

Delving into the Ruins: The AMIA Bombing, the Struggle for Justice, and
the Negotiation of Jewish Belonging in Argentina

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ABSTRACT

Michelle Amy Cohen: *Delving into the Ruins: The AMIA Bombing, the Struggle for Justice, and the Negotiation of Jewish Belonging in Argentina*
(Under the direction of Marisol de la Cadena, Advisor, and Dorothy Holland, Chair)

This work is an anthropological study of the political and social effects of the 1994 bombing of an important local institution in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This institution, known as the AMIA, was and continues to be a center for Jewish life in Argentina, housing a burial society, archives, and the offices of the DAIA, (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas), along with many other offices and programs. Eighty-five individuals were killed in the attack, and hundreds were injured. Fifteen years later suspected perpetrators of the bombing have yet to be tried in Argentine courts. The attack, in addition to terrorizing the Jewish Argentine community and residents of Buenos Aires, raised important questions about the functioning of Argentina's democracy, human rights, and the belonging of Jewish Argentine citizens. Immediately after the bombing, state officials, commentators, and everyday citizens contributed to a discourse in which the Jewish victims were separated from Argentine or "innocent" victims, despite the fact that the majority of those killed, Jewish and non-Jewish, were Argentine citizens. Concordantly, the bombing was treated by certain state actors as a narrowly defined "Jewish problem," rather than an attack on the nation-state. This dissertation shows historically and ethnographically how Jewish Argentine citizens and the bombing itself could be viewed in such terms, and what this reveals about politics and difference in Argentina.

I illustrate how many family members of the victims, along with other social actors, have defied the view that the AMIA bombing isn't a national concern, and the idea that its intended targets—Jews—are ambiguously Argentine. I show how the social movement

Memoria Activa, in particular, has worked to place the bombing squarely within the confines of the nation, arguing that in doing so they are challenging and reshaping dominant notions of Jewishness and politics in the process. Ultimately, I demonstrate that for Memoria Activa and other social actors, the bombing is less a “Jewish issue” than a highlighting of a politics of impunity and forgetting that many see as endemic to state and local politics.

Dedicated to those who lost their lives in the bombing of the AMIA, and to those who continue the struggle for justice.

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Prologue: A City

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightening rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.

We are here. Together. In Buenos Aires, a city that once mentioned can bring a nostalgic gaze to a person's eyes—*Tango! Beef! Wine! Gauchos! The Paris of South America!* Or it can elicit a shudder and a look of disappointment and sadness. Most often—if talking to someone from this place—the reaction is likely to be a combination of both, and the city will not disappoint in its seductions and terrors. Situated along a wide, dun colored estuary known as the *Río de la Plata*, Buenos Aires spreads out into the Pampas, gesturing toward the geographical center of the nation, surging to define its figurative heart.

The city will tempt you. It will lure you with the grainy, sadness-tinged voice of tango singer Carlos Gardel, easing out into the air from buildings as dusk approaches, the streets and cafes filled with smoking and talking *porteños*. All night long tango sessions—*milongas*—offer the chance of a hidden life behind seemingly non-descript stone walls. The city will entice you with its numerous *parrillas*, the smell of charring meat lending itself to a craving. It will offer you luxury: the wide boulevards and buildings Parisian and ornate, with glittering shops filled with soft leather goods and expensive clothing from the country's top designers. You may amble by the colossal and lovely *Teatro Colon*, filled to standing, as Daniel Barenboim plays Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. Or you may choose to stroll through one of its lovely parks, and perhaps take in some art and a bite at the recently built *Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires*, or MALBA, a modern structure seemingly

built out of light itself. But the city will also present to you, if you care to see, shantytowns, or *villas*, sitting abreast to some of the wealthiest areas of the city. Toward dusk there will be small armies of children and adults collecting recyclable goods from the garbage. Turning the corner of a busy intersection you may find an archeological site, a place where people were secretly held and tortured during the “Dirty War.” Here, silhouettes will be painted into the concrete and signs will proclaim *Nunca Más* (Never Again!) and *Basta a la Impunidad* (Enough impunity)! Heading into one of the many enormous plazas, you could find yourself in the middle of a protest, signs flickering in the wind, or simply surrounded by old men on benches feeding flocks of sooty pigeons. Trying to cross the street you find yourself facing men, women and children who have set up a roadblock with tires, *piqueteros* who frequently have come from the provinces to the center of Buenos Aires to use their bodies to reorient the city, its traffic, its priorities, and demand to be heard. Like many other struggles that dot the city landscape, they have come to stake a claim, to create something on their own terms—whether it be about food, job security, justice, or some other right they see being violated or not recognized. You might turn another corner and find a non-descript building with concrete barricades in front and security guards, a mezuzah sitting quietly on the doorframe. The city does not reveal all at first glance.

Still, here we are! Please, come. Sit down. Even at this workday hour, late morning, the corner café is filled with chatter and clinking cups. I have brought you to a busy cafe where the streets Talcahuano and Tucumán meet. From here we have a good view of the grey stone of the Justice building and the open space of the Plaza. Lawyers, judges and others who work in the legal profession intently discuss their business and lives.

The waiter comes over, somber and professional, to take our orders. What would you like? *Café con leche*? I order a *lágrima*, a tiny cup of steamed milk with a “teardrop” of espresso darkening its center. Our waiter returns shortly with a tray filled with our hot drinks and small glasses of sparkling water. Three delicate cookies sit on a plate that land

between us. With our steaming cups beside us, you look at me. I look back, look away, hesitate. I need to begin.

I am unsure as to how to shorten the gulf that must be breached in order to share these stories. I'll tell you what I've learned, but much still remains to be captured as knowledge. There is the issue of feeling and of order and sense. This may take a while. You turn away, and we both become aware of some movement outside.

A flash of something by the window. You are distracted. I gaze over to where you are looking. Off in the Plaza Lavalle, in front of the Palm tree, people are gathering. Someone begins to speak in a microphone, although from here it is impossible to hear what is being said. Suddenly an uncanny sound lifts into the air, the sound of a horn being blown, a sound of convocation, or of warning. No, perhaps it is the sound of grief. A white banner with black letters flaps about. People walk by this group, some stop and listen for a minute, most don't pause. Gently I bring you back to my attention. Listen, I say, these people are here every Monday...

You turn back to me and I start talking. We finish our coffees. I've only begun to speak. But still, there is the distraction outside, people shouting, something's happening. Finally I turn to you and say, "Alright. Let's go. Let's go out and meet them." And so we gather our things and weave our way through the smoky labyrinth of tables to the door and step out. We head towards the crowd gathered in front of the Judicial palace.

I. Introduction: The Politics of Belonging, The Political Life of Bombs

Once

The bus ride from the Palermo neighborhood of Buenos Aires to the area known as *Once*, only takes about 15 minutes. Sitting on the relatively quiet early-evening bus, I gaze out of the smudged window and watch, drowsily, the activity of the streets. As we get closer to *Once*—a busy, merchant and vendor filled neighborhood that earlier in the 20th century was predominately populated with Jewish immigrants—the streets become more crowded and slightly more unkempt. Diesel fumes billowing out of the cantankerous vehicle, we speed by kosher markets and bakeries, hardware stores, synagogues and apartment buildings. A group of Orthodox Jewish men in black suits with *paisim* (side locks) speak quietly but urgently as they walk briskly down the street. An old man with visible stubble on his cheek slowly walks his equally arthritic dog. As the light fades to a plum-hued glow, fruit sellers prepare their stalls for the last sales of the day and begin to clean up. Groups of *carteneros*—organized residents that sift through garbage to collect all that is potentially recyclable—work silently and expertly, dropping cardboard and paper into their large oil-cloth bags.

I have taken this route many times, the sights part of my weekly routine, and yet something indefinable always shifts inside me when I get closer to my destination, Pasteur street, named, I assume, after the famous French physician. The feeling that rises through me in this part of the city is similar to what happens when I cross the infamous Plaza de Mayo—over its hundreds of years, a place of so much repression, violence, protest, and

solidarity, promise. Or when I gaze over to the neatly manicured bucolic grounds of the *Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada* (widely known as *ESMA*—a navy mechanics training school), where so many were tortured and ultimately disappeared during the years of the last military dictatorship. These sites, *Pasteur Street*, *Plaza de Mayo*, *ESMA*, are charged with contradiction, their meanings discursive battle scenes punctuated with blood.

As we get nearer to the intersection of Pasteur and Viamonte, I signal the driver to stop. Jumping from the bus, my feet tap the pitted city sidewalk, and as I approach my destination, the memory of the famous French man is eclipsed by the destruction that happened on this street (then) 10 years previous. Indeed, the street Pasteur now carries two signs, one that simply says “Pasteur” and another, placed on top of it, which states: “In memory of the victims of the AMIA bombing, July 18, 1994.”

On the morning of the bombing, at 9:53 AM, the street is rumbling with activity. The nearby café is bustling with wait staff serving *cortados* in small white espresso cups and dry, toasted triangles of white bread. There is already a line for the job center at the AMIA, and many are at their desks in the various floors of the building. People walk outside the institution, casually, just going from one place to another. Sometime before or at 9:53 a white Renault van pulls up in front of the building and explodes, sending many tons of explosives into the black marble façade. Several moments later, the front half of the building lay in a crumpled heap. *The appalling informal nature of risk.*

I walk towards the AMIA, re-built in 1999, nothing like a ruin and yet evocative of the tragedy: the new building itself a place and act of commemoration. The new edifice is much grander than the previous one. Constructed with the financial help of the Argentine government, it sits away from the street, protected by cement block sentinels and security that rivals a post 9-11 airport security check. Since the bombing of the AMIA, nearly all buildings affiliated with Jewish life, from synagogues to social clubs, museums, and political

and international organizations, bear the marks of security and surveillance.¹ Identification is checked, questions are asked and bags are searched before walking through a metal detector. The cement barriers and uncompromising security guards function literally and symbolically as a border, delineating “Jewish” spaces from “non-Jewish” ones.

Lest the shiny new building completely belie its bloody past, the front of the building is covered with a black board that has the spray-painted names of the 85 dead. Andrea, Alberto, Silvia, Kuky, Cynthia, Erwin... The presentation is informal but deliberate, like the writing of children marking their names in soft cement. Little tree monuments with plaques to the dead line the street. People have used the small, enclosed squares of these memorials as refuge for their garbage, making small sanctuaries of paper and soda cans—more out of indifference than maliciousness, I would guess.

The AMIA Bombing, Jewish Belonging, and Struggles for Justice

On an otherwise unremarkable winter morning in July of 1994, powerful explosives tore through the Jewish Argentine building known as the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina), leaving 85 dead and hundreds wounded. It was the second of two bombings targeting Jews in Buenos Aires, the first being an attack two years earlier on the Israeli embassy. Unlike the Israeli embassy, the AMIA building and the organizations it held, from the social outreach programs of the AMIA to the political negotiations of the DAIA (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas), were less ambiguously Argentine institutions, although founded to meet the needs of a small minority population. Many describe the AMIA building and the institutions it housed as the political and social center of Jewish-Argentine life, and its destruction was a powerful physical and symbolic message to the community. It resurrected difficult memories that many Jews have embodied and

¹In Buenos Aires, the only Jewish affiliated building to my knowledge that didn't have any cement barriers was the *Fundación Pardés* synagogue. Officiated by the progressive rabbi Baruj Plavnick, I asked him why there were no security barriers out front. He responded that he didn't want to turn the synagogue into a kind of marked ghetto, and mentioned that he would put barriers in front when all the churches did as well.

transmitted through the generations, surfacing feelings of fear and vulnerability and questioning the possibility of calling Argentina home. It also collided with recent memories of the violence that accompanied the last military dictatorship, and raised serious questions about Argentina's still nascent democracy.

As many were busy with the logistics of sorting through the physical remains of the bombing—gathering stone and sinew, rescuing and healing the survivors, and collecting evidence—Argentines and *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) in particular, struggled to make sense of the destruction. In reference to the bombing two years earlier, newspapers and magazines ran with the headline *Again!* The recurrence of such a shocking violent event in the absence of war or the intense internal strife that proceeded and endured during the last military dictatorship, seemed almost unbelievable: a sinister illusion. But of course, it wasn't an illusion.

Almost immediately, the attack was made intelligible as an act of international terrorism, perpetrated by terrorist cells based in or flowing through the tri-border region (an area where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay share a border), with operational directives and financial backing coming from the Middle East, probably Syria and Iran.² As time passed, however, for many of the family members of the victims, or *familiares*, the bombing and its aftermath, while understood as an event with transnational connections, became thoroughly imprinted with historically specific understandings of justice, democracy, corruption, and in particular, *impunidad* (impunity). The bombing has also served as a kind of test of the limits of belonging, and an intensification of the cultural politics of citizenship, explicitly in this case concerning Jewish-Argentines.

In many circles, the AMIA bombing largely ceased to be simply about “Jews,” or Mid-East politics, or terrorism. It was about Argentina: the very functioning of the state, the

²The tri-border area is often described in the media as “lawless” with borders relatively fluid, facilitating the illegal movement of bodies and goods.

nature of its democracy, the contradictions of its national imaginaries, the presence and legitimacy of its Jewish citizens. At the time of this writing (spring 2009), the Argentine state and its judicial system has failed to bring any of the suspected perpetrators or accessories to either bombing to justice.

The attack on the AMIA forms a network through which various people, objects and ideas have flowed into and radiated out—akin, perhaps, to a neuron with its arbor of dendrites. My particular focus within this network concerns the following actors: Jewish-Argentine citizens and institutions, the Argentine state, and the social movements and organizations that have mobilized around the AMIA bombing, in particular, Memoria Activa. In an effort to capture some of the generalized representations or commonly referenced understandings of the bombing, “the state,” and “Jews,” I also track Argentine media sources, and some state-authored texts.

The AMIA bombing ruptured bodies, lives, buildings, and streets, but it also disrupted and opened up certain discursive fields about the “nation,” “the state,” “citizenship,” and “Jewishness.” As I expand upon in the chapters that follow, the victims of the bombing were marked by semantic instability—to some the victims were Argentines who were Jewish, others positioned the victims as “Jews,” shorn from their nationality (or given a surrogate nationality through an assumed primary affiliation with Israel, and the assumption that Israel was “responsible” for Jews worldwide). Sometimes those caught in the bombing were separated into “innocent victims” and “Jewish victims,” prompting many to wonder if Jewish-Argentines were themselves to blame for the attack. This kind of positioning and claiming of the victims occurred in the media and by the state, among Jewish and non-Jewish-Argentines. It seems that despite the many generations of Jews that have made their lives in Argentina, Jewish citizenship and belonging was less certain than Argentines of Spanish

or Italian descent.³ The crisis of the AMIA bombing inflamed and made overtly visible this ambiguity. This ambiguity, however, does not mean that Jews essentially don't "belong" in Argentina, but that this belonging is repeatedly disrupted and questioned.

This work engages the following questions: How is it that Jewishness in Argentina, and by extension, Jewish citizenship and belonging, came to be a site of ambiguity, even suspicion? How has the AMIA bombing, and the events and mobilizations following it, created a public sphere through which tensions about the Argentine state and citizen-subject, as well as Jewishness, are actively negotiated? How has the grassroots social movement Memoria Activa enacted a kind of counter-Jewish subject that challenges dominant constructions of Jewishness in ways that create new possibilities for the political and social in Argentina?

In what follows is a discussion of the construction of the "field" of this work: the actors, situations, and journey from proposal to project; the theoretical frameworks that have helped me to amplify and understand some of the issues most constitutive of this field; and a brief introduction to the chapters.

The Making of the "Field"

Exploring the possibilities and limitations of the idea of "the field" thus carries with it the opportunity—or depending on one's point of view, the risk—of opening to question the meaning of our own professional and intellectual identities as anthropologists. —Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations* (1997)

Monday, January 5, 2004. Plaza Lavalle, Buenos Aires. 9:45 AM.⁴ It's a warm, humid summer's day with a subtle rainfall that coats us, the pedestrians, with a refreshing

³I am not arguing for Jewish exceptionalism here. Argentines, and more broadly, Latin Americans, of Muslim, Middle Eastern or Asian descent struggle with many of the same ambiguities and hierarchies of citizenship as Jews. Furthermore, Argentines of Spanish and Italian descent may belong with less certainty based on their sexual preference, class, etc. See below.

mist. I am nervous and apprehensive, as this morning will be my first real introduction to Memoria Activa. But I need to do this, so despite the rain and anxiety I walk on. I approach the western side of the plaza where Memoria Activa gathers, directly across from the immense presence of the Tribunales building. Despite its size and grandeur—meant to inspire confidence in the workings of justice, I suppose—its relation to “justice” was disputed: stamped on the walls of the judicial palace and on the sidewalks was the word “impunidad.” Impunity. Even in my short time in Buenos Aires, this word has already become familiar to me.

Apparently I am the first to arrive at the Plaza—there’s nobody else here. Doubt begins to work its way through my body—is this even the right place? *What am I doing here, standing alone in the rain?* I don’t feel like I’m doing fieldwork. I *feel* like a lost tourist. Finally an old man with white hair and an umbrella slowly walks towards the area. He stops and seems to wait. Is he here for the *acto*? Feeling slightly ridiculous, I walk over to the man and ask him if we are in Plaza Lavalle. I’m sure it is the correct plaza, but this question seems an easy way to begin a conversation. He confirms that we are indeed standing in the Plaza Lavalle, and I proceed to ask him if he’s part of Memoria Activa. He is. This man is animated and friendly, and with him I begin to relax. As other people begin to trickle into the vicinity, we talk about what I am doing here, at the plaza. I struggle to explain this. Suddenly the plan I prepared in my research proposal seems flat, empty, mere shadows. To reduce my presence to research feels disrespectful somehow, and inaccurate. Yet, in my agitation it is the only thing that comes to mind. I give a rather vague explanation that I am an anthropologist researching the AMIA bombing and Memoria Activa’s struggle for justice. He seems satisfied with this accurate, but in my mind, flat representation. Caressed

⁴For ten years, beginning the Monday a week after the bombing in 1994 to the end of December in 2004, Memoria Activa engaged in a weekly protest in front of the Supreme Court building in the Plaza Lavalle. The *acto* began at 9:53, the time at which the AMIA building was blown up by a car bomb. A more detailed history of Memoria Activa is provided in Chapter four.

by the light drizzle, this older gentleman takes me around and introduces me to everyone there. Most are not surprised to see a relatively young, North American female researcher in their midst, as Memoria Activa has become internationally known and the AMIA bombing already the subject of other dissertations and papers.⁵ Thus I don't have to say much for people to accept my presence and have a general understanding of my purpose. As we've talked a white banner with the words, "Todos Somos Memoria Activa" (We are all Memoria Activa) is strung up.

I notice that almost all the people here are past middle age, probably over 60. I suppose that many of the younger people are busy with school, work, or raising children, and coming to the plaza every Monday is not practical endeavor. Before the actual event begins, I am given a newspaper called "Mundo Israelita" (Jewish World) and a couple of photocopied sheets of paper with information about the "CTA"—a kind of worker's union. People stand around in small groups, talking, with not much interaction between them.

In front of a large palm tree are two large cameras and a microphone. At 9:53, the time of the bombing, a man with shoulder-length curly hair begins to speak, and he mentions the number of days since the bombings of the AMIA and the Israeli Embassy, as well as other victims of impunity. Although for the most part people have greeted me with warmth and interest, I feel quite out of place, and I stand a little apart. I don't take out a notebook or recorder—to document would feel like I was taking something that I had no legitimate claim to. A *shofar* (ceremonial ram's horn) is blown, a rather incongruous sound in a bustling city street. I am unused to hearing the *shofar* blown in the street, as I've

⁵Other researchers before me include two other North American female scholars, Annette Prekker Levine, a modern languages scholar specializing in Argentine literature, and Natasha Zaretsky, a fellow anthropologist. Physically joining me in the field later in 2004 was Karen Faulk, another anthropologist. See Annette Prekker (2000) "Memoria y Justicia: Separate Places for Separate Spaces," *Modernity 2*, www.eiu.edu/~modernity/prekker.html and Natasha Zaretsky (2008) "Singing for Social Change: Nostalgic Memory and the Struggle for Belonging in a Buenos Aires Yiddish Chorus" in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. In addition, Susana Wappenstein, a sociologist, also wrote about Memoria Activa in her 2001 paper, Mnemonic Struggles: Nation, Human Rights, and Remembrance in Argentina, presented at the XXII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington D.C..

previously only experienced its arresting sounds as an indoor and rather communally specific sound affiliated with certain times in the Jewish year. To hear the sound of the *shofar* blown on the streets of Buenos Aires is a significant marker of specificity and difference.

As I learned while doing preliminary research, Memoria Activa invites speakers from a broad section of society to speak every Monday. Today, a journalist is welcomed to the microphone, and she offers her withering analysis of the investigation into the AMIA attacks thus far. The *acto* concludes with three calls for justice, one each for the victims of the two bombings, and one for the disappeared of the last military dictatorship. Facing Tribunales, everyone raises their arms in solidarity and shouts “*justicia*” (justice).⁶ Feeling awkward, I do not join this public, communal reclamation. In what ways are these demands for justice my own? Was I here in solidarity with Memoria Activa, or as an empathetic listener—and how might this complicate my position as a researcher? The claims of these people do not yet inhabit me. Do I want them to?

There’s no time to ponder my ambivalent feelings. Before stepping away from the microphone the curly-haired man recites a line from Deuteronomy, “*justicia, justicia, Perseguiras*” (justice, justice you shall seek), and the group begins to break up. Two different members of Memoria Activa offer to take me to coffee, and I am flustered at what to do. But these men, having attended the *actos* together for many years are already engaged in their own social negotiations, and I barely say a word before the decision is made. It seems that we will not all have coffee together, and as we walk off, I mention to the man remaining that I will go with him next week.

⁶As I was to find out, these calls for justice vary somewhat from week to week. They always include the victims of the AMIA and Israeli Embassy bombings and the disappeared of the “dirty war.” Sometimes calls for justice are added depending on what is currently happening or being commemorated in Argentina, such as kidnappings, or the assassination of the journalist José Luis Cabezas in 1997.

And thus begins a year with Memoria Activa, and a tradition of two coffee dates, one after another, every Monday. These regular coffee meetings helped to transform me from an “anthropologist” studying “something” to a friend and legitimate participant in this particular social field. This process took many hours and days, incrementally and in a non-linear fashion, until finally I felt like Memoria Activa and Buenos Aires had a claim on me. The “field” ceased to exist in a particular location, out there, but acquired substance and relevance through relationships, through us. I was caught.

I arrived in Buenos Aires late in the year 2003 suited and armed with an array of maps and technologies: my dissertation proposal, books on social theory, recording equipment, and the memory of countless anxious conversations with professors and other students. Years of thinking and mulling over—writing—had gone into crafting a project that was now ensconced safely and neatly on paper. But the proposal turned out to be less than a rudimentary map, not much more than points on a page: something is supposed to be here, but there are no coordinates or street names, and one has little idea where or how to find it. Abstracted from the social messiness of life, the project on paper only made sense in the quiet and solitariness of my own home. Outside, walking the streets of Buenos Aires, the pages fluttered and flew away. I needed and continue to need others as guides and teachers, and this has necessarily redefined what I previously understood about the “field.”

I consider “fieldwork” to be a process by which the original “project” becomes displaced, re-oriented and impinged upon by the people, events, feelings and knowledges engaged in the “field.” This marks the field as active, rather than a passive construction of my (hopefully well-informed) imagination. It means that actors in the field become partners in the creation of the meanings, categories, and knowledges that are presented in this writing. Their knowledge becomes *counsel*, rather than mere information (Simon 2005). The field, then, has been created through my dialogues, engagements and experiences with friends, acquaintances, and other scholars situated in Buenos Aires, but also comes into

being through classrooms in North Carolina, discussions with friends and faculty, engagements with books and ideas. The field is in many senses intensely specific, yet its creation is also dialogic and complex, yielding potentially new understandings and categories for thought.

Acknowledging this co-production of the field does not mean that “I” have disappeared or that everything I say is “given” to me by my field partners. It means that this text represents an engagement at multiple levels, in places as diverse as Buenos Aires, Chapel Hill, Chicago, classrooms, streets, plazas, homes. The field has many authors. I no more “own” this field than those others (people and objects) that work to constitute it, although I take full responsibility for this particular telling. This ethnography is a particular iteration, and is not meant to stand in for the field itself.

This field, then, is not just a place out there, a point on a map to journey to, but it exists through people, through relationships, both animate and inanimate, and thus is not located in one place, separate from the relations that mark it. Because these relations exist, in part, through me and inhabit this work, I want to complicate the bifurcation between “home” and “field,” and consequently between “observer” and “observed.” Gupta and Ferguson (1997:12-15) have explored and questioned these distinctions that have largely depended upon on a spatial and temporal separation with certain epistemological consequences. While it is true that I no longer physically dwell in the particular location engaged in this writing, my notions and experience of “home” and “field” have been significantly transformed through the process of fieldwork. Both “home” and “field” and “field notes” and “ethnography” have become more muddled and intertwined than the (now perhaps significantly destabilized) sanitized ideal might suggest.

In what follows I provide some orientation notes on the becoming of this field, particularly through people and situations in Argentina; the next section will look at some of the theoretical signposts.

Family Members of the Victims, and the “Jewish Community”

Although I have opened up the concept of the “field” above, I do not mean to diminish the “location” of this work, nor the lives of the people who have had a critical role in shaping it. The principle substance of this dissertation took place at protests and talks, homes and plazas, *confiterías* and institutions, through formal interviews and less formal dialogues. As I became a part of the field itself, I spent many hours discussing the AMIA bombing, impunity and justice, the state, Jewish life in Argentina and democracy with friends and acquaintances. People shared thoughts about how Argentina might become a better place, socially, economically, and politically, and how a “culture of impunity” affects everyday life. We explored what it meant to be Jewish and Argentine and how these identifications often exist uneasily, and yet inflect and intertwine with each other to the point where they can’t be cleanly separated. Family members of the victims patiently and gracefully talked about the person or people they lost in the bombing. These serious conversations were coupled with laughter about the latest comedy in the cinema, the merits of a particular play, the everyday concerns of family and friendship.

Questions were also asked of me. Where did I grow up? Why didn’t I have kids? Am I going to attend the *acto* tomorrow night? What do I think about what so-and-so said? Do I like Buenos Aires? Could I please explain how the people of the United States could elect George. W. Bush again? (I tried my best with this one, but I too was at a bit of a loss as to how this could have happened.)

Who were these people I spent my days with? Many of them were members of Memoria Activa. Most of them identified as culturally Jewish to varying degrees (few were religious). Some were *familiares* (family members) of the victims, who were part of Memoria Activa or the two other *familiares* groups, *Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas*, and APEMIA (Agrupación por el Esclarecimiento de la Masacre Impune de la AMIA, Association for the Unpunished Massacre of the AMIA Bombing). Others were persons very active from a

position of Jewishness in Argentine human rights movements such as Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo—Linea Fundadora, or the journalist Herman Schiller who founded the group *Movimiento Judío por Derechos Humanos* (Jewish Movement for Human Rights) along with the North American rabbi, Marshall Meyer, during the last military dictatorship.⁷ In sum, most of my time was spent directly with those most affected by the attack on the AMIA and involved in the struggle for justice for this event and other violations of human rights. The majority of those I worked with either explicitly identified as Jews, or became “caught” as Jews through the AMIA attack—those who considered their Jewishness primarily an historical fact effectively became a Jewish subject by virtue of the bombing. However, while it can be said that I engaged with the “Argentine Jewish Community,” this needs to be complicated in light of the divisions that formally emerged after the AMIA was attacked.

Jewish Argentines generally refer to themselves and fellow Jews as a “community,” or *colectividad*. This community is conceived as nationally located, but in a diasporic manner, also transgresses national borders. Depending on context, the “community” can mean someone who claims to be Jewish, wherever he or she lives. Thus, an important aspect of my access into Jewish institutions concerned not only who I knew, but who I was. Inevitably, when approaching a security guard in front of the AMIA and handing over my U.S. passport, I would be asked, “*sos de la colectividad?*” –basically, are you Jewish? I don’t mean to imply that non-Jews wouldn’t gain access—my friend and fellow anthropologist Karen went in and out of the AMIA probably as much as I did—but I want to

⁷I emphasize their involvement as Jews because these individuals separated themselves out in this way. For many of the Jewish madres, this separate identification, even as they fought for human rights for the whole society, articulated with their memories, experiences, and identifications with times of Jewish persecution. For some, there were painful overlapping memories between the Holocaust and the “dirty war” as some survived Nazi death camps (or had most of their family killed in them), and sought a new beginning in Argentina, only to find their daughters and sons stripped of their rights as citizens and subject to state terror. Moreover, numerous testimonies and the CONADEP investigation revealed that while Jews weren’t particularly singled out as Jews, they received special and often, harsher treatment, than non-Jews. See, in particular, Timerman (2002) *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*; *Nunca Más: Informe de la comisión nacional sobre la desaparición de personas* (1985); Edy Kaufman and Beatriz Cymberkopf, (1989) “La dimensión judía en al represión durante el gobierno militar en la Argentina (1976-1983).

point out that to some extent, the notion of “Jewish community” as it was often employed in Buenos Aires transcends a specific location.

While many Jewish-Argentines talk casually and loosely about who belongs to the *colectividad*, the word can have a more specific connotation of Jewishness, particularly when employed by formal representatives of the Jewish community. Often referred to as the “leaders” of the community, I am primarily referring to the titular heads of the two main Jewish Argentine organizations, the AMIA and DAIA. These institutions have come to officially represent “Jewishness” and “Jewish interests” to the Argentine state, society, and Jewish organizations in other countries. The presidents of these organizations have been the primary source of opinion, comment, or statement from the Jewish Argentine community to the media, although this is no longer the case regarding the AMIA bombing. While others certainly exercise some power within the *colectividad*, it is the AMIA and DAIA that have historically had the authority to speak for the community and thus mark its borders.⁸ However, as I will demonstrate in chapters four and five, the power of the AMIA and DAIA to claim to speak for Jewish-Argentines and define Jewishness has been significantly challenged by other community actors, as was seen during and after the “dirty war” and now with the AMIA bombing and investigation.

In recent years it is primarily the politicization of some of the family members of the victims and their supporters that have challenged the power of the Jewish-Argentine institutions. Memoria Activa has been one of the most vocal and organized critics of the leaders of the AMIA and DAIA. The DAIA, in particular, in its role as mediator between state and Jewish community, has gradually gained the image of being more aligned with (and part

⁸I have not found significant research that has examined how over time these institutions came to wield so much power in the Jewish community, particularly the DAIA. The DAIA was organized in the 1930s as a political organization that monitored anti-Semitism and discrimination in general, becoming a kind of lobbyist of the state. Thus the DAIA from its inception was a conduit between the Jewish-Argentine community and the government in power. While I did interviews regarding the history of the DAIA and people’s conceptions of it and collected some documentary sources, they are not enough to provide an informed and nuanced rendering of this process. This is something I plan to focus on more explicitly in future research.

of) the Argentine state, than the public. The failure of these institutions to denounce the state despite what many see as mounting evidence of corruption in relation to the AMIA case, has further eroded community trust. Alternatively, the grassroots citizens group, Memoria Activa, is portrayed by some Jewish-Argentines as “too political,” as they’ve subverted “legitimate” political channels and made the streets a site of political struggle. Worse, they’ve done this without completely sublimating their Jewish identity. This presents a problem for some members of the community, whether in positions of power or not: by agitating *as Jews*, however defined, they are thought to expose the community to possible attack, rhetorical or otherwise, they are taking “private” matters “public,” they are challenging the power structure of the Jewish Argentine community that has evolved over the years, and they are articulating an alternative expression of Jewishness than the one historically prescribed for them.

Up until now, I have used the terms “Jew” and “Jewishness” without further complicating them. In what follows, I discuss images of the “Jew” in Argentina, and Jewish identity and difference.

What We Talk About When We Talk About “Jewish”

The Jew is ambivalence incarnate. – Zygmunt Bauman (1998)

The figure of the “Jew” is one of the most prolific and contradictory in contemporary times. This is as true in Europe as it is in Latin America, and in this case, Argentina (Graff Zivin 2008). Argentina has the largest Jewish population in Latin America (around 200,000 at present), at one time swelling to an estimated 300,000 individuals.⁹ Although images of the “Jew” and understandings of “Jewish” are always historically situated, many of these images are well traveled through the colonial and discursive force of European power, albeit subtly or more overtly transformed in new contexts. Many images of the “Jew” that can be

⁹See the demographic information put out by the American Jewish Committee Yearbook. Can be accessed at www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/AJYB727.CV.pdf

found in Argentina are similar to what one might find in Europe, although utilized for different purposes and with varied effects.

What specters, then, inhabit the image of the “Jew” in Argentina? The intolerable and devilish presence of the Spanish Inquisition, in need of conversion, death or expulsion? The mystical Kabbalist of Borges’ fancy; the cultural outsider whose very marginality is a site of innovation? Harbingers of greedy capitalist “values” and materialist ambition—destroying the very soul of the Argentine republic—as Julián Martel’s 1891 novel *La bolsa* portrays the “Jew”? Or does the “Jewish presence” bring to mind the so-called *Rusos*, or Russians, of the early twentieth century, whose supposedly “foreign” political ideas threatened to refashion the very logic of Argentine society? Or are the “Jews” best represented as victims, by the emaciated and huddled victims of pogroms and death camps—bodies heaped on the dusty earth like a horrifically bountiful harvest of potatoes? Emblematic of occupation, repression, and brutality or champions of human rights? Militaristic or weak and effeminate? Is the “Jew” the bespectacled marker of modern intellectualism, inheritor of a rich hermeneutic tradition and progenitor of *porteños*’ beloved (and for some, dangerously subversive) psychoanalysis? Or backwards representatives of a counter-enlightenment philosophy that stubbornly insists on exclusivity, chosenness? Can the “Jew” be truly Argentine, or is he fundamentally a cosmopolitan roamer?¹⁰ A patriot or yoked to the dream, and now fact, of another homeland?

As this tour through some of the most actively employed symbolic imaginary of the “Jew” in Argentina attests, the figure of the “Jew” is highly contradictory, malleable and unfixed. What we find when we peer ever so slightly into the discursive construction of “Jew” is a cacophonous and flexible riot of possibilities: “Jewish” is an elastic, powerful category with rich and diverse histories that can be mobilized within various contexts by

¹⁰I employ the masculine pronoun here because in general the subject imagined here is male.

disparate actors, and in quite contradictory ways. While all identities are semantically unstable and open to multiple possible associations, the figure of the “Jew” has become profoundly heteroglossic, particularly in the Christian dominated West.¹¹ Scholars such as Jon Stratton (2000), Max Silverman (1998), Bryan Cheyette (1993), Zygmunt Bauman (1991), and Slavoj Zizek (1989) have noted, in Graff Zivin’s words, the “radical flexibility of ‘Jewishness’” as a category (2008:3).

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has argued that within Christian dominated Europe, the “Jew” has become the site exemplar of ambiguity, flux, disorder. Rather than using the terms anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism, he prefers “allosemitism” to describe the complex feelings that Christian Europe reserves for the Jews (1998). “Allos” being the Greek word for “other,” highlights Jews’ historical position of radical alterity within the consciousness of the Christian West. (Bauman is not very subtle when it comes to talking about groups of people; they tend to be lumped into large undifferentiated categories. Nevertheless, he makes some insightful points.) Bauman writes, “‘Allosemitism’ is essentially non-committal...it does not unambiguously determine either hatred or love of Jews, but contains the seeds of both...”(1998:143). “Allosemitism” is an attitude primarily of ambivalence, and this ambivalence, Bauman argues, dangerously marks the subject as well. Bauman suggests that it is not perhaps Jewish difference (in dress, practices, etc.) that is so troubling, but

the apprehension and vexation [is] related not to someone or something disquieting through otherness and unfamiliarity, but to something or someone that does not fit the structure of the orderly world, does not fall easily into any of the established categories, emits therefore contradictory signals as to the proper conduct—and in the result blurs the borderlines which ought to be kept watertight.” [1998:144]

Bauman further argues that the primary source of this ambiguity as it relates to Jews is connected to how their relationship to Christianity has been conceived by dominant

¹¹Perhaps not unlike the category “Mestizo” as Marisol de la Cadena (2005) illustrates in her article *Are Mestizos Hybrids? The Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities*.

Christians. Jews are both the source of Christ and his denial. Their continued existence and belief articulates a powerful counter-truth to Christian truth and power. They represent the unruly excess to the Christian subject:

...identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993). Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected. Every identity has at its 'margin,' an excess, something more. [Hall 1996:5]

While many European (and beyond) countries underwent a secular revolution beginning in the eighteenth century where religion became, for many, divested of absolute truth, the ambivalence that often marks Jews still circulates in Christian influenced imaginaries. As Jews became part of a nominally secular society, becoming neighbors instead of strangers, shedding their skull caps and tzitzit, shaving their beards and side-locks, and Jewish women expanding their worlds outside their homes, Jews adopting the national language—in short, leaving much of their outward difference aside, ambiguity still marked the Jewish figure. And Jews themselves very often expressed an ambiguity of identity, of feeling both inside and outside the societies in which they lived.

As developing states sought unification through an imagined ethnic community, Jews had a difficult time being excepted as true nationals by dominant society in most places. They were still other, but in some ways more ambiguously so in post-Enlightenment Europe. The Jewish other, which was generally plain to see (in customs of dress, profession, language, and where they lived) before the eighteenth century, became difficult to distinguish from "real" Germans, for example. To take an image from current popular culture, Jews in many ways came to function like Cylons within the dominant society: it

became difficult to separate the real from the “ersatz” imitation.¹² And under certain regimes of power and knowledge, this became an intolerable state of affairs.

As much as Argentines can be said to be Christian subjects, Jews are held at the discursive margins of the nation—and of course, Jews are not the only or even the primary “outside.” The more potent “others” of Argentine identity are generally of indigenous or African descent. The question is, however, how do different discursive regimes deal with these others, how is this “constitutive outside” dealt with on the ground?

If within European lands the primary way to deal with the difference Jews represented was to get rid of it, either by expelling or murdering them, in Latin America, difference in general doesn’t operate under the exact same logics. This is not to say that extermination and other less extreme efforts at homogeneity have not been part of various projects in Latin America, as indeed they have, but one could argue that eradication of the other has not achieved the same logical force as it did (and one could argue still does) in Europe, or that it exists in tension with more inclusive discourses. In her illuminating book on the rhetoric of Jewishness in Latin America, Graff Zivin (2008) notes that there is a kind of “fatalism of difference” in the symbolic imaginary of Latin America—a recognition of an unavoidable heterogeneity forged through the violent crucible of the colonial encounter. Along with elite desires of purity and “whitening,” is the acceptance and sometimes celebratory recognition that the cultures and bodies of Latin America are radically diverse and “hybrid.”¹³ Indeed, mixture and hybridity are often terms used to talk about Latin American identities and subjectivities, even as these terms have come to signify different, or

¹²For those not in the know, Cylons are from the popular TV series *Battlestar Galactica*. Cylons are androids that were made by humans who eventually rebelled and evolved. Some look exactly like humans and there are only a few ways to tell if someone is a Cylon or human.

¹³For one well known positive view of miscegenation, see José Vasconcelos (1925) *La Raza Cósmica (The Cosmic Race)*.

multiple things over time.¹⁴ (And importantly, but not addressed here, is how changing conceptions of race have constructed these identities in both positive and negative ways.) Graff Zivin cites Roberto González Echevarría's (1998) idea of the "Other Within" to help conceptualize the interplay between discourses of exclusion and inclusion that have circulated in Latin America. According to this argument, the "Other" is recognized to be an essential part of the subject, a constituting presence traced to the Conquest that is futile to erase. To eradicate the Other would be to turn on one's self, as the other is already in the nation and in the body. (In this way, one could argue that Derrida's notion of *Différance* approaches this conception of difference.) Within this logic, the Jew as Other is not necessarily seen as an entirely foreign presence:

If modern European notions of "Jewishness" (and, by extension, difference in general) often focus on a foreign invader that would corrupt the purity of the national corpus, Latin American representations of the "Jew" tend to recognize a primordial other that, symbolically or historically, forms a part of the individual or collective self... [Graff Zivin 2008:19]

However, this "primordial other" that is part of the self is not necessarily celebrated, but expresses, a profound ambivalence. I might add, also, that Jews and other minorities, such as Latin Americans of Asian or Middle Eastern descent, are perhaps less a "primordial other," than another kind of "Other," given the relatively recent arrival of "real" breathing Jews to Latin America.

The idea of the "Other Within" however, does seem to resonate with certain ideas about *Argentinidad*, that appear rooted in ambivalent feelings. In my many discussions with *porteños*, a narrative of failure—national, social, governmental—would almost always arise,

¹⁴See, for example, Charles Hale (1996), "Mestizaje, Hybridity, and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Latin America," in *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 34-61. Also, John Kraniauskas (2004). "Hybridity in a Transnational Frame: Latin Americanist and Postcolonial Perspectives on Cultural Studies." In *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, eds. Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo, 736-59. Durham: Duke University Press. For an analysis of how the terms *mestizo* and *mestizaje* have come to embody different meanings, see Marisol de la Cadena (2005) "Are *Mestizos* Hybrids? The Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, pp. 259-284, and Marisol de la Cadena (2000) *Indigenous Mestizos*. Durham: Duke University Press.

a sense of seemingly inevitable breakdown and disappointment that was focused within rather than without. The prevalence of psychoanalysis among middle-class Argentines also alludes to a general feeling that there is something “wrong” within, or something hidden that needs to be exposed. These feelings have deep histories, as I discuss in Chapter one.

Will the “Real” Jew in the Room Please Stand Up?

The above has mostly discussed representations of Jews and Jewishness and constructions of Jewish difference. Thus when I write about “Jews,” and “Argentines,” for that matter, I recognize that these are not fixed, timeless categories that denote a unified essence or truth about “a people,” even as they are often employed as such by those who inhabit and enlist these identities. Rather, identities as I understand them are “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourse, practices, and positions (Hall 1996:4). However, as I conceive of identities as fundamentally discursive, this doesn’t imply that they don’t have consequences that can be seen and felt. On the contrary, the discursive vigor of “Jew,” not unlike other identifications with histories of subjugation, carries a material force that can be horrific in its effects. The Jew, as Jonathan Boyarin states (1992:xiv) is “more than just the suffering allegory.” In other words, it is important to attend to the historically, lived experience of those on the ground who claim and are claimed by Jewish identity, lest the notion of “Jewishness” itself become a reified category, unconnected to the varied and specific meanings and experiences that can inhabit it. This is often the aim of ethnography, and in this case, I had to suspend my North American ideas about “Jews” and “Jewishness,” to be able to see and hear how Argentines construct this identity for themselves.

I attempt in this dissertation to provide a nuanced account of both “real” Jews on the ground, and the specific ideological constructs that give meaning and material presence to the category “Jewish-Argentine.” I am not trying to make a clean separation between the

“material” and “ideological,” as the two are constitutive of each other. “Real,” living (and dead) Jews are quite invested in “ideas” about Jewishness, as they are enlisted by them. By “real” Jews I am again not referring to an idea of authenticity, but to consider the “existence of real people who have lived as Jews—whether by religious observance, patrilineal descent, participation in Yiddish theater or Zionist socialism, or by having been victims of the Holocaust or other forms of anti-Semitic violence—without limiting the boundaries of this category” (Graff Zivin 2008:9). Indeed, it would be hard to limit “Jewishness” to a list of possible identifications, as it is a site of proliferating possibilities, based in part through the variety wrought from living in highly heterogeneous societies.

I will point out, however, that there are some broad stroke differentiations that Jews make amongst themselves that concern language, culture, and to some extent religious practice. As many of those we now call “Jews” began to migrate and disperse from the Levant after Roman invasion, Jews began to live in widely disparate areas. Following further expulsions and opportunities over hundreds of years, communities of Jews lived in regions and countries as geographically dispersed as England and India, sub-Saharan Africa and the Caucasus. Thus the community that identified as Jews became a reference for hybridity, multiplicity, and heteroglossia, while at the same time holding onto the idea of a shared mythic past and a series of fundamental texts, notably the *Tanach* or “old” testament and volumes of Talmudic writings, that could provide a touchstone of collective identity. Sander Gilman writes that “The Jews are to be understood as a multiple yet single entity: multiple because of the cultures manifested under that label, yet unitary because of the common archaeology or cultural identity they believed themselves to share (1999:20). Currently the cultural diversity to be found among Jewish groups (and these identifications are waning within many communities) is lumped into two primary categories: Ashkenazi (Yiddish speaking Jews that at one time were concentrated in German speaking lands that later migrated East to Poland and Russia), Sephardic (specifically referring to Ladino

speaking Jews that had one time lived in Iberia, but today also refer to Jews from North-Africa and the Middle East, sometimes called *Mizrahi*). These groupings are sometimes further broken done by cities in which there were long-standing communities: Damascene Jews, Baghdadi Jews, etc. I note these divisions to further complicate the image of the “Jew” (which in contemporary times is likely to be glossed as Ashkenazi) and because these points of identification can be important sites of stratification and power within Jewish communities, particularly in Israel (Alcalay 1997).

Most of the Jewish-Argentines I knew in Argentina were connected to Ashkenazi heritage. When I speak of “the community” I refer to Jewish-Argentines of all possible affiliations.¹⁵ At this point I’d like to turn to a further consideration of such “real” Jews through the disciplinary lens of Latin American studies.

Where’s the *Jewish* in Latin American Studies?

While drafting an email message to a prominent scholar of Jewish cultural studies (who trained in Anthropology), I began to articulate some feelings about my work that had as of yet not been fully apparent to me. This individual, Jonathan Boyarin, has written about the possible intersections between Jewish studies and cultural studies (1997). Boyarin and his brother Daniel note that, “...younger ethnographers who work on Jewish materials seldom find a place among lingering areal divisions and the newer ‘diversity’ categories that dictate academic hiring choices” (1997:xii). This statement resonated with a barely examined unease I felt in studying “Jews,” as if looking at these particular people “should” only happen in Jewish studies, not Anthropology or Latin America.¹⁶ (Interestingly, I would feel differently if I were studying Israelis, whose controversial actions are intensely

¹⁵The majority of Jews in Argentina are Ashkenazi. For an examination of Sephardic Jews in relation to the Jewish community at large in Argentina, see Adriana M. Brodsky (2004) “The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880-Present” Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University.

¹⁶ See Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (1997), Sander Gilman (1999) and Jon Stratton (2000) for historical explorations of the development of Jewish studies vis-à-vis “ethnic” or cultural studies.

scrutinized in media, public, and academic venues. Whether deemed legitimate or not, Jews are often seen as connected to the lands that comprise Israel and Palestine in ways that, for example, Jews in Mexico are not.)

As I explained in my email, my way of dealing with this ambivalence was primarily to ignore it, and therefore, when I found myself *compelled* to delve deeply into the “Jewish question” and questions of Jewish difference in Argentina, I scrambled to acquaint myself with literatures that I had neglected for most of my graduate studies. I felt insecure about studying Jews as Latin Americans, and among other Latin Americanists I sometimes felt slightly illegitimate, as if I wasn’t working with “real” Latin Americans or issues of regional import. While this perception probably says as much about me as the discipline itself, it does reveal certain biases and aporias within Latin American studies and Latin America itself. It elicits a questioning of how “Latin America” has been constructed through the discipline of Latin American studies (and from a predominately Anglo perspective, although this is changing). As the historian Jeffrey Lesser has written, “To be sure, no one has ever claimed that Jews never lived in Latin America. Even so, Latin American historians have tended, at least until recently, to see the study of Jews as really a part of Jewish history, implicitly relegating Jews to a space in which they were not real Latin Americans” (1995:xv). At the disciplinary level, then, the study of Jews had been in effect ghettoized into its proper place. However, as I will show, this disciplinary segregation of Jews in Latin America arose from both Latin Americanists *and* the ways in which Jewish Latin Americans had been conceived and studied by (often Jewish) researchers.

Responding to this personal and disciplinary ambivalence, one of the main objectives of my work is to examine historically and ethnographically the unspoken assumption that Jews of Latin America are somehow separate from the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they live, and to show how understanding the relations between Jewish and other Latin Americans can reveal important insights about difference, state-building, and

nationalism in the region. Importantly, I owe a debt to the social movement Memoria Activa for teaching me that the dominant view of Jewish Latin Americans or Jewish Argentines—as insular, separate, and incidental to the cultural politics of the nation—needs to be revisited and complicated. In carrying on the legacies of Jewish Argentines who mobilized for human rights during and after the “dirty war,” Memoria Activa refuses to accede to the perception that Jews remain outside of the main currents of Argentine society and can (should) not participate in processes that dramatically challenge the state and society. Significantly, the latter sentiment comes from a portion of the Jewish Argentine community itself.

Part of the general scholarly neglect of Jewish Latin Americans and the feeling that Jews aren’t “real” Latin Americans, might have to do with the relatively small populations of Jews in many Latin American countries and the fact that many Jewish populations do retain some level of corporate separation from the dominant society.¹⁷ But this separation should not be confused with isolation or a general lack of interest in country within they live. Identifications are fluid, multi-faceted, and over-lapping, sometimes in profound tension, but not mutually exclusive and rigid. Often class interests are one site where Jews suture into society, and these interests may trump assumed Jewish loyalty.

In Argentina many Jews do belong to organizations that provide religious, social, and cultural support that may not be fulfilled by national organizations or practices (for example, the particularity of Jewish burial practices). They serve as means to satisfy the ways in which some individuals want to connect with Jewishness, however imagined. Like other minority groups, many Jewish Argentines attend “Jewish” schools (these aren’t generally religious and most are highly regarded academically) instead of public schools, as a way of connecting with histories and practices that aren’t part of the dominant culture. (Since the bombing of the AMIA, however, attendance at Jewish schools has been down, as parents

¹⁷See the demographic information put out by the American Jewish Committee Yearbook. Can be accessed at www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/AJYB727.CV.pdf

express a fear that their children may be targets.) While there are popular “Jewish” sports and social clubs—huge venues for various kinds of sports, exercise, and social reunions, and cultural events—these clubs are part of the culture of the middle class, not necessarily a sign of Jewish separation. They also reflect the legacies of large-scale immigration in the latter portion of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, where social clubs and mutual-aid societies were essential support systems for new immigrants. In addition to “Jewish clubes” one can find a “club Italiano” and “club Español” in Buenos Aires today. In short, while one could argue that in other Latin America countries Jews are less integrated (although what this means and says about the society at large needs to be delineated) Argentina has a Jewish population that is highly assimilated; that is, individual Jewish Argentines tend to be highly integrated with Argentine society—sometimes to the point of relinquishing their Jewish identity.¹⁸ While a certain percentage of Jewish-Argentines associate with the organized Jewish community—synagogues, clubs, the AMIA, schools—a significant percentage do not, enacting their Jewishness in other spaces and through other vehicles, if at all. I would argue that today in Latin America, in practice and imagining, Jewish insularity is more of a myth than a reality. More current scholarship on Jewish communities in Venezuela, Uruguay, or Chile, for example, needs to address these issues.

Another possible source of elision of Jews from dominant streams of Latin American studies is that they fall outside of historically specific categories of identity and ethnicity (often framed through racial discourses) such as “European,” “indigenous” or “African,” or “mestizo.” Jewishness fits uneasily in any of the categories mentioned above, and even though Jews can often “pass” as white, they are not unambiguously European (this

¹⁸Judith Elkin, one of the early pioneers of Jewish Latin American studies, has written about reasons for why some Jewish communities have remained less integrated: “There is a world of difference between merging with a secular population on equal terms and accepting a subordinate position on a Catholic standard” (1998:219). I find this explanation lacking, as it gives a monolithic reading of Catholicism, “secular population,” as well as the assumed Jewish subject. Nevertheless, there is something different (locally specific) about processes of incorporation in countries with different historical experiences and national visions. Processes of integration are obviously not the same from country to country.

becomes even more obvious when one considers Jews from North Africa or the Middle East). Although Jewish identity is often described as hybrid or “double,” the hybridity assumed here still fits ambiguously with dominant Latin American lexicons of identity. There are other populations that have achieved a certain visibility and invisibility, such as the considerable populations of Peruvians and Brazilians of Japanese descent, and Latin Americans whose roots hail to the Middle East.¹⁹ Nevertheless, pluralism in Latin America is often primarily conceived through varieties of indigeneity, (sub-Saharan) Africanness, and whiteness, which fail to include groups that are discursively constructed as outside or marginal to these identifications. This is in spite of the fact that Latin American countries received immigrants from diverse parts of the world. Despite the relative paucity of materials focusing on minority ethnicities in Latin America, Lesser and Rein have noted that currently, readily available scholarly and cultural production concerning Jews in Latin America dwarf the materials devoted to or emerging from Latin Americans of Japanese or Middle Eastern descent (2008: 26). More attention in general to minority ethnic groups in Latin America would reveal important insights into the theorization of difference, popular culture, and nation-building projects.

The emphasis on the above-mentioned categories of identity (indigenous, mestizo, etc.) undoubtedly has something to do with the regional foci of Latin American departments in the U.S., where research on Andean, Mexican and Central American countries has predominated. In Anthropology in particular, it has only been the last twenty years or so that Argentina and other Southern Cone countries have become popular “fields” in which U.S. based anthropologists work.²⁰ While I cannot go into all the factors that made certain

¹⁹Scholars such as Lesser (1999), Klich and Lesser (1998), Hirabayashi, Kikumura, and Hirabayashi (2002), and Anderson and Lee (2005) have begun to address the lacunae in the literature on these populations.

²⁰When I started my fieldwork in 1999 I knew of few anthropologists with North American backgrounds working in Argentina and Chile. Andrew Lakoff, Julia Paley, and Lessie Jo Frazier were the most prominent. In contrast, when I went into the field for extended fieldwork in 2004, I knew of at least 7 other North American

regions and peoples of Latin America more desirable or “reasonable” to study—and I emphasize that U.S. Latin American Studies today is much more diverse than it was twenty or thirty years ago—I can attest to a measure of ghettoization of studies focusing on Jewish, Asian, or Middle Eastern Latin Americans. This is due in part to how scholars of these populations have historically developed and positioned their studies—in ways that emphasize bounded group identity and history, apart from larger a national context.

In the case of Jewish life in Latin America, for many years, the existence of Jews in Latin America remained under the radar of scholarly study within Latin American studies, and was primarily “catalogued” by umbrella organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, a non-academic institution, which advocates on behalf of Jewish communities all over the world, or was subject of much internal publication within specific Jewish Latin American communities. However, in the 1960s and 1970s Latin American Jews began to be a focus of study within Israel, albeit with little attention outside of the country (Lesser and Rein 2008:27). In North America, serious investigation into Jewish Latin America began with the work of Judith Laikin Elkin. Her publications, which were wide-ranging and informative, provided a detailed panorama of Jewish life and history in various countries in Central and South America.²¹ In 1982 Elkin founded the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), to formalize and support the scholarly study of Jews in Latin America. This was the first attempt within North American academic circles to approach the study of Jews from within Latin American studies, and over the years studies of Jewish-Latin

anthropologists working in or around Buenos Aires—promising a boon in anthropological studies of urban Argentina.

²¹ Her books include *Jews of the Latin American Republics* (1980) Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (1988) New York: Harper Collins; and *The Jews of Latin America* (1998) New York: Holmes and Meier.

Americans have slowly become more visible within mainstream U.S. Latin American studies.²²

Thus over a period of about thirty years, attention to Jews as part of the ethnic diversity of Latin America began to increase in the United States, but often failed to challenge some of the dominant assumptions about Jewish life in Latin America—nor did they problematize “Jewish” identity. As Lesser and Rein (2008:28) note, “The research produced since 1982...is much like the earlier studies that emerged from the Institute of Contemporary Jewry [based in Israel], often embedded with the idea of Diasporic primacy rather than nation-based identity.” Despite the promising formation of LAJSA, studies of Jewishness in Latin America tended to ignore the significant differences between Jewish groups, and tended to focus on or characterize Jewishness as if it were essentially Ashkenazi. Additionally, Jewishness was often uncomplicatedly portrayed as the “primary” site of identification (overshadowing national belonging and feeling) and viewed as largely insular or community based. Many of these studies focused on anti-Semitism and tended to emphasize Jewish life in Latin America as a continual struggle against recurring tides of anti-Semitism. While none of these characterizations are wholly inaccurate, they portray a simplistic picture of the varieties of Jewish experience in Latin America, and the diverse ways in which Jews identify among themselves. Moreover, these studies often failed to take into account the particular locales in which Jews lived, as if Jewishness remained the same whether in Buenos Aires, Curaçao, or Rio de Janeiro, rather than paying attention to how Jews of different backgrounds have influenced local cultures and have been shaped by them. Additionally, an attention to gender, which is also missing from this work, has previously been found lacking. At times, these early forays into the study of Jewish-Latin

²²This is evident in part by the academic publishing industry, with publishers with significant Latin American series, such as Duke and California, publishing works that examine Jewishness in Latin America. As I show, the work coming out of LAJSA has in recent years has moved beyond “community studies” to offer rigorous and nuanced studies of Latin American Jewishness.

Americans resembled a highly detailed travel guidebook, or a synthesizing of demographic information, rather than a nuanced interrogation of the possibilities and transformations of Jewishness in local contexts. At the same time, however, it is important to note that these early studies were critical in making a subject out of what otherwise may have remained overlooked.

I agree with Lesser and Rein (2008), that work on Latin Americans of Jewish, Eastern European, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent need to be put in dialogue with each other and complicate prevailing visions of Latin America, and are presented in ways that illuminate larger national processes. Encouragingly, in recent years more scholars appear to be focusing upon these other Latin Americans and going beyond the static, essentializing, and bounded conceptions of identity that tended to characterize previous studies. At this writing, the study of Jewish-Latin Americans and other less discussed groups seems poised to enter a sustained and engaged dialogue with other streams of Latin American studies. Recent notable works focusing on Jews and Japanese minorities in Latin America, such as Lesser and Rein's 2008 compilation, Erin Graff Zivin's 2008 study of the figure of the Jew in Latin American literature, and Jeffrey Lesser's 2007 study on Japanese-Brazilians, have as much to say about the nation-state as a particular minority within it. Speaking of the nation-state, the next section theorizes "the state," and "citizenship," as they've come to be central sites through which the AMIA bombing and the struggle for justice is interpreted, and in turn, re-shapes these concepts.

Re-figuring the "State"

"Argentina seems like a country, but isn't."—Baruj Z., Buenos Aires, September 10, 2004

The above statement reflects sentiments about Argentina I heard many times during my fifteen months in the country. In fact, the ways in which I most commonly heard the

state, and often society, invoked by middle-class *porteños* is through a discourse of failure. “*Argentina no existe*”—Argentina doesn’t exist—a close friend used to say to me. The state, according to these actors, is primarily a site of brokenness, sickness—an inability to function. Not only is the state portrayed as fundamentally lacking, but in fatalistic tones it was sometimes expressed to me that this was unlikely to ever change. This fatalism stems in part from a circulating belief that the society itself is fundamentally flawed, imbued with a “culture of impunity” that dwells in the highest public offices and in less overtly political spaces. (I will return to these feelings about the state and society in chapters one and five.) Perhaps this lack of trust and faith in either the nation or the state is due to promises of democracy that in the eyes of many Argentines have yet to be fulfilled, as an institutional or cultural process. In order to give a broad historical reference for how the “state” is envisioned as a site of failure, corruption, and impunity by many middle-class actors, I will provide a brief discussion of the role of democracy and human rights in recent Argentine history.

Argentina has had a turbulent political and social history, one in which democratic ideas have existed in tension with more authoritarian and elitist sympathies. In the nineteenth century, democracy, when it was discussed and implemented, was rarely if ever envisioned for the masses, but reflected the interests of the landowning and educated elite. Bonner (2007:34) notes that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, liberal democracy as a political practice never had a strong foothold in Argentina, although liberal ideas—particularly economic liberalism—circulated productively among the elite.

As Bonner (2007:41) points out, the close connection of the governing bodies to the military (often presidents were military generals and the force of the military was frequently used to “win” elections) early in the nation’s history helped to ensure the latter an excess of unchecked power that would come to haunt Argentina in the twentieth century. Since the 1930s, Argentines experienced no less than six military governments. In 1983, after the last

military dictatorship ended, when there was a concerted effort to remake Argentina into a democracy, it was a project that involved not just the formal agencies, posts, and bureaucratic structures that people often affiliate with the “state,” but intense mobilization by the many Argentine human rights organizations, and ostensibly a remaking of Argentine citizen-subjects. As with all such projects, this process is ongoing and continually negotiated by various actors.

The process of democratization is rarely easy or quick, and in Argentina it was complicated by the human rights abuses perpetrated by the previous government. For the middle-class human rights movement and its supporters, any transition to democracy had to be coupled with a societal wide reckoning of the military dictatorship, with junta leaders held accountable by the state itself for their actions. From this perspective, in order to move on as a nation and state, it was important to reclaim the archive and re-write the official story and have the state assume responsibility for the dead, especially since military leaders continually denied the disappearances of thousands of citizens. To this end, during Alfonsín’s government (1983-1989) a truth commission was set up to investigate the military’s actions, producing the report *Nunca Más* (Never Again) in 1984.²³ Military leaders were tried and sentenced in historic trials that were televised for the whole nation to witness. However, after this initial burst of attention to human rights and a state interest in holding members of the military accountable for their actions, toward the end of the nineteen-eighties another discourse began to capture the nation’s attention: forgetting. At the end of a historic presidency, President Raúl Alfonsín enacted two laws known as “*las leyes de impunidad*” (laws of impunity), the Final Point law and the Law of Due Obedience. These laws effectively ceased trials against the military, from the highest to lowest ranks. President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) deepened an adherence to a politics of forgetting and

²³Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP) (1984). *Nunca Más*. Buenos Aires: Editorial de Universidad de Buenos Aires.

a culture of impunity by granting amnesty for those military officers already charged for having committed human rights crimes.²⁴ Under Menem's presidency, forgetting was promoted as essential to "societal healing," and economic prosperity was tied to a neoliberal agenda, with now famously disastrous results.

After the economic collapse of 2001 and the political crisis that followed it, the Argentine state under Néstor Kirchner was eager to portray stability and "seriousness" to its citizenry and the world (see chapter 5). A main pillar of Kirchner's government was a commitment to "human rights," emphasized as a necessary feature of a democratic society. Beloved by many in the mainstream middle-class human rights community (something that I experienced first hand), under Kirchner's government the amnesty laws were over-turned. As is discussed in the chapters that follow, Kirchner has also shown a more open attitude than his predecessors toward taking the demands of family members of the victims of the AMIA bombing seriously, albeit with few different results.

Given the ways in which the state has historically wielded power against or in spite of the citizens, middle class *porteños* tend to talk about the "state" in ways that sharply delineate it from civil society. (Even when they might see a fundamental connection between the two via the discourse of *impunidad*.) Human rights discourse plays an important role in the fashioning of Argentine citizen-subjects, as holders of certain rights and responsibilities, and tends to be an idiom utilized across class and gender affiliations—although the understanding of what these rights should consist is constantly being tested.²⁵ However, this discourse tends to reify the separation between "state" and "society," even as

²⁴See Michelle D. Bonner (2007) *Sustaining Human Rights*, University Park, PA: Penn State Press, pp. 118-124) for a detailed analysis of the effects of these laws.

²⁵For an analysis of notions of "rights" in Argentina, see Bonner (2007). For earlier influential analyses of human rights and democratization in Argentina and Latin America, see Alison Brysk (1994) *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina: Protest, Change and Democratization*, Stanford: Stanford University Press and Elizabeth Jelin and Eric Hershberg, eds. (1996) *Constructing Democracy: Human Rights, Citizenship, and Society in Latin America*. Boulder, Co: Westview.

non-state actors have been successful in shaping the state. A view of the state as primary locus of power also corresponds with recent Argentine history, when the state effectively worked to control the bodies and knowledges of the citizens (Taylor 1997).

While a separation of state and society may be formally expressed by many different actors, and particularly through the discourse of human rights, the *practices* of human rights groups and social movements like Memoria Activa considerably complicates the distinction between state and society. Since 1983 the crucial role of non-state actors in constructing and hailing the state, and reshaping understandings of citizenship and human rights, complicates this commonly expressed separation of state and society, and the power that each is assumed to wield. To greater or lesser degree, the construction of the state since the last military dictatorship has taken place on city corners and plazas, cafés and living rooms, in newspapers and other media, as well as within the halls of congress and painted-pink walls of the presidential palace. Even before this latest transition to democracy, Argentine citizens had, over time, developed a rich tradition of negotiating, whether through active or passive means, with the state outside of formal channels. This process of negotiation can be thought as not only resistance, but as actively productive of new forms of governance and sociality and ultimately deepening democratic practice. Dagnino (1998:47) has argued that,

...social movements have advanced a conception of democracy that transcends the limits of political institutions as traditionally conceived and of “actually existing democracy.” The distinctive feature of this conception, which points toward the extension and deepening of democracy, is the fact that it has as a basic reference not the democratization of the *political regime* but of society as a whole, including therefore the cultural practices embodied in social relations of exclusion and inequality.

Democratic practice, then, is not “located” in one designated place, fixed in the halls of government and through the voting box. It is not only a means of governance, but an attitude and a basis for kinds of social relations. Democracy as it is being practiced and formulated by many social movements and other actors, then, is not just a series of acts and

a formalized set of relationships that exist in isolation of public spheres. Thus, what is often glossed as “the state” is not simply “out there” but also exists *through* us. It is not simply a “the,” it is a multitude. Thus I present a conception of “the state” and “politics” that exists beyond the buildings, policies, governmental organizations, and individuals who formally make up the government in any given place. Rather “the state” alludes to a shifting constellation of people, ideas, and practices that range from civil society to public office, as well as events, ceremonies, ideas, processes, buildings, documents. One does not find “the state” in one centralized local, although it is often invoked as such, but instead the state comes to be seen and felt through a multitude of actions and discourses at different levels of society. Following Gupta (1995) and Aretxaga (2003), I understand the state to be constitutively performed at the level of everyday life—in conversations in homes and in the streets, in the effect of a given policy on someone’s ability to feed themselves or their family, on the ways in which state-sponsored city planning attempts to guide bodies through the city. In this way, one knows the state “through its multiple effects” (Aretxaga 2003:398). The state, then, ceases to be seen as “out there,” but as intertwined with everyday spaces and situations; “it” is a blurred site, negotiated through the everyday. While I am de-centering the state, I am also acutely aware of the imbalance of power often involved in these negotiations. Even as the state’s power is challenged by social movements, other non-governmental organizations, “globalization,” and individuals, in most cases it still effectively wields the physical power and authority to create and enforce “the law.”

While this work as it stands can only begin to be called an ethnography of the state, I do hope that the various ways that actors involved in seeking justice for the AMIA bombing are suggestive of the ways in which the state is a “social subject in everyday life” (Aretxaga 2003:395).

“State effects” are keenly and intimately felt by the family members of the victims of the AMIA bombing. In this case, the state is primarily experienced as a *lack*, a feeling that

the state isn't working in the citizens' interests, that it has abandoned its dead and is indifferent to its citizenry. Amongst many family members of the victims, the state is often portrayed to have failed in its responsibility to its citizens on many accounts relating to the attack on the AMIA: it failed to protect, it failed to investigate, it failed to provide justice. These accusations have formed the basis of the case that Memoria Activa has taken to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights at the OAS. In many ways, however, the activism of Memoria Activa has turned these failures into questions and accusations posed to society as well as the state and to some extent blurring the boundaries of each.

Much of this failure is thought to be due to corruption and *impunidad* (impunity), as well as a sense that the Argentine state as it stands lacks the organization and sophistication to fulfill its responsibility to the citizenry. *Impunidad* and accusations of arbitrary applications of the law are a fairly common charge against the Argentine state, particularly in relation to the last military dictatorship, the AMIA bombing, and other acts of violence thought to be connected to improper or negligent application of state power.

Aretxaga's piece *Maddening States* has one of the best descriptions of impunity I've seen:

Sovereignty then presents itself as the law, which stands outside the law. In this sense, to claim state sovereignty is to embody a juridical order that cannot be held accountable. The state in this sense is and is not the law. The lack of distinction between transgression and execution of the law that characterizes the state of exception, within which anything can happen, leaves the law as a terrifying force devoid of meaning from which one cannot escape. [Aretxaga 2003:405]

Argentines of a particular generation and position have intimate knowledge of the "state of exception, within which anything can happen." For this reason, the charge of *impunidad* takes on a particularly urgent force when understood through the memories (and largely unpunished actions) of the last military dictatorship. The charge of *impunidad* sounds an alarm about slipping into the danger zone of the "state of exception," threatening the very rights of the citizen, as many of those struggling for justice for the AMIA bombing

have acknowledged. Articulating and arguing for the rights of the citizen is one potent way that actors have found to engage the state.

In the last thirty years or so, the concept of “citizenship” has become a useful tool amongst various social actors and movements in Latin America (Dagnino 2003). What is meant by “citizenship” is negotiated and contested among various actors, including the state, social movements (both international and national), organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, and multi-national corporations. While ideas about citizenship in Latin America and other parts of the world have been in changing in response to neoliberal projects, many social movements have been active in articulating alternate conceptions of citizenship that include (or argue for a return to) legal rights beyond market participation and cultural recognition of various sorts. As I’ve suggested above, the discourse of citizenship has been important for those struggling for justice for the victims of the AMIA bombing. Like other social movements, groups like Memoria Activa present citizenship as both a status and a project, conferring legal rights and responsibilities on the one hand (in this case specifically the rights to justice and protection), and arguing a grounds for a “new sociability” (Dagnino 2003) on the other hand. At the same time as Memoria Activa seeks to engage and challenge the state as a particular entity, they also recognize that the workings of the state and the culture of impunity are part of a larger sphere of social relations. Claiming and shaping the discourse of citizenship both inserts the AMIA bombing and its victims within the collective nation, hails the state as a responsible party, and articulates the possibilities for a new socialibility. How this unfolds will be made clear in the chapters that follow.

Structure of the Dissertation

Taking into account the importance of past events and debates in present-day articulations of central issues that have emerged in relation to the AMIA bombing, I have structured the dissertation in two parts. Part I, composed of chapters one and two, are

largely historical journeys. These chapters, however, while providing important contextual depth, are meant to go beyond context to deconstruct and propose understandings and possibilities for citizenship in Argentina, and ethnic and religious difference. Part I is meant to situate the debates, understandings, and feelings that have been circulating through and around the AMIA bombing and its victims in locally salient idioms. Chapter one focuses on key events and ideas that have significantly influenced the processes of Argentine state-making and development of civil society, and have deeply shaped its national imaginaries. This chapter discusses the role of some vital Argentine visionaries and leaders in conceiving the nation, particularly Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and the civilization and barbarism debate, and his contemporary Juan Batista Alberdi. In relation to these thinkers, I also look at the ideological justifications for promoting immigration to Argentina—and resistance to this idea—as well as the process of incorporating these potential citizens into the nation, with specific focus on Jewish immigrants. Finally, I look at the rise of organized right-wing nationalist movements in Argentina, their ideological antecedents and basis in Argentine society. Particular focus is placed on the tense encounters between Argentine forms of liberalism and right-wing anti-liberal movements—which can't be cleanly separated, even as they are often promoted as discrete ideological poles.

Throughout most of the chapter, these histories are presented in relation to the positioning of “Jews” in the national imaginary and on the ground, and more generally, the question of difference. This chapter also provides an introduction to some of the feelings and ideas that Argentines use in the relation to understanding and seeking justice for the AMIA bombing. I ask, what kind of Argentine citizen is invoked in struggles against impunity? Among many middle-class Argentines, the more obvious questions might be: Will Argentina fully implement the structures and feelings associated with liberal democracies or remain a nation socially and politically governed by more authoritarian anti-liberal currents? Is Argentina part of Europe or Latin America?

Chapter two looks at historical discussions about Jewish citizenship as they emerged in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. Much of these discussions, informed by Enlightenment thought and the process of transforming Europe into unified nation-states structured by the ideals of liberalism, concern how Jews could be transformed from a ghettoized “other” to part of society as citizens. This process and discussion varied across the region, and I particularly focus on French and to some extent German, contexts. I look at this revolution from what at the time constituted a Jewish perspective (religiously informed, and male), as well as from the understandings about “Jews” presented by elite French and German intellectuals and leaders. Ultimately I show that the process of making Jewish citizens required a profound transformation of the meanings and practices of Jewishness; a transformation that required a significant loss of Jewish specificity and outward difference, and elicited a kind of hybridity and “double consciousness” in Jewish-identified subjects.²⁶

While the discourse of universalism as it was linked to ideas of citizenship and equality appears to be neutral, this is far from the case. Rather, the claim of universalism is rooted in quite specific images of humanity: European, pale skinned, male, and Christian. While societies based on liberal tenets, and thus buttressed by a “universal” vision of humanity, appear to be inclusive of difference, as we saw in creation of the French republic, this difference was meant to be erased through the process of citizenship. Radical difference at the epistemological level was and is rarely given parity in the West. Moreover, as biological race garnered political and social force as a site of absolute difference, the color of one’s skin or the shape of one’s nose, could determine one’s position—or one’s necessary removal—from society. At the conclusion of this chapter, I briefly discuss some

²⁶I take the term “double consciousness” from W.E.B. Du Bois’ (2007) *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford University Press.

of these ideas in relation to Argentina and the complicated ways in which Jews identify as Jewish and Argentine.

Even though chapter two takes the dissertation outside of the geographical boundaries of Argentina and Latin America, it is not outside of larger imaginaries active in the region. In the emerging nation-states of nineteenth-century Latin America, intellectuals and leaders were seriously debating and engaging aspects up Enlightenment thought and liberalism, and coming up with new political and social formations to reflect local circumstances. Argentina's constitution is based in large part on the U.S. and French constitution, albeit with particular local transformations, such as the declaration of Catholicism as the official state religion. The legacies of the Enlightenment, specifically liberalism (particularly in an economic sense), secularism, and democratic ideas have been profoundly constitutive of many Latin American nation-states—but not without contestation from more authoritarian nationalist movements based on an imagined pre-Enlightenment Spanish utopia, as has been present throughout Argentine history. Moreover, I argue that the European and Jewish histories presented in chapter two are local in the sense that they have worked to shape Jewish-Argentine subjectivities. They are a part of “feeling” Jewish in Argentina. While some of the experiences presented may be particular to the “Jews,” they can be mobilized in Argentines in ways that exceed their specific origins.

I intend chapters one and two to provide historical depth and specificity to the debates and circumstances of the AMIA bombing and the struggle for justice. But they are also necessary to denaturalize certain understanding about Jews and Argentines. I provide this because I found the category of “Jew” and the discussions surrounding the bombing of the Jewish site in Argentina, too laden and fraught with certain “common sense” knowledges that served to shut down dialogue and debate. Concepts such as “anti-Semitism,” for example, tend to enclose events within a timeless and essentializing narrative of Jewish victim-hood and difference. Without giving at least a partial history of Jewish difference as

constructed vis à vis the emerging liberal nation state in Europe and Argentina, as well as the image of the Jew circulated by counter-liberal nationalist movements in Argentina, I felt conceptually trapped by the explanatory powers of words like “anti-Semitism,” “terrorism,” and “victim” to describe and give meaning to an event like the AMIA bombing. This is not to say that these terms don’t circulate meaningfully in Argentina. They do, but they are contested, and it is this struggle that I am most interested in exploring. It is precisely this “common sense” vision of the attacks that social movements such as Memoria Activa are struggling against, working to rearticulate the bombing within other explanatory frameworks.

With the images and ideas of Part I circulating, Part II begins to directly engage with the events of the AMIA bombing. Chapter three continues the story of Jewish Argentines, with the history of the AMIA building and its destruction in 1994. I then detail the responses to the bombing, from both Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines positions. I show how the bombing and its Jewish victims were frequently placed at the margins of the nation and the ambivalence that attends Jewish citizenship in Argentina. I discuss how the view of the AMIA bombing as solely a “Jewish” affair, has been contested by social movements composed of family members of the victims such as Memoria Activa and APEMIA, and much of the middle class human rights community. I argue that the competing visions of the bombing express different ways of conceiving Jewishness and *Argentinidad*. This discussion leads into the next chapter, where I look at the divisions within the Jewish Argentine community that became amplified and created after the AMIA bombing.

In chapter four, I focus on the groups of *familiares* (family members of the victims) that formed after the AMIA bombing, and how these groups diverge in their engagement with the memory of the bombing and the struggle for justice. I look at the role of the main community organizations, the AMIA and DAIA, in constructing and maintaining a certain vision of the *colectividad*, or Jewish Argentine community, and how this representation has been challenged in recent years. Thus this chapter primarily highlights the tensions and

divisions within the Jewish Argentine community that have become amplified through the bombing and the tortuous search for justice. These divisions, I argue, are tied up with different notions of community and citizenship. I end with a reflection upon how the social movement Memoria Activa enacts another politics kind of politics of belonging outside of formal channels, widening the possible perimeters of what is “properly” Jewish in Argentina.

Chapter five directly takes up the subject of justice. It has been nearly fifteen years since the AMIA bombing and seventeen since the Israeli embassy was attacked, but any form of justice for the victims continues to remain elusive. In the case of the AMIA bombing, “justice” has gone beyond finding the direct authors of the attack, broadening into an issue of human rights that potentially concerns all Argentine citizens. While the investigation of international suspects and connections remains important, the AMIA case is seen as an emblematic example of the “culture of impunity” that many lament is endemic in Argentine politics and society, and therefore, the *investigation of the investigation* has garnered almost equal importance. For many years the AMIA investigations, and the one trial relating to it, has been the subject of various allegations and suspicions alluding to a deliberate obstruction of justice—a cover-up. This was for good reason, as over the years pieces of evidence have been lost, key suspects have been dropped, and information about the handling of the case by the judge in charge of the investigation hinted at serious infractions. Memoria Activa has been one of the only public voices that have consistently critiqued the role of the state in essentially enabling the attack, and later, obstructing justice. Through the work of groups like Memoria Activa, along with middle-class human rights organizations, the attack on the AMIA has been used like a mirror to reflect and highlight issues of impunity, corruption, and human rights within the nation. I detail how the Argentine state has become one of the principle actors in the AMIA case, and not in the roles one might expect (as protector and source of justice), but as perpetrator of a crime. In this chapter, I show how the AMIA case came to be emblematic of impunity and the violation of human rights in

Argentina, detailing the twists and turns of the AMIA investigations, and the failure of the only trial relating to the attack.

Only in the last few years have the AMIA investigations (or lack thereof) been officially recognized by the state as being significantly compromised, with networks that reach all the way to former Argentine president, Carlos Saúl Menem. This chapter highlights in particular the role of Memoria Activa in attempting to hail the state and demand accountability and responsibility. Groups like Memoria Activa directly challenge the discursive authority of the state to create meaning and fashion an “official story” to serve the purposes of government officials, offering a counter-archive of knowledge.

The conclusion is really an ode to Memoria Activa. I focus on their decision to leave the Plaza Lavalle in 2004, and the discussions that led up to this result. I further reflect upon how what Memoria Activa was able to do in their ten years in the Plaza (they are still struggling for justice, but cease to have weekly presence in the street), and how they’ve opened up a critical space within which to discuss citizenship, Jewishness, and the nation. The conclusion is also meant to give a sense of the journey I took over the course of thirteen months in Buenos Aires. As I provided a description of my first day in the Plaza here in the introduction, I describe a scene of my last Monday with Memoria Activa. Importantly, as I reflect upon this work, I also look to the future and delineate further questions and aporias that need greater contemplation.

II. Can an Argentine Be a Jew?

“Last name?”

“Schneiderman.”

“Again?”...

“Schneiderman,” you repeat...

“It would be better,” he answers... “if you write it yourself. I find it difficult to copy *foreign* names.”

“What is your name, sir?” you ask....

“Hector García. Why?”

“And your name is not ‘foreign’ but rather ‘Argentine’?”

“Yes... Yes, sir.”

“You mean to say, then, that you descend from a tribe of Mataco Indians. Or Tobas. Or from Querandí Garcías. Perhaps Califucara García, an Araucano chief...”

“No, sir, I wanted to say that I am ‘Argentine’ because I was born here. In this country.”

“I was also born here.”

“In Buenos Aires. In the neighborhoods.”

“In Buenos Aires. In the neighborhoods.”...

“My mother too is Argentine...I am a second-generation Argentine.”

“My mother too is Argentine. A native of Buenos Aires, to be exact. Second generation.”...

“You don’t understand me. To be Argentine is...”—Ricardo Feierstein, *Mestizo* (2000).

“Nations, in their infancy, are children who foresee nothing, who know nothing, and men of much foresight and much knowledge must serve as their fathers. The barbarians have devoured us...”—Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (1845)

Introduction

This chapter is part one of a two-part section entitled “The Jew in the Nation.” Both chapters taken together explore the “Jewish Question” in Argentina from the perspective of Argentine nation-building processes on the one hand, and on the other, from European processes of Jewish emancipation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Both chapters consider challenges and responses to citizenship from Jewish intellectual, social, and

religious perspectives. Although the “Jewish Question” in Argentina was never part of the political and social climate as it had been in Europe, I use it to refer to the social and political questions that Jews (and by extension other minorities) posed to the nation and state at various times. Through a tracing of some of the sources from which Argentine national imaginaries draw, I ask, “*Can an Argentine be a Jew?*” I look specifically at two important dialogues in nineteenth and early twentieth century Argentina that continue to resonate today, the ideas of “civilization” and “barbarism” and ideas about immigration and the role of immigrants in creating the nation. I show how immigration was not just a topic of practical concern, but part of an ideological mission to transform Argentina—and a highly contentious one. In order to conceptually frame the desire for immigrants—specifically, European immigrants—I give an account of one of the most visible and influential debates of nineteenth century Argentina, that of “Civilization and Barbarism.” I also discuss the rise of “traditionalist” and “nativist” discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that attempted to define the nation in part through a rejection of all that was “foreign.” These discourses were often taken up in specific ways by the ultra-right nationalist movements that began to coalesce in the 1930s and 40s.

In all of these topics, the visions of Argentina conceived through immigration and polarizing discourse of “Civilization and Barbarism,” and right-wing nationalist movements, I ask where or how Jews may fit into or disrupt these national dialogues, particularly when they came to inhabit not just Argentine imaginaries, but life on the streets. I discuss some important aspects of Jewish life in Argentina, from the time of immigration to more contemporary periods, in order to show the processes and practices through which Jews accommodated and stretched the dominant articulations of *Argentinidad*, often occupying a position of ambivalence. This ambiguity is reflected in the various ways that the bombing of the AMIA came to be interpreted, and the position and positioning of Jews vis à vis this act

of violence. I now turn to a recurring source of tension in discussions of the nation, the topic of immigration.

The Specter and Promise of Immigration

“...the principal element of order and morality upon which the Argentine Republic relies today is the immigration of Europeans...If there were a government capable of directing their movement, this alone would be enough to cure in ten years, at most, all the homeland’s wounds made by the bandits, from Facundo to Rosas...”— Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo*, (1845)

In 1852 Juan Bautista Alberdi famously said that in America, “to govern is to populate.” This statement was made shortly before the Constitution of 1853 would be ratified, a document largely constructed through the vision of Alberdi elaborated in his famous essay, *Bases y Puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* (1852) (Bases and Points of Departure for the Political Organization of the Argentine Republic). Forty-two years after independence from Spain, Argentines were intensely negotiating their national identity and system of government. There were many, notably wealthy urban elites of whom Alberdi was one, who desired to release Argentina from its Spanish colonial roots, and prosper among the “enlightened” nations of the world: France, England, Germany, and the United States.¹ However, in order to achieve this transformation, *criollos* needed to be convinced that the way of life that had developed in Argentina was not the way to progress, and that immigration was a necessary remedy for the nation’s ills.²

¹For a discussion of the desire for immigration among elites (both liberal and non-liberal) see Nicolas Shumway (1993) *The Invention of Argentina*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Donald S. Castro (1991) *The Development and Politics of Argentine Immigration Policy, 1852-1914: To Govern is to Populate*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press; and Tulio Halperín Donghi (1976) “¿Para qué la inmigración?: Ideología y política inmigratoria y aceleración del proceso modernizador: El caso Argentino, 1810-1914,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 13: 437-489).

²During colonial times *criollo* referred to Spanish born in the colonies, as opposed to Peninsular Spaniards in Spain or who had posts in colonial America. *Criollo* came to represent a different way of life and culture than Spaniards, forged through the colonial experience. Thus, the term *criollo* began to refer less specifically to those of Spanish descent to those who were from the colonies and were often of mixed Spanish, indigenous and

Why was the uniting of nation-building with immigration so strong among these urban, liberal intellectuals? Immigration served a dual purpose: increasing the population would allow for the “improvement” and “development” of the land and economy through industry, agriculture and the building of infrastructure, and it would help realize a vision of the nation that was “white,” “civilized,” and “productive.”

Alberdi and others within his elite intellectual circle, such as Domingo F. Sarmiento and Esteban Echeverría, called “liberals” and often “Unitarists” (as liberals often wanted to unite the provinces under the power of Buenos Aires) fought for a particular vision of Argentina that was rooted in enlightenment ideas, particularly economic liberalism, popular secular education, separation from the Church. However, along with these ideas championed by men such as Sarmiento and Echeverría, was a notion of governance that in conception and practice only included the educated, land-owning elite.³ Thus, while influenced by the popular democracies of France and the United States, their political visions were heavily colored by strict colonial hierarchies and the belief that the “masses” were ill-suited on multiple levels to participate in processes of governance, including voting. (Widespread suffrage for men wasn’t implemented until 1912 with the passing of the Sáenz Peña Electoral Law. Women did not get voting privileges until Perón came to office in the 1940s.⁴)

African heritage. Around the time of independence, *criollo* began to refer to particular ways of life and social and political sensibilities that were at odds with the developing attachment to “liberalism” and to some extent, cosmopolitanism, in the cities. Even though men like Alberdi and Sarmiento were *criollo* by virtue of their birth, they distinguished themselves through their social and political beliefs and “non-native” ideas.

³The labeling of these men as “liberals” should not be confused with current popular usage of the term in the United States. To call men like Alberdi and Sarmiento “liberals” refers to the ways in which they challenged parts of culture and politics of Spanish colonialism (but not necessarily its hierarchical ideas), and argued for an opening up of the economy to foreign investment, widespread secular education and a general desire to limit the role of the Catholic church in state and society, and an emphasis on reason.

⁴See Bonner (1997:51-57) for a discussion of the expansion of political rights for women under Perón and the role of Evita in championing these rights.

Battles about how the nation would be conceived were often waged along axes of “rural” and “urban” or Buenos Aires and the provinces. There was intense strife between the power the came to be located in Buenos Aires and its environs and the power of the provinces. There were those (Unitarists) who sought to unite Argentina as a republic, significantly curtailing the autonomy of the provinces, and others who wanted greater autonomy for the provinces (Federalists). Federalism came to be associated with *populism*, which realized the political power of the popular classes and came to articulate a position of nativism to the “Euro-centrism” of most Unitarists.⁵

Power in general and the ability (legitimacy) to govern was concentrated in the hands of wealthy landowners, whether urban or rural based. Up until the constitution of 1853 which instituted Argentina as a republic with centralized power based in Buenos Aires (the Unitarists won this fight, but not the battle), government in the provinces consisted of a loose federation of wealthy landowning families and individuals who were essentially free to make laws according to their own interests, with little thought to larger political or economic concerns. The provincial leaders were known as *caudillos*, and the style of their leadership known as *caudillismo*.⁶ In opposition to the vision of the state desired by elite urban intellectuals, the *caudillo* and *caudillismo* came to be seen as one of the sources of trouble (or barbarism) for Argentina. The rule of the *caudillo*, while sharing the same elitism and paternalism as the liberals, was seen as capricious, self-centered, passionate and violent. The suspicion toward the *caudillo* will be further elicited below through the sharp words of

⁵Shumway (1993:47-48.)

⁶The *caudillo* and *caudillismo* has a rich history in Argentina and Latin American. Used rather generally today to refer to a type of politics that often has aspects of populism, localism and personalism—a strong leader that often sees himself (and is seen to be) above the law. At the time of Alberdi and Sarmiento, *caudillos* were primarily associated with rural politics and referred to a local leader (a wealthy landowner) who consolidates and keeps his power through a combination of patronage, intimidation or violence, often along with a cult of personality. The *caudillos* fought ideological and bloody battles for their particular economic and political interests, enlisting the help of the *peonadas* (peons) in battle. For their loyalty, the *peonadas* were given security, employment, food and shelter (Lynch 1993:16).

one of their greatest critics: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The effort of the Unitarists could be seen as a desire to suppress *caudillismo* and “civilize” the pampas.

Another significant source of tension among Argentine elites concerned the place of Spain and Spanish “tradition” in the nation. Among certain prominent men in society, what they identified as “Spanish culture” was like the kiss of death: it was viewed as against progress, dominated by Catholicism, and “backward.” Among many liberal intellectual elites, including Sarmiento and Echeverría, Spanish culture came to be seen as reason for the deficiencies of *criollo* culture. Shumway (1993:137) notes that, “Sarmiento laments that Argentina had not been colonized by a more ‘civilized’ country that would have left Argentina a better legacy than ‘the inquisition and Spanish absolutism.’ Spain for Sarmiento is the backward daughter for Europe....” From the perspective of men who held these ideas, what Argentina needed was an injection of fresh blood and enlightened ideas from Northern Europe. The rebirth of Argentina would happen in part through education, but mostly, it was hoped, through an infusion of new bodies from more “desirable” countries in Europe: France, Germany, and England.

Carrying on the legacy of Argentina’s first president, Bernardino Rivadavia, and his dream of a “new society that...would become a showplace of Western Civilization, an exemplum of European culture in the Americas, Paris in the Pampas” (Shumway 1993:84), Alberdi and his ideological brothers looked to Europe and North America, rather than Spain or *criollo* culture to fashion a newly independent Argentina. From the perspective of these urban elites, their struggles could be subsumed within the following concerns: Would the Argentine state adopt the liberal ideals present in the United States and Northern European countries, albeit with significant local transformations, or would it continue to be heavily influenced by the political traditions that had evolved with Spanish colonization? Would Argentine culture become a shiny showcase of European manners and civility, and perhaps

most importantly, productivity, or remain tied to the traditions of Spanish colonial rule—intensely hierarchical, authoritarian, insular, stagnant, and tied to the power of the Church?

Two ideological positions came to dominate the Argentine imaginary, one defined as liberal, European, and “civilized” and other which invests civilization in the traditions of Spain and the Catholic church. To some extent, these positions are premised upon a distinction between “rural” and “urban,” with the latter corresponding to the former, and vice versa. These divisions can be traced back to the early years of independence, if not earlier, and have much to do with the different ways that Buenos Aires and the interior developed, in power, wealth and culture.⁷ Those who saw Argentina’s future with the local culture of the *criollos* became part of a nativist movement that would see its fullest political fruition in the rise of *nacionalismo* in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. The liberals, on the other hand, were portrayed as “selling” Argentina to Europe, and betraying the true heart of the nation. This debate has as much resonance today as it had in the nineteenth century.

The cities, and Buenos Aires in particular, came to represent a liberal vision of Argentina that sought economic growth and security, as well as a civilizing process through European immigration.⁸ Many of those who held political and economic power in the provinces, the *caudillos*, wealthy landowners, and Catholic Church, were not necessarily interested in being “civilized” by European immigrants, nor did they necessarily believe that the destiny of Argentina lay outside of its national or regional, boundaries. The problem was not just of political power, but about authenticity and the definition of the nation. From what

⁷Shumway writes, “By 1820 the fault underlying Argentine society and history was clearly visible...On the side of the fault were the liberals, mostly the Unitarians of Buenos Aires, who lived facing Europe, and were anxious to import the latest, most modern ideas from abroad, to wrench their embryonic nation into modernity whatever the cost, and to make it a showplace of European civilization. In their scheme, Buenos Aires would serve as exemplar and tutor of the provinces and perhaps for all of Latin America. On the other side of the fault were Federalists, provincial caudillos, and populists of several stripes. Although their dream for Argentina was less clear and less articulate than that of their liberal enemies, they sought a more inclusive polity where there was a place for the campesino, the Indian, the mixed-bloods, and the gauchos” (1993: 80).

⁸“Buenos Aires” and the “interior” (and here I need to be careful not reify these places more than they already are) were quite different culturally and economically, even if the urban elite intellectuals often had considerable *estancias* in the country of their own.

sources would the spirit and people of Argentina be forged? For those who lay claim to authenticity through Spanish “tradition” and local *criollo* culture (often under the umbrella of Federalism, *caudillismo*, nativism, and later *nacionalismo*), whether a wealthy landowner of *peonada*, it was the Europeanized *porteños* who were the imposters and had to sublimated.

The fascination with non-Spanish Europe by many intellectual elites of the nineteenth century, coupled with a romantic but ultimately negative image of the “local,” is reflected in one of the most important and infamous debates in Latin America: that of Civilization and Barbarism. The subject of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s seminal work of Argentine and Latin American literature, *Facundo*, this debate was a struggle not only to define the burgeoning nation, but to determine from where its spirit would be drawn. This debate, as I will illustrate below, is not only a discussion about kinds of bodies and ways of life, but also of geography: the “natural” world and its “tamed” counterpart, the city—or “nature” and “culture.”

Civilization and Barbarism

The breath of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento can still be felt in the streets, homes, and cafes of Buenos Aires. His legacy can be felt in the classrooms of public schools that dot the country, and in the ways in which Argentines (perhaps especially *porteños*) conceive of themselves in relation to “Latin America,” “Europe,” and today the “United States.” During his time, Sarmiento was a powerful force in Argentine letters and politics. The man made an impression by both his word and his girth; he was not immoderate in either thought or appetite, and during most of Sarmiento’s political career (1830s-1880s) he wasn’t an easy figure to ignore, even in exile.⁹ Born and educated in 1811 in the Argentine province of San Juan, he was neither wealthy nor European educated. Notably for the time and influential to his thought, the social and economic position he was born into did not hinder his future

⁹Sarmiento, like many in his intellectual circle, went into exile a couple of times during the Rosas regime (1829-1852). He wrote one of his most famous works in Chile, *Facundo, or Civilization or Barbarism*.

success. Sarmiento, then, was not part of the Buenos Aires intellectual elite by birthright, but gained prominence through his lively polemical writings, philosophical beliefs and political activities; his life was in many ways an example of one of his most cherished beliefs: the power of the individual "...to shape personal and public destinies" (Kirkpatrick and Masiello 1994:4).

Sarmiento engaged with an important group of intellectuals based in Buenos Aires, European educated, and for the most part wealthy, who formed a literary society in 1837 as a forum to challenge the existing political leadership of the country, most notably the rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas—a brutal *caudillo* ruler (1829-1852) despised by Sarmiento and his circle.¹⁰ The founder of the group known as *La asociación de Mayo* (The May Association, a reference to Argentine independence), Estaban Echeverría, along with Sarmiento, Juan Batista Alberdi and Bartolomé Mitre, among others, believed in the power of the "right" ideas and beliefs, and along with this, the strengths of "good" breeding and racial provenance, to set Argentina in the direction they desired (Shumway 1993:126-127). What the people needed was the right words, delivered by a man of particular genius. Esteban Echeverría argued that this man will..."drink from the fountains of European civilization, he will study our history, he will examine with a penetrating eye the depths of our society, and, enriched by all the treasures of study and reflection, he will...bequeath a legacy of works that will enlighten and ennoble the patria" (Shumway 1993:127).

What the people also needed, were more (and different) people. Immigration was the other side of this coin. Immigration served two needs: to tighten a claim on the land and increase economic productivity, and to realize a vision of society based on (non-Spanish) European ideals and phenotype. Immigration, it was believed, could tame and transform the

¹⁰Alberdi is probably the more subtle thinker in this group. He initially supported the Rosas regime and argued that *caudillismo* was not mere barbarism but reflected a genuine reflection of the people, and a "stage" toward democracy. As the brutality of the Rosas regime grew, he attitude toward the leader changed (Shumway 1993:124-125).

inherent barbarism that Sarmiento in particular perceived in the nation. The desired goal of these intellectuals was less a revolution composed of arms and blood (although it was this too: the extermination and suppression of the indigenous population was part of this project) than an attempt to transform Argentine society through social engineering, education, and “whitening” the population through immigration. While most of their ire was directed at the Rosas regime, it was not just the man they despised, but what they felt he represented: the illiberal and irrational demagoguery of the *caudillo* and an ethics derived from the untamed pampas, rather than the enlightened reason and noble leadership provided by the books and intellectual banter of the salons.

For Sarmiento, land or place had a deterministic power on character; it could cultivate an industrious “reasoned society” or stimulate “savage impulses” and idleness, with the culture and tamed nature of the cities promoting the former and the plains of Argentina advancing the latter. What the ‘untamed’ plains could nurture, apparently, was (in Sarmiento’s eyes) a brute like Rosas. The figure of Rosas, whose use of violence and intimidation were well known, became for Sarmiento and his peers more than a vicious tyrant. Coming from the provinces (although in actuality not too far away from the city of Buenos Aires), he symbolized aspects of Argentina, its people and land, that, according to Sarmiento, threatened progress, civilized life, reason and liberty. It is Rosas that is to stand in for all that is barbaric in Argentina: “...[the] despotic government of the rancher Don Juan Manuel de Rosas... sticks the gaucho’s knife into cultured Buenos Aires and destroys the work of centuries, of civilization, law, and liberty” (Sarmiento 2003:78). The desire for immigration was in part an economic and racial desire, but it also promised to transform the land into civilized, productive spaces, that in turn would foster the “right” kind of culture.

Therefore, the work of Sarmiento and his peers is more all encompassing and expansive than a directed political attack. Shumway sums up the struggle of Sarmiento and his intellectual siblings in the following way: “The cause of his generation was not, then,

merely a fight against a particular politician, but a monumental struggle the pitted the forces of civilization against the powers of barbarism; Civilization or Barbarism are the choices Sarmiento offers us, and to a degree those terms become the rallying cry of the entire generation” (1991:134). The epic quality ascribed to this struggle required significant discursive work. It is not an understatement to say that Sarmiento, along with his contemporaries, provided some of the most lasting, powerful, and problematic guiding fictions for the nation.

Sarmiento’s masterpiece, *Facundo, Civilization or Barbarism*, published in 1845, most compellingly and urgently evokes what is at stake for Argentina in this battle.¹¹ While Sarmiento’s analysis of the nation is composed of rather absolute dichotomies and his bombastic prose annoyed some his contemporaries, the lens with which he renders Argentina has served as a potent narrative of understanding for many of its citizens. It can be argued that Sarmiento’s dichotomous rendering of Argentina is so entrenched and all-encompassing that it is difficult to interpret the events and ideas of the nation outside of its perimeters. The ideas presented in this stylistically groundbreaking narrative (it can’t be contained by one genre, but includes many), have given the Argentine nation a national ethos with which to unite, and become. “Civilization or Barbarism” gave Argentines—and Latin Americans in general—a language with which to know and interpret themselves and their country’s history. Echevarría states in his introduction to the most recent (and most complete) translation of *Facundo* in English: “With *Facundo* in particular, Sarmiento had given Argentina a national discourse, a set of ideas and figures through which the country could think itself—a phenomenology of its spirit, as it were” (2003:10). More recently, one can detect echoes of Sarmiento in questions that *porteños* sometimes pose to themselves: is Argentina part of Europe or Latin America?

¹¹The book has changed titles over successive printings. The original title of this book was *Civilization and Barbarism: The life of Juan Facundo Quiroga, and the physical aspect, customs, and practices of the Argentine Republic*.

What are the evocative ideas and figures that manifest so prominently in Sarmiento's prose? Ostensibly a non-fiction narrative about the life of Juan Facundo Quiroga, a caudillo leader in the Northwest of the country who is seen to be a precursor to Rosas, the book is "about" much more than Facundo or Rosas. The main actors in Sarmiento's national drama are: *gauchos* and *caudillos* in contrast to *porteños* and other city-folk, centralism opposed to federalism, democracy vs. despotism, and the landscape of Argentina itself. The gaucho in particular, while romanticized at times in Sarmiento's prose, is one of the most vivid examples of "barbarism" that he provides. The independent gaucho, this famous image of Argentina that still graces literature for tourists and the popular imagination, was for Sarmiento an image of unrestrained wildness, of a life lived outside of society and the law. Sarmiento's negative view of the gaucho, and his denigration of what he saw as "barbarism" would be later challenged by a resurrection of nostalgic feelings for this "authentic" Argentine figure.

Interestingly and not insignificantly, the other work of literature that has most contributed to nationalist discourses and feelings is José Hernández's myth-making epic poem on the gaucho, *Martín Fierro*, published in 1872. Ironically, by the time this work was published, "the gaucho had become an object of nostalgia, a lost origin around which to build a national mythology" (Echevarría 2003:15). *Martín Fierro* helped to immortalize the gaucho as a figure of authentic Argentineness, a model to be lauded rather than denigrated. These two works, one championing the civilization of the cities, with its industrious immigrants and its educated citizens, and the other celebrating resourcefulness, the bounty of the land, and the individual unschooled in neither the laws, customs, or knowledge of urban society, are again evidence of the tensions and contradictions at work in Argentine

national discourse, and are a testament to the ways in which “civilization” and “barbarism” can come to mean different things.¹²

In many senses, the vision that Sarmiento provided Argentina (and beyond), being based on irreconcilable opposition—Civilization *or* Barbarism—has created a blueprint for failure. Can Argentines or Argentina ever fully rid themselves of “barbarism”—a category whose qualities change over time—and if not, what then? Argentina becomes a nation “betwixt and between”: “The image of Argentina as an incomplete being, an inauthentic reflection, or an unfinished product of modernity has often been seen as the inevitable drawback of its European genealogy. From this angle, Argentina appears to be a utopian dream that went awry...the lingering ruins of a stillborn great nation” (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2002:4). A significant legacy of Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, can be described as a sense of failure, a feeling of inevitable decline that haunts discussions about the state and society.¹³

Sarmiento’s other significant contribution to the shaping of the country is less ambiguous in its benefit. The well-developed education system, which he worked at expanding and improving most of his life, is one of his most important legacies. Sarmiento was president of Argentina from 1868-74, during which time some of his most successful works included building schools and the education system, as well as the modernization of the railway and communication systems of the country. For Sarmiento, education was foundational to his vision of the individual and his (and to some extent, her) ability to

¹²See Josefina Ludmer’s work, (2002) *The Gaucho Genre: A Treatise on the Motherland*, for an in depth study of the gaucho and national discourse.

¹³It is not clear to me that thinking in Sarmiento’s terms of “Civilization and Barbarism” is still relevant among younger Argentines. It did seem to still be an important idiom through which to conceptualize the state and society for older middle-class Argentines, however. Among younger social actors, intellectuals, and social movements (all of which are not mutually exclusive of course) in Argentina and beyond, the categories of “civilization” and “barbarism” are being redefined or thrown out altogether. See Walter Mignolo (2005) *The Idea of Latin America*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. xviii.

progress and access power.¹⁴ In part, his own modest upbringing and improvised education may have shaped his thinking in this regard. Sarmiento, a man of rather humble background, achieved quite illustrious goals in the world of politics and letters. (Not incidentally, many of his ideas about education and the implementation of public schools are directly influenced by the U.S. system. In fact, Sarmiento brought U.S. school teachers to Argentina to help set up schools.) His thoughts on popular education may seem at odds with some of his more hierarchical and elitist views, but in this aspect Sarmiento was a visionary for his time and place. As Halperín Donghi states, "...Sarmiento always refused to believe that the distinction between rich and poor established the most important internal boundary in Argentine society..."(1994:23). Perhaps contradictory to some of his other social and political positions, Sarmiento, like his North American contemporaries, sought education to help level the effects of differences in wealth and power. However, other boundaries in society remained unexamined in his thought.

As a man of his time and place, Sarmiento's world-view was deeply marked by a profound racism and elitism. The question of from where to build a national foundation was a thoroughly racialized issue. In 1844 he defends the Spanish treatment of native peoples by saying: "...It may be very unjust to exterminate savages...but thanks to this injustice, America, instead of being abandoned to savages, incapable of progress, is today occupied by the Caucasian race, the most perfect, the most intelligent, the most beautiful, and the most progressive of those who people the earth" (Kirkpatrick and Masiello 1994:6). For those intent on transforming Argentina it was not simply a matter of education or improved living conditions: the monumental task required new blood. The barbarism that Sarmiento and others see is connected to an idea of racial inferiority, and the inferior culture of the

¹⁴For a greater understanding of how Sarmiento approached the matter of women and education, see Elizabeth Garrels (1994) "Sarmiento and the Woman Question: From 1839 to the Facundo." In *Sarmiento: Author of a Nation*. Tulio Halperín Donghi, Iván Jaksic, Gwen Kirkpatrick and Francine Masiello, eds. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

criollos was due in part through the inevitable mixing of colonialism. Although in his later years the influential essayist Juan Batista Alberdi comes to respect aspects of *criollo* culture, he doesn't mince words when he writes in 1852, "Take one of our ragamuffins, or gauchos, or half-breeds—the essential ingredients of our popular masses—through all the transformations of the best educational system, and in a hundred years you will not make of him an English laborer" (Shumway 1993:141-142). According to this line of thinking, the "popular masses" were inherently indolent and lacked the culture and thinking that would bring about "progress" to the vast fertile plains and deserts of Argentina. No amount of education could significantly change these qualities: culture and body were unequivocally bound together—blood was destiny.

For Sarmiento, as with Alberdi, the project of nation-building was yoked to immigration. For many decades immigration was seen as an effective means of "improving" the nation by the urban elite, but not without heavy opposition from leaders in the interior. Despite support for immigration reaching back at least to Rivadavia (1820s) it wasn't until late in the nineteenth century that Argentina actively pursued a pro-immigration policy. And immigrants did come, particularly between the years of 1870 and 1914, when almost 6 million immigrants ambled their sea-addled bodies through the ports of Buenos Aires (Cortés Conde 1993:55). The majority of immigrants to arrive to Argentina were from Spain and Italy, with significant numbers of Eastern Europeans and Russians. Amongst this wave of immigrants were thousands of Jews, the majority hailing from Czarist Russia's "Pale of Settlement," an area of land that comprises present day Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus. However, as I explain more fully in the pages to come, most of these immigrants did not match the dreams of men like Alberdi and Sarmiento.

Immigration Implemented: Settling and Unsettling Argentina

In the years between 1871 and 1914, nearly 6 million new immigrants entered Argentina. About 3.2 million chose to settle permanently in the country (Gallo 1993:83). As I described above, the reasons for encouraging immigration were rooted in European ideas of (economic and social) progress and civilization. Argentine leaders and elite urban intellectuals thus desired to “modernize” their nation by expanding the economy, building infrastructure, and having greater numbers of people to make the land productive. In the 1820s, Bernardino Rivadavia, the first President of a newly independent Argentina, began agitating for a policy of immigration and colonization, but this policy met with little success before 1870 (Cortés Conde 1993:54). Despite all the talk in the middle decades of the nineteenth century about the positive role immigrants could play in shaping Argentina, politically it was difficult to install a successful immigration policy. This was primarily due to two factors. As I iterated above, resistance from landowners and others who had different economic and philosophical interests than the liberal leaders, were not keen on “developing” the country through immigration. The other problem was largely practical: the considerable difficulties of moving people into the interior without cheap and adequate transport services (Cortés Conde:54). In short, there was very little infrastructure to support bringing more people into the interior, and yet, it was hoped that by increasing the population the infrastructure would be built.

With the liberally-minded elite in power in the last quarter of the nineteenth century a substantial immigration policy was put in place in the 1870s, challenging and changing the society in ways unanticipated by even the policy’s supporters. In fact, the population of Argentina grew quite drastically once the Immigration and Colonization Law passed on October 19, 1876. Bureaucratic changes to Argentina’s immigration agencies in Europe served to more aggressively proselytize Argentina and facilitate immigration. In 1869 foreigners represented 12.1 percent of the population, but by 1914 they corresponded to

nearly 30 percent of the total population, and the number of urban dwelling people rose to a majority (Cortes Conde:55-57). In many respects, Alberdi's aphorism, "gobernar es poblar" (to govern is to populate) was realized, although not exactly in the way he and others hoped.

For Juan Batista Alberdi, governance and immigration went hand and hand, each influencing the other to strengthen the developing republic. However, Alberdi's plan, like Sarmiento's and many of their intellectual contemporaries, depended upon the "right" kind of governance and the "right" kind of immigrants in mutual development of each other. As he writes in his most famous political essay, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina*: "Do we want to plant and nourish the qualities of English liberty, French culture, and the industriousness of men from Europe and the United States? Then let us bring the living exemplars of these attributes...and let those qualities take root here" (Alberdi [1852]2002:95).

The majority of people who responded to Argentina's aggressive immigration policy were indeed European. But most didn't hail from France, England, or Germany. Argentina didn't receive the dreamed of large numbers of "intellectual," "industrious," and "civilized" peoples from the more northerly regions of Europe—a romantic vision of Europe to be sure. Weary and weakened by long travel, most of those who ambled from the ships into the boisterous world of Buenos Aires were poor or working class immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Russia, along with a smaller percentage of people from the Middle and Far East. The vast majority were Catholic, many were Protestant, some were Jewish or Muslim. It was primarily through the labor and society of Italians and Spaniards, Jews and Asians, descendents of slaves and indigenous people, that the nation of Argentina was built— "barbarism" with "civilization," in spite of Sarmiento's vision. What were the Argentine elite and popular classes to do with this babel of languages and customs? In a country that until then had been primarily Catholic in religious and cultural terms, the presence of

Protestants, Jews, and Muslims tested the limits of religious pluralism as defined in the constitution. How this opening to religious others came to be is worth a brief explanation.

While the Spanish colonialists left Argentina with a powerful, vocal Catholic Church and a society steeped in the mores and traditions of Catholicism (while hardly unchanging, the Church works to present an illusion of constancy and tradition), from early in the country's history liberal Argentines sought to curtail the power of the church and allow for the immigration, and tolerance of other religious traditions, particularly Protestantism. The desire for non-Catholics stems in part from the negative perception that many liberal elites had of "Spanish culture." According to this view, the country needed Protestants (who correspond to the Northern European countries) in order to prosper and thrive.

Characteristically, Alberdi states this best in his "*Bases*" essay: "Reduced to Catholicism to the exclusion of other beliefs, Spanish America is a lonely and silent monastery...to exclude dissident religions sects in South America is to exclude the English, the Germans, the Swiss, the North Americans who are not Catholics, that is to say, to exclude those settlers whom this continent needs most "(Alberdi 2002:98).

Given the great influence that Alberdi had on the drafting of the 1853 constitution, it is not surprising that Article 25 states: The federal government will encourage European immigration and will not restrict, limit, nor burden the entry to Argentina with any taxes the entry of any foreigner whose goal is to work the land, improve industry or introduce and teach the sciences or arts.¹⁵

Thus, any *European* immigrant who may be able to help "improve" Argentina will not be hindered or discriminated in any way, and while the constitution overtly supports Catholicism as the official religion (Article 2), it also guarantees freedom of religion before

¹⁵The article reads as follows in Spanish (my translation above): El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea; y no podrá restringir, limitar ni gravar con impuesto alguno la entrada en territorio argentino de los extranjeros que traigan por objeto labrar la tierra, mejorar la industrias, e introducir y enseñar las ciencias y las artes. Go to <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/constitutions/argentina/argentina.html> for the full text of the Argentine constitution.

the law (Article 14). The guarantee of religious freedom coupled with the emphasis on European immigration, functioned as a welcome mat for German and English Protestants—some of the most desired immigrants by the intellectual liberals.

The constitution of 1853, followed by an encouraging immigration policy in the subsequent decades, did bring some Protestants to Argentina. For the most part, however, whatever particular positive influence Protestants were thought to bestow upon Argentina was overwhelmed by the Catholics, Jews and others who arrived with them. While Protestant immigrants left and continue to leave a distinct influence on Argentine society, they didn't have the overpowering edifying affect Sarmiento or Alberdi were hoping for. That is to say, they didn't provide the revolutionary force of civilization that Sarmiento consistently championed (Alberdi's thinking became more nuanced in the later years and less disparaging of "native" (*criollo*) people and culture).

However, the desire for immigrants and the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom did create a legal fissure through which Jews and Muslims could enter the nation. It is unlikely that the guarantees of religious freedom proposed in the 1853 constitution had Jews and Muslims in mind. Initially, their entry into the country was a side effect of the desire for more immigrants. As Avni has pointed out, "Alberdi's idea of change was restricted to altering Argentina's status as a Catholic country only to the point at which it be known as a Christian country. This made it highly unlikely that the Jews would be classified as desirable immigrants" (1991:16). According to Avni, the records of the constitutional deliberations contain very few references made about Jews, and it is difficult to ascertain what, if anything, the authors of the constitutions were thinking regarding non-Christian settlement (1991:17).¹⁶

¹⁶As Avni writes, the 1853 discussion of article XIV of the constitution dealing with religious freedom was contentious, yet ultimately those in favor of religious tolerance prevailed, for the most part: "Non-Catholics could not aspire to become president of the Republic. Nonetheless, they were promised total religious freedom, equality before the law, and the opportunity to be appointed or elected to other public offices. The decisive factor

Whatever ideas about Jews had been circulating, they were not overwhelmingly negative or persistent enough to prohibit the entry of Jews into the country.¹⁷ Indeed, Jewish immigration was sometimes positively promoted as a way to help “build” a nation’s economy, as Lesser (1994) pointed out in the case of Brazilian nation-building. The passing of the immigration law and the protections guaranteed in the constitution, opened the doors to Argentina for Jews. By the 1880s the Argentine government was pursuing a more robust push for immigrants than ever before, and under President Julio Roca (1880-1886), Jewish immigration actually became a pursued policy, at least moderately so. The Argentine government fostered Jewish settlement by offering free or subsidized passage to Argentina and a plot of land. These promises were not always kept, but thousands of Jews arrived—and stayed—regardless.

The changes in immigration policy, the increase of Russian pogroms, and the money and connections of a German Jew named Baron Maurice Hirsch coalesced to make Argentina a viable and sometimes celebrated option for Jewish settlement.

From Pale to Pampa: Jews Arrive to Argentina¹⁸

Before the great waves of immigration in the late 1900s, Jews were a rather insignificant presence in Argentina. But the combination of an active and liberal immigration policy, along with increasing instability for Jews in Europe and particularly, Russia, brought thousands of Jews through the port of Buenos Aires. The latter portion of the nineteenth

here, constantly repeated by the legislators, was the need for massive immigration” (Avni 1991:5). Carlos Menem, Argentine president from 1989-1999, himself a convert to Catholicism from Islam, changed the law requiring Argentine presidents to be Catholic.

¹⁷What is missing from this analysis is a greater understanding of what “Jews” signified to the elite and popular classes in nineteenth century Argentina. Actual Jews were scarce in Argentina until late in the century, and I have not significantly explored how the image of “the Jew” in colonial Spanish America articulated with changing European notions of race that elite Argentines most likely engaged with. What I will show, however, are some of the ways Jews came to be perceived once they settled in Argentina in significant numbers.

¹⁸I am borrowing the title of Eugene Sofer’s (1982) book *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires*. I am using the example of Russia to discuss Jewish immigration to Argentina because it is where the majority of the first waves of Jewish immigration have come from. Jews in Argentina were often called “Rusos” as I show below.

century was a chaotic and dangerous time for most of Russia's millions of Jews. Confined to the Western border of the country (which at the time included portions of today's Eastern Europe) by Catherine the Great in the late eighteenth century, and limited in their freedom of occupation and participation in wider Russian society, the Jewish population mainly lived in smaller towns (called *shtetls* in Yiddish) and maintained their own system of education and social life, as dictated by religious practice.¹⁹ *Pogroms*, or periodic organized violence against Russian Jews, reached a particular intensity in the late nineteenth century, and helped to instigate waves of emigration. While I cannot fully expound upon the complex life and place of Russia's millions of Jews, suffice it to say that the relationship between "Russians" and "Jews" during the late 19th century was becoming increasingly perilous for the latter. I focus here in particular on Russia's Jews because of the significant number of them who set their sights on Argentina. Some quite specifically imagined Argentina as a refuge (based on some literature available at the time) and others simply wanted out of Russia, by whatever route possible.

While many new Jewish immigrants chose to settle in Buenos Aires and other cities, a significant number stayed in urban Buenos Aires for only a brief period of time, on their way to decidedly more tranquil locals. Instead of making a living as peddlers, tailors, seamstresses, or merchants in the cities, with the help of Baron Maurice Hirsch and the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) they traveled to the interior of Argentina and to the vast fertile plains of the pampas.²⁰ These intrepid, hopeful, and originally non-agricultural Jews settled in sparsely settled areas on tracts of land bought by the JCA. At these sites, known as *colonias*, they farmed, raised cattle and built the structures necessary for

¹⁹The legal decree stipulating that Jews live in the "pale of settlement" lasted from 1791-1917, the year of the October Revolution.

²⁰Baron Maurice Hirsch sponsored Jewish immigration, primarily from Czarist Russia to Latin America, Canada, and Palestine. His organization, the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), was instrumental in helping thousands of Jews travel to Argentina and settle in agricultural colonies.

maintaining Jewish life: synagogues, schools, mutual aid associations, cemeteries. In living a largely agricultural life in rural Argentina, they couldn't have found a more direct route to becoming part of Argentina's mythologized past: they became the *Los Gauchos Judíos*, the Jewish Gauchos.

The *colonias* were isolated, unique outposts of Yiddish and *criollo* culture. With the help of the JCA, 17 *colonias* were established in Argentina at the end of the 19th and early 20th century (Feierstein 1999). In these hybrid spaces, Yiddish mingled with Spanish and farming and ranching complemented trips to the library and local Yiddish theater. In the beginning, Yiddish was the lingua franca and the newly erected stone buildings bore writing in Yiddish (a language composed with the Hebrew alphabet), which can be seen today. The first and most famous of the *colonias* in Santa Fé province, Moisés Ville, began with a group of 136 families, all from Russia's Pale of Settlement. While many of Russia's Jews favored relocation to Palestine or North America, Argentina had a lure of its own. To a limited extent, Argentina competed with Palestine as an envisioned site for independent Jewish life (Gerchunoff 1998; Avni 1991). In pamphlets and brochures that highlighted the availability and quality of Argentine land, and most importantly, the freedom to live there and cultivate it, Argentina began to be seen by some as an alternate "promised land"—alternate to the envisioned redemptive promises of Palestine and the imagined gilded freedoms of North America.

By the time Jews came to settle the pampas, the *gaucho* had all but disappeared. The term *gaucho*, now laden with nostalgia, pride, and "authenticity," had lost its specificity and had come to refer to rural inhabitants in general (Shumway 1993:12). Many of the rural folk were skilled in the same way as the *gauchos*, but led a life substantially different from the *gauchos* of the past—they were not the independent roamers of earlier times. Nonetheless, despite the absence of the "real" gaucho, his image as the archetypical Argentine cowboy par excellence, infuses discussions about Argentina's rural agricultural

life. With the publication in 1910 of Alberto Gerchunoff's *Los Gauchos Judíos* (published in English as *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*), Jews firmly appropriated one of the most cherished—and contested—figures of Argentine nationalism, positioning themselves not just as Jews *in* Argentina, but Jews *of* Argentina.²¹ As Elkin notes, "...the Jewish gaucho symbolizes the settlers' physical and psychic investment in the upbuilding of the Argentine interior" (1998:115).

While the image of the "Jewish gaucho" is celebrated in some Jewish-Argentine sectors, it is largely ignored or looked upon with amusement by general Argentine society (Lockhart 2005). Despite the fact that the *colonias* figure prominently in the history of Jewish-Argentine life, their populations were never huge, the settlements weren't economically successful, and they have all but disappeared in present-day Argentina. Moises Ville, the earliest and one of the most robust of the *colonias*, exists today as a sleepy rural village where every once in a while one sees a tourist bus amble through its dusty streets. The Yiddish-inscribed buildings still remain, as does a Jewish school and an active synagogue. But the majority of the town today is non-Jewish and there are few opportunities for young people. Most of the Jewish-Argentines who grew up in the *colonias* chose to raise their families in more urban locations, where there were more business opportunities, and particularly in Buenos Aires, a thriving Jewish cultural scene that beckoned by the 1910s.

As the Jewish community swelled in Buenos Aires, so did the institutions and cultural offerings that catered to Jewish life. The AMIA had been established by 1894 and by the early decades of the twentieth century one could choose from a variety of Yiddish theater (to accompany the lively and prestigious theater culture already present in Buenos Aires since

²¹Another recent translation to English of *Los Gauchos Judíos* is Aizenberg's 2000 publication of *Parricide on the Pampa? A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's Los Gauchos Judíos*. For more on the figure of the "Jewish gaucho" see Lockhart 2005 and Aizenberg 2004. See also Juan José Jusid's 1975 film *Los Gauchos Judíos*, based upon Gerchunoff's book.

the late nineteenth century), Jewish social and sports clubs, camps, schools, political organizations and philanthropic societies. One could find multiple outlets for kosher meat and bakeries to pick up Challah bread for Shabbat dinner, and signs in Yiddish graced some of the streets of Buenos Aires. As new immigrants, many Jews chose to live in particular parts of the city, such as the neighborhood known as *Once*, where they created businesses and organizations that catered to their needs, like the AMIA and DAIA. Popular daily Yiddish newspapers, such as *Di Yiddishe Zaitung* and *Di Presse*, existed for over half a century, in addition to dozens of smaller news outlets that catered to the spectrum of Jewish political and social interests. Thus, by the early part of the twentieth century, various iterations of Jewish life was more or less thriving in Argentina. According to Avni, by World War I the community numbered between 100,000 and 115, 600 persons, the majority of whom lived in Buenos Aires (1991:91). By the end of World War II, the Jewish population swelled to near 300,000, but it has been declining since. While perhaps not fully incorporated into the dominant visions of *Argentinidad*, Jews were nevertheless able to practice their religion and pursue their interests relatively unencumbered. And over the generations, many Jewish Argentines would come to have more affinity with others of their economic class than religious or ethnic group. However, the “success” of Jewish life in Argentina does not preclude the existence of anti-Jewish sentiment to either “real” or “figurative” Jews, and anti-Semitism has had a respectably resilient history in the country.

Popular literature, such as Julián Martel’s *La Bolsa* (1890), portrays “Jews” as a foreign element (although not as foreign, say, as an Englishman) inherently connected to greedy capitalist ventures, intent on taking over Argentine society and economy (if not the world). Martel was writing at a time when the nation was experiencing tremendous confusion, strain, and reorganization due to the large numbers of immigrants coming to work and settle in Argentina, it was a period of extreme economic stress. It is during this time that we begin to see the seeds of the *nacionalismo* movement begin to sprout, as we see later in

the chapter. This movement resurrected “nativist” traditions and ideas for Argentina, and marks a resurgence of anti-liberal sentiment in Argentina.

As I’ve previously mentioned, Jews weren’t the only immigrants to enter Argentina in significant numbers, and the influx of new immigrants challenged and changed the physical make-up of the country and added to the tributaries of ideas flowing into the nation. By 1914, third generation Argentines did not make up more than 20 percent of the total population of cities like Buenos Aires, Rosario and Santa Fé (Cortés Conde 1993:85). According to Cortés Conde, the changes wrought by so many new immigrants did lead to conflicts and tensions between native Argentines and those recently arrived, but they were not of a “serious character” and “assimilation was, generally speaking, both rapid and peaceful” (1993:91-92; see also Romero 2004). However, I argue that it is debatable whether or not the tensions between new immigrants and native Argentines were not of a “serious character.” This same period of rapid immigration saw also a re-evaluation of “native traditions” by both supporters and critics of immigration, as I show below, reflecting the uneasiness that many *criollo* Argentines felt in the presence of so many new immigrants. Moreover, the process of assimilation was unevenly experienced and pursued by different immigrant groups, further complicating the stories that can be told of this period.

In fact, some of the outcomes of the immigration policies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely exceeded the peaceful, seamless nation-building that nineteenth century liberals imagined. Those who initially supported or were indifferent to immigration may have changed their minds when substantial numbers of immigrants actually came to Argentina, and challenged the entrenched power of the wealthy, and often ruling, elite. By the beginnings of the twentieth century rumblings of discontent began to gather force at the margins.

Given the writings of men such as Sarmiento and Alberdi it is not unreasonable to aver that those whose liberal visions supported immigration for both economic and social

purposes envisioned receiving people whose worldview was not so different from their own. The immigrants, however, were not a homogenous bunch and they brought with them different social norms and customs, and also bundled within this, new or otherwise “foreign” ideas about politics and society. “European” proved to be many things, and the period (1880-1920s) of immigration corresponded with vast social and political changes in Europe.

Many of the new immigrants, particularly from Russia, sparked life in political movements and aspirations that previously had little purchase in Argentina. With a burgeoning immigrant community often at the margins of society, social and political philosophies such as anarchism, syndicalism, socialism, and communism found a new home in the streets and meeting places of the larger urban centers—most prominently in Buenos Aires. In the early twentieth century, labor laws were loose at best and a governmentally run social safety net was inexistent (this was to be handled somewhat by Mutual Aid Societies organized by different immigrant groups). As Rock has noted, by 1914, “There was no minimum wage law, eight- or ten-hour act, pensions or retirement provisions” (1993:136). While demands for improved (or at least standardized) working conditions and visions for a differently organized society rallied a new generation of workers and intellectuals, these demands were not particularly cared for by business owners and many of the wealthy elite. Frequently coupled with a desire for improved labor conditions was an interest in transforming the very structure and rationale of society. Anarchism, in particular, became a well-organized and popular movement in Argentina. This was due in large part to the number of Russian immigrants who settled in Buenos Aires since the 1880s. A visible portion of these Russians were Jews.

Jews, while somewhat isolated in the Pale from larger currents in Russian society, or perhaps because of their marginalized position in Russia, were not ignorant of the social and political changes happening around them. By the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish life all over Europe began to transform in greater or lesser degrees in response to changed

political and social environments sparked by movements sprung from the Enlightenment (see chapter two). Jews in Russia created their own organizations that combined Jewish ideas of social justice with larger political movements. The Bund, a secular Jewish socialist party, was created in Wilno in 1897, but more assimilated Russian Jews shed their religious and ethnic identity and became directly involved with the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party.²² Some of these new Russian Jewish immigrants (along with other non-Jewish Russians and Europeans) brought their anarchist and socialist ideas to Argentina, particularly Buenos Aires, disturbing the extant hierarchical society with their political organizing, and agitation for better working conditions and wages. As I expand upon below, as increasing numbers of immigrants began challenging the aesthetics and politics of Buenos Aires, a backlash against immigrants, and in particular, *Rusos* or Russians, began to gather force.

The involvement of many Jews in revolutionary political movements brought generally unwanted visibility to the Jewish community (who were often stereotyped and seen as guilty by association), and perhaps further marginalized them from mainstream *Porteño* society. Although Jews did not by any means make up the majority of any particular movement, their involvement, particularly in the anarchist movement, was disproportionately high, and their presence was quite visible (Moya 2004). Perhaps the most notorious example of this concerns the assassination of the Buenos Aires' Chief of Police in 1909. The man eventually associated with the crime was a Russian-born Jew, Simon Radowsky. As Moya (2004) details, the killing of the Chief of Police, along with a couple of other high-profile events, solidified the stereotype of Jews as anarchists. (Significantly, it wasn't only Jews who were stereotyped, but Catalans as well—not surprising given the prominent place of Barcelona in the anarchist movement.) Thus, Jews,

²²See Nathans (2004) for more on this complex period of Jewish Russian relations.

who as the Other to Christian Europe for centuries already were ambiguously welcomed into Argentine, particularly *porteño* society, were also seen as harbingers of “alien” and threatening political sympathies. In early twentieth century Buenos Aires, with its growing population of Jews from Russia, the majority of whom still lived in relatively closed communities, “Jews,” “Rusos,” and “revolution” came to be almost interchangeable terms (Moya 2004; Rock 1993; Avni 1991). However, the association of Jews with alternative political philosophies wasn’t entirely negative. While the active involvement of Jews in revolutionary and labor movements and the stereotype marginalized the community from business and elite sectors, Moya (2004) argues that involvement in these mobilizations may have helped Jews integrate with other immigrants and the working classes.

In the first few decades of the previous century, Rio de Plata based (this includes the cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Uruguay) anarchists were some of the most active politically, and therefore, visible. By the early decades of the twentieth century, Buenos Aires had become “...probably the second most important center for anarchist activism, after Barcelona” (Moya 2004:20). Anarchism, a political philosophy with many incarnations, has at its root a belief in “freedom” that can best be achieved without the artificial and often negative strictures of a governing body, or state. Peter Kropotkin, an early and influential anarchist thinker, believed in the “natural” and beneficial tendency among humankind for cooperation and mutual aid, in refutation of the need of an organizing state or governing body (1972).²³ In early twentieth century Argentina, there were anarchists who aligned themselves with socialism, anarchists who were active in the union movement, and anarchists whose notion of society and freedom eschewed both of the above (Moya 2004). While Jews of mainly Russian descent did play a prominent role in anarchist and Bolshevik

²³This is a very truncated definition of a complicated, and varied, political philosophy. Unfortunately, a more complete and nuanced exploration of anarchism is beyond the bounds of this dissertation. See Peter Kropotkin’s (1972) *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, Robert Paul Wolff’s (1998) *In Defense of Anarchism*, and George Woodcock’s (1986) *Anarchism* for a thorough introduction to the subject.

movements in Buenos Aires, they were not the sole or even the majority representatives of these movements. Nevertheless, in some people's minds, the Jewish community (and to some extent most immigrants) was guilty by association, and was often targeted for the actions of a minority. The most egregious example of the power of this assumption probably occurred during a week of political and social unrest, known as "*Semana Trágica*" (tragic week).

Following the negative economic effect that World War I had on the Argentine economy and the political excitement stemming from the 1917 Russian Revolution, social conflict began to intensify in Buenos Aires. Workers, challenged by difficult economic times and perhaps buoyed by the October Revolution, initiated a wave of strikes that reached its zenith in 1919. The government at the time led by Hipólito Yrigoyen sought to negotiate with syndicalist demands rather than resort to outright oppression, but as the strikes increased, negotiation became an increasingly tenuous option. The infamous week known as "*Semana Trágica*" was sparked by a strike in a metallurgical factory in Buenos Aires and was followed by a succession of general strikes. During one week in January 1919, Buenos Aires became a "no-man's land" with a series of "...violent incidents that took place between the strikers and the police, who abandoned a hands-off policy and unleashed a harsh repression" (Romero 2002:31). The army, acting independently of the executive branch, took matters into their own hands and released troops to quell the violence. Significantly, this week marks the beginning of the army's assertion of power independent of the Commander-in-Chief (the president)—a development that will come to deeply mark Argentina in the twentieth century. Aiding the army were groups of armed civilians organized by the Naval Academy. As the general chaos and violence spread, Jews and Catalans were disproportionately targeted by these civilian groups. Jewish and Catalan businesses and homes were vandalized and people on the street were harassed and beaten. Rock (1985; 1993) while not going into detail, also notes how the Jewish

community, in particular, was targeted. He writes, “The manhunt for ‘agitators’ claimed scores of victims, among them numerous Russian Jews who were falsely accused of masterminding a Communist conspiracy”(1985:202).²⁴ For the Jewish community—so many of whom still held relatively recent memories of Russian pogroms—the attacks raised serious questions of their acceptance. Shortly after the attacks, the Jewish Argentine literary magazine *Vida Nuestra* solicited responses from several statesmen and intellectuals, who affirmed the community its place in the country (Avni 1991:101). Leaders from the community also met with President Yrigoyen, and were assured by the president that “...persecution of the Jews was ‘incompatible with the traditions of the country and spirit of its laws...Public opinion and the government consider Jewish immigration an advantageous and important element...’”(Avni:101). The actions toward the Jewish community during *Semana Tragica* do not appear to be condoned by the president or other governmental officials, and in fact, anti-Semitism as *state policy* has never really existed in Argentina. However, as I describe below, within the *nacionalismo* movement, particularly after 1928, rhetorical scape-goating and derision of the “Jews” developed more productively than it had previously.

Right-Wing Movements and the “Jewish Question”

The profound social and political changes of the period between 1900 and 1920 incited a desire for the search for origins and “authentic” Argentine identity.²⁵ Many *criollos* saw the policies of the liberals, particularly immigration, pulling the country apart and introducing “foreign” and “corrupting” values. The years 1909 and 1910 brought the

²⁴For more on *Semana Tragica* and how it affected the Jewish community in particular, see Wald 1998 and Avni 1991:100-102.

²⁵ For more extended discussion on the debates and ideas of this time period, see Lilia Ana Bertoni (2000) *Patriotas, cosmopolitas, y nacionalistas: Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica*; Aldofo Prieto (1988) *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina Moderna*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana; Nicolas Shumway (1991) *The Invention of Argentina*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 214-296; David Rock (1995) *Authoritarian Argentina*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.1-37.

publication of two important, early works that helped to give a vision to those for whom an emphasis on immigration and an elision of what was seen as the nation's "traditions" by the liberal, cosmopolitan leanings of the Buenos Aires elite were a mistake. The publication of Ricardo Rojas's *La restauración nacionalista* and Manuel Gálvez's *El diario de Gabriel Quiroga: Opiniones sobre la vida Argentina*, articulated a new interpretation of Argentine history and new blueprint for *argentinidad*, one that looked to *caudillismo*, *gauchismo* and the "spiritualism" of Spain for inspiration and direction (Rock 1993:40-42). These books helped to resurrect the *caudillo* president, Juan Manuel de Rosas (Argentina's downfall, according to Sarmiento) as emblematic of the "national character" and a hero to be emulated, not despised. Rosas became an example of the kind of "native" leadership many "traditionalists" desired: Catholic, paternalistic, and autocratic.

Previously, much of the nation's written history was dominated by urban liberals, and accordingly, often reflected a desire to suppress or denigrate what the traditionalists saw as the true spirit and strength of *argentinidad*. The gaucho, the *caudillo*, the Church, and rural life were not the sites of barbarism or backwardness, as Sarmiento passionately argued nearly a half-century earlier. According to Rojas and Gálvez and others sympathetic to their thought, liberalism as it had been practiced in Argentina, along with cosmopolitanism and positivism, were not the harbinger of progress, but its very opposite: signs of social decay and chaos (Romero 2002:17). "Civilization" as conceived by Rojas, lay in the "native" traditions and organizations of Argentina before the triumph of "foreign" ideas and the influx of Europeans (Rock 1993:44-45). With biting sarcasm, Gálvez writes,

[W]e began to bring in multitudes of rustic peoples from the Italian countryside...Then we started to imitate English and French customs. Jews and Russian anarchists came...The old Creole squares became English parks; the barbarous and poor Spanish language has been smoothed out and enriched with many Italian, French, English, and German words...We have forgotten our own traditions and those ridiculous old-fashioned customs...Today anyone can read Voltaire, Marx, Kropotkin, or Bukunin for a mere thirty cents. As everyone can see, we're now completely civilized [Rock 1993:43].

Gálvez's ironic words illustrate the variety of people and ideas that had come to inhabit Argentina's physical and imaginary landscape, threatening to erase *criollo* culture. And what did Argentina get to "civilize" the *criollos* and *criollo* culture? "Rustic peoples," Jews and Russians, among a smattering of other Europeans whose "civilizing" ideas—socialism, communism, anarchism, and the rationalism of Voltaire—were the source of the materialism, greed, and decay of social order.

Gálvez's and Rojas' writings, along with the works of Argentine poet Leopoldo Lugones, tapped into a general kind of romantic nostalgia that reassured those who longed for a long suppressed "other" Argentina to the liberal project—a more homogenous, homegrown, spiritually united Catholic nation. These writers were part of a growing expression of uneasiness regarding the liberal vision as it was unfolding in Argentina. They saw a society torn apart by "materialism": a turning away from religious truth and Spanish traditions, an alienating focus on the individual, and an unseemly emphasis on the pursuit of wealth. For some of the authors of this new traditionalism, and later *nacionalismo* (or right-wing nationalist movement) "the Jew" came to represent this foreign presence and influence, a topic I will return to below.

Some of the sentiments expressed in the writings of Rojas, Gálvez, and Lugones, I would aver, was something with which many of the *criollo* Argentines, including supporters of liberalism, could identify. While liberals may not have agreed that turning to "Spanish traditions" was the right path, they weren't necessarily prepared for societal challenges that rapid immigration brought.²⁶ Things *were* changing in the social and geographic landscape of Argentina. The country was growing rapidly in wealth and population size, the old ways of doing politics and conceiving of society were challenged by new ideas and logics of living. During this time, new hybrid cultural expressions began to take shape and grow in popularity

²⁶Even Sarmiento wasn't so sure, when he saw the threat of "two nations"—immigrant and native (Rock 1993:40).

(particularly in and around Buenos Aires), such as Tango and an Argentine slang known as *Lunfardo*—often to the distaste of the elites (Romero 2002:20). In some of their more lofty and enthusiastic moments Sarmiento and Alberdi alluded to immigration as a panacea—orderly, industrious and “cultured” Europeans would come to calm and instruct the less refined *criollos*. However, both the “*criollos*” and the “Europeans” in this drama were products of fantasy, and the country grew and changed in ways unpredicted by the nation’s liberal fathers.

Immigrants, then, weren’t the only ones to experience change and the need to accommodate a new social rhythm. For many native Argentines, daily life was *shifting*, and some people found they could no longer occupy the same social and political space. In particular, the wealthy elite felt that their institutional power was waning, as other compelling forces threatened influence on the discursive playing field. The narrowly conceived elitist democracy of previous generations was superseded in 1912 by the *Saenz Peña* law, which established universal male suffrage. (As I mentioned earlier, women weren’t given the vote until 1947, under Peron.) The institutional power of the wealthy elite was further eroded when Hipólito Yrigoyen of the Radical Party was elected president in 1916. The Radical Party was a more populist and inclusive party (but not “leftist”), in opposition to the patrician *Partido Nacional Autonomista* that had dominated Argentine politics until then (Romero 2002:19-25).²⁷ Thus the elite sectors that had dominated Argentine politics and its social sphere for decades were feeling encroached upon from multiple fronts. A greater political consciousness was spreading among the popular and emerging middle classes, due in part, to the political ideas the new immigrants brought with them. The strikers, anarchists and Bolsheviks were not only *saboteurs* of the factories, railroads and institutions of society, but *saboteurs* of the mind as well, as Gálvez and his ideological supporters eloquently argued.

²⁷Romero defines the *Partido Nacional Autonomista* as a “...federation of governors, the provincial heads of the political establishment” (1994:14)—an elite, closed system of governance.

They questioned the assumed logic of Argentine society, and began to alter the circulation of ideas. *Criollo* Argentines and new citizens alike were presented with the possibility of a different kind of society and nation. The upheavals of 1919 (Semana Trágica), along with the growing ideological and political challenge to the status quo, was sufficiently threatening to hasten the founding of the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* (Argentine Patriotic League, *Liga* from now on). For those who were to become the ultra-right (*nacionalistas*), the combination of “foreign” socio-political ideas and the secularism and materialism they associated with liberalism was Argentina’s downfall. Despite the disruptions and changes that occurred in Argentina between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, it wasn’t until the 1920s that the ultra-right nationalist movement begins to gather significant force, with the *Liga* as its early incarnation.²⁸

The Liga

While the writings of the “traditionalists” and their supporters glorify qualities and values marked as right-wing in Argentina, it isn’t until the formation of the *Liga* in 1919 that a clear *mobilization* of these values comes into being. The Argentine historian Luis Alberto Romero described the *Liga* as a “right-wing paramilitary organization,” as it brought together citizens and military to effectively contain “undesirable” actions or citizens (2002:33).

The *Liga* brought together many Argentines from the upper and middle classes who were concerned about labor militancy, the erosion of traditional structures of power, and the dilution of “*argentinidad*” due to large numbers of immigrants. In part, it represented a concerted effort to integrate the immigrants, and transform them into a specific idea of *argentinidad*. The overarching expressed goal of the *Liga* at its inception was to “...foment the spirit of *argentinidad* among all inhabitants and awareness of a citizen’s obligations to

²⁸In Argentina the nationalist movement or *nacionalismo* refers to ideas considered to be right-wing and their authors and supporters: often counter-liberal, anti-immigrant, pro-Catholic and anti-democratic. Thus nationalism in Argentina usually doesn’t refer to in a general sense to a community of people with imagined or genealogical ties. If I am speaking of nationalism in this generic sense I will note it.

the homeland” (McGee Deutsch 1993:39). They understood *argentinidad* primarily through conformity with their vision of the status quo, and pursued their goals by a variety of means (McGee Deutsch 1993:39).

Education was seen as a primary vehicle through which to create the kind of subjects they desired, and they worked to foster patriotic feelings through an understanding and celebration of their rendering of the country’s history both inside and outside of school settings. Along with the Catholic Church, they also sought to increase the welfare of the poor, in the hopes of staving off a search for alleviation through “foreign” (read: socialist or anarchist) ideas. The military was actively involved in the *Liga* as well, with military officers serving in official roles and working with the *Liga* to break up union activities.

The *Liga* was able to mobilize and recruit large numbers of Argentines to form citizen’s brigades, “...which assumed the task of imposing order through force...and to pressure the government” (Romero 2002:34). Like the traditionalists, many urged a return to “order” (people in their proper place) and “Hispanic tradition,” and called for a return to the Church for moral reform (Rock 1995:67-68).

The *Liga* was primarily comprised of members of the upper class and business owners, although many in the middle class became involved in the association as well. The organization was not overtly hostile to new immigrants qua immigrants—they welcomed them with the express purpose of turning them into “proper” subjects. It was only those who harbored “alien” ideas that challenged the status quo who would feel the harsher side of their reform. While the *Liga*’s rhetoric was often chauvinistic with a narrowly conceived vision of *argentinidad*, membership was not completely off-limits to new immigrants or those who might be called “foreigners.” Nor were some immigrants immune to the benefits the *Liga* could provide, particularly if they were business owners or landed agriculturalists. Thus despite the pro-Catholic rhetoric of the *Liga*, Jews sometimes made alliances with this group. In fact, in the province of Entre Ríos, where many Jewish agriculturalists were based

in their *colonias*, a struggle between workers and farmers in 1921 brought the interest of Jewish landowners and the union-breaking *Liga* together. After this event, McGee Deutsch writes, “Jews joined the Liga in increasing numbers” (1993:44). The participation of Jews in the *Liga* is an intriguing topic that deserves more consideration than I can provide here. The entry of Jews into the *Liga* shows that the *Liga*’s nationalism was largely based on “...an idealized conception of worker-employer relations” (McGee Deutsch 1993:47). In this respect, it was more or less open to anyone who saw the same enemy. In comparison to what was to follow, the *Liga*, while repressive and suspicious of popular democracy, appears if not open-minded, then significantly less xenophobic.

The Nationalists

Like much of the world, at the end of the 1920s Argentina was suffering the economic consequences of the global depression, instigated by the 1929 U.S. stock market crash, and the democratically elected government of Hipólito Yrigoyen was facing considerable opposition from the military (already a powerful independent force) and elites who derided his populism and what they saw as too strong of a commitment to democracy. In 1930, Yrigoyen’s government was overthrown in a *coup d’état*, installing a military lead government for two years.²⁹ In the reorganization of the government that followed the ousting of Yrigoyen, the voice of the nationalists and their agenda became one of the most prominent.

I do not intend to provide a detailed discussion of the nationalist period here, as this topic has been extensively covered by others.³⁰ My purpose here is to illustrate probably the

²⁹For more on this period, see Romero (2002:47-58).

³⁰See, for example, David Rock (1995) *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Deutsch and Dolkart 1993; Sandra McGee Deutsch (1999) *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, 1890-1939*, Stanford: Stanford University Press; Luis Alberto Romero (2002) *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, University Park, PA: Penn State Press, pp. 27-90; Barbero, María Inés and Fernando Devoto (1983) *Los nacionalistas*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina.

most rigorous undertaking of the “Jewish question” in Argentina. As I’ve previously iterated, negative images of Jews circulated in Argentine society prior to the late 1920s and 1930s, however when the nationalist movement acquired greater organization and force in Argentine society, the figure of the “Jew” acquired new layers of threat and denigration.

The contradictions, claims, and beliefs embodied in the Argentine nationalist movement are not simply to parse, as the movement was “more effective at attacking rather than building” (Romero 2002:61). The *nacionalistas* drew on the ideas presented in the previous pages, albeit with new infusions of thought from Nazism and the eugenics movement. Like earlier thinkers, the main sources of corruption to true *argentinidad* were “liberalism and individualism, democracy and capitalism, socialism, communism, and ‘cosmopolitanism,’ Judaism and Masonry” (Rock 1995:1). Although Jews weren’t the only targets of the *nacionalistas*, as I have illustrated elsewhere, “Jewishness” came to be discursively connected to a variety of often contradictory ideas and practices—many of the same social and political ideas that the *nacionalistas* sought to wrest out of Argentine politics and society.

Scholars such as David Rock (1995) and Nancy Leys Stepan (1991) have both noted the marked anti-Semitism of the Argentine Right, particularly in the 1930s.³¹ Thus, the anti-Semitism that was building to a crushing crescendo in the 1930s and 40s in Europe had its Argentine counterpart—although not the same kind of power or logic behind it. In many ways, the reaction of Argentine anti-Semites (who may or may not have been Nationalists) toward the Jews followed well-worn narratives: Jews were an enemy of the nation, linked to economic imperialism and “foreign” influences like communism. As the depression hit Argentina, fears about political and social revolution gave way to deepening worries about the economy, and conspiracy theories involving Jews and often Freemasons circulated in

³¹See also McGee Deutsch 2005 and 1993; Rein 2003; Feierstein 1999:203-206; Avni 1991.

Argentina and elsewhere. As the economic depression deepened, shadowy but well organized Jews were invoked as secretly undermining the world economy for their own purposes (Rock 1995:23). Jews were sometimes imagined as being engaged in organized, secret plans to take over the world. In the 1930s, copies of the infamous pamphlet, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* circulated in Buenos Aires, which portrayed Jews' engaged in a secret "Bolshevist" plan to take over the world (Rock 1995:104-105).³² After the 1930's the *nacionalistas* increasingly believed that Argentina's welfare was being attacked from abroad; a conspiracy that "united liberals, democrats, leftists, foreign capitalists and Jews" as the enemy (McGee Deutsch 1993:52).

While Jews were certainly not the only targets of the *nacionalistas'* ire, they were often invoked as "behind" the various movements and philosophies that they despised. It would not be an exaggeration to note that for many *nacionalistas*, Jews were enemies of the imagined ideal and "true" Argentine nation. Not being Catholic or even Christian, their customs and beliefs were alien; they were seen as "materialists" in opposition to the spiritual essence of the Latin peoples; they were the sources of 'skepticism,' 'tolerance,' and 'relativism' so threatening to the absolute truth provided by the Catholic Church (Rock 1995:23). The image of the "Jew" came to inhabit a multitude of categories that were in direct opposition of much that the *nacionalistas* held dear. As Leys Stepan notes,

[A]nti-Semitism was characteristic of a particular stream of right-wing thought in Argentina in the 1930s. The Jews were stereotyped in everyday life and in the right-wing press as an alien race; they were said to bring with them dangerous and unfamiliar ideas, such as communism, and strange languages and customs. They were seen as disturbing elements, fundamentally foreign. [1991:143]

For the most part, *nacionalistas* were opposed to immigration and foreigners in general. While Jews were probably the most "rhetorically active"—negative stereotypes and images of Jews were easy to resurrect, particularly in the 1930s—target of the Nationalists,

³² Portions of the protocols began to surface in a Russian newspaper in the 1903. It portrayed Jews as joining together against the state by interfering with the economy, controlling the media, and inciting religious conflict. This piece of literature continues to circulate today, along with the allegations it makes against "the Jews."

for those who envisioned a holistic, culturally and physically homogeneous nation, the perimeters of difference was quite narrow. With regard to the homogeneity of the nation, in the 1930s and 40s the eugenics movement began to dovetail with the goals of the *nacionalistas*: “The eugenists argued that their country’s potential for a true Latin identity was threatened by incommensurable fractions of non-Latin peoples...”(Leys Stepan 1991:142), and some argued for a ban on “non-white” immigration.³³ In many ways, the desires of the Argentine eugenics movement—to create a “racially” homogeneous (white) Latin nation—corresponded with the goals of the *nacionalistas*, and added a compelling biological layer to their vision of *latinidad*. One notorious racist expression of the nationalist movement is the 1935 novel *Oro* (Gold), by Gustavo Martínez Zuviría. In this novel, not only were Jews portrayed as plotting to take over the world economy, but as a distinct and unchangeable racial type.³⁴ The question of Jews was infrequently mentioned in the journal of the Argentine Association of Biotypology, Eugenics, and Social Medicine (Leys Stepan 1991:143). (If they were mentioned it was mostly likely as *Rusos*, or Russians.) However, the silence of the organization regarding Nazi’s Germany’s eugenic racism (the group was in no means unaware of German policies and there was a “German” section of the association) “speaks volumes,” and Leys-Stepan suggests that, “...anti-Semitism was an unspoken aspect of their racial ideology” (1991:144-145). This suggestion deserves further inquiry in the future.

By the late 1930s and early 40s, Argentine nationalism was reaching its peak. Along with “liberalism,” “cosmopolitanism,” and “communism,” Jews continued to be positioned as foreigners and pariahs, particularly among the pro-Nazi segments of the nationalist movement. In 1943 a military coup gave the right-wing *nacionalistas* the power to enact

³³It is not entirely clear to me what constituted “non-white” in this social milieu. Leopoldo Lugones was one who argued to close immigration to “non-whites” (Rock 1995:103).

³⁴“Judaism,” Martínez Zuviría wrote, “is as indelible as the color of one’s skin. This is not a religion but a race” (Rock 1995:106).

their goals (this dictatorship lasted until 1946 when Colonel Juan Domingo Perón, himself part of the ruling junta, was elected president). One such act was to re-instate the teaching of Catholicism in state schools, revoking a 1884 law that established secular public education. While Jewish and Protestant Argentines criticized the decree, the main political organization for the Jewish community, the DAIA (which had been formed in the 1930s), encouraged Jewish parents to demand that their children be removed from religious instruction, but the DAIA did little else to overtly confront Argentine leaders (Rein 2005:165). Their subtle approach—which was more akin to asking to be let alone than agitating for rights—in many ways foreshadows their stance toward Argentine leaders during the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 and more recently with the AMIA bombing. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the description Rein provides of the attitude of the DAIA in 1943 resonates deeply with how the DAIA has positioned itself in more recent times:

Why didn't the Jewish leadership adopt a more combative attitude toward a military regime that considered only Catholics "good Argentines"? It seems that this generation of Jewish leaders, born mostly in eastern and central Europe, were accustomed to quiet lobbying and requests for government protection and not to public protest or the mobilization of public opinion to put direct pressure on the authorities. Furthermore, being at least partially aware of the fate of their brethren in the Old World, they did not lose their sense of proportion. [2005:165-166]

In addition to the imposition of Catholic education, as well as a general discourse that promoted "Catholicism" as the proper and true nature of *argentinidad*, prominent Jewish families faced threats, Jewish associations were shut down by the military state, and citizenship was revoked for some naturalized Jews (Rock 1995:137). This period in the 1940s was probably the most overtly anti-Semitic in the nation's history.³⁵ More than other times in Argentine history, Jews posed a question to the nation and were imagined as a

³⁵Some claim that in the 1930s and 40s, the Argentine government issued identification cards to Jews with small perforated stars of David on them, although this has been denied by the government. See Ricardo Feierstein (2001) *La logia del umbral*. Buenos Aires: Galernal, and Stephen A. Sadow (2005) "Lamentations of the AMIA: Literary Responses to Communal Trauma" in *Memory, Oblivion, and Jewish Culture in Latin America*, Marjorie Agosín, ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.

threat to the very heart of *argentinidad*. However, anti-Semitism never took off with the fanatic and seemingly deep-rooted zeal that it did in Europe. Jews, while living in a social and political climate not entirely favorable to them or other Others, were able for the most part to continue their activities as *Jews*, and faced relatively little threat to their persons (the last organized attack against Jews was in 1919 during *Semana Trágica*). Anti-Semitic graffiti, isolation from certain sectors of society (like the military), and occasional discrimination marked Jewish-Argentine life then, as today.

While some Jewish-Argentines I knew thought Argentina was an anti-Semitic country, most reported experiencing very little direct anti-Semitism in their daily lives. I would argue that Jewish-Argentines, like Jews in many other countries, feel a complicated sense of belonging and not belonging, with certain events accentuating this tension. The complexities of this “belonging and not belonging” will be discussed in the next chapter.

The tensions of Jewish belonging and their experiences as both citizens who have successfully negotiated *argentinidad* as Jews, while also being targets of it, is due in part to the main contradictory visions that have informed ideas of Argentina. Within the culture of liberalism as it has developed and been employed in Argentina—particularly in Buenos Aires—Jews have been tolerated and sometimes celebrated as part of a lively, cosmopolitan, urban culture, even if they were not the hoped for and imagined civilizing agents.³⁶ At the same time, within the national imaginaries that celebrate an idealized “native” culture, championing Catholicism and homogeneity, Jews have found little purchase. But that does not mean they have not found a place; even a margin can be imagined to have a ledge.

³⁶ Recently in Buenos Aires one could attend an exhibit on *Yiddishkeit* (Yiddish culture) at the national library, well-received and popularly attended plays with Jewish protagonists, among other cultural activities that attract the middle-class.

III. Can a Jew be an Argentine?

“Be a Jew on the inside and a man on the Outside” –Moses Mendelssohn

Introduction: The Problem

Buenos Aires, August, 20, 2004 Baruj’s office. How does one live as a Jew and an Argentine? This was, in short, the question I asked the elegantly dressed man sitting in front of me. We were in his book-lined office facing the busy street Libertador, my recorder collecting the rowdy traffic noise along with our more subdued voices. From the large window behind Baruj’s desk, winter light the color of weak tea eased into the room. To the right of us was a wall of books—philosophy, history, pedagogical texts, Jewish history and philosophy. Given a prominent place among the neat rows of bounded words was a picture of his three daughters. We ordered coffees.

Baruj, an extremely thoughtful and generous director of a science and technology-centered private school in Buenos Aires, seemed quite excited, intellectually, to discuss my research and answer my questions. In answer to my query about being Jewish and Argentine, he replied with the following explanation:

...let’s say to be a Jew in modernity, that’s to say, after the French Revolution as a starting date...is to become part of a global society. The attempt to insert themselves in the global society has to do with what happened to Jews in their encounter with modernity...if you are orthodox and don’t integrate with the general society you only live in relation to this society, only participating as much as the society obliges of you...The other extreme is assimilation and the abandonment of Jewish practice. Yes? But to be a Jew in Argentina, or to preserve a Jewish identity is not a simple thing...¹

¹...digamos ser judío en la modernidad, es decir después de la revolución francesa, por tomar una fecha, conlleva, es decir va acompañados de las características de la sociedad global. El intentar insertarse en la

Baruj does not, doesn't ever, give a personal answer to this question. Instead, with pedagogical intent he historicizes the issue and leads me to the root of my question.

So *can* a Jew be an Argentine? Or perhaps the better question begins with *how*. In the previous chapter I discussed the possibilities for Jewish citizenship and belonging from the perspective of dominant Argentine imaginaries and the formation of the nation-state. The strain of liberalism and cosmopolitanism that runs through Argentina whose adherents sought to (re)build a country out European immigrants—influencing its society and shaping its constitution—has allowed for the entrance, and for the most part, flourishing of Jewish life. But what this Jewishness is, or can be, still remains a question. As I will continue to show, there are limits to the claiming of Argentineness for Jews and others, even while there are intense structures of belonging. Jews have achieved political citizenship in Argentina, but as is the case in many other countries where Jews reside, “social citizenship” expresses itself with ambivalence at times. And their political citizenship, along with most Argentines, is often precarious as well, evident in the ways in which the government has handled the AMIA bombing, as I illustrate in the following chapters.

In chapter one, the limits to Jewish belonging and citizenship in Argentina were discussed from primarily within Argentine social and political history. However, another angle on this subject takes us outside the boundaries of Argentina proper and into a study of discourses whose histories begin in other times and places. I am speaking here of the transformative ideas of the Enlightenment and what has come to be called “modernity,” and some European Jewish responses to these social and intellectual processes.² Indeed,

sociedad global tiene que ver con lo que pasaron todos los judios en la modernidad, es decir o eres ortodoxo y no te integras a la sociedad general, sólo vives en relacion con esa sociedad en aquellas cosas la sociedad te obliga ... Y el otro extremo es la asimilación, el abandono de las prácticas judias ¿sí?. Pero ser judio en la Argentina, o sea preservar la identidad judía no es una cosa simple...”

²I understand “Enlightenment” to refer primarily to the seventeenth and eighteenth century European movement that championed reason over religion, individual freedoms and free will, and universal notions of humanity over particularism. I agree with Foucault’s definition of modernity as primarily an *attitude*: “...by ‘attitude,’ I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking

Enlightenment discourses such as liberalism, have come to circulate fruitfully in Argentina (and Latin America) with various effects and transformations, as I've outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter I examine what historically it has meant for Jews to become minority citizen-subjects within the model of a liberal nation-state.³ What is the nature of their citizenship, and what is lost and gained through the process of becoming citizens? What understandings of self, nation, religion—and indeed, humanity—have to be circulating in order for Jews to become part of a larger body politic? How does the historical construction of Jewishness open itself up to this possibility, and at the same time, profoundly trouble this process? I explore these questions by means of one primary route: I discuss the “Jewish question” in European history and social thought and extrapolate upon what this problem reflects about the possibilities of Jewishness within a liberal nation-state. For the most part I discuss the “Jewish question” in terms of the process of political citizenship in Europe that began in earnest with the French Revolution, but aspects of social citizenship—the ways in which one feels and sees oneself as “French” or “Argentine” will be noted as well.⁴

While the main theater for this intellectual history is eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, the problems it centers upon continue to suppurate and itch, from the streets of Mumbai, suburban apartment houses outside of Paris, bridges in Amsterdam, and

and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*. And consequently, rather than seeking to distinguish the ‘modern era’ from the ‘premodern’ or ‘postmodern,’ I think it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of ‘countermodernity’ (1994:39). See Bruno Latour (1993) for an analysis of the “content” and “work” of modernity. As I show below, Jewishness in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was constructed as a stubborn site of “countermodernity” or unseemly “hybridity” within a Europe increasingly defining itself under the signs of modernity.

³For the purpose of this analysis, I leave the case of Jewish belonging and citizenship in the United States aside. First of all, Jews never had to undergo a process of “emancipation” in the United States. Secondly, because of different social conditions and objectives, the history of Jewish life and constructions of Jewishness in the United States markedly deviates from the European, and Argentine, experience, although there are some key similarities. To read this chapter through the lens of Jewishness in the United States removes Jewishness from contingent historical conditions, and simplifies the argument I am trying to make.

⁴What is missing in this discussion, particularly in reference to Jewish subjectivity is a sustained discussion of the idea and function of “Diaspora,” and how seeing themselves as a people in exile has helped to shape Jewish subjectivity and practice, and complicate inter-community belonging.

cement-barricaded buildings in Buenos Aires. It is, in large part, the story of the birth of “universal man” and his bastard sibling, difference. My goal in this chapter is not to ask, specifically, “how Jews are different,” but *why and when this difference matters in particular times and places*.

The “Jewish question” as it developed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe involves multi-faceted histories with complex genealogies that deserve much more attention and space than I can give to them here. Consider this chapter as an overture—an invitation to enter into what will become a much longer conversation outside the bounds of these particular pages.

The Threshold

Baruj does not give an outright personal exposition of his own struggles, and perhaps resolutions, to the question of being Jewish and Argentine. But he does underscore this condition in his understated way: “to be a Jew in Argentina, or to preserve a Jewish identity is not a simple thing.” He also mentions the two “poles” assimilation/sameness or separation/difference—that often tend to define the options for Jewishness within the framework of modernity. These poles mark the boundaries of the *debate* about the Jewish question as it arose in eighteenth century Europe, but not the *living*. As Baruj notes, the living is not a simple thing.

This friction between assimilation and deliberately maintaining difference has been raging among European Jewish communities since Spinoza, and has been marking Jewish intellectual thought in the Enlightenment ruled west for just as long. The ideas set forth in the age of Enlightenment opened a door, as it did for most of those living in its wake, and offered Jews the possibility to step outside of the rigid demands (and often physical perimeters) of their religious communities and join a newly emerging secular society. They could lose the “shackles” of their particularity and join universal “common humanity.” In

practice, however, the choices were more complicated, the living more nuanced and precarious. To a large extent, Jewishness under the sign of modernity was not rooted to one pole or the other, but is characterized by an intense loitering at the threshold. And in this sense, Jewishness became a troublesome hybridity, and not a clearly demarcated sign of one extreme or another.⁵

As Latour (1993) has elegantly illustrated, the practices of modernity typically rest on the purification of hybridity and the fixing of boundaries. In the nineteenth century, as many Jews were most actively involved in negotiating between relinquishing the most profound features of their particularity and maintaining their separateness through adherence to a way of life coded as “nonmodern,” or “traditional” one could argue that Jewishness itself became marked by this instability: their unseemly difference was understood not in religious terms, but precisely by this flux. In other words, Jews could never quite be purified, but remained on the threshold between nature (nonmodern) and culture (modern). Given their “doubleness” it wasn’t clear exactly “who” Jews were, until biological racism located and fixed their difference in the body, with horrific effects.

This threshold, then, is a site of much anxiety, as the act of straddling the particular and universal is continually active. I experienced the ongoing performance of this anxiety in Buenos Aires, with the ways Jewish-Argentines sometimes were seen and felt themselves to be both Argentine and not-Argentine. I, too, live within the disquiet of the threshold, vacillating between feeling “too Jewish” or not nearly Jewish enough, although not under the same logics as my Jewish-Argentine friends.

While in many contexts contemporary Jewishness may be a much more complex amalgam than the two poles of assimilation and separation suggest, sometimes the

⁵Sander Gilman suggests the term “frontier” as a way of imagining the interstitial space of Jewish history and identity. For Gilman, “frontier” moves Jewish history and understanding away from core/periphery models and emphasizes instead “...a history with no center; a history marked by the dynamics of change, confrontation, and accommodation...(1999:11). And he also remarks that “the frontier becomes the space where the complex interaction of the definitions of self and Other are able to be constructed”(1999:12).

extremes do feel like the only “real” choices—the threshold often feels uncomfortable, it is too intense, shifty, and uncommitted. Jewishness, then, is a site of intense negotiation, and profound anxiety. It is impure and precarious. It offers the *possibility* of critique and counter-discourses to modernity. Let’s turn now to some of the processes that have led to this lack of fixity and the (incomplete) disarticulation of Jewishness from “tradition” and even religion.

The Jewish Question: Becoming a Citizen and Joining “Humanity”

The Jewish question, per se, is primarily an eighteenth and nineteenth century Western European political issue, concerned with the creation of citizens.⁶ Its social dimension, the corresponding problem of how Jews could be made to “fit” into the social fabric of various European nations once they became citizens, was subsumed within the larger political quandary. Indeed, as a political question it gained particular urgency at the end of the eighteenth century beginning with the reorganization of state and society after the French Revolution. The presence of Jews in Christian Europe had mostly been conceived as a “problem”—even a cursory look at European history will yield this knowledge—although the understanding of the problem and response to it changed according to place and circumstance. For example, in the seventeenth century, the discourse about Jews began to shift from a dilemma framed in largely religious terms to a more overt political problem for “society.”⁷ This change in attitude toward the Jews reflected a larger epistemological shift in

⁶The nuances of this question will be explored throughout this chapter. However, for the sake of initial clarity I define the “Jewish question” to concern the political fate of Jews in Europe vis à vis the secular, liberal nation-state and civil society. It was most productive in the eighteenth and nineteenth century with the reorganization of European states and society, and is informed by Enlightenment ideas regarding “sovereignty,” “secularity,” and “humanity.” However, given the legacy of the Enlightenment and the continued hegemonic power of liberalism, it has not totally disappeared today, although it has become more of a social than overt political question.

⁷I want to emphasize that despite the long history of Jewish marginalization (and worse, expulsion and violence) in Christian Europe, the making of Jewish difference must always be historicized as part of particular political and social contexts. To do otherwise only reifies Jewishness within an amber drop of “timeless,” “mystical,” and “unyielding” difference, the same discourse that gives anti-Semitism much of its potency. Unfortunately, Jews themselves are not innocent of contributing to this discourse.

which an emphasis on religious truth and morality was challenged by a new way of knowing independent of divinely inspired knowledge.

While the Jewish Question as it was formulated in Europe ceases to be a legitimate political question in many parts of the world, (there are indeed, other political “Jewish questions,” most notably to do with Zionism), the ideological dilemma it contains is still quite productive. While the Jewish question may have ceased to be a political question in terms of *granting* citizenship, it still resonates and circulates in other political and social terrains. Like other “problematic citizens” Jewish belonging and loyalty to the nation—and indeed, their “Frenchness,” “Englishness,” or “Argentineness”—frequently comes under interrogation, particularly in times of crisis.⁸ There are certain times and places when the mostly dormant (or seemingly “resolved”) issues embodied in the Jewish question explode into contemporary daily life, as happened in late nineteenth century France with the Dreyfus affair.⁹ This rupture also occurred in a significant way—but not nearly as wide-reaching or devastating as in France—with the bombing of the AMIA in Buenos Aires. Discussing the Jewish question is essential to historicizing the ways in which Jews entered the nation-state as both proper and improper subjects, and it also bears upon modern constructions of Jewishness and the challenges of belonging.

The Jewish question is not really a question, but a problematic that contains a whole set of beliefs and ideas concerning the “human,” the “state,” and “society.” It specifically arose as a problem confronting the newly forming secular and (more) egalitarian European nation-states, beginning in practice with the French Revolution. From the perspective of the

⁸In recent times the specter of the Other in Europe, the United States and other liberal nation-states has become less about Jews and more about Muslims. In a sense, the “Jewish question” has transformed into the “Muslim question.” See, for instance, Baruma’s (2007) *Murder in Amsterdam* and Mufti’s (2007) *Enlightenment in the Colony*.

⁹What is known as the Dreyfus Affair concerns, in the most concrete terms, the arrest of Captain Alfred Dreyfus under false charges of treason in 1894. However, what is significant about this event is the social and political turmoil that preceded and followed it, in which Jews in France became a debate about the “Jewish question,” eliciting a public sphere wherein the very question of “Frenchness” was at stake.

architects of this re-envisioned nation, the problem in brief was this: How can the Jews, conceived at the time primarily as an insular religious nation bound by a tradition rooted in laws and practices derived from the Old Testament, be incorporated into a secular political community conceived as having common goals and allegiances—a national community founded, at least ideally, as a break from religious superstition and the past? How could they transcend their particularity and become citizens, not just of France, but enter into the abstract universal vision of humanity that was becoming hegemonic? To be sure, this was a question that the architects of the French Revolution had to pose not just to Jews, but to all who were to participate in this new society as equals: Jews, Catholics and Protestants, aristocrats and commoners, city and country dwellers.¹⁰

In France at least, Jews may have been Others, but they were for the most part considered *reasonable* others; that is, they were thought capable of reason—if often irrationally rooted in the “mysticism” of religious tradition—and thus were within the perimeters of potential citizenship. It was a matter of reformation. Whether or not Jews could be reformed was another matter. There was the problem of determining, practically, how to incorporate this small, but visible, minority into the body politic. There was also the problem of making them French.

At the time of the French Revolution (1789) the territory unified as France had a small minority of Jewish inhabitants, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi, “scattered around the country in various settlements” (Marrus 1971:5).¹¹ Until the revolution, Jewish communities formed somewhat autonomous areas that were granted particular privileges of self-governance, but were also restricted in their activities. Their security in terms of personal harm and the ability to live according to their laws and traditions, and indeed, provide for

¹⁰In general, Enlightenment thinkers positioned women in the home, outside of the political sphere and women weren't granted political rights during the revolution. They weren't allowed to vote until 1944!

¹¹Paula Hyman (1987:25) estimates the population of Jews in France in 1789 as being 40,000.

themselves, was capriciously determined in large part by the necessities or tolerance of local rulers. While there may have been individual “court Jews” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (never very widespread under French aristocracy) whose usefulness awarded them special dispensations and privileges, for the most part Ashkenazi Jews formed a distinct and decidedly non-privileged community, and interaction between Jews and non-Jews was quite limited to prescribed economic exchanges.¹² The situation for the small minority of highly acculturated Sephardic Jews (descendents of *conversos*—Jews who converted to Catholicism during the Inquisition, but privately remained Jewish—from Spain) differed from the larger, poorer, and more isolated Ashkenazi communities. The Sephardic community was more integrated with their French neighbors and was seen as the “ideal” Jew from a particular French perspective (Hyman 1987:25). To this end, the Sephardic community was granted citizenship before the substantially larger Ashkenazi population. However, as I elaborate upon below, the situation of the majority of the Jews in Western and Eastern Europe has significant consistency with the Ashkenazi population in France.

Before the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment really began to gather force and profoundly alter the lives of both Jews and non-Jews alike, European Jewish populations were primarily tightly bounded communities organized by Jewish law and attempted adherence to a way of life vitally informed by the past.¹³ As such their daily practices and rhythms were significantly different from the Christian societies within which many of them lived (the case was somewhat distinct with Jews living with Muslims and under Muslim rule). While both Christians and Jews organized their lives, their

¹²See Marrus (1971) and Katz (1998).

¹³The concept of the “past” in Judaism is complex and cannot be thoroughly elucidated here. Suffice it to say that the prominence of the past in Judaism is different from being “stuck” in the past or without change. Although the “distant past” had immense force in Jewish life, this relationship is dynamic. The (selective) past was in no way passive, but was the source of interpretation of the present, and in a very real sense it *constituted* the present. The “past” in “traditional” Jewish practice is not something to contemplate from afar, but to individually experience in the present. As Yerushalmi (1996) emphasizes, this relationship with the past should not be confused with modern historiography, or with a nostalgic or cataloguing approach to the past. As such, it is more akin to memory than history.

epistemologies, and their practical concerns on tenets of faith, the content of these ideas and practices differed markedly. For Jews, matters of daily life, such as food preparation, eating, and caring for the body were ritualized and bounded by strict particular laws, which also served to differentiate Jewish populations from their non-Jewish neighbors. Indeed, it can be said that the overall outlook and *purposes* of the Jews were remarkably different from their Christian neighbors. After all, Jews were living in a world in which the Messiah had not yet arrived. And their understanding of themselves as exiles in foreign lands, along with other's perception of them as such, deeply shaped their interactions with those around them.

It should be noted that before Jewish encounters with modernity significantly challenged and changed Jewish thought and practice, the condition of exile was not defined in political terms. Rather, exile was understood as a religious predicament, specifically as a punishment from God. For a people whose lives in exile became a kind of ritualization of that exile and a *legitimization* of their marginality in "foreign lands," insularity and apartness became, under this vision, purposeful and necessary for communal survival. Jewish life was in essence concerned with the practice of making and re-making pre-exilic Judaism—an attempt to fulfill their relationship with their God as a "chosen people," and bring about the conditions for redemption, despite the incongruence of practice and place.¹⁴ As Jacob Katz writes, "The special feature of Jewish society was its total reliance on the distant past; for Jewish tradition regarded everything of value in Jewish religion—law, learning, and culture—as stemming from ancient times" (1998:5). Moreover, this was a collective and daily endeavor. Jewishness itself, then, to a large degree, entailed its own ostracism, both in practice and orientation. Living as strangers in foreign lands was not just an unfortunate

¹⁴Many of the practices of pre-exilic Judaism, or ancient Judaism, were intrinsically tied to *place*, specifically the land defined as biblical Israel and the holy temple. Certain injunctions could not be fulfilled without access to this ascribed sacred space and thus had to be reinterpreted, or put aside altogether in exile. Contemporary synagogues or "temples" should not be confused with this specific space.

historical condition, but was constitutive of Jewish subjectivity. To some extent, I argue, aspects of this subjectivity (inherited, oriented in relation to particular times and places) manifest today within both religious and secular Jewish expressions of identity.

However, it was a two-way process, for while Jews often may have sought a measure of independence and exclusivity, they were greatly aided in this process by harsh oppressive measures and restrictions:

Generally outside a very few enclaves of toleration (notably Holland, and then England from the seventeenth century), and until the very end of the eighteenth century, Jews lived throughout the Christian and Islamic world under some combination of legally institutionalized disabilities and the threat of violence at the hands of lord and mob alike. Regulated, restricted, or even totally denied were the Jew's right of residence, his occupation, his freedom of movement and public worship, his effective recourse to justice, his right to property, his dress, his right to bear arms, even in some countries, his right to marry and rear a family. The Jews, in a word, were not properly part of civil society, but set apart from it... [Vital 1975:24]

This grim picture of Jewish life in Europe before the French Revolution can be tempered by exceptions—moments or places when Jews and Christians co-existed in relative peace, but never equality—and indeed, Jewish and non-Jewish relations differed somewhat from region to region, hamlet to hamlet (Katz 1998). For example, the relationships between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Muslim Spain is often cited as a particularly dynamic time, when social practices were at odds with the circumscribed life of Jews in other parts of Europe.¹⁵ Jewish life was in large part characterized by a negotiation between the demands placed on them from the society around them and the injunctions of their faith. To this end, it is somewhat a distortion to give a picture of Jewish life as totally separate and unchanging. Jewish and non-Jewish interaction was limited, but Jewish life

¹⁵See for example, James Clifford (1994) "Diasporas" in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 325-326; For a view on Jews in a larger North African/Mediterranean context see Solomon Dob Fritz Gotein (1967-93) *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Cairo Geniza*. Six Volumes. Berkeley: University of California Press. Also, Amitav Ghosh (1992) *In an Antique Land*. London: Granta Books.

and practice was modified in relation to the larger societies within which they dwelled.¹⁶ One can imagine that in some cases, such as in Muslim ruled Spain, Jewishness had an effect on general society as well. Keeping the above exceptions and nuances in mind, the *overall* picture of Ashkenazi Western and Eastern European Jewry, reflects the highly marginal, oppressive, and separatist situation iterated above. Nevertheless, Jewish life was not immune to or completely ignorant of the larger social, economic, and political trends taking place around, and in some cases through, them.

Thus, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, individual Jews in Western Europe were beginning to feel the effects of and participate in the intellectual spirit that was transforming aspects of European society and politics. Ideas prominent in Enlightenment thought—reason, not religion, as the author of truth and the equalizing essence of human kind, the freeing of the “individual” from the arbitrary demands of power and community and his birth as an autonomous, “free” subject —began to filter into Jewish life, and slowly change the ways in which Jews understood themselves.¹⁷ For the most part, these ideas were interpreted through Jewish intellectual thought and understanding, producing the Jewish Enlightenment, or *Haskalah*. In effect, the work of the Enlightenment came to radically transform Jewish life, perhaps even more profoundly than Christian Europe. I return to these subjects later. My point here is that by the time of the French Revolution, the ideas that ushered in this new political and social entity were not wholly unknown to individual or even communities of Jews in parts of Western Europe. And indeed, the

¹⁶For more on this period, see Jacob Katz’s work, particularly *Out of the Ghetto and Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval Times*. Both David Vital’s *A People Apart: A political History of the Jews in Europe, 1789-1939* and Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz’s edited volume *The Jew in the Modern World*, provide ample background to Jewish life pre-emancipation.

¹⁷In the seventeenth century, the philosophy and life of Baruch Spinoza has been said to be “...the first modern, secular Jew” (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995:55). Or at least Spinoza is the first “modern secular Jew” we know about.

eventual success of the French Revolution and the spread of liberal and democratically organized states depended, in part, on Jewish participation and desire.

Jewish Emancipation in France

“We are now, thanks to the Supreme Being, and to the sovereignty of the nation, not only Men and Citizens, but we are French-men!” –Berr Isaac Berr (1791)

It was meant to be a revelation. A gift. For many Jews, the emancipation brought about by the French Revolution was precisely this: a gift, an opportunity. The gates were finally open, the streets were to be free to roam, economic strictures were to be loosened. The Jews were let out of the ghetto, literally and figuratively, and were to become *citizens*. When speaking of this time period, and speaking of the Jews (although there were other marginalized groups at the time) one cannot emphasize the word enough: *citizen*. While the overthrow of the monarchy and the development of the Rights of Man were truly revolutionary, the consideration of making Jews citizens was a minor revolution in its own right. Jews were to become French, with all the rights and responsibilities that it would entail. Legally at least, they would cease to be social outcasts and problematic political subjects, and become united with their fellow humanity (or at least “Frenchmen,” who arguably represented universal humanity!). They were permitted to participate in civil society, and choose not to be marginal or anathema to it. For those Jews already peering through the unstable threshold defined as between “tradition” and “modernity,” the French Revolution finally let them take a tentative step through. But political emancipation is not social acceptance. As I show below, Jewish entry into French society was rather circumscribed and troubled for both Jews and non-Jews—more complicated than perhaps either the Enlightenment believing Jews and non-Jews imagined. And in fact, full Jewish entry into the republic was not a given, and was not immediately granted.

Whatever the feelings of the leaders of the new French nation and its recently incorporated French citizenry toward the Jews, the stated goals of the Revolution—brotherhood, equality, and liberty—stipulated that something had to be done about them. Even though the French Revolution was inspired in part on these utopian ideals, there was still a question of whether or not Jews could be French citizens. (And indeed, despite the claims of the Revolution, the dominant thinking at the time was hardly inclusive of all.) On December 23, 1789 the French National Assembly met to specifically discuss the fate of the Jews living in the nation, during which points for and against the granting of equal rights for Jews were posited.¹⁸ There were citizens who fought for the right of Jews to join them in citizenship, but only under certain conditions. Count Stanislas de Claremont-Tonnerre, an advocate for equal rights for Jews, said the following at the meeting:

The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals. They must be citizens...there cannot be one nation within another nation...It is intolerable that the Jews should become a separate political formation or class in the country. Every one of them must individually become a citizen; if they do not want this...we shall then be compelled to expel them. [Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship 1995:115, emphasis added].

I will return to the significance of this passage for the Jews in France in a moment. Arguments against making Jews citizens cited their seemingly intractable insularity and corporatism, their longing for another homeland, and the intense dislike “the people” have for them. As one prominent Frenchman from Lorraine skeptical of granting Jews citizenship remarked, “The people detest them...” (Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship 1995:116). According to these objections, Jews could never be “of” France without significant reformation—that is, assimilation. However, despite the misgivings of some of the participants at the debate—and the generalized dislike and suspicion of the French populace toward the Jews—Jews were eventually granted citizenship on September 28,

¹⁸See the “Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

1791. (The more assimilated and cosmopolitan and thus viewed as less problematic Sephardic community was granted citizenship in 1790). The declaration of their citizenship made all previous local decrees concerning their activities and legal rights and limitations null and void. Given the date of this declaration (roughly two years after the revolution), it is clear that absorption of France's substantial Jewish population was not an easy decision. However, it was a necessity.

The necessity of incorporating the Jews as French subjects is encapsulated in the remarks by Count Stanislas, above. As the Count makes plain, it was common at the time to speak of the Jews as a "nation." The ways in which Jews were conceived in terms of "nationhood" by themselves and by others, and the changing understandings of the term itself, is a fascinating but complicated, long story that cannot fully be told here. We can gather, however, at least one general sense of nation that Count Stanislas refers: that of belonging to a discrete, insular community with its own desires and objectives. On the one hand, the corporatism and separatism of the Jews contradicted the spirit of the new society, a society based, in part, on a broad "brotherhood," individualism, and secular ideals, not clannishness and religious authority. Alternatively, the conception of Jews as a nation with its own, potentially nationalistic, purposes and goals was not acceptable within a process that sought a cohesive national identity and a centralized government.¹⁹ As the Count asserts, "...there cannot be one nation within another nation." The Jews could have been expelled, outright, as they were in 1394. But the social and political situation of 1789 was

¹⁹There is little evidence of organized national political aspirations—Zionism—among European Jews in the eighteenth century, or before. For Jews at this time, the return to Israel as a political movement rooted in concrete actions made little sense, as it was predicated on a host of fantastical events, the most important being the return of the Messiah. Adherence to the *Torah* and performing *Mitzvot*, or following the laws, customs and practices of *Halakhah*, was seen as preparing the ground for the return of the Messiah and an end to exile. But this was hardly a call to arms or political pressure that resulted in practical steps taken toward this end. In fact, to hasten the end of exile was seen as direct refutation of God's will. The religious anti-Zionist group, called Neturei Karta, represent these beliefs today. It wasn't until the late nineteenth century and the reinterpretation of Judaism from the perspective of modernity, that Zionism as a secular political movement began to gather force (see David Vital's *The Origin of Zionism* and Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (1993) "Diaspora: Generational Ground of Jewish Identity" *Critical Inquiry* 19 (4):693-725, for an in depth treatment of this topic). Presumably, those Frenchmen concerned with the potential nationalism of the Jews were questioning Jewish commitment to a national purpose—however ungrounded—other than their own.

radically different than 1394. The participants at the Debate about Jewish citizenship acknowledged the “usefulness” of Jews in matters of economy and finance, and beyond this, incorporating the Jews was a way to underscore the power of their vision. A hasty expulsion without the opportunity to become citizens could seriously delegitimize the underlying principles of the Revolution. Arguing the “Jewish question” was in effect, testing the precepts of the Revolution.²⁰ In fact, Jews made up a very small proportion of the population of France, and one could ask why the Jewish question was such a debatable issue in revolutionary France (and in other parts of Europe as well, such as the German states). Why would a small minority community, thought of as backward and deficient in most every way, and without legitimate political power, preoccupy the intelligentsia and politically powerful of Western Europe as much as it did in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries?²¹ Citing an article by Ronald Schechter, the historian Jonathan Hess writes,

...Jews were chiefly of symbolic significance to the French. Viewed by traditional prejudice as the ultimate anti-citizen, Jews thus offered the perfect test case for revolutionary principles of the moral transformation of both individuals and the French nation as a whole...In debating the moral and political transformation of the Jews, the French were testing the limits of the very concept of political universalism. [2002:5]

Following Schechter, it can be argued that within Europe, Jews became an important litmus test for the power of Enlightenment ideals to transform and remake society into a secular and rational space, and create a universalizing vision of humanity. (A similar test can be said to have been underway in the European colonies at the time, although with differing purposes and outcomes.) The transformation of the Jews into enlightened

²⁰For more insight into this period with regard to the Jewish question in France, see Arthur Hertzberg (1968), *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, New York: Columbia University Press. Also Paula E. Hyman (1987) “The French Jewish Community from Emancipation to the Dreyfus Affair” in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice*. N.L. Kleeblatt, ed. Pp. 25-36 Berkeley: University of California Press.

²¹For example in the German states, Jonathan Hess notes that the “...Nazi historian Volkmar Eichstädt documented in his 1938 *Bibliography of the History of the Jewish Question* that more than 3,000 titles dealing with Jews, Judaism, and Jewish emancipation had inundated the German book market by 1848...” (2002:4).

Frenchmen was thus a political necessity in two senses: It diffused the specter of a potentially unpredictable fifth column and it put the assertions of the Enlightenment into rigorous practice, by making a citizen out of the stranger.

This citizen, however, was *singular*, and predicated on an individual self. The only way Jews could be granted entry as citizens was as *individuals*. Jews as a corporate entity, and by extension, Jews as Jews, would be given nothing; a Frenchman who happened to be a Jew, ostensibly everything. This was the intent, at least. In effect, Jewishness had to be re-fashioned into something palatable for the new French nation. As Wendy Brown states,

To be compatible with membership in the French republic, Jews had to be individuated, denationalized, decorporatized as Jews. To cohabit with Frenchness, Jewishness could not longer consist in belonging to a distinct community bound by religious law, ritualized practices, and generational continuity; rather, it would consist at most in privately held and conducted belief. [2006:52]

According to the underlying logic of French (universal) citizenship, the evolving constellation of beliefs and practices that had maintained Jewish distinctiveness throughout the years of exile were no longer needed. France could become their “home.” As individuals they were free to practice their faiths and live in accordance with their laws, as long as those laws were in agreement with and subservient to the laws of the new French nation. However, this breaking of Jewish “corporate” identity into “individual” practice represented a serious departure from a defining feature of Jewish life as it had historically developed in France, at least for the Ashkenazi. This fracturing of corporate identity would occur throughout the process of emancipation. Thus most Jews were challenged to conceive of themselves in entirely different and alien terms, entailing a radical shift in belief and practice. Frenchness as a secular and cosmopolitan attitude with an emphasis on the individual, was incommensurable with the ways in which Jewishness had come to inhabit most of Europe (as it was I’m sure for a lot of other groups). The act of becoming citizens and the whole emancipatory process, then, was shot through with *loss*. Whether or not this rupture was

more abrupt or profound for the Jews than for others in Europe, is arguable. What is clear is that grounds for becoming French—the reformation of the Jews—entailed not just their transformation, but in a significant sense their ceasing to be Jewish as it was previously known.

Even after the September 1791 decree, Jewish *citizenship* in the fullest sense of the word was not guaranteed. Legal equality was granted, but social acceptance in France continues to be an ongoing process. Moreover, following pressure from particular sectors of the Republic, the rights of French Jews to engage in certain economic activities and reside in particular areas was prohibited by decree in 1808 (this decree, however, was not renewed after it expired in 1818). The passing of this decree—which appreciably curtailed civil rights for Jews—is a significant example of the ambivalence and precariousness of Jewish citizenship in post-revolutionary France.²²

Yet, this ambivalence eventually existed alongside a flourishing of this new French Jewishness. As Marrus (1971) points out, Jewish entry and participation into French society was, due to various factors, relatively quick and comprehensive. By the end of the nineteenth century, “French Jews had emerged from the ghetto and were scattered throughout the French social structure. They no longer perceived life in the same way as before and they differed fundamentally [from previous generations of Jews] in the kind of life they led” (Marrus 1971:49). Five years before the arrest of Captain Alfred Dreyfus for treason in 1894, the Jews of France celebrated the centennial of the Revolution with great enthusiasm: “One rabbi gratefully proclaimed in a sermon on the occasion, ‘We have adopted the customs and traditions of a country which has so generously adopted us, and today, thanks to God, there are no longer any but Frenchmen in France’” (Hyman 1987:25). While Jews to a greater and lesser degrees had declared French identity as their own, their

²²See “The ‘Infamous Decree’ (March 17, 1808) in *The Jew in the Modern World*, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. Oxford, U.K.: University of Oxford Press.

position within French society was revealed to be precarious, as the Dreyfus affair (roughly 1894-1906) and the later Vichy regime (1940-1944) made evident. The courtship of Jewishness and modernity and the political emancipation of Jews in France, while engendering a tremendous transformation in society, did not guarantee a full embrace of the arms of the Republic.

The example of French Jews provides an early and dramatic example of the “working out” of the Jewish question in Europe. In making the leap from particularism and strict religious authority to an abstract, universal humanity, Jews were given the opportunity to gain political equality and access to parts of society previously dark to them. This act of walking through the threshold, between “tradition” and “modernity,” religious Jewish authority and knowledge and rational secularism, the particular and the universal, continues to be a messy, hybrid affair. In the process of stepping through, a new version of Jewishness *and* modernity was, and continues to be, negotiated. But the process of permitting entrance to the Jews, also entailed, to some extent, changes in the ideas of “humanity” and “universalism” to include Jews. However, this admittance was enacted largely on non-Jewish terms. Many Jews welcomed these social transformations as an opportunity, despite the losses it entailed. But what did this transformation mean more specifically for Jewishness? Obviously, Jewishness did not disappear completely, even among communities that are considered to be highly assimilated. It became a hybrid thing, a loitering at the threshold, a frontier subjectivity. (I reject Sartre’s argument that Jews exist because of anti-Semitism, although anti-Semitic attitudes toward Jews do help to resurrect Jewishness even in the most assimilated individual.)²³ What attitudes, identities, and practices emerged with these new articulations of Jewishness? What does an analysis of

²³Sartre, Jean-Paul (1976) *Anti-Semite and Jew*. New York: Schocken Books.

Jewish emancipation reveal about the construction and regulation of difference within modernity? What does it say about how the liberal nation-state accommodates difference?

Jewish Emancipation and the Problem with Difference

“The baptismal certificate is the ticket of admission to European culture...” –Heinrich Heine, 1823

The whole process of turning Europe’s Jews into citizens and granting them equal rights is generally termed emancipation.²⁴ But emancipation is not a straightforward concept. The question still remains, *emancipation into what?*

As I’ve already discussed, the combination of the social and political openings sparked by the Enlightenment and the subsequent processes of political emancipation precipitated a kind of crisis for Jews who continued to live in bounded, tightly organized communities. Those Jews already touched and taken in by the ideas of the Enlightenment sought to reconcile Jewish life as they inherited it with the social and cultural currents of their neighbors or fellow citizens. Looking beyond the insularity and relatively narrow perimeters of much of European Jewish life, they sought intellectual and personal freedom through the seductions of the Enlightenment. However, for a significant portion of Jews, as with Christians, the political and cultural changes brought about were not welcome. For these Jews, this growing force of change threatened the established authority of the community and a whole way of life that was propelled not by looking to a distant future (or linear marked time), but by a dialectical relationship between present and past. It was a life marked by precariousness and periods of overt persecution, but within the logic of Jewish understanding, this was part of being in exile, and to some extent constitutive of their subjectivity as Jews. Despite the promises of emancipation and modernity, not all Jews

²⁴The term “emancipation” was historically tied specifically to England. However, it has come to be applied more generally to the processes of political incorporation of Jews in Europe. See Jacob Katz (1964) “The Term *Jewish Emancipation*: Its Origin and Historical Impact” in *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*, Alexander Altman, ed. Pp. 1-25, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

were anxious for a change of their status or a radical opening of possibilities. There were Jewish communities and individuals that rejected the promises of modernity—this was the case in particular among some Eastern European Jewish communities, for whom connection with the transformative processes of the Enlightenment came late (Vital 1975).

But for the most part, the process of emancipation was welcomed, or at least accepted, in Western Europe. Emancipation was a doubled process— political emancipation within the realm of the nation-state, and also emancipation from strict religious Jewishness—and this led to multiple possible orientations for Jews toward the latter. These positions ranged from reinforcing and reinvigorating Jewish observance to renouncing Jewishness altogether. Many Jews hovered in between and tried to find mediating practices to accommodate both Jewishness and the attitudes, habits, and practices of their respective nations.²⁵ Regardless of the path individuals took, European Jews had to learn to live as incorporated members of a larger society that for all intents and purposes contradicted their worldview and practices. Despite the desires of individual Jews to join with European societies, in many cases the society they were to be absorbed into was hostile toward them. So what could one do?

As the historian David Vital put it, “The process of assimilation hinged on retaining membership in two, in important respects incompatible and traditionally hostile, cultures—or, with greater traumatic effects, seeking to pass from one to the other entirely” (1980:26). As we saw in the French case above, for the most part belonging in society was not done on Jewish terms. It was the Jew and Jewishness that had to change, while society tolerated this process. However, there was one prominent Jewish figure that sought to enter society on different terms.

²⁵Along with other members of society, the affiliations multiplied and fractured, as over time other aspects of identity and belonging came to be emphasized, such as gender, sexuality, and politics.

One of the most prominent figures of the German enlightenment and “Jewish enlightenment” or *haskalah*, is Moses Mendelssohn, a German Jewish philosopher who lived and wrote in the eighteenth century. Mendelssohn wanted to hold on to aspects of traditional Judaism while at the same time participate fully in the society around him. His claiming of Enlightenment ideas is present in the famous statement attributed to him, “Be a Jew on the inside and a man on the outside.”

One of the factors in the debates that comprised the Jewish question throughout the nineteenth century was the belief that Jews were part of an “antiquated” religion, mystical, and more rooted in the East than the West. An influential eighteenth century German supporter of Jewish emancipation, Christian Wilhelm Dohm (a contemporary interlocutor of Mendelssohn’s), referred to Jews as a “nation” of “unfortunate Asiatic refugees” (Hess 2002:2). Moreover, Jews, or more accurately, ancient Hebrews, became an object of study within the growing field of “Orientalist studies” in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. In these senses, they were hardly seen as ideal candidates for participation in a modern, secular state and society. They were perceived as other in both their outlook and origin. Mendelssohn, a friend of Kant’s and a prominent participant in the Berlin Enlightenment, struggled to rectify Judaism with political integration. He sought not assimilation in the sense of losing or profoundly modifying one’s Judaism, but instead, he argued in his essay, *Jerusalem* (1783), that Judaism was *compatible* with the emerging modern state and the ideas of sovereignty so central to thought in this period.²⁶ In other words, he argued that Jews as Jews could be members and useful participants of a modern liberal society, and that Judaism was perhaps *a more suitable foundation for this society than Christianity*. As Jonathan Hess (2002) has pointed out, Mendelssohn and others offered up a different

²⁶It should be made clear that Mendelssohn’s Judaism is not the same as the “traditional” religious Judaism of the ghetto. Mendelssohn is an Enlightenment actor and this is reflected in his vision of Judaism, which he presents in terms that mimic aspects of Christianity. He presents Judaism within terms of Christianity, such as the notion of “confession.” Nevertheless, as Hess points out, “Judaism may indeed be constructed as a religion in mimicry of Christianity, but this act of mimicry is a subversive one *vis-à-vis* its object...” (Hess 2002:97).

version of modernity and universalism—one that could accommodate Judaism not as an anachronistic religion, or a threat to universal values, but as intrinsically compatible with society’s emerging ideals. Through a critique of Christian imperialism in his essay *Jerusalem*, he questions the compatibility of a “secular political order” with Christianity (Hess 2002:95). Elsewhere Mendelssohn states that in contrast to Christianity, “...Mosaic law was in its purest form devoid of coercive force (Hess 2002:95).” In a private letter to Wilhem Dohm, he goes even further, referring to Christians as “...conquerors, oppressors and slave traders” (Hess 2002:92).

I agree with Hess that an evaluation of Mendelssohn’s conception of Judaism is less important than the ways in which he actively challenges Christian discourse, and passionately argues for a place for Judaism in the society and civic life of Europe.²⁷

Mendelssohn’s argument is remarkable in its *public Jewish critique* of Christianity—a sure sign of the work of the Enlightenment movement. Mendelssohn’s combative stance toward the vision of modernity being formulated in eighteenth century Berlin is an example of how Jews actively negotiated their position within this emerging vision of society, and did not always passively accept the terms of the debate. It is also an example of how Jews from *within Judaism* contributed to the cacophony of voices and positions that we would come to call “modern.”

What’s “Universal” About “Universal Man”?

Ultimately, a robust Jewish claim on the ideas and structures we call “modernity” was ceded to more powerful discourses circulating at the time. These discourses, coded as secular, universal, and oriented toward and creating the individual (in the form associated with liberalism), expressed liberation in the minds of its champions at the same time as it

²⁷To this end Hess writes, “...I am concerned less with the philosophical inadequacy of Mendelssohn’s defense of Judaism as a ‘revealed legislation’ than with the polemical unity of his argument, the way he systematically confronts, subverts, and reformulates the positions of his opponents”(2002:95).

advanced a Western, Christian and male vision of humanity. Moses Mendelssohn represents one attempt, from a Jewish perspective, to change the terms of the project and provide a space for Jews to actively and legitimately participate from within Judaism. Ultimately, the dominant vision of political universalism that ushered in the process of Jewish emancipation required a baptism of sorts: to enter the water as a Jew and emerge a man.

The process of Jewish emancipation and (often Jewish desired) transformation of Jewishness *vis à vis* the forces of modernity is not only relevant to Jews or Jewish studies. Rather, it is one example, one of the emblematic examples *within* Europe (the colonies were another, not unrelated, matter), of the ways in which emerging discourses about the “human,” “liberty,” and “society” in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century dealt, and continue to deal, with difference. An analysis of the Jewish Question is an important early example of the tensions and contradictions involved in making liberal citizens out of non-white and non-Christian people, a process that extends from the eighteenth and nineteenth century into the present. Today, the prominence of the idea of a universal secular human subject anchored to individual “freedom” has engendered a significant amount of anxiety—and in some cases explosive violence—for some minority groups living in the liberally informed nation-state. Aamir Mufti argues that the Jewish question in particular bears upon, for example, the predicament of Muslim Indians in the post-colonial state.²⁸ As Mufti frames it, the crisis of Muslim identity is traceable to the “problematic of secularization and minority in post-Enlightenment liberal culture as a whole,” and the working-out of these problems in Europe was done most explicitly with Jews and through the Jewish question (2007:2).

What an analysis of the Jewish Question reveals, then, is not so much what is “wrong” with Jews or what precisely makes them different, but what is peculiar or

²⁸See Mufti’s (2007) *Enlightenment in the Colony*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

problematic about these visions about society and the human—particularly when they are yoked to citizenship and the power of the nation-state. For within the supposedly equalizing, universalizing force of much Enlightenment thought, Jews and other minorities are granted “freedom” precisely through their dissolution. “It’s as if you are mentally disappeared,” a young Muslim Dutch woman says in describing living as a religious minority in Holland (Baruma 2006:139). As has already been well documented in other places, the discourses and events that we have come to call the Enlightenment are not neutral or objectively universal (coercively and seductively universal might be a better way of putting it).²⁹ The Enlightenment push for secularism and embrace of rationality are *despite their claims otherwise* rooted in political and social traditions dominated by Western forms of Christianity. Although the Enlightenment was based in large part on a rejection, or perhaps, reinterpretation, of religion and its resurrected partners “tradition” and “superstition” as the source of epistemological or moral truth, the European societies that emerged were still, primarily, Christian places. (Nor were the “religious” and “rational” realms ever completely purified!)

An example of something seemingly universal or neutral is “time.” The weekday and the yearly calendar were (and are) structured around Christian time—with the Jewish Sabbath and holy days increasingly at odds with the financial and social rhythms of the societies around them. But it’s not just a matter of structuring the political and social life of a society in certain ways, but reflects a different logic of understanding the relation between past and present, or the motion (or lack of) of time. Dominant conceptions of time in the West are linear, perhaps reflecting the eschatological purpose of Christian time, rather than the non-linear movement of Jewish Messianic time. Similar problems confronted and continue to confront Muslims and those of other religious faiths and cultural traditions. Thus

²⁹See for example, Walter Mignolo (2002) “The Enduring Enchantment (or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here)” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4): 927-954. See also Paul Gilroy (2000) *Against Race*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

while the modern nation-state was to be predicated on a separation of church and state and “universal” rights, the temporal structure of society and social custom made it difficult for Jews and other religious groups to fully participate without shedding important aspects of their faith or understanding of the world. This compromise was not imposed upon faithful Christians, however. In other words, political economy and the organization of society and state in the West was tacitly built on religious, that is, Christian worldviews that became coded as “secular,” “normal” or “universal.” To a large extent, then, secularity was compatible with Christianity in ways not possible with Judaism or Islam. Walter Mignolo acknowledges as much when he writes, “Secular thinkers criticized religion that became the ‘opium of the people,’ although Christianity remained complicit with secular discourse, since Christianity could not have been placed at the same level...with Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or even [!] Judaism”(2002:934).

The ecumenical reach of the Enlightenment, and its goals of “emancipation” and “progress,” are ideas that are not difficult to rectify with certain interpretations of Christianity. Indeed, they found a nice fit in colonization projects and the logics of the missionary. Enlightenment ideals and the political and social structures they brokered are universal only in the sense that they demand a critical level of assimilation of difference. “Others” either had to conform to this so-called universal, remain social pariahs, or were outside of the bounds of knowable, acceptable humanity, from a European male perspective, to be considered for inclusion in the “universal” in the first place.³⁰

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (1993) pinpoint the location of this universalizing discourse in the Pauline texts. Paul, a radical Jewish figure represents a “universalizing of the Torah” and a breaking through of Jewish “particularism” (1993:694). The baptismal process entailed “substituting an allegorical genealogy for a literal one...in

³⁰I think that the idea of gender offers a slightly different problematic that I cannot address here.

baptism, all the differences that mark off one body from another as Jew or Greek...male or female, slave or free are effaced, for in the spirit such marks do not exist” (1993:695).

These are the roots of Enlightenment thought, the Boyarins argue, and also the source of its coercive force. The Boyarins cite Elizabeth Castelli:

Paul’s appropriation of the discourse of mimesis is a powerful rhetorical move, because this language identifies the fundamental values of wholeness and unity with Paul’s own privileged position vis à vis the gospel, the early Christian communities he founded and supervises, and Christ himself. *Here is precisely where he makes his coercive move. To stand for anything other than what the apostle stands for is to articulate for oneself a place of difference, which has already been implicitly been associated with discord and disorder.* [1993:696]

Paul’s discourse was not anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic, rather it was articulating a different grounds for Judaism, one that differed radically from extant forms of Judaism.³¹ However, Paul’s discourse of universality in both of its pre and post-Enlightenment versions became in a significant sense the foundation for the Jews’ troubled presence in the Christian world.³² Their refusal to accept Christ as Messiah and become “one in Christ” represents an enduring critique of Christian truth and a problematic site of disorder, frustrating the universal vision of Christianity. In the seemingly secular discourse of the Enlightenment, however, Jews were given a more palatable, seemingly neutral or non-Christian, discourse of universality to enter into and absorb. The political and social factors that made European Jews “ready” to embrace—if often tentatively and partially—Enlightenment promises, cannot be attended to here. It can be said, however, that many Jews chose to negotiate with the discourse of universality and citizenship, even though it entailed a radical rearticulation of their beliefs and way of life.

³¹The Boyarins write, “True Jewishness lay, according to Paul, precisely in renunciation of difference and entry into the one body of Christ” (1993:697).

³²This is not to lay absolute blame on Christians or Christianity for all Jewish troubles. Nor is it meant to be a condemnation of Christianity or the utopic vision of the Pauline texts. Indeed, Paul’s vision and the discourses that sprung from it envision an “ideal” world freed from the prejudices and constraints of particularism and difference. Yet, as these ideas became yoked to absolute truth and political power they were used in coercive and imperialistic ways even as they have enabled equality in other ways.

In practice, while strictly religious Judaism may have faded amongst a large percentage of the population, Jews, particularly in Western Europe, accommodated themselves by reinterpreting their faith and entering more widely into gentile society. Jewishness bloomed into a spectrum of possibilities, rather than the sole options of adhering to strict laws and normative traditions or leaving the community all together. It is more accurate, perhaps, to think about degrees of assimilation and processes of acculturation. Scholars such as Hess and Paul Mendes-Flohr (1999) emphasize that the social and political changes brought upon and often embraced by European Jews in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were characterized by a process of acculturation, as well as assimilation. By the late nineteenth century, Jews in Western Europe were not just in the culture, but creating it, and participating in a wide variety of social milieu, even if from a position of marginality. However, even as they did this, the rise of a kind of nationalism that sought to link territory with a bounded, primordial “people,” combined with new racial sciences, would drastically unsettle the processes of Jewish belonging and citizenship, as well as provide fertile ground for the growing Zionist movement.

Once the ideas and practices associated with biological racism began to circulate widely and deeply within European culture, Jewish difference became innate and unchangeable, no matter the level of assimilation or acculturation. According to this logic, Jewishness remained as an indelible stain despite shedding one’s religious beliefs and adopting the custom, dress, and social mores of the general culture. Jewish difference became absolute, obstinate, and inassimilable. One could cast off any historical, religious, or cultural claims of Jewishness, as many European Jews did, only to later be called “home” by the discourse of biological race, encoded in the Nuremberg laws.

Even as Jews “passed” into German, or French, or Dutch society (where in cities like Amsterdam there was actually quite a long history of interchange between Jews and non-Jews), dressing and speaking like their co-citizens, engaging in lively intellectual debates,

contributing to the political culture of the time, and in many cases converting to Christianity, the burgeoning hold of biological racism coupled with an insurgence of nationalism checked this passage, culminating finally, and tragically, with the death camps.³³

Conclusion

In the previous pages I have provided an overview of the ideas, processes, and debates surrounding the Jewish Question and the emancipation of European Jewry. I have tried to show how the successfulness of this process depended on an individualization and privatization of Jewishness, in relation to a public, national persona. I have also discussed how, by virtue of this bifurcation, Jewishness came to be marked and experienced as being betwixt and between possible identifications. Jewish citizenship and belonging, then, become sites of ambivalence and intense, ongoing negotiation. While the same can be said for other groups in a given nation-state, given the ways in which Jews have been historically produced as “other” or “stranger,” I argue that this precariousness is more easily exposed and subject to critique.

What does the Jewish Question say, if anything, about Jewish belonging in Argentina? Except perhaps during the rise of ultra-nationalist movements in the 1930s and 40s, the Jewish Question, as a political concern, never really arose in Argentina. As I’ve previously discussed, Jews were admitted into the nation under the liberal project that was unfolding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were one group among many who would become Argentines, at the loss of their particularity (it was hoped). As

³³Hannah Arendt provides a searing critique of assimilation on precisely these grounds. For Arendt, assimilation as the resolution of the Jewish question is at best politically naïve and perhaps disgraceful (as a parvenu) and at worst, incredibly dangerous. Arendt argued that the best option for Jews was to become *pariahs* to the society at large, and even among the Jewish community if necessary, fight for political rights as *Jews* and provide a critique of the status quo. In other words, Arendt, reflecting on the rise of totalitarianism and the demise of European Jewry, saw a danger in fighting for inclusion based on an abstract, universal conception of humanity. As she writes, “The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human...” (Arendt 1979:299).

chapter one demonstrates, however, the waves of immigrants that eventually came to Argentina, mostly through Buenos Aires, challenged the vision of “Argentina” imagined by elites in profound ways. However some immigrant groups, such as Italians, were able to capture and reshape *Argentinidad* in ways that, over time, became “natural.” Jews, at the same time as they adopted significant aspects of Argentine culture—ways of feeling, of thinking—also retained a level of particularity that distinguished them from those for whom dominant constructions of *Argentinidad* could be embraced and reshaped with little contradiction. At play in articulations of Jewish difference in Argentina is the ways in which Catholicism has become an important vehicle through which to express *Argentinidad*, particularly outside of Buenos Aires. The ways in which Jewish Argentines both belong and don’t belong in the nation is informed in part by the engagement of Jewishness and modernity discussed above.

In many ways, the event of the AMIA bombing, while perhaps not formally raising the Jewish question, animated the concerns and problems of the Jew as minority citizen-subjects. It was not just that the assumption of physical safety of Jewish Argentines was shattered (by an external terrorist threat and the alleged complicity of some Argentine citizens), but that their claims to *Argentinidad* were also vulnerable. Specifically, it became a site of rupture within the discourse of assimilation and acculturation of the Jews in Argentina, and initiated a public sphere where Jewish belonging could be discussed and questioned. To this end, my good friend José can express that “somehow or another the Jewish community never was fully considered Argentine...the feeling I have is that Argentine identity for the Jews requires in some way an elaboration, it is not a natural situation.”³⁴

³⁴“que de alguna manera la comunidad judía nunca fue plenamente considerada como argentina... yo la impresión que tengo es que la identidad argentina de los judíos de alguna manera requiere de una elaboración, es una opinión, requiere de una elaboración, no es una situación natural.” Interview May 23, 2004 in Buenos Aires.

IV. Inside and Outside the Nation: The Bombing of the AMIA

My problem began after the AMIA bombing, when they asked me if my daughter was a Jew or an Argentine... --Sofía Guterman

Introduction: The Vulnerability of the Body

Buenos Aires, August 21, 2004. I think about how easily harmed a body is.

Frequently, I have these thoughts during the day, as I navigate my way through the busy city streets. Everything, every surface and situation vibrates with the possibility of destruction.

As I walk down the sidewalk, I look down at my hands, the skin thin and transparent, revealing the sustaining networks inside. Everything is too close to the surface I think, too visible and easily tampered with. Even the hard parts of our bodies—bones, teeth, cartilage—offer little protection against just a little too much pressure, an excess of force. Just look at that bloody clump in the middle of the street, bones crushed, feathers matted, beak flattened. It could be me, or you for that matter. Anytime, anywhere. You never know.

Babies and toddlers ride shotgun with their parents, they rock in the seat as the car comes to a stop. I can't help but imagine what will happen if the vehicle is casually bumped from behind. *The appalling informal nature of risk.* The other day, while walking in Recoleta, I came across a destroyed car, seemingly abandoned on the side of the street. The windshield on the driver's side had a perfect hole the size of an adult human head. The connection of the body and the windshield an intimate one; the glass shattered around it like the concentric circles of a stone tossed in water. I turn my head and walk faster down the street, toward the flashing lights of the shops and cinema, filled with people at rest, carefree and laughing.

Buenos Aires, July 18, 1994. Andrea wakes early that winter Monday morning. She wants to leave her apartment before 9:00 AM to go to the AMIA building, located on Pasteur Street, and register at the job center there. She's interested in a job at a nursery school, and after discussing the matter with her mom, thinks that the job center at the AMIA could help her. But first she is going to check another nearby nursery school for job possibilities. Her mother, Sofía, is anxious that morning about Andrea's plans—there were a series of ominous dreams, and Sofía had had strange chest pains for most of the night and morning. She tries calling her daughter, but the machine picks up. Apparently, she had already left.

It is a typical winter morning in Buenos Aires: a bit colder than most, but sunny and bright. At around 9:30 AM Andrea put in an application at the nursery school. She was only three or four blocks away from the AMIA building on Pasteur Street. Pasteur Street, and the *Once* neighborhood, has special significance for her. She and her family used to live on this street, just a few doors away from the AMIA. In a way, walking down Pasteur was like coming home. As she walks, people are engaged in their morning rituals and routines—off to work, children to school, the small *confiterías* on *calle* Pasteur steamy with coffee and casual conversation. A mother walks with her son along the street, people load and unload trucks, someone stops briefly to purchase something at a small store. Underneath the city, students and other commuters dose or read on the *Subte* (subway), on their way to work or school. At some point before 9:53 AM Andrea enters the AMIA.

They say that when the bomb detonated at approximately 9:53, its presence could be felt in the surrounding neighborhoods. Windows rattled, floors vibrated. *What was that?* Sofía, in her apartment, felt nothing even though her neighbors later report feeling the power of the explosion. Her chest hurt, and she had been busy getting tutoring materials together for her students. Andrea's fiancée, looking for Andrea, calls Sofía at around 10:10. A little

while later Sofía's husband calls, and says that many of their old neighbors from Pasteur Street had been calling him.

"Why?" Asked Sofía.

"Because they blew up the AMIA," He said.

"Andrea went there," Sofía replies.

The search and rescue operation went on for days. On the eighth day of searching for the bodies and potential survivors of the bombing, they found Andrea's body, her chest compressed by a piece of cement. "And from that day," Sofía iterates, "begins another kind of life."¹

With 85 people dead and hundreds injured, the bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (from now on, AMIA) remains the largest terrorist attack in the country's history. While Argentine and other state intelligence agencies have pin-pointed several Iranian nationals as the main suspects, to date, key alleged perpetrators have not been put on trial, basic facts about the bombing remain unknown or controversial, and government officials including former President Carlos Menem and the judge in charge of the AMIA case, Juan José Galeano, have been implicated in a cover-up. Moreover, the Argentine state has been petitioned through the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights at the Organization of American States for its failure to provide what are deemed basic human rights in a liberal democracy—security and justice.² For the family members of the victims—*los familiares*—the past 15 years have been marked not only by the pain of personal loss, but by the elusive, maddening search for information and justice. Some have given up hope in ever achieving justice through the courts, others have put their efforts in demanding that the Argentine state fulfill its responsibilities to its citizens—in short, insisting that the state

¹The narrative about Andrea was taken from my interview on July 1, 2004 with her mother, Sofía Guterman, at her home in the Villa Crespo neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

²The Argentine state that is invoked here is a narrowly defined institution that needs to be brought into the sphere of "proper" liberal democratic practice.

and society realize the liberal democratic principles the transition to democracy in 1983 is supposed to guarantee. Framed this way, the fight for justice for the AMIA bombing engages the discursive work of middle-class Argentine human rights organizations, and also connects to the liberal traditions that have formed the idea of the nation since independence.³ For many, the bombing of the AMIA has become one of the emblematic examples of the weak state of Argentine democracy, and the continued reign of the “culture of impunity.” Indeed, for some actors, justice for the AMIA bombing is not only important for the victim’s families, but for the nation itself, with “memory” becoming, as with the last dictatorship, a crucial agent against impunity and the official amnesia that accompanies it.

This chapter specifically discusses details about the AMIA bombing, along with the history of the institution and its function within the Jewish Argentine community. I follow this discussion by looking at the ways in which the public and state responded to and framed the AMIA bombing within discourses of exclusion and inclusion. Central to these discussions are the ways in which Jewish Argentines position themselves and are positioned by the state and fellow citizens. In many respects, the explosion of the AMIA building is a site of multiple kinds of ruptures: of bodies, lives, dreams of liberal democracy and Jewish life within it. In other respects, however, it is a site where people and imaginaries have come together, as memories of the “dirty war” mingle with memories of the Holocaust, and Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines come together to mourn, make sense of the violence, and ponder the state’s role in this act.

The Bombing in Context

The bombing of the AMIA was not the only attack of this type to occur in Argentina. Two years prior to the destruction of the AMIA, the Israeli embassy in downtown Buenos Aires was bombed and completely destroyed. Both bombings are connected in the minds of

³See chapter one for an overview of how liberal ideals helped to shape the nation. The specifics about the struggle for justice and human rights are detailed in chapter five.

Argentines, their targets ostensibly “Jews,” their shared location, Buenos Aires. They are also powerfully linked in the ways the state responded to both bombings—both have become examples of *impunidad*. While the two attacks share many features, they have substantively different consequences when considered through the lens of citizenship and national identity. The embassy, while located in Buenos Aires, functions symbolically as a piece of Israel in Argentina.⁴ While many of those killed in the bombing were Argentine citizens, the target itself is more ambiguously Argentine than the AMIA.

Given this past act of violence, some argue that the bombing of the AMIA was to be expected, and yet when it arrived the country appeared to be completely unprepared. The day after the AMIA bombing, *Página/12*, a popular left-leaning national newspaper ran with the headlines, “*Otra Vez*” (Again).⁵ It felt expected because the Argentine metropolis experienced a similar attack two-year years earlier, and yet like this previous act, the government seemed completely unprepared. Since 1992, not much had changed in security or intelligence to hinder a similar act of violence, and the investigation into the Israeli embassy bombing appeared stalled. Evidence also surfaced that the Argentine secret service, along with other governments, knew there was going to be another attack in Buenos Aires, and yet neglected to act.⁶

The Israeli embassy was bombed on March 17, 1992. The embassy, located in an attractive old-fashioned building on a corner in downtown Buenos Aires, was completely destroyed by a car bomb. Twenty-nine people, Israeli and Argentine nationals, were killed in the attack. Islamic Jihad (a part of Hezbollah) asserted responsibility for the bombing, stating that it was in response to Israel’s assassination of Hezbollah’s leader at the time,

⁴And perhaps is actually a piece of Israel in Argentina—I’m not sure if when one enters the Israeli embassy if one is actually under the jurisdiction of Israeli law.

⁵*Página/12*, Martes 19 de Julio de 1994, pp.1.

⁶This was conveyed to me by Laura Ginsberg on December 14, 2004 and is also put forth by Rotella (1999) and Escudé and Gurevich (2003).

Sheik Abbas al-Musawi, earlier that year.⁷ The attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires forms part of a string of attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets worldwide between the years 1992-1994.⁸ However, the possible role of Hezbollah along with Iran and Syria, in the Israeli Embassy bombing rests at the level of allegation.

At the time of my fieldwork (2004-2005), there seemed to be little political will on the part of Argentines or Israelis to apprehend those suspected to be responsible, even though it is widely believed that this bombing is linked by ideology and perpetrators to the later AMIA bombing. Like the AMIA bombing, members of Argentine security forces came under suspicion as accessories or having prior knowledge of the attack, although these allegations have not been taken to court. The case still remains unsolved—at least officially.⁹

Carlos S. who lost his daughter in the bombing of the embassy, is one of the only Argentines actively involved in championing the case. Carlos had been following the case closely and had recently been given access to government files regarding the investigation of the 1992 bombing. An elderly gentleman with warm eyes set in a gently aged face, he told me the story of the embassy bombing, his daughter who was killed, and the ongoing investigation. Insistent but not angry, he leaned over our table, strewn with empty espresso-sized cups, and said, "... the bombing of the [Israeli] embassy is clear, they know who were the authors—a small section of the Argentine intelligence agency...the Israeli intelligence agency and other countries already know perfectly who were the authors of the bombing."¹⁰

⁷See Gurevich (2005:3) mentions another possible reason for the attack, citing Argentina's break with neutrality in sending to two ships to participate in the Gulf War against Iraq.

⁸See *The New York Times*, "A Bleak History: Three Decades of Attacks on Jewish Targets and Israelis Abroad, October 8, 2004."

⁹In 2008 the man widely believed to be behind the two attacks in Buenos Aires among others, the Hezbollah leader Imad Mughniyeh was killed in a bombing in Damascus. Hezbollah blames Israel, while Israel continues to deny involvement.

The reasons why neither the Argentine nor the Israeli state, haven't enacted formal judicial procedures in regards to the Israeli embassy bombing are complex and are not entirely unconnected to the AMIA case. The issue of justice, particularly in relation to the AMIA bombing, will be addressed in chapter five. In relation to the Argentine state, the two bombings are linked in the minds of many Argentines through the view that the state has failed in its role to provide security and protect its citizens, and tolerates and facilitates a culture of *impunidad*. The fact that two years after the bombing of the Israeli embassy there had been no conclusive steps toward solving the case was seen to send a clear message to the international world: crimes remain unpunished in Argentina. The tacit impunity given the perpetrators could be seen as a green light inviting similar acts of terror and crime in general, and as I've already stated, many of the victims of the AMIA bombing hold the Argentine government responsible for fomenting such conditions. With the bombing of the Israeli embassy in mind, I turn now to specifically address the AMIA bombing.

A Rupture in the City; a Puncture in the Heart

Buenos Aires, December 14, 2004. It is an incredibly hot summer morning, and by 9:00 AM the temperature is well into the eighties. I am sitting in a corner *confitería* in the neighborhood of *Villa Crespo* (often referred to as Villa Kreplach because of the number of Jews who live there), talking with a remarkable woman.¹¹ Remarkable because after ten years she seems to never tire of denouncing the Argentine and Israeli governments, Jewish community leaders, and others she accuses of *impunidad*. Remarkable because she has been unwilling to change her argument or her tactics, despite the criticism she receives from the Jewish Argentine community, and her alienation from other family members of the victims. Laura lost her husband in the bombing.

¹⁰ "...el atentado a la embajada está esclarecido, se sabe quienes fueron los autores, los servicios de inteligencia argentinos, un pequeño sector, los servicios de inteligencia israelíes y de varios países más ya tienen perfectamente ubicados quienes fueron los autores del atentado."

¹¹ Kreplach is a kind of dumpling, often meat filled, popular in Ashkenazi cooking.

In the photos I've seen of Laura Ginsberg, she appears with a face that betrays extreme pain or tension. An accomplished rhetorician, her words can cut as much as they evoke empathy and sadness. But when I am with her in person she seems relaxed, her face open and friendly, her demeanor generous. She is casually dressed in a tank top and has short brown hair that gently frames her bespectacled face. It has taken me months to arrange a meeting with her, a consequence of my nervousness in approaching her as much as her demanding schedule. She had been difficult to track down, as she was very busy between her work at the university and her public role in pressuring the government to stop covering-up the AMIA investigation, and to call out the impunity she sees burying the case. Once a prominent member of Memoria Activa, Laura left (or was forced to leave—this remains a point of controversy) to form her own group, APEMIA (Agrupación por el Esclarecimiento de la Masacre Impune de la AMIA, Association for the Clarification of the Unpunished Massacre of the AMIA Bombing), perceived as more direct and forceful in their reclamations than Memoria Activa, and aligned with less mainstream currents of political activism. Yet, while many people I spoke with didn't agree with her politics and non-Zionist position on Israel, I was often told that she had the "clearest" vision of the bombing and the state's crimes in relation to this attack.

Laura had recently given a long interview in a weekly newsmagazine (which was the cover story) regarding her views on the investigation of the bombing and the ways in which the state needs to be held accountable for their actions in relation to the attack. With my quiet, tentative Spanish and academic project, why would she want to talk with me? We eventually found a 45-minute window in her schedule to talk. We ended up talking for more than 4 hours over two meetings.

She immediately put me at ease. And rather uncharacteristically for those most affected by the AMIA bombing and publicly involved in the struggle against impunity, she is incredibly patient: after giving a long, complicated answer to a question, she looks at me and

asks what other questions I have, or what else I want to know.¹² Sitting by the window in a nondescript corner restaurant, the sidewalks busy with morning pedestrian traffic—ordinary people involved in their own hopes and struggles, not anticipating any shock or significant change in their routine—Laura tells me about the day, seemingly so ordinary, when she received her own shock:

I remember the morning when it happened. I was going to work and when I arrived a co-worker came up to me and told me what had happened, and I never imagined that it would be of the magnitude it was, until I arrived at Pasteur street, I arrived an hour and half later, I work quite far...obviously the memory I had at that moment is that I couldn't understand how this could happen again, because we've already had a bombing here [in Buenos Aires]. That was the first sensation. I knew that my husband was there, and well, soon after we arrived at Pasteur and when I saw the dimension [of the bombing], all of the people, the number of ambulances, I realized that it wasn't a minor thing...I looked for him for 3 days until the morgue called me and they told me that the body of my husband had been found.¹³

Laura's reaction to the bombing reflects some common sentiments experienced by *familiares*. A sense of shock, of incomprehension, the unsettling sensation of familiarity, that this had happened before, just two years previous, with the bombing of the Israeli embassy. In the days, months, and years that followed, as Laura and other *familiares* tried to accommodate their grief with the relentless, daily demands of living, incomprehension and shock of the bombing were replaced by anger and by *understanding too much*: the AMIA bombing was becoming another example of *impunidad*, another "official story" constructed by powerful and interested parties to occlude rather than reveal, maintain the status quo rather than create new possibilities. Laura, along with other *familiares* and

¹²This is not a criticism of others, most of whom were incredibly generous and kind with me, but a reflection of how tired people were, after so many years of struggle and grief.

¹³Bueno, recuerdo la mañana que ocurrió. Yo estaba viajando hacia mi lugar de trabajo y cuando llegué me encontré con una compañera de trabajo que fue la que me dijo lo que había ocurrido y yo jamás imaginé que tenía la magnitud que tuvo hasta que llegué al calle Pasteur que llegué como una hora y media más tarde, yo trabajo bastante más lejos... obviamente el recuerdo que tengo de esos momentos es que no podía entender cómo había pasado otra vez porque acá ya habíamos tenido una bomba. Esa fue la primera sensación. Yo sabía que mi marido estaba allí y bueno al rato que llegamos a Pasteur y cuando vi la dimensión que eso tenía por la cantidad de gente que había, la cantidad de ambulancias me di cuenta de que no había sido un hecho menor...lo busqué durante tres días hasta que me llamaron de la morgue y me dijeron que habían encontrado el cuerpo de él.

Argentine citizens, had become all too wary about the version of events provided by the state, as during the “dirty war” the state masterfully wove visions of reality that had little correspondence with the daily life experience of many Argentines. The attack on this Jewish institution was, for Laura, clearly an Argentine story, rooted in the politics and history of the nation. As this chapter and the next will proceed to show, this perspective is contentious.

Later, I stand in front of the shiny citadel of the new AMIA building. The new building gleams, a fortress of modern architecture on a street of modest structures. You might forget that the AMIA was a sight of destruction and death if it weren't for the names of the victims spray-painted on the wall outside. You might forget, except that if you passed security and went inside its walls you would see pieces of the old building and scorched papers and objects retrieved from the debris. You might forget, but you can't, really, because in some form or another the AMIA bombing is mentioned in an article in the morning paper you just read. I try to imagine those moments immediately after the old building collapsed. The new building is a palimpsest: traced within the new, shiny building is the older one, both destroyed and intact. Here is a scene, culled from pictures, other people's descriptions, and imagination:

The face of a building torn off, jagged lines of ceilings and floors that now lead nowhere but into the smoky, debris filled air; the ground a large crater of jumbled pieces. Dust. Charred books, files—the detritus of archives, offices. People screaming—those up above, peering over the edge of what used to be their office, others down below, buried or searching for survivors. Some frozen, dumb-struck by the destruction, unsure whether they are dead or alive. Broken rocks, pieces of furniture, black marble glinting in the hazy air. Bodies, pieces. Blood.

As I discussed in chapter one, Jewish immigrants had been living on Argentine soil in significant numbers since the latter two decades of the nineteenth century, and have, not

unproblematically, adopted Argentina as their country. At the same time they have been successful at organizing for their particular communal requirements; the formation of the AMIA met many of these needs.¹⁴ Located on a short five-block city street in the Buenos Aires' neighborhood of *Once*, it is an institution that, since at least the 1930s, has had practical and symbolic importance for a large portion of the Jewish Argentine community. The AMIA is a distinctly local Argentine institution and began life in 1894 as a Jewish burial society, or *Hevre Kadisha*. Unable to bury their dead in the national (Catholic) cemeteries without submitting to baptism, and wanting to preserve their own highly ritualized treatment of the dead, the Ashkenazi Jews who settled in Buenos Aires created their own institution and cemetery to care for the deceased. In the 1930s, the *Hevre Kadisha* became institutionalized as the AMIA, and expanded over time to include community archives, social services and outreach programs, a teacher training academy, cultural activities, the office of the chief rabbinate, and a job center, among many other things.¹⁵ It is also an important site for the documentation of Jewish Argentine life, although much of the records and documents of this history were destroyed in the bombing. The inauguration of the old AMIA building took place in 1945, and through the services provided, the AMIA became an important site of Jewish specificity within the nation.¹⁶ With tragic irony, the year of the bombing, 1994, the AMIA was preparing to commemorate its one hundred year anniversary—as its first incarnation as a burial society was in 1894—which was also going to be a celebration of one hundred years of Jewish life in Argentina.

¹⁴Initially the AMIA was an Ashkenazi institution, and thus not necessarily welcoming of or useful for Sephardic Jewry. As the Jewish community has consolidated somewhat over the years, the AMIA has come to serve the collectivity as a whole.

¹⁵See Judith Laikin Elkin's (1998) important work, *The Jews of Latin America*. New York: Holmes and Meier. Also, Ricardo Feierstein's (1993) *Historia de los Judíos Argentinos*. Buenos Aires: Planeta.

¹⁶Jewishness in Argentina also flourishes in political clubs, choruses, large social and sports clubs, the theater, synagogues, and a system of Jewish schools, as I mention in chapter one.

Unlike most other Latin American countries (Brazil and Mexico being notable exceptions), the Jews of Argentina are scattered throughout many of the major cities outside of Buenos Aires (Elkin 1998). However, Buenos Aires has the largest community of Jewish Argentines, and the functioning “core”—both administratively and culturally—of the community is considered to be in Buenos Aires. This in part reflects the size of the Jewish Argentine population in the city, and is also a manifestation of the centrality of Buenos Aires to the governing and imagining of Argentina. The AMIA is often portrayed to be the nucleus of that center—institutionally and symbolically—particularly after the bombing.¹⁷

The AMIA building also came to house the offices of the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (from now on DAIA), a political organization that was founded in 1935 to combat the rising anti-Semitic and discriminatory practices that accompanied the surge of right-wing nationalism, as I noted in chapter one. The role of the DAIA and the controversy that surrounds it will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

The AMIA is an institution that in many ways reflects both the acceptance of Jewish specificity in Argentine life, and amplifies Jewish difference (both self-imposed and ascribed) within a society that largely frames itself as Catholic. It is much more than a social club, or a place for Jewish learning and enrichment—it is a place where certain specific needs for maintaining Jewishness can be found, such as proper treatment and burial for the dead and the education of children. While the people it serves are Argentine citizens, the AMIA is a place where the historically inscribed particularities of Jewishness may be emphasized over national identity. The AMIA, then, is an institution that accommodates *privately* some of the essential needs of a particular collectivity that are not met by the society at large, and as such it is a prominent marker of Jewish difference in Argentina. An article that appeared in the daily newspaper *Página/12* the day after the bombing states that, “The building at 633

¹⁷This is view is from the perspective of Buenos Aires and represents the dominance, institutionally and in the national imaginary, that the city has over the rest of the country. From the perspective of Jews in other cities, it is not a wholly uncontroversial claim.

Pasteur was practically the *Casa Rosada* of the Jewish collectivity.”¹⁸ The *Casa Rosada* is the Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires—the seat of executive power. This same assertion was made in an interview I had with former AMIA president, Abraham Kaul, who characterized the AMIA as “el gobierno de la comunidad Judía”—the government of the Jewish community.¹⁹ These comments point to the importance of the AMIA to Jewish Argentines, but it also presents an image of a nation within a nation, parallel to the state, and possibly construed as beyond the responsibility of the state—or a threat to it. The existence of a separate Jewish governing body has deep historical roots that extend far beyond recent Argentine history, reflecting a means of community survival, and the somewhat autonomous position of Jews in the lands and societies in which they lived. (And as I illustrated in the last chapter, this “corporatism” is what the architects of the French Revolution felt they needed to break down in order to make citizens out of Jews.) The AMIA (and DAIA) can be seen as a continuation of that tradition, although to a lesser degree. In some ways, the AMIA represents the limits of *argentinidad*’s claim on Jewishness, and the limit of the latter’s absorption into the former. The AMIA as a site of possible destabilization of Argentine identity may partially account for the narrative confusion over identifying or claiming the victims of the attack as Jews or Argentines. A further discussion of the construction of Jewishness as politically and socially separate from the nation will be explored below, along with some counter-narratives that challenge this vision.

The AMIA bombing not only tore through the material and symbolic heart of a minority community, but also substantially shook the national imaginary of who or what could be considered Argentine. The fact that the attack was carried out against a particular—and quite established—minority population raised serious questions about

¹⁸*Página/12*. 1994. “El edificio de Pasteur 633 era prácticamente la Casa Rosada de la colectividad Judía.” Pp. 11. 19 de Julio, Buenos Aires.

¹⁹This interview took place on August 4th, 2005 in his place of business. He had recently stepped down as president of the AMIA.

national belonging and the limits of citizenship, as well as the status of Argentina's raw and delicate democracy. Correspondingly, discussion after the bombing frequently centered on some of the following concerns: How and why did Argentina become the target, again, for such an act? Was Argentina actually a target, or simply a convenient staging ground to attack the (non-national) enemy? Were the victims, then, "innocent civilians" and "Argentines" or "culpable" and essentially "foreign" Jews? What role did the Argentine state and society have in the bombing? How "healthy" is Argentina's democracy?

On the one hand, these questions point to an ambivalent position of Jewish subjects vis-à-vis the state and society. This ambivalence, I argue, is not something that is necessarily overtly manifest through specific acts, such as anti-Semitism, or a state policy of discrimination—although anti-Semitic actions and discourse have been and continue to be quite present in Argentina. Nor does it necessarily mark the everyday life of Jewish Argentines as "separate" or "different" from other Argentines, particularly within the middle class. Instead, I see this ambivalence or precariousness as latent within dominant ways of thinking and feeling "Argentine" that articulate particular assumptions and opinions regarding "Jews" and "Jewishness." At the same time, this precariousness is also an articulation of a certain kind of Jewish subjectivity, in which to be a Jew in the diaspora is always potentially unstable, and occupies the position of stranger.²⁰ It is after a shattering event like the AMIA bombing that these often unexpressed thoughts and feeling are often expressed, and perhaps accentuated.

While the bombing and its aftermath exposed the uneven sutures of Jewish belonging, it also placed Jews squarely within certain histories and memories that circulate powerfully in Argentine society, and reflect the precariousness of all Argentine citizens. Some of the questions posed in response to the bombing point to generalized feelings of

²⁰This realization was made even more apparent to me during a recent Passover Seder, where it is repeated many times that Jews will be strangers. The effect of reciting these words year after year cannot but effect a certain kind of subjectivity based on dislocation and foreignness.

uncertainty, distrust, and ill-will toward the state that circulate generally within much of Argentine society: animated in the streets, coffee houses, theaters, and analyst offices of Buenos Aires. The questions raised by the bombing, then, are not questions that are necessarily of interest to the Jewish-Argentine collectivity or only affect them, but engage popularly expressed currents of national anxiety, insecurity, and suspicion. In some ways, the AMIA bombing can be seen as disrupting a narrative of marginal *Jewish* citizenship: within the culture of *impunidad*, the citizenship of all Argentines is potentially compromised, with the possible exemption of those who attempt to exercise absolute power above the law.

Who were the Victims of the AMIA bombing?

And because their voices cry out from the center of the land, we demand justice. –
Laura Ginsberg, 1997²¹

Plaza Lavalle, Buenos Aires. July 19, 2005. When I saw Marcos he appeared visibly upset. He was tightly gripping a copy of the popular daily newspaper, *Clarín*. It was a day after a weekend of *actos* commemorating the 11th anniversary of the AMIA bombing, and the main newspapers devoted front-page coverage to the events and to the status of the investigation of the case. The AMIA bombing was once again occupying the nation's attention, although it is rarely entirely absent from the news. Those who slowly gather to the plaza that cold winter morning are somewhat weary after the emotional and busy weekend. The weeks leading up to the anniversary are always unusually active with government meetings, official visits from the American Jewish Committee and other interested parties, and a general focus of media attention on the bombing and Jewish Argentine community. There was a buzz at the *Memoria Activa* anniversary *acto* last night, as the Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had unexpectedly attended (she is now President of the nation), her presence seeming to be an indication that she takes the claims of the social movement

²¹Ginsberg, Laura (2002) "Active Memory" in *The Argentina Reader*, Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, eds. Patricia Owen Steiner, trans. Durham: Duke University Press.

seriously.²² Like her husband Néstor Kirchner, as President Cristina Kirchner has made human rights an important aspect of her political agenda.

Thus when Marcos runs up to me, I thought he was going to report something about Senator Kirchner, or one of the many speeches given over the weekend. Marcos, a long-time participant of *Memoria Activa*, is generally mild-mannered and quick to smile, but this day he forcefully thrusts the front page of *Clarín* into my hand and angrily points to a picture that occupied a portion of the front cover of the paper. It was a fairly standard photo of the crowd of people attending the ceremony. However, the photo focused on an area of the crowd (there were thousands of people) where an individual had held up an Israeli flag.²³ Marcos was outraged that someone would raise an Israeli flag at the event, and that the most widely read newspaper in Argentina would choose that image as emblematic of the commemoration.²⁴ (At the two large community anniversary *actos* I attended, Israeli flags were not commonplace—I don't remember seeing one at either, although the bombing of the Israeli embassy is always mentioned.) The intent of the person waving an Israeli flag at an AMIA *acto* are unknown—it's possible that it could have been in remembrance of the embassy bombing—but the appearance of the flag hails and fortifies particular feelings and discourses about Jews, citizenship, and belonging. Marcos feared that the widely publicized appearance of the Israeli flag would work to further remove Jewish citizens and the bombing from the national sphere—the image effectively solidifying a perception that elides the

²²The unannounced appearance of the Senator was quite impressive. *Memoria Activa* holds a separate *acto* from the much larger community affair held on Pasteur Street, and in general, government officials only attend this large central event. The *Memoria Activa* *actos* only draw a fraction of the crowd that the central *acto* does—hundreds as opposed to thousands. The presence of the Senator was a sign of the legitimacy, and to some extent power, of *Memoria Activa* to interpolate the state—separate from the “official,” organized Jewish Argentine community.

²³The byline under the photo reads, AMIA: “No alcanza con los gestos,” (taken from two of the speeches given at the anniversary) *Clarín* Martes 19 de Julio 2005, pp 1.

²⁴Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru note that *Clarín* has the largest circulation in Argentina, “with 45% of the country's readership” (2003:159). It is also worth noting that *Clarín* is a “popular” paper that appeals to individuals throughout the class spectrum, unlike its more elite competitor, *La Nación*.

argentinidad and legitimate citizenship of Jewish Argentines. The image of the Israeli flag both produces and reproduces a discourse of marginality for Jewish Argentines; emphasizing a connection with Israel over Argentina is one way that Jews can be described as not “really” Argentine.²⁵ It also symbolically removes them from Argentine history and space and into a kind of diasporic ether untethered to place (from which neither Argentina nor Israel claim them—as Israeli citizenship, and thus responsibility, is not simply active by virtue of their “Jewishness”).

The presence of the Israeli flag in a context such as the AMIA bombing anniversary represents a point of anxiety and ambiguity about belonging and allegiance that is animated *both* within and outside of the Jewish Argentine community. (And indeed, this anxiety is not only located in Argentina, as I’ve noted elsewhere.) In different moments in Argentine history, such as during the controversial capture, extradition and trial of Adolf Eichmann by Israeli agents, Jewish-Argentines have been accused of harboring “dual loyalties” (Rein 2003). These charges are most forcefully made from right-wing nationalist groups, and have been accompanied by gross acts of anti-Semitism.²⁶ Marcos’ anger about the Israeli flag, and the attendant issues about Jewish belonging in Argentina, are centrally related to one of the principal discourses circulating about the AMIA bombing: That it wasn’t an attack on Argentines, but on Jews, and that Jewish-Argentines are more properly represented by or aligned with Israel than Argentina. These ambiguities can be expressed by questions like the one asked Sofía Guterman: Is your daughter a Jew or an Argentine? It is also expressed by Jewish-Argentines who at certain moments stress an alliance with Jewish identity—sometimes articulated to Israel—over national belonging. Within this view, the

²⁵See Rein (2003) for a detailed account of the relationship between Argentina and Israel, particularly during the Peron years and the capture of Adolf Eichmann. Chapter 7 of his book addresses the issue of “dual loyalty” accused of the Jews.

²⁶One particular incident involves the kidnapping and assault of a 19-year old student, Graciela Narcisca Sirota. She was badly beaten and burned with lit cigarettes, a swastika tattooed onto her chest (for an extended description of this event see Rein 2003:214-221).

specific location of the bombing, and any national responsibility for the attack, are eclipsed by a narrative of (obstinate and unchanging) anti-Semitism and “foreign” mid-East politics. As I will show more specifically below, this perspective on the bombing emerged from both non-Jewish and Jewish quarters, and again point to an ambivalence that marks the perception and living of Jewish Argentine citizen-subjects.

Significantly, about a third of those who were killed in the attack were not Jewish, yet they remain largely invisible in the narratives about the bombing—except sometimes singled out as “innocent” victims, as I explain below. These include individuals working for the AMIA in various capacities, and also contracted workers who were doing some renovations or other work in the building. It also includes passers-by in the street. The elision of some of these individuals happens on two levels: some are immigrants from Bolivia or Paraguay (five are Bolivian, there is one Paraguayan national) who are politically and socially marginalized in Argentina, and furthermore, their stories have become overwhelmed by the “Jewishness” of the crime. In the memorial book for the victims of the AMIA, *Sus Nombres y Sus Rostros (Their Names and Their Faces)*, the majority of the victims who were non-Argentine citizens (six total) are represented not by writings from family members, but by the Bolivian embassy, or in the case of one Paraguayan, by a poem written by Israeli poet Amir Guilboa. A few of these individuals don’t have a photograph next to their name. Jewish family members of the victims have been open to and have tried to include relatives and supporters of non-Jewish victims in their memorial services and political activities, but except for a few families, there has been little success.²⁷

²⁷The reasons for this are not entirely clear to me. On the one hand, it was difficult to track down some of the families of the victims who were not Argentine. Some individuals did not have family members in Argentina. For others, I would suppose that there may have been a lack of identification with the Jewish victims and their families, and concurrently, a possible insensitivity from the part of the Jewish Argentine community to non-Jewish victims. Certainly the framing of the bombing as a “Jewish problem” rather than an attack on the nation contributes to the elision of non-Jewish victims. But even if the AMIA bombing were fully seen as an attack on Argentina, some of the victims would still be marginalized as (often undesired) illegal or migrant workers. This is an area that deserves further investigation.

There are also some Jewish family members of the victims who are not actively involved in organized demands for justice, or in the various memorial events for the bombing. Sofía, whose story is related above, had given me the phone number of a woman who had lost two daughters in the attack. She told me that the family of the girls who were killed hadn't been very involved in any of the groups formed by family members of the victims after the bombing, but that she would probably want to speak with me. Sofía was quite wrong in this respect. Not everyone desires to speak about their loss, or engage in public protest or memorialization.

Immediately after the bombing, the citizenry expressed shock and horror at the enormity of the destruction, and incomprehension of the repeat performance—the AMIA echoing the explosion of the Israeli embassy. Four days after the bombing, an estimated 150,000 people attended a street convocation in repudiation of the attacks.²⁸ Due to rain and the undulating shields of umbrellas that marked the crowd, the day became known as the Día del paraguas, or Day of the Umbrellas, the soft winter rain and grey skies seemingly an appropriate accompaniment to the pain, confusion and anger that coursed through the crowd. The national newspapers and magazines were filled with stories ranging from earnest political analysis, analysis of the act from international “terror experts,” outrage and expressions of solidarity with the family members of the victims by government officials, and promises to find those responsible. Emotional eyewitness accounts of the destruction accompanied pictures of seemingly dozens of people sifting through an enormous pile of rubble, picking up a shoe here, moving a body there. Banners were raised in some Buenos Aires’ streets proclaiming, “Today we are all Jews,” and articles appeared with titles such as, “This didn’t happen to the Jews, it happened to everyone.”²⁹ Genuine expressions of

²⁸This estimate is provided by the DAIA and can be found in the memorial pamphlet “18 de Julio de 1994.”

²⁹“No le pasó a los judíos, nos ocurrió a todos” por Atilio Cadorín, *La Nación*, Martes 19 de Julio de 1994, pp. 14.

solidarity and sympathy poured out from various sectors of society. Harsh approbation was expressed toward the authors of an act that was widely agreed to be an act of horrific terrorism.

A closer look at how the victims were portrayed in the media and by politicians shows a parallel discourse that equivocates over exactly who was attacked and why. Often the victims were portrayed as “Jews” and contrasted with “innocent” or “Argentine” victims, the bombing a “Jewish problem.” In their analysis of national media discourses (taken from the two most popular dailies, *La Nación* and *Clarín*) about the bombing, Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru (2003) illustrate how common it was to write about “Jewish victims” and “innocent victims” and that the bombing was presented as something that happened to the “Jews,” rather than the nation as a whole, “...discursive strategies that effectively distanced Argentinean Jews from non-Jews” (2003:160).³⁰ The authors also note that the victims were made to appear “foreign” by certain visual cues, such as using images of orthodox men and boys in black dress and hat with side-locks as representatives of the “Jewish people,” even though this representation only fits a very small minority of Jewish-Argentines (Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru 2003:161).

In a radio address two days after the attack, then-President Carlos Menem expressed that “we have all been dealt a blow”³¹ and that in terms of pain, he “also was a victim.”³² He also apologized for this unfortunate episode and promised to “redouble the efforts to investigate this new attack.”³³ He goes on, however, from solidarity to separation,

³⁰Federico Pablo Feldstein and Carolina Acosta-Alzuru (2003) “Argentinean Jews as Scapegoat: A Textual Analysis of the AMIA Bombing, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp.152-170.

³¹Todos hemos sido golpeados. “Discurso Del Sr. Presidente de la República Argentina, Dr. Carlos Saúl Menem, con motivo del atentado terrorista del 18 de Julio de 1994.”

³²...yo también soy una víctima. (Menem 1994).

³³“...quiero pedir perdón por este lamentable episodio y comprometerme a redoblar los esfuerzos para esclarecer este nuevo ataque...;” “*redoblar los esfuerzos para esclarecer este nuevo ataque*” (Menem 1994).

placing the attack, not within local space and time, but within a timeless narrative of Jewish victim-hood: “A thousand times the Jewish community has been struck. A thousand times it has risen from its suffering.”³⁴

Menem’s address is noteworthy for the ways in which it offered solidarity and even identification with the victims (through “pain”) and simultaneously established a distance between them and “todos los argentinos” (all Argentines). Menem effectively, if not consciously, places himself and the nation as sympathetic watchers, as if the suffering and destruction took place elsewhere. His use of a narrative that inscribes Jewishness within a history of persecution and dogged perseverance removes the attack from historically inscribed local and global circumstances and makes it appear inevitable. This fixing of Jewishness to a history seemingly driven by suffering and persecution (which has been very productive since the Holocaust) also appears to legitimize the attacks as a necessary element of an imagined “Jewish condition.” These unexamined “truths” mark the ways in which the AMIA bombing is frequently framed by politicians, journalists, and the public—Jewish and non-Jewish. They also contribute to a situation in which the Argentine government is not perceived to be responsible for victims of the AMIA bombing, and doesn’t need to seriously investigate the case.

Perhaps the most emblematic gesture of the distancing between Jewish victims and the nation proper is the phone call Menem made to then Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. Shortly after the attack, Menem called the Israeli Prime Minister to express his condolences for the Jews who died in the bombing. In their textual analysis of the bombing, Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru write that, “...both newspapers [*La Nación* and *Clarín*] portray Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as the representative of the Argentinean-Jewish community” (2003:163). As I’ve learned from my time in Buenos Aires, this act enraged

³⁴“Mil veces ha sido golpeado el pueblo judío. Mil veces se ha levantado de su sufrimiento” (Menem 1994)

many Jewish-Argentines—a community that was already well-established decades before the creation of Israel—because it seemed to place responsibility for Jewish-Argentine citizens on the Israeli government. It also assumes that Jewish Argentines “feel” more connected to a transnational community than to their immediate neighbors and co-citizens; that somehow they have remained separate from the processes and knowledges, rooted in the everyday and beyond, by which one becomes “Argentine.” During a conversation with Sofía, she emphasized to me that Menem’s call of apology was “the worst thing Menem could have done when he found out about the bombing.”³⁵ It strongly suggests Israel as the legitimate home for “the Jews,” and places Argentina in the position of a surrogate and temporary homeland. The phone call symbolically revoked Argentine citizenship, and the rights and responsibilities inherent to it. In this way, the bombing is often situated as an “international” problem that has little to do with Argentina. I imagine that all of this is part of what Marcos saw in the *Clarín* picture that winter day.

While there certainly are international or global aspects to the bombing, with connections to other countries and events in the Middle East, the bombing has been shown to have distinct connections to local individuals, national politics and Argentine foreign affairs, and state agencies. And as I’ve already mentioned, for a certain sector of society, the bombing, rather than being an unique event that “happened” to occur in Argentina because of the Jewish population, is directly linked to a Argentine history of state failure and terror. Even when the victims are bracketed as Jews and not Argentines, the ways in which understandings of the bombing are “worked out” are always in reference to local understandings of politics, human rights, and citizenship, as well as “Jewishness” and “*argentinidad*.”

³⁵“lo peor que pudo hacer Menem es que cuando se enteró del atentado a la AMIA mandó un telegrama de pésame al embajador de Israel.” Sofía remembers Menem sending a telegram to the Israeli ambassador, which he may well have done. Other reports are that he called Prime Minister Rabin.

Even *if* many Jewish Argentines express a separate, supra-national communal belonging, they don't necessarily see this as contradictory to their Argentine citizenship—having layered loyalties expresses the uneven ways that citizen-subjects are sutured to dominate articulations of the nation. As persons may “feel” Jewish, they also can “feel” Argentine; the two don't *necessarily* need to overwhelm each other.

This double articulation of belonging—that exists as a tension and not a break—is communicated by those for those whom Jewishness is an important aspect of their identity, and yet, does not negate their identity as Argentines. Santiago Kovadloff, the Jewish Argentine writer mentioned in chapter two, describes his Jewish identity as *para mi muy central* (for me very central), and refuses to settle the bombing of the AMIA as a “Jewish issue.” Sitting on a sofa in his elegant apartment in *Barrio Norte*, he describes in a soft but firm voice what he felt after he found out the AMIA had been bombed:

And well when I found out from the radio what had happened, I felt, I felt that the country had been attacked, not the Jewish community and my first pronouncements to the press, television, or radio were to rebel against those who said that the Jews had suffered a bombing, I felt that they had bombarded my city and war was declared on us and I didn't accept that it was a problem of the Jewish community. Buenos Aires had been bombarded.³⁶

Buenos Aires had been bombed. The crater in Pasteur Street and mounds of debris attest to this fact. But the question still lingered: who were the victims? Santiago rebels against the rhetorics that articulate a unified, essential notion of identity, and a placing of the AMIA outside of the figurative borders of the city. The bracketing of the AMIA attack as a Jewish problem negates how, through historically constitutive processes, Jewishness and Argentineness have mingled and influenced each other, if sometimes uncomfortably. It raises the specter of the Jewish question: what kind of citizens can Jews be made into? For

³⁶Y bueno en cuando supe lo que había sucedido por la radio me sentí, sentí que el país había sido atacado, no la comunidad judía y mis primeros pronunciamientos a través de la prensa o a través de la televisión o de la radio fueron revelarme contra quienes decían que los judíos habíamos sufrido un atentado, yo sentía que habían bombardeado mi ciudad y que nos habían declarado la guerra y no aceptaba que hubiese sido un problema de la comunidad judía, Buenos Aires había sido bombardeada.

some, identification with Argentinidad is stronger than any claim Jewishness might have on them. Ana María, a woman whose ancestors arrived in Argentina around the turn of the last century, lost her daughter in the bombing. She and her husband have been very active in one of the groups of *familiares* (Los Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas). Although she comes from a Jewish family she describes herself as “totally Argentine.” “In general I’ll tell you that for me I’m totally Argentine, I feel Argentine... if I had to choose between saying I’m Argentine or Jewish, 100% I am Argentine, I totally identify with the good and bad of Argentina.”³⁷ I heard this assertion from many who are identified in one way or another to Jewishness, and yet feel as comfortable (or more) as Argentines—revealing complicated alliances that can’t be assumed a priori. In some ways, those victims of the bombing for who Jewishness had previously not been a significant aspect of their identity (although they claimed some connection), became “caught” in the bombing of the AMIA and a certain fixed Jewish identity was ascribed to them. They literally and figuratively became marked as Jews, no matter how weak their connection to Jewishness, no matter how Argentine they felt or understood themselves to be. The examples of Santiago and Ana María, show that common sense understandings of “Jewish” belonging in Argentina are contested and far from certain.

As non-Jews or “Argentines” were often portrayed as innocent victims of a crime that had nothing to do with them, Jewish Argentines were sometimes accused of “bringing” the bombing to Argentina. This echoes the attachment of disaster and Jew that Menem linked into, and is also a way of blaming the victim. Anita, a member of Memoria Activa, understood the public response to the bombing as complex and contradictory:

[The response was] Very diverse, very diverse, in the beginning there was a lot of anguish and a lot of misunderstanding. A man that had a television program, one of the most popular in the country, that same afternoon [as the bombing], I heard him

³⁷En general yo te digo que para mi yo soy totalmente argentina, yo me siento argentina y si tengo que optar y tengo que elegir entre decir soy argentina o soy judía, cien por cien soy argentina, yo estoy totalmente identificada con lo bueno y con lo malo de la Argentina.

say that it was an attack on the community [the Jewish community], on a community building, and that innocents were also killed, making it understood that the Jews were responsible. I think that this also was part of everything, there were people in solidarity with the victims and people who didn't care, and there were those who were happy.³⁸

Repeatedly emphasized to me was this feeling of ambivalence toward the bombing and its victims, expressed from various sectors of society. José, a friend from Memoria Activa, reflects upon a similar politics of blame, at the same time as he recognizes that the society in which he lives has more complicated attitudes toward the bombing and the Jews than he previously thought. The public response to the bombing

...was ambivalent, it was ambivalent. It [the bombing] was on a Monday and the following Thursday there was, here, in Congreso, a march that they called el día del paraguas (the day of the umbrellas), it was raining and there was an acto and they had at this acto, I don't remember, around 200,000 people. Obviously they weren't all Jews. I realized that in Argentine society there were a large number of people...who not only didn't have anti-Semitic feelings, but have their heads in the right place....But I don't know, but there were [also] reactions of this type [anti-Semitic] and this reaction, Michelle, is characterized by the following: this problem, the bomb in the AMIA, is a Jewish problem, and I don't have anything to do with them, they are an element of danger that can bring a bomb.³⁹

The secretary of human rights for the city of Buenos Aires when I was in Buenos Aires, Gabriela Alegre, emphasized the positive reactions of solidarity at the same time as she notes certain discriminatory responses:

I think that public reaction in general was good...I think that it was divided, let's see, if we are objective I think that there must be a part of the population that will think,

³⁸Muy diversa, muy diversa, de mucha angustia al principio, de no entender nada, de que un señor que tenía un programa de televisión, uno de los más vistos del país, esa misma tarde dijo, yo lo escuché, fue un ataque a la comunidad, a un edificio de la comunidad, también murieron inocentes, con lo cual dio por entendido que los judíos eran los culpables. Yo creo que eso también fue parte de todo, hubo gente solidaria hay gente que no le importa, hay gente que se alegró. Interview conducted in Buenos Aires, October 11, 2004.

³⁹ Fue ambivalente, fue ambivalente. Eso fue un lunes, al jueves siguiente hubo acá en Congreso una concentración que se llamó el día de los paraguas, fue un día de lluvia y hubo un acto y hubo en ese acto, yo no recuerdo, creo que alrededor de 200.000 personas, obviamente que no eran todos judíos. En la sociedad argentina yo me doy cuenta que hubo una gran cantidad de gente en la Argentina que no solo no tiene sentimientos antisemitas sino está muy bien ubicada...Pero no lo sé, pero hubo reacciones de este tipo, esa reacción Michelle es característica de lo siguiente: este problema, la bomba en la AMIA, es un problema de los judíos, yo no tengo que ver con ellos, ellos son un elemento de peligro que puede atraer traer una bomba. Interview conducted in Buenos Aires, May 10, 2004.

this is something against the Jews... Look, look what the Jews bring here, the problems that they bring us. Because this happened also with the embassy.⁴⁰

The politics of blame are not unknown in Argentina. Indeed, during the *Proceso* or “dirty war” a locally articulated politics of blame worked to justify and make invisible the disappearances of thousands of people. Thus, the separation of Argentines and Jews, or “innocent” and “guilty,” echoes a similar tactic during the years of state terror, where victims were often assumed to be guilty: *por algo sera*, “they must have done something.” Often underlying this reasoning is a tacit acceptance and even approval of the disappearances and deaths. The politics of blame employed by some sectors in relation to the attack on the AMIA also distinguishes “real” Argentines from marginal or fraudulent citizens—again not unlike the rhetoric of the military junta, which distinguished between “authentic” and “suspect” Argentines. In this context, it was Jews and their problems, Jews and the whole imbroglio of Middle East politics that was responsible, and a Jewish site in Buenos Aires “happened” to be the target. Within this scenario, Argentines are separated from the victims as “sympathetic witnesses” who are watching, as if from a distance, the pain of others.⁴¹

Importantly, however, it wasn’t only non-Jewish leaders and publics that declared the bombing more of a “Jewish” rather than national issue. This was done in part through understandings of the attack that placed it within particular constructions of Jewishness; for example, by evoking the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. At the same time, the President of the DAIA at the time, Rubén Beraja, positioned the bombing squarely within the problems of Argentina’s still nascent democracy. Now I will turn to the march and convocation mentioned earlier, the “Día del paraguas,” (Day of the Umbrellas) to show how particular

⁴⁰ Yo creo que la reacción pública en general fue Buena...Creo que debe haber estado dividida, a ver, si somos objetivos creo que debe haber una parte de la población que habrá pensado, esto es un tema contra los judíos...mirá lo que nos traen los judíos acá, los problemas que nos traen. Porque también con la Embajada había pasado eso. Interview conducted in Buenos Aires, November 4, 2004

⁴¹Feldstein and Acosta-Alzuru also make this point, 2003:160-161.

acts and words were used to claim the bombing of the AMIA (and Israeli embassy) within Jewish and/or Argentine histories.

The Day of the Umbrellas

The convocation was called by the DAIA for the Thursday after the bombing, the 21st of July, 2004. Steadily marching from the site of destruction on Pasteur Street to the Plaza de Congreso (Congress Plaza), one of the symbolic and political hearts of Buenos Aires, *porteños* from many walks of life expressed their shock, sadness, and outrage. By most accounts, the amount of people (around 150,000) and the feeling in the crowd was impressive and moving. In looking back on this day, Baruj Z. describes the event as akin to a *cacerolazo*. “Do you know what a *cacerolazo* is?” he says to me. (I did.) He continues, “two years ago with the [economic] disaster the people went out into the streets hitting pans, a very strong spontaneous human reaction, very impressive.”⁴² Argentines have a rich history of taking to the streets in acts of protest. The many plazas of Buenos Aires seem made for such events, and over the years Argentines have used them well to make their claims, express their outrage, and struggle for other visions of the nation. The streets and plazas of Buenos Aires are opportunities for public solidarity in grief and happiness, challenging the state and civil society to see and be seen. The convocation for the AMIA, then, is part of a larger repertoire of political culture that manifests in public reclamation and solidarity.

On that rainy Thursday, Argentines came out to mourn the attack on the AMIA and demand a response from the government. How could an attack of this magnitude have happened again? The choice of the plaza, situated between important sites of Argentine governmental authority and democratic possibility, itself offers a view of the bombing that transcends the perimeters of the historically Jewish neighborhood *Once*, location of the

⁴²“la gente saliendo a las calles golpeando las cacerolas hace 2 años atrás con todo el desastre, una reacción humana espontánea muy fuerte, muy impactante.”

AMIA building. The convocation was a mixture of public mourning, questioning, and recrimination. It combined specific acts of Jewish ritual, such as the recitation of Kaddish (prayer for the dead), with the air punctured by the seeming anachronistic sound of the blowing of a ram's horn (Shofar). But these community-specific words and actions accompanied speeches that attempted to interpolate the state and nation in particular ways. The implication was that although a distinct group was the target today, *all* were vulnerable within a state that could not guarantee security or justice—a state where the institutions of liberal democracy were seen to be lacking. The *possibility* of the bombing and the seeming inability to clear up the attack on the Israeli embassy two years previous, were viewed as direct evidence of this failure.

It should be recalled that democracy, while not new to Argentina, had been effectively eroded and superceded by many decades of leadership that was rooted more in authoritarianism than participatory government. Moreover, Argentine democracy in practice was historically an exercise for the elite, except for a relatively brief period in the beginning of the twentieth century and (arguably) again under Peron (1946-1955).⁴³ In a concrete sense, a vision of participatory democracy was still being worked out in the streets and institutions of the country. At the time of the AMIA bombing, Argentina was only about 10-years distant from a nearly 7 year brutal military dictatorship, and the continuing process of democratization was much in people's minds. After the brutality of the government toward the citizenry during the dictatorship, "human rights" became one of the primary lenses through which democracy was discussed. Any situation in which the state was perceived to have violated human rights could be seen as continuing the policies of the military junta—with "democracy" functioning as a mask over politics as usual. As I detail in the upcoming

⁴³Peron's presidency can be called democratic in the sense that he gave a larger swath of Argentine society a greater political and social purchase than ever before. However, his presidency became increasingly authoritarian over the years, and the state as conceived under Peronism departed dramatically from what might be called "classical" liberal traditions.

chapters, the AMIA bombing became a window through which a “mask of democracy” could be revealed. Within this context, Rubén Beraja’s response to the bombing of the AMIA, and by extension, his institution, the DAIA (which was housed in the same building), places this act of violence within a larger discourse about the rights and responsibilities of the state and society within a certain vision of liberal democracy. Framed thus, the violence and specificity of the bombing of the AMIA could become a moment of horror—and of possibility—for the nation itself.

Speaking through the rain, the words of the president of the DAIA filtered into the crowd and echoed off the buildings. The AMIA president, Dr. Alberto Crupnicoff, and Chief Rabbi of the nation at the time, Shlomo Ben Hamu, sat behind him (they would also speak). At their side were President Carlos Menem, and the First Cardinal of the nation, Antonio Quarracino, among other political leaders. At this moment, Beraja was still respected within the Jewish-Argentine community—his eventual disgrace will be discussed in chapter four—and his political acumen shone as he captured and re-presented the feelings and desires of an attacked citizenry suspicious of their democracy. Articulating what would become the basis of social movements like Memoria Activa (even as they later worked to distance themselves from Beraja and the organized Jewish-Argentine community), he eloquently explains what is at stake for Argentina, for all its citizens, in the wake of the attacks on the Israeli embassy and AMIA.

Beraja’s words make clear that the bombings deliver a message that exceeds an attack on Jews: Argentina is an easy target because of the inability of the state to protect its citizens and provide justice. In highlighting justice, Beraja is specifically referring to the failure of the state to bring suspected perpetrators of the Israeli embassy to trial. But his reference to justice may have another, perhaps unintended, resonance among the listening public. Just a few years previous, former president Alfonsín instituted the so-called “laws of impunity” which effectively ceased the trials against former military leaders. Menem, upon

taking office, further instituted impunity by providing amnesty for those military leaders *already* convicted. Beraja never mentions these specific laws, nor directly implicates specific government leaders, but his placing of the bombings within a discussion of the (lack of) vigor of Argentine institutions inserts these acts within the heart of larger national struggles. Determining who was responsible for the bombings

was necessary not only as an issue of punishment but essentially because it would have meant a validation of the way things should be, our legal system above the system of terrorist criminals. It would have demonstrated the capacity...to show ourselves and the world that the life of our residents, that their property isn't at the mercy of international terrorism, but under the protection of the Republic of Argentina and its institutions.⁴⁴

Because Argentina failed to provide a sufficient response to the Israeli embassy bombings, and show themselves and the world that Argentine citizens are “under the protection of the Argentine republic and its institutions,” Argentine citizens will continue to be vulnerable, and within this climate of state weakness, *anyone* is a potential victim. The implication here is not only that Argentine citizens could be targets of an attack organized by non-Argentines, but as was seen most recently during the “dirty war” would continue to be at the victims of their own institutions. Beraja ends his speech with the following emphasis: “To make what we believe a reality is not merely in the interest of the Jewish community of Argentina. It's not simply an interest of the Jews of Argentina.”⁴⁵ In his use of “we” Beraja makes and hails a certain kind of Argentine citizen-subject, one that believes in and demands a liberal democratic republic, where citizenship erases the difference of religion or ethnicity. Additionally, by the utilization of discourse (“the liberal state”) that had become

⁴⁴“era necesario no por una mera cuestión sancionatoria, sino esencialmente porque implicaba revalidar el orden constituido, nuestro sistema legal por encima del sistema de los criminales terroristas. Implicaba una demostración de nuestra capacidad de reacción para mostrarnos a nosotros mismos y al mundo, que la vida de nuestros habitantes, que sus bienes, no están a merced del terrorismo internacional, sino bajo a protección de la República Argentina y sus Instituciones.” (Discurso Beraja 1994)

⁴⁵“Para hacer realidad lo que creemos no es un mero interés de la Comunidad Judía Argentina. No es un simple interés de los judíos de la Argentina” (Discurso Beraja 1994).

nearly hegemonic, accommodating Menem's neoliberal visions as well as other articulations of rights and citizenship, Beraja's speech combines critique with inclusiveness, encouraging a wide base of solidarity.

Juxtaposed to Beraja's astute political framing, Crupnicoff's (the president of the AMIA) speech is more elegiac and broad, less about fortifying state institutions and more about the tragedy of the attack, and finding the strength to persevere. But lest anyone doubt the legitimacy of the Jews as Argentine citizens, he says, "My grandfather, like so many other grandfathers came to this land because of persecution, and this land and its people took him in. But I, and all of you like myself, are here thanks to nobody, but by our own right. This land is ours. It's ours, and we can't leave it undefended."⁴⁶ The fact that Crupnicoff feels he needs to establish the rightful place of Jews within the nation reflects an undercurrent of insecurity, both physical and conceptual, that has shaped the subjectivity of many Jewish-Argentines. But it also betrays, I think, a real sense of ownership, of being claimed and claiming this land, Argentina, albeit with a melancholy awareness of the precariousness with which this belonging is achieved.

I read these speeches after I left Argentina. I have to admit that they surprised me, particularly the speech made by Beraja. Having been somewhat conditioned to expect substantial differences between the tactics of community leaders and those of Memoria Activa and other non-official voices, Beraja's speech in particular does not in substance contradict what Memoria Activa has come to argue. (It is important to keep in mind that at the time of fieldwork Beraja was totally disgraced and his statements largely discredited.) Both emphasize why the bombing is not "merely" a Jewish problem. Both appeal to normative ideas about liberal democracy and citizenship, and seek redress through the strengthening of its institutions and practices. However, Memoria Activa becomes much

⁴⁶"Mi abuelo, como otros tantos abuelos vino a esta tierra perseguido, y esta tierra y sus hombre lo cobijó. Pero yo y todos ustedes como yo estamos aquí no por gracias de nadie sino por derecho propio. Esta tierra es nuestra. Es nuestra y no podemos dejarla indefensa" (Discurso Crupnicoff 1994).

more insistent in their demands and critical of the reigning power structure, while Beraja and the DAIA came to be seen as implicated in it. Additionally, even as Memoria Activa calls upon normative ideas about liberal democracy, they also enact a vision of the state and civil society that challenges normative assumptions about what liberal democracy and Jewishness can mean. These distinctions will become clearer in the upcoming chapters.

Before, during and after the speeches, other knowledges about the bombing circulated through the crowd. One particularly powerful way of approaching the bombing was through the Holocaust. The Holocaust has been extremely constitutive of Jewish subjectivity, and has become a powerful interpretative filter through which “Jewish experience” past and present has come to be read. Among the multitudes that rainy Thursday, some positioned the bombing within a narrative of ever-present Jewish tragedy, not unlike in Menem’s speech discussed above. Some members of the crowd looked for meaning and solidarity through the symbolism of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, framing the AMIA event within a historical trajectory of lachrymose Jewish experience. This reference to the Holocaust wound its way through the crowd as a yellow star on the sleeves and chests of certain individuals. The yellow stars bound the attack within a particularly Jewish historical narrative of pain, suffering, and victim-hood: the victims of the AMIA bombing can be added to the numbers who perished in the concentration camps and mass killings of Nazi-occupied Europe. More recently, one of the *familiares* of Memoria Activa, Adriana, who lost her sister in the bombing described the attack on the AMIA explicitly as a Holocaust:

And I’m going to tell you that the Jewish community also is very tired of protesting about the bombings and also prefer to say “no, enough, finish making your demands” it’s what you hear sometimes, but how can they say this? Because it’s the same if they said you don’t need to protest more, that one has to forget the Holocaust. No, this is the same, this was the Argentine Holocaust, this is the truth, the mass death of 85 people without a common cause is a Holocaust... ⁴⁷

⁴⁷“y te voy a decir que la comunidad judía también está muy cansado del reclamo por los atentados y también prefiere decir “no, basta, terminen de reclamar”, es un poco lo que vos escuchás a veces, ¿pero cómo pueden

In connecting the Holocaust to the necessity of memory and protest and to the bombing, Adriana gives the attack a specific charge and weight. For her, the bombing of the AMIA and the death of 85 people is an injustice, like the Holocaust, that demands to be remembered and fought against.

Comparison of the Holocaust or Nazism to Argentine tragedies is not limited to the AMIA bombing. While the last military dictatorship did not officially sponsor anti-Semitism, the disproportionately high number of Jews who were targeted by the military, and the evocations of Hitler and Nazi Germany some Jewish-Argentine experienced under their captors, couldn't help but resurrect and intersect with memories of Nazism (Timerman 1981, CONADEP 1985; Partnoy 1986). For some Jewish family members of those who were killed or disappeared, memories (either transmitted or first-hand) of the Holocaust informed their understandings of what was happening in Argentina, and influenced the actions of the leadership of the Jewish community during this difficult time.⁴⁸

Others (who may or may not have been Jewish) linked the AMIA bombing, specifically to the "dirty war" and disappeared. Someone in the crowd carried a placard with the words: "We have another 70 disappeared." (Bruchstein quoted in Taylor 1998:81), adding the victims of the bombing to the ranks of the disappeared. "Disappeared" is a term used for the tens of thousands Argentine citizens who were kidnapped during the dictatorship, and whose bodies remain largely unfound and their stories untold.

The use of the term "disappeared" is interesting in this context: its usage points not only to the fact that the fate of many individuals are still unknown, it also places the victims of the attack squarely within powerful currents of Argentine history and feeling. It refers to

decir eso?, porque es lo mismo que si dijeran no hace falta reclamar más, hay que olvidarse del holocausto. No, esto es lo mismo, esto fue el holocausto argentino, esta es la verdad, la muerte en masa de 85 personas sin una causa común es un holocausto," Interview conducted on July 6, 2004 in Buenos Aires.

⁴⁸I come by this understanding through interviews with Jewish mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Linea Fundadora) and other human rights groups related to the last military dictatorship.

someone subjected to a specific and local experience of state violence: characterized as much by brutality as confusion, suddenness, and often, impunity. Additionally, to be “disappeared” powerfully implicates the state and larger society in the crime, as was the case during and after the “dirty war.” Since disappearances were directly related to the military dictatorship and dependent on the collaboration and “blind eye” of Argentine citizenry, the term “disappeared” not only reflects the state of a person, but also makes a compelling accusation—one that the public and the government can’t easily ignore. It follows then that the incorporation of the AMIA bombing and its victims into the national consciousness by naming them “disappeared” is a politically powerful way to position the event and its victims squarely within the confines of Argentine history and human rights discourse. The connection of victims of the AMIA and Israeli Embassy bombings to the victims of the last military dictatorship is continued by human rights groups such as CELS, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and Memoria Activa.

This chapter has given an overview of the AMIA and its destruction and has examined the ways in which the AMIA bombing came to be a site through which tensions of identity and belonging were explored. However, differences in interpreting the destruction of the AMIA reveal less of a split between Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines, but rather fault lines within the society itself. While the AMIA bombing resurrected latent ideas about the ambivalence of Jewish belonging and citizenship, it also became a site through which the precariousness of citizenship and belonging of all Argentines could be called into doubt, due to a characterization of the state as institutionally weak, and worse, making deliberate victims out of its citizens through corruption and a culture of impunity. The struggles against impunity and for justice discussed in the next chapters will deepen the complexities expressed in these statements.

After the Día del paraguas, the completion of the search, rescue, and identification of victims, the taking account of all that was destroyed and all that could be saved, and the settling of the shock of the attack, the focus of many shifted to the investigation of the bombing and the seeking of justice. The family members of the victims continued their painful process of accommodation to a changed world, and most sought some limited solace through the hope of justice. The pursuit of which has proven to be longer, more vertiginous and elusive than perhaps anyone would have expected.

V. We Are All Memoria Activa?: Community Divisions After the Bombing

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation. —Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

“To forget is synonymous with impunity”—Rabbi Daniel Goldman, 2008¹

“In the beginning we all were Memoria Activa”—member of the group, Family and Friends of the Victims²

Introduction: Picking up the Pieces

The days following the bombing were overwhelming for the city and citizenry of Buenos Aires. City and state officials were busy searching for victims and possible survivors, as well as the collection of evidence and eventual clean-up of the site. Family members of the victims were dealing with burial preparations, or if they were lucky, caring for the injured. The hospitals were overwhelmed with injured victims, the morgue flooded with bodies, parts. Those who lived and worked near the AMIA had their own trauma, as the shock and force of the bombing worked its way into their lives, into their living rooms, shattering windows and filling their rooms and workspaces with the acrid, horrifying smells emerging from the enormous sepulcher down the street. Volunteers worked to recover important books, papers—bits of an archive that contained documents pertaining to over a hundred years of Jewish Argentine life. The remaining officials and personnel of the

¹“Olvido es sinónimo de impunidad.” “Las nueve razones del atentado a la AMIA.” 2008. *Página 12*, 22 de Julio, El País Buenos Aires.

²“En principio todos éramos Memoria Activa,” interview recorded on September 21, 2004 in a suburb of Buenos Aires.

organizations and offices housed in the AMIA building, in particular, the AMIA itself, and the political organization of the Jewish community, the DAIA, scrambled to set up temporary offices around the corner at 612 Ayacucho. The march and convocation that became known as the “Día del paraguas” was called for a few days after the bombing, in which the presidents of the AMIA and DAIA, their lives spared as they were not yet in their offices when the explosives went off, spoke to a crowd of roughly 150,000 in a steady downpour of winter rain. Ex-president Menem in a radio address promised to redouble the efforts to find the perpetrators of this and the Israeli embassy bombing. The city was busy with rescue and reconstruction, the state vowed to punish those responsible for the crime, the family members of the victims slowly absorbed their loss.

The Monday immediately following the bombing, a few individuals went to stand in front of the Judicial Palace or *Tribunales* in Plaza Lavalle around the time of the bombing (9:53) as a kind of silent vigil, waiting and wondering how the state will respond to this second bombing. Honoring the victims and the search for justice was the basic motivation of this incipient mobilization, but in the beginning, it wasn't entirely clear what was called for or what should happen in the plaza. Organized by the Association for Jewish Professionals, this weekly gathering was initiated by non-family members of the victims—those that had lost someone were quite preoccupied with their own grief and burial preparations. Later, family members of the victims actively joined these weekly gatherings and would greatly influence the direction of the movement.

The few people who stood in front of the *Tribunales* building in those early weeks mostly observed a moment of silence. The choice to meet in this particular spot, in front of the building symbolic for justice, shows that from the beginning this was not just a gathering to express remorse or solidarity, but the public formation of a series of questions and claims, posed to the state and citizenry. Would the state fulfill its responsibility to its citizens and pursue justice for the victims? Would the citizenry demand that this be done?

A month after the first silent vigil, a large act was convened in front of Tribunales, drawing a wide range of people from the Jewish Argentine community, government officials and representatives of political parties, and other citizenry. As the days and months passed, and the investigation into the bombing appeared to falter—as well as people’s memory of the event—the questions posed by those gathered at Plaza Lavalle would gather the force of a sustained protest. The name *Memoria Activa* came about in a meeting in the early weeks of the manifestation, and stuck. It was a name that resonated deeply with Jewish traditions of justice and continuity, as well as the mobilizations of memory by Argentine human rights organizations and others to counter the lack of responsibility and accountability of the powerful and the historical amnesia of the status quo. Like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who continue to circle weekly the enormous plaza in front of the Presidential Palace to protest and remember the disappearance of their children during the last military dictatorship, Memoria Activa protested every week in a public plaza.¹

In the early years of its inception, Memoria Activa was a group widely supported in the Jewish-Argentine community, including its primary institutions, the AMIA and DAIA. The divisions among the *familiares* and the Jewish-Argentine community wouldn’t appear until later. In what follows, I expand upon some of the basic tenets of Memoria Activa’s position vis-à-vis justice, the state, and the citizenry. I also talk about the differences between Memoria Activa and other *familiares* groups, Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas, and APEMIA, organized in 2002. The differences between the groups reflect in part their attitude and relationship to the leadership of the DAIA and AMIA, as well as to the Argentine state. As I show, the splits within the *familiares* became most pronounced after the 1997 anniversary of the AMIA.

¹Memoria Activa formally stopped their weekly protest in Plaza Lavalle in December 2004, although a small number of members continued to meet after this decision was made. This is discussed in the conclusion.

Memoria Activa

A portion of the prologue to the booklet of speeches given at Memoria Activa *actos* in 1994 and 1995 reads as follows:

“Justice, Justice, You Shall Pursue” (Deuteronomy XVI:20)
It is not a march, it is not an institution, it is an expression of life from all men and women with good will, Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines, and all those that want to accompany us in this demand for justice.
Each and every one of us works daily to construct a better country, and only in a country where justice exists can we develop a full life.
This active memory is our modest testimony for a society that doesn’t forget and wants to live in peace.
A peace that begins by having justice...²

This booklet contains many of the *testimonios* (testimonies) given by various members of society every Monday in the plaza. It also contains the speeches given by the *familiares* on Pasteur Street every month on the 18th. These monthly speeches began a short time after the bombing, organized under the name of Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas. The combining of the discourses of both the weekly and monthly *actos* reflects a period of time when formal divisions between the family members of the victims and their supporters had not yet emerged. The above passage taken from the prologue represents the position of Memoria Activa in the fight for justice, placing the demand for justice for the AMIA within a larger national framework in which a properly functioning judicial system is necessary for a peaceful and fully achieved citizenship. By framing the bombing in this way, Memoria Activa universalizes the specificity of the victims, emphasizing on one hand their rights as citizens in Argentina, and also, articulating their position to broader discourses about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the state, and civil society. In contrast to

²“Justicia, Justicia Perseguirás...” (Deuteronomio XVI:20)

No es una marcha, no es una institución, es una expresión de vida de todos los hombres y mujeres de buena voluntad, argentinos judíos y no judíos, de todos aquellos que quieran acompañarnos en este reclamo de justicia. Todos y cada uno de nosotros trabajamos diariamente, construyendo un país mejor, y solamente en un país donde la justicia exista, podemos desarrollar una vida plena. Esta memoria activa es nuestro modesto testimonio por una sociedad que no olvida y quiere vivir en paz. Una paz que comienza haciendo justicia...”
Norma Lew, Diana Malamud, Enrique Burbinski, and Sergio Bergman (1995) “Prologo” in *Memoria Activa, a dos años del atentado de la AMIA*. Buenos Aires: Editorial La Página S.A., pp. 7.

the other group of *familiares* that would form, Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas, Memoria Activa positioned themselves publicly, within the framework of society, rather than simply speaking from and to the Jewish community. Diana Malamud one of the *familiares* of the group, explains:

Memoria Activa began with a group of people from the Jewish community, who after the the attack on the AMIA thought that the possibility of obtaining justice would be very small, especially after the experience of the bombing of the Israeli embassy. These people, who all were members of the Jewish community, got together and decided to have an *acto* in a public place, in contrast to all the *actos* of the Jewish community, that always were closed and private, no? Very much turned toward the community. And well, this group decided that it had to be in the Plaza Lavalle, in front of the Tribunales palace, on the same day and time as the attack on the AMIA occurred.³

Initially, the leaders of the Jewish community supported the group, as they were seen as one facet of the struggle for justice and remembrance (Gurevich 2005:15). However, as it would become clear, Memoria Activa would only remain supported as long as they didn't go beyond their place as defined by the DAIA: "[the] DAIA should remain as the sole formal and legal negotiator in the name of the victims and the Jewish organizations vis-à-vis the national authorities, and also as the sole Jewish political representation within mainstream society" (Gurevich 2005:15-16). But Memoria Activa would go against the desires of the Jewish community leadership, and their independence from the community is a key aspect of their identity as a social movement. An elaboration on the ways in which Memoria Activa refused the role given to them by the leaders of the Jewish community will be explored below.

Early on, Memoria Activa based its protests broadly within struggles against impunity and for human rights. While the bombing of the AMIA was its main touchstone and

³Memoria Activa empezó con un grupo de personas de la comunidad judía, que después del atentado a la AMIA pensaron que la posibilidad de hacer justicia era muy poca, sobretodo después de la experiencia del atentado a la Embajada de Israel. Esta gente, que eran todos miembros de la comunidad judía, se reunió y decidieron hacer un acto en un lugar público. A diferencia de todos los actos que había hecho la comunidad judía, que siempre eran cerrados y privados, ¿no? Muy hacia adentro de la comunidad. Y bueno, este grupo de gente decidió que debía ser en la plaza Lavalle, frente al Palacio de Tribunales, y el mismo día y a la misma hora que había ocurrido el atentado. Interview with Diana, conducted on Nov. 4, 2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

motivation, their struggle became a fight for the rights of all Argentine citizens, and for a particular vision of state and society. The *actos* of Memoria Activa became a forum through which issues of justice, impunity, corruption, and memory could be discussed, and not only in relation to the AMIA bombing. Speakers—artists of all kinds, intellectuals, journalists, politicians, among others—were invited every week to give their testimony. By inviting speakers from a broad spectrum of society, and demanding justice for the victims of the two bombings and other victims of impunity, they placed their struggle beyond the imagined borders of the Jewish community, at the same time as they expand the discursive borders of who and what is properly Argentine. As they opened up new spaces for the articulation of Jewishness and Argentineness, however, they also retained a certain Jewish specificity that was easily recognizable.

Those who attended Memoria Activa *actos* were diverse. The primary participants were Jewish, although a few non-Jewish Argentines attended the weekly *actos* and were present as speakers. Jewishness took different forms in the group. A few were religious, such as Rabbi Sergio Bergman (who left the group in 1996), but most identified as Jews primarily in a cultural sense. For those with little or no religious background, Jewishness was expressed through Yiddish culture and sometimes through leftist political orientations that at one time flourished in Yiddish speaking communities.⁴ Others, while coming from “Jewish backgrounds” (variously defined) did not particularly identify as Jewish in any substantial way. The group then, can’t be simplistically characterized as a “Jewish group,” although they do engage particular histories and traditions affiliated with “Jewishness.” This is most notably visible in the blowing of the *shofar*, or ram’s horn, to signal mourning, presence, and a call to action. In addition, the Old Testament injunction, “*Justicia, Justicia,*

⁴For an example of the importance of Yiddish culture to many Jewish Argentines see Natasha Zaretsky (2008) “Singing for Social Change: Nostalgic Memory and Struggle for Belonging in a Buenos Aires Yiddish Chorus” in *Rethinking Jewish Latin-Americans*, Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, eds. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 231-265.

Perseguiras”(Justice, Justice, You Shall Pursue) serves as a key rationale guiding their struggle. This particular section of the Old Testament is often interpreted to mean the centrality of “justice” (broadly defined) to Jewish practice.

As certain members of Memoria Activa began to emphasize broader struggles against impunity, some family members of the victims as well as members of the Jewish community began to feel uncomfortable, as it seemed that the memory of the particular victims of the AMIA bombing were being diluted by other causes and victims. Additionally, as I will show, Memoria Activa’s increasingly confrontational style against the state and Jewish leadership began to make some *familiares* and supporters began to feel unsure about the positioning and motives of the group. Moreover, Memoria Activa based their struggle in part on liberal ideals that tended to emphasize the individual over the community, something that sat uneasily with the communitarian spirit championed by leaders of the Jewish Argentine community.

In reaction to these feelings, a monthly commemoration of the victims on Pasteur street became a site where the names of the individual victims of the bombing could be read (this wasn’t generally part of Memoria Activa *actos*), and family members of the victims and their supporters could come to together in a more private and less “politicized” atmosphere. As is noted in the publication of testimonials referenced above, this split was not initially antagonistic, and *familiares* and their supporters tended to move between the weekly and monthly *actos*.⁵ As previously mentioned, the monthly commemoration in front of the AMIA became the group Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas (Family and Friends of the victims). As months and years after the bombing passed and it became increasingly clear that justice for the victims of the AMIA bombing would not be easily obtained (see next chapter), the

⁵For more on the different groups of family members of the victims, see Beatriz Gurevich (2005) “After the AMIA bombing: A Critical Analysis of Two Parallel Discourses” in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory*, ed. Kristin Ruggiero, Brighton and Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 86-111 and Annette Prekker (2000) “Memoria y Justicia: Separate Places for Separate Spaces” *Modernity 2*, www.eiu.edu/~modernity/prekker.html.

differences between the groups of *familiares* and their supporters became more ossified. It wasn't until the third AMIA anniversary in 1997, however, that the differences among the *familiares* and within the community came to a head. Before discussing that watershed event, I will further elaborate on the differences between the two groups that organized in relation to the AMIA bombing, Memoria Activa and Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas. Later a third group would form in 2002, APEMIA, due to increasing political differences between the family members of the victims.

Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas

The gatherings of the *Familiares y Amigos* was historically quite different from what occurred in front of Tribunales every Monday. These monthly acts, convened near the site (and later in front of) the AMIA, elicited a tone of “private” or “community” remembrance, rather than the open public protests of Memoria Activa. The focus of these *actos* was on the AMIA bombing and its victims, and did not embrace other struggles and victims of impunity. In contrast, Memoria Activa positioned themselves in the heart of the city in front of one of the symbols of the Argentine state, the Supreme Court, and sought alliances with other anti-impunity and human rights movements. Connecting the AMIA bombing to other acts that have remained unpunished, and to a certain understanding of citizenship has been central to Memoria Activa's claim that the AMIA bombing cannot rest as a “Jewish” issue.

Initially the two *actos* were conceived to fulfill different but overlapping purposes. Mondays in the plaza became a place where private pain became a public demand for justice and change, while the monthly *actos* were a place where the *familiares* could come together with a particular focus on the victims of the AMIA bombing. Although both manifestations were described as engaged in the struggle for memory and justice, one articulated these goals outward toward the nation in general, while the other positioned

themselves inward, toward the Jewish community and the victims.⁶ These differences are reflected through the demarcation of physical space in the *Familiares y Amigos actos*, as well as the style of rhetoric.

The monthly *actos* on Pasteur street had a much different feel than what happened in the Plaza Lavalle every Monday. This is due in part to the more secluded location of the *acto*, and the closing of the street to vehicle traffic. Pasteur street is a relatively small street in the city, and the blocking off of the street increased the sense that what was about to happen was a private event. In addition, the presence of a number of obvious security personnel, an example of the extra security and vigilance that have accompanied Jewish organizations in the city since the bombings, added to the feeling that there was an “inside” and “outside” to what was about to occur. Bystanders or passersby are treated with more attention and sometimes suspicion than in Plaza Lavalle. Indeed, when I first attended one of these *actos* in 2004, I was subjected to some questioning by security. Although this questioning was rather benign, having to justify my attendance made me feel somewhat uneasy. This would not have happened in the plazas on Monday.

A large banner is attached to light poles and hung over the street with the words “Justicia y Memoria” (Justice and Memory), and the amount of time that has passed since the attack. In front of the AMIA building, sits a little podium and from there the names of each of the victims are read, with the lighting of a candle and placing of a rose for each of the dead. Behind the podium, on the cement security wall that frames the outside of the building (the building itself is set off from the street by a small courtyard and security area), hangs a black board with the names of the victims spray-painted on, in a few instances a picture of the deceased was placed near their name. This billboard had been at the AMIA

⁶There are some instances in which an expression of solidarity with other victims is expressed in the *Familiares y Amigos actos*: in the case of terrorism. As over the years other bombings thought to be linked in ideology and source—in the United States, London, and Madrid—occurred, these events and anniversaries would be marked in the monthly *actos*. Often the ambassador of the attacked nation would be invited to speak or be honored.

site since it was a pile of rubble, and stands as a reminder that justice still has not been had (Gurevich 2005:8). More solemn than the public reclamations of Memoria Activa, the Familiares y Amigos *actos* are more a place to actively mourn and recognize the dead. Every month a different family member of the victim would read a speech (over the years, the pool of *familiares* who will speak has shrunk to under ten people) that focused particularly on the bombing, the victims, and the search for justice.

Contrasting themselves to Memoria Activa, the *familiares* associated with the Familiares y Amigos group present their group as apolitical, in contrast to the claim that Memoria Activa is “too political.” As Memoria Activa became more firmly rooted as a grassroots mobilization against impunity that shared concerns with other victims in society and distanced themselves from the leadership of the Jewish community, they were thought to be politicizing the dead by other family members of the victims, as well as by some community leaders. More specifically, what was it that was “too political” about Memoria Activa?

The critiques of Memoria Activa’s politicization appear to reference four primary characteristics: Its critical position toward the leadership of the AMIA and DAIA, and its distancing from these institutions, particularly after 1997; the presence of overt political actors in some of their *actos*, which appeared to some to be a using of a victims for political gain; the ways in which Memoria Activa connects the AMIA bombing to other instances of violence and impunity, and aligns with itself with human rights movements; a sense that some of the more vocal participants of the movement are furthering a political agenda that seeks to transform aspects of state and society, above and beyond achieving justice for the victims of the AMIA. Embedded within these criticisms are normative ideas about the “Jewish community” and “individual,” as well as vision of politics that is narrowly focused on “official” channels and a sanctification of the dead that sought to remove them from social and political struggle.

With the exception perhaps of the first critique, which will be expanded upon in the next section, these evaluations often accompany a feeling that Memoria Activa isn't sufficiently focused on the victims or achieving justice for them. Or worse, that the dead are being used for political or personal purposes. As Sofía iterated to me:

In reality at first we were all together, every Monday we went to the plaza to demand justice in front of Tribunales, and on the 18th of each month we had an act in honor of the victims in Pasteur street. Then Memoria Activa formally organized [as a non-profit] and it was as if the plaza was an open place for all to speak, but among those who came to speak were politicians who came during their campaigns...and used the dead for their personal interests, and personally for me, I didn't like this.⁷

Another *familiar* expressed the difference between Memoria Activa and Familiares y Amigos in the following manner:

We began to notice that there were some sectors of Memoria Activa that were politically involved, and aligned with certain political sectors or had political tendencies, or mixed other cases together with the AMIA. And we decided that this wasn't what we were looking for. If I want to support and accompany other parents that have had misfortunes...I'm going to go as a citizen but not as a member of the group because we want to maintain our purpose totally at the margin, removed from all other instances and everything else. Do you understand me? We don't have political aspirations (apetencias), we don't have any political interests, and the other groups, they do...⁸

Having a political stance or engaging in what is seen to be as politics is seen as compromising the dead. And interestingly, the above *familiar* makes a distinct separation between group interests and individual interests. This relates to how the Familiares y

⁷“...en realidad al principio éramos todos juntos, los lunes íbamos a la plaza Lavalle a reclamar justicia frente a los tribunales, y los 18 de cada mes hacíamos el acto de homenaje a las víctimas en la calle Pasteur. Luego Memoria Activa se institucionalizó y es como que la plaza fue un lugar abierto para que hablen todos, pero entre los que venían a hablar también había políticos que venían cuando hacían sus campañas... usaban a los muertos para sus intereses, y en lo personal a mi esto no me gustó, yo no quiero que usen a mi hija para intereses personales.” Interview conducted on July 1, 2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

⁸“...empezamos a notar que en Memoria Activa había algunos sectores que estaban involucrándose políticamente, acercándose a determinados sectores políticos o tenían tendencias políticas, o mezclaban otros casos junto con la AMIA. Y nosotros decidimos que eso no era lo que nosotros buscábamos. Si yo quiero defender y acompañar a otros padres que han tenido desgracias...yo voy a ir como ciudadana pero no como integrante de grupo porque nosotros queremos mantener nuestro propósito totalmente al margen, ajeno a todas las demás instancias, a todas las demás cosas, ¿me entendés?, no tenemos apetencias políticas, no tenemos ningún interés político, y los otros grupos sí...” Interview conducted on September 21, 2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Amigos position themselves as non-hierarchical, in contrast to what they view as Memoria Activa's explicit demarcation of roles and offices. Since their incorporation as a non-profit, Memoria Activa has had a small group of members who function essentially as a governing body, not all of whom are *familiares*. Luis Czyzewski, one of the most visible and vocal members of Familiares y Amigos characterizes the group in the following way: "We have an organization that's a little bit special. I am one more among many, we don't want to organize ourselves with a board of directors, with special posts because we consider this is not they kind of organization that needs to have this kind of functions, let's say."⁹ The use of "we" when speaking of the *familiares* in this group is quite typical; when one gives a speech it is always implied that he or she is speaking for the group. However, as I witnessed, this expression of horizontal organization and decision-making through negotiation is not perceived as such by all the *familiares* in the group.

Up until relatively recently, the members of Familiares y Amigos have not publicly contradicted the opinions and tactics of the AMIA and DAIA, even if some *familiares* in the group might disagree with the leadership. In this way they can be understood as continuing to champion the group over individual or political interests—to some extent it is an expression of loyalty. The radical departure of Memoria Activa from the leaders of the community and other *familiares* can be seen in their decision to hire their own lawyer and file a separate complaint in the AMIA trial. The other plaintiff was composed of the AMIA and DAIA and the Familiares y Amigos group. Against the statements of approval made by the AMIA and DAIA (and not contradicted by the Familiares y Amigos group), Memoria Activa had raised suspicions about the way the judge assigned to the case, Juan José Galeano, was handling the investigation, and later the trial. It wasn't until the problems with

⁹"Nosotros tenemos una organización un poco especial. Yo soy uno más tanto como todos, nosotros no quisimos organizarnos con comisiones directivas, con cargos porque consideramos que este no es un tipo de organización que tenga que tener ese tipo de funcionamientos, digamos." Interview conducted on August 20, 2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

the trial and investigation were becoming increasingly difficult to ignore that Familiares y Amigos spoke out against the judge, while the AMIA and DAIA continued to support him. In contrast to Familiares y Amigos and Memoria Activa, the group APEMIA is the most distant from the organized Jewish community, and the most aligned with more marginal social actors and political currents.

APEMIA

APEMIA is an acronym that translates to Association for the Clarification of the Unpunished Massacre of the AMIA Bombing. In 2002 the group was formally inaugurated, principally by Laura Ginsberg, a once prominent member of Memoria Activa. Laura left Memoria Activa after she publicly and unilaterally called for the resignation of the lawyer that Memoria Activa had hired to represent them, Alberto Zuppi. The departure of Ginsberg from Memoria Activa further fractured the increasingly splintered groups that had formed around the AMIA bombing, and she took some members of *Memoria Activa* with her. Laura, a fierce critic of the political system as it has historically developed in Argentina, felt Zuppi's recent appointment as secretary of justice in the brief presidency of Adolfo Rodríguez Saá (this was after the economic collapse when the office of presidency functioned as a kind of revolving door), presented a conflict of interest. If Memoria Activa was positioning itself in critical opposition to the state, how could their very own lawyer properly represent them against the state and yet be part of the state as well?

Not everyone was pleased with Laura's departure from the group, and some members of Memoria Activa began to participate in both groups. The individuals who continued to support Laura, while active and loyal participants in Memoria Activa, were generally those who had little power in the group. These individuals, whose viewpoints are discussed further in the conclusion, often disagree with the leadership of Memoria Activa, but have little social power through which to press their opinions. Nevertheless, they continue to attend the meetings in the plaza.

The politics of APEMIA are more aligned with various leftist movements (Trotskyist, anti-globalization, worker's rights) than the other *familiares* groups. While Memoria Activa could be considered progressive in comparison to the center, they are also rooted in more middle class ideas about state and society that are essentially liberal in content. Thus while from the perspective of the Jewish Argentine community, Memoria Activa is in certain ways "too political," from the position of APEMIA, they don't go far enough. APEMIA has done the most to reach out and make allegiances with other groups who seek a more radically re-defined state and society. While Memoria Activa has done significant work to link the AMIA cause with other issues of human rights in Argentina, APEMIA has been successful at linking with movements outside of the middle class, where "human rights" is more broadly construed. Ginsberg's group has fostered overt connections with *piqueteros* (unemployed worker's movements with different leftist or progressive political affiliations), CORREPI (Coordinators Against Police and Institutional Repression) and FUA (Argentine University Federation, a student rights organization), among others.

APEMIA protests more closely resemble those organized by worker's groups and *piqueteros* than most gatherings of the mainstream human rights community. At APEMIA's yearly anniversary *acto*, one can hear popular music, pick up flyers and pamphlets about worker's rights and socialist or communist groups, and see flags with a screened image of Che Guevara. The *actos* of APEMIA are less ceremonious than the others, with the laughter and movement of children and an absence of a hushed sense of formality. Ginsberg's rhetoric at these events unfailingly highlights the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of government leaders who claim to be advancing the AMIA investigation, while being part of the same machine that has worked to cover it up. This in turn, is her most fierce critique against Memoria Activa, as the latter seeks the Argentine state (as flawed as it might be) as an interlocutor in the AMIA case and the pursuit of human rights. Any claimed achievement in getting the government to respond or move forward in the investigation is denounced as

illusory according to APEMIA. For Ginsberg, as Gurevich points out, “the Argentine state is the local connection of the attack against the AMIA” (2005:25).

Regarding the AMIA investigation, APEMIA seeks full access to the government’s secret service files, as well as an independent investigation of the attacks. While President Néstor Kirchner opened up some secret files pertaining to the AMIA, there are still many that remain unavailable. In Ginsberg’s view, the state only operates under a mask of democracy, and has not changed in significant details since the last military dictatorship. Although many organizations that are “*contra impunidad*” (against impunity), such as Memoria Activa argue along similar lines, Ginsberg feels that they are still participating to some extent in “politics as usual,” because they seek some level of negotiation or participation with the state as it stands.

Ginsberg’s analysis of the AMIA investigation is that the Argentine state deliberately mishandled the case in response to pressure from the United States and Israel. Although she would like to see the perpetrators of the attack brought to justice, she sees the emphasis put on Iran and the Middle East as part of a politics of imperialism supported by Israel and United States that works to justify attacks against the “axes of evil.” As she iterated at the 12th anniversary of the AMIA bombing, “We are not in agreement with putting the AMIA case at the service of the politics of war and aggression.”¹⁰ Thus she is as critical of the imperialism of the Israeli and U.S. governments as she is of the Argentine state (Ginsberg and her group are anti-Zionist), and she sees these imperialist interests as part and parcel of the cover-up of the AMIA. In this way, APEMIA connects to broader critiques of the U.S. and Israel that circulate within certain leftist circles in Latin America and beyond. Furthermore, as the state appears to be making advances in the AMIA case through a focus on Iran, impunity in Argentina can continue. Recently, in response to a disturbing

¹⁰“Nosotros no estamos de acuerdo en poner la causa AMIA al servicio de esta política de guerra y agresión.” (APEMIA, “Discurso 18-07-06” <http://apemia.blogspot.com>, accessed on August 1, 2006).

kidnapping and attack against one of the former lawyers who had worked on the investigation of the AMIA (those who carried out the attack claimed to be from the Argentine secret service), Ginsberg wrote

The entirety of the official investigation is directed toward accusing a group of Iranians as the intellectual organizers of the crime [AMIA]. With this accusation, on the one hand, and with the search for “irregularities” [of the investigation] on the other, the State attempts to avoid being responsible for its criminal responsibility and cover-up of the AMIA massacre. For this reason impunity continues.¹¹

To be clear, Ginsberg is not accusing the state of being directly behind the attack on the AMIA. According to Ginsberg, the state is responsible, however, for failing to protect the rights of its citizens, for allegedly participating in the attack as an accessory (this allegation is made against police forces), and for contributing to a political culture in which crimes remain unpunished. These aspects of the AMIA bombing connect to other cases where state officials are directly implicated in acts of violence, but whose actions effectively remain beyond the reach of the law.

Like Memoria Activa, Ginsberg sees the leadership of the Jewish community as working in tandem with the state’s efforts to place the AMIA bombing squarely within the realm of Middle East politics and terrorism, in an effort to occlude Argentina’s responsibility in the attacks.

In order to better understand the historical role of the leadership of the Jewish community, particularly the DAIA, in the next section I discuss the often-fraught relations between this organization and the community it seeks to represent. Finally, I give an account of the famous J’accuse speech given by Laura Ginsberg at the third AMIA

¹¹Toda la investigación oficial está encaminada a acusar a un grupo de iraníes de ser los cerebros organizadores del crimen. Con esta acusación, por una parte, y con la búsqueda de “irregularidades”, por la otra, el Estado pretende evitar ser inculcado por su responsabilidad criminal y encubridora en la masacre de la AMIA. Por eso sigue la impunidad.” (APEMIA, “Ante el secuestro de Claudio Lifschitz” <http://apemiacomunicados.blogspot.com>, accessed on March 10, 2009.)

anniversary, which signified one of the turning points in the struggle for justice and ability of the DAIA to represent the community.

“Defending Jewish Dignity”: The DAIA

Mediating between the street and the state, the DAIA is a non-governmental organization that has become the main official advocacy group to represent the “Jewish community” to the government. Instituted in the 1930s in response to rising anti-Semitic currents in Argentine society, the DAIA’s motto is “Defending Jewish Dignity.” An important aspect of their work involves the investigation and production of yearly studies related to issues of racism and discrimination in the country.

Representing what they decide are Jewish interests, they function as a political lobby and primary unified voice of the Jewish community. The DAIA seeks to be (and has been officially seen as such) the legitimate political arm of the Jewish Argentine community, and engages directly with government officials and state-run institutions. In this way, they consider themselves to be a neutral party for the Jewish community, and see themselves as best positioned to speak for the collectivity. However, the DAIA is not a democratic institution (its leaders are appointed rather than voted in by the community), and their vision of the Jewish community tends to be narrow and quite conservative. Thus from its inception, its stated goals were controversial. The executive director of the DAIA in 2004 described DAIA function in this way:

What is understood by political service? To petition, to ask, to demand to the authorities—the government, police, political parties—to have one voice that can go out to confront, discuss, and fight so that a president of a schule (school) or a president of an institution doesn’t have to. This is political service, to confront situations that have to do with defending dignity, security, the DAIA is primarily involved with combating anti-Semitism, the defense of human rights, and defending the community. These three things are done or are achieved with work programs and with political lobbying, the lobby has to have people that have a view of the whole community and are able to sit down with a president, with a governor or minister, with a police officer, to ask, discuss, and fight but this activity doesn’t affect other institutions because if I am a president of a school, I’m not capable of these things,

therefore, when there is some problem that comes from outside the community, the DAIA must go out and speak in defense, this is representation.¹²

While the DAIA claims to speak for and represent the “Jewish community,” historically this community was conceived rather narrowly, and the definition of “Jew” was a politically conservative one. From early on, Communist and Anarchist Jews were excluded, creating an official boundary of acceptable Jewishness that still exists today to some extent.¹³ The exclusion of more politically “radical” Jews, however, may have been in part a reaction to the downplaying of Jewish identity by many involved in these political movements.

As was seen during the last military dictatorship, the DAIA is a politically conservative organization that will not openly confront the government if this isn't understood to be in the best interests of the Jewish community as a whole. In this way, the DAIA is often perceived as submitting to governmental power rather than challenging it. Its style tends to be one of negotiation and accommodation rather than substantial critique.¹⁴ Before heading into the ways in which the DAIA came under attack in relation to the AMIA bombing, I will briefly discuss their role during the “dirty war,” and the ways in which they privileged the community at the expense of individuals.

¹²“¿Qué se entiende como prestación (provision/service...) política?, el peticionar (to petition), el pedir (to ask), exigir (to demand) frente a las autoridades, gobierno, policía, partidos políticos, tener una voz que pueda salir a confrontar, a discutir, a pelear y que no tenga que ser el presidente del schule o el presidente de una institución. Eso es la prestación política, frente a situaciones que tienen que ver con la defensa de la dignidad, la seguridad, la DAIA tiene como tema el combate del antisemitismo, la defensa de los derechos humanos, la defensa de la comunidad, estas tres cosas se hacen o se logran con programas de trabajo y con lobby político, ese lobby lo tiene que hacer gente que tenga una mirada de toda la comunidad y que pueda sentarse con un presidente, con un gobernador, con un ministro, con un policía, pedir, discutir, pelearse pero que esa actividad no afecte otras instituciones porque si yo soy presidente de una escuela yo no estoy capacitado para estas cosas, entonces esta es la representación política, entonces cuando hay algún problema que viene desde afuera de la comunidad quien debe salir a hablar en defensa es la DAIA, esa es la representación.” Interview conducted on December 14, 2004 at the DAIA, Buenos Aires.

¹³Feitlowitz, Marguerite (1998) *A Lexicon of Terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 97.

¹⁴Perhaps the most severe critique I heard about the DAIA from individuals was that it functioned akin to the *Judenrat*, mediators between the Jews and Nazis within the ghettos of Nazi-occupied Europe. The famous Jewish Argentine journalist, Jacobo Timerman also names the DAIA, *Judenrat*, for their actions during the “dirty war” (Feitlowitz 1998:108).

During the last military dictatorship, the DAIA remained essentially neutral, even as dozens of Jewish Argentine families appealed to them for help.¹⁵ The actions of the military during the “dirty war” presented a paradox for the leaders of the Jewish Argentine community. While the community on the whole wasn’t directly affected in a negative way by the dictatorship, many Argentines who were Jewish were. As Rein and Lesser (2008:13) put it, “...Jews arrested by the military suffered more than non-Jews; yet, community institutions continued with their normal activities, no anti-Semitic laws were ever instituted, and relations with the State of Israel were excellent.” The failure of the DAIA to speak out against the *junta*, even while human rights were put aside in order to achieve particular ends of the dictatorship, is one oft-cited instance when the institution failed to represent at least some of its constituents, and apparently, went against its mandate to protect human rights. The thinking was, why should the DAIA potentially risk retaliation on the whole community for a relatively small number of individuals?

For the DAIA, as long as Jewish life could continue more or less unhindered, it was not worth challenging the power of the generals. Granted, the Jewish-Argentine community was already nervous under a regime that proposed to rescue “Western and Christian” society for Argentina, and imagined Jewish influence through Freud, Marx, and Einstein were singled out as prime subversive forces.¹⁶ One way DAIA officials legitimated their actions during the *junta* is by how they chose to define “Jew,” and those who were deemed subversive were often characterized as undesirable members of the Jewish community, or not interested in being part of it. Might “real Jews” come to signify a subversive, foreign, and dangerous element in society? This image of Jews was already circulating in the nation, as it had in the past. Accordingly, DAIA officials often assumed along with the ruling generals,

¹⁵On this topic, see again, Feitlowitz (1998:89-109).

¹⁶Feitlowitz (1998)

that the individuals targeted must have done something. In response to this, Rabbi Marshall Meyer is quoted as saying, “As though *anything* could justify disappearance” (Feitlowitz 1998:100). Exemplifying what Jon Stratton (2000) has termed “ghetto thinking,” the leaders of the Jewish Argentine community proceeded with caution during the last military dictatorship as they will with the AMIA bombing.¹⁷ The status of the DAIA as “representing” the community is disrupted and challenged by this history.

With the memory of the last military dictatorship hovering in the minds of many Argentines, a large part of the distrust of the DAIA comes from its direct link with government officials, whom many already think to be corrupt. Given the close connection with the government that the DAIA seeks to foster, an allegation of corruption against the government has tended to reflect negatively upon the Jewish institution. At the time of the AMIA bombing, the specter of corruption within the DAIA was embodied by the figure of Rubén Beraja. Beraja was president of the DAIA from 1991-1998. In the early decades of the nineties—principally before the bombing of the AMIA— Jewish community leaders and Jewish Argentines in general were particularly “close” or in support of president Menem.¹⁸ However, after the AMIA bombing, this closeness, rather than viewed as an asset, came to be seen by many in the community as a sign of suspicion. Immediately after the bombing, Rubén Beraja, then president of the DAIA, demanded that Menem’s government investigate all possible hypotheses about the origin of the attack, and insisted that the bombing had a

¹⁷Stratton has defined “ghetto thinking” as a kind of structure of feeling (Williams 1977), in which fear, a focus within the community, and mutual self-help systems are main components. Although his main subjects of analysis are Yiddish-speaking Jews and their descendents, he sees “ghetto thinking” as a possibility among other minority groups as well. Regarding Jews and “ghetto thinking” he states, “...over many centuries the Jews of Europe evolved a way of being in the world which was premised on an assumption that the world in which they lived their everyday lives was fundamentally antagonistic to them. Fear was an adaptive defence mechanism which kept the Jews on their guard, every watchful, ever protective of their own” (2000:84). While I think this is overstating the case somewhat, I do find that this description resonates with some expressions of Jewishness in Buenos Aires, and the attitude of the main Jewish organizations.

¹⁸Reasons for this closeness are explained in Diego Melamed’s (2000) *Los Judíos y el Menemismo*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.

local connection .¹⁹ However, as time went on and the investigation appeared seriously compromised, Beraja and the DAIA were later seen as “soft” in their demands, and even accomplices to (the growing awareness of) an organized cover-up.

Beraja’s position as a banker didn’t help matters. He was the president of the now defunct (Jewish) community bank, Banco Mayo, and had substantial economic reasons to align himself with Menem and Corach (ex- minister of interior under Menem), and these close relations were seen as a significant conflict of interest. At the same time as the AMIA investigation was underway, Beraja’s bank was floundering, and eventually collapsed. The collapse of Banco Mayo resulted in the loss of millions of client’s dollars, and also further eroded the faith that many Jewish Argentines had in their own institutions. Moreover, Beraja was accused of some culpability in the bank’s collapse and was subsequently detained in an Argentine jail for almost two years (he has since been freed), for his suspected involvement.

As many Jewish-Argentines as well as many *familiares* began to increasingly accuse the state of deliberately mishandling the AMIA case, there was an expectation that the leaders of the community, the AMIA and DAIA, would speak out against the government. This would not be the case. Instead, Beraja would be formally accused in 2008, along with former president Menem, former judge Galeano, and Hugo Anzorreguy the ex-president of the SIDE of obstruction to justice in regards to the AMIA case.²⁰ The DAIA, at least under Beraja, is widely accused of compromising the Jewish Argentine community in its demand for a thorough and impartial investigation of the bombing. The tarnished image of Ruben Beraja only confirmed the impression for Memoria Activa and many others that the DAIA is corrupt and untrustworthy.

¹⁹“...el presidente de la Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA), Rubén Beraja, reclamó al Poder Ejecutivo que no descarte ninguna hipótesis sobre el origen del ataque contra el edificio de Pasteur 633...” *Página/12*, (1994) “Tensiones Locales.” Pp.11, 19 de Julio, El País, Buenos Aires.

²⁰Irina Hauser (2008) “Un banquillo para los encubridores de atentado,” *Página/12*, 14 de Noviembre, El País, Buenos Aires.

The tensions between the DAIA and Jewish Argentine community have been publicly reflected during the AMIA bombing anniversaries. In recent years, representatives from the DAIA have not spoken at the yearly anniversary commemorations of the AMIA bombing held on Pasteur street, although they do remain an official presence. Nineteen ninety-seven is the last year that a DAIA official spoke at an AMIA anniversary *acto*. This is also the year when former member of Memoria Activa, Laura Ginsberg (now of APEMIA), gave her powerful and moving “J'accuse” speech that unequivocally denounced the Argentine government, and initiated the formal departure of Memoria Activa from the mainstream Jewish Argentine community. I will now turn to this important day.

A Community Divided and Furious: the Acto of July 18, 1997

It had been three long years since the AMIA had been bombed, and five since the Israeli Embassy lay in a crumpled heap at the corner of Arroyo and Suipacha. The family members of the victims were becoming impatient with the investigation into the attack on the AMIA, and pointed accusations against the government of ex-president Carlos Menem and the former governor of Buenos Aires (and later president of the nation), Eduardo Duhalde, were already circulating in the Jewish Argentine community. Menem, Duhalde, and the Secretary of the Interior at the time, Carlos Corach, were no longer appealed to by some *familiares* in an effort to ensure against impunity and deliver justice—for many they were now seen as part of the problem. Allegations of a cover-up were rising from the citizenry, the state itself accused of being an accomplice to the bombings. Meanwhile, growing impatience felt towards the AMIA and DAIA as they continued to be mild in their condemnations of the government. At the third anniversary *acto*, this suspicion and anger toward the Argentine state and increasingly the head of the DAIA, Ruben Beraja, pulsed in the crowd of 10,000 standing that cold morning on Pasteur Street. People in the crowd were hoping to hear Beraja “name names” and pinpoint government officials involved in a

cover-up. The anger in the crowd may have drawn in part from the still potent memories of the violations of human rights inflicted on the citizenry during the last military dictatorship. The liberal democracy desired by the majority of the middle class was still being built, and the politics surrounding the AMIA bombing were beginning to stink of the old “politics as usual,” where impunity for the powerful stubbornly remains.

On the stage facing the crowd this winter morning were Rubén Beraja of the DAIA, Oscar Hansman, the president of the AMIA, and then Israeli ambassador, Yitzhak Avirán. Joining them were several government officials from the executive branch, but not president Menem. The crowd was already agitated at the arrival of these individuals: would the same people suspected of being part of a cover-up stand on stage *as if* they were working for the public? As these officials walked up to the stage cries of “*asesino*,” and “*complice*” (assassin and accomplice)—and worse—rose from the audience. Some of the most virulent remarks against state officials were directed toward the Secretary of State, Carlos Corach, who as a Jew, was perhaps seen to have betrayed the Jewish Argentine community in both his official capacity and community affiliation. During the speech made by Corach, shouts of “Jewish traitor” were hurled from the crowd (Gurevich 2005:19). From the perspective of the leadership of the Jewish community and government officials, the *acto* to commemorate the AMIA bombing was off to a rocky start. But it would only get worse.

An article that appeared in *La Nación* the day after the event remarked that the *acto*, “Was an hour and half charged with hostility. It was the harshest *acto* organized by the Jewish community in Argentina since the AMIA was blown up.”²¹ The crowd’s anger was channeled and amplified by the remarkable speech given by Laura Ginsberg of Memoria Activa. At this time, Memoria Activa still participated in the large community event that took place on the anniversary of the bombing, and Laura was still an active member of social

²¹“Fue una hora y media cargada de hostilidad. Fue el acto más duro organizado por la comunidad judía en la Argentina desde que explotó la AMIA.” Rey, Alejandra (1997) “Indignación con el gobierno” in *La Nación*, 19 de Julio, Información General, Buenos Aires.

movement. In 1997, Laura was the designated spokesperson for all the *familiares*. Her address, popularly referred to as the “J’accuse” speech, powerfully struck the public with its moving language and fierce accusations against Carlos Menem’s government. Unlike the directors of the AMIA and DAIA, Ginsberg did not mince words or fail to name names. This speech was a lament for and remembrance of the dead, but it did not dwell in a passive articulation of memory. Instead, like the name Memoria Activa suggests, it made memory into an accusation, a persistent question, and a tool against impunity, not unlike the use of *la memoria* to challenge the official discourse of the military after the “dirty war.” Ginsberg’s speech took the AMIA cause beyond talk of victims and perpetrators, the dead and the wounded, Jews and non-Jews, and opened it up to a discussion about citizenship and human rights. And more than this—Ginsberg’s speech, like the politics of Memoria Activa, challenge the status quo of the Jewish Argentine community. Ginsberg is no parvenu, and she elicits a politics and identity that will not acquiesce to the accepted norms of Jewishness elaborated by the leaders of the Jewish community and Argentine society.²² She and Memoria Activa will not quietly “work with” state power, no matter what the cost, in the name of security and tolerance.

Like Zola’s famous *J’accuse* speech ninety-nine years earlier, Ginsberg directly and lyrically accuses those in power of contributing to a cover-up. Speaking to the crowd of thousands, Ginsberg eloquently moves from personal images of life before the bombing to sharp accusations aimed at the highest state offices. It is worth quoting this historic speech at length:

“I close my eyes, and I imagine that it is July 1994 at seven o’clock in the morning. Like any Monday, we all get up to begin another week. Parents have breakfast with

²²It should be noted that Ginsberg’s relationship to Jewishness is a tenuous one. In her interview she explained that her connection with Judaism was mostly through other people, her deceased husband and friends. For her, Jewishness was not something she grappled with or thought much about; it wasn’t an identity she positively ascribed to herself. However, in relation to the AMIA bombing, she became positioned to some extent as Jewish.

their children, and we...say 'I love you' before we leave the house. But many of us didn't do this because we never thought that it would be for the last time...

I open my eyes, and the image of the horror invades my being: smoke, firemen, police pushing, people crying, people screaming, people praying, people who are not able to do anything...At seven minutes to ten the building belonging to the Jewish Center has been blown up...

...I open my eyes, it is three years later, and I am with other victims of the same type of unpunished crime: the twenty-nine dead in the attack on the Israeli embassy and the photographer, José Luis Cabezas, assassinated six months earlier...And all the while the assassins surely glory in the crime and trust in the national government that covers their backs...

All the crimes and attacks, committed and yet to be committed, have a common denominator. I accuse the government of Menem and Duhalde [then Governor of the province of Buenos Aires] of consenting to the impunity, of consenting to the indifference of those who know and yet keep silent, of consenting to a lack of security, of exhibiting a lack of skill and sense of ineptitude. I accuse the government of Menem and Duhalde of covering up the local connection that killed members of our family.

I close my eyes, and I imagine that it is twelve midnight on 18 July. We are all deep in dreams, our families are still whole and we make plans for the following day with the irreverent madness of living, the defiant thought of living, the illusory desire to live.

But when I open them, I find myself three years later with the irreverent madness of longing for justice, with the defiant thought of demanding justice, and with the illusory desire of "never again."²³

In this speech, the last speech anyone from Memoria Activa would give in front of the AMIA building, Ginsberg forcefully emphasizes one of Memoria Activa's most important political claims, that the bombing of the AMIA is a not a "Jewish" problem but a national tragedy, and that the failures of the state made evident by this case highlight the vulnerability of *all* Argentines—not just the Jews. She speaks about living and justice as if they are a dream, illusions that one defiantly holds onto, and thus, presents the attack on the AMIA as a breach of human rights. By speaking of unpunished crimes she alludes to an entrenched political culture that isn't about Jewish victims. Rhetorically, she emphasizes

²³The translation of this speech was taken from *The Argentina Reader*, Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, eds. Patricia Owen Steiner, trans. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 544-548. To see the full text in Spanish, go to <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/aniversarios.htm>

this by talking not just about the attacks and crimes that have already happened (which I interpret as going beyond the two bombings), but about the *ones that have not yet occurred, but are poised to do so, given the prevailing social and political climate*—“the illusory desire of ‘never again.’” She relinquishes Argentines from an imagined security and into the real possibility of horror. Going against Menem’s official politics of forgetting and his championing of neoliberal pleasures and solutions, Laura says, “No.” She reminds Argentines that they have not been safe in the past and will continue to not be so, if the victims of the AMIA bombing are swallowed by impunity.

As I detail in chapter five, the accusations and claims presented in Ginsberg’s speech have formed the nucleus of Memoria Activa’s activism: the state is responsible for failing to provide security for its citizens; the state is responsible for deliberately obstructing justice; the state is responsible for participating in a political culture where impunity is unremarkable; the AMIA bombing, along with many other acts of terror and violence, is an Argentine human rights issue.²⁴

Ginsberg’s “J’accuse” speech tore asunder the already tenuous relations between the leadership of the Jewish Argentine community and much of the community itself. In its tone and independence it was defiant; and Laura refused to be silent even though leaders of the Jewish community had warned the *familiares* against “inflammatory speech” (Gurevich 2005:18). Laura’s speech, while ostensibly meant to reflect the thoughts and opinions of the *familiares* as a whole, left some feeling uncomfortable. This unease was rooted in a sense of going against “the community”—represented by its leaders—and showing the nation that the Jewish community was not unified. This discomfort was present even among those who liked and agreed with the assertions made in Laura’s speech. Given that Laura was most

²⁴While Ginsberg may still agree with these accusations, she is not in agreement with the ways in which Memoria Activa has attempted to force the state to claim responsibility. See next chapter.

closely identified with Memoria Activa, her speech further placed the group beyond the bounds of the community. She, and Memoria Activa, had become too political.

Despite the misgivings some in the crowd may have had toward Ginsberg's confrontational style, her speech was greeted by enthusiastic applause. On the other hand, Beraja's speech, which followed hers, was seen as laughable: along with hisses and other insults, the crowd turned its back on the speaker, denying the titular representative of the Jewish Argentine community his role.

After Ginsberg's explosive performance, the leaders of the Jewish community, Beraja and Hansman, apologized to President Menem for Ginsberg's harsh speech, infuriating many of the family members of the victims.²⁵ This act of apology was seen as an example of cowardice—or worse—and a contradiction of a primary purpose of the *acto*: to demand justice and transparency from the Argentine government. But it also showed the leadership of the Jewish community scrambling for authority: the AMIA and DAIA could no longer unequivocally be seen as representing the Jewish community. This act, among others, solidified the view stressed by some *familiares*, Memoria Activa, and later, APEMIA that the community leadership is complicit with government (*son cómplices*). Since her days with Memoria Activa and continuing today, Laura has stressed that, "...from the beginning and throughout these ten years [now 14], the leadership of the Jewish community took a supportive role and went along with the politics of the Argentine state..."²⁶

The DAIA seeks to represent and act in the "best" interests of the Jewish Argentine community. But how one defines "community" is continually a source of conflict, as was explicit during the last military dictatorship. The power of Jewish agencies like the DAIA to "speak" for the "community" is an attempt to solidify and define the negotiated boundaries

²⁵La Nación (1997). "Replanteo tras el acto de la AMIA" 20 de Julio, Información General, Buenos Aires.

²⁶"...la dirigencia judía desde el principio y durante todos estos diez años tuvo un papel de sostenimiento y de acompañamiento de todas las políticas que el estado argentino tuvo..." Interview, December 14, 2004.

and multiplicities of Jewish Argentine life. In this way, the DAIA becomes a powerful force in producing and maintaining normative Jewish Argentine identities and practices. From the perspective of the DAIA and its supporters, dissent and critique of the government, society, and Jewish Argentine community—when it is articulated from a position of Jewishness—should ideally be expressed through the (private) networks of the Jewish Argentine agencies, rather than publicly on the streets. This form of disciplining is justified through the proposed necessity of presenting a “united front” to the rest of society, as if Jews are a discrete group set apart, and embattled.

Contrary to these expectations, Memoria Activa has ignored their “place.” Rather than go through authorized channels they have opened up a space as Jewish citizens to interpolate the state. The members of Memoria Activa act “out of turn” within the two overlapping circles of the organized Jewish-Argentine community and Argentine state and society. In taking to the street and constantly making demands on the state they are unruly citizens. By refusing to work with legitimate and sanctioned channels of negotiation (which generally takes place behind closed doors) between the leaders of the Jewish community and the state, they are seen as disloyal to their community and as “loud Jews.” And importantly, until the AMIA bombing and challenge to the leadership of the DAIA by Memoria Activa, the organization was viewed by the state to be imbued with the sole authority to represent the Jewish community. This is no longer the case, as Memoria Activa has not only helped to undermine the credibility of the leadership of the Jewish community, but has successfully interpolated and negotiated with the state, as will be seen in the next chapter.

VI. The Search for Justice and the Politics of Impunity

Introduction: The Boiling Frog

Buenos Aires, September 10, 2004. I am traveling to the office of Baruj Z. again, this time to speak with his secretary about the American Rabbi Marshall Meyer, since she had known him personally for many years. Rabbi Meyer transformed Jewish practice in Argentina and beyond, and was one of the most important voices of opposition from within Argentina during the last military dictatorship. He is well known and highly regarded within human rights movements such as *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, and was a member of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared or CONADEP. However, in addition to my meeting regarding Rabbi Meyer, Baruj and I sit down at a long wooden table in a conference room adjacent to his office. I want to discuss with him the recent unsettling news regarding the verdict of the AMIA trial. All the defendants had been acquitted based on insufficient and invalid evidence. Reactions to the results of this historic trial had been occupying the attention of many *porteños* for a week now, and it hovered in my thoughts as well.

Baruj, sitting across from me at the table, his demeanor respectful and kind, begins to talk about justice. Baruj couldn't say whether he thought those who were absolved were actually guilty of something. However, for him, the essential failure of the trial reflected a problem with the judicial system, and signaled a lack of justice in general in the country. He looks directly at me as he says, "There isn't justice in Argentina," and then, echoing

comments I heard in other places, he remarks, “Argentina seems like a country but isn’t.” He goes on to say that the laws of Argentina functioned like “dead letters,” even though “everybody promises justice, truth, saying that these are the most important things.” Like many other middle-class *porteños*, Baruj expresses his critiques within a liberal framework, in which individual rights of citizens are to be guaranteed by the state. The breaking of this bond between state and citizen, according to this principle, can be devastating. In accordance with this dire scenario, Baruj’s reflections about his country became ever more bleak and hopeless.

“To not have confidence in the institutions of a country is very serious. We have confidence in football. This is what is in the news. This isn’t a country or a society.” Finally I asked him, “But how does one live in a country that isn’t a country?” To this question, Baruj responds with a parable. He asks me if I had heard about the story about the frog. I tell him I wasn’t sure that I had, so he continues: “If you put a frog into boiling water it will immediately jump out. But if you put a frog in room temperature water, water that is pleasing to the frog—water it can live in—and then put the heat on low, slowly heating up the water, the frog hardly notices that his climate is becoming toxic, deadly. He stays in the water as it slowly boils, and eventually the frog gets boiled alive.” You get used to the dangers, slowly over time. “It’s like this” he says simply and looks at me with a gentle but firm expression.

I leave his office with the sad image of the slowly boiled frog representing the citizens of Argentina.

Degrees of Responsibility

In July of 2005, shortly before the eleventh year anniversary of the AMIA attack, Kirchner’s government published a page-long “Decreto” (Decree) in Argentina’s leading newspapers. The purpose of Decreto 812/05 was an acknowledgement and acceptance of the failure of the Argentine government to fulfill certain obligations to its citizenry, and is

signed by “the president of the nation”—at the time, Néstor Kirchner. The subject was the 1994 AMIA bombing. After eleven years, the Argentine government formally accepted responsibility for denying the following rights to its citizens: The right to life (derechos a la vida); Physical Integrity (la integridad física); Judicial Process (las garantías judiciales y la tutela judicial efectiva). The Decreto goes on to state the following:

The Argentine state...recognizes the responsibility incumbent upon it for the denounced violations, as prevention of the attack was not achieved because suitable and effective measures weren't adopted—taking in account that two years previous there was a terrorist attack against the Israeli Embassy—and because there was a cover-up of the facts and a serious and deliberate failure to fulfill an adequate investigation of the crime... which produced a clear denigration of justice ...¹

In addition to an admission of culpability on various accounts, the Decreto also details some concrete actions that the government promises to take. These include the publication and diffusion of the Decreto itself, different measures to support the investigation of the AMIA and the sanctioning of those found responsible in hindering it, the creation of a special “catastrophe unit,” with particular contingencies for attacks like the AMIA and Israeli Embassy, to improve medical emergency efforts and the collection and protection of evidence, and measure taken to improve the transparency of the SIDE's use of funds as well as helping to make intelligence information available to judges who are investigating acts of terrorism. The publication of the Decreto, although eleven years too late for many, was received by Memoria Activa and several *familiares*, as an important step toward greater governmental transparency and accountability. As will be shown, the attack on the AMIA has become a case of Byzantine proportions—a kind of disorienting fun-house labyrinth, with no end in sight. Many of the government officials involved in the investigation of the

¹“Que el Estado argentino...reconoció la responsabilidad que le incumbe por las violaciones denunciadas, en cuanto existió incumplimiento de la función de prevención por no haber adaptado medidas idóneas y eficaces para prevenir el atentado—teniendo en cuenta que dos años antes se había producido un hecho terrorista contra la Embajada de Israel—y porque existió encubrimiento de los hechos y medió incumplimiento grave y deliberado de la función de investigación adecuada del ilícito, lo cual produjo una clara denegatoria de justicia...”
A full text of this document can be accessed at http://www.memoriaactiva.com/Decreto812_2005.htm

bombing or with the power to influence it, are now themselves being investigated for allegedly engaging in a deliberate miscarriage of justice. The Decreto, then, is an official acknowledgement of many counts of failure on the part of the state, and an effort to achieve a position of authority and trust amongst citizens who graffiti the walls of governmental buildings with words like *impunidad* (impunity) and *asesinos* (assassins).

This Decreto is a direct result of Memoria Activa's presentations, along with CELS (Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales) and CEJIL (Center for Justice and International Law), before the Organization of American States' (OAS) Commission of Human Rights. In 1999, Memoria Activa embarked on an important new route for their activism, and presented their case internationally, to the Commission of Human Rights in the OAS. In this, they supplemented their weekly demands in front of the Tribunales building by appealing to the power of the OAS to monitor the Argentine state and force compliance to internationally recognized standards of democracy and human rights. Traveling by plane from Buenos Aires to Washington D.C. two of the *familiares* from Memoria Activa, along with lawyers and representatives from CELS and CEJIL, presented their case to the Commission on various occasions, the most recent being in 2007. The basis of their accusation rests on the failure of the Argentine state to take proper precautions in preventing the attack and protecting the life of its citizens and the failure of the state to provide justice for the victims—essentially what the Decreto recognizes.² Memoria Activa's actions in the OAS resulted in the assignment of an official observer of the trial relating to the bombing that had begun in 2001. This overseer, Claudio Grossman, published a report of his findings after the outcome of the trial was determined in 2004.³ (This was the failed trial that Baruj and I discussed above.)

²In the words of the presentation, "El Estado Argentino ha fracasado en brindar prevención y no se ha hecho cargo de su fracaso. El Estado Argentino ha fracasado en su obligación de impartir justicia y no se ha hecho cargo de su fracaso." Presentación de Memoria Activa ante la Comisión Internacional de Derechos Humanos de la OEA, 4 de Marzo de 2005, can be accessed at <http://www.memoriaactiva.com>.

His findings, which validated much of the public knowledge about the “irregularities” of the investigation circulated by the media and Memoria Activa, helped to precipitate the Argentine government’s acceptance of responsibility.

For some of the main actors in the Argentine human rights community, the Decreto is a document not just for the victims of the AMIA, although this was the cause of its publication. It is a document for the *nation* proclaiming that the Argentine state takes its responsibility toward its citizens seriously. Víctor Abramovich, the director of the well-respected human rights organization CELS, praised the Decreto for its “historical value” and added that the AMIA case made evident the “weakness of Argentina’s democratic institutions.”⁴

Although the Decreto and Kirchner’s words and actions have been criticized as mere gestures, the publishing of the Decreto illustrates a significant shift in attitude and approach of the Argentine government. When Memoria Activa first presented their case to the Commission in 1999, they were treated with harsh, combative words from Menem’s government. This is in contrast to the “solución amistoso,” or friendly negotiation promised by Kirchner’s government in the Decreto. Kirchner’s government ran on a platform of human rights with the slogan “Argentina-un país en serio” (Argentina—a serious country), and as I witnessed on numerous occasions, Kirchner was greatly admired by many in the human rights community. When I arrived in Argentina, the slogan of Kirchner’s government could be seen all over the place, on signs announcing public works, old campaign posters, even in pre-movie advertisements. It was as if repetition would make it a reality.

What is implied by stating that under Kirchner’s leadership, Argentina would become “a serious country?” Kirchner’s campaign was articulating with historically constructed

³Informe Observación del Decano Claudio Grossman Observador Internacional de la CIDH en el Juicio de La Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), 22 de Febrero, 2005.

⁴*Página 12*, (2005)“El estado admitió su culpa,” 13 de Julio, El País, Buenos Aires.

popular feelings of failure—most recently animated by the disastrous economic collapse that reached its peak in 2001. Capturing the middle class’s strong attachment to liberalism, “a serious country” refers to a nation with solid democratic foundations based in part on the protection and solidification of human rights. However, the slogan is also broad enough, with its connotation of responsibility and reliability, to appeal to other sectors of society that don’t necessarily adhere to a liberal understanding of human rights.⁵ “A serious country” is a response to those Argentines who say that “Argentina doesn’t exist” or “This isn’t a country.” It is also referencing stability, and assuring the populace that they can begin to have confidence in their government after the chaotic succession of five presidents in roughly four years that followed the 2001 economic collapse.

By many accounts, the installation of human rights and democracy, officially begun by Raul Alfonsín and human rights activists in 1983, suffered serious setbacks under Menem (Bonner 2007).⁶ The manner in which the investigations of the Israeli embassy and AMIA were handled, and the pardons granted to military officers convicted of human rights violations are two examples of his controversial legacy. Menem’s robust embrace of economic neoliberalism is also blamed by many sectors as precipitating the country’s economic collapse. The privatization of state-owned companies under Menem contributed to a growing number of unemployed workers—many of whom have organized as *piqueteros*. In contrast to Menem and the instability that followed his presidency, Kirchner presented himself as another kind of president.⁷

The national congress under his presidency repealed two of the laws that effectively granted amnesty to the armed forces for their actions during the military dictatorship, the Ley

⁵Thanks to my colleague Karen Faulk for pointing this out.

⁶ However, the erosion of human rights had already begun at the end of Raul Alfonsín’s presidency, as I note in the introduction. Under Menem these trends deepened.

⁷Interestingly, Kirchner, a relatively unknown politician from Patagonia, won the presidential election with only 23% of the popular vote, after Carlos Menem dropped out of the race.

de Punto Final (Full Stop Law) and Ley de Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience), thus making way for the re-opening of human rights cases. In relation to the AMIA bombing, in addition to Kirchner's government willingness to amicably treat with Memoria Activa and the publication of the Decreto, he sat down many times with some of the *familiares* from the group most closely aligned with the AMIA and DAIA, Los Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas—something Menem never did—and made a portion of the secret service files available for the investigation. For the Familiares y Amigos group at least, this willingness to talk was viewed positively.⁸ (The question of why the secret service files concerning the bombing were closed (and still are in part) in the first place is one of the strongest pieces of evidence of a cover-up, and the basis of much of the accusations about the government's unwillingness to investigate the attack. The "secret files" of the AMIA bombing are at the heart of the protests Laura's group APEMIA have issued against the government, and as I've previously noted, she sees little difference between Kirchner's leadership and Menem's: both engage and perpetuate a system of impunity.)

Despite the shift in attitude and acts of goodwill, little has effectively changed on the ground for the surviving victims of the bombing. The case still remains unsolved, and many of the tangible actions promised in the Decreto have yet to be realized. For these reasons, most *familiares* think that Kirchner has done little in concrete terms to further the cause, and protest against what they see as mere gestures. Laura's group APEMIA has issued the harshest critiques of the Decreto, claiming: "In the hands of these people, the proposed actions contribute to a deepening of the cover-up of the attack and not a clear explanation."⁹

⁸To the best of my knowledge, Kirchner only met with members of the Familiares y Amigos group. I believe this is because, in part, these meetings were facilitated by the AMIA and DAIA, which Memoria Activa and APEMIA were estranged from, and also reflect an unwillingness of members of these groups to appear to treat in a relatively cozy manner with the state. Memoria Activa negotiated with the state through the international NGO the Organization of American States, while APEMIA's Laura Ginsberg would not treat in any way with representatives of the state who she saw as criminals.

For APEMIA, the Decreto represents one more manipulation in which the public is deceived into thinking that the state accepts responsibility for their part in the bombing, while in actuality only a few sacrificial victims will be punished.

Nor was the Decreto received with satisfaction by the presidents of the AMIA and DAIA at the time, Jorge Kirszenbaum of the DAIA and Luis Grynwald of the AMIA. Both dismissed the importance of the Decreto. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the leadership of the Jewish community has been loath to pursue the culpability of the state in the bombing. In contrast to the claims of Memoria Activa, APEMIA and some other *familiares*, they view the concentration on the Argentine government's role in the bombing as diverting the focus from the real perpetrators of the attack—most directly, Iranian citizens. The placing of the bombing outside of the frame of the nation explicitly contradicts how Memoria Activa and APEMIA see the attack as intimately caught up in the political machinations of the state, and reinforces APEMIA's assertion that privileging an international cause for the AMIA bombing is part of a wider U.S. and Israel led effort to isolate and demonize particular states.

At the *acto* for the eleventh anniversary of the AMIA bombing hosted by Memoria Activa—which took place roughly a week after the publication of the Decreto—spokesperson Diana Malamud had harsh words for the leadership of the Jewish Argentine community. (This was the same *acto* that Senator Cristina Fernández de Kirchner attended.) Gripping a microphone, Diana shouts a response to Kirszenbaum (who isn't present) and his claim that focusing on the Argentine government was simply a diversion: “He says that we aren't putting our focus where we should. Let it remain clear: Our focus is

⁹“En manos de esta gente, las acciones propuestas contribuyen a profundizar el encubrimiento del atentado y no su esclarecimiento.” APEMIA, “Acto a 11 Años de la Masacre de la AMIA,” www.apemia.blogspot.com, accessed on August 10, 2005.

on the carcel of assassins, accomplices and others engaged in a cover-up.”¹⁰ She goes on to respond to Grynwald’s proposal to “stop blaming previous governments” and says, “ The responsibility is on the governments, their officials and their leadership, that for personal interests are to blame for the reasons why we don’t know the truth.”

The Decreto then, was interpreted in differing ways. And while its significance has decreased as time has passed, at the time of its publication it was perceived as a significant act in many circles beyond the Jewish-Argentine community and the *familiares*. This was most notable with some of the central actors in the human rights movement, as the quote by the director of CELS, above, demonstrates. From the perspective of those invested in furthering the installation of human rights based on liberal traditions in the nation, the admission of culpability by the state has at least initiated an end to the construction of an “official story.”¹¹ The recognition by the state that there was indeed a cover-up and an organized obstruction of justice is seen as an important step toward changing or challenging the “culture of impunity” that many Argentines see as socially and politically endemic. In order to get a perspective on the Decreto from one of the key players in the Argentine human rights community, I met with one of the lawyers from CELS working with Memoria Activa in bringing their case to the OAS.

Buenos Aires, July 30, 2005. To get to my meeting at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, or CELS, I travel by subway and bus from the Buenos Aires’ neighborhoods of Palermo to San Telmo. When I emerge from the subway steps in downtown Buenos Aires, I find myself in the middle of a protest, with people shouting and wearing photos of dead teenagers around their necks. One hundred ninety-four were killed,

¹⁰“Dice que no estamos poniendo el eje donde lo debemos poner. Que quede claro, nuestro eje es cárcel a los asesinos, cómplices y encubridores.... dejar de culpar a los gobiernos anteriores... La culpa es de los gobiernos, de sus funcionarios y de los dirigentes que por intereses personales son culpables de que no se sepa la verdad.” See the full speech at <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/aniversarios.htm>.

¹¹ Although Laura Ginsberg would say that the presentation of the Decreto only appears to arrest an “official story” and is really hoodwinking the public.

mainly adolescents, in a recent fire (December 30, 2004) in a popular nightclub in *Once*. At a New Year's Eve concert in the club, a lit flare proceeded to ignite in flame the highly flammable materials that surrounded the concert-goers. Against city regulations, all but two of the doors were locked from the inside with chains, including fire doors, and most of the victims died from inhalation of a mixture of poisonous gases and smoke. This atrocity renewed accusations of impunity and criticisms of the apparent dysfunctions of city and national government. The protest I find myself witnessing is primarily a demonstration against the then mayor of the city, Aníbal Ibarra, for a failure to enforce public safety laws and the general disorganization of the inspection system. (Ibarra was subsequently impeached, amidst much controversy.) As I wind my way through the crowd, the protesters wave their flyers against "impunidad" and "cover-ups," grainy images of pubescent kids flapping on their chests. The rhetoric is the same used during many of the AMIA *actos*, and I carry these images with me as I continue to San Telmo. In so many ways, the deaths of those in the nightclub and the deaths of the AMIA were linked through a narrative of state corruption and failure—two horrendous examples of what can result in a "culture of impunity."

As the bus steers its way through the congested downtown streets of Buenos Aires, south toward picturesque San Telmo, the view from the window begins to change. Instead of the many business and buildings of downtown and its crush of people navigating the narrow sidewalks, San Telmo is a neighborhood of cobblestone streets with people casually strolling by quaint looking cafés and stores filled with antiques or the products of local artists. I had spent weekends walking the markets of San Telmo, eating tasty *parilla* at sidewalk tables and watching the occasional street-side tango show. A combination of working class and Buenos Aires' bohemian with some touristy kitsch thrown in, I notice some particularly elaborate and beautiful graffiti praising Evita—something that is rare in the middle and upper middle class areas of the city.

I am heading to CELS to meet with Andrea P. who works with Memoria Activa and their case with the OAS. I enter the beautifully restored building and given the reputation that precedes this organization, I feel as if I have come to a very special and authoritative place. CELS is one of the most important centers of the Argentine human rights movement, and the joint work between Memoria Activa and CELS is one illustration of how fully the AMIA case has been adopted by the human rights community. Because human rights are central to most mainstream discussions of democracy in Argentina, the positioning of the bombing within this locally active discourse is a very effective means by which to hold the state responsible for the AMIA bombing and install it as a national and international concern. Importantly, in 2006 the judge now handling the investigation of the AMIA case, Rodolfo Canicoba Corral, in the same statement in which he called for the capture of nine Iranian citizens—including ex-president Rafsanjani—clearly stated that the AMIA bombing was a “crime against humanity.” Understanding the bombing in this way situates the bombing within the heart of human rights tradition and activism as it has developed internationally and in Argentina, and strongly inserts the bombing within the local culture and politics of *impunidad*.

The *porteños* I know often speak of an ingrained “culture of impunity” that permeates both civil society and government. This culture of impunity is seen to greatly contribute to the violation of human rights, social indifference, and weak democratic practice. Both the discourses of human rights and impunity are strongly aligned with the practices of *la memoria* (memory)—a rich site of potential dissent, mourning, and oppositional politics in Argentina, something that has informed the political praxis of Memoria Activa.

Sitting across from Andrea in a non-descript meeting room in CELS, she begins to explain her work and the importance of the Decreto. I ask her what she thinks will be the long-term effects of this document. First she emphasizes to me the significance of the AMIA

case in terms of the dys/functions of the state: “Because for us the AMIA case is above all a paradigmatic case of how the state neglected its function, how the state didn’t fulfill its role, how state institutions put in place to prevent or obstruct impunity didn’t work.”¹² Then she goes on discuss to the importance of the Decreto and its possible ramifications:

I believe that it has important cultural effects. I think that it’s no small thing that the State recognizes this, because this begins to re-write the “official truth.” The “official truth” was marked by the discourse of Galeano, and of Menem and Beraja for so much time, and it [the decreto] begins to change the story, converting it into truth, it seems to me...this has a very important cultural effect. I think that it will result in the re-writing of history. Official truth...this seems to me very interesting...and the promised measures here [in the decreto] will hopefully be achieved because this would have a lot of effect in the long-term. This is what we hope for, to have a long-term effect. That the weight of the tragedy of the AMIA case allows for a before and after. That democracy will be improved and things won’t be the same as before...¹³

Laughter interrupts her last sentence. If from nervousness or from some form of doubt, I’m not sure.

Andrea’s mention of “official truth” has its basis in the struggles of the Argentine human rights community to uncover what happened to Argentine citizens during the “dirty war” and cut through the “official” stories designed to make a society deaf, dumb, and blind. Re-writing the official story is essentially a struggle about knowledge and who controls the archive. Since the end of the military dictatorship in 1983, the human rights community has attempted to wrest the archive from state control and write history from another perspective, turning subversives into victims. A similar process of occlusion has happened with the AMIA bombing, and the Decreto is a sign of, at the very least, an effort at transparency.

¹² Porque para nosotros el caso AMIA es sobretodo un caso paradigmático de cómo el Estado resignó su función, como el Estado no cumplió con su función, de cómo las instituciones que el Estado tenía para evitar que el caso AMIA sucediera o para impedir la impunidad, no funcionaron.

¹³ Yo creo que tiene efectos culturales importantes, yo creo que no es poca cosa que el Estado reconozca esto, porque esto es empezar a escribir la verdad oficial de nuevo. La verdad oficial que durante mucho tiempo estuvo marcada por el discurso de Galeano, y de Menem, de Beraja, y esto empieza a cambiar la historia, esto, esto se convierte en verdad, me parece. Y...y eso tiene un efecto cultural muy importante. Yo creo que tiene el efecto de volver a escribir la historia de nuevo....Verdad oficial, y...y eso me parece muy interesante y ojalá tenga esto, las medidas que se prometen acá sean cumplidas porque eso sí tendría mucho efecto a largo plazo. Eso es lo que buscamos, tener efecto a largo plazo. Que el caso AMIA permita a pesar de la tragedia, permita un antes y un después, no? Que no sea igual que antes y que se mejore la democracia... (Risa).

Notably, Andrea speaks of “cultural effects.” This reflects a position that views the construction of an “official story” and *impunidad* as one of complicity between state and civil society. In other words, it takes a network of politicians, bureaucrats, neighbors, security forces, etc. to make *impunidad* work and to construct an “official story.” It is a community affair, and involves participants at all levels of society. This perspective is historically based—most recently—in the cultural politics of the “dirty war,” where one saw but did not see, heard but did hear, becoming tacit accomplices to terror (and these accomplices were themselves terrorized). The point being that as in the “dirty war” and with the AMIA case, the citizenry allows, and sometimes fosters, a culture of impunity. However, the discourse about impunity in Argentina has much deeper roots than events in the last 30 years. It is a discourse that can be rooted in the “civilization and barbarism” debate from the nineteenth century, and the critique or championing of *caudillismo*. The discourse of *impunidad* is flexible enough that it can be utilized for various ends and from different ideological positions. The charge of *impunidad*, like the discourse on human rights, is claimed and reshaped by actors across the political and class spectrum.

Memoria Activa continues their work with the Commission on Human Rights in the OAS. While those directly responsible for the bombing still elude the courts, the Argentine government has, at least for now, admitted its culpability in relation to the AMIA case, and at present trials are underway to determine degrees of culpability of various former state officials (see below). For the leaders of Memoria Activa, and those seeking greater accountability and responsibility from the government, these actions constitute perhaps a weak promise that the violation of their rights with impunity will abate in the not so distant future.

How did we get here? How did the AMIA bombing become primarily a case against the Argentine state for actors such as Memoria Activa, APEMIA, and other human rights and counter-impunity organizations? In part, this answer must come from a careful historicizing

of the discourses of impunity and human rights, and an analysis of how the relationship between state and civil society developed into a site of intense agonism. While I will not be able to provide such detail here, what I will show are the concrete actions and situations that have turned the AMIA bombing into an emblematic case of impunity and the weaknesses of democracy in Argentina.

Anatomy of a Fracaso Part I: The International Investigation¹⁴

Three months after the attack on the AMIA, President Menem asserts with confidence that the Justice department will clear up the terrorist attack against the AMIA.¹⁵ Ten years later, Memoria Activa is still standing in front of the judicial palace in downtown Buenos Aires—“El Palacio de *Injusticia*,” I was quickly instructed. They speak the words from Deuteronomy, “*Justicia, Justicia, Perseguirás...*” (Justice, Justice, You Shall Seek...) and through their words and actions fight against the perception that the AMIA bombing is a “Jewish problem,” and that justice is *only* a matter of finding the direct authors of the attack. No, from the perspective of Memoria Activa, justice will be achieved when the culture of impunity comes to a halt, when there is a change in a governmental ethos that fosters criminal activity and shelters criminals, when society stops looking the other way, and when all the accomplices and authors of the attack are brought under the gaze of a functioning and authoritative judicial system.

I don't know if anybody thought they would be standing in the *Plaza Lavalle* for ten years, demanding justice. I don't know if anyone felt they would *have* to. At the time of my fieldwork it had been ten years since the AMIA building was blown up, in broad daylight on a street where people live and work. It had been ten years since 85 people were violently killed, and not one of the suspected architects of the crime had been brought to trial.

¹⁴Fracaso means failure. It also has connotations of disaster and ruin.

¹⁵This is reported in the “Crónica de los Noventa Días Siguiendo al Atentado,” published by the DAIA, Centro de Estudios Sociales, 1994.

Meanwhile, more and more evidence was surfacing that implicated high-ranking government officials in a cover-up. Moreover, much about the bombing was still unknown: evidence seemed to appear and disappear, bribes were offered and taken, international and national *realpolitik* seemed to be in the way.

Before any specific accusations of wrong doing by particular individuals could be made, the investigation of the AMIA was seen as seriously compromised. The forensic teams assigned to investigate the case were accused of being unorganized and ill-prepared for an attack of this kind (despite the similar attack two years previous) and even the exact number of dead bodies was unclear for a few years. (There still are doubts about the exact number of dead in both the Israeli embassy and AMIA bombings.) The scene of the bombing was described as chaotic, with hundreds of people climbing over a mountain of rubble to retrieve victims and others waiting in the sidelines to offer assistance. Search and rescue was performed with the help from many different quarters, including Argentine security forces, a team of search and rescue experts from Israel, and average citizens—all leading I imagine to coordination difficulties. The collection and storage of potentially important evidence was seen as disorganized and inefficient, and in some cases it appears that evidence was deliberately lost or destroyed—as Decreto 812 admits.

The investigation, under the guidance of federal judge Juan José Galeano, moved along at a seemingly glacial pace.¹⁶ Shortly after the attack, Galeano detained and questioned various individuals, mostly Argentine nationals. All but one, Carlos Alberto Telledín, accused of selling the van (a Renault Traffic) to the perpetrators, were released after a brief detention. (Telledín was later prosecuted in the “local connection” AMIA trial, described below.) Galeano also investigated the activities of Irani diplomats and ordered the international capture of four of these diplomats who were no longer in Buenos Aires,

¹⁶Today the speed of the AMIA investigation is frequently compared to 9/11, and the bombings in London and Spain, where in a matter of days key suspects were apprehended.

(nothing came of this and Argentina is still seeking their extradition).¹⁷ The investigation thus followed two routes: one centered on international connections to the bombing, the other focused on the so-called local connection. It soon became apparent that the investigation of the *conexión local* was going to proceed more quickly—but ultimately not more successfully—than the international investigation, and there are many possible reasons for this.

On the one hand, there was the recurring opinion that that Argentine agencies and institutions weren't sophisticated or coordinated enough to handle attacks of this magnitude and complexity. In 2005, the U.S. State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Philip C. Wilcox, corroborated this opinion in a hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁸ On the other hand, there seemed to be a conspicuous lack of will. Raul Kollman, a *Página 12* journalist who has closely followed the AMIA case for many years, has written:

The real problem is that the Argentine government was never interested in solving the case. At times, only fifteen to twenty people were assigned to it, while after the Oklahoma City bombing 5,000 law enforcement officials were deployed immediately. The United States sent over 1,500 agents to Africa after the bombing of the embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. These agents interrogated 10,000 witnesses in four days. In Argentina, witnesses are still waiting to be called. And it took over three years to put together a 100-person team of investigators that never functioned properly. [Escudé and Gurevich 2003]

As has already been demonstrated, it is widely felt by *familiares* that on Argentina's part there has been little political motivation to solve the case. Almost immediately, the bombing was hailed as an act of international terrorism, calling forth the various agencies, experts, and nations interested in fighting terrorist acts that appear to stem from groups

¹⁷In 2001 a former Iranian diplomat stationed in Buenos Aires, Hade Soleimanpour, was arrested in London in connection to the AMIA bombing. However, British officials would not extradite him to Argentina because they rejected the evidence provided by Judge Galeano as insufficient. Soleimanpour was later released.

¹⁸See U.S. government document "Terrorism in Latin America/AMIA bombing in Argentina." Can be found at www.state.gov. At the hearing, a representative of the DAIA and one familiar, Luis Czyzewski, presented their case, along with various representatives from U.S. Jewish agencies, to the Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives.

such as Hezbollah or so-called rogue nations such as Iran. Thus the secret service agencies of the U.S., Spain, and Israel were mobilized to contribute to the investigation, and after the fall of the Twin Towers and the attacks at Atocha the focus on the Middle East was intensified. With the power and cooperation of all these nations, why did the investigation falter?

Weaving its way through all this is the specter of corruption. “Corruption” while not used in the same manner as institutions such as the IMF might use it, is a common critique of the state expressed by Argentine citizens. The charge of corruption often goes hand-in-hand with accusations of *impunidad*. By embracing and rearticulating this all too easily made assumption about political culture in Latin America, Argentines from across the political spectrum are able to harness the power of this label to demand change. This change is often rooted in strengthening responsibility and accountability between and among state and society, and is not necessarily aligned with the interests of international lenders or the United States government. At first this lack of will—most directly associated with the government of Carlos Menem—was thought to be due to political and economic agreements made between Menem and other governments, and the belief that a thorough investigation would reveal networks of corruption in which particular government officials could be caught. Moreover, it was speculated that a careful inquiry into how and why an attack of this magnitude happened a second time in Buenos Aires could implicate too many individuals and agencies, and expose not only possible corruption, but widespread incompetence.¹⁹

The minute twists and turns of the international investigation have been documented elsewhere, and here I will only relate some of the main trends and complications.²⁰ Initially,

¹⁹This was often related to me as popular knowledge, but Escudé and Gurevich (2003) note this as well.

²⁰For detail on this up until 2003 see, for example, Escudé and Gurevich (2003). Joe Goldman and Jorge Lanata’s book, *Cortinas de Humo*, also gives some details about the initial enquiries about the bombing. More

the international investigation was mainly focused on Hezbollah and Iran, with possible Syrian support. The “Syrian connection” was later downplayed, somewhat suspiciously. In part, this has been attributed to Menem’s connections with and promises made to Syria. Menem had received financial support for his presidential campaign from Syria, and had later made promises to Assad of nuclear technology and a partnership in a ballistic missile project. As world geopolitics shifted after the U.S. invasion on Iraq, however, Menem broke his promises and positioned himself more firmly with the U.S. and Israel. A further investigation of the “Syrian connection” was seen to be a potential source of embarrassment for Menem, given his previous dealing with Assad.²¹ Israel has also been suspected of dragging its feet with the finding and prosecution of suspected perpetrators, particularly the “Syrian connection.”²² This was thought to be due to tentative steps taken to include Syria in the peace processes under way at the time.²³

There was also the mysterious case of Alberto Jacinto Kanoore Edul, an Argentine of Syrian descent who was initially wanted for investigation for the attack, but essentially fell from the radar after his father was seen visiting the Casa Rosada (presidential palace) a few days after the bombing.²⁴ A raid on his house was subsequently cut off and the investigation of him essentially diverted toward other suspects. Since his visit to the

recently, the Informe published by Claudio Grossman about Federal Oral Trial #3 (colloquially known as the AMIA trial, or local connection trial) in 2005 has some details about the international investigation, as does a 2006, 800-page report written by prosecuting lawyer for the AMIA case, Alberto Nisman.

²¹It is well known that Menem is of Syrian descent, and this often appears as subtext to his connections with Syria.

²²With both the AMIA and Israeli embassy bombings there is a popular and official sense that the perpetrators are known and that if the Argentine government, along with Israel and the United States wanted them to found and brought to trial it would have happened. This may be a piece of wild speculation, but it seems to me that if this is true all three governments have decided either tacitly or more overtly to “punish” those thought responsible (Iran and Hezbollah, perhaps Syria) by other means.

²³Escudé and Gurevich (2003).

²⁴The Argentine press often refers to Kanoore Edul as “la pista Siria”, meaning the Syrian clue or track. It is not clear if this is merely a reference to his country of origin, or if it is thought that he had connections to the Syrian government that might implicate them in the bombing. If it is the former, it appears to be an example of how certain groups continue to be defined by their country of origin, rather than as “Argentines.”

presidential palace his whereabouts have remained unknown. The apparent disappearance of Kanoore Edul from Argentina and from the investigation would come back to haunt Menem and other government officials.

For all intents and purposes, in the initial years of the investigation Syria appeared to be dropped in connection to either the Israeli embassy or AMIA bombings. As Escudé and Gurevich iterate, “The generalized perception of senior Argentine Foreign Ministry sources was that Syria had been an important co-sponsor of both the 1992 and 1994 bombings, but that it was in no one’s interest to bring this out, excepting the victims’ families...” (2003: 5-6). Except for recently in relation to Kanoore Edul, the “Syrian connection” has effectively faded from the investigation. Whether this is because intelligence information has cleared Syria from any direct involvement, or due to other reasons, remains unclear.

What was increasingly becoming apparent to certain actors, however, was that the Argentine government appeared to be deliberately directing the investigation in particular ways. Important evidence was deemed “lost.” Information about how the federal judge in charge of the investigation, Juan José Galeano, was handling the case cast deep suspicion on his impartiality. Popular knowledge held that there was too much at stake, politically and economically, to allow the AMIA bombing to be fully investigated. As Alejandro Rúa, former director of the Ministry of Justice’s Special Investigative Unit for the AMIA bombing stated upon his leave of office in February 2006: “There was a false hypothesis driven by the intelligence (SIDE), the police and the ministry of justice, with the backing of a large part of the leadership of the Jewish community, that at that time was almost impossible to put in doubt...”²⁵

²⁵“Había una hipótesis falsa impulsada por Inteligencia, las policías, la Justicia—con el respaldo de gran parte de la dirigencia comunitaria judía—que en aquel entonces era casi imposible de poner en duda...” *La Nación* (2006) “Entrevista con Alejandro Rúa: ‘Cayó el impulso en la causa AMIA,’” 26 de Febrero, Enfoques, electronic edition, accessed on February 26, 2006.

Over the years, suggestive, but not conclusive, details have emerged about the AMIA case. In the late 1990s, national and international media reported that more than a week before the bombing, a Brazilian man calling himself Wilson Dos Santos tipped the Argentine consulate in Milan that another Jewish target in Buenos Aires was to be bombed.²⁶ A curious figure with supposed connection to an Iranian “terrorist cell” that claimed to be responsible for the Israeli Embassy bombing, Dos Santos also provided information to the Buenos Aires’ police and Argentine officials in Rome after the bombing. The information was never forwarded to Jewish institutions in Argentina and only passed on to higher national authorities after the attack.²⁷ Strangely, Dos Santos denied his knowledge of the bombing during later investigations in Argentina and was charged with perjury and jailed, but was conditionally released after a week.²⁸

In 2001, it became public that an Iranian intelligence official known as witness “C” had confirmed that Hezbollah and Iran were involved in the Argentine bombings.²⁹ In his testimony he implicated the cultural attaché to the Iranian Embassy at the time, Moshen Rabbani, as well as another senior Iranian intelligence official. Witness “C” also stated that former president Menem had accepted a large sum of money from Iran, with the suspicion that this was hush money. However, a couple of years later, witness “C” recanted and said that Iran had never given money to Menem’s government.³⁰ The alleged payment to Menem has not been confirmed, and this suspicion is not part of the charges currently held

²⁶Rotella, Sebastian (1999) “Deadly Blasts and an Itinerant’s Tale.” *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, electronic edition, accessed on August 4, 2004.

²⁷Gurevich, Beatrice (2005: 3).

²⁸Rotella (1999); see also Escudé and Gurevich (2003).

²⁹Apparently, Witness “C” and his claims were known by investigators but not the public. See *Clarín* (2001) “Quieren que vuelva a declarar un iraní que habló del menemismo,” 17 de Junio, Buenos Aires; *Clarín* (2002) “El Testigo ‘C’: Un Viejo conocido para los investigadores del caso,” 23 de Julio, Buenos Aires; Rohter, Larry (2002) “Iran blew up Jewish Center in Argentina, defector says” *New York Times*, June 22, electronic edition, accessed on October 15, 2008.

³⁰Gerardo Young (2003) “El testigo C ahora dice que Irán nunca le pagó al menemismo”, *Clarín*, 12 de Enero.

against him. It does, however, add to the intrigues of the investigation and the distrust many have of Menem's political dealings.

In September of 2002 the suicide bomber who is believed to have carried out the AMIA attack was identified by Argentine intelligence and the FBI as Ibrahim Hussein Berro, a member of Hezbollah. Family members of Berro deny his involvement in the attack, as does Hezbollah.³¹

As I have demonstrated above, the investigation of the international connection to the AMIA bombing has not been a straight-forward process of finding and bringing to trial suspected perpetrators. Witnesses come forward and then later recant their testimony. Iran refuses to cooperate with the investigation. APEMIA's claims that the investigation is being directed toward particular international targets with U.S. and Israeli backing, casts further suspicion on an already severely compromised investigation. While a case of this complexity can never be entirely straight forward or easy, the AMIA case is marked by serious questions about the investigators themselves. For every step forward, something happens or is revealed that effectively takes the case two steps back. Carlos S., who lost his daughter in the bombing of the Israeli embassy, has described the two bombings as part of a wide-ranging and complicated (*una envergadura muy grande*) network or politics and politicians that "imply a large sphere of suspicious negotiations that have, let's say, international protection, other countries mixed up with Argentine politics and politicians..."³²

The troubled international aspect of the bombing is further complicated by the failure of the only AMIA trial to date, Federal Oral Trial #3 or the popularly called "local connection" trial. This is trial in which Baruj Z. talked about the lack of justice in Argentina. In the

³¹*La Nación* (2002) "Identifican al conductor del coche bomba" 28 de Septiembre, Información General, Buenos Aires.

³²"...implica un gran globo de negociaciones raras que tiene digamos una proyección internacional, mezcla países con la política argentina, con los políticos argentinos..." Interview with Carlos S. on October 22, 2004.

collapse of this historic trial, evidence of a deliberate obstruction of justice becomes even more lucid.

Anatomy of a Fracaso, Part II: Federal Oral Trial #3

It is September 2nd of 2004, and I am visiting the Northwest of Argentina with other North American researchers living in and around Buenos Aires. Through the generosity of our granting institution we are spending a week in the Northwest of Argentina—an area of the country significantly different in culture and landscape than the city of Buenos Aires and the Pampas.³³ I'm in Salta, the medium-sized capital of Salta province. This city feels more like a typical Spanish colonial city than Buenos Aires, whose French-style architecture and expansiveness overwhelms the vestiges of the colonial Spanish vernacular. Sitting around a long table eating dinner at a simple but comfortable small downtown hotel, we are just getting into our salads when a local anthropologist serving as our guide and companion to the area rushes into the room and relates the outcome of the nearly 3-year AMIA trial of the “local connection”: all those on trial were to be acquitted, based on insufficient evidence and what were referred to as “irregularities” (*irregularidades*) that had invalidated much of the proceedings. After three years, the defendants of the trial are deemed neither innocent nor guilty. Moreover, the judges' verdict includes an accusation of wrongdoing on the part of the investigators of the case. Immediately I feel sick and anxious, and I want to leave the table, go lie down, write. I also feel impatient to get back to Buenos Aires. But I don't move, and sit there in numbed silence, absent-mindedly chewing my lettuce. The other Argentines present are equally awe-struck by the news, calling it a “disgrace” and evidence of *impunidad*. I've been following the trial, mostly through the analysis and reactions to it from members of Memoria Activa and different *familiares*. At this moment, I wish to be in Buenos

³³The trip was organized and paid for by Fulbright (U.S. Dept. of Education), and included both Hays and IIE grantees.

Aires, I wish to be in the courtroom awaiting the judge's verdict and not thousands of miles away, my attention diverted for a while, my time spent in educational leisure.

When I return to Buenos Aires a few days later, I find out that some *familiares* and members of Memoria Activa did not attend the reading of the verdict. The outcome had been predicted, particularly by members of Memoria Activa, and it was thought to be too painful to watch in person. In a phone conversation, Sofía expressed how the acquittal of the five accused was like “starting over again,” how difficult it was to feel as if she and the other *familiares* were, after ten years, at “point zero.” (The acquittal of the accused in the AMIA case was not a clear verdict of innocence. It was more an acknowledgement that the defendants could not be fairly judged.)

Buenos Aires, September 6, 2004. When I arrive at the Memoria Activa *acto* in the Plaza Lavalle the Monday after the verdict, the gathering crowd is more excited than usual. The weather is pleasant, easing into spring after the dreary and cold winter. Everyone is standing around in small groups discussing the *fallo* (verdict). The leadership of Memoria Activa, while unhappy that the trial is essentially a failure, is in agreement with the verdict. In significant ways, the verdict confirmed what Memoria Activa has been saying for many years; that Galeano, the lawyers appointed to help with the investigation, and various governmental officials all the way to the highest levels have been engaged in an elaborate cover-up. Memoria Activa considers the whole trial “*armado*,” (basically falsely constructed) and therefore any “truth” that could be found in a conviction is fundamentally troubled. Their position toward the verdict is contra to both APEMIA and Familiares y Amigos de la Víctimas and the AMIA and DAIA.³⁴ While APEMIA and Familiares y Amigos are in agreement with the Supreme Court judges confirmation that the actions of Galeano and other government

³⁴For a detailed breakdown of the different responses and how they agree and disagree, see Kollmann, Raul (2004) “Un fallo judicial que divide las aguas” in *Página/12*, 9 de Septiembre, El País, Buenos Aires. Also see Kollmann, Raul (2004) “Menos Memoria Activa, todos convocan a la marcha” in *Página/12*, 8 de Septiembre, El País, Buenos Aires.

officials demand investigation, all but Memoria Activa believe that there was enough evidence to at least convict Telleldín. The leadership of the AMIA and DAIA at the time not only wanted a conviction, but remained supportive of Galeano. For the majority of the trial, Familiares y Amigos did not overtly critique Galeano, but towards the end, they too began to negatively view the Judge.

Immediately after the verdict was announced, APEMIA held a rally at the busy intersection of Pasteur and Corrientes in which they announced that the verdict of the trial was a further example of *impunidad*. Although here *impunidad* is primarily referring to the release of the defendants without charges. At this moment, individuals normally at odds became joined by the rejection of the outcome of the AMIA trial, and some *familiares* from Familiares y Amigos attended APEMIA's rally, and APEMIA attended the convocation called by Familiares y Amigos along with the AMIA and DAIA a few days later. As in 1994 after the AMIA was bombed, they decided to have a march in Plaza de los Congresos under the banner "85 muertos no son nada para la justicia argentina" (85 deaths are nothing to Argentine justice). The AMIA and DAIA wanted it held on Pasteur street in front of the AMIA building, but the spokesperson for the Family and Friends group, Luis Czyzewski, argued that it had to be in front of the buildings of congress, "to treat the convocation as something not just for the Jewish community, but for the whole society, like it was in '94."³⁵ But in the plaza in front of the judicial palace, Diana Melamud of Memoria Activa announces that they won't attend. They refuse to attend an event that is held with the support of the DAIA:

Those who claim to be the political representation of the Jewish community, led by the ex-lawyer of Banco Mayo, Jorge Kirzenbaum, have the gall to call for a march that has nothing to do with the search for truth and justice, but instead will be used to cover up and escape unscathed from the responsibilities that they have...

³⁵ "...se trata de una convocatoria no sólo a la comunidad judía sino a toda la sociedad como fue aquella del '94." Kollmann, Raul (2004) "Menos Memoria Activa, todos convocan a la marcha."

To be against the acquittals is to support all the illegal actions of Galeano. In fact, two weeks ago the DAIA through their lawyer Nercellas...declared in favor of Galeano before the Consejo de la Magistratura.³⁶

The decision taken by the leadership of Memoria Activa to avoid the central march in the Plaza de los Congresos was not only a source of controversy within the Jewish Argentine community, but within Memoria Activa itself. After the Monday morning act, I'm having a *lagrimea* with some members of Memoria Activa in a popular pizza restaurant on Corrientes. There is indignation that the decision to boycott the community-wide convocation was made without input from all the members of Memoria Activa. This is a common feeling among the members of Memoria Activa who regularly meet at this restaurant. While many members of Memoria Activa envision the group as a horizontally-run grassroots social movement, in practice significant decisions are made by a small group of individuals. Others aren't angry with how the decision was made by Memoria Activa, but aren't in agreement with the decision and plan to attend anyway.

It was not just family members of the victims and their supporters for whom the verdict was painful. A press release from CELS shortly after the verdict argues this case by stating that, "The verdict of the trial reveals the machinations of impunity" and "At ten years the challenge continues to be for truth and justice and the need for deep restructuring of democratic institutions."³⁷ I return to the various reactions toward the verdict below. Now I turn to some details about Federal Oral Trial #3 (or TOF for short), and illustrate how it fits into the AMIA case as a whole.

³⁶"Los que se atribuyen la representación política de la comunidad judía, encabezada por el ex abogado del Banco Mayo, Jorge Kirzerbaum, tienen la vergonzosa actitud de convocar a una marcha, que nada tiene que ver con la búsqueda de la verdad y la justicia, sino que será utilizada para tapar y buscar salir indemnes de las responsabilidades que les caben.... Estar en contra de la nulidad de toda la causa brigadas es avalar todo el accionar ilegal de Galeano. De hecho hace dos semanas la DAIA a través de su abogada Nercellas concurrió a declarar a favor de Galeano ante el Consejo de la Magistratura."

³⁷"El fallo del tribunal reveló la trama de impunidad" and "A diez años, el desafío sigue siendo la verdad y la justicia y las reformas profundas de las instituciones democráticas." Comunicado, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales/CELS, Atentado de la AMIA, 7 de Septiembre de 2004.

In length, topic, and unfortunately, in its failure, this trial is one of the most historic trials in Argentine history. As I mentioned previously, the AMIA case has split into two distinct investigations, the international and the local. Federal Oral Trial #3 concerns the “local connection” and focuses on the alleged roles Argentine citizens had in the bombing, primarily as accessories to the crime. The trial began in 2001 and came to its end, but not conclusion, in 2004. It remains the only trial concerning either the Israeli Embassy bombing or the AMIA bombing.

It is significant to note that the prosecution was undertaken by two separate prosecuting parties. One group consisted of the AMIA, DAIA and the group Los Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas (Family and Friends of the Victims, who represented the majority of the victims), and the other was Memoria Activa.³⁸ This is one of the clearest examples of the independence of Memoria Activa from the leadership of the Jewish community and other *familiares*. Because they had a different vision of how the case should proceed, and political differences with the representatives of the AMIA and DAIA, Memoria Activa chose to have their own lawyer and give independent testimony. A key point of difference between Memoria Activa and the other plaintiffs has been their severe critique of judge Galeano. Members of Memoria Activa were also suspicious of the lawyers representing the AMIA, DAIA and the Los Familiares y Amigos, considering them a part of the same forces that would seek to derail the AMIA investigation.

The whole trial was primarily centered upon this one piece of evidence: the charred engine of a Renault Traffic (a van). Twenty-two Argentine citizens were accused of being involved in the preparation and transfer of the van to those who would carry out the attack, but due to insufficient evidence and the statute of limitations, only five of them came to trial. These five included one previously prosecuted reconitioner of stolen cars (which he would

³⁸According to one of the members of Memoria Activa, originally it was hoped to have four prosecuting parties: AMIA, DAIA, Familiares y Amigos, and Memoria Activa. But it turned out they were limited by law to two, so the first three organizations united, and Memoria Activa remained independent.

then resell) named Carlos Telleldín, and Juan José Ribelli, a high-ranking police officer of Buenos Aires province.³⁹ Telleldín had been detained as a suspect ten days after the attack. He was identified as the last known person to have had the Renault Traffic that supposedly contained the deadly explosives. In the story of how these five individuals—four former police officers and Telleldín—came to be under trial as accomplices to the AMIA bombing, we begin to see how the investigation and trial was marked by “irregularities”—ultimately leading to the acquittal of all five men charged.

In his initial statements Telleldín reported that he sold the van to a man named Ramón Martínez. However, two years later, in 1996, Telleldín changed his story. In this new version of events, Telleldín implicated the police of the province of Buenos Aires, known as *los bonaerense*. Telleldín was engaged in illegal car trafficking, and claimed to be subject to extortion by the provincial police. In exchange for payment of cars or money, Telleldín could continue his “business,” and the police would look the other way. Telleldín asserted that the Renault van was one such payment, and implicated the police officers that were subsequently were accused, and a few were brought to trial. This statement, while not exonerating Telleldín, cast deep suspicion on members of the provincial police: How were the police implicated in the delivery of the van to those planning a terrorist attack? Did they know about the plan to bomb the AMIA?

It is important to note that in Buenos Aires and Buenos Aires province, police involvement in something like the AMIA bombing can be made plausible without much difficulty. Some members of Memoria Activa as well as other *porteños* I spoke with emphasized that there are certain elements of the security forces (including the local and provincial police of Buenos Aires) that are corrupt and dangerous. This distrust of the police is not just a rumor or suspicion, but is based in part on a long history in which the police and

³⁹ The three other accused were former police officers. The provincial police force is known as *Policía Bonaerense*, and they do not serve in the city of Buenos Aires (which is served by the Federal police), but the province of Buenos Aires.

military have acted independently to pursue their own ends (or the ends they have deemed “good” for society), and have often gone unpunished for their actions. The security forces, both police and military, have long operated with great autonomy from other state actors, and the military with the cooperation of certain sectors of the police, has at various times in Argentine history opposed and taken over the government, effectively becoming part of the central leadership of the state—the *junta* in 1976 being the most recent example of this. The police have been suspected of involvement not only in the AMIA bombing, but also in kidnappings and assassinations.⁴⁰ In 2004, the disappearance and death of Axel Blumberg, a 23 year-old student, captured the headlines for many weeks. Blumberg’s death was part of a wave of extortion-based kidnappings in which the provincial police force had been strongly implicated. More recently, with the 2006 re-opening of human rights trials dealing with the 1976-1983 dictatorship, threats were made against court officials, and a man who was tortured during the dictatorship who provided testimony that helped to convict a police commissioner, disappeared.⁴¹ However, while some *porteños* view the actions of some sectors of the police as a source of terror sanctioned by impunity, others view them as protectors of certain political or ideological views.

Thus, seeing members of the provincial police on trial for the AMIA bombing was not a great surprise. Indeed, there were many rumors circulating about how the provincial and city police at least knew that the AMIA was going to be bombed. One of the most common instances of this concerns the apparently conspicuous absence of police officers in the area of the AMIA building on the morning of July 18, 1994. (In Buenos Aires it is common police practice for there to be a stationed police officer at street corners scattered throughout the

⁴⁰Based on information that Telledín was paid to implicate the police, there are many members of Memoria Activa who now think the police had little if any connection to the bombing. This is another reason why they didn’t have as many issues with the verdict of the trial as the other *familiares* groups.

⁴¹See Goñi, Uki (2006) “Terror Tactics Return to Argentina”, in *The Guardian*, October 5, electronic edition, accessed on October 5, 2006 and *Clarín* (2006) “A veinte días de la desaparición, ninguna pista conduce a Lopéz,” 8 de Octubre, electronic edition, accessed on October 8, 2006.

city.) However, evidence began to surface that placed doubt on Telleldín's testimony and the impartiality of the Judge Galeano. Most damning was a videotape presented in 1997 by one of the accused, Juan José Ribelli, in which Galeano appears having an informal discussion with Telleldín about the case. In this video, parts of which were aired on national television, Telleldín was offered a significant amount of money (later confirmed to be 400,000 dollars) in a manner that strongly suggested that he was being asked to direct the investigation in a specific way. It later emerged that the money was obtained, at the request of Galeano, through negotiations with the ex-head of the Argentine secret service agency (SIDE), Hugo Anzorreguy, and ex-secretary of the interior, Carlos Corach. This transaction between Galeano and Telleldín, with the apparent participation of other government officials, effectively called into question the investigation of the police, and undermined the foundations of the whole case. As is telling from the appearance of the videotape, and his admission in 2001 that he had destroyed videotapes that contained evidence potentially useful to the investigation, Galeano's conduct in the investigation was "irregular" from the beginning.⁴² After this revelation, the lawyers of Memoria Activa pressed charges against Galeano and the judge went under investigation, *but still remained on the case* as it went to trial.⁴³ The trial continued despite the growing clamor of its illegitimacy (from Memoria Activa and others), allegations which Galeano and his supporters denied.

In late 2003, the case was finally taken from Galeano's hands and reviewed by three Supreme Court judges who would decide on a verdict.⁴⁴ It was these judges who

⁴²See Kollman, Raúl (2001) "Galeano admitió que destruyó los videos que había mandado filmar" in *Página/12*, 20 de Septiembre, electronic edition, accessed on January 25, 2004. See also Claudio A. Lifschitz (2002) *AMIA, porque se hizo fallar la investigación*. Buenos Aires: Departamento Editorial, 2000, pp. 10-11.

⁴³Under Argentine judicial procedure, the judge is essentially in charge of the investigation with the lawyers presenting their evidence to him or her. It is the judge who also determines the verdict. Thus Galeano was well positioned to manipulate the case.

⁴⁴ The 3 judges are Guillermo Andrés Gordo, Gerardo Felipe Larrambeberé, and Miguel Ángel Pons. Argentine Judicial procedure has a two-tier system of judges. Judges in the first tier, such as Judge Galeano, investigate

determined the final ruling of acquittal. What is baffling to myself, and many others following the case, is given the evidence mounting against him, how was Galeano able to remain the principal investigator of the AMIA bombing as long as he did? When I've inquired about this, the usual answer consisted of a rueful shrug and the mention of *la impunidad*.

On September 3, 2004, federal Judges Gordo, Larrambebere and Pons issued their infamous verdict on Federal Oral Trial #3. While the five under trial were not technically found innocent of the crimes charged to them, they were absolved. And as I've already shown, responses to the acquittal of Telleldín, Ribelli, and the three other provincial police officers were varied. Included in the verdict was a request for a criminal investigation of the former judge in charge of the case, Juan José Galeano, the lawyers working with him, and other officials, including the ex-president of the SIDE and the former secretary of the interior. Ex-president of the DAIA, Rubén Beraja was also named. In response to reasoning expressed by the judges for the acquittal and the request of an investigation of Galeano, et al, the president of the DAIA remarked without approbation, "The trial that should have been against the accused ended up being against the judge, the lawyers, as far as the leaders of the Jewish community."⁴⁵

The Downfall of Federal Judge Juan José Galeano

A communiqué presented by Memoria Activa at one of their Monday morning *actos* sums up, in their opinion, one of the most important achievements of the verdict. Following the summary provided by the verdict of the judges, the communiqué states: "It [the verdict] established the roots of numerous proven irregularities, that the Sr. Judge Instructor [Galeano] guided his behavior toward constructing an incriminating hypothesis, pretending

cases along with the help of district attorneys. When they have amassed enough evidence, the case is sent to trial to be reviewed and tried by three second-tier judges.

⁴⁵"El juicio que debía ser contra los imputados terminó siendo contra el juez, los fiscales y hasta los dirigentes de la comunidad judía." see Kollmann, Raul (2004)"Un fallo judicial que divide las aguas."

to look after ...the logical demands of society, at the same time satisfying obscure interests of unscrupulous leaders (Memoria Activa a la Opinión Publica).”⁴⁶

Once in charge of one of the most historic and complicated investigations and trials in the nation’s history, Galeano’s once promising career ended in infamy and disgrace. As the results of the verdict (the full reasoning of which was published in October of 2004) clearly called into question the impartiality of judge Galeano, procedures were finally being taken by the state that could lead to the destitution of Galeano, and perhaps later, his prosecution in a criminal court. In the Argentine summer of 2004, the Accusation Committee of the Consejo de Magistratura (Magisterial Council, an entity that oversees the selection of judges and supervises their performance) began a round of hearings in which Galeano’s fate as a judge would be decided. In essence, this committee would have the power to recommend—or not—to the general Consejo that Galeano be subject to a political trial. Despite the real steps being taken to evaluate Galeano’s conduct, there were many doubts that Galeano would actually suffer any serious repercussions from the AMIA affair. And indeed, it was a tense few months for all interested parties. It wasn’t clear that all members of the Accusatory Committee would vote in favor of a political trial—there was at least one member on the committee who clearly supported him. Moreover, the hearings seemed to unfold erratically, in fits and starts: one week there wouldn’t be a quorum, the next week Galeano would be scheduled to present his defense but would never show up, asking for more time to read the fundamentals of the AMIA verdict, finally a member of the committee requested that the vote be put off until after the summer recess, putting in jeopardy the whole process, as there was a specific date by which a decision had to be made. Laura and another member of APEMIA expressed their doubt that anything would happen to Galeano.

⁴⁶“Se pudo establecer, a raíz de las numerosas irregularidades comprobadas, que el Sr. Juez Instructor orientó su actuación a “construir” una hipótesis incriminatoria, pretendiendo atender... las lógicas demandas de la sociedad, a la vez que satisfacer oscuros intereses de gobernantes inescrupulosos.” Memoria Activa, Lunes 6 de Septiembre de 2004.

According to them, if Telleldín wasn't found guilty, Galeano wouldn't be either.⁴⁷ (Laura and this other individual asserted that rather than risk a political trial Galeano would give up his post voluntarily and the government would accept this; the implication being that the government wouldn't gain anything by a further inquiry into Galeano's wrongdoings. Galeano did try to give up his post, but ultimately was blocked by President Kirchner.) Members of Memoria Activa had high hopes that Galeano would be disrobed, but had little faith in the Argentine judicial system. The DAIA continued in their actions and statements to stand by Galeano. We would all have to wait and see how it would unfold.

Buenos Aires, December 7, 2004. Tribunales Palace, meeting of the Accusation Committee of the Consejo de Magistratura. It is a hot summer morning as I make my way from my apartment in Palermo to the Tribunales building. I wasn't sure what to expect. Having spent many months standing in front of the building with Memoria Activa, I had never actually been inside of it. It is an imposing structure, made of large blocks and fronted by an impressive series of stairs. Barricades are positioned around the front, bottlenecking access to the building—too many protests, I suppose (these barricades are common in front of government buildings in Buenos Aires). Challenging the authority of the architecture and the proceedings within it, however, are small acts of defiance; words like *impunidad* and the word *justicia* with a slash through it act like cracks in the facade. I walk up the steps and a feeling of menace comes over me; I have, after so many months of talking with people who feel betrayed by Argentine justice, come to embody a feeling of suspicion.

Inside, the building is chaotic and disorienting. It is bizarrely maze-like. I get to the room where the meeting is to be held and am immediately hit with the smell of cigarette smoke; numerous people in the room have lit cigarettes, even though I notice a no-smoking sign on the wall. The room is fairly dark, hazy with drifting smoke. Around a huge, dark wood table sit members of the committee. Hanging on a wall is a large crucifix. Over by the

⁴⁷“¿Pero alguien cree que Galeano va a ir preso?, no fue preso Telleldín va a ir preso Galeano?”

wall, near the door is a long bench, and I walk over to where the members of Memoria Activa are sitting, along with a few *familiares* from the Los Familiares y Amigos group. Absent are representatives from the leadership of the Jewish Argentine community and APEMIA.

The proceedings seem to me an unexpected mix of formality and informality. Galeano, after postponing three times, finally presented his defense in November. All that is needed now is a vote. As the members of the committee discuss the matter, people are walking in and out the room, smoking cigarettes at the table and talking on their cell phones. It soon becomes clear that not everyone on the committee has shown up today, which effectively works to delay the process—no vote today. I can barely hear what is being said, but it seems that a long time is spent arguing when the next meeting will be, and accusations of deliberately causing delays shoot across the table. As the proceedings continue, a man dressed in black pants and a white shirt rushes around bringing water and coffee to the members. Some committee members admit they have not read, or have only skimmed, the report prepared for the session. This is not looked favorably upon, and tensions are high around the large table. As we watch this admittedly painful process unfold, a member from Memoria Activa whispers in my ear, “Do you see why justice is so slow here?” Another individual, rage barely suppressed, turns to me and says, “Do you see the culture of impunity that is here? This is it.” His comment refers to the apparent unpreparedness of members of the Consejo, and what he sees as obvious moves to delay the vote.

This committee met for a series of meetings from November 2004 to February 2005. Members of Memoria Activa, other *familiares*, journalists and researchers like myself came and sat along the hard benches, straining our ears to hear what the committee members were discussing. Often what was said elicited groans and dismissive gestures from the people sitting around me. Finally on February 2, 2005, the Accusatory Commission came to

a vote. Despite all the delays, and the presence on the committee of individuals sympathetic to Galeano, the commission voted to recommend that Galeano be subjected to a political trial for his conduct in the investigation of the attack on the AMIA.⁴⁸ The general Consejo, having approved this recommendation a week later, began to prepare for the political trial of Juan José Galeano. In the meantime, Galeano was still a practicing judge. The political trial began in June 2005 and ended on August 3 of that same year. The tribunal was presided over by Supreme Court Judge Augusto Belluscio, and consisted of nine jury members.⁴⁹

Buenos Aires, August 3, 2005. From where I am sitting, I can see the courtroom clearly. Galeano appears to be absent, on this, his day of judgment.⁵⁰ The room is filled nearly to capacity, and I am sandwiched between my friend, another North American anthropologist, and a friend from Memoria Activa. Laura from APEMIA sits behind me, and scattered throughout the room are various *familiares*, members from the AMIA's ministry of justice and past president of the AMIA Abraham Kaul, a well-known Rabbi involved in human rights, and various other individuals from the Jewish Argentine community who are following the case. Present, also, are ex-police members who were previously accused in the AMIA trial, including Juan José Ribelli. Conspicuously absent are any representatives of the DAIA, and of course, the accused himself. It is a rather unlikely congregation of people, and the tension in the room is as much a result of the impending verdict, as rivals—and one could even say enemies—sitting shoulder to shoulder in a packed room. It is an impressive

⁴⁸See Fernández Moores, Lucio (2005) "Galeano quedó más cerca del juicio político por la causa AMIA" in *Clarín*, 2 de Febrero, electronic edition, accessed on February 3, 2005.

⁴⁹For more detail about the trial and the verdict, see Hauser, Irina (2005) "El juez actuó fuera de todo cauce legítimo" in *Página/12*, 4 de Agosto, *El País*, electronic edition, accessed on August 4, 2005.

⁵⁰At the July 14th session (the penultimate session before the verdict) I witnessed Galeano's lawyer present his case in front of the jury. Sitting next to him, Galeano engaged in the seemingly incongruous gesture of comforting his lawyer, who was gesticulating and speaking so forcefully on behalf of his client that his papers flew about and sweat ran down his face. Galeano patted his back and said something to the effect of, "it's alright." To this, a member of Memoria Activa remarked, "this is theater."

turnout, and the place is abuzz with representatives from various media outlets. Unlike the hearings conducted by the Accusatory Committee, the room and the proceedings have a decidedly more formal and impressive feeling. Security is tight, and I have waited in a long line to show a picture I.D. in exchange for entry. The courtroom, with its dim lighting and walls paneled with dark wood, one wall is graced with an incredible piece of stained glass (two hands clasped with a sun over them), looks somewhat familiar. Later I find out that the courtroom is the same one used in the historic trial of top military officials from the last dictatorship. Sitting here, surrounded by so many people who have invested so much in the process, I can feel the momentousness of the occasion. And indeed, after the jury finally delivers its verdict announcing that judge Galeano was to be *destituido* and cease to be a judge, the room seems to become quiet and loud all at once, and it is clear that for so many this act is representative of something much bigger than the AMIA case and a rogue judge.⁵¹ For many, it spoke perhaps to a tiny crack in the structures of impunity and corruption that many of the *porteños* I know view as part of daily life. For others, it was perhaps an example of justice ill-placed, or not just at all. As one person remarks to me as we walk out of the courtroom into the flashing lights of the media, “this is a historic day for Argentina.” And I think this is true no matter how one views the situation.

Galeano no longer serves as a federal judge of Argentina. But for members of Memoria Activa, along with many *familiares*, this is but one achievement in a much larger struggle. As Laura Ginsberg would respond, the punishment of Galeano must not serve as a sacrificial lamb onto which all other sins can be absolved.⁵² The actions of former judge Galeano are a part of a network of *encubrimiento*, that many believe leads right to the top of

⁵¹The decision to remove Galeano as a federal judge was based on three of the most serious accusations he faced. These three are 1) the payment to Telleldín to implicate the provincial police; 2) having informal and secretive conversations with the accused, and surreptitious filming these conversations; 3) Galeano had approved the recording in secret of a conversation between the lawyers of the plaintiffs AMIA-DAIA and Los Familiares y Amigos and one of the accused. (The lawyers wore microphones under their robes.)

⁵²See, for example her speech given on the eleventh anniversary of the bombing, which can be accessed at <http://www.apemia.blogspot.com>

the Argentine government. Thus Diana Malamud of Memoria Activa feels that the verdict against Galeano is bittersweet:

I was satisfied because after working so long to unmask what is shameful and offensive has been fruitful. At the same time I felt indignation and hate. Galeano made an illegal payment in order to create an official story that would end the investigation. He didn't do it alone, but with the participation of government leaders and the Jewish community.⁵³

The struggle to re-write the official story continues.

“We’re At Where We Began:” The Investigation Today

The political intrigues surrounding the AMIA case have not only seriously damaged the investigation, but have overwhelmed the case itself. As a historical event it is as much about the death of 85 individuals as a window onto the machinations of Argentine politics and the functioning of its institutions. Perversely, the bomb that ripped open the AMIA also in many ways created a hole in which the Argentine public could effectively see how the government “works”—in multiple senses of the word. For many, this view confirmed what had been suspected all long: the rot of corruption, the flagrancy of impunity.

Over the years a few seemingly confirmed details about the bombing have emerged. To the contrary, these past 14 years have yielded more intrigue and confusion than information. Accordingly, Memoria Activa presented the fourteenth anniversary of the AMIA bombing within the theme of a labyrinth, proclaiming that, “after 14 years we are almost experts in traveling through labyrinths, nevertheless we still can’t find the exit.”⁵⁴

⁵³“Tenía satisfacción porque tanto trabajo para desenmascarar lo bochornoso rinde sus frutos. Y a la vez sentía indignación y odio. Galeano hizo un pago ilegal para crear una historia oficial que cerrara la causa. Pero no lo hizo solo sino con los dirigentes de turno y de la propia comunidad judía.” Quoted in Hauser, Irina (2005)“El juez actuó fuera de todo cauce legítimo” in *Página/12*, 4 de Agosto, El País, electronic edition, accessed on August 4, 2005.

⁵⁴“Después de 14 años somos casi expertos en recorrer laberintos y sin embargo todavía no encontramos la salida.” Memoria Activa, Discurso Pronunciado en Plaza Lavalle. <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/aniversarios.htm>

To date, Iran and Hezbollah continue to be the main focus of the investigation of the AMIA bombing, and current President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has ramped up her government's pressure on Iran to cooperate with the investigation.⁵⁵ In the last year of Néstor Kirchner's presidential term in 2006, Argentine federal judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral issued international arrest warrants for former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and eight others.⁵⁶ This was in response to an 800-page report put together by the head of a special AMIA investigative unit organized by President Kirchner, lawyer Alberto Nisman, along with his colleague Marcelo Martínez Burgos. This report charges high-level Iranian officials and one leader from Hezbollah with the attacks, which basically repeats the allegations made in the early years of the investigation. Nisman offered as a possible motive for the bombing a suspension in 1991 of assistance of nuclear technology, an agreement made under Alfonsín's government (1983-1989).⁵⁷ However, Iran continues to refuse to aid in the deliverance of former high-ranking Iranian officials that have been solicited by Judge Corral, claiming that Iranian citizens didn't have any involvement in the bombing and there is insufficient evidence for extradition.⁵⁸ Increased pressure on Iran is a recent phenomenon.

Added to the investigations of the international and local connections to the bombing is a third, the investigation of "irregularities" related to the investigations. The destitution of former judge Juan José Galeano is part of this third investigation. The charge of "encubridor" (someone involved in a cover-up) has been leveled all the way to former president Menem who is currently under investigation, along with former Judge Galeano,

⁵⁵"Cristina pidió a Irán que facilite la presentación ante la justicia de los acusados por el atentado a la AMIA" *Página/12*, Martes, 23 de Septiembre de 2008.

⁵⁶"Argentina Seeks Arrest for Iran's Ex-Leader," Reuters, NYTimes, November 10, 2006

⁵⁷Fernández Moeres, Lucio (2006)"AMIA: el nuevo fiscal acusó a Iran como responsable del atentado" in *Clarín*, 26 de Octubre, electronic edition, accessed on October 27,2006.

⁵⁸"Una respuesta política de la Justicia" *Página/12*, Viernes, 24 de Octubre de 2008

Menem's brother Munir (the ex-ambassador to Syria), ex-head of the secret service, Hugo Anzorreguy, and ex-police chief Jorge Palacios. Ex-president of the DAIA, Rubén Beraja is also being investigated and will soon go to trial in relation to the illegal payment of 400,000 dollars to Telleldín.⁵⁹ Confirming the arguments of Memoria Activa and others, the state prosecutor Alberto Nisman presented in May of 2008 a formal denunciation against the aforementioned officials. Based on Nisman's presentation, the judge in charge of investigating the irregularities of the investigation, Judge Ariel Lijo, called all of the named to appear in court and testify. Nisman presents evidence of a "a phenomenal conspiracy of concealment" and to this end, he cites the "destruction of evidence, a failure to fulfill the duties of a public official, omission or delay of duties of office, use of ideologically motivated lies as a political instrument, and failure to fulfill the obligation to promote the persecution and repression of offenders."⁶⁰ At the center of these accusations is the alleged protection of an Argentine man named Alberto Jacinto Kanoore Edul—the so-called Syria connection—mentioned above. In other words, it is now thought the false accusation of the provincial police provided by Telleldín was an effort coordinated at many different levels to maneuver the investigation away from Kanoore Edul. Although the links to Menem's family are established, the precise reasons for this extreme act of subterfuge to protect one man remain unclear.

The AMIA case, then, remains arrested in a tangle of international negotiations and national political maneuverings, and the painfully slow process of creating a common truth

⁵⁹At the request of Judge Lijo, at present a number of individuals will be subjected to a criminal trial for the illegal payment. The prosecuted include Beraja, former judge Juan José Galeano, Carlos Telleldín, lawyers who worked with Galeano, ex-president of the SIDE, Hugo Anzorreguy, among others. In a move that infuriates many, on February of 2009 the AMIA and DAIA announced that they would not testify against Rubén Beraja or the ex-prosecutors in the case.

⁶⁰"...una fenomenal maniobra de incubrimiento" and "...destrucción de pruebas, incumplimiento de los deberes de funcionario público, omisión o retardo de los deberes del oficio, falsedad ideológica de instrumento público e incumplimiento de la obligación de promover la persecución y repression de delincuentes." See Fernández Moores, Lucio (2008) "Acusación del fiscal Nisman por la pista Siria" in *Clarín*, 30 de Mayo, electronic edition, accessed on May 30, 2008.

around which justice might be had. The dead don't hold their breath, but the living might be suffocating.

VII. Memoria Activa, the Plaza, and the Reshaping of Citizen-Subjects

We do here what nobody would have done for us. We shout here what nobody would have shouted for us. We denounce what nobody would have denounced for us. We say, with first and last name, all that impunity and the powerful wanted to hide.—2004, Diana Malamud of Memoria Activa.

...in a country without memory or justice... This plaza was witness to our struggle—2004, Adriana Reinfeld of Memoria Activa

Is it possible that the antonym of “forgetting” is not “remembering,” but *justice*?—Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1996

Many Endings

December 27, 2004, Buenos Aires. Well, I've come to the end. I think this as I get off the bus at Talcahuano and cross the street to get to the Plaza Lavalle. I pass the *confiterías*, the newspaper vendors, lawyers heading to work. It is a hot, humid summer day, and the sun at 9:30 AM is already gathering its strength. The light linen shirt I'm wearing by now feels damp and heavy on my body. I come to the spot, in front of a mature palm tree, where Memoria Activa officially gathers for the last time. The final decision to leave the plaza—but not the fight—was made a week ago in a meeting at the Hebraica sports and social club.¹ It is the last time Memoria Activa in full will regularly meet in front of the Judicial Palace on Monday mornings to make their demands, and appeal to the state and society to challenge *impunidad*, and take responsibility for each other. It is also nearly

¹The decision to leave the plaza was intensely argued over two meetings. There was not consensus on the issue, and many felt that the decision to leave the plaza was made unilaterally by the leaders of Memoria Activa, and there was much anger and frustration. See below.

the end of my 13-month stay in Buenos Aires. And given these “endings,” I feel melancholic, and also exhilarated with heightened senses—I want to absorb everything, and I want to be able to meet the situation with the consideration and gravity it deserves.

I enter the loosely formed circle, and begin to greet the friends and acquaintances I have made over the year. Benjamin has draped the Memoria Activa banner that says “Todos Somos Memoria Activa” (We are all Memoria Activa) around the commemorative sculpture made by Mirta Kumpfermenc, recognizing the victims of the bombing and the achievements of Memoria Activa. He sees me and asks me to take a picture. It seems we are all here with an incredible urge to document, to witness, and take account the ways in which this small area of concrete and trees has been transformed into a place of heightened purpose by the words and presence of Memoria Activa. There are several active cameras and other recording devices here today.

The crowd is more numerous than it has been most of the past year, but despite the energy a large turnout provides, it is a solemn and subdued gathering. Enrique, who always begins the Memoria Activa *actos*, begins to speak, and a halo of microphones and recorders form a technological collar around his face. He begins as he has for many years, with a counting of days: “At 4665 days since the attack on the Israeli embassy; at 3779 days since the AMIA massacre; At 544 weeks from July 18, 1994, Memoria Activa returns to say, PRESENTE!” He continues his speech in the form of a testimony, beginning each statement of acknowledgement, appreciation and remembrance with the words, “Quiero testimoniar” (which one can translate as “I want to bear witness to”). Many in the crowd, mostly those who have attended every Monday for years and years, are standing arm and arm, tears marking a trace on their faces. Enrique continues with his testimony, questioning a society—his society—that doesn’t seem to value “justice” as a system that meets out punishment and reward in a transparent and accountable manner:

I want to testify to society that these massacres [of the AMIA and Israeli embassy] are lamentably, a continuation of other massacres and disappearances that are the expression of a people that still don't prioritize justice as elemental to a just society.

I want to again testify that these and so many massacres that bring us together are not merely a Jewish issue, they happened in our country, in our Buenos Aires, and here they try to sell to us again, like so many other times, the garbage of an official lie, that still continues.¹

Many people go to the microphone to read something about Memoria Activa and the struggle against impunity. As with other Memoria Activa *actos*, the speeches tend to negotiate between remembering the specific dead of the two bombings and connecting these acts of violence to other tragic acts in Argentina. People struggle to sum up with brief words, 10 years of struggle in the plaza, 10 years of trying to reconstitute shreds of truth that have become submerged under "official stories." Adriana Reinfeld, one of the *familiares* of Memoria Activa, emphasizes that leaving the plaza does not signal an end to the fight: "The plaza was witness to the history [of the struggle], we are not abandoning our struggle, but on the contrary we are going to intensify it, make our presence felt by every official... judge or legislator that has something to do with the AMIA case."² After the last speech is read, people embrace and begin to break up. It is hard to leave the plaza today, knowing that to step away concretely marks the departure, the shift in the struggle, away from weekly public reclamations to more private, and ultimately more exclusive venues. "The end of an era" someone mentions. Leaving the plaza is seen as a loss in so many ways, ranging from the power that comes from placing one's body on the line in a public protest, to the loss of a

¹Quiero testimoniar a la sociedad que estas Masacres, lamentable continuidad de otras Masacres y desapariciones son expresión de un pueblo que aun no a priorizado a la Justicia como eslabón primordial de una sociedad justa. Quiero volver a testimoniar que estas y tantas Masacres que nos convocan no son un tema de los judíos, ocurrió en nuestro país, en nuestra Buenos Aires, y aquí intentaron vendernos nuevamente, como tantas otras veces, la basura de la mentira oficial, que aun no termina. Discurso de Lunes de Diciembre de 2004, www.memoriaactiva.com, accessed on January 30, 2005.

² La plaza fue testigo de la historia, no abandonamos nuestra lucha, muy por lo contrario la intensificamos, marcaremos de cerca a cada funcionario... juez o legislador que tenga que ver con la causa AMIA. Discurso de Lunes de Diciembre de 2004, www.memoriaactiva.com, accessed on January 30, 2005.

special space for social interaction and involvement that many members of Memoria Activa cherish.

After saying goodbye to those I won't likely see before I journey back to the United States, I slowly leave and head to coffee with José, Abraham, and Julio. Over *cortados* that emit curls of steam, Julio regrets the loss of the public reclamation. He sees both aspects—the public protests and the work done in the OAS and the legal pursuit of the *encubridores*—as essential to the fight for justice. This opinion is expressed among another group I have coffee with, those who congregate at the pizza restaurant *Bancharo*, and there is mention of the importance of having a “Jewish presence in the street” while another agrees with this comment but adjoins, “but Memoria Activa is not a Jewish group.” The ambivalence that marks the characterization of Memoria Activa is a result of the difficult and controversial stance that the group tries to maintain—appealing to the universal in arguing for rights of citizenship while holding on to a certain specificity—and also the different ways that members identify as Jews and Argentines.

In general, those who express an attachment to the public fight in the plaza are generally dismissed as “sentimental,” or not keeping their focus on the overall cause. This became clear during two meetings held over the previous weeks. These meetings were called to discuss the future of Memoria Activa, and a large number of the long-standing participants of the group were invited. Ostensibly the meetings were about whether or not to leave the plaza, and the political course of Memoria Activa. These meetings were tense and emotional, and while anger and exasperation were clearly palpable, edgy moments were more often than not diffused—at least for the moment—by humor.

In practice, the work and cause of Memoria Activa was manifold for the participants. It was a place of Jewish solidarity and also a gathering of concerned citizens. Memoria Activa members often dubbed themselves “citizens of the plaza,” and indeed, going to the plaza was understood to be a fundamental act and expression of citizenship. But it was also

a social opportunity and a place to enact a struggle against impunity; it was a means of bearing witness and a demand to be seen by the state and society; it was an important venue through which to connect with other sectors of society. Perhaps all of these things are aspects of what members of Memoria Activa took citizenship to mean in late 20th century, early 21st century Buenos Aires. Significantly, the work of Memoria Activa to engage the nation as citizens and Jews opened up a general social and political sphere in which difference was not entirely subordinated to the status quo, and the act of being a citizen was not merely ascribed from above.

However, for the *familiares* of Memoria Activa who were most involved in the legal battles and the work with the OAS, the mission in the plaza had largely run its course. During one of the meetings, one *familiar* described the plaza as an “instrument.” The question was, did their presence in the plaza every Monday make practical political sense anymore? The *familiares* and those who comprised the *mesa directiva* (leadership) felt drained by the legal paths Memoria Activa had taken, and felt that the work in the plaza had reached its zenith, and its political power was in decline. It was getting more difficult to pull in speakers, and the weekly attendance seemed to be shrinking. Nevertheless, for a large percentage of Memoria Activa’s loyal participants, the plaza was the primary means of participation in the struggle for justice, and to leave the plaza meant giving up the struggle. Those who hadn’t lost anyone in the bombing did not participate in the trial (although they could attend portions of it), nor were most of them a part of the small circle that made most of the decisions. Many of these individuals, while appearing in the plaza week after week, did not attend the hearings or trial relating to former judge Juan José Galeano. For these individuals, the act of standing in the plaza had exceeded any measure of political utility; the plaza was transformed into a symbolically powerful site of resistance and solidarity, and going to the plaza a kind of responsibility, as citizens, and as Jews. Importantly, it was a place where they felt they could act, politically and collectively, perhaps more comfortably

than as individuals through more formal political channels. For them, the work in the plaza *is* Memoria Activa.

One individual stated that the “soul of Memoria Activa is the plaza” and referenced the Madres de Plaza de Mayo: “Look at the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, every Thursday they are out there, they go even if they are only 8 or 10 people. Memoria Activa is going through a crisis because we are unsure about how to continue. But we need to keep the soul of Memoria Activa.”

Despite staunch resistance the leadership of Memoria Activa held firm—even if privately they may have held similar feelings toward the plaza—they wanted to put their energies into something that might yield greater results. They were weary and didn’t feel the need to rouse up the motivation to organize the Monday morning *actos*, especially when there seemed to be so little interest. Those arguing to leave the plaza opposed the idea of the plaza being the “soul” of the struggle. Summing up the purpose, difficulties, and successes of Memoria Activa, one individual forcefully retorted:

I am in agreement that the soul of Memoria Activa isn’t the plaza. For me, what does the plaza represent? We had a piece of shit government (*un gobierno de mierda*) and we took the plaza at that moment. The Jewish institutions...their justice doesn’t represent us. The plaza was a space of liberty and what we have done there is very impressive. But when I call people to come speak in the plaza they say, “What can I say? I already said everything.” 10 years. 10 years. Now there are huge difficulties in getting people to speak in the plaza after 10 years...The plaza has resignified things. We had an enemy in the government, Menem, and we had Beraja. And now the picture has changed. What is happening with the Organization of American States is the primary juridical tool we have right now. Regarding the plaza, we don’t have the attendance we had. This isn’t our fault, but we need to find new methods. The plaza *was* the soul of Memoria Activa. Las Abuelas [*de Plaza de Mayo*] aren’t in any plaza but they have made a huge impact on the society. This is a good example for us.

The final answer to all this debate was to leave the plaza. As the above member emphasized, the plaza had done its work, and “the picture has changed.” Another powerful actor in Memoria Activa adjoined: “...we aren’t going to continue in the plaza. We need to

prioritize other things, even if it causes personal pain, we know this is the right step...we have some differences, but we will continue...we thank you.”

The ultimate decision to leave the plaza clearly angered many. Even though the leadership of Memoria Activa had called these meetings to discuss the future of the group, some members saw obvious signs that the leadership had already made its decision and the meetings offered an explanation as to why and a forum for people to express their opinions—with little actual dialogue. In a small way, the meetings also provided a measure of gratitude for those who have participated in the *actos* for so many years. These meetings showcased some of the clear cleavages within the group, and also highlighted the relatively powerless position of many long-time members. As I was walking toward home with Karen, a fellow anthropologist, after the first meeting, a couple of the Memoria Activa members I spoke with regularly stopped us in the street. Visibly upset, they wanted our opinion of the meeting and conduct of the leadership. They clearly felt sideswiped, but perhaps even more upsetting for them, they felt that the leadership of Memoria Activa had decided to give up the struggle. As I previously mentioned, for many in the group, the plaza *is* Memoria Activa and its fight.

The disempowerment experienced by many and the divisions within the group were plainly articulated one Monday in December (one of the last before Memoria Activa would officially leave the plaza). One member, who for many years was responsible for bringing and displaying the “We are all Memoria Activa” banner, abruptly stopped bringing the banner the Monday after the first meeting was held. It was a conspicuous absence, and afterwards over coffee I asked him where the banner was. He responded aggressively by pounding the table and saying that “it was clear that we are NOT all Memoria Activa.” His eyes were hazy with tears.

The differences within Memoria Activa are to some extent a reflection of class distinctions, as well as whether one was a family member of a victim. The leadership and

principal political authors of the group are mainly middle-upper middle class, cosmopolitan, and well-educated. Others came from other sectors of Argentine and Jewish life, one that was of considerably humbler economic and social origins. The voice of these individuals was often superceded by more “savvy” and mainstream discourse about politics, rights, and citizenship. While recognizing the importance of the work Memoria Activa was doing in the OAS and other formal political actions, for individuals who are not a family member of a victim, and perhaps lack the knowledges thought to be needed to navigate international and formal political spaces, these arenas were effectively closed for participation.

Given the purpose many saw in continuing in the plaza, this space was not given up entirely by all members of Memoria Activa. If some in Memoria Activa still wanted to go to the plaza on Mondays, they should. And they did. Immediately after Memoria Activa formally vacated the plaza there was a lot of activity around “re-taking” the plaza. There was talk of getting Laura Ginsberg from APEMIA to come back, or maybe the prominent leftist journalist Herman S.—a long-time gadfly to the leadership of the Jewish community—would seize the reigns (he came once but never returned). But nothing formal happened. Nevertheless, for years afterward, ten to fifteen individuals would gather around the monument to Memoria Activa, using the metal structure as an anchor for their cause (this is a slightly different spot than previously). They called themselves the “base” of Memoria Activa. The few gatherings that I attended when I returned to Buenos Aires in the summer of 2005 were subdued, and continued with some of the traditions from before, including the measure of time passed, the blowing of the shofar, the mentioning of the victims and the struggle against impunity. Afterwards, separate groups proceed to their *confitería* of choice. As of May 2009, a small group of individuals still continue to gather at the Plaza on Monday mornings.

Even if the public presence of what was Memoria Activa dwindles to memory, for years to come residents of Buenos Aires, particularly those that followed the AMIA case with interest, or who walked over the stones of Plaza Lavalle nearly every Monday morning in the years Memoria Activa stood in front of the Tribunales, the place near the tall palm tree will still suggest activity. Memoria Activa, in their struggle against impunity and for a vision of the nation that upholds the rights of citizens ranging from the courts of justice to the city plazas, have contributed to the making of a public sphere in which *impunidad* and indifference is not tolerated. While their political goals may not be radical compared to other political actors, it is significant that they have mobilized in the street from a position of Jewishness—however widely or loosely defined—something that in Argentina, at least, has not happened very often. I see in their activism a rejection of the terms of identity as it is often framed: to be either Jewish or Argentine, or be Argentine in public or Jewish in private. In the plaza Memoria Activa performed both Jewishness and Argentineness, public reclamation and the private pain of loss.

But they did more than rearticulate public possibilities for Jewishness. In struggling against the *impunidad* they see encircling many cases of violence in Argentina, they have also helped to instigate a process of change in civil society and the state. Like many movements that target or call out impunity, they have mobilized an alternate vision of politics and society, one in which the oft-used expression *Nunca Más* (Never Again) ceases to be empty words. They and the other actors that have worked to ensure the bombing of the AMIA does not become bracketed as a concern only for “others,” have reinvigorated an ethic of collective responsibility and accountability already discursively present in Argentina. But perhaps, with the scream of the *shofar* coursing through the streets, they have done so in a way that enlarges this call for social responsibility to include citizens who don’t easily fit into the “us.”

At a broad level, this work contributes to the understanding of how non-governmental actors and the state negotiate the practices of citizenship, human rights, and justice, and adds to knowledge about difference and identity in Argentina. However, there is much in these many pages that I have reserved for future further inquiry. For example, greater attention to how practices and knowledges concerning difference have historically developed in Argentina would help to expand the question of Jewishness in Argentina to consider other marginalized groups, ethnicities, sexualities as they negotiate the nation. More consideration of how Jewishness is constructed through the processes and negotiations of everyday life could lend greater richness and understanding to the ways in which Argentineness and Jewishness are mutually constitutive, particularly in a dense, cosmopolitan city like Buenos Aires. Looking more closely at how the figure of “the Jew” has functioned socially and politically in Argentina in comparison to other nation-states would deepen an understanding of what is specific to Argentina with respect to Jewishness. Situating the AMIA bombing more securely in some of the larger social and political matters occupying the nation’s attention in the period that this work engages—the economic collapse, a concern with “security,” the faltering middle class, will contribute to a deeper analysis of the public sphere in which the bombing occurred, and the one it helped to create. Finally, asking what the functions of witness and witnessing are in relation to the AMIA bombing, remembering, and identity could open up new possibilities for the ethical dimensions of political practice and citizenship, and understandings of responsibility.

It has been fifteen years since the black marble façade of the AMIA building, with all its activity inside, was blown up. For many of those most directly affected by the violence, it has been another year of active remembrance and demanding to see the perpetrators brought to justice. For others, in addition to remembrance this fifteenth year marks another cycle of questioning posed to the government and society. Will this act remain unpunished?

Who will take responsibility for these deaths? What other deaths and injustices remain in a similar state, and *which acts not yet committed* will bear the mark of impunity?

Here at the end I find myself circling, erratically, the idea of witnessing. Reflecting on one understanding of the practice of witnessing—not just to see, but to somehow be transformed by, to be claimed by something and thus somehow beholden to it—I ask myself what kind of witness I have been, and the relation of this work to this responsibility. The answer comes in and out of focus, hazy with the dust and the debris of the years and events that have come since my body directly engaged with the people and occurrences described in these pages. And yet, I do not forget, I have not ceased to be transformed and troubled by what I have learned, despite the distances of time, geography, and the alchemy of turning memories, relationships, and yes, information, into a dissertation.

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