The New Jewish Argentina

Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone

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CHAPTER TWELVE

"MEMORIES THAT LIE A LITTLE." NEW APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH INTO THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE DURING THE LAST MILITARY DICTATORSHIP IN ARGENTINA

Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan

> I live within the ironic awareness that the very mode in which I delve into the Jewish past represents a decisive break with that past.[1]

Introduction

At the beginning of his *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, Fritzche introduces part of an account by Victor and Eva Klemperer which might be illustrative of the problems that this work will attempt to present. In September 1938, while driving from Dresden to Leipzig, the couple took a break at a truck stop. As they walked into the restaurant, the speeches from the Nazy party rally in Nuremberg were being broadcast on the radio. Whereas the transmission and the speeches broadcast were indicative of the joy and solemnity of the meeting, at the restaurant it was very noisy. Even though all the customers greeted with "Heil, Hitler!", no one was paying attention to the statements made by the Führer's followers. "Truly: Not one of a dozen people paid attention to the radio for even a single second, it could just as well have been transmitting silence or a foxtrot from Leipzig," Victor Klemperer asserts.[2]

Is it that we should stick to the image of the widespread Nazi greeting to check society's support for the regime? Or is it that the racket would rather indicate lack of interest or even opposition from the customers to Nazi policies? The account given by the Kemplerers raises a number of questions that can be carried over to the various actors in the broad

[1] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zajor. Jewish History and Jewish Memory.* (Washington, Harold Bloom, 1989) , 81.

[2] Peter Fritzche, *Vida y muerte en el Tercer Reich.* (Barcelona, Crítica, 2008), 27–28.

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Argentine-Jewish institutional field during the last dictatorship: Is it possible to be a supporter of the regime, indecisive about it, or a rival and fighter against it at one and the same time? If I set out to find every trace of adherence to the military dictatorship in each of the announcements made by the actors under consideration, it might be asserted that the Jewish leadership was "collaborationist" with the regime. But if I were to look for the opposite—just like Passerini, who, in order to prove the widespread resistance to Fascism[3] finds inscriptions in the bathrooms which ridicule the Duce—it might as well be asserted that those same actors questioned the policies established by the Military Junta.

In this regard, the historiographical account—I am not saying anything new—is based on the researcher's questions. But, by failing to suspend our own a prioris on the period or problem under review, to what extent are we in a position to produce a text of historiographic knowledge that adjusts to an illustration of the tensions that signaled the period? The literature devoted to analizing the stance adopted by the Jewish community leadership during the military dictatorship has situated itself on the opposing side of this question.

As early as Jacobo Timerman's account of his days of captivity at the hands of Ramon Camps's squads, an interpretive framework started to consolidate on a harsh moral judgement that condemned, in particular, those in charge of DAIA (Argentine Jewish Community Centers Association) as collaborationists, in the worst of cases, or as indifferent to the demands from the families of the disappeared, in the best. Ignacio Klich,[4] Marcel Zohar,[5] Gabriela Lotersztain,[6] Guillermo Lipis,[7] and Diego Rosenberg[8] (although it is not at the core of his analysis) draw on this perspective condemning the attitude of all those who did not commit to the defense of human rights, and, conversely, enhancing the image of the ones who cooperated with human rights organizations.

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[3] Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of Turin Working Class*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[4] Ignacio Klich, "Política comunitaria durante las Juntas Militares argentinas: La DAIA durante el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional," in Senkman, *El antisemitismo en Argentina*, (Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1986).

[5] Marcel Zohar, *Manda a mi pueblo al Diablo*, (Tel Aviv, Zitrin, 1990) [In Hebrew].

[6] Gabriela Lotersztain, *Los judíos bajo el terror*, (Buenos Aires, Ejercitar la Memoria, 2008).

[7] Guillermo Lipis, *Zikaron-Memoria. Los judíos bajo el Plan Cóndor*, (Buenos Aires, Del Nuevo Extremo, 2010).

[8] Diego Rosemberg, *Marshall Meyer, el rabino que le vio la cara al Diablo*, (Buenos Aires, Capital Intelectual, 2010).

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The question posed by these investigations puts under discussion—with various nuances—this issue: How is it possible that the Jewish leadership did not do anything in view of the clear anti-Semitic bias showed by a regime which caused the detention and disappearance of between 1,500 and 2,000 individuals of Jewish origin? Given the weight of this figure, and a considerable number of testimonies as evidence, Guillermo Lipis, for example, asks: Why was anti-Semitism denied, and why were the disappearances not talked about, thus strengthening, as we have already seen, the notion of the existence of a "flourishing community"?[9]

This work will attempt to deconstruct that question, which tends to be accompanied by a severe ethical judgement. The pages that follow seek to suspend the accusation that fell on the Jewish leadership over their passivity in the face of the anti-Semitism prevailing during the dictatorship, while acknowledging the existence of a *public* manifestation of anti-Semitism, and a *clandestine* one; problematize the notion of "detained-disappeared citizen of Jewish origin", and delve into how a "normalized" way of life developed within a context marked by the *state of emergency*.

The Anti-Semitic Dimension Differentiated during the Military Dictatorship and Its Various Responses

Criticism of the dictatorial regime as to its anti-Semitic nature was recorded early. The issue of anti-Semitism gave material form to a number of objections to the military intervention raised at the international level, even before Argentina became a showcase for the world during the celebration of the World Cup in 1978. A number of "reports" from international organizations revealing human rights violations demonstrate the significance that the "treatment of the Jews" would gain in the accusation of acts of arbitrariness commited by the military: from the Amnesty International Report (1976), and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (1979) to the *Nunca más* report of the CONADEP[10] (National Commission on the Disappeared), and the last Report of the DAIA, the existence of a

[9] Lipis, *Zikaron-Memoria*, 49.

[10] The National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) was an early initiative of Raúl Alfonsín's democratic government, and was made up by prestigious Argentine personalities. It undertook an investigation in order to gather information about the repressive dynamics of the dictatorship, which was later published in the book *Nunca Más*. For a history of CONADEP, and the various editions and readings of its report, see Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca Más*, (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2008).

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"special treatment of the Jews" at the clandestine detention centers has been maintained.

These analyses of anti-Semitism during the last dictatorship have taken on an instrumental nature: the possibility of equating—in part at least—the experience undergone by the Jews during the Holocaust with what happened in Argentina during the military dictatorship.[11] This correlation with the extermination of European Jews provided the basis for regarding the crimes committed in Argentina as genocide and crimes against humanity.[12]

But the instrumental nature of this correlation helped to distinguish between the positions and social attitudes adopted by different actors of the Jewish community during the regime. As in the case of the Holocaust, the accusation of "collaborationists" brought against the Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*) served several actors—from Jacobo Timerman to the Jewish Human Rights Movement and the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Jews—to denounce and condemn those who acted as representatives of the main institutions of the Jewish community.[13]

However, a survey of various corpuses as well as the work published by the actors involved make it possible to suspend certain a prioris concerning the accusation. An analysis of the documents enables us to distinguish, broadly, between two manifestations of "anti-Semitism": a *public* manifestation and a *clandestine* one. Public manifestations of anti-Semitism consisted in the commercial broadcasting of anti-Jewish libels and threats; attacks on community institutions; the use of expressions that characterized everything Jewish as alien to Argentine nature, and even the attempt to enforce the compulsory teaching of the state religion in public education, which was felt as an anti-Semitic official policy. Clan-

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[11] Emmanuel Kahan, "Discursos y representaciones en conflicto sobre la actuación de la comunidad judía durante la última dictadura militar: análisis de los Informes sobre "los detenidos desaparecidos de origen judío", 1984–2007," in Emmanuel Kahan, Laura Schenquer, Damian Setton, and Alicia Dujovne, *Marginados y consagrados. Nuevos estudios sobre la vida judía en Argentina*, (Buenos Aires, Lumiere, 2011).

[12] The request made in 1996 by the Spanish prosecutor Carlos Castresana to the Judge Baltasar Garzón for the perpetrators of state terrorism to be tried for crimes against humanity was based on the consideration that the crimes committed in Argentina carried genocidal connotations given the fact that Argentine citizens of Jewish origin had been particularly subjected to persecution.

[13] For an analysis of the use of the Holocaust in the description of the military dictatorship in Argentina, and the response drawn by Jacobo Timerman's account, see Estelle Tarica, "The Holocaust Again? Dispatches from the Jewish "internal front" in Dictatorship Argentina", in Journal of Jewish Identities* 5:1 (January 2012).

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destine manifestations of anti-Semitism, by contrast, were realized in a less open way, far from the channels of public dissemination. When mentioned in testimonies and reports, it tended to be confused with public anti-Semitism. Clandestine anti-Semitism refers to the manner in which Jews were treated at the clandestine detention centers, and at the various other prison units which housed political prisoners legalized under regulations from the National Executive Power.

After an arduous search into the Argentine Jewish community document archive, it might be said that public anti-Semitism represented a steady concern throughout the period, both to Jewish leaders and to senior government officials. From the outset of the military regime, the leadership of the DAIA presented their demands in view of an impending threat against Jews. In many instances, this brought about active policies from the regime to restrict the scope of public action of such threat. Furthermore, unlike what happened during the third Peronist government, in which their complaints went unheard among government officials, as it can be noted in the work by Leonardo Senkman,[14] during the military dictatorship the leadership of the DAIA managed to reach, on several occasions, the then Minister of Interior, General Albano Harguindeguy, and other officials close to the President.

Through these efforts, some resolutions—unprecedented and quite significant in the context of a dictatorship—were achieved. For instance, decrees forbidding the circulation of publications from Milicia[15] and Odal, confiscation of the issue on the "Graiver case" of *Cabildo*[16] magazine, constraints on the teaching of Civic and Moral Education[17] at schools, and the granting of permission to screen the television series *Holocaust*, in

[14] Leonardo Senkman, "El antisemitismo bajo dos experiencias democráticas: Argentina 1959–1966 y 1973–1976," in Leonardo Senkman (comp.), *El antisemitismo en la Argentina*, (Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989).

[15] According to Martin Andersen, *Milicia* was edited by personnel of the Secretariat of Intelligence (SIDE). Since the beginning of 1976, it published the collection "Biblioteca de Información Doctrinaria", which edited works by Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels and Julius Streicher. See Martin Andersen, *Dossier secreto. El mito de la "guerra sucia" en Argentina*, (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2000).

[16] For an analysis of the magazine *Cabildo* during the military dictatorship, see Jorge Saborido, "El antisemitismo en la Historia argentina reciente: la revista *Cabildo* y la conspiración judía," in *Revista Complutense de Historia de América*, vol. 30, (Madrid, 2004), 209–223, http://revistas.ucm.es/ghi/11328312/articulos/RCHA0404110209A.PDF/.

[17] As shown in the work by Laura Rodriguez, the initiave, proposed during Rafael Llerena Amadeo's office at the Ministry of Education of the Nation, intended to introduce the teaching of Catholic religion in public schools. Due to the opposition from several sectors, including the DAIA, the subject could not be implemented, at least not with its original

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December 1981.[18] Although these are just a few examples, they make it possible for us to see in the community press an active denunciation of local anti-Semitism by the Jewish leadership.[19]

In contrast, clandestine anti-Semitism was regarded differently. Even though the community leaders gained early knowledge of the repressive practices carried out by the military,[20] their public pronouncement on them took place much later. On certain occasions, as when international Jewish agencies denounced the treatment meted out to the Jews held in captivity, those in positions of authority at the main institutions rejected the accusations of anti-Semitism brought against the regime.

But, indeed, it could be said that not only the community leadership denied the existence of anti-Semitism in connection with the treatment to which individuals of Jewish origin detained by the Armed Forces were subjected. Given such early reports on anti-Semitism as those filed by Jewish organizations based on the United States, Jacobo Timerman was the first to raise his voice. As director of the newspaper *La Opinión*, he sent a letter on October 1st 1976 to the US Senator Donald Fraser, then president of the subcommittee dealing with human rights violations in Argentina, in which he took a different position from the one held by Levinson,[21] a representative of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL):

> My newspaper, *La Opinión*, has always cared about that issue [human rights] and has always kept an objective, impartial view, always concerned about the human rights of all the inhabitants of the country. It is in that spirit

objectives. See Laura Rodríguez, *Católicos, nacionalistas y políticas educativas en la última dictadura (1976–1983)*, (Rosario, Prohistoria, 2011).

[18] The permission was granted as a result of the impact created in the public by a report that the DAIA filed after the television broadcast of a controversial interview that the journalist Enrique Llamas de Madariaga held with the engineer Jaime Rozenblum in *Videoshow*.

[19] Throughout the course of the investigation carried out in order to obtain my doctorate in history, the following print media belonging to the network of Jewish institutions were surveyed: *Mundo Israelita, La Luz, Plural, Nueva Sion, Nueva Presencia, El Observador, Informativo DAIA* and *Tiempo*.

[20] The second chapter of my doctoral dissertation analyzes the ways in which the various actors within the Argentine Jewish community expressed their knowledge of the practices carried out around the detention of individuals by the military regime.

[21] On 28 September 1976, Burt Levinson, in his testimony to the subcommittee of the Lower House of the United States of America in charge of looking into the reports on human rights violations perpetrated in Argentina, states that, in that country, Nazism has reached record levels, making reference to the case of Jewish individuals killed in terrorist attacks, and among the people who have disappeared. See "Testimonio de Burton Levinson, Presidente del Comité de Asuntos Latinoamericanos de la ADL sobre antisemitismo en Argentina", 28 September 1976, Archivo Nehemias Resnizky (CES-DAIA).

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> that I feel obliged to point out the danger in listening to biased testimonies, which is what, in my view, is happening within that subcommittee. *La Opinión* has always condemned all forms of violence and, on several occasions, it has stressed that condemning only one of the extremes, be it left or right wing terrorism, means being an accomplice to the other extreme. This leads me, dear Mr. Fraser, to request from you an invitation to testify before that subcommittee, in the belief that my testimony will help understand the human rights of all the people of Argentina without exclusion, and prevent an unnecessary deterioration of the relations between our countries.[22]

Along the same vein, Marshall Meyer, at the annual convention of the World Council of Synagogues held at the beginning of 1977 in Jerusalem, regretted to say that:

> what many Jews would like to believe, that is, that there are pogroms in the streets of Buenos Aires is not altogether true. It is undoubtedly true, however, that I have seldom seen anti-Semitic manifestations so well organized and financed, not only by the Arab League but also by traditional local Fascist circles. But under no circumstances were such anti-Jewish manifestations performed with the consent of Argentine authorities.[23]

Is it possible to conclude from such statements—even those made by people who would afterwards denounce the regime's systematic policy of violation of human rights—that all the actors involved were unaware, at the time, of the fate that awaited the people detained by the security forces? Or, simply, that there were certain limits as to what could and could not be denounced—which is a possibility—or that the repressive policies adopted in order to restore social and political order, widely sensed as inevitable, had gained some degree of acceptance. Judging by the analysis of the kidnapping of Sojnut representatives[24] in Cordoba, made by Haim Avni in an interview with Dov Goldstein, from the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, the characteristics of the repressive system in Argentina were known to the Jewish leadership:

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[22] Jacobo Timerman, "Una carta al subcomité", *La Opinión*, (1 October, 1976).

[23] Column "De semana en semana," *Mundo Israelita*, (19 February 1977).

[24] On 22 July 1976, five emissaries of the Jewish Agency and three Zionist activists were arrested in Cordoba. Their detention stirred Israeli public opinion to the point that Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave priority to the events stating that the emissaries of the Jewish Agency should be regarded as authorized representatives of an Israely public entity. After efforts made before Argentine military officials, all the individuals involved were released on 3 August, thirteen days after the detention. See Joel Barromi, "Israel frente a la dictadura militar argentina. El episodio de Córdoba y el caso Timerman", in Leonardo Senkman and Mario Sznadjer, *El legado del autoritarismo. Derechos humanos y antisemitismo en la Argentina contemporánea*, (Buenos Aires, Nuevo Hacer, 1995).

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> The arrest of the Israeli emissaries must be interpreted in the context of the struggle put up by the Argentine government against the left and its underground organizations. [...] On taking office, the government slogan became "Order and Social Peace", and their inmediate duty has been to fight to the death against leftist guerrillas. [...] It is most significant that the emissaries should have been detained in Cordoba, a city that has been for years at the center of the fight against the leftist guerrilla. It might be the case that the emissaries were arrested due to suspicions from Argentine authorities that they may have been somewhat linked to subversive activities. Despite our certainty that such suspicions are totally unfounded, we must understand the intensity of the struggle in Argentina, and the government's fierce determination to destroy terrorist organizations in all its forms and manifestations.[25]

However, this is not about citing examples so as to expose the actors' weaknesses, but rather, it is about turning to historiographical reconstruction in order to qualify a number of a prioris about how the members of the Jewish community should have behaved. As pointed out by an extensive bibliography devoted to the study of different forms of social behavior during the military dictatorship, no one could have been totally unaware of most of the repressive mechanisms at work in the persecution and detention of political, social and union activists.[26] In this regard, examining the varying degrees of acceptance that the regime's repressive policy found among broad and diverse areas of society would allow the suspension of the meanings built around the reassuring innocence of a few, the active collaboration of others, and the zealous resistance of the rest.

"Special Treatment" Afforded to the Jews at the Clandestine Detention Centers

The second problem posed by Lipis' question, although it can be considered a consequence of the first, calls, as a priority, for a redefinition of

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[25] The Spanish translation of this article was published in *La Luz*. See "¿Es el antisemitismo en Argentina de raíz católica, de la derecha nazi, de la extrema izquierda o de todos estos factores juntos?," *La Luz*. (24 September 1976), 23.

[26] See Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en la Argentina.* (Buenos Aires, Colihue, 1998); Hugo Vezzetti, *Pasado y presente. Guerra, dictadura y sociedad en la Argentina.* (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2002); Daniel Lvovich, "Dictadura y consenso ¿Qué podemos saber?," in *Revista Puentes*, no. 7, 6 year, (La Plata, Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, 2006); Gabriela Aguila, *Dictadura, represión y sociedad en Rosario, 1976/1983. Un estudio sobre la represión y los comportamientos y las actitudes sociales en dictadura*, (Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2008).

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some categories, deeply ingrained in common sense, concerning the representation of the Jew as a particular type of victim of state terrorism. As mentioned above, several reports (the *Nunca Más* Report, the Amnesty International Report (1976), the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, and the last Report of the DAIA) have claimed the existence of a "special treatment of the Jews" at the clandestine detention centers.[27] Nevertheless, the testimonies gathered over the course of thirty years, in which the horrible tortures suffered by all the prisoners are described, would suggest that, beyond certain specific tortures inflicted to prisoners of Jewish origin, these did not receive a particularly cruel treatment compared to the rest of the disappeared. Or rather, cruel treatment at the clandestine detention centers was extensively inflicted on all the prisoners.

As Bernardo Sorj points out, in the face of the decline of 20th century main social transformation movements, "victimization that seeks reparation became a new discursive matrix of collective identities".[28] However, a fresh analytic approach should be able to suspend such accounts in order to revictimize the Jewish experience at the detention centers. Not because the Jews were not victims of the regime; but rather, because they were not the only ones: *genocidal practices*—to name but one category put forward by the Report of the DAIA[29]—were equally administered to Jewish and non Jewish prisoners, men and women, young people and adults, Argentine and foreign citizens, etc.

We would like to illustrate this point by means of two questions: What difference is there between "fucking Jew," "fucking whore," "fucking negro,"

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[27] The notion of "special treatment" refers to various and specific types of torture inflicted to the Jewish individuals kept at the clandestine detention centers, where clandestine anti-Semitic practices were performed. As stated in the *Nunca Más* report, Jewish people were treated pejoratively and were insulted because of their ethnicity. For further references on the characteristics of such special type of tortures, see the section on "Anti-Semitism" of *Nunca Más*, http://72.52.96.202/nuncamas/web/investig/articulo/nuncamas/nmas1d12.htm.

[28] Bernardo, Sorj, "Deconstrucción o reivindicación de la Nación: la memoria colectiva y las políticas de victimización en América Latina", in Paul Mendes-Flohr, Yom Tov Assi, and Leonardo Senkman, eds., *Identidades judías, modernidad y globalización* (Buenos Aires, Lilmod, 2007), 365.

[29] One of the members of the research team, Daniel Feierstein, subsequently published an article in which the concept of "genocidal practices" was defined as "that power technology whose objective lies in the destruction of the social relations of autonomy and cooperation, and of the identity of a society, by means of the annihilation of a significant fraction of that society, and through the use of terror, the product of annihilation, with the aim of establishing new social relations and identity models." See Daniel Feierstein, *El genocidio como práctica social. Entre el nazismo y la experiencia argentina.* (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), 83.

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"fucking Indian," or "fucking guerrilla" hurled by a member of the task forces to a prisoner during a torture session? Or where does the distinction lie between making a prisoner of Jewish origin shout "Heil Hitler!", and the systematic rape of women, or the theft/appropriation of their children during the concentrationary experience undergone in Argentina during the military dictatorship?

It will also seem necessary to suspend the notion of "overrepresentation" of the Jewish victims among the detainees-disappeared. Not because their number be irrelevant, but rather, because the reason behind such "overrepresentation" lies in the fact that young Jews were overrepresented in political-military, student or social organizations, that is, the objects of the persecution carried out by the Military Junta. In this respect, a reconstruction and analysis of the militants' backgrounds might be revealing.

But drawing on the notion of "overrepresentation" presents, in turn, a few methodological problems: On what figure will the number of detainees-disappeared of Jewish origin be calculated? On the 30,000 cases reported by human rights groups, on the about 9,000 recorded by CONADEP, or on the insignificant number, denounced as "excesses", maintained by the perpetrators of state terrorism? Who are they, and how are the disappeared Jewish individuals to be counted? What conditions must be set in order to establish who is a Jew and who is not?

Finally, the very concept of "Jewish detainee-disappeared" should also be regarded as a problem for historians and social scientists. Even though this category was fixed early on,[30] its use has become so widespread that it has turned into another "common sense" representation of the concentrationary experience that devastated Argentina between 1976 and 1983. However, both its invocation, as well as its implementation as a category for registering detainees-disappeared might be problematic.

The following example may illustrate the problems that its use entails. In one of the testimonies gathered during the development of the documentary film *Kaddish*,[31] the sister of a Jewish detainee-disappeared states

[30] As pointed out by Laura Schenquer, this category was used by the relatives of the Jewish detainees-disappeared and by members of the Jewish Human Rights Movement in order to accuse the DAIA leadership and the representatives of Israel in Argentina either of inaction or of being in connivance with the military authorities during the dictatorship. See Laura Schenquer, "Inicios de una disputa por la memoria de los detenidos-desaparecidos judíos," final monograph for the semminar "Memorias sociales: construcciones y sentidos", Instituto de Desarrollo Social (IDES) 2007, (Mimeo).

[31] It is a documentary film on the impossibility of performing the Kaddish mourning prayer when the figure of the "disappeared" prevails. It was made in Buenos Aires by Bernardo Kononovich.

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that, before his arrest and subsequent disappearance, her brother would have rejected his identification as a victim of Jewish descent. Why would he have rejected his identification as Jew? The answer, while it could be the product of numerous personal decisions, can be found by reference to the context prior to the military irruption, and the persecution to which political, union and social militants were subjected. Many of the young people who had participated in the ranks of Zionist and non Zionist youth movements started to move away from Jewish activism in the early 70s, in particular, between "Lanusse's dictatorship" and "Campora's spring".[32]

In effect, a large number of young people who had swollen the ranks of political-military formations, university groups, and social organizations had distanced themselves from the various forms of identification posited by the Jewish world. In fact, some had gone so far as to challenge it. But it is also true that, once caught in the jaws of clandestine repression, the stigma of their Jewishness was brought back on them by their tormentors as they inflicted their tortures on them.

How was the notion of "Jewish detainee-disappeared" built up? This question faces us with a number of problems. For, even if we are dealing with an accepted and widely employed category, we must take into account the fact that many of these young people were "rejudaized" by their torturers. Are we fair to the personal and militant backgrounds of those young people who are now labelled as "Jewish disappeared"? On what grounds were they "rejudaized"? Mainly, basing on how their last names sounded. A criterion shared by those who, with the best of intentions, afterwards made up the lists with the number of "Jewish" victims of state terrorism.

Revisiting the debate over their personal backgrounds, their estrangement from Jewish activism, and their rejection of the socialist way of life at the Kibbutz might help us understand how these young people could possibly be swallowed by the concentrationary experience. Moreover, we should refer back to the period inmediately preceding the irruption of the Military Junta in order to gain some insight into the radicality of the debate, and into what extent it influenced subsequent views as to whether or not to claim on behalf of young people who were being detained, but who had given up their identification as members of a community. A controversy

[32] See Adrian Krupnik, "Cuando camino al Kibbutz vieron pasar al Che. Radicalización política y juventud judía: Argentina 1966–1976", in Emmanuel Kahan, Laura Schenquer, Damian Setton and Alicia Dujovne, *Marginados y consagrados. Nuevos estudios sobre la vida judía en Argentina*, (Buenos Aires, Lumiere, 2011).

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that sparkled in the pages of *Nueva Sión*, between Marcos Blank and David Ben-Ami, in September 1974, might be illustrative of the types of arguments offered by some young people in abandoning the Zionist cause.[33] But it will also be most instructive as regards how to interpret the representation as "traitors" to the Jewish cause held on those who had defected from the Zionist cause by various actors within the Jewish community—including members of the Zionist-Socialist Youth Movement.

At the risk of sounding excessively controversial, I would like to suggest that the controversy over "Letter from an anti-Zionist" by Blank will let us understand the origin of a representation formulated within the Jewish community, which would later fall, as part of the evidence supporting the accusation, on the Jewish leadership. As a matter of fact, before the coup d'etat, many young Jewish people had ceased to be regarded as such by the Zionist organizations themselves, much like what had happened with ICUF in the 50s.[34] An analysis of the relevant documents should reveal this tension: as some young people walked away from Jewish causes, those who remained would claim that the first were no longer Jewish. So, why should the Jewish leadership have been required to come to the aid of people who had distanced themselves from Jewish institutional life—some in an open break with it—, if these were, at one and the same time, deemed "non-Jewish", or "traitors", by many who had shared their participation in the youth movements with them?

However, the strength that the concept of "Jewish detainee-disappeared" has retained for over thirty years cannot be diminished. It has served as a tool of political denunciation used by the relatives to the detriment of Jewish community leaders. And also, as a category to legitimize Spain's intervention in the investigation of crimes against humanity committed in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. But the investigations around the Jewish community during the military dictatorship will have to draw on a body of experiencies and militant backgrounds that will confront with the category of "Jewish disappeared".

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[33] See Marcos Blank, "Carta de un antisionista", *Nueva Sión*, (9 September, 1974) and David Ben-Ami, "Respuesta de un sionista," *Nueva Sión*, (9 September, 1974).

[34] Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, "La conquista de las comunidades: el movimiento sionista y la comunidad ashkenazi de Buenos Aires (1935–1949)," in *Judaica Latinoamericana*, Estudios Históricos y Sociales II, (Jerusalén, Ed. Universitaria Magnes, 1993).

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Records of "Normalized" Life in a Context Marked by the State of Emergency

Since the period of transition towards democracy, the notions of "normality" and "flourishing" became the main theme in the interpretations around the stance adopted by the Jewish community leadership during the dictatorship. But more in order to counter the practices performed by those in charge of the main institutions than to look into what it meant that "Jewish life" should have been signaled by patterns of "normality" and "flourishing". But why should we find the categories of "normality" and "flourishing" surprising in the functioning of Jewish institutional life during the dictatorship? Would it be right at all to point to records of "normalized" life in a context marked by the state of emergency?

In a study that reflects on its own historiographical production, Carlo Ginzburg points out that "those who study the functioning of a society having the set of its norms as starting point, or certain statistical fictions such as the average man, or the average woman, will inevitably remain on the surface. I believe that an in-depth analysis of an anomalous case will prove infinitely more fruitful."[35] Ginzburg's statement might be helpful in order to rethink the approaches from which to inquire into the life of the Jewish community during the dictatorship. If the analyses of the dictatorship have focused on explaining the repressive nature of the regime, then, trying to understand how an actor, putatively sensitive to the implementation of policies of persecution, could lead a public life without feeling threatened would not be a minor issue. It might even help to understand why the Jewish leadership did not report the disappearance of Jewish individuals. To be sure, institucional life "was flourishing" in ways people had not witnessed before.

Nevertheless, a survey of the relevant documents makes it possible to put forward a rather more controversial hypothesis: the development of certain activities within the framework of Jewish institutions provided a sense of security, and even of freedom, to individuals who would have been in danger should they have participated in the same activities in different environments.[36] In an interview with Maria Matilde Ollier, Liliana

[35] Carlo Ginzburg, "Brujas y chamanes" in Carlo Ginzburg, Carlo, *El hilo y las huellas. Lo verdadero, lo falso, lo ficticio.* (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010), 424.

[36] This idea was outlined by Adrian Jmelnizky. See Adrian Jmelnizky, "Aproximación a los últimos treinta años de trabajo comunitario con jóvenes judíos en edad universitaria," in Bernardo Zelcer and Gabriel Trajtenberg, *Los adultos jóvenes judíos*. (Buenos Aires, Agencia Judía para Israel, 2003), 77–95.

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Hecker tells that during the dictatorship she began teaching literary workshops in the IFT Theatre, "which was leftist." "The number of people who would come was amazing; that was when workshops emerged as phenomenon, because, during the dictatorship, they worked as small spaces of freedom where you could read and, for example, talk about Freud, who was banned outside."[37]

The IFT (Idisher Folks Theatre), located in the Once neighbourhood, was not just leftist; it also belonged to ICUF, a Jewish organization close to the Argentine Communist Party. As with Hecker's account, an analysis of the documents studied in this section will allow us to identify different voices that, coming from the fields of economy, politics, journalism or the university, found a space where to "talk", and also an audience willing to listen to them.

Following Ginzburg's analytical proposal, the study of these various *anomalie*s will make it possible, in turn, to suspend the hypothesis of the restriction on the use of *public space* during the regime. Nearly over a month after the coup d'etat, for instance, the ICUF convened the "first public meeting" authorized by the Military Junta: the event of remembrance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which took place in the Majestic cinema on 25 April 1976, under the slogan "Nothing more, but nothing less":

> To block the way of Fascism in Latin America and Argentina/Against terrorism of any type and the threat of a coup d'etat/Against anti-Semitism and racial hatred encouraged by Fascism/For peace in the Middle East/Say NO to Fascism. Solidarity with the peoples of South America subjected to its terror! Against the murders, abductions and attacks committed by fascist gangs![38]

Subsequent reports stressed the large number of people attending the "first political public meeting authorized in the Capital by the new national authorities."[39] Similarly, as with the event convened by the "19 April Committee" of the ICUF, the events of remembrance of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and of the Anniversary of the Creation of the State of Israel continued to be held throughout the period. Despite a certain displacement of discourses, and a lack of the militant enthusiasm that

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[37] Maria Matilde Ollier, *De la Revolución Argentina a la democracia. Cambios privados, públicos y políticos de la izquierda argentina*. (Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno, 2009), 109.

[38] "Convocatoria Acto de Levantamiento del Ghetto de Varsovia", *Tiempo*, no. 88. (March 1976). In the April issue of *Tiempo* the confirmation of the event can be seen: "El gran acto antifascista está autorizado."

[39] "El Gran Acto Antifascista", *Tiempo*, no. 90, (May 1976).

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youth wings had shown during the first half of the 70s, the meetings were masively attended.

In 1978, for example, during the celebration of the Anniversary of the Creation of the State of Israel, 20,000 people showed up to the ceremony that took place at Luna Park concert hall.[40] The rejoicing among the Jewish community actors over the rapprochement between Israel and Egypt, an Arab country, at the end of 1977,[41] must have drawn such crowd. On 26 March 1979, when the Camp David Agreement was signed, a huge crowd gathered in front of Israel's embassy in Buenos Aires to watch the signing of the agreement, which was broadcast via satellite on channels 11 and 13, and to celebrate "a step towards peace in the Middle East." According to press reports, the various institutions of the Jewish community afterwards promoted all kinds of celebrations: the most important ones took place in the Temple of the Argentine Israeli Congregation (CIRA) and in the Hebrew Society of Argentina.[42] An event of similar dimensions was held on 17 August 1980, when the main institutions of the Jewish community—DAIA, AMIA, OSA and CJJA—organized an event at the Gran Rex theatre with the presence of the military and political Jewish leader, Itzjak Rabin.[43]

In contrast to what happened in the national political arena, political disputes and elections were not forbidden inside the Jewish community, and this did not suspend them either. Jewish institutions were not placed under the control of the National Executive Power, nor were their authorities' terms of office automatically extended, in contrast to what happened to political parties and labor unions. In April 1976, Nehemias Resnizky was reelected president of the DAIA by its plenary assembly.[44] And despite the heavy criticism that would later on be directed at Resnizky, he was

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[40] "En vibrante manifestación la comunidad festejó el 30° Aniversario de la Independencia de Israel," *Mundo Israelita*, (20 May 1978); "El Luna Park fue totalmente colmado en un memorable saludo a Israel," *La Luz*, (19 May 19789).

[41] On 19 November 1977, the Egyptian prime minister Anwer Al-Sadat visited Israel and its Parliament as a gesture of acknowledgment, the first made by an Arab country, of the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

[42] "Inolvidable jornada vivió la comunidad," *La Luz*, (30 May 1979).

[43] "Itzjak Rabin habla a la Argentina," *Mundo Israelita.* (9 August 1980). The activity took place in the morning of Sunday 17 August. But, on Friday evening, Rabin gave a conference in the SHA theatre, which stirred a reaction from several Jewish religious groups denouncing the profanation of Shabbat. See "Honda repercusión tuvo en la colectividad la visita de Ytsjak Rabin," *La Luz*, (29 August 1981).

[44] "La DAIA en estos años difíciles fue un medio decisivo para luchar por la dignidad judía," *Mundo Israelita*. (10 April 1976); "El Dr. Nehemías Resnizky redesignado presidente de la DAIA," *La Lu*, (9 April 1976).

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again reelected by the members of the Board of Directors of the DAIA in 1978.[45]

The dynamics of the "political game" within the DAIA continued to work despite the restrictions prevailing in the national *public space*. However, the fact that it was possible to hold open electoral contests in organizations such as AMIA and OSA (Zionist Organization of Argentina) was much more significant than the renewal of authorities process within the DAIA. In 1977, a call was issued for the renewal of members of OSA's Territorial Convention, and the election to choose the local delegates to the Congress of the World Zionist Organization was held. The elections took place on 27 November, and there were seven slates: Likud, Renovadores, Apartidarios, Mapam, Avoda, Sefaradim, and Mizraji. During the electoral contest, 6,220 OSA members, out of a total of 22,686 eligible voters, cast their ballots, giving the victory to the ruling party, Avoda, with 1,813 votes.[46]

Something similar happened in May 1978: seven slates were filed for the elections to renew the Board of Directors of the AMIA. In contrast to what had happened the year before at OSA elections, on this occasion, there were a number of alliances and breakups among the political parties of the community. Fraie Schtime, for instante, broke its ties with Mapam, as it refused to endorse the latter's Zionist program. In consequence, the Zionist-socialist organization established ties with the ruling party, Avoda. Furthermore, Zenon Goldstraj and Jose Jaritonsky, ex senators with the Radical Party, made up a group, the Dash, which shared candidates with the opposition party, Jerut.[47]

Eventually, about nine thousand votes were cast at the election, two thousand more than in the previous election, in 1974. The winning alliance, made up by Avoda-Mapan, was supported by 4,019 voters, 45% of the ballot.[48]

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[45] "Renuevan autoridades de la DAIA: el Dr. N. Resnizky reelecto presidente," *Mundo Israelita*, (1 April 1978).

[46] "Deparó sorpresas el comicio sionista," *La Luz.* (1 January 1978). The analysis in *Nueva Presencia* stresses a significant topic: the last elections at the OSA had taken place in 1971. During the Peronist government, elections could not be held. In the 1971 election, only 2,597 voters participated. See "Ajustada victoria de Avodá," *Nueva Presencia*, (3 December 1977).

[47] "Comicios a la vista," *Nueva Presencia*, (24 April 1978).

[48] "Inobjetable triunfo de Avodá en la elecciones de AMIA," *La Luz.* (2 June 1978); "El frente comunitario de Avodá afirmó su posición mayoritaria en los comicios," *Mundo Israelita*, (27 May 1978).

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As can be noted, mobilization, participation and political debate over the leadership of the main Jewish institutions were not interrupted during the dictatorial period. Even ICUF, which did not take part in the struggle over the distribution of power in the DAIA, the AMIA and the OSA, managed to organize, in 1976 and 1980, the XI and XII ICUF Congresses, where the political platform of the associated organizations was discussed.[49] And, in 1981, it hold the "Icufiadas '81", an event attended by over 700 young people who "debated issues that currently concern both the young and the Argentine people as a whole." As an example, ICUF members, as well as spokespeople from the youth wing of the Radical Party, and a member of the Argentine Peace Council took part of the "socio-political" discussion panel.[50]

As in the case of the functioning of political activity within the Jewish community, it can be suggested that, at the cultural level, its limits were expanded in relation to the situation endured by the rest of the civil society.[51] As mentioned at the beginning of this section in connection with Liliana Hecker's account, within the community *public space* some initiatives were carried out, which, besides proving appealing to other members of the community, made it possible for several professionals to teach workshops and conduct courses of intellectual training. In April 1976, two important education centers were opened: the Institute of Advanced Studies of the Hebrew Society of Argentina, and the Center for Jewish Studies. The first was coordinated by Jose Luis Romero,[52] and Luis Alberto Romero formed part of its teaching staff, in charge of the course: "The 80s: projection and development of a liberal Argentina."[53]

The Center for Jewish Studies was sponsored by the "Dor Hemshej" program ('continuing generation') of the Jewish Agency, and was academically

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[49] "Llamamiento del XI Congreso del ICUF," *Tiempo*, no. 95. (October 1976); "Al congreso del ICUF, salud!," *Tiempo*, no. 140, (October 1980).

[50] "Icufiada 81," *Tiempo*, no. 149, (August 1981).

[51] As a suggestion for future research, it might be argued that certain common sense representations over the effectiveness achieved by the cultural censorship imposed during the military dictatorship should be suspended. The columns of cultural critique by Graciela Safranchik in *Nueva Presencia*, for example, dealt with a wide range of drama performances and films that were not censored and that showed the work of banned authors, such as Bertolt Brecht, German Rozenmacher, etc.

[52] "SHA inicia el ciclo de miércoles culturales," *Mundo Israelita*, (24 April 1976).

[53] "Publicidad IDES Hebraica," *Mundo Israelita.* (2 August 1980). Among the courses imparted, there were: "The Jewish Conception of Man", taught by professor Mordejai Levin; "Arab and Jewish Positions and their Influence on the Development of the Conflict in the Middle East", imparted by Shimón Farja, and "Crisis and Contemporary Thought", by Abraham Haber.

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counseled by the University of Tel Aviv. According to the account of one of its first coordinators, it aimed at providing education and training to would-be "community leaders".[54] Following its initial call for registration, launched in *Mundo Israelita* and *La Luz* during the first week of May 1976, registration was higher than expected: out of the 138 candidates, there were places for 85 people only.[55] The course subjects and teachers were: 1) "Contemporary Jewish Thought," imparted by rabbis Roberto Graetz and Mario Albin, 2) "Social History of Argentine Judaism", in charge of Julio Brenner, 3) "Historical Roots of the Arab-Israeli Conflict", taught by Yaacov Rubel, and 4) "Jewish Identity, Group Reflection Laboratory", coordinated by Luis Sidicaro and Eduardo Rogoski.[56]

But, apart from these, there were other less structured settings where distinguished personalities from various fields of cultural, scientific, intellectual, literary and journalist production also gave conferences, as in "Wednesdays at the Hebrew Society of Argentina" and "Thursdays of Hacoaj". Among many others, Ernesto Sabato,[57] Jorge Luis Borges,[58] Gregorio Klimovsky, Bernardo Korenblit, Juan Carlos Ghiano,[59] Cesar Tiempo, Berta Singerman, Leon Dujovne, Roberto Talice, Juan Jose Jusid,[60] Julio Cesar Calvo, Silvio Huberman, Enrique Pugliese, Daniel Muchnik, Alberto Rudni, Ernesto Schoo,[61] Pacho O´Donnell, Luis Gusman, Enrique Medina, Rodolfo Rabanal, Manuel Mujica Lainez,[62] Carlos Carballo, Roberto Lavagna[63] and Carlos Fayt[64] participated in these conferences.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that detailed research into the records of the public activities carried out by the Jewish institutions will make it possible to suspend the notion around the pervasiness of the anti-Semitism which characterized the dictatorship. Even though the litera-

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54 Interview with Yaacov Rubel made by the researcher.

55 "Alto nivel del Centro de Estudios Judíos," *La Luz*, (21 May 1976).

56 "Se iniciaron los cursos del CEJ," *Mundo Israelita*, (15 May 1976).

57 "Jueves de Hacoaj," *Mundo Israelita*, (5 April 1980).

58 "Homenaje a Spinoza en Hebraica," *Mundo Israelita*, (9 July 1977). In the discussion panel, Bernardo Korenblit, Gregorio Wainberg, Jaime Barylko, Padre Carlos Cucheti and Luis Farré took part.

59 "Miércoles de SHA," *Mundo Israelita*, (24 April 1977).

60 "Jueves de Hacoaj: homenaje a Alberto Gerchunoff," *Mundo Israelita*, (2 September 1978).

61 "Jueves de Hacoaj: Nosotros, los periodistas," *Mundo Israelit*, (12 July 1980).

62 Publicidad de actividades en el SHA y Hacoaj, *Mundo Israelita*, 4 de octubre de 1980.

63 "Jueves de Hacoaj: Encrucijada económica 198," *Mundo Israelita*, (23 March 1981).

64 "Octubre en el SHA," *La Luz*, (22 September 1978).

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ture on the "Jews" during the military regime has stressed the anti-Semitic nature of the dictatorship, the wide range of public activities performed, as well as the unrestricted development of the community's "political life" allow to tone down the judgement over the outrageous quality of daily life for the Jews and their institutions during the military dictatorship.

A Few Final Considerations

Without intending to underestimate the pioneering work performed by other researchers, it may be stated that, following a systematic survey into the existing documents, the significance attached to the reports on human rights violations prevented the possibility of acknowledging the distinctness of the various forms of social behavior developed within the Argentine-Jewish community during the military dictatorship. As the saying goes, "we couldn't see the forest for the trees."

Why? The centrality accorded to the issue around human rights did not allow to take into account other significant characteristics of the period. The belief that the resistance to the dictatorship limited itself to denouncing the detention-disappearance of individuals—an a priori assumption made by researchers—would fail to acknowledge what other issues could have exposed the cracks in the regime's official discourse.

Coming back to the question posed after reference to Fritzche was made: should we then hold that the Argentine-Jewish community did not resist because interest in human rights appeared later on? Once again, the question reveals the researcher's concern rather than the tensions manifested by the actors. Should the question and concern over the violation of human rights be regarded a priority, for example, when challenging the actors' positions? Or, which is more likely, have these—question and concern—not been shaped after the events? This rhetorical questioning appeared as a main problem during the investigation. Given that the Jewish leadership failed to make public statements, did not make efforts to promote the prisoners' release, and did not openly participate in international forums, it must be concluded that most members of the Jewish leadership were collaborationists. However, to what extent was the issue of the violation of human rights a problem for all the actors? Or when did it start to be one?

For, just as the actors "didn't say anything" in the face of human rights violations, they did tirelessly oppose, and with some degree of effectiveness, the proposal to introduce the teaching of Civic and Moral Education,

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advocated by the Ministry of Education of the Nation, in the hands of fundamentalist Catholic sectors: the subject could not be introduced, at least not under the precepts with which it had been thought of.

In this regard, the problem posed by the investigation has to do with a revision of the questions and a prioris on which the research has been conducted. Following the reading of the literature on the dictatorship, and on the behavior of the Jewish community during the period, as well as of the accused, the heroes, and the demons, I would like—as suggested by Deleuze—to "suspend judgement". To build a historical text that is not founded on a moral judgement. After all, as pointed out by Ginzburg in the first text I was assigned to read for my history major, *The Judge and the Historian*,[65] our work does not pronounce a sentence; it does not have punitive effects.

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