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**Performing future affiliations at Argentine spaces of memory<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction**

In the aftermath of devastating military dictatorships, one of the most substantial ways in which Latin America's Southern Cone has worked to cultivate a dynamic and politically significant memory of its traumatic recent past is by transforming former sites of repression and political terror into spaces of commemoration and collective mourning. Despite repeated official attempts to undermine—whitewash even—the magnitude of the crimes committed during the military dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983), Chile (1973-1990) and Uruguay (1973-1985), the Southern Cone is home to a dynamic set of monuments, museums, archives

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and intangible creative practices—what Pierre Nora famously termed “realms of memory” (1984)—that continue the vital work of keeping memory at the center of public life.

Within this context, this article focuses on three of Argentina's most emblematic memory "museums" (for want of a less tricky term): the former-ESMA Museum of Memory in Buenos Aires; “La Perla” complex on the outskirts of Córdoba (Argentina's third city, located some 600km from Buenos Aires in the center of the country); and the Provincial Memory Archive (formerly known as the “Department of Police Information” or “D2”), also located in the city of Córdoba. Rather than thinking of these museums in the normative sense, as clearly demarcated spaces in which both narratives, archives and objects recalling the traumatic past become crystallised and static, we argue that these spaces have been created and curated in ways that make them vital contemporary sites of encounter and, as a result, live agents of political engagement and change. To illustrate this, we discuss here a constellation of four activities and encounters that have taken place in the aforementioned memory museums in the past year.

In the mid-2000s, the official mandate of a collective and public “right to” these formerly clandestine and unacknowledged “spaces of concentration” (Calveiro 2014) concurred with President Néstor Kirchner’s decision to repeal the controversial amnesty laws that had been in place since the late 1980s. Together, these initiatives constituted an important statement of what we might call “spatial justice” (Harvey 1990 and Soja, 2010), leading not only to the reopening of (currently ongoing) trials that have sought to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights violations, but also setting the scene for the emergence of broader societal debates around questions of justice and responsibility. Moreover, during the so-called “Kirchnerist period” (2003-2015), the national government adopted mourning as question of a state. By embracing the flags of the victims, the three successive Kirchner administrations—the late Néstor Kirchner from 2003 to 2007, followed by his wife Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner from 2007 to 2015—showed how the resonances of trauma did not only concern direct victims, but could be adopted by those who were considered to be “illegitimate” witnesses. It is within this fertile context of openness and accountability regarding the past that human rights activists, creative practitioners and curators set about turning these former detention centers into dynamic public spaces of commemoration; spaces that have creatively cultivated a shared sense of affiliation with the traumatic past. Unlike those museums that have been purpose-built—the brand new memory museum in Santiago de

Chile with its austere geometric forms, for example, or the deliberately crafted “voids” that cut through the pristine Libeskind Building in Berlin—what each of these sites in Argentina has in common is that it is a recovered space that operated previously as a clandestine detention center during the 1976-83 military dictatorship. This makes these memory “museums” complex locations indeed, as they have a topographical, as well as a symbolic, relationship to the past. They are not blank canvasses, but the scenes of the most horrific crimes, the material site of multiple traumas, both private and collective.

With this in mind, this article wishes to focus not on the topography of these museums—their location and monumental function as *places* of memory, that is—but on their spatiality: the dynamic and vital role they play as *spaces* of memory. We understand space here to be socially produced (Lefebvre 1992), as “a practiced place” (De Certeau 1984, 117) that is embodied in the encounters and interactions that take place therein. In addition, we take on board, the work of North American scholar and visual artist Laurie Beth Clark who contends that sites of memory function as ‘heterotopias’ (Clark 2011, 69) or ‘countersites’. In particular, she thinks of spaces of trauma as “bracketed-off mirrors of reality where dilemmas of the parallel (real) world are played out within more limited parameters” (Clark 2011, 69). There, visitors have the rare opportunity to perform their identities in a public space and be ‘socially transformed’. Bearing Clark’s insights in mind, we would like to consider some of the particular dramas that took place in Argentina during the dictatorship and its aftermath. These social dramas relate mainly to a process of transference, a process of grief that struggled to circulate from direct victims to more expanded audiences. By looking at these four recent encounters that have taken place in the ESMA, “La Perla” and the Provincial Memory Archive in Córdoba, we wish to explore not only the extent to which memory museums have become live installations for on-going political struggles in Argentina, but also advocate for the importance of creating and curating designated memory museums as dynamic spaces of encounter—both local and transnational—where new agents of memory can enter the stage and where struggles new and old can intersect with one another. By showcasing the expertise gained in the region, this article hopes to contribute to an emerging field of transcultural knowledge that explores how the resonances of traumatic pasts continue to shape the present of communities while creating new legacies for the future. Such knowledge may be useful to a transnational generation of memory scholars and practitioners, as it inspires strategies for the making of memory spaces not only across broader geographies

affected by public loss, but through processes that seek to foster wider public engagement with traumatic pasts.

### **1. ESMA Museum: an unplugged installation.**

Among the symbols of Argentina's dictatorship, the former Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA) is arguable the most iconic. Something of a small village inside one of the wealthiest areas of Buenos Aires, it covers 170,000 square meters and hosts 45 buildings. When democracy was restored in 1983, the question of what to do with the ESMA was a source of public anxiety: should it be closed, converted into a museum or simply demolished? Some 20 years later, on 24 March, 2004—the anniversary of the 1976 military coup—the recently-elected president Néstor Kirchner removed the portraits of the Military Junta from the main building, a gesture marking the official transfer of the grounds to civilians. He promised, in front of a large crowd, to convert the site into a “space of memory”. While there was not necessarily consensus as to how to go about doing this, victims' associations, human rights groups and the national government hosted a public contest inviting civilian society to suggest how the space could and should be reoccupied.<sup>2</sup> Now home to national offices and archives, the headquarters of victims' associations, a public TV channel, the dynamic Haroldo Conti Cultural Centre and the brand-new Malvinas-Falklands war museum, the space regularly hosts a wide range of cultural manifestations, both national and international.

Yet, following the military's eviction from the ESMA compound, one building stood empty: the former Officers' Casino. This haunted building had served as the largest of the 340 clandestine detention centers that operated across the country. More than 5,000 men and women—mostly leftwing activists—were held captive and tortured there. Most were then drugged and cast into the river—weighted down and still alive—from the planes on the so-called “death flights”. The building also contained a maternity room where the babies of pregnant political prisoners were born. Most of the 500 babies born there were stolen by military personnel, or families close to them, and raised under falsified identities. Others were

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<sup>2</sup> As Jens Andermann noticed, there were three main positions: the testimonial, which proposed keeping the entire site as “unalterable heritage”; the museal, which argued for the “pedagogical functions” of the space; and the performative, which claimed that only by “handing over” the place to “future-oriented artistic activities” the space could be wrested from death (Andermann 2012, 85). The space now witnesses a particular combination of the three different strategies.

illegally given to unsuspecting couples. The dilapidated Officers' Casino remained empty and almost untouched for years. It only opened for free guided tours based on survivors' testimonies. In May 2015, a Museum of Memory was inaugurated in the building. A team of experts led by art historian Alejandra Naftal—a survivor herself—set about designing the curatorial script, which had to respect one crucial constraint: since the building was, *is*, still a crime scene under investigation, it cannot be altered as that would amount to tampering with legal evidence.

“To light up without altering” was, then, the guiding idea that shaped the museum; floating walkways, explanations on Perspex plaques, virtual and holographic projections turned the former detention center into a kind of pop-up installation—as easily dismantled without trace as it was mounted—thus ensuring that visitors can circulate and be informed without intervening in the materiality of the space. While some detractors described the site as a “show of lights”, others praised it as “one of the most carefully curated trauma museums of the world”. Despite these constraints, or almost certainly because of them, the ESMA Museum has emerged as a “counter-site” of memory, never more so than under president Mauricio Macri’s soon-to-be-ended conservative administration which sought to undermine existing public discourses on memory, while shifting them from the center of political and public life.<sup>3</sup>

### **Trans-generational encounters ;*Vivas Nos Queremos!*/We Want Us Alive!**

In tune with the “performative turn” in the field, the ESMA Museum exists as a live space of memory, which aims to reach new audiences. Every last Saturday of the month, special guests are invited to engage in conversation with the audience while touring around the ESMA Museum. Survivors, relatives, lawyers, journalists, philosophers, artists and even comedians have intervened in the established “5 o’clock visit”. Each new visit highlights the liminal character of the building; each organic encounter opens up new possible narratives both in the present and towards the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Macri’s administration tried to dismiss major achievements of the local human rights’ movement calling the number of disappeared into question and revitalizing apologetic two demons’ narratives, in which state violence was justified as “violence on both sides” (Pittaluga 2007).

Today, March 30, 2019, we have the opportunity to attend the 5 o' clock visit within the context of the exhibition “Ser mujeres en la ESMA. Testimonios para volver a mirar” [Being women at ESMA: testimonies to look again], a temporary exhibition which aims at revising the experience of captivity from a gendered perspective. The special guests, on this occasion, are five women who were held captive at ESMA during the dictatorship: Ana Testa, Norma Suzal, Marta Álvarez, Graciela García Romero and Liliana Pontoriero. For some, it is their first time in the building since they were held captive there. The women have had a private tour around the exhibition before the visit begins. “This is both timely and necessary”, they agree, their faces barely containing the emotion.

In front of the Museum's main entrance the atmosphere buzzes with excitement. More than 300 people attend the event, mostly women and young people, many of whom were not yet born when state terror took place. Green scarves—a now iconic symbol of the legal abortion campaign which has seen over a million women take to the streets in protest—decorate the crowd. Although Senators rejected the law on the 8 August 2018, having been initially approved by congress, the “free-abortion-at-public-hospitals” tagline has not lost momentum. The green scarves are a direct reference to the white handkerchiefs worn by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayor since the late 1970s. The faces of the disappeared, which cover a transparent wall just outside the building—another curatorial technique that enables their presence to be “liberated” from imprisonment—look different today. The fresh faces that congregate in front of the building today match the young faces of the portraits frozen in time, which accompany us on this intergenerational walk of discovery and exchange.

As we enter with our group, of immediate note are the very visible edits that have been made to the Perspex panel exhibiting the welcoming explanation about the ESMA. Hand-written modifications in bright purple marker demand gender equality in the language in the description. As is the case with most languages which gender, mixed plurals automatically default to the masculine form. These amendments have been made throughout the building. “When a museum does not speak”, states an adjacent panel, introducing the curatorial frame for the exhibition, which aims to intervene and correct the silence within the museum's script about sexual violence. As one of the survivors remarks during the exhibition launch: “Feminism has entered the ESMA and will never leave it again”.

During the visit, there is a bustling interactivity between the different generations as they encounter the testimonies of 28 women taken from files on the ESMA trials and in which they recall their times of captivity. As footages in the “I accuse” section of the exhibition states: during the historic 1985 Junta Trials, sexual crimes were considered to be part of and equivalent to other acts of violence. The gendered-dimension of state terror was not fully recognized until the trials were reopened. Even then, its recognition as a “systematic practice” was slow. Despite some convictions, none of the ESMA’s Task Force have yet to be prosecuted on these grounds. “The guards used to say that women were much more dangerous than men”, it reads under the initials A. B, kidnapped from December 1978 to August 1979. “Our bodies were their war trophy. That is quite common, if not very common, in sexual violence. [...] And this was no exception”, reads another signed under the initials S.L, captive between December 1976 to June 1978. The narrative also highlights acts of solidarity and companionship through which captives attempted to respond to sexual slavery, terror and torture.

The experiences of women during the dictatorship have been provocatively framed within the contemporary feminist imaginary through the use of taglines belonging to the contemporary feminist movement: *The personal is political*, *Sororidad* [Sisterhood], *Vivas Nos Queremos* [We Want Us Alive]. The result is vibrant: everyday forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence experienced in the building during the 1970s are liberated from the paradigm of victimhood eyes and recast into a collective act of resistance. Never is this more stirring than in the final gathering in the *Salon Dorado* [Golden Lounge], where habitually the names of the disappeared are pronounced. Past and present become beautifully and electrifyingly entangled; the contemporary feminist uprising provides fresh eyes to look back the experience of captivity. The survivors with their trembling voices address their *compañeras*, new and old: “We are here thanks to you, thanks to the green scarves”, one of them states, speaking specifically to the “revolutionary daughters”. The audience bursts into applause, a flurry of green scarves fan the air and impulse the winds of change. “The patriarchy must and will fall”, they chant, as they salute the strength and resolve of these women, who have overcome their sense of guilt and shame surrounding their experiences of sexual violence. “You have reinvigorated the feminist fight. You allowed us to realize how much women survivors have been territory of dispute”, claims another. In a country that still sees almost daily occurrences of femicide, with relatively few convictions, gender-based violence might well be the dark and unspoken continuity between dictatorship and democracy making this

alliance between past and present, between survivors and bright young activists, not only timely, but urgent.

On this autumn afternoon at the ESMA, the museum has acted as a “contact zone”, to use James Clifford’s seminal expression (1987). It emerged as a “site of passage and contestation” (Clifford 1987, 210), in which women of different generations have revisited their activism through the prism of another generation. In four years of existence, the ESMA museum has not only survived the conservative turn in national politics, but it has dared to transform itself in line with an important wave of changes taking place in society as a whole. The silent purple intervention has now become a permanent part of the museum’s script, as proof of the current entanglement between gender politics and human rights activism. The museum lives and breathes in the present as a space of memory that looks openly towards its activist future.

## **2. La Perla: Activism (and disobedience) over time**

*Memoria. Verdad. Justicia* [Memory. Truth. Justice]: three fundamental terms in the lexicon of post-dictatorship transition and memory, inscribed here with all their symbolic weight on the three concrete pillars marking the entrance to La Perla, the second largest former Clandestine Detention Centre in Argentina.<sup>4</sup> Between 2,200 and 2,500 political detainees were held in captivity here during the dictatorship period. Most of them are still missing, or remain “disappeared”. Despite being located—albeit at some remove—along the highly transited main road that leads to the province’s most popular tourist resort, Villa Carlos Paz, the site seems quite literally to be falling off the map. Upon arrival, the blustering wind and the constant murmur of cars speeding past accentuate its solitude within the surrounding landscape. Contrary to other former detention centers-turned-museums—namely here the ESMA and the Provincial Memory Archive of Córdoba—La Perla deviates from the concentrationary model (Calveiro 2014), as it is located on the outskirts of the city of Córdoba in the middle of an extensive buffer zone of land belonging to the military.

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<sup>4</sup> The full official term used in Spanish is *Centro Clandestino de Detención Tortura y Exterminio* (CCDTyE).



During the dictatorship, Córdoba was a laboratory of repression with regards to one particular dimension of the civil conflict: the worker-student alliance that took over the streets of the provincial capital in May 1969 in a movement of civil disobedience, known as the *Cordobazo*. Removed from the city's urban fabric, La Perla served as the ideal place not only for dismantling, but also disciplining, that possibility. On March 24, 2007, the space was by presidential decree restored to civil society and transferred to the Provincial Commission for Memory. Two years later, it opened as a Space for Memory and the Promotion of Human Rights.

Today, August 7, 2019, we have come to visit La Perla as part of a creative-academic documentary film project that seeks to record the local imaginaries of post-dictatorship Argentina. Emiliano Fessia, director of the memory museum, the son of disappeared militants, and an active member of the political group H.I.J.O.S., comes to reception to welcome Silvia Villegas, the “disobedient” daughter of a military perpetrator. She grew up in a designated neighborhood located within this expansive military territory, but has never visited the space before. We are all anxious. Emiliano and Silvia seem to get along well as they wander around the installations. What begins as a guided tour soon turns into the affective flow of very personal stories and uncodifiable intensities. As they walk together around the site, their embodiment of this particular interaction weaves a new thread into the collective narrative producing the space of memory in La Perla. Emiliano is warm and solicitous towards Silvia. Not only is he sensitive to how difficult this visit must be from her perspective, but he is open to sharing his “ownership” of the memory of trauma.

Silvia is loosely associated with the group *Historias Desobedientes* [Disobedient (Hi)stories], although she is clear in her divergence from their position as “daughters and sons *of...*”. She refuses to be defined by her family tie to a history of repression. Indeed, the descendants of perpetrators are, in many ways, orphans by choice. In some cases, they have gone through legal process of disaffiliation in relation to their parents. They have had to rebuild their own identities in the public sphere. An actor and dramatic coach herself, Silvia has been involved in films that have dealt with the memory of dictatorship. On this occasion, she seems to forget about the presence of the camera and our filmmaker Alejo Moguillansky, accompanying her visit. Mariana Tello Weiss, who worked at La Perla for more than 10 years, argues that this encounter can be read in relation to the changing profile of what she calls “special visitors” to the site. To begin with, these special visitors were mostly relatives

of the disappeared; then they were survivors; then relatives and survivors who had not declared at the trials. “Now”, she says, “the special visitors are the relatives of the repressors. [...] They have another type of link with history. It is a (hi)story that marks and hurts them. They have to go through another kind of grief. Fortunately, they have somewhere to go. Spaces of memory can also be places of containment”, she argues. For Tello, this change is also related to the ongoing trials that have helped the relatives of perpetrators to reorder versions of the recent past and establish different forms of responsibility. “Once this is clear, you can then talk about all the grey areas: what is the status of the perpetrators’ descendants? Are they also victims? At least, the trials also liberated them. They no longer need to take responsibility for them”, she argues.

This shift in “special visitors” speaks about the tensions and hierarchies within the human rights movement in Argentina. The disobedient daughters and sons are a new branch, another layer in the traditional paradigm of the “wounded family” of victims (Sosa 2014, 65), evoking the community bound by blood ties that has prevailed as an instrument for political interventions for more than 30 years. If the network of organizations created by mothers, grandmothers, children, and relatives of the disappeared articulated their demands for justice by evoking their biological ties to the missing, in recent years memory museums such as La Perla have emerged as heterotopic spheres capable of hosting and sheltering alternative encounters. Silvia’s presence at the site bears witness to this. In her case, her “disobedient” activism goes against bloodline ties.

She weaves her way pensively through the brightly decorated silhouettes that mark the presence of absence. She confronts a large photograph of Luciano Menendez, the General who orchestrated the repressive apparatus in Córdoba, on the day of his historic conviction for human rights violations. This brings the painful reminder of her father offering her a framed portrait of himself alongside Menendez, an impossible gift that she viscerally rejected. Eventually she wanders into two small exhibitions of objects. The first—“Objetos desobedientes/Disobedient Objects—is also capturing the imagination of a lively local school group visiting the former camp. It exhibits objects associated with the activism of the 1960s and 70s, including vintage clothes and vinyl records. The second is more solemn. (Sobre)vidas [(After)lives], as it is called, displays a collection of objects that former detainees managed to get out of the camp; a humble display of minimal items—a wedding ring, chess pieces made of bread, a cross, a bible, all part of their owners’ everyday lives in

captivity—which nevertheless vibrate, from beneath their unassuming aspect, with the affective power of resistance, solidarity and survival. Most of the objects were left before their owners were “transferred”, which usually meant assassinated on the camp’s premises. The objects survived their owners. As James Clifford argues in his study on museums, objects are “travelers”, “border-crossers” (1997, 213). The objects exhibited at La Perla work very much in this vein, as a “contact zones” (Clifford 1997). Mostly donated by inmates’ relatives, they return to the camp to make public their burden. As Erica Hughes argues, spaces of commemoration “are not merely archives, serving as depositories –they are also sites of community gathering in which the repertoire of memory is rehearsed, enacted and (re)produced” (Hughes 2018, 280). As we are able to witness during Silvia’s visit, the relational conviviality produced between objects, visitors and the materiality of the former camp transcends temporalities and varying relationships to the violent past. It shows how mourning can recreate new communities and inspire future-oriented and disobedient forms of activism.

### **3. “De-archiving” memory: An illuminating tree and budding affiliations**

August 6, 2019: On a clear and balmy winter’s afternoon in Córdoba city, we arrive at the Memory Archive of the Province of Córdoba. The archive can be found nestled along the cobblestone pedestrian Santa Catalina Passage at the very heart of Córdoba’s historic centre. Before it was recovered as a space of memory in 2006, it functioned as the Police Information Department, or “D2”, and a clandestine detention and torture center during the dictatorship. As Calveiro makes clear, the “fragmentary” repressive model in Argentina relied upon the construction of “‘a clandestine and parallel structure’ (*Nunca más* 1991: 56) superimposing an illegal repressive circuit onto the legal one” (2014). The modus operandi of the “D2”, as it was known, is a precise example of this. On one side, it continued to function, as indeed it had prior to the dictatorship, as a jail for those accused of legal infractions. On the other side of the building, it functioned as a clandestine detention and torture center for political prisoners that was cut off completely from the rest of the building and the city outside. Embedded in the thick of the urban landscape, the space is a chilling reminder of the ways in which gross human rights violations are committed in deliberately constructed “blind spots” often located at the very core of everyday urban life.

Standing in front of the archive, prior to entering, two striking inscriptions of note meet the visitor: the first is an imposing portrait of fallen activist Santiago Maldonado, a young artisan who went missing in August 2017 after a violent attack perpetrated by the National Gendarmerie on the Mapuche Lof Cushamen community land in the province of Chubut. This aboriginal community was resisting the occupation of their ancestral lands by a company owned by Luciano Benetton. Months later, after an escalating international campaign demanding his appearance, Maldonado's body was found dead in the waters of a river. His portrait hanging over the Archive's main entrance stands as an evocative reminder that "issues of memory no longer simply concern the past but have become part of the very political legitimacy of regimes today" (Huysen 2003: 94). The second inscription of note is a series of four gigantic fingerprints covering the outer wall of the archive from floor to ceiling. The contours of these fingerprints are poignantly marked out using the names of the disappeared in Córdoba, the collective symbolization of what is normally a marker of identity that is biologically unique. It also contests the narrow association of fingerprinting with staple police identification techniques, something denied even to political prisoners as the entire repressive apparatus aimed at "disappearing" the detainees in every sense of the word via "the negation of their social and civic existence" (Tello Weiss 2012, 143). The memory museum and its archive, before even entering, are clearly codified as a space of collective identity woven through the communal practice of memory.

An unsettling blanket of cool air envelops us as we enter the museum and navigate the dim and claustrophobic labyrinth of passageways that once functioned as a sinister site of detention and repression. The site's violent and clandestine past is laid bare to the visitor; the archways connecting these passageways seem to have been hammered out of bricked-up doorways with a mallet, a hermetic space broken into. There is no attempt to conceal, no attempt to manicure the surroundings. The past is allowed vibrate on the walls. These affective resonances impress themselves upon the visitor's skin, which cannot help but quiver. The layers of texture on the walls are a visual reminder of hidden pasts through the temporalities that are left to co-exist upon a single surface. At one point, five different layers of plaster and paint are visible.

Eventually, we find ourselves in the respite of the open courtyard to the rear of the building, now known as the *Patio de las Luces* [Patio of Lights]. The space begins to bustle as it gradually fills with visitors. The atmosphere is festive. Visitors congregate in particular

underneath the *Memorial de las luces*, a light installation that has illuminated the central patio since March 2013. As retracing the fragility of a broken genealogy, the light installation has 500 little lamps, one for each child abducted during the dictatorship, most of whom have been raised under falsified identities. Over the past four decades, the *Abuelas* [Grandmothers] of Plaza de Mayo have worked tirelessly to recover 130 of them, thanks to the advent of DNA screening enabling the appropriated grandchildren to test their biological identity. Each lamp lit in the patio signals that one of them has been found. Each empty socket waiting for a bulb also urges the search for the other 370 yet to be located.

The feeling of anticipation about becoming part of a very special collective encounter is one of effervescing inner excitement. Javier Matías Darroux Mijalchuk—affectionately known as *nieto #130*, or grandchild #130— will be the first of the dictatorship’s recovered stolen grandchildren to illuminate his own lightbulb, in the flesh. The celebration has become something of a ritual carried out on the patio of the archive since March 2013 every time the steadfast Grandmothers announce with joy that another has been found. Matías was found abandoned as a baby close to the ESMA in Buenos Aires. He now lives in Capilla del Monte, a small town up in the mountains just to the north of Córdoba city.

Voices emerge from the tightly packed crowd at the Archive: “Let it be there, without masks. We are broken; we have been broken. We have been struck by a lighting of violence (...). Of all the ways to celebrate, perhaps this is the most appropriate, the most ours. A celebration that does not fit the words. Only in this brightness of the lamp 130”, reads the local author Eugenia Almeida. As the sun sets on the day, we watch a tangibly moved Matías climb to the top of a ladder to light up lamp number 130. His partner, Vanina, the understated spur behind his quest to know more about his origins, looks on with emotion and admiration. They are surrounded by friends, some who have shared part of this journey, others were until today unknown to them. “This light is yours. *Abuelas* has accompanied you along this way. We are here for you whenever you need us”, says 90-year-old Sonia Torres, the indefatigable President of the Grandmothers Córdoba branch, who offers all the affection of the *Abuelas*’ collective *abrazo* (hug) as she continues her own search. “I feel that this lamp belongs to all of us”, responds Matías. The recovered grandson also hangs a small portrait of each of his disappeared parents—Elena Mijalchuk and Juan Manuel Darroux—among the colorful crocheted flowers of the festively decorated lapacho tree “of life” that sits under the corona of

light created by the installation. Both the lapacho tree and the spotlights speak about broken lineages. More than a site of pain and loss, this evening the Memory Archive feels like a space of creation and restitution. The pervading music of a guitar comforts visitors to tuck into the refreshments whilst sharing their response to the ceremony. The walls do not only embrace the newly recovered grandson, but a whole community that has come together to show its support. Matías's embrace pulsates with warmth, gratitude and joy. The archive emerges as a memory stage on which celebrations are also possible. It suggests another form of care. In this manner, this particular memory archive works actively to "de-archive" the past (its own term), by creating a live space of remembrance that is open to new encounters and affiliations.

### **Epilogue: Towards a transnational form of care**

As Laurie Beth Clark notes in her probing research on 'traumatic tourism' across the world, the vast majority of people visiting sites of trauma have neither a direct nor an inherited affiliation with the site in terms of either victimhood or the legacy of perpetration. They are, she suggests provocatively, "trauma tourists" (Clark 2011, 68), an unsettling combination of terms that interlocks pleasure/leisure with another's pain, pointing to a branch of commercial travel that poses serious ethical, moral and political questions. Yet, as Clark also suggests, learning about those persistent and seemingly irresolvable traumas is also fundamental to any human society. She points to a significant ethical tension between selfie-grabbing "day trippers" and those visitors with a genuine desire to implicate themselves in the memories on display.

Important distinctions also need to be made with regard to Clark's observations when turning to the Argentine case: the first is that the memory museums explored in this article have been an important space for victims and their families. Each of the museums dealt with here has received many victims and witnesses returning to the site of their trauma to recover their past, in many cases to offer their testimonies in trials, signposting the extent to which the legal path has been a main endeavor in the local aftermath of violence. Moreover, given that the haunted presence of the "disappeared" left no bodies to be mourned, relatives and friends of the victims have used these spaces as ad-hoc cemeteries, creating rituals of mourning, commemoration and resistance. Pain is never put to rest in these spaces, but rather "worked through" in collective encounters. Above all, these museums have emerged as civic *spaces*,

embodied and produced in the interactions and encounters that are practiced on these premises. In this vein, survivors, disobedient relatives of perpetrators, new generations of bystanders gather at these sites to get in touch with one another, and become transformed by such encounters. Within these processes, new generations have also managed to embrace and bear witness to trauma, sometimes, from an activist perspective.

It is important, however, to draw a distinction here between Clark's ruminations on "tourists" and what Michel Rothberg recently termed "implicated subjects" (2018). Rothberg draws upon Hannah Arendt's notion of our "vicarious responsibility for things we have not done" (cit. Rothberg 2019) and his own work that advocates for a horizontally "multidirectional", rather than a hierarchically competitive, dialogue across communities, generations, cultures of memory and national contexts (2009). A key agent in this often necessarily agonistic encounter, the "implicated subject", is "neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations in which the positions of victim and perpetrator are possible—even likely—yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles" (Rothberg 2018, 535). It is precisely from this ethical position, which goes beyond victim/perpetrator binaries that spaces of memory invite us to discover their future knowledge: How might they contribute to kindle a collective sense of ownership towards traumatic pasts? How might they encourage a sense of care from multiple communities? As proposed in this article, spaces of memory in Argentina forge an expanded and diversified process of transmission that not only concerns those 'directly affected', but also "implicated subjects" who can also partake in trauma. In this sense, Argentine spaces of memory invite "reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss" (Butler 2003, 10). In different ways, each of the events recounted here has produced encounters within the public sphere that are socially transformative. Rather than seeking a form of closure—an impossible resolution or reconciliation—local spaces of memory provide a stage for conflicting forms of being together after loss. As paradoxical as it sounds, spaces of memory are alive in Argentina. They have managed to emerge as the amplified stage upon which new affiliations can be formed.

Yet, the encounters depicted in this article are all on a national level. What of the transnational possibilities of exchange and solidarity? As we draw to a close, we turn our attention with bated breath to a forthcoming transnational encounter that will take place at the

ESMA in November 2019, as part of the creative-academic project, “Staging Difficult Pasts”. Wojtek Zielmiski, a Polish contemporary visual artist, director and choreographer, will conduct a three-week artistic residency at the ESMA Museum. Bringing his existing ruminations on the Holocaust experience to Argentina, on Saturday 30 November, the finale of this residency, he will stage a public intervention for those attending the monthly 5 o’clock visit; it will be the first time that an event of this kind will have been led by a “foreigner”. Although the outcomes can be hardly predicted, the Polish artist’s intervention already questions how national themes might be reimagined within a transnational frame. At a time when both Poland and Argentina face internal backlashes with regard to cultural memory, Zielmiski’s intervention will provide a further opportunity to test how disparate narratives of victimhood can intersect with one other. His intervention will necessarily test the extent to which audiences are always implicated in larger processes of loss. Will the ESMA museum emerge as a “contact zone”, then, (Clifford 1997) for transnational audiences? Will Zielmiski’s co-habitation with a space of memory that belongs to another instance of historical trauma result in a productive connection between the two, avoid thus the trap of constructing competing narratives and drawing potential lines of transnational solidarity? The experiment sets the stage for exploring common forms of bodily vulnerability that, indeed, call for a transnational sense of care.

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