

Retributive Justice, Public Intimacies and the Micropolitics of the Restitution of Kidnapped Children of the Disappeared in Argentina

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Abstract

The human rights movement in Argentina has remained steadfast in its demand for retributive justice in addressing the legacies of the Argentine military dictatorship (1976–1983), which disappeared up to 30,000 citizens. One of the most agonizing issues has been the need to locate kidnapped children of the disappeared in the custody of members of the armed forces and the efforts to reunite them with their biological families by a human rights organization, Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. The process of ‘restitution’ by which their biological identities are restored to them has generated resistance among some of the children, who reject the notion that they are victims of a crime. Through several case studies, this article examines how the everyday lives and interpersonal familial relationships of these children have become battlegrounds for transitional justice.

Keywords: forced disappearance, retributive justice, identity, restitution, Argentina, human rights

In addressing the actions of the military dictatorship that held power between 1976 and 1983, Argentina has become one of the first countries not only to deploy what came to be known as transitional justice but also to set a number of legal precedents for addressing the legacies of authoritarian rule. Argentina’s painful history is well known. Launching what it deemed a ‘war against subversion,’ the Argentine military dictatorship disappeared an estimated 30,000 of its citizens, kidnapping and taking them to clandestine detention centers where they were tortured and, in the vast majority of cases, killed, their bodies unrecoverable. The most visible response by civil society to these atrocities has been the coordinated efforts of family members of the disappeared, in particular mothers, who came together in 1977 to form *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, or Mothers). As Michael Humphrey and Estela Valverde note, human rights politics in Argentina have been organized around a ‘politics of victims.’¹ As the

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¹ Michael Humphrey and Estela Valverde, ‘Human Rights and Injustice: Transitional Justice in Argentina and South Africa,’ *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2(1) (2008): 83.

Mothers' weekly silent demonstrations gained international prominence, the Mothers became key protagonists within the human rights movement, pioneering a new form of emotionally charged symbolic protest that has inspired numerous other movements throughout Latin America and the world.²

As a result, Argentina has contributed an important model for transitional justice not only concerning the role that can be played by civil society but also demonstrating specific mechanisms, including a truth commission in 1984, a trial for military leaders in 1985 and test cases in the application of international jurisdiction in the 1990s. In the words of Kathryn Sikkink, Argentina is a 'global protagonist' in the international human rights struggle, 'the source of an unusually high level of human rights innovation and protagonism' that have been 'broadly diffused' throughout the world.³

It is important to note, however, that many of the country's greatest successes have met with setbacks. While the 1985 trial led to convictions of military leaders, amnesty laws and pardons in 1986 and 1987 prevented further prosecutions. Even those convicted were pardoned in 1990. Faced with these challenges, the human rights movement remained steadfast in pursuit of its demands. Above all, its demand for retributive justice has been absolute and non-negotiable. Argentine human rights activists notably reject reconciliation, one of the traditional goals of transitional justice. Reconciliation in Argentina is a term generally associated with apologists and defenders of the dictatorship. This rejection of reconciliation and the prioritization of punitive justice can be seen as a challenge to transitional justice,⁴ even while they have been a crucial element in the movement's success. Refusing to back down in the face of continuing governmental appeals for reconciliation and forgiveness in the 1980s and 1990s, human rights activists have pursued their claims through periods of impunity in the absence of institutional justice mechanisms. Their persistence helped lead to Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón claiming international jurisdiction in the 1990s, which led to investigations into the military dictatorship being reopened. Their sustained effort yielded further results after Néstor Kirchner's election as president in 2003. The Kirchner government repealed the amnesties and pardons, enabling trials to restart in 2006.

The issue that best characterizes civil society's tenacious pursuit of transitional justice in Argentina is the search for and recovery of the kidnapped children of the disappeared. The scale and nature of what took place is hard to exaggerate. Included among the 30,000 who disappeared were pregnant women and young infants kidnapped alongside their parents. Pregnant women were detained until they gave birth and then murdered. Their babies were handed over to members of

² Marysa Navarro, 'The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo,' in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Susan Eckstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

³ Kathryn Sikkink, 'From Pariah State to Global Protagonist: Argentina and the Struggle for International Human Rights,' *Latin American Politics and Society* 50(1) (2008): 1.

⁴ See, Marek M. Kaminski, Monika Nalepa and Barry O'Neill, 'Normative and Strategic Aspects of Transitional Justice,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(3) (2006): 295–302.

the armed forces, who were issued falsified birth certificates that certified them as the children's biological parents. *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, or Grandmothers), formed out of the Mothers not only to demand justice for their disappeared children but also to search for and recover missing grandchildren, estimate that up to 500 children suffered this fate.

The Grandmothers faced three major challenges in their initial struggle. The first was to locate grandchildren through anonymous tips and their own investigations. The second was to prove that the children were who they believed them to be. With assistance from scientists using emerging technologies in the field of genetics, they were able accurately to ascertain familial links. In 1987, the Grandmothers successfully lobbied the government to establish a National Genetic Data Bank to store blood samples of family members searching for missing children in order to identify them when they are located. The third challenge was to convince judges to restore custody of these children to their biological families. This resulted in often arduous legal battles. Lawyers hired by the kidnappers argued that changing custody would constitute a second trauma and that the children in question did not always want to be removed from the people they considered their parents. The Grandmothers, working with a team of Argentine psychiatrists, argued that allowing their grandchildren to remain with the adoptive parents would perpetuate the psychological damage already undergone by the child. Judges eventually concluded that minors believed to be kidnapped children of the disappeared could be subjected to genetic identification against their volition and that they should be restored to their biological families.

Tensions resulted from cases in which children of the disappeared rejected what was being restored to them and wanted to remain with the people who had raised them. The Grandmothers believed in the non-negotiable 'right to an identity.' This dynamic generated difficult, even agonizing, questions for the Grandmothers, who rejected offers from judges to share custody of the children, even when faced with children's pleas to stay with the people they considered their parents. The Grandmothers argued that the only just solution in these cases would be that the ties between kidnappers and their grandchildren be broken. In the process, the children of the disappeared emerged as emblematic figures of the Argentine human rights struggle.

The Grandmothers' search had wider legal consequences. Because the crime of kidnapping was exempt from the amnesties and pardons of the late 1980s, it became a juridical means of pursuing justice against military perpetrators in the context of the impunity of the 1990s. In 1998, a former dictator was arrested for the crime of kidnapping, even though the children in question were by then legally adults.⁵ Even in cases where custody was no longer an issue, the

⁵ Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

Grandmothers argued that suspected children of the disappeared should be submitted to verification of their biological identities against their proclaimed will.⁶

The Grandmothers use the term 'restitution' to describe the process by which their grandchildren's biological identities are recovered. Restitution, a term used primarily for property, is the act of restoring to a rightful owner what has been taken away. The Grandmothers argue that the children of the disappeared are not simply being restored to their biological families but also being 'restored to themselves.'⁷ They assert that since the children's biological identities were unlawfully taken from them, their identities are being restored to them. In making this argument, the Grandmothers prioritize essentialized conceptions of identity, suggesting that identity is somehow a fixed and stable object. They also appear to argue that identity is not an individual choice but an inherent biological attribute. In a sense, the dispute over 'ownership' of the children seems to be caught between notions of individual choice (a person can decide his or her identity) and biological determinism (identity is fixed at birth).

By examining the everyday lives and contested identities of the children as battlegrounds for transitional justice, I aim to unpack some of the different ideas and assumptions inherent within this struggle. Specifically, I examine the implications of the fact that while the Grandmothers' institutional discourse embraces notions of biological determinism, they are arguing fundamentally for a relational notion of identity. In short, the process of identity restitution entails a construction of a new narrative identity that involves the recontextualization of social relations and life histories. I argue that this process reveals what sociologist Margaret Somers terms the 'narrative constitution of identity,' an antiessentialist process in which social identities are continually negotiated and redefined against a number of competing affiliations and group memberships, including not only kin groups but also human rights organizations.⁸

As this article will show, this new narrative identity is part of a larger historical narrative of transitional justice in Argentina. Transitional justice provides institutional mechanisms for addressing the past. For family members, the restitution of their disappeared children is the only means of social repair and redress, an attempt to restore familial relationships broken by state terror. Yet, the past cannot be fully redressed without the person assuming the identity of the person they would have been if they had not been taken from their parents and their parents had not been killed. Children of the disappeared have been raised by others and often remain loyal and devoted children, refusing to recognize the crime committed against them. In these cases, private lives and personal relationships become battlegrounds in the pursuit of human rights accountability and the

⁶ Ari Gandsman, "'A Prick of a Needle Can Do No Harm': Compulsory Extraction of Blood in the Search for the Children of Argentina's Disappeared,' *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 14(1) (2009): 162–184.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Margaret R. Somers, 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,' *Theory and Society* 23(5) (1994): 605–649.

lived experiences of kidnapped children of the disappeared become battlegrounds of transitional justice. Private, interpersonal relationships are intertwined with both public positions and historical interpretations of the past. Restitution, as understood by the Grandmothers, cannot occur unless the children adopt the human rights narrative of what occurred in Argentina during the military dictatorship. In this interpretation, everyday family dynamics are, effectively, microcosms of larger political histories. By examining the challenges restitution poses, this article suggests that to understand fully how transitional justice works, one has to look beyond its formal public and legal events to its profound consequences in everyday life.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Buenos Aires over 15 months between November 2003 and January 2005 and December 2008 and January 2009. In total, I conducted 44 semistructured interviews with human rights activists and family members of the disappeared. This included interviews with six children of the disappeared who had recovered their biological identities. Extensive study was made of the Oral Archive of the human rights organization *Memoria Abierta* (Open Memory) in its Buenos Aires offices, where it stores video interviews with family members of the disappeared. In total, I viewed and transcribed over 50 interviews during my research, including several that are featured in this article. When possible, I supplemented the video accounts with my own interviews. In addition, I attended numerous human rights events and activities, including several legal trials, and made extensive use of archives, including those of numerous human rights organizations.⁹

Duel Identities

The Grandmothers' institutional literature and publications on restitution failed to prepare me for my encounter with 'incomplete' restitutions.¹⁰ As the Grandmothers describe it, ties between kidnappers (the 'parents') and their victim (their 'son' or 'daughter') invariably dissolve as the truth of the child's parentage becomes apparent. The experiences of numerous children of the disappeared, including one I interviewed, support this idea, but a number of children are far more ambivalent or resistant. These individuals have been officially 'restituted' but still consider the people who raised them to be their parents and have publicly defended them. They do, however, maintain relationships with their biological families. In such cases, they celebrate two birthdays (their biological one and their false one), use two names and essentially have two families.

Psychologists working alongside some of these 'children' point out that restitution is not simply the legal moment when the judge announces it but a psychological and social process that takes time.¹¹ They reflect the reality that restitution, in this context, is more than a change in identity documents or the

⁹ Funding for this research was provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

¹⁰ Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, *Restitución de niños* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1997).

¹¹ Personal interview, Alicia Lo Giudice, Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 2004.

result of a genetic identity test; it takes place throughout an individual's life in small moments via the slow construction of a new set of relationships.

'How is Rodolfo doing now?' I ask his paternal grandmother, Argentina. 'He does not want to be called that,' she sighs. 'He wants to be called Guillermo.'¹² Although Argentina speaks with evident joy in describing their initial encounter, this emotion has since been tempered by a complicated reality. Guillermo is the name given to her grandson by the people who raised him. At the time of the interview, more than three years had passed since his 'restitution.' In that time, Guillermo had publicly clashed with the Grandmothers, including his maternal grandmother, Rosa (vice president of the organization), and his sister, Mariana (who worked in the investigative section of the group). While Argentina tells me she has a good relationship with Guillermo, she also says that he tells her very little about his life and that their relations are tense. She does not see him frequently, and when she does, she does not ask questions.

Guillermo is the biological son of José Manuel Pérez Rojo and Patricia Roisinblit. Patricia was eight months pregnant and finishing a degree in medicine when she disappeared the same day as her husband. In 1981, a woman who had been disappeared but was subsequently released reported that Patricia had given birth to a son on 15 November 1978, whom she named Rodolfo. They were forcibly separated shortly after. In 2001, Mariana, who grew up with her grandparents after her parents were disappeared, received a phone call at the Grandmothers' office. An anonymous caller claimed to know the location of someone who was the son of a young disappeared medical student who had been taken by the Air Force to a clandestine detention center where she had given birth to a son in November 1978. He was now considered the child of Francisco Gómez and Teodora Jofré. Mariana immediately recognized that the caller was describing her family. The caller also gave addresses, including where the son worked. Abandoning the Grandmothers' normally cautious procedure, Mariana proceeded to the son's place of work. They ended up meeting and talking. As she left, she handed him a letter stating that he might be a child of the disappeared and gave him her contact information, leaving him one of the Grandmothers' books, which included a photograph of his possible biological parents that revealed a close resemblance to his disappeared father. That same day, he showed up at the Grandmothers' headquarters. Later claiming that he only went because he was curious to find out whether he had a sister, he volunteered to do a genetic identity test.¹³ Since the case involved prominent members of the organization and had a strong likelihood of family belonging, the Grandmothers bypassed their protocol of using time-consuming government

¹² Personal interview, Argentina Rojo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 12 March 2004.

¹³ These account draws on a mix of interviews that the actors involved have given over the years, including my own interviews and conversations with them, taped interviews from the *Memoria Abierta* organization and media coverage. All translations from the Spanish were done by the author.

institutions and used a private lab. Results confirmed that Guillermo was Rodolfo, Mariana's brother and Rosa and Argentina's grandson.

Once the genetic link was verified, the case was turned over to the judiciary. On 8 February 2001, the same day that the Grandmothers publicly announced his restitution, Guillermo/Rodolfo's father/kidnapper, Francisco Gómez, was called before a judge. Francisco admitted that he was not the biological father and was subsequently placed under arrest for kidnapping and falsifying documents. His wife was also charged. Guillermo would later describe it as one of the worst days of his life. He had pleaded with the Grandmothers not to take the case to the judiciary and blamed them for his father's arrest. He refused to see his biological family for five months and went to the press to denounce the Grandmothers in one of his only public statements to date.¹⁴ Guillermo maintained that his father did not take part in disappearances and that he was a civil employee of the Air Force who worked in maintenance as a gardener and bricklayer. He blamed his legal situation on the Air Force, which issued the false birth certificate for him rather than going through an adoption process. In court, Francisco claimed not to understand the illegality of what he did, claiming that he 'thought it was an abandoned child' and he was 'doing a good deed.'¹⁵ The Grandmothers' position, as in other cases where similar defenses are offered, was that Francisco was lying and that he worked in intelligence and participated in disappearances.¹⁶

Although the court did not find adequate proof linking Francisco to the disappearance of the biological mother, it decided that his story lacked credibility and that both he and his wife knew the child's origins. After Francisco's arrest, a problem emerged because Guillermo's identity as Rodolfo could not be officially confirmed without verification from the National Genetic Data Bank. In a newspaper interview, he stated that he was not planning to take the genetic identity test, announcing, 'I want to continue being Guillermo Francisco Gómez. I want to continue being the son of my parents, not of two people that I never knew.'¹⁷ He was angry at the Grandmothers, especially Rosa, the organization's vice president, because they refused to negotiate with him to spare his parents from going to prison.

This experience points to two contentious issues around restitution. First, once genetically identified, children of the disappeared are issued with new identity papers with their biological family's name. Since their previous identity papers were falsified, courts require them to change their legal identity. Second, confirmation of their biological identity leads to the arrest of the people who raised them. If they are believed to have probable knowledge of the child's origins, they are charged with kidnapping, identity theft and falsifying documents. In other

¹⁴ María Elena Polack, "Quiero ser hijo de mis padres, no de gente que no conocí," *La Nación*, 18 February 2001.

¹⁵ *Gómez Francisco s/prisión preventiva*, Case No. 17.592 (3 May 2001). [*Gómez Francisco sentence with preventive detention*].

¹⁶ 'Un día de derechos humanos,' *Página/12*, 25 August 2004.

¹⁷ Polack, *supra* n 14.

words, the child's genetic identification serves as evidence that could send them to prison. Some analysts have argued that if the Grandmothers compromised on these issues, the process of restitution would be less contentious.¹⁸ The Grandmothers respond that impunity cannot be granted in cases relating to mass human rights violations. It is an absolutist position that, as argued above, characterizes the human rights movement in Argentina. If the Grandmothers were willing to make a deal granting amnesty to the parents, these situations could be resolved with less acrimonious public disputes. Yet, the human rights movement's prioritization of retributive justice makes this impossible. Echoing others, Guillermo has stated that the Grandmothers are less interested in finding children and more in vindictively trying to 'find people that had nothing to do with it so that they could make them responsible for the death of their children.'¹⁹ He subsequently advised anyone who doubted their origins not to go to the Grandmothers but to ask their parents. If they thought their parents were lying, he advised them to keep their doubts to themselves.²⁰

Micropolitics of Restitution

In Guillermo's story, we see how a human rights case can become a public family drama. Everyday lives and familial interactions become the contested terrain through which a human rights case is made. For biological family members, justice can only be done when Guillermo accepts that he is Rodolfo and that his 'real' parents were disappeared. This struggle is shaped by a larger political context of transitional justice that favors prosecution for all military perpetrators and the rejection of reconciliation. Notably, in discussing his relationship with his sister during the newspaper interview, Guillermo said that they had arguments 'because she has an ideology that I do not share. I don't have an ideology.' He then linked her ideology to what happened to 'her' parents: 'She grew up knowing that they had separated her from her parents and took away her brother.' Crucially, Guillermo did not say 'our parents.' In fact, he accused Mariana of misdirecting her resentment for what happened to 'her parents' against 'his':

Arguing with Mariana, I explained to her why I defend my parents so much: because I had parents. I had someone to fight for. I feel responsible for something. She doesn't.²¹

Mariana, on the other hand, argues that she is fighting for her parents. According to Mariana, Guillermo can accept some aspects of his history but not others: 'He's happy to have a sister, two grandmothers, and parents who wanted him and did not abandon him. There are other parts that he really cannot accept.' But, according to Mariana, 'this is a package. One cannot accept one part and not the other.

¹⁸ Personal communications with Argentine human rights activists.

¹⁹ Polack, *supra* n 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

This is all his history.²² Part of the difficulty, she says, is that he has not 'finished assimilating (*asimilar*)' who his parents were. He has not accepted the larger historical narrative and its consequences: that his parents disappeared, he was violently separated from his mother at birth and the people who raised him are not his parents but rather had committed a crime in the context of mass human rights violations.²³

The position of the Grandmothers is that these cases need time to be resolved through the slow construction of new relationships and breaking of ties with the kidnappers. According to Argentina's account, Guillermo had doubts about his identity before meeting Mariana. He told her that he had once asked his mother if he was really her son or if he was adopted. She slapped him and he never asked again. For Argentina, this is evidence of an abusive relationship in which he was prevented from asking questions. At the same time, she says that he 'knows perfectly well that he is not the son of those people. The blood showed him.'²⁴

Indeed, Guillermo acknowledges that his parents are not his biological parents, but he claims that the lack of a biological link is irrelevant to their affective ties. In the same way, he argues that he should be able to choose whatever name he wants, even though the Grandmothers argue that he cannot make these choices. As for the emotional bonds, the Grandmothers argue that such relationships cannot be based on love because they are built on lies. In explaining why he requested his parents not be arrested, Rosa argues,

He felt obliged to her or, better, they handed him over the bill for all the years they looked after him. But I wanted him to understand that these people were not his real parents.²⁵

Although Rosa acknowledges that her grandson received 'a hard shock' and argues that he is 'a victim of the dictatorship,' she maintains that he will only cease being a victim by cutting off relations with the people who raised him: 'He can break off relations he has with the kidnappers which is a perverse and lying relationship.'²⁶ Rather than blame her for his parents' situation, he must understand that they are responsible for a crime:

I am only responsible for having filed a request to find my daughter and my grandson in 1979. I am guilty of having searched for him, of doing the indescribable to find him and for claiming something that is mine.²⁷

A victim claims restitution for what was taken. In this case, it is a human being. In the meantime, the child has grown up and, when finally located, does not want

²² 'Eterno retorno al pasado,' *BBC Mundo*, 23 March 2001.

²³ Testimony, Mariana Eva Pérez, *Memoria Abierta* video archive, 14 August 2002.

²⁴ Personal interview, Argentina Rojo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 12 March 2004.

²⁵ Interview cited in Guillermo Lipis, *Nueva sión, periodismo crítico: De lo comunitario a lo nacional: 1948–2003: Los últimos 5 años (1998–2003)* (Buenos Aires: Colección Testimonios, 2003), 145.

²⁶ Testimony, Rosa Roisinblit, *Memoria Abierta* video archive, 4 September 2002.

²⁷ Interview cited in Lipis, *supra* n 25 at 136.

to be 'reclaimed.' Rosa argues that he has no choice because his identity is fraudulent:

So he could maybe call himself Guillermo, but he is going to call himself Pérez Roisinblit [his family name]. Of that I have no doubt, because that is his real name: Pérez Roisinblit. He cannot call himself by anything else.²⁸

Mariana also speaks of the conflict resulting over his desire to keep the name that his kidnappers gave him: 'He thinks he has the choice of being Gómez or being Pérez. It doesn't work that way. He is who he is.' Conflict over his name has also caused awkwardness in their relationship:

I can't call him anything else and he doesn't want to be called Rodolfo. I say *che boludo* (literally 'you stupid,' but often used as a term of endearment in Argentina). It's a very slow process.²⁹

'When We Are Together, Something Very Much Like Justice Occurs'

Meeting her brother has had profound consequences for Mariana. A year after their first encounter, she published an open letter to her brother in which she states, 'In finding you, I found myself.'³⁰ In it, she argues that before finding him, his absence 'paradoxically, occupied *everything*.'³¹ The letter hints at the difficulty in their relationship:

I cannot accept you with any other name that isn't the one that our parents gave you. Because if you are not Rodolfo Fernando, I am not Mariana Eva. Because our names relate us to them and relating us to them relates us to each other.

She then tells him, 'When we are together, something very much like justice occurs.'³² Justice is not accomplished simply through a judicial decision but by reestablishing broken relationships. However, as Mariana acknowledges, 'There are things that I don't think can be fixed.' She also finds the balance difficult between her concerns as a human rights activist and her concerns as a sister, as well as her encounters between the idealized image she had during her long search for him and the human being she encountered:

Our relationship isn't linear. I discovered I was more fragile than I thought. I discovered I had limits and at times there are things I can't give in the relationship with him. And in the end, it doesn't make any sense to force myself to give them for any activist consideration. I have to approach him as my brother not as a human rights activist, because if I did, I would be classifying him like his kidnappers did. So now I'm

²⁸ Ibid., 138.

²⁹ Testimony, Mariana Eva Pérez, *Memoria Abierta* video archive, 14 August 2002.

³⁰ Letter from Mariana Eva Pérez to her brother, *Mensuario de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (June–July 2001).

³¹ Ibid (emphasis in original).

³² Ibid.

trying to get close to him as a person and not like a projection of my search – like my long lost little brother . . . I try to accept the person he is. We can fight if we have to fight. We can fight because he's a person. My imaginary Rodolfito behaves very well. He appears when I want him to and doesn't mess around when I don't want him to.³³

In the end, Guillermo kept his first name but was compelled to add his biological names, Guillermo Rodolfo Fernando Pérez.

Guillermo's discovery was instrumental for the human rights movement. It was the first time the Grandmothers had located a grandchild in the hands of Air Force personnel. The doctor who delivered the child and signed the false birth certificate, Jorge Luis Magnacco, had long been accused of involvement in clandestine births of children of the disappeared and, finally, here was the proof needed for his arrest. In 2005, Magnacco was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Francisco Gómez was given seven years and his wife three and a half years. Furthermore, the judge found that the kidnapping of children of the disappeared was part of a 'systematic plan of annihilation' where 'it was necessary to eradicate those who in the future could harbor the same thoughts,'³⁴ making it a further victory for the Grandmothers. Guillermo would later figure as one of the cases in the trial over the systematic theft of babies that began in 2011 and included eight high-profile defendants. Even though he came to regret his restitution and to reject his biological identity and his biological family, he became a reluctant protagonist in a major human rights case.

'It's a Horrible Story but It's Our History': Transitional Justice in Everyday Life

If restitution is a transformative event that provokes a profound change in all aspects of a person's life, Guillermo resisted its effects. Even restitutions that have taken place under less acrimonious circumstances have resulted in similar challenges. The encounter between family members is structured by a temporal gap between the family members' long search and the experience of children who have recently discovered a new biological family. This imbalance can cause problems by creating different and, at times, opposing expectations.

The dilemmas this imbalance generates come through clearly in the story of Claudia Victoria. She was born on 25 March 1978, but was registered as Mercedes Beatriz Landa, with the birth date 13 June 1978, by military official Ceferino Landa. She was eventually located by the Grandmothers and summoned to court. When asked to undergo genetic testing, she consented and the results were returned in February 2000. According to her grandmother Buscarita, their first encounters were awkward and emotionally difficult but they eased over time:

The first days were terrible because we didn't know what to say to each other. She found herself with a family that she didn't know, and I found myself with

³³ Testimony, Mariana Eva Pérez, *Memoria Abierta* video archive, 14 August 2002.

³⁴ 'Diez años de prisión para el médico que asistía los partos en la ESMA,' *Página/12*, 23 April 2005.

a granddaughter that I hadn't seen since she was a baby. There was nothing to talk about. There were no words. The only thing that we could say to her was: 'These are photographs of your family, your parents. That's you when you were little. That's your mother feeding you. That's your father bathing you.' What more could we talk about? It was difficult. But little by little, we reconstructed a grandmother–granddaughter relationship.³⁵

The tension Buscarita initially felt made her wonder if restitution was the right thing to have done:

She was so old to be provoking such a change in her life. What if it was damaging for her? What have we done? Is this good or bad? It's terrible to find out at 22 that her parents weren't her real parents.

At the same time, Buscarita rationalized the need for restitution: 'But this is who she is. She's not another person. She wasn't the person she was supposed to be.'³⁶

Claudia Victoria eventually adjusted to her new identity. According to Buscarita, one of the integral moments in her restitution was her first celebration of her biological birthday a month after they found her. The event helped integrate her into her new biological family. During these early stages, Buscarita tried to leave her alone as Claudia Victoria had asked for her privacy to be respected. The customary practice of the Grandmothers is to display photographs of their recovered grandchildren in their office and on their website. Like Guillermo, Claudia Victoria did not want her photograph displayed. Buscarita tried not to pressure her and resisted asking too many questions: 'I want to ask her how she's doing in her daily life but I don't know.' A year after her restitution, Claudia Victoria was still living with her kidnappers. Buscarita thought she wanted to be independent but was unable to for economic reasons. At the time of my interview with Buscarita in 2004, Claudia Victoria was working in Venezuela and Buscarita did not know much about her life.

Claudia Victoria had been taken by a colonel from a clandestine detention center in Buenos Aires three days after she was kidnapped alongside her parents.³⁷ The colonel and his wife could not have children of their own and illegally registered her as theirs. When the colonel and his wife were put on trial for her kidnapping in 2001, Claudia Victoria was called to testify on their behalf, which she did in private. On the stand, however, she did not defend her kidnappers; she simply told her life story. When asked her name, she gave her biological name: Claudia Victoria Poblete Hlaczik. When asked the names of her parents and her date of birth, she gave the names of her biological parents and her real date of birth. In Buscarita's opinion, the fact that her kidnappers would make her testify proved that they were not her 'real' parents: 'I would never have asked her

³⁵ Personal interview, Buscarita Roa, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 18 June 2004.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

to do such a thing.³⁸ In the end, her testimony did not help and they were both convicted of kidnapping, identity theft and falsifying documents.

Like Guillermo's case, that of Claudia Victoria had ramifications for the broader pursuit of transitional justice in Argentina. The Poblete case, as it came to be known, became a watershed moment for human rights: it was the basis upon which Argentina's amnesty laws were initially ruled unconstitutional in 2001. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court, which decided to overturn the laws in 2005.³⁹ Prosecutions restarted and the first to be convicted was Julio 'El Turco' Simon, a former police officer and one of the dictatorship's most notorious torturers. In 2006, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison for his role in the 1978 disappearance of Claudia Victoria's parents and her kidnapping.⁴⁰ Claudia Victoria being found in the custody of a military officer was instrumental proof of the disappearance of her parents. After 20 years of impunity, this was the first sentence passed for disappearances.

After the Supreme Court overturned the amnesty laws, Claudia Victoria emerged as a public figure. In 2005, she issued her first public statements. Unwilling to speak about her relationship with her kidnappers, she admitted she was still in contact with them, but implied that their punishment was deserved: 'Everyone is responsible for their actions.'⁴¹ More important, she spoke of the need to pursue justice against military perpetrators and her support for overturning the amnesty laws:

No sentence is going to take away the pain I had to go through. But it is important that these unjust laws are annulled. In order for justice to take place, there has to be justice for everyone.

With these words, Claudia Victoria adopted the role of a family member-activist actively seeking justice. This marked an important transition. She employed the Grandmothers' institutional discourse to describe her life, portraying her restitution as a liberating experience: 'I discovered a new world. The world opened up to me.' She noted that this caused a positive psychological change in her life:

Later, I realized that, before, unconsciously, I had a weight that I hadn't noticed, that I didn't say or do certain things. Now I feel more complete, more peaceful, and I wouldn't have made these changes without knowing who I was. Now I am not part of a lie.⁴²

As one of a handful of grandchildren who now speak publicly, Claudia Victoria said in an interview a year later that she had finally decided to distance herself from her former life, including many friends and even her adoptive parents.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Simón, Julio Héctor y otros s/ privación ilegítima de la libertad, etc. -causa N° 17.768-*, Case No. 1767. XXXVIII (14 June 2005) [*Simón, Julio Héctor and others sentence with unlawful imprisonment, etc.*].

⁴⁰ Pablo Abiad, 'Por secuestros y torturas, le dan 25 años de cárcel al "Turco Julián,"' *Clarín*, 4 August 2006.

⁴¹ Victoria Ginzberg, 'Tiene que haber justicia para todos,' *Página/12*, 15 June 2005.

⁴² Ibid.

However, she had not broken off all contact with her parents, especially her mother, who claimed to have no knowledge of Claudia Victoria's origins. Explaining this, she stated,

All the memories of my childhood, all the good and bad, all the colors, they are these people, and I can't ignore that. It's a horrible story, but it's our story.⁴³

The Political Is Personal: The Emergence of the *Nieto*

This last remark is fundamental. Unlike Guillermo, Claudia Victoria is able to make the leap beyond the intimate familial realm. The story she is referring to is not just her personal life story or that of her family but the larger history of Argentina.⁴⁴ In this case, she collectivizes her personal history and can situate it within a larger narrative of recent Argentine history. The movement of her experience from the sphere of the individual and the familial to the larger collective experience of all Argentines represents not only an essential triumph for the Grandmothers but also, I argue, the end goal of restitution.

Claudia Victoria's public appearance heralds the arrival of the *nieto* (grand-child) as a public figure and political actor. With it, the legacy of the dictatorship is symbolized by the life history of one individual tied up in a web of complex interpersonal interactions with both victims and perpetrators. Emerging out of these relationships, children of the disappeared who have recovered their identities become symbols of postdictatorship Argentina – they are able to take their experience and transform it into that of an assertive and politically engaged postdictatorship subject who has assimilated the past and is now able to move forward.

It is important to note, however, that while the children have always been the central focus of the Grandmothers' work, the voices of the children themselves are not strongly represented in the history of the institution. For years, very few gave interviews. Faced with intense public scrutiny, the Grandmothers rightly shielded their grandchildren's privacy. Restitutions were announced in a single public act – a press conference. During these conferences, the president of the organization would give biographical information about the disappeared parents and describe the family's search for the child. Scant information about the children was given. Family members were present; the children were not. In two press conferences, the children specifically asked for privacy.⁴⁵

Over time, however, the children have become increasingly visible. This is linked not to their age (children of the disappeared were born between 1975 and 1978 and had become adults) but to the Kirchner government's public support for human rights. The first major appearance of the *nietos* as a collective on

⁴³ Jack Chang, "'Dirty War' Babies Learn Painful Truth,' *Miami Herald*, 16 April 2006.

⁴⁴ In Spanish, *historia* means both history and story.

⁴⁵ Personal observation from attending three press conferences on 16 December 2003, 20 October 2004 and 4 November 2004.

the political stage took place on 20 November 2003, when a small group met with Kirchner. The primary purpose of the meeting was to petition the state for financial compensation. In a group statement, the *nietos* spoke of the need for 'symbolic reparation for the damage committed by the genocidal state.'⁴⁶ They spoke from the perspective of their own life histories and a demand for public recognition: 'With great suffering, we recognize and remember what happened to us. Now we want others to recognize and remember it.' This was a new development, as the Grandmothers had previously spoken for them. Four months after this meeting, the government announced that kidnapped children of the disappeared would be given reparations.

Soon after, two grandchildren emerged as representative *nietos* and used the transformative experience of restitution as the basis for becoming political figures. The first is Juan Cabandié, who spoke alongside Kirchner at the public ceremony announcing the transformation of a clandestine detention center where the disappeared were held – and where Juan was born – into a Museum of Memory. His restitution had only been announced two months earlier and this was his first public event. In his speech, Juan moved from his own personal and intimate story to embracing the entire history of Argentina, drawing a direct parallel between his situation and that of all Argentines. 'The words that defined the day,' in one newspaper's assessment, were 'truth is absolute freedom.'⁴⁷ These words referred to Juan's situation of finding his 'real' identity as well as the entire country's experience. Juan noted that just as he needed to accept the truth about himself, his identity and what happened to his parents, Argentines also needed to accept the truth about what happened during the dictatorship.⁴⁸

Juan's restitution reads like the Grandmothers' idealized account in almost every detail. His kidnapper was a physically and emotionally abusive police officer, and many of the everyday life events he recounts can be seen as examples of Sigmund Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness) – events whose meanings are only revealed retroactively. For example, Juan claims he never wanted to celebrate his birthday although he did not know why the date depressed him. After the restitution, he understood this was because it was not his real birthday. He also claims to have always wanted to be named Juan without knowing that this was the name his biological mother gave him before he was taken from her. He retrospectively asserted, 'I was always Juan Cabandié; only for 26 years I did not know it.'⁴⁹

At the same time, Juan does not attribute his doubts as a child to the set of markers the Grandmothers' narratives often put forth, including lack of family resemblance, parents who appeared too old to have children and no photographs of his mother pregnant. In Juan's account, he was raised to respect military and

⁴⁶ Victoria Ginzberg, 'La memoria de una historia en común,' *Página/12*, 21 November 2003.

⁴⁷ Victoria Ginzberg, 'La verdad es la libertad absoluta,' *Página/12*, 25 March 2004.

⁴⁸ Comment made at public event, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 24 March 2004.

⁴⁹ Victoria Ginzberg, 'La realidad se transforma con política,' *Página/12*, 26 May 2007.

police authority and was politically conservative during his youth. Upon reaching maturity, his politics changed and this newfound political awareness provoked his doubt. In interviews, he offers differing but complementary accounts of this transformation. In some accounts, it occurred through volunteering to help the poor, despite not being raised with a sense of charity. In one interview, Juan cites the importance of seeing Fidel Castro speak. In another, he cites the transformative shift that occurred on the night of the protests that heralded the collapse of the government during the economic crisis:

Then, on the night of 19 December 2001, in the midst of the *débâcle* [the national protest against the country's failing economy], I found myself in the Plaza de Mayo and I understood that I no longer identified with the values of my adoptive parents.⁵⁰

Many scholars now interpret the protests that drew masses onto the streets and eventually brought down the government as heralding the collective political awakening of Argentina.⁵¹ Juan's rejection of his parents' legitimacy came at the same moment when Argentina rejected its government's legitimacy. The collective political experience of all Argentines coincided with Juan's private experience. The everyday life of a child of the disappeared is a microcosm for all Argentines as Juan's breaking with his kidnappers is likened to a broader breaking with the legacy of the dictatorship (the collapsed economic system). Juan's subsequent media celebrity became a launching ground for a political career, and, in 2007, he was elected city legislator on the Kirchner-affiliated *Frente para la Victoria* (Front for Victory) ticket. In his campaign, Juan linked his politics explicitly to his restitution: 'Knowing my identity helped me to deepen this ideological, social, and political position.'⁵²

Around the same time, another child of the disappeared emerged as an even more prominent political figure. A law student named Analía Azic discovered her parents were not her biological parents after her father attempted suicide following a leak that a Spanish court was investigating his role in disappearances and torture. Notified by human rights workers that she might be a child of the disappeared, she was initially hesitant but finally came forward in October 2004. A genetic identity test revealed that she had been born in a clandestine detention center, her real name was Victoria Donda and her biological father's brother was a torturer who may have been involved in her biological mother's disappearance. Like Juan, she held opposing political beliefs to the people who raised her, something that she retroactively interpreted as a product of her 'real' identity. She volunteered in a soup kitchen named after the founder of the Mothers and remembers her father being upset with her for putting a poster of Che Guevara up in her room. In 2006, a documentary about her life was released, and she was elected to City Council. The following year, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in

⁵⁰ Tomás Bril Mascarenhas, 'House of Horror,' *New Internationalist* 385 (2005): 10–12.

⁵¹ See, for example, Victoria Goddard, '"This Is History": Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis Argentina 2001,' *History and Anthropology* 17(3) (2006): 267–286.

⁵² Ginzberg, *supra* n 49.

the Argentine National Congress as part of Kirchner's political party, the youngest woman ever elected to that position. In 2009, she became president of the Chamber's Argentine Commission of Human Rights (*Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*), which oversees prosecutions of military perpetrators, including of the man who raised her.

Although Victoria claimed her new identity, she kept Analía as her middle name, stating she was both Victoria and Analía. She was always the daughter of her biological parents, but she still visits the man who raised her, even after he was sentenced to 18 years in prison in 2011 for his crimes against her. Although she calls them kidnappers in public, she calls them Mum and Dad in private. She agrees that her father/kidnapper deserves his punishment but also notes 'ambiguities' in her feelings and admits that she still loves him.

The emotional entanglements of these restitutions reveal the complex repercussions of transitional justice. In addressing her ambivalent feelings, Victoria, like Juan, likens her experience to that of all Argentines and promotes the continued search for the rest of the kidnapped children of the disappeared as a prerequisite for justice and for an end to this chapter of Argentina's history. An understanding of her experience in the context of Argentine history becomes the basis for her political activism:

My story is not only my own, Victoria's or Analía's, but it is the history of Argentina, a history of intolerance, violence, and lies that continues to the present. It will not end until the last of the babies stolen during the dictatorship can recover his or her true identity and until the last of those responsible for these atrocities are judged for their crimes, until the last of the thirty thousand disappeared can be given a name, a history and a cause of death, and until the last of their relatives can mourn.⁵³

Identity, Agency and the Conditions of Victimhood

In 2004, a documentary called *Nietos* was released. The film, made by a child of the disappeared who grew up with his biological family, is a 'generational testimony' featuring the grandchildren as protagonists. Several weeks after the film's release, I spoke with a child of the disappeared who appeared in the film.⁵⁴ He told me that the film intentionally avoided politics in order to focus on the everyday lives and relationships of several recovered children of the disappeared. At the same time, he acknowledged that the film's intentions were political, as documenting the children's lives was a way to support the continuing search for other kidnapped children of the disappeared by testifying to the importance of restitution. He noted that the Grandmothers' unwavering belief that restitution is a fundamental good needed to be backed up with empirical evidence.

⁵³ Victoria Ginzberg, 'En primera persona,' *Página/12*, 12 July 2009.

⁵⁴ Personal communication, Manuel Gonçalves, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 22 October 2004.

The best evidence is the lives of grandchildren like Claudia Victoria, Juan and Victoria, who come forward to attest to the positive change in their lives that restitution has signified. Juan and Victoria both argue that their experience has led them to become young political leaders with a newfound agency that was restored to them by not only discovering but also embracing their 'true' identities. This reflects one of the dominant assumptions of transitional justice made by the Grandmothers: that truth has a therapeutic value.⁵⁵ The Grandmothers argue this to be the case even with grandchildren who reject the truth (that their parents were disappeared and the people who raised them were complicit). As they argue, to continue 'living a lie' (living under a false identity) is inherently unhealthy. Children of the disappeared like Guillermo, who remain fundamentally ambivalent about their restitution, question whether this applies to everyone. The Grandmothers argue that, given enough time, such cases will be resolved as the children invariably embrace the institutional narrative of restitution. In the meantime, however, the everyday lives of the children become the contested terrain of transitional justice.

While there is little dispute that children of the disappeared are the primary victims in Argentina, the divergence of opinion comes in deciding how to end their victimization. The Grandmothers' position raises a challenging question that has broader relevance to transitional justice. Much of the transitional justice literature assumes or argues that transitional justice processes should prioritize victims' needs, especially when it comes to reparative efforts.⁵⁶ Yet in practice, a common critique of transitional justice is that it is generally not 'victim-centered' enough,⁵⁷ but rather overly prescriptive, elite-driven and top-down. Suspicious of experts speaking to what victims need without consulting them, critics argue that the voices of victims are too often left out or marginalized within transitional justice mechanisms. As a result, researchers have attempted to address victims' needs through calls for 'participatory' approaches to transitional justice that emphasize 'victim perspectives' and embrace community-based remedies that enhance 'local agency'.⁵⁸

As Alexander Laban Hinton argues, 'Transitional justice needs to more deeply grapple with the messiness of global and transnational involvements with the

⁵⁵ Simon Robins, 'Challenging the Therapeutic Ethic: A Victim-Centred Evaluation of Transitional Justice Process in Timor-Leste,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6(1) (2012): 83–105.

⁵⁶ See Simon Robins' victim-centered approach, *ibid.* or that of Jay Aronson, who starts from the assumption that 'transitional justice demands that at least some of the needs and desires of victims of human rights abuse are met.' Jay D. Aronson, 'The Strengths and Limitations of South Africa's Search for Apartheid-Era Missing Persons,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5(2) (2011): 280.

⁵⁷ Simon Robins, 'Towards Victim-Centred Transitional Justice: Understanding the Needs of Families of the Disappeared in Postconflict Nepal,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5(1) (2011): 75–98.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Kimberly Theidon, 'Justice in Transition: The Micropolitics of Reconciliation in Postwar Peru,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(3) (2006): 433–457.

local, on-the-ground realities with which they intersect.⁵⁹ Such beliefs are often framed by critiques of transitional justice's legalistic focus on punitive justice, as Kieran McEvoy has argued.⁶⁰ Yet, local demands are never monolithic. Some believe that an emphasis on 'on-the-ground' entanglements means that one should abandon a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.⁶¹ In this case, it could be argued that the Grandmothers should abandon their absolutist legal approach to focus on the particularities of each case and make adjustments based on what the victim needs (like accepting Guillermo's decision to keep his name or not to charge his parents).

'Victim needs' are often identified by what victims of mass violence tell researchers they need. The Grandmothers argue that they know what their kidnapped grandchildren need and that the 'children' are not able to define and decide upon their needs, which complicates the idea that victim-oriented transitional justice should privilege what victims say they need. For the Grandmothers, professed loyalties to kidnappers are a manifestation of Stockholm syndrome (in which kidnapping victims become sympathetic to their kidnappers), a form of victimization that can only end when bonds based on lies and criminal actions are broken. Reparative efforts are usually based on victims' claims for redress for harm and injury, whether economic, social or psychological. This, however, is an instance of transitional justice in which victims not only deny claims of harm and redress but also deny their status as victims. Moreover, they profess loyalties to individuals considered perpetrators of (or, at the very least, complicit in) the crimes against them. What they consider a source of love and affection is, they are told, a source of harm and injury. This is what makes these cases so agonizing.

Either the Grandmothers are overzealous in their pursuit of retributive justice at the expense of victims' needs or understanding victims' needs is more complicated than simply listening to what victims say they need. If justice is what victims require, justice can only be achieved when victims consider themselves victims. In this sense, restitution is oriented toward the production of victimhood, in which recovered children of the disappeared understand and accept the injury done not only to their biological parents but also to themselves and their primary relationships with others.

The Grandmothers do more than deny the agency of victims such as Guillermo, they make one question the grounds upon which claims to agency are made. Since identity forms the basis of agency, the basis of the agency of children of the disappeared – their ability to make decisions about what they want – is exactly what is in question. But while the Grandmothers prioritize biologized and

⁵⁹ Alexander Laban Hinton, 'Introduction: Toward an Anthropology of Transitional Justice,' in *Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence*, ed. Alexander Laban Hinton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 1.

⁶⁰ Kieran McEvoy, 'Beyond Legalism: Towards a Thicker Understanding of Transitional Justice,' *Journal of Law and Society* 34(4) (2007): 411–440.

⁶¹ Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, 'Whose Justice? Rethinking Transitional Justice from the Bottom Up,' *Journal of Law and Society* 35(2) (2008): 265–292.

essentialized conceptions of identity in their arguments for restitution, the process of restitution reveals that identities are actually intersubjective and relational – they function in antiessentialist ways and are fluid and constructed. In this understanding, personal identities are constituted out of one's relationships with others, as articulated by Mariana: 'Because if you are not Rodolfo Fernando, I am not Mariana Eva,' and, 'In finding you, I found myself.'⁶²

Personal identity, subjectivity and agency are not formed in a vacuum but rather within a complex web of relationships and a matrix of larger historical and political processes. Restitution involves a process in which the individual's identity is inserted not only into a new set of personal relationships but also into a new understanding that involves the acceptance and reproduction of a particular historical narrative, as articulated by 'successful' restitutions. Individuals are then able to place their life histories within the context of a larger historical narrative of Argentine dictatorial and postdictatorial history. Transitional justice involves a struggle between competing narratives or, as Ruti Teitel argues, transitions 'offer a choice among contested narratives.'⁶³ In this case, justice is achieved when recovered children of the disappeared reinterpret their subjective experiences and personal relationships through the human rights narrative – a narrative that reorients them in their relationships with others. Although transitional justice is generally considered retroactive, in these instances it is not. The profound consequences of restitution not only reorient children of the disappeared toward the past but also orient them toward the future. Justice emerges less out of judicial decisions and more from their consequences on interpersonal relationships. As Mariana says, 'when we are together, something very much like justice occurs.'⁶⁴

Conclusion

In Argentina, the dominant demand of organizations that represent family members of the disappeared has been clear: the absence of legal justice is impunity and the fight against impunity is an absolute good. In the end, locating children of the disappeared in the hands of military families, including those who do not wish to be recovered, has had profound consequences that have spiraled up the chain of command. In human rights circles, the Grandmothers are feted, as noted in one book written about them, for their 'persistence' and their 'tenacious pursuit of justice.'⁶⁵ This tenacity, however, is linked to absolutist positions that reflect their unremitting prioritization of retributive justice, which views any compromise as impunity.

Kidnapped children of the disappeared appear trapped in the similarly absolutist logic of a dichotomy: between their biological identities and the identities they were raised under. However, close examination of case studies reveals messy

⁶² Letter, *supra* n 30.

⁶³ Ruti G. Teitel, 'Transitional Justice Genealogy,' *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 87.

⁶⁴ Letter, *supra* n 30.

⁶⁵ Arditti, *supra* n 5.

entanglements featuring both resistance and accommodation. Interpersonal relationships involving ambivalent and ambiguous affective ties link perpetrators of crimes under the dictatorship with victims through children of the disappeared struggling to assimilate the idea that the people they consider their parents kidnapped them in the context of systematic human rights violations. It is in this sense that the children become microcosms of postdictatorship Argentina, which is still struggling to come to terms with its past. The location of each kidnapped child of the disappeared is a reminder that even three decades after the dictatorship's end, its consequences are still unfolding. The most recent restitution took place in August 2011 – the 105th case resolved.⁶⁶ The Grandmothers' main challenge remains to make victims of a crime understand that they are victims of a crime.

⁶⁶ Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 'Prensa y Difusión,' http://www.abuelas.org.ar/comunicados.php?comunicados=restituciones.php&der1=der1_varios.php&der2=der2_dif.php (accessed 18 June 2012).