

Women: Memories of the Repression in Argentina

Video lecture by Raquel Partnoy

During the seven years of dictatorship in Argentina thirty thousands people were killed by the military junta in the name of national security. Most of them were young adults and even teenagers and children. State terrorism created a new term to mask such a crime: *desaparecidos*, the disappeared.

The soldiers made people disappear by fiercely taken them from home, destroying and stealing their belongings. They took the prisoners to one of three hundred forty six detentions camps where they were physically and psychologically tortured by trained guards. Those guards employed different methods to exterminate their captives such as suffocation, immersion, or electric shocks; throwing captives from airplanes into the river or sea with stones tied to their feet. The victims were shooting individually or in mass executions and their bodies were incinerated or buried in mass graves. After this cruel regime collapsed in 1983, mass graves with victims remains were found.

When local and foreign human rights organizations criticized those techniques, members of the military junta replied that repression was necessary in a dirty war. In fact, it was not a dirty war. It was not even a war. It was a genocide against anyone suspected of being a subversive and everyone who reacted against the atrocity that the military were perpetrating.

As a mother of a "disappeared" child I experienced the terror of seeing how my family was gradually destroyed. From the day my daughter Alicia and her husband Carlos were kidnapped by the military forces, anguish, hatred, and depression overwhelmed us while we wondered if they were still alive, felt impotent because the military wouldn't give us any kind of information. There was no communication among people, only silence and fear.

At first we thought we were alone. Later we learned that thousands and thousands of families were going through the same situation.

The voices of the women I have included in Women: Memories of the Repression in Argentina express their feelings through poems, tales, letters or testimonies as ways to

keep alive the memory of such a cruel tragedy. The military always wanted us to forget but I believe that, through art, we can preserve what happened to Argentina's population during those times.

Matilde Mellibovsky, is a very courageous woman. She is the mother of a disappeared daughter. Matilde got the strength to be one of the founders of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a Buenos Aires organization which have been circling around the plaza every Thursday since 1977, soon after the coup, asking for the whereabouts of their children.

Etelvina Astrada describes very well in her poem the brutality of the dictatorial regime through their procedures.

Irene Martinez, is one of the few Argentinean who survived torture. She was a medical student when the military kidnapped her. She was tortured, spent time in jail and under house arrest before obtaining political asylum in the United States. In this country she practices medicine and specializes in the rehabilitation of tortured victims.

Graciela Cabales captures in her story the anguish of the mothers of disappeared children who never got the chance to see their dead bodies, and remain the rest of their lives searching for them, finding similar features in the faces of other young people they see everyday.

Carmen Batsche, of Guatemalan descent, came with her family to live in Argentina. In her testimonial letter to my daughter Alicia, she tells of her impotence after her sister was disappeared in Argentina. Her mother, also a political activist, went back to Guatemala and was killed at the hands of the military of her country.

Heriberto Lorenzati, sent us the images related to the Argentinean's genocide to accompany the writings of these women.

I hope that the voices of these women reach you and through their words we maintain the flame of memory alive so that this tragedy is not repeated anymore, in Argentina and in any country around the world.

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