

# Re-telling the Story of Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina

## Lessons on Constructing Democracy and Reconstructing Memory

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*L'autore a examine les implications pédagogiques de la mémoire publique et collective de la dictature en Argentine entre les années 1976 à 1981 comme elles ont été définies par Las Abuelas y Madres de Plaza de Mayo et consolidées par la démocratie. L'autore a interviewé des femmes dans quatre grandes villes de l'Argentine entre mai et août 2007.*

*La autora examina las implicaciones pedagógicas y la memoria colectiva de la dictadura militar, entre 1976-1983, construida por las Abuelas y Madres de Plaza de Mayo, en el proceso de consolidar la democracia argentina. El artículo presenta entrevistas, realizadas entre mayo y agosto del año 2007, con las Madres y Abuelas en cuatro ciudades de Argentina.*

In this contemporary moment in which immense loss and indescribable violence simultaneously unites and divides us, public and collective remembrance of violence is necessary for the work of mourning and for the political work of demanding justice and constructing democracy. In many Latin American countries a common objective of public and collective remembrance of violent histories is to ground the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy within the memory of past state violence (Jelin). However, in uniting to remember, people are divided in how they think the past should be remembered. Importantly, the inherently conflictual nature of public and collective remembrance of past violence has pedagogical implications for developing and maintaining democratic life (Simon).

Argentina is an example of a society in which the transition to democracy that began in 1983 is embedded within the memory of the political, social, and economic violence of the 1976-1983 dictatorship. During this time 30,000 people were disappeared and 500 children were appropriated by the military.<sup>1</sup> The military had established a national underground network of torture centers where people were tortured, murdered, and disappeared and where children were stolen from their mothers and sold to the military junta's supporters. As I was born in

Argentina in 1980 and moved to Canada with my parents and younger sister in 1988, I have no personal memories of this past. However, despite my distance from this past and from this place, much of my day-to-day life has been framed by others' memories and stories of the violence of the dictatorship. Those stories, until recently, being primarily that of my parents.

In Argentina, it is because of human rights groups committed to securing the memory of this past within the Argentinean social fabric that everyday life is marked with the present absence of *los Desaparecidos* (the Disappeared). *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) and *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Abuelas) (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo) have established the foundation upon which many human rights groups today such as *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia Contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (HIJOS) (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence) and *Herman@s de Desaparecidos por la Verdad y la Justicia* (Herman@s) (Brothers and Sisters of the Disappeared for Truth and Justice) have subsequently constructed their work to demand justice from post-dictatorship Argentinean states for past and present violence. For the last 32 years, Madres and Abuelas have marked the country with an urgency to remember the violence of the dictatorship through their relentless defiance of government attempts to erase the atrocities of this past from national reconstructions of history. Today, their work of resistance to reconstruct the memory of this past is implicated in many current political issues both directly and indirectly linked to the dictatorship. However, divisions and conflicts between and within Madres and Abuelas occur as groups of individuals, and individuals within and between each group, struggle to legitimize their work against current oppressive state policies and practices as the most appropriate way to remember this historical violence. In this paper I draw from conversations I had with members of Madres and Abuelas in 2007 in order to examine how their inherently conflictual work

to reconstruct the memory of the 1976-1983 dictatorship informs constructions of democracy.<sup>2</sup>

### **Beginning the Work of Memory, Truth, and Justice**

I write this paper from my position as a witness to a witness—I am a witness to the violence of the dictatorship by virtue of listening to others' stories of experiences with a violence that I did not live through. When I returned to Argentina in 2007 and asked members of Madres and Abuelas to share with me their stories of their children, their grandchildren, and the violence of the dictatorship, they agreed to do so on the condition that I re-tell their stories of the 30,000 Desaparecidos - of why they were disappeared, of who disappeared them, of the 500 appropriated children,<sup>3</sup> and of the continuation of state violence in Argentina. As witnesses, Madres, Abuelas, and I share the responsibility to tell and re-tell in order to mobilize social change for justice in the present and future. However, I have not witnessed the same events as Madres and Abuelas—our stories, testimonies, and memories begin at different junctures.

The Madres and Abuelas appeared on the Argentinean political scene in 1977 in response to the disappearance of their children and to the state's refusal to provide answers as to their whereabouts. Saturday April 30, 1977 has been stamped as the official date on which the Madres de Plaza de Mayo were established as an organization as it was their first march at Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires.<sup>4</sup> Eventually they changed their weekly marches at Plaza de Mayo to Thursdays, which would become their day at the Plaza for the next 32 years (Arditti; Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo; Bouvard; Nosiglia; Padilla). On November 21 1977, during the march at Plaza San Martín where the Madres submitted written testimonies of the disappearance of their children to then U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, a group of women who were searching for their children and for their grandchildren decided to start meeting separately to strategize this dual search. This group of women later came to be known as Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Padilla).

The division from Madres de Plaza de Mayo to form Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo was due primarily to differing political priorities rather than to incompatible political ideologies (Padilla). However, the shift from a dictatorship to a constitutional government in 1983 brought with it changes in the way in which Madres and Abuelas understood their social and political responsibility to remember their children and, for Abuelas, to also find their grandchildren. The groups were divided in their differing attitudes toward the 1985 federal trial against the top military officials that headed the dictatorship and the exhumations of mass graves that were occurring at the time. On the one hand, there were those who renounced the exhumations rooted in the belief that they granted grounds on which the state could pronounce los Desaparecidos dead without providing an-

swers as to the circumstances of their deaths. On the other hand, there were others who supported the exhumations as they sustained proof that los Desaparecidos were tortured and assassinated. Consequently, in 1986 the Madres split into two groups: those who renounced the exhumations joined to form *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Asociación Madres) (Association Madres of Plaza de Mayo), and those who supported the exhumations gathered to form *Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora* (Madres-Línea Fundadora) (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo-Founding Line) (Bouvard). Asociación Madres exist only in Buenos Aires and Madres-Línea Fundadora have branches across the country (although there is no currently existing branch in the city of Córdoba). Abuelas chose to align themselves with Madres-Línea Fundadora as both groups shared the view that the exhumations were necessary in order to properly carry out justice. Ten years later, in 1996, due to a dispute over the role of the lawyers who worked with Abuelas, some of the Abuelas separated to form *Asociación Anahí* (Association Anahí) (Padilla). In contrast to Abuelas which has branches across the country, Asociación Anahí exists only in the city of La Plata. Today in Asociación Anahí, María Isabel Mariani ("Chicha") and Elsa Pavón are the only active members. Both Asociación Anahí and Abuelas associate themselves primarily with Madres-Línea Fundadora, rather than Asociación Madres, and often collaborate with them in collective political work.

Despite their differences, all of these women credit the birth of their struggle for truth and justice to their children. Thus, while they all demand truth and justice for the 30,000 *Desaparecidos* and for the 500 appropriated children, each woman that I spoke with in the cities of Buenos Aires, La Plata, Rosario, and Córdoba has an individual beginning for their work of memory, truth, and justice. Evel Petrini, General Secretary of Asociación Madres, began her work with Madres in 1977 when her son Sergio Petrini was disappeared from her home. Nora Cortiñas, who is now a member of Madres-Línea Fundadora in Buenos Aires, has her son Gustavo Cortiñas disappeared also since 1977. The disappearance of Carlos Alayes in 1977 prompted his mother, Adelina Alayes who is now a member of Madres Línea-Fundadora in La Plata, to organize with Madres. Darwinia Gallichio, who is active in both Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas in Rosario, became a member of Madres and Abuelas when her daughter Stella Maris Gallichio was disappeared in 1977 along with her daughter Ximena. Ximena's father, Juan Carlos Vicario was disappeared the following day. Until 1989, when Darwinia legally recuperated her granddaughter, Ximena was living unknowingly under a false identity with people whom she believed to be her biological parents. Alba Lanzillotto, a member of Abuelas in Buenos Aires, began her work with the group in 1976 when her twin sisters, Ana María Lanzillotto and a pregnant María Cristina Lanzillotto, were disappeared. Jorgelina Azzari de Pereyra who is now a member of Abuelas in La Plata is also searching for her



*Madres and abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina*

disappeared daughter's child. Jorgelina's daughter, Liliana Pereyra, was pregnant when she was disappeared in 1977 and when her remains were found after the dictatorship it was confirmed that she had given birth before she was murdered. Sonia Torres, President of Abuelas in Córdoba, was also able to recover the remains of her daughter, Silvina Parodi de Orozco. Like Jorgelina, Sonia received confirmation that her daughter had given birth to the child she was carrying when she was disappeared in 1977. Chicha, President of Asociación Anahí, is currently searching for her granddaughter, Clara Anahí Mariani, who was kidnapped in 1976 at three months of age. Clara Anahí's parents, Diana Teruggi de Mariani and Daniel Mariani (Chicha's son) were members of a left-wing activist group known as Montoneros. With the help of other members of the group they ran a clandestine newspaper in their house in which they published the names of those who had been disappeared as well as information about clandestine torture centers. Their house was bombed by the armed forces and the Argentinean Federal Police in 1976 in an attack that lasted four hours. Diana was killed in the attack. Clara Anahí survived but has not been seen since. Daniel was not in the house at the time but was murdered by the Argentinean Federal Police in 1977.

### **Reconstructing Memory: Similarities and Differences**

Despite differences between groups, these women are bound by the specificity of their experiences with loss and

violence. The women in these four groups are united by the time they spent together in the distressing search for their children—an experience that, as Sonia Torres reminded me, is one only known to those who have had a family member disappeared. As such, these women are bound by a shared sense of untranslatable and insurmountable pain of a loss characterized by the complete elimination of a person's existence in this world—specifically, the state's elimination of a person's existence from this world. With respect to the differences between Asociación Madres and Madres-Línea Fundadora, Adelina Alayés explained it as such: "*Estamos en posiciones totalmente diferentes, pero nos une el mismo dolor... la pérdida*" ("We hold totally different positions, but we are united by the same pain... the loss") (Interview, August 09, 2007). Over the years these women have also been united through their collective perseverance in their quest for justice for los Desaparecidos and the missing children in the face of violent attacks by the state. Nora Cortiñas recalls the first attack on Madres:

*Era julio del '77. Ellos creyeron que con el secuestro de las Madres—Azucena Villaflor, Mary Ponce de Bianco, y Ester de Ballestrino Careaga—de la Iglesia de Santa Cruz, iban a disolver el movimiento de las Madres. Pero las Madres perseveramos y demostramos no valentía sino decisión. Decisión con un espíritu de rebeldía y resistencia.*

*It was July of '77. They thought that with the kidnapping of the Madres—Azucena Villaflor, Mary Ponce de*

*Bianco, and Ester de Ballestrino Careaga—from the Church of Santa Cruz, they were going to dissolve the Madres' movement. But the Madres persevered and we showed not courage but decision. Decision with a spirit of rebellion and resistance.* (Interview, June 22, 2007)

This spirit of rebellion and resistance in the face of violence continues to define these women. The most recent example of the state using violence to terrorize these women was the beating of Sonia Torres in 2006 by an unknown paramilitary group. Today, their collective and individual struggle for memory, truth, and justice occurs against a backdrop of widespread violence and injustice exacerbated by mass unemployment and poverty, police repression (e.g. *gatillo fácil*),<sup>5</sup> and the impunity laws of the 1980s and the pardons of 1990 which, although recently declared unconstitutional, have thus far succeeded in only a handful of convictions.<sup>6</sup>

The four groups have always grounded their work of resistance in a shared conception of the truth—that los Desaparecidos were disappeared as part of a larger political and economic project implemented in the Southern Cone of Latin America and supported by the U.S. government. They maintain that this project required the extermination of left-wing community activists, union workers, and student movements. As such, they characterize the period between 1976 and 1983 as a genocide of an entire generation who had begun a social revolution to transform the inequalities between the rich and the poor. Each group has consistently organized its work with the purpose of teaching Argentinean society about this truth, aiming to mobilize action to eradicate present-day inequalities. All of the groups agree that the most appropriate way to remember los Desaparecidos and to learn from this past is to continue the work that they began and for which they were disappeared—the work to construct “*una sociedad solidaria con trabajo y educación para todos*” (“a society of solidarity with work and education for everyone”) (Evel Petrini, Interview, July 20, 2007). What is at issue between the groups then is how to continue this work. In other words, what is the work that must be done in order to facilitate a learning that will mobilize society-wide action for social change and thus adequately carry forward the memory of los Desaparecidos?

Differences between groups about how to continue the work that los Desaparecidos began has become more pronounced with both the previous and current Kirchner governments (Nestor Kirchner 2003-2007 and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner 2007-present). These governments have been simultaneously celebrated for their efforts to secure the required conditions for the present trials of those who committed crimes during the dictatorship, and criticized for ignoring current state repression and economic violence. Generally, the differences between groups have been exhibited primarily through three lines of work: each groups' varying work with present-day rights groups whose

struggle is focused on the social and economic violence of today,<sup>7</sup> each groups' participation in the current federal trials, and each groups' work to reconstruct former torture centers into sites of memory.

While all four groups concur that it is important to support the struggles of present-day rights groups, they choose to do so in different ways. Asociación Madres for example are involved in community building projects across the country such as their cooperative housing project in the northern province of Chaco, one of Argentina's poorest provinces. They also run a “popular university,” *La Universidad Popular de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, which was founded to provide accessible higher education to all. Although they participate in some protests organized by present-day rights groups such as the June 28, 2007 protest of the *Federación Agraria Argentina* (Argentinean Agrarian Federation), they have been criticized by Abuelas, Madres-Línea Fundadora, and Asociación Anahí for limiting too much of their work to righting the wrongs of the past and not focusing enough on the injustices of today. These criticisms have been voiced much more loudly since 2006 when Asociación Madres decided to end their participation in the annual *Marcha de Resistencia* (March of Resistance)—a march started in 1980 by Abuelas and Madres to protest the state's violation of human rights. Asociación Madres argued that they would no longer be participating in this 24-hour march because “*el enemigo ya no está en las Casa Rosada*” (“the enemy is no longer in the Government House”) (Hebe de Bonafini, President of Asociación Madres, cited in Keve). In contrast, although Madres-Línea Fundadora, Abuelas, and Asociación Anahí agree that the Kirchner governments should be recognized for adhering to human rights groups' demands for justice for past violence, they view this as an accomplishment toward partial justice. In their view complete justice would translate into “*no a la deuda externa, no a la pobreza, no al gatillo fácil*” (“no to the external debt, no to poverty, no to gatillo fácil”) (Alba Lanzillotto, Interview, July 23, 2007). As such these groups, particularly Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas, are much more visible in protests organized by present-day rights groups demanding justice for today's violence.<sup>8</sup> For example, only members of Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas were present at the June 26, 2007 march in remembrance of two piqueteros, Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki, that were murdered by the Argentinean Federal Police at a protest during the 2001-2002 economic crisis.

Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas have been present at all of the current federal trials maintaining that these trials are crucial in positioning the state as accountable for attending to the past in the present.<sup>9</sup> They argue that the first step in assuming responsibility for injustices of the present is assuring that justice is served for past wrongs. Madres-Línea Fundadora is one of the leading human rights groups that unremittingly insists that in a democracy the

work of justice to publicize the truth, punish the guilty, and repair the damage is the responsibility of the state and that the Kirchner governments have not assumed this responsibility to their full capacity. They cite the state's initial dismissal of the 2006 disappearance of a witness in the Miguel Etchecolatz trial, Julio López, as evidence of such. Human rights groups have maintained from the beginning that Julio López was disappeared by the Federal Argentinean Police because of his testimony. However, while the government has since launched an investigation into his disappearance, it was initially dismissed as a case

*sean juicios pero ya no nos dedicamos a eso. Nos dedicamos muchísimo más a hacer cosas por la vida*" ("As Madres we have maintained our lawyers for anything that has to do with the trials but we no longer dedicate ourselves to that. We dedicate ourselves much more to doing things for life") (Interview, July 20, 2007).

Since the official eviction of the navy from the former torture center known as Escuela Mecánica de la Armada (ESMA) (Navy School Of Mechanics) in 2008, differences between groups have been clearly depicted in the debates that have ensued throughout the process of reconstructing

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**"We do memory work everyday when we fight for justice and punishment for the repressors [of the dictatorship] and when we take up our son's and daughter's banners and protest with the Aborigines who are reclaiming their land."**

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of an elderly person who had gotten disoriented and lost on his way home from a friend's house. Madres- Línea Fundadora, Abuelas, and Asociación Anahí have publicly condemned threats made against witnesses and judges as an inadequacy of the state to protect its citizens. Notably, with the recent deaths of two military officials who were to stand trial in 2008 and who are believed to have been murdered by their own colleagues for fear that they would identify others involved in crimes, Abuelas and Asociación Anahí are also urging the state to provide protection for the perpetrators for they may hold information as to the whereabouts of the missing children. Madres-Línea Fundadora, Abuelas, and Asociación Anahí believe that the state's disregard for its own responsibility in dealing with certain current issues related to the dictatorship can be seen in the way in which it overlooks violence and injustice in the present. As such, these groups understand their work of memory as being one of demanding justice for the past in the present and justice for the present in the present: "*La memoria la hacemos todos los días cuando luchamos por la justicia y castigo de los represores [de la dictadura] y cuando levantamos las banderas de nuestros hijos y salimos a reclamar la tierra de los Aborígenes*" ("We do memory work everyday when we fight for justice and punishment for the repressors [of the dictatorship] and when we take up our son's and daughter's banners and protest with the Aborigines who are reclaiming their land") (Nora Cortiñas, Interview, June 22, 2007). In contrast, Asociación Madres refuse to attend the current federal trials because this kind of work does not coincide with their conceptualization of memory which is that of *memoria de acción*—a memory of action in the present which celebrates los Desaparecidos' life and disavows their deaths because the culpable have never admitted to their murders.<sup>10</sup> As Evel Pettrini explained: "*Las Madres mantenemos nuestros abogados en todo lo que*

spaces such as this one into sites of memory. During the dictatorship this space was used as a clandestine torture center. It is estimated that 30 of the appropriated children were born here and that 5,000 people were disappeared from here. Until January 2008, the navy continued to use this space for training. Currently, it is officially under the control of a collective of human rights groups (*Instituto Espacio para la Memoria*) who are working to reconstruct it as a site of memory. Because of the absence of properly marked gravesites in Argentina, places like ESMA often function as a physical space where survivors can contain their loss and grief. These spaces also stand as a testimony to the violence of the dictatorship and can serve to confirm survivors' witness accounts. As such, Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas agree that while such spaces should serve as a place to hold social events that aim to teach the public about the dictatorship, such a reconstruction should not disturb their use as evidence in legal trials. Chicha has preserved her son's house in La Plata, *Casa Mariani-Teruggi*, as it was left after the attack—partially destroyed by bullets, bombs, and fire—primarily for its use as evidence. Thus, while she opens it up for public visits one day per week, she chooses not to hold social events within that space. In keeping with their notion of *memoria de acción*, Asociación Madres have already begun to reconstruct ESMA as a "*centro cultural de vida*" ("cultural center of life") (Evel Pettrini, Interview, July 20, 2007) where, among other activities, people will be invited to play music, perform plays and train as visual artists. For example, on February 4, 2008 Asociación Madres invited the public to join them in ESMA to paint the walls with symbols of life and joy (e.g. colorful flowers and hearts). As a result, they have been criticized by the other human rights groups for interrupting the space's possible use in future legal trials.

## Constructing Democracy: Conclusions

For all of these women the struggle to consolidate democracy is understood as a construction rather than a reconstruction, as there is no desire to return to the democracies that preceded the dictatorship which were characterized by corruption and state repression. Their work to start anew follows the path that their children began and for which they were disappeared. What differs is the ways in which each group has chosen to walk this path. Asociación Madres has continued the work of their children by participating in and organizing community activist work that they believe celebrates los Desaparecidos' life and that fosters the right to a life constituted by equal access to education, work, health care, and adequate housing. For them, the past was taken care of with Néstor Kirchner's official apology for the dictatorship and with the declaration of the impunity laws as unconstitutional. Underlying Madres-Línea Fundadora's work is the notion that to continue their children's work is to work with those who are marginalized today and to break the culture of impunity that they believe still exists by continuously demanding truth and justice from the state for past and present violence. Similarly, Abuelas and Asociación Anahí also believe that in order to continue their children's work they must continue to demand that the democratic promise of justice be delivered by the state. However, unlike either of the branches of Madres, their work is primarily motivated by the need to find the missing children in order to return to them the identity which they have been denied. Although they choose to work separately, for Abuelas and Asociación Anahí identity reconstruction is inextricably linked to the reconstruction of memory and to the construction of democracy.

These women exist in a disjointed unity in which they are at once united and divided. Despite the differences between and sometimes within these four groups, their work to remember los Desaparecidos and their conceptions of justice is not mutually exclusive. It is within this disjointed unity, a space in which the tension between unity and difference is constantly being (re)negotiated, that these women teach us to understand participation in democracy as "having opinions and offering them for debate and making decisions regarding aspects of one's life with others" (Simon 6). In their attempt to grapple with violence and loss in order to move towards a more just and democratic society, their simultaneously similar and distinct work necessitates and demands that we consider how we live with and alongside others – others whom we never knew, others whom we cannot know, others whom we do know, and others whom we have yet to meet. They foster a democratic social grounded in the understanding that "there is no 'I' without 'you'" (Butler 22)—that "we" are constituted by the "you in I" and by the boundaries between "you" and "I." Their work points to the interdependence between "you" and

"I" in which how "I" come to bear witness to violence, how "I" choose to remember it, and how "I" choose to carry these memories forward is always cognizant of "you," because "I" cannot exist without "you", but also remains attentive to the diversity in "you" and "I" and therefore the differences between "us."

Through their inherently conflictual work of memory and resistance Asociación Madres, Madres-Línea Fundadora, Abuelas, and Asociación Anahí provide the conditions of possibility necessary to counter current global discussions entrenched with fear laden messages that democracy needs to be forcefully "installed," that violence is an acceptable means by which democracy and justice can be achieved, and that violence is the only viable response to violence. They ask that as witnesses to witnesses we be accountable to and for their stories of experiences with violence and loss—experiences which are incommensurable to us—in order to construct an alternative future than one which is dominated by violence. As witnesses to witnesses it is then our task to allow these stories to disrupt the familiar frame through which we live in the present and approach the future—a disruption that fosters a critique of how we struggle against injustice, how we demand that democracy deliver its promises and, ultimately, how we live our lives with those who are here and with those who are gone.

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<sup>1</sup>The term "disappeared" is both a noun and a verb. A person can be a disappeared person and to disappear is an act that one can do to another. In the case of the latter, this is a direct translation of the Spanish "*ser desaparecida*." Specifically, in the case of Argentina, the implication is that the military were the ones doing the disappearing between 1976 and 1983. The disappeared, although understood to be dead, are often spoken of as disappeared rather than as deceased because many of their remains have yet to be found. The appropriated children on the other hand are still alive but living unknowingly under a false identity and under the impression that the people who raised them are their biological parents.

<sup>2</sup>Between May and August of 2007, I returned to Argentina to speak with members of a range of human rights groups who could offer insight into what it means to live in this present moment in Argentina with an acute

awareness of the persistence of the violence of the past. In this paper I focus only on those conversations I had with members of Abuelas and Madres. The story of Abuelas and Madres is important to re-tell because they were the founders of a movement in Argentina—the human rights movement—that today grounds its work primarily in the memory of the state violence of 1976 to 1983.

<sup>3</sup>Thus far, Abuelas have succeeded in finding 97 of these children. These children are referred to as appropriated or missing children rather than disappeared children because, unlike the disappeared, they are alive.

<sup>4</sup>Located in front of the federal government house, Plaza de Mayo stands as the hub of political activity in the capital city

<sup>5</sup>This term literally means “quick trigger” and refers to the freedom and impunity with which the Argentinean Federal Police uses violence often ending in the death of Argentinean citizens.

<sup>6</sup>After the 1985 federal trial two laws of impunity were enacted for crimes committed during the dictatorship: *La Ley de Punto Final* (The Law of Final Stop) which assured that no military personnel could be tried after 1986 and *La Ley de Obediencia Debida* (The Law of Due Obedience) in 1987 which stated that middle-ranking officers could not be tried on the basis that they were following orders. Official pardons were granted in 1990 by then President Carlos Menem to those convicted in the 1985 trial. The Supreme Court declared these laws unconstitutional in 2005, which provided the conditions necessary to begin trials of those who committed crimes during the dictatorship. The first of these trials took place in 2006.

<sup>7</sup>Although present-day rights groups often situate their struggles within a legacy of violence in Argentina, what distinguishes them from the human rights movement established by Abuelas and Madres is that present-day rights groups do not necessarily ground their political activism in remembering los Desaparecidos. An example of a present-day rights movement is the *piquetero* movement composed of groups such as *Frente Darío y Maxi* and *Movimiento Territorial Liberación*.

<sup>8</sup>Chicha of Asociación Anahí mostly makes herself present in these demands through signing petitions and letters sent to the government and published in newspapers. She is unable to attend many public events because she is losing her eyesight.

<sup>9</sup>As of yet, Chicha of Asociación Anahí has only attended the trial of Miguel Etchecolatz. Miguel Etchecolatz was involved in the bombing of Chicha's son's house and is believed to know to whom Clara Anahí was given.

<sup>10</sup>Asociación Madres grounds much of their work in their refusal to accept the death of their children. While they understand that in fact their children are dead, they believe that if they represent them in any way as dead they are in effect killing them because no one has ever confirmed their death by way of, for example, admitting to their murder or disclosing what happened to their remains.

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## PATIENCE WHEATLEY

### Undo

If only there were  
an undo button  
in life

an undo button that would wipe out  
the mistakes we make  
and foretell worse  
before we make them

like the time I left you standing lonely  
on the street  
because I thought  
you expected me to leave

*Patience Wheatley's third book of poetry was published by Pendass Productions. Her poems appear in The Missing Line published by Inanna Publications in 2004.*