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Enemy Construction in Argentina 1976-1983

How did the Argentinian Military Dictatorship Construct an Enemy?

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Abstract

This research investigates how the Argentinian military dictatorship constructed an enemy between 1976-1983. This was done by means of analyzing the Nunca Más report. In addition, conceptual and analytical frameworks such as securitization and enemy construction have been used in order to illustrate and identify four main enemy construction tactics. In conclusion, the Argentinian military regime constructed an enemy that was not nearly as dangerous as they made them out to be. The military demonized their leftwing opponents through speech acts and reinforced their choice to do so by pushing blame upon ‘’the subversives.’’ They created narratives to justify their excessive violence. These narratives were then reinforced through domination of the Argentinian public. The securitization process provides a framework for these actions. In short, the Argentinian military used dehumanization, blame, framing, and domination to construct their enemy and shape reality in a way that justified their actions.

Introduction

*‘’Democracy brought much discussion of Argentinian state terrorism. Most of this centered on bringing the actual events to light, hence the very high sales of Nunca Más, which documents the type and extent of the state repression in gory and convincing detail; the daily coverage of testimony at the commanders’ trial; special weekly newspapers devoted to the trial (El Diario del Juicio); and so on.’’[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Looking back on the Argentinian conflict now, several decades later, it appears clear the military committed state terrorism.[[2]](#footnote-2) Eyewitness accounts, trials and government reports have brought to light some of the horrors that played out between 1976 and 1983. During this timeframe however the military succeeded in avoiding responsibility for their actions. They constructed an enemy, that was to blame for all Argentina’s problems.

Argentina is known to have a longstanding history of authoritarianism and state violence.[[3]](#footnote-3) In 1930, the military orchestrated a coup against president [Hipólito Yrigoyen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip%C3%B3lito_Yrigoyen). The ‘Infamous Decade’ commenced in which political corruption and torture played central roles. Argentina remained unstable until the 1940s when Juan Domingo Perón took over. Although Perón’s popularity stemmed from his passion for social justice, his regime also provoked protests, violence and chaos. An anti-Peronist movement sprouted in the 1950s. Violent attacks and outbreaks resulted in another successful coup in 1955. Perón fled Argentina while the military took over. After several turbulent decades and public outcry from his followers, Perón returned to Argentina. Despite his name being excluded from elections he became president in 1973. Many Argentinians had high expectations of Perón’s return.[[4]](#footnote-4) However disaster struck again when Peron died in 1974. His wife, Isabel Martínez took over, despite being unfit for leadership.[[5]](#footnote-5) A period of chaos and violent outbreaks followed. Leftwing guerilla insurgencies such as the Montoneros fought rightwing death squads during the next two years. [[6]](#footnote-6)

In 1976 the military took over by means of another coup in an effort to restore balance to Argentina and its people.[[7]](#footnote-7) The military started an anti-subversion campaign also referred to as the National Reorganization Process (*Proceso de Reorganizacio ́n Nacional*)[[8]](#footnote-8) and ruled with an iron fist. Political violence continued on an even bigger scale. No political opponents were allowed. This becomes clear trough a statement made by General Iberico Saint-Jean, a prominent political figure during the military dictatorship, (later charged with crimes against humanity). He made the following statement in 1977:

“*First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then ... their sympathizers; then ... those who remain indifferent; and, finally, we will kill those who are timid*.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

This statement may be the most often quoted phrase in regards to the Argentinian conflict. It shows the brutality of the Argentinian military regime and their unwillingness to work with opponents of any kind.

This research will explore how the Argentinian military dictatorship constructed an enemy. This project was originally inspired by the book *’Argentina Betrayed, Memory, Mourning and Accountability*’ by scholar Antonius Robben.[[10]](#footnote-10) Even though he book provides much insight in the Argentinian conflict, it additionally leaves the reader with questions such as: how did the government successfully construct an enemy? What were the most important factors within the process of enemy construction in Argentina? In order to answer these questions, the theoretical framework of securitization, as proposed by scholar Ole Wæver, will be used to analyze and understand government framing. In the securitization process, the government (among other actors) attempts to securitize against a threat.[[11]](#footnote-11) The threat in the Argentinian conflict can be defined as leftwing political opponents. The government securitized against this threat by means of varying methods. One of which can be defined as ‘framing’ in order to get public opinion on their side and stop future opposition. The process of securitization will further be discussed in chapter one.

In addition this research will dive into enemy construction on a broader level. Enemies can be constructed through a combination of different methods, such as dehumanization, framing, inclusive and exclusive terminology etc. The article ‘*Torture and the Construction of an Enemy: The Example of Argentina 1976-1983’* by Lindsay DuBois will be used in order to make an analysis.[[12]](#footnote-12) In addition previous genocide research will be utilized to identify the factors most important to enemy construction.

The theoretical frameworks of securitization and enemy construction, discussed in chapter one, will be applied to the Argentinian conflict in the second chapter. Lastly the Argentinian enemy construction process will be analyzed on the basis of these pillars, by means of analyzing the ‘’Nunca Más’’ report.[[13]](#footnote-13) Issued by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, also referred to as the CONADEP.

In 1983 President Alfonsín took over. In order to restore balance, Alfonsín decided it was important for the Argentinian people to finally receive answers, and for perpetrators to go to trial. He created the CONADEP and issued them to investigate the political violence that had taken place in the previous years (1976-1983). The CONADEP in turn created the Nunca Más (Never Again) report, in which they detailed the findings of their investigation as well as numerous eye witness accounts of survivors and family members of the disappeared.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The release of the CONADEP report caused a shift in the national (and international) narrative concerning the Dirty War in Argentina. Starting in 1976, the military proposed two national narratives often referred to as Dirty War, and the Two Demons or Two Evils Theory. These narratives claimed the illegitimate means used by the military were justified and necessary, in order to defeat a dangerous enemy.[[15]](#footnote-15) (These narratives will further be discussed in chapter one and two.) The release of the Nunca Más report however shifted people’s perception of the conflict towards state terrorism. It became increasingly clear that the extraordinary means used by the military regime were illegitimate and unjustified.[[16]](#footnote-16) The enemy they purported to fight against did not exist. Although there was an opposition, these leftwing opponents were nowhere near as dangerous as the military said they were. It has become painfully clear that the state terrorized their people between 1976 and 1983.

In the end, the military regime failed at creating an enemy, however their methods carried a level of success during their reign. On a national, as well as an international level, people viewed the dirty war as legitimate in the 70s and early 80s. It is hard to imagine how Argentina, and the rest of the world stood idly by as the military regime, tortured, raped, killed and disappeared thousands of people. Here we find a modicum of success in the enemy construction process set into motion by the repressive military regime.

Can the different pillars of enemy construction be found in eye witness accounts? Was there widespread public support for the military coup? If so, was this one of the reasons why the military was able to successfully construct an enemy? These questions will be taken into consideration in the third and final chapter.

Even though the conflict ended in 1983, the aftermath is currently still ongoing. Not only has the conflict left lasting impressions on the Argentinian people (that to this day have not been repaired), human rights movements are currently fighting for genocide recognition. Genocide recognition is important in order to repair the broken relationships that prevail in Argentinian society today.

*‘’Implicit in this politics of victims is a relationship with the state. Victims use human rights as a discourse to constitute themselves as political subjects, to claim a moral relationship to power as victims of abuse and to demand recognition on the basis of their humanity and compassion (i.e., recognition of suffering). The very thrust of human rights claims is to reclaim personhood and gain moral visibility.’’[[17]](#footnote-17)*

Recognition for the horrors that played out in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 are imperative to national healing.

This research additionally speaks to literature on dictatorial repression and enemy construction and could be used in comparative research to help recognize and possibly prevent similar conflicts from happening in the future.

Chapter 1: Securitization and Enemy Construction

The Argentinian military started their anti-subversion campaign in 1976. They constructed an enemy and proceeded to securitize against this dangerous threat. In this chapter the conceptual frameworks of securitization, and enemy construction will be specified and set out.

Scholar Ole Wæver is a professor of international relations at the University of Copenhagen and is internationally recognized for his work within security theory. Wæver has been credited for coining the concept of ‘securitization,’ which he applies not only to conflict but additionally to foreign policy, religion, and climate change.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In short, the securitization process is a process through which a securitizing actor uses a speech act, to convey a security problem to a relevant audience. The referent object needs to be protected from this threat by the securitizing actor who will in turn employ extraordinary measures.[[19]](#footnote-19) The mentioned concepts will further be explained in this chapter. Analytical theory as well as a conceptual framework will be provided.

First and foremost, what is considered to be a security problem? According to Wæver, examples of security problems can constitute of threats such as terrorism, dangerous policies, and even climate change.[[20]](#footnote-20) *‘’Security problems are developments that threaten the sovereignty or independence of a state in a particularly rapid or dramatic fashion, and deprive it of the capacity to manage by itself. This, in turn, undercuts the political order. Such a threat must therefore be met with the mobilization of the maximum effort.’’[[21]](#footnote-21)*

Summarily, security problems are existential threats against which harsh and unconventional methods may be used. These security problems are brought to the attention of a relevant audience by the securitizing actors. In most cases securitizing actors consist of the state / important political leaders.[[22]](#footnote-22) They convey these security problems through speech acts.[[23]](#footnote-23) Examples of speech acts are political speeches or news articles. Oftentimes the media is utilized to transmit this important information.[[24]](#footnote-24)

*‘’With the help of language theory, we can regard "security" as a speech act . In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. […] By uttering "security," a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it.’’[[25]](#footnote-25)*

*The use of this speech act had the effect of raising a specific challenge to a principled level, thereby implying that all necessary means would be used to block that challenge. And, because such a threat would be defined as existential and a challenge to sovereignty, the state would not be limited in what it could or might do. Under these circumstances, a problem would become a security issue whenever so defined by the power holders.[[26]](#footnote-26)*

The means necessary to block a threat are often considered to be extraordinary measures. When an existential threat presents itself, these extraordinary measures are commonly considered to be justified in order to protect the referent object. In most cases the referent object is the citizens, or the innocent population within a state or country. Public support of extraordinary measures is important, however a securitizing actor can (and is often justified to) move forward with their measures without the support of their population. Public support will be discussed in chapter 3.

The securitization process is a helpful analytical framework. Not only does it provide insight in the way governments operate, it can additionally be employed to identify abuse of power. According to Wæver the state and its elites have the ability to abuse the securitization process to further their own agenda.

*‘’In naming a certain development a security problem, the "state" can claim a special right , one that will, in the final instance, always be defined by the state and its elites. […] Thus, that those who administer this order can easily use it for specific, self-serving purposes is something that cannot easily be avoided.’’[[27]](#footnote-27)*

Abuse of power is a common occurrence within politics. Whether or not this was the case in Argentina will be discussed in the second and third chapter.

**Enemy Construction**

Even though enemy construction is a concept that presents itself regularly, there is little literature on this topic. Nonetheless, this section will combine varying sources and case studies in order to identify the different methods used to construct an enemy. Much of the following research stems from literature on the topic of genocide. Reason being, enemy construction (generally) plays an important role in genocide.

Four methods of enemy construction have been identified and will be demonstrated in this chapter. Firstly, demonization dehumanization are prevalent methods used to construct an enemy. Commonly, one group is singled out and demonized in order to create a common enemy.[[28]](#footnote-28) Oftentimes, the securitizing factor will no longer refer to the enemy as people but use a phrase that separates victims from everyone else. For instance during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 victims were referred to as ‘’cockroaches.’’[[29]](#footnote-29) Such language demonizes as well as dehumanizes ‘’the enemy.’’

Other forms of language, such as inclusive and exclusive terminology like ‘’us’’ and ‘’them’’ are often utilized to create a dived between different groups. This additionally is often experienced as dehumanizing. [[30]](#footnote-30)

Secondly, victims are regularly blamed for problems within society and / or used as a scapegoat. An example of blame being pushed on victims can be found in the Armenian Genocide. The Ottoman Empire lost the First Balkan War between 1912 and 1913. This was often seen as a great humiliation. The Young Turks shifted blame towards Balkan Christians. The (Christian) Armenians were held responsible for the lost war. According to the Young Turk leaders the Armenians conspired against the Ottoman empire and undermined their authority.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Thirdly, a social, political and historical reality is constructed that leaves no room for differing opinions or realities. Simply put, this entails both a constant repetition of the previously mentioned techniques as well as framing. Oftentimes an (inter)national narrative is constructed that reinforces whatever it is that the securitizing actors want their audience to believe. According to scholar Antonius Robben, discursive frames bestow trustworthiness on social memories by providing plausible interpretations of experiences through meaningful narratives and logical reasoning.[[32]](#footnote-32) The Cambodian genocide forms an example for such framing. According to Cambodian ideology, a complete societal reformation was necessary and justified in order to clean the slate and start over as an agricultural society. Being a farmer and living a ‘’simple life’’ was idealized. Intellectuals such as students and scholars, powerful individuals such as police or government officials and educated people such as doctors and writers were executed. According to national narrative, this was the only way to ensure Cambodia could achieve its goal.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Lastly, domination plays an important role in the construction of an enemy. In order to reinforce the national narrative domination techniques are often employed. High sanctions may be put on disagreement (of any kind) with state ideology.[[34]](#footnote-34) Additionally telling on acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues, friends and family is encouraged. The Holocaust can be taken as an example of such domination. Not only were German citizens encouraged to tell on their Jewish neighbors, colleagues and friends, but they additionally could be punished, if they helped Jews in any way. Some of those who were brave enough to help and hide Jews during the second world war paid for these ‘’transgressions’’ with their lives.

In summary, enemy construction consists of dehumanization, blame, framing, and domination. Undoubtedly there are more methods used to construct an enemy, however for the purpose of this research the previously mentioned methods will be used and further specified in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 2: Existential Threat

*‘’From many perspectives, any explanation that might suggest some equivalency between the violence of the Argentine government and its revolutionary opponents is absurd – and for many, reprehensible.’’[[35]](#footnote-35)*

Although equal violence seemed incomprehensible for many, this was the explanation and / or justification commonly given by the Argentinian government. Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina suffered at the hands of a repressive, rightwing military dictatorship. The military abducted, tortured, killed and made to disappear those they deemed as political opponents. During this time, the regime attempted to frame the conflict in a way that justified their actions. The government constructed an enemy in the process.

An important question that needs to be answered is whether or not there was an actual enemy to begin with. Was there a guerilla insurgency? How dangerous were these subversives? Did the government blow this ‘’existential threat’’ out of proportion? Or was there reason for concern? How did the government successfully construct this enemy?

Human rights organizations as well as the military, agreed that there was a guerilla insurgency present in Argentina. However, reports on the size of the guerilla insurgency vary greatly. According to human rights organizations the guerillas were few and far between. The military on the other hand insisted that there were tens of thousands of dangerous guerillas present in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. [[36]](#footnote-36)

‘*’While the human rights organizations insisted that the guerillas had numbered no more than two hundred, the military leadership maintained that the figure was thirty thousand.*’’[[37]](#footnote-37)

Videla, an important political figure and general during this time claimed the military had successfully exterminated 90% of these ‘’subversives.’’ *‘’Videla says that two years into ‘’the Process of National Reorganization’’ the ‘’National Strategy of Countersubversion’’ has successfully eliminated 90 percent of the ‘’opponent,’’ he lays out plans for continuing the campaign in a way that seems to explicitly expand the object of attack to those with subversive ideas. Videla calls for a renewed effort.’’[[38]](#footnote-38)*

In the conclusion of the Nunca Más report it becomes clear that the excessive violence was not just targeted towards those who were ‘’guilty’’ of opposing the government. Thousands of innocent people were subjected to rape, torture, disappearances and death.

*‘’We can state categorically - contrary to what the executors of this sinister plan maintain - that they did not pursue only the members of political organizations who carried out acts of terrorism. Among the victims are thousands who never had any links with such activity but were nevertheless subjected to horrific torture because they opposed the military dictatorship, took part in union or student activities, were well-known intellectuals who questioned state terrorism, or simply because they were relatives, friends, or names included in the address book of someone considered subversive*.’’[[39]](#footnote-39)

The leftist guerilla group, regularly referred to as ‘’the subversives,’’ was not nearly as large nor as dangerous as the Argentinian military made them out to be. In addition, many innocent lives were lost for disagreeing with the national narrative, or in some cases even associating with an individual that disagreed with state ideology. How did the military regime convince Argentina that their country was in danger of an enemy that most likely consisted of no more than 200 guerillas? How was this enemy constructed?

**Argentina and the Securitization Process**

As discussed in the introduction, Argentina has a longstanding history with authoritarianism and political violence. Life in Argentina had been unstable and chaotic for several decades.[[40]](#footnote-40) The military (allegedly) wished to restore balance to Argentina and thus committed a coup. According to the securitization process, the military is considered to be the securitizing actor. The securitizing actor attempts to securitize against an existential threat. Even though no such threat existed, the military dictatorship defined this existential threat as left wing political opponents, however later broadened their victim group to political opponents of any kind. As became clear through statements from Generals such as Iberico Saint-Jean: even those who did not show enthusiastic and public support for the military and their violent regime were seen as threats and needed to be eliminated. This can be deducted from his statement previously mentioned: “*First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then ... their sympathizers; then ... those who remain indifferent; and, finally, we will kill those who are timid*.”[[41]](#footnote-41)

The military regime made it appear as though left wing guerilla groups formed an existential threat.[[42]](#footnote-42) The referent object needs to be protected from this threat. The military dictatorship had several main goals. First and foremost, they wanted to restore balance to Argentina. In addition military generals are often quoted saying they are protecting Argentina’s Christian values. Thus, Argentina as a whole should benefit from resolving the security issue. Undoubtedly there would have been differing agenda’s and personal objectives that played important roles in this conflict.

The element the military is in agreeance over however is that extraordinary and unconventional measures needed to be taken in order to defeat the enemy. These means are justified and necessary to protect Argentina and its people.[[43]](#footnote-43) This sentiment has played, and still plays an important role in the past trials and the more recent fight for genocide recognition.

*‘’The defense asserted that the war against terrorism was a just war, necessary in order to save the country from chaos. Similarly, the armed forces argued that it had been ‘’fighting’’ in self-defense.’’* [[44]](#footnote-44)

The extraordinary measures taken by the regime are now most often referred to as state terrorism. The military terrorized its citizens, both those they deemed to be opponents, as well as those they were ‘’protecting.’’[[45]](#footnote-45) Speech acts played an important role in the processes of justification and terrorization.

**Enemy Construction in Argentina**

When the military took over in 1976 it became increasingly clear that political opponents were unwanted in Argentina. Members of Guerilla groups were arrested and did not return.[[46]](#footnote-46) Initially some of Argentina’s citizens initially did not mind the removal of these individuals. Guerilla members were causing chaos, and the military was doing exactly what they set out to do: restore balance by removing those factors in society that caused disorder.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Additionally, Argentinian citizens only knew what the media and the military told them. Which in this case meant that the leftwing Guerilla members were dangerous and one should refrain from associating with these individuals and / or groups. The military constructed an enemy through varying methods such as dehumanization, blame, framing, and domination. The military appeared to be relatively successful at doing so (for the time being).

The military used varying demonization and dehumanization tactics in order to construct their enemy. Firstly, the leftwing political opponents were no longer referred to as such. The military dictatorship started referring to them as ‘’the enemy’’ or ‘’the subversives.’’ Inclusive and exclusive terminology was used as well in media broadcasts and speeches. This created a divide between ‘’the enemy’’ and the rest of Argentina.

In addition leftwing political opponents were blamed for the unrest and chaos that prevailed in Argentina. The military made it clear that the source of all evil in Argentina were ‘’the subversives,’’ and they needed to be dealt with accordingly.

Furthermore the military attempted to shift national narrative. Two national narratives arose that justified the military’s extreme violence (often referred to as state terrorism).[[48]](#footnote-48) Through these narrative the strove to justify their actions as well as shape the reality of the Argentinian people. First, the military proposed the term ‘’Dirty War.’’

*‘’General Vilas (1976: 9) emphasized: ‘This is a dirty war, a war of attrition, dark and sly, which one wins with decisiveness and calculation ...’ General Camps explained: ‘The subversives made it dirty. They chose the forms of combat and determined our actions.’’’*[[49]](#footnote-49)

To this day the Argentinian conflict is often referred to as such even though it is readily agreed upon that state terrorism better describers the events that played out between 1976 and 1983. According to the Dirty War narrative both parties, meaning the military and their leftwing opponents, were fighting a war with unconventional methods and weapons. This narrative suggests a fight between good and evil.[[50]](#footnote-50) In 1983 the ‘’Two Demons’’ or ‘’Two Evils Theory’’ became prevalent when president Alfonsín decided to prosecute the guerilla leaders as well as military juntas.[[51]](#footnote-51) This narrative also implies equal violence on both sides, which later was disproven. Both of these narratives were utilized in order to justify the excessive violence and terror used by the military. These narratives shaped the realities of Argentinian people for many years, even after the conflict was over.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Lastly, the military regime dominated reality. The previously mentioned narratives were reinforced with threats of violence. Disagreement with these statements was extremely dangerous and could result in torture or death. Additionally the military encouraged the Argentinian people to tell on their acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues, friends and family. If the people refused to do so, they would be punished and tortured until names were given.[[53]](#footnote-53)

In summary, the Argentinian military regime constructed an enemy that was not nearly as dangerous as they made them out to be. The military demonized their leftwing opponents through speech acts and reinforced their choice to do so by pushing blame upon ‘’the subversives.’’ They created narratives to justify their excessive violence. These narratives were then reinforced through domination of the Argentinian public. The securitization process provides a framework for these actions.

Chapter 3: Never Again

*‘’The normal attitude of the torturers and guards towards us was to consider us less than slaves. We were objects. And useless, troublesome objects at that. They would say: ’You’re dirt.’ ’Since we ”disappeared” you, you’re nothing. Anyway, nobody remembers you.’ ’You don’t exist.’ ’If anyone were looking for you (which they aren’t), do you imagine they’d look for you here?’ ’We are everything for you.’ ’We are justice.’ ’We are God.’’’[[54]](#footnote-54)*

Through framing the military created a new national narrative and a new reality. In this ‘’reality’’ a dangerous enemy committed acts of terrorism. All means were justified in order to protect Argentina and annihilate this enemy. Physical, as well as emotional and psychological torture were methods used to shape the reality of prisoners in detention centers. In addition these practices reinforced the realities of perpetrators. Many prisoners would, even though they were innocent, ‘’admit’’ to being terrorists in order to stop the torture.[[55]](#footnote-55)

In the previous chapter a broad overview has been provided of enemy construction in Argentina. This chapter will dive deeper into enemy construction by means of analyzing the Nunca Más report (translated: Never Again), released shortly after the conflict. The Nunca Más report is considered to be a significant resource in several different ways. Firstly, this report was the main resource used to prosecute the military juntas during the trials. The report that detailed human rights violations additionally became an example for many other Latin American countries. Uncovering historical truth by means of employing a truth commission was seen as a productive way of both finding, and sharing facts regarding human rights violations. The Nunca Más report has additionally been influential on a scholarly level as is has been repeatably analyzed in relation to transitional justice.[[56]](#footnote-56)

What did enemy construction look like according to eyewitnesses, family members and victims? What were the techniques used, and how did it affect the bereaved relatives as well as the surviving victims and perpetrators?

The military referred to its enemy as subversives. Leftwing guerilla fighters were seen as the main threat. However the phrase ‘’subversives’’ was soon used to describe anyone with an opposing view to the regime.[[57]](#footnote-57) According to many surviving victims, dehumanization techniques were used not only through speech acts in media, but additionally through many horrific methods in detention centers.

*In the SDCs they used numbers, sometimes preceded by letters, to identify prisoners, as another way of suppressing the identity of the abducted persons. […] As soon as the victims were brought in they would be told to remember their number because it would be used to call them from then on, whether to go to the toilet, to be tortured or to be transferred. [This constituted] yet another way of making the prisoner lose his or her identity.’’[[58]](#footnote-58)*

Many examples of dehumanizing acts and circumstances in detention centers are given in the Nunca Más report. ‘’*Conditions during the period of detention were deplorable. Prisoners were left lying on mattresses filthy with blood, urine, vomit and sweat. In some cases, they had to relieve themselves in pots, which were later removed.**In others, they weren’t even given containers and had to relieve themselves on the spot.’’[[59]](#footnote-59)*

Not only were these horrific circumstances degrading and dehumanizing, they additionally were meant to deprive the prisoners of their identities. As stated in the Nunca Más report: ‘*’The characteristics of these centres, and the daily life led there, reveal that they had been specifically conceived for the subjection of victims to a meticulous and deliberate stripping of all human attributes, rather than for their simple physical elimination*.’’

Victims were taken from their homes and brought to detention centers where they would be subjected to abominable torture techniques. The reasons why these subversives were brought to detention centers varied greatly. Some of the detainees were members of the guerilla insurgency. Others were openly against the military regime. However many of the people brought to these centers were innocent. Some knew individuals who were in some way associated with subversives or were subversives themselves, others were in no way connected to the Argentinian conflict at all.

*‘’He told me they knew I was not involved with terrorism or the guerrillas, but that they were going to torture me because I opposed the regime, because: ’I hadn’t understood that in Argentina there was no room for any opposition to the Process of National Reorganization.’ He then added: ’You’re going to pay dearly for it ... the poor won’t have any goody-goodies to look after them any morel’’’[[60]](#footnote-60)*

The government dominated every aspect of life in Argentina. They reinforced the realities of the Argentinian people, and the victims, as well as those of the perpetrators as a result of false confessions.

‘*’It is the ultimate in domination, a domination not only of the body, but also of ideas. Through the practices of torture, the torturers use their victims to confirm and act out their world-view. By treating thousands of people as communist terrorists and Zionists, they create them as terrorists.*’’[[61]](#footnote-61)

‘*’The military were never made to confront the fact that they were abducting, torturing, and murdering thousands of ‘’innocent’’ people as terrorists. People without ties to terrorism or ‘’subversion’’ were ‘’remade’’ into terrorists or subversives*[[62]](#footnote-62).’’

Perpetrators likely were greatly affected by confirmation bias. Everything around them affirmed the reality that a just war was being fought against a dangerous enemy. Tens of thousands of (often innocent) people were brought to detention centers where they were tortured and interrogated for information. Oftentimes victims of torture ‘’admitted’’ to belonging to the guerilla insurgency and committing acts of terrorism as a way to avoid further torture. To perpetrators, this could have affirmed the fact that large insurgency groups were in fact attacking Argentina. In addition it may have served as a justification for their horrible acts of violence.

It is unsurprising that (most) perpetrators stood behind their ideology of violence.[[63]](#footnote-63) However, it remains incomprehensible for many that the general public in Argentina stood idly by as well. The fact that many Argentinians stood by and watched as their neighbors and friends were abducted and never returned, speaks to the apparent success the military had in creating a reality in which such acts were justified. An explanation for the continuing support is provided in the article “Why Do Corrupt Governments Maintain Public Support?.” The authors claim that states in which unrest is prevalent and democratic systems are weak, public support for corrupt governments are more likely to prevail.[[64]](#footnote-64)

It is however important to note that not everyone stood by as their family was being taken. Many bereaved relatives continuously begged police for help in the search for their relatives. A famous example of an organized group, searching for their family members are the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. During the Argentinian conflict pregnant women and babies were kidnapped and placed with military families that vowed to raise the children according to state ideology. Few of these children have been identified. Their grandmothers have been protesting at the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires for decades, in an attempt to spread awareness and hopefully return their lost grandchildren.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Some Argentinians were convinced the guerilla insurgency was a major threat to Argentinian society, others remained silent in fear of horrific repercussions. The terror experienced by many Argentinian people has now been replaced with anger, frustration and distrust.[[66]](#footnote-66) The conflict is over, but many Argentinians are still living with the remnants of the terrible events that played out between 1976 and 1983.

Conclusion

Even though state terrorism in Argentina ended in 1983, the aftermath is currently still ongoing. Not only has the conflict left lasting scars on the Argentinian people (that to this day have not been repaired), human rights movements are currently fighting for genocide recognition.[[67]](#footnote-67)

On a scholarly level much research has been done on the Argentinian conflict. However not much attention has been paid to the role of the military regime in the construction of their enemy. This Argentinian case study additionally speaks to the more general literature on dictatorial repression and enemy construction.

This research has identified four main tactics used by the Argentinian military to construct an enemy. The securitization process identifies the various steps taken in doing so. The Argentinian military used dehumanization, blame, framing, and domination to construct their enemy and shape reality in a way that justified their actions. The Nunca Más report was analyzed in order identify the techniques used in enemy construction.

This research has several limitations. Firstly, much conflicting evidence has been found regarding the size and level of threat the guerilla insurgency carried. Human rights movements downplayed the role of the activism present in Argentina, whereas the military exaggerated the size as well as level of danger connected to their opponents. Therefor this research was unable to provide a definitive answer on this particular question. This thesis is based on the assumption (and evidence provided) that the military used excessive violence against an enemy that was nowhere near as large or dangerous as thy made them out to be. Further research on this topic should include an in dept analyses of relative size and level of danger of the guerilla insurgency.

Although this analysis addresses four ways of constructing an enemy, it is likely there are many more ways in which an enemy can be constructed. These may or may not be applicable to the Argentinian conflict. These methods were not discussed in this research. Future research could conduct a more extensive analysis on enemy construction. More extensive research into enemy construction can help identify (government) manipulation during conflict situations and (hopefully) help prevent similar events from happening in the future.

Despite the fact that conflict in Argentina ended in 1983, many bereaved relatives are still looking for answers. Social and political trust has not been repaired and according to many victims, justice has not yet prevailed.[[68]](#footnote-68) Researching cases such as these can be depressing, frustrating and saddening, however research into enemy construction and perpetrator behaviour can provide valuable insights into future conflicts. By identifying the tactics and methods involved in such conflicts, hopefully similar conflicts can be prevented from happening in the future.

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