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How History Shapes Memories in Autobiographical Narratives

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Abstract

This article examines the interaction between the processes of autobiographical memory in relation to the military dictatorship of 1976-1983 in Argentina and the narrations constructed and communicated by these practices. In this context the article goes over the experiences of a former political dissident in 1970s in Argentina and constructs a self-narration which leads to a sense of this life in history. The results of the connection and synchronization of the autobiographical experiences in a much broader social context made them much more meaningful. Thus, these autobiographical narratives also indicate the ways in which significant historical events mold individual subjectivities.

Keywords: history, autobiographical narratives, memory, Argentina, dictatorship



Cómo la Historia Moldea Memorias en Narrativas Autobiográficas

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Resumen

Este artículo examina la interacción entre los procesos de la memoria autobiográfica en relación con la dictadura militar de 1976-1983 en la Argentina y las narrativas construidas y comunicadas por estas prácticas. En este marco, se aborda cómo un antiguo disidente político durante la década de 1970 en la Argentina, construye un *self* narrativo que induce un sentido de vida en la historia. Los resultados de la conexión y sincronización de las experiencias autobiográficas con un entorno social más amplio, las hace mucho más significativas. De este modo, en estas narrativas autobiográficas también se pueden hallar indicios de las formas en que los grandes acontecimientos históricos moldean las subjetividades individuales.

Palabras clave: historia, narrativas autobiográficas, memoria, Argentina, dictadura

Studies on autobiographical memories about Argentinean history have often developed from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework which fruitfully attempts to combine and integrate historical, sociological (Crenzel, 2008; Feierstein, 2007; Jelin, 2002), anthropological (Robben, 2005, 2006) and psychoanalytic (Kordon & Edelman, 1986) approaches to better understand how personal and collective memories are strategically constructed according to specific political interests. Nevertheless, most of these studies focus either on how direct victims and their relatives experienced the terror of being tortured or the disappearance of a loved one, or on the ways in which elites and the mass media create and reproduce a hegemonic political discourse about the past.

In contrast to Gandsman (2009), in this study we interviewed individuals who do not have missing relatives or who are currently members of human rights organizations. In doing so, we aim at shedding light on how people who went through the period of dictatorship but are not currently considered as “victims” (e.g., Grandmothers; Mothers and Children of the disappeared) are able to narratively reconstruct their selves embedded in such experience in relation to the current political changes in the way people have of understanding the recent violent past. Thus, this study complements and goes beyond previous investigations which were exclusively focused on discourses of human rights organizations.

In the first section of this article, we deal with the concept of autobiographical memory based on the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and psychological anthropology. Another question we also consider is how the autobiographical memory, as a reconstruction of past and present experiences related to the retelling of stories - events in their lives - orient the processes through which individuals give meaning to the world and they define themselves in relation to the psycho-social-cultural context. Then we describe how the autobiographical memory is in constant transformation as a consequence of the relationships of interdependence between groups, individuals and the cultural system. In the second section, we go into some of the historical background of the military dictatorship in Argentina in the years 1976-1983. We briefly show how the theory of

the “two demons” – the idea that the violence of the two sides affected not only those they were combating but also people who did not use violence - has been used through a schematic narrative template to interpret the experiences of the dictatorship as a war. The following section is dedicated to the methodology. We describe the characteristics of the focus group used for our investigation: place, date, dynamics, characteristics of the people interviewed and the criteria used for their selection. Finally, we analyze the narrations of the former political dissident during the decade of the 1970s in Argentina.

Self-narratives: Linking Autobiographical Memories with Historical Processes

Autobiographical memory (Tulving, 2002) guides the processes by which human beings define themselves and assign meaning to the world. From the here and now, autobiographical memory enables the reconstruction of and reencounters with experiences that have occurred throughout one’s life course. Autobiographical memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Conway, 2005) is always a malleable reconstruction of the past unfolding in the present. It is largely sustained by subjective as well as culturally shared social knowledge of the world in which, naturally, a self-schema (who I was, who I am, who I will be) is also embedded. Autobiographical memory operates to sustain a network of personal aims over the course of a person’s life. For normal healthy humans this ability to reminisce about specific past events is an integral part of daily life. People often take this ability for granted because such autobiographical memories are often involuntary and without deliberate intent to remember.

The idea that processes of autobiographical remembering are constructive in nature is fundamentally grounded in findings on the interlocking of culture, mind, and brain: Bartlett’s influential book *Remembering* (1932) in which he investigated the constructive character and progressive rationalization of exotic stories in a series of re-narrations by English participants according to their cultural schemata; and, secondly, the new neurobiological findings in brain plasticity (Brockmeier, 2010; Edelman, 1990) demonstrating that the brain

changes all the time, continuously adapting to new circumstances (Brockmeier, 2010, p. 24). In current neuro-cognitive memory research, it is hard to find an approach that does not consider the constructive and distributed character of autobiographical remembering.

Nevertheless, acts of memory-making are not only distributed and constructed across brain regions. They are continually being reshaped and elaborated again by means of interaction with other people and cultural resources such as technological devices, textbooks, rituals, commemorations, memorials, and the media (Brown & Hoskins, 2010; Shore, 1996; Sutton, 2009; Wertsch, 2009). Processes of memory-making always emerge in situated activities, the goal of which goes far beyond the mere act of remembering (Bietti, 2010, 2012b; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Murakami & Middleton, 2006). That is, the action of communicating past experiences is not driven by the mere transmission of narratives of the past, but also by a situated reconstruction of those experiences in the present, depending on interpersonal/social group goals and pragmatic needs. Hence, we argue that processes of autobiographical remembering are always action oriented reconstructions of the past that are highly dynamic and malleable by means of communication and social and cultural context (Bietti, 2012a). Thus, they also play a crucial role in social interactions (Pasupathi, 2001; Pasupathi et al., 2006). People usually use their past experiences in order to both begin and cement new human relationships. Autobiographical memories in narrative forms are also utilized to create a feeling of connection and intimacy with partners (Pasupathi, 2001).

Shore (2009) claims that the role played by practices of autobiographical memory-making goes beyond the boundaries of the individual to play a key role in practices of identities-making within social groups and communities. Moreover, in socio-cultural approaches to memory inspired by Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Luria (1976), Wertsch (2002) claims that public narratives of the past (e.g., commemorative discourses, media discourse and educational discourse about a collective past) function as mediators between the historical events and our understanding of those events. Nation states are not the only entities responsible for supplying the modern world with collective memories. However, it should be pointed out that they do play a central

role in shaping what should be remembered and what it is better to forget due to their power and the amount of resources devoted to the issues addressed at the level of the state. These narrative resources are schematic templates deeply embedded in socio-cultural frameworks that act “to break down dichotomies of individual-society” (Birth, 2006, p.174). In doing so, schematic templates may serve to overcome psychological and cultural reductionisms that have been “an enduring barrier to exploration of the relationship between intra-and intersubjectivity” (Birth, 2006, p. 175). These schematic templates function to organize specific narratives according to abstract categories. Hence, abstract structures can underlie an entire set of specific narratives, each of which has a particular setting, cast of characters, dates, and so forth (Wertsch, 2009, p. 129). The schematic narrative templates are specific to particular narrative traditions which can be expected to differ from one socio-cultural setting to another (Wertsch, 2009, p. 129). In this perspective, human action implies a tension between actors and cultural tools such as master narratives of the past (Lyotard, 1984). Therefore, cultural tools do not mechanically determine people’s behavior, although it is crucial to acknowledge the strong influence that they have.

Birth (2006, p. 76) accurately asserts that investigations of how memory is dialogically interanimated with history also “call for thinking through the connections between psychological and ideological processes” that offer insight into the ways in which autobiographical memories are embedded in historical processes.

Autobiographical remembering in relation to political events can be thought of as a mediated and social action, which implies the interaction between social actors and cultural tools. It is not an action performed only by isolated individuals, or only by cultural tools. Both elements must be related to each other, always taking into consideration that perhaps that relation is in tension.

The narrative self is characterized by the organization of experience that the subject carries out in memory in the form of narrative and autobiography, thus creating “personal life stories” (Brockmeier, 2002; Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p. 46). Narratives based on personal experiences are one of the most widespread cultural, cognitive, and linguistic resources used to construct, communicate, and transform

autobiographical memories (Pasupathi, 2001; Skowronski & Walker, 2004). The object of the narrative is the "vicissitudes of the human intentions"; the series of facts and happenings the subjects experience over the course of their social, cultural, and historical life (Bruner, 1986, p. 20). The narration makes possible the institution of a consciousness and all that this implies.

Autobiographical narratives must be considered as verbal elaborations based on conscious remembrances of self-experience (Schmidt, 2008). The self narrative, is transformed and placed oneself within a social setting (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002) always in relation to and in interaction with others. After an autobiographical narrative has been told those accounts and understanding participate in how the teller acts (Bruner, 1986; Ricouer, 1992).

Thus, narrative order in terms of causal and coherent interconnected sequences of episodes, events and actions must be fundamental at the time of giving life a sense of meaning and direction. Moreover, the self made in narratives is closely related to other's evaluations of the teller, their credibility in particular, and thus, the narrative must fulfil the needs of a social interaction (Bruner, 2002). That is to say, one employs self-narratives as a way of positioning oneself (Davis & Harré, 1990) in relation to the environment.

In short, the narrative self would be the kind of person the speaker claims to be in narratives. The narrative construction of the self embedded in society, culture, and history is what facilitates the emergence of a sense of living in history. This occurs by connecting and synchronizing autobiographical experiences with larger social milieu making the experiences and the accounts in which they are relayed both meaningful.

Opposing Schematic Narrative Templates to Understand the 1976-1983 Military Dictatorship in Argentina

The discourse of both previous (2003-2007/2007-2011) and current (2011-2015) governments in Argentina promotes and legitimizes a very different ideological stance than the one taken by the democratic governments which came more immediately after the 1976-1983

military dictatorship. This new discourse is trying to create the view that the Military Dictatorship was a war obsolete (Robben, 2005; Feierstein, 2007). The schematic narrative template (Wertsch, 2002) used to interpret the experience of the dictatorship as a war is based on the Theory of the Two Demons. This theory about the origins of the violence became widespread as result of the report *Nunca Más* (Never Again) which was issued by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) in 1984.

This theory sustains the following explanation of the origins of the violence in Argentina: first, there is a left-wing demon which throws society into confusion by means of its extreme violence; second, a right-wing demon which reacts to the former, but with a systemic violence which is much worse; third, is a passive and innocent society in between these two demons, a society which, when democracy was restored several years later, argued that the process of state terrorism was beyond its control (Crenzel, 2008; Drucaroff, 1997). The following two extracts, taken from the prologue of the 1984 edition of the *Nunca Más*, clearly illustrate this point¹:

Durante la década del 70 la Argentina fue convulsionada por un terror que provenía tanto desde la extrema derecha como de la extrema izquierda, fenómeno que ha ocurrido en muchos otros países. [Nunca Más, 1984, p. 11]

During the 1970s, Argentina was torn by terror from both the extreme right and the far left. This phenomenon was not unique to our country. [Nunca Más, 1984, p. 11]

[...] a los delitos de los terroristas, las Fuerzas Armadas respondieron con un terrorismo infinitamente peor que el combatido, porque desde el 24 de marzo de 1976 contaron con el poderío y la impunidad del Estado absoluto, secuestrando, torturando y asesinando a miles de seres humanos. [Nunca Más, 1984, p. 11]

[...] the Armed Forces responded to the terrorists' crimes with acts of terror far worse than the ones they were combating, and, after March 24, 1976 they could count on the power and impunity of an absolute state, which they misused to abduct, torture and kill thousands of human beings. [Nunca Más, 1984, p. 11]

The point of departure of the Theory of the Two Demons, what triggers it, is that national security is put at risk by the first demon and that is responsible for a disproportionate response by the second demon. The condemnation of the Military Dictatorship since 1983 centers on the means used by the second demon to defeat the first, and maintains that even in war certain rules should be respected. The Military Dictatorship was a tragedy for the post dictatorial society as a whole, a society which was only able to be a passive bystander to the disappearances of large numbers of people. This lack of awareness of what was occurring on the part of society was justified by abstracting the political violence from the historical processes (Feierstein, 2007). The Theory of the Two Demons created the view that there were two demoniac actors who both wished to take control of the state (Drucaroff, 1997). However, it neglected to mention that a considerable part of society was seeking social change at that time. It should be borne in mind, for example, that the Peronist party was banned from government for more than 17 years after the second administration of Juan Domingo Perón who was overthrown in the 1955 coup d'état. Moreover, several countries in Latin America had been experiencing increasing social and political activism among students, intellectuals and workers since the Cuban Revolution in 1959. This rising social and political activism was one of the main reasons for the emergence of anti-democratic regimes throughout the whole region (O'Donnell, 1997).

However, there has been a new discourse about and new political measures in relation to the troubling past since the election of the administration of Néstor Kirchner. This has served not only to open the door for the prosecution of perpetrators of the military regime, but also to legitimize a new way of interpreting the experience of dictatorship (Bietti, 2011). This new way of conceptualizing the military regime is by means of a genocide narrative template. In 2003 the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) introduced the use of the genocide

narrative template in the interpretation of the experience of the dictatorship. The use of this template has been maintained since then by his government and by the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2011/2011-2015). From the point of view of the *genocide narrative template* the purpose of the 1976-1983 Military Dictatorship was the annihilation of certain social relations which had begun to be dangerous, i.e. unions, political parties, and cooperatives. This annihilation of certain social relations targeted not only the bodies of dissidents, but also the social relations they embodied in an important proportion of Argentinean society. In other words, the new discourse which is based on the *genocide narrative template*, maintains that the military dictatorship developed a technology of power (Foucault, 2007) to destroy not only the corporality of a specific social relation (e.g., unions, political parties, and cooperatives), but also the very likelihood that these could be conceivable within Argentinean society (Feierstein, 2007).

The following two examples are taken from the reformulated prologue in the 2nd edition of the *Nunca Más* which was published in 2006 to mark the 30th anniversary of the coup d'état. This new edition does not exclude the previous prologue of 1984, but as it will be shown, renders it anachronistic. The new prologue was signed by the Human Rights Secretary of Néstor Kirchner's administration.

Por otra parte, el terrorismo de Estado fue desencadenado de manera masiva y sistemática por la Junta Militar a partir del 24 de marzo de 1976, cuando no existían desafíos estratégicos de seguridad para el status quo, porque la guerrilla ya había sido derrotada militarmente. La dictadura se propuso imponer un sistema económico de tipo neoliberal y arrasarlo con las conquistas sociales de muchas décadas, que la resistencia popular impedía fueran conculcadas. [Nunca Más, 2006, p. 8]

On the other hand, state terrorism was systemically launched on a large scale by the Military Junta after March 24, 1976, at a time when the guerrillas had already been defeated and were no longer a strategic threat to the security of the status quo. The military government set about imposing a neoliberal economic system which demolished the social triumphs of many decades, the

removal of which popular resistance had prevented. [Nunca Más, 2006, p. 8]

Disciplinar a la sociedad ahogando en sangre toda disidencia o contestación fue su propósito manifiesto. Obreros, dirigentes de comisiones internas de fábricas, sindicalistas, periodistas, abogados, psicólogos, profesores universitarios, docentes, estudiantes, niños, jóvenes, hombres y mujeres de todas las edades y estamentos sociales fueron su blanco. Los testimonios y la documentación recogidos en el NUNCA MÁS son un testimonio hoy más vigente que nunca de esa tragedia. [Nunca Más 2006, p. 8]

Their evident purpose was disciplining society by drowning in blood all forms of dissidence or protest. Workers, leaders of the factories internal commissions, union leaders, journalists, lawyers, psychologists, university professors, teachers, students, children, young boys and girls, men and women from all ages and social classes, all of them were their target. The Nunca Más' documents and testimonies are a tragedy's evidence, whose actuality was never as clear as today. [Nunca Más, 2006, p. 8]

The following analysis attempts to provide empirical evidence which supports the claim that practices of autobiographical remembering and self-making embedded in Argentina's troubling political history embody the interanimation of different sorts of autobiographical memory (Brockmeier, 2002; Conway & W. Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Shore, 2009) and changing schematic narrative templates (Wertsch, 2002), all of which helps understand the period of dictatorship. The types of autobiographical memories used for the analysis are based on Shore's distinction between generalized routine memory and event memory (Shore, 2009). The narrative analysis of Guillermo's autobiographical memories enables us to show the ways in which situated processes of self-making unfold in real-time interaction interconnecting individual memories with larger historical events. In these processes of self-making in history we observe traces of the social relations and the ties that bind the solidarity that the Military Dictatorship set out to annihilate.

Methodology

For the specific purposes of this study we will explore the data obtained in a focus group (Marková, Linell & Grossen, 2007; Medina, 2011) of strangers which was conducted in Buenos Aires in February 2008. The focus group was formed according to a generational parameter: A group of three people aged between 50 and 60 years old. The decision to organize the focus group according to generational parameters was based on the fact that it is assumed this group went through related experiences during the period of dictatorship. The participants of group – Liliana (1952), Carlos (1950), and Guillermo (1948) – were selected because they belonged to the generation which was the main target of the dictatorship due to its political and social engagement². During the period of dictatorship (1976-1983) these participants were aged between 20 and 30 years, the age group representing more than the 58 percent of the people who went missing (CONADEP, 1984). They were recruited via an advertisement which was placed in local newspapers and they did not know each other or the interviewer at the time of the focus group.

The group session had two parts. In the first part, one of the authors who acted as interviewer presented five historical dates linked to Argentinean history from 1945 to 1983. In the second part, the interviewer showed five images relating to the military dictatorship. The participants were asked to do the following: to discuss these historical dates and images and to make an attempt to incorporate their own personal experiences in this discussion. The group was recorded with an audio device and then the audio recordings were transcribed in detail. Contextual notes, such as important gestures and other non-verbal behaviors were reported³.

Integrating memory, narrative and history: Living in the Experience of Dictatorship

The analysis that follows shows how one of the participants of the focus group, who was born in 1947, positions himself in the present as an individual who has first-hand knowledge of what occurred during the Military Regime in Argentina. The participant is a psychologist and psychoanalyst living in Buenos Aires.

The self-narrative that follows is composed of two autobiographical episodes: firstly, the activities in which Guillermo was involved during the time he was in the exile, in Colombia; secondly, the positive outcomes of his activities during his time away from Argentina. For the purpose of this analysis, the autobiographical narrative was thematically divided into each of the episodes mentioned above.

By episodes we mean coherent stretches of narrative about the same topic (Ji, 2002; Van Dijk, 1981) that are formed by coherent sequences of events described in topics and actions in which the self plays a central role.

Episodes 1 and 2 [25.52-28.38]

1. **Guillermo:** Desde el exterior este yo fui a Colombia, y yo recibí mucha solidaridad de
Guillermo: From overseas (.2) I went to Colombia, and I received a lot of solidarity
2. todos los grupos profesionales donde me vinculé, también de la universidad, de los
from all the professional groups where I linked myself, also from the university, from
3. grupos universitarios, y también este me invitaron a dar charlas sobre la situación en la
the university groups and also they invited me to give talks on the situation in
4. Argentina, en la universidad, di varias charlas, a raíz de eso el cónsul me llamó. y me
Argentina, in the university, I gave several talks soon after that the consul called
5. dijo que no estaba haciendo lo correcto el cónsul argentino, y me dijo
me and told me, that I was not doing the right thing the Argentinean consul and he told
6. que no debería estar haciendo esas cosas porque no me convenía hacer esas cosas
me that I should not be doing those things, because it wasn't right for me to do such things
7. yo le dije que yo sabía lo que hacía, este (.2) que no me interesaba (.2)
I told him that I knew what I was doing, that that I was not interested (.2)

[End of episode 1]

8. **G:** Este (.2) también en el exterior había mucha solidaridad (.3) porque se formaron
G: That (.2) also overseas there was a lot of solidarity (.3) because they formed
9. grupos en el exterior (.) yo estaba vinculado con un grupo en México que ellos
groups overseas (.) I was linked with a group in Mexico, that they
10. se dedicaban a falsificar pasaportes y nosotros financiábamos conseguíamos el dinero
were working making fake passports, and we financed them we got the money

11. para sacar gente del país, entonces mucha gente se iba por Uruguay se les pasaba la
to take people out of the country, thus a lot of people went to Uruguay they were given
12. documentación para poder salir porque con la documentación salías y se la vuelven a
the documentation to leave because with the documentation you could leave and they once again
13. (no se entiende) en la frontera y el dinero para comprar los pasajes para poder comprar lo
(inaudible) in the border and the money to buy the tickets to be able to buy
14. que sea para poder salir del país
whatsoever was needed to leave the country.

[End of episode transition]

15. **G:** Yo estaba en una organización que nos dedicábamos a sacar gente del país
G: *I was in an organization, we dedicated ourselves to helping people get out of the country*
16. (.) inclusive un cosa muy curiosa hace 3 años yo estaba en la casa de un amigo
(.) I'll tell you something curious that happened 3 years ago, while I was at a friend's house
17. yo soy muy amigo de Jorge Guinzburg (presentador de TV) entonces yo estaba en la casa de
I am good friend of Jorge Guinzburg (TV entertainer) therefore I was in his house
18. él, entonces una amiga de la esposa de él, que es periodista estaba saliendo con el juez
was in his house then a friend of his wife, who is a journalist, was going out with the Judge
19. Bernasconi estamos hablando del año noventa y pico
Bernasconi we are talking of the year ninety and something
20. **Carlos:** Lo ubico (.) lo ubico todo
Carlos: *I get it (.) I get everything*
21. **G:** Y (2) estaba la hermana del juez Bernasconi, y entonces me llaman a parte
G: *And (2) where was the sister of Judge Bernasconi, and then they call me to aside*
22. y el juez Bernasconi me dice “bueno, te tengo que agradecer”, la hermana me reconoce
and the Judge Bernasconi told me “well, I have to thank you,” the sister recognizes me
23. a mi le dice al hermano quien era yo “te tengo que agradecer porque yo soy una de las personas
and tells her brother who I was “I have to thank you because I am one of the people
24. que vos sacaste del país, o que vos ayudaste a sacar del país durante la época
that you took out of the country or that you helped get out of the country during the time

25. de la dictadura” ¿No es cierto? Porque la hermana que yo, que era militante de la misma
of the dictatorship, isn't it? Because the sister that I, that was a militant of the same
26. agrupación que yo me había pedido que ayudemos al hermano porque estaba en una
grouping had requested me to help her brother because he was in an
27. situación desesperante entonces le habíamos mandado la documentación y el dinero
exasperate situation, thus we had sent him the documentation and the money
28. para que pueda salir del país entonces el famoso juez Bernasconi fue uno de los que
so that he could leave the country so the famous judge Bernasconi was one of those
29. salió del país siempre era anónima porque nunca sabíamos quién era,
that left the country it was always anonymous because we did not know, who we were helping gave
30. pero en este se dio la casualidad que sabíamos a quien estábamos ayudando
but in this case it gave the chance that we did know who we were helping.

[End of episode 2]

In lines 1-3 Guillermo inserts a new autobiographical episode, but one from his exile in Colombia. The actors within the first lines are “yo,” (I) “grupos profesionales” (professional groups), and “grupos universitarios” (university groups). Between lines 3-4 Guillermo describes what kind of professional activity he did in Colombia. Guillermo’s only action is realized in “di varias charlas”(gave several talks) in a highly institutional setting “en la universidad” (in the university). The setting in which the actions (e.g., “dar charlas” [*to give talks*]) unfolds are crucial for understanding Guillermo’s political positioning in the past. These talks were about the overwhelming situation in Argentina under the rule of the military junta (human rights abuses, kidnappings). Next, a new actor appears in Guillermo’s story. The Argentinean Consul in Colombia carried out an action which was motivated by Guillermo’s political activity described above. In Guillermo’s account the consul’s call functions by introducing Guillermo’s autobiographical episode of a specific event and reinforces the importance of Guillermo’s activities. Besides the anaphoric function of “esas cosas” (those things) to refer back to the actions that Guillermo did during his exile in Colombia (gave talks, etc.), the use of the noun phrase seems to ‘violate’ the maxim of quantity, and thus,

creates the conditions for the emergence of an implicature (Grice, 1975, 1989; Levinson, 2000) semantically grounded in the schematic narrative template used to understand that the dictatorship can be experienced as genocide. By implicature we understand something meant implicitly or suggested and different from what has been said or not said (Grice, 1981, 1989, Van Dijk, 2003). They can be either a part of the meaning of verbal and non-verbal behavior in terms of cultural models (Quinn & Holland, 1987; Shore, 1996) or dependent on the conversational context (Levinson, 1983). Grice (1975) pointed out that the trigger of implicatures in communicative interactions is based on the interlocutors' violation of a set of 'maxims of conversation'. These are the maxims of quality ('say what you believe to be true'); relevance ('make what you say relevant and timely'), quantity (don't say more or less than is required'), and manner ('be brief and clear').

The social and cultural meanings suggested by the implicature (e.g. to give talks on human rights abuses, kidnappings, etc in Argentina during the military regime) seem not only to be grounded in cultural models and schematic narrative templates in relation to the Military Dictatorship but also in the conversational context. This occurs because of the clear anaphoric and pronominal functions of "esas cosas" (those things). What can be inferred from the opposition between the right thing and "esas cosas" (those things) (L.6) is that to give talks about the situation in Argentina during the military dictatorship is a bad thing in the eyes of the Argentinean Consul. This places the Argentinean Consul on the opposite side of the moral spectrum. The inference triggered by "sabía" (I knew) suggests that Guillermo was fully aware of the potential negative consequences of his political activities during his exile. These negative consequences could be related to both, the likelihood of the military police detaining and even torturing Guillermo's family and friends still in Argentina, as well as the possibility of being killed by members of the Argentinean military intelligence who were infiltrated in the social and political organizations formed by Argentines who had gone into exile overseas (Dinges, 2004). That is, the Argentinean Consul's warning did not fulfill its main goal, which was to make Guillermo stop carrying out his political activities.

Guillermo's memories of his political activities in Colombia begin to shed some light on the extent to which he was politically engaged

during the period of dictatorship. Guillermo's activities in exile are an example of what the leaders of the military junta called "The anti-Argentine Campaign" aimed at creating a negative image of the country overseas during the experience of dictatorship.

In the events described in the reconstruction of a memory of a specific event (e.g., *to be called by the Argentinean consul*), by calling him in and saying what he said, the Argentinean consul appears to be warning Guillermo. This warning marks a transition from a memory from a *generalized routine autobiographical memory* (e.g. to give talks that the university while being in the exile in Colombia) to a *memory for specific events*.

The Argentinean consul, being a high ranking functionary of the military dictatorship abroad, is endowed with the authority to give such a warning. Moreover, the consul's reaction is completely in line with the measures that the military took to stop "The anti-Argentine Campaign" overseas⁴. It is important to note how Guillermo's memories of a specific autobiographical event while being in exile serve to create dialogic relations (Bakhtin, 1981) with the foreign policies that the military was undertaking in the late 1970's.

The extract between lines 8 and 14 functions to connect the previous autobiographical episode with the one that begins at line 15. The actors responsible for actions inserted in the story are: "grupos en el exterior (groups overseas) [(L. 9)]; "yo" (I) [L. 9] "un grupo en Mexico" [L.9]; "ellos" (they) [L.9]; "nosotros" (we) [L.10]; "mucha gente" (a lot of people) [L.11]. The definition of "un grupo en Mexico" (a group in Mexico), as well as "yo – nosotros" (I-we) is mainly realized by the actions they perform. The goal of the actions verbalized is to help the people whose lives were jeopardized. Hence, actions such as "se dedicaban a falsificar pasaportes" (were working making fake passports), which is generally associated with crime, within the storyworld that Guillermo is developing, gains a positive meaning. The quantification of the people who were helped to leave Argentina operates by making the actors' actions more remarkable and receives a positive evaluation in moral terms. Immediately following the episode of transition, Guillermo provides an autobiographical narrative which functions by bringing into a more near present the positive consequences of the pro-social behavior introduced above.

In this section of the narrative Guillermo inserts the time, place, and participants of the story he is unfolding. The place is the house of a famous Argentinean humorist and TV presenter. The participants represented as actors are: “yo”, “una amiga de la esposa de él” (a friend of his wife), and “la hermana del juez Bernasconi” (the sister of Judge Bernasconi) Definitions “yo soy muy amigo de Jorge Guinzburg” (I am a good friend of Jorge Guinzburg) [L.17] -famous characters make the story more interesting to listen to-, and the identity of the actors grounded in taken-for-granted knowledge (who they are), which Guillermo assumes to be shared in the focus groups, together with “algo curioso” (something curious)[L.16], acts as a meta-narrative mechanism in order to create the exceptionality of Guillermo’s *specific event memory*.

A few lines below [L.27], Guillermo’s helping behavior in exile, reported by the Judge Bernasconi between lines 23-25, is carried out by a collective actor, “nosotros” (we). The reformulation from the singular to the plural form of the 1st person serves to distribute agency in relation to the helping behavior. A change in the pronoun use indicates a sense of “collective agency” by embedding Guillermo’s self-experience as political activist within a network of solidarity altruistic behavior which goes beyond the individual efforts of those who had to leave Argentina as they were being persecuted by the military. Interestingly, that sense of “collective agency” can be linked to the *genocide schematic narrative template* explained a few sections above. It provides a clear example of how social relations worked and examples of networks of solidarity and resistance that military was aiming at eliminating.

The Judge Bernasconi is portrayed as performing an extremely important illocutionary act “agradecer” (to thank). By illocutionary act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975), we refer to real actions which are performed by the utterance (e.g. *to bet; to welcome* and *to warn*). In this case the illocutionary act appears to be repeated and reinforced by a deontic modal verb “tengo que” (have to). In Guillermo’s reporting of how the judge Bernasconi positively evaluates the events, he is not only expressing Judge Bernasconi’s attitudes and emotions towards Guillermo and the group he belonged to but also creating a positive

representation of the events within the focus group session which may be more pragmatically effective than simply saying “I or we saved Judge Bernasconi’s life”. Moreover, it represents a compelling instantiation of the story inserted into the episode of transition [L.8-14] and, thereby, justifies the positive outcomes of Guillermo’s behavior aimed at helping others, as well as the benefits obtained from the network of solidarity he belonged to. Subsequently, the further clarification that the “famoso” (famous) Judge Bernasconi was merely one case suggests that many people were helped by Guillermo and the organization he belonged to.

The last section of the autobiographical episode relates Judge Bernasconi’s particular case to the larger pro-social practice of helping people whose continuity of life was jeopardized by the perpetrators of the military dictatorship. The explanation of the method employed to select the recipients of help by means of the lexical item “anónima” (anonymous) operates as a mechanism to universalize the help to those whose lives were in serious danger. The transition from simple past perfect “había pedido” (had requested) to progressive “estábamos ayudando” (were helping) forms in the past tense realizes a shift from an autobiographical memory of a specific event, which operates as clear instantiation of the behavior to help others of Guillermo and the organization he was part of, to a *generalized routine autobiographical memory* (Shore, 2009). Guillermo’s *generalized routine memory* manifests an example of resistance to the actions committed by the perpetrators of the military regime while trying to annihilate the ties of solidarity within the Argentinean society.

Final remarks

The autobiographical episodes analyzed show how in the telling of Guillermo’s life story the social, cultural and historical contexts play a role. The study indicates the ways in which Guillermo describes different topics and how he builds the characters in his narration (including himself) and the actions in the inter-related autobiographical episodes. Little by little Guillermo shows us how he was actively involved in an organization that helped people persecuted by the military regime – the Junta- to escape from Argentina. Another subject

on which we shed light is how the development of the use of personal pronouns has grown towards a collective sense of belonging ("collective agency") in the descriptions of the memory of specific events (for example how Guillermo helped the judge Bernasconi flee the country). Changes in the use of past verb tenses allow Guillermo to transform these memories of specific events into generalized routine remembering. In this way through the narrative process of the self-making we have been able to gradually show a significant example of opposition and resistance. This enables us to better understand the members of the political organization in Argentina, who went into exile in the 1970s and then went on to participate in the networks of solidarity and support driven by pro-social and altruistic behavior for the group (for example, the judge Bernasconi) and for people outside the group (for example, those anonymous individuals who were helped). The detailed linguistic and pragmatic analysis of Guillermo's *autobiographical episodes* and the re-construction of the self-making process give empirical foundations to support these affirmations and interpretations.

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Notes

¹ The English translation s of the extracts taken from the *Nunca Más* can be found at http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_002.htm, accessed November 13, 2007.

² In order to protect the identity of the participants they were asked to choose pseudonyms by which they would identify themselves throughout the entire session.

³ The extracts that are used in the analysis were translated into English from the Spanish version by the first author with the help of Annabelle Lukin. We would like to thank her for having revised the original translations.

⁴ In 1977 the military junta created the *Centro Piloto Paris* (Pilot Paris Center) the aim of which was to improve Argentina's image in relation to human rights overseas. Among its activities, the center published political propaganda material, falsified correspondence of alleged mothers of the disappeared in Argentina and infiltrated military officials into the groups of Argentines exiled in Europe.

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