

# Legacies of the Dirty War

The differences and similarities in perception of what happened during and after the dirty war between the inhabitants of Retiro and Villa 31 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



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Master Thesis

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Photo on the front-page (taken by Floor Ketting): Neighborhoods of Research;  
Villa 31 on the foreground and Retiro in the background.

## **Abstract**

Based on fieldwork in two neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, this thesis explores the differences and similarities in perception of the residents of what happened during and after the dirty war (1976 – 1983) regarding justice and truth-telling. The neighborhoods, Retiro and Villa 31, are chosen for their contrast and proximity: Retiro is a rich neighborhood, whilst Villa 31 is a poor neighborhood, yet the two neighborhoods border each other. The research is based on semi-structured interviews about how the residents of the two neighborhoods (or their parents) experienced the dirty war and what their opinion is about justice and truth-telling. Also, case-studies serve to illustrate the research-findings. The reasons for the differences and similarities in perception found between the residents of the two neighborhoods are analyzed. An important difference is the different stance people in both neighborhoods take in the matter, in addition to which left- and right- thinking patterns play an important role. Central to the discussion of the research findings are the concepts of collective memory, trauma, reconciliation, justice and truth-telling. About the concept of collective memory two different opinions exist in the two neighborhoods, which work through in the opinions about justice and truth-telling.

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## 1. Introduction

The dirty war, as the period of military repression in Argentina is known by European and American researchers, lasted from 1976 – 1983 and cost the lives of many people. Thousands of people were abducted and tortured by the military and became victims of forced disappearances. Nowadays, almost thirty years after the end of the dirty war, the crimes perpetrated during the military regime still have their influence on Argentinean society. Re-opened lawsuits against military perpetrators make the dirty war an actual topic.

Much research has been done on dirty war related concepts like collective memory, trauma, reconciliation, justice and truth-telling, but in most cases the focus has been on perpetrators and/or victims of the regime. Robben (2005) for example thoroughly researched the trauma of Argentinean society. Also, much attention has been given to human rights organizations demanding justice, truth-telling and reparation. Van Drunen (2010) analyzed the complex interplay between human rights organizations and politics, thereby focusing on the concept of collective memory. This thesis focuses on something that so far has remained underexposed; how the dirty war affected the lives of ordinary people, who neither can be classified as perpetrators, nor as victims.

Buenos Aires is the most suitable city in Argentina to conduct this research, since during the dirty war the capital was affected most. This makes Buenos Aires the most logical choice when conducting research on the dirty war in Argentina. Also, one third of the country's inhabitants live in this city. Thus in Buenos Aires it is reasonable to expect to find a lot of different people, with different backgrounds and with different opinions concerning what happened during and after the dirty war.

A rich and a poor neighborhood were chosen for comparison, since it is reasonable to expect to find the biggest differences there. It is probable that factors such as a high education/a low education, a high income/a low income, literacy/illiteracy and the degree of impact the dirty war had on the daily lives of people help explain differences in perception. For this research the rich neighborhood Retiro and the poor neighborhood Villa 31 were chosen, because these two neighborhoods are located within close proximity of each other. The only thing that separates Retiro from Villa 31 is a train rails, accentuating the enormous differences between rich and poor which exist within a few meters of each other. Eventual differences and/or similarities in perception of what happened during and after the dirty war between these two neighborhoods are extra interesting if you realize that they exist so close to each other. The central research problem of this thesis is:

‘What are the differences and/or similarities in perception of what happened during and after the dirty war in Argentina between the inhabitants of Retiro and Villa 31 in Buenos Aires

and what are the reasons for these differences and/or similarities?’

The societal relevance of this research lies in the fact that more knowledge is obtained about the stance of ordinary people in Buenos Aires considering what happened during and after the dirty war. This research generates more insight into this particular subject. The scientific relevance of this research is found in the fact that also for science, this particular approach of the subject generates insight and might cause a new way of approaching and studying the subject. It might generate more research with similar approaches.

The fieldwork for this research was conducted in the months February, March, April and May of 2010 in Buenos Aires. The research methods used constitute of participant observation, semi-structured interviews with open questions, informal conversation and written material. The semi-structured interviews proved to be most informative. The research population consists of people who live in Retiro and in Villa 31. To obtain a complete image of the different perceptions that exist in the two neighborhoods, as much age-variety as possible was strived for. People interviewed range from 16 to 82 years old. A condition for selecting informants was that they or their parents experienced the dirty war. In the Villa the realization of this condition proved to be important, since there reside many recently immigrated people from neighboring countries.

In the Villa I needed to take some security measures. It was advised against to enter alone, since the situation can be dangerous. Inhabitants of the Villa itself express fear of living there. Tourists that wander in by accident frequently end up being robbed. What’s more; only being robbed is considered lucky by some. Therefore I never entered the Villa alone; I was always accompanied by key-informants who live in the Villa. A difficulty I ran into was that it was hard to determine in which neighborhood people live in some cases. Many people tried to ‘upscale’ the neighborhood in which they live. In which neighborhood you live appeared to be a subjective concept. For example, people who live close to Retiro (but not as chic) will say they live in Retiro and people who live in Retiro will say they live in Recoleta, which is a nearby even chicer neighborhood. Also, every map defines Retiro differently. In the end I decided to stick to the official borders of Retiro written out by the municipality and before or during each interview in Retiro I tried to find out where the people interviewed exactly live.

This thesis is built up as following: the second chapter explores the concepts of collective memory, trauma, reconciliation, justice and truth-telling. All these concepts are of importance when we speak of the aftermath of the dirty war in Argentina. The third chapter elaborates on the dirty war in Argentina and places the concepts of collective memory, trauma, justice and truth-telling into the Argentinean situation. Information about Buenos Aires, Retiro and Villa 31 is also given, which provides the reader with the insight needed to understand to which background the story takes



place. In the empirical chapters of this thesis; the fourth, fifth and sixth chapter, the perception in the two neighborhoods of what happened during the dirty war, the perception regarding justice and the perception regarding truth-telling are explored. Differences between and similarities in the perception of the inhabitants of the two neighborhoods are highlighted, whereby it becomes clear to the reader that the perception of the inhabitants of the two neighborhoods can be explained by differences, but similarities also play a significant role. Several case-studies help to illustrate the argument. The thesis is concluded in the final chapter; where all the important concepts for this thesis pass the review.

## **2. Collective Memory, Trauma and Reconciliation**

In this chapter important theoretical concepts for this research are discussed. The concepts of collective memory, trauma, reconciliation, justice and truth-telling can not be overlooked when we speak of the legacy of a regime that has inflicted terror in the past.

### ***2.1. Collective Memory and Trauma***

Memory and trauma can not be treated as two different concepts; they are unmistakably intertwined. As Robben (2005: 122) states ‘memory, violence and trauma coexist’. According to him, traumatic experiences are characterized by the inability to be either completely recalled or completely forgotten. He notes that it is this inability to total remembering or total forgetting and the search for understanding that makes trauma so persistent and memory so obsessive. Caruth (1995: 7-9) agrees with Robben on this, stating that it is the remembrance of the traumatic experience that produces trauma, not the experience itself. According to her, there is a period of ‘latency’ between the event and the experience of trauma, in which forgetting is characteristic.

Halbwachs first coined the concept of collective memory. According to Halbwachs (cited in Gedi & Elam 1996: 37), there is no such thing as an individual memory. He states that people always recollect their memories within the framework of a certain social group. A social group may consist of a family, a social class or a religion. Whatever individual memory someone might have, it can not be detached from the ideas, customs and modes of thinking that exist within the social group that the individual is part of. These ideas, customs and modes of thinking shape individual memory. Therefore individual memory always exists within and is formed by collective memory, according to Halbwachs.

Of course, Halbwachs’ first attempt to describe such a comprehensive concept as collective memory has been critiqued and further elaborated on. Giesen (in Alexander et. al. 2001) completes Halbwachs’ view on collective memory by stating that collective memory unifies a nation or a community through time as well as through space, by providing both the individual and society with a temporal map. Olick (2007: 20) suggests that Halbwachs’ theory lacks a description of the relation between individual and collective memory. In later years, Antze and Lambek (1996: 8) correct this by posing a central concern with the complex interplay between individual and collective memory.

A lot has been written about collective memory, but also about cultural trauma. Alexander (in Alexander et. al. 2004: 1) describes cultural trauma as following: ‘Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future

identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways'. Thus the term cultural trauma refers to 'members of a collectivity'; a certain group of people. Alexander (in Alexander et. al. 2004: 2) argues that cultural trauma as a term is easy for traumatized groups to identify with, because the concept is widely experienced and therefore intuitively understood. An emphasis on the collectivity is placed as opposed to an emphasis on the individual, in accordance to Halbwachs' view on collective memory. Erikson already tentatively set this process of focusing on the collective experience instead of the individual one in motion in 1978 with his work *Everything in its Path*. This work has set the groundwork for the term cultural trauma, according to Alexander (in Alexander et. al. 2004: 4). *Everything in its Path* (Erikson 1978) is an ethnographic case study of a natural disaster; the destruction of a community in the Buffalo Creek Flood. Erikson focuses on the collective experience of trauma as opposed to the individual one by referring to trauma as being collective, thereby not actually naming the term cultural trauma, but setting the groundwork for its later usage. Returning to the concept of cultural trauma; Smelser (in Alexander et. al. 2004) also offers a definition that is useful: 'A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership ground and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions'. Furthermore Hale (cited in Eyerman 2001) speaks of several possible responses to resolve cultural trauma, all of them having to do with identity and memory.

Whereas Alexander, Smelser and Hale speak of cultural trauma, we can also speak of national trauma. Neal (1998) describes a national trauma as having long-lasting effects and as relating to events which can not be dismissed easily. Therefore these events become ingrained in collective memory. In this sense, national trauma bears many resemblances with cultural trauma, as described by Alexander, Smelser and Hale.

Thus memory and trauma are related in the sense that traumatic experiences are characterized by the inability to be completely remembered or completely forgotten. But memory is also a way to come to terms with the traumatic past, as becomes clear when Alexander (in Alexander et. al. 2004: 8) tells us: 'The efforts to memorialize the victims of the repression [in South America] are presented as efforts to restore the objective reality of the brutal events, to separate them from the unconscious distortions of memory'. These efforts translate themselves into monuments, museums and memorials.

The concept of identity has much to do with the concepts of collective memory and trauma. Trauma can be linked to identity in the following way: when a traumatic event creates trauma this affects the group's identity in the sense that the traumatic event is experienced as a threat to the group identity (Alexander in Alexander et. al. 2004: 10). What follows is that the traumatic event

alters this collective identity. Here the concept of memory comes into the field, in the sense that this alteration of group identity occurs by remembering the collective past of the group, thereby constructing a new group identity (Alexander in Alexander et. al. 2004: 22). It follows that identities are constructed by reconstructing the group's earlier life.

Collective memory and trauma manifest themselves in daily life through visible elements such as newspapers, radio and television (Eyerman 2001: 3). The monuments, museums and memorials mentioned earlier also belong to this visible group. Such manifestations directed at the community always entail interpretation and selective representation, since they depend on the decisions of authorities. Other daily manifestations of collective memory and trauma can be found in what we call coping mechanisms. Mourning is an example of such a coping mechanism. The common assumption however, is that individuals and societies first repress traumatic experiences, before being able to mourn (Robben 2005: 123). Thus repression is also a coping mechanism. Other consequences of collective memory and trauma are named by Sztompka (2000: 459): anomie, civilizational incompetence, social friction, distrust syndrome, collective guilt, collective shame, crisis of identity, legitimation crisis and cultural lag.

When we speak of collective memory and trauma, we have to keep in the back of our heads that theories about trauma have been mostly formulated by Western societies, whereas the non-Western societies have been the ones who have suffered most from traumatic experiences lately (Alexander in Alexander et. al. 2004: 24).

## ***2.2. Reconciliation***

In the aftermath of a traumatized society, reconciliation with the past and reconciliation between perpetrator and victim is sought, in order to be able to come to terms with the past. The general understanding is that both the search for justice and truth-telling contribute to reconciliation (Hegarty 2002). But between justice and truth-telling there is a fragile balance. Achieving justice for example might entail that perpetrators get high jail sentences. But for truth-telling this means that perpetrators are not motivated to tell the truth in court, knowing that the sentence is so high.

The general agreement is that reconciliation is more a process than an objective. Also, a distinction is made between individual reconciliation and national/political reconciliation. The first is most difficult to obtain. With justice and/or truth-telling reconciliation is not automatically obtained. Reparation programs and acknowledgement by perpetrators for example are also important in order to obtain reconciliation (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 122).

## ***2.3. The Search for Justice***

Two different kinds of justice can be distinguished; retributive and restorative justice. Retributive

justice focuses on obtaining justice through the imposition of punishment, whereas restorative justice focuses on obtaining justice through restoring the relation between perpetrators and victims (Wenzel et. al. 2008). The Western way of thinking about justice is focused on retributive justice (Huyse 2003: 97).

Retributive justice is strived for through national or international tribunals. International tribunals step in when national tribunals fall short. This has not always been like this: for centuries crimes committed within the borders of a state have been trialed within the borders of this same state. However, this changed in the 1950s when a consensus was reached about the duty to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations, if necessary by courts outside the country in question (Huyse 2003: 99-102).

Possible benefits of retributive justice are: avoiding unbridled private revenge, protecting against the return to power of perpetrators, fulfilling an obligation to the victims, individualizing guilt, strengthening legitimacy and the democratization process and breaking the cycle of impunity (Huyse 2003: 98).

However, retributive justice also has its risks and limits. As for the risks; not everybody supports retributive justice. An argument against retributive justice is its possible hindering of the truth-telling process. Another risk is the fact that retributive justice may provoke danger for a successor regime. Furthermore it has to be taken into account that countries coming out of a civil war or a period of violence have a lot to deal with. Dealing with perpetrators is one of the many challenges and it may not be a priority. In addition, prosecutions can have destabilizing effects on fragile peace situations or newborn democracies. For this reason policy makers can decide not to opt for trials. Lastly, retributive justice can provoke subcultures and networks which are hostile to democracy and it may have crippling effects on governance.

As for the limits of retributive justice; different kinds of drawbacks can be found. For example the attention the victim needs can be overlooked, since prosecutions focus on perpetrators. Also, trials may lead to the re-victimization of the victim. Moreover, courtrooms often are not capable of dealing with the complexities of violent conflict behavior. At the end of a trial a 'guilty' or 'non-guilty' verdict is given; to reach this verdict much information is restricted. Also, evidence may have been destroyed or concealed, damaging the victims' trust in the trials. Furthermore, the justice system may have been one of the sources of violence and injustice that is being trialed (Huyse 2003: 102-106).

Since retributive justice faces a wide set of problems, alternatives have come into play, such as truth-telling, amnesty and restorative justice. Amnesty implies officially declaring and imposing forgiving and forgetting, thereby promoting impunity. It is difficult to obtain reconciliation when the circle of impunity is not broken. The transition to democracy in many Latin American countries

was characterized by ‘self-amnesty’; pardon was granted to political leaders and army officials by the military or the government. Total amnesty does not occur often; limitations come in the form of amnesty for crimes committed during a specific period or amnesty for certain perpetrators. Therefore amnesty is often disputed and remains contradictory (Huyse 2003: 108-111).

Restorative justice is also proposed as an alternative to retributive justice; it offers a middle way between retributive justice and amnesty. Whereas retributive justice focuses on the perpetrator, restorative justice works with the participation of the victim. The needs of victims are prioritized and can be summarized as the need for information, truth-telling, empowerment and restitution. Another difference is that retributive justice focuses on the individual, whereas restorative justice takes the affected community into account. The main goal of restorative justice is to restore the relations between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s). Other goals of restorative justice are to put important decisions into the hands of those who have been affected by the crime, to transform justice into a more healing and more transformational kind of justice and to reduce the probability of the occurrence of future crimes (Huyse 2003: 111-114; Zehr 2002).

Of course, restorative justice also has its weaknesses. The compromise that is reached may be the result of unequal bargaining strengths of the two parties in question. Also, inequalities on the basis of gender, age or status might influence the outcome of the compromise. Lastly, it is possible that existing leaders favor certain parties, in terms of wealth, education or status. It has to be noted that restorative justice is relatively new and thus has not been practiced yet in many post-conflict societies. Also, the examples are recent, therefore it is difficult to measure the degree of success obtained (Huyse 2003: 112-113).

#### ***2.4. The Search for Truth-Telling***

Truth-telling can provide an alternative to justice. Justice and truth-telling mostly exclude each other; only in Argentina trials were held alongside truth-telling. Truth commissions are the most popular form of truth-telling, even though the concept has been developed only recently, during the last thirty years. Truth commissions resemble courts, but the two are not comparable; truth commissions have no judicial powers. Examples of countries where truth commissions have been instilled are Argentina, Chile, Germany, El Salvador and Rwanda (Hayner 1994; Collins 2008: 21).

Already at least 25 truth commissions have been established since 1974 (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 124). Truth commissions have many benefits, as well as risks. As for the benefits; obviously, truth commissions can help establish the truth about the past. Also, truth commissions can promote the accountability of perpetrators of human rights violations. Furthermore they can provide a public platform for victims, inform and catalyze public debate, recommend victim reparation, recommend necessary legal and institutional reforms, promote social reconciliation and help consolidate a

democratic transition (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 125-127).

There are also many motives not to resort to truth commissions. Fear of ongoing or renewed violence, a situation of ongoing conflict, lack of political interest, other urgent priorities, insufficient capacity and the choice for alternative mechanisms are all reasons for societies in transformation not to resort to truth commissions. When the decision is made to instill a truth commission, there are potential risks. For example, it could be the case that the truth commission was instilled for improper motives. Also, unrealistic expectations about what the truth commission can achieve portray a risk. Concerning the composition of a truth commission it is very important that commissioners are chosen with care; they determine if the truth commission will be a success or a failure (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 127-129).

Factors that can constrain truth commissions in their work range from destruction of evidence by the current regime to corruption in the justice system. But there are also factors that enable truth commissions to do their work such as: support from within civil society for the truth commission, widespread social identification with the victims of the abuses (which also requires independent media) and persistent international attention and pressure. Without one of these three factors it would be a lot more difficult for truth commissions to do their work (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 128-129).

Truth commissions are not the only truth-telling mechanisms. There other truth-telling mechanisms can be identified. Firstly, historical commissions inquire into state abuses that took place many years ago, as opposed to truth commissions, which are part of a political transition and inquire into recent abuses. Secondly, there have also been official or semi-official inquiries into past human rights violations, which are distinguishable from truth commissions in the sense that they are less independent of political processes and more limited in scope. These inquiries have also been international, in many cases sponsored by the United Nations. They have often been relatively easy to establish, as opposed to truth commissions, which can be a long and difficult process. However, they often result in an incomplete picture of the past. Lastly, there have been many non-governmental projects which have reported violations and abuses. In cases where official truth commissions are not possible, these non-governmental reports have proven to be very important. Non-governmental projects however have their limitations; they lack the power to investigate and access to government records. Also, personal impunity is not granted and their reports are less influential than government reports (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 123-124).

### 3. The Dirty War in Argentina and the Search for Justice and Truth-Telling

This chapter provides more information about the dirty war in Argentina, whereby the concepts of collective memory, trauma, justice and truth-telling are applied to the Argentinean situation. Also, more information about Buenos Aires and the two research neighborhoods is provided.

#### 3.1. *The Dirty War in Argentina*

The Argentinean dirty war lasted from 1976 – 1983. The increasing guerrilla actions were feared and under the pretence of restoring order and diminishing communistic danger the military took over control. The military took over control under the pretence of restoring order and diminishing communistic danger. The aim of the dictatorship was to transform Argentinean society. The regime employed every means available to them, which led to gross human rights violations such as torture and kidnapping. The military ordered the disappearance, kidnapping, torture and execution of thousands of people during these seven years. The crimes were specifically conducted against the left-wing guerrilla and their sympathizers. Left-wing intellectuals were targeted, as for example politicians, journalists and professors. They were seen as subversive and as a threat by the military.

What happened during the dirty war in Argentina still has its consequences for Argentinean society today in the sense that many disappearances have never been cleared up. *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (the Mothers of the May Square) have demonstrated against the disappearance of their children during the dirty war since as early as 1977. *Las Madres* still gather and demonstrate; however now they demonstrate for justice against the perpetrators responsible for the disappearances. *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo* (the Grandmothers of the May Square) demonstrate for truth-telling concerning their grandchildren who were born in captivity and given away to families that favored the military regime (Robben 2005).

The concept of collective memory for the Argentinean situation has been researched thoroughly. Van Drunen (2010), among others, notes that the search for a collective memory in Argentina has been a struggle. Society has been divided between the wish to forget and the necessity to remember. Human rights organizations have also been divided; radical organizations wanted to change the political system and more moderate organizations have wanted to improve the political system by cooperating (to a certain extent) with the government. Official policies regarding the subject change every time a new President comes into play. President Menem has tried to put the subject at a rest with a general pardon in 1990. However, in 2003 President Néstor Kirchner came to power and the demand for memory, justice and truth-telling returned (Pauchulo 2009: 302). His wife Cristina Kirchner took over presidency in 2007 and has maintained the same focus. The Kirchner principle can be summed up in a few often-mentioned words: ‘Never again’ and ‘Do not



forget'. Every year on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March the day of the military coup is commemorated, highlighting that this military wrongdoing should never occur again (see appendix 3).

When we speak of memory, the concept of trauma also enters the field. Argentinean society was definitively left traumatized in the aftermath of the dirty war. According to Robben (2005: 122), a characteristic of trauma is that the repression of traumatic events is a first stage in order to be able to come to terms with the past. But he admits that in Argentina this has hardly been the case; society was left traumatized, but almost immediately entered into debate over the meaning of its recent past, leaving little room for repression. Robben (2005: 345) makes a distinction between the collective trauma of Argentina society as a whole and social trauma as a group-specific condition. This leaves room for the different social traumas victims and perpetrators have. Likewise, social traumas of the armed forces and the human rights movement are different; nevertheless both groups suffered the far-reaching consequences of decades of violence. Of course, social trauma and social memory have everything to do with each other. Robben agrees that collective memory exists, however he stresses the co-existence of different social memories, kept alive by different social groups.

### ***3.2. The Search for Justice and Truth-Telling in Argentina***

In 1987 a law was passed that granted amnesty to virtually all the perpetrators of the dirty war, on the basis that they were following orders from superiors (Bonner 2005). In the years that followed, more amnesty laws were passed, resulting in President Menem's general pardon in 1990. It was hoped that Argentinean society would accept and forget. Prosecutions can have destabilizing effects on fragile peace situations or newborn democracies (Huysse 2003). For this reason the amnesty laws were passed in Argentina (Robben 2005: 121).

However, the laws of impunity backfired, of which the interview of Scilingo, a navy captain during the dirty war, in 1995 is a good example. In this interview the traumatized navy captain talked openly about what happened during the dirty war, thereby breaking the military's pact of silence. This interview shocked Argentinean society, provoked more revelations by the military and made the human rights movement renew their plea for prosecution of the perpetrators, thereby hindering the fragile reconciliation process that had been put into progress (Robben 2005: 120-121).

In Argentina the members of the truth commission (the *National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons*) after the dirty war have been appointed through a procedure that relied on the judgment of the responsible authority, with little consultation of civil society. Practice has proven that in order for a truth commission to be successful, it is important that civil society is included in the appointing process (Freeman & Hayner 2003: 129). It may be clear that this has hindered the functioning of the truth commission in Argentina. However, the report that was

produced in the end, called *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commissions on the Disappeared* (Dworkin 1986), documents many cases of disappearances (although not all) and its importance is significant, in the sense that it is the most extensive document available to the public until now.

The search for justice and truth-telling in Argentina still continues today, almost thirty years after the end of the dirty war. Despite the limitations of justice and truth-telling in the past, recent events have proven to be hopeful. With the election of President Néstor Kirchner in 2003, the immunity of military officials was revoked (Rauchfuss & Schmolze 2008: 9). Lawsuits against important military perpetrators of the dirty war were re-opened. This has opened up a new window of hope for human rights organizations for justice to be obtained after all.

### **3.3. Buenos Aires**

Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, houses around 13 million people. The city of Buenos Aires and the 24 municipalities around it constitute Greater Buenos Aires (Gran Buenos Aires). The city of Buenos Aires is not part of the province of Buenos Aires, nor is it its capital; it is an autonomous federal district. The city has been built in a European style, which is most noticeable in the centre. Neighborhoods range from impoverished neighborhoods to rich neighborhoods; differences are striking (DuBois 2005: 5).

Buenos Aires, as well as the country as a whole, does not resemble many other Latin American cities concerning race and ethnicity. Population of African origin in Buenos Aires is strikingly absent. Therefore *porteños* (as people from Buenos Aires are referred to), feel their city is superior to other Latin American cities concerning race and ethnicity (DuBois 2005: 5-7). Also, a second factor that has promoted this feeling of superiority in the past has been the city's economic strength. Compared to other Latin American cities, Buenos Aires fared pretty well economically. But since the 1960s the economy has been declining, hitting rock bottom during the crisis of December 2001. However, Buenos Aires is still relatively well off compared to the rest of Latin America (DuBois 2005: 8-9). Despite this positive observation, the differences between rich and poor in Buenos Aires are striking. The city comprises of mostly middle-class neighborhoods, a few very rich neighborhoods and Villa's<sup>1</sup> scattered all over the city. All Villa's in Buenos Aires have been given a number. What makes the differences between rich and poor in Buenos Aires so striking is that some Villa's are located next to very rich neighborhoods, accentuating the contrasts. The Villa's emerged in the 1930s when European immigrants started coming to Buenos Aires, spurred by the Great Depression, which hit Europe hard. Buenos Aires fared well in that time and therefore attracted many immigrants. These European workers settled in what we call the Villa's nowadays

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<sup>1</sup> Villa is the Argentinean equivalent of a shantytown.

(Blaustein 2006: 21-22). The Villa's of Buenos Aires have become more and more populated over the last couple of years; the population in the Villa's grew 30 % in just one year and a half. In 2008 the population of the Villa's in Buenos Aires was estimated between 195.000 and 235.000 people (Rocha 2008).

### ***3.4. Villa 31 and Retiro: the Research Neighborhoods***

Villa 31 is located in the city centre, on the outskirts of a rich neighborhood called Retiro (see appendix 4). Villa 31 can be considered a sub-neighborhood within another neighborhood. The two neighborhoods are divided by the railway of a train station called *Estación Retiro*, where the north-bound trains depart (see appendix 5). Next to the train station a long-distance bus station called *Terminal de omnibus* is located. According to a census in 2001 (the last census available) 38.635 people reside in Retiro (Buenos Aires – Gobierno de la Ciudad 2010). This includes the people living in the Villa, which officially is located within Retiro. According to the most recent census in 2009 the population in Villa 31 constitutes of 25.987 people (Infobae 2009). However, the inhabitants of the Villa itself calculate that there are more than 35.000 people living in the Villa, as many people are illegal. In the 2001 census inhabitants of the Villa were calculated to be 12.204 (Infobae 2009), which means that the Villa has doubled or even tripled in size over the last couple of years.

Living standards in Retiro are high; Retiro is one of the most upscale neighborhoods in Buenos Aires. The fact that the neighborhoods overlook each other accentuates the enormous differences (see appendix 6). Monica (44), resident of Retiro, has a realistic view: 'Retiro is not the Latin American reality; the Villa, that is the reality. Retiro is an island'.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Villa 31***

It is noticeable that none of the official maps of Buenos Aires mention the existence of the Villa; it is as if they wish the Villa did not exist and therefore prefer not to mention it. There have always been plans to remove the Villa. During the dirty war the Villa was broken down with the use of violence and psychological manipulation (Blaustein 2006). Since 2010 there are plans to urbanize the Villa and include it into the city, but people are skeptic about the realization of these plans. Tapia (68) gives a brief overview of the history of the Villa, having resided there for almost 50 years now:

'When I came to live in the Villa in 1963 the neighborhood was already formed and big. The houses in that time were made of wood and carton. Many people that lived in the Villa worked in the nearby port, this is why the Villa is situated where it is and this is where all the material for the construction of the houses came from.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview, 16-03-2010.

The formation of the Villa started in 1940, around there. During Peron there was much unemployment in Europe because of the war, whereas in Argentina manpower was needed. Under Peron many immigrants came to Argentina. The first part of the Villa that got a name was named after these immigrants; neighborhood of immigrants. Most immigrants left, but the neighborhood is still called like this.<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays the Villa consists of many immigrants who came from poor periphery countries; mostly Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru. The Argentineans that live in the Villa have fled from a precarious situation in the countryside. In the Villa numerous problems exist. Pablo (around 30), a coordinator of social activities in Villa 31, tells: ‘The situation in Villa 31 has become more and more dangerous over the last couple of years’. He names three reasons for this: the upcoming popularity of paco (a cheap and highly addictive drug), the duplication of the Villa and the lack of services provided by the government.<sup>4</sup> Flora (46) tells: ‘We live like rats, in cages, me for example; I live behind a door with bars, a window with bars, like a parrot’.<sup>5</sup> Residents of the Villa do not feel safe in their own neighborhood. Most people in the Villa live in poverty; exceptions can be found in a handful of people who have found a good living and choose to stay because of the proximity of family and in people who gain good money because they are into drugs. Andrea (57) is a typical inhabitant of the Villa; she comes from the province, finished primary school, has three children and sells handcrafted towels and pillowcases, just enough to make a living. She tells: ‘I am not in a good place, all the money I make is to cook, for the things needed at home; I never have 5 cents left to buy a yoghurt’.<sup>6</sup> The roads in the Villa are narrow and unpaved. An ambulance could only reach the outskirts of the Villa when needed. Marcelo (42) tells that people in the Villa are discriminated against, which makes it difficult for them to get higher up.<sup>7</sup> However, it is interesting to note that people in the Villa do the same thing; Flora (46) compares her neighborhood to the Brazilian favela<sup>8</sup>, concluding: ‘But we are still not as bad of as they are in the favela’.<sup>9</sup> Because of the growing amount of new people that enter the Villa and the growing families, people have decided to start building towards the sky. Flora (46) tells:

‘Me and my husband we live downstairs, we have a kitchen, a bathroom and a diner. I am building floor after floor. My daughter and her husband will get yet another floor. My son who has a girlfriend will be living upstairs. That way I will be able to live in a room with dignity. I will not be eating next to the bathroom. You can not live with dignity like this. If only the government would make the home for us that they are promising.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>4</sup> Informal conversation, 10-03-2010.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, 10-03-2010.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>8</sup> Favela is the Brazilian equivalent of a shantytown.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

In their head they have this project; we would live in our house, with out bathroom, our living room, our dining room, like everyone else, with dignity. So no, I do not agree with the way we live like rats. This is why the government is uneasy that we are climbing for the sky. But we do not have possibilities to grow on the side.’<sup>10</sup>

Josefina (66) in Retiro laughingly calls the Villa: ‘A Villa VIP; because they have better houses than in other Villa’s, they keep on building, some houses are even for rent. VIP is a joke right? But compared to the other Villa’s it is’.<sup>11</sup> Pablo (20) in Retiro does not agree with the term VIP and describes the Villa as follows: ‘All Villa’s have drugs, weapons, deaths, robberies, kidnappings, etcetera’.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Retiro***

Life in Retiro is completely different compared to Villa 31. Agustin (30), resident of Retiro, agrees with this: he calls his neighborhood a ‘bubble’, sheltered from the problems that exist in the rest of Argentina.<sup>13</sup> The existence of *Estación Retiro*, *Terminal de Omnibus*, a subway line and many city buses make Retiro buzz with commuters on all hours of the day. Retiro is also known as a business area; many companies are located in the neighborhood. Agustin (30) tells: ‘Today in Retiro all the important businesses are located, the centre is three blocks away, the stock exchange, everything is here, everything economic, and it has always been like this’. He explains that this historically chosen economic role of Retiro has to do with the port that is located nearby.<sup>14</sup> Also, a few five star hotels further upscale the neighborhood. On *Plaza San Martín* (San Martin Square) a statue of the hero of the Argentinean War of Independence can be admired. On the *Plaza Fuerza Aérea Argentina* (Argentinean Air Force Square) the *Torre de los Ingleses* (British Tower) stands proudly, giving the neighborhood a chic allure. For shopping residents of Retiro do not have to go far; designer shops are scattered across the neighborhood. The impressive *9 de Julio* (9<sup>th</sup> of July), an avenue of 16 lanes, runs through Retiro. People in the neighborhood receive good schooling, have good jobs and gain good money; it is a neighborhood of middle- to high- class residents. The contrast with Villa 31 is enormous.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

<sup>11</sup> Interview, 18-03-2010.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

<sup>13</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

#### 4. The Perception in Villa 31 and Retiro of what happened during the Dirty War

Aside from differences there are also similarities to be found concerning the perception of what happened during the dirty war in the two neighborhoods. These differences and similarities are thoroughly explored in this chapter, thereby describing the different historical situation of the two neighborhoods during the dirty war.

##### *4.1. Perceptions in Villa 31: the Group of Resisters*

The people who live in the Villa can be divided into three groups when we speak of their perception of what happened during the dirty war. The first group of people - the resisters - is the smallest, yet the most interesting. This group is made up of 43 families that have resisted the eradication efforts perpetrated by the military before and during the dirty war. Having resisted the eradications makes them the oldest residents of the Villa. The second group of people consists of the majority of the people living in the Villa; they are referred to as common people. The third group of people consists of the people who distinguish themselves from the common people by taking on leadership roles; they run an NGO, they are politically active, they fight for better circumstances in the Villa, etcetera.

The first and smallest group of people living in the Villa has been affected greatly by the dirty war, but succeeded in resisting the eradication efforts of the dirty war. The military decided to eradicate Villa 31 and the other Villa's of Buenos Aires, because the shabby state of the neighborhoods did not match with their vision of how Buenos Aires should be. Villa 31 was targeted most, since it is the Villa that is most visible, located in the centre of the city. What's more is that Villa 31 was known for its social activism and resistance to injustice, which was perceived as dangerous by the military. Tapia (68), one of the people that resisted the eradications, tells:

'They [the military] started to attack Villa 31, because it was the most populated and the most combative. Also the military focused more on this Villa because it is located in the centre. That is why this Villa was persecuted so much. And this is where they started to destroy. They grabbed families, they loaded them into trucks and they threw them out in the province. They came and started destroying everything with bulldozers.'<sup>15</sup>

Oscar (50) also resisted the eradications. He tells that before the dirty war the Villa consisted of 8.000 families:

'The military used violence and psychological pressure to get the people to go from the Villa. For example in the middle of the night or early in the morning they would take you out of your house naked to threaten you

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

with a gun; to terrorize, to intimidate and to break you physically and morally so that you would go away. Also they made sure there was no more water, electricity and light in the Villa. Because of fear and cowardice the people left.’<sup>16</sup>

Alicia (62) is also part of one of the 43 families that resisted:

‘I was pregnant during the eradications and my daughter was born. The year after my son was born. The military beat us, my husband went to jail a couple of times, they threw us out of our homes, they took people and kidnapped them. But we stayed; we did not have water, we did not have light, there was no shop, because they destroyed everything. These years were very difficult. A lot of neighbors fell; they [the military] took them, they kidnapped them, they [the neighbors] did not come back. They [the military] broke down the houses and robbed the stuff. Others they cheated; they told them that they were going to give them a house and they never did, they threw them out on the side of the road.’

About her husband’s captivity she tells:

‘I could never go and visit him. He was in jail about three times. One time for three months and, well, I wanted to go back to Jujuy [where she is originally from], because I was alone. The other times he was in jail for 20 days, 30 days, 15 days... And they captured him again, because they were always searching to see if you had something; if you belonged to a political group.’<sup>17</sup>

Alicia, Tapia and Oscar were able to resist the military intimidation and violence by joining forces and fighting for their rights. Together with a group of neighbors Tapia decided to ask for the help of some priests and with them they attended a congress of human rights. They secretly started meeting up with one of the presidents of this congress in churches, since churches were respected by the military. Together with the president of the congress they made a plan how to stop the eradications. This man on its turn presented the group of neighbors to some lawyers, which enabled them to start a lawsuit against the military government. The first time the lawsuit was lost, but the second time, in 1980, it was won and the military finally left the Villa alone.

Oscar, Alicia and Tapia know quite a lot about the dirty war, because they experienced it first hand and were victimized by the military. However, it has to be noted that this does not make them experts in the subject. Many subjects that have to do with the dirty war they know little about and it was clear that they had not given much thought to these particular subjects when the questions came up during interviews. What happens - and this was most clear in the case of Tapia - is that these people approach the subject from a very personal level. They tend to describe the dirty

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

war by describing what happened in their own neighborhood, thereby showing less interest for the broader picture. This was very clear in the case of Tapia when he continuously answered questions about crimes perpetrated during the dirty war by referring to himself and his own personal situation during these years. When Tapia was asked about the re-opened lawsuits under Kirchner he immediately answered: ‘Lawsuits with Kirchner, we do not have any, us inhabitants of Villa 31’. Of course he misunderstood the question, but it is illustrative for his way of thinking and keeping the conversation close to his personal experiences.

#### ***4.2. Perceptions in Villa 31: Common People and Community Leaders***

The group of common people; young and old, who live in the Villa, tend to have little knowledge of what happened during the dirty war in Argentina.<sup>18</sup> Young people who were born after the dirty war hardly take an interest in this period of their history. Jose Alfredo (23) illustrates this by saying: ‘I have never been interested in things that have already happened, because they have already happened’.<sup>19</sup> The parents of this generation did experience the dirty war, but they also take little interest and tell their children little about it. Jose Alfredo’s opinion can be traced back to his father’s opinion. Jose (48) tells that there is no interest in the subject of the dirty war: ‘Because it is something that has already happened and it does not have any implication for life nowadays’.<sup>20</sup> This attitude helps explain the lack of interest of their children.

Most people who live in the Villa nowadays come from the province, thus they (or their parents) experienced the dirty war whilst living there. In some cases, whilst living in the province, they vaguely realized what was happening around them, but only little did it affect them personally. Andrea (57) admits her lack of knowledge concerning the subject:

‘I was living in Jujuy. I lived far away from everything, I never went into town. We did not have a television, we did not know anything. I found out about everything in Buenos Aires. I did not even know the name of the President; I did not even know that he existed. What ignorance, right?’<sup>21</sup>

In most cases, and as Andrea already says, the little that the common people know about the dirty war, they learnt afterwards, mostly through popular communication means such as television. Many common people who live in the Villa have little to no educational background; they started a family

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<sup>18</sup> Among the common people are also foreigners (mostly Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian) who have moved to the Villa recently, in search of better circumstances. The focus of this thesis is not on them, since they have not experienced the dirty war in Argentina, nor have their parents. This thesis only speaks for the Argentinean inhabitants of the Villa.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, 10-03-2010.



when they were young and found themselves having to work in order to be able to survive. Of course, older people who have experienced the dirty war themselves have not been schooled in the subject. However, it is remarkable that young people who were born after the dirty war note that the school they attended did not talk about the subject. And if the school did treat the subject, they had not listened or they had already forgotten what the teacher had said.

A good example of this disinterest and lack of knowledge concerning the subject comes from Jose Alfredo (23) and his father Jose (48). The first interview was conducted with Jose, whilst being joined by his son. A few weeks later a second interview was conducted with Jose Alfredo, who confessed that the interview with his father had actually been the very first time he had heard his father talk about the subject of the dirty war.<sup>22</sup>

The last group of people living in the Villa consists of the people that lead the community. These people organize themselves politically and/or socially and strive for better means of living, not just for them, but for everyone in the Villa. Overall (but not necessarily) this group of people is better educated than the group of common people. Also, they are better informed about what happened during the dirty war than the group of common people, because they are socially and politically active. They articulate themselves negatively about the military activities of that period. Marcelo (42) is the correct man to illustrate this particular group of people, since his political and social activism is impressive, as is his knowledge of what happened during the dirty war. As for all the people in the Villa who have a clear opinion and knowledge about the subject, his opinion is left and anti-military, in line with the official history of the actual government.

However, having noted that the group of community leaders and the group of resisters know considerably more about what happened during the dirty war than the group of common people, it has to be stressed that these two groups are the minority of people living in the Villa. Therefore it is safe to say that the majority of the (Argentinean) people living in the Villa think about the dirty war with disinterest. They are more concerned with their personal and collective problems and with the future of their country.

### ***4.3. Father Mujica***

When we speak of Villa 31 and of important things that happened before and during the dirty war, one man can not be left unmentioned. Father Mujica was a popular priest who was killed in 1974 by the Triple A, a right-wing death squad. His death devastated many people, since he had fought for Villa 31 and for better circumstances as no other had before (see appendix 7). Oscar (50), who has known father Mujica personally, tells that he has had much importance, because he had the means

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

to fight against the oligarchy.<sup>23</sup> Marcelo (42) explains:

‘It was more strategic to kill father Mujica than to kill ten neighbors, because of the popularity of father Mujica; to disorient the people, to make them afraid, because he was their protector. If a man hit a woman he would take the responsibility of improving the situation, he was on a more personal level with everyone than any other priest.’<sup>24</sup>

Tapia (68) also knew father Mujica personally and he explains that father Mujica fought for many things, such as the recognition of the residents of Villa 31 as citizens of Buenos Aires. Also, because of his efforts, an agreement was signed that electricity in the Villa is paid by the municipality. The thing that makes father Mujica so special is the fact that residents of the Villa are not accustomed that someone with a good welfare level puts that much personal effort into their wellbeing; they are accustomed to having to do this alone.<sup>25</sup>

The influence of father Mujica is still noticeable in the Villa today since many organizations go by his name, his death is commemorated every year and everyone knows his name. The 11<sup>th</sup> of May of 2010 I attended the official commemoration ceremony which was led by Cristina Kirchner, the President of the nation. She was there to emphasize the importance of father Mujica and to accentuate the need for equality; an ideal that father Mujica had died for. Also, she stressed the importance of democracy: ‘Let us thank God, father Mujica and those who like him gave their life so that no-one in Argentina can be persecuted for what he says or thinks anymore’.<sup>26</sup> What struck me was that the people that attended the ceremony this day behaved extremely rude and selfish in order to be able to stand in front and see the President; people were pushed and shoved away and the atmosphere was tense. It was clear that a lot of people were there purely to catch a glimpse of the President. On the Sunday following Father Mujica’s day of death, which fell on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May this year, I attended Father Mujica’s second commemoration day. This day started with a church ceremony which was followed by a meal and a murga, which is a popular form of making music in the Villa. Every Villa in the capital has its own murga, a band made up of mostly children. Participating in a murga is a way of giving the children of the Villa a feeling of self respect, pride and importance. This second commemoration day was strikingly more respectful and more peaceful; the people that attended the ceremony that day clearly were there to honor father Mujica (see appendix 8). This example clearly illustrates the different kinds of people living in the Villa and the varying degree to which father Mujica is given importance.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>26</sup> Speech, 11-05-2010.

Although everyone knows father Mujica's name, not everyone in the Villa knows the exact story, especially the people who have moved to the Villa only recently. Also, about the way father Mujica died there are many different versions. Alicia (62) for example claims he was killed by Montoneros, although it is widely known that he was killed by the Triple A. Flora (46) tells yet another version of his death:

'I think it was an accident, probably for wanting to steal something from him they killed him. Because if they would have known that he was a famous priest they would not have done it, because even in the period of the dictatorship they could not kill him.'<sup>27</sup>

Thus, apart from not knowing the exact story around father Mujica's death Flora also seems to think that father Mujica was killed after the dirty war, instead of before.

Father Mujica's story is of considerable importance when we speak of the perception of the inhabitants of Villa 31 of what happened during the dirty war. There is an attempt to keep the memory of father Mujica alive, as Tapia (68) describes:

'We are going to construct a monument for father Mujica. There are reunions about this in every part of the Villa; about how the monument should look. Everyone agrees that the monument should be placed on the side of the highway and that it should exist of two joined hands.'<sup>28</sup>

Also, Oscar (50) sees himself as the continuer of the work of father Mujica. However, despite these good intentions, the majority of the people living in the Villa do not really show an interest for the man. Alicia (48) explains:

'We should know more of everything that has happened; there are many people who do not know. Before we did not take these things into account, only the older people did. The people here in the Villa do not know what happened with father Mujica; how he lived, why they killed him. Now they give you more information in the schools; also they talk about him in church. Before no-one cared, no-one asked 'Why did he die? What did he do? Why did they kill him?' Everything is known, but people should be better informed. So that we understand more, know about his [father Mujica's] life. Because there are many new people here who do not know. The people that know are the people that live here for 50 or 60 years already, the people that experienced the dictatorship and stayed.'<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, a positive footnote is in place; almost everyone in the Villa does know father Mujica's

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<sup>27</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

name and they realize he has been important for some reason. This way military wrongdoing before and during the dirty war is highlighted in the Villa and this influences their perception of the matter. Also, the need to fight against inequality is given importance, which still is a harsh reality for the inhabitants of the Villa. Tapia (68) hopes that the monument for father Mujica will be constructed soon, so that the consciousness of father Mujica's message rises in the Villa over the next couple of years.

#### ***4.4. Perceptions in Retiro: a Rightist Tendency***

In Retiro the opinion about what happened during the dirty war is dominated by a right-thinking pattern. Also, many people show little interest for what happened during the dirty war, because they are of the opinion that focusing on the past is not in the best interest of the country. Felipe (22) states:

‘Do you want me to tell you the truth? I do not want to hear anything anymore about the dictatorship. It does not interest me. What interests me is that the country fares well, that the problems of the people are resolved in the best way possible and that we can live in a normal country.’<sup>30</sup>

What Felipe is distraught about is what the leftist government is doing at the moment in Argentina; focusing on the past and on obtaining justice concerning what happened during the dirty war. Many people agree that this focus on the problems of the past should shift to a focus on the problems that exist nowadays in Argentina.

Many people who live in Retiro have a considerable military background. Out of 13 people interviewed two of them have military grandparents and one of them had a military husband. Result is that many people in Retiro tend to be more negative about what the guerrilla did during, but especially before the dirty war, thereby downscaling what the military did. Most people recognize that what the military did was wrong, but they stress the fact that what the guerrilla did was also terrible. Retiro suffered from many guerrilla bomb attacks, especially in the years leading up to the dirty war. Military men and their families were targeted, but sometimes also innocent people were killed. Examples of these bombings and the damage they caused were endless during the interviews in Retiro. Many people in Retiro feel offended by the official government story of what happened during the dirty war. This official story focuses on military wrongdoing during the dirty war. The many victims the military made are portrayed as innocent victims. Felipe (22) is annoyed by this and exclaims: ‘They [the military] killed people, because these persons had done something! I am

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<sup>30</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

not saying it is okay, but if they killed people it was for this reason'.<sup>31</sup> Guerrilla misconduct is not mentioned in the official history. Young people who did not experience the dirty war, as well as older people who did experience the dirty war fall over this lack of truth-telling. They agree that what the guerrilla did in the years leading up to (and during) the dirty war was terrible and can not be left unmentioned. Felipe (22) sarcastically describes the official history in the following way:

'The official history is the following: there were young people with great ideas and out of nothing appeared three or four crazy military men in the government and they started killing because they felt pleasure of doing this and they wanted to kill them. Poor young people with leftist ideas, the right military killed them.'<sup>32</sup>

The remarkable thing is that Jorge (around 55), an old guerrilla combatant, whom I met by chance, explained the same view as the right-thinking people in Retiro; he does not agree that guerrilla victims are portrayed as innocent victims by the official history. He says: 'We were fighting for something, we had ideals! The way the government talks, it makes it seem as though my companions have died for nothing'.<sup>33</sup> Josefina (66) in Retiro thinks in line with this: 'To admit that this was like this [guerrilla wrongdoing] is also part of reality; also to give more value to their actions and to the deaths on their side'.<sup>34</sup>

Maria Ester (67), who experienced the dirty war in Retiro, sketches the guerrilla as following:

'They [the guerrilla] also killed him [the father of a colleague of my daughter], only for what he thought. That was the only reason they needed to kill someone. And like this they tortured, held captive and killed many military men. Some they killed in front of their children's eyes. Just like that. The situation was terrible.'<sup>35</sup>

Some people in Retiro even go so far as to say that the guerrilla started the dirty war; various people suggest that it was because of the guerrilla that the military had to intervene. Betina (71), who also experienced the dirty war in Retiro, confessed: 'When the guerrilla was here the situation was so terrible that we asked the military, we asked ourselves, when is the military going to come and end this'.<sup>36</sup> By many in Retiro the military period is perceived as a quiet and peaceful period; their families were not targeted by the military and the guerrilla was silenced, therefore they took more notice of the guerrilla actions as opposed to the military actions. Following this line of thought,

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

<sup>33</sup> Informal conversation, 21-03-2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, 18-03-2010.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, 14-05-2010.

various persons also suggest that during the dirty war at least it was safe to go outside, whereas nowadays the safety situation does not allow this anymore. Pablo (20) tells:

‘What they told me [my parents] is that when the country was under military rule the country was very safe. For example my mother played in the street when she was 6/7. There was no rapist, there were no robberies. Nowadays this is not possible anymore. My sister of 11 years old can go out on the street, but anything can happen to her. Things that in this period [the dirty war] was different, for what they told me. My father lived in the province of Buenos Aires and every day he took the train to Buenos Aires at 4 o’clock in the morning. Now this is not possible anymore. Nowadays this service at 4 o’clock in the morning does not exist anymore, but if it would, they would kill you.’<sup>37</sup>

This quote is also illustrative for the fact that parents in Retiro talk to their children about the dirty war; many children in Retiro portray the opinion of their parents. Van Drunen (2010: 332) mentions the ‘theory of the two devils’. According to this theory the dictatorship is seen as a result of the confrontation between the guerrilla and the armed forces. Both are seen as equally responsible. Van Drunen claims that this theory was popular in the eighties, but lost its popularity mid nineties. However, in this thesis it becomes clear that the theory of the two devils still exists in Argentinean society. The people in Retiro that experienced the dirty war hold on to this theory. They are very well aware that their opinion clashes with the public opinion and therefore they keep their opinion to themselves and only speak it out in private. It can be concluded that the discussion about the two devils has disappeared from the public debate, however, in the private sphere in richer areas this way of thinking persists. Since parents carry their opinion over to their children, it is questionable if this theory really belongs to the past.

Some people in Retiro went as far as totally diminishing military wrongdoing. Carmen Maria (72) positioned herself pro-military and was not ashamed of this. Although she realizes her opinion is controversial she did not seem to mind the fact that the interview was conducted in a full café. She gave her opinion anyway, loud and clear, not bothered by the people sitting close and possibly overhearing the conversation. Carmen Maria clearly prefers the military period to the situation nowadays:

‘One thing I can tell you, I absolutely have nothing against this period [of the dictatorship]. There was order and peace, everyone was out in the streets, at night everyone went out; nowadays everyone is locked up at home, for being scared.’<sup>38</sup>

It has to be noted that many crimes committed by the military during the dirty war are not

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<sup>37</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

recognized or are diminished by the anti-guerrilla thinking people in Retiro. Maria Angelica (82) for example is the widower of a military man who had worked in the air force during the dirty war. When the interview touched upon the subject of the people that were thrown from airplanes in the Rio de la Plata (river alongside Buenos Aires) she expressed disbelief. Her reasoning is the following: if it were true that bodies were dumped into the Rio de la Plata her husband would have told her. And since he did not tell her anything, it could not possibly be true.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in Retiro people overall are better informed about what happened during the dirty war, but their opinion about the period is partial in the sense that they focus on guerrilla wrongdoing. Many people are light to strong right-thinkers. Of course, there are also some left-wing opinions to be heard in Retiro, but the right-wing opinions definitively overrule. The remarkable thing is that the people who articulate themselves more leftist concerning the subject are mostly the people who are less informed about the dirty war. These people were or very young during the dirty war or born after the dirty war. Sometimes they did not know how to answer interview questions and they copied opinions of the official discourse to be able to say something. They were pretty embarrassed by their lack of knowledge; it was obvious they were faced with interview questions they had never thought about before.

Apart from the guerrilla bombings Retiro is also known for where the former intelligence services SIDE (Servicio de Inteligencia del Estado) were located during the dirty war. It is noticeable that only one person articulated herself negatively about the SIDE. Maria Hilda (70) was the only person who experienced the dirty war in Retiro and articulated herself negatively about the military. She found the SIDE to be somewhat intimidating.<sup>40</sup> The right-thinking majority in Retiro however, hardly took notice of the SIDE, since their most important 'enemy' before and during the dirty war was not the military, but the guerrilla. Therefore the SIDE was not perceived as being intimidating.

#### ***4.5. The Daughter of Lambruschini***

As Villa 31 has father Mujica, Retiro also has a famous victim of the dirty war of whom many people know. This victim clearly illustrates the pro-military stance the residents of the neighborhood take, since the victim is a victim of the guerrilla, not of the military. The fact that this victim is so well known and widely commented upon says a lot about the residents of Retiro and falls into place with the anti-guerrilla stance they take.

The story goes that the 16-year-old daughter of Lambruschini, a well known military man, befriended a guerrilla girl who placed a bomb in the apartment of the Lambruschini's. When the

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<sup>39</sup> Interview, 21-04-2010.

<sup>40</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

bomb exploded the daughter of Lambruschini died. This example is used by many people who experienced the dirty war in Retiro to demonstrate the terrible cruelty of the guerrilla. Maria Ester (67) tells the story as follows:

‘There was the daughter, I do not remember if the father was a military... And the friend of the daughter put a bomb in the house. The daughter died and the father died. The girl put the bomb under the bed of her friend, or better said: the girl of whom she said she was her friend. Imagine that the girl that put the bomb there also was 16 years old.’

After telling this story she exclaims horrified: ‘That a girl of 16 years old puts a bomb in her friends house is a terrible act!’<sup>41</sup> The way Maria Ester tells the story is also illustrative for something else; it is noticeable that she dramatizes the story by not stressing the fact that the father was part of the military. Overlooking this fact the girls motives for placing the bomb are left unclear and it makes her act seem random almost, and very cruel at the least.

#### ***4.6. Different Stances in the Neighborhoods***

People in both neighborhoods clearly take a different stance. The leftist view of the people in the Villa can be partly explained by the fact that many people say their information is based on the media and on movies such as *Noche de los Lapices*, which all focus on military wrongdoing. Also, victims of the dirty war who reside in the Villa were victimized by the military. Therefore, perceptions of what happened during the dirty war in the Villa are in line with the official history presented by the government.

The anti-guerrilla and to a varying degree pro-military stance people in Retiro take can be explained by the fact that it is a rich neighborhood in which many families with a military tradition reside. It follows that people raised within such a family tend to think more rightist and focus on the guerrilla as wrongdoers, thereby diminishing to a certain extent the wrongdoing of the military. Some people in Retiro even totally diminished military wrongdoing.

But even when people in Retiro do not come from a military family, they present themselves to be anti-guerrilla, because they or their parents experienced the many bombings of the guerrilla. Since they mainly only experienced guerrilla misconduct and military misconduct went past them their opinion has been formed accordingly. They were relieved when the military came to restore order and save them from the guerrilla and residents of Retiro experienced the military period without troubles; it was the period before that had troubled them. People in Retiro are still outraged by the terrible situation they had to live in because of the guerrilla and their children accordingly

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<sup>41</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.



also portray this vision.

#### ***4.7. Lack of Interest***

Almost everyone in both neighborhoods agrees that it is time to look towards the future and stop focusing on the past. Not many people have directly suffered from the dirty war, except for the resisters of the eradications in the Villa, Rufino (43), who lives in the Villa and lost various family members during the dirty war in Tucumán and Flora (46), who had to leave the Villa at the age of 13 because of the eradications. For the rest no-one has experienced hardship during the dirty war. Many people have stories to tell about disappearances, but only little did these stories affect them personally. Also, many people in Retiro experienced more inconvenience by the guerrilla than by the military. These two factors help explain why many people in both neighborhoods wish contemporary Argentinean society would get over its past already and move on. They are more preoccupied with current Argentinean problems and with the future of their country, than with the country's troublesome past. The remarkable thing is that even the few people who have been victimized by the dirty war voice this same opinion.

Many Argentines are sick of the constant division in Argentina between left and right. Carmen Maria (72), who lives in Retiro, referred to Uruguay as an example. In Uruguay the new left-wing President who had been a victim of the Uruguayan dictatorship said that the country should get over its troublesome past and start looking towards the future. Left and right united in order to work towards a better country. In Argentina Carmen Maria wishes they would do the same, instead of keep arguing about the same issue.<sup>42</sup>

An interesting explanation for lack of interest comes in the form of Maria Hilda (70):

‘So many awful things happen in Argentina that one thing covers the other. The situation is so terrible, and since there is no project, no plan for the country, one thing covers the other. We are all tired because of all these things that are happening.’<sup>43</sup>

#### ***4.8. Lack of Knowledge***

In both neighborhoods we can speak of lack of knowledge about the dirty war, although it has to be noted that lack of knowledge in Retiro was only found in the group of people that were very young during the dirty war. In Villa 31 however lack of knowledge existed in all age groups, even the group of people that had consciously experienced the dirty war. Of course, this lack of knowledge can be related to lack of interest.

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<sup>42</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

In the Villa this lack of knowledge can be explained by various factors. Lack of good education for example is a reason. Many people only attended primary school. For many primary schools the subject of the dirty war is too heavy. And if the subject was treated at school, young people in the Villa did not pay attention or had already forgotten. Simply put it does not interest them, since the dirty war has not had any implications for their lives. Parents do not tell their children about this period of Argentinean history, since the implications for them were also little. They are more concerned with the problems of everyday life. Life in the Villa is difficult; many people have to work hard to be able to get by. Insecurity is becoming a bigger problem over the last couple of years. Drugs hold the Villa in its grip; many people, even entire families, are hooked on *paco*. Thus taking an interest for what happened during the dirty war is a luxury problem for these people. A last explanation for this ignorance that exists in the Villa is that most Argentinean people in the Villa come from the countryside where the effects of the dirty war were smaller than in Buenos Aires. In Buenos Aires the dirty war was felt the most. Thus it is logical that people who (or whose parents) did not experience the dirty war in Buenos Aires have been affected less.

Lack of knowledge in Retiro has to be explained otherwise, since they live in an entirely different situation, although lack of impact of the dirty war on their personal lives also plays a central role. Maria Nieve (48) knows little of what happened during the dirty war. Her father worked in a political prison as a dentist at the time. She kept insisting that her father had nothing to do with the military regime; he was only exercising his work as a dentist. Which of course can easily be true, but fact is that he must have seen and known what was going on. In Maria Nieve's home the subject was not discussed. She wishes she would have grown up with more political consciousness. This lack of political consciousness is visible in the way she talks about the dirty war; she abstains from giving her opinion. She was aware of and felt embarrassed by her lack of knowledge.<sup>44</sup> It seems reasonable to suggest that her father's occupation was the reason politics were not discussed at home; it is typical that father's who had to do with the military regime did not discuss this at home, it was a taboo subject. The truth is harder than ignorance. Like Maria Nieve, Agustin (30) also knows little about the dirty war and he frankly admitted: 'I am at a point in my life where I am more concerned with myself'.<sup>45</sup>

Maria Nieve and Agustin were both very young during the dirty war. They went to school during and after the dirty war. Therefore it is presumable that lack of good education about the subject plays a role in their ignorance. Directly after the dirty war schools were still looking for a way to educate about the dirty war. Younger people in Retiro, born after the dirty war, have been properly educated about the dirty war and know considerably more.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview, 07-04-2010.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

An interesting difference between people who know little in the Villa and in Retiro is that people in Retiro admit that they know little about the subject, even though they feel ashamed. In the Villa it is probable that people also feel ashamed, but what happens there is that they start talking around the subject; when they do not know the answer to a question they simply start talking about something else, even though in some cases it is not remotely related to the question asked. The people in the Villa kept this up until the subject was dropped.

Based on the prior paragraphs you could also think that maybe the subject of the dirty war was too painful for some, and therefore they avoided the subject by pretending to know little. But this is not very probable, since all the people interviewed knew about the subject that would be discussed beforehand, and knowing this, they all agreed to do the interview. If it really was too painful to discuss, it is more probable that people would not agree with the interview. It follows that of the people that express ignorance it can be said that they do not appear to be traumatized by the dirty war. Agustin (30) clearly confessed his (and other people's) ignorance by telling the following:

'My point of view is that the people do not know very well what has happened [during the dirty war]. I feel stupid talking like this. Because I have little idea of what happened to tell you the truth. Now that you are asking me all these questions I realize I know little. I think there are a lot of people who think exactly like me. And I think there are people like my friend who can talk for two hours about what happened. I am not giving you anything, maybe... I feel like Paris Hilton.'<sup>46</sup>

Telling all this just to hide his discomfort with the subject does not seem probable.

#### ***4.9. Collective Memory and Trauma***

The memory people in Retiro have about the period of the dirty war is different from the collective memory presented by the government. People in Retiro think in line with the theory of the two devils; which stresses equal guerrilla and military responsibility. In the eighties this theory was supported by the government, whereas nowadays the government focuses on military wrongdoing. Because of this people in Retiro mostly keep their opinion to themselves, realizing it is not politically correct to speak out. Also, it is not something they discuss frequently among themselves; many people in Retiro are surprised to find out that they are not the first to voice this particular opinion. Thus this particular vision of history is definitively not widely shared and acknowledged. Many people in Retiro wish it were so, but the opposite is true. Giesen's (in Alexander et. al. 2001) description of collective memory therefore can be debated, since he states that collective memory unifies a nation by providing both the individual and society with a temporal map. However,

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<sup>46</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

Argentinean society appears to be divided instead of unified. It is clear that collective memory as presented by the government is not shared by everyone.

In Villa 31 collective memory as presented by the government is more appreciated. At least the memory of the inhabitants of Villa 31 is in line with the official history presented by the government. However, lack of interest and lack of knowledge complicate the matter. Collective memory in the Villa is portrayed in the image of father Mujica. He is remembered every year on the day of his death and schools and corporations go by his name. However, despite the attempt to collectively remember this man, many people do not know the exact story around his life and death. Nonetheless, collective memory in the Villa is more manifested, since it is noticeable that many people who do not know what to say copy answers from the official discourse; things they must have picked up watching television or talking to neighbors. Eyerman (2001) noted that collective memory and trauma manifest themselves in daily life through the media. The inhabitants of the Villa get their information from the media; therefore they portray this particular vision of history, as opposed to most people in Retiro, who are annoyed by this one-sided information stream. Robben (2005) noted that such manifestations in the media require critical interpretation, since they depend on the decisions of authorities. It follows that people in the Villa are less critical of the authority than people in Retiro, in the sense that people in the Villa agree with the government, whereas people in Retiro clearly take a different stance.

Since collective memory is closely related to trauma, some remarks about trauma are in place. People in Retiro seem to be traumatized by the guerrilla bombings, as opposed to the socially accepted military-inflicted trauma. People who have experienced bombings in Retiro can still tell a pretty detailed story of how and where these bombings had taken place, almost forty years ago. However, their trauma is not recognized by the government and opposed by the official story. Therefore they do not ask for attention concerning their trauma. Nevertheless, their trauma becomes visible in the fact that society is extremely divided.

Trauma in the Villa does not occur to a great extent, since many people go untouched by the dirty war. Surprisingly, even the victims of the dirty war in the Villa; the group of resisters of the eradications seem unscarred by residing in their situation and by suggesting that the topic of the dirty war has been covered enough over the last thirty years. Of course, this can be what they want people to think, whereas it is possible that deep down resisting the eradications has left its permanent marks on their lives. Alicia (62), who has resisted the eradications, suggests this by answering the question if she wants to know more about the dirty war as follows: ‘No, what for? If it already happened, it is already over’. This suggests she has gotten over it, but then she says: ‘Why would I want to remember it, it was very painful, very terrible.’<sup>47</sup> This suggests that she would

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

rather forget in order to be able to move on with her life; remembering is too painful for her. According to Robben (2005), individuals and societies repress traumatic experiences before being able to mourn. It is possible that thirty years later the victims of the eradications in the Villa are still in this phase of repression. This seems probable if you realize that living conditions in the Villa are tough; the cruelties afflicted on them during the dirty war are not the only injustice they have suffered. Right after the return of democracy for example Argentineans had to deal with an economic crisis, which affected the people in the Villa the hardest. This realization opens the possibility that people in the Villa have not had the time to mourn and process their trauma.

## 5. The Perception in Villa 31 and Retiro regarding Justice

In this chapter the subject of justice is explored in detail and linked to the perception of the inhabitants of the two neighborhoods. The subject of justice concerning the dirty war is an actual topic in Argentina, since under the previous President Néstor Kirchner the amnesty laws were revoked and lawsuits against dirty war criminals were re-opened under the new name ‘crimes committed against humanity’. Under the actual President Cristina Kirchner these lawsuits are still running. In Argentina the focus is on retributive justice; obtaining justice through punishment.

### 5.1. Re-opened Lawsuits

In Villa 31 everyone who has an opinion about the matter agrees that there has been insufficient justice concerning the military perpetrators of the dirty war. Their faith in the recently re-opened lawsuits against these same perpetrators however is little. Rufino (43), victimized by the military in Tucumán during the dirty war, tells:

‘I do not have faith [in the re-opened lawsuits]. If you would invite me to a reunion where they are going to sentence someone, I would stay at home drinking mate and making money. If I already know what they are going to say; prison at home, buy him a plasma TV to watch the world tournament, he will be imprisoned at his home. Is this justice? No, this is not justice for me.’<sup>48</sup>

People are very skeptic about the concept of justice; many people agree justice does not exist in Argentina. All three different groups of people living in the Villa seem to agree on this, even the group of common people. Concerning the subject of justice everyone has an opinion. Common people who do not know much about the re-opened lawsuits against the military relate to the subject with an example that is more familiar to them, also illustrative for their lack of faith in justice.

The arguments against the re-opened lawsuits in the Villa mostly come down to the following: they find that the lawsuits cost a lot of money and they wish to see this money used otherwise. Jose (48) voices this in the following way:

‘If you take a man who is responsible for various deaths to justice, what happens? The government pays all these costs. It implicates money; lawyers have to be paid, various things have to be done to be able to take the man to justice. Then they tell him he has been sentenced to jail. But he goes to a place that is called a prison, he is well, he has his color television, he has his food on time, he has all his diversion even if it is in a place like that. So what is the use?’

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<sup>48</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

The re-opened lawsuits for Jose are: ‘A waist of money, investments that can be made in other things’.<sup>49</sup> Also, as already expressed in Rufino’s (43) quote, many people in the Villa express themselves angrily about the fact that rich (military) people go to ‘VIP jail’. With this term they refer to rich (military) perpetrators who are old and therefore get sentenced to jail in their own home. Rufino tells:

‘Justice in Argentina is for the poor. Injustice is for the rich. Here the one who gets sentenced to jail the most is the poor man. For the man who has money justice does not exist.’<sup>50</sup>

Out of 26 people interviewed only two persons expressed faith in the judiciary system; both residents of Retiro. However, their faith was not convincing; in both cases they articulated their faith carefully and unpersuasively. Betina (71) started laughing when she was asked if she had faith in justice:

‘Look, my family is full of lawyers; they all work in the judicial power. So it would look very bad if I told you that I do not have trust. I want to be able to have trust and I wish that the judiciary power is good.’<sup>51</sup>

The way she formulated her statement is interesting: she did not directly say she has faith in justice: she said she could not say otherwise, since many of her family members earn their living like this. The way she formulated her belief in justice is shaky. A second example is also noteworthy. Agustin (30) said: ‘I want to trust, I want to believe in justice. I want to believe that people were trialed well’.<sup>52</sup> The way he formulates his opinion is also shaky, since he seems to suggest that he is having difficulties actually believing what he is saying.

In Retiro people do not necessarily argue that the re-opened lawsuits are a waist of money, rather they find it a waist of time. It is too late for obtaining justice concerning the dirty war. They would rather see other problems in Argentina being dealt with. The focus of the country should be on the future, not on the past. Thus, hardly anyone seems to give importance to the possible positive effect of retributive justice: breaking the cycle of impunity (Huysse 2003).

In Retiro, there are various people who suggest that the government has interests in continuing the lawsuits against the military endlessly. Maria Ester (67) explains:

‘I think there are people who have interests in never finishing the lawsuits; some politicians in the government

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<sup>49</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

<sup>51</sup> Interview, 14-05-2010.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

right now; because you have to divide to be able to rule. So if society is divided, in good and bad, there is always someone who can win and benefit from this. The one who governs can benefit. If society pacifies and is not hurt and forgives and life is focused forwards, then the ones who govern also have to be better. They [the government] have interests in keeping the situation bad. We are not united like a strong nation. We should be a strong nation with a strong family with people who are capacitated to choose.<sup>53</sup>

Maria Ester is not the only one in Retiro who suggests this. Pablo (20) is also negative about the re-opened lawsuits under Kirchner; he thinks that the lawsuits have been re-opened by the Kirchners to divert the attention from themselves, to appear less suspicious. The Kirchners have a lot of money and property of which is unknown where it comes from. Thus Pablo suspects that they re-opened the lawsuits without the intention of finishing them purely in an attempt to distract people.<sup>54</sup> Van Drunen (2010: 226) also signaled this criticism against the Kirchner government: ‘The most critical sector accused Kirchner of using the measures in the realm of truth, justice and memory as a means to divert attention away from the fact that more structural changes were lacking’.

A difference between the inhabitants of Villa 31 and Retiro concerning their view on the re-opened lawsuits is that in Villa 31 there are pro-death sentence voices to be heard, whereas in Retiro this is not the case. When the interview touches upon the subject of Videla, Flora (46) says: ‘Well, his head should be taken off. For everything he did; for the people that disappeared, for the murdered mothers, for the dead children, for everything that happened in the Villa’.<sup>55</sup> Rufino’s (43) opinion is even harsher:

‘They all deserve to die, all the military bosses who ordered to kill people. They are now in prison or they are being trialed. But if they did not mind killing you, then why should I even bother trialing these people? When they killed my entire family, my family-members? They killed people they should not have killed; I do not have a reason to trial these people. I should hang them on the obelisk or on a pole at *Plaza de Mayo*, make sure all his family is there, and in front of his family kill him the same way he killed people, so that his family sees and feels in their heart what we felt when they killed a family-member, a loved one.’<sup>56</sup>

## 5.2. *Julio Lopez*

Julio Lopez is the first of two case studies that are illustrative for the way people think about the re-opened lawsuits. Julio Lopez was a bricklayer that was tortured during the dirty war. Having survived the dirty war, he was an important witness in a trial against Etchecolatz, a dirty war criminal. However, Julio Lopez disappeared in 2006, a few hours before giving his final testimony

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

<sup>56</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.



in court. This makes him the first (well-known) disappearance-case since the return of democracy. Shortly after his disappearance a lot of effort was done to find him. However, what exactly happened has never been discovered. There are many different versions about his disappearance. Most people, as well in the Villa as in Retiro, think he has been disappeared and killed by the military. Since he was testifying against the military it is probable that they would have interests in letting him disappear. Other people, mostly in the Villa, have no idea who Julio Lopez is and refrain from giving an opinion.

A few opinions about Julio Lopez deserve special attention. Carmen Maria (72), who lives in Retiro and strongly sympathizes with the military, suggests that he must have been disappeared and killed by the actual government. She thinks the government gave him money to declare against the military. Afterwards they made him disappear and gave his family money to keep still, according to Carmen Maria. It becomes clear she is not a big fan of the government when she suggests the following:

‘The government got him to testify and then they made him disappear. It was even commented that he was put inside a grill. I do not know where exactly. They put him inside a grill, they burnt him alive. Someone told me this, and not just one; various persons told me this. I believe it is true.’<sup>57</sup>

The fact that Carmen Maria turns the situation around and does not suspect the military of having something to do with the disappearance of Julio Lopez can be explained by her strong military sympathies. Pablo (20), also in Retiro, finds the case of Julio Lopez suspicious. He explains that he finds that there must be something behind the whole search for Julio Lopez. According to him, this type of thing is used by the government to hide other things, bad things. For Pablo the whole search and attention for Julio Lopez was unnecessary, every day someone disappears in Argentina and they never get this much attention: ‘They want to seem good [the government]. They dedicate themselves to an anti-military public’.<sup>58</sup>

### ***5.3. General Bignone***

A second case study concerning the re-opened lawsuits is about former general Bignone. In April 2010 he has been sentenced to prison for 25 years, which received much media attention. Many people, in both neighborhoods, however, do not know who general Bignone is. They do not really show much interest for the subject, which is telling for the way they think about the re-opened lawsuits. Alicia (62), who experienced the eradications in the villa, is one of the two people in the

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<sup>57</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

<sup>58</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

Villa who knows who Bignone is. Her opinion about the 25 years of prison he got sentenced to is very clear:

‘But they do not fulfill these 25 years. Why do they not give him lifelong? He is already so old; they do not fulfill the sentence, because they put him in his house, because he is sick, because he is already old. It is like that. It is bad; I wish he sat out his time in jail. I wish he died in jail just like he killed people.’<sup>59</sup>

It is noticeable that in the Villa the two people who know about Bignone were both victimized by the military. Rufino (43) is the second person in the Villa who knows Bignone and his lack of faith in justice becomes clear by his opinion:

‘25 Years? The sentence that is advantageous for them, the government; more than that they can not give him, because he knows a lot about the government. He knows things about the judges, he told them ‘Give me 25 and I will not say anything’. The guy pays 40/50 dollars and the year after he is out. That is how it works, I swear to you. He is going to get out, but of course, here he is not going to be able to live. They are going to arrange a permit for him to be able to live in Spain or another country. But they pay him. They are going to pay him lots of money so that he goes. They are going to pay his expenses, his rent, so that he is well and that way does not say anything. In Argentina it works like this.’<sup>60</sup>

In Retiro the only person that knows who Bignone is uses this example to tell a different story. Carmen Maria (72) says:

‘For me Bignone was one of the most tranquil military men that there are; a tranquil guy, a serious guy. For me, but they are blaming him, did you notice? For me his sentence is unfair.’<sup>61</sup>

#### ***5.4. Guerrilla Perpetrators***

There is an important distinction to be made between the opinion about justice in Retiro and in the Villa; in Retiro many people agree with the people living in the Villa that there has been little justice concerning the military perpetrators of the regime, but many people in Retiro also stress the lack of justice concerning guerrilla wrongdoing. Many find that if they are going to re-open the lawsuits against the military, they should also open lawsuits against former guerrilla members. ‘Or equal justice for all, or no justice at all’ is an opinion voiced frequently in Retiro. Since many people in Retiro lean towards having more sympathy for the military and underline the wrongdoing of the guerrilla this particular stance concerning justice was to be expected. Many people in Retiro are

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<sup>59</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

<sup>60</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

outraged by the fact that guerrilla wrongdoing is not mentioned by the official history, let alone punished. Maria Hilda's (70) opinion is representative for the rest of the opinions in her neighborhood:

'The guerrilla has not been punished accordingly; since Kirchner all the Montoneros are free and they even occupy important posts in the government. For me it was not the same the measures they took against the military compared to the guerrilla. They focus too much on the military. I am tired of the trials with the military men who are old by now, we already know, what can we do?'<sup>62</sup>

These people fail to notice that military wrongdoing was far more serious than guerrilla wrongdoing. Also, the fact that most of the guerrilla was killed by the military is overlooked.

However, not everyone in Retiro thinks like is described above. Since the actual government stresses military wrongdoing during the dirty war and the search for justice, it is noticeable that people who are overall little informed and little interested, copy this opinion. They do not really seem to be able to tell why it is that they find this. They base their opinions on what they see on television, read in the newspapers and hear from other people. This happens in both neighborhoods; it is not necessarily a 'poor' or a 'rich' thing.

### *5.5. Two different kinds of Military Perpetrators*

Going more into specifics concerning justice, the opinion about how the jail sentence of military men who gave orders and those who followed orders should differ is shared by most inhabitants of both neighborhoods. When the military was first trialed for the atrocities committed during the dirty war it was taken into account that the lower military men had to obey the orders of the high military men under a law called 'law of obedience'. However, nowadays this law is not considered in the reopened trials. Most people, in both Villa 31 and in Retiro, are of the opinion that the military men who gave the orders should be punished more and that it should be taken into consideration that lower military men were following orders. They realized that if they did not follow the order, their own lives might be in danger. Some people, also both in Villa 31 and in Retiro, do not know sufficient about the subject to be able to answer the question and therefore they refrain from giving an opinion. It is noticeable that it seems that for some people the question forces them to think about the matter for the first time, which makes the question difficult to answer for some people.

Pablo (20), a student in Retiro, had an exceptional opinion about the matter; he is the only one who said both military men who gave the orders and military men who followed orders should be sentenced to jail for the same amount of time. He was irritated by the fact that only the high

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<sup>62</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

officers were persecuted: 'No-one has the right to take a life, only God. The two of them want to take a life, so the two of them should be punished equally.'<sup>63</sup>

Another exceptional opinion comes from Rufino (43), who lives in the Villa and has suffered a great deal during the dirty war in Tucumán. He seems to understand the situation by referring to the time he was doing military service:

'That is the order of the soldiers. Because many soldiers are still alive today, or they died, or they killed themselves, because they knew that someone ordered them to kill people. And they knew they killed innocent people. Many killed themselves for having a heart: 'I know that a person died I should not have killed. But I have to follow the order'. They told me, being a soldier, that I had to wash the dishes in 5 minutes and I had to do it. If I did not do it they punished me.'<sup>64</sup>

The comparison he makes is interesting, since these same soldiers made his life hell. However, he seems to be able to understand them and forgive them based on his own experiences as a soldier.

### *5.6. Compensation of Victims*

Concerning the financial compensation the victims of the dirty war received the opinions in both neighborhoods are unanimous. Most people agree that this compensation is not enough and that money does not compensate for the loss of a loved one. However, the big difference in opinion between the two neighborhoods is that various right-thinking people in Retiro comment upon the fact that only victims of military wrongdoing have been compensated. They are of the opinion that victims of guerrilla wrongdoing should be compensated too. Maria Ester (67) tells:

'They compensated the victims of the military, not the victims of the guerrilla. They gave money to the victims of the military. But I think that the victims of the guerrilla did not get anything. The families of these people have not received any sort of compensation from the government. There are people who are working on this, that the victims of the guerrilla will also be compensated economically. Did they not suffer also? Justice has to be for both sides. Both sides need compensation. Both sides were victimized by violent acts. Justice is not justice if it only works one way. Compensation had to be the same for everyone.'<sup>65</sup>

This way of thinking about the compensation is a logical consequence of their line of thinking. Of course, as for all topics covered, there are also people, in both neighborhoods, who do not know exactly how the victims of the dirty war have been compensated and therefore do not have a clear opinion about the matter.

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<sup>63</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

<sup>64</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

The group of this research that has been victimized by the military is the group of 43 families that have resisted the eradications. When Tapia (68) is asked if they have had any form of compensation he tells: ‘The compensation we had is that we started a lawsuit against the government’.<sup>66</sup> This lawsuit was won in 1980, and based on this lawsuit the eradications were stopped and the 43 left over families could stay. Alicia (62) however feels different about the matter:

‘They [political fugitives] were compensated with money for moral and physical damage. But there are people who did not... For example, us, the 43 families: we all suffered, we stayed, they beat us. We could not start a lawsuit. We still want to do it, but we do not, because we do not get together all of us.’<sup>67</sup>

Two other people in the Villa were also victimized by the dirty war. Rufino (43) experienced the dirty war in Tucumán and lost various family members to the military. Two uncles of him died in a confrontation between the police and the military. Compensation however, is something he has never heard about. Flora (46) was also a victim of the dirty war in the sense that she had to leave the Villa when she was 13 because of the eradications. Her family returned to Bolivia, their country of birth and she lived there for decades, until she decided to return to the Villa by herself as an adult. Like Rufino, compensation is a word that is unfamiliar to her.

### *5.7. Special Attention for Justice in Villa 31*

In Villa 31 justice is far to be sought when we speak of the death of father Mujica. The perpetrator has never been caught and punished. Oscar (50) has no faith in justice and has found another sort of justice he strives after: ‘The re-distribution of belongings in the world’. If this is reached the victims of the dirty war will not have died in vain. It is remarkable that Oscar seems to have resigned in this lack of justice, having suffered that much from the eradications. For him it is not necessary to punish the military perpetrators; punishment will be given to them by God. He concludes his story about justice in the following way: ‘What use is it to us that this asshole goes to jail when I stay the same, worse than ever, the future generations? It is of no use!’ However, there is a form of justice more close to him which he is still hopeful about, since he is part of one of the 32 families that is in trial against the government for how their rights have been mistreated during the eradications in the Villa. The trial has been running for 32 years already, it keeps being postponed in the hope that the 32 families forget. ‘But one day it is going to happen’, according to Oscar. He seems optimistic

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>67</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

since he calls the trial: ‘A joker I have up my sleeve and will use some day’.<sup>68</sup>

Tapia (68) and Alicia (62), who have also resisted the eradications, elaborate further on the trials that they initiated against the military during the dirty war. They tell that during the dirty war, towards the end, they initiated a trial against mistreatment, which they lost in the first place, because not all the neighbors dared to approach court and testify. After that they decided to split the trial up into groups of ten neighbors, instead of working with all of the neighbors at the same time. This worked and they won the trial in 1980, which gave them the right to stay in the Villa. After that, they initiated a second trial against the government for the return of water and electricity, which they won in 1983, and where after the Villa started to be livable again.<sup>69</sup>

Unlike Oscar, Tapia and Alicia are not involved in any trials nowadays. This is an interesting difference, since Tapia and Alicia are two of the scarce people that pronounce themselves positive about the re-opened lawsuits. They are of the opinion that it is good that the lawsuits are re-opened, since justice has not been obtained so far. The remarkable thing is that Oscar does have faith in the lawsuit he is currently involved in, for decades already, whereas Tapia and Alicia are not involved in any sort of lawsuit. Tapia and Alicia seem to reside more in their situation, whereas Oscar is a fighter. Alicia appears to reside the most, which clearly follows from the following; when she is asked why she does not start a lawsuit for compensation she answers: ‘Sometimes we start but then we stop. We should do it. But... it is like that’.<sup>70</sup> It is possible that Oscar is such a fighter, because he does not have faith in justice, whereas Tapia and Alicia put their trust in the actual lawsuits.

### ***5.8. Lack of Interest, Knowledge and Faith***

In both Retiro and Villa 31 everyone agrees that there has been little justice so far concerning the dirty war. However, most inhabitants of the two neighborhoods seem to resign in this lack of justice. Whether they are right-thinking, left-thinking, personally affected by the dirty war or not, almost everyone seems to agree on this. This resignation can be linked to the tendency described in the previous chapter; that residents of Retiro and Villa 31 are tired of focusing on the past, they wish for their country to focus on the future. What also seems to play a central role in the opinion-forming of Argentinians concerning justice is that faith in the judiciary system is little. The reasons for this lack of faith in both neighborhoods are different, but in the end it leads to the same. There are not many people that have faith in justice and the good hope Alicia (62) and Tapia (68) have for the re-opened lawsuits can be called an exception. Lack of knowledge is also an explanation for the stance people take concerning justice. Lack of knowledge has as a direct result that justice concerning the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

<sup>69</sup> Interviews, 22-04-2010; Interview, 29-04-2010.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, 29-04-2010.

dirty war seems less important to them. Also, many people have not been personally affected by the dirty war, thus justice is of less importance to them.

However, the victims of the dirty war also express lack of knowledge, interest and faith. With the exception of Alicia and Tapia, who do appear to be hopeful about the re-opened lawsuits, the other three victims voice the same opinion as non-victims: Rufino (43), Oscar (50) and Flora (46) do not articulate themselves positively about the re-opened lawsuits. They have absolutely no faith that they will be concluded some day and that justice will prevail. It is possible that these victims are more traumatized than they appear to be. Lack of knowledge, interest and faith might be a way repression of the hardships of the dirty war expresses itself; repression being a symptom of trauma. Repression usually occurs directly after the traumatizing event (Robben 2005), but it is possible that victims of the dirty war in the Villa have not had the time to pass through this phase and start mourning, since life went on and more terrible things happened, which also had to be dealt with. However, a second interpretation is in place. Robben (2005) also states that in Argentina repression has hardly occurred, since society immediately entered into the debate of its recent past. But this debate was between human right organizations and the government, leaving the inhabitants of the Villa out of it. Also, this debate has been going on for thirty years now already and its conclusion is still not in sight. It is also possible that this never-ending debate has traumatized society. For the people that have experienced little effects of the dirty war this certainly seems to be the case; for the people that have been victimized this is something that might play a role.

The case study of general Bignone clearly illustrates the lack of knowledge and interest for the re-opened lawsuits, since most people in both neighborhoods do not know who he is, although he was sentenced to jail during the time of research, in April 2010, which received a lot of media attention. Also, the opinions of the few people that do know him is illustrative for the lack of faith in justice that exists, since one person does not believe that he will actually serve all his jail time and the other one is outraged about the fact that he will be able to serve his time in his own home.

It is remarkable that in Villa 31 various voices in favor of the death penalty are heard, whereas in Retiro no-one voices this idea. Perhaps the fact that life in the Villa is tough, not comparable to life in Retiro, had lead to this harsh opinion. Death is something that is not uncommon in the Villa. Also, voting for the death penalty in the Villa can be linked to the opinion that the re-opened lawsuits are a waist of money; money that could be inverted into bettering their situation.

### ***5.9. Justice Meaningful for Reconciliation between Left and Right?***

The fact that in Retiro people underline the necessity to punish the guerrilla for what they did clearly illustrates their anti-guerrilla and to a varying degree pro-military stance. The hinder they or

their parents experienced caused by the guerrilla mostly explains their partial view on the matter. Thus most people in Retiro agree that if the military is going to be trialed, guerrilla members should also be trialed. Other examples are also telling for the different stance people in both neighborhoods take. The different versions of the disappearance of Julio Lopez for example clearly portray who sympathizes with whom. Many people believe the military has made him disappear, whereas in Retiro stories circulate about state-complicity in the matter. The government at the moment is left and comprises of various ex-guerrilla members. Furthermore, the opinion about the compensation of victims is telling, since many people in Retiro stress the necessity of compensation of victims of the guerrilla, as opposed to only compensating the victims of the military.

Thus everyone seems to agree on the fact that justice concerning the dirty war has lacked, however the opinion about what justice is and how it should be exercised vary in both neighborhoods. Also, in both neighborhoods people seem to reside in the fact that justice has lacked, it is too late to achieve justice according to them. It can be concluded that it does not seem that justice is helpful for reconciliation; the opinions are too divided. Huyse (2003) stated correctly that prosecutions may endanger reconciliation, instead of promoting it. Also, Freeman and Hayner (2003) remarked that with justice reconciliation is not automatically obtained. Acknowledgement by perpetrators for example is important according to them. This has to do with justice, but also with truth-telling, which is discussed in the next chapter.



## 6. The Perception in Villa 31 and Retiro regarding Truth-Telling

The opinions about truth-telling, in both neighborhoods, are divided. In this chapter the different perceptions of truth-telling that exist in both neighborhoods are explored.

### 6.1. Lack of Truth-Telling

Most people, in both Retiro and the Villa, agree that concerning the truth about what happened during the dirty war there are still many questions left unanswered. Some of these people say they would like to know the answers to these questions and are optimistic about truth-telling. Ruben (27) in the Villa for example states: ‘Justice can not be achieved, but the truth can’.<sup>71</sup> However the majority seems to reside in this lack of truth-telling and indicate that they do not necessarily want to know more about the subject of the dirty war. 19 out of 26 people interviewed agreed on this, for a variety of reasons. Carmen Maria (72), a right-thinking woman in Retiro, admitted: ‘It does not interest me [the dirty war]. What worries me is the future of my grandchildren’.<sup>72</sup> Like Carmen Maria there are many; people are more concerned with their own problems. Andrea (57) in the Villa expressed a similar view: ‘It is not that it does not interest me, deep down it does, but I hardly pay attention, because what am I going to do if I find out? Nothing...’<sup>73</sup> Lucas (23) offers an explanation for the fact that many people do not wish to know more:

‘There is a lot of news, there is a lot of manipulation of information and well, this is very clear. Every day you can see the manipulation of information of subjects like these. But everyone would like to know 100% of the truth, because there is no better way of forming an opinion than knowing 100% of the facts, without a doubt. I hope this will happen some day, but it is difficult. There is a lot of corruption.’<sup>74</sup>

Lucas is an exception in the sense that he would like to know more about the subject and thinks that everyone thinks like that. Without realizing it he offers a reason for not wanting to know more about the subject; the realization that everything you hear may not be true. Most people have grown tired of this.

There are also a few people, in both neighborhoods, who are of the opinion that everything about the dirty war is known. The remarkable thing is that in the Villa the five people who voice this opinion are the exact five persons who have been victimized by the military during the dirty war. Even more surprisingly, all these five victims of the dirty war voice the opinion that they have

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<sup>71</sup> Interview, 10-03-2010.

<sup>72</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

<sup>73</sup> Interview, 10-03-2010.

<sup>74</sup> Interview, 13-05-2010.

heard enough about the subject; it is time to move on. Rufino (43), when asked if he would like to know more about the subject, answered:

‘No, to be honest, no more, it is not that it does not interest me, it is just that I do not like to remember. Bad things I do not like to remember, because bad things are no good for anything. We have to have something good. I hope we win the world cup, after so many bad things.’<sup>75</sup>

Rufino’s stance in the matter is understandable when you realize the terrible situation he has lived in during the dirty war in Tucumán. Alicia (62), a resister of the eradications, also articulates this particular stance of not wanting to remember the past, because it is too painful.

In Retiro the situation is different; the people that claim that everything is known about the dirty war mostly use this statement to indicate that they are done with the subject; they do not wish to hear more about it. Maria Ester (67) states that everything about the dirty war is known and out in the open:

‘I do not want to know more about anything. I am tired of dwelling in a sad past. I wish to live life focused on the future, that my country lives and plans for the future. Not that they plan backwards, to stay revengeful and hateful, no.’<sup>76</sup>

There are only a few exceptions to this tendency of most people of not wanting to know more. In Villa 31 three out of 13 people indicate they would like to know more about the subject. In Retiro the interest in knowing more is a little bit bigger; four out of 13, but when they articulate this vision, they use it to stress a different kind of truth-telling, which is explained in the next sub-chapter.

## ***6.2. Lack of Truth-Telling in the Official History***

An important difference between the two neighborhoods concerning their opinion about truth-telling is that many people in Retiro do not focus on military truth-telling. They interpret truth-telling in a different way; what bothers them is that the actual government only tells one part of the truth, namely the terrible things the military has done during the dirty war. They wish for the government to give a more complete image of the truth and tell what the guerrilla has done, instead of portraying them as poor victims. Therefore, in Retiro when people say that truth-telling lacks and they wish to know more, what usually follows is that they stress the lack of truth-telling concerning what the guerrilla did. Lucas (23) is a good example of this:

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<sup>75</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

<sup>76</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

‘It is very difficult to know everything. I am sure that there are a lot of things that are not known, from both sides. I would like to know; that they tell us the whole truth, not just one part of it.’<sup>77</sup>

Carmen Maria (72) also articulates this view:

‘They [the government] do not remember all the generals and military men they killed. About this they do not speak. They speak of one side, of the other they do not speak.’<sup>78</sup>

However, people who think like this are careful to voice their opinion. Felipe (22) tells:

‘Seen apart from the political opinion; people from both sides are hurt. Imagine how a victim of the guerrilla must feel that the military is being trialed, but the guerrilla is not. There are many people who think like this, but they do not speak it out, since it is not political correct to say. If you speak it out they will accuse you of genocide and you will be a bad person according to public opinion.’<sup>79</sup>

Van Drunen (2010: 212) notes that it is surprising that the Kirchner government received little criticism when they announced to organize its governance around truth and justice. Seen in the light of the former remark, it seems that people choose to vent in private.

### ***6.3. To Remember or not to Remember?***

Lucas (23) in Retiro brought up a subject during the interview, which was not voiced frequently:

‘I think it [the dirty war] is a very important part of the history of this country. I think we should not live tied to this, but we should take it as a warning not to make the same mistakes in the future, on both sides. I think what we do most in this country is repeat mistakes of the past and we should stop doing this, we should start learning from our mistakes and start thinking forward, trying not to make the same mistakes.’<sup>80</sup>

You would expect to hear this opinion more frequently, however most people deliberately do not feel the need to remember. Jose (48) for example in the Villa is of the exact opposite opinion. About this research he says:

‘You can break your head by studying all this, but what is your conclusion? The conclusion is that it is something that has already happened. You can study it a hundred times, but that does not change anything. You

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<sup>77</sup> Interview, 13-05-2010.

<sup>78</sup> Interview, 27-04-2010.

<sup>79</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

<sup>80</sup> Interview, 08-04-2010.

can find out more, but that is the only thing that you will achieve: it is something that you have wanted to find out, nothing more. The future is not going to depend on these things.’<sup>81</sup>

Agustin (30) in Retiro completes this by arguing why he thinks that there is no need to know everything:

‘Nowadays we do not know everything. I think being informed is good, but it depends on the form they give us the information. For example, they told us that in the ESMA people were tortured. But they did not tell us the details; how it happened, where it happened, but it is known. But this is sufficient. I do not want to know how many victims there were, what this is, what that was, how they did it. I think that telling that people were tortured there is more than enough.’

When I asked him if he thus suggested that he does not wish to know more about the matter he said with a pained face: ‘It is just that everything they are going to tell me is bad news, it is all negative’.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately Lucas’ (23) opinion does not seem to be widely shared.

#### ***6.4. The Subjectivity of Truth***

There is another remark to be made about the concept of truth; it is a subjective concept, since for everyone the truth means something else and there are so many different versions of the truth. The fact that people in Retiro stress telling the truth about what the guerrilla did proves that, but also all the case studies in this thesis are illustrative. These case studies make clear that there are a lot of different versions of the truth; everyone opinions accordingly to their own line of thought. Oscar (50) in the Villa for example is optimistic about truth-telling: ‘The truth is known, but there is no justice concerning father Mujica’.<sup>83</sup> Alicia (62) in the Villa however thinks that father Mujica was killed by Montoneros. It is unlikely that this is what Oscar meant when he said that the truth about father Mujica’s death is out in the open.

That the truth is a subjective concept is also demonstrated by Flora (46). She has lived in the Villa until she was 13 years old, when she and her family were forced out by the military during the dirty war. Her perception of this event differs considerably from what you would expect; she is angry at her parents for having had to leave, she was happy in the Villa. This is the reason she returned years later. She is of the opinion that her parents could have resisted the eradications if they had wanted to. She compares the situation of the Villa during the dirty war to the situation nowadays and she reckons it is the same situation. She is proud of herself, because nowadays when

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<sup>81</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 15-04-2010.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

the government has plans which are not in the best interest of the Villa, she forms a road block together with a group of politically active people and they stop the plans from being carried through. She wishes her parents would have done the same. The fact that she compares the situation during the dirty war with the situation in Argentina nowadays portrays lack of knowledge of this episode in Argentinean history, although she was part of it and the eradications have had big implications on her life. Her story also differs considerably from the stories in the Villa about the eradications told by the people who resisted. Flora (46) tells that the military paid the people in the Villa to leave, whereas the survivors of the eradications tell that people were picked out of their homes, loaded into a truck, whilst their house was being broken down, to be left somewhere on the side of the road. Flora's story almost makes the military sound decent, which is an interesting vision coming from her.

A last interesting vision on the truth comes in the form of Maria Ester (67), who believes that during the dirty war the military gave every family in the Villa 30.000 dollar to leave. The term forced eviction does not ring a bell in her pro-military version of the truth.

### ***6.5. Nunca Más***

Regarding the truth commission that was appointed shortly after the return of democracy in 1983 and that wrote the world-famous report called *Nunca Más*, most people in Retiro are critical. One of the few positive opinions about *Nunca Más* comes from Monica (44):

‘Very prestigious, very honest and real action. Supported by a President that permitted them to work with very prestigious and intellectually respectable members.’<sup>84</sup>

However, most people in Retiro let themselves out critically about the report. Felipe (22) for example says:

‘It was a good idea, but I do not know if it was written by people who were objective enough, not about one side, nor the other, so I have my doubts. The report should have been written by people who did not have anything to do with the matter. But this was not the case; the people who wrote it were too leftist. Also, the amount of victims named in the report is not true.’<sup>85</sup>

Felipe is not the only one who criticizes the estimate of victims named in the report; various other persons comment on the estimate of 30.000 victims perpetrated by the state. Their arguments are of the following kind. Felipe (22) remarked: ‘Where are these 30.000 families of which one member is

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<sup>84</sup> Interview, 16-03-2010.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

missing?'<sup>86</sup> Cecilia (37) states that the amount of victims was overestimated on purpose to call international attention; the correct amount is 7.000 instead of 30.000 according to her.<sup>87</sup> Maria Ester (67) immediately focuses on the lack of attention for guerrilla victims when the interview touches upon the subject of *Nunca Más*: 'How are you going to write history seen from only one perspective? No, history is written by showing both sides to the story'.<sup>88</sup> It is not surprising that voices about *Nunca Más* are so critical, since Freeman and Hayner (2003) noted that in Argentina the members of the truth commission have been appointed through a procedure that relied on the judgment of the responsible authority, with little consultation of society. The observation that a potential risk of truth commissions is bias from commissioners themselves (Freeman & Hayner 2003) is used by the inhabitants of Retiro, thereby diminishing military wrongdoing.

Aside from the opinion forming about *Nunca Más* in Retiro, it is noticeable that in Villa 31 few people know of its existence. Out of 13 people interviewed three have heard of *Nunca Más*; Marcelo (42), a community leader and Oscar (50) and Alicia (62), both victims of the dirty war. The explanation for this big difference between the inhabitants of Retiro and Villa 31 is simple; the majority of the people living in Villa 31 have had little education and thus can not read and write. Rufino (43) admits this by saying: 'I do not know it, because I can not read and write, but I am being honest with you; even if I could read and write, it would not interest me'.<sup>89</sup>

### **6.6. Captain Scilingo**

A case study about truth-telling is about Scilingo. He is a former captain who has participated with the well-known death flights. In 2005 he has been sentenced to jail for crimes committed against humanity in Spain. Prior to his conviction Scilingo had attracted attention by publicly confessing what he had done, thereby breaking the military pact of silence. Many people in both neighborhoods however, do not know who Scilingo is.

Some remarks about Scilingo are noteworthy, since they are expressive for the different way people look at the matter in both neighborhoods. Betina (71) in Retiro is not sure which side to take:

'Someone who they take so seriously has to be because it is true. But that he waited so long before talking? That does not make it sound probable. Therefore I can not give you an opinion. I can not tell you if it is true or if it is not true. What do I know, who knows this man, Scilingo or something.'<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

<sup>87</sup> Interview, 16-03-2010.

<sup>88</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

<sup>89</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

<sup>90</sup> Interview, 14-05-2010.

Monica's (44) sympathy towards the military shines through her opinion about Scilingo:

'I think that he was talking as a man, not as a military man. Probably it was the man inside of him who had to confess what he had done. It is terrible what he has done. However I think that we should also understand the military and that period. These kinds of formations, I do not know... Everything is difficult, in Argentina the military men have turned to this profession to not die of hunger.'<sup>91</sup>

Josefina (66) in Retiro claims not to remember who Scilingo was and asks for an explanation. When she hears the story she reacts offended and abstains from giving her opinion in the following way: 'Of course I do not remember that they threw people out of an airplane, it sounds terrible!'<sup>92</sup> She seems to take the subject personally and tries to appear ignorant about the subject. Lastly, Maria Ester's (67) opinion is interesting. She does not approve of what Scilingo has done and she does not sympathize with him, yet she is irritated by the fact that other countries meddle in affairs that have nothing to do with them. She refers to the fact that Scilingo was trialed and sentenced to jail in Spain; 'Business of Argentina should be business of Argentina', according to Maria Ester.<sup>93</sup>

In Villa 31 three people have an opinion about Scilingo. However, the opinions differed considerably. Jose (48) clearly does not know who Scilingo is, but when he hears the story he does have a remarkable opinion about the matter:

'He talked because he was sorry for everything he had done. That is why, in this moment I can assure you that he is in a good place. Not economically, but spiritually. He is in a good place because he confessed and feels sorry; his spirit is good. When a person does something bad the best justice there is, is the justice of the heart and the mind.'<sup>94</sup>

Many people in the Villa seem to explain things with God and find comfort in the idea that God is in control. When justice lacks, you turn to other channels. Rufino (43) however, a victim of the dirty war, is not as forgiving as Jose:

'I think that it was very brave that he confessed what he had done. He himself said: 'Bring me a gun, so I can kill myself'. But he was a coward. It is good that he confessed, but confess and kill yourself. Say to yourself: 'Well, for all the people I killed I am going to take a life that never had a purpose'. It is the least he could have done.'<sup>95</sup>

Marcelo (42) offers a sensible response, since he notes: 'It is good that he confessed in the sense

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<sup>91</sup> Interview, 16-03-2010.

<sup>92</sup> Interview, 18-03-2010.

<sup>93</sup> Interview, 26-04-2010.

<sup>94</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

that it brings us closer to the truth'.<sup>96</sup> Lucas (23) opinions the same, but at the same time stresses the involvement of the guerrilla:

'It is great that he confessed. It depends on these kinds of confessions that we get to know the truth. If they do not confess it is very difficult to know the truth. I wish that everyone confessed, not just him, but everyone, from both sides.'<sup>97</sup>

### **6.7. Cristina Kirchner's self-proclaimed Imprisonment**

Another case study about truth-telling is an actual example. In February 2010 President Cristina Kirchner proclaimed that she had been captured by the military during the dirty war. This has generated much discussion. Everyone who has an opinion about the matter in Retiro does not believe this is true. When the subject comes up during the interview Maria Hilda (70) immediately responds: 'She lied. She was never held captive. They use it as a political excuse, to appear like martyrs'.<sup>98</sup> Josefina (66) also does not believe Cristina Kirchner, her explanation is the following: 'She lied to obtain an image of having been persecuted'.<sup>99</sup> Felipe (22) is of the opinion:

'It is a lie and it is proven. They [the Kirchners] are trying to look as if they were fighters, but it is not true, they were not. I do not know why they are trying to look like that, because I do not think it is a good thing.'<sup>100</sup>

Thus everyone in Retiro seems to think Cristina is making it up in order to gain sympathy. Being a victim of the military and being anti-military is the trend nowadays in Argentina. Betina (71) articulates an interesting observation when asked if she thinks it is true or not:

'I do not think so, because we would have found out more. Before and during, that suddenly one day she tells you this, I do not know, I think it would have been better if she had used it a little earlier. For every politician, when they are held captive or something like that, it is the first thing they take out as a flag, as if it were an honor. If she really had been taken captive she would have said it much more *voz populi*.'<sup>101</sup>

In Retiro people are very negative about the President. The general tendency is to think that the only thing that is of interest to Cristina and her husband Néstor Kirchner is to make money and to fill their pockets. The right-thinking people in Retiro use this example to underline the popularity of the

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<sup>96</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>97</sup> Interview, 13-05-2010.

<sup>98</sup> Interview, 17-03-2010.

<sup>99</sup> Interview, 18-03-2010.

<sup>100</sup> Interview, 31-03-2010.

<sup>101</sup> Interview, 14-05-2010.



guerrilla; they are outraged by the fact that nowadays being a former guerrilla member is used as a publicity stunt.

In the Villa opinions are more divided; some are of the opinion that it is possible that it is true, others agree with the residents of Retiro that it is not true. Arguments of the more left-thinking people in the Villa that say that it is possibly true are of the following. Oscar (50) said: 'It can be true, because all the militants of the Peronist Youth were the first to be persecuted'.<sup>102</sup> Tapia's (68) reasoning is similar: 'It could be true. She was a member of the Montonero Youth in that period. All the leaders of that period were captured right?'.<sup>103</sup> Arguments of people who do not believe Cristina is speaking the truth are also found. Jose Alfredo (23) reasons as following: 'I did not know this, but I do not think it is true. All the people that were captured died right?'.<sup>104</sup> Flora (46) also does not believe it, but her argument is different, based on ignorance:

'Cristina does not have a single politician in her family. That is why I am telling you that it is a lie, because this woman in her family circle does not have a single politician. The military repression was directed against the people who were politician, revolutionaries and people from the left. Her husband was a Peronist and because she saw how he progressed she decided to join.'<sup>105</sup>

Rufino's (43) opinion is most in line with the people in Retiro:

'She was not held captive. She says she was held captive for a day, but she says it because it is of use to her politically. It is of use to her because the people will say: 'Ah that poor woman'. For this, politically she uses it. Here people and words are used a lot.'<sup>106</sup>

### ***6.8. Lack of Knowledge, Interest and Faith***

As for justice, lack of knowledge, interest and faith explain the way people in the Villa and in Retiro look at truth-telling. Lack of knowledge makes the truth a subjective concept. Lack of interest is noticeable in the fact that most people state they do not wish to know more about the subject, even though the majority is of the opinion that not everything is out in the open. This also illustrates their lack of faith; realizing that not everything is known, yet not wanting to discover the truth signals that people have grown tired of the whole subject and do not have faith that the truth will be out there some day. Therefore they resign in the situation. Lack of interest also further stimulates lack of knowledge, as shown in the example of Agustin (30); he signals not to want to know all the

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<sup>102</sup> Interview, 01-04-2010.

<sup>103</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>104</sup> Interview, 22-04-2010.

<sup>105</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

<sup>106</sup> Interview, 19-05-2010.

details of what happened during the dirty war, which results in a lack of knowledge of what happened. Thus lack of knowledge can be a personal choice. Also, the fact that many people did not have an opinion about the case studies of this chapter is illustrative for their lack of knowledge and interest. Thus it is clear that lack of knowledge, interest and faith have everything to do with each other.

However, there are some positive voices to be heard about truth-telling; not everyone is of the opinion that it can not be achieved; not everyone lacks faith. Concerning justice hardly any positive voices were to be heard. This makes lack of faith less present in the case of truth-telling, even though it is the minority that is hopeful. Also, there are some that indicate that the truth already is out in the open. All these people signal that it is time to leave the subject for what it is and focus on the future. In Retiro the argument that everything is known is used by right-thinking people to argue that it is time to focus on the future. In Villa 31 the people that indicate that everything is known are the people that were victimized by the dirty war. They also find it is time to focus on the future, which is an interesting vision, coming from them.

### ***6.9. Truth-Telling and Trauma***

The victims of the dirty war in the Villa deserve special attention. It is remarkable that all five of them claim that the truth about the dirty war is known and that it is time to move on and leave the subject for what it is. As already has been mentioned in the conclusions of the former two chapters, it is possible that this is an outlet of trauma. This wish for closure of the subject (lack of interest and faith) can be seen as a symptom of trauma. Robben (2005) names repression as a stage that occurs after the traumatizing event, however he signals that in Argentina this stage of trauma-processing has hardly occurred. Society immediately entered into the debate about the meaning of its past. However, thirty years later this debate has still not been concluded. It is possible that for the victims of the dirty war in the Villa that feel that they do not have any influence on this debate, repression and disinterest is their way of dealing with the difficult past. It seems that thirty years later the stage of repression still comes into play, at least for this group of people. Also, it is probable that hardship experienced during the dirty war has gotten overshadowed by other hardship in later years. Since the restoration of democracy Argentina has experienced more than one economic crisis, which hit the lower-class people the hardest. Flora (46), banned from the Villa during the eradications, is of the opinion that the situation in Argentina still is the same as during the dirty war:

‘The situation is the same, nothing changed. The only thing that changed is the military dictatorship; they are not in power anymore. At any moment there can be a coup in Argentina. The situation of the people is terrible

with all the robberies, deaths and assaults.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore it is also probable to assume that people in the Villa have not had the time to properly pass through all the stages of mourning, since one bad thing covers the other. Repression has become a continuous stage which is needed to be able to deal with the hardship of everyday life.

#### ***6.10. Truth-Telling Meaningful for Reconciliation between Left and Right?***

The subjectivity of truth is noticeable in the fact that people in Retiro who stress the importance of truth-telling use this argument to stress the importance of telling the truth about what the guerrilla did. Once again, the different stance people take in both neighborhoods comes to the forefront. Also, in the case studies in this chapter the different stance shines through. The fact that many people in Retiro do not believe that the estimated amount of victims mentioned in *Nunca Más* is true portrays the way people downscale military wrongdoing in this neighborhood. Also the fact that some people express themselves to be agitated that there is no room for the voices of guerrilla victims in the report is illustrative for their anti-guerrilla stance. Furthermore, when people gave their opinion about captain Scilingo in Retiro their anti-guerrilla and to a varying degree pro-military stance shone through in their answer. The same can be said for the different opinions in both neighborhoods concerning the case study about President Cristina Kirchner. Everyone in Retiro believes her story is a lie, whereas the people in Villa 31 believe it could be true. The fact that everyone in Retiro is so harsh in their opinion about Cristina Kirchner is in line with their disagreement with the left Kirchner government.

It follows that the opinions about truth-telling are pretty divided. The one thing most people agree on is that the truth is not out in the open; however they do not wish to know more about the subject. They reside in a lack of truth-telling. Furthermore the truth is a pretty controversial and subjective concept. This lack of truth-telling, resilience and disagreement about the concept of truth does not sound hopeful for reconciliation. However, some people articulate themselves positive and hopeful about truth-telling, which can not be said about justice. The subjectivity of it all however makes it complex; inhabitants of Villa 31 wish for military truth-telling, whereas inhabitants of Retiro wish for guerrilla truth-telling. One group will always be benefited more than the other, since interests are so different. Freeman and Hayner (2003) remarked that with truth-telling reconciliation is not automatically achieved. As mentioned in the conclusion about justice, acknowledgement by perpetrators is important for reconciliation. However, apart from the Scilingo case, this has hardly occurred, nor from the military side, nor from the guerrilla side.

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<sup>107</sup> Interview, 18-05-2010.

## 7. Conclusion

In this thesis I explore the aftermath of the dirty war in two different neighborhoods in Buenos Aires; Retiro and Villa 31. Thereby the focus is on collective memory, trauma, reconciliation, justice and truth-telling. The two neighborhoods are different in the sense that Retiro constitutes of middle- to high- class residents, whilst Villa 31 is a shantytown. Meanwhile, these two neighborhoods are located next to each other, only separated by a railway, which further accentuates the enormous differences. The central research problem as stated in the introduction of this thesis is:

‘What are the differences and/or similarities in perception of what happened during and after the dirty war in Argentina between the inhabitants of Retiro and Villa 31 in Buenos Aires and what are the reasons for these differences and/or similarities?’

People in the two neighborhoods appear to think very differently about what happened during the dirty war (which also becomes evident in their opinion about justice and truth-telling); in Villa 31 voices are anti-military, whereas in Retiro voices are anti-guerrilla. Voices in Retiro are also anti-military (to a varying degree), but this is diminished by their anti-guerrilla plea. This difference stance that is taken is in line with what happened during the dirty war in both neighborhoods. Villa 31 was eradicated by the military; only 43 families managed to resist and stay in the Villa. Retiro however traditionally is a rich neighborhood, in which many families with a military background reside. Therefore residents of Retiro suffered from guerrilla bombings during the dirty war, instead of military wrongdoing. At the same time, this difference is remarkable, since the pro-military/anti-guerrilla voices are hardly heard in the official literature about the dirty war. All the reports that have been published on the dirty war focus on military wrongdoing and on the plea of human rights organizations for justice and truth-telling. Also, the actual government highlights military wrongdoing and does not mention guerrilla misconduct, something the inhabitants of Retiro can not find themselves in. People in Retiro however realize their opinion is not politically correct and therefore prefer to keep their opinion to themselves.

When we move on to the subject of justice, it becomes apparent that everyone in both neighborhoods agrees that justice lacks in Argentina. But many people seem to have resided in this lack of justice. The re-opened lawsuits do not open up a new window of hope for them; they argue that they find it either a waist of time (in Retiro) or a waist of money (in Villa 31). Furthermore justice does not seem meaningful for reconciliation, since the opinions about justice differ too much; inhabitants of Retiro stress the importance of lawsuits against former guerrilla members, whereas inhabitants of Villa 31 focus on the lawsuits against military perpetrators of the dirty war

when they speak of justice. Huyse's (2003) observation that prosecutions may endanger reconciliation is appropriate for the Argentinean situation, since few people seem to be positive and hopeful about the re-opened lawsuits.

In Argentina the focus is on retributive justice. Would voices concerning justice have been more positive if the justice system had focused on restorative justice? Restorative justice is characterized by its focus on victims and affected communities. More attention for the affected community might have proven useful, since Argentinean society has had little say in the matter. For almost thirty years now they have had to watch the changing policies regarding justice. This tug-of-war has made them tired.

The opinions about truth-telling are more positive compared to the opinions about justice. Not everyone resides in lack of truth-telling and there is a minority who is of the opinion that truth-telling has been achieved. As opposed to the zero people who are of the opinion that justice has been achieved, this is a positive interpretation. Therefore truth-telling seems more promising for reconciliation than justice. Once again however, different stances complicate the matter; the few people who wish for more truth-telling are mostly residents of Retiro who accentuate the need for guerrilla truth-telling.

Apart from this difference stance in the two neighborhoods, some striking similarities can be found. These similarities can be described as lack of interest, knowledge and faith. Lack of interest is observed in both neighborhoods; people are tired of the everlasting discussion about the dirty war. Lack of impact on the lives of residents of both neighborhoods can be named as a cause. In Retiro the fact that guerrilla wrongdoing impacted more than military wrongdoing also has to do with this particular opinion.

Lack of knowledge is a second similarity observed in both neighborhoods; however it occurs more in the Villa. In Retiro and in Villa 31 lack of impact of the dirty war and lack of education can be named as explanations. However, in the Villa people hardly receive schooling, whereas in Retiro people receive good schooling. The people in Retiro that express lack of knowledge were young during the dirty war, thus went to school in the years after the restoration of democracy. It is reasonable to expect that in these years schools were still struggling to find a way to educate about the matter; hence the lack of knowledge of the people that went to school in this period. Also, the fact that many people in Villa 31 experienced the period living in the countryside, where the dirty war impacted less than in Buenos Aires, is an explanation. In Retiro another explanation is that it is possible that family members were involved in the dirty war, since many families have a military background. When a family-member is involved, what often happens is that the subject is not discussed at home, since it was a taboo subject, which can lead to lack of knowledge.

Concerning justice and truth-telling, a third similarity between the inhabitants of both neighborhoods comes into play: lack of faith. This becomes apparent in the fact that many people reside in lack of justice and truth-telling. Regarding justice however lack of faith is bigger compared to lack of faith in truth-telling. Lack of interest, knowledge and faith all interplay with each other and thereby maintain each other.

The existence of a collective memory concerning the dirty war can be questioned. The official history proclaimed by the government is focused on military wrongdoing. In Villa 31 this collective memory is shared, whereas in Retiro it meets resistance. In Retiro the theory of the two devils, which was valid in the eighties, still lives on in private discussions. According to Giesen (Alexander et. al. 2001), collective memory is supposed to unify a nation. However; Retiro and Villa 31 seem to be extremely divided. Therefore, the usefulness of the term collective memory can be questioned. Robben's (2005) distinction between collective memory of society as a whole and social memory as a group-specific condition is of use here. The armed forces and the human right movement can have different social memories according to Robben, both having suffered from decades of violence. Something similar occurs in the neighborhoods of research; in Retiro and in Villa 31 people have different social memories of the dirty war. Thus for this research the term social memory is of more use than collective memory.

Concerning trauma it thus can be said that there exist two different sorts of social trauma in the two neighborhoods. People in Retiro seem more traumatized by the guerrilla bombings than by military actions. However, they do not ask for attention concerning this trauma, since they realize it is not politically correct. In Villa 31 the victims of the dirty war express lack of interest and faith, which is possibly an expression of trauma. Regarding truth-telling for example, all five victims claim that everything is known and they use this argument to argue that it is time to leave the past for what it is and move on. It seems that these victims are repressing the traumatizing events in order to be able to deal with it. Repression is an expression of trauma and usually occurs immediately after the traumatizing event (Robben 2005), but it is possible that this phase of repression has not ended for these victims. Life in the Villa is tough and people experience hardship after hardship. Dealing with the eradications during the dirty war is not the only difficulty they have had to face during their lives. This realization opens up the possibility that these victims have had no time to mourn and process their trauma; repression has become a continuous stage which is needed to be able to deal with the hardship of everyday life. A second possibility is that, like the rest of society, they are more traumatized by the never-ending debate about the subject than by the dirty war itself, and therefore wish to give the subject a rest.

The perception people in both neighborhoods have of reconciliation is not a hopeful one. Freeman and Hayner (2003) correctly observed that reconciliation is more a process than an

objective. The process of reconciliation is difficult. Freeman and Hayner also remarked that justice and truth-telling do not automatically lead to reconciliation. Acknowledgement by perpetrators is equally important. Apart from the Scilingo-case however, this does not occur frequently. Reconciliation between victim and victimizer remains difficult according to the inhabitants of both neighborhoods, since victimizers do not acknowledge their wrongdoing. Of course, people in the Villa focus on military perpetrators, whereas people in Retiro focus on guerrilla perpetrators. Therefore it can be concluded that reconciliation between left and right in Argentina does not look hopeful, since opinions about the dirty war are still too strongly divided. Left blames right, right on its turn blames left and compromises are far to be sought. Collective memory remains a struggle.

Differences and similarities in perception of what happened during and after the dirty war have been discussed. Of course, one has to take into account that this research only speaks for the residents of Retiro and Villa 31. Buenos Aires consists of many other neighborhoods and shantytowns. Knowing of the sharp division in opinion between the inhabitants of Retiro and Villa 31, further research concerning this different stance is advisory, since it has remained underexposed until now. More knowledge and recognition of the different stances concerning the dirty war might spur a better understanding of how to deal with this dark period of history.

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## Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

### Villa 31:

- Alicia. 62 years old. Runs a diner. 29-04-2010.<sup>108</sup>
- Alicia Galindo. 48 years old. Runs a diner. 02-04-2010.
- Andrea Cardozo. 57 years old. Housewife. 10-03-2010.
- Diego David Dornet. 16 years old. Scholar & delivery boy. 10-03-2010.
- Jose Alfredo Rodriguez. 23 years old. Singer. 22-04-2010.
- Jose Rodriguez. 48 years old. Baker. 17-03-2010.
- Marcelo Mansilla. 42 years old. Administrative worker of the municipal government. 17-03-2010.
- *Oscar Vallejos*. 50 years old. Newspaper salesman. 01-04-2010.
- Ruben Alberto Segundo. 27 years old. Courier of correspondence. 10-03-2010.
- Rufino Campos. 43 years old. Taxi driver. 19-05-2010.
- Sandra Viviana Choque. 49 years old. Cleaning lady. 16-03-2010.
- Tapia Theofilo. 68 years old. Runs a diner. 22-04-2010.
- Maria Flora Cespedes Zurita. 46 years old. Cooperative co-worker. 18-05-2010.

### Retiro:

- Agustin Badino. 30 years old. Financial manager. 15-04-2010.
- Betina. 71 years old. Retired teacher. 14-05-2010.
- Carmen Maria. 72 years old. Retired international trade employee. 27-04-2010.
- Cecilia Garcia. 37 years old. Notary. 16-03-2010.
- Felipe Videla. 22 years old. Student. 31-03-2010.
- Josefina Constenla. 66 years old. Professor & editor of a magazine. 18-03-2010.
- Lucas Libardi. 23 years old. Financial employee of an agricultural company. 13-05-2010.

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<sup>108</sup> Pseudonyms are marked in italics. The date refers to the date of the interview.

- Monica Martinez. 44 years old. Lawyer. 16-03-2010.
- Maria Nieve Errozarena. 48 years old. Teacher. 06-04-2010.
- Maria Ester Amorrortu. 67 years old. Real estate agent. 26-04-2010.
- Maria Hilda. 70 years old. Retired teacher. 17-03-2010.
- Maria Angelica Martinez Carrera. 82 years old. Retired teacher. 21-04- 2010.
- Pablo Ferari. 20 years old. Student. 08-04-2010.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

### *Questions about during the dirty war:*

1. ¿Como ha experimentado los años 76 – 83?
2. ¿Que recuerdos tiene sobre esta época?
3. ¿Ha tenido alguna experiencia mala durante los años 76 – 83 por lo que estaba sucediendo durante estos años? En tal caso: ¿Que tipo de experiencia?
4. ¿Pasó algo durante estos años que le impresionó mucho? En tal caso: ¿Que?
5. ¿Como vivó este acontecimiento?
6. ¿En que medida tuvo alguna influencia lo que sucedió durante estos años en su vida personal en el pasado?
7. ¿Pasó algo en específico que le influenció en su vida personal? En tal caso: ¿Que?
8. ¿Pasó algo en específico que influenció la vida personal de alguien cerca de usted? En tal caso: ¿Que?
9. ¿En que medida todavía tiene alguna influencia lo que sucedió durante estos años en su vida personal hoy en día?
10. ¿En que medida todavía tiene alguna influencia lo que sucedió durante estos años en la vida personal de alguien cerca de usted hoy en día?

### In Retiro:

11. ¿Conoce usted el SIDE? En tal caso: ¿Qué sabe del SIDE?
12. ¿Conoce usted la historia de la hija de Lambruschini? En tal caso: ¿Qué es la historia?

### In the Villa:

13. ¿Conoce usted el padre Mujica? En tal caso: ¿Qué sabe usted de la vida de el?

### *Questions about after the dirty war concerning justice:*

14. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los militares quienes han desaparecido a personas durante los años 76 – 83?
15. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los militares quienes han mandado la desaparición de personas durante esta época?
16. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los militares quienes han participado con respecto a la adopción ilegal?
17. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los autores en el gobierno quienes han desaparecido a personas?
18. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los autores en el gobierno quienes han mandado la desaparición de personas?

19. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los autores en el gobierno quienes han participado con respecto a la adopción ilegal?
20. ¿En que medida se ha castigado suficiente a los guerrilleros por las desapariciones que han causado ellos?
21. ¿En que medida se ha compensado suficiente a las víctimas de lo que pasó durante los años 76 – 83?
22. ¿Recuerda usted algún proceso en específico que había después de esa época? En tal caso: ¿Que proceso?
23. ¿Que opina sobre este proceso en específico? ¿Los castigos eran demasiados altos/bajos según usted?
24. ¿Conoce a Julio Lopez? En tal caso: ¿Que opinas de lo que paso?
25. ¿Que es su opinión sobre los procesos que se han vuelto a abrir hace poco? ¿Tiene fe en los juicios?
26. ¿Hay suficiente justicia con respeto a padre Mujica/la hija de Lambruschini?
27. ¿Hay/había juicios relacionado al barrio que tienen que ver con la dictadura?

*Questions about after the dirty war concerning truth-telling:*

28. ¿En que medida se ha llegado a descubrir todo lo que pasó durante los años 76 – 83 según usted?
29. ¿Que opina sobre la comisión verdad y justicia que había después de esa época?
30. ¿Sobre que acontecimientos descubrieron la verdad?
31. ¿Sobre que acontecimientos requiere más información?
32. ¿Ha dicho el gobierno cosas que no son verdad según usted? En tal caso: ¿Que cosas?
33. ¿Han dicho los militares cosas que no son verdad según usted? En tal caso: ¿Que cosas?
34. ¿Han dicho los guerrilleros cosas que no son verdad según usted? ¿Que cosas?
35. ¿Ha escuchado sobre capitán Scilingo? En tal caso: ¿Que opina sobre este acontecimiento?
36. ¿Que opina usted sobre Kirchner que ha dicho que ha sido capturada durante la dictadura?
37. ¿Se sabe todo sobre la historia del padre Mujica?

*General questions:*

38. ¿Que hace para ganar dinero; que ocupación tiene?
39. ¿En que medida le ha afectado el crisis de 2001?
40. ¿Cual es el nivel de enseñanza más alto que ha terminado?
41. ¿Con que tipo de gente asocia en su vida diaria? Piensa en: familia, gente de ese barrio, gente de otros barrios, gente de trabajo, gente de tus/sus estudios, gente de tu/su escuela,



etcétera.

42. ¿Conoce a y asocia con personas fuera de la capital? En tal caso: ¿Como se conocen?
43. ¿Le gusta leer la prensa diariamente? ¿U otro medio de información tal vez?
44. ¿Puede describirme que hace en un día normal?
45. ¿Esta activo de manera políticamente? En tal caso: ¿Que partido tiene su preferencia?
46. ¿Que le enseñaron en la escuela con respecto a la dictadura?
47. ¿De donde sale su conocimiento de lo que paso durante la dictadura?
48. ¿Que opina de la inseguridad?

### Appendix 3: Posters hung during the 24th of March

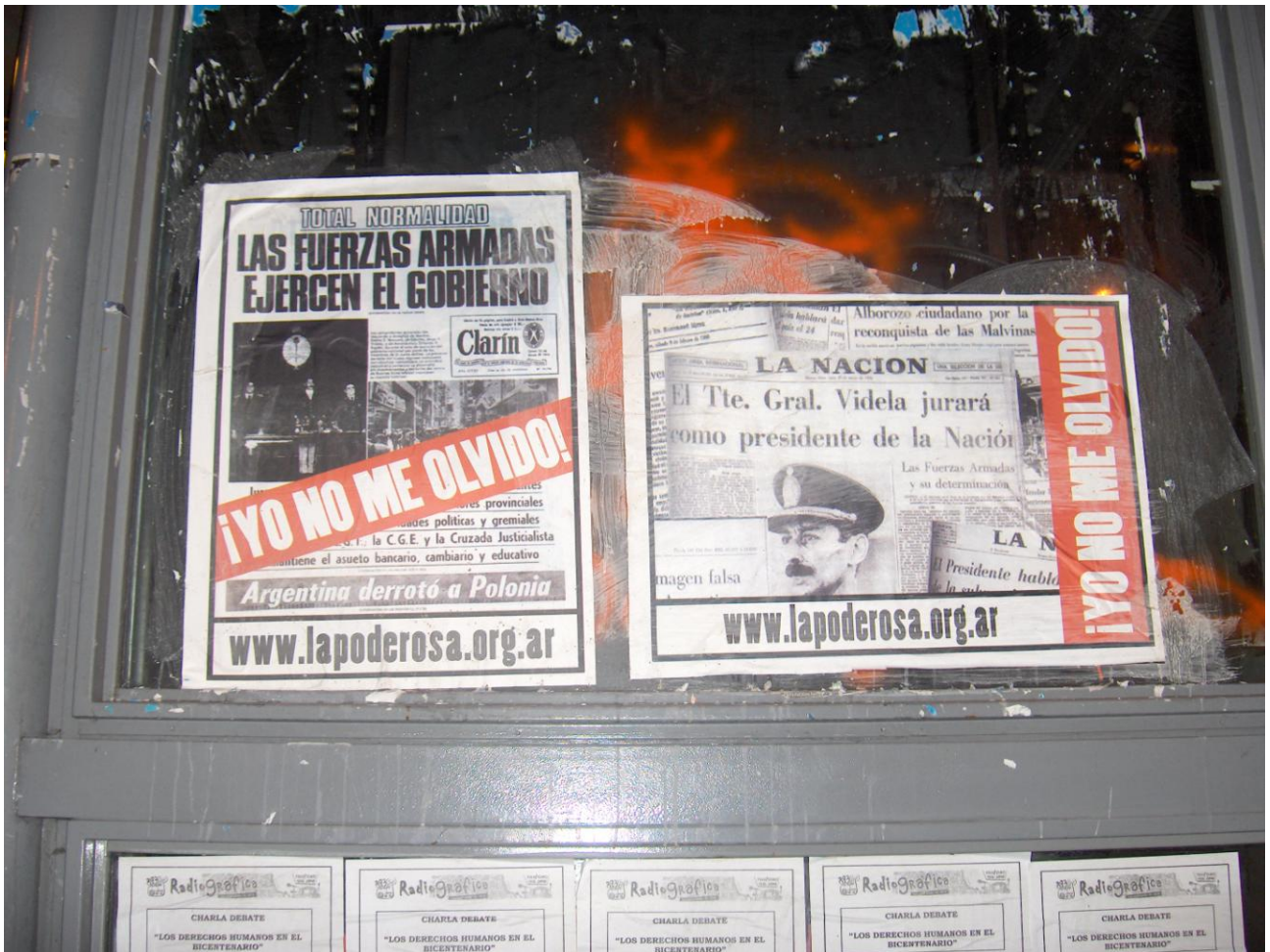


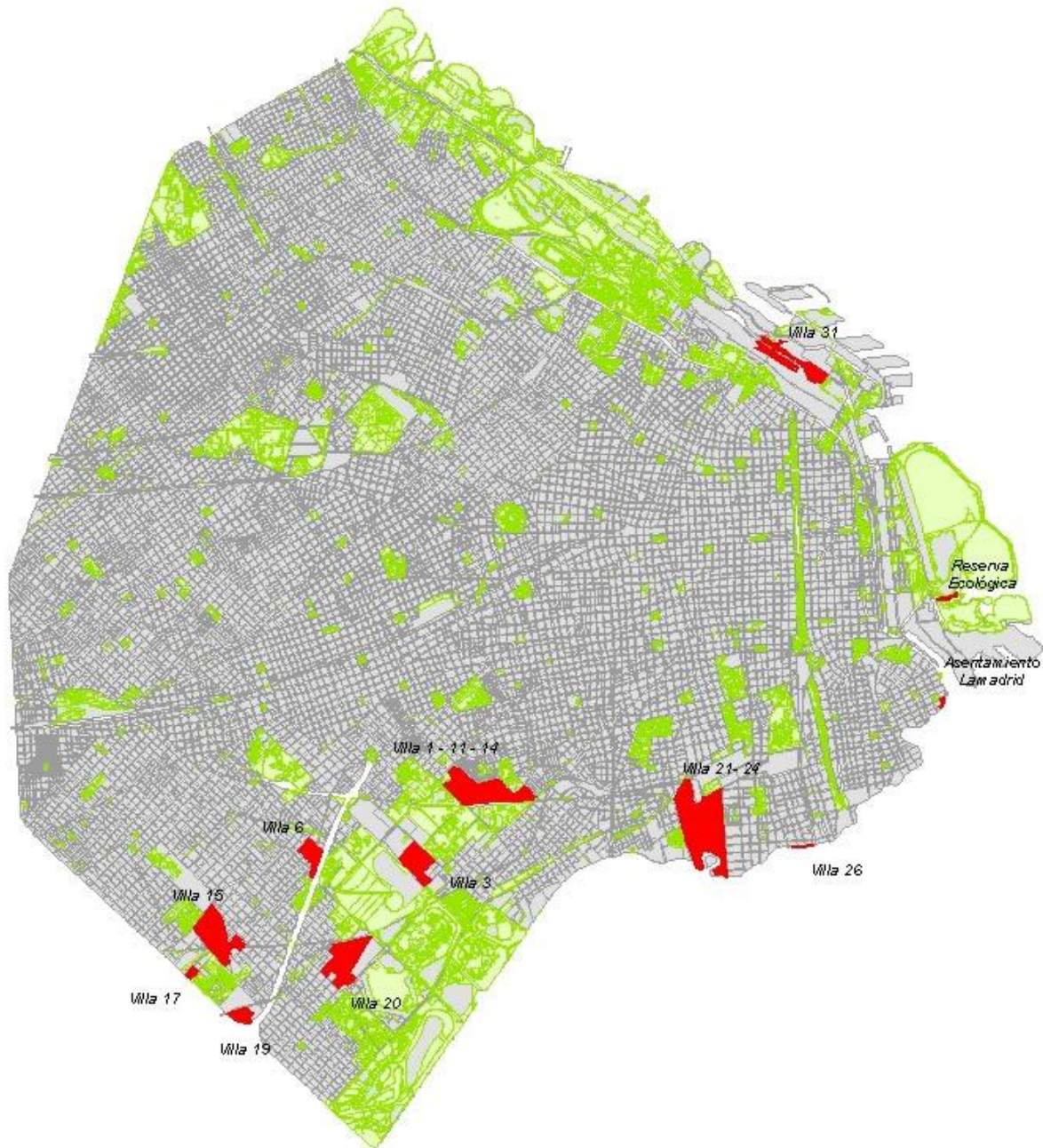
Photo taken by Floor Ketting.

#### Appendix 4: Location Retiro and Villa 31



Source: Buenos Aires Enjoy It.

# Villas



Source: Buenos Aires – Gobierno de la Ciudad.

## Appendix 5: Railway that separates Villa 31 from Retiro



Photo taken by Floor Ketting.

## Appendix 6: Contrast between Villa 31 and Retiro



Photo taken by Floor Ketting.

## Appendix 7: Father Mujica's grave



Photo taken by Floor Ketting.

## Appendix 8: Commemoration days of father Mujica's death



Photo taken by Floor Ketting: 11-05-2010.





Photo taken by Floor Ketting: 16-05-2010.