Governing the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead: the violent pursuit of cultural sovereignty during authoritarian rule in Argentina

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Graciela Beatriz Daleo was abducted on 18 October 1977, at the age of twenty-eight. She had been active in the *Juventud Peronista* since 1966, a Peronist youth organisation whose incessant street demonstrations during the early 1970s had been instrumental in the return of the exiled former president Juan Domingo Perón to Argentina. The Peronist Montoneros, the Marxist People's Revolutionary Army or ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*) and a host of other guerrilla organisations had equally contributed to Perón's political rebirth through armed operations against the reigning military dictatorship of Lieutenant-General Lanusse. Free elections were held in March 1973, and Perón became president of Argentina in July 1973. Soon, a violent factionalism developed between left-wing and right-wing Peronists about the administrative control of national, provincial and local governments, while the ERP continued to attack the armed forces and dreamt of a Cuban Revolution on Argentine soil. The left-wing Montoneros resumed their political violence by late 1973, in part as a response to right-wing death squads. Perón died in July 1974. His widow María Estela Martínez de Perón assumed his place in a worsening political and economic climate. The ERP and Montoneros were persecuted relentlessly, especially after the military coup of March 1976 (Robben 2005: 134–42).

Graciela Daleo had joined the Montoneros in 1975. She organised logistic support by providing weapons, safe houses, money and documents, and went into hiding when the military took charge of

the country. On the morning of 18 October 1977, she was at the Acoyte subway station in Buenos Aires, and about to board the train when a man crossed in front of her and said: 'Federal Police, you have to accompany me.' She threw herself on the platform, began to scream and tried to bring the cyanide capsule she had taken from her shirt pocket to her mouth when three men belonging to a naval task group launched themselves at her. The cyanide capsule fell from her hand, and she was unable to reach the other capsules hidden in her bra and handbag. They beat her, and grabbed her by the wrists to be handcuffed. 'I'm called Graciela Daleo!', she screamed, 'They're abducting me. They're going to kill me! Call my father at 592780!' The men choked her and shouted: 'It's for drugs, she's a drug dealer', and dragged her up the stairs of the subway station. They hooded her, threw her into a beige Ford Falcon passenger car and took her to the clandestine detention centre at the Navy Mechanics' School or ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada). Three witnesses to the abduction called her father anonymously later that day (Anguita and Caparrós 1998: 345–46; Daleo and Castillo 1982: 1–5).

At the ESMA, Graciela Daleo was tortured and interrogated for hours by Navy Lieutenant Pernías about her friends, contacts and political militancy, and finally subjected to multiple mock executions while kneeling on the grass outside the detention centre. She was penned up for months in a tiny cubicle and eventually forced to do typing work as part of a rehabilitation programme. After more than fifteen months in captivity, she spent February and March of 1979 in Bolivia as a test of her ideological recovery. She was told that her relatives and fellow captives at the ESMA would suffer the consequences if she tried something foolish, and was obliged to report periodically to the embassy's naval attaché. Upon her return to Buenos Aires, the disappeared Graciela Daleo was allowed to visit her parents, accompanied by naval personnel. On 20 April 1979, she was sent into exile to Venezuela. She was considered unsuitable for Argentine society but still fit to live abroad. She returned to Argentina in May 1984 (Camara Nacional 1987 2: 327–30; *El Diario del Juicio* 1985 22: 422–5; interviews with Graciela Daleo on 4 and 24 October 1990).

Daleo's multiple political transformations from street protester and guerrilla insurgent to torture victim, disappeared, forced labourer, exilee and free citizen reveal the authoritarian state's necro- and biopolitical hold over its citizens. If state sovereignty is defined as the power to rule about life or death in exceptional situations, as Agamben (1998: 8) and Foucault (1998: 135) have argued, then this

dominion was manifested in Argentina during the 1976–83 dictatorship. Anthropology has demonstrated how everyday acts and local practices at society's fringes shape the state and its multiple imaginations (e.g. Biehl 2005; Das 2007; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Skidmore 2004), while studies about state terror have analysed the state's repressive, regulatory and disciplinary influences on people's agency (e.g. Aretxaga 2003; Sluka 2005). This boundless 'ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity' (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 295) was exercised by the Argentine authoritarian regime to enforce cultural sovereignty through a devastating assault on Argentine society. The term cultural sovereignty refers to the state's power to regulate society's cultural practices, and ultimately to impose a particular cultural project on its citizens. The violent conflict between the Argentine revolutionaries and the military was therefore not just about political power but was a cultural war about the vested authority to determine the cultural confines and social conditions of the Argentine people. Graciela Daleo's predicament illustrates this contest. Rather than being assassinated together with thousands of other disappeared citizens, she was forced into a rehabilitation programme to dispel her revolutionary ideas and instil notions of order, hierarchy, discipline and morality.

Based on in-depth interviews with key actors during the dictatorship and the analysis of newspapers, secret army documents and official reports, this chapter examines the governing of the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 by an authoritarian regime which was convinced that the nation's cultural tradition was besieged by a guerrilla insurgency and a revolutionary ideology, thus challenging its political and cultural sovereignty with arms and ideas. According to the military, the Argentine state was endangered by infiltration and armed violence supported by foreign communist regimes, while the nation's Western, Christian heritage was being corroded by revolutionary beliefs that did away with the nuclear family and paternal authority as bourgeois, private property as the exploitation of the proletariat, religion as an alienating ideology and the divine social hierarchy as maintaining an unjust social inequality. The Argentine dictatorship was determined to cleanse the national body and spirit of such forces and ideas, described as cancers and viruses. Tens of thousands of people were disappeared through state terrorism, at least 10,000 of them were assassinated, others were forced into exile, while only an estimated 100 captives passed through a few rehabilitation programmes.

The chapter's main argument is that necropower and biopower were under military rule no longer the baleful and benign faces of a sovereign state, exercised with due process and regard for people's common welfare, but became intertwined in an authoritarian governmentality that comprised a 'complex form of power, which has as its target [the] population' (censorship, intelligence gathering, disappearance), 'a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses' (media surveillance, tasks forces, secret detention centres, rehabilitation programmes), and the 'governmentalisation of the state' (state terrorism) to guarantee the survival of Argentina's cultural sovereignty (Foucault 1991: 102–3). This unbounded state power organised forced disappearances to assess citizens suspected of endangering the Argentine state and the nation's Christian culture. The disappeared were kept in a condition of social indefinition as living-dead whose ideological transformation and social conduct under captivity were monitored to determine their fate. This undefined status continued for the assassinated captives when the military junta lost power in 1983: the disappeared changed from being alive yet missing into dead yet unaccounted for. The democratic government tried to purge the fallen regime's necropolitical control from Argentine society through a truth commission, criminal trials, exhumations and the rule of law but was held hostage by the military's refusal to resolve the liminal condition of the living-dead; even thirty years later when nearly a thousand perpetrators were convicted or indicted for human rights violations.

Cultural war and the process of national reorganisation

The Argentine armed forces did not stage a coup d'état in March 1976 to fight the insurgency more effectively, because they had already acquired extensive powers in October 1975 and the guerrilla organisations had incurred significant losses by late December 1975. The military installed a dictatorship to give the military junta a free hand to reconstruct Argentine society and restore 'the essential values that serve as the foundation to the comprehensive rule of the State' (Record of Basic Objectives, cited in Verbitsky 1988: 145). This ambitious programme was called the Process of National Reorganisation. The name harked back to the National Organisation of 1852–62 that began with the ouster of the nationalist dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852 and ended with the formation of

the state in the classic sense of the term as a sovereign power and a national territory with an organic whole of institutions. A National Constitution was written, the Republic formed, Congress instated and a national education system developed. In addition, Argentina's national territory was enlarged in the 1870s, when the Patagonian pampas were occupied through a genocidal military campaign against the indigenous population. This expansion made the economy take flight with the export of salted beef, hides, wool and wheat. The three Argentine presidents – Mitre, Sarmiento and Roca – most responsible for the territorial conquest, political stability, economic prosperity and state sovereignty were all retired generals. The 1976 military junta believed they were following in their footsteps: Videla, Massera and Agosti were convinced that they could repeat the feats of their illustrious predecessors. They were determined to wipe out the revolutionary insurgency, and restore the nation's cultural sovereignty by banning foreign ideologies and forbidding subversive cultural expressions and practices.

Cultural sovereignty was to be achieved through a cultural war against the so-called subversion. 'We understand by subversion the attempt to alter our essential values inspired by our historical tradition and Christian conception of the world and of man. This man who inherited from God his freedom and dignity as a person as his most precious good' (Lieutenant-General Videla, cited in *La Nación*, 14 December 1976). Or, in the words of General Leopoldo Galtieri: 'The subversive war ... is the clash of two civilisations, ours and the Marxist, to determine which one will be dominant and thus inspire or direct the future organisation of the world. More concretely, it is about discovering which scale of values will serve as the foundation of such organisation' (*Somos*, 11 April 1980). General Díaz Bessone had already declared in 1976 that 'the coexistence of two value systems within one national society is impossible. This is why we combat the subversion that wants to impose another value system: a system without God, without religion; a system that builds walls to drown freedom; a system without private property' (*La Nación*, 24 November 1976).

The Argentine military classified certain citizens as subversives unfit to live in Argentina for not embodying Argentine culture and traditional values, and therefore subject to annihilation. The words of junta leader Lieutenant-General Videla are revealing: 'I want to point out that the Argentine citizenry is not the victim of repression. The repression is against a minority which we do not consider Argentine' (*La Nación*, 18 December 1977). Non-Argentine

Argentines were thus placed beyond the constitutional provisions of the state of siege and beyond international war conventions by turning them into outlawed, exterminable subversives rather than irregular combatants. The Argentine citizenry did not escape the military's strategic classification, either. The 1975 battle plan subdivided them into friendly forces, neutral forces and proper forces that each required different forms of psychological warfare (CGE 1975). Nobody was beyond suspicion, and life could not be taken for granted because the boundaries with death were permeable political constructions. As the cultural war progressed, some forces were reclassified as hostile to the Argentine state, such as labour unions, progressive parishes, neighbourhood associations and cultural centres. Norberto Liwsky suffered this fate for being involved with a community housing estate that vied for legal recognition. An officer told him that he knew that Liwsky was not involved with the insurgency but that he was going to be tortured for not understanding that 'there was no room for any opposition to the Process of National Reorganization' (CONADEP 1986: 22).

Guerrillas, revolutionaries and activists were threatened with annihilation. Many targeted Argentines, like Graciela Daleo, coped by living in illegality while continuing with the armed resistance, whereas others refrained from politics entirely and chose an internal exile in the countryside. At least 10,000 Argentines did not fit in with the military's grand design for Argentina, as was documented by the CONADEP truth commission and forensic investigations. They were forced to undergo a terrifying passage between life and death through torture and disappearance to end up on the wrong side of the verdict.

The violent confrontation between the Argentine military and a revolutionary segment of Argentine society was a dispute about cultural sovereignty between enemies that adhered to two fundamentally different cultural projects. The revolutionaries believed in the naturalness of social equality, the blessings of Marxism and the historical inevitability of a class struggle ending in the proletariat's victory and a world without exploitation and alienation. The military believed in the existence of a divine natural order with an intrinsic social hierarchy. They emphasised Argentina's traditional Christian culture that respected private property, paternal authority and the nuclear family (Robben 2005: 172–80). Lieutenant-General Videla explained that the conflict between armed forces and revolutionaries was therefore not purely military but cultural: 'The fight against subversion is not only a military problem: it is a worldwide phenomenon

which has a political, economic, social, cultural, psychological and also a military dimension' (*La Nación*, 8 September 1976).

The Argentine military often spoke of society as a social body, and employed etiological terms to describe the ills and cures of the diseased Argentina. The guerrilla organisations were for General Díaz Bessone 'strange bodies' that had to be extirpated, 'however hard the surgery may be' (*La Nación*, 23 October 1976). The state of siege of 1974 and the mandate given in 1975 by the democratic government to annihilate the subversion had provided the military with the scalpel to heal the nation once and for all, according to General Galtieri: 'We all wish to be cured with medicines, but if the Nation's authorities so desire, the Armed Forces will operate, and in that case, let nobody have any doubt that all evil will be extirpated; and to extirpate all evil, all cells will have to be extirpated, even those about which we are in doubt' (*La Nación*, 5 December 1979). The word 'cell' bridged metaphor and object because guerrilla combatants were organised in cell-like structures. The military employed organograms to unravel these social networks through the torture of captives, and then root out the combatants systematically throughout the country.

Conquering bodies and minds

Blindfolded, humiliated, disoriented, stripped naked and already beaten during the abduction and transportation to the clandestine detention centre, captives were immediately subjected to torture. The overt rationalisation was to obtain information about imminent threats, such as assassination attempts and bombs in crowded places, but there is not one known case of such urgency. In fact, most captives were extensively abused before even one question was asked. Coercive interrogation was believed to reveal the captive's social relations, and served to identify new human targets, secret meeting places and safe houses, despite the unreliability of information extracted through pain infliction. The military, however, were convinced that such information helped destroy the contaminating subversion, dyad by dyad.

Elaine Scarry (1985: 61) has drawn an analogy between war and torture by arguing: 'Whereas the object of war is to kill people, torture usually mimes the killing of people by inflicting pain, the sensory equivalent of death, substituting prolonged mock execution for execution.' Torture was extended into the selves and minds of

the captives to break their fighting spirit and erase subversive ideas because, according to General Alcides López Aufranc (1975: 644), the political violence in Argentina ‘concerns an infection of the minds, a gangrene that runs the risk of killing the free, democratic and plural Argentine social body if it is not attacked decisively and energetically’. Lieutenant-Colonel Minicucci concluded in 1977: ‘The population is essential in this war. Because they want to capture man in body and mind. The struggle of ideas is therefore fundamental in this war’ (*La Nación*, 29 October 1977). The military’s dual use of bio- and necropower is manifested in the daily practices of state repression. They tried to influence the minds of the Argentine people through a strict control over school and university curricula; the censorship of books, films and music; the fostering of religious faith – especially Roman Catholicism – and the inculcation of patriotism and respect for authority. Torture was reserved for the most subversive minds, namely those of abducted guerrilla insurgents and political activists. Interrogators explored captives as if they were surveyors, mapping life histories, political beliefs and thoughts about family life. Body and mind were dominated through torture with the objective to desocialise and traumatisé the victims so that their political agency was crippled and their trust in fellow human beings for ever damaged.

The simulation of death in torture demonstrated the authoritarian state’s omnipotence through a theatrical display of the power to assassinate captives at will and make their bodies disappear through a network of clandestine detention centres. These centres were called black holes (*chupaderos*) into which captives vanished to never emerge again unharmed. Life was held in abeyance because of the ambiguous status of the disappeared as missing yet alive. The disappeared were in fact structurally and socially dead when they arrived at the clandestine detention centres, and might develop compulsive thoughts about death and even about being dead. The ex-disappeared Norberto Liwsky has remarked: ‘I began to feel that I was living alongside death. When I wasn’t being tortured I had hallucinations about death – sometimes when I was awake, at other times while sleeping ... I desperately tried to summon up a thought in order to convince myself I wasn’t dead. That I wasn’t mad. At the same time, I wished with all my heart that they would kill me as soon as possible’ (CONADEP 1986: 23). One disappeared survivor observed how captives feared death in liminality: ‘that particular death which is dying without disappearing, or disappearing without dying. A death in which the person dying had no part whatever: like

dying without a struggle, as though dying being already dead, or like never dying at all' (CONADEP 1986: 167). This fear of death was the fear of falling for ever in the social interstices as neither dead nor alive, as neither mourned nor mournable.

The military dimension of the cultural war was principally focused on intelligence. The strategy was to dismantle the cellular guerrilla networks, their outlawed front organisations, and a heterogeneous array of militant labour unions, progressive parishes and radical student associations. Aside from the mass arrest of striking workers, the most common tactical procedure was abduction. Lieutenant-General Videla stated that the counterinsurgency 'Implied attacking en masse, with everything, throughout the entire terrain, taking them from their hide-outs' (Seoane and Muleiro 2001: 52). A targeted location would be sealed off with regular uniformed troops, and then a task group of military and policemen dressed as civilians carried out the raid. A brief but rough interrogation was conducted upon capture, and then the hooded captive was taken to one of over 650 clandestine places of detention.

Most clandestine detention centres were small, with one or two rooms or a cellar at a police station, and functioned mainly between 1976 and 1978. There were also half a dozen large centres with dozens of cells and several sizeable enclosed spaces that functioned into the early 1980s. Captives were registered upon arrival on a detention card with their name, age, gender and degree of danger, the area of detention and the security force in charge. This administration served a repressive infrastructure that implemented the national reorganisation through secret guidelines and operating procedures. Clandestine detention centres served to achieve the cultural sovereignty of a revitalised Argentina through the triage of so-called subversives.

Passage through the clandestine detention centres proceeded by way of consecutive transformations of body and mind, at which death might appear at every threshold. Captives in small detention centres traversed these stages within the same confined space but large centres like the Navy Mechanics School accorded a proper place to each social phase. Different places signified different phase-specific relations to death, and implied other captor–captive interactions. In this sense, the large clandestine detention centres were a microcosm of the desired New Republic. Although magnified by the absolutist dependency relations between captors and captives, these centres represented the quintessence of a society structured along strictly authoritarian and hierarchical relations. They were manifestations

of the natural hierarchy, where some were on a higher rung than others, with disappeared subversives at the very bottom and military officers at the top.

The Navy Mechanics' School or ESMA in Buenos Aires was one of Argentina's largest clandestine torture and detention centres through which an estimated 4,000 inmates passed during the dictatorship. Located in the three-storey Naval Officers' Mess, it operated between March 1976 and November 1983, and can be regarded as the most elaborate of all centres, with torture rooms, cabins and cubicles for shackled, hooded captives, a maternity ward for pregnant captives, an infirmary, a television room, an office for forging documents, a documentation centre for captives forced to do office work, a photo lab, a recording room, a storage room for booty, living quarters of naval officers and a war room where organograms were kept up to date, raids were planned and the final fate of the disappeared was decided (Robben 2005: 250–3). The various routes of captives through this complex universe expressed different relations to their captors, their degree of recovery and their final destination; yet they all began in the basement's torture cells.

The predicament of the disappeared-living

The ESMA Basement (*el Sótano*) housed the interrogation and torture rooms. Here, the ground rules between torturers and tortured were set by changing the subject–subject relation into a subject–object relation of absolute dependency. The captive transformed from being a person with a complex social status into a nonperson identified by a number and completely isolated from society: naked, hooded, immobilised, hungry and often terrified. The blindfold or hood made the disoriented captive unable to anticipate the captor's actions. The subjugated captive became the captor's extension, responding to his every command, but was at the same time his negation by being entirely deprived of agency. One policeman boasted of having his private captive on a leash, making him walk on all fours and bark like a dog (Andersen 1993: 209). This condition simultaneously dehumanised and acculturated the captive. It maintained the difference between victor and defeated, between self and other, but also enforced the torturer's self and his terms of social engagement onto the captive.

Some persons died accidentally from torture. One man was so severely beaten at the clandestine detention centre La Escuelita in

Tucumán Province that he urinated blood. Antonio Cruz, also captive, testified that he mentioned this to the captors but they dismissed it: 'Before the torturers went off that night, they left him tied to a pillar in the open air with strict orders not to feed him and to give him only water to drink. He died hanging there in the early hours of the morning ... the interrogators were told what had happened, and they regretted having been unable to obtain any precise information' (CONADEP 1986: 37). In fact, the captors regarded this death as a defeat, according to the ex-disappeared Juan Gasparini (1988: 149): 'One had to endure the suffering before an enemy who didn't give death away. The victory was to earn one's death.' Such death wrested power from the repressive state and affirmed the deceased's agency in the eyes of the remaining captives.

Graciela Daleo's failed suicide attempt, described above, demonstrates how the Argentine military tried to rule over the lives and deaths of their targets. Task groups carried antidotes and substances that provoked intense vomiting in case a cyanide capsule had been swallowed. They rushed the captive to the hospital to empty his or her stomach, and then proceeded to the secret detention centre for torture. Often emotionally deeply shaken by their narrow survival, the captive was told that he or she owed their life to the military because the Montonero commanders had ordered their combatants to choose death upon capture. The disappeared's death was not defined by accident or volition but by an administrative procedure that calculated the value of his or her life.

Captives who survived the first stage of torture were assessed by senior officers. There are no reliable estimates available, but thousands of Argentines were abducted, tortured and released again. Elena Alfaro was told by General Suárez Mason: 'You are being released; in fact, you shouldn't have been abducted, but you know that sometimes things slip out of our hands, especially with the [task group] gangs' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 14: 319). Still, she remained under surveillance and could have been abducted again if the military saw reason to do so. Furthermore, her abduction had most likely had the desired effect. The experience of torture would make her mistrustful of others and shy away from any revolutionary activity that would undermine the state's cultural sovereignty. Decades after her release from the ESMA, Liliana Gardella still feels spiritually assassinated: 'I have lost my naturalness and spontaneity, and therefore also my identity. And this is so because a [life] project is missing' (Actis *et al.* 2001: 65). Munú Actis concurs: 'I also felt at the ESMA that they were killing me. What I used to be died ... I felt

dead. One never recovers entirely from that condition' (Actis *et al.* 2001: 66). Hannah Arendt (1975: 474–7) has argued that authoritarian states thrive on terror and loneliness. People feel isolated by the internalisation of fear, and experience the loss of self as a social death by being deprived of social contacts.

ESMA captives considered unfit for release were moved from the Basement to the Hood (*la Capucha*), where they were held in windowless cabins (*camarotes*) or smaller cubicles (*cuchas*) of 2.0 × 0.7 × 0.7 metres into which hooded captives were shoved. Captives who responded favourably to the ESMA regime might be considered recoverable for Argentine society. Recoverable captives were treated better than those deemed nonrecoverable, who were assassinated sooner or later. One prominent Montonero member spent two years in a cubicle before receiving a lethal injection (Actis *et al.* 2001: 58; Martí, Milia and Solarz 1995: 52).

Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga explained to me how the decision to assassinate a captive was made. 'The death of any guerrilla was always decided by at least five persons. But one thing yes, five persons who like you and me, sitting like this, said, "That one can't go on living"' (interview with Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga, 3 October 1990). The verdict entered the ESMA's necropolitical administration through one capital letter on the detention card: 'L' or Liberty (*Libertad*) meant that the captive had been recuperated and would be freed. 'T' or Transfer (*Traslado*) indicated a death sentence (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 24: 457). The Argentine military used the term 'Transfer' as a euphemism for death. It was the same term used in Argentine cemeteries to indicate the transfer of human remains from one grave or one cemetery to another. No date of death was added to the inscription, as if the condemned captive had already been killed administratively and the actual assassination was a matter of routine.

Condemned captives were taken to the Little Hood (*la Capuchita*) in the ESMA's attic. Fifteen to twenty cubicles were available for captives before they were taken down to the Basement for a death flight. The captives were given a sedative to make them drowsy, were loaded on a truck, driven to the airport and put on board an aircraft bound for the South Atlantic Ocean. Rear-Admiral Mayorga described the final procedure as follows: 'they injected them and threw them in the sea. They didn't ... He didn't even know that he was going to die, I can assure you' (interview with Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga, 3 October 1990). Proof of this procedure was provided in 2005 when forensic anthropologists exhumed twelve individuals at General

Lavalle cemetery and discovered, by examining the skeletal lesions, that they had fallen onto a water surface from a great height before washing ashore (EAAF 2006: 18).

Recoverable ESMA captives were enrolled in a rehabilitation programme. This programme resembled the thought-reform programmes of communist China, which Lifton described as an alternation between assault and leniency, and the demand of confession and re-education. 'The physical and emotional assaults bring about the symbolic death; leniency and the developing confession are the bridge between death and rebirth; the re-education process, along with the final confession, create the rebirth experience' (Lifton 1961: 66). The ESMA rehabilitation programme pursued a similar structure of social death and rebirth, implemented through brutality and forbearance, but the specific steps were quite different from the Chinese practice. The emphasis rested on the social habitus of the captives, on changing their social identity, group attachments and sense of social order as well as an embrace of Western and Christian values.

The ESMA rehabilitation process consisted of four phases. The first phase was directed at the old self. Disappearance and torture accomplished a social death, briefly described above. The second phase served to assess the transitional self. The captive's conduct revealed the effects of the dismantling process. Some became apathetic, others collaborated and still others resisted any attempt to destroy their social identity. The condition of being disappeared suspended captives between life and death, and their behaviour and thoughts determined whether they would be saved or assassinated. At this stage, decisions were taken about the person's life. Recoverable persons were resubjectified by converting the subject-object into a subject-subject relation between captor and captive, albeit under strict conditions and without reverting to the old self. Without shackles and blindfolds, the captives were taken to the Hood, put in a cell, and ordered to carry out small tasks such as sweeping floors or distributing meals.

The third phase accomplished a social rebirth through the slow reconstruction of a new self in harmony with the reorganised Argentine society. Dignity was restored by addressing captives by their personal names, and by providing privileges such as bathroom facilities, cigarettes and better food. Birthdays would be celebrated and captives might go out on a picnic or play a game of soccer with their captors. New tasks were assigned that were in accordance with their old professional identities. Meanwhile, supervising officers held lengthy conversations with the captives and observed them closely.

Graciela Daleo felt like crying when a close fellow captive was brutally tortured but she succeeded in containing herself until she was in her cell, because 'crying was a sign of weakness or that one had not recuperated' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 22: 424). She observes that they wanted her to abandon the feelings of social solidarity nurtured during her decades as a revolutionary, and become an individualist. She was told repeatedly: 'it's an individual process here, you have nothing to do with the rest, everything has to do with you' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 22: 429).

The rehabilitation programme pursued a resocialisation that involved accepting the conditions set in the detention centre. Captives were given psychological tests to assess their progress, and were encouraged to write a self-critique. Whereas before they were punished for using reflexive forms, such as 'I think' and 'I believe', they were now asked to reflect on their lives. Miriam Lewin's life story was so liked by her captors that they gave her the good news: 'You're reborn, kid. What you wrote fell really well, so we have decided to save your life' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 21: 413). A successful spiritual rebirth meant that the disappeared denounced his or her Marxist beliefs and had acquired Western and Christian values. The release of recovered captives was a proof to the military that the cultural war had been won because if even confirmed believers in the revolution could be resocialised, then they were living proof that Argentine society as a whole had been remade. The Process of National Reorganisation had been successful, in their eyes, and the Argentine military who had had the ungrateful task of curing the sick social body through more than 10,000 assassinations had acted in a Christian spirit of forgiveness, mercy and magnanimity by freeing some of their former enemies.

The rehabilitation programme's final phase was the slow reincorporation into society. The disappeared reappeared through a phone call to relatives, an outing to a bar or a short family visit accompanied by one or two officers. Eventually, the person would be released but remained under surveillance and had to call or visit the clandestine detention centre periodically for assessment talks. The ESMA rehabilitation programme contained these four phases most clearly, but the first three were common in other clandestine detention centres.

The return of the disappeared-dead

The assassination of abducted captives was carried out by task forces who possessed jurisdiction over the 117 areas that organised

the nation-wide repression. Each area had one or more clandestine detention centres that formed part of a secret web of repressive institutions (Robben 2005: 193–7). The armed forces, police, courts, hospitals, morgues, cemeteries and airports were to a greater or lesser extent all involved in the necropolitical shadow state. The disappeared were cremated, buried in mass and anonymous graves or dumped at sea. Forensic anthropologists have documented around 10,000 assassinated disappeared persons, but the human rights movement insists that 30,000 disappeared were murdered. The Argentine armed forces tried to erase every trace of their remains, but failed to do so.

Uruguayan authorities found mutilated bodies along its shores within weeks of the military coup of March 1976 (Dandan 2011). The Argentine police recovered bloated corpses from the Paraná river, and brought them to a local cemetery 'blindfolded, gagged and with their hands tied behind their backs with wire' (CONADEP 1986: 228). These remains were most often buried anonymously, even when a positive identification had been made. Occasionally, the relatives were notified. Elsa Sánchez de Oesterheld's husband and four daughters were abducted in 1976 and 1977 by the Argentine Army. They all disappeared, except her eighteen-year-old daughter Beatriz. Her body 'was the only one I recovered because a police commissioner did not have the courage to bury her anonymously' (interview with Elsa Sánchez de Oesterheld, 15 April 1991).

Thus, the disappeared-dead came to govern the dictatorial state, to paraphrase John Borneman (this volume), as they kept turning up and as searching relatives kept demanding attention to their plight. Human rights organisations, and in particular the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, reminded the Argentine people and the state authorities of the existence of disappeared citizens through habeas corpus petitions and public protests. All levels of state were obliged to respond to the pleas for information but they only seldom came through: the judiciary, the armed forces, the police, local, provincial and national authorities, state hospitals, morgues, military bases, Argentine embassies and so on. In addition, searching mothers told their heartrending stories abroad, and solidarity movements sprang up in Europe and the United States.

The first cracks in the shadow state developed after the June 1982 defeat of Argentine troops by a British expeditionary force during the Falkland/Malvinas War. Government employees tipped off relatives about the whereabouts of anonymous burial places, and a few judges felt more at liberty to order exhumations. The first exhumation of a mass grave took place in October 1982. Around 400 unidentified

skeletons were found at the Grand Bourg cemetery (Cohen Salama 1992: 60). The December 1983 turn to democracy, and investigations into the whereabouts of the disappeared by a truth commission, made room for many more exhumations.

The military's grand design for a reorganised Argentina had been eroded by the very disappearances that were intended to accomplish the desired cultural sovereignty. Key military commanders were sentenced between 1984 and 1986 but growing unrest within the armed forces, and the determination of President Raúl Alfonsín and his successor Carlos Saúl Menem to reconcile the nation, resulted in an amnesty for indicted troops and former guerrillas in 1986 and 1987, and the pardoning of convicted officers, junta members and guerrilla commanders in 1989 and 1990.

Ongoing exhumations, and the creation of memorials, monuments and memory sites during the 1990s, unveiled the hidden infrastructure of the necropolitical shadow state. The disappeared, who had been assassinated and concealed to cleanse the nation of so-called subversive elements, were reincorporated into Argentine society through ceremonial reburials as honourable deceased citizens whose ideals for a more just Argentina were praised publicly. Meanwhile, the clamour for the resentencing of perpetrators became louder and louder.

Declarations by Army Commander Martín Balza that the dictatorship had designed a standard operating procedure to separate guerrillas from their children, and hand them to childless military couples, led in June 1998 to the arrest of the pardoned dictator Lieutenant-General Jorge Rafael Videla on kidnapping charges. The incarceration of many other high-ranking officers encouraged human rights lawyers, judges and members of Congress to seek the derogation of the amnesty laws and presidential pardons. These initiatives were accelerated when President Kirchner took office in 2003. The Supreme Court overthrew the amnesty laws in 2005 and the presidential pardons in 2007. By August 2011, 198 persons had been convicted of human rights violations, and 1,061 had been indicted or were on trial (CELS 2011; Robben 2010).

Conclusion

The Argentine military embarked between 1976 and 1983 on a cultural war against their own people, determined to secure the country's cultural sovereignty. Biopower was defined in cultural

terms, and required necropower to constitute an authoritarian governmentality. Whereas the territorial sovereignty of the Argentine postcolonial state had been achieved in the late nineteenth century through the aggressive conquest of land and the extermination of the indigenous inhabitants, the dictatorial regime sought to create cultural sovereignty through state terrorism, crimes against humanity and an authoritarian control over Argentine society. Cultural sovereignty became extended into the bodies and minds of the enemies of the state through disappearance, torture and either rehabilitation or assassination. Just as the political sovereignty of rulers is ultimately vested in the power to decide about life and death through the constitutional right to punish offenders and make war against foreign powers, so the Argentine military felt legitimated to define the boundaries and conditions of Argentine society and culture. Argentines considered unfit for the coveted Christian nation were disappeared so that they could not be reincorporated into society as dead citizens or remembered as martyrs for what the military regarded as subversive causes.

The military soon realised that their grandiose plans were frustrated by the disappeared-living and disappeared-dead who had been banned from society. Relatives demanded information about their fate, and resisted attempts to silence them through denial, intimidation and the disappearance of human rights leaders. The defiant weekly protest of searching mothers, right in front of the presidential palace at the Plaza de Mayo, showed that the authoritarian regime had been unable to stamp out the culture of street mobilisations that had characterised Argentine politics since the rise of Perón in 1945 and had forced the military to allow his return to the presidency in 1973. Increasing street protests and strikes by workers in 1981 and early 1982 added to the social unrest. The worsening economic crisis, rising political expectations about a peaceful transition to democracy, and national and international human rights protests moved the junta to invade the Falkland/Malvinas Islands to detract from the domestic troubles. The military defeat in the South Atlantic accelerated the fall of the dictatorship and resulted in free elections by October 1983. Little remained of the regime's cultural sovereignty as the democratic government reversed the restrictions on political freedom and cultural expression to create an open society.

The sovereign democratic state was, however, unable to disentangle itself from authoritarian necropolitics because the social indefiniteness of the disappeared continued to weigh on Argentina.

The disappeared could not be incorporated into society as deceased members and the searching relatives could not occupy their place as bereaved citizens. This existential anguish made former Montonero Ernesto Jauretche wish a similar fate upon Emilio Massera, the one-time junta member and master-mind of the ESMA secret detention centre, who died a convicted man in November 2010. Jauretche (2010) wrote in his scathing obituary:

That he will never return from his decaying remains, that he will never be able to reproduce himself; that if God exists, he will not give him shelter not even in a latrine of heaven, and that neither the devil nor the third hell will accept him. That there will not even be for him the promised biblical resurrection.

Radical evil does not deserve the spiritual rest denied so cruelly to others, Jauretche seems to suggest, because death is not there for human beings to own or dispossess.

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