

Politics of Bereavement

**Women's Narratives of Continuing Bonds
in a Post dictatorial Argentine Society**



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The painting on the cover was made by Monica Escudero

"Anthropological writing about death has to be, if not an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us, at least an ice pick to chip at the conventional forms of representing and narrating the encounter of the anthropologist with death"

Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*

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Introduction

Imagine you are cooking with your partner, brother or sister, someone close to you. While cooking you notice an ingredient is missing and the other person goes to the supermarket to get it, but never returns. When searching, you learn that he or she has been taken by the government and is being kept imprisoned, but still no one seems to know where. How would you react? How would you feel? Eventually what would you do?

I was confronted with the horrible events that took place throughout the Argentine dictatorship for the first time as an undergraduate anthropology student. Immediately, I was overwhelmed by the violence and torture that kidnapped persons had to bare on their bodies, before these disappeared. Besides the violence inflicted upon the ones who disappeared, relatives and loved ones who stayed behind were in turn agonized with the uncertainty of death. When I tried to think this through, I could not. I wondered how can you continue life, if someone you love so deeply has been taken away from you? How do you continue life, is this possible at all? I learned that women were the ones that started to take over the streets during the dictatorship, demanding to know what happened to their loved ones and where they were. Every Thursday these women demonstrated on Buenos Aires's main square: The Plaza de Mayo. The women came to be known as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Nowadays, 35 years after the dictatorship ended, these same women are still demonstrating by walking their weekly round. It was then that I decided to leave for Buenos Aires, Argentina and walk the round with them.

Two years have passed since I for the first time went to Argentina to carry out field research. During this stay, I gained a first impression of Argentine society and acquired a general understanding of the contemporary context of the disappearances that happened during the dictatorship. In 2012 I returned to Argentina, this time my research was more focused on the process of bereavement and how women maintained a relationship with their disappeared loved ones. My research informants consisted all of women who had lost a family member during the Argentine dictatorship and who have become active in social movements. I explicitly chose to focus on women since, first, they had been the ones who had started to demonstrate during the dictatorship and who are still very active on a collective basis. Second, being a woman myself, I felt more comfortable to engage with women in such intense conversations in the private sphere of the home. Most studies on bereavement are about women which reflects the stereotypical notion that addresses women as being more emotional

as opposed to men being rational. Nonetheless, I am aware of the fact that this research also focuses on women's experiences of bereavement but intend not to reproduce such stereotypes. My aim is to approach these women not only as women, but also as political actors trying to bring about change in society. Furthermore, I seek not to portray them solely as victims, even though their stories of loss might be heartbreaking. Instead, through the women's narratives I wish to illustrate the complexities of their losses, which includes their strength as empowered political actors.

Historical and contemporary social context

The Argentine dictatorship lasted from 1976 until approximately 1983. During this military regime, which consisted of the land force, the navy and the air force, political and civil rights were suspended. Elections were not being held, political parties were excluded and many people considered to be subversive were disappeared by the state. Anyone who acted against the military or lived with socialistic ideologies was considered to be a subversive (Robben 2005). Consequently, between 10,000 and 30,000 people who opposed the military regime in one way or another disappeared. For the military junta, to only incarcerate the subversives would not be sufficient: they wanted to destroy their ideological framework both physically and psychologically (Robben 2005). To accomplish this purpose, the military used a particular tactic of kidnapping and torture. After being kidnapped, individuals were taken to one of the many clandestine centres, where eventually most of them were killed. Their bodies were cremated, buried anonymously in mass graves or thrown into sea. In this way the military dehumanized the disappeared and left family members in uncertainty and despair (Robben 2005). Almost thirty years after returning to democracy, many family members do still not know where the bodies of their disappeared loved ones are.

Still during the dictatorship many women, especially mothers started to search for their disappeared family members at hospitals, police stations and even mortuaries. During these searches they encountered each other and shared their experiences. Since they were not able to talk openly, they started meeting in places like churches. During one of these meetings, as I was often told during fieldwork, one of the mothers –Azucena Villaflor De Vincenti– stated "we should go to the Plaza de Mayo and ask about the whereabouts of our children". From that day on the women met every Thursday¹ at the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos

¹ In the beginning the Madres started to meet on Fridays at the square, but that turned out not to be a busy day, so they changed it to Thursdays.

Aires, which is located just outside the presidential palace, *la Casa Rosada*. They became known as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Nowadays the *Madres* are still active as a collectivity and continue to demonstrate every Thursday at the Plaza de Mayo. They struggle for the rights of marginalised people in society. After the dictatorship a great number of human rights movements were formed by family members of the disappeared. These are still very active and play a prominent role in society nowadays. Their struggle for justice, truth and memory continues. Several women have remarked, that the removal of general Videla's portrait from the presidential palace, by the late president Nestor Kirchner, was an important symbolic moment for family members of the disappeared and for human rights movements.

During the time of research, court cases were being held against perpetrators of human rights violations during the dictatorship. This was considered as a immense step forward by family members and human rights organizations. Finally, there was social recognition and a sense of justice. Although most of the women agreed that real justice is not possible so many years after the horrific atrocities committed by the military, it is a way to fight against impunity. Furthermore, several former detention centers are being transformed into memorial sites and museums, wherein the message of *Nunca Más*, never again, is being transmitted to future generations. An extensive wall inscribed with the names of all the disappeared was placed at the *Parque por la Memoria*, a memorial park on the banks of the River de la Plata. When I visited the park I noticed numerous flowers in between the grooves of the wall (see figure 0.1). It seems that in the absence of a grave, people turn to other places to remember their lost loved ones. Another initiative has been the placement of memorial tiles at places where people disappeared in the city of Buenos Aires. In short, all these initiatives and events demonstrate how the disappeared are still present in contemporary Argentine society.



Figure 0.1: A flower next to one of the many names inscribed in the memorial wall at the *Parque por la Memoria*.

Debates

Within political sciences, anthropology and cultural studies the Argentine dictatorial history and its aftermath have been studied extensively. Most studies tend to focus on political and social movements whereby the Madres de Plaza de Mayo have gained special attention. Usually the group is approached as grieving mothers who have become political actors, emphasizing their political activities and not their process of grief per se. In contrast, I will discuss the intertwining between the personal, the process of bereavement, and the political, undertaking action in a collectivity, and illustrate how both spheres are not always clear-cut. Furthermore, I do not focus specifically on the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, but rather on women who are active in different social movements that are composed of family members of the disappeared. In so doing, I will discuss not only the older generation of Madres, but also how the younger generations of sisters and daughters cope with loss and have become politically active. I address how, approximately thirty years after the dictatorship, women are still actively engaged in political movements, and how this influences both their everyday lives and contemporary Argentine society. In other words, through these women's narratives, I will study the complexity of bereavement in social and political realms.

The theoretical framework of this research consists of an interdisciplinary approach and draws on several bodies of literature from the field of anthropology, psychology, philosophy and feminist theory. This has provided me with a broad theoretical understanding of loss and bereavement. In studying bereavement, I follow Klass et al. (1996) in their delineation of grief resolution, who state that grief is not something one overcomes, but is a continual process. Therein, they understand that a continuing bond with the deceased can be a healthy part of bereavement. A continuing bond is referred to as an ongoing relationship with the deceased, whereby death does not end the relationship but transforms it. As such, the deceased continues to influence the lives of the bereaved in the present. While most of the literature on continuing bonds are based on psychological or clinical research, and includes a number of sociological studies, my aim is to discuss the concept from a more encompassing perspective which allows me to address the individual and social complexities.

Klass (2006: 843) argues that "cultural / political narratives are woven into individual grief narratives and if we do not include community, cultural, and political narratives in our understanding of continuing bonds we are in danger building bereavement theory that applies to only a small portion of one population in one historical time". In this line, this thesis seeks to contribute to a comprehensive reading of the cultural, social and political dimensions of the processes of bereavement of the women whose family members disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship. The main question that will guide me through this endeavour is: *How can the process of bereavement be understood as a source for increasing capacities to act?* Through Foucault's notion of power I will argue that bereavement needs to be positioned inside power structures in order to grasp its complexities but also its capacities. Additionally, I will argue that the presence or absence of the body of the deceased must be taken into account when studying bereavement and its political dimensions. Most studies tend to focus on the role of the body in mortuary rituals, and presume family members have access to the body. In the Argentine case, because of the disappearances, the bodies are often missing. This influences and complicates bereavement. The absence of the body was used by the military as a powerful weapon to inflict pain and despair, but it also moved and united family members to continue searching. In Valentine's inspiring work on experiences of bereavement in contemporary British society, she states that "there can be no 'formula' for grief since how people grieve cannot be separated from the way they live the particularity of their individual lives"(2008: 3). By letting participants set the agenda during open-ended interviews, Valentine captures the variety of experiences of bereavement in people's everyday worlds. Similar to Valentine, I approach the experiences of bereavement through narratives. Yet, in

the presentation of these narratives I have chosen to portrait each woman's individual experience, in this way, highlighting the complexities and ambiguities of each narrative.

Methodology

From February until April 2012 I have been living in Buenos Aires to conduct field research among women who have lost family members during the Argentine dictatorship. Initially I came into contact with them through human rights organizations, but soon I started to meet women through the social networks of my informants. This proved to be of great value because these women did not have to uphold a general discourse as it is advocated by the several human rights organizations. In order to gain an understanding of the women's lives and experiences I have used participant observation, life-histories and in-depth interviews as my main research methods. Robben and Sluka (2007) have defined anthropological fieldwork as an intimate participation in the community by observing modes of behaviour and the organization of social life. Traditional perspectives on fieldwork i.e. Dewalt and Dewalt (2001) often problematize fieldwork via the notions of involvement and detachment, insider and outsider position. In my view, defining fieldwork and its practice through these binary notions is deeply rooted in a positivist paradigm that emphasizes the construction of value-free and objective knowledge. As Hesse-Biber (2007: 6) has described it "as if an objective reality or truth is lying out there, just waiting for us to discover". My approach to the field is based on a feminist anthropological epistemology, following Abu-Lughod (1993: 6), who states that "feminist work thus encouraged a heightened consciousness of two issues - standpoint and the power dynamics of self and other - that dovetailed with anthropologists' increasingly sophisticated attention to reflexivity in fieldwork and writing". In this line, I take the encounter between the researcher and the informant, as the starting point for sharing and constructing knowledge. Considering that both individuals are positioned in the world in a particular way, both experience the world from a partial perspective (Haraway 1988). This makes me aware of the nature of the relationship between my informants and me, and the various power structures in which both of us are positioned (Hesse-Biber 2007). As a European ethnographer I faced no difficulties in crossing national borders to write down women's stories. In the encounter between me and the Argentine women, I decide how to give form to the women's life stories and what to share with the reader, whereas the women decide which parts of their stories they want to silence or share with me.

Moreover, besides a European ethnographer, I am also Brazilian. By emphasizing my Latin American half, the distance between me and the women became slightly smaller. I noticed a change in some women's behavior when I told them about my background. I was no longer from the other side of the world, the unknown. Instead they called me neighbor.

Usually I started the interviews with the question, can you tell me your story? Through this open question and approach, the women themselves could choose where to start their stories and what they would like to share with me. While the interview focused on loss, the women could also talk about their families or other events they had gone through in life such as exile or the loss of a sick parent. By addressing the interview in such a way I aimed at gaining more knowledge about the context of a person's life. According to Freeman (in Atkinson 1998) the life story interview is one of the most effective means for gaining an understanding of how the self evolves over time. In my research on bereavement this proved to be important because through the life stories I was able to grasp to a certain extent the women's experiences of grief and how these changed over time. Leavy (2007: 153) has argued that "the researcher serves as an active listener" during life story interviews, in addition, I want to stress that the researcher is not only a story-listener, but also a story-teller. The story as it was narrated by the informants is translated into text by the ethnographer. As I returned from Argentina, I found myself puzzled. How was I going to share the stories of violence, suffering, strength and hope that I had heard? How could I transmit these stories, in a way they would continue to move the readers, like they moved me when I heard them for the first time? I decided to not only use the life story approach during interviews, but also to attempt to transfer it into the text of this thesis. By preserving the narratives as they were shared with me, I hope to bring the reader closer to these women's lives, reminding both the ethnographer and the audience that "we hold in our words real people's lives" (McClaurin 2011: 122). In so doing, my aim has been to give voice to women's experiences of loss, through which I analyze the concepts of bereavement and continuing bonds.

Most interviews were held at the women's house. The reason for this is twofold, first, because it is a familiar atmosphere for them, a place where she can talk freely, without having to restrict her emotions and second, because it also provides me with an opportunity to have a glance into that person's life. I believe that a lot can be observed from the place where a person lives. During these occasions I observed if there were objects that belonged or referred to the disappeared family member, such as photographs. By obtaining this kind of knowledge, I could perceive what role the disappeared continued to play in the household in everyday life.

Considering the topic of this thesis, one may wonder if it is ethically right to ask about such painful experiences, am I not only provoking suffering again? However, what became apparent during fieldwork was that the women enjoyed talking about their loved ones. The shared stories did not only include pain and despair, but also joy, hope and love. It made me realize that to acknowledge grief, was to acknowledge love. The anecdotes and stories were often so lively that I left the room not only with a portrait of the woman I had spoken with, but also of the person who had disappeared. It seemed that the women wanted to stress their loved one's uniqueness. Furthermore, several of them shared with me, that they appreciated the open and engaged approach to interviewing.

In her remarkable interweavement of ethnography and memoir, *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar (1996) argues that an ethnographer must be a 'vulnerable observer' who needs to be willing to include his or her pain and wounds in the research and its writing. Behar states that the whole sphere of emotions and affects shape the researcher's relationship with her informants as well as the research findings. In other words, one cannot neglect the personal self and especially not in anthropological research, since we ourselves are our main research tools, or the "instrument of knowing", as Sherry Ortner has so cogently put it (Ortner in Buch and Staller 2007: 187). By including emotions and experiences in the writing I would like to follow Behar in the sort of ethnography that she proposes, namely one that is a form of literature, "mixing together travel stories, memoirs, biographic vignettes, and cultural analysis, all in the service of creating vivid accounts rooted in fieldwork" (Behar 2011: 107). In this thesis I have searched and tried to stay close to the voice I like best when writing. A voice that sweeps the reader with me to the stories that were shared with me. A juxtaposition of an ethnographic voice, that is able to make a theoretical contribution to academic debates, while reaching to people's emotions.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter one focuses on the theoretical framework of this thesis and lays out the groundwork for discussing the process of bereavement inside social and political spheres. I will outline the concepts of grief, mourning and bereavement and argue that a distinction between grief as a personal, individual process, and mourning as the social and cultural regulations of behaviour after loss, is not always clear-cut. Because of a conceptual overlap between grief and mourning, I will refer to the more encompassing term bereavement when discussing the process of coping with loss. I will contrast traditional models of grief wherein notions of

detachment from the deceased prevail, to a continuing bonds approach that acknowledges that an ongoing relationship with the deceased can be a healthy part of bereavement. Furthermore, I argue against categorizing death and bereavement in ways that can not address the reality and complexities of people's lives. The second and third chapters, build on the theoretical frame presented in the first chapter, to discuss the narratives of women who have become politically active after losing a loved one during the Argentine dictatorship. The second chapter discusses how the absence of the body influences the process of bereavement, and how women maintain a continuing bond with the disappeared through inner representations and material objects. The third chapter analyzes how continuing bonds and bereavement become intertwined with politics and power. Finally, in the conclusion I will propose a politics of bereavement built on the narratives of women's losses. All the interviews were held in Spanish and translated by the author. Additionally, all the pictures were taken by the author.

Chapter one: Conceptualizations of grief and mourning: a continuing bonds approach.

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical frame of this thesis and lay out the groundwork for discussing bereavement, before engaging with the narratives of Argentine women whose family members disappeared during the dictatorship, in the second and third chapters.

In discussing the processes of grief and mourning, scholars often distinguish between the two based on a private-public divide. Grief on the one hand is considered as a person's private feelings following loss (e.g. Seale 1998 in Howarth 2007, Holst-Warhaft 2000, O'Rourke 2007), while mourning on the other hand refers to culturally prescribed behaviour for the bereaved. The former relates to a personal suffering, the emotional work, whereas the latter could be approached as applying to a social function (O'Rourke 2007). Acknowledging that such a distinction can be perceived as problematic, it has been widely used in literature concerning studies of death for its usefulness in studying the social functions and practices of death rituals (O'Rourke 2007, Holst-Warhaft 2000). Nevertheless, it is of great importance to understand both concepts not as exclusive and in binary opposition to each other, but as complementary and without clear-cut borders. During fieldwork, and through women's narratives, I observed grief and mourning as overlapping in a gradient. Social, intersubjective dimensions emerged simultaneously with personal feelings from women's narratives. In this way, as stated by O'Rourke (2007), grief and mourning are not two different practices, but two different interpretations of a single practice. Similarly, in the narratives of bereaved in contemporary British society, Valentine (2008) recognizes both social, interactive, intersubjective and personal, individual dimensions of grief. Based on my experiences in the field I agree with Valentine to challenge the distinction between grief and mourning. She states that "experiences of absence, and continuing presence, were materialized through formal and informal ritualisation and memorialisation, challenging the distinction between grief and mourning, or inner feelings and outer behavior" (2008:170). Due to this conceptual overlap I will refer in this thesis to bereavement to discuss the process of loss. Bereavement is defined by Charles-Edwards (2005: 4) as "the process of adapting to loss". I consider bereavement to be a more encompassing term than either grief or mourning. Bereavement can involve grief and can be "active or passive or both" (Charles-Edwards 2005: 4). Only when a distinction comes forward clearly from the data, will I refer to grief or mourning.

In bereavement studies several authors have distinguished between types of death, such as Stroebe and Schut (2001) who discuss 'off-time' death, referring to dying at a young age, and sudden and unexpected losses; C tedra (2004) who differentiates between good, bad, violent and tragic deaths; and Davis et al. (2007) who discusses nonnormative and normative deaths, wherein a desired way of dying predominates. While recognizing diversity within and between cultures, Seale and Van der Geest (2004:885) state that "some ideals about dying well seem nearly universal" and "ideas of bad death also have a remarkable overlap in very divergent cultures and societies". A 'good' or 'normative' death is herein defined as occurring at old age, without suffering or violence. These distinctions raise the question from which point of view a death is being labeled. I perceive categorizing death as highly problematic since it does not reveal anything about the social context and complexity of death. Labeling and categorizing as such can thus be questionable since it does not tell how different aspects are related and interwoven. Furthermore, when distinguishing categories it is unclear for whom these apply. Referring to a 'good' death immediately raises the question, good for whom? Good for the person that died, good for the bereaved, or good for society? At the moment a death is being labeled as either 'good' or 'bad', a moral claim is being made of what constitutes good and bad. Although I do understand where such categories come from, they tell us little about the complexity of death. Therefore, differences within and between circumstances, cultures and experiences of both the bereaved and the dying person need to be taken into account. Van der Pijl (forthcoming) for example, illustrates, based on a single death in a Surinamese Creole family, how there can be internal contradictions within categories and how people can experience the same death differently. As categories overlap and are interpreted differently, clear-cut boundaries between them become blurred. In discussions concerning the circumstances of death, cautious suggestions are made which indicate that grief and mourning are intensified and prolonged when death has a violent cause (Boelen et al. 2006; Davis et al. 2007). However, little has been written on grief, mourning and continuing bonds when death is uncertain and the body is absent. In this chapter I explore a theoretical approach towards the deceased body and how it influences the process of bereavement.

Although contemporary models of grief increasingly take social and cultural dynamics into account and acknowledge that individuals can maintain a continuing bond with the deceased, older models of grief were based on detachment. Therefore I will revisit the lines of thought of 20th century psychological models of grief, wherein detachment from the deceased is considered normal or healthy and a continuing attachment is considered pathological. In the

1990s new ways of thinking these attachments emerged. The model of continuing bonds developed by Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) conceptualizes a continuing bond as a relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, whereby the deceased continues to influence life in the present. Continuing bonds should be considered as a means to cope with loss without labelling it as unhealthy. When defining grief, mourning and continuing bonds these need to be understood within their social, cultural and political contexts. This is important because bereavement influences and is influenced by social, cultural and political processes. While the model aims at a more culturally and socially sensitive framework to understand processes of bereavement, I argue for a development in which the circumstances of death and the presence or absence of the body are taken into account as significant dimensions that influence the process of grief, mourning and continuing bonds.

First, I will discuss 20th century psychological models of grief in which maintaining a continuing bond with the deceased was considered undesirable and labeled as unhealthy. Following I will elaborate on the model of continuing bonds that counters these traditions of pathologizing continuing relationships with the deceased. The circumstances of death and the role of the body of the deceased are highly influential in the process of bereavement and in the ways people maintain a continuing bond. I argue that the absence or presence of the body should be taken into account. Furthermore, when coping with loss, material objects and embodied practices can mediate the relationship between the living and the deceased. Objects, embodied practices and inner representations play an important role in maintaining a continuing bond. Next I will argue that the process of bereavement and continuing bonds do not exist in a vacuum but take place inside gendered and cultural mechanisms. Therefore, we have to place the concept of bereavement in power structures. To conclude the chapter, I will briefly discuss how the boundaries between life and death can become unclear when the deceased is both present and absent.

Traditional models of grief

In most 20th century psychological models of grief, the process often came to be understood as either 'normal', 'healthy' or 'pathological', and was as such defined in medical terms (Howarth 2007; Hallam 1999; Klass 1996; Scheper-Hughes 2004). In these models, maintaining a continuing bond with the deceased has been addressed as a pathology. The continuing bond between the living and the deceased were considered to be a form of neglecting reality, whereby the bereaved attempt to maintain a bond with the deceased and do

not want to accept that the person has passed away (Klass 1996). By revisiting some of these models I will illustrate how grief and mourning were theorized namely with a focus on successful mourning as a process of detachment from the deceased. It is important to understand the lines of thought of these detachment-based theories, since many of the underlying assumptions are still very influential in contemporary society and theory.

According to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917/2005) mourning produces severe deviations from 'normal' behaviour. These deviations in behaviour often include loss of appetite, loss of concentration, loss of interest in everyday things and a decrease in sociability. Furthermore, Freud states that this state of mourning should be overcome over time. Successful mourning is then considered to be, being able to exchange the lost object for another (Freud 1917/2005). Herein a prevailing view of grief is developed, as something wherein the individual has to become detached and relinquish the ties with the deceased, in order to become independent and be able to invest one's energy in new attachments.

Similarly, Bowlby's *Attachment and Loss*, (1980 in Field 2006; in Howarth 2007; in Klass 1996; in Hallam et al. 1999; in Robben 2004) distinguished between 'normal' and 'pathological' grief, whereby 'healthy' grieving takes place when an individual accepts that a change has occurred in his external world and that he is required to reorganize and reorient his attachment behaviour. In other words, adaptation after death is defined as detachment from the deceased. Detachment in this sense does not mean forgetting the deceased, but integrating them in one's memory of past experiences. In this way, the bereaved is required to move on without allowing the deceased to play an active role in his present life.

Parkes's (1988 in Howarth 2007; in Klass 1996) even takes illness as a starting point in his discussion of grief. While he considers the impact of bereavement as a psychosocial transition, he sets out four areas of grief-work, which a person has to pass in order to mourn successfully. Grief-work is considered to be a process of transition whereby the bereaved has to pass through different stages. Grief, in this view, is resolved when the bereaved manages to adapt psychologically to the changes in social expectations caused by death. Hereby Parkes presents a more nuanced view on grief as he does take both psychological and social aspects into consideration. Furthermore he acknowledges that major life events can have different implications on different persons. However, working through grief still implies breaking the attachment with the deceased. Opposing such thought, Klass et al. (1996) proposed a model wherein a continuing attachment to the deceased was not considered to be problematic.

Continuing bonds

To introduce the model of continuing bonds, I will follow Butler's delineation of the concept of mourning. According to Butler (2006), our self is constituted through the ties we have with others. Thus, whenever we lose a loved one, we do not only lose that person, but actually what we lose is a small part of our self. In such a way, we are not only mourning that person's loss, but also "become somewhat lost ourselves" (Butler 2006: 22). Likewise, Howarth (2007) argues that a sense of self is constructed in relation to the identity of others, when losing someone, we are actually also losing an substantial element of our self. In this way, the relations we have with others are highly important for the construction of our self. Along this line, Klass et al. (1996) argue that one cannot deal with loss, without recognizing *what* is lost (1996: 18). Similar to Butler's and Howarth's argument, Klass et al. state that when someone dies, what we lose is more than just that person, it is also a social role. Thus for example, if a woman loses her partner, her social role is altered from spouse to widow. In this way Klass et al. (1996) state that the relationship with the deceased does not end, but that it is modified. Relationships are not only of great significance between living persons, but can continue after a person has died. In short, as our self is constituted through intersubjective relations, whenever these relations are modified because of loss, we ourselves change as well.

In their book *Continuing bonds, new understandings of grief*, Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) challenge traditional notions of grief wherein detachment plays a central role. According to Klass et al. (1996) there is increasing agreement among bereavement theorists and practitioners that an ongoing attachment to the deceased can be an integral part of the resolution of grief. This is most often referred to as the continuing bonds perspective. In their book, the authors illustrate several case studies wherein the bereaved maintain a continuing bond with the deceased and in which the deceased is part of the social reality of the bereaved. Individuals can experience a continuing bond to be helpful in moving towards resolution of grief. A continuing bond refers to an attempt of preserving the relationship with the deceased, whereby "memorializing, remembering and knowing the person who has died, and allowing them to influence the present are active processes that seem to continue throughout the survivor's entire life" (Silverman and Klass 1996: 17). Through a continuing bond the survivor is able to keep the deceased in his or her present life. In this way, the model of continuing bonds contrasts traditional models wherein an emphasis is placed on independence as being good and desirable, whereas dependence comes to be seen as a bad and unwanted development and even labelled as pathological. According to Howarth (2007),

the notion that the tie with the deceased must be relinquished are based on a view whereby individuals are theorized as disconnected from each other rather than in relation to one another.

The construction of continuing bonds, which can be considered as inner representations of the deceased, allows individuals to learn how to go on without the lost loved one, while interacting and keeping them present in their lives (Howarth 2007, Klass et al. 1996). Inner representations can be approached as important features that shape the world and lives of survivors. As outlined by Marwit and Klass (1994) the deceased can function as a role model, who can offer advice and support, serving as a guide in the survivor's current life. The survivor can incorporate characteristics and values that once belonged to the deceased in his everyday life. Inner representations of the deceased can become performed through embodied practices that influence the survivor's at specific moments or in daily life. In other words, these inner representations move the individual and influence his enactments throughout life. In this way the survivor is able to keep the deceased's memory alive and maintain a continuing bond with him or her. Even though inner representations can be experienced on an individual basis, they can also be expressed socially. By incorporating and reproducing certain values of the deceased loved one, a continuing bond can even become the vehicle for political action. Additionally, Rizzuto (in Klass et al. 1996; Howarth 2007) has argued that inner representations of the deceased are not static or unchangeable, but need to be seen as changing along with the individual's life path. Not only these inner representations are changeable, both our self and the relationship we maintain with the deceased are dynamic. In other words we are not fixed entities in time, but continually changing and developing, along the ties we have with others. In turn, when we maintain a continuing bond after loss, this bond also continues to be a part of our self.

The concept of continuing bonds has often been approached as the new orthodoxy, placing a value judgement on continuing relationships, as if that should be the new way of processing bereavement (Howarth 2007). Klass argues that the idea of continuing bonds as a 'description' has often been mistaken for a 'prescription' (2006: 844). In this way, continuing bonds are being advocated as if they would provide better adjustment to loss. However, Klass (2006) argues that this has never been his intention, and that the concept of continuing bonds was rather developed as open to both positive as negative consequences. To concentrate exclusively on the question if the bond is helpful or not, would in Klass' (2006) view be a too simple discussion. Furthermore, Klass et al. (1996) do not approach bereavement as a psychological state from which one has to recover. It is not a process that will at certain point

reach closure. The bond can become more or less intense over time, however, the meaning of loss is then renegotiated. Continuing bonds are processes of change and can affect the survivors for the rest of their lives.

I agree with Klass et al. (1996) as they argue for an expanded view of bereavement processes. Their proposed paradigm shift, wherein qualitative research methods are used not to verify preconceived theories, but rather to understand people's experiences in their full complexities, is a necessary one. However, to further grasp the complexities of people's lives and their experiences of bereavement, research needs to take a more inclusive approach. Bereavement should be placed inside political power structures and address an individual's position in society, since these create and restrain people's capacities to act and cope with loss. This point will be further elaborated below, but first I will discuss the circumstances of death and the role of the body of the deceased in the process of bereavement.

Circumstances of death

To achieve a broader understanding of grief, mourning and continuing bonds, the circumstances of death have to be taken into account. I deem this of great importance and provide further exploration, since the circumstances of death frame to some extent, how we will cope with loss and how we maintain a continuing bond. For instance, if someone dies from a long period of illness, individuals will deal differently with death, than if a person dies unexpectedly in an accident. I do not mean to create a hierarchy and state that one type of death is easier than the other, I just want to point out that there are different ways of coping involved. It matters if someone is prepared to accept death or not, and what the main reason is that caused death.

Whenever a loved one dies this can be perceived by the bereaved as a disturbing and disrupting event. Losses often shatter what formerly gave life meaning and purpose and violate dreams, life goals and expectations (Davis et al. 2007). On the one hand, as I outlined above, loss causes a disruption in the intersubjective self of the bereaved. On the other hand, "death is regarded as a disturbance of the social order and a gap in social and family networks" (Robben 2004:13). As outlined by Davis et al. (2007) people have to make sense and give meaning to such disruptive events to be able to cope with them. Hereby, sense making is defined as the process of incorporating the loss experience into prior self-views and worldviews. In addition, making sense of loss seems to require a reconstruction of how it happened. This reconstruction is often an important part in requiem novels (e.g. Didion 2011;

van der Heijden 2012) whereby the bereaved writer time and again returns to the moment of death and the preceding and following events. In doing so the bereaved repeatedly restructures the event in such a way that it becomes comprehensible.

However, Davis et al. (2007) makes clear that not all losses disrupt the self or social body in the same way or to the same extent. Therefore we have to consider the circumstances of death. In this line, C tedra argues that death is intrinsically connected to its social context. She states that for a coherent understanding of the death process its relation with "pain, age and suffering" (2004: 87) must be taken into account. Many factors which I conceptualize here as the circumstances of death influence grief and mourning, of which some have been researched to great extent while others have received little attention. Generally, the age at which someone dies, if death has a violent cause, and whether death was expected or sudden, are considered to be influential. However, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, we should be careful to categorize the circumstances of death. Violent, unexpected and premature deaths, Davis et al. (2007) state, can intensify grief reactions and lead people to search for meaning as such deaths are more likely to disrupt our worldview and sense of fairness, justice and predictability. An important element related to the circumstances of death, that has received little attention in theory, is the absence or presence of the body of the deceased, and how this is of influence in bereavement.

Absence of the body

In the anthropology of death many studies have considered the social meaning of death rituals. More often than not, authors refer to Hertz (1907/2004) and Van Gennep (1909/2004) in their delineation of death rituals as transitory and transformational. Considering that death causes an interruption in the social order, rituals can be seen as restoring this gap in the social body (Howarth 2007, Robben 2004). Thus, death rituals are generally understood as reintegrating the bereaved into society after a disruption caused by death and providing a framework for the resolution of grief and mourning. However, most studies concerning grief, mourning and death rituals assume the body of the deceased is present. This means the body is accessible for death rituals to be carried out, such as burial, cremation or embalmment. Furthermore, the body of the deceased can be seen as the material reality of death (Hallam et al. 1999). Perceiving the body can be experienced as a confrontation with death and plays a key role in coming to terms with its certainty (Valentine 2010). In other words, the body of the deceased in the form of tangible remains is often needed for the bereaved to be able to

accept death and for death rituals to be carried out. In this way the body is of influence in the resolution of grief. The absence of the body of the deceased then implies the absence of the material 'reality' of death. By not being able to perceive the dead body a confrontation with death does not take place. As such death remains uncertain and what is experienced is not death per se, but loss. The uncertainty of death has ambiguous implications for grief and mourning. On the one hand, one cannot start mourning as this might feel as giving up on that person because what if he or she is still alive? While on the other hand, one cannot resolve grief and mourning because culturally designated death rituals cannot be carried out without the body of the deceased. Either way, grief and mourning become protracted processes.

Furthermore, Hallam et al. (1999) remind us that through autopsy the body is considered to be an essential source of knowledge for explaining and reconstructing death. In other words, the absence of the body complicates establishing the cause of death. Additionally, as Robben (2004) states, legal claims can hardly be grounded without the body of the deceased. The absence of the body makes proof of death difficult and, if actors are involved in the cause of death, persecution becomes harder which can trigger a sense of injustice among the bereaved. Considering the body as essential in grief and mourning, its absence can be a powerful political weapon in managing the bereaved (Holst-Warhaft 2000; Robben 2004).

The absence of the body of the deceased does not imply the end of the relationship between the bereaved and the missing person. As outlined above, death or loss do not mean the end of a relationship but rather a transformation. Maintaining a continuing bond with the missing person provides a way for the bereaved to cope with the ambiguity of protracted grief and mourning. While on the one hand the bereaved have to learn to continue their lives without the missing person, on the other hand they are able to maintain the person present in their lives through a continuing bond. As Klass et al. (1996) state, rather than emphasizing letting go, the model of continuing bonds focuses on negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of loss over time. Through maintaining a continuing bond the bereaved continue life without the missing person while keeping this person as a part of their social reality.

Continuing bonds through material objects

One of the ways to include the deceased in the social reality of the bereaved, is through material objects, as objects can evoke the presence of the deceased. According to Lupton (1998) objects influence and shape social relationships. They can serve as mediators and

support emotional bonds between people. Even though Lupton focuses on the relationship between living persons, objects are also of great importance in relationships between the living and the dead. Considering that death does not necessarily end a relationship, but transforms it, the role objects play in that relationship can also be continued and modified. This point was advocated by Hallam and Hockey (2001: 2) who argued that objects mediate "our relationship with death and the dead". Objects not only have the capacity to physically endure time, they are also able to carry meaning across time. Though meaning should not be approached as a fixed entity but as a dynamic process, both differentiating and providing continuity over time. In this way objects can activate a sense of past or future in the present moment (Hallam and Hockey 2001). Alongside memories, objects can persist and evoke sensory experiences that are connected to the deceased, among the living.

Hallam and Hockey (2001) have distinguished between *dedicated* and *emergent* objects, whereby the former are considered to be intentionally constructed to maintain a connection to the deceased such as memorials, and the latter as objects that belonged to the everyday life of this person before death. Everyday life objects can have a strong personal association that continues after death. After loss, objects are often selectively preserved because of personal associations and tend to become perceived as an extension of the personhood of the deceased (Hallam and Hockey 2001). Therefore, material objects can provoke a sense of presence of the deceased among the bereaved (Hallam and Hockey 2001, Valentine 2008). Objects such as clothing can even provoke a sensory experience of a continuing presence (Valentine 2008). Preserving objects that belonged to the deceased can be approached as a way of coping with loss, as objects have the ability to evoke someone's presence while the person is physically absent. Evoking this presence is a way of incorporating the deceased into everyday life and thus a way to maintain a continuing bond. In contrast, because of a strong association with the dead, objects can also emphasize absence and thus provoke a sense of pain. By simultaneously evoking presence and absence, objects can transmit multiple meanings and can thus be considered ambiguous.

As discussed above, traditional models of grief pathologized a continuing relationship with the deceased. When discussing material objects, theorists such as Parkes (in Hallam and Hockey 2001) argued that objects were only allowed in the initial stages of grief. An overinvestment in objects, exceeding 'acceptable' confines has thus been considered as pathological. This raises the question, what can be considered 'acceptable' behaviour or an overinvestment in objects? I will discuss this point in the next chapter through the analysis of a bereavement narrative. My aim is not to provide a full answer, but rather to pose the

question, evoking a dialogue instead of fixing labels of what should be considered 'normal' or 'unhealthy'. Maintaining the deceased present through material objects should be considered as one of the many ways to keep their memory alive and continue a bond with them.

Bereavement as gendered and cultural processes

When discussing continuing bonds we should bear in mind that these processes take place inside gendered and cultural mechanisms and social and political realms. Gender is complex and as it structures and informs social relations and practices its meaning shifts over time according to social and cultural frameworks (Hallam 1997). Gender is neither only about women, nor men, it is about processes and practices by which men and women's location in society are organized. When discussing bereavement, we should bear in mind that the positioning of the bereaved in society is structured through gendered mechanisms. This makes bereavement a gendered process. Different roles are stereotypically associated with men and women in these processes, relating men to reason, work and the public sphere and women to emotion, family and the private sphere (Hockey 1997; Howarth 2007). Some scholars still tend to confirm such stereotypes. Walter (1999: 178) for example, states that women engage more socially and emotionally in coping with grief while men are active and oriented towards solving problems. He concludes that "expressing grief is a more typical female response to bereavement, and containing grief a more typical male response". Even though he emphasizes that these are typical differences, he reinforces these as he labels men and women in such stereotypical ways.

However, other studies do challenge stereotypes of gendered grief and mourning. For example, Riches and Dawson (1997) approach patterns of grief as fluid and state that it is unreliable to associate fixed coping strategies with men and women, since both draw from a range of sentiments to cope with grief and mourning. In a similar vein, I argue for a step away from stereotypical notions of grief and mourning related to men and women and a move towards a more open multifaceted approach to grief and mourning in which different aspects are being taken into account. By this I do not mean that we should disregard gender issues to understand mourning and grief. In contrast, gender is of great importance since it influences and structure one's positioning in the world and possibilities for action. Likewise, gender notions constitute certain patterns of expectations with regard to men and women which frame to a large extent male and female experiences. It is thus highly significant that we do not treat gender as prefixed categories or relations.

In this, I would also like to open up the dimension of sexuality. In none of the studies on bereavement I have read so far, did I encounter a deviation of a heteronormative approach. When reading about widows, a group often researched in psychological studies, their counterparts' gender are always male or not explicitly mentioned. Either way this is problematic. On the one hand, if the spouse is always male, it means that research only includes heterosexual couples, and in this way excludes bereavement among homosexuals. On the other hand, if the deceased gender is not stated explicitly an unspoken, underlying assumption is made that creates and re-establishes a heterosexual norm. Bereavement studies on bereaved and deceased children or adolescents, often neglect gender altogether. Children are usually grouped into one category, without distinguishing their gender. In the light of the above, it seems that bereavement studies do acknowledge a gendered dimension, but selectively.

As stated by Stroebe et al. (1996) bereavement is influenced by social, cultural and historical circumstances and is subject to change. In this light we can neither speak of one format of how grief and mourning are processed nor can we speak of a single way in which continuing bonds are maintained. In the words by Stroebe et al. (1996: 36), "in some cultures people hold tight to those who are dead: in others they try quickly to relinquish all ties". As such there can be no universal approach to grief and mourning, and even within a specific cultural and temporal setting we cannot generalize what can be considered as healthy or pathological grieving and mourning. As many aspects such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion and class, influence our position in society, different people cope differently with loss. Therefore we have to include the positioning of the bereaved within a cultural, social, historical and political framework in our understanding of different coping mechanisms of bereavement.

Bereavement and political power structures

In *Continuing conversation about continuing bonds* Klass (2006) responds to contributions made by several authors to the concept of continuing bonds. Since Klass et al. first published their reader on continuing bonds in 1996, the concept is further developed through conversations and research. In this response article, he states that the question if continuing bonds help or hinder grief adjustments is too simple to understand the complexities of continuing attachments. Instead, he argues we have to take the social, cultural and political context into consideration, for a more complete and nuanced understanding of continuing

bonds. Moreover, Holst-Warhaft (2000) stresses that grief can always be employed in politics because it arouses passion. Grief can either be a means to achieve political change or be imposed, prolonged and intensified. This demonstrates two dimensions in which grief and mourning are linked to politics: first, grief can become the basis for political action to bring about change in society; and second, political measures can inflict and prolong grief. While grief and mourning make us sad and vulnerable, Holst-Warhaft acknowledges they can also be the basis for empowerment and release an inner strength. Such a double characteristic of bereavement ultimately leads us to a Foucaultian notion of power.

In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1982: 208) stresses that his objective for the last twenty years had been to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”. Stating that a subject is always placed *in* power relations, he sets out his exploration of disciplinary and normalizing power in modern society, by giving a historical account of state punishment in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault continues to study the dynamics of power and asks the question whether “the workings of power, and in particular those mechanisms that are brought into play in society such as ours, really belong primarily to the category of repression” (1976/1998: 10). In this way, he questions power as a unidirectional mechanism that can only be understood as repressive. He argues that “there are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscious or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (1982: 212, italics in original). By placing subjects in structures of power, Foucault delineates a double meaning, namely that of *assujettissement*, or subjection. In this way, power can be imposed upon someone, whereby he or she becomes subjected, as in being oppressed by power, whereas on the other hand, by being subjected an individual gains knowledge and consciousness of his own positioning. This enhances a subject position and can become a source for empowerment. It is thus not as if one is simply oppressed and thus powerless, instead subjection can be the very essence that enables a subject to speak.

This process of subjectivation enables us to address the ambivalence of the bereaved subject. The bereaved subject, indeed, is subjected to the power of its loss but also emerges as an active subject through that loss. Therefore, I argue that we must place the concept of bereavement inside power structures. This allows us to understand the Argentine context whereby bereavement not only released a sense of suffering, but also immense strength and perseverance. Bereavement became a source for productive action, as women took over the streets to protest against the military government. However, I would like to add that this

empowerment does seem to require bereavement to be experienced as injustice. In her study on feminist movements Sara Ahmed argued that pain or suffering on itself does not suffice to start a movement. Rather, "the response to pain, as a call for action, also requires anger; an interpretation that this pain is wrong [...] and that something must be done about it" (2004: 174). In this way, a sense of injustice influences the process of bereavement and its intertwinement with political action.

Boundaries between life and death

Through the multiple ways in which the bereaved can maintain a continuing bond with the deceased, whether through objects, inner representations or embodied practices, the presence of the deceased is evoked. In this way, the deceased is included in the present life of survivors in which they can have an active role. Valentine (2008: 12) refers hereby to a paradox of absence and presence, wherein the living are "carrying on without [the deceased] whilst at the same time maintaining them as a presence in their everyday worlds". Through continuing bonds the memory and presence of the deceased is maintained in the ongoing lives of the living. Howarth (2000) remarked that it is particularly interesting that continuing bonds are not restricted to individual inner representations, but that they may also be shared with others or collectively maintained. In this way as Hallam et al. (1999: 155) note "the dead may continue to live on in a social, as well as 'inner' sense, in terms of exercising agency in the lives of the living". Therefore, the relationship between the survivor and the deceased can trespass the boundary between life and death (Valentine 2008, Howarth 2000, Hallam et al. 1999). Although people do biologically die, they can continue to influence the present through ongoing individual and collective relationships with survivors. This raises the question to what extent we can speak of a clear-cut boundary between life and death.

In the next chapter I will discuss how the presence of the deceased is evoked through individual acts and social practices in the private sphere of the family. Through narratives of bereaved Argentine women I will illustrate how the deceased still influences their ongoing lives and how through maintaining a continuing bond the boundaries between life and death in a way can become blurred.

Chapter two: Continuing bonds: presence through absence

This chapter contains portraits of three women wherein they tell their stories of loss, but also of hope and strength. I hope to in this way present women's lives in their full complexities and multi-layeredness. The narratives illustrate women's feelings, thoughts, ambiguities but above all their perseverance in continuing life in a way that embraces their disappeared loved ones. I discuss the variety of ways in which women who have lost family members during the Argentine dictatorship maintain continuing bonds with their disappeared loved ones. Based on the narratives of these women I argue that a continuing bond does not have to be considered unhealthy, but rather that continuing a bond with the disappeared is a way for them to cope with the ambiguities of bereavement. After loss, these women struggle to continue life, while they renegotiate the relationship with their loved ones as a part of their social reality. This argument is in contrast to traditional models of grief discussed in the first chapter, whereby maintaining a continuing bond with the deceased is considered to be pathological. I agree with Silverman and Klass who state that "we are not talking about living in the past but rather recognizing how bonds formed in the past can inform our present and our future" (1996:17). It appears that the disappeared are simultaneously absent and present in the women's lives. While evoking the presence of the disappeared through inner representations, embodied practices, and objects, their continuing presence also marks their physical absence.

When discussing the bereavement process, the presence of the dead body is often taken for granted, or not explicitly mentioned. However, how are grief, mourning and continuing bonds influenced when the body of the deceased is absent? The body is not always present and therefore we cannot assume it is. The processes of bereavement that followed the Argentine dictatorship and the disappearance of its opponents, confronts us with a situation in which bereavement has become problematic. Not having the body causes an ambiguity in which on the one hand it is uncertain if the missing person is dead and on the other hand culturally designated death rituals cannot be performed. This means we should no longer take the presence of the dead body as the norm but ask how its presence or absence influence grief and mourning.

In this chapter I present the narratives of Hilda, whose daughter was kidnapped from a train station in 1976, Alba, who lost both her younger twin sisters and recently found the

remains of one of them, and Ines, whose mother disappeared when she was one and a half years old. Bereavement studies have largely focused on groups classified by their social relation to the deceased, such as mothers, fathers, siblings, widows, widowers, and children. However these categorizations fail to address the complexity of the relationship with the deceased both prior to and after loss. Hilda, Alba, and Ines are respectively a mother, a sister, and a daughter of disappeared persons but the richness of their stories reveals that there is more to these relationships than the labels of mother, sister, and daughter would suggest.

I discuss the processes of grief and mourning of these women in which the body of the deceased is absent, and in one case was found and reburied. These narratives illustrate how different aspects influence and relate to each other. In this way the narratives contain a complexity that does not always fit into prefixed categories. They reveal how the three women in different ways maintain continuing bonds with their lost loved ones and how the absence or presence of the body influences this bond.

Evoking presence through objects: Hilda's narrative

I am waiting in front of a large residential building in the centre of Buenos Aires. Behind the window a woman waves at me and shrugs her shoulders while she smiles. I have known the woman behind the glass for two years now, the last time I have seen her was during a previous research period in Buenos Aires in 2010, when we also met for an interview at this same place where she still lives. While the large metallic doors are separating our encounter, we are both waiting for the housekeeper. From what I could understand she went out to buy batteries for the remote control of the television and has taken the house keys. At last the house keeper arrives and lets me inside. The encounter with the woman behind the glass is joyful, we seem both happy to see each other. We take the elevator upstairs to the sixth floor and upon entering the apartment I immediately notice things have been changed since the last time I was there. The apartment seems brighter than before and things are more organized. During my last visit to the place, I shivered. The place seemed desolated and the woman broken. She had even forgotten that we had made an appointment that day and I had rung the doorbell five times. However, today all seems brighter and the encounter is warm and comfortable. The first time Hilda shared her narrative of loss with me, she told me that she had two children, a boy and a girl, and the girl they have taken away from her. she disappeared from a train station and Hilda never heard of her again. Upon asking Hilda how she copes with loss, she answers:

"I always have my daughter with me, she is always present. So I don't know about mourning. I don't experience it as mourning. I remember her and the moments we were together and the things she did. It is very difficult because they have taken away a half of me, like it is missing. And I don't want to start crying, but it is very hard. The absence of the body is the most horrible thing they can do to you. They have taken something from me and dragged me along. It is terrible. I have a son and a daughter, and the girl they have taken away. For this there is no comfort, we live because we have no choice, but in reality it is pretty ugly. I feel like something is missing from me. My daughter is a part of myself, and in this way she will always be present with me. This feeling has not changed over time. There are moments you feel awful, you feel the loss. This experience is terrible. To be honest, one cannot overcome such a thing"

Here, Hilda's narrative reveals how the self is constituted through intersubjective relations. As argued by Butler (2006), we are constituted through the ties we maintain with others. Thus when we lose someone we do not only lose that person but we experience loss within ourselves. In the words of Butler, "it is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am" (2006:22). In this way loss reveals the ties we have with others and how they compose our self. Hilda explicitly addresses that her daughter is a part of her self. Hilda and her daughter can be approached as relational as they mutually constitute each other. The loss of her daughter is thus also experienced by Hilda as a part of her self that is missing. Although her daughter is physically absent, Hilda experiences her presence continually. In this way the ties Hilda had with her daughter are not ended but transformed by loss. This is in line with the conceptualization of continuing bonds by Klass et al. (1996) in which the intersubjective ties are not ended by loss but are transformed, as "the bereaved ... have to change their relationship to the deceased". This relationship can be sustained throughout the entire life of the bereaved. Hilda, who lost her daughter 36 years ago, and who is now 82 years old, still continues to maintain the presence of her daughter. A feeling that, she states, has not become less over time.

However, we must consider the specificity of her story in which grief and mourning have become problematic. Hilda states that the absence of the body drags her along, which relates to an ongoing process of bereavement that has not been 'closed'. Because the military deployed a strategy of kidnapping and disappearing the body, grief and mourning became

prolonged. The absence of the body made it impossible to carry out death rituals and produced a sense of uncertainty since the bereaved could not encounter the material reality of death through the body of the deceased. Therefore, Hilda even distances herself from the term mourning, stating that she does not know if she can address her experience of loss as mourning.

According to Klass, "visitors to the cemetery experience physical proximity to the deceased" (2006:849). In Hilda's case there is neither a grave, nor another place where she can experience this physical proximity because of the absence of the body of her daughter. Because the bodies of the disappeared are missing, many people in Argentine society place a tile at the location where their loved ones lived or eventually disappeared. Inscribed on the tile is the name or names of persons who disappeared at that particular place, the date of the disappearing and sometimes a more personal statement. During fieldwork I have been present at several tile placement ceremonies which are organized by *Barrios por Memoria y Justicia*, which means neighbourhoods for memory and justice. The event consists of two meetings. First, one in which family members and friends of the disappeared make the tile with cement and decorate it with colourful stones. Second, a ceremony takes place wherein the tile is placed. During this ceremony, family members and friends hold speeches and recall memories and anecdotes of the disappeared. More often than not, the atmosphere was joyful and dedicated to hope and justice instead of pain. This is done so to maintain the memory of the disappeared. In contrast, Hilda does not want to place a memorial tile at the location where her daughter disappeared:

"They took her from a train station. For me it is a place without sense, so it is not a specific place I would like to put something to remember, such as a tile. I never visited the place, why should I? What will I see? It is a train station, she is not there".

By stating that the place has no meaning for her since her daughter's body is not there, it becomes clear that in her experience the body is essential to feel a connection to the place. For others, having a tile can have a different meaning. Eliana for example, one of the other women I interviewed, also told me she did not feel a connection to the tile placed for her disappeared sister. Upon asking, she readily agreed to visit the tile together. However, when the day of our appointment arrived she told me she could not handle it and we cancelled it. For her, viewing the tile would be a disturbing confrontation with loss, as the tile marks the location where her sister disappeared. Another example would be Maria Adela, who placed a

tile in memory of her brother in front of the house where he disappeared and she continues to live. For her, viewing the tile daily is comforting, since it is a way to keep his memory alive. These examples indicate that different people ascribe different meanings to such a memorial tile and thus cope differently with loss. What can be experienced as a comforting reminder for one, can be a painful confrontation for another.



Figure 2.1 Example of a memorial tile on a sidewalk of Av. Santa Fé in Buenos Aires.

Even though physical proximity cannot be experienced by visiting the cemetery because the body is absent, it can be experienced through other means. Although Hilda has no grave to visit, she can achieve physical proximity to her daughter through objects that belonged to her:

"I have a night gown that belonged to my daughter, which I kept. It is still the same as when they took her. I also have some other clothes and small things. I see these objects as a part of her, something that belonged to her, that she used. Sometimes I wear it. When I put it on, I feel closer to my daughter. I have not washed it on purpose. Like she left it behind, so it still is."

By wearing her daughter's night gown, Hilda is able to embody and provoke her daughter's presence. She consciously attempts to preserve the object, not modifying it since the disappearance of her daughter. I believe this aspect, of not washing the night gown, and keeping it 'intact' is highly significant. It points to the importance of preserving it as it was, as if this brings her daughter closer to her. Lupton (1998) has argued that objects such as

clothing can provoke a sensory experience of continuing presence. Hilda actually experiences proximity to her daughter, not only through the object *an sich*, but also through sensory experiences of touching, smelling and wearing. Hallam and Hockey (2001) have argued that objects tend to become associated with a person and as such become perceived as an extension of someone's personhood. For Hilda the night gown has come to represent her daughter. Through such an embodied act of wearing the night gown, Hilda maintains her daughter present in her everyday life and embraces a continuing bond with her. Provoking the presence of her daughter is a means for Hilda to cope with her loss. The act of wearing the night gown also represents a paradox, since it simultaneously stresses her daughter's loss, her absence, while at the same time evoking her presence (Hallam and Hockey 2001).

In the previous chapter I have already discussed how traditional models of grief aimed at relinquishing the ties with the deceased as to overcome grief. Briefly I have touched upon the approach to objects in such models. Considering that objects evoke presence and a continuity of ties, traditional models leave little space for the bereaved to engage with these, since objects would impede relinquishing the bond with the deceased. In such models an overinvestment in objects, exceeding 'acceptable' conduct are considered unhealthy and thus pathologized. However, what can be considered an overinvestment or 'acceptable'? If we return to Hilda's case, wherein she sleeps in her daughter's night gown, without ever having washed it after almost 35 years, can this be considered 'acceptable' behaviour? In other words, should this then be labelled as unhealthy, and if so, why? Because it has not been washed, or because she wears an object of someone who is no longer among us, or because it, even after 35 years, brings her comfort? Such an embodied practice, of wearing the night gown, is one of the means for Hilda to cope with the loss of her daughter and maintain her presence. How useful would it then be to mark such behaviour as unhealthy, considering that this is how she is able to continue life?

While objects that are associated with the deceased can provide the bereaved with a sense of presence and comfort, they can also painfully emphasize absence. This illustrates the ambiguous meanings of death, and objects that are related to it (Hallam and Hockey 2001, Valentine 2008). Upon asking Hilda if she kept photographs of her daughter, she first answered not to know where the pictures were, stating they got mixed up when she moved to her apartment. As our conversation proceeded it became clear that she did not organize them since looking at the photographs of her daughter is a too painful experience:

"A picture is more difficult than a night gown, because you see her. Yes, I do have pictures of her, but I do not look at them because it hurts too much. For me to see her pictures, I can't. It is not that I cannot look at her, but when I do that I feel worse. It provokes a sentiment of rebellion, of anger, of pain, because I think how different my life would have been with her presence."

This illustrates the ambiguity that objects can contain. While one object can provide a comforting sense of proximity to the disappeared, other objects can "become powerful symbols of absence" (Valentine 2008:120). For Hilda a picture would be too painful to look at, since it underlines her daughter's absence. Instead the night gown in a certain way brings a sense of presence that is comforting. In this way, Hilda maintains a continuing bond with her daughter through diverse actions and objects. In the next excerpt of her narrative, we can see how the bond and the need for her daughter become more pertinent, as Hilda becomes older.

"As you become older, you require more. When you are younger, you can manage things differently. I missed her, but in another way. Now I also have problems that I can fall and break an arm or a leg. In this way I need her more. I feel the emptiness. Thus as I get older, I feel more the need to have my daughter with me. It is very hard, very hard. It is horrible."

This excerpt demonstrates how the continuing bond is not a fixed entity, but changes along one's life path. Hilda's narrative informs us, that the bond with her daughter has not ended through loss, but changed and continued throughout her life. This illustrates how continuing bonds can be dynamic and change according to the social circumstances of the bereaved. I will return to this point when discussing the narrative of Ines, who has lost her mother. For Hilda, the continuing bond takes shape on the one hand, through a permanent sense of her daughter's presence, while on the other hand she is able to experience a sense of physical proximity, through objects that belonged to her daughter.

Maintaining a conversation through the stars: Alba's narrative

The woman on the other side of the telephone line does not seem to understand me. After calling three times I return to call Eliana, who gave me the number in the first place, to check if I am dialling the correct one. After confirming the number I try again. This time Alba, the person I was looking for, answers the phone and we set an appointment for next week. When

meeting Alba in person, my first impression is of tenderness and kind-heartedness. She leads me to the kitchen and we sit down for coffee. During our conversation it becomes clear that Alba's greatest wish is to find the child one of her sister's was expecting when she was kidnapped. She starts telling me her story and explains the political situation of her family prior to the disappearances of her sisters.

"I am a teacher from Rioja, a province in the north of Argentina. Two of my sisters disappeared, Maria Christina and Ana Maria were twins and the youngest of the family. They were 19 years younger than me. Both lived in Tucuman and were married with boys also from there. Ana was pregnant when they kidnapped her. One time in 1972, Ana Maria was imprisoned because together with three other companions they had stolen toys, to distribute with Christmas. I too have been imprisoned and so has my oldest sister. I did not militate² but my family was marked as communists. My brother was quite radical, but I never belonged to a certain political affiliation. However, during the dictatorship thinking was already dangerous and so were we all in danger. In la Rioja all the painters, writers, journalists and teachers were taken away. Therefore, I went into exile in Spain until after the dictatorship."

Even though strictly seen Alba's social position in relation to the disappeared twins is that of a sister, she makes clear that her feelings correspond with those of a mother.

"Since me and my brother were 19 years older, we were almost like parents for the twins. I did not lose a child, but it felt almost like that because they were the youngest of the family. My mother was crazy about them. Fortunately she died before they disappeared, because she would not have endured it. The sentiments I have for the twins are nearly those of a mother. If we went somewhere, for example to a carnival, we took them along. These kinds of experiences besides our age, made me feel this."

Alba's narrative illustrates that we should not assume certain categories, such as mother, sister, or daughter, solely based on kinship and gender. This would risk ignoring the complexity of social relations. Even though different kinship bonds do influence the process of grief and mourning differently, we need to take into account how these bonds are experienced and lived by the bereaved. If we were to categorize Alba exclusively based on

² The Spanish term *militancia* or *militar* refers to being politically active in a social movement. This is a common used term inside human rights and political movements in Argentina. It does not necessarily refer to an armed struggle as the English term *militate* may suggest.

kinship, her experience of bereavement would be approached as that of a sister. However, when taking into account the context and her experience of the relationship with her twin sisters, we can observe that the relationship is more complex than perceived at first sight. She does not only feel related to them being a sister, but also experiences her connection to them as a mother-daughter relationship. In this argument, I agree with Silverman and Nickman when they state that "as we try to understand the nature of the bond with an absent person, we also need to understand the relationship that existed prior to the loss" (1996:349). The relationship prior to loss influences how one goes through the process of bereavement and the relationship after loss. However, tracing the nature of the relationship prior to loss should not be our aim. What should be our aim is to grasp how the relationship prior to and after loss is experienced by the bereaved since it influences their experience of bereavement and how and if they maintain a continuing bond. Considering Alba's narrative it becomes clear that she maintains a strong bond with her twin sisters:

"They are not physically present but for me they are always present. I do not know if there are specific moments for this, I just feel their presence always, always. Together with my daughter, we always speak about them as if they were present. It is not as if we talked about someone who died and that person is gone. They are present. Sometimes I climb up to the roof of my house, where I can watch the stars. There are always these two that are standing together, next to each other. I then talk to the stars, imagining that they are the twins. They will always influence my life. In my dialogues with them they always advise and support me. I do not have many objects that belonged to them, the clothes I gave away. I do not really need things, because they are always with me, giving me strength."

Similarly to Hilda, Alba experiences her lost loved ones' presence constantly. Even though they are not physically present, their presence is maintained through inner conversations and imaginings. According to Klass et al. (1996) maintaining a continuing bond implies allowing the deceased to influence the lives of the bereaved. This point becomes explicit in Alba's narrative, as she refers to a dialogue between her and her twin sisters. While she speaks with them she also experiences to receive support and advice from them. In this way Alba renegotiates the role her two disappeared sisters play in her life and allows them to influence it. Continuing conversations with the disappeared are a way to sustain their presence and maintain a continuing bond. While Alba states that objects that belonged to her twin sisters are not of great importance to maintain their presence, she does point out to talk about them

with her daughter as if they are present. By doing so, Alba evokes the presence of her twin sisters by socially sharing this presence in conversations with her daughter and by inner conversations. This reveals a social aspect of continuing bonds and underlines a conceptualization wherein continuing bonds are not only inner representations, but also socially constructed. By talking about the disappeared with others the bereaved are able to integrate them in their social networks (Klass 1996). I will return to and elaborate further on how continuing bonds are socially and politically embedded in the third chapter.

On different occasions during fieldwork, informants stressed the importance of maintaining the presence of the disappeared. Because of the horrible way in which loss was inflicted by the military, who attempted to vanish and dehumanize subversives, it became of utmost importance for family members to restore their presence and humanize them. One of the ways to achieve this is by carrying out culturally prescribed death rituals when the remains are found. Reburial of the remains can in this sense be experienced as a social recognition of the existence and humanity of the disappeared (Robben 2005). This clarifies why in the next excerpt Alba states that finding and reburying the remains of one of her sisters felt as a small victory.

"Once the police told me they had taken Christina to a prison in San Nicolas, that they had tortured and killed her there. But this was a lie, they had taken her to another centre. They killed her and her husband by shooting them. We found the remains of both of them in 2006. We came to know that Christina was shot in her back because there was a fraction in it. We reburied them in the graveyard of la Villanera, just outside the city of Buenos Aires. We have never found Ana's remains or her child. I think she was thrown into sea but we are still searching. To know what has happened is a very contradictory feeling, because you have an encounter with the remains, but which is not your sister. I remember her so beautiful and full of life, but then to see the skeleton assembled on a table, it breaks your heart. But it also feels like a victory, because their (the military) idea was to make them disappear, as if they had never existed. Thus to recognize them, is like to bring them back to life. Now that my sister and her husband are buried, we can take them a flower. In the case of Ana, we cannot because we do not know what has happened to her."

Alba recalled how seeing the skeleton of her sister displayed on a table provoked a sense that it was not her sister laying there. It was hard to comprehend the enormous contradiction between the memory of her sister as a lively and beautiful woman and the bones in front of

her. Discussing such contradictions, Valentine (2008) has raised the question to what extent the body of the deceased continues to represent the once living person. Herein she challenges a discourse wherein viewing the dead body is considered to be crucial for the bereaved to come to terms with and accept the reality of death. She leads us to a paradox, in which on the one hand viewing the dead body can be considered as the material reality of death (Hallam et al. 1999) while on the other hand viewing the body can provoke a sense of disbelief that this is the person you love. I agree with Valentine when she states that viewing the body does not by definition lead the bereaved to accept death. However, especially given the context and circumstances of death in this research I stress that viewing the body cannot be ignored when discussing bereavement. Alba has found one of her sister's remains which enabled her to rebury the body, which provided her with a meaningful place to visit and take a flower to. Additionally, as indicated by Hallam et al. (1999), the body can be considered an essential source of knowledge. This is of great importance since "relatives often want to know how the person has died" (Walter 1996: 98). Through her sister's body Alba, was able to reconstruct the cause of death. The body of her other sister remains absent which causes her to continue searching for it. Having found one of the bodies, has implications for the way in which Alba maintains continuing bonds with her sisters:

"Every year in June I place a small recordatorio (reminder) in the newspaper 'Pagina 12'. The last one I placed for Christina was a year ago when we found her remains. I stopped placing one for Christina, but I still place one for Ana until I find her. When writing such a reminder it is as if I am speaking to them, telling them something, sending them a message. I tell them how things are. For me this is a way of maintaining their memory and their names. Perhaps not for myself, because I remember them in my mind, but so that society also knows and remembers the disappeared. That is actually the function of such a reminder."

The *recordatorios* Alba speaks about are small notices placed in the newspaper *Pagina 12*. Many family members of the disappeared place such a notice on the date of disappearance of their loved ones. Regularly the *recordatorios* consist of a message to the disappeared, written as if a conversation with them is taking place. Often the message is written poetically and a photograph of the disappeared is included (see for examples figure 2.2). Through *recordatorios*, family members communicate with the disappeared and in doing so continue a bond with them. By publicly displaying these conversations family members keep the memory of their loved ones alive both for themselves and socially. Generally the objective of

these recordatorios is thus to work against silence and oblivion, reaffirming the existence and presence of the person who disappeared.



**MARIA BEATRIZ MARONI
CARLOS ALBERTO RINCON**
Detenidos-desaparecidos el 5-4-77

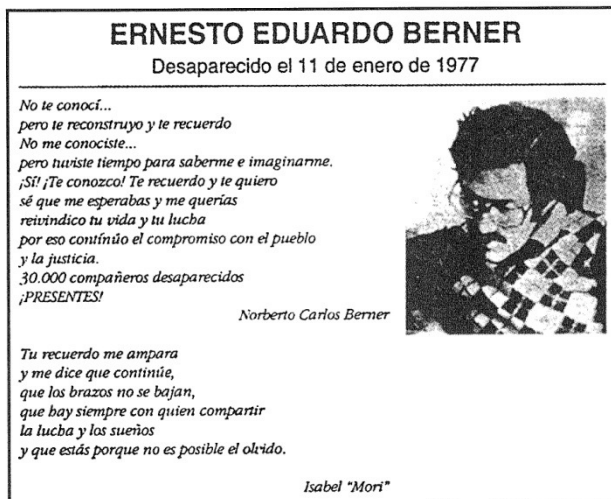
Hace 25 años la dictadura genocida los arrancó físicamente de nuestro lado, pero no pudo arrancarlos de nuestro corazón y de nuestros pensamientos. Durante estos 25 años, ellos estuvieron presentes cada vez que luchamos por una sociedad equitativa, liderada por la Memoria, la Verdad y la Justicia. NO al olvido ni al perdón

Sus familias, sus amigos, sus compañeros y todos los que estuvimos esperándolos con un enorme amor

María Beatriz Maroni, Carlos Alberto Rincón
Detained disappeared April 05, 1977

25 years ago the genocidal dictatorship wrested you from our side but could not wrest you from our hearts or thoughts. For those 25 years you've been present in all our struggle for a more equitable society, one led by memory, truth, and justice. No forgiving or forgetting.


Your families, friends, compañeros, and all of us who await you with enormous love.



ERNESTO EDUARDO BERNER
Desaparecido el 11 de enero de 1977

*No te conocí...
pero te reconstruyo y te recuerdo
No me conociste...
pero tuviste tiempo para saberme e imaginarme.
¡Sí! ¡Te conozco! Te recuerdo y te quiero
sé que me esperabas y me querías
reivindico tu vida y tu lucha
por eso continúo el compromiso con el pueblo
y la justicia.
30.000 compañeros desaparecidos
¡PRESENTE!*

Norberto Carlos Berner



*Tu recuerdo me ampara
y me dice que continúe,
que los brazos no se bajan,
que hay siempre con quien compartir
la lucha y los sueños
y que estás porque no es posible el olvido.*

Isabel "Mori"

Ernesto Eduardo Berner
disappeared January 11, 1977

I don't know you... but I reconstruct you and remember you. You did not know me... but you had time to imagine who I would be yes! I know you! I remember and love you! I know you were waiting for me with love. I vindicate your life and cause as I continue your commitment to our people, and to justice. 30,000 Disappeared compañeros PRESENT!

Norberto Carlos Berner

The memory of you sustains me and tells me to go forward, never giving up, that there'll always be others to share the struggle and the dreams, that you are here, because forgetting is impossible.

Isabel "Mori"

Figure 2.2, *Recordatorios*, As published and translated in Giannoni (2007)

In Alba's narrative we can observe how finding the body of her sister Christina influenced the way in which she maintains a continuing bond with her. After finding the body she stopped placing recordatorios for Christina, but continued placing them for Ana, the sister she has not found. With both of them she continues to communicate and maintain a bond. However, finding the body of Christina implies that she is no longer disappeared. The body strongly confirms her presence. She is now buried which provides a meaningful place that indicates she is present there. In this way, Alba no longer needs to reaffirm Christina's presence and existence through recordatorios. Because Ana's body has not been found, she is still missing.

Therefore seeking social recognition of Ana's presence through recordatorios is still needed for Alba to socially reaffirm her presence.

Reconstructing an image: Ines' narrative

While entering the small alley, I remember I am supposed to walk until the end of it and then go two stairs up. Ines is already waiting by the door with her radiant smile. Two years have passed since our paths crossed for the first time. I am excited to see her and talk about life. Ines lives together with her daughter of six years old in the Montserrat neighbourhood in Buenos Aires. I enter the residence I already visited once and both the home and our interaction feel familiar. During both times I have met Ines our conversations were affectionate and unconstrained. While talking to her I experience a tangle of emotions, on the one moment she is crying while at the same time she already starts laughing again. In between this she presents herself as a strong independent young woman, who knows what she wants but still struggles with the greatest event that impacted her life; the disappearance of her mother. Ines lost her mother during the dictatorship when she was one and a half years old. After the disappearance of her mother, her father went into exile in Norway. Ines went to live with her maternal grandparents. After the dictatorship her father returned to Buenos Aires, but their relationship is complicated. Ines tells me that since they have never lived together there are many things that remained unspoken. Not knowing and not having her mother, influenced her life. She says to find it difficult not to know things and cannot stand to be in uncertain situations. Throughout life, Ines compares herself with her mother and states that others do so as well.

"The moment I gave birth to my daughter was very important, because in such moments you compare yourself with your parents. When my mother was detained she was also pregnant, so this made me think about her very much. I could identify with her being pregnant and wondered how she was doing and how she would do things. For my father this was also a difficult moment because, people say that I look very much like my mother, especially being pregnant like she was when she disappeared. The whole year I was pregnant I didn't see him much, because he felt very bad when seeing me. To pass the age of my mother was also a very important moment. My mother was 27 when she disappeared, so when I became 27 I was in crisis. Because I was surviving my mother's biological age and life. My whole life I have been comparing myself to her, because everyone around me told me several times that I look just

like her. Another important moment was when my daughter passed the age I was when my mother disappeared. She was so small, and I became conscious of everything that happened to me and how small I was. These were very strong moments."

Ines' narrative reveals that grief and mourning can become more intense at certain moments in life. Being pregnant was a confronting experience, first because she came to look much like her mother who was also pregnant when she disappeared. This made that others saw in Ines a resemblance of her mother. Second, being in this life stage made Ines wonder how her mother had experienced pregnancy and how she would go through parenting. Other moments which had a strong impact were when Ines passed her mother's age and thus outlived her, and when Ines' daughter passed the age she was when her mother disappeared. Silverman and Klass stress that bereavement cannot be approached as a "psychological state that ends and from which one recovers" (1996:189) but as a process wherein the intensity of feelings may lessen or increase over time. Similarly, Rosenblatt argues that "all that is lost is not concentrated at the time of loss. There is, instead, a sequence, perhaps extending over one's lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of loss. Some of those new realizations or new losses are developmental; they are only present or perceived when one has developed to the point where one would need what has been lost" (Rosenblatt 1996: 50). In the light of Ines' narrative we can perceive how new realizations of loss were triggered when Ines passed the age of her mother and when her daughter was the age she herself was at the time of disappearance. Furthermore, Ines developed to the point of becoming a mother, at which she needed her own mother as a role model. This intensified the realization of what she needed but had lost as an infant. For Ines, certain ages and life experiences caused her sense of loss to intensify. Rather than letting go, Ines maintains a continuing bond by comparing herself with her mother. In her ongoing life, Ines continues to be influenced by inner and social representations of her disappeared mother. Just as grief and mourning do not necessarily end but become part of one's ongoing life, so can continuing bonds change over time. This is underlined by Rizzuto who states that inner representations "are neither static nor unchanging but something that grows and changes with the individual's development and maturation" (Rizzuto 1979 in Silverman and Klass 1996: 17). The bond between Ines and her mother changes as Ines matures and goes through different life stages such as motherhood. This process of changing realizations of loss gradually contributes to a consciousness of irreversible loss, which Ines elaborates on:

"It is not really mourning, but at certain point in life you realize that the person will never return. This is something you become conscious about bit by bit, it is a process. The thing is that you will never know exactly, because there is no place or moment at which you can direct mourning. To achieve this consciousness is a constant process throughout your life. You do not know anything. The most terrible thing is to be in such a situation of ambiguity. In a certain way you have to find a way to step out of this ambiguity, you have to close it. For many years my grandmother continued to search for her. She thought perhaps she is crazy somewhere. She could not accept that she was dead. For my grandmother, my mother could be crazy in an asylum or at some other place but not dead. This is also what she transmitted to us, my sister and I. It is a way of maintaining hope. Still, if someone calls my grandmother, she thinks it could be her. It doesn't let you close it."

Like the narratives of the other women indicate, Ines states that the ambiguous situation of loss, a situation of not knowing what has happened to the disappeared in which it is uncertain whether this person is alive or dead, is a terrible experience. It seems that an account of how death occurred is necessary to deal with and make sense of it. Similar to Hilda's narrative, Ines makes clear that the experience of loss is an ongoing process. The process of bereavement has, also in the case of Ines become protracted, as something that cannot reach closure and one endures throughout life. As an example Ines refers to her grandmother, which illustrates how living in ambiguity has become part of everyday business in life such as answering the phone. Not knowing in this case drags the bereaved along and complicates the resolution of grief. It raises hope among the living: Ines' grandmother still hopes to find her daughter alive and imagines her rather as being crazy than dead. Maintaining hope however, can herein be understood as impeding in coming to terms with death. Unable to do so herself, Ines stresses that it would be best to find a way to end this ambiguity. However, she does not know how. In the following excerpt she does mention that the body can play a role in this process. As I discussed above, the absence of the body plays a key role in this ambiguous experience. It is likely that recovering the remains, which can function as a confrontation with death, will play a significant part in ending this ambiguity. Hoping to find the remains of her mother, Ines joined the EAAF³, the Argentine forensic anthropologist organization that is in charge of exhumations and identification of bodily remains.

³ EAAF: Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, is a non-governmental, not-for-profit, scientific organization that applies forensic sciences - mainly forensic anthropology and archaeology - to the

"I don't know if finding her body would change anything for me, I try not to have many expectations because the chances are too little. I do think it would bring a bit of tranquillity, but you should not put too much hope on it because otherwise you cannot go on with your life."

What consequences finding the body of her mother will have precisely is unclear, but Ines does expect that in finding the body she will also find some kind of tranquillity. This points to a sense of unrest that is caused by the bodily absence of her mother.

What can be observed in all the narratives, but made explicit by Ines, is that the loss has not meant a discontinuation of the lives of the bereaved. Ines states that one has to find a way to deal with the ambiguity and not maintain too much hope so that life can be continued which otherwise becomes unbearable. Although Ines continues her life she also continues struggling with the disappearance of her mother. This does not mean she is living in the past, but that the loss and the relationship with her mother have become part of her ongoing life. This is in line with the argument by Silverman and Klass (1996) that continuing bonds are integrated in one's present and social life. Ines continues to tell me how she and her family maintain the bond with her mother:

"On her birthday we always come together with the family and we look at pictures. I like to have her with me and I talk with her and think what she would do or say. I do not have many things that belonged to her, only a purse and some notebooks and letters. For me it is very important to guard these carefully. They are of great significance because they show me what she did and how she did it. I can see her handwriting and sometimes I read them. But now I have come to a moment I do not read them, I know they are there and that is enough. I keep them also to show them to my daughter. I talk with her naturally about her grandmother. Every year on the date she was kidnapped we place a recordatorio in the newspaper. Sometimes I write it, sometimes my father and sometimes we all write it together. In it we write everything we have to say to her. It is something my father told me to do. I don't think I would do it by myself, if I were alone."

By coming together with her family on meaningful dates such as her mother's birthday and the day she disappeared, Ines does not only maintain a continuing bond individually, but as a part of family life. This makes the continuing bond, as already stated by Valentine (2008:85) "not only an 'inner', 'psychological' dynamic, but a profoundly social experience". Even though Klass (1996:200) defines continuing bonds as 'inner representations' he does admit that the word inner "may be somewhat misleading, for our psychic life is constructed to a great extent by social bonds". The social and the individual emerge strongly as mutually influential, as the family reunites to collectively remember Ines' mother. Through writing a *recordatorio* together, individual messages to her mother are collectively bound whereby a collective 'conversation' with her mother takes place. Ines points out that she was encouraged by her father to write the *recordatorios* and that she would not do so if she were alone. This exemplifies how social relations influence the way in which Ines maintains a continuing bond with her mother. In this case the social and the personal bond become blurred, reflecting the discussion mentioned earlier concerning the conceptual distinction between grief and mourning whereby the boundaries between the inner and the social are not always clear-cut. Ines saves the notebooks and letters that belonged to her mother so that she can share them with her daughter. Hereby she aims at passing on the knowledge of her mother's existence and who she was to her daughter. By sharing this knowledge and by placing *recordatorios*, her mother's presence is socially recognized. As such, the continuing bond is held and recognized across generations. In this way her mother continues to be an integral part of the family. Furthermore, Ines actively searches for people who were in contact with her mother:

"During the court case I got into contact with another girl who was giving her testimony. Her mother was imprisoned together with mine. We saw a picture in which we were on the beach with both our mothers at a very young age. It was quite emotional because we were very small. All these things are small victories that you achieve. They are small steps towards constructing these bonds that they (the military) wanted to destroy. It is important to be in contact with people who were companions of my mother and in this way to reconstruct an image of her. In a certain way this empowers you, because you are together with others who have passed through a similar experience. In this way you also find more sense to vindicate their (the disappeared) struggle and continue it."

Meeting people that were in some way connected to her mother, provides Ines with information on who her mother was. With this information she is able to reconstruct parts of

an image of her mother. Since Ines was still very young when her mother disappeared, she does not have memories of her. Ways to reconstruct an image of her mother are through objects that belonged to her, through social interaction with others who were connected to her mother, and by engaging in activities and interests that were also to her mother's concern. According to Valentine (2008:135), continuing bonds include "discovering more about the deceased person, to further define and enhance his or her personhood and the relationship itself". The image Ines reconstructs can thus be seen as a part of her continuing bond with her mother. However, she does not reconstruct this image on her own but in social interactions with others. Rizzuto (in Klass et al. 1996) has observed this importance of others, and states that construction is partly a social activity in which the family and significant others are involved. Here again the social dimension of continuing bonds becomes apparent. Through meeting others, companions of her mother, Ines does not only reconstruct an image, but also the social network of her mother. This is considered to be a victory since it illustrates that the military was not able to destroy all that was linked to the disappeared. By re-establishing the bonds with significant others the memories of the disappeared are kept alive.

In the next chapter I will continue to discuss the social dimensions of continuing bonds and address the empowering aspect of sharing similar experiences of loss and how this can be the basis for a collective political struggle.

Complexities of loss in narratives of bereavement

Death disrupts people's everyday lives. After death occurs, most of us find ourselves wondering, lost and in search for meaning. We all think it would be impossible to continue life without our loved ones, but still people do it on a daily basis. As we have seen from the Argentine women, this does not go without struggling, suffering, and in search for inner strength to proceed. Besides death's disruptive force, dealing with loss and bereavement reveals itself as an ambiguous process. Often we find ourselves struggling between continuing life and nourishing the memory of the deceased. Life continues without the deceased, yet our relationships with them carries on. The narratives show us that continuing bonds and bereavement are not linear processes. As both Hilda's and Ines' experiences reveal, feelings can become more or less intense at certain moments in life.

Through the narratives of these three women continuing bonds emerge as a means to cope with loss. By continuing a relationship with their disappeared family members, these women have managed to include their loved ones into their present lives. Through inner

representations, objects that belonged to the deceased, embodied practices, conversations, and imagining the deceased as a role model, women evoke their presence. Although, not surprisingly, all of them do so in different and sometimes contradictory ways. As we can read from Hilda's narrative she cannot bear to look at photographs of her daughter, this is too painful for her because it is a straight confrontation with absence. For her, wearing her daughter's night gown gives her a sense of closeness and consolation. In sharp contrast with Hilda, Alba does not care much about objects, but tells us she talks with her twin sisters through the stars. Ines shares her image and objects of her mother, with her daughter and family. This brings us to the social dimension of maintaining a continuing bond, which is not something we do just by ourselves, as if detached from the world we inhabit, but with others. This is important because only then the deceased loved one is included in our social reality. *Recordatorios* and memorial tiles are social and collective reminders of the existence of the disappeared and are placed to fight against forgetting, urging recognition from society. However, also these tiles are attributed different meanings. While some celebrate it festively, for others it is no more than a reminder of how their loved one was pulled out of their lives. By exposing these contradictions, I do not mean to simply compare these women's experiences. Rather, I want to show the diversity and complexity of dealing with loss and going through bereavement, illustrating that there can thus be no prefixed model or way to resolve grief. Similarly, there is no predetermined approach to maintaining a continuing bond. While a continuing bond can be helpful for some, it can be depressing for others. In this way, as Klass (2006) already remarked, continuing bonds are *a way* to cope with loss, not *the way*.

In the Argentine context, the absence of the bodies causes a strong sense of uncertainty. In the ambiguous situation of not knowing what happened to their loved ones and where their bodies are, unrest persists and causes family members to continue searching. The absence of the body problematizes grief and mourning and keeps the bereaved from coming to terms with death. The body clearly influences bereavement and how a bond is continued. This is illustrated in Alba's narrative, where the bond with one of her twin sisters is altered after her body is found. It also illustrates how the bond does not end when the body is found, but takes a different shape. Therein, the body itself can have an ambiguous meaning. While it can serve as a confrontation with death, it can also be experienced as not being the person we love. In such a situation, it seems that the contrast between alive and dead is too strong.

When discussing bereavement, Renato Rosaldo has argued that "rather than speaking of death in general, one must consider the subject's position within a field of social relations in order to grasp one's emotional experience" (2004: 167). However, when taking social

relations into account we must be wary not to attach certain patterns of grief to specific social positions. Neither should we prescribe grief reactions based on stereotypical gender views. As already mentioned, people are diverse, they have different personalities and are situated in life by different aspects. All of this must be taken into account to understand their reactions to loss. An open-ended approach is necessary to grasp the complexities of bereavement. Considering that bereavement is a diverse and contradictory process, I argue here for an understanding whereby multiple readings are possible. Grief is not logical, and perhaps it is just not to be captured in a single theorization.

Chapter three: Sharing experiences of loss

In this chapter I illustrate how a 'personal' continuing bond, between the bereaved and the disappeared, becomes social and political as the bond is shared with others in human rights movements. In this way, a strict division between the personal and the political becomes blurred. Many people have become politically active after someone close to them was taken by the military. Still a great number of people continues to undertake action nowadays. What moves them to do so? And what does this tell us about the intertwinement of bereavement with politics and power? To explore an answer to these questions, I present the narratives of three women who have become politically active after losing a family member: Mirta, who lost her daughter, started to be active while Argentina was still governed by the military dictatorship; Monica, started to undertake action after returning from exile. While in exile she never had the opportunity to search for information on the disappearance of her siblings; and Adriana, who lost her parents as an infant, and who tries to reconstruct an image of her parents through being active in a collectivity. The motivation for choosing these women's stories for this chapter, is that the political and social aspects of the continuing bonds they maintain with their disappeared loved ones, strongly emerged from their narratives.

Klass (2006) has noted that research on continuing bonds needs to take into consideration the social and political context wherein bereavement takes place. I agree with Klass, since, to come to a better understanding of bereavement an encompassing approach is needed to address its multi-layeredness and complexities. By gaining a thorough understanding of bereavement we come to understand the diversity of reactions it may trigger. By disappearing people, the military spread fear in society and aimed at paralysing family members who were left behind (Robben 2005). However, this did not happen. Instead, their losses triggered family members to take over the streets, and to continue to be politically active and struggle for justice. To grasp how loss, and the process of bereavement can be a basis for politics, I follow Foucault's delineation of power. In doing so, I argue that, however agonizing an experience of loss may be, it can also generate empowerment.

The beginning: Mirta's narrative

I met Mirta during the weekly march of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora. After walking several rounds around the pyramid in front of the presidential palace, the group stopped and walked towards the side of the square. A small woman, who I later learned to be Nora, started talking. She spoke about the disappeared during the dictatorship, about the current situation in society and ended her talk with "30.000 detenidos desaparecidos, presente!" "30.000 detenidos desaparecidos, presente!" "Ahora y siempre" "Ahora y siempre", which means "30.000 detained disappeared, present. Now and forever"⁴. Subsequently, I would learn that this was how they use to conclude their weekly gathering on the Plaza de Mayo.



Figure 3.1 Members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora demonstrating at a Thursday march. On the right: The weekly speech, concluding with *Hasta la Victoria Siempre!* Until Eternal Victory!

After the speech people greeted each other and talked for a while. At this moment I approached one of the Madres, and explained my interests. Her name was Mirta, and we agreed that I would call her later that night in order to make an appointment for an interview. We arranged a meeting for the next week at the *Casa de las Madres*, which is the office of the organization of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora. When entering the small apartment on the first floor of a large building I see the secretary who is typing behind a computer. She asks me to wait for a moment. Mirta is on the phone and will be with me in a minute. The room is filled with pictures of demonstrations, prices and artworks.

Above the secretary's table a large picture of the first three Madres is on display. They were the first ones who decided to undertake action and go to the Plaza de Mayo to protest and ask about their children's whereabouts. Unfortunately, the military kidnapped them during

⁴ Author's translation.

the dictatorship in an attempt to break the movement. Their bodies were found washed ashore a couple months later on a beach in Uruguay. The military did not foresee that this cruel act would not stop the movement, but only cause more anger and strengthen the collectivity. I hear Mirta hanging up the phone and walk towards my direction. A thin woman with dark glasses appears in the doorway. She greets me with a kind smile and says "hola corazon" I follow her into the other room. Upon asking Mirta if she could tell me what had happened to her, she answers:

"Well the reason I am here, and continue to be here is because on August 27, 1976 the front door of our house was forced. My daughter and her husband lived with us, they married a couple of months before. That very day my daughter had told me that they were going to look for an apartment for the both of them. I understood it, it was obvious they wanted to have a place for themselves. So we decided to start looking for it the next day, all these things were already set and planned when the military invaded our home through the front door, there were also some of them on the roof. All these plans stranded of course because... (silence). They (the military) lowered from the roof through the ramparts of the neighbours and invaded the house. Well this was the day they took our daughter, Ana Maria Beravalle and her spouse Julio César Galizzi. Ana Maria was 5 months pregnant and that same afternoon we had gone to the doctor for control, to see if everything was alright. The doctor told us that everything was going very well. He even congratulated her for having such a perfect pregnancy. So when she was taken away and the days passed, and we did not know anything, of course we worried about her. We also worried about what happened to the baby, because the doctor had just said that everything was perfect. The military took people from their houses, their work or even when walking on the street. I am telling you my story, it is only an example, but there are thousands of cases. So when they (the military) took our children, who was going to imagine that they were not going to return? Who was going to imagine?"

Mirta's narrative, a mother who lost her daughter and grandchild, illustrates how the military forces overwhelmed and disrupted family life in a split second. Future plans were at first suspended, but upon realizing the magnitude of the case and that their loved ones would not return, these plans were destroyed. Family members were left in despair and without knowing where their children were taken to and if they were still alive. In Mirta's case a profound anguish became even more puzzling. Besides not knowing where her daughter and son in law were, she did also not know what had happened to the baby her daughter was carrying. Did

her daughter gave birth, was the baby healthy, was it a boy or a girl, was it with the mother or was it taken away from her, and if so where would he or she be now?

In the Argentine context, grief was inflicted with a purpose, namely to eradicate subversive, socialist ideals and to regulate society. As Holst-Warhaft (2000) also noted, grief can thus be considered as a powerful weapon to cause pain and oppress. Understanding grief as a weapon makes it inevitable to place it inside power structures. As delineated in the first chapter, I understand power in a Foucaultian sense, as he states that power is not something one can hold, but "is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (1976/1998: 94). Approaching power not as something that someone holds, but as a mechanism that takes place in interactions, makes us aware of power not as unidirectional, as simply oppressive. In contrast, it shows that every power constitutes a counter power.

Mirta was among the first fourteen mothers who gathered and started to undertake action against the military government. The mothers demonstrated at the Plaza de Mayo to know where their children were. Mirta proceeds her story and tells me how she and other searching mother's engaged in collective actions. Eventually they would become known as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora.

"I started to look for Ana one day after she disappeared, we went immediately to the police station to make a denunciation and see what was going on. There they played with us, asking what colour dress she was wearing, what kind of shoes etc. They wanted to know everything precisely, he said in this way we can locate her. This was a parody. It was like a pilgrimage of search, we all had experienced the same drama and all the women had this particular look in their eyes. As days passed by some of the women started to recognize each other and so we discussed among ourselves what had happened. Each one of us said "What can we do?" At first we went to the church. We thought they would help us. This was in the beginning, when we truly believed that there was the possibility of gaining help. How could we accept what was happening? The search which one started in solitude continued, at that time one did not even imagine that there were so many families suffering these absences. The moment we decided to go to the Plaza de Mayo, we thought, if we are with a lot, Videla is going to answer us. And on April 30 we went to the square for the first time, first we tried a Saturday and then a Friday but on those days the Plaza was empty, and so we decided to go on a Thursday. When we started to meet, we did not know we were all mothers, we were just women searching. At this moment it became established. It was not that we had created the

Madres, no it was something that emerged from the situation we were in. And from that moment on, we thought we have to continue this. The first time we were only with around fourteen mothers. However, every week the number of mothers who joined us grew".

Due to the fact that political parties and gatherings were not allowed, it was very hard for women such as Mirta to gather and undertake action. However, this did not mean it did not happen. One of the most prominent groups that emerged during the dictatorship were the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, which consisted mostly of mothers of the disappeared. As Mirta's story shows, becoming a group was not planned by the Madres, but it emerged from the situation they were in. On the one hand, the Madres were subjected to the power of loss, while on the other hand, loss was what moved them to become active. Two instances in Mirta's narrative can be approached to explore the Madres' response to the military violence: along emotions of despair, the Madres experienced an immense will to become active. The first instance is when she says that the Madres said "*what can we do*", indicating that despite and between the restrictions imposed by the military, the Madres were thinking of their possibilities to act. A second moment is when Mirta says: "*how could we accept what was happening?*", which refers to the conviction that what had been done to them was not to be accepted, that it was unjust and that they had to take action against it. Through these two remarks the bereaved subject's ambivalence becomes apparent. While women were being subjected by the power of the military and suffering was inflicted upon them, they were already searching for alternative ways to question and undertake action against the military. Being subjected through grief, was a basis for empowerment and collective action. This refers to Foucault's exploration of power, whereby power limits us and at the same time is what enables us to speak from a subject position.

By the joining of hands and the appropriation of space, the Plaza de Mayo, the Madres started a collective protest against the military dictatorship based on their shared suffering as mothers. The Madres claimed a subject position as mothers of the disappeared, by presenting themselves as such, and not essentially as political actors. Several Madres told me about the beginnings of the movement, and remarked that they were tolerated on the Plaza because they were women. For men it was more likely that they would be arrested if they were to protest as well. The military did not consider the women as a threat. Instead, they were ridiculed and called *las locas de la Plaza*, the crazy women of the square. By ridiculing them, the military aimed at disempowering and discouraging the movement. Instead, the Madres continued their actions, and have obtained a specific position in Argentine society, a credible, legitimate

position which provides them with respect and the legitimacy to speak, since they are the mothers of those who disappeared. I have noticed this based on a few examples. First, during an interview with Nora she states that when present at for example LGBT demonstrations, youngsters like to stand next to her, so if their families or acquaintances spot them, they can point to the fact that a Madre also supports the cause. Because a Madre is present at the demonstration, people seem to be more inclined to accept the cause as valid. A second example, was during a conversation I had with a man after a Thursday march. I approached him to ask if he had also a disappeared family member. This was not the case, he was a harbour worker whose rights had been neglected. Together with four other workers he was present every Thursday at the Plaza because the Madres supported their cause. That these men searched for the support of the Madres, allows us to see their important position in society with a certain degree of authority. Both examples show that if the Madres argue for a certain human rights cause, then that charge is considered to be legitimate. Another observation which lead to this view was a mural I encountered while walking on the Avenida de Mayo. The mural showed several important human rights issues of Argentine society. In the centre of the drawing, a Madre wearing a *pañuelo* is depicted (see figure 3.2). This mural illustrates the centrality of the Madres in Argentine society and their relation to human rights issues.



Figure 3.2 Mural on the Av. de Mayo, Buenos Aires

The Madres central position in Argentine society and their affiliation with human rights is the result of their commitment to their disappeared children. As Mirta states in the next excerpt, the Madres feel a commitment to continue their disappeared children's values and ideals and to bring about change in society.

"What prevailed was the fact that our children deserved that we would do whatever was within our reach to do. In this way, everything happens in their sake, for our children, grandchildren and the family. Because we do not want it to happen again, and this is why we are so committed. Committed to continue their ideas and create a better society. We think what our daughters and sons would have wanted, education and housing for everyone, no one would have to live in the streets. This would be so beautiful, because this was their dream. All the children had this same dream. So it is no longer an individual commitment of one of us, but of all of us. It is a commitment we have with all the 30,000 disappeared. I want to be a dignified mother for my daughter, because I cannot stop valorising what she did. I want my daughter's memory to be present. That their memory is installed, is the motive for all. And also justice above all. At this moment 'true' justice is not possible anymore, but that does not mean, we do not demand it. Justice must be done, especially for future generations so that they see that there is justice and structure in this country".

A sense of commitment towards the disappeared loved one, can be analyzed as a decisive incentive for continuing collective action and simultaneously as a way to keep the disappeared present and maintain a continuing bond. Marwit and Klass argue, that one of the ways in which the deceased can play a role in the ongoing lives of the bereaved, is through "adopting or rejecting a moral position identified with that of the deceased" (1994: 288). In other words, through continuing the ideals and values of the deceased, or in the Argentine case, the disappeared, the bereaved are able to continue a relationship with them. By being active in the movement of the Madres, Mirta continues the ideals and values of her daughter for a more equal and better Argentine society. This enables Mirta to keep her daughter present and her memory alive. The continuing bond between Mirta and her daughter partly takes shape in Mirta's commitment to continue her daughter's ideals and values. She expresses and continues this commitment through collective political action. Political action in this way can be approached as a means for Mirta to maintain a continuing bond with her daughter. For Mirta, continuing the dreams of her daughter is a part of being a good mother and a part of the

continuing bond with her daughter. To stop being active in the collectivity at this point, would perhaps feel as giving up on her daughter and her ideals.

This commitment Mirta feels towards her daughter, not only indicates an individual bond. Several women shared with me that they feel a commitment towards their disappeared loved ones. Based on shared experiences of loss and their individual commitments, women undertake political action in a collectivity. At this point, women's continuing bonds, materialized through a commitment, become socially held. This is in line with Howarth (2000) who states that continuing bonds can be shared with others. This sharing makes a continuing bond a social rather than a solely individual experience. Such a commitment towards the disappeared eventually also generated solidarity among the living. This caused women to group themselves and not only struggle in the memory of their individual losses, but for all the 30,000 disappeared. As the personal bond became social and political, the political became personal. As follows, political action based on shared experiences of loss, transcends the boundaries between private and public. This illustrates that continuing bonds are not only individual inner processes, but take place in a social and political realm.

Another important aspect that we need to consider in the specific Argentine context, is the injustice that caused death. For these women the disappearance of their family members is experienced as unjust. Even though, death can be always experienced as unjust, someone you love is taken away from you, in the Argentine case, injustice has become explicit through state violence. Injustice thus composes the circumstances of death and influences the process of bereavement. Besides suffering, it has caused tremendous anger among family members of the disappeared. In line with Sara Ahmed (2004) this anger is what is required to move from pain to action. To be angry as stated by Ahmed "is to assume that something is wrong" and "that something must be done about it" (2004: 174-5). In other words, that injustice has been inflicted upon you. A feeling of injustice can in this case be approached as one of the triggers that moved women from suffering to political action. Injustice frames how Mirta and other Madres experience bereavement. The women have become politically active to demand justice for their children. Their political action can thus be read as a double commitment. On the one hand, women have committed themselves to demand justice for what has been done to their children, while on the other hand, they feel committed to advocate their children's ideals and values in society. The struggle against injustice and a commitment to the disappeared have become integral parts of the continuing bond. Fighting impunity is also about installing the memory of the disappeared, but also about safeguarding society. Preventing violence and educating future generations give meaning to the Madres' cause. During the conversation with

Mirta, another Madre enters the room and asks if Mirta wants to partake in a demonstration in five minutes. There is a protest by people whose family members got shot by the police. Mirta responds *"of course I am coming"*. When she returns her attention to me she says:

"How are we not going to appreciate these people who valorise our presence? Because if I stay at home and think oh I am not going to the Plaza, how can I not go to the Plaza if there will be people there? It is this commitment. I do not let things get me down, because my daughter would not have wanted that".

Mirta makes clear she feels appreciated by people who ask the Madres for support. This provides her political actions with meaning and recognition from society. While Mirta is committed to her daughter, she is also committed to society, which provides her with strength to continue being active in the movement and eventually to continue life.

Mirta's narrative illustrates the initial stages of being active in a human rights movement during the dictatorship and its development until nowadays. In the following narrative, Monica talks about the urge to become active she felt when she returned to Argentina after being in exile in Uruguay.

Returning home: Monica's narrative

I enter the house and greet Monica, I feel warm and tired from an overcrowded metro and a whole day of work. Entering the house feels a bit like coming home, although my home is at this moment far away, this place has something comforting. I have been here for several times now and it feels familiar. Monica asks me if I want to drink something. I tell her, while leaning back in the doorway to the kitchen, that a bit of water would be nice. I have known Monica from a previous fieldwork experience in 2010 and we got along quite well. We continue to discuss our day while we walk towards the living room. During our first encounter in 2010 Monica told me about the disappearance of her siblings.

"I have two siblings disappeared, one sister, Ana Christina Escudero, and my brother, Fernando. Both disappeared the same day. The family was at that moment composed of my mother, and the three of us. My father had already passed away a couple of years ago. So my mother lived in her house with my brother, and Christina my sister, lived in a small community she had established with three other girls, where they took care of disabled

children. My sister, Christina had also her own antiquarian. Each Tuesday, and this particular one September 28, 1976, as well, Christina had to go with her car to pick up one of the disabled boys and take him to the physiotherapist. Every Tuesday my brother, who had a difficult character, very retracted, went there with my sister. Then the men (the military) came and took him in two cars, the famous Ford Falcons. Evidently they asked him Christina's address. She lived about 5 kilometres from there. They took him and went to her house, by coincidence she was home. One of the girls was at the university, the other two where there with the children. They (the military) entered and turned around the entire house. Three months ago one of the girls told me that they had taken the children to the kitchen so that they would not see anything. The military took Christina to the sleeping room, where they took all her belongings. I have been told that they even lifted the entire floor searching for a cellar. Such strange things. And eventually they took her. My brother stayed in the car, while they took Christina. This was principally everything".

Monica's narrative illustrates the significance of reconstructing in details the moment of the disappearance of her brother and sister. It seems of great importance to know who was present at the moment and how this terrible event evolved in order to reconstruct an image. Searching information is hereby a continuous process, which influences and eventually becomes part of the continuing bond that Monica maintains with her siblings. Valentine has argued that "as well as representing continuity and sometimes change, continuing bonds included discovering more about the deceased person, to further define and enhance his or her personhood and the relationship itself" (2008: 135). This becomes apparent in Monica's narrative, where she tries to assemble the pieces that constitute the moment and places the disappearances inside a framework of everyday life. Monica describes how her sister weekly accompanied a disabled boy to the physiotherapist. She illustrates a weekly routine that was part of everyday life, that with the arrival of the military was disrupted. In the ordinariness of these moments, the disappearance is being constructed as a violation (Valentine 2008). By narrating the story in this way, Monica is able to demonstrate the ordinariness of things and how daily life was violated. Since she herself was not present during the disappearance, and had to leave Argentina shortly thereafter, Monica is dependent on the stories of others in this process of reconstruction. This becomes apparent as she states that she "*has been told that they had lifted the entire floor*" and that only "*three months ago*" one of the girls told her the children were taken to the kitchen. These two remarks illustrate how Monica reconstructs the moment of the disappearance through the stories of others and still continues to do so. Furthermore, as she

continues her narrative, it becomes clear that she was only able to start this process of reconstruction in the year of 2000, when she returned from exile.

I have three children, Paula, Pedro and Mathias and at that time I worked at the Tigre hospital because I am a nutritionist. In September they had fired me from the hospital because we had democratized the hospitals internal functioning, we created elections and assembly's, which was all quite revolutionary, thus I started to work at the Italian hospital. One morning when I was at work my mother appeared at the hospital and said "They have taken away the children". She proceeded by saying that I could not stay at home anymore, and so I started to stay with friends, one day here, the other day there, and my children at another friend etc. we were all divided. Then I decided to leave the country and go to Uruguay. During that time Uruguay was also a dictatorship, but since we had always lived under a dictatorial regime, I thought let's wait for three months and then I will return to Argentina, but no. I returned to Argentina in the year of 2000, when my mother passed away. Also because I had the desire to know what happened to my siblings. I had read things about Familiares in the newspaper and I liked it a lot, especially their way of thinking. And thus the next day that I arrived from Uruguay, I rang the doorbell at Familiares and they accepted me".

Both the loss of her siblings and the necessity to go into exile have disrupted Monica's life. Having to leave her country and go on to live in exile brought about difficulties in Monica's life, whereby it seems that searching for information about the disappearance of her siblings was a pressing need, that was put on hold while in Uruguay. However, when Monica returned to Argentina, it was one of the first things she looked for. The organization she decided to join, *Familiares de desaparecidos y detenidos por razones politicas*⁵, is composed of family members of disappeared persons including both men and women, brothers, sisters, cousins, mothers and fathers. I will refer to the organization throughout the chapter as Familiares. Familiares was formed, like the Madres, during endless searches led by family members in despair. By connecting with each other and sharing their suffering they organized themselves.

The group was first established in Cordoba in January 1976, and in March that year a group was organized in the capital of Buenos Aires. During the dictatorship its main task was to denounce the disappearances and collect testimonies given by family members. Furthermore, Familiares was involved in the creation of the FEDEFAM (Federación

⁵ Translated into English as: family members of disappeared and detained for political reasons

Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos) in 1981, a Latin American organization, connecting family members from several countries who had passed through similar losses during military dictatorships across the continent. Nowadays Familiares continues to serve as a place for people to gather and share stories. They remain united in their search for justice and memory and throughout the year they organize events such as book presentations and street demonstrations. Upon asking Monica why she specifically decided to join Familiares she told me she liked their way of thinking, and had the desire to investigate the disappearance of her siblings, to know more about it. She starts by elaborating on the principles of the organization and her search for information.

"All the disappeared were the same. It didn't matter from which political organization they were or where he or she had militated. For us they were all disappeared persons. Politics didn't interfere in nothing. Several governments had passed and Familiares continued, like all the human rights organizations, with a politics about the disappearances and nothing more. The quest of the disappearances was not politicized and this was what made me feel proximate to the organization, there were no hierarchies. Furthermore, they had a great basis of information so one could investigate. I had never had the opportunity to talk about all this with my mother or with the girls who lived with Christina, for them it was all done. Thus she (her mother) often took away the opportunity for me to talk about it, how can I explain, to enjoy a dialogue with someone with whom I shared the happening. For my mother, to remember was like to return to suffer again. She suffered in silence and couldn't talk about it. This attitude of my mother, made my situation also difficult. With who was I going to share this? At Familiares, we saw we all suffered a similar thing. All the disappeared were from all, "todos los desaparecidos eran de todas".

By joining Familiares, Monica found a space where she could discuss her personal tragedy with others who were able to listen and understand. At Familiares, people share a similar experience of bereavement, because all have lost family members under comparable circumstances. In discussing bereavement after what he calls 'unique disasters', tragic events wherein numerous people come to pass away, Walter states that: "you are in a company of others who have suffered the same trauma, will face the same challenges and will suffer again on the same anniversaries. Such people can form intense bonds. They share each other's stories and may together construct their communal version of what happened" (1999: 98). In

the case of the Argentine disappearances, many people lost their loved ones in similar circumstances. As they share stories, they can understand and emotionally support each other.

Yet, not only their stories are shared, but they are able to remember, commemorate, and organize events collectively. Familiares for example, participates together with other human rights organizations, in the yearly commemoration of the anniversary of the dictatorship on March 24.

Being able to share her experiences of bereavement at Familiares, was especially important for Monica, since she did not have the opportunity to talk about this inside her own family circle. Even though her mother had lost a son and a daughter, she did not to take action or talk about it. She approached dealing with her loss differently. Rizzuto (in Silverman and Klass 1996: 17) "observed the importance of the role of others, as well, in the construction of inner representations of significant people in her subjects' life". In contrast, Monica could not share the bond with her siblings in the family, which made her look for alternatives. Monica felt an enormous urge to share her experiences of loss, and to know more about what happened. From the day after she returned to Argentina, Monica decided to join Familiares which was an important step in sharing her experiences of loss and her ongoing relation with her siblings. As advocated by Klass (1996), sharing this bond serves to maintain a continuing bond as a part of the social reality, integrated in the social network of the bereaved. This social sharing can be experienced as a guidance in coping with pain. In the Argentine context, through sharing continuing bonds a collective search is established for all the 30,000 disappeared. As such, shared bonds are socially maintained and integrated in society, by installing the memory of the disappeared in Argentine history.

Besides for sharing experiences, Monica joined Familiares to investigate her siblings disappearance. Familiares has an extensive archive where family members can collect information on their disappeared loved ones and people can exchange knowledge. This assists family members in reconstructing an image of what happened to their loved ones. In this way the movement can also be approached as a source for knowledge. Gaining more knowledge and knowing what has happened are important aspects that influence bereavement. By not knowing as discussed in the previous chapters, the bereaved is positioned in an uncertain situation. Walter (1999) has argued that piecing together what happened is an important component of dealing with bereavement. Indeed, the majority of women I spoke with during fieldwork, expressed their desire to know and are still searching. However, conversations with women who actually did discover the gruesome details of what was done to their loved ones revealed that it only made them disturbed and depressed. During fieldwork I encountered two

women who did find out what had occurred to their disappeared family member. The first encounter was with a mother at the Madres' office. I was waiting for an interview and started a conversation with the woman in front of me, who all of a sudden told me she had a missing daughter. Since a couple of months she discovered that her daughter had been killed during a massacre. Now she knows how her daughter was tortured and where she died. She continues telling me that since she got this information she was not able to give any interviews anymore, because it was too cruel. The second encounter was with a woman to whom I was introduced after the Madres' weekly round. She had lost her husband and since a year, knew what had happen to him. She told me she did not want to talk about it because it was too horrible. Ever since she came to know what had happened she became sick. When I asked her how this influenced the relationship with her husband, she snapped and said "*Don't you understand, being sick has become my relationship with my husband*". During our conversations, both women appeared to me as agonized, they were restless and had tears in their eyes. These two encounters illustrate how ambiguous the search for knowledge can be. While on the one hand, family members like Monica, want to know, on the other hand, the ones who know, are completely traumatized by it. It seems people want to know to escape the uncertainty and ambiguity of not knowing. However, in the Argentine cases wherein torture and violence are prominent, knowing the circumstances in which a loved one died, exceeds the imaginative. Knowing, for some, then turns out not to provide comfort but a reconstruction of violence that repeatedly inflicts pain on the bereaved. As becomes clear, wanting to know and knowing influence bereavement and how one maintains a continuing bond. Being able to know and search for information regarding lost family members compels women to join human rights movements. In these movements, the disappeared' existence are recognized and form a part of family members everyday realities.

"This was what provided you with a sense of belonging to Familiares. It wasn't focus on one disappeared, but on all, this is what made it extraordinary. This gave it a different social and political dimension. Thus all the disappeared, like the Madres say; they were all our children. In the end, the search for all the youngsters, to know what happened to them, was the search of all of us. If the body of one disappeared was found, it was in a certain way an achievement for all of us. Small victories".

Based on a sense of collective struggle and shared experiences, individuals were able to create a space were they would feel they belonged. This was even of greater importance in cases

were supportive family networks were dysfunctional. In the organization the struggle is focused on the 30,000 disappeared rather than solely on the individual loss. In this way, the memory of the disappeared is collectively established whereby the continuing bond is integrated in the social network of the bereaved. Monica emphasizes that all achievements are experienced collectively as "*small victories*" in their collective struggle. The collective aspects of bereavement that come forward in Monica's narrative, illustrate how bereavement is interwoven with social and political spheres.

Looking back: Adriana's narrative

I am waiting at a deserted gate. The weather is cold and cloudy which provides the immense buildings in front of me, behind the gates, with an even more atrocious appearance. I wonder if this is because of the grey atmosphere or because I am aware of the horrifying things that happened behind these gates, when my phone rings and disrupts my thoughts. It is Adriana, she informs me that she is at the gate waiting for me. I look around but I do not see her. I realize I must be at the wrong entrance and start walking back, when in the distance I notice a young woman. On the phone she says she is seeing me, so it must be her. I walk towards her, we greet and together we walk across the lanes between the vast amounts of grey structures. I wonder if I will be able to find my way back to the exit again. The place I am at is the former Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) a naval school that functioned as one of the largest clandestine torture centres during the dictatorship. It is estimated that around 5000 disappeared persons have passed through this place (Archive Espacio por la Memoria).

In front of one of the edifices Adriana stops, on its surface says in grey metallic letters *Casa de la militancia - H.I.J.O.S.* Adriana apologises for the mess, they are still restoring the building in order to inaugurate it in a couple of months. The building belongs to the organization H.I.J.O.S (Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio), which is composed by children whose parents disappeared during the dictatorship. They organized themselves in 1995 to fulfil the need to unite and vindicate the struggle of their parents and fight against impunity. To do so, H.I.J.O.S. organizes demonstrations and events (see for example figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3 H.I.J.O.S. during a street demonstration on the anniversary of the dictatorship, March 24, 2012

I enter the building with Adriana. Except for a large table with chairs and some music instruments, the room is empty. We sit down at the table and I ask her if she can tell me her story.

"My name is Adriana Victoria Lewly, I am 35 years old, my parents are Jorge Claudio Lewly and Ana Maria Sonder. They disappeared in 1978, I was one year and a half. I was raised by my maternal grandparents, but after a while I went on to live with my uncle, and after this with my paternal grandparents. After all this, at the age of sixteen, I went on to live by myself. The relationship with my maternal grandparents was not very good, it was not very loving. Of course, they did what they could but they were not the most loving persons. I felt relieved when I moved away, but also when I lived with my uncle, I had a bit more of air, but still it was very hard. He had also been kidnapped twice by the military, so he was struggling a lot with the consequences of the dictatorship. Thus for me it was once again to be in a situation without much love and affection".

As in the mother's and sister's narrative Adriana's life became disrupted by the disappearance of her parents. A complicated relationship with her grandparents and afterwards the difficulty of living with her uncle caused her to desire a life of her own. Conceivably this is what increased a need to belong, a theme that Adriana elaborates on in the excerpts below.

"They (the grandparents) did not have these same desires, so I never really felt a part of them. Also because the family did not quite recognize the existence of my parents, they did not talk about them and their disappearance. When they did talk about them, they closed the curtains in the kitchen. Because of this, one starts to fall out of family circle, one feels she does not belong. You belong to that family because you are the daughter of someone, otherwise you would not be in that family, but if your parents are not recognized, you also feel you do not belong. Upon what is the union with them based on then? One wonders how are they able to do this, to neglect such a situation of violence. Well, this made me to want to choose my own direction in life."

Adriana states that she does not feel a part of her family, since she feels her parents are not being recognized by her grandparents. Her grandparents did not talk about the disappearances or about her parents. Because of this, Adriana could not make her parents part of her social reality, as a part of family life. In studying bereaved children, Normand, Silverman and Nickman, have argued that "talking about the deceased with others [is an] activity that helped to keep the parents "present" within the families" (Normand et al. 1996: 92). As her narrative shows, Adriana did not have the opportunity to talk and evoke the presence of her parents in the family circle. Eventually this caused the family ties between Adriana and her grandparents to weaken, as Adriana could not comprehend her grandparents' reaction to loss which, in her eyes, neglected the existence of her parents. Adriana does not have clear memories of her parents, who disappeared when she was one and a half years old. Her experience illustrates that, as stated by Klass et al., "other significant adults in children's lives, can play an active role in facilitating children's connections and in giving them information they need to vitalize their memory" (1996: 72). Since conversations about her parents were discouraged, and she was too young to have a solid memory of them herself, it was hard for Adriana to connect to her parents and create an image of them. However, as becomes apparent in the following excerpt, by joining H.I.J.O.S., Adriana has found alternative ways to connect and feel closer to her parents, but also others with whom she can share similar experiences of loss.

"I am a musician and I have two children. I am a militant at H.I.J.O.S since four years and I work at a governmental institute called Espacio por la Memoria, where the ex-ESMA was situated. We organize different activities, which are also related to my militancy. When I first joined H.I.J.O.S this was because I was searching for a place to belong to. Also because I always wanted to do something in order to bring about change, but well, to bring about

change on your own is very difficult, it is better when you are a collectivity, because it multiplies. The sensation I felt when joining H.I.J.O.S was that of having found a safe haven, where people understand you, and where doors open and your own power is multiplied. You are not alone anymore, but a collectivity, and things can only be modified with a collective strength. For the first time I feel like I am in the place I need to be and I am overwhelmed with a sense of tranquillity I had never felt before. I was used to always be the different one and it is nice to find a place where one encounters people with similar experiences.

The decision to join the organization has been influenced by a need to belong, the need to be understood and share experiences. By being in the presence of others who have passed through similar experiences, Adriana feels she belongs to this group. In here she is not peculiar, but able to share her thoughts and emotions with several other members who have lived through similar experiences. In discussing bereavement after what he calls 'unique disasters', tragic events wherein numerous people come to pass away, Walter states that: "you are in a company of others who have suffered the same trauma, will face the same challenges and will suffer again on the same anniversaries. Such people can form intense bonds. They share each other's stories and may together construct their communal version of what happened" (1999: 98). Sharing experiences not only provides a sense of understanding, but as Adriana remarks, also a sense of empowerment. The social and the individual emerge strongly as mutually influential, as not only their stories are shared, but they are able to remember, commemorate, and organize events collectively. Furthermore, becoming active in the movement does not only enable sharing experiences but also sharing knowledge:

"Another reason I started to militate in H.I.J.O.S was because I wanted to know more about what it was to militate. To continue the ideology of my parents and their way of life, to struggle for a more equal and just Argentine society. When militating I feel closer to my parents. To find out what kind of things they did and if I am similar to them. It is something that has to be done. Also to get to know more people who also had their parents disappeared and who perhaps had their parents imprisoned together with my parents, in this way one can gain more knowledge about what happened. Also because there I gained the opportunity to find out more about what had happened to them (her parents) and who they were, through conversations with others. I found out that they were imprisoned at the Olimpio. However, it is still very difficult to reconstruct them in my mind, at the moment they are these grand vague thoughts. But I do want to investigate more, because this situation is very difficult, it will not

be able to heal. I always maintained the ideals of my parents, to change the world, but my grandparents did not share this vision-ideal with me".

As comes forward in the other narratives as well, Adriana is looking for information about the disappearance of her parents. However, she seeks not only to reconstruct the moment of disappearing or death, she also looking towards the past, trying to reconstruct an image of who her parents were. Her situation of not knowing her parents is hard to cope with, which shows the importance of reconstruction in dealing with loss. Joining H.I.J.O.S. is a way in which Adriana can encounter other individuals who have known her parents before their disappearance or during imprisonment. Becoming active in a human rights organization can thus be approached as a source for information and thus a possibility for further reconstruction. It provides information by conversations with others, but also through embodied practice: by being active in a movement herself, like her parents were active in a social movement before they disappeared, Adriana experiences what it is like to militate. This experience makes Adriana feel closer to a reconstruction of her parents and how they went through life. Furthermore, Adriana also upholds the values and ideals once advocated by her parents through active participation in a social movement. In line with Marwit and Klass (1994/1995), this is one of the ways in which the deceased can continue to influence the lives of the bereaved. By militating, Adriana experiences closeness to her parents and maintains a continuing bond with them. Similar experiences were noted by Normand et al., who state that bereaved children showed "signs of having internalized the deceased's values, goals, personalities, or behaviours as a way of remaining connected to the forever absent parents. They saw this as a legacy from their parents and cherished these qualities in themselves as a way to immortalize the dead" (1996: 93). Through political action Adriana evokes her parents presence, which supports her in coping with loss. Political action proves thus to be highly important in the bereavement process.

Continuing bonds in society

By continuing the ideals and values of the disappeared, the women keep them present in their lives and allow them to continue to influence it. As the narratives show, the women have committed themselves to bring about change in society, in name of the disappeared. In this way, the women maintain a continuing bond with them. In human rights organizations, family members share their experiences of loss. They exchange their understandings of the disappearances and collectively undertake actions as a part of coping with loss. Their

activities, such as demonstrations, lectures, publishing books with life histories, supporting other groups in society, and educating future generations, are all done in name of the 30,000 disappeared. In other words, family members not only share their experiences, they also share the bonds they maintain with the disappeared. Expressing a commitment to all the disappeared establishes their memory not only for the family members themselves but also in society. Whereas in chapter two I have discussed the sociality of continuing bonds in the family sphere, here it becomes clear that this social dimension of continuing bonds is also prominent in society. Family members make the disappeared not only part of their own social reality, but also a part of the social reality of society, by provoking the presence of the disappeared through their activities.

Both Monica and Adriana experienced difficulties to share their experiences of loss with others in the family circle. Monica lived in exile, and her mother did not want to discuss the disappearances. Similarly, Adriana's family did not talk about her disappeared parents. Therefore, they could not discuss their feelings, which made them search for alternatives. Human rights organizations, provide a vital source of information for many family members like Monica and Adriana. Through the organization, they attempt to reconstruct what has happened to their loved ones. The situation of uncertainty that surrounds death, influences bereavement and continuing bonds, in the sense that family members want to know, and continue searching. Getting to know more provides the bereaved with a clearer image of what happened to their loved ones. In the case of women who did find out what exactly happened to their loved ones, the continuing bond becomes established in the violence and pain they learned about. The search for knowledge and the commitment to the disappeared are tied to a search for justice, which can be experienced as a recognition from society of the pain that has been inflicted upon you. Gaining recognition from society can influence how we go through bereavement. What becomes clear in the experiences of bereavement of the women in Argentina, is that politics influence bereavement while bereavement influences politics. In the concluding part of this thesis, I will further discuss the intertwining of politics and bereavement.

Conclusion

"How I wish I could describe their pain, or my own"

Tango with lions - In a bar

As I start to write the concluding thoughts of this thesis, I want to insist on the absence of the body of the disappeared loved ones and how this influenced women's process of bereavement. But I find myself searching. Searching for the words to discuss or even to describe the intensity I saw in women's eyes when telling me about the missing bodies, the despair, when imagining they would not be able to find them as time is passing, or the joy when talking about how brilliant and wonderful their daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, or parents were. What can be told from these stories? Loss breaks our hearts and still we manage to continue, to continue life and to continue to care. As becomes apparent from the women's narratives, time alone does not end grief. In the lives of the narrators, bereavement has become a protracted and uncertain process. Since the bodies of the disappeared are missing, death remained uncertain and family members were not able to carry out socially and culturally designated mourning practices. How can one continue life, without knowing where she stands? Women were left with an open wound that seems not to heal. However, in this thesis I illustrate that in the process of bereavement, recovery should not be addressed as a destination, but rather as a journey that changes us for life.

Considering the uncertainty of death caused by the absence of the body, and a lack of information on the moments prior to death and the circumstances of death itself, women were eager to obtain more knowledge about what happened to their loved one. In the process of bereavement, knowing what happened, is an important aspect in dealing with loss. The will to know forms a driving force to continue searching, and can be approached as a trigger for action. Most importantly, these women became active not only on an individual basis, namely to cope with their personal losses, but rather in a political, collective way.

One of the reasons women have become politically active, is to advocate and continue the values and ideals of their disappeared loved ones. In this way, women vindicate the principles once envisioned by the disappeared. From this commitment the women draw their strength to persevere in their political action. A part of this commitment is to fight against

impunity, and demand justice. On the one hand, women call for justice for their individual losses, while on the other hand, they unite and demand justice for the all the 30,000 disappeared and their families, for disrupting their lives. Furthermore, this call for justice, in name of their loved ones, is also a message to society and future generations, a plea to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again. For the women in Argentina, the process of bereavement and their political activism are strictly entangled. Their bereavement is through political action, because through maintaining alive their loved ones' ideals they maintain a continuing bond, and simultaneously they are politically active through bereavement, because it is political to grieve those losses.

As these women maintain a continuing bond through a commitment, their bond is not only an individual matter but integrated in the social realm. Through conversations with others and through collective actions, women share their experiences of loss in the family and in society. Based on shared experiences of loss, women collectively claim justice for the 30,000 disappeared. In this way, their commitment towards the disappeared, establishes solidarity among the living. Bereavement, in these cases, brought people together. Similar experiences of bereavement, when socially shared, led to mutual understanding and increasing capacities to act.

Klass (2006) has argued that, we have to take into account culture and politics, since these are woven into individual narratives of bereavement. In this line, this thesis seeks to contribute to a culturally, socially and politically sensitive approach to bereavement and continuing bonds. When studying bereavement, I argue, we have to be aware that it is a process that takes place in power structures. Through a Foucaultian understanding of power, I argue that bereavement does not only imply passivity and subjugation, but that it can be precisely what makes us a subject and enables us to act. Bereavement is not an unilateral process that leaves the bereaved helpless and powerless. On the contrary, bereavement can be a catalyst for political action, since it, as formulated by Holst-Warhaft, "arouses passion" (2000: 5). However painful loss may be, it can strengthen and empower. In the lives of these women, shared experiences of loss and suffering, a shared sense of injustice, and a collective commitment to the 30,000 disappeared, are triggers for political action. In short, bereavement can move us, to act.

As the narratives presented in this thesis reveal, the women's actions aim at evoking the presence and installing the memory of the disappeared. Through a variety of ways, women actively maintain an ongoing relationship with their disappeared loved ones. By holding on to objects that belonged to the disappeared, and through inner conversations, a search for

knowledge and justice, and a strong commitment to continue their ideals and values, women experience the presence of their loved ones in everyday life, even though they are physically absent. Through this continuing presence, the disappeared continue to influence the women's lives and society. However, the continuing presence of the disappeared and the continuing bonds women maintain with them, causes the women to undertake precisely these actions. The continuing bond, then, is an active bond, a part of their life, which moves and influences them.

I have illustrated that, although death occurred under similar circumstances, women's responses to loss are diverse, as are the ways through which they maintain a continuing bond with their loved ones. This variety uncovers that while categories of death, such as sudden or violent deaths, can perhaps guide analytical thinking on theorizing death, they fail to address the complexities and particularities of how someone died and how the bereaved will cope with this loss. By categorizing death, and especially by predicting behavior upon categories, a certain path is created of how to handle bereavement, of how this process will evolve under specific circumstances. However, such categorizing, narrows our view and runs the risk of neglecting complexity and diversity. There is no single line to follow when going through bereavement. Similarly, there is no single approach for men or women in this process. Even though family relations and gender are of influence in bereavement, this cannot be generalized. Focusing on solely one aspect of life, such as gender, does not encompass a person's particularity. Rather, we have to address bereavement through a person's positionality and life story. Attempting to break with stereotypes of mourning women as solely emotional and passive, In this thesis I have addressed women as political actors of change. The diversity of bereavement includes a capacity for action. In the Argentine case women have demonstrated themselves as engaged and fierce political actors, who do not give up their struggle.

For future research, it would be interesting to elaborate further on the Argentine context, and focus on the effects of finding and not finding the body of the disappeared on bereavement and continuing bonds. Also, the experiences of men and people who have not become active in political movements, would provide us with significant insights in the diversity of how we cope with loss. Furthermore, to address how emotions move us, the affectivity of bereavement would be a valuable starting point for further research.

It is the night before I will leave Buenos Aires and return home. I am at Monica's house to say farewell. We are sitting in the living room talking about life, art and about the friendship we have established. When at certain moment Monica's takes a large photo book

from underneath the coffee table. It turns out to be the family photo book, with childhood pictures of her and her siblings. The photographs are structured in a chronological way, in the beginning only photographs of Monica appear, since she is (was) the oldest one. As the pages are turned over photographs appear of her sister, and further on of her brother. It seems that these childhood pictures, which demonstrate the innocence and a full life ahead of her, make the act of the disappearances even more cruel and painful. At each picture of her sister, Monica stops and remarks how beautiful and lovely she was. At certain moment Monica attempts to say something about a pictures, but seems not to be able to find the words for it. I look at her, while she is looking at the photographs, her eyes are watered. She closes the book with a sigh.



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