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Collective Memory and the Argentine Military Dictatorship

A Discourse Analysis

Caitlin Wiley

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the Lee Honors College of Western Michigan University

“We want justice, we want a real, strong recuperation of memory and that in this Argentina they remember, recapture and take as an example those who were capable of giving everything for their values... Today they are present in your hands.”

- President Néstor Kirchner, March 24th, 2004

“I am sure that this truth and justice should be accelerated and found and that this 24th of March and all 24ths of March should serve in the construction framework of the true memory. This date should be firmly consolidated and not taken over by anyone based on short term political speculations.

Because dear brothers and sisters, the true vanguard of the fight against the dictatorship was the Grandmothers and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.”

- President Néstor Kirchner, March 24th, 2006

“For this all Argentines ask, earnestly, for our justice that ends with this page and that we can continue constructing memory, continue constructing justice and respect and honor in the world.”

- President Cristina Kirchner, March 24th, 2010

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Historical Overview	7
Precipitating Factors	7
Return to Democracy	9
Néstor and Cristina Kirchner	12
Collective Memory	16
Political Uses of Memory	18
Commemorative Speeches and Bodily Practices	20
Analysis of Selected Presidential Speeches	23
Method of Discourse Analysis	23
Nodal Points	26
Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2004	29
Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2006	33
Speech by Cristina Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2010	41
Discussion	48
Conclusion	52
References	56
Appendix A: Full Text of Selected Speeches	58
Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA on March 24 th , 2004.....	58
Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA on March 24 th , 2006.....	59
Speech by Cristina Kirchner at la ESMA on March 24 th , 2010.....	65
Appendix B: Master Signifiers and Myth References by Speech	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Abstract

The last Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) employed strategies of extreme violence against its own people, including kidnapping and killing an estimated 30,000 people. After the dictatorship ended in 1983, the country began a process of reconstructing the collective societal memory of the dictatorship years, which involved individuals processing their memories of family members and friends who had “disappeared” (now known as *los desaparecidos* or “the disappeared in Spanish”). This investigation focuses on how former Argentine Presidents Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015) reignited the national discourse around the dictatorship years and shaped the collective memories of the public in recent years.

Specifically, this work is a discourse analysis of three speeches given by Néstor and Cristina Kirchner in recent years. All three of the speeches analyzed were given on March 24th, the anniversary of the coup that installed the dictatorship, and all three commemorate important steps taken to remember the victims of the dictatorship. The speeches will be analyzed using several linguistic tools, including looking for nodal signifiers (words that refer to abstract ideas), master signifiers (which refer to identity), binaries created (polarizations between two separate ideas or sides), and examining how Néstor and Cristina place themselves and their roles as Presidents of Argentina in the discourse.

The investigation concludes that through these commemorative speeches, the Presidents use the collective memory of the dictatorship years to articulate several goals: seeking final justice for *los desaparecidos*, unifying the country under one master narrative of the dictatorship years, placing blame on responsible societal actors, and a setting a direction for the future while facilitating the national healing process.

Introduction

Between the years of 1976 and 1983, Argentina was ruled by a violent and oppressive military dictatorship that legitimized the use of kidnapping and torture against its own citizens. In an attempt to eliminate political dissidents, guerrilla fighters, and instability in the country, a campaign known as the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” (Process of National Reorganization), also called the “Dirty War,” was launched by the dictatorship. This process ultimately led to the disappearances of anywhere from an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 people. Those kidnapped under the regime are known today in Argentina as *los desaparecidos*, literally meaning “the disappeared” as many seemed to simply vanish and were never seen by their loved ones again.

The human rights violations committed against *los desaparecidos* beyond kidnapping included brutal forms of torture and murder. Bodies were disposed of during so-called “death flights,” where the kidnapped would be drugged and thrown out of planes to drown in the ocean (Robben, 2005, p. 120). In addition, hundreds of pregnant women gave birth while held captive by the military, and their babies were rarely returned safely to their families. Instead, many were abducted and given to military families or adoptive parents, with many of these lost children never knowing their true identities (Kaiser, 2005, p. 3). Most often the human rights violations were carried out at over one hundred clandestine torture centers around the country. Many of these centers were located in heavily populated areas such as the la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Mechanical School of the Army) in Buenos Aires, Argentina’s capital city (CONADEP, National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, 1984).

After seven years of state led terrorism, the dictatorship was weakened by the failure of the Falkland Islands War (Robben, 2005, p. 130) and increased international attention to the

prolific human rights violations. The military dictatorship came to an end in 1983, and the transition to democracy with a quest for justice for the *desaparecidos* began. That quest, as well as the remembrance of those killed during the dictatorship, continues to the present day. The annual celebrations held on March 24th, the anniversary of the dictatorship's beginning and a national holiday known as the Día de la Memoria por la Verdad y Justicia (the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice) reveals each year how the social memory formed during the dictatorship still resonates in modern Argentina.

I first became interested in the Argentine military dictatorship when I was studying abroad in Buenos Aires in the spring of 2016. Before arriving in Argentina, I had never heard of the dictatorship, *los desaparecidos*, or Argentine human rights organizations such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo). However while studying abroad there, I witnessed some of the demonstrations that occurred throughout the country on March 24th, and spent a significant portion of my class time learning about what happened under the dictatorship. It was discussed frequently in everyday life. Many people who were alive during that period have vivid memories of the fear they lived through, and seeing their neighbors, friends, and sometimes loved ones vanish overnight.

Upon returning to Western Michigan University I continued to think about what I had learned, and about how such impactful and traumatic experiences could leave lasting legacies on a society. I wanted to answer several questions, such as how does that memory manifest itself today? How are the *desaparecidos* talked about and remembered in modern Argentina, after the dictatorship has ended? Is there a desire for closure for family members of the lost, and for proper justice for those who acted on behalf of the dictatorship? It is for these reasons and to answer some of these questions that I have undertaken this investigation.

To narrow this investigation into collective memory and the popular discourse in Argentina, I decided to examine what the most powerful voice in the Argentine government had to say about the dictatorship. I chose to consider presidential speeches as a form of constructing official dialogue about the topic, and as the subjects of my investigation. All three of the speeches chosen to be examined are commemorative presidential speeches delivered on March 24th, the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice, across a time period of 6 years, 2004-2010. Two speeches were delivered by President Néstor Kirchner in 2004 and 2006, and one was delivered by Cristina Kirchner in 2010. The reasons for choosing presidential commemorative speeches, the two Kirchner presidents, and March 24th will be fully described later in the investigation.

For the purposes of further narrowing the investigation, a guiding question was also posed. That question is: How do Argentine presidents use the memory of the dictatorship in a modern context through commemorative speeches? To analyze the speeches, there are several more minor guiding questions that will contribute to answering the over-arching question. The minor questions include: What are the specific key words referenced frequently in each speech? How does the president characterize the societal actors involved such as the human rights organizations, agents of the dictatorship, the armed forces, and *los desaparecidos*? And finally, how do the presidents refer to themselves in the narrative on the dictatorship? Do they portray themselves favorably to advance their own image, or do they connect themselves to certain societal actors? The discourse analysis that follows seeks to answer these questions.

This work is composed of five sections. The first is a Historical Overview which will provide a background to the events of the dictatorship. This is followed by a section on Collective Memory, detailing what it is and its political uses. From there we will continue on to the analysis of the three selected speeches, and end with discussion and conclusion sections.

Historical Overview

This section will provide brief historical context of the time period around the dictatorship. The historical overview will cover precipitating factors that led up to the dictatorship, the return to democracy in 1983, and the discourse changes that occurred under Néstor and Cristina Kirchner starting in 2003. The information presented will provide the reader with the context of what was occurring in Argentina before, during, and after the dictatorship to understand the actors involved and the speeches analyzed.

Precipitating Factors

The Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-83 was not an isolated incident. While the last dictatorship is perhaps the most famous, it was actually the last in a series of military interventions in state affairs over the course of the 20th century. Between the years of 1930 and 1973, at least 5 military interventions took place in Argentina when armed forces leaders took political control of the country in times of crisis (Soledad, 2010). This established a repeated pattern and normalized the idea of military intervention as a useful recourse for when democracy failed to maintain order.

These military interventions from 1930 onward led to the “increasing militarization of Argentine society and the politization of the armed forces” (Soledad, 2010). At times the military was so powerful that they dissolved the Congress and suspended all civil political power as military leader General Juan Carlos Onganía did in 1966 after disposing democratically elected President Illia (Romero, 1994, p. 174).

The frequency of military interventions in civil society created a pendulum-like system in which authoritarian and democratic governments alternated every few years. Gradually, the Argentine people became accustomed to this pattern and even began to expect it in times of

instability. It is not surprising then that when the country experienced political and economic strife in the early 1970s the military was expected to step in. Historian Luis Romero summarized the general feeling of the populace around the 1976 coup in stating that “as on previous occasions, the majority of the population received the coup with enormous relief and high expectations” (1994, p. 214).

But what created the conditions that immediately preceded and justified the dictatorship? A combination of several factors, including political fighting among factions, and a lack of political leadership, and economic troubles. The problems that led most directly to the rise of the 1976 dictatorship actually began during the previous dictatorship, which lasted from 1966 to 1973. Political rebellion in the country began around 1970, when young liberal guerrillas who called themselves *Montoneros* (identified ideologically with former President Juan Peron’s populist tradition) began attacking military officials and installations. According to Historian Luis Romero, the *Montoneros*’ “experience with authoritarianism” during past dictatorships had convinced them that “there was no alternative to defeating the [current] dictatorship except armed struggle” (Romero, 1994, p. 189). For this reason, in 1970 the *Montoneros* kidnapped and killed former president General Pedro Aramburu who had been involved in the dictatorship after Juan Peron was first overthrown and exiled in 1955 (Robben, 2005, pp.128-9; Romero, 1994, pp. 189). The military then began a counter-insurgency campaign to combat this group and other armed guerrilla groups and the struggle became a fight between far-right and far-left groups.

The problems intensified in 1973 when the formerly exiled President Juan Perón was re-elected to the presidency with his wife Isabel Martínez de Perón as his Vice President. Upon Juan Perón’s death in 1974, Isabel was inaugurated despite “a widespread view that Isabel was not competent to assume leadership of a country in crisis” (Hedges, 2011, p. 204) having no

serious political experience. The political violence between the military and guerrilla groups like the *Montoneros* worsened under Isabel's floundering government, finally prompting the military to intervene in March 1976 (Robben, 2005, p. 129). In summary, "the economic crisis of 1975, the crisis of leadership, the factional struggles and the daily presence of death, the spectacular actions of the guerilla organizations . . . all created the conditions for the acceptance of a military coup that promised to reestablish order and ensure the state's monopoly on violence" (Romero, 1994, p. 215). The Argentine people considered another military dictatorship to restore order to be both necessary and prudent at this time of uncertainty, and so the coup d'état of March 24th, 1976 ensued.

Return to Democracy

Several events brought about the end of the military dictatorship seven years later in 1983. Chief among them were the terrible failure of the Falkland Islands War, and the internal pressure on the military junta from human rights organizations and the Argentine people. The Falkland Islands (known as the *Islas Malvinas* in Argentina) had been contested territory ever since the British took them from Argentina in 1833. In April 1982 the Argentine dictatorship decided to retake the islands from Great Britain as a way to galvanize positive national sentiment in a worsening economy. Military leaders believed that in retaking the islands they could "count on the support of the United States and a hesitant response from Great Britain" (Romero, 1994, p. 243) which they viewed as an aging military power. After Argentina easily reconquered the islands, Great Britain responded with significant military force almost immediately. Britain quickly secured support from the European community to act militarily and also imposed economic sanctions on Argentina, and ordered their navy to retake the islands. Although the US had initially allied itself with Argentina, upon seeing Great Britain's surprising military response

America preferred to side with their long-time ally and abandoned the Argentine military effort (Romero, 1994). Military defeat quickly followed, and by the middle of June Argentina had completely surrendered leaving the islands once again to Great Britain.

The embarrassment and failure of the Falkland Islands War compounded the societal unhappiness caused by an economic crisis and anger over human rights violations. Human rights organizations and activists such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) had an important hand in bringing the true extent of the dictatorship's abuses to light. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo were an organization started informally by women who had lost children or family members to the agents of the dictatorship.¹ They started protesting and demanding the return of their disappeared family members in 1977 by marching around the Plaza de Mayo outside the Casa Rosada, the Argentine president's office building, every Thursday afternoon (Goñi, 2017). Reporters soon broadcast these mother's stories to the international community, informing them of the human rights violations in Argentina. The Madres' marches became known as "'marches for life,' which effectively identified the government with death" (Romero, 1994, p. 249). This increased attention to abuses of power, combined with the worsening economy and military failure, ultimately resulted in a return to democracy.

President Raúl Alfonsín, the first leader under the restored democratic system, was elected in 1983 and set about the work of returning the country to normalcy (Romero, 1994, p. 254). One of his first official acts was to establish the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, also known as CONADEP. The commission was tasked with determining the extent of the human rights violations that had occurred under the military

¹ Henceforth, the term "agents of the dictatorship" will be used to refer to those who acted on behalf of the military dictatorship including military officials and any others who committed human rights violations in the name of the dictatorship.

dictatorship, hearing the testimony of survivors, and compiling the evidence of said violations. The group published their full report in 1984 under the title *Nunca Más*, or “never again”, in which the stories of thousands of disappeared and tortured Argentines are told.

One of the most important revelations that came from the report was the full extent of the use of terror against the people of the country, and how frequently the average person with no political ties became a victim. Originally the regime had justified the use of terror by claiming that the chaos in the country needed to be quelled and that they were fighting a war (citation from Kaiser). However, the report of CONADEP established that this was not always the case:

We can state categorically - contrary to what the executors of this sinister plan maintain - that they did not pursue only the members of political organizations who carried out acts of terrorism. Among the victims are thousands who never had any links with such activity but were nevertheless subjected to horrific torture because they opposed the military dictatorship, took part in union or student activities, were well-known intellectuals who questioned state terrorism, or simply because they were relatives, friends, or names included in the address book of someone considered subversive. (*Nunca Más* (Never Again), 1984)

The stories of survivors included in the report detail how the agents of the dictatorship would use fear tactics, torture, and kidnapping to control political thought in the country. Even those who had committed no crimes could still be detained if they simply spoke out against the regime, and often whole families disappeared overnight. Many people were tortured and released later when it was found that no criminal charges could legally be brought against them.

In the aftermath of the dictatorship, the question of how to adequately punish those responsible for human rights violations in the military proved very difficult to tackle. After the military tribunals found that the military had been justified in the acts of the Dirty War, Alfonsín allowed the cases to continue to civil courts (Romero, 1994, p. 262). Many military officials were tried extensively by the civil court system, but there was a plea for innocence and an outcry from lower ranking officers. In particular, “lower-ranking officers . . . did not consider

themselves responsible but simply carried out orders” given by their superiors in the military (Romero, 1994, p. 263). This led Alfonsín’s government to focus on prosecuting only those who were in positions of power in the military, and a Due Obedience law was implemented that effectively pardoned lower-ranking officials. His government also put in place a Full Stop law, which established a statute of limitations of only sixty days to prosecute all individual officers for their crimes under the dictatorship (Robben, 2005, p. 139). This effectively placed a huge time constraint on the judicial processes and made it extremely difficult to fully prosecute all those responsible in such a short period of time. The goal of this law was to prevent what Alfonsín worried would be the “cost to democracy of a resentful armed forces” and to ensure that there was an eventual end to the prosecutions after the dictatorship (Robben, 2005, p. 139). While all of these laws and policies were designed to help the military reconcile with civil society, for many Argentines it did not bring a complete sense of justice.

Néstor and Cristina Kirchner

Before Néstor Kirchner’s presidency began in 2003, much of the discourse by elected officials about the military dictatorship centered on the theory of the “Two Demons,” or the idea that there were two main political actors seeking control of the country in 1976: the groups of left-wing guerrillas like the *Montoneros* that instigated the upheaval of society, and a right-wing military force that responded to restore order. The consensus around innocent Argentine killed in the fighting or kidnapped as “subversives” was that they were simply members of polite society caught in the middle of the struggle (Bietti, 2014, p. 8). This kind of dialogue was promoted in 1983 mostly by the military, which sought to justify its actions in fighting to restore order in the country as the lesser of two evils. As Anthropologist Antonius Robben states, “In

[the military's] eyes, Argentine society had to remember the victory over the subversive left and forget the inevitable tragedies of war" (Robben, 2005, p. 130).

This dominant discourse of the military fulfilling its duty to restore order changed when Néstor Kirchner entered the presidency in 2003. Néstor introduced a new way of thinking about the actions of the military dictatorship as a form of genocide (Bietti, 2014, p. 9). Bietti, a linguist who has extensively analyzed social remembrance of the dictatorship, details what is meant by the term "genocide" as applied to the 1976 dictatorship:

From the point of view of the genocide model the purpose of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship was the annihilation of certain social relations which had begun to be dangerous, i.e. unions, political parties, and cooperatives. This annihilation of certain social relations targeted not only the bodies of dissidents, but also the social relations they embodied in an important proportion of Argentinean society. In other words, the new discourse which is based on the genocide model, maintains that the military dictatorship developed a technology of power (Foucault 2007) to destroy not only the corporality of a specific social relation (e.g. unions, political parties, and cooperatives), but also the very likelihood that it could be something conceivable within Argentinean society. (Bietti, 2014, pp. 9-10)

In this way, what occurred under the dictatorship was framed beginning in 2003 as a genocide that was not racially or ethnically motivated, but was extremely political in nature and devastating to the Argentinean society. It was also a genocide because the military tried to destroy the *ideas* that those dissidents represented, physically and intellectually removing them from society. This same discourse arc, which held the military accountable for crimes essentially of genocide, continued under the presidency of Néstor's successor, his wife Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

Several concrete actions were taken under Néstor's presidency to make this discourse shift an official position. The first of these changes came shortly after his election, when Néstor announced that the former Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Navy School of Mechanics or

ESMA), a famous torture center used by the dictatorship, would be transformed into a museum (Druliolle, 2009, p. 77). This act represented the re-taking of a physical space imbued with memory from the military to the state, and was also symbolic of the state re-taking the mantle of memory from the military. The museum was officially opened on March 24th, 2004 when “President Kirchner led a highly symbolic public event during which he and a range of social actors entered the premises of the ESMA where thousands of Argentines were taken clandestinely under the dictatorship” on the twenty-eighth anniversary of the military coup (Druliolle, 2009, p. 77).

A second major change that occurred under Néstor was the 2005 annulment of the “full stop” and “due obedience” laws put in place under President Alfonsín. These laws when originally halted prosecutions and full judicial proceedings in the aftermath of the dictatorship, and prevented what many saw as complete legal prosecutions. With these laws overturned by the courts in 2005, judicial proceedings could be re-opened against those who had committed human rights violations under the dictatorship and been pardoned during the return to democracy (Forero, 2009). Néstor explicitly mentions these actions during his speech on March 24th, 2006 as steps forward towards the fulfilment of the justice process for the country.

A third critical step taken under Néstor’s administration to cement the importance of memory in society was the establishment in 2006 of March 24th as the annual Day of Memory for Truth and Justice (Bietti, 2014, p. 66). Creating this day as a fixed holiday in the Argentine calendar was a way to bring memory to the forefront, and annually large rallies and demonstrations are held to commemorate March 24th, 1976 when the coup that officially started the dictatorship took place. These days also feature a speech by the president almost every year, and serve as an important event for the Argentine president to interpret the memory of the

dictatorship annually to the Argentine people. All three of these high profile, official acts served to revitalize the memory of the *desaparecidos* and continue to seek justice through the legal system for victims of the dictatorship who had previously been excused or not entirely punished for their human rights violations.

Collective Memory

This section on collective memory will briefly explore the idea of social remembrance and how individuals come together to form shared memories of an event. The concept of collective memory will be explored, followed by a section on how memory is used politically, and finally there will be a section on how commemorative speeches and bodily practices such as those seen on March 24th serve to communicate memory as well. The purpose of this portion of the work is to more fully understand how memory behaves in a society, how it is created, and how it can be used by those in power.

The idea of “collective memory” is a broad term that can have several meanings and crosses various disciplines of social science. As it was originally defined by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs “collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in light of the present” among members of a society (1992, p. 34). It can also be defined as the interactions that take place between individuals and the society around them in characterizing past events, with regards to remembering specific people, events, and time periods. It consists of a complex “interplay between the psychological mechanisms of the individuals and situational, cultural, social, and historical mechanisms” of the greater system (Bietti, 2014, p. 1). How human beings remember varies greatly from person to person, and changes as well with passing generations as stories are shared by those who lived through them with those who did not experience them firsthand (Kaiser, 2005, p. 11).

While many may argue that memory is similar to history, some scholars have pointed out that there is a distinct line between what qualifies as history and what constitutes memory. The idea of memory carries connotations of being more alive and recent than history. Moreover, in the introduction to *The Politics of Memory* the idea that memory is directly tied to an individual

person is touched upon: “For if memory, at least in common use, implies a person who is remembering, then with the rememberer, memory dies; and history traditionally might have been seen as that which replaces memory, as generations replace one another” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003, p. 9). In this case, memory relies directly upon having a personal experience on an individual level or as a group, and in some ways is “a very fragile possession, to be seized from its aged and valuable bearers and passed on” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003, p. 10). In some ways, this definition of memory as being attached to the rememberer also adds in how the memory is framed in an emotional context. What the person was experiencing at the time might affect how they remember the event that happened.

While it is true that the creation of memories as we normally perceive the process does rely on the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of individuals as they move about their lives, as well as the context in which the memories are created, memory is also deeply social in nature. As Halbwachs points out, “if we examine a little more closely how we recollect things, we will surely realize that the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us” (On collective memory, 1992, p. 38). Individuals need interactions with others to bring back details that they may have forgotten, to paint the most complete picture of the events together, and to solidify what that experience meant to each individual involved. We also situate our memories within a framework of the society around us, and may be reminded of memories brought on by physical spaces, objects to which we attach special meaning, and the memories of others. How we interpret and recall memories can also change with the passing of time. For example, some traumatic memories may be repressed for long periods of time so the traumatized person(s) can heal and confront painful memories later on. Robben discusses the “tendency to repress collective traumatic memories” at length in his

article “How Traumatized Societies Remember: The Aftermath of Argentina's Dirty War,” especially when referring to how long it took to process memories of the Holocaust (2005, p. 123).

As a result of these changing interpretations or suppressions of memories, sometimes individuals must rely only on the memories of others to frame their own memory when it has been altered over time. This is especially true, as discussed above, after trauma or terror such as that experienced under the military dictatorship in Argentina. Susana Kaiser, a Buenos Aires native who studies the legacies of the Dirty War, relates an anecdote in the introduction to her book *Postmemories of Terror* about forgetting an event she was involved in during the dictatorship:

As my friend told the story, I was perplexed. The tricks of memory hit my own recollections. I didn't remember a thing; I had completely edited this episode out of my memories; it had been totally forgotten. As I write these lines, I still cannot remember that this happened, despite confirmation from other old friends, not present, who had heard about the incident later on. I have only a vague recollection . . . I am convinced that the fear I felt at the time acted as a big eraser. What other reason could there be for this memory gap? (Kaiser, 2005, p. 9)

For the purposes of this study on the uses of collective memory by Argentine presidents, collective memory is the aggregation of individual experiences of those affected by the dictatorship, both directly and indirectly. It is how current Argentine society reconstructs its own past in light of what is now occurring in the world, and how politicians have used this memory to unite or divide, to condemn or absolve, and how society is moving forward into the future.

Political Uses of Memory

In addition to being culturally important to individuals and societies, collective memory is also a political tool as the ruling political group in a nation can often control the societal discourse about events. As Kaiser states, “Memory has political value and power. Historical

accounts that are reshaped to fit and legitimize a present social order are based on the perception that the past influences actions in the present and the future, that people's memories affect their beliefs and choices" (2005, p. 6). Therefore the group in control of the societal dialogue surrounding the past can influence not only descriptions of the past, but also the direction of the future. They can influence the tides of opinion, justify certain actions, or condemn those who may be aligned against them based on the perceived historical precedent remembered by a nation's citizens.

This was definitely true in the immediate aftermath of the dictatorship when the military tried to control the discourse on the events that had transpired. Before the transition to democracy began, the dictatorship tried to legitimize its actions as a reaction to restore order, as was discussed in the section on Néstor and Cristina Kirchner. In addition, they had an advantage in holding all the information about what had really happened to *los desaparecidos* while the rest of the country was left to wonder and imagine. As Robbens points out, "The military had had a head start in the politics of memory by obliterating the bodies of the assassinated disappeared, thus attempting to confine the traces of their repression purely to the discursive domain. It was their word against that of the surviving victims" (Robben, 2005, p. 131). This passage refers to the death flights and burials of victims in mass graves in an attempt to hide the evidence of wrong-doing and control what the populace thought about what had happened. In this way, memory is both physical and discursive at different points in time, and the bodies of the victims served as a sort of reminder of the brutality destroyed by the military to preserve their image. Both of these incidents of the military trying to control the narrative in Argentina both in terms of words and the physical evidence left behind were attempts by the military to exercise control over political memory ultimately.

Commemorative Speeches and Bodily Practices

Commemorative speeches and bodily practices are also important ways in which memory is preserved and transferred to new generations of people in a ceremonial manner.

Commemorative speeches, such as those given by the Argentine president every year, help to form the discourse and words used about the past, but they are often augmented by physical acts such as marches and protests on March 24th. Social anthropologist Paul Connerton argues that socially critical events are recalled in two ways: first through the performance of culturally significant ceremonies, and second the bodily practices of those involved with the ceremonies (Connerton, 1989). In support of these theories, he examines how rites and ceremonies are carried out with deeper social meaning, and how they are repeated over time. Connerton cites examples from the annual ceremonies of the Nazi regime such as the celebration of Adolf Hitler's birthday and the parades to commemorate the Putsch of 1923 (pp. 41-3). In this way, through commemorative ceremonies "a community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative" (Connerton, 1989, p. 70). This also leads to the formation of what Connerton calls a "collective autobiography" or a community-wide synthesis of personal memories and experiences (p. 70). This can be seen in Argentina in the annual ceremonial events, commemorations of new buildings being opened, speeches, and other invocations of past memory. When Argentines come together to celebrate the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice, they are continuing the tradition of memory by performing what could be described as "commemorative ceremonies" as Connerton describes them. In the case of Argentina, these ceremonies and commemorative speeches perpetuate the memory of an event that was a turning point for the country, the coup of 1976.

Referring back to Connerton's earlier example of the invention of celebrations and ceremonies by the leaders of the Third Reich in Germany, he states that many modern day elites, especially in political and religious arenas, have done the same thing. They "have invented rituals that claim continuity with an appropriate historic past, organizing ceremonies, parades and mass gatherings, and constructing new ritual spaces" (Connerton, 1989, p. 51). The actions of the political leaders of Argentina from Néstor Kirchner on in commemorating the start of the military dictatorship annually on March 24th in the form of political speeches and official demonstrations mirror this performative connection to the past. This is also evidenced by the creation of "new ritual spaces" as Néstor did in 2004 with the opening of la ESMA as a museum of memory.

These commemorative speeches, ceremonies, and physical acts of marching and protesting are all ways in which memory is passed on. However, they are also events through which memory can be interpreted (or reinterpreted) in a particular way that may be useful to a ruling class or group of people in power. Those with power are often the ones who establish these traditions and ceremonies in the first place, and they can have a certain power over how memory is articulated through these events, shaping it to fit their needs. For example, the "Beer Hall Putsch" event celebrated annually in Nazi Germany actually commemorated a failed coup staged by Hitler many years before he became the Chancellor of Germany. However when he did manage to take over the country, the Beer Hall Putsch became a celebrated historical event because it was "re-presented" by Hitler as an important historical moment in his rise to power (Connerton, 1989, p. 43). The organization of power in certain cases such as this one is directly to those who control its interpretation because history (or how history is interpreted) informs a society's understanding of the present.

I would like to argue that this relationship of understanding also goes in the other direction: the understanding of the present shapes our remembrance of the past. In Argentina “public narratives about the military dictatorship are not mechanically determined by the objective facts about the past, but are rather socially mediated by ideologies in the present” (Bietti, 2014, p. 27). The progressive, leftist administration of Néstor Kirchner was able to change the societal discourse around the dictatorship because the people were ready to confront the past and to seek a final justice after twenty years of democracy. Commemorative speeches and bodily practices, such as those on March 24th annually in Argentina, serve as an important exhibition and interpretation of memory. In addition, they may also indicate something about how Argentine political elites mediate the relationship between the present while forming the master narratives of the country all at once.

Analysis of Selected Presidential Speeches

Method of Discourse Analysis

The term “discourse analysis,” the primary method of this investigation, has different definitions in various disciplines. For our purposes I will use the definition employed by Jorgensen and Phillips of discourse as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). In this work, the authors analyze various theoretical traditions in discourse analysis, including one called “Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory”. This tradition highlights the importance of what are called “key signifiers,” essentially terms that when attached with meaning in discourse can convey a message. The Jorgensen and Phillips expand on the role of key signifiers as described by Laclau and Ernesto on page 50:

First, the different key signifiers: nodal points, master signifiers and myths. Generally speaking, nodal points organise discourses (for example, ‘liberal democracy’), master signifiers organise identity (for example, ‘man’), and myths organise a social space (for example, ‘the West’ or ‘society’). All of these concepts refer to key signifiers in the social organisation of meaning. When key signifiers are identified in specific empirical material, the investigation can begin of how discourses, identity and the social space respectively are organised discursively. (Discourse analysis as theory and method, 2002)

Essentially, what connects all of the key signifiers and gives them importance is how they are imbued with social meaning. In the cases of the speeches in this examination, nodal points will be identified such as *memoria* and *justicia* (“memory” and “justice”) and their uses will be examined in the speeches. These nodal points are words that refer to abstract concepts to organize the meaning of the speech around certain topics, as well as to emphasize the meaning of the speech. Their frequency, that is how many times they are mentioned and their contextual uses will be examined in the speeches.

In addition to nodal points, master signifiers are important in discourses because they help to establish meaning and order identity between different actors within the speeches. These master signifiers help to characterize the various actors involved in the dictatorship, and will be noted as they appear in the speeches. I am particularly interested in references to the human rights organizations involved with the memory of the dictatorship, and will look for them when conducting the word count along with nodal signifiers. This word count will be conducted along with an in-context analysis of the master signifiers when appropriate.

Another feature to be analyzed in the speeches outside of nodal points and master signifiers are the binaries created between opposing ideas. In his discursive analysis of several commemorative speeches given by President Néstor Kirchner, Bietti focuses in particular on the polarizations and binaries created in political communications, which he describes as “highly goal-oriented performance[s]” (2014, p. 64). He does this by examining how the actors and participants in the speech are characterized, for example the employment of personal pronouns such as “we” to describe those celebrating the Day of Memory vs. “they” meaning the agents of the dictatorship (2014, pp. 64-5). In addition, he also examines Kirchner’s creation of separate timeframes, which “reveal to us the way in which ex-president Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) attempts to construct a new time of exceptionality from 2003 to the present in social, moral, and political terms” and breaking with the past (2014, p. 65). Bietti argues that the goal of these techniques used by Néstor Kirchner in his speeches is to “create polarizations between an in-group and an out-group” and a clear break with past times moving into a new present under the Kirchner administration (p. 66). In this case, those in the “in-group” include the human rights organizations, in some cases the *desaparecidos*, Néstor’s political party, and Néstor himself. The “out-group” generally consists of the military during the time of the dictatorship and all

those responsible for human rights violations and covering up what happened under the dictatorship. These divisions are important because they create sides of the society, with one side (the “in-group”) having the moral high ground according to Néstor. It could also be said that this divide fractures society into distinct parts: those in favor of the dictatorship and those against it.

Beyond analyzing the binaries and polarizations created in the speeches, Bietti also looks carefully at the lexical choices Kirchner employs. He examines how particular selected words, such as “*definitivamente* (‘once and for all’) and *terminar* (‘to finish’),” impact the meaning and interpretations of the message (p. 69). Specifically in this example, Bietti frames these words as an attempt by Néstor to put an end to the previous time period under the dictatorship. They are also used to differentiate the present time period in which Néstor is giving the speech (2004) from previous administrations which did not deliver justice after the dictatorship. Bietti states on page 69, the use of the word *definitivamente* “reminds us of the former democratic governments’ failed attempts to condemn ex-perpetrators.” This juxtaposition of the failures of past government actions with Néstor’s renewed pursuit of justice leads the audience to form conclusions about the past, present, and future in this case and how they differ.

As a part of the master signifiers, I am also interested in examining how the Presidents refer to themselves or their role as President in situating the memory of the dictatorship. I will also examine the uses of personal references and how the presidents characterize themselves when addressing these audiences. This will be done with the goal of answering questions including: what kind of groups do they align themselves with? What do they promise to do or advocate for? This is important in understanding how the presidents use the memory of the

dictatorship in modern domestic politics and how they place themselves into the national narrative.

In summary, these methods as described by Jorgensen and Philipps, and Bietti will be used in this political discourse analysis. This will include the following: 1) identifying nodal points, 2) identifying master signifiers and how they are used to characterize the actors involved (such as the *desaparecidos*, agents of the dictatorship, and human rights organizations), 3) the polarizations created in the speech to examine what they convey about the speech themes and in-groups vs. out-groups, and 4) the role of the president according to how they characterize themselves in the speech.

The speeches were originally given live to audiences and were recorded or transcribed by various organizations, but for the purpose of this study they will be considered in text format. They will also be studied in the original Spanish; longer passages when quoted in their entirety are in both Spanish and English, here shorter quotes have been translated into English by the author.

Nodal Points

The nodal points that will be searched for throughout all three speeches include the following Spanish words: *amor* (“love”), *memoria* (“memory”), *justicia* (“justice”), *verdad* (truth), *impunidad* (“impunity”), *construcción* and *reconstrucción* (construction or reconstruction), and *lucha* (“fight”). I selected these nodal signifiers specifically because they occur frequently in the speeches and are often imbued with deeper, abstract meanings. For example, the word *amor* was used most frequently in the three speeches in Cristina Kirchner’s 2010 speech, and can serve to organize the meaning of the speech. Cristina is speaking in that speech about how the memory of the dictatorship should be converted from one of anger to one

of love for those who disappeared and those they left behind. Counting the nodal points which serve to give overall meaning to the speeches will be useful in determining the overall themes of the speeches. The table below includes the word counts of these selected nodal points per speech, along with the master signifiers for the human rights organizations, which will also be discussed.

Table 1: Word Counts of Nodal Points and Master Signifiers for Human Rights Organizations

Category	Word(s)	Speech		
		NK - 2004	NK - 2006	CK - 2010
Nodal Points	"amor" (love)	1	1	7
	"memoria" (memory)	1	9	9
	"justicia" (justice)	4	22	19
	"verdad" (truth)	0	24	8
	"impunidad" (impunity)	3	4	1
	"construcción" and "reconstrucción" (construction or reconstruction)	1	7	9
	"lucha" (fight)	5	6	3
Master Signifiers for Human rights organizations	"madre" (mother)	4	4	2
	"abuela" (grandmother)	4	4	4
	"hijos" (children)	3	5	1
	"derechos humanos" (human rights)	0	4	2

As can be seen in the table above, the uses of the nodal points vary across the speeches examined. Some general trends can be identified looking at this table with simple numbers of word uses: in the first speech by Néstor in 2004, *lucha* and *justicia* were the most commonly used nodal signifiers. This could represent the struggle towards justice and changing the discourse around the dictatorship and *los desaparecidos*. 2004 was early on in Néstor's presidency and it was also early on in his attempts to change dialogue from the "Theory of the Two Demons" to a state of mind that held the dictatorship more accountable. In the second speech, Néstor's 2006 speech celebrating the establishment of the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice, the words *verdad* and *justicia* are the most frequently referenced. This could indicate a

trend at this point towards continuing the earlier work for truth and justice and making these the central foci of investigations into the dictatorship's abuses. The frequent use of *verdad* is interesting as well as there seems to be a very strong emphasis in bringing memory, and not just any memory but the *true* memory to light. In the third speech by Cristina Kirchner in 2010, the most commonly used nodal points are *memoria*, *justicia*, and *construcción* or *reconstrucción*. The nodal point of justice is interesting because it is used frequently in all three speeches, but the theme of memory is seen frequently in this speech which, while not new as memory was referenced in other speeches, is noteworthy. The interesting point in this speech is the emphasis on the theme of construction, which could refer to the construction of memory, the physical construction of the country, or a combination of these.

When searching for nodal points, I also searched for several master signifiers that establish identity. The words I searched for included *madres* ("mothers"), *abuelas* (grandmothers)," *hijos* ("children"), and *derechos humanos* ("human rights").² The frequency of the uses of these references is also noted in the table above, however I found that they are less useful than nodal points out of context. As such, the master signifiers will be examined more thoroughly in context with each speech.

² A note on the names of the human rights organizations: The word for "mothers" was used to look for references to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, discussed in the historical section. Over time as the mothers were unable to find their disappeared children, they began searching instead for the disappeared grandchildren, the children of disappeared women who were pregnant and gave birth in captivity. The children were often not returned to their families, and were instead given to adoptive parents (generally military families). Many grew up not knowing their true identity until the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the same women who had been Mothers but many years later, began requesting that young people of a certain age get DNA tests to possibly find their lost relatives. There is now an organization called HIJOS composed of these lost young people who have been reunited with their families. These three terms were used to refer directly specifically to the three connected human rights organizations in the speeches.

Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2004

The first speech to be analyzed was given by President Néstor Kirchner at La Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (Mechanical School of the Army) on March 24th, 2004. On this day the President was commemorating the re-opening of the ESMA, which was a former torture center during the dictatorship, as the “Espacio para la Memoria y para la Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights).” The publically available full text of the speech was retrieved from a web site titled “Creación del Museo de la Memoria, Néstor Kirchner en la ESMA en 2004,” and a video of the original speech delivery was also referenced.

This speech is 649 words in length, and when delivered originally lasted approximately 7 minutes and 30 seconds. As Table 1 in the Nodal Points section shows, Néstor use the nodal point *lucha*, meaning “fight,” most often in this speech compared to other nodal point, using it 5 times. After *lucha* the word *justicia*, meaning “justice,” was referred to 4 times and *impunidad* meaning “impunity” was used 3 times. *Impunidad* was used mainly in the sense that the agents of the dictatorship should not have impunity and that there should be “a fight against impunity” as he says in the first portion of the speech. This means that those who committed human rights violations and were not properly tried at the end of the dictatorship now should be prosecuted to finally seek justice for *los desaparecidos*. He also uses the key words for the human rights organizations, such as *madres* and *abuelas* which refer to the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo several times in the relatively short speech.

As far as the master signifiers and characterizations of actors in the speech, Néstor is quick to otherize those who were involved in the clandestine acts of the dictatorship, unambiguously calling them “assassins who are repudiated by the Argentine people.” He

establishes a connection between himself and the audience he is speaking to by referring to them throughout the speech as *compañeros*³, effectively creating an “us” vs. “them” situation with Néstor on the side of the Argentine people and human rights organizations against the agents of the dictatorship.

In several instances he invoked the victims of the dictatorship, even going as far as to say “I know that from heaven, from some place, they are coming to watch us.” In this first fragment, Néstor invokes the memory of the *desaparecidos* as being present everywhere in Argentina, wherever people celebrate and remember what happened.

... <i>compañeros</i> and <i>compañeras</i> that are not here but I know that they are here in every hand lifted here and in so many places in Argentina...	... <i>compañeros</i> y <i>compañeras</i> que no están pero sé que están en cada mano que se levanta aquí y en tantos lugares de la Argentina...
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This second fragment (below) includes a reference to the past with a call to action in the future, and an encouragement that Argentines must keep “fighting” as Néstor says, most likely fighting against the agents of the dictatorship but this could also refer to fighting against forgetting what happened.

Because of this, I know that from heaven, from some place, they are coming to watch us; I know that they remember those times; I know that we were not at the height of history, but we must continue fighting as we can, with the arms we have, bearing the squeezes and tightenings that we can. But we are not going to give up, <i>compañeros</i> y <i>compañeras</i> .	Por eso, sé que desde el cielo, de algún lado, nos están viendo y mirando; sé que se acordarán de aquellos tiempos; sé que por ahí no estuvimos a la altura de la historia, pero seguimos luchando como podemos, con las armas que tenemos, soportando los apretujones y los aprietes que nos puedan hacer. Pero no nos van a quebrar, <i>compañeros</i> y <i>compañeras</i> .
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³ The Spanish word *compañero* roughly translates as “companion” in English, and has a connotation of a common struggle among a group of people and a sense of being a part of something with others. As the English word “companion” does not carry the same connotation, the Spanish word will be used in this study.

The third fragment below expands on the earlier call to action by invoking the *desaparecidos* as people to be admired and remembered for their deeds, along with the ones they left behind who now comprise the human rights organizations.

<p>We want there to be justice, we want an actual strong recovery of the memory and that in this Argentina they return to remember, to recapture and to take as an example those who were capable of giving everything for the values they had and a generation in Argentina that was able to do so, that has left an example, that has left a trail, their lives, their mothers, that has left their grandmothers and that has left their children.</p>	<p>Queremos que haya justicia, queremos que realmente haya una recuperación fortísima de la memoria y que en esta Argentina se vuelvan a recordar, recuperar y tomar como ejemplo a aquellos que son capaces de dar todo por los valores que tienen y una generación en la Argentina que fue capaz de hacer eso, que ha dejado un ejemplo, que ha dejado un sendero, su vida, sus madres, que ha dejado sus abuelas y que ha dejado sus hijos.</p>
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When it comes to describing his own role in the situation, Néstor mainly appears in his official capacity as the President of Argentina, and does not refer to himself generally as an individual. He uses his executive position early in the speech to officially ask forgiveness from the people, stating in the third paragraph that “as President of the nation, I come to ask pardon on behalf of the State for the embarrassment to have been silent during 20 years of democracy on such atrocities.” His opening of the ESMA in 2004 was a significant step towards an open national dialogue about the dictatorship, and this official apology in this speech to the dictatorship’s victims is another significant step in righting the wrongs done to them.

Néstor refers to himself (and more importantly, his office as President) once again later in the speech stating that “I do not come in the name of any particular [political] party, but as a *compañero* and as President of Argentina and all Argentines.” With this, he once again aligns himself with the will of the people instead of political will, and is attempting to reassure the people that he represents their interests. In addition he also makes it clear that he is president of “all Argentines,” which promotes a feeling of national unity. In identifying himself with all

Argentines and in asking forgiveness for what happened under the dictatorship, Néstor is also establishing that his regret over what happened during the dictatorship should be the feeling of all Argentines. In essence, with this speech Néstor is changing the official dialogue surrounding the dictatorship from one of silence and ignorance over what happened to asking forgiveness and moving forward with national unity.

In summary, this first speech given by Néstor on March 24th, 2004 is about changing the dialogue around the dictatorship. Three main points are important in this speech: First, Néstor's frequent use of the nodal point *lucha* represents the beginning of a struggle to change not only the dialogue, but to renew the struggle for justice. Second, Néstor uses master signifiers to paint the *desaparecidos* as watchers waiting for justice after their deaths in some ways. He invokes the memory of the dead and disappeared in this speech, reminding the living that they "are coming to watch us" from heaven. With this, he seeks to incentivize the living into action to honor and bring justice to those who have been rendered silent by the dictatorship. Third, the position of presidency is used by Néstor in this speech to establish that he is the President of all Argentines, and is changing the official national discourse for everyone in the country from that position. This also carries an additional implication that to take a position other than the official state position would be in some ways anti-Argentinean, as Néstor represents all true Argentines. While this speech does not feature many prominent examples of polarizations and binaries, he does make an important distinction between "us" and "them" groups with his use of *compañeros* to refer to himself and his audience, while referring to the agents of the dictatorship as "assassins." Over all, the establishment of the ESMA as a site of memory commemorated with this speech represents the initiation of a struggle for justice; the battle for truth and memory continues with Néstor's March 24th, 2006 speech.

Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2006

The second speech to be analyzed was also given by President Néstor Kirchner two years later, on March 24th, 2006 at the site of the EMSA. This speech commemorated the passing of a law that declared that the 24th of March would be the “National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice,” the day to remember the dictatorship and *los desaparecidos*.

This speech is the longest of the three speeches to be analyzed, and includes 24 uses of the nodal point *verdad* and 22 references to *justicia*. Out of all three speeches it also includes the most direct references to the words for the human rights organizations with a total of 17 specific nodal point uses of the words for these organizations.

The majority of the speech is dedicated to a historical overview of the coup and the dictatorship, as well as the characterization of many societal actors involved. In addition to talking about human rights organizations, agents of the dictatorship, and *los desaparecidos*, Néstor also discusses Argentine society as a whole and apportions some of the blame for the dictatorship to other sectors of society. This differs from the first speech analyzed, in which Néstor accepted blame for the government, and now is distributing blame to some others actors as well. Blame also re-occurs as a theme in Cristina’s 2010 speech when she places blame only on small groups in society who believed in the dictatorship, such as specific politicians and business people who supported the military. In the section below, Néstor explicitly names some of these actors normally left out in discussions of the dictatorship:

The coups suffered by the Argentines have had in the 20 th century a long, mournful, and difficult history and never constituted episodes only featuring the military. Sectors of society, of the press, of the church, of the Argentine politicians, certain sectors of the citizens also had their part every time the	Los golpes de Estado padecidos por los argentinos han tenido en el siglo XX una larga, luctuosa y difícil historia y nunca constituyeron sólo episodios protagonizados por militares. Sectores de la sociedad, de la prensa, de la iglesia, de la clase política argentina, ciertos sectores de la ciudadanía
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constitutional order was subverted. I say it because not all of them have realized yet their responsibility in these acts.	tuvieron también su parte cada vez que se subvertía el orden constitucional. Lo digo porque no todos han reconocido todavía su responsabilidad en los hechos.
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This section references past military dictatorships that occurred at various intervals throughout the 20th century whenever the state was in danger of instability. The military, encouraged by members of various sectors of society, would take control to restore order (Soledad, 2010). Some people even welcomed the coup of 1976 when it happened as a similar attempt to restore order in the country. As Néstor says in another portion of this speech, “there were some who went as far as to say that General Videla (the original leader of the military dictatorship) was a democratic general and that it was the transition that we needed.” These portions of the speech help to shed light on how the rest of Argentine society reacted to the dictatorships and how sometimes they were well received by the people. This also serves to place blame and some responsibility for the dictatorship on other actors within the state.

Néstor spends the most time in this speech describing the agents of the dictatorship and the impacts that they had on the Argentine society throughout the dictatorship. I counted roughly 9 references to the dictatorship and its agents, some of which were long sections of the speech describing the actions of the dictatorship. The characterization of the agents of the dictatorship is generally negative, describing the dictatorship as having “illegal power” which was used to “apply State terrorism that manifested in the systematic practice of grave human rights violations.” Néstor goes on later in the speech to describe the coup as a “criminal plan” put in place before March 24th, 1976 and justified using the Argentine National Security Doctrine. These negative characterizations of the dictatorship’s abuses of power are typical, but Néstor goes on to describe some of the reasons why the dictatorship used such brutal methods of repression:

<p>The dictatorial power meant that the people would surrender to its arbitrariness and omnipotence. They were looking for a fragmented, immobile, obedient society, and for this reason they tried to break it and empty it of everything that made them uncomfortable, annulling its vitality and dynamics and that's why they prohibited politics and even art. Only in this way could they impose a political and economic project that replaced the process of import substitution industrialization with a new model of financial valuation and structural adjustment with a smaller role for the State, external debt and capital flight, and, above all, with a social discipline that would allow them to establish order that a democratic system would not guarantee.</p>	<p>El poder dictatorial pretendía así que el pueblo todo se rindiera a su arbitrariedad y su omnipotencia. Se buscaba una sociedad fraccionada, inmóvil, obediente, por eso trataron de quebrarla y vaciarla de todo aquello que lo inquietaba, anulando su vitalidad y su dinámica y por eso prohibieron desde la política hasta el arte. Sólo así podían imponer un proyecto político y económico que reemplazara al proceso de industrialización sustitutivo de importaciones por un nuevo modelo de valorización financiera y ajuste estructural con disminución del rol del Estado, endeudamiento externo con fuga de capitales y, sobre todo, con un disciplinamiento social que permitiera establecer un orden que el sistema democrático no les garantizaba.</p>
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In the fragment above Néstor continues to describe how the structural adjustment put in place by the dictatorship continued into the 90s and affected Argentina long after the dictatorship has ended, further establishing the importance of this time period outside of the human rights violations and social memory created. One interesting note about the economic aspects of the dictatorship mentioned here is that they are common neoliberal strategies promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Import Substitution Industrialization was an attempt by many Latin American countries in the second half of the 20th century to reduce their reliance on foreign imports by developing their own manufacturing industries and producing those goods themselves. Neoliberalism, which emphasizes free trade and free market ideals, undercut these attempts by Latin American states such as Argentina to develop their own industries and kept them reliant on foreign imports. One of the lasting legacies of the dictatorship, according to Néstor, was reversing the industrial

development of Argentina as it was in the best interest of the dictatorship to favor foreign economic interests over their own.

This speech also diverges from the narrative created by the other speeches analyzed because Néstor references the current Argentine armed forces. The reference to the armed forces seems to be a rebuke, but is in some ways simultaneously setting a goal of changing the image of the armed forces as a group to be trusted, not feared. It is also an opportunity for Néstor to remind the military that the people they are sworn to serve should not be afraid of army members:

<p>We have learned and today our children and grandchildren learn in the nation's schools, the journeys of their lives and their exemplary projects. In their examples and in the examples of so many other heroes and anonymous citizens the Argentine military and all citizens should inspire them. We want to feel proud that all the uniforms of our country's soldiers are respected in their prestige and viewed with happiness and not fear, like the fear that we felt thirty years ago, beloved brothers of the Armed Forces, when we saw a uniform and believed that our lives were over.</p>	<p>Hemos aprendido nosotros y hoy aprenden nuestros hijos y nuestros nietos en las escuelas de la Nación, el recorrido de sus vidas y sus proyectos ejemplares. En sus ejemplos y en el de tantos otros próceres y ciudadanos anónimos deben inspirarse los militares argentinos y todos los ciudadanos de la Patria. Queremos sentirnos orgullosos de que todos los uniformes de los soldados de la Patria sean respetados en su prestigio y vistos con alegría y no con temor, como ese temor que tuvimos hace treinta años, queridos hermanos de las Fuerzas Armadas, que veíamos un uniforme y creíamos que se nos terminaba la vida.</p>
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In this fragment, Néstor establishes both an ideal of what the military should be (an exemplary organization) and compares that ideal to what it was under the dictatorship, mainly a tool for terror and violence. It serves as an opportunity to shame the military in some ways for past actions while also setting a goal for the future, and rebuking them for what occurred under the dictatorship. It also changes the identity and master signifier of the modern armed forces and

gives them a goal to be different from their counterparts of the past. This rebuke for the armed forces also comes with a warning later in the speech:

Dear chiefs of our Armed Forces, beloved brothers: when I hear those who would defend the aberrations and ignoble crimes and actions of '76 and raise up the coup of '76, I believe there is no human passion that could rise to defend such terror.	Queridos jefes de nuestras Fuerzas Armadas, queridos hermanos: cuando escucho a algunos defender los aberrantes e innobles crímenes y acciones del '76 y levantar el golpe del '76, yo creo que no hay pasión humana que puede llevar a defender tanto terror.
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Thus taken together, all of these messages that Néstor is sending to the armed forces could be summarized as a final rebuke for their actions and a goal of respectability for the military, but a reminder that the actions of the past should neither be exalted nor repeated. The speech also in some ways deals with the Bietti's idea of polarizations between and "us" and a "them" group. This is done in the speech fragments reference above by referring to the armed forces using the master signifiers for "brothers," *hermanos*, implying that the group of "us" which is normally used to refer to those outside of the agents of the dictatorship possibly includes "our brothers in the armed forces." The line between "us" and "them" which separates the majority of society from those people who committed human rights violations may be becoming less important as time goes on and relations are normalizing between these groups. However, with the warning that Néstor issued in the second fragment, there was a definitely a separation between those who would defend the dictatorship and those who believe that what the dictatorship did was wrong. The "us" vs. "them" polarity in this speech is more mediated and perhaps more flexible than in the other speeches when the distinctions are firmly established.

Outside of speaking to the military and other sectors of the country, Néstor also addresses *los desaparecidos* in the speech. He characterizes them for the most part as young, innocent victims and mentions how Argentine society as a whole was impacted by their deaths. Similarly

to his reference in the first speech of the *desaparecidos* watching Argentina from heaven, they are also portrayed in a very favorable manner in this reference as well. In addition, there is a binary created in this second speech between the idea of the *desaparecidos* in a state of “living” or “dead.” In the beginning of the 2006 speech when describing some of the historical buildup to the dictatorship, Néstor describes some of what victims suffered, repeating the words “absent for always.” This refers back to that binary as they are both possibly living and dead. Although there is great certainty at this point that there are dead, the state of being “absent” serves as a mediator between the twin states of “living” and “dead.”

... thousands of people were subjected to kidnapping, torture and death and became “absent for always”, “absent for always”, as the people most responsible for the crimes cynically proclaimed. Other thousands populated the jails without cause or with illegal processes and many thousands more found themselves in exile as the only form of survival.	...sometió a miles de personas al secuestro, a la tortura y a la muerte y los convirtió en “ausentes para siempre”, “ausentes para siempre”, como cínicamente proclamó el mayor responsable de los crímenes. Otros miles poblaron las cárceles sin causa o con procesos ilegales y muchos miles más encontraron en el exilio la única forma de sobrevivir.
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Néstor does not make many references to himself and his role as president in this speech, but there are a few references worth noting. As in the previous speech, he does not separate himself and his ideals from the position of presidency and presents himself during the speech in his official capacity as the head of state. However despite the power he wields in this position, he is also very forthright in acknowledging that even as president he is not solely responsible for creating the definitive truth of the dictatorship era:

As President of the Republic I do not pretend to construct a definitive truth, which is the heritage of all generations. I only contribute, as I have said many times, my relative truth. But yes, I should work hard to help ensure basic principles of coexistence.	Como Presidente de la República no pretendo construir una verdad definitiva, que es patrimonio de todas las generaciones. Sólo aportó, como lo he dicho muchas veces, mi verdad relativa. Pero sí, debo trabajar
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	duramente para contribuir a asegurar principios básicos de la convivencia.
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This recognition is interesting as Néstor publically admits that he alone cannot form the official discourse on what happened, or at least states that he cannot. While presidents and elected officials have a great deal of influence over the dialogue around events, Néstor is implying that all he can do is contribute to the memories of multiple generations. It serves to downplay his role and his power as a president and leaves room for other voices in the discourse around the dictatorship. This downplaying highlights another binary seen throughout these speeches: the differences between democracy and authoritarian governments. As Néstor is a democratic president, he does not have the power to completely dictate what the discourse will be, only to guide the conversation and set an official position. Unlike the dictatorship leaders, he cannot make people who do not agree with him simply disappear. Authoritarian leaders can completely control the official position and the ability of people to discuss this position by using force to prevent opposing ideas from surfacing.

Despite Néstor's admission that he does not have absolute power, he does make his position clear before the speech is over. Towards the end he discusses the annulments of several laws passed after the dictatorship ended, called the "final point and due obedience laws" which pardoned many of the military officials involved in human rights violations. In 2006 before Néstor gave this speech those laws were repealed, opening opportunities for new trials for those who had not been originally tried in the years after 1983. Néstor describes his position on these laws very clearly:

You all have heard me publicly claiming in other times, that there was no final point without truth; you have also heard from my mouth, there when others managed it, that it	Me han escuchado reclamar públicamente en otros tiempos, que no había punto final sin verdad; han oído también de mi boca, allí cuando otros lo apañaban, que no era posible
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was not possible to invoke as a legal apology the fulfillment of manifestly illegal orders.	invocar a modo de disculpa legal el cumplimiento de órdenes manifiestamente ilegales.
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This opinion places Néstor on the side of those seeking final justice and court trials for those who committed human rights violations, in some cases even those who were simply on orders from the supervisors. This also serves to align him with the majority of people who want to see some form of final justice and extended judicial proceedings for those who committed crimes for the dictatorship.

Three key points are important to summarize this speech: First, in terms of word choice, the numerous uses of the nodal points *verdad* and *justicia* illuminate the main theme of this speech. It is a continuation of the struggle to bring to light what really happened under the dictatorship and to make it part of the public memory. Second, with the master signifiers and characterization of societal actors Néstor places blame on more groups besides the military such as the press and Argentines who supported the dictatorship. However he takes an opportunity in the speech to especially shame the military and gives the military a goal of redemption to work towards, but acknowledges that other sectors (and possibly international actors) also had a hand in what happened. In addition, he blurs the lines between “us” and “them” by describing the armed forces as “brothers,” meaning that they are closer perhaps to the “us” group now than to the “them” group. Third, he uses his position as President to advocate for the continuation of remembrance, to celebrate the Day of Memory, and to publically denounce the annulled Due Obedience and End Point laws. With this, he is commemorating the official changes in law surrounding those who committed crimes for the dictatorship. Similar to the opening of the ESMA, the establishment of the Day of Memory was a concrete action which created a physical celebration that annually brings up memories of the dictatorship and *los desaparecidos*. These

actions and the goals articulated by Néstor in this speech serve to preserve collective memory for future generations.

Speech by Cristina Kirchner at La ESMA, March 24th, 2010

The third speech to be analyzed was given by Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner on March 24th, 2010, the Día Nacional de la Memoria, por la Verdad y la Justicia, and is a commemorative speech to celebrate the official inauguration of a new cultural center located in the Ex-ESMA Espacio de la Memoria, established only a few years prior by Néstor Kirchner.

The speech is approximately 23 minutes long and given to an audience including other political leaders from neighboring countries and many members of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and relatives of *los desaparecidos*. The speech was given to commemorate a new cultural center reconstructed in a part of la ESMA and the 34th anniversary of the start of the dictatorship. The mostly frequently used nodal point in the speech is *justicia*, which was used a total of 19 times. The next most commonly used nodal points were *memoria* meaning “memory” and versions of *construcción* which means “construction.” Both of these words were used a total of 9 times in the speech. After that, *verdad* was used 8 times, and *amor*, meaning “love” was used 7 times. The use of *amor* 7 times in the speech was the most out of all three speeches analyzed. There are not as many references to the human rights organizations in this speech as in the two previous speeches by Néstor Kirchner.

In terms of the master signifiers and characterization of actors, Cristina makes many positive references to the Argentine human rights organizations throughout the speech, praising them for maintaining the “call to memory and the demand for truth a justice” very early on in the speech. She also speaks of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in a very personal manner in many of her references, mentioning them individually by name and sharing some of their stories. Her

role as a woman president may make her more disposed to talk about them in such personal tones as she perhaps related to them more closely. In addition, it is possible that so many years after the dictatorship (the March 24th, 2010 speech would have been on the 34th anniversary of the dictatorship), Argentine society was more comfortable hearing individual memories and stories of loss. Either way, she established a firm connection between herself and the Madres as an ally to their cause and a sympathizer for what they have suffered.

Cristina also makes reference to the agents or supporters of the dictatorship, separating them from the attendees at the speech and creating an “us” vs “them” binary. At one point, she states that she wants to convene “the memory of all Argentines – of all, and when I say all I am only excluding tiny groups that hide themselves . . . that hide themselves behind pretend ideologies.” This distinction serves to cement the idea of two sides in this conflict: those who are fighting for memory and justice for the *desaparecidos* on one side (on the side of Cristina and the Madres) and those who were involved in violent acts on behalf of the dictatorship on the other.

Some of the language that Cristina uses to describe her audience and more broadly those who kept alive the call to memory is interesting in the specificity of the words she uses. For example, at one point when talking about how Argentines were able to overcome the tragedy of the dictatorship, she says they were “capable of this because this is *the army of memory*...” The term “the army of memory” in this section is particularly interesting as Cristina is co-opting the language of the military in using the word “army” to describe those gathered to listen to the speech. In framing the listeners and those opposed to the agents of the dictatorship as a kind of army, they take the language of the military and personalize it in an interesting manner. In addition, it draws interesting connections between polite society and the military in making them

seem like one, simply different types of armies perhaps. In terms of master signifier use, this example serves to give the “army of memory” almost a form of military identity, organization, and power.

Cristina also refers to herself personally several times in the speech. She seeks at one point early on to create a connection between herself and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, which she later builds upon by citing her personal relationship with one of the women who originally founded the organization. While this may be an authentic connection and Kirchner may genuinely know the women of this organization, this is also in many ways a political move for the president to align herself with those who have lost the most under the dictatorship. The memory of past years on the 24th of March is also cited as a day on which Kirchner has personally felt the pain, tensions, and anger of many Argentines, meaning that she empathizes with them and has felt the same frustrations. She also references her past career as a lawyer at one point, and how that experience made her “so clearly see our laws” and how justice should be applied. With this, she is building her personal credibility that she is qualified to talk about justice being applied to those responsible for the human rights violations committed during the dictatorship. Cristina also personally makes a personal promise to the people of the country in this speech, the full text and translation of which can be seen below:

...and let me commit myself before you – before all of you and all Argentine that if we do not find justice in Argentina, I as President will accompany it to other international tribunals also demanding justice.	...y déjenme comprometerme ante usted – ante ustedes y todos los Argentinos que si no encontramos justicia en la Argentina, yo como Presidenta la voy a acompañar a otros tribunales internacionales también demandando justicia.
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This personal promise for justice also helps to establish her credibility with the people and solidify the fact that she is committed to justice. The nodal point *justicia* also happens to be

the most frequently used nodal point in her speech, and could be said then to be a main theme in her message to the people of the country.

At another point in this speech, Cristina mentions how the international community views what occurred in Argentina, and also incorporates an element of shame for what happened in the past through a personal anecdote. This reference to the international community serves to situate Argentina within the rest of the world, and helps establish how Argentines think of themselves in an international context. The story she tells involves a conversation with former President of France, Jacques Chirac before Cristina became president:

<p>I do not want to live in a country where as a public official when one goes to visit another foreign public official they ask for justice around the citizens of their own countries who were disappeared or detained here in Argentina. I remember the first time that I accompanied my life companion [former president Néstor Kirchner] on a foreign visit and we went to meet with the President of France, then President of France, Jacques Chirac... But the first thing he said to me... was that the French society could not understand that the people who were responsible for the disappearances of French citizens could still continue freely, I remember it as if it was today. And let me say that as an Argentine I felt an immense embarrassment because I did not have a response...</p>	<p>Yo no quiero vivir en un país donde como mandataria cuando uno va a visitar a otro mandatario extranjero le reclaman por justicia acerca de ciudadanos de sus propios países que fueron desaparecidos o detenidos aquí en la Argentina. Recuerdo la primera vez que acompañaba en una elegida del exterior a mi compañero de todo la vida y fuimos a entrevistarnos con el Presidente de Francia, entonces Presidente de Francia, Jacques Chirac... Pero lo primero que me dijo... fue la sociedad de Francia no puede entender que todavía quien fue responsable de la desaparición de ciudadanos Franceses sigue en libertad, lo recuerdo como si fuera hoy. Y deje me decirle que como Argentina sentí una inmensa vergüenza porque no tuve respuesta...</p>
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This section is important because it addresses the international community's views of the disappearances, and also legitimizes the call to properly prosecute those who responsible for the kidnapping and torturing under the dictatorship. It also establishes a few binaries: one between blame and shame, and another related binary between looking outwards and inwards. The first

binary between blame and shame deals with the distribution of blame within the country for what happened, but the second idea of shame has more to do with embarrassment displayed outwardly. The inward and outward binary is very related to this as when looking inward, blame is felt and given to groups of society for the dictatorship but when looking outward at the rest of the world, the reaction and behavior is very different. Later in the speech, Cristina goes on to extend the references to the international community by mentioning a memorial in Israel to those who disappeared under the dictatorship in Argentina:

Because they are questions that are beyond, they are questions that, as I said at the beginning, have universal value. I say it here in Argentina and I said it as well in the Forest of Memory in Israel, in Jerusalem when in front of the Monument to the Jewish Detained Desaparecidos in Argentina, we remember that these things cross over all religions, cross over all beliefs: the respect for and value of life, memory, and justice.	Porque son cuestiones que son más allá, son cuestiones que, como decía al principio, tienen valor universal. Lo digo aquí en la Argentina y lo dije también en el Bosque de Memoria en Israel, en Jerusalén cuando frente al Monumento a los Judíos Detenidos Desaparecidos en la Argentina, acordábamos estas cosas que atraviesan todas las religiones, que atraviesan todas las creencias: el respeto y el valor de la vida, a la memoria, y a la justicia.
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In addition to referencing the outside community again by talking about Israel and the Jewish desaparecidos, Cristina also emphasizes that the values of memory and justice repeated frequently throughout the speech are “universal values” as she states at one point, and therefore should be preserved and promoted.

Four main points can summarize this speech: First, the main theme of the speech and the nodal points change with Cristina to include *amor* and *construcción* instead of focusing as heavily as the first two speeches on truth and justice. There is still a strong focus on those points and memory, truth, and justice are commonly seen together in this speech. However love and construction, both of memory and physical reconstruction of old buildings like the new cultural center she is commemorating, are emphasized much more in this particular speech. Second,

Cristina focuses on master signifiers placing herself, the human rights organizations, and the agents of the dictatorship in context. She promotes a positive characterization of the human rights organizations and establishes personal connections with organization members. While there is some blame placed on agents of the dictatorship, more of the emphasis of the speech is on the positive actions taken by human rights organizations and the desire for reconstruction of the country. Third, Cristina refers to the international community at several points, including a story about feeling embarrassed because of the dictatorship when meeting the President of France and promising to pursue justice to international courts. Fourth, Cristina establishes several binaries: between army of memory and agents of the dictatorship (“us” vs “them”), between blame and shame, and between looking inward in Argentina and looking outward to the rest of the world.

All of these factors combine together to form a message that the personal stories of those affected by the dictatorship matter. In addition, the personal stories of the survivors and families of the *desaparecidos* should be remembered. Through the speech Cristina is trying to change the feeling surrounding the Day of Memory to be one of remembrance and love instead of anger, as she states in the first few paragraphs. This theme contrasts with the previous themes explored by Néstor about initiating the *lucha* for memory. By the time that Cristina gave this speech in 2010, society was perhaps more ready to accept the legacy of the dictatorship, confront the horror of the past, and focus on the future. This was possible in some ways because the memory of the past had already been firmly established and fought for in the previous steps taken by Néstor. Essentially, in the context of the other speeches analyzed in this work, this speech can be seen a shift from outright struggle for memory and justice to a reframing the memory around the events of the dictatorship. With more time passing, perhaps the memory of the dictatorship is less

painful and it is easier for individual stories to be shared. Society at this stage is openly accepting the legacy of the human rights organizations and Cristina sets a goal of personal remembrance with this speech and a final search for justice, either in Argentina or in international courts.

Discussion

All three of the presidential speeches analyzed were texts that contributed to the discourse surrounding the Argentine dictatorship and the various actors involved. All the texts were complex documents with references to many different actors, each created and delivered to commemorate a different moment in Argentina's history. Throughout the analysis, some overarching themes became evident: negative portrayals of agents of the dictatorship with a search for final justice, multiple positive references to human rights organizations like the Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, and a call for the search for final justice. In addition, in the 2004 speech Néstor repeatedly mentioned the memory of *los desaparecidos* as being “present” with his audience and all Argentines, effectively invoking their spirits. In his 2006 speech he provided an interesting vision for the Argentine military to re-establish its reputation with society while also emphasizing the importance of final justice. Cristina's speech in 2010 focused heavily on emotional values such as her personal relationships with the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and the search for the three universal, international values of memory, truth, and justice coupled with love and construction.

Overall, the three speeches feature shifts over time from 2004 to 2010. Initially in the 2004 speech, Néstor sets up the struggle for justice and to recover memory in the country by re-opening old cases. Establishing the ESMA as a museum and space for memory widely open to the public helped to air out the secrets kept by the government since the end of the dictatorship and contributed to transparency. The struggle for justice was then converted into a societal struggle for unity. He spoke of societal unity with the purpose of preventing the complacency in all sectors of society that allowed the dictatorship to occur, and unity while moving forward as

one Argentine *pueblo*⁴. Blame is placed on some sectors as part of this process, but overall a goal of finally pursuing justice in the courts and bringing an official close to the pain of the past together becomes the dominant discourse. In 2010 memory was addressed from a much more personal context with Cristina's speeches and personal connections to the families of *desaparecidos*. While the quest for justice is still important at this stage, remembering the individuals and the memory that they left during their lives becomes a more central focus. The confrontation of painful memories and the way that these memories were approached changed over time with each new speech, as the events of the past framed in a new way by these two presidents.

In terms of the methodology and theory applied to analyze these speeches, the nodal points, master signifiers, binaries, and characterizations of the presidents applied to themselves helped to form a picture of the speeches. The nodal points selected show the general trends of the speeches through choice of words imbued with social meaning. The speeches evolved over time in terms of the nodal points used, beginning with the *lucha* that Néstor initiated, continuing with heavy emphasis on truth and justice as primary goals for all Argentines, and ending with Cristina's goals of reaching justice linked with love and construction. Together, the changes in these points represent a transition from a fighting mentality to one that sought to discover the truth of what really happened and understand peoples' experiences, and culminated in the desire to move forward with positive strategies for development, both physically and in terms of memory for the Argentine people.

The master signifiers throughout the speeches developed and managed identity, separating groups of people in some instances. For example, Néstor characterized the agents of

⁴ Spanish word literally translating as "town," but more frequently used with the connotation of "nation," "citizens of a country," or "people."

the dictatorship in his first speech as “assassins” and established himself as the President of “all Argentines.” These master signifiers in many cases served to help develop Bietti’s concept of binaries as these frequently existed between groups. One of the most prominent binaries was the division between “us” and “them” according to the presidents, with the in-group representing those on the side of the state and the out-group being those on the side of the dictatorship. While this thread occurred repeatedly, there were other powerful mediated binaries such as the division between the living and the dead among *los desaparecidos* and the society they left behind, placing blame and experiencing shame over the dictatorship, and a tension between feelings in Argentina when looking inward compared to looking outward. Additionally, the presidents almost always placed themselves on the side of the human rights organizations and opposite the dictatorship, taking the moral high ground in some ways.

This interpretation of these speeches has some limitations as well that should be discussed. One of the first limitations of this analysis is that only three speeches are covered. To truly get a sense of how commemorative speeches such as these help to form the national discourse around this topic, a few more speeches should be considered. In addition, these three speeches only cover two Argentine presidencies. These two are also very similar presidents ideologically; they are of the same party and also a married couple, so they likely share similar messages. To get a more complete picture, speeches from a wider variety of presidents should also be sought out. This would be an interesting area of exploration in the future, to look at the broader historical trends in the characterizations of actors and the presidents themselves in speeches.

Another important consideration in thinking about this work is that it is largely interpretive; I used my previous knowledge and research into this topic to make conclusions

about the allusions in speeches. For example, consider the following passage: “There are no different ideas that one can give – and that occurs in every democracy – that can make one think that you can construct a country on a base of pain, desperation and absences, as the almost unnamable general said.” This passage, to someone who has studied the dictatorship, refers to General Jorge Rafael Videla, one of the original leaders of the military coup in 1976 who was responsible for directing many of the human rights violations that occurred. However there is room for error in some of these speech interpretations, and there are also multiple possible meanings for some of the passages cited.

One final limitation of this work is the possibility for errors in translation. Since I examined these speeches in the original Spanish and translated them to English, some of the meaning could have been lost in the translation and some of the passages may not retain the original meaning.

Conclusion

Why analyze presidential speeches? Why take the time to understand collective memory? Because memory matters. In this case, memory matters in its relation to how a society as a whole remembers what happened. The memories of the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983 were for many very painful, and for some justice still has yet to be achieved. Despite this, understanding how Argentine society has navigated a complicated national history and several narratives over what happened under the dictatorship is important for a few reasons: first, it can help to bring justice in the present for *los desaparecidos* and their families. Second, it can help to ensure that no such events ever occur again in Argentina, and that societal memory of the mistakes of the past endures.

Bringing renewed attention to the dictatorship was one of the goals Néstor Kirchner accomplished with his 2004 speech and re-opening of the ESMA as a museum and site of memory. This event and historic speech reinvigorated the search for memory and identity in Argentina in the wake of the dictatorship, and brought renewed interest in telling the stories of *los desaparecidos*. The annulment of the Final Point and Due Obedience laws in 2005 allowed agents of the dictatorship to be officially prosecuted. The establishment of the Day of Memory for Truth and Justice, celebrated in Néstor's 2006 speech and created times for public, national mourning of those lost under the dictatorship and facilitated the healing process. When Cristina Kirchner officially recognized the contributions of human rights organizations such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in 2010, she reaffirmed the value of the "army of memory" while renewing a pledge to pursue justice. All of these discourses, with their characterization of actors, descriptions of the past, and visions for the future, helped to shape the ideas in the country around what really happened between 1976 and 1983 in Argentina.

Beyond shaping and controlling the past, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner were also actively involved in shaping the country's future with these speeches. Interspersed with descriptions of the past were visions for the future and what Argentina should become. The armed forces should be respected and men and women in uniform should not be feared as they were during the dictatorship. The country should continue searching for children of the disappeared in order to restore their identity and by extension, the national identity. Final justice should be pursued, either at home or abroad, to restore the international image of Argentina. All of these goals articulated in these speeches create a blue print; essentially they form a map to healing and a new national unity in the post-dictatorship Argentina of the present day. Addressing the dark legacies of Argentina's past through these presidential speeches has not only helped to orient the people to their own past, but will also help Argentina move forward in the future.

The struggle to mediate memory and fully address the legacies of the dictatorship is still going on today in Argentina. March 24th can sometimes be a sober day or remembrance, but in some years it has become politically charged. The marches and rallies on March 24th, 2017 serve to illustrate this very point. While March 24th is normally a peaceful day, in 2017 the people took to the streets to attend the marches but they turned into a political protest. The subject of the protests was current Argentine President Mauricio Macri, who had recently expressed doubt that he did not know if the number of *desaparecidos* was really 30,000, the generally cited highest possible number of disappeared people. Macri said, "I do not know if they were 9,000 or 30,000. The Dirty War was a horrible tragedy," (Cué, 2017) in a way minimizing the impact of the dictatorship. An article published on March 24th of that year in *El País*, a Spanish newspaper, detailed the response from the people to these comments at the annual demonstrations in the Plaza de Mayo:

A familiar feeling dominated the scene: many parents brought their children to teach them the ideal of *Nunca Mas*. But it quickly became a protest against Macri [the current President of Argentina].⁵ Not all of the attendees were kirchnerists, but the large majority were. In fact the event closed with songs of “to return, we will return”, a type of motto that encourages the return of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to power. All of the official speeches criticized the president, while the plaza booed his name.⁶ (Cué, 2017)

Journalist Carlos Cué, the author of the article, continues to describe the rocky relationship between Macri and the human rights organizations with close ties to Kirchnerism. At one point during these demonstrations, the crowd began chanting songs associating Macri’s democratic government directly with the dictatorship. Cué explains that the demonstrators “associated Macri with the dictatorship because of his economic policies, the strongest accusation that can be made against a government official. ‘Macri, trash, you are the dictatorship’, was sung in the plaza during part of the protest” (Cué, 2017).⁷

As this example demonstrates, Néstor and Cristina took great strides to mediate memory and bring the collective societal memory of the dictatorship to the forefront. However the relationships between the government, the military, and the people is not always entirely harmonious when it comes to interpreting the memory of the past. In this age of ever-shifting political narratives and rising tides of nationalism among many countries, the fight for memory and the ways it is used are more important than ever.

⁶ Original text: “Dominaba un ambiente familiar: muchos padres acuden con sus hijos para inculcarles la idea del *Nunca Más*. Pero rápidamente se convirtió en una gran protesta contra Macri. No todos los que asistieron eran kirchneristas, pero sí la gran mayoría. De hecho el acto se cerró con cánticos de “a volver, vamos a volver”, una especie de lema que alienta el regreso de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner al poder. Todos los discursos oficiales criticaron al presidente, mientras la plaza abucheaba su nombre” (Cué 2017).

⁷ Original text: “Los organizadores asociaron así a Macri a la dictadura por su política económica, la acusación más dura que se puede hacer contra el gobernante. “Macri, basura, vos sos la dictadura”, cantó en algún momento la plaza durante la manifestación” (Cué 2017).

As I have shown in this examination of several discourses, the relationships between Argentine societal actors as they relate to the memory of the dictatorship are constantly shifting. Even after all the concrete actions the Kirchners took to fix the importance of memory firmly in the minds of the people, there are still members of society who do not value that memory. The struggle to deal with the collective memory of the dictatorship in Argentina and for the country's leaders to interpret it in a way that is meaningful to the people will likely continue well into the future.

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Appendix A: Full Text of Selected Speeches

Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA on March 24th, 2004

Queridos Abuelas, Madres, Hijos: cuando recién veía las manos, cuando cantaban el himno, veía los brazos de mis compañeros, de la generación que creyó y que sigue creyendo en los que quedamos que este país se puede cambiar.

Fueron muchas ilusiones, sueños, creímos en serio que se podía construir una Patria diferente y también cuando escuchaba a H.I.J.O.S. recién vimos la claudicación a la vuelta de la esquina. Es difícil, porque muchos especulan, porque muchos están agazapados y muchos esperan que todo fracase para que vuelva la oscuridad sobre la Argentina y está en ustedes que nunca más la oscuridad y el oscurantismo vuelvan a reinar en la Patria.

Las cosas hay que llamarlas por su nombre y acá si ustedes me permiten, ya no como compañero y hermano de tantos compañeros y hermanos que compartimos aquel tiempo, sino como Presidente de la Nación Argentina vengo a pedir perdón de parte del Estado nacional por la vergüenza de haber callado durante 20 años de democracia por tantas atrocidades.

Hablemos claro: no es rencor ni odio lo que nos guía y me guía, es justicia y lucha contra la impunidad. A los que hicieron este hecho tenebroso y macabro de tantos campos de concentración, como fue la ESMA, tienen un solo nombre: son asesinos repudiados por el pueblo argentino.

Por eso Abuelas, Madres, hijos de detenidos desaparecidos, compañeros y compañeras que no están pero sé que están en cada mano que se levanta aquí y en tantos lugares de la Argentina, esto no puede ser un tira y afloje entre quién peleó más o peleó menos o algunos que hoy quieren volver a la superficie después de estar agachados durante años que no fueron capaces de reivindicar lo que tenían que reivindicar.

Yo no vengo en nombre de ningún partido, vengo como compañero y también como Presidente de la Nación Argentina y de todos los argentinos. Este paso que estamos dando hoy, no es un paso que deba ser llevado adelante por las corporaciones tradicionales que por allí vienen especulando mucho más en el resultado electoral o en el qué dirán que en defender la conciencia y lo que pensaban o deberían haber pensado.

Por eso, sé que desde el cielo, de algún lado, nos están viendo y mirando; sé que se acordarán de aquellos tiempos; sé que por ahí no estuvimos a la altura de la historia, pero seguimos luchando como podemos, con las armas que tenemos, soportando los apretujones y los aprietes que nos puedan hacer. Pero no nos van a quebrar, compañeros y compañeras.

Aquella bandera y aquel corazón que alumbramos de una Argentina con todos y para todos, va a ser nuestra guía y también la bandera de la justicia y de la lucha contra la impunidad. Dejaremos todo para lograr un país más equitativo, con inclusión social, luchando contra la desocupación, la injusticia y todo lo que nos dejó en su última etapa esta lamentable década del '90 como epílogo de las cosas que nos tocaron vivir.

Por eso, hermanas y hermanos presentes, compañeras y compañeros que están presentes por más que no estén aquí, Madres, Abuelas, chicos: gracias por el ejemplo de lucha.

Defendamos con fe, con capacidad de amar, que no nos llenen el espíritu de odio porque no lo tenemos, pero tampoco queremos la impunidad. Queremos que haya justicia, queremos que realmente haya una recuperación fortísima de la memoria y que en esta Argentina se vuelvan a recordar, recuperar y tomar como ejemplo a aquellos que son capaces de dar todo por los valores que tienen y una generación en la Argentina que fue capaz de hacer eso, que ha dejado un ejemplo, que ha dejado un sendero, su vida, sus madres, que ha dejado sus abuelas y que ha dejado sus hijos. Hoy están presentes en las manos de ustedes.

Muchísimas gracias y abracémonos fuertemente por un país distinto.

Muchas gracias.

Speech by Néstor Kirchner at La ESMA on March 24th, 2006

Señor Vicepresidente de la Nación; señores integrantes de los poderes Ejecutivo, Legislativo y Judicial; autoridades provinciales y municipales; señores miembros del Cuerpo Diplomático; representantes gremiales; representantes de las organizaciones de Derechos Humanos, especial Madres, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo; personal militar de las Fuerzas Armadas; autoridades de las mismas; señoras y señores: el 24 de marzo de 1976 y hasta el 10 de diciembre de 1983, se instaló en nuestra Patria un gobierno de facto a cargo de las Fuerzas Armadas que se atribuyó la suma del poder público, se arrogó facultades extraordinarias y en el ejercicio de esos poderes ilegales e ilegítimos aplicó un terrorismo de Estado que se manifestó en la práctica sistemática de graves violaciones a los derechos humanos.

En el juicio a las Juntas la causa 13.984 caratulada “Jorge Rafael Videla y otros” quedó suficientemente probado que a partir de ese día se instrumentó un plan sistemático de imposición del terror y la eliminación física de miles de ciudadanos sometidos a secuestros, torturas, detenciones clandestinas y toda clase de vejámenes. En este propio Colegio Militar fueron secuestrados cadetes que luchaban por la vida y por la democracia. Por eso nunca más el terrorismo de Estado, hasta acá llegó.

Hace pocos días el Honorable Congreso de la Nación dispuso por ley que esta fecha, “Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia”, figure entre los feriados nacionales inamovibles. Debe ser ésta, entonces, una jornada de duelo y homenaje a las víctimas y también para la reflexión crítica sobre la gran tragedia argentina que se abrió un día como hoy de 1976 con el golpe militar que fue el camino y el instrumento del terrorismo de Estado, la más cruenta de las experiencias antidemocráticas que nuestra Patria haya padecido.

Venimos hablar en este día a los jefes de las Fuerzas, a los generales, almirantes y brigadieres, a los oficiales superiores, a los oficiales jefes, a los jóvenes oficiales, a los suboficiales, a los soldados voluntarios, al personal retirado y a los civiles que trabajan en instituciones castrenses, le hablamos a las mujeres y a los hombres de la institución militar, pero también hablamos para toda la sociedad, porque aquel golpe no se redujo a un fenómeno protagonizado por las Fuerzas Armadas.

Los golpes de Estado padecidos por los argentinos han tenido en el siglo XX una larga, luctuosa y difícil historia y nunca constituyeron sólo episodios protagonizados por militares. Sectores de la sociedad, de la prensa, de la iglesia, de la clase política argentina, ciertos sectores de la ciudadanía tuvieron también su parte cada vez que se subvertía el orden constitucional. Lo digo porque no todos han reconocido todavía su responsabilidad en los hechos.

Cuando alguien abría la puerta de los cuarteles para ir hacia el poder y en contra de las instituciones de la democracia, previamente habían concurrido otros a golpearlas; poderosos intereses económicos cuya representación ha sido y es patéticamente minoritaria trabajaron incansablemente para deteriorar las instituciones democráticas y facilitar el atropello final a la Constitución.

Han contado también con el aporte de otros factores culturales, el aporte de distintas concepciones del mundo de diversas ideologías, de los medios de comunicación y de muchas instituciones que nunca toleraron el principio rector de la soberanía popular; había algunos que hasta decían que el general Videla era un general democrático y que era la transición que necesitábamos. Esa soberanía popular que es base irrenunciable de la institucionalidad republicana democrática.

Ese conglomerado económico cultural, social y político trató y lo logró por mucho tiempo de convertir a las Fuerzas Armadas en el brazo instrumental y protagónico de ese proyecto que afectó tanto a la estructura de la sociedad.

A partir del 24 de marzo de 1976, se aplicó un plan coordinado y sistemático de exterminio y represión generalizados, con un costo humano minuciosamente calculado, que sometió a miles de personas al secuestro, a la tortura y a la muerte y los convirtió en “ausentes para siempre”, “ausentes para siempre”, como cínicamente proclamó el mayor responsable de los crímenes.

Otros miles poblaron las cárceles sin causa o con procesos ilegales y muchos miles más encontraron en el exilio la única forma de sobrevivir. Cientos de niños fueron arrancados de los brazos de sus madres en cautiverio al nacer y privados de su identidad y de su familia. No se trataba de excesos ni de actos individuales. Fue un plan criminal, una acción institucional diseñada con anterioridad al 24 de marzo y ejecutada desde el Estado mismo bajo los principios de la doctrina de la Seguridad Nacional.

La mayoría de las víctimas pertenecían a una generación de jóvenes, hijos de muchos de ustedes, hermanos nuestros, con un enorme compromiso con la Patria y el pueblo, con la independencia nacional y la justicia social, que luchaban con esperanza y hasta la entrega de sus vidas por esos ideales. Pero más allá de estos miles y miles de víctimas puntuales, fue la sociedad la principal destinataria del mensaje del terror generalizado.

El poder dictatorial pretendía así que el pueblo todo se rindiera a su arbitrariedad y su omnipotencia. Se buscaba una sociedad fraccionada, inmóvil, obediente, por eso trataron de quebrarla y vaciarla de todo aquello que lo inquietaba, anulando su vitalidad y su dinámica y por eso prohibieron desde la política hasta el arte.

Sólo así podían imponer un proyecto político y económico que reemplazara al proceso de industrialización sustitutivo de importaciones por un nuevo modelo de valorización financiera y ajuste estructural con disminución del rol del Estado, endeudamiento externo con fuga de capitales y, sobre todo, con un disciplinamiento social que permitiera establecer un orden que el sistema democrático no les garantizaba.

Para el logro de estos objetivos querían terminar para siempre con lo distinto, con lo plural, con lo que era disfuncional a esas metas. Ese modelo económico y social que tuvo un cerebro, que tuvo un nombre y que los argentinos nunca deberemos borrar de nuestra memoria y que espero que también la memoria, justicia y verdad llegue, se llama José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz.

Lamentablemente, este modelo económico y social no terminó con la dictadura; se derramó hasta fines de los años 90, generando la situación social más aguda que recuerde la historia argentina.

Víctima de ese modelo fue el pueblo, que sufrió empobrecimiento y exclusión, de las que todavía hoy afrontamos las terribles consecuencias. Lamentablemente, los verdaderos dueños de ese modelo no han sufrido castigo alguno.

En los momentos terribles de la noche dictatorial, fueron mujeres y hombres, pero sobre todo mujeres, mujeres, las que se organizaron para enfrentar a la barbarie, Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.

Esta casa y esta institución del pueblo las recibe con los brazos y el corazón abiertos, reconociéndoles su tremendo valor. Ese puñado de mujeres sin más poder que su dolor, su amor y su coraje, enseñaron el camino de la lucha para reconstituir un orden democrático y por conseguir una cuota de justicia y de verdad. Ellas fueron un maravilloso ejemplo de la resistencia frente a la barbarie que trató de suplir la lamentable defección de muchos otros.

Todos hemos aprendido de aquel error. Ese proyecto criminal ha sido derrotado en la conciencia política argentina. Nuestra sociedad, en la que casi la totalidad de los sectores políticos, sociales, culturales y económicos rechaza ese pasado, lo juzga críticamente y es por su lucha que los impedimentos jurídicos para el juzgamiento de crímenes contra la humanidad, están derogados y la Justicia desarrolla su tarea con total y absoluta independencia. La dictadura militar fue una gran tragedia para el país; su ejecución, repito, no fue solamente una responsabilidad castrense; también los sectores dominantes de la vida económica y cultural contribuyeron a construir esa Argentina sometida a una estrecha, mezquina y explotadora concepción del mundo.

La gravedad de lo ocurrido, su saldo luctuoso y desgarrador, las monstruosas y aberrantes conductas en que incurrieron las Fuerzas Armadas, las consecuencias de la concentración económica, el desempleo, el aumento de la pobreza, la destrucción de la economía local y la exclusión que se derivaron del modelo implementado, hacen imperativa la reflexión sobre ese período.

Porque el pueblo que no piensa su pasado y que no lo elabora, corre el grave riesgo de repetirlo; pero más importante aún que recordar, es entender, aunque para entender es indispensable también recordar. Ese proceso de recordar, esa reconstrucción de la memoria, es un valioso mecanismo de resistencia.

Obviamente, es también un ámbito de conflicto entre quienes mantienen el recuerdo de los crímenes de Estado y quienes quizás, algunos todavía con buena intención pero otros buscando su propia impunidad, proponen dar por cancelado ese período y pasar a otra etapa argumentando que la clausura de la memoria, facilita la reconciliación.

Muy por el contrario, creemos que la memoria no es sólo una fuente de la historia, sino que es fundamentalmente un indispensable impulso moral y, además, es un deber y una necesidad ética y política de la sociedad.

Afortunadamente, hoy tenemos una amplia y diversa producción cultural que, con formato de ensayo, libro, testimonio, obras de ficción, teatro y cine argumental y documental, expone y discute nuestro pasado inmediato.

Esas elaboraciones, esas discusiones son muy fecundas porque son plurales. Cuando buscan la verdad y como lógica consecuencia la obtención de justicia, cuando no persiguen el odio ni la revancha, pueden aportar el conocimiento del pasado. En ellas la Argentina vive y transfiere su dinámica y su voluntad de persistencia y transformación a nuestros hijos y a los hijos de nuestros hijos.

Como Presidente de la República no pretendo construir una verdad definitiva, que es patrimonio de todas las generaciones. Sólo apporto, como lo he dicho muchas veces, mi verdad relativa.

Pero sí, debo trabajar duramente para contribuir a asegurar principios básicos de la convivencia. A los argentinos se nos ha hecho carne, después de mucho dolor, la necesidad del respeto a la vida y a la dignidad de la persona humana y de la vigencia efectiva de los derechos humanos que están constitucionalmente consagrados.

Nuestro íntimo convencimiento es que no puede haber convivencia en paz y reconciliación mientras queden resquicios de impunidad. Siempre hemos pensado que sólo con verdad y con justicia, conformaremos una sociedad que se desarrolle en paz. Nunca hemos creído que eludiendo el veredicto y forzando el olvido, calmaremos la sed de justicia que exhibe el alma misma de nuestra comunidad. Sólo castigando a los culpables se liberará de culpa a los inocentes.

Me han escuchado reclamar públicamente en otros tiempos, que no había punto final sin verdad; han oído también de mi boca, allí cuando otros lo apañaban, que no era posible invocar a modo de disculpa legal el cumplimiento de órdenes manifiestamente ilegales. Igual que en esos casos siempre hemos cuestionado que la facultad de indultar haya servido para condonar o aliviar las condenas judiciales impuestas o para impedir el juzgamiento de los responsables del mayor genocidio que nuestra historia recuerda.

Lo dijimos cuando se dictaron en la Plaza, lo reiteramos hoy: ni el punto final ni la obediencia debida ni los indultos fueron los caminos adecuados para alcanzar la verdad e imponer la justicia. Sólo han sido enormes heridas y frustraciones cuidadosamente envueltas en las formas pero carentes de contenido ético.

En todos los casos, lejos de calmar la vocación ciudadana de justicia, se incrementó día a día, mes a mes, año a año el reclamo de las víctimas, de sus deudos y de la sociedad argentina. Sigo anhelando que la verdad y la justicia predominen, pero aspiro lograrlo respetando el marco institucional que la República impone. Hemos acompañado la anulación de las leyes de punto final y obediencia debida en la certeza de que ése era el camino constitucionalmente adecuado para desandar el sendero de la impunidad al que nos condujeron y al que nos quisieron dejar atrapados.

En pos de la verdad y la justicia, tal vez sea la hora de desarticular la red de impunidad tejida a través de aquellos indultos. Algunos tribunales han declarado ya en casos concretos su inconstitucionalidad, pero esta vez, también respetando el marco institucional que la República impone, debe seguir siendo la Justicia quien deba dejar con claridad la inconstitucionalidad de dichas normas que, a mi juicio, chocan frontalmente con la ética republicana que recomienda que ante el crimen busquemos la verdad y anhelemos la justicia.

No es posible reestablecer la calidad institucional y la marcha hacia la verdad buscando el atajo de lo inconstitucional. Nadie puede pedir que un decreto derogue a otro a través del cual se indultó. Aquellos indultos trasgredieron, a mi juicio y a mi verdad relativa, la ley fundamental de la Patria.

Espero, como se reclama permanentemente, que prontamente la Justicia determine la validez de esa constitucionalidad o lo que yo pienso a mi juicio, la inconstitucionalidad de los mismos.

Nos quieren y me quieren, sectores de la extrema derecha y algunos otros, hacer caer en una trampa, que no podemos dejar que nos lleven a ella por las democracias, sus instituciones, la verdad y la justicia.

Quiero que mi decisión de seguir buscando la verdad y la justicia siga siendo tan firme como mi respeto a las normas constitucionales y a las instituciones de la República en la que la certeza de que todo está indisolublemente unido.

Queremos poner fin a los códigos del silencio que subordinan todo el ocultamiento de la verdad. Descorriendo este velo sabemos que contribuimos a evitar que los verdugos se mezclen con los inocentes y se oculten detrás de las instituciones.

Con verdad, con memoria y con justicia, con castigo a los culpables, poniendo las cosas en su justo lugar, echaremos las simientes para construir un país más justo.

Debo hoy también decir acá que en este edificio y todo establecimiento militar debe ser para siempre solamente la casa del general San Martín y sus hermanos en la lucha por la independencia: el general Belgrano y el almirante Brown.

Debe ser la casa de San Martín, el gran libertador, que combatió en San Lorenzo, cruzó Los Andes, luchó, libertó Chile y Perú y se abrazó en el combate independiente con grandes americanos como O'Higgins y el gran Simón Bolívar.

Debe ser la casa de aquel San Martín que nunca desenvainó su espada en el campo siniestro de las guerras civiles.

Debe ser la casa del ciudadano general Manuel Belgrano, el hombre que marchó a su destino del general improvisado y nos legó la bandera que nos unifica distintivamente como nación.

Debe ser también la casa de Guillermo Brown, ayer y hoy nuestro primer almirante, el inmigrante que fundó nuestra flota y combatió con denuedo y sencillez. Y debe ser la casa y la Argentina de los principios de ese ilustre ciudadano y gran político y pensador argentino que se llamó Mariano Moreno.

La soberbia, el militarismo y la distancia con el pueblo, nunca estuvieron en las convicciones de las conductas de estos grandes hombres.

Hemos aprendido nosotros y hoy aprenden nuestros hijos y nuestros nietos en las escuelas de la Nación, el recorrido de sus vidas y sus proyectos ejemplares. En sus ejemplos y en el de tantos otros próceres y ciudadanos anónimos deben inspirarse los militares argentinos y todos los ciudadanos de la Patria.

Queremos sentirnos orgullosos de que todos los uniformes de los soldados de la Patria sean respetados en su prestigio y vistos con alegría y no con temor, como ese temor que tuvimos hace treinta años, queridos hermanos de las Fuerzas Armadas, que veíamos un uniforme y creíamos que se nos terminaba la vida.

No sólo aquellos que éramos militantes de mucho tiempo, militantes de nuestras convicciones, sino con el tiempo una ciudadanía asustada y aterrorizada. Yo sé que todos los cuadros de hoy tienen una gran tarea cívica, una gran tarea junto a los ciudadanos de la Patria a construir no la adhesión a algún partido político o a alguna fuerza determinada.

Acá, desde el Colegio Militar de la Nación, quiero llamar a la conducción de ciudadanía, queremos sentirnos ciudadanos y para sentirnos ciudadanos, respeto a los derechos humanos, justicia, equidad, inclusión social e igualdad de oportunidades para todos los argentinos, con certeza indiscutible para que todos los sables sanmartinianos protejan al ciudadano y que el juramento constitucional siempre sea honrado.

Miremos el pasado en nuestras guerras civiles y sin que la mía pretenda ser una interpretación única de la historia, quiero que reflexionemos sobre el enorme espacio de espanto que crímenes sin sentido abrieron en nuestra historia. La inmolación de Manuel Dorrego en el siglo XIX y de Juan José Valle en el siglo XX, constituyen las marcas iniciáticas de una tragedia que nos ha azotado hasta el presente.

Creo interpretar a mis compatriotas al estimar con optimismo el futuro, con esa convicción que proclamamos: nunca más al golpe y al terrorismo de Estado, por siempre respeto a la Constitución Nacional, verdad, memoria, justicia y, obviamente, ni odios ni venganzas. Solos aquellos que no tienen la verdad, solos aquellos que no creen en la democracia; solo la

actitud de aquellos que desprecian la diversidad, la pluralidad y el consenso y el derecho a pensar distintos, pueden aspirar a tener esas nostalgias que duelen y espantan.

Queridos jefes de nuestras Fuerzas Armadas, queridos hermanos: cuando escucho a algunos defender los aberrantes e innobles crímenes y acciones del '76 y levantar el golpe del '76, yo creo que no hay pasión humana que puede llevar a defender tanto terror. No hay ideas diferentes que se pueden dar -y que se dan en toda democracia- que puedan hacer creer que se puede construir un país en base al dolor, a la desaparición y a la ausencia, como dijo ese general casi innombrable.

Quiero terminar así: cuando la prensa del mundo le preguntaba “Y los desaparecidos, ¿quiénes son?”. Y dio una definición de desaparecidos que a cada uno en el lugar que estábamos nos espantó: “No están, no existen, no hay desaparecidos”.

Señor Videla, porque no merece que lo llame general, hay treinta mil argentinos que fueron desaparecidos de distintas ideas y hay cuarenta millones de argentinos que fuimos agredidos y ofendidos por su pensamiento fundamentalista y mesiánico. Espero que la justicia proceda y a fondo.

Yo estoy seguro que esa verdad y esa justicia debe ser acelerada y encontrada y este 24 de marzo y todos los 24 de marzo deben servir en el marco de la construcción de la verdadera memoria. Es una fecha que debe ser fuertemente consolidada y no tratar de adueñarse nadie de ella, basados a veces en especulaciones políticas de corto lucro.

Porque queridos hermanos y hermanas, la verdadera vanguardia de la lucha contra la dictadura fueron las Abuelas y las Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Muchísimas gracias.

[Speech by Cristina Kirchner at la ESMA on March 24th, 2010](#)

Muchas gracias. Muchas gracias. Muy buenos días a todos y a todas, señores, Ministro de Derechos Humanos de la República Federativa de Brasil. Querido amigo Senador Mandato Cumplido de la República de Chile, Carlos Ominami, gracias por estar con nosotros. Organizaciones de derechos humanos, madres, abuelas, hijos, familiares, asamblea permanente en fin. Todos aquellos que mantuvieron viva la llama de la memoria y la demanda de verdad y justicia. A todos ustedes el nombre de todos los Argentinos y también creo el nombre de la condición humana independientemente del lugar en que un haya nacido, cual dios que rece, en el nombre de la condición humana, muchas gracias por estos años de lucha.

Pero también quiero agradecerles otras cosas tal vez menos perceptibles. Tal vez menos identificables pero sin ningunas dudas muy valiosas. Porque a mí durante mucho tiempo el 24 de marzo lo vivía como con dolor, como con rabia, como. . . como con bronca. Como tal vez lo vivían muchísimos Argentinos. Pero la verdad que de las Madres, de las Abuelas, de Estela, de Abel, de Tati, de Rosa, no quiero dejar de nombrar a una pero a todas, aprendí a recordar de otra manera. Aprendí a recordar con amor. Aprendí a recordar con demanda de memoria, de justicia, y de verdad, pero también de amor a la vida y de alegría y alegría. Porque ellas son a los que la

conocemos, a la que charlamos con ellas, son alegres. Es increíble. Yo siempre lo dije cuando me toco en mi banca de Senadora de citar la cosa de punto final yo no sé si hubiera podido hacer lo que ustedes hicieron.

Cuando. . . cuando la veo a Elsa con su marido y sus cuatro hijas todos desaparecidos, sin familia, y la veo con esperanzas, con alegría, recordando con amor, digo: por eso estamos aquí. Porque no nos ha movido ni el odio ni la destrucción. Al contrario nos ha movido el amor y la acción permanente, que es lo que verdaderamente verdura y enaltezca la condición humana. Fíjense hoy estamos inaugurando este fantástico Centro Cultural que lleva el nombre de este extraordinario Argentino desaparecido Haroldo Conti. Y en este lugar. . . en este lugar que ha sido remodelado, rediseñado, pero que conserva las estructuras originales absolutamente modernizado, en este lugar que fue viejo porque fue de destrucción y de muerte. . . ahora es nuevo porque es de construcción y de amor. Acabamos exhibir las obras de artes de artistas nacionales, de artistas extranjeros. Acabo de venir argentinos y ciudadanos del mundo para admirar y mirar vida, admirar construcción, admirar como pudimos sobreponernos a todo lo que sucedió entre estas paredes y fuimos capaces porque esto es el ejercicio de la memoria, no de la destrucción de este espacio. Hemos sido capaces de recuperarlo para el amor, para el arte, para la vida, para la construcción que es lo que nos moviliza y que nos va a seguir, movilizándolo siempre. Y también como Presidenta de la nación, tal cual como lo dije en mi mensaje a la Asamblea Legislativa, quedemos finalmente que se aplique la justicia con los jueces de la constitución que finalmente termine, como recién decía La Papa que me precedió en el uso de la palabra, termine este, este capítulo tan trágico de los Argentinos y podamos dar vuelta de esta página de la historia pero con verdad y con justicia, eso es que queremos. No es tanto. No es tanto.

Yo creo que nosotros. . . nosotros tenemos – y cuando hablo de nosotros, hablo de todos aquellos que creen en el ejercicio de la memoria, de la verdad, y de la justicia – que viene hasta de mandatos bíblicos, ni siquiera nos detenemos en un capítulo político o ideológico. La demanda de justicia proseguiría, de memoria, de verdad vienen todos los mandatos de todas las creencias, de todas las religiones, por eso son valores universales. No estamos planteando de valores en la Argentina, valores traídos de los pelos aquí. Lo que estamos planteando son valores universales, los que nos convierten en un país que mire con dignidad y con orgullo al mundo y que también sea mirado por el mundo con respecto y honor.

Yo no quiero vivir en un país donde como mandataria cuando uno va a visitar a otro mandatario extranjero le reclaman por justicia acerca de ciudadanos de sus propios países que fueron desaparecidos o detenidos aquí en la Argentina. Recuerdo la primera vez que acompañaba en una elegida del exterior a mi compañero de toda la vida [reference to Néstor Kirchner, her husband and Former President] y fuimos a entrevistarnos con el Presidente de Francia, entonces Presidente de Francia, Jacques Chirac, nadie podría pensar que Jacques Chirac sea un hombre de izquierdas. Pero lo primero que me dijo – en realidad lo dijo a él [reference to NK] porque él era el presidente, yo estaba acompañándolo – fue la sociedad de Francia no puede entender que todavía quien fue responsable de la desaparición de ciudadanos Franceses sigue en

libertad, lo recuerdo como si fuera hoy. Y deje me decirle que como Argentina sentí una inmensa vergüenza porque no tuve respuesta y miren que solo tener respuesta para todo. Pero no. Allí no pude. Allí no pude.

Por eso. . . por eso le pedimos todos los argentinos encarecidamente a nuestra justicia que termine con esta página y podamos seguir construyendo memoria, seguir construyendo justicia y respeto y honor en el mundo. Yo no quiero terminar sin dirigirme a quien quiero mucho y que se llama Estela Carlota y que es la Presidente de las Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. Tal vez Estela sea un emblema, un símbolo de esa reconversión de la lucha que al principio fue para que aparecieran los que no. . . no estaban y reconvertir esa lucha en los que sí sabemos que están. De los que sí sabemos que están pero todavía, nos ocultan. Déjeme decirle. . . Estela, Rosa, todas las abuelas que están buscando todavía a sus propios nietos para que se dan de vuelta a sus familias y a los argentinos porque cada nieto que aparece es una victoria sobre el olvido, sobre la muerte y es esencialmente. . . y es esencialmente también una victoria del estado de derecho, sí, del estado de derecho, del estado de derecho. ¡Del estado de derecho! De la calidad institucional que tanto replican, ¿cómo puede haber calidad institucional, como puede haber estado de derecho si no hay identidad?

Es. . . es el de la identidad primer de hecho. Naces y tenes que saber quién sos. Porque si no sabes quién sos, no tenes libertad. Porque no podes elegir. Nadie que no pueda elegir tiene libertad. Nadie que no sepa quién es realmente es libre. Por eso yo quiero decirte Estela porque sé que estas atravesando uno de los momentos más difíciles, vos y la democracia Argentina. Saber si los Argentinos vamos a tener y su justicia. Y su justicia porque es nuestra justicia. La que tenemos. Si nuestra justicia será capaz de atravesar esta verdadera prueba del ácido para saber si vivimos en democracia. Saber. . . saber si realmente. . . si realmente, dejen me apostar que si, por favor. Tengo la obligación creerlo porque soy la presidenta de los Argentinos. Déjenme creer que va a haber justicia finalmente luego de tantos años de impunidad por el poder mediático. Vamos a poder saber y conocer realmente la identidad que ustedes están andadamente tratando de buscar. Pero déjenme decirle también a usted y a todo como Presidenta de todos los Argentinos que confío que finalmente va a haber justicia, que confío que finalmente a pesa de ese inmenso poder casi extorsivo sobre políticos, sobre jueces, hasta sobre empresarios, casi un poder mafioso, si realmente vamos a poder sobreponernos y conocer realmente esa identidad y déjenme comprometerme ante usted – ante ustedes y todos los Argentinos que si no encontramos justicia en la Argentina, yo como presidenta la voy a acompañar a otros tribunales internacionales también demandando justicia.

Yo confío. . . déjeme decirles algo, sinceramente del corazón, ustedes saben que no digo las cosas por decir nada. Así me cuesta lo que me cuesta, pero bueno, soy así, no voy a cambiar ahora. Déjeme decirles que tengo confianza en que no vamos a tener que llegar a esta situación.

Tal vez mi condición de abogada, tal vez mi condición de haber sido durante tantos años Presidenta de la Comisión de Asuntos Constitucionales en mi provincia en la escena de la nación, me hacen ver tan clara nuestras leyes. Me hacen ver tan claro nuestro código penal, los derechos, tan claramente expresados que me resisto a que finalmente no sean aplicados y sobre

todo cuando no estamos hablando de cuestiones menores. Estamos hablando nada más ni nada menos que delitos de la inhumanidad imprescriptibles que ni siquiera. . . que ni siquiera pudieron ser alcanzados por las leyes de obediencia de vida, y punto final. Estoy hablando de cosas muy importantes, muy sagradas. Por eso, confío. Confío y espero. Pero también me comprometo con ustedes. A que usted Señora [Estela Carlota]. Usted y quien sean. Los familiares de estos jóvenes van a tener justicia porque van a tener identidad.

Yo quiero. . . yo quiero finalmente, finalmente convocar desde este día de la memoria a todos los Argentinos – a todos, y cuando digo a todos solamente estoy excluyendo a pequeños grupúsculos que se esconden. . . que se esconden a través de pretendidas ideológicas. No, no, acá no se confunden. Nosotros tenemos nuestro corazón.

Pero no se confunden que son problemas de derechas e izquierdas, no. Yo conozco gente que no piensa igual que yo, yo conozco gente que puedo definir marcadamente de derecha conservadora y sin embargo, y sin embargo nunca puede estar de acuerdo con procedimientos como los que hemos vivido durante la dictadura militar.

Porque son cuestiones que son más allá, son cuestiones que, como decía al principio, tienen valor universal. Lo digo aquí en la Argentina y lo dije también en el Bosque de Memoria en Israel, en Jerusalén cuando frente al Monumento a los Judíos Detenidos Desaparecidos en la Argentina, acordábamos estas cosas que atraviesan todas las religiones, que atraviesan todas las creencias: el respeto y el valor de la vida, a la memoria, y a la justicia. En nombre de esos tres valores universales convoco en la Argentina, a la reflexión y también a la construcción de un país que deje atrás con justicia y con castigo para los que delinquieron.

Por allí escucho, por allí escucho alusiones olvidar el pasado. El pasado no está siendo juzgado. Lo que está siendo juzgado son personas concretas que cometieron violaciones, el pasado no se juzgó. El pasado. . . el pasado no se juzga, no hay ninguna figura en el código penal que castigue ser miembro del pasado. Todos los tipos penales son claros, objetivos y concretos. Un razonamiento de esta naturaleza nos llevaría decir que bueno que alguien que mató hace cinco años como ya es pasado, tampoco que sea juzgado. Acá nadie está juzgando el pasado. Acá lo que estamos juzgando son delitos concretos cometidos por hombres concretos. ¡Nada más que eso, ni nada menos! Ni nada menos.

Por eso. . . por eso quiero convocarlos a todos a la construcción de esta sociedad democrática donde viva todos, tengamos puntos de vista diferentes. Algunas crean que hay que ir para un lado o para el otro. Pero a que nadie se le ocurra porque el otro quiere ir para el otro lado tomarlo preso, detenerlo, hacerlo desaparecer, es muy poco lo que estamos pidiendo. Libertad. Libertad y democracia. Libertad, democracia, y justicia. Por eso con amor y construcción. Siempre. Ustedes nos enseñaron y nosotros aprendimos.

¡Muchas gracias! ¡Muchas gracias! A todos y a todas, ¡muchas gracias!