

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: ARCHIVES IN THE ATTIC: EXILE,
 ACTIVISM, AND MEMORY IN THE
 WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN
 RIGHTS IN ARGENTINA

Perri Alexandra Pyle, Master of Arts, 2019

Thesis Directed By: Dr. Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, History

Spurred by the human rights violations committed by the last Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983), exiled Argentines in Washington, D.C. formed the Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina (WCHRA) to facilitate the transnational exchange of information between those under threat in Argentina and political actors in the United States. This thesis outlines the story of the WCHRA through the records they created – kept for nearly forty years in an attic – and oral interviews with former members. The collection consists of letters, testimonies, petitions, and notes that reflect the group’s extensive network and provide insight into how Argentine exile groups inserted themselves into the larger human rights movement. By critically examining how one small group of activists came together, I explore how archival records enhance, challenge, and reveal new insights into the politics of exile, activism, and memory, as seen through the lens of the records they kept.

ALTERNATE ABSTRACT

Alternate Title of Thesis: ARCHIVOS EN EL ALTILLO: EXILIO,
 ACTIVISMO, Y MEMORIA EN EL
 WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN
 RIGHTS IN ARGENTINA

En reacción a las violaciones de los Derechos Humanos cometidas por la última dictadura argentina (1976-1983), exiliados argentinos en Washington, D.C. formaron el Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina (WCHRA) para facilitar el intercambio transnacional de información entre los que estaban en peligro en Argentina y los actores políticos en los Estados Unidos. Esta tesis cuenta la historia del WCHRA a través de sus documentos – guardados por casi cuarenta años en un altillo – y entrevistas orales con exmiembros. La colección consiste de cartas, testimonios, peticiones y notas que reflejan la red extensa de la agrupación y nos permiten entender cómo grupos de exiliados argentinos se insertaron en el movimiento global de Derechos Humanos. Al analizar cómo se juntó un pequeño grupo de activistas, exploro cómo los archivos mejoran, cuestionan y revelan nuevos conocimientos sobre la política de exilio, activismo, y memoria, a través de los documentos que guardaron.

ARCHIVES IN THE ATTIC: EXILE, ACTIVISM, AND MEMORY IN
THE WASHINGTON COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARGENTINA

by

Perri Alexandra Pyle

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2019

Advisory Committee:
Professor Karin Roseblatt, Chair
Professor Chantel Rodriguez
Professor Kenneth Heger

© Copyright by
Perri Alexandra Pyle
2019

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to Tomas and Ana for trusting me with your story and your records. Working with you has been one of the highlights of my life, and I am honored and humbled to call you my friends. I am especially grateful to Ana Berta, Eugenia, and Juan for taking the time to meet with me and contribute to this project. Mil gracias to my advisor, Karin Roseblatt, for guiding me through this project and helping me make connections with other scholars who have enriched my studies, and to Chantel Rodriguez and Kenneth Heger for your invaluable insight. Thank you to my friends and family who have listened to me gab about my work far longer than anyone else would, my compañeros whose passion and brilliance inspires me every day, and to Alan for the many hours spent reading and editing. Most of all, thank you to my husband Guille, for being the reason I began this journey and my constant source of support and admiration.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Acronyms	iv
List of Figures	v
Introduction	1
Argentine Context	3
United States Context	5
Research Questions & Archival Records	7
Methodology	9
Chapter 1: Archives and Exile	16
1.1 Historiography of Exile	16
1.2 Argentines in Washington, D.C.	20
1.3 Reasons for Exile	22
1.4 U.S. Reception of Exiles	27
1.5 Record Keeping in Exile	31
1.6 Conclusion	34
Chapter 2: Archives and Activism	35
2.1 Human Rights Activism Around the World	36
2.2 Human Rights Activism in the United States	38
2.3 Human Rights Activism in Washington D.C.	41
2.4 The Formation of the WCHRA	43
2.5 “Trabajo de Hormigas” – Daily Actions of the WCHRA	48
2.6 Conclusion	71
Chapter 3: Archives and Memory	73
3.1 The End of the Dictatorship and <i>Nunca Más</i>	74
3.2 Post-Trials, Amnesty, and the Reparations Project	78
3.3 Memory Struggles	82
3.4 Social Memory and Archives	86
3.5 Conclusion	93
Conclusion	94
Appendix I: Oral Interview Questions	96
Bibliography	97

List of Acronyms

AAA: Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) or Triple A

AAAS: American Association for the Advancement of Science

AISC: Argentine Information Service Center

ANCLA: Agencia de Noticias Clandestina (Clandestine News Agency)

APDH: Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (Permanent Assembly for Human Rights)

CADHU: Comisión Argentina de Derechos Humanos (Argentine Commission for Human Rights)

CAS: Comisión Argentina de Solidaridad (Argentine Solidarity Commission)

CAIS: Centre Argentin d'Information et Solidarité (Argentine Information and Solidarity Center)

CELS: Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Center for Legal and Social Studies)

CODEPPA: Comité de Défense des Prisonniers Politiques Argentins (Committee in Defense of Argentine Political Prisoners)

CONADEP: Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons)

ERP: Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army)

HRW: Human Rights Watch

IACHR: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

IDB: Inter-American Development Bank

MASA: El Movimiento Antiimperialista por el Socialismo en Argentina (The Anti-Imperialist Movement for Socialism in Argentina)

OAS/OEA: Organization of American States/Organización de Estados Americanos

OCAA: Organization for Christian Action in Argentina

WCHRA: Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina

WOLA: Washington Office on Latin America

List of Figures

Figure 1: Two of the original boxes from the attic.	9
Figure 2: In this photo, the original folder titles can be seen next to my own.	11
Figure 3: Stamps used by the WCHRA.	15
Figure 4: This Christmas card was created as a joint campaign by the WCHRA and WOLA.	32
Figure 5: The activities planned by the WCHRA (left) versus the final itinerary (right).	55
Figure 6: "Response from the Government of Argentina."	59
Figure 7: WCHRA copy of the IACHR report.	60
Figure 8: List of potential petition recipients compiled by the WCHRA.	61
Figure 9: Flyer for movie screening hosted by the WCHRA.	63
Figure 10: A poster from Italy that reads “Resist! Soccer YES, Torture NO.”	67
Figure 11: Flyer for the panel at UMD.	75
Figure 12: Pamphlet from my visit to the Memory Museum in Buenos Aires.	82
Figure 13: Recordatorio for Ana’s sister, Teresa.	88
Figure 14: Digitizing an oversized poster from the WCHRA collection.	91

Introduction

On a sunny September day, I followed the stone path up to the house in the quiet Palisades neighborhood of Washington, D.C. A sign near the door in the classic Argentine *fileteado porteño*¹ style brought a smile to my face, a silent reassurance that I was in the right place. With an introductory kiss on the cheek, 73-year old Tomas Gergely welcomed me in as if we were longtime friends, not total strangers whose paths just happened to cross through mutual colleagues. His kind, friendly demeanor put us both at ease as we chatted over coffee and Belgian chocolate, a recent acquisition from a friend's vacation abroad. Just a few weeks earlier, I had started poking around the library at the University of Maryland, asking vague questions about human rights and transnational solidarity. Now, I sat quietly and listened as Tomas told me the story, *his* story, of the Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina.

The WCHRA was founded in 1977 by a group of Argentines living in Washington D.C., in the wake of a military coup d'état in Argentina that installed General Jorge Rafael Videla as president after years of political and social upheaval. For the next six years, the military regime implemented what it called the National Reorganization Process (*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*) to rid the nation of "subversives" and Communist influences. Operating under a state of emergency, the military junta implemented a nationwide system of illegal detentions, torture, and disappearances that constituted gross violations of human rights.² Around the world, Argentines living abroad heard of the atrocities in bits and pieces, catching word of a neighbor whose son was being held in prison without a trial, or a former colleague whose wife awoke to see him whisked away by men in military garb. Reports of widespread political repression,

¹ A popular artistic style characterized by colorful flowers and stylized letters used in Buenos Aires.

² Human rights, in this context, refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948: www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights.

illegal arrests, and covert abductions seeped out, despite crackdowns on the media and the disappearances of the military's most outspoken critics.³

In Washington, D.C., Argentines began to gather in earnest to discuss the news they received from home. Initially, they were not sure what purpose their organizing could serve, but each knew for certain that they had to do *something*. Together they felt an urgent need to draw the attention of U.S. government officials and other influential leaders in D.C to the situation in Argentina in the hopes that international pressure would cause the military junta to release the detained and provide information on the missing. It was March 22, 1977 when Tomas' wife, Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely, received word that her 24-year-old sister Teresa had been forcibly taken from her apartment. As the violence of the dictatorship reached the front door of their D.C.-area home 5,000 miles away, Ana and Tomas felt that they had to do everything within their power to oppose the dictatorship from abroad. Joining forces with colleagues and friends in Argentina and D.C., Ana and Tomas joined the wave of activists emerging all over the world to lend their voices to a growing opposition movement that demanded transparency from the junta's leaders and justice for the thousands who went missing under their regime.

It was in this context that Ana and Tomas formally joined the human rights movement in mid-1977, founding the Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina (WCHRA) together with other area Argentines with missing relatives, friends, and colleagues. Members drew on existing transnational networks of academic, religious, and human rights organizations to act as a liaison between those targeted by the regime and those willing and able to help from within the heart of the United States government. Membership in the WCHRA was informal and

³ For a thorough history of the dictatorship and the human rights violations committed, see the bibliography in Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

fluid as people travelled in and out of D.C, and although the roughly twenty members came from a variety of backgrounds and had different motivations that fueled their involvement, together they played a key part in the transnational network of human rights activists that united to oppose the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s. With their personal and professional ties to Argentina, the WCHRA proved a crucial link for the human rights organizations and political actors in D.C. that facilitated the transnational exchange of information at a time when official channels were dangerous and fraught with political repercussions.

Argentine Context

The political landscape in Argentina throughout the 20th century was largely characterized by short bouts of democracy and frequent coups d'état. By the 1970s, Argentina was once again a nation in turmoil. Since the overthrow of democratically-elected Arturo Illia in 1966, growing numbers of Argentines left the country to escape the violence wreaked by oppressive military dictatorships and revolutionary guerrilla groups. The return from exile and subsequent reelection of former President Juan Perón in 1973 only added to the chaos when he died less than a year after taking office, leaving his ill-equipped wife Isabel to assume the presidency. In the midst of the upheaval arose the *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*, Argentine Anticommunist Alliance or Triple A, a far-right death squad founded by the Peróns' advisors and dedicated to quashing militant revolutionary groups. Members of organizations like the *Montoneros* and the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP, the People's Revolutionary Army) quickly went underground as the Triple A amped up targeted attacks on political opponents and activists alike.

Tensions came to a head in 1976 when members of the Argentine military overthrew the government of Isabel Perón and installed Videla as the de facto leader of a series of three-part

military juntas, the first of which included Admiral Emilio Massera and General Orlando Agosti.⁴ Though previous dictatorships had implemented similar campaigns that cracked down on leftist ideologies, intellectuals, activists, and opposition parties, the *Proceso* marked an era in which the reach of the Argentine state extended into all segments of society, dictating how “civilized” Argentines were expected to carry themselves and stay off the radar of the military squads. In a press conference with British journalists, Videla stated that “the repression is directed against a minority we do not consider Argentine... a terrorist is not only someone who plants bombs, but a person whose *ideas* are contrary to our Western, Christian civilization.”⁵ Anyone deemed “subversive” faced a risk as the military systematically kidnapped people in their homes, throwing them into cars and whisking them off without explanation. The military converted buildings, some in the middle of heavily-populated metropolitan areas, into clandestine detention centers where the detained were held without trial, tortured, and ultimately “transferred,” a veiled euphemism for the now-notorious *vuelos de la muerte* (“death flights”) when prisoners were dropped – naked and drugged, but still alive – from planes into the La Plata River. Pregnant prisoners were routinely allowed to carry to term, only to be killed shortly after and their children adopted out to military families.

As relatives and friends desperately sought information on the whereabouts of missing people, they found few resources were provided by the military government. The missing were called *desaparecidos* – disappeared – because the junta denied any knowledge of their

⁴ There were four successive juntas throughout the dictatorship: 1976-1980, 1980-1981, 1981-1982, and 1982-1983.

⁵ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 24.

whereabouts. “A desaparecido was someone who was ‘absent forever,’ whose ‘destiny’ it was to ‘vanish,’” Commander Roberto Viola was quoted as saying in a 1979 speech.⁶

United States Context

The relationship between Argentina and the United States shifted drastically in the years immediately following the latest military coup d'état. In the midst of the Cold War, previous administrations had largely supported anti-Communist governments in South America with little regard for the often-brutal tactics they employed to combat alleged “subversion.” A military overthrow of President João Goulart in Brazil in 1964 was hailed by Thomas Mann, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s chief diplomat on Latin American affairs, as a great success, as Brazilians fled amidst reports of torture and executions.⁷ A decade later, the overthrow of democratically-elected Salvador Allende in Chile was similarly lauded as having avoided the emergence of “another Cuba” in South America, a threat that Nixon later stated would have created a “red sandwich that could eventually have enclosed all of Latin America in Communism.”⁸ Covert support of the military regimes was also accompanied by more explicit tactics: the United States was directly involved in training Latin American military leaders in counterinsurgency tactics through the U.S. Army School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. There, under the tutelage of the United States, many of the future dictators were introduced to one another and learned the use of torture and psychological warfare. Those relationships formed the basis for the cross-continent campaign that became known as Operation Condor, an alliance of the right-wing dictatorships in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina that lasted nearly

⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁷ James N. Green, “Clerics, Exiles, and Academics: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States, 1969–1974,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 1 (2003): 87.

⁸ Graham Hovey, “Nixon Saw Cuba and Chile Enclosing Latin America,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1977.

twenty years.⁹ The continued declassification of documents further implicate the involvement and support of the CIA in efforts to destabilize popular governments not only in Latin America, but all over the globe.

Yet by the 1970s, Washington, D.C. was a city quickly becoming immersed in human rights activism. Widespread opposition to the war in Vietnam planted the seeds for movements against U.S. interventions in Latin America, and many of the influential human rights organizations that are widely recognized today were founded in the wake of the 1973 overthrow of Allende and the subsequent abuses committed by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. A wide range of concerned parties, from religious institutions to scientific foundations, focused their efforts on calling attention to the South American military regimes, working with groups like the Washington Office for Latin America (WOLA) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), an independent organ of the Organization of American States (OAS). Working in conjunction with exiles and influential activists, these groups led the charge to push U.S. policy-makers to center human rights as a core influence in how they interacted with the leaders of repressive regimes. By the time of the Argentine coup in 1976, influential politicians in Congress like Senator Ted Kennedy and Representatives Chris Dodd and Tom Harkin were already holding hearings on human rights regarding the Chilean dictatorship; efforts that soon expanded to address the situation in Argentina as well.

The election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 heralded a new era for human rights activists in Washington. Shortly after taking office, Carter created the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and named Patricia “Patt” Derian as its head. Derian’s presence in the

⁹ William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy Toward Argentina* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2017), chap. The Third World War: U.S.-Argentine Relations, 1960-1976.

State department was a far cry from previous administrations who had largely ignored issues in Latin America. Working closely with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Derian pressured Congress to impose sanctions on Chile and Argentina and urged military leaders to allow visits from Amnesty International and the IACHR to investigate human rights allegations. She received much of her news from Tex Harris, a U.S. diplomat who worked in the embassy in Argentina and had undertaken a personal campaign to gather information on the disappearances that were consistently denied by Argentine officials. Acting on his own volition, Harris instituted a policy of allowing people to visit the embassy to file reports of their missing relatives and friends, which he kept on note cards in his office and then mailed directly to the State Department.¹⁰ Derian also made multiple trips to Argentina herself, making it a point to confront the military leaders in person: “You and I both know that as we speak, people are being tortured in the next floors,” she reportedly said to Massera.¹¹ Under Derian’s leadership, the Department of State ultimately blocked millions of dollars in military and commercial aid to Argentina on the basis of human rights.¹² With the president, his cabinet, and notable members of Congress sympathetic to the cause of human rights, activists from around the world considered the United States a strong ally in the push to remove the Argentine leaders from power.

Research Questions & Archival Records

When Tomas first recounted his story of the WCHRA in late 2017, my interests shifted to the experiences of the Argentines who lived out the years of the last dictatorship (1976-1983) from afar. They were, in a sense, torn between two countries; physically safe from the reach of

¹⁰ Tex Harris. Interview with Pablo Palomino. *Memoria Abierta*. November 22, 2004.

¹¹ National Security Archive, “The Pentagon and the CIA Sent Mixed Message to the Argentine Military,” March 28, 2003.

¹² Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, chap. Introduction: Human Rights and the Cold War.

the death squads and military forces, and yet deeply tied to what was happening at home. How did they see themselves in relation to the dictatorship? What did it mean to try to enact change in your home country from five thousand miles away? More specifically, how did living in the capital city of the United States shape the way that Argentine exiles experienced and participated in the global human rights movement?

These questions crowded my mind, but I was concerned that I had not come across the WCHRA anywhere in my research on U.S.-based solidarity movements. It seemed that scholars of human rights often loop small groups like the WCHRA into a general category of “other grassroots organizations” in writing about with “big name” organizations like Amnesty International. Nowhere in the sources I consulted was there any mention of the WCHRA: not in the human rights archives at Duke University, where Patt Derian’s papers and the WOLA records are held, or in the Congressional records of human rights hearings, or books on the 1970s political scene in D.C. Tomas’ memories were engaging, clear and strong, but without any documentation I had little else to go on.

Unbeknownst to me, just above our heads lay an archivist’s treasure trove, tucked away in the dusty attic of their three-story row house. In dilapidated cardboard boxes labeled ATTIC-PAPELES, pages and pages of handwritten notes and typed memos lay in varying states of decay, buffered by posters and flyers with curled edges and faded ink. Stacks of unsigned postcards, a drawing of a woman and child on the front, were scattered about, mixed in with letters and reports held together with rusty staples. Time had turned the once crisp white pages to yellow; attic pests had nibbled holes on the edges. At the bottom of a box lay two rubber stamps, imprinted with a logo and long-disconnected phone number. Inside these boxes was the story of the WCHRA told from a wholly different perspective – one simultaneously entwined with and

distanced from the personal narrative that Tomas told. The WCHRA collection, as I came to call it, speaks to the tireless work that went into forming a global network in the age before the internet, the millions of letters and memos and telegrams that carried small bits of information to human rights groups, who painstakingly compiled it into evidence of the crimes committed by the junta.



Figure 1: Two of the original boxes from the attic.

Methodology

For this project, I draw on methods taken from my background as both a historian and an archivist. Physical records like those kept by the WCHRA are vital to human rights campaigns that challenge the narratives put forth by repressive regimes. When official records of human rights violations are destroyed or altered by their perpetrators, records created and compiled by activist organizations are often all the evidence left to bring justice for the victims. At the same time, archival records are not neutral; they are imbued with the creators' own motivations and trauma, and blank canvases that researchers fill with their own personal inclinations. Both physical records and first-hand accounts are vital to understanding how and why the WCHRA was formed. In *Paper Cadavers*, Kirsten Weld writes that “documents, archives, and historical knowledge are more than just the building blocks of politics – they are themselves sites of

contemporary political struggle.”¹³ By critically examining this one small group, I explore how archival records enhance and challenge histories of exile, activism, and memory.

This project was enriched by both first-person narratives of former members of the WCHRA and the records that were gifted to me by Tomas and Ana. After my initial informal interview with Tomas, I approached the boxes of records as though they were an unprocessed archival collection, as it was largely untouched from when it was boxed up at the end of the dictatorship. “I’m not even sure if there’s anything worth seeing in here!” Tomas had said as we lugged the boxes down from the attic and into my car. I found his assumption to be wildly inaccurate as I scattered approximately 600 documents, books, pamphlets, and posters around my apartment. My initial survey of the collection revealed that it contained documents of varying sizes, pamphlets, oversized posters, books, and a few miscellaneous 3D objects. The documents were in relatively good condition, except for some damage from rusty staples, discoloration due to age, and holes from pests nibbling on the edges of the paper. There was no original order to the records aside from a few labeled folders that contained documents for specific campaigns or organizations, just enough to provide me with a glimpse into how the WCHRA had organized their records while they were active. I made the decision to rearrange the records per current archival standards, knowing that they had been in the possession of one sole owner throughout their lifetime. Tomas assured me that there was no secret to how they were packed in the boxes. I arranged the records into groups based on the distinct campaigns in which the WCHRA had participated and the organizations with whom they collaborated; for example, I grouped all documents related to the boycott of the 1978 FIFA World Cup together into one folder, while all

¹³ Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

the memos that were circulated by WOLA I placed in another. I began to see patterns emerge that revealed more about the WCHRA as an activist organization and helped me develop a strategy for how best to use them moving forward.



Figure 2: In this photo, the original folder titles can be seen next to my own.

While sorting the records, I also developed a strategy for how the WCHRA collection could be used and accessed by future researchers. Digitizing the collection allowed me to look closely at each individual record in a way that most institutions do not have the time or resources to accommodate. As a small, short-lived organization, the WCHRA is not explicitly mentioned in many other archival collections. This is by far the most thorough representation of the work of the WCHRA, with records including its mission statement, memos, meeting notes, and various campaigns. The last chapter of this thesis explores the potential uses for the digitized collection in more detail, but one of the main benefits of digitization is that archival sources are more easily shared between institutions, whether near or far from the physical location of the records.

There is a growing movement within the archives field that encourages archivists to take an active approach to collecting stories and materials from members of communities whose

records are not commonly represented in the archives. The incorporation of grassroots activist collections is a large part of this trend. Ann Massmann wrote:

Academic and community circles had been focusing on grassroots efforts and impacts for decades, yet the documentation of these efforts is often absent or minimal in archives. If scholars such as social historians are looking at communities from the “bottom up,” then archivists need to seek out the records from the grassroots level, as well as those of the “movers and shakers” in the upper rungs of society.¹⁴

When I asked Tomas why he had not donated the WCHRA papers to an archive, he responded, “I just always hoped someone would come along and want to look at them.” Only through seeking out the contributions of populations who do not consider themselves “archive-worthy” will archivists secure the future of collections like the WCHRA. Incorporating the active participation of group members in that process – from acquiring and arranging the records to creating public exhibits to display them – is a vital part of “community archiving” efforts.

This community outlook is the guiding principle behind my approach to both the WCHRA papers and the oral history interviews I conducted with five former members who still reside in the D.C. area: Tomas Gergely, Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely, Ana Berta Chepelinsky, Eugenia Kalnay, and Juan Méndez. After our initial one-on-one interview in September 2017, Tomas provided me with a list of members’ contact information and I reached out to ask for their participation. My main concern in addressing each person separately was to alleviate any hesitation they may have felt about sharing their story with a non-Argentine; I included some information about my background and the extended period I spent living in Buenos Aires. After each agreed to an interview, we arranged to meet in a convenient location: my interviews with Tomas and Ana were conducted in their home; with Juan and Eugenia, in their university offices;

¹⁴ Ann M. Massmann, “Documenting 20th Century Chicano/a Grassroots Activism in the Southwest,” *Latino Studies* 4, no. 1–2 (March 2006): 148.

and with Ana Berta, in a local restaurant. The interviews were conducted between October and December 2018. Although there are several other former WCHRA members I could have contacted, I chose just a few due to the limited scope of a master's thesis. I chose members who were either in close contact to Tomas or easily reachable by me; Eugenia, for example, works at the same university that I attend. I initially planned to only do the first three interviews (with Tomas and Ana, Eugenia, and Ana Berta), but after each participant reiterated that Juan was a key member to speak to, I contacted him and arranged an interview in late November 2018. I met with Ana Berta twice, conducting my final interview in December 2018.

In preparation for the interviews, I consulted with several works on the legal and ethical aspects of oral history, including John A. Neuenschwander's *Oral History and the Law* and Alessandro Portelli's *The Battle of Valle Giulia*. I then created a list of ten guiding questions that focused on each member's time in Washington, D.C.: how and when they arrived, how they received information on the events occurring in Argentina, and why they decided to form the WCHRA.¹⁵ The questions were arranged in roughly chronological order, from the members' arrival in D.C. and the start of the dictatorship to its aftermath. Four participants allowed me to record the interviews on a Zoom H1 Handy Recorder. Most of the interviews were conducted in English to facilitate their use in this paper, although there are several times when either I, or the participants, lapsed into Spanish to explain a concept or tell a story. Though we did not always follow my prepared questions in the order they are written, all of the interviews touched on the concepts that I sought to address. Afterwards, I roughly transcribed the interviews so that I could easily navigate between them and have kept those transcriptions to donate with the recordings.

¹⁵ See Appendix I for a full list of the interview questions.

Collaborating closely with community members in this way allows archivists an opportunity to reconsider the way we tell stories from the archives and, in particular, the terminology we choose to use. For example, in English-language histories of the dictatorship, it is common to see that time period referred to as the *guerra sucia* or the “Dirty War.” This term was created by the military leaders to justify their use of violence to combat the populations that they considered “terrorists;” it then became a widely-used, all-encompassing term for the period of the dictatorship. The term’s origin was later explored in depth and widely denounced by human rights activists.¹⁶ I, too, originally used the term out of ignorance for its history, which led to a highly uncomfortable moment during one of my interviews. Only our willingness to listen and learn from one another salvaged the relationship and their participation in this project and is the reason that I no longer use that term. In the last chapter, I address some of the other benefits and challenges of incorporating oral histories into the archives.

Through Tomas, I was also made aware of several other notable people who participated both directly and indirectly with the WCHRA, including Mario del Carril, Eva Martinez Vidal, Alicia Partnoy, Isabel Mignone, Brian Thompson, Silvia Méndez, Jo Marie Griesgraber, and Mark Schneider. I also want to acknowledge former members and supporters who have passed away: Patrick Rice, Carlos Martínez Vidal, Emilio Mignone and Angélica Sosa, and José Federico “Pipo” Westerkamp. Though I was unable to reach out to everyone involved with the group and their network extended far beyond these few names, all of their contributions were vital to the work of the WCHRA and the records they compiled throughout those years. Echoing Weld’s words, the WCHRA collection has “many stories to tell, and most are not expressly

¹⁶ Two of the most prominent works on this are Daniel Frontalini and María Cristina Caiati, *El mito de la guerra sucia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial CELS, 1984). and Martin Edwin Andersen, *Dossier secreto: El mito de la “guerra sucia”* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000).

written on its documents' pages.”¹⁷ This work is dedicated to all who joined the WCHRA in combating the dictatorship from afar and the enduring legacy of their impact on human rights activism around the world.



Figure 3: Stamps used by the WCHRA.

¹⁷ Weld, *Paper Cadavers*, 19.

Chapter 1: Archives and Exile

*We called ourselves exiliados because while the dictatorship was there, we couldn't go back. When I came to study, I was sure I was coming back. And then I realized, slowly... we couldn't come back.*¹⁸

Of the thousands of Argentines who lived in exile during the dictatorship, many returned home at its end, leaving behind the letters, petitions, flyers, and posters that give materiality to their memories. The existence of the WCHRA collection, stored for years in boxes in a dusty attic, offers a unique physical connection to the exile experience: one sees in the sheer number of folders, envelopes, papers, and books how all-consuming their activism was. What now occupies only a few boxes must have once taken up rooms full of coveted space in already-crowded D.C. homes; the tireless nature of human rights activism revealed in paper form. In this chapter I will discuss the challenges and value of record keeping while in exile, and how the experiences of exiles have often been relegated to the footnotes of more noteworthy archival collections. The WCHRA collection reveals much about the everyday efforts of small groups of activists, often mentioned only in passing – those “other grassroots organizations” that are tacked onto the ends of sentences in history books. When physical evidence is combined with personal memories, there is no denying that exiles were also victims of state-sponsored terror.

1.1 Historiography of Exile

Exile, here, refers both to those who were formally exiled through legal means and those who left voluntarily but considered themselves exiled by the economic, political, or social forces at play in their home country. I draw on Marina Franco's justification for considering exiles beyond those who were legally ejected to encompass the breadth of the different backgrounds and experiences of the people who left. Franco seeks to situate exile in the conversation around

¹⁸ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

other types of migration, using the term *emigrados políticos* – political migrants – as a broad term for all who left or were forced out during the dictatorship, then further distinguishing between refugees (*refugiados*) and exiles (*exiliados*) to highlight the political activism that many exiles engaged in while living in foreign countries. By questioning the limits of “free choice” in times of political and social upheaval, Franco acknowledges the desire of the subjects she interviewed to be considered part of the greater exile community, as I do here.

The place of exiles within the history of the dictatorship has not always been clear. After the dictatorship ended, societal pressures led many exiled Argentines to downplay their role both as victims and as activists. There was, Franco writes, a “social imagination that, for years, condemned ‘those who left’ and pushed them to silence, not considering them victims of state terror because, ultimately, it had saved their lives.”¹⁹ For a core set of historians, seeking out and incorporating exiles’ stories into the greater narrative has become a decades long project. It was not until the 1990s, fifteen years after the dictatorship ended, that the experiences of exiles began to be incorporated into the multitude of scholarly works that have been published on the dictatorship. The first works that emerged focused heavily on first-person narratives, creating space for those who lived in exile to share their experiences and, effectively, insert themselves into the history books. It was through these oral histories that the realities of the divide between *los que se fueron* – those who left – and those who stayed behind began to be illuminated.

In 1995 three journalists, Ana Baron, Mario del Carril, and Albino Gómez, set out to interview exiled Argentines around the world, compiling their stories in *Por qué se fueron: Testimonios de argentinos en el exterior*. In this work, the authors did not attempt to analyze or

¹⁹ Marina Franco, *El exilio: Argentinos en Francia durante la dictadura*, Historia y cultura (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2008), 27.

categorize the stories, instead letting them appear “naturally” without order or arrangement.²⁰

Without judgement or narrative, the capturing of these testimonies was the start of a push to incorporate exile experiences into the ongoing conversation about who was affected by the junta’s Process. Yet finding participants who were willing to speak to their experiences was not the only challenge that historians of the field faced.

For activist groups of exiles, their transitory and – for many, temporary – residence in a foreign country did not facilitate the long-term preservation of their records. Historians long relied heavily on first-hand accounts to make up for this lack, but also sought out alternative forms of evidence. Silvina Jensen’s massive 1998 work, *La huida del horror no fue olvido: El exilio político argentino en Cataluña*, was the first to take the field beyond oral histories and into detailed case studies of specific regions, a tradition that has governed how most scholars have approached Argentine exile in the years since. Focusing intently on a specific geographical region, Jensen dove deeply into the reality of political exile in Catalonia, pooling sources from disciplines far beyond what had been compiled before, such as census and government records, and linguistic studies on the roots of words like “exilio” and “destierro.” Jensen did not conduct any oral histories for this book; rather, she explored the many threads of the solidarity movements through a multidisciplinary lens, revealing the divisions between Argentines living in exile and enriching the way that historians approach the topic.²¹

The scholarship on exiles that followed tended to align with these two historical traditions: oral histories and case studies of specific cities and regions. Few works capture this

²⁰ Ana Baron, Mario del Carril, and Albino Gómez, *Por qué se fueron: Testimonios de argentinos en el exterior*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1995), 10.

²¹ Silvina Jensen, *La huida del horror no fue olvido: El exilio político argentino en Cataluña (1976-1983)*, 1st ed. (Barcelona: Editorial Bosch-COSOFAM, 1998).

more than the 2007 compilation *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias bajo la dictadura militar*, edited by Jensen and Pablo Yankelevich. Compiling contributions from scholars of Argentine exile with a specific regional focus, *Exilios* seeks to place exile within the cultural memory of the dictatorship, discussing debates over its meaning, the role of the state in defining exile, and the key role that exiles played in the struggle to bring the dictatorship to an end. Featuring chapters on Spain, Mexico, Sweden, and Brazil, among others, the scholars attempt to re-incorporate their regional specialties into the wider global narrative surrounding Argentine exile.

Though several works on Argentine exile have been published in the decade since, Marina Franco's *El exilio: Argentinos en Francia durante la dictadura* (2008) most closely reflects my work with the WCHRA in her use of both personal documents and oral histories to explore the complexities of life as an exile. Both in their daily activities and approach to global campaigns, the choices exiles made in how to participate in the human rights movement both shaped and were shaped by the environment they operated in. Nowhere is this clearer than in Franco's work. Paris, like D.C., is a bustling, active city known for heavy political activity. Despite this, not many Argentines ended up living in either place. Both Paris and D.C. have a distinct connection to human rights as headquarters of some of the world's most notable organizations like Amnesty International and the Human Rights League (*Ligue des droits de l'homme*). Franco firmly situates the Argentine exiles in France within the context of both the country they landed in and the one they left, noting that the militancy of French political protest made it a welcoming and sometimes overwhelming environment for exiles fleeing a violent regime. She also dives deeply into the challenges of relying on oral histories to tell the story of exile, noting that the stigma against *los que se fueron* has shaped what they believe they could, or should, say and, subsequently, the works that have given them a forum to tell their stories.

Testimonies lend a personal air to the study of exile but drawing on other types of evidence is also necessary to relate their stories.

Nearly all of the works published on Argentine exile were written in Spanish and, in many cases, for an intended audience of other Argentines in particular. The introductions of many of these works makes this clear, with references to the importance of telling *nuestra historia*, “our history.”²² There are a limited number of English-language works on Argentine exile, and even fewer that focus on the experience of those exiles who were living in the United States during those years. There is a need for both. The experiences of Argentines in the United States, particularly those who became activists during the dictatorship, varied greatly depending on their location – those living in Los Angeles had a different reception and had access to different resources than those living in New York City. English-language investigations into how they influenced national policy are crucial for understanding the larger significance of transnational immigration and human rights activism between the United States and Argentina.

1.2 Argentines in Washington, D.C.

Many exiles from other South American countries were already in D.C. when Argentines began arriving in the early 1970s. Two coups in 1964 sent Bolivians and Brazilians fleeing their country as academics, left-wing Catholics, and political opponents were targeted by the military regime.²³ Uruguay, too, saw the installation of a military dictatorship in mid-1973.²⁴ But it was the Chilean coup in 1973 that saw the largest exodus of Latin American immigrants and the

²² María Teresa Piñero and Jorge A. Taiana, *Testimonios de la solidaridad internacional* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, 2007).

²³ See James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*, Radical Perspectives (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010) and Thomas C. Field, Jr., *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014).

²⁴ See Vania Markarian, *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

uptick in public consciousness of the repressive tactics being used in those regimes – all with the clandestine support of the U.S. government.²⁵ U.S. foreign policy at the time was largely dominated by Henry Kissinger, who showed little interest in South America throughout his tenure, first as National Security Advisor and then as Secretary of State for Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. “History has never been produced in the South,” he is quoted as saying to a Chilean foreign minister in 1969; “What happens in the South is of no importance.”²⁶ It was those earlier regimes that first ignited the push for human rights that heavily influenced U.S. policy during the Carter administration.

Yet of the thousands of Argentines who left the country in the years of the Triple A and the military dictatorship, relatively few found themselves living in the United States, and even fewer settled in the D.C. area. Logistical reasons often outweighed personal choice. The English language barrier, in particular, presented a challenge that many did not want to submit themselves or their families to, especially for what they hoped would be a temporary amount of time. As a result, the number of Argentines who resettled in the United States was quite small, especially compared to areas like Mexico City and Paris. In 1975, the approximate population of Argentines in the United States was between 150 and 200,000 people, with 60% concentrated in New York City.²⁷ After the coup, those who did flee to the United States generally went to cities with high numbers of established communities of South American immigrants, like New York City and Los Angeles, aiding their resettlement and easing the language and cultural barriers

²⁵ For more on U.S. involvement with the Chilean dictatorship, see Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003).

²⁶ Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, chap. The Third World War.

²⁷ Pablo Pozzi, “Denuncia: Una experiencia editorial de inmigrantes y exiliados argentinos en Estados Unidos de América (1976-1983),” in *Represión y destierro: Itinerarios del exilio argentino*, ed. Pablo Yankelevich (Buenos Aires: Al Margen, 2004), 254.

they encountered. Their destination largely depended on the reasons behind their exile: whether they sought economic and social opportunities or were legally expelled by Argentine courts.

1.3 Reasons for Exile

Many Argentines in D.C. originally came to study or teach in area universities or to work in the headquarters of international organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Pan-American Health Organization. Ana Berta Chepelinsky, a biochemist, first came to the United States in the late 1960s to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). After receiving her degree, Ana Berta made plans to leave Boston and travel around South America before returning home to Argentina. Like many international students, Ana Berta always planned to return home after completing her studies, but those plans were foiled by the uptick in violence after the Chilean coup and the emergence of the Triple A in Argentina. Arriving back in Buenos Aires in 1974, she found herself on the radar of the death squads after attending the funeral of Rodolfo Ortega Peña, a Peronist party representative in Congress who is widely considered the first “official” assassination of the paramilitary forces. The buses that carried the approximately thirty mourners were stopped en route to the funeral by the police, who wrote down the names of all of the attendees. Soon after, Ana Berta was picked up at her apartment by civilian-clad men and taken to a detention center, without any information regarding the reason for her arrest.

When a person was arrested or disappeared, one of the first measures their friends and family undertook was to file a writ of *habeas corpus*, a legal recourse that prevents people from being held without charges being brought against them. Though not explicitly written in the Argentine Constitution, *habeas corpus* is found in the Code of Criminal Procedure and is

implicitly regarded as a universal right to prevent unlawful imprisonment.²⁸ As the political situation in Argentina deteriorated, legal means of petitioning for the detained grew less effective and were largely ignored by judges and government officials. The French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that Argentine courts rejected over 20,000 writs of habeas corpus between 1977 and 1979. On November 6, 1974, Isabel Perón declared a state-of-siege, effectively “suspending [the] constitutional liberties” that allowed imprisoned people to petition for release for its duration.²⁹ Ana Berta’s parents had filed a writ of *habeas corpus* on her behalf just a week before the declaration. Fearing that it would not be long before she was detained again, she quietly left the country, telling only her family as she made her way first to Brazil and then to Mexico.

Along her journey, Ana Berta picked up contacts and friends within the burgeoning solidarity movement that was growing among Brazilians, Chileans, Uruguayans, and Argentines who had fled the repression in their home countries and were beginning to reconvene in exile. One of the first groups formed by Argentine exiles, the *Comisión Argentina de Solidaridad* (CAS), first began organizing in Mexico City in early 1975.³⁰ There was, wrote activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a “subterranean solidarity that wasn’t talked about, of people, of organizations, of religious communities, that accompanied the right to life, the social and cultural resistance opposing all of that violence.”³¹ Even years before the official start of the dictatorship, a growing solidarity movement emerged in all parts of the world where exiled Argentines ended up. After an extended stay in Mexico, Ana Berta decided to return to Boston where she had studied years

²⁸ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “The Right to a Fair Trial and Due Process,” 1976 Annual Report on Argentina, June 7, 1977.

²⁹ Robert D. Kartheiser, “De Facto Government, State of Siege Powers, and Freedom of the Press in Argentina,” *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 18, no. 2 (1986): 255.

³⁰ Luis Roniger et al., *Exile, Diaspora, and Return: Changing Cultural Landscapes in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 77.

³¹ Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, “La memoria debe iluminar el presente,” in *Testimonios de la solidaridad internacional*, 24.

earlier. It was there she began to dedicate all her free time to the human rights movement and, after meeting several people who were already heavily involved with prominent organizations in D.C., decided to move there to be closer to the heart of U.S. solidarity work.

When facing the choice between living in danger in Argentina or living in exile, it was common for academics like Ana Berta to follow their professional ties to cities where they had previously studied or worked. Within the WCHRA, several members also came to D.C. because of their professional ties to the area, after having studied and worked at area universities as graduate students and postdocs. Tomas, an astronomer, and Ana, a mathematician, first came to the United States in 1966 after the notorious “Night of the Long Batons” (*La Noche de los Bastones Largos*), when the dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía violently occupied five colleges of the University of Buenos Aires, beating and imprisoning the students and faculty who had occupied the buildings in protest.³² Ana was arrested after helping stage a protest in one of the buildings and spent several days in jail.³³ Soon after, Tomas urged her to leave Argentina to pursue their education at the University of Maryland, where he had been accepted into a PhD program. The two became part of the notorious *fuga de cerebros*, the “brain drain” of academics who sought education and career advancement abroad in the wake of political upheaval at home. After graduation, Ana and Tomas returned to Buenos Aires and attempted to resettle with their young children, but their economic situation grew increasingly tumultuous. “The situation in Argentina was horrible,” recalls Tomas; “[People] were killed on the street. Cadavers appeared everywhere.”³⁴ Both had trouble holding steady jobs because of their past political activism and

³² Sergio Morero, *La Noche de Los Bastones Largos* (Buenos Aires: Nuevohacer, Rupo Editor Latinoamericana, 2002).

³³ Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely. Interview with Susana Skura. *Memoria Abierta*. June 26, 2007.

³⁴ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

the continued crackdown on academic freedom. Tomas eagerly accepted a postdoc position with his thesis advisor in Maryland and the family returned to the D.C. area, hoping the violence would subside and they would be able to return home within a few years. The coup made their plans to return impossible, and instead they found themselves drawn to the human rights movement with other area Argentines as they watched the events in Argentina unfold from afar.

“Official” exile took a specific legal form in the context of the Argentine dictatorship. The *derecho de opción*, roughly translated in English as the “right of option,” is a commonly used term for a right derived from Article 23 of the Argentine Constitution.³⁵ Article 23 states that in times of national emergency, when an *estado de sitio* or “state of siege” is declared, Constitutional guarantees are suspended. During that time, the President may arrest and transfer people to other parts of the nation at will – unless they choose to leave Argentina. Specifically, the article provides for “the suspension of *habeas corpus* temporarily, the detention of suspects indefinitely and the moving of accused persons from place to place within the country without their consent.”³⁶

This “right of option” effectively allows imprisoned people to choose exile rather than stay in prison for what could be an indeterminate amount of time. Exiles who petitioned for the *derecho de opción* had little power over whether it was granted, and where they were sent when released from prison in Argentina depended largely on the strings they (and their families) could

³⁵ Daniel Alberto Sabsay and José Miguel Onaindia, *La Constitución de los argentinos: Análisis y comentario de su texto luego de la reforma de 1994*, 7th ed. (Buenos Aires: Errepar, 2009), 76–78.

³⁶ This 1979 report by the U.S. State Department notes that the Argentine Constitution is “closely patterned after the U.S. Constitution,” with the major exception of the “State of Siege” provision.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights and U.S. Policy: Argentina, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Peru, and the Philippines: Reports Submitted to the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1979, 1.

pull in their desired destination. One case study of a prison in northern Argentina found that only one-eighth of those who petitioned for exile were granted it.³⁷ Further complicating the process, Isabel Perón issued a last-minute declaration that anyone granted the *derecho de opción* could not go to any country in the Western hemisphere, eliminating many of the countries where imprisoned Argentines were likely to have friends and family – or, at the very least, a connection through language.³⁸ Thus, imprisoned Argentines largely depended on court orders to determine their fate, and the courts that operated under the junta that followed did not commonly grant permission for exile. Those who were eligible for the right often needed to demonstrate external support from influential organizations or people – to be considered a “person of interest” – to be granted exile.

Juan Méndez and Patrick Rice were both granted exile while imprisoned in Argentina under different circumstances. Juan, an Argentine lawyer who often defended political prisoners, was taken into custody in August 1975, tortured and imprisoned for a year before he was granted the *derecho de opción*. While in prison, a family from Chicago, Illinois who he had spent time with as a teenager advocated on his behalf, bringing attention to U.S. Congress members about his case. As a result, he was adopted by Amnesty International as a “prisoner of conscience,” defined as “someone who has not used or advocated violence but is imprisoned because of who they are (sexual orientation, ethnic, national or social origin, language, birth, colour, sex or

³⁷ María Virginia Pisarello, “Los presos políticos de la última dictadura y la opción de exilio: El caso de la cárcel de Coronda,” in *Exilios, militancia y represión: Nuevas fuentes y nuevos abordajes de los destierros de la Argentina de los años setenta*, ed. Silvina Jensen, María Soledad Lastra Viaña, and Mario Ayala (La Plata, Argentina: EDULP, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2014), 301.

³⁸ Juan E. Méndez and Marjory Wentworth, *Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

economic status) or what they believe (religious, political or other conscientiously held beliefs).³⁹ Pressure from those external forces ultimately resulted in his exile.

Patrick was an Irish priest who did missionary work in the slums of Buenos Aires and had begun to report on the rise in disappearances as prominent Catholics around the country were kidnapped and killed. He was arrested during a prayer meeting in late 1976 and accused of “passing out leftist guerrilla leaflets and posters.”⁴⁰ He was tortured and held while personnel from the Irish Embassy and the United Nations desperately sought information on his condition. Though both Juan and Patrick had people advocating for them in the United States, Isabel Perón’s earlier mandate meant that the United States was not an option for direct exile from Argentina. Patrick was sent home to Ireland where he immediately joined the human rights campaign, helping to establish the London Committee for Human Rights in Argentina and then the WCHRA in D.C.⁴¹ Juan was formally exiled to France, where he reunited with his family and arranged to travel to Chicago on tourist visas. Once there, they planned to seek asylum with the U.S. government, as many other Latin Americans fleeing violence did in those years.

1.4 U.S. Reception of Exiles

The U.S. government, at the time, was receptive to immigrants seeking asylum from the Southern Cone, though each applicant’s case was thoroughly examined and had to be backed up by offers of support from politicians or human rights organizations. There were three main paths through which Argentines sought admission to the United States: as a refugee, as a target of political persecution, or by illegally crossing the border.⁴² Originally established for Chilean

³⁹ Amnesty International, “Detention and Imprisonment,” www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/detention/.

⁴⁰ “Argentina to Deport Irish Catholic Priest,” *The Washington Post*, December 3, 1976.

⁴¹ Dermot Keogh, “Text of the Introductory Address on the Occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, on Patrick Rice” (June 6, 2008).

⁴² Pozzi, “Denuncia,” 264–65.

refugees in 1975, the Special Parole Program was extended to include Argentine exiles during the Carter administration.⁴³ To apply for “refugee” status, the applicant first had to declare that they had “never been a member of an organization that advocated for the violent overthrow of the United States,” the list of which included many of the leftist guerrilla groups operating in Argentina at the time. Despite the economic sanctions placed on the junta for human rights violations, the United States still technically considered Argentina an ally for its strict anti-Communist stance and, as a result, did not make a habit of granting refugee status to Argentines. Between 1978 and 1981, only about 50 Argentines were admitted as refugees.⁴⁴

Juan, on the other hand, applied for asylum as a target of political persecution through his contacts as a lawyer and his sponsorship by Amnesty International, members of the U.S. Congress, and the support of solidarity organizations around the country. After it became widely known that the Chilean coup and ousting of Allende had been heavily backed by the CIA, the United States sought to improve its international image by accepting “reputable” exiles like Juan Méndez.⁴⁵ Even so, he would not be permitted to stay without a valid offer of employment, so those advocating for him in the United States began a campaign to find him a job offer, sending out dozens of letters on his behalf.⁴⁶ While many of the Argentines who formed the WCHRA considered themselves politically active, having participated in protests and student organizations, none were active members of the militant organizations first targeted by the junta. “The farthest thing from my thinking was to get involved in political activity,” Tomas recalls

⁴³ Benedetta Calandra, “Exile and Diaspora in an Atypical Context: Chileans and Argentineans in the United States (1973–2005),” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 32, no. 3 (2013): 312.

⁴⁴ Pozzi, “Denuncia,” 265.

⁴⁵ Calandra, “Exile and Diaspora,” 313.

⁴⁶ Zachary Steven Ramirez, “International Human Rights Activism in the United States during the Cold War” (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2013), 112–13.

about their return to the United States.⁴⁷ Rather, their identity as academics and scientists was the primary drive of their professional and social lives and the reason they were able to stay in the United States.

Yet for many exiled Argentines, it was their political backgrounds that most affected their choice of destination and how they travelled to get there. Those who were not eligible for asylum because of their affiliation with guerrilla organizations opted to overstay tourist visas in the United States or cross the border from Mexico with the help of solidarity organizations sympathetic to their politics.⁴⁸ Often, exiles who had participated in revolutionary groups in Argentina felt a moral obligation not to live in the United States, even if they had the opportunity to get there. Given the heavy anti-American sentiment that fueled much of their radicalism, former members of the Montoneros or the ERP did not, for the most part, resettle in the United States, and especially not in the capital of the U.S. government. Instead, exiled guerillas regrouped in countries like France and Mexico where their radical politics were more welcomed. The militancy of those radical groups was widely known and their exile a politically fraught topic by the late 1970s, so much so that some “organizations of exiles found it necessary to construct a visibility and a kind of denunciation that would distance them from any possible association with figures of terrorism.”⁴⁹ By downplaying prior radical political activity, many exiles sought to counteract the popular narrative put forth by the junta that those targeted by the regime were terrorists and deserved of their fate, as the oft-repeated adage *algo habrán hecho*, “they must have done something,” went. Adopting the language of human rights enabled

⁴⁷ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

⁴⁸ Pozzi, “Denuncia,” 265.

⁴⁹ Franco, *El exilio*, 122.

activists to downplay their political past by “stress[ing] the moral priority of ending human rights abuses,” rather than the political nuances that were used to justify them.⁵⁰

Another motivation for distancing themselves from militant groups came from a very real fear of retaliation by the Argentine military. High-ranking members of the Argentine military traveled often to D.C. and had deep connections in the region that left exiles wary of staging public displays against them. The 1976 assassination of exiled Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his American aide Ronni Moffatt in D.C.’s Sheridan Circle shook the exile community not only in the United States, but around the world. The blatant attack by agents of Pinochet in the heart of D.C. weighed heavily on the minds of those who participated in solidarity organizations in its aftermath.

In Mexico City and Paris, for example, members of well-known solidarity organizations like CADHU (*Comisión argentina de Derechos Humanos*) and CAIS (*Centre Argentin d’Information et Solidarité*) acted under the assumption that they could be specifically identified and targeted by the military leaders, who published reports in Argentine newspapers labeling them “subversives” and “terrorists.”⁵¹ After the junta passed a law prohibiting the formation of “Marxist political groups,” Argentines who had formed MASA (*el Movimiento antiimperialista por el socialismo en Argentina*) in New York City were threatened when they travelled home to Buenos Aires. The publishers of the NYC-based solidarity newspaper *Denuncia* were approached and threatened by two military men from the consulate if they refused to close down.⁵² Exiles who participated in demonstrations and campaigns around the world took

⁵⁰ Patrick William Kelly, “‘Magic Words:’ The Advent of Transnational Human Rights Activism in Latin America’s Southern Cone in the Long 1970s,” in *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, by Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 90.

⁵¹ Franco, *El exilio*, 117–23.

⁵² Pozzi, “Denuncia,” 261.

precautions to keep their names and identities off the junta's radar. "The military was not nice people," recalls Tomas; "They were not beyond kidnapping your parents or your relatives... so you had to be a little careful."⁵³ When driving past the Argentine embassy in D.C., Tomas was acutely aware that government agents took photographs and noted the movements of Argentines in the city, particularly the human rights activists who visited to petition Congress. When driving them around, he always made sure to avoid common routes and to hide his face to avoid detection. The unease that they felt is reflected in a letter forwarded to Tomas by a colleague in Texas, who scribbled a note at the bottom explaining why he signed the letter with a different name: "It was suggested that I use a pen name just in case I ever want to visit Argentina."

The need to protect their identities and maintain a veil of secrecy is part of the impetus for forming the WCHRA. In giving the informal group an official name, members lent an air of authority to their work while also keeping their personal names off of the documents and records that circulated between U.S. Congressmen, D.C. area human rights organizations, and solidarity groups in Argentina and around the world. Naming the WCHRA helped them to stake out a space in the global human rights network, and to join the ranks of other small groups of Argentine exiles like the CAS in Mexico, the Chicago Committee for Human Rights in Argentina, the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Argentina in Ontario, Canada, and the Committee for Freedom in Argentina in San Jose, California.

1.5 Record Keeping in Exile

Still, as a relatively small group, the WCHRA frequently partnered with "big name" organizations to reach a wider audience, particularly WOLA. Their petitions, letters, and flyers are often marked with the names of both organizations, the senders and recipients blending

⁵³ Tomas Gergely. Interview with author. September 29, 2017.

together as each built upon one another's work. Ultimately, this also meant that the records and documents of the WCHRA blend into those they worked closely with. Despite their overlapping campaigns and the close proximity in which they operated, the WOLA records at Duke University make no specific mention of the WCHRA, and the archivist in charge of the collection was unable to identify any materials by the group in the research guides.

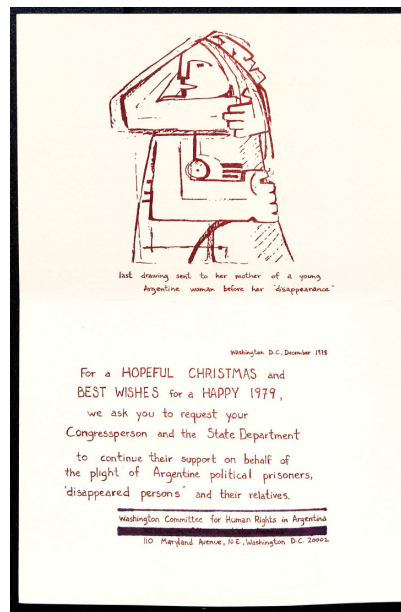


Figure 4: This Christmas card was created as a joint campaign by the WCHRA and WOLA.

“Washington Office on Latin America” is blacked out on this card to indicate it was sent by the WCHRA.

As is the case with the WCHRA, the records of small Argentine exile groups are not generally found in archives, even those dedicated to human rights activism. There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn for why this is. One is their work was reflected and incorporated into the records of the larger organizations they worked in conjunction with, like WOLA, but were not significant or numerous enough to be listed as a separate entity. This effectively relegates them to the “other grassroots organizations” category that blurs their

specific contributions into one group effort and makes it difficult to see the nuances of the individual work involved. Another conclusion has to do with the temporary nature of life as an exile. Most exiles did not consider their temporary location during the dictatorship as a permanent home and, as a result, did not keep excess materials in anticipation of their return to Argentina. Many chose to return home at the dictatorship's end, leaving behind many of the records they had created and collected during their time as human rights activists. Nearly all former members of the WCHRA lamented having thrown away much of their materials from that time, discarding them when moving houses or thinking that the more important items were already housed in an archival institution somewhere. The WCHRA collection kept by Tomas, the official secretary of the group, is unique in that he and his family stayed in the same city where they initially moved to escape the dictatorship, so their boxes were not discarded for lack of space or in a move-related purge. It is also possible that many exiles simply did not consider their papers worthy of saving. One WCHRA member was particularly adamant that their work was of little consequence in the grand scheme of the human rights movement and struggled during an interview to understand the historical significance of their contributions.

The WCHRA collection is also reflective of the great focus that the human rights movement placed on collecting documentary evidence. Record keeping (and record destroying) measures were a priority for all involved in both committing and denouncing the disappearances. Inside Argentina, the dictatorship went to great lengths to suppress the most damning evidence of human rights violations. Few official state records survived the end of the junta; to this day there is uncertainty over whether they were all destroyed, or were ever created at all.⁵⁴ "Official"

⁵⁴ Katherine Worboys, "Letting in the Light: The Emergence of an Information-based Civil Society in Post-Dictatorship Argentina, 1984-2004," *History of Education Review* 35, no. 1 (2006): 58–71.

physical evidence of the dictatorship's crimes is therefore difficult to come by, and a large part of the reason that the process of bring criminal charges against the perpetrators was a long and drawn out process. It was the systematic destruction of evidence by the junta that spurred much of the information-sharing work of the human rights movement, and why the campaign around Argentina was so heavily focused on finding evidence and sending it to safety out of the country.

1.6 Conclusion

Whether legally exiled or not, many of the Argentines who lived abroad during the years of the dictatorship found solidarity in defining themselves as *exiliados*. By the time of the Argentine coup, the burgeoning human rights movement in D.C. was in full swing. Argentine exiles flocked to the many organizations who were staging solidarity campaigns to draw attention to the disappeared and the crimes of the military junta. The formation of the WCHRA was shaped by each members' experience with exile and the specific context they were operating within in Washington, D.C. Their story provides a glimpse into the inner workings of grassroots activist organizations of exiles; how they formed, what they did, and how they operated. Having established that the WCHRA collection's existence is, in itself, unique, next I will examine the activism that is reflected in its records. How they chose to insert themselves into the transnational discussion reveals much about their motivations and the power of political advocacy to encourage intervention in situations where human rights are being violated.

Chapter 2: Archives and Activism

*All those years, I would say, from '76 to '84, all of our life revolved around what was happening in Argentina.*⁵⁵

When legal means for seeking justice through the Argentine government failed, human rights activists launched a global campaign to publicly denounce the dictatorship by gathering and circulating information on the detained and disappeared. In this context, *denuncias* (denunciations) were public complaints “made against officials or people who occupy positions of power in search of forms of justice that accusers cannot access through other means.”⁵⁶ In the wake of the coup, prominent organizations like Amnesty International and the IACHR began compiling reports received from the friends and relatives of the disappeared, relying on local groups to navigate the gaps in communication caused by long distances, multiple languages, and the misinformation propagated by military leaders.

The Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina (WCHRA) formed with the purpose of mediating between locally-based NGOs and the people and organizations operating in Argentina, providing information on disappearances and legal cases, circulating petitions and pamphlets, and housing visitors from around the world who came to petition Congress and share their stories. This chapter will explore the day-to-day activities that the WCHRA undertook, drawing connections to the large-scale changes in policy and public opinion to which they and other groups of exiles around the world contributed. By taking a deep dive into the WCHRA collection and speaking with former members, I demonstrate the important role that small

⁵⁵ Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely. Interview with Susana Skura. *Memoria Abierta*. June 26, 2007.

⁵⁶ Daniel Lvovich, “Sospechar, delatar, incriminar: Las denuncias contra el enemigo político en la última dictadura militar argentina,” *Ayer* 107, no. 3 (2017): 76.

grassroots organizations of exiles played in the global human rights movement through their own words and documents, many of which have been lost to history.

2.1 Human Rights Activism Around the World

To amplify their message and make the greatest impact, activist groups of exiles worldwide adapted to the norms of political organization in the places they resided. France's long history of human rights activism meant that Argentines there worked closely with and absorbed into solidarity organizations like the *Comité de Défense des Prisonniers Politiques Argentins* (CODEPPA), founded years before the coup by intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre to show "solidarity with all the oppressed of the earth."⁵⁷ In Sweden, the steep language barrier and relatively small number of exiles led Argentines to consolidate into one organization, the *Argentina Kommitte*, setting aside internal political differences to combat the isolation they felt as foreigners in Swedish society.⁵⁸ Exiles encountered varying levels of societal and governmental support in the countries where they organized: in Brazil – a country whose own ongoing dictatorship forced many Brazilians to also flee into exile – Argentines were highly monitored by agents of Operation Condor who shared information across the continent.⁵⁹ An estimated 350 Jewish Argentines were able to flee to Israel, but complicated legal and religious precedents kept them from "develop[ing] into a community with its own identity and political

⁵⁷ Franco, *El exilio*, 91.

⁵⁸ Brenda Canelo, "Cuando el exilio fue confinamiento: Argentinos en Suecia," in *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias bajo la dictadura militar*, by Pablo Yankelevich and Silvina Jensen (Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2007), 120–21.

⁵⁹ Samantha Viz Quadrat, "Exiliados argentinos en Brasil: Una situación delicada," in *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias*, 74.

agenda.”⁶⁰ Some of the first and most active solidarity organizations formed in Mexico City and operated with widespread support of the Mexican government.⁶¹

Resident countries shaped not only how activist organizations were formed and organized, but also how that activism was manifested. Argentine exiles took “full advantage of the French intellectual tradition of strong public involvement and sensitivity to social injustice,”⁶² staging weekly protests in front of the embassy and distributing flyers with bold messages like “IN ARGENTINA, ARRESTS BECOME KIDNAPPINGS.” The small geographical size of Belgium facilitated political activism for exile groups: even people who lived in other areas of the country would, sooner or later, pass through the capital of Brussels and could easily centralize their activities there.⁶³ The political and social stability in Venezuela in the 1970s made it a haven for exiles from all over Latin America, leading to the organization of solidarity groups whose work incorporated activists from across the continent, rather than one particular country. Groups like the *Programa Venezolano Pro-Refugiado Latinoamericano* and the *Fundación Latinoamericana para el Desarrollo Social* (FundaLatin) were collaborative efforts of Argentines, Chileans, and Venezuelans to circulate information and tie together solidarity actions on a continent-wide scale.⁶⁴ Both the political history and cultural norms of resident countries influenced how the Argentine exiles who participated in solidarity activities organized and fit into the wider society.

⁶⁰ Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, “From Argentina to Israel: Escape, Evacuation and Exile,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 376.

⁶¹ Roniger et al., *Exile, Diaspora, and Return*, 77.

⁶² Marina Franco and Carlos Pérez, “Between Urgency and Strategy: Argentine Exiles in Paris, 1976-1983,” *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (2007): 50–67.

⁶³ Michiel Van Meervenne, “Buscar refugio en un lugar desconocido: El exilio argentino en Bélgica (1973-1983),” in *Exilios, militancia y represión*, 179.

⁶⁴ Mario Ayala, “Los exiliados argentinos en Venezuela: solidaridad, denuncia y construcción de redes regionales de Derechos Humanos (1976-1981),” in *Exilios, militancia y represión*, 125.

2.2 Human Rights Activism in the United States

In the United States, Argentine exile activism likewise depended largely on which city they inhabited. The Argentine community in New York City was already well established by the time of the 1976 coup. As a result, many of the activist organizations founded in its wake were made up of immigrants who had left Argentina due to earlier political and social crises. One such group, MASA (*el Movimiento Antiimperialista por el Socialismo in Argentina*), consisted primarily of radical leftists and former guerrilla activists from groups like the Montoneros and the ERP. MASA's primary objective was to organize and connect Argentines in the United States to the guerrilla activist groups still operating in Argentina. Because of their high profile and radical politics, the members of MASA operated in as much secrecy as possible, adopting *noms de guerre* and taking extra precautions when arranging meetings in person. MASA capitalized on the high number of Spanish-speaking immigrants in NYC by publishing and circulating a newspaper called *Denuncia*, originally targeted towards "exposing the crimes committed by the government of Isabel Perón."⁶⁵ As the activities of militants worldwide shifted towards solidarity and human rights, MASA's militancy gave way to collaborations with other U.S.-based organizations, though its membership stayed rooted in leftist, revolutionary politics. *Denuncia* circulated reports from the *Agencia de Noticias Clandestina* (ANCLA), a Montonero-led initiative to defy the military's censorship and publish information on the disappearances, and an English-language version was established by MASA members based in San Francisco.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Pozzi, "Denuncia," 257–58.

⁶⁶ ANCLA was founded by the journalist Rodolfo Walsh and ceased with his assassination in March of 1977. In one year, ANCLA sent out over 200 cables documenting disappearances and assassinations. For more, see: www.revistasudestada.com.ar/articulo/986/ancla-una-historia-clandestina/.

Through collaborations with groups of exiles around the world, *Denuncia* reached a circulation of 18,000 copies in nearly 30 countries.⁶⁷

The high population of Argentines and other Latin Americans in New York City also facilitated the formation of other activist groups with a less militant membership than MASA. In parts of the country where fewer Argentines lived, exile organizations relied heavily on partnerships with established groups already involved in the solidarity movement, many of them headed by U.S. citizens. Building on the national network fostered by MASA, Argentines helped create several other organizations around the United States, most notably the Argentine Information Service Center (AISC), the Organization for Christian Action in Argentina (OCAA), and the *Comisión Argentina de Solidaridad* (CAS).⁶⁸ Operating out of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the AISC was headed by a North American activist and consisted mostly of professionals and intellectuals. Argentines who contributed to the AISC came from a wide range of political backgrounds, united by a shared campaign to list the names of every *desaparecido* and present it to governmental leaders like U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who later took the list of 15,000 names with him on a state visit to Argentina.

The smaller organizations that exiles participated in popped up all over the United States and were often collaborations between Argentine nationals and sympathetic Americans. It is difficult to delve deeply into the history of these small solidarity groups, as their records are not easily found and are often spread out within the personal papers of former members, if mentioned at all. As a prime example, the Committee for Freedom in Argentina (based in San Jose, California) has one folder listed on the University of Connecticut Special Collections

⁶⁷ Number published in *Denuncia* no. 44 (July 1979), cited in Pozzi, "Denuncia," 264.

⁶⁸ This CAS was founded in Los Angeles later than the aforementioned CAS formed in Mexico, though they share the same name.

website, and another at the University of California. Other than a few documents found in the WCHRA records, this is the only mention of this group that is available to the public. Much of what is known about these small activist groups today is derived from passing references to their work that cover the larger solidarity movement. There are scores of groups like these represented in the WCHRA collection, but little information is found elsewhere.

There are works that outline the broader commonalities of how these small, localized groups of activists formed and operated and from which can be gleaned a sense of their contributions to the larger human rights movement. Many of the campaigns that converged under the banner of “human rights” in the 1960s and 70s shared common characteristics – trends in the way activists organized, the information they collected, and how they disseminated it. Political scientists Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink expanded on the ways that these campaigns developed in *Activists Without Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, outlining how small, localized groups of activists worldwide formed transnational advocacy networks to “provide information that would not otherwise be available, from sources that might not otherwise be heard, and... make this information comprehensible and useful to activists and publics who may be geographically and/or socially distant.”⁶⁹ Those local groups often included Argentine nationals who contributed information gathered from people they knew personally who had been targeted and abused by the regime.

International campaigns further helped to bridge groups through collective actions like boycotts, petitions, and collecting testimonies. Information gathered through personal letters and diplomatic cables was later compiled by human rights activists and used by politicians to put

⁶⁹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 18.

political pressure on the military leaders. Historian Kenneth Cmiel calls this a “politics of the global flow of key bits of fact,” placing the 1970s human rights movement against the backdrop of globalization and noting the influence that activist groups held over public opinion through the cases they chose to amplify. Activists in the United States “devised ways to collect accurate accounts of some of the vilest behavior on earth... [then] invented ways to move this information to wherever activists had some chance to shame and pressure the perpetrators.”⁷⁰ In selectively choosing not only what to circulate, but who to circulate it *to*, activists challenged the lack of information provided by the dictatorship by constructing and publicizing a counternarrative based on shared knowledge and personal connections.

2.3 Human Rights Activism in Washington D.C.

Argentine exiles in Washington, D.C. found themselves organizing in a city unlike any other in the world: right in the heart of the United States government. People from all over Latin America lived and worked in D.C. in the mid-1970s. Cities like Los Angeles and New York City, with a high concentration of Latin Americans, attracted immigrants from a more radical political background than those in D.C. Drawn to the area by educational and professional opportunities, many Argentines studied in local universities and worked in international organizations like the Pan-American Health Organization and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Ana spent her days at the IDB conversing and working in Spanish, surrounded by other immigrants like herself. After returning to the area in early 1976, Ana and Tomas found that their social circle consisted primarily of people from Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay; “We didn’t have American friends,” Ana recalls about their first years back in D.C.⁷¹ Ana Berta was

⁷⁰ Kenneth Cmiel, “The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1, 1999): 1232.

⁷¹ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

the first person the couple met who was involved in the human rights movement. After following her professional connections to the D.C. area, the biochemist had quickly become involved with two organizations that played a key role in bringing human rights issues to the forefront of D.C. politics: WOLA and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

The AAAS and WOLA are representative of two key groups that consistently played a role in the global human rights movement: academics and religious organizations.⁷² Many of the Americans who were drawn to human rights activism in the United States were highly educated professionals whose “moral sensibilities had been greatly offended” by reports of disappearances and unlawful detainment in other countries.⁷³ Headquartered in D.C., the AAAS is a non-profit founded in 1848 to promote international cooperation among scientists. The organization’s foray into human rights began when scientists in the United States began receiving alarming reports of the detentions and disappearances of colleagues from Chile and Argentina. In response, AAAS members established a permanent committee dedicated to human rights and academic freedom. This “Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility” launched global campaigns to advocate for detained scientists in South America.

WOLA was founded in 1974 by Protestant and Catholic church leaders “to connect policy-makers in Washington to those with first-hand knowledge of the thousands of deaths, disappearances, cases of torture, and unjust imprisonment occurring under the dictatorships of that era.”⁷⁴ Though originally formed to denounce the Chilean dictatorship, the organization shifted to address the Argentine situation with the influx of new exiles arriving in D.C. WOLA

⁷² For more on the role of religious organizations in human rights activism, see Edward T. Brett, “The Attempts of Grassroots Religious Groups to Change U.S. Policy Towards Central America: Their Methods, Successes, and Failures,” *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 4 (1994): 773–94.

⁷³ Ramirez, “International Human Rights Activism in the United States,” 1.

⁷⁴ WOLA, “History of the Washington Office on Latin America”: <https://www.wola.org/history-of-wola/>.

played a lead role in pressing for Congressional hearings on human rights issues; prominent members submitted hundreds of materials and testified on a range of issues affecting Latin America, from religious persecution to the impact of economic sanctions on the poor. In a 1979 hearing, WOLA deputy director Jo Marie Griesgraber volleyed with Representative Don Bonker over the effectiveness of current policy:

Mr. Bonker: I am just trying to draw from you some of the complexity of trying to apply human rights policy.

Ms. Griesgraber: I agree with you; it is very complex. What I am asking for is consistency; particularly that every agency of the United States be required to follow the same human rights policy.⁷⁵

Three years later, executive director and co-founder Reverend Joe Eldridge joined Griesgraber to present marks on religious persecution under the South American dictatorships, and again the following year to challenge the regression of human rights policies under the Reagan administration.⁷⁶ Since its founding, WOLA has been an active participant in nearly every discussion of Latin American human rights and U.S. foreign policy.

2.4 The Formation of the WCHRA

It was through these social and professional connections that the members of the WCHRA first began to meet in early 1977. Gathered in the living room of Carlos Martinez Vidal, an engineer, and his wife Eva, the founding members of the WCHRA discussed the news that had reached them from home. Tomas remembers the group's formation as "a very

⁷⁵ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979, 141.

⁷⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Religious Persecution as a Violation of Human Rights: Hearings and Markup Before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 1982, 737-747 and *Human Rights in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay: Hearings Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983, 97-116.

spontaneous thing... people came from all over the political spectrum, including those of us who were really not in any party.”⁷⁷ Many, like Eva and Ana, were living and working in D.C. when they received word that family members had disappeared. Other members, like Juan Méndez and Alicia Partnoy, had been imprisoned and tortured themselves, then exiled from the country upon their release. The WCHRA grew to a steady size of about twenty members – some who were new to activism, and others who were already deeply involved in established campaigns. Membership in the group was informal – they never could decide on “official” bylaws – and there were countless others who lent their support indirectly. They forged strong relationships with other D.C.-based organizations and were joined in their efforts by non-Argentine activists like Patrick Rice, whose own experience with torture by the junta drove his continued human rights work. The WCHRA was thus born out of their collective struggle and desire to restore democracy to Argentina and end the trauma caused by years of state-sponsored violence and repression.

Each member of the informal organization brought with them connections to professional organizations and NGOs that were prominent within the human rights movement at the time. Carlos was serving as the Scientific Chief of the IACHR as they pushed to send an investigative team to Argentina, which the military junta repeatedly denied. While working with the AAAS, Ana Berta developed a close relationship to Eric Stover and Rosemary Chalk, two prominent members who served as heads of the association’s Human Rights Program and the Office of Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, respectively. She also spent her evenings volunteering at WOLA, making copies and translating documents that were circulated between the various organizations. Juan and Patrick had both been sponsored by prominent U.S. politicians while

⁷⁷ Tomas Gergely. Interview with author. September 29, 2017.

imprisoned and drew closely on those networks, appealing often to the people in Congress who were sympathetic to the Argentine cause like Ted Kennedy, Tom Harkin, and Chris Dodd. Both were also closely connected to the Catholic-led Tabor House, which served as a refuge for recent exiles like themselves as they resettled in D.C.

The WCHRA also benefited from a direct link to the human rights movement that was emerging inside Argentina through a close relationship with Emilio Mignone, founder of the *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* (CELS).⁷⁸ Mignone, a lawyer, founded CELS in 1979 after the disappearance of his daughter Mónica and years of fruitless attempts to uncover what had happened to her. Mignone's other daughter, Isabel, moved to D.C. and was a founding member of the WCHRA, along with her future husband Mario del Carril.⁷⁹ Emilio Mignone was in constant communication with the WCHRA throughout its existence and traveled often to D.C. to meet with politicians and leaders of human rights organizations. The WCHRA also received periodic bulletins published by CELS that were translated into English and circulated to exile groups around the world. The bulletins provided updates on political developments inside Argentina, news on disappearances, and documented threats made against human rights activists, from graffiti on the walls of their offices to menacing phone calls and bomb threats. Through Mignone, the WCHRA tapped directly into a credible information source inside Argentina.

Initially, they were not sure what purpose their organizing could serve. When exiled Argentine Senator Hipólito Solari Yrigoyen visited D.C. in early 1977, he encouraged them to give their group an official name that would distinguish it from other organizations with whom

⁷⁸ Other human rights organizations founded in Argentina in the 1970s include the Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos (APDH), Movimiento Ecuaménico por los Derechos Humanos (MEDH), Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, and Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas.

⁷⁹ Carril recently published a biography of his father-in-law, Emilio: Mario del Carril, *La vida de Emilio Mignone: Justicia, catolicismo y Derechos Humanos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Planeta, 2011).

they worked. This group would “meet regularly... with the objective of discuss (sic) what is in Argentina and see if there is a way we could help,” remembers Ana.⁸⁰ After the release of a damning Amnesty International report in March of 1977, their usefulness to the greater cause became clearer. After receiving an alarming number of allegations, Amnesty International sent a team to Argentina to investigate reports of human rights violations. Their report on the visit condemned the Argentine government for unlawful arrests, imprisonment and torture, and called for the immediate publication of a full list of the disappeared and killed.⁸¹ The official release of this report, as well as follow-ups conducted by the United Nations and other international organizations, gave the budding WCHRA and other activist groups the evidence they needed to appeal to the U.S. government for political intervention.

Suppression of the media and attacks on freedom of speech within Argentina began in force well before the military seized political control, limiting the channels through which information criticizing the government could leave the country. Official governmental accounts denied anything more than the legal arrests of “suspected terrorists,” while the disappeared were either “living in exile” or “residing in Argentina with false identities.”⁸² Newspapers went silent as journalists fled the country or went underground, while others abstained from publishing any negative information about the regime, either out of fear or complicity.⁸³ One of the only newspapers that long evaded government censors was the English-language Buenos Aires Herald, which continued to openly criticize alarming developments like this April 1976 law: “The Government has forbidden the publication of all news items concerning terrorist activity,

⁸⁰ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

⁸¹ Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina, November 6-15, 1976* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1977).

⁸² Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 13.

⁸³ Jerry W. Knudson, “Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983,” *Peace Research Abstracts* 37, no. 3 (2000): 93–112.

subversion, abductions or the discovery of bodies, unless officially announced.”⁸⁴ Hundreds of other publications were closed by the government for “exceeded[ing] the mark of healthy criticism” as determined by the junta.⁸⁵

As a result, much of the information concerning human rights violations was passed clandestinely through personal correspondence to contacts outside of Argentina, who used what they knew to undermine the censorship imposed by the regime and encourage other governments to apply outside pressure. Larger organizations relied heavily on activists with direct ties to Argentina to provide reliable information through their relatives, friends, and colleagues. In a letter to Carlos, Horacio Lofredo of CADHU clarified what larger organizations needed from groups like the WCHRA. CADHU (the Argentine Commission for Human Rights) started in Buenos Aires early in the dictatorship, but quickly expanded its operations to Madrid, Paris, Mexico City, and Geneva. To support its expansion to the United States, Lofredo asked for help from local Argentines to develop relationships with U.S. Congressmen and heads of other political and professional organizations, handle administrative tasks like answering phone calls and translating documents into English, and organize fundraising efforts to maintain their D.C. office. The military’s efforts to suppress news of the arrests and disappearances were undermined by groups like the WCHRA who were there to receive and disseminate the reports and first-hand accounts of what was happening inside Argentina.

Inexperienced with political organization in the United States, WCHRA members drew inspiration from their earlier participation in popular U.S. protest movements. Both Ana and Ana Berta were heavily impacted by the movements they witnessed as college students in U.S.

⁸⁴ Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina*, 15.

⁸⁵ Kartheiser, “De Facto Government,” 262.

universities. While attending MIT, Ana Berta participated in an anti-Vietnam War march where a mass of students closed the Harvard Bridge to Boston.⁸⁶ Looking around, she noticed that police were surrounding the protestors; not to arrest them, but to protect their right to protest.⁸⁷ The moment shocked her after years of political repression in Argentina that was particularly harsh for university students. Ana, too, remembers witnessing the 1970 Vietnam War protests at the University of Maryland and feeling a kinship with the student protestors: “When I came in 1970 I was used to what is called the ‘student movement’ [in Argentina], which was very important in the newspapers and in decisions. And I came here and the students were doing panty raids and very stupid things. The only time I felt at home is when they did all the things for the Vietnam War.”⁸⁸ Her experiences protesting at the University of Buenos Aires and her arrest during the *Noche de los Bastones Largos* differed drastically from her life as a graduate student in Maryland, yet seeing firsthand how political activism played out and was perceived in the United States greatly influenced her future perception of how popular political actions could affect change. Those experiences gave them hope that their activism now, as Argentine exiles, would have a similar impact on U.S. human rights policy.

2.5 “Trabajo de Hormigas” – Daily Actions of the WCHRA

Entering the burgeoning arena of human rights activism in the United States presented both risks and opportunities for the WCHRA, yet they took up their tasks with fervor. Ana Berta described their work as *trabajo de hormigas* (“ant work”); each working quickly and efficiently, doing their part to contribute to the group’s efforts.⁸⁹ They scrawled pages and pages of names of

⁸⁶ David N. Hollander and Carol R. Sternhell, “Boston: 100,000 Rally,” *The Harvard Crimson*, October 16, 1969.

⁸⁷ Ana Berta Chepelinsky. Interview with author. December 7, 2018.

⁸⁸ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

⁸⁹ Ana Berta Chepelinsky. Interview with author. December 7, 2018.

those they knew who were missing and what was known about their whereabouts, brainstorming ways to draw attention to their cases. Their work became more focused as the WCHRA grew and established formal contacts with other human rights activists.

In all of their activities, the WCHRA was driven by several key factors that heavily influenced how they targeted their work: their proximity to heads of organizations and governments in Washington, D.C., their professional connections, and fear of repercussions against their loved ones if their identities were revealed to the regime. Following the precedents set by Amnesty International and the IACHR, the WCHRA launched letter-writing campaigns, gathered testimonials, and delivered petitions to influential men and women in positions of power. Much of their work was thus heavily focused on *information sharing*: consolidating the information they received and translating it into an easily understandable narrative geared towards their target audience, whether that be members of Congress or the public at large. In the following section, the various activities initiated by the WCHRA are explored in more detail.

Gathering Testimonies

The recording and circulation of testimonies was a powerful tool used by human rights organizations to counter the narrative espoused by the junta, who continued to deny the existence of detention centers and the systematic killing of prisoners. In a tactic he calls “testimonial truth,” Steve Stern argues that “personal experience and personal witnessing, told as living memory of the authentic, could bring out a collective truth denied by the official story.”⁹⁰ The sheer number of testimonies collected throughout these years undeniably proved the counter-narrative and had major shock value for people in the United States who knew little, if anything,

⁹⁰ Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973-1988*, The Memory Box of Pinochet’s Chile, Book 2 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 90–97.

about the dictatorship. Testimonies were presented at hearings, included in reports, published by journalists, and presented to Argentine military leaders on official U.S. state visits. By contributing their stories to the global denunciation of the dictatorship, individuals helped shift the narrative of the dictatorship away from “subversives” and “terrorists” and towards the unjust and inhumane treatment of human beings.

In one of the boxes in the attic, Tomas kept hundreds of pages of notes and reports in a folder labeled “*Testimonios*” (testimonies). The WCHRA saved hundreds of stories of the detained and disappeared that were circulated throughout the global human rights network. These stories often arrived piecemeal as details were stitched together by various groups, adding details that they knew about each case and filling in the gaps in information. In an undated, handwritten note, the WCHRA scribbled details on the disappearance of 23-year-old student Daniel Oscar Sonzini across a piece of thin paper: “Disappeared on the streets of Córdoba on the 12th of August, 1976... There were 2 cars with people, apparently from the provincial police.” On another, the words *siguen incomunicados* (they are still incommunicado) are scrawled above the names of two men.

Testimonies were written following the format established by the larger human rights organizations, but varied depending on the intended audience.⁹¹ Testimonies that were sent to politicians and other governmental figures highlighted the upstanding character of the individuals for whom they advocated, since members of Congress were more likely to use politically advantageous stories to push for human rights legislation. Basic details like the individual’s name and age were followed by a synopsis of their professional and family

⁹¹ For an example of a common format, see the testimonies included in Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina* (Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1980), chap. 3.

background: whether the person was married, had children, or a relative of someone who has previously disappeared. In the following memo from 1977, the WCHRA contemplated how to take advantage of the popularity of Juan's case in order to advocate for others who were detained with him:⁹²

Persons imprisoned with Juan Mendez who could more easily be freed:

Francisco Virgilio Gutierrez
Delegate of the Metalurgists union of Quilmes
Detained August of 1975
Declared innocent, December of 1975
The "tramite de opcion" was begun
Single, 25 years old he is in the death block (Pabellon de la Muerte) his companion who had been detained with him was killed. His life is in great danger.
His mother's address: Ruth G. de Gutierrez...

Luis Francisco Iglesias (has a sister in Boston)
A union delegate for the banking union for the last 16 years. He is between 35-40 years old.
He is in Unidad 9 de la Plata sin causa since October of 1975 under Executive Power. He was declared innocent in december of 1975. In september 1976 his wife Alicia Calzetta (was detained without any process in movement) appeared between Jan and Feb. 1977 in the prison of Neuquen.
They have an 8 year old child. A writ of habeas corpus has been filed with no results.
His sister in Boston is: Graciela Iglesias

In this instance, the WCHRA sought to highlight prisoners who had been declared innocent in the Argentine courts *prior* to the start of the dictatorship, in the hopes that the legal precedent made it more likely that they would be granted exile if enough people advocated for their release. Family information was also considered especially relevant, particularly if the person had a family member living in the United States who was involved in the case. The legal details of each case were always listed, including any known court dates or rulings. It was also noted if *no* legal methods were taken during their imprisonment, drawing attention to the illegality of their

⁹² The following text was copied directly from the document with original spelling, grammar, and accent errors. Underline emphasis added by author.

arrest and violation of their individual rights. Testimonies concluded with the person's current status and condition, if it was known. Details about the person's politics or any previous arrests were *not* highlighted in these testimonies, nor were their political leanings, especially if they were members of radical or revolutionary groups. While many members of Congress were sympathetic to human rights cases and willing to hear testimonies, they were nevertheless hesitant to publicly support cases that were not clear violations of legal rights.

In other cases, the political activities of the individuals were not only included but emphasized to exude a message of impartiality: that human rights, and the right to not be tortured, does not hinge on a person's political affiliation. Testimonies that were drafted for use in large-scale reports of human rights abuses homed in on the mental and physical violence that individuals endured, along with the violations of their legal rights. After her imprisonment, torture, and exile, WCHRA member Alicia Partnoy sent a letter to the UN Division of Human Rights asking for help in investigating the case of a pregnant woman she had met while in prison. In the letter, Alicia described in brutal detail the torture she had endured alongside her friend and the last known details of her status, in the hopes that the information she provided would help with the search. In another letter titled "URGENT APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE," a Uruguayan woman reported what had happened to her coworker after he was kidnapped and tortured in her presence. After describing, in detail, the various forms of torture he was submitted to while in captivity, the woman pleaded with readers to help spread her testimony. In these two examples, the political affiliations of both victims – one, a pregnant woman who gave birth while imprisoned, another a union organizer from Uruguay – serve as an explicit "appeal to all those who acknowledge and defend human rights, and who believe in the rights of workers to defend

their own interests.” How testimonies were recorded and disseminated depended largely on the audience who would read them.

Several times throughout their seven years of work, the WCHRA helped individuals who were recently exiled to capture their own stories in writing. In late 1975, Physicist Elena Sevilla was arrested just a few days after giving birth, then finally released after a fierce, three-year campaign waged by her sister, a student at Cornell University at the time.⁹³ In her testimony recorded by the WCHRA, Elena described in detail the Villa Devoto prison where she had been held – its layout, the names of other prisoners, their daily regimen, and the punishments inflicted upon them. Four revisions of Elena’s testimony are included in the WCHRA papers, demonstrating the painstaking effort put into crafting each line. By changing language like “dental care is very limited” to “dental care is almost nonexistent,” the WCHRA strengthened the testimony’s message and provided evidence of the crimes committed by military agents.

When activists from around the world traveled to D.C. to give testimonies in Congress and to the prominent human rights organizations, the WCHRA arranged their travel, housing, and transportation, hosting visitors like Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and politician (and future President) Raúl Alfonsín. Hebe de Bonafini (founding member of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, an organization formed by mothers of the missing known for staging a weekly protest in front of the Argentine presidential residence) stayed with Tomas and Ana when she visited D.C.⁹⁴ WCHRA members also testified to the disappearances and detentions themselves, sharing their experiences with the organizations that gathered testimonies to submit to the U.S. Congress and Argentine leaders. The OAS regularly hosted community

⁹³ Anthony Lewis, “ABROAD AT HOME; It Tolls For Thee,” *The New York Times*, May 14, 1981.

⁹⁴ Tomas Gergely. Interview with author. September 29, 2017.

events where people could share information about the missing. At an open hearing on human rights hosted by Representative Dodd, Ana presented all that she knew about her sister Teresa's disappearance. Open testimonies centered human rights concerns over political ones, providing a space where individuals could share stories of their missing loved ones and connect with others who shared their frustrations.

Conferences

When important visitors traveled to D.C., the WCHRA organized gatherings to bring together activists from various circles, facilitating the growth of their network and spawning collaborations between organizations. Inspired by a 1980 visit by the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo,⁹⁵ the WCHRA planned four days' worth of interviews, discussions, and receptions at places like the IACHR, the Washington Post, and the State Department. Drafts of the itinerary show that the WCHRA was overly ambitious in their initial scheduling – but reflect their eagerness to see and talk to as many people as possible when the opportunity arose. Six events were whittled down to two that would maximize the Abuelas' time in D.C.

⁹⁵ The Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo are a separate organization formed by women whose grandchildren were kidnapped by the dictatorship. These children, and those born in captivity from pregnant desaparecidos, were adopted out to military families.

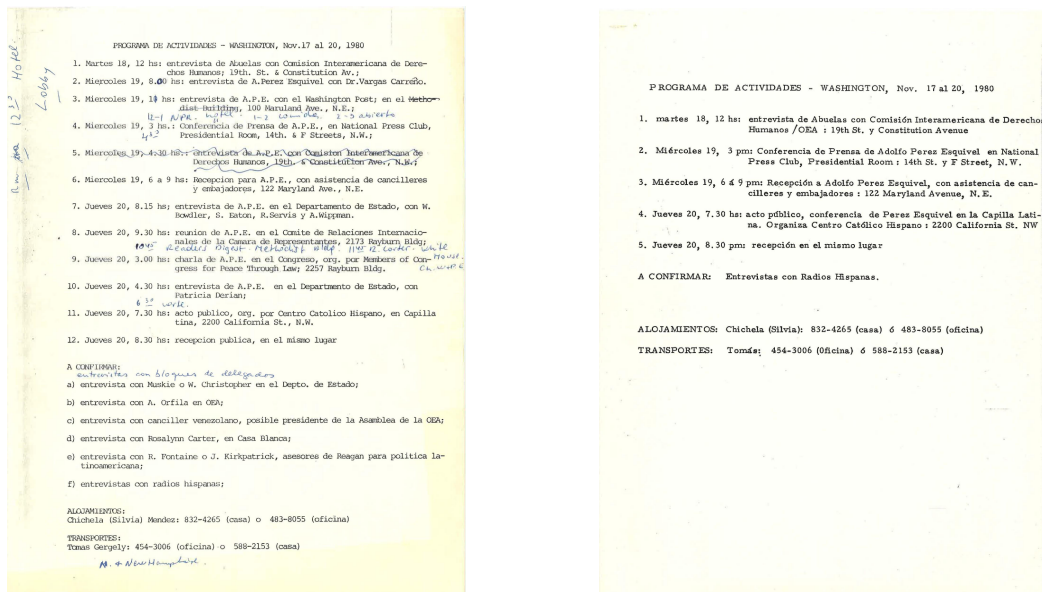


Figure 5: The activities planned by the WCHRA (left) versus the final itinerary (right).

One of the first major collaborative efforts came with the organization of the “First International Solidarity Congress with Argentina,” held in New York City from May 11 to 14, 1978. Thirty committees from around the world attended the Congress, with the WCHRA representing Washington, D.C. Together, the groups drafted a “Work Plan” which “demand[ed] of the military junta the full application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the immediate re-establishment of the state of law,” and called on “all solidarity groups all over the world of regional and international organizations, of government agencies, of trade unions, professional and student organizations... [to] devote their full energy to the achievement of those demands.” The unification of so many distinct groups of activists helped streamline and energize their efforts, reminding the many small, informal organizations that while each did their separate part to combat the dictatorship, together their work was having an impact. The International

Solidarity Congress reinforced the mantra that “doing what they can” was an effective strategy in the global opposition movement.⁹⁶

The WCHRA also boycotted conferences on the principle of human rights concerns. International conferences hosted in Argentina provided an opportunity for activists to intervene in circles where human rights were not generally discussed. Buenos Aires is an attractive city that played host to several prestigious international conferences throughout the dictatorship. The WCHRA approached these events in two ways. First, they used the publicity surrounding the events to draw attention to human rights violations by calling for cancellation or relocation of the conference. If those efforts failed, they used the opportunity provided by large-scale conferences to educate and recruit other attendees to join their cause. Generally, organizers did not heed the calls to cancel or relocate major conferences.

While many of the letters the WCHRA sent to organizers simply went unanswered, one response captures the challenges that activists faced when trying to bring the discussion of human rights into non-human-rights circles. Conrad Taeuber, a prominent American statistician, wrote to the organizers of the International Statistical Institute Meeting to be held in Buenos Aires in 1981, expressing his concern that the institute would choose to host their conference in a country where known human rights violations were occurring. The committee responded by sending a list of other prestigious conferences that had been held in Argentina in recent years, stating that “the human rights problem does not correspond to this National Organizing Committee, as this matter is being adequately dealt with by the Argentine Government and in the international organisms.”

⁹⁶ Quote taken from a handwritten note scribbled at the top of a testimony that was sent to the WCHRA: “Tom - Please do what you can. Thanks.”

As this was most often the response, Plan B called for using the conference as a rallying point to educate a large audience about the abuses being committed around them while they attended the conference. In a memo created at an WCHRA meeting in September 1981, members made plans for how they could best use their presence at the ISI conference to their advantage. They attached four bullet points to the official program:

1. Meeting with Argentine Authorities to Deliver Petition on Behalf of Carlos Noriega and Graciela Mellibovsky⁹⁷
2. Meetings Between Interested ISI Participants and Human Rights Groups in Buenos Aires
3. Arrangements by ASA Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights and AAAS Clearinghouse From Washington D.C.
4. Any Further Activities To Be Carried Out at the ISI Meetings:
 - i. Meeting With U.S. Ambassador
 - ii. Meetings With Argentine Scientific Associations
 - iii. Meetings With Domestic and Foreign Press

Activists who attended the meeting seized the opportunity provided by the large gathering of academics to serve as couriers, seeking out new sources of information and disseminating what they already knew. Emilio Mignone wrote to the WCHRA to encourage their plans, urging them to distribute pamphlets and reports that detailed the human rights situation to conference-goers and to participate in the march of the Madres, held every Thursday in the city center. At the ISI meeting, WCHRA members facilitated exchanges with organizations inside Argentina whose normal means of communication were inhibited by the Argentine authorities.

The most notable event for which a boycott *did* occur was at the World Cancer Conference held in Buenos Aires in October 1978. A group of medical professionals in the United States and France called on invitees to attend a “counter-conference” in Paris instead. In

⁹⁷ Two missing Argentine statisticians who were, it was later discovered, both killed by the dictatorship.

their absence, a team of lawyers delivered a list of disappeared doctors to the military leaders.⁹⁸ Both the World Cancer Conference and “Counter-Conference” were featured prominently on the front pages of newspapers in France and Argentina. Argentine journalists characterized the boycott as an “insidious maneuver orchestrated from abroad” and chastised the French government for supporting it.⁹⁹ Although the original conference still took place in Buenos Aires, enough notable medical professionals cancelled their attendance to significantly impact the meeting’s success and draw global attention to the disappearances of scientists and medical professionals. By raising awareness of human rights violations in professional circles, activists laid the foundation for further collaborations within their academic and scientific communities.

Petitions

In human rights activism, petitions are defined as “a document signed by a large number of people requesting some action from the government or another authority” and serve the purpose of creating an official record of a complaint.¹⁰⁰ Petitions serve both a legal and a symbolic purpose. Argentine citizens continued to use *habeas corpus* petitions to appeal to the government for information on the missing, though they were increasingly ignored: the French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that Argentine courts rejected over 20,000 writs of *habeas corpus* between 1977 and 1979.¹⁰¹ Within the United States, the OAS accepted petitions on behalf of missing people and would then appeal directly to the Argentine government for information on that person. Ana flew to Buenos Aires to file a writ of *habeas corpus* immediately after her sister was kidnapped. When she received no response, Ana filed a petition with the OAS in November

⁹⁸ Franco, *El exilio*, 117–23.

⁹⁹ Hugo Spinelli, “Historia reciente: XII Congreso Internacional del Cáncer, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1978,” *Salud Colectiva* 10, no. 1 (April 4, 2014): 70.

¹⁰⁰ Cambridge Dictionary, “petition,” <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/petition>.

¹⁰¹ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, ix (footnote).

1977. It took until July of the following year, but she finally received a response from the Argentine government:

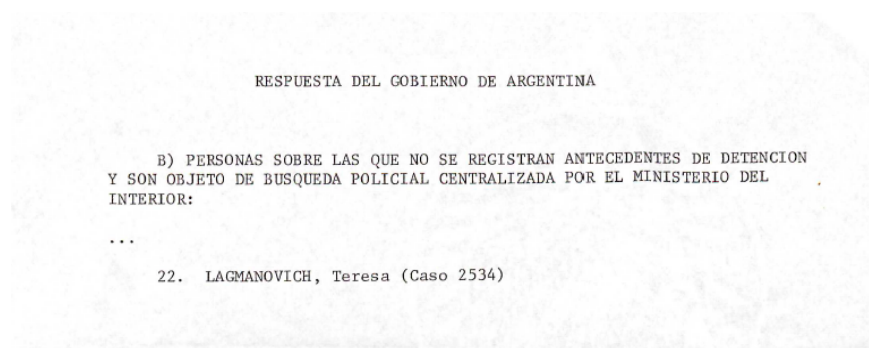


Figure 6: "Response from the Government of Argentina."

The response reads: “Persons about whom no records of detention are registered and are the subject of a centralized police search by the Ministry of the Interior: Lagmanovich (*sic*), Teresa.” Legal appeals like Ana’s were, more often than not, met with frustrating silence: a complete denial of the missing person’s existence.

When legal recourse within Argentina proved unfruitful and the true numbers of the detained and disappeared were obscured by the junta, human rights organizations launched petition campaigns to spread awareness of the abuses and garner support for their cause around the world. News of the arrests of prominent Argentine scientists prompted the WCHRA to launch petitions on their behalf, gathering signatures of notable scientists and academics in the United States. These petitions served a variety of purposes – some were used to support boycotts of conferences, others were sent to Congress, while still more were destined for publication in Argentine newspapers and journals. When someone particularly close to the WCHRA was arrested they began almost immediately to petition for their release, exchanging dozens of letters with friends and family of the detained to share details about each case. The sudden arrest in 1981 of CELS founders, Emilio Mignone, Augusto Conte, and Jose Westerkamp, among others,

sent the WCHRA into a flurry of action. A quick draft of a letter addressed to then-President Reynaldo Bignone reads:

The undersigned, Argentine citizens residing in Washington D.C. request from you the immediate release of [Jose] Federico Westerkamp, detained when he tried to determine the situation of his son, incarcerated without trial for seven years. Abuses like those committed against the Westerkamp family do not contribute in any way to better the deteriorated image of our country overseas, as a civilized community, and make more difficult the transition of the military dictatorship to representative democracy, longed for by the majority of Argentines.

By the early 1980s, military leaders were highly aware of their damaged reputation around the world, particularly after the release of the IACHR's *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina*. In preparation for the IACHR's visit in September 1979, the military closed all but seven of the detention camps and the rate of disappearances dropped dramatically.¹⁰² The attempted "cleanup" did little to appease the investigative team, who subsequently published a "scathing denunciation of the military junta's draconian violations of personal liberty and security, habeas corpus, freedom of expression and religion, and political and labor rights" that was "immediately recognized as a landmark condemnation of the Argentine military junta's systematic use of abduction, torture, and murder."¹⁰³ The WCHRA invoked the sting of the IACHR report in their letter to

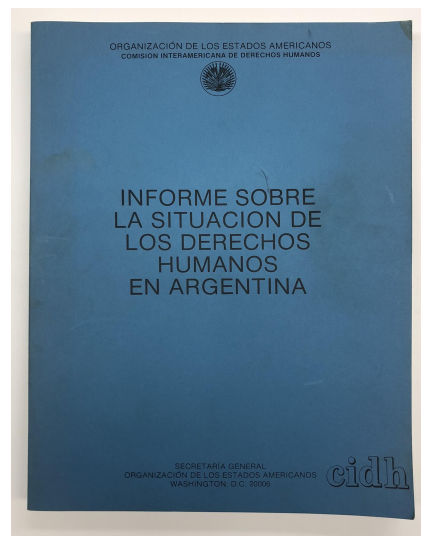


Figure 7: WCHRA copy of the IACHR report.

President Bignone, lamenting the "deteriorated image" of Argentina in the eyes of the world and the return to democracy so "longed for" by "civilized" Argentines. Smaller human rights groups

¹⁰² Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, chap. On the Offensive: Human Rights in U.S.-Argentine Relations, 1978-1979.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

built off the momentum sparked by widely publicized reports to draw attention to individual cases of their friends and colleagues.

Two petition campaigns in 1982 sought to further embarrass the regime by gathering names of prominent academics around the world who supported human rights and then publishing them in the Argentine newspapers *La Prensa* and *Clarín*. The WCHRA led the charge from abroad, collecting as many signatures as they could from their various professional circles.

NAME	AFFILIATION OR OTHERWISE
✓ Kenneth J. Arrow	Stanford University, Nobel Laureate in Economic Science, 1972
V.F. Atchison	Professor of Computer Science, University of Maryland
Richard H. Austin	University of Maryland
Victor E. Basil	Center for "Chaos" Research, Cambridge, MA
David Baltimore	City College of New York
Gary S. Brown	Distinguished Professor Emeritus, University of Colorado
Kenneth E. Boulding	West President, American Association for the Advancement of Science
Lipman Bers	Columbia University
J.B. Berland	Imperial College of Science and Technology
Ann Beneduce	Philosophy
J. Joseph Blum	Duke University
Rose Chomsky	National Institutes of Health
Jack S. Cohen	Committee on Human Rights, National Academy of Sciences
Carol Corliss	Professor of Physics, American University
Earl Cullen	Anthropology Resource Center, Boston
Shelton H. Davis	University of Maryland
Daniel J. Dougherty, Jr.	Long Island College Hospital
Cynthia Dachowitz	

Figure 8: List of petition recipients compiled by the WCHRA.

They began by pooling names, listing their known contacts and university affiliation and adding comments. The WCHRA then sent each contact a letter stating the goal of the petition and a report written by Eric Stover of the AAAS detailing his recent visit with relatives of the missing scientists. The petition asked signers to declare: “We support the just and longstanding request for information by the relatives of the following detained-disappeared scientists,” then listed 22

scientists and the details of their disappearance. The WCHRA received over 150 responses from academics at universities all over the world; Eugenia Kalnay even managed to gather signatures from Nobel Prize winners George Wald and Salvador Luria and linguist Noam Chomsky. The list of names was published in the Argentine press: a public statement of widespread condemnation of the junta that circled the globe to get there.

The WCHRA also enthusiastically contributed to global petition chains that were broadcast throughout the Argentine exile community. Catholic groups commonly appealed to the pope to intervene in human rights cases, and the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II to D.C. – the

first time that a sitting pope came to Washington – presented an opportunity for local groups to voice their concerns. The WCHRA, along with four other solidarity groups from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chile, wrote a letter to the pope drawing attention to human rights abuses across Latin America and asking for his intervention. “We are confident that your personal intervention will greatly contribute to alleviate the suffering of our people,” they wrote. Two versions of their letter (one in Spanish, one in English) were delivered during his visit to the OAS, in which he “delivered his most stinging attack to date on the dictatorships of South and Central America... dismiss[ing] the notion that individual rights may legitimately be subordinated to the security of the state.”¹⁰⁴ Similar collaborative campaigns were ongoing throughout the dictatorship, like the push to nominate human rights groups and activists for the Nobel Peace Prize. Groups worldwide participated by writing letters and signing petitions that showed solidarity with the larger human rights movement, circulating sample letters that were sent out by committees and copied by thousands of activists. Petitions like these were often streamlined and straightforward – their power derived from the quantity of supporters who adhered to the same campaigns.

Public Protests

Human rights activists in D.C. developed a strong relationship with several local journalists who took a vested interest in covering developments in Latin America. Between 1976 and 1983, the *Washington Post* ran hundreds of articles on the human rights situation in Argentina, evidence of a strong connection between local activists and sympathetic reporters who wanted to tell their stories. Colman McCarthy, Pamela Constable, and Jackson Diehl are just a few of the journalists who reported widely on the human rights movement for the *Post*.

¹⁰⁴ David A. Maraniss and Christopher Dickey, “Swirl of Stops, Sparse Crowds Mark Pontiff’s First Day Here,” *The Washington Post*, October 7, 1979.

Despite the sympathetic local press, most WCHRA members chose not to participate in public events for two reasons: fear of retribution on their family members still at home and the general feeling that most Americans were indifferent to what was happening in Argentina. “The vast majority [of Americans] didn’t react much, despite Carter talking about human rights,” Ana recalls.¹⁰⁵ The WCHRA mostly focused its efforts on lobbying Congress and building awareness within their professional communities, not on campaigns aimed at educating the public.

Because the fear of retribution by the Argentine government was never far from their minds, only the WCHRA members who were already “known” to the dictatorship, like Juan and Patrick, led the handful of events that they conducted in public. In April 1980, the WCHRA co-hosted a screening of “The Triple A,” a film produced in exile by Argentine filmmakers that told the story of the military coup d’état and challenged the official government narrative about the violence that had occurred since.

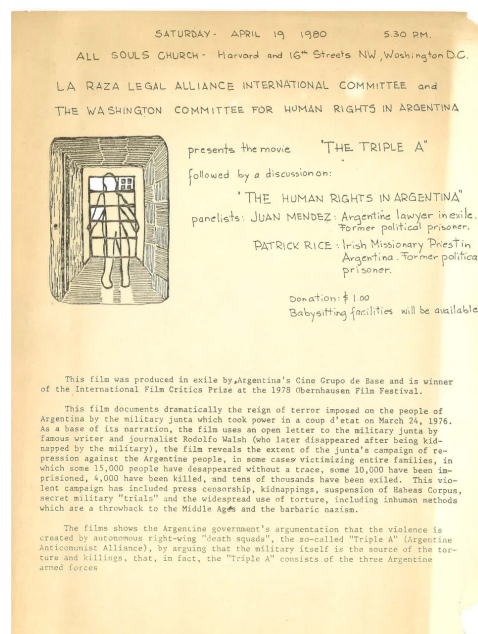


Figure 9: Flyer for movie screening hosted by the WCHRA.

¹⁰⁵ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

Afterwards, Patrick and Juan led a panel on “Human Rights in Argentina,” identified on the event flyer as former political prisoners. Their personal narratives proved to be a powerful tool for countering the narrative that “terrorists” were the only people targeted by the Argentine government.

There is one notable exception to the relatively insular nature of the human rights movement in D.C.; an event that remains vivid in the memories of all who witnessed it.¹⁰⁶ On May 25, 1979, three hundred and fifty members of the Argentine military and their families were invited by the embassy to attend a mass in honor of Argentine Independence Day at St. Matthew’s Cathedral in downtown D.C. The mood was celebratory as the military men arrived and took their seats in the church, but quickly turned as Reverend Sean O’Malley began to speak of social justice. Patrick Rice then stood up and began to recount the story of how he had been kidnapped and tortured while doing missionary work in Buenos Aires, targeted under orders from the very men who now sat before him. Several nuns stood in silence behind him, wearing hoods and white handkerchiefs and holding signs with the names of the disappeared as the archdiocese and church rector, unaware of the planned protest, raced to cut his microphone and blasted organ music to drown him out. The chilling scene was made even more so as policemen arrived to usher the protesters out, watching as several were punched and had their hoods torn off by the military men. One man pointed his index finger like a gun to the sky, telling Patrick: “When you return to Argentina, we’ll send you to heaven.” The military men filed out in disgust, cursing the church leaders for “turning a religious event into a political one.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Account retold based on multiple sources: McCarthy’s column (cited below), a letter sent to Bishop Thomas Kelly the next day by witnesses; and interview with Tomas and Ana.

¹⁰⁷ Colman McCarthy, “Mass at St. Matthew’s Drives Argentines From Church,” *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1979.

Ana and Tomas watched the events unfold from the back of the church: “I remember, when the military they left the church, all the sisters that were with the hoods... they took off their hoods and they took communion! And Patrick gave communion. Remember that? That was fantastic!”¹⁰⁸ Human rights activists relished in the publicity that the event garnered and the embarrassment it brought to the regime while visiting the United States. Journalist Colman McCarthy summarized the effect of the protest in an article the following week: “The unpleasant truths presented by O’Malley and Rice won’t release any of the 4,000 to 6,000 people who Amnesty International estimates are being brutalized for political reasons. But it may ease some of the victims’ painful sense of isolation.”¹⁰⁹

International Campaigns

Throughout the dictatorship, there were two major events that deeply divided the Argentine exile community around the world: the 1978 FIFA World Cup and the invasion of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands in 1982. Both the military junta and human rights activists used the international publicity of these events to further their agenda: the former to promote an image of peace, order, and national pride, and the later to highlight human rights abuses. Though the disappearances were well-known by 1978, plenty of Argentines still supported the dictatorship, or kept their opposition private. Hundreds of Argentines lived and in D.C. during those years, but many chose not to get involved in the human rights movement. WCHRA members did not interact much with those Argentines, beyond work obligations: “we believed that they were in agreement with the Proceso [since] they did nothing,” recalls Ana.¹¹⁰ Even Argentines whose relatives were among the disappeared did not always feel inclined towards activism, whether out

¹⁰⁸ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ McCarthy, “Mass at St. Matthew’s Drives Argentines From Church.”

¹¹⁰ Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely. Interview with Susana Skura. *Memoria Abierta*. June 26, 2007.

of fear or a sense of detachment from the atrocities that were occurring at home. Both the World Cup and the Malvinas War thrust Argentines everywhere into a dilemma over patriotism and national pride, even causing rifts amongst activists who had previously put aside their political differences to further the cause of human rights.

The 11th tournament of the FIFA World Cup was hosted by Argentina in June 1978 at the same time as the denunciations of human rights abuses reached their peak. The vast majority of the disappearances had already occurred by this time, the military's attempt to "clean up" subversive activity in anticipation of the IACHR visit the following year and the thousands of visitors who flocked to the country for the tournament. Human rights activists were outraged that the tournament was continuing in spite of the disappearances, and fearful of the repercussions that such a large, prestigious event could have on improving the junta's image around the world. Long before the games began, campaigns were launched from both sides. Military leaders attempted to evoke an image of peace and order while launching an extensive PR campaign to discredit the claims of human rights activists. Anyone who opposed the games was part of the "anti-Argentina campaign" staged by subversives and terrorists who had fled the country out of cowardice. The military plastered signs around Buenos Aires that read "*Argentinos somos derechos y humanos*" – "We, Argentines, are human and right" – a play on "human rights" that appeared on the sides of buses and buildings and was worn by attendees on stickers and pins.¹¹¹ Hosting – and winning – the World Cup would show the world the "true Argentina," a country that had rid itself of subversion and was assuming its place on the world stage on par with other "civilized" nations.¹¹² In a particular blow aimed at detractors in the United States, the

¹¹¹ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 35–36.

¹¹² Marina Franco, "Solidaridad internacional, exilio y dictadura en torno al Mundial de 1978," in *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias*, 30.

military invited Henry Kissinger to attend the games as an honored guest, where he declared, “This country has a great future on every level.”¹¹³ The military continued to deny the existence of clandestine detention centers, though it was later revealed that there were people imprisoned and tortured close enough to the stadiums to hear the roar of the crowds watching the games.

In countries where soccer was a popular sport and the World Cup was highly anticipated, human rights activists demanded either a boycott or a change of location. Support for a boycott was highest in countries whose national teams were not participating, since activists did not face the challenge of convincing fanatical soccer fans not to watch the sport’s most anticipated event. Recognizing that the excitement surrounding the World Cup’s history long predated the dictatorship, most human rights groups opted for a strategy of *denuncia sin boicot* (denunciation without boycott). Resigned to the fact that the tournament would take place as planned, activists seized the World Cup as an opportunity to draw attention to the disappearances on a global scale and to spread their message to people outside of the political and activist sphere who were not yet aware of the abuses.



Figure 10: A poster from Italy that reads “Resist! Soccer YES, Torture NO.”

¹¹³ Eduardo H. Galeano, “El Mundial del ’78,” in *El fútbol a sol y sombra* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1995).

The uproar caused by the World Cup was not as momentous for the WCHRA, based in the United States where soccer fans are not nearly as fanatical as in other countries. There was no need to call for a widespread boycott of the games: Americans, in general, did not watch them anyway, and the U.S. national team did not qualify to compete in 1978. For Argentines in the United States, the decision to boycott the tournament was largely a personal one. Employees at the IDB, where Ana worked, put up a large projector to screen all of the games. She remembers questioning a coworker who chose to watch: “There was a guy at the IDB who had his brother disappeared and he participated... I said, ‘How can you do that?’ He said ‘it has nothing to do – the soccer, the fútbol – with that.’”¹¹⁴ Though they did not launch any campaigns of their own, the WCHRA participated in the boycott from afar, refusing to watch the games and challenging those they knew who were swept up in soccer fever. Their fears of pro-junta propaganda were legitimized when Argentina won the tournament, taking home their first championship and shifting the global conversation about the country away from human rights. Few other events sewed such widespread division among exiled Argentines, torn between national pride and an obligation to oppose the dictatorship on all fronts – even Argentina’s first World Cup.

The ties that bound exile groups were strained yet again when Argentina invaded the British-owned Malvinas (Falkland) islands on April 2, 1982. News of the invasion sent a ripple of shock through the political world as countries took sides over the conflict. A year into Ronald Reagan’s presidency, D.C. politics no longer revolved around issues of human rights and the politicians who championed the cause had lost much of their influence in Congress. The Reagan administration did an abrupt about-face in their relationship to Argentina, lifting the bans on military sales and aid impose by the previous administration and declaring support for the strict

¹¹⁴ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

anti-Communism of the junta.¹¹⁵ When the Malvinas War broke out, Reagan urged U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to seek a peaceful resolution, but made it clear that the United States would side with Britain over Argentina if the conflict continued. When Argentina refused to surrender the islands, the United States imposed sanctions and provided military support to British troops.

Argentines grappled with conflicting emotions over the war. On the one hand, regaining control of the Malvinas was a historical sore spot in the Argentine psyche: school children were taught that the islands were rightfully Argentine and a modern-day remnant of British colonialism. On the other, it was clear that declaring a war for the Malvinas was a last-attempt power move by a government whose grasp on the country was rapidly fading. Argentina was \$46 billion in debt at the time of the invasion and embattled after seven years of fighting allegations of human rights abuses.¹¹⁶ A coup d'état within the Argentine military ousted Roberto Viola from the presidency and placed General Leopoldo Galtieri at its head. Talks of another coup were already swirling by the time the war was declared, as members of the military locked horns over how best to move the country forward.¹¹⁷ The disastrous attempt to retake the Malvinas ended abruptly when Argentina surrendered only ten weeks after the invasion began. Argentines were left reeling by the whirlwind succession of events and the rapid decline of the dictatorship that followed.

Within the WCHRA there was a general consensus about the boycott of the World Cup, but the Malvinas War caused division even within their close-knit D.C. community. There were

¹¹⁵Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, chap. Conclusion: Carter, Reagan, and the Human Rights Revolution.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Cynthia Gorney, "Argentina, A Sense of Coming Apart: Coup Rumors Contribute to Feeling That Argentina Is Coming Apart," *The Washington Post*, July 5, 1981.

some who supported reclaiming the islands despite the political motives fueling it, while others were angered that the lives of Argentine soldiers were being sacrificed for a haphazard and ill-advised intervention. The invasion brought renewed attention to the junta and its crimes that angered WCHRA member Alicia Partnoy, who spoke to the *Washington Post* in 1982: "I feel a little bit angry that now is the time people discover there is a dictatorship in Argentina, when it has been there for six years."¹¹⁸ When the war ended, the WCHRA quickly wrote and circulated a report titled "The Post-Malvinas Crisis in Argentina: Prospects for Democracy and U.S. Response" in which they tried to balance their emotional response with the practical consequences of the defeat, particularly for the cause of human rights. They wrote:

The international community should understand and hopefully support Argentina's claim to the Malvinas which is quite independent of the methods the current military government used in its failed attempt to recover the islands. All Argentines, and most Latin Americans, recognized that Argentina has both a historical right and an actual right to the economic wealth of the islands and to their security advantages... But those who see merit to the Argentine sovereignty claims must make it clear that only a democratic Argentina respectful of human rights will be able to receive unstinted international support for its position.

The war was a "disastrous failure" orchestrated "to distract the population from... economic failure," they warned. Grappling with conflicting feelings of patriotism and sadness that the Malvinas remained British-owned, the WCHRA chose instead to focus on the future of the country. The dictatorship continued to crumble in the aftermath of the war as Galtieri resigned from the presidency and any remaining support for the military diminished. Galtieri's successor, Reynaldo Bignone, announced that his intention was to hold elections within two years, heralding the long-awaited return to democracy.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Jay Mathews, "Many Who Fled Argentina Back Government on Falklands Move," *The Washington Post*, April 18, 1982.

¹¹⁹ Juan Bautista Yofre, *1982: Los documentos secretos de la guerra de Malvinas-Falklands y el derrumbe del Proceso* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2011).

As the transition to democracy grew ever more likely, the changing rhetoric spouted by the junta gave exiled Argentines pause; they feared that the promising words would not be followed by actions and were merely an attempt to shift attention away from the abuses they had committed throughout the past seven years. Addressing this concern, the WCHRA wrote: the “military government is weak and it is seeking support both at home and abroad by promising democracy, respect for human rights and the implementation of an economic policy more responsive to the human needs of the population.” It would take more than words to restore democracy in Argentina; for human rights activists, the only path forward included justice for those who had disappeared.

2.6 Conclusion

Though it is difficult to pinpoint exact moments when exile activism led to institutional change, there are several key shifts in policies and public opinion that were undeniably linked to the work of global human rights activists. Within Argentina, those moments came in 1976 and 1979, respectively, when Amnesty International and the IACHR visited the country to investigate human rights abuses, then published damning reports that exposed the systematic use of torture and disappearances to the world. Both the visits and the subsequent reports were facilitated by the testimonies and connections established by exiled Argentines. In the aftermath of those visits and the harsh criticism that followed, detentions and disappearances continued at a much slower pace as the junta sought to clean up its image on the global stage.

In Washington D.C., exiles from Chile and Argentine led the way in pushing the U.S. government towards a diplomatic strategy that centered human rights above economic concerns. An amendment to the Foreign Aid bill (1976) sponsored by Representative Tom Harkin cut off aid “to the government of any country which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations

of international recognized human rights”¹²⁰ and “inserted human rights considerations into nearly every foreign aid decision”¹²¹ that followed. Two years later, the Kennedy-Humphrey amendment prohibited all military sales and training to Argentina on the basis of its human rights record.¹²² Military aid was not restored to Argentina until Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, and then was quickly revoked by Congress with the outbreak of the Malvinas War the following year.

The WCHRA collection reflects nearly seven years of nonstop activist work: boxes filled to the brim with letters, petitions, memos, notes, posters, and more. In keeping such meticulous records – and saving them for future generations – the WCHRA opened the doors for scholars to see the inner workings of Argentine exile organizations in a new light.

¹²⁰ “House Votes to Ban Foreign Aid For Human-Rights Violations,” *New York Times*, 1975.

¹²¹ Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, chap. ‘Human Rights Is Suddenly Chic’: The Rise of The Movement, 1970–1976.

¹²² Schmidli, chap. ‘Human Rights Is Suddenly Chic’: The Rise of The Movement, 1970–1976.

Chapter 3: Archives and Memory

*After two weeks [in Argentina] I said, what am I doing here? I don't belong. That's sad, but it's true. I don't feel I belong here, too, so I am an outlier... I am an American citizen and I don't feel American at all.*¹²³

With the promised return to democracy in October 1983, seven years of dictatorship and state violence in Argentina finally came to an end.¹²⁴ For human rights activists, immediate efforts to bring the military to justice for their crimes gave way to discussions over how to memorialize those who had disappeared. Scattered to all corners of the world, Argentine exiles looked to the possibility of returning home, but their place within the larger narrative of the dictatorship was a source of contention that lasted for many years. Members of the WCHRA faced the difficult choice between remaining in their close knit, makeshift community in D.C. or uprooting their families to live in a country that had only recently welcomed them back.

Archiving records of trauma can be a difficult and heavy task. This chapter will explore the politics of memory that shape how histories of sensitive subjects are created, shared, and remembered. Reflecting on the WCHRA's work through today's perspective, I consider how their efforts contributed to the human rights movement in D.C. and Argentina. I then examine how the WCHRA collection – both the physical records and oral interviews – can be used to expand the way we view exiles' place in history. Archival collections that contain materials in multiple languages present challenges for institutions that do not have the resources to adequately describe or share them. Digitization can bridge the divide between institutions separated by geographical and language barriers. Looking beyond the traditional reasons for digitization to new technologies allows us to visualize archival data and historical narratives in

¹²³ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

¹²⁴ Jackson Diehl, "Alfonsín Vows A 'State of Law' For Argentina: Argentina Returns to Democracy," *The Washington Post*, December 11, 1983.

innovative ways. The stories that exiles choose to relate are highly curated by time and pain, and their memories inherently fallible; what they choose to omit often speaks as loudly as what they disclose. Working with exile archives, both archivists and historians have the opportunity to reexamine how the exile story has been shaped by the politics of memory.

3.1 The End of the Dictatorship and *Nunca Más*

Divisions within the exile community did not end with the return to democracy, despite widespread euphoria and relief that the military's grip on the country had finally eased. Debates over how the country would move forward after years of tumult affected all of Argentine society, from those who still sought information on their missing loved ones to those who supported the junta even after their fall from power. The years immediately following the dictatorship were characterized by intense debates over how or whether to hold the military responsible for the so-called "Dirty War" and how to memorialize those who were killed. Human rights activists continued to focus on exposing the crimes of the military on a global stage, but the military leaders themselves laid out an equally-as-vocal counter narrative in their Final Document (*Documento Final de la Junta Militar*), released shortly before the 1983 elections. In it, military leaders downplayed the number of disappeared persons and placed all blame for state violence on the "subversives" who had threatened the safety and honor of the Argentine nation. As throughout the dictatorship, exiles were characterized as terrorists who had "fled to gilded refuge," leaving their companions behind, along with the "bloody legacy" of violence.¹²⁵ The military also attempted to prevent future legal action against themselves by passing the Law of National Pacification (commonly called the Law of Self-Amnesty) in September of 1983.

¹²⁵ *Documento Final de La Junta Militar sobre la guerra contra la subversión y el terrorismo* (Buenos Aires: Impreso en los Talleres Gráficos de la Dirección Nacional del Registro Oficial, 1983).

Within months of his election, newly-elected president Raúl Alfonsín introduced legislation to nullify that law and ordered the formation of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* or CONADEP) to investigate the disappearances. In collaboration with the many human rights organizations that had emerged during the dictatorship, CONADEP compiled 50,000 pages of testimonies, reports, maps of detention centers, and lists of names of the disappeared. The release of this report, titled “*Nunca Más*” (Never Again), formed the basis for the indictment and trials of the military men that followed. Five of the top military men, including Videla and Massera, were sentenced to prison for their part in the abuses committed under their command.

In D.C., the “official” organization of the WCHRA ended with the dictatorship; “The group dissolved almost immediately, I think... it had no reason for existing,” recalls Tomas.¹²⁶ Those who were still in D.C. followed the trials closely and coordinated events where community members discussed the investigations and debated the likelihood that any other members of the military would be prosecuted for their crimes. In late 1983, Tomas, Juan, Brian Thompson, and Richard Claude hosted a panel discussion on “Argentina: The Recent Elections and the Democratic Perspective” at the University of Maryland, where scholars from multiple departments discussed the complicated situation that Argentine exiles faced. For the first time in a decade, Argentines who had fled to exile faced the possibility of returning home.

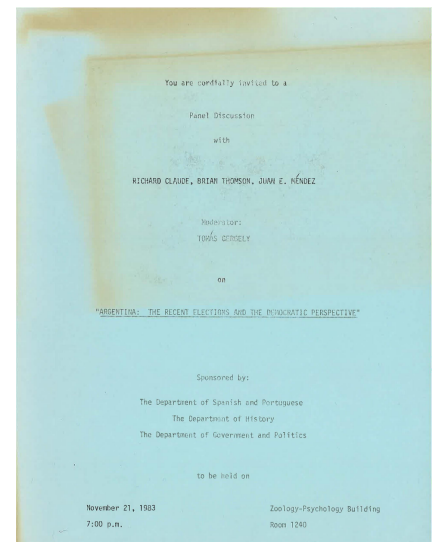


Figure 11: Flyer for the panel at UMD.

¹²⁶ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

The decision did not come easily and depended heavily on how they had experienced exile and integration into the society in which they lived. In places like Sweden, Argentines had struggled to integrate due to the tiny Latin American immigrant community. Most exiles there chose to return home after the dictatorship, leaving behind the language barrier and cultural differences that made their assimilation so challenging. Exiles in Mexico, on the other hand, adapted relatively well in the larger cities and had the support of the Mexican government to aid their resettlement. To this day, there continues to be a large Argentine community in Mexico City; the same is true of New York City and Los Angeles, all metropolitan areas that are highly populated with Latin American immigrants.

The trend extended throughout the United States: “Although many Chileans and Argentineans were suddenly forced to come to the United States, years later, they consciously choose to stay, somehow going from the condition of exiles to that of voluntary migrants.”¹²⁷ Former members of the WCHRA had forged strong ties with one another and with colleagues and friends not only from their own country, but other Latin American communities in D.C. as well. Most had found solid employment working in prestigious international organizations and area universities as respected professionals. Work and family obligations played a large role in their decision to stay; many had small children who identified as Americans and uprooting them to a country they did not know carried its own problems.

Ana and Tomas disagreed on what they should do: both had well-paying jobs and had advanced in their careers, their children were thriving in school, and yet, Ana longed to return home. “I wanted Gaby [my daughter] to go to school in Argentina, to go through the things I went. I remember[ed] my childhood, but childhoods were different at that point,” she

¹²⁷ Calandra, “Exile and Diaspora in an Atypical Context,” 321.

reflected.¹²⁸ The challenges of relocating were too complicated, and too much time had passed since they first arrived as graduate students in the late 1960s. From that point onward, Ana's self-identity shifted to match her new reality: "Until '84, I considered myself exiled... and then, when democracy returned, no longer; I was an immigrant. I went from exile to immigrant because, from that point on, we didn't go back."¹²⁹ Many Argentine and Chilean exiles who stayed ultimately became U.S. citizens, which "serves as a very meaningful factor in the redefinition of their sense of belonging."¹³⁰ Both Argentina and the United States allow dual citizenship, so exiles did not have to formally renounce ties to their homeland – and yet, many found that:

their home countries became gradually and irreversibly distant and foreign, and they had to accept that their dreams and desires for the future of their own countries would never materialise. Even the most minor and everyday aspects of life in Chile and Argentina felt progressively more foreign to them. Day by day, they became less recognisable, less sharable – that is, less their own. Erstwhile the idealised place of return that demanded all their leisure time, the motherland was profoundly transformed. Consequently, new feelings of distance and ways of taking root in the new America ensued.¹³¹

Ana identifies as an "outlier" even after spending the majority of her life in the United States. "I am an American citizen and I don't feel American at all," she stated. WCHRA members found consolation in the friendships they had formed within the group and continued to play a large role in each other's lives, celebrating holidays together and hosting *asados* (Argentine barbecues) with their families.

For some, the opportunities for career advancement in D.C. far outweighed opportunities in Argentina. Eugenia continued to pursue her career in meteorology and remained in the D.C. area to work at NASA, the National Weather Service, and the University of Maryland, where

¹²⁸ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

¹²⁹ Ana Lajmanovich de Gergely. Interview with Susana Skura. *Memoria Abierta*. June 26, 2007.

¹³⁰ Calandra, "Exile and Diaspora in an Atypical Context," 321.

¹³¹ Ibid.

today she is a distinguished professor. Juan's involvement with human rights activism did not stop with the end of the Argentine dictatorship: after graduating from American University with a law degree, he opened the Washington office of the NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) in early 1982. Originally dedicated to monitoring human rights in the Soviet bloc, HRW expanded to include an offshoot called Americas Watch that addressed human rights violations committed in Central American countries wracked by bloody civil wars throughout the 1980s and 90s.¹³² Juan's work in human rights eventually led him to serve as the "United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" from 2010 to 2016, and he continues to teach law at American University. With the challenges that faced their resettlement and new opportunities in the United States, many WCHRA members let go of the idea of returning to Argentina, leaving behind their time as Argentine exiles for a new future as U.S. citizens.

3.2 Post-Trials, Amnesty, and the Reparations Project

In a multi-day conference held at the University of Maryland at the end of 1984, former exiles, politicians, and scholars came together to discuss the rapid succession of events that had occurred in the year since the elections. The conference, called "Repression and Reconstruction of Culture in Argentina," featured panels on culture, literature, technology, and exile. Moderator and Chair of the Spanish department Saúl Sosnowski later wrote that the event was meant to be a "critical comparison of the many facets of cultural production both inside these countries and in exile" that would be a "starting point for collective reflection upon the multiple futures opening

¹³² Méndez and Wentworth, *Taking a Stand*, 98.

up for each country in question.”¹³³ Despite the return of democracy, the future for former exiles and their place within the wider narrative of the dictatorship was far from clear.

As many feared, any sense of resolution that the trials of military leaders brought did not last. Following the initial period of intense focus on the junta’s crimes came a period in which Argentine leaders, including President Alfonsín, attempted to close the door on the past by passing a series of “laws of impunity” that prevented further investigations and prosecutions of crimes related to the dictatorship.¹³⁴ In 1989, Alfonsín’s successor Carlos Menem officially pardoned the military men who had been previously convicted, releasing them from prison and causing outrage among human rights activists. Menem also granted official amnesty to the leaders of guerrilla groups like the Montoneros, many of whom had continued living in exile rather than face trials for existing charges of subversion and terrorism. Rather than calm the sense of upheaval, the pardons reinvigorated public debate in Argentina and widened the societal divide between those who demanded retribution for the disappearances and those who wanted the country to move on. For the first time since 1973, the doors to return to Argentina were opened to all exiles, even those who had participated in violent guerrilla movements.

Throughout the 1990s, a fierce debate raged within the human rights movement over who was considered a “victim” of the dictatorship. The investigations and trials had revealed the wider picture of who was targeted by the regime and sparked a renewed discussion of the place of “exiles” in the larger narrative. Argentines abroad grappled with conflicting emotions over their place in the debates. On the one hand, the focus of their activist work had always been on

¹³³ Saúl Sosnowski and Louise B. Popkin, *Repression, Exile, and Democracy: Uruguayan Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 1.

¹³⁴ These include the Full Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final* - 1986), Law of Due Obedience (*Ley de obediencia debida* - 1987), and the official pardons granted in 1990.

the political prisoners and the disappeared inside Argentina, not on their own experiences as exiles. On the other, their experiences as exiles were profoundly traumatic and isolating. Shaking the reputation of “privilege” was a difficult and painful task, especially for those exiles who had left Argentina voluntarily. Political exile during the dictatorship was “subsumed...in the universe of metaphorical exiles, intellectual journeys, the ‘brain drain’ or the general trend of migration; and... provoked the privatization of the suffering of the exiled and disassociated it from the collective history of repression.”¹³⁵ For over a decade, a large number of former exiles felt compelled to downplay their role as victims of the dictatorship and their participation in the global struggle to oppose it.

By the end of the decade, several campaigns led to shifts in this attitude towards exiles and a growing incorporation of their experiences into the wider narrative of the dictatorship. The authors discussed in Chapter 1 played a large role in this conversation by actively inserting exiles’ stories into scholarly works on the dictatorship and pushing to expand the category of “exile” to include those who had left for a variety of reasons, beyond the legal definition and the “right of option.” While many Argentines followed President Menem’s lead and felt that the time had come to stop focusing on the dictatorship, human rights activists continued to push for public recognition of the disappearances and punishment for those who had perpetrated them. Many exiles who had participated in solidarity campaigns from abroad felt compelled to add their voices to the struggle for justice.

Scholars also began to take a closer look at how the popular narratives surrounding the dictatorship had shaped the social memory both of those who experienced it firsthand and the

¹³⁵ Silvina Jensen, “‘Nadie habrá visto esas imágenes, pero existen’: a propósito de las memorias del exilio en la Argentina actual/“No One Has Seen These Images, But They Exist”: The Memory of Exile in Contemporary Argentina,” *América Latina Hoy* 34 (2010): 110.

younger generations who were born in its aftermath. Both the Final Document published by the junta and the Nunca Más had, in many ways, reinforced a *teoría de los dos demonios* – “theory of the two demons.” The idea that the violence perpetrated by the guerrilla factions was as reprehensible as that committed by the military junta left little room for nuance; the idea that one was either “for” or “against” the military dominated public discourse and created an imagined binary between “victims” and “perpetrators.” Only recently have scholars begun to break down this binary and consider the role of those who lived outside the circles of the military and the opposition movements, like some members of the Argentine middle class.¹³⁶

Although exiles were still largely excluded from the wider conversation, in the early 2000s politicians in Argentina introduced the “Law of Economic Reparation to Exile” (*Ley de Reparación Económica al Exilio*), the first official acknowledgement that former exiles should receive compensation for the persecution they suffered under the junta. The Reparations Project settled on four main points, that:

1. Exiles form part of the Argentine nation;
2. Exile entailed pain and suffering, alienation, loss of identity, and violent interruption of all the activities of daily life;
3. Exile was a planned practice of the National Security Doctrine... and as such is a clear violation of human rights;
4. Exile created the political labor of international denunciation of state terrorism.¹³⁷

Though these reparations laws never passed, they helped to legitimize the place of exiles as one of the many groups who had been subjected to violations of their human rights by the

¹³⁶ For examples, see: Sebastián Carassai, *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982)* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014). and David Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War* (Gainesville, F.L.: University Press of Florida, 2012).

¹³⁷ Jensen, “Nadie habrá visto esas imágenes,” 114.

dictatorship. Representation in the legal sphere opened exiles up to further contributing their experiences to the ongoing efforts to memorialize the disappeared.

3.3 Memory Struggles

In 1999, human rights activists worldwide celebrated the creation of Memoria Abierta, a collaboration of eight of the most prominent human rights organizations in Argentina that “promotes the memory of human rights violations of the recent past, the acts of resistance and the struggle for truth and justice to reflect on the present and strengthen democracy.”¹³⁸ Today, Memoria Abierta forms a key part of the Museo de la Memoria (Memory Museum), sharing grounds with the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA), a former detention and torture center that was converted into a museum in 2004. Memoria Abierta also maintains the archives of those human rights organizations, providing the public with access to the records kept by the activists who continue to speak out about the crimes of the dictatorship.

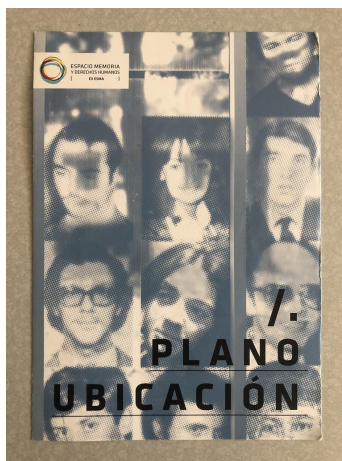


Figure 12: Pamphlet from my visit to the Memory Museum in Buenos Aires.

¹³⁸ Memoria Abierta, “About”: <http://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/sobre-memoria-abierta>.

Memoria Abierta also developed a large-scale oral history project to collect testimonies from “people whose lives were affected in diverse ways by the terrorism of the state.”¹³⁹ Archivists have captured nearly 1,000 oral history interviews since its foundation, including those of former exiles and foreign diplomats who opposed the dictatorship on human rights grounds. Tex Harris, the boisterous U.S. diplomat who collected early reports of disappearances and snuck them to the State Department, recorded his testimony in English, as did Patt Derian and WOLA founder Joe Eldridge. WCHRA members Juan and Ana both contributed their testimonies, traveling to Buenos Aires to record them in 2004 and 2007, respectively.

The memory of what exiles experienced firsthand fades each day with the passage of time. Though nearly four decades have passed, the stigma that followed *los que se fueron* has still not fully faded, particularly for those who chose not to return once the dictatorship ended. They have stayed both entwined with, and separated from, Argentina; forever “not-belongers,” as Tomas jokingly quips. Asking them to share their experiences as they remember them today, 35 years after the end of the dictatorship, is challenging: details are forgotten, others misremembered, and current events weigh heavily on how we view the past.

In *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote that “history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of such narratives.”¹⁴⁰ The long passage of time has given former exiles ample opportunity to reflect on their experiences and craft their own narrative, as they would like it to be told. Juan Mendez is a highly public figure who has been interviewed by countless journalists and historians over the years; his autobiography, *Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human*

¹³⁹ Memoria Abierta, “About Testimonies”: <http://memoriaabierta.org.ar/wp/sobre-testimonios>.

¹⁴⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 25.

Rights, was published in 2011 and is highly acclaimed. Juan spoke to me in sound bites reminiscent of the hundreds of interviews he has given before; personal and informative, but highly curated by years of practice. Several other WCHRA members declined to participate in this project at first, citing a desire to “leave the past in the past” and not revisit the trauma of their years in exile. Marino Franco wrote that “the interview is a conversational narrative only understood by understanding the relationships within the closed framework that it represents.”¹⁴¹ As an outsider and a non-Argentine from a younger generation, they viewed me with skepticism, wary of my motives or political agenda. One expressed exasperation with how “young people these days” approach projects, afraid that I might misinterpret or misrepresent the stories they told. We slowly felt one another out, building a relationship and sharing stories of Buenos Aires; only after gauging my sincerity towards this project did they decide to participate.

One of the long-term consequences of the oversimplified “two demons” narrative of the dictatorship was the “erasure of the political identities of the victims... as a precondition for their social re-legitimization.”¹⁴² Human rights activists contributed to this binary of “victim” and “torturer” by using selective language that emphasized the immorality of the state and downplayed the politics of the detained or disappeared person. Former WCHRA members still struggle to break from the well-rehearsed formula of human rights activism. When we first spoke about this project, Tomas mentioned that he and Ana were not politically active before their time in the WCHRA, only that they had been caught up in the protests at the University of Buenos Aires while students in Argentina. Yet in her *Memoria Abierta* testimony recorded ten years earlier, Ana spoke of how she spent several days in jail after she was arrested in those protests

¹⁴¹ Marina Franco, “Sentidos y subjetividades detrás del discurso: Reflexiones sobre las narrativas del exilio producidas en entrevistas orales,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 64, no. 1 (2007): 40–41.

¹⁴² Jensen, “Nadie habrá visto esas imágenes,” 108.

and discussed her sister's growing interest in the Peronist party. Both of those actions landed Ana and her sisters on the lists of "subversives" sought out by the security forces. When I asked Ana to elaborate in a later interview, she said that when her sister Teresa was kidnapped, the military men who took her demanded that her father tell them the whereabouts of her sisters – "Where are your three daughters?" – they asked.¹⁴³

Whether an intentional omission or a momentary forgetting, Tomas' downplaying of Ana's past activism speaks to several factors of the exile experience. Steve Stern characterizes the memory of trauma as "remembrance as *olvido* (oblivion or forgetting)", noting that "forgetting is filled with memory and meaning."¹⁴⁴ Argentines living in exile often grappled with guilt over those they had left behind; in a 1995 *Washington Post* article, former WCHRA members revealed that each new bit of information on the disappearances "revived feelings of impotence and guilt;" Ana's father confided that he would "never forgive himself" for giving the military men the address of his daughter Teresa.¹⁴⁵ That inner conflict has carried over into a lingering sense that any efforts they contributed to by resisting the dictatorship from abroad are not noteworthy enough to be discussed. Ana Berta's characterization of their efforts as "ant work" takes on a different meaning when considered in this light – as though the individual contributions of exiles are insignificant without the "big name" figures who are remembered for it, like Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy. Yet without the efforts and knowledge of exiled Argentines, the international human rights network would have faced steep barriers due to the geographical divide, the language barrier, and the censorship and destruction of information by

¹⁴³ Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich. Interview with author. October 22, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998*, The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile, Book 1 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 112.

¹⁴⁵ Pamela Constable, "Revisiting the Horrors of Their Past: Survivors Deal With Old Pain as Argentina Comes Clean on 'Dirty War,'" *The Washington Post*, May 22, 1995.

the military junta. Encouraging former exiles to share their experiences adds to our ever-growing understanding of the long-reaching impacts of state-sponsored violence, and the consequences that violence and repression have far beyond national borders. Deep dives into the experiences of exiles who did what they could to oppose the junta from afar demonstrates the resilience and courage that human beings harness in times of trauma, and contributes to the continued construction of social memory of the Argentine dictatorship.

3.4 Social Memory and Archives

The struggles of memory make the existence of the WCHRA collection all the more important. Social memory is not only influenced by legal cases and changes in popular opinion; the existence of physical records and how archives choose to maintain them has a tremendous impact on how people remember the past. Archival collections that do not exist – or live their lives untouched in a residential attic – are voices left unrepresented to the wider public. Archivists and historians must play a greater role in expanding the scope of archival collections by actively engaging with communities who are underrepresented in the archives, seeking their continued input and participation in how their records are maintained. The WCHRA collection serves as a prime example of the value that comes from this user-centered approach to archives: one that encompasses not only their material, but emotional worth.

Michelle Caswell has dedicated much of her career to advocating for the individuals and communities represented in human rights archives. In “Toward a Survivor-centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse,” Caswell argues that “records of human rights abuse rightfully belong to the communities whose abuse they document,” advocating for a reevaluation of how archivists consider policies of ownership and outreach when handling

sensitive records.¹⁴⁶ This approach is a fundamental reason that activists continue to push for the release of state documents about the dictatorship, both in Argentina and abroad. Since 2016, the United States has declassified over 4,500 records related to human rights abuses during the dictatorship.¹⁴⁷ In Argentina, activists continue to push for all existing records pertaining to the disappearances to be made public, “phras[ing] their demands upon the state in archival terms: to obtain documentary access means to obtain truth, and to obtain truth means to obtain justice.”¹⁴⁸

Caswell also advocates for injecting a renewed sense of empathy into archiving underrepresented communities, noting the power struggle embedded within human rights records. For the thousands of disappeared Argentines, any power they had over how their stories are told and catalogued was stripped along with their lives. Their names are memorialized in archives, on websites, and in the memories of their fellow Argentines; used in speeches by politicians and embedded with meaning that they, themselves, did not shape. Within the WCHRA collection there are dozens of reports listing names and photographs of the missing, compiled by activists scattered throughout the world and with whom they had no personal relationship. The people “depicted in these records did not choose to be documented,” Caswell writes; “the least we can do as memory workers is honor their ongoing sense of agency by centering them and their wishes in our present decision-making processes about how such records are treated in the future.”¹⁴⁹ In Argentina, some family members and friends of the disappeared continue to publicly honor their loved ones by publishing *recordatorios* – memorial

¹⁴⁶ Michelle Caswell, “Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (October 1, 2014): 309.

¹⁴⁷ “Department of State Release of Documents on Argentina and the Latin American Region, 1977-1980,” *Department of State*, April 24, 2017, 551.

¹⁴⁸ Weld, *Paper Cadavers*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Caswell, “Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach,” 309.

advertisements – in the newspaper *Página/12*.¹⁵⁰ Since 1988, the newspaper has dedicated pages to these public notices, creating a space for communal remembrance and mourning.



Figure 13: Recordatorio for Ana's sister, Teresa.

Graham Stinnett, curator of human rights collections at the University of Connecticut, writes that “a quintessential task for the activist archivist is providing access points for society into the archives. By conveying the importance of archives to the general public, memory can be recognized as the cornerstone of society, which archivists profess it to be.”¹⁵¹ New technologies have allowed both archivists and human rights organizations to reevaluate how information reaches the public. *Página/12* created an online database that automatically reposts the recordatorios on the anniversary of the disappearances. Memoria Abierta launched an interactive website about the Campo de Mayo, a military base north of Buenos Aires where four detention centers operated during the dictatorship.¹⁵² The site invites viewers to explore the base through an interactive map and to contribute to the project by sharing information about the detention

¹⁵⁰ Memoria Abierta and *Página/12*, “Haciendo memoria: Cómo surgieron y se fueron modificando a lo largo de los años”: <http://recordatorios.com.ar/haciendo-memoria/origen>.

¹⁵¹ Graham Stinnett, “Archival Landscape: Archives and Human Rights,” *Progressive Librarian*, no. 32 (Winter/Spring 2009): 16.

¹⁵² Memoria Abierta, “Reconocer Campo de Mayo: Relatos y trayectorias de la militancia y el terror estatal”: <http://www.memoriaabierta.org.ar/campodemayo>.

centers that operated there. CELS created a digital collection of letters sent by Emilio Mignone and his wife Chela to members of the Catholic church during the search for their daughter. Scrolling through the letters, viewers can “trace the organization of the budding human rights movement, from solidarity to the growing bond between families of the disappeared.”¹⁵³ Projects like these encourage users to engage with historical records from their homes and are key to the future of human rights archives.

Digitization makes these projects possible by facilitating the exchange of historical sources and information among institutions that are separated geographically. In 2005, forty museums from twelve countries across Latin America teamed up to create the “Red de Sitios de Memoria Latinoamericanos y Caribeños” (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Sites of Memory), where they share exhibits, programming ideas, regional news, and resources. Their collaboration unites the histories of dictatorships in each country into a larger narrative of state terror, “using the sites as privileged vehicles for building and strengthening a truly democratic culture and to avoid all forms of authoritarianism in future generations.”¹⁵⁴ Archivists digitize collections in order reach not only the users we already *know* have interest in the materials, but also new audiences who do not yet know of their value or existence. By digitizing their collections, museums and archives open borders for potential researchers who do not have the means to visit individual institutions.

Yet archives that contain collections in multiple languages and from different countries often face challenges in providing access to those materials due to lack of resources for translating and ethically handling sensitive materials. While some portions of the Red de Sitios

¹⁵³ CELS, “Chela y Emilio Mignone: Cartas a la Iglesia”: www.cels.org.ar/especiales.

¹⁵⁴ Red de Sitios de Memoria Latinoamericanos y Caribeños: <http://sitiosdememoria.org/es>.

site are accessible in English, its use is mostly limited to Spanish speakers; even well-supported organizations like Memoria Abierta do not provide online access in other languages. Many Latin American human rights archives in the United States are similarly limited and accessible only in English.¹⁵⁵ This problem goes deeper than any individual institution; many of the tools that support digitization projects and digital exhibits are designed to support English sources.

Archivists often resort to workarounds to incorporate other languages into these tools by adding bilingual tags and metadata, but the larger problem of reaching users who do not speak English still stands. Special collections archivists at Arizona State University attempted to face this challenge by creating dual-language finding aids for six collections in their Chicano/a Research Collection and found that use of their collections by people outside the United States increased significantly.¹⁵⁶ Their success is indicative of the need for archives and museums with bilingual and multicultural collections to build connections with other institutions worldwide and to focus on reaching users beyond national borders.

It was for these reasons that I digitized the WCHRA records and drafted a proposal for an online exhibit that would be accessible to users from both the United States and Argentina, reflective of the transnational community who created them. Because the WCHRA records were not arranged in any particular order when I first received them, digitizing the collection allowed me to draw connections between people, organizations, and campaigns that are easily overlooked in institutions with heavy backlogs. I collected metadata for each record's title, creator or organization, date, and geographic location, and also assigned tags in both Spanish and English

¹⁵⁵ A notable exception to this is Princeton's Digital Archive of Latin American and Caribbean Ephemera, which is searchable in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Dunham and Xaviera Flores, "Breaking the Language Barrier: Describing Chicano Archives with Bilingual Finding Aids," *The American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 499–509.

to make the data searchable in either language. This data can be used in a digital exhibit to track how the human rights network surrounding the Argentine dictatorship was formed and to highlight the global circulation of human rights records. By making use of interactive tools like timelines and maps, this exhibit gives users a visual representation of the paths that the letters, reports, pamphlets, and posters travelled to and from Washington, D.C.¹⁵⁷ The WCHRA collection is small enough to be a manageable candidate for digitization, but its contents are diverse and reflective of the human rights work of Argentine exiles around the world.



Figure 14: Digitizing an oversized poster from the WCHRA collection.

Collaborative digital projects also help archivists build relationships with the creators of human rights records. Establishing mutual trust lies at the heart of the archivist-community relationship, and Caswell's approach heavily influenced how I interacted with the former WCHRA members and their records. I expressed my desire early on to donate the collection to an archival institution, along with the recordings of our interviews and any digital exhibits I

¹⁵⁷ More information on this tool, Neatline, can be found here: <https://neatline.org>.

created in the making of this project. From an archival standpoint, the addition of oral histories to the WCHRA collection means that there are now two subseries within the collection: the original records compiled by Tomas and the oral histories recorded by me. How both were created and organized is meaningful to the researchers who will access them; essentially, my work as a historian and archivist is now entwined within the WCHRA collection itself. It is imperative for future researchers to analyze my own place within their narrative, as well as the role of the former members I have interviewed.

Incorporating oral histories into archives is a growing trend: many Memory archives that focus on human rights have taken steps in this direction, incorporating oral histories and testimonials alongside textual records.¹⁵⁸ Although the WCHRA records are thorough and well kept, without the firsthand accounts of former members they are, at core, an institutional history, distanced from the emotional trauma that drove their creation. The urgency of the WCHRA's work might be ascertained by the quantity of records they compiled, but they are brought to life by the stories and memories of how the organization was formed and the innovative tools through which we reexamine their history.

The future of the WCHRA collection depends entirely on Tomas, the WCHRA's official secretary and the person who held onto the boxes all these years. After visiting the Memoria Abierta archive in Buenos Aires, I suggested to Tomas the possibility of donating the WCHRA records to an Argentine repository. Since most research on the dictatorship is conducted by Spanish speakers, I pondered whether the WCHRA records would have more value there, alongside the records of other prominent human rights organizations like the Madres and the

¹⁵⁸ For examples, see Chile's Museo de la Memoria y Derechos Humanos; Colombia's Museo Casa de la Memoria; Spain's Instituto de la Memoria, la Convivencia, y los Derechos Humanos.

APDH. Tomas' response was kind, but firm – under no circumstances did he want the records kept in Argentina. The passage of time may have eased the pain caused by the dictatorship, but an underlying distrust of the Argentine state is something Tomas cannot shake; a lingering effect of the trauma of exile that time has done little to erase.

3.5 Conclusion

Argentine exiles struggled to find their place in the post-dictatorship period, but the persistence they showed while opposing the regime carried over to the efforts to memorialize those dark years. Today, human rights archives around the world pay homage to the disappeared of Argentina and the dedication of the activists who opposed the dictatorship, both at home and abroad. From institutions like the Museo de la Memoria in Argentina, the Human Rights Archive at Duke University, and Amnesty International's forthcoming digital archive, exiles' stories enrich the narrative of the dictatorship beyond national borders.¹⁵⁹ After spending decades in a Washington, D.C. attic, the WCHRA collection now has the potential to reach researchers from around the world, bringing the efforts and memories of its dedicated members to life.

¹⁵⁹ Lisa Peet, "Amnesty International To Create Human Rights Archive," *The Library Journal*, October 1, 2018, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=181001-Amnesty-International-Archive>.

Conclusion

At the end of the dictatorship, the WCHRA records were packed into boxes and placed in an attic, where they remained untouched in the decades since. Gathering dust, they were surrounded by trophies and family heirlooms; items that mark a lifetime of memories. For former members of the WCHRA, the seven years they spent working together shaped every moment of their – and their children’s – lives: on the backs of papers detailing horrendous human rights violations, Tomas and Ana’s young daughter Gaby practiced writing her name and doodling.

Marina Franco’s words stayed fresh in my mind throughout this project, especially her warning about the habit many historians fall into that tends to elevate the human rights movement and its participants to an almost untouchable status. The human rights movement faced, and continues to face, the same problems that any global movement in the pre-internet era encountered – knowledge gaps, errors in communication, censorship of the press, and internal political divisions, to name just a few. The WCHRA members, too, consistently reminded me that in the end, they were all just “regular” people doing what they could in an unforeseen situation.

Former exiles continue to contribute to political developments between the United States and South America, advocating for the continued release of classified documents related to the dictatorship and a consideration of human rights in crafting current immigration policies. The impact of their activism while living in exile not only contributed to the end of the Argentine dictatorship, but also forever changed how organizations approach issues of human rights by setting precedents for the campaigns that followed. The history of the dictatorship also continues to develop as generations of scholars born after 1983 analyze the last period of state terror from a new lens. Scholars today publish studies on economics, art, music, and feminism, as well as

works on the production of social memory and the continued push to memorialize the disappeared.¹⁶⁰

With the “transnational turn” has come a renewed interest in the impacts and politics of exile, particularly on the reception (and rejection) that Argentine exiles felt when returning home. The experience of exile profoundly changed their lives, reshaping how they view both the countries that accepted them and the one that had expelled them. So, too, did those experiences impact how their stories have been recorded. As Caswell writes, “Archival work fundamentally deals with if and how we remember the past; such work is wholly imbricated with the politics of the present.”¹⁶¹ As the WCHRA project shows, there are still many stories left to be told. It is up to activist-minded archivists to seek out the histories stored in the memories – and the attics – of those who lived them.

¹⁶⁰ For a list of new scholarship on the dictatorship, see the bibliography of Marina Franco, “La última dictadura argentina en el centro de los debates y las tensiones historiográficas recientes,” *Revista Tempo e Argumento* 10, no. 23 (April 20, 2018): 138–66.

¹⁶¹ Caswell, “Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach,” 318.

Appendix I: Oral Interview Questions

1. What brought you to the United States? How did you end up in D.C.?
2. When and how did the news of what was happening in Argentina first reach you?
3. How did the WCHRA form? How did you meet the other members?
4. How did the WCHRA operate? What was your function within the group?
5. Were you politically active before forming the WCHRA?
6. What kind of interactions did the WCHRA have with other activist groups operating in D.C. at the time (like Chileans)? What were they doing that was similar/different?
7. What was the reception to the WCHRA in D.C. in general? Among politicians? To other Argentines? Supporters of the dictatorship?
8. How did the WCHRA approach the various campaigns - Copa Mundial, Nobel Prize, Malvinas? When the dictatorship ended, how did you react?
9. Did you ever plan to return to Argentina after the dictatorship ended? What influenced your decision? Do you visit Argentina now?
10. Are you still in contact with other people you met or worked with in the WCHRA?

Bibliography

Archival Sources

WCHRA collection, Washington, D.C.
Duke University, Rubenstein Library, Human Rights Archive
Memoria Abierta, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Interviews

Tomas Gergely, September 29, 2017
Tomas Gergely and Ana Lajmanovich, October 22, 2018
Ana Berta Chepelinsky, December 7, 2018
Eugenia Kalnay, October 23, 2018
Juan Méndez, November 30, 2018

Congressional Records

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1979.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights and U.S. Policy: Argentina, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Peru, and the Philippines: Reports Submitted to the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1979.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Religious Persecution as a Violation of Human Rights: Hearings and Markup Before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 1982, 737-747 and *Human Rights in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay: Hearings Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983.

Websites Referenced

Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/>
CELS, <https://www.cels.org.ar>
Memoria Abierta, <http://memoriaabierta.org.ar>
Neatline, <https://neatline.org/>
Red de Sitios de Memoria Latinoamericanos y Caribeños: <http://sitiosdememoria.org>
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights
Washington Office on Latin America: <https://www.wola.org>

Works Cited

- Amnesty International. *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Argentina, November 6-15, 1976*. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1977.
- Andersen, Martin Edwin. *Dossier secreto: el mito de la "guerra sucia."* Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000.
- "Argentina to Deport Irish Catholic Priest." *The Washington Post*. December 3, 1976.
- Ayala, Mario. "Los exiliados argentinos en Venezuela: solidaridad, denuncia y construcción de redes regionales de Derechos Humanos (1976-1981)." In *Exilios, militancia y represión: Nuevas fuentes y nuevos abordajes de los destierros de la Argentina de los años setenta*, by Silvina Jensen, María Soledad Lastra Viaña, and Mario Ayala. La Plata, Argentina: EDULP, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2014.
- Baron, Ana, Mario del Carril, and Albino Gómez. *Por qué se fueron: testimonios de argentinos en el exterior*. 1st ed. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1995.
- Brett, Edward T. "The Attempts of Grassroots Religious Groups to Change U.S. Policy Towards Central America: Their Methods, Successes, and Failures." *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 4 (1994): 773-94.
- Calandra, Benedetta. "Exile and Diaspora in an Atypical Context: Chileans and Argentineans in the United States (1973-2005)." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 32, no. 3 (2013): 311-24.
- Canelo, Brenda. "Cuando el exilio fue confinamiento: Argentinos en Suecia." In *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias bajo la dictadura militar*, by Pablo Yankelevich and Silvina Jensen. Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2007.
- Carassai, Sebastián. *The Argentine Silent Majority: Middle Classes, Violence, Political Culture, and Memory (1969-1982)*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Carril, Mario del. *La vida de Emilio Mignone: Justicia, catolicismo y Derechos Humanos*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Planeta, 2011.
- Caswell, Michelle. "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Records Documenting Human Rights Abuse: Lessons from Community Archives." *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (October 1, 2014): 307-22.
- Cmiel, Kenneth. "The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States." *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1, 1999): 1231-50.
- Constable, Pamela. "Revisiting the Horrors of Their Past: Survivors Deal With Old Pain as Argentina Comes Clean on 'Dirty War.'" *The Washington Post*. May 22, 1995.
- "Department of State Release of Documents on Argentina and the Latin American Region, 1977-1980." *Department of State*, April 24, 2017, 551.
- Diehl, Jackson. "Alfonsín Vows A 'State of Law' For Argentina: Argentina Returns to Democracy." *The Washington Post*. December 11, 1983.
- Documento Final de La Junta Militar sobre la guerra contra la subversión y el terrorismo*. Buenos Aires: Impreso en los Talleres Gráficos de la Dirección Nacional del Registro Oficial, 1983.
- Dunham, Elizabeth, and Xaviera Flores. "Breaking the Language Barrier: Describing Chicano Archives with Bilingual Finding Aids." *The American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 499-509.
- Esquivel, Adolfo Pérez. "La memoria debe iluminar el presente." In *Testimonios de la solidaridad internacional*, edited by María Teresa Piñero and Jorge A. Taiana. Buenos

- Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, 2007.
- Feitlowitz, Marguerite. *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Field, Jr., Thomas C. *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014.
- Franco, Marina. *El exilio: argentinos en Francia durante la dictadura*. Historia y cultura. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2008.
- . “La última dictadura argentina en el centro de los debates y las tensiones historiográficas recientes.” *Revista Tempo e Argumento* 10, no. 23 (April 20, 2018): 138–66.
- . “Sentidos y subjetividades detrás del discurso: Reflexiones sobre las narrativas del exilio producidas en entrevistas orales.” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 64, no. 1 (2007): 37–62.
- . “Solidaridad internacional, exilio y dictadura en torno al Mundial de 1978.” In *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias bajo la dictadura militar*, by Pablo Yankelevich and Silvina Jensen. Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2007.
- Franco, Marina, and Carlos Pérez. “Between Urgency and Strategy: Argentine Exiles in Paris, 1976-1983.” *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (2007): 50–67.
- Frontalini, Daniel, and María Cristina Caiati. *El mito de la guerra sucia*. Buenos Aires: Editorial CELS, 1984.
- Galeano, Eduardo H. “El Mundial del ’78.” In *El fútbol a sol y sombra*. Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1995.
- Gorney, Cynthia. “Argentina, A Sense of Coming Apart: Coup Rumors Contribute to Feeling That Argentina Is Coming Apart.” *The Washington Post*. July 5, 1981.
- Green, James N. “Clerics, Exiles, and Academics: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States, 1969–1974.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 1 (2003): 87–117.
- . *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*. Radical Perspectives. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Hollander, David N., and Carol R. Sternhell. “Boston: 100,000 Rally.” *The Harvard Crimson*. October 16, 1969.
- “House Votes to Ban Foreign Aid For Human-Rights Violations.” *New York Times*. 1975.
- Hovey, Graham. “Nixon Saw Cuba and Chile Enclosing Latin America.” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1977, sec. Archives.
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina*. Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1980.
- . “The Right to a Fair Trial and Due Process.” 1976 Annual Report on Argentina, June 7, 1977.
- Jensen, Silvina. *La huida del horror no fue olvido: El exilio político argentino en Cataluña (1976-1983)*. 1st ed. Barcelona: Editorial Bosch-COSOFAM, 1998.
- . “‘Nadie habrá visto esas imágenes, pero existen’: a propósito de las memorias del exilio en la Argentina actual/‘No One Has Seen These Images, But They Exist’: The Memory of Exile in Contemporary Argentina.” *América Latina Hoy* 34 (2010): 103–18.
- Kartheiser, Robert D. “De Facto Government, State of Siege Powers, and Freedom of the Press in Argentina.” *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 18, no. 2 (1986):

- Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Kelly, Patrick William. “‘Magic Words:’ The Advent of Transnational Human Rights Activism in Latin America’s Southern Cone in the Long 1970s.” In *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, by Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Keogh, Dermot. “Text of the Introductory Address on the Occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, on Patrick Rice.” University College, Cork, Ireland, June 6, 2008.
- Knudson, Jerry W. “Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983.” *Peace Research Abstracts* 37, no. 3 (2000).
- Kornbluh, Peter. *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*. New York: New Press, 2003.
- Lewis, Anthony. “ABROAD AT HOME; It Tolls For Thee.” *The New York Times*. May 14, 1981.
- Lvovich, Daniel. “Sospechar, delatar, incriminar: Las denuncias contra el enemigo político en la última dictadura militar argentina.” *Ayer* 107, no. 3 (2017): 73–98.
- Maraniss, David A., and Christopher Dickey. “Swirl of Stops, Sparse Crowds Mark Pontiff’s First Day Here.” *The Washington Post*. October 7, 1979.
- Markarian, Vania. *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Massmann, Ann M. “Documenting 20th Century Chicano/a Grassroots Activism in the Southwest.” *Latino Studies* 4, no. 1–2 (March 2006): 147–53.
- Mathews, Jay. “Many Who Fled Argentina Back Government on Falklands Move.” *The Washington Post*. April 18, 1982.
- McCarthy, Colman. “Mass at St. Matthew’s Drives Argentines From Church.” *The Washington Post*. June 1, 1979.
- Meervenne, Michiel Van. “Buscar refugio en un lugar desconocido: El exilio argentino en Bélgica (1973-1983).” In *Exilios, militancia y represión: Nuevas fuentes y nuevos abordajes de los destierros de la Argentina de los años setenta*, by Silvina Jensen, María Soledad Lastra Viaña, and Mario Ayala. La Plata, Argentina: EDULP, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2014.
- Méndez, Juan E., and Marjory Wentworth. *Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Morero, Sergio. *La Noche de Los Bastones Largos*. Buenos Aires: Nuevohacer, Rupo Editor Latinoamericana, 2002.
- National Security Archive. “The Pentagon and the CIA Sent Mixed Message to the Argentine Military,” March 28, 2003.
- Neuenschwander, John A. *A Guide to Oral History and the Law*. The Oxford Oral History Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Piñero, María Teresa, and Jorge A. Taiana. *Testimonios de la solidaridad internacional*. Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto, 2007.
- Pisarello, María Virginia. “Los presos políticos de la última dictadura y la opción de exilio: El caso de la cárcel de Coronda.” In *Exilios, militancia y represión: Nuevas fuentes y nuevos abordajes de los destierros de la Argentina de los años setenta*, by Silvina Jensen, María

- Soledad Lastra Viaña, and Mario Ayala. La Plata, Argentina: EDULP, Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2014.
- Portelli, Alessandro. *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.
- Pozzi, Pablo. "Denuncia: Una experiencia editorial de inmigrantes y exiliados argentinos en Estados Unidos de América (1976-1983)." In *Represión y destierro: Itinerarios del exilio argentino*, edited by Pablo Yankelevich, 253–74. Buenos Aires: Al Margen, 2004.
- Quadrat, Samantha Viz. "Exiliados argentinos en Brasil: Una situación delicada." In *Exilios: Destinos y experiencias bajo la dictadura militar*, by Pablo Yankelevich and Silvina Jensen. Buenos Aires: Libros del Zorzal, 2007.
- Ramirez, Zachary Steven. "International Human Rights Activism in the United States during the Cold War." Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2013.
- Roniger, Luis, Leonardo Senkman, Saúl Sosnowski, and Mario Sznajder. *Exile, Diaspora, and Return: Changing Cultural Landscapes in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Sabsay, Daniel Alberto, and José Miguel Onaindia. *La Constitución de los argentinos: análisis y comentario de su texto luego de la reforma de 1994*. 7th ed. Buenos Aires: Errepar, 2009.
- Schmidli, William Michael. *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy Toward Argentina*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2017.
- Sheinin, David. *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War*. Gainesville, F.L.: University Press of Florida, 2012.
- Sosnowski, Saúl, and Louise B. Popkin. *Repression, Exile, and Democracy: Uruguayan Culture*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Spinelli, Hugo. "Historia reciente: XII Congreso Internacional Del Cáncer, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1978." *Salud Colectiva* 10, no. 1 (April 4, 2014): 67.
- Stern, Steve J. *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988*. The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile, Book 2. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.
- . *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London, 1998*. The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile, Book 1. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Stinnett, Graham. "Archival Landscape: Archives and Human Rights." *Progressive Librarian*, no. 32 (Winter/Spring 2009): 10–21.
- Sznajder, Mario, and Luis Roniger. "From Argentina to Israel: Escape, Evacuation and Exile." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 351–77.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Weld, Kirsten. *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Worboys, Katherine. "Letting in the Light: The Emergence of an Information-based Civil Society in Post-Dictatorship Argentina, 1984-2004." *History of Education Review* 35, no. 1 (2006): 58–71.
- Yofre, Juan Bautista. *1982: Los documentos secretos de la guerra de Malvinas-Falklands y el derrumbe del Proceso*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2011.