truth becomes the country's historical truth. The language of identity provides the important link between the individual and collective and the intimate and the public. The entire sociopolitical identity of a country is interconnected with the life history of a young child of the disappeared.

The Uncertainty of Being Argentine

The *Grandmothers'* publicity campaigns reveal a larger discourse of self-doubt and identity questioning in Argentina. In Argentina, there is a pervasive belief that Argentines 'do not know who they are' as a people. This not only forms part of national discussions but is also a starting point for many scholarly works written by Argentines and non-Argentines alike. One can argue that this doubt can be said of any "imagined community," but in Argentina such questioning appears particularly resonant. Anthropologist Julie Taylor (1998:7) writes in her analysis of the tango that Argentines have been constantly confronted by "excruciating questions about their own identity." As a country of immigrants, their history has been a constant struggle to define who they are—whether European or Latin America, "First" or "Third World."

Jeffrey Bass (2006) has recently argued that these uncertainties about Argentine identity help to explain why Buenos Aires has more psychoanalysts per capita than any other place in the world. He writes that Argentine identity is one of the "central topics of discussions during psychoanalytic psychotherapy" (Bass 2006:433). Bass contends that the popularity of psychoanalysis among the Argentine middle class directly correlates with uncertainties about national belonging as psychoanalysis provides a forum for self-exploration for the middle class to address the country's "identity disorder." In this sense, Bass' analysis of psychoanalysis in Argentina parallels Taylor's discussion of the tango; they both are forums

for national self-reflection. The publicity campaigns of the *Grandmothers*, an organization with close ties to psychoanalysts, also provide such a forum.

The country's endemic political and economic upheavals and a wide perception of "national failure" contributed to these anxieties about identity. At the dawn of World War I, Argentina was one of the wealthiest countries in the world with a small population and vast natural resources. Considered a "land of opportunity" in South America, the country drew masses of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Buenos Aires was hailed as the "Paris of South America," renowned for its imposing boulevards and Beaux-Arts architecture. Argentina had an educated and literate urban population with a burgeoning middle class. A perception existed that the country's manifest destiny was to become a global power. However, Argentina became "a utopian dream that went awry," (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2002), a country that followed a "reversal of development" (Waisman 1987) that saw its status downgraded from categories of developed to underdeveloped. Connections exist between the country's economic crises and cycles of authoritarian rule (Pion-Berlin 1989). When the military dictatorship took power on March 24, 1976, it was the latest in a long line of military coups going back to 1930 when the country's first democratically elected President was removed from power. During the interim, there was an average of one coup per decade. From the 1950s onward, Argentina was described as being in a perpetual state of crisis (Romero 2003; Scobie 1971). The once seventh-richest country in the world (with a per-capita income ahead of countries like Canada, France, Spain, Japan, and Italy) descended into widespread poverty and an economic crisis that led to the world's largest debt default and the collapse of the government in December 2001.

Although the prolonged economic crisis is the cause of profound social suffering (anxieties stemming from the crisis resulted in increased use of antidepressants as analyzed by Lakoff 2004), it also sparked a period of renewed political participation and artistic creativity. The economic crisis provoked what was described as an "identity crisis" in the national media, leading to widespread critical self-reflection about what it means to be Argentine. The *Grandmothers'* public campaigns are a product of this cultural moment.

These "anxieties of globalization," as Lakoff (2004) describes them, are not distinct to Argentina. According to theoreticians of modernity, doubt and uncertainty are key characteristics of the current historical moment. Zygmunt Bauman (1991), Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991), and Ulrich Beck (1992) have all written extensively on the topic. For example, both Giddens and Beck define risk as "manufactured uncertainty." They all see uncertainty as one of the destabilizing consequences of globalization and modernity. In this literature, the very question of identity is a thoroughly modern one. Identity is posed as a question because identities have become unstable. "People no longer know who they are," we are told. That we live in "times of uncertainty" is repeated so often as to have become hackneyed.

The *Grandmothers'* campaigns are predicated on this preexisting and prevalent notion that Argentines do not have a well-defined identity. In confronting this issue, the *Grandmothers*

address not only their individual search for their grandchildren or the search for a national identity but also the problem of finding meaning in human existence. In directing people to doubt their identities, the *Grandmothers'* campaigns direct individuals to confront basic existential questions in the same way that the events of the dictatorship made them confront their own.

The literature that examines doubt and uncertainty as a by-product of modernity sees doubt as a negative condition, one that can even provoke violent responses.¹⁸ Too much doubt is considered paralyzing and debilitating. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is popularly known as the "doubting disease." However, in Western thought, doubt is not only a fatal flaw but also a positive value. Doubt is the sign of a self-reflexive, moral agent. Too little doubt is seen to engender fanaticism and fundamentalism. As Bertrand Russell once famously declared, "the whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts." According to this view, doubt is the engine of scientific inquiry. Descartes famously began his philosophical treatise with the proposition of doubting the entire world around him, and Galileo declared doubt to be the "mother of invention."

The *Grandmothers'* campaigns promote the concept of doubt in both senses: as both a negative and positive value. The use of genetic technologies to determine biological identities is often criticized in the anthropological literature for its reductionistic and essentializing notions of assumptive identity (e.g., Finkler 2001; Brodwin 2002; Elliott 2003), but when the *Grandmothers* invoke identity, they also mean it in its nonreductionistic, constructivist way. At many of their artistic events, they explicitly state that although specifically directed at recovering more grandchildren, "We want this to be a mode of self-reflection for everybody." This larger relevance is what gives their campaigns their broad significative power. In such a way, this doubt that the *Grandmothers* are promoting resembles the doubt of radical hermeneuticians like that of philosopher John D. Caputo, whose book on the subject is subtitled "on not knowing who we are" (2000). According to that philosophical tradition, we will never know our true essence or nature.

Concepts of truth, justice, and memory—the three main consigns of human rights—are all predicated on uncertainty. They are never fixed or unchanging in the sense that they are sometimes wished to be. Much as the apparent paradox holds that "there can be no faith without doubt," one might add that there can be no certainty without doubt.¹⁹ Justice is not always blind, memories can be forgotten, and truth admits to its blurred boundaries in between. All of this points to a basic indeterminacy of social life. The dictatorship manipulated this fundamental indeterminacy as a means of instilling fear and terror. The *Grandmothers* employ a discourse of uncertainty in an effort to direct Argentines to confront basic existential questions, both as individuals and as a nation. In some ways, this conclusion is paradoxical. I am arguing that, in campaigns promising to resolve doubts about identity, the *Grandmothers* actively promote doubt. However, the doubt they promote is a different kind than that which they promise to resolve. In this broader sense, I argue that the doubt the *Grandmothers* promote is healthy. People who do not doubt also do not question. They

follow order blindly. The *Grandmothers*, however, offer a balance between truth and indeterminacy, claiming truth while simultaneously acknowledging its incompleteness and indeterminacies.

Conclusion: Toward a Human Rights Culture?

Truth for the *Grandmothers* is self-knowledge. Identity is a quest or a process. Their campaigns urge people to question the world around them. Because the *Grandmothers* are foremost a human rights organization, the question can be raised: Is this the end goal of human rights? The *Grandmothers* position their work as part of a larger process in the emergence of Argentine postdictatorship civil society. This larger project is a process of subject formation linked to the emergence of a “human rights culture.” Who is the subject of this human rights culture? The concept of a human rights culture was first popularized in the academic world by the philosopher Richard Rorty (1993). Rorty adopted the concept from Argentine jurist Eduardo Rabossi, who was actively involved in the government during the postdictatorship democratic transition. Terry Eagleton distinguishes two competing meanings of the term *culture*. *Culture* in its earliest etymological meaning was a concept derived from nature: it was an activity and a process. *Culture* in its latter and common usage is as an entity. When the *Grandmothers* invoke the concept of culture, they mean it in its earlier meaning; as a process of self-cultivation, or in Eagleton’s words, “a kind of ethical pedagogy which will fit us for political citizenship” (2000:7).

When Rorty speaks of a human rights culture, he means culture in the sense of a process as well. The end goal of a human rights culture, according to Rorty, is to produce “people like us,” a presumably tolerant and enlightened class of people. This project is evident in the “ethical pedagogy” of the *Grandmothers’* campaigns. The work of the *Grandmothers* is organized around an effort to create an educated and enlightened political citizenship that are not only interested in such matters but also question the world around them; people who are presumably tolerant and enlightened. When Rorty writes that a human rights culture is diffused through empathetic appeals, what he calls the telling of “sad and sentimental stories” (1993:119), the *Grandmothers* provide an empirical case study of an organization structured around such appeals. The *Grandmothers* are organized around the grief of mothers who lost their children and the appeal of loving grandmothers searching for their missing grandchildren.²⁰ At the same time, the critical self-reflection that their public campaigns attempt to provoke can be seen as part of a broader human rights project that strives to turn individuals into self-conscious subjects. Educators who see the goal of the pedagogical enterprise as teaching critical thinking skills likewise aim to turn their students into people who question the world around them. Anthropology is an academic pursuit that prides itself on this. Many anthropologists see the task of the discipline in questioning taken-for-granted knowledge. The campaigns of the *Grandmothers* promote precisely that.

Notes

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1. For the sake of brevity, I refer to them as “the *Grandmothers*” from here onward. For an oral history of the *Grandmothers* organization, see Arditti (1999).
2. The total number of disappeared is contested (see Brysk 1994). Thirty thousand is often considered an “emblematic” number used by the majority of human rights groups. The official report in the aftermath of the dictatorship, CONADEP, documented 8,960 cases but admitted at the time that its investigation was incomplete. Numbers ranging between 12,000 and 20,000 are considered more official.
3. The *Grandmothers* formed out of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* who attracted attention to the disappearances of their children at the height of the dictatorship through their silent protest marches.
4. This was confirmed by my interviews with members of the *Grandmothers*’ psychological team who have worked with the grandchildren through the process. Because of the amount of media attention the cases receive, most children of the disappeared do not conduct interviews or only do so through the official channels of the *Grandmothers* organization. During the course of my fieldwork, I had six interviews with children of the disappeared and spoke informally with another five who did not wish to be interviewed. The interviews I conducted were in 2004. More recently, however, they are increasingly public figures and more likely to give public speeches and media interviews.
5. In a 1909 essay, Sigmund Freud (1959) coined the phrase “family romance” for the fantasy that children have that their parents are not their real parents. According to Freud, this fantasy emerges out of two corresponding developments; the realization that one’s parents are imperfect human beings with human failings and the feeling that one’s filial affections are not fully reciprocated. With the drama of the children of the disappeared in Argentina, those who fit the profile of the missing grandchildren have a historical reality around which this fantasy can be constructed.
6. For an early example of this literature, see Triseliotis who details the early stages of this movement and the emergence of open adoptions. At the time of publication, adoptees searching for their origins were described as a “small and rather unusual group of adopted people”(1973:ix). The influence of the adoption rights movement was clarified for me by my interview with the founder of the organization, María Isabel Chorobik de Mariani.
7. For an example of this literature, see Keith Griffith’s *The Right to Know Who You Are* (1991).
8. The organization openly acknowledges their debt to the *Grandmothers*. (Quienes Somos n.d.).
9. For example, as Steffen and colleagues write, “Despite its goals and intentions, western biomedicine cannot help but sow the seeds of new uncertainties” (2005:25).
10. This information was gathered through Juliana’s videotaped testimony for *Memoria Abierta* (Open Memory), an organization that collects family member testimonies, as well as my own interview with her.
11. This account is also based on video-taped testimony housed by *Memoria Abierta* and my subsequent interview with Alba.
12. It is also the title of a recent work by Mark Danner (2004) that examines the use of torture by the U.S. military in Iraq.
13. Frankl’s work was extremely popular in Argentina and widely disseminated, including a large Logotherapy Society. Shortly after the fall of the dictatorship, in a brief span between 1985 and 1986, Frankl was conferred seven honorary doctoral degrees from Argentine universities.

14. This observation is based not only on my interviews with members of the group but also derives from their publications and their media interviews.
15. Kirchner was elected as part of a South American continental shift toward more progressive and Left-wing leaders. Many on the Argentine left criticize him for his appropriation of human rights discourse while failing to address the underlying economic situation in Argentina.
16. For example, a book that addresses how to teach the lessons of the dictatorship to children is called *Making Memory in the Land of "Nunca Mas"* (Dusse and Gojman 1997).
17. For an historical account of the emergence of this modern conception of identity, see Taylor (1989).
18. For the view that doubt can in some circumstances engender violence as a means to its resolution, see Hoffman (1986) and Appadurai (1998). For a popular history of doubt, see Hecht (2003).
19. In *On Certainty* (1972), Wittgenstein concluded the exact reverse also held true. He argued that there could be no doubt without certainty.
20. In their words, "we only want to hug our grandchildren before we die."

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