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Memory(s) and creation about the last military dictatorship in Argentina (2003-2019)

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Abstract

This paper is focused on the memorial activism in the Argentinean society about the recent past. During the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), an illegal, repressive and systematic violence was used by the military and their civilian accomplices. The slogan "memory, truth and justice" illustrates the social demands provoked by this violence. Forty years after the end of the dictatorship, part of civil society still puts forward these revindications. These claims are inserted in the public space and the cultural sphere. In the last two decades, the transmission of individual memories and the denunciation of the last dictatorship's illegal repression have been reflected in a diversity of productions, particularly artistic ones. In this paper, we put forward two types of memorial creations: murals and tiles; wondering how part of civil society commemorates the last dictatorship's victims and narrates this traumatic past.

Keywords: Argentina, memory, dictatorship

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1. Introduction

In Argentina, from 1976 to 1983, a military dictatorship implemented a repressive and illegal violence against thousands of people through a system of sequestration, torture and murder and the creation of clandestine concentration and extermination camps. This dictatorship was led by a military junta including the leader of the three military branches: the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. On March 24th of 1976, the military overthrew the Isabel Martínez de Perón's government and took over with a coup d'État. The same day, the "proclamation of the Argentinean military junta" was published. It was signed by the leaders of the three military forces: Jorge Rafael Videla for the Army, Emilio Eduardo Massera for the Navy, Orlando Ramón Agosti for the Air Force. In this one-page document they tried to legitimate the coup describing it as necessary. They also sought the support of civil society.

The figure of the "subversive" appeared as an enemy that the military junta wanted to eliminate. This conception of the enemy is key to understand this military dictatorship. The junta's official discourse was focused on the necessity to fight and eradicate an internal enemy, implying that the threat did not come from outside the

country (as it usually happens in wars) but from within. The military propaganda created the image of the "subversive" and used this word against any opponent of the regime (political and social militants, their families and friends). The junta created an atmosphere of terror in which anyone could be a victim of the repression. The regime disseminated the idea that "subversion" was a threat to the country and used the ideology of "National Security" (Duhalde, 1999). This doctrine was invented by the United States Joint Military Staff in 1947. Its main idea is that the country's security is endangered by the presence of an infiltrated threat, in the Argentinean case: the so-called "subversion". The use of this ideology by the Argentinean dictatorship can be better understood with the "basic objectives for the National Re-Organisation Process" published by the military on March 24th of 1976. The third objective was to protect the national security "eradicating the subversion and the causes that favour its existence". The semantic of the verb "eradicate" implies a physical and radical violence that became concrete through the systematic and illegal repression that the military organised. It is important to indicate that not only military participated of this violence, but civilians (entrepreneurs, judges, doctors, members of the clergy...) also did. An example would be the doctors who were present in the concentration camps when the pregnant women gave birth. The complicity of part of civil society with the military regime lead researchers to use

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the expression “civil-military dictatorship”.

The deadly and illegal repression of this dictatorship is now called State terrorism by researchers and part of civil society. It can be defined as the use of physical violence (kidnappings, tortures, assassinations, forced disappearances, appropriations of children) by a government to establish its political and social power through terror. The philosopher Max Weber theorized the legitimate use of violence by the State. The repression carried out during last Argentinean dictatorship cannot be considered as a legitimate State violence because the military had legal tools but they chose to organise a criminal repression. An example of it is the creation of more than 800 concentration camps in the country (Calveiro, 1998). Nowadays, these repressive places are also called clandestine detention, torture and extermination centres which resumes their illegal use. Another illegal practice was the “death flights”: the victims’ bodies were thrown into the La Plata river from an airplane.

During the dictatorship, families of the victims of forced disappearance searched them and manifested against the military repression. In April 1977 the association of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo was created. In Buenos Aires, these mothers were marching in front of the Casa Rosada, the government’s headquarters, demanding the reappearance of their loved ones alive. A few months before the end of the dictatorship, on September 21st of 1983, a collective action called the “Siluetazo” was organised for the third march of resistance in the centre of Buenos Aires. Three artists, Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Guillermo Kexel and Julio Flores, had the idea of representing the victims of forced disappearance in the streets of Buenos Aires with white silhouettes painted on the ground and on the walls. As written by Maurice Halbwachs (1925), given that we cannot relive the past, its representation is a way of rebuilding it and remember. The “Siluetazo” was a participative creation that combined art and politics (Longoni, 2010). It was a way to demand justice for the disappeared and also to show that the military had not manage to make their victims disappear because par of civil society was claiming their presence and putting it forward in the public space. With the “Siluetazo”, marking the public space became a way of giving visibility to the dictatorship’s victims.

Representing these victims and making memory of them became an issue for part of the society. Among the memorial tools, art is a very important one. It allows to transmit individual memories creating a collective memory (Halbwachs, 1997).

The visual arts (painting, photography, movies, graphic novels) are often used to make memory of the recent past. The corpus of our thesis is composed of murals and tiles. This visual corpus implies to study the public and the cultural spaces and how civilians become “memory entrepreneurs” (Jelin, 2022).

2. Research idea

In the last two decades, the memory of the last Argentinean military dictatorship has been analysed by researchers from different perspectives: history, sociology, communication sciences, political sciences... Among this type of research, three main themes can be identified: the memory policies implemented by the national government, the figure of the disappeared or the survivor and the role of the associations. The study of the memory policies is usually centred around the opposition between: on one hand, the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) and, on the other hand, Mauricio Macri’s (2015-2019). The Néstor Kirchner’s and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s governments promoted and disseminated the memory of the victims of last dictatorship through public policies focused on this memory. On the contrary, during Mauricio Macri’s government, the interpretation of the recent past became an issue of conflict between the authorities and part of civil society. Negationist discourses and acts of vandalism increasingly occupied the public space, legitimised by the positions of some political figures, including the president himself. The second type of research about the last dictatorship puts forward its victims and in particular: the disappeared or the survivors. The forced disappearances organised by the junta illustrate the military’s will to erase all traces of their crimes. Nevertheless, the demands of “memory, truth and justice” from part of civil society since 1977 show that the memory of the disappeared is still present. The third and last central theme of research is the role of the human rights associations. A few examples are: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (1977), the Argentinean Historical and Social Memory Foundation (1987), the H.I.J.O.S Association (1995), the Memory, Truth and Justice Commission (1996) and the Provincial Commission for Memory (1999). These associations and the neighbourhood assemblies play a very important role in the memorial transmission especially to younger generations and also in the public claims for “memory, justice and truth”.

In the Argentinean memorial activism, truth and

justice are two pillars linked to the memory. This relation is shown through the slogan “Memory, truth and justice”. For this research, the concept of memory is the one that interests us the most. The singular of the word “memory” is often used but it is misleading because in reality, it refers to a diversity of individual memories that may converge into a collective memory. The memory that interests us is the one of the victims of the dictatorship. However, we should note that there are other memories, some of which exalt the military of the junta, while others are those of the children of military who denounce the crimes committed by their parents¹. Therefore, the memory of the last dictatorship cannot be separated in two Manichean groups: the victims and the persecutors. In these two simplistic categories, there is a diversity of memories and ways to narrate the past.

In our thesis, the plurality of victims’ memories will lead us to interrogate the concept of victim which goes beyond the judicial definition. Who is considered as a victim of the last dictatorship? The memory of the last dictatorship is diverse because the individual memories of the victims can be very different according to the type of violence they suffered. A temporary typology of the victims of the dictatorship would include: the disappeared, the murdered people whose bodies were found, the concentration camp survivors, the children taken away from their family and appropriated by families usually close to the regime, the families of these victims. The word “victim” raises the question of its use: do the people involved use it or do they prefer other words? For instance, on the memorial tiles in Buenos Aires this word does not appear and is replaced by the expression “popular activists”. The choice not to use the word “victims” can be linked to the fact that this concept could imply the idea of passivity (Zenobi & Marentes, 2020). Another question raised by the idea of victim is: what happens to the memory of dead or disappeared victims? Who takes over to tell the stories of their lives and transmit it to the next generations? In the case of the disappeared of the last dictatorship, their memory (as individuals and as a social group) can be conveyed to the rest of the society by their family, their friends or the members of human rights associations through testimonies and investigations.

During the past two decades, the memory of the last dictatorship victims occupied the political space. Between 2003 and 2015 the

national government was an actor of memorial initiatives. Nonetheless, the State is not the only protagonist in the diffusion of this memory. Part of civil society has been playing a major role since the very period of the dictatorship. This research is focused on memorial initiatives created by the Argentinean civil society about the last military dictatorship. At the beginning of our project, the very first question was: how do civilians make memory of the last dictatorship’s victims? What techniques do they use? The “Siluetazo” (1983) showed that art could be used to transmit memory: the individual victims’ memories and a collective memory about this period. Because of the diversity of memories, the past can be narrated differently according to the type of victim. The narratives about this traumatic past are present in a variety of artistic productions. Our main research question is the relationship between the memorial activista and the governments, between 2003 and 2019. We selected two types of memorial productions : murals, tiles.

3. The corpus

Our corpus occupies the urban space. We will analyse the murals and the tiles as memorial claims in the public space.

The murals

The figure of the disappeared is present in the rest of the corpus, that is: in the murals and the tiles. The representation of this type of victims in murals exist since the end of the dictatorship. The “Siluetazo” (1983) inaugurated the graphic representation of the disappeared in the public space. Murals are often present in Latin-American cities and address a diversity of topics. They are an artistic form of expression in the public space. For the murals and the tiles, we chose to limit our work to the province of Buenos Aires. We will focus particularly on the cities of Buenos Aires and La Plata. We selected 13 murals in Buenos Aires, 11 in La Plata and 3 in Castelar (in the place of memory named Mansión Seré). During our first field trip in Argentina (September-November 2022), a first observation was that memorial murals occupy different types of public spaces: streets, faculties’ or schools’ facades, places of memory such as former concentration camps. Not only are the murals painted in memorial places but they also mark daily-life spaces such as schools or faculties. In these educative places, the memorial murals are usually created by students, that is to say by young

¹ This is the case of the association “Historias Desobedientes” created in 2017 by the daughter of a police officer who worked for the military in a concentration camp of Buenos Aires during the last dictatorship.

generations who did not live the dictatorship. This memorial transmission allows part of the Argentinean society not to forget this traumatic past (Yerushalmi, 1998: 17). These generations do not have a personal memory of this period but a memory they inherited. In Argentina, since the early 2000's a new generation began to be part of the memorial activism. These individuals were born at the end of the dictatorship or after the return to democracy (1983). This is what Marianne Hirsch considers to be the generation of the "postmemory" (2008, 2014). She initially used this concept about the graphic novel *Maus* (Art Spiegelman's). In this case, the idea of "postmemory" applies to a familiar memory. Marianne Hirsch then expanded the concept to intergenerational memories transmitted, not only in families, but also in the society (Hirsch, 2008). Young generations who do not have a familiar link with the violent past can play an important role in the creation of memorial productions such as murals for instance.

The murals attract the attention of the passerby, Argentinean or tourist, and put forward the necessity of recording this recent past in the public spaces. Since the end of the dictatorship in 1983, memorial initiatives marked those spaces. With the return to the democracy, citizens have been able to express demands of "memory, truth and justice" and to recover their right to occupy the streets. Part of the society began to use art to make memory of the dictatorship's victims. Murals are spontaneous artistic productions that are often ephemeral. Lot of the murals realized during the 2000's have been replaced by other murals or erased. In some specific places such as places of memory, the memorial murals are replaced by other memorial murals which creates a graphic continuity. For instance, this is the case of the outside walls of the former "Olimpo" (a former camp concentration in Buenos Aires). The fragility of the murals, which are meant to disappear or be replaced at some point, prevents from having an exhaustive corpus. In spite of this difficulty, we were able to find murals covering all our corpus period (2003-2019). This selection is characterised by different ways of representing the last dictatorship's victims. A diversity of victims is shown: anonymous or famous disappeared, groups of memorial activists, anonymous stolen children. Identifiable victims and anonymous figures coexist in the murals and are associated with memorial symbols more or less known by the Argentinean society. The objective of our work is to analyse how these creations interact with each other and with the social and political context. We will precise this idea in the part about the analytical framework.

The Tiles

The memorial and visual occupation of the streets is a common point between the murals and the tiles. These creations are meant to draw people's attention to the memory of the dictatorship's victims. In Buenos Aires, the project of the "Baldosas por la Memoria" ("Tiles for Memory") began in 2005 and became concrete on March 24th of 2006, 30 years after the coup d'État to the day. For this commemoration, neighbourhoods associations² decided to pay tribute to the people kidnapped or killed in the city because of the State terrorism. First, this tribute took the form of stickers placed where the tiles would be. The expression "State terrorism" is fundamental because it refers to a violence that had begun before the coup d'État. In 1973, José Lopez Rega who was the the Minister of Social Affairs created the "Alianza Anticomunista Argentina", a paramilitary right-wing organisation also known as the "Triple A". This group used an illegal violence (kidnappings, assassinations) which introduced State terrorism in the country. The idea of the memorial tiles is to pay tribute to all the victims of this illegal violence organised from the State, from 1973 to 1983. The short text on the tiles always uses the expression "State terrorism". Some tiles are dedicated to individuals whereas others are focused on a group. The text gives their identity and explains why this particular place is significative to make memory: because the victims worked, lived, studied, were kidnapped or killed there.

The tiles imply a previous investigation by the associations. In order to place them, the associations had to establish a list of the disappeared in their neighbourhood with a local investigation. Since the beginning of this project in 2005, these lists did not stop growing. The memorial work of identification of the victims is constantly being updated. This is also the case of the tiles which are sometimes added to a place where other memorial tiles had already been placed. After the investigation lead by the associations to identify the neighbourhood's victims of the State terrorism, the next step is to contact members of their family or friends. Sometimes the associations are contacted spontaneously by family members or friends of disappeared. This contact allows to take important decisions for the tiles such as the place and time of their creation and their laying. Creating and laying the tiles are occasions of a commemorative event including people linked to the victims, members of the associations and anyone who wants to participate. Another

² They were created during the 2001 social, economic and political crisis.

important decision is linked to the choice of the text. The associations agreed to have some guidelines for the text: the expressions “State terrorism” and “popular activists” are always used. The second one is a way to unify the victims honoured by the tiles as a group. Nonetheless, one of the objectives of this initiative is to pay tribute to the disappeared as individual beings. The claims for “memory, truth and justice” on behalf of the disappeared are traditionally more focused on the idea of a group than on the individuals. An illustration of it is the slogan “30.000 [disappeared] present”. The tiles put forward individual identities. During their creation and laying, the testimonies of their families or friends reconstruct their lives. This reconstruction is accessible in the four books (*Barrios X Memoria y Justicia*, 2008; 2010; 2013; 2016) published by the associations which are united under the name “Barrios por la Memoria y la Justicia” (“Neighbourhoods for Memory and Justice”).

In La Plata, the memorial tiles are part of a project called “Baldosas Blancas de la Memoria, la Verdad y la Justicia” (“White Tiles of Memory, Truth and Justice”). It is the result of a call for projects by Adelina Dematti de Alaye in 2009, when she was secretary for Human Rights in La Plata. Adelina Dematti de Alaye was one of the founder of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo and wanted to create memorial marks in the urban space of the city. In February 2011, Florencia Thompson and Pablo Ungaro’s project won the competition and the first tile was placed on March 24th of the same year. Our next field trip will allow us to analyse in detail this initiative.

The memorial tiles of Buenos Aires and La Plata imply a material creation that does not lack of a certain aesthetic appeal, even though it is not the first objective. Therefore, the artistic dimension of the tiles shall be questioned. A tile is an object of the daily life, it is part of the city’s “skin” (Ungaro, 2012). The neighbourhood associations create those tiles *ex nihilo*. In Buenos Aires, the tiles are handmade. A tribute text and pieces of colourful mosaic are placed on the tile. In La Plata, sometimes photographs are on the tiles. This process implies a material creation. To what extent this creation can be considered artistic? Our research will try to answer this interrogation.

4. Analytical framework

The analytical framework is threefold and focuses on: the visual content of every production selected, their historical dimension and their context (political, social, judiciary).

First, the visual content refers to the victims’ representation: which victims are shown, are they groups or individuals, anonymous or famous victims, what symbols are used to represent them? Memorial symbols can create interactions between the creations. A well-known symbol of the memorial activism in Argentina is the white scarf of the Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They wear it since they began to protest in April 1977. At first it was a symbol that allowed them to recognise each other in the public space (Crenzel, 2010: 43). Then it became an emblem of the fight for justice and truth, and later for the memory of the last dictatorship’s victims. It is used in many visual representations. Not only does it represent the Mothers’ and Grandmothers’ of the Plaza de Mayo claims, but it also refers to the wider memorial activism of civil society. It puts forward the role of these associations during and after the last dictatorship and shows the continuity of their demands. The symbol of the white scarf appears in three murals of the corpus, thus creating links between these creations and other memorial productions or events. Another symbol used to represent the recent past is the bird of prey; a vulture or an eagle. It is used as a reference to the “Operation Condor”. This expression alludes to a clandestine cooperation between the military dictatorships of South America in the 1970’s and 1980’s. This transnational collaboration, supported by the United States of America, had the objective to eliminate the so-called “subversive” threat. The word “condor” in the operation’s name evokes some ideas often associated to it: power, strength. The condor was used as a symbol in the name of the clandestine operation. Since the end of the South American dictatorships it became emblematic of the State terrorism of this period. Its representation in several murals of our corpus illustrates how some symbols can make memory of the recent past and also transmit historical facts.

The historical dimension of the corpus is the second idea of the analytical framework. Murals and tiles convey facts about the last military dictatorship. These media can reach a wider audience and transmit the results of investigations lead by the Justice, by human rights associations or by popular assemblies. In the case of this dictatorship, the transmission of facts in the society is all the more important that the military tried everything to erase all traces of their crimes. As we mentioned earlier, one of their strategy was the “death flights” during which the victims’ bodies were thrown into a river from a plane, preventing families from grieving and having evidence for future trials. This historical phenomenon became emblematic of the illegal violence implemented by the dictatorship.

The third aspect of the analytical framework is based on the analysis of the context, wondering how the memorial productions participate of social and political debates. From 2003 to 2015 the governments of Néstor Kirchner and then Cristina Fernández de Kirchner were very favourable to memorial issues. Researchers call this period “memory institutionalisation” (Balé, 2018: 40). Our hypothesis is that the memorial productions created during those years participated in this process alongside with the government. From 2003 to 2015, these productions were in accordance with the public policies at the time. Nevertheless, the majority of the memorial initiatives of our corpus were not financed by the State. Some memorial activists met during our first field trip indicated that the absence of funding for their actions give them the freedom to create the way they want. In the case of the murals and the tiles this is particularly relevant because these productions occupy the public space and do not always require authorisation. Between 2015 and 2019, Mauricio Macri’s government was more hostile to the themes of memory and it was also a time of public controversies about the last dictatorship and the memory of its victims. In this context, the memorial productions acquire another role: to overcome the lack of memorial public policies and to fight against revisionism. In our corpus, this process is illustrated by a mural painted in December of 2015 on an exterior wall of the place of memory *Mansión Seré* (Castelar). The mural was created to answer an act of vandalism on the wall. The week before the presidential election that would give Mauricio Macri as the new president, someone painted anonymously in red letters that the election day would be the end of the “scam” of the human rights. It implied that Mauricio Macri would be elected and echoed one of his public declaration during the campaign. We will explain more about it in the next paragraph. The team of the place of memory decided not to erase this inscription, but to answer it with a mural. The mural represents people united by a long blue ribbon. The text is half black and half red: the end of the original sentence has been kept but the modification of its beginning gives it an absolutely new meaning. The new sentence is: “La lucha no se termina” (“The fight does not end”). The mural thus keeps a trace of the act of vandalism but responds to it by claiming the fight for “memory, truth and justice” in a context of increasing vandalism and revisionist speeches.

The analysis of the context will be double: it will be diachronic and synchronic. For the diachronic analysis, the main questions raised are: do the memorial productions adapt to every government, and if so, how? Do they accompany and reinforce State memory policies or do they

fill a void due to the absence of such policies? The project of the Buenos Aires’ tiles appeared in 2005, during Néstor Kirchner’s government which had already implemented memorial policies such as the recuperation of the former concentration camp ESMA³ in 2004. The tiles are a local project created by popular assemblies in Buenos Aires that can be considered complementary with national memorial institutional initiatives. With the election of Mauricio Macri in 2015 the context changed radically. This president embodied an opposition to memorial and human rights initiatives about the last dictatorship. During his campaign, he considered publicly that human rights (which include the claims of “memory, justice and truth” about the dictatorship’s victims) were a “scam” implying that the associations such as the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo were stealing money. The word “scam” can also mean that their demands would not be legitimate. The fact that a candidate to presidency, then elected president, made such a declaration can be considered as the beginning of a new period for memorial activism.

This leads us to the synchronic analysis of the context. During a same period, how the productions interact with each other and participate of public debates about memory? This will be important for the tiles, in order to study the continuity and changes of these processes in Buenos Aires and in La Plata from their creation to the end of Macri’s government in 2019. The last years of our corpus were marked by the increase in vandalism against memorial productions, not only tiles but also murals. Those acts used symbols of the revisionist speech such as the word “stealer” that echoes Macri’s comment about the associations, or the numbers 7.000-8.000. These numbers illustrate the downward revision of the number of disappeared during the last dictatorship. It is opposed to the number traditionally used among the memorial associations and activists which is 30.000. Obviously, it is impossible to have the exact number of victims of forced disappearance and murder. Nevertheless, “30.000” became a symbol of memorial activism. Memorial activists consider that denying it implies that the illegal violence during the dictatorship could be considered as less serious. The negation of the number 30.000 can come from anonymous voices, but also from public ones such as politicians like Darío Lopérfido (Macri’s Minister of Culture) or such as journalists like Ceferino Reato. In 2020 he wrote a book about what he calls the “truth about Perón, the guerrilla, the

³ Historians estimate that between 4.500 and 5.000 people were detained illegally in the ESMA and fewer than 200 survived (Palermo & Novaro, 2003).

dictatorship, the disappeared and other victims" (Reato, 2020). This idea of "other victims" can lead to a revisionist conception of the military and their accomplices who kidnapped, tortured, killed, made disappear victims, stole children. Some of these protagonists have been sentenced to jail. Given their age, a lot of them serve their sentence at home. Those people, declared guilty of crimes against humanity are considered to be victims by some groups such as the association "Hijos y nietos de Presos Políticos" ("Children and grandchildren of Political Prisoners") (2008-2017). The expression "political prisoners" shows a revision of the past and of the crimes but also a revision of the present and of the legitimacy of the trials. This association was created at the beginning of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's first mandate. It shows that the disputes about memory and the interpretation of the last dictatorship already occupied the public space before Mauricio Macri's election. We will study how these disputes took place in the public, political and cultural spaces in relation to our corpus. The vandalism against these productions did not begin in 2015. It already existed and we will study how it affected and maybe transformed these memorial initiatives. Nonetheless, 2015 is a milestone because it marked the beginning of increased revisionist speeches about the past and vandalism.

5. Methods and expected outcome

To carry out these lines of research we are using: in situ observations, comparative analysis of the memorial productions and semi-structured interviews.

From September to November 2022 a three-months stay in Argentina allowed us to begin the in situ observations in Buenos Aires and La Plata. We visited former concentration camps transformed into places of memory such as the former. We also visited the Memorial Park in Buenos Aires which is by the river La Plata. This place of memory was built in the years 2000 which distinguishes it from the former concentration camps. Nevertheless, the former concentration camps transformed into places of memory and the Memorial Park have in common the transmission of historical facts and individual memories about the last dictatorship. They also show the implication of a part of civil society. For instance, during our first visit of the former "Atlético" (Buenos Aires), a mural on one of the pillars caught our attention. It represents numerous silhouettes one on top of the other. This mural is an idea of local residents. In 1996, before the site was recovered and transformed

into a place of memory, they decided to mark it with this mural. The initiatives which mark spaces linked to the illegal and State repression of the last dictatorship are very important in our research. A lot of memorial tiles and some murals of our corpus have been created with this objective. The observations in the places of memory were necessary to delimit the corpus; 14 murals selected for our research are in these places. Obviously, the in situ observations are completed by the visit of research places such as archives or libraries. Finally, the observations are also nourished by a participatory observation of the commemorations, in particular the laying of memorial tiles. During our last stay in Argentina, we attended three gathering of this type. This experience allowed us to note that these commemorations could be described as "carnavalesque" (Larralde Armas, 2022: 211). The historian Florencia Larralde Armas does not use this word with a pejorative meaning but to analyse two types of commemorations about the last dictatorship in Argentina: on the one hand, the "solemn" ones focus on the absence of the disappeared whereas; on the second hand, the "carnavalesque" commemorations put forward the idea of life with a more festive tone. The laying of tiles we attended correspond to this second type of commemoration: there was singing, music and sometimes even dance. The Argentinean musical genre of the "murga" (people in colourful clothes dancing to the sound of the drums) can be part of these memorial gatherings.

Then, the comparative analysis of the corpus' productions is another step of the investigation. It consists of studying how memorial symbols emerge from these creations and create dialogue with other initiatives. How the visual content can become emblematic and what elements become memorial symbols? The visual content of the corpus allows us to formulate hypothesis. In order to analyse the murals, we created and filled individual sheets for each mural. The criteria are as follows: title if there is one, date, place, author(s), first impression(s), colours and shapes, size, technique (for some murals the artists used mosaics), text if there is one, figures of victims and choices of representation, signature and date if they are indicated, creation process (particularly in relation to the type of actors involved). We also added a section for the questions and hypothesis. These sheets enabled us to identify common points between some murals. These common points are mainly linked to the use of memorial symbols or contexts of creation that echo each other. For instance, four murals were created in the context of the month of March, also known as "memory month" in Argentina.

Finally, the semi-structured interviews with memorial activists, survivors of the dictatorship, artists of the corpus and researchers specialized in the themes of memory and visual arts are important for this research. In the case of the memorial tiles, the interviews conducted during our last field trip were helpful to understand the process of creation of these types of public claims. Interviews with members of associations allow us to gather information not only on the creation process but also on the commemorations, which are unique moments that are never repeated exactly in the same way. As far as the murals are concerned, the interviews with their authors are very important. The creation process will lead us to interview people who were involved in the creative process of these productions but who are not artists: members of the commissions of the places of memory where some murals of the corpus were painted.

Regarding the expected outcomes, four issues have emerged. They respectively concern: the political sphere, the social sphere, the intergenerational transmission and the concept of places of memory.

As regards the political sphere, we will wonder if there is a causal link (and if so, how is it characterised?) between the government's political orientation and the memorial initiatives. What is the relationship between the memorial activists and the government? How do the memorial productions of the corpus reinforce public policies that institutionalise memory or compensate for the absence of public memory policies?

In relation to the social sphere, the productions of the corpus and the reactions they provoke raise the question of the cohesion or cleavage of public opinion about the memory of the victims of the last dictatorship. How do the productions of the corpus adapt to the political and social context, thus dialoguing with current debates? To what extent does memorial activism reflect the unity and divisions of the society and the tone of governments on memorial issues? The productions in the corpus are part of already existing debates and can give rise to new ones about the memory of the recent past. The 2015 mural on one of the walls of *Mansión Seré* illustrates how a group of memorial activists decided to respond to vandalism. Another question raised by the memorial productions and that can create disagreements among the human rights associations is linked to the expression used to refer to the disappeared. As explained earlier, during the creation process of the Buenos Aires' tiles, in 2005 and 2006, popular assemblies agreed on guidelines to

unify the tiles. The text written on the tiles always refers to the disappeared as "popular activists". The associations finally chose not to specify the political groups to which belonged the victims in order to include them in a united group, even though it does not mean forgetting the heterogeneity of this group. On the contrary, in La Plata, the name of political groups to which belonged the disappeared is written on the memorial tiles. This decision is linked to a wider process of « militant re-signification » (Albornoz, Kelly & Laffaye, 2011: 9).

Then, a dimension that cuts across the political and social spheres concerns the intergenerational issue: the transmission to younger generations who did not live through the dictatorship, the political commitment and militancy of these generations. How is the memory of the last dictatorship passed on to the younger generations born after the end of the dictatorship? To what extent are these generations becoming protagonists of the memorial activism linked to our corpus? Since their creation, the "Baldosas for la Memoria" (Buenos Aires) and the "Baldosas Blancas de la Memoria, la Verdad y la Justicia" (La Plata) projects have brought together an increasing number of Argentinians born at the end of the dictatorship or even after the return to democracy. The tiles involve young generations (primary school pupils, students), who often help to make and lay the tiles. Generational diversity therefore characterises the groups that create and install the memorial tiles. It implies a collaboration between witnesses, survivors of the dictatorship and people who did not live through it and who do not always come from the families of victims. The implication of young generations about the memorial tiles lead us to the concept of "postmemory" (Hirsch, 2008). Its application to the Argentinean society will be studied.

Finally, the last issue concerns the idea of places of memory. This concept, theorised by Pierre Nora (1984), refers to a meaningful unity which can be material, symbolic or functional. The material and symbolic aspect of the places of memory can be identified in the productions of our corpus. The murals and the tiles materialise representations of the recent past in the public or cultural spaces. They can become symbols of memory of the last dictatorship's victims. We will wonder if and if so, how, these initiatives are places of memory. In June 2011, the law 26.991 defined the places of memory in Argentina with two categories: first, the former concentration camps; second, the places where emblematic events of the State terrorism took place during the last dictatorship. According to this law, we can already consider numerous memorial tiles as places of memory because they were laid where

victims of the illegal repression were kidnapped, killed or tortured. The murals of our corpus might become symbolic places of memory because they are a staging of memories represented graphically and textually. Some murals are painted near a former concentration camp and therefore become tools to mark those sites.

6. Conclusion

This research work requires several field trips with three main objectives: accessing to research databases, carrying out semi-directive interviews and doing participatory observations.

Accessing to databases (libraries, archives, etc.) enables us to carry out a more detailed analysis. One of the difficulties of our subject is that, due to the recent nature of the corpus, there is no centralised database for each type of memorial initiative in the corpus. However, certain research sites are interesting for our subject. The first one is the "Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires Dr. Ricardo Levene", which contains archives on Adelina Dematti de Alaye. This will give us an opportunity to find out more about the genesis of the 2009 call for projects, which resulted in La Plata's white tiles. The archives of Télam (Argentina's national press agency) will also be helpful to answer the question of how the press reported on the memorial initiatives of the corpus. These archives can give clues for an initial analysis of the corpus' reception. This will be particularly interesting in relation to the vandalism that has increasingly targeted memorial tiles and murals since 2015.

We will continue to conduct semi-directive interviews in relation to the three types of memorial productions in the corpus.

For the murals, the interviews concern the muralists and the members of the commissions of the places of memory where the murals were painted.

In the case of the Buenos Aires' tiles, the interviews focus on members of neighbourhood associations that are part of the "Barrios por la Memoria y la Justicia" group. During our field trip in 2022 we already met members of the following groups: "Asamblea Popular Plaza Dorrego" (San Telmo), "Memoria Palermo", "Pompeya no Olvida", "Vecinos de San Cristóbal contra la impunidad". In La Plata, interviews will be conducted with the authors of this initiative: Pablo Ungaro and Florencia Thompson. In 2009, Adelina Dematti de Alaye, Secretary for Human Rights and one of the founders of the Mothers of

the Plaza de Mayo association, launched the call for projects to create memorial markers in the city in tribute to the victims of the last dictatorship. Once we will have selected the tiles that will be analysed, we want to (as far as possible) conduct interviews with members of the families of the disappeared for whom the tiles were created. It could also be interesting to interview members of La Plata's Secretary for Human Rights who participated or assisted to the process since its genesis in 2009.

Finally, participatory observation is a fundamental tool to deepen the analysis and interpretation, particularly for the tiles. It implies attending tiles' laying ceremonies. The ceremonies we attended in 2022 gave us clues about the issues involved in these commemorations, which bring together members of human rights associations, victims' families and anyone else who wants to take part. These are memorial rituals that take place when the tiles are laid, but also afterwards, for example during the "Marchas de antorchas" organised by neighbourhood associations before March 24th (National Day of Remembrance, Truth and Justice). During these marches, regular stops are made in front of the memorial tiles to read texts about the victims of the dictatorship commemorated on the tiles. Attending these memorial events will help us confirming or disproving the idea that commemorations in the public space can transform the tiles, and perhaps also the murals, into places of memory on a local scale.

Laying the tiles is not the only commemoration linked to these objects. The creation of the tiles also provides an opportunity for commemoration. The four books published by the Buenos Aires' tiles group underline the importance of this moment. In the books, the material creation of the tiles is described as a moment of conviviality during which people who knew the disappeared can share memories and anecdotes, thus paying tribute to the memory of these victims of the dictatorship. It is also a time of memorial transmission through stories of the disappeared' life. This transmission of memories on a neighbourhood scale is partially materialised in the tile. Its text is concise, but its purpose is to invite the passer-by to find out who more about the named person. On some of the tiles, symbols representative of the disappeared' lives are placed: mosaic drawings, photographs... This diversity of visual strategies to pay tribute to the disappeared illustrates the singularity of the tiles' projects which commemorate the disappeared in original ways.

To conclude, we want to put forward that the representation of the last dictatorship victims

and of their memory is plural. In our corpus, the visual choices to represent the traumatic and recent past characterise artistic and material creations. Murals and tiles have in common that they materialise individual memories that come together to participate in a collective memory in different scales: local or national. The idea of creation leads us to the concept of “artivismo” (Lorena Verzero, 2020) which refers to an activism through all kinds of arts (photography, painting, theatre, literature, cinema...). This concept will help us define the memorial activism in the case of our corpus, which is a corpus that transmit memory through objects and images. Images can become traces of the past and contribute to build a social memory (Feld & Mor, 2009: 25). Not only do these productions put forward fragments of the past, but they are also inserted in a present in which the revindication for “memory, truth and justice” about the last dictatorship is still an actuality. The ways of representing this past are updated in the present, always linking the past to the present. The memorial activism inherited an intrinsic character of memory: its link to the past, present and future.

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