

**Stories from Adults Stolen as Babies  
During Argentina's Last Dictatorship (1976-1983):  
A Narrative Inquiry into *Identity Restitution*.**

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## Abstract

This narrative inquiry explores the complex psychological, socio-political and relational processes involved in *Identity Restitution* as experienced by three individuals who, unaware they had been stolen as babies by the last Argentinean dictatorship, were found in subsequent decades as adults. Conversational interviews were carried out after researcher's immersion in already available public stories. Interweaving subjective and communal dimensions of experience, their stories were then *re-presented* and *new* narratives *re-created* from these encounters. Using overarching themes identified and researcher's reflexivity throughout, a multi-layered, situated narrative was developed, related not only to the *topic* studied, but also to the process of research. In this way, data collection and analytic processing were interlaced across the piece from beginning to end. Overall, *Identity Restitution* was found to function as a reparative process, allowing those previously victimised and appropriated to shift, with time and support, towards positionings and identities (personal, ethical, political and communal) holding a growing sense of agency, responsibility and choice. Associated socio-political practices developed as antidotes to appropriation and victimization mainly by the relentless work of human rights organisations like Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo in the search for their grandchildren, were found to be powerfully enabling, supporting these individuals to re-develop their bonds with the world, with others and with themselves -and in this process, to construct a personal and collective voice in response to their (and their families') ordeal. Throughout this piece, reflexivity is used widely, conveying the development of the researcher's position within the research process, whilst enlightening and shaping the style of *knowledge co-production*. Exploring *identity restitution* via narrative inquiring was linked and paralleled to a take on psychotherapy and research that challenges the understanding of neutrality as passivity. Although implications for professional practice are left to resonate rather than being fully proposed, through the narratives produced there is an invitation to question standardised uncritical practice, particularly when working with victims of organised abuse. Following the *grandchildren's* accounts around what have *helped* them (or not) to work-through such complex ordeals, approaches to practice that are willing not just to listen but to respond from within (reaching also outwardly with the acknowledgement of contextual responsibility) were found to be vital. Therefore, a call to embrace less fixed or homogeneous approaches to treatment is endorsed; highlighting the importance of more receptive, creative, attuned and immanent ones -including in them multidisciplinary perspectives and activist, socio-political developments such as the struggle for Truth, Memory and Justice described throughout the piece.

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# 1. Introduction

## Background to the Study

“Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow...” (Benjamin, 1999:91).

The early stages of this inquiry coincide with an identity shake-up of my own: my *becoming* a mother, far away from my family and homeland Argentina. Certainly, the story starts earlier, as the story of any child precedes her birth. Bringing unfathomable changes in me (the wonder and astonishment of creation, a gulp of life-death whilst facing the terrifying unknown), my daughter’s birth also pushed me crudely into the *return-of-the-known*: the regularly visited pains and fears, the well-known possibility of devastating loss. But, my then long recent work in psychoanalytic psychotherapy had helped me open-up, clearing spaces, finding hope, re-fertilising the ground. Whilst crying out my pains and fears, I had begun to allow myself to un-weave out of it the possibility of life. I had been so tightly wrapped-up in *knowing* the likelihood of horror, that the possibility of life that dared to risk loss of this kind paralysed me (what we have, we can lose...). It took hours and hours of attentive listening and ‘ninja-mothering’ (such was the caring but sharp, daring style of my psychotherapist) for me to take responsibility for my desire, my life, and risk choice.

My sense of identity had begun developing within my family and within a socio-political context undoubtedly embedded in it in complex ways. I grew-up during dark, terror-filled years, so a disturbing atmosphere clouded much of my childhood. A Civic-Military Dictatorship took hold of Argentina during 1976-1983 and through a calculated terror strategy, an estimated 30,000 civilians were made ‘disappeared’ (CONADEP, 1984). People were ‘sucked-in’, *wiped-out* (Font, 2000): illegally detained, kept captive in clandestine detention centres, tortured, executed. Most bodies are still to be found. Their families desperately searched for their loved ones but were intentionally denied any information in a strategic cover-up system that included the participation of corporations, institutions, and civilians (Villalta, 2012; Amantze Regueiro, 2012). The *disappeared* were typically students, workers, intellectuals, artists and activists opposing a totalitarian, repressive way of governing who favoured the upper-classes and those in power. Many

of these were part of highly organised *popular armies* actively fighting the advance of this far right catholic force the government was becoming, imposing *law and order* in arbitrary ways. Within these very heterogeneous groups, there were young families and expectant parents. Many children were killed by the Junta, and around five hundred new-borns and young children are thought to have been stolen from *the disappeared*, vanishing -like their parents- without a trace (Gutman, 2018).

Although none of my family members were detained, tortured or disappeared, as a child I felt *somewhere* what was going on around me. While unable to make sense of it, I *knew* something of the terror around us and was curious, albeit scared, of the *half-said* stories I overheard when adults close to me spoke with each other. Also, due to having spent my first part of life in an incubator, combined with my mixed cultural lineage perhaps, I had been intrigued often about issues related to traumatic separation, dislocation, injustice, survival, life reconstruction, identity assemblage, loss. My ancestors were from different parts of the world and had left their families, languages and places of origin behind, never to return to them again. I loved asking my grandmother questions about her long-lost home in now ex-Yugoslavia, the family she reluctantly left behind due to the first world war. She might have found in my curiosity a platform to remember and re-connect because with me she spoke a lot about it. Through a storytelling ritual we developed when alone with each other (*"Tell me about it, grandma..."*) I weaved much of my sense of identity, of belonging, of love, combining vulnerabilities and strengths I managed to 'fish-out' from her tales. Her longings opened questions of my own, and her stories became intrinsic parts of mine.

The wider context's framework in which I grew-up condemned differences and advocated a univocal, totalitarian version of 'truth', but I resisted this approach viscerally: it did not sooth but distressed, insulted me. I also felt dislocated somehow.

So, when my daughter arrived decades later, bringing her beautifully terrifying otherness into my world (we were so incredibly connected yet so unbelievably *other!*), the weaving of stories across the generations -my own and her father's- started to be rewritten and retold with the magnificent event of her birth. Bathed in awe for *what was possible*, eventually, pending debts to myself started to resurface. I became pulled-by or called-by some yet unvisited stories of my troubled childhood.

The air I *breathed* (Rodulfo, 1989) whilst growing-up was so tainted with trouble involving babies, parents, grandparents and society as my bigger family that is no wonder motherhood took me *there* again somehow. Astounded, during my visits home, I had begun noticing changes in unexpected yet for long desired ways. Tacitly forbidden stories were being approached, talked about publicly, and this made me feel so moved, so 'proud' of what was happening in 'my' Argentina! Babies that had been abducted in the cruel dictatorship of my childhood were being found (now, as adults!) and they were talking out-loud about their experiences, transforming themselves and Argentina with their stories. It is no exaggeration to say that, listening to them felt tremendously emotional, like witnessing birth.

## Stolen Lives

“In Argentina, the ‘spoils of war’ often included babies, stolen and parcelled out to childless couples among the military and their allies.

This violation of family rights was justified by the messianic argument that the subversives’ new-borns would be brought up

to respect the values of ‘Western and Christian Civilization’”

(Hollander, 1997:107).

During those times, illegally captive pregnant women (usually very young ones) were kept alive and customarily killed after their babies were born. Their babies were consequently handed over to families deemed *appropriate, better* for them than their *subversive parents* or families. Other young children were kidnapped or given to others after surviving their families’ annihilation (or passed-on to midwives, left in hospitals, police headquarters, orphanages) and were illegally imposed new identities. Only a few were taken by families who looked after them after their parents’ disappearance (i.e., a neighbour that found them). Not being lied to, these very few children were typically reunited with their extended families once localised later (Arditti, 1999). Albeit their unjust loss, these children managed to preserve and develop a sense of their identity and history, and a relationship with both families was encouraged. These were the least of cases, though. Other children found back then were only able to legally recover their identity years later, given that the

judicial system was uninformed, perverted, slow (Penchaszadeh, 2009) and their abductors were usually influential and powerful, and therefore were able to manipulate truth for their convenience.

Fear, silence and impunity were dominant practical and psychological weapons that thrived with the complicity of common civilians and social practices -like the buying and selling of babies and other kinds of irregular adoptions, quite common in Argentina (Villalta, 2012). At the time, the argument was that purposeful concealment of the child's origin was for 'the good of the child', because 'telling them the truth' was thought to be *traumatizing*. The appropriators, but also judges, doctors, nurses, priests and civilian or corporate associates collaborated with the so-called *Process of National Reorganization* (the dictatorship) strategically forging birth certificates, registering these children 'officially' as others with false data (i.e., a two-year-old was registered as *new born*) to conceal their legitimate origins and identities so as to prevent their identification later. In this way, these children were treated like *objects or war trophies*, as Herrera & Tenenbaum (2007) argue: kept-by or passed-onto families allied with the Junta, growing-up unaware of their origins and identity in families or institutions that deliberately kept these hidden.

Much of this cover-up persists as a *wall of silence* today. Most of those responsible or with information keep silent (about what happened to someone still missing, about where the stolen children were left or where they might be now). Within this approach, individuals directly affected and their families' human rights keep being violated and society oppressed.

## **The Search**

As a response to what was happening with such impunity, affecting individuals, groups and society in devastating ways, the families of *the disappeared* started to look for them. First meeting secretly, they eventually organised themselves as the groups 'Mothers of Plaza de Mayo' and 'Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo', gathering at the square opposite the Government's House to make the disappearance of their children and grandchildren known and claim for their *appearance alive*. Coming from all walks of life and social



sectors (professionals, working-class, housewives), they courageously challenged the terror and intimidation that spread widely in society even when most had not been involved in politics or activism before. The authorities, using the media tactfully, depicted them as *mad women* to underrate them publicly and deny any truth to their claim. Giving them forged details of the whereabouts of their children and grandchildren or denied any information at all, they attempted to demoralise the mothers and grandmothers whilst convincing society of their *lunacy*. After Graziano (1992) and Feitlowitz (1998), Cohen argues that (2001:82) “The Argentinean junta... invented a special language, a clandestine discourse of terror to describe a private world whose official presence was publicly both denied and justified” and that “the phenomenon of ‘disappearances’ takes its very definition from the government’s ability to deny that it happened. The victim has no legal corpus or physical body; there is no evidence to prosecute, not even a sign of a crime. In the Argentinean junta’s discourse, the physical acts of abduction, torture and execution were complemented by the speech act of denial; ...for a disappearance to be a disappearance, it has to be denied...” (Cohen, 2001:105).

However, “on behalf of their loved ones, with their own lives in constant danger, they tenaciously confronted the armed forces... purposefully designed their discourse to reflect their traditional domestic roles: theirs was a struggle on behalf of motherhood and in defence of children... The military paternalistic underestimation of women prevented them from recognising the Mothers as a potential threat to their authority, and this tactical error gave the women the time they needed to organise themselves” (Hollander, 1997:140). Suspecting that their grandchildren might be alive and taken, Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (henceforth here referred as *Grandmothers*<sup>\*1</sup>) slowly summoned the support of scientists, psychologists, lawyers, human rights activists, students, etc., building an impressive movement that stands active and creative to this date (Arditti, 1999; Amantze Regueiro, 2012). Their initially *secret* suffering entered public life, becoming *visible*; and even if yet not legitimized, their loss was never again just *theirs*.

*Grandmothers’* and other human rights organisations’ struggles have changed with time but have not disappeared. Investigating to arrive to the truth, reconstruct acknowledgement and hold those responsible for the crimes committed accountable to the law, they continued trying to sum-up governmental support for denial and impunity to

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 -**Glossary**, where words/expressions marked with (\*) are further developed.

be tackled, and for the *right of identity*\* to be established and legitimised. For instance, some perpetrators had been sentenced during an exemplary Trial to the Junta\*, but later ‘pardoned’ by subsequent governments. Only after a trial during 2011, Grandmothers acting as plaintiffs proved that the disappearance of babies and young children had been part of a systematic plan, and as such it was pronounced as a crime against humanity. Many criminals that had managed to escape justice were found guilty and sentenced accordingly, and new investigations emerged.

During the democratically elected government those I spoke to described (from about 2003 to when we met, in 2014), things had changed significantly for Grandmothers as their struggle for ‘Truth, Memory and Justice’\* became a governmental priority. The socio-political changes this official initiative engendered were manifold and distinctly noticeable for me during my trips back home.

Sadly, in Argentina’s current political climate, tendencies attempting to discredit and dismount the achievements accomplished are gaining force and wide terrain again. In large sectors of the population, human rights activists and Grandmothers are being portrayed again as crazy or liars, and many official departments, research, legal and support teams have been dismantled in brutal governmental moves (even when paradoxically, they are considered internationally as examples to follow). Civil rights are being stripped-off, genocide criminals taken out of prison, new civilians imprisoned without trials, young activists killed with impunity by gendarmerie, indigenous peoples persecuted, any protest violently repressed. Behind the hundreds of *grandchildren* still missing there is yet a vast structure thriving, supporting and perpetuating that oppressive, unjust, totalitarian and ravenous paradigm. Many are still awaiting trials, many may never be judged.

But the work undertaken cannot be easily erased. After four decades, the number of missing children found (restituted\*) amounts to 130 (June 2019) and the search for the hundreds still missing continues. Considered to be living in *unknown captivity* (Lo Giudice, 1999; 2004), these missing ‘children’ (now in their forties) continue to live unaware of the violence the system and the families they grew-up in have been exerting upon them whilst their origins remain deliberately hidden.

## Identity Restitution

Once a concealed identity is suspected or revealed, the facts are laid to the law to deal with it accordingly. When a person is legitimately proven to be one of the appropriated children, it is said they have been *restituted*: in legal terms, they have recovered their original *identity*. The families who unlawfully took these children must face investigations and eventually, trials against the crimes committed. Identity restitution entails a legally long process. An outcome of the work of justice, not free from bureaucratic obstacles, political and ethical conundrums, *identity restitution* is also a singular psychological journey that cannot be generalised or pre-established.

Because of Grandmothers' search, the disappeared children are known as '*nietos*' (*grandchildren*). Considering them solely as *grandchildren* would be to strip them of their singularity and agency, re-enforcing what LaCapra (2001) calls a *negative sacrality* (when a *founding trauma* is the basis for individual or collective identity). Nevertheless, by joining Grandmothers in their struggle to find the still missing and to hold those responsible accountable for their acts, most have positioned themselves in the wider picture as '*one-of*' those *grandchildren* found; embracing a common denominator that for me signals a sort of *lodging* in a loving signifier. So, I will henceforth refer to them as grandchildren - honouring this signifier but without placing them all in one homogeneous bag.

## Other Legacies

During my twenties, as I worked with children with multiple and complex needs whilst training in Clinical Psychology and Psychoanalysis in Argentina, the few stories I came across about the stolen and appropriated children deeply wobbled me. I wondered about them... '*How could this have happened?*' Although the press and even highly regarded professionals in the field *pressed* the notion that restitutions were damaging for the children (they should be kept with the 'adoptive' parents; truth was harming, denial and oblivion desired), the importance of historical truth in these cases was undoubtedly clear to me. Even if 'only' inside their mothers' wombs, or soon after being born, *this had happened to them*, even if it could not have been assimilated yet as a personal

experience. How could we deny it? What would we be saving them from by hiding the truth? It seemed obvious to me that this meant validating the crimes committed against them and their parents; against us all. However, complex questions arose. If the truth about their origins and disappearance was important to be unveiled, I wondered:

*How can you survive something like this?*

*Where would you place your 'up-to-then parents' after learning their role in this?*

*Where would you place the horror that your parents (and yourself, at such young age) went through?*

*What are the 'marks' of this in your identity?*

*Could you get away from being owned by this? Could you ever make this experience yours?*

*What happens to your sense of belonging, your sense of self, of others, of trust?*

And basically,

*How do you survive, work-through something of this magnitude?*

## **The Doctorate**

Embarking on the doctorate programme at Middlesex University/Metanoia Institute in London was eventually one consequence of my *not-forced* but also *not-chosen* migration. Having arrived to the UK already with a strong sense of my professional identity made re-accreditation a very difficult task. The official administration only recognised about a fifth percent of my previous long training and experience in Argentina. I did not feel 'seen' or appreciated; my experience felt 'untranslatable', I felt grossly misread, I could not find a new home professionally. After years, frustrating as this was, the training eventually gave me a chance to re-visit a story that had 'clung' to me as if calling to be heard again, re-told, re-written from a different place. A chance to work on the questions that had arisen then, helping me re-connect with my professional, personal and political identity whilst re-adjusting, working-through again; mourning, honouring and re-building.

Friend: 'Ah, there you go, Egle! ...throwing yourself into the catacombs of the past!'

I: 'Well... it's more about the aftermath...

The 'now' out of 'then'...what's emerging out of it.

You know the wild flowers sprouting out of the graveyards? Something like that...

*That beauty... how come?!*

That's what baffles me here...'

Looking through my notes and diary entries, this dialogue seems to mark the start of some clarity around "why on Earth...?" I embarked in this piece of work and not another. My partner became used to finding me weeping (sometimes extremely sad, revolted; other times so moved and inspired) as I read testimonies, clinical vignettes, and Grandmothers' accounts of their search whilst our baby slept. Colleagues and friends incessantly asked me: *"Why not choose something simpler, more practical, less risky? Something you could do quicker?"*

At times, I thought maybe they were right. I was funding the re-training and the (re)search with my own work, raising my new family far away from my family of origin. The toll (emotional, financial, timewise) was heavy on me but the lingering sour after-taste of a 'giving-in' endeavour like this would have been damaging, betraying and disavowing my need to work-through all this. I somehow used the empathic attunement my emotional state of the time allowed me to experience to start immersing myself in it. I wanted to know more about this, I wanted to talk to the grandchildren, acknowledge my choice, honour it. I am aware that embarking on this research was undoubtedly a response to a personal call. Perhaps, I also did this for my daughter, as a desire to leave her an inspiring legacy of love, of hope, and of daring.

## **So, What?**

I have always been drawn to wonder about those I meet who have encountered the most adverse of beginnings -be it because of genetics, consistent cruelty, neglect, abuse, deprivation, segregation, marginality, lack of resources; those we would tend to believe would have very little chances. It is not surprising I became a psychotherapist. My

interrogations around restitution connect with psychological survival, with the capacity for life and creation out of adversity, or horror even: “How did he manage?”, or “How has she done this?”; “What do we do with what was given, encountered? How much can we change, engender, how much can we not or would not...?” These are questions that impregnate my practice, my way of working and my way of thinking about my work and life.... always there, in the background. This profession was a vocational choice. Is it science, is it activism? Is it art, a craft? I ask questions to myself, to others, help others question themselves, search, re-search. Resisting totalitarian narratives and ways (of working, of thinking, of being), I do not identify entirely with any of these ‘given’ places or denominators -although I accept their institutional necessity sometimes. Meeting in the here-and-now with an *other*, I listen to stories or aim to support their development when these are not possible yet to be uttered, accompanying people in the dismantling sometimes, the rebuilding or creation of them (their past and their future ones). I am not searching for a ‘truth’ or a ‘method’ that is applicable to all, but for ways in which the person I work with can find their own. My professional work contributes to my personal one, as... are they that separate anyway?

In her wonderful tales of psychotherapy, Touton-Victor (2011:21) highlights how, sadly, we (patients, psychotherapists) are rushed in contemporary life “to pack in as much as possible”. I find that increasingly in our profession, in education, health, or social work, people learn to apply packs of support for certain ‘groups’, ‘diagnosis’ or ‘presentations’. Some professionals become experts in reductionist techniques and in ‘cost-effective’ manualised practices -in my opinion, at a high cost to the dignity of individuals and groups (psychotherapists included). How do we then think with somebody else about what *they* are experiencing, what their life was/is like? In which way may they (as we) be contributing to their suffering or oppression, in which ways may they be resisting it, how have they come to be where they are now? How can change take place when the patient becomes “less a person to be listened to than an object to be treated” (Leader, 2011:4) or studied?

What are we doing, then? In this way, we straightforwardly dismiss “the violence at play..., present each time we try to crash a patient’s belief system by imposing a new system of values and policies on them” (Leader, 2011:7) by obediently focussing on diagnosis, on getting people ‘back on their feet’, on getting rid of what hurts. This current tendency for uncritical obedience and quick-fix leans on a budget paradigm where people seem to

account for numbers that need to be moved within a table, or data on a recording system. My sums do not add-up, though. In my view, this is false, dishonest. The so-called *revolving-door* patient is a clear symptom of this. Could it be that, given more appropriate space and time, the patient would not need to come back incessantly? Furthermore, this is not just maintained by some practitioners, regulators, or institutions. I find it stubbornly embodied in my patients' demands way too often: countless men and women, even some children have told me that giving themselves time to really think about themselves seems like 'an indulgence'! What do we become (patients, professionals) then?

Badiou describes slavery in a way that reminds me of this. The *body of the slave* is a body (somebody) alienated from its ideas, projects, views: "I will call justice to all attempts to fight against contemporary slavery, which means *to struggle* for another conception of the human being... This attempt is a political affirmation ...as it puts forwards another vision of (wo)men, proposing to link back the body of humanity with the project and the idea" (Badiou, 2007:23). I do wish our contemporary practices were more aligned with such an attempt. Mine, at least, aims to be "...an approach that looks not for the errors but for the truth in each person's relation to the world, and the effort to mobilize what is particular to each person's story to help them to engage once again with life: not to adapt them to our reality, but to learn what their own reality consists of, and how this can be of use to them" (Leader, 2011:7). I also join Guattari (2008:27) in his call: "an end to psychoanalytic, behaviourist or *systematist* catechisms!", reminding us that psychological therapists or "...psychiatrists must demonstrate they have abandoned their white coats, beginning with those invisible ones that they wear in their heads, in their language and in the way they conduct themselves".

My life in Argentina shaped much of this positioning. Whilst studying Clinical Psychology and Psychoanalysis there, I worked with marginalised individuals and communities. I found a formative lodging in an orientation that clinicians and academics from a previous generation had been developing (in Argentina or whilst in exile) that resonated profoundly in me... a sort of integration of "object relations and Lacanian ideas with radical social theory, ...practiced in an activism that aligned them with human rights and social justice movements" (Hollander, 2017:204). These were founding experiences, and 'my' style started to develop as I worked and studied in multidisciplinary teams. I worked intensively in a closely-knitted team with children with serious physical and psychological hurdles,

and with their parents, siblings, teachers, doctors. I also joined a governmental multidisciplinary preventative team in the most deprived of communities (devastated by HIV-aids, drug abuse, and extreme poverty) inviting neighbours, young people, health teams to come together and talk, to think deeply about their problems, collectively assessing contextual and contingent aspects of their situation; helping them construct and deconstruct them, face complex social issues and personal dilemmas and to explore and implement possibilities of change. We then met as a team, to think about the dilemmas encountered, about our work and its impact in our lives and work, as individuals and as a team. We then suggested policy and practical changes to those who employed us. I learnt so much back then!

So, whether I were in the UK to call myself a psychoanalyst, a psychotherapist, a psychologist, a family support worker even (I worked as such in London for about fifteen years with vulnerable families with very young children), I did not want to find myself operating like yet another automat technocrat, regurgitating already chewed-up conclusions about somebody else's life, 'disease', or choice; imposing interpretations that were the fruit of other searches, other minds, other geo-socio-political times. In my view, this "*produces a stereotyping which renders [us] insensible to the singular otherness [alterite'] of patients*" (Guattari, 2008:26), and even to our own. Developing my positioning further was an urgency because in such calcified environment, I felt ethically impoverished, an 'objectified-objectifier'.

Struggling with these issues amongst different regulations for professional practice, I found Grandmothers and *grandchildren's* stories powerfully moving, enriching, inspiring and 'truth-carrying'. During my visits back home, I had noticed the number of *grandchildren* that were speaking-out was increasing. Even more, people were approaching Grandmothers spontaneously, and more grandchildren were being found because of this. Something was allowing these stories to develop in this way. Despite the inherent sorrow, their narratives were movingly encouraging and seemed to me worth of closer exploration, even of wider dissemination: they *were* indeed new *becomings* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988)!

Choosing this topic to review has been perhaps also an attempt to move away from the place of the bystander and assume my own hurt. I wanted to face this part of my story, to learn from the *grandchildren* and re-tell their stories to a wider audience who might want



to learn from them, too. Exploring the grandchildren's experiences of restitution as adults, I wanted to gain insight into what supported the processing of a 'truth' that at once could have dismantled their world but instead seemed to have helped form a new, more dignified one. What had supported them? How come they *seemed* (at least, to me) to be standing so tall? As Andrews (2014:87) states, individuals "reveal how they position themselves within the communities in which they live, to whom or what they see themselves as belonging to/alienated from, how they construct notions of power, and the processes by which such power is negotiated. For individuals, political narratives are the ligaments of identity, revealing how one constructs the boundaries of, and the connections between, the self and the other... Political stories, even when they relate to individual experience, are never just the property of isolated selves". Furthermore, these stories "gain political purchase in the context of particular historical conditions and opportunities. These conditions are part of what shapes testifier's classic journeys from silence to speech gaining a hearer, being actively listened to, finding particular representational forms, and then finding their way to a juridical context. This is more than a political and a legal journey; it is a psychological one" (Andrews, 2014b:5).

I believe listening to the perhaps untidy, complex truths that can be constructed subjectively within processes of this nature can be hard, but is crucial "...to enable and further processes of working-through that are not simply therapeutic for the individual, but have political and ethical implications" (LaCapra, 1998:7). Denial of agency brings suffering, as it means oppression -whether intended or not. Focusing on what a particular subject or group has done with what was done to them, how they construct meaning out of the experiences lived, can help us to avoid discourses and practices that *hold the flag of truth for and about* the other (by thinking 'we' know what's best for 'them', by boxing people into diagnostic criteria or pre-established ways to confront their suffering). The poet Rodriguez, (2008) sings it:

"...So, don't tell me  
about *your* success...  
nor *your* recipes for *my* happiness..."

No doubt I found a narrative research methodology suitable and relevant for this task. Having no alternative but to learn on the go, I had to trust the inherent *thoughtful*

*improvisation* it required. Its methods resembled those of my work in (and out of) the consulting room, which allowed me space for appreciating and enduring the messiness of this particular ordeal, identifying complexities, implications, impact and possibilities - including the difficulty of feeling like a novice and the complex task of 'writing it up'.

I could not have hurried this. It required of me careful considerations of ethical issues and style, and crucially, of epistemological positioning. Therefore, the design of this research became itinerant, nomadic: taking form, direction and tone as the research developed.

## 2. Literature Review

As a preliminary proposed unfolding, this chapter presents part of my ‘theoretical lenses’ (Creswell, 2009) or *organisers*, delineating my position at the start of the process, the focus of my study and some of its edges, mainly to depict the questions guiding the project, painting a picture (a view) for approaching them. Multidisciplinary studies and theoretical readings permeated the piece in an un-prescriptive way as I weaved them into the inquiry as a whole (i.e., in the introduction, glossary, discussion). The issue of *identity restitution* is quite specific and most articles and studies are written in Spanish. However, their perspectives were developed integrating to them findings from other socio-political, clinical interventions and theoretical international perspectives (i.e., with survivors of state-inflicted violence, civil right abuses, Holocaust studies, truth and reconciliation initiatives, testimonial work), so I hope this is discernible here. As already part of the interpretative data collection and analysis, I do identify here themes and variations appearing in other research or theoretical explorations, predominantly to situate the issue studied in a wider context, whilst leaving space open to further explorations. Additional reading was incorporated in later chapters as I continued with the analytic process.

### What can be deemed to have been traumatic?

“...knowledge without acknowledgement;  
suffering without compensation;  
violation without accountability;  
horrors that are not exorcised;  
history without continuity -perfect post-modern events...”  
(Cohen, 2001:247)

The questions propelling this study were related to others generated in my practice as a psychotherapist in London. At the time, I was working with many patients raised by *survivors* of the four-decades long dictatorship in Spain. These young adults had been victims of domestic violence and cruel early relational abuse to a level I was not used to finding in my work. Adaptation and naturalisation seemed so common that it was not just

the denial of their own suffering what was at stake; there was also an alarming disinterest in wider historical issues clearly intertwined in their suffering in decisive ways. They talked about horrific situations in a startlingly naturalised way. Psychoanalysis and attachment theory (Freud, 1913; Bowlby 1969) have for long studied the effects of intergenerational trauma and systematically kept secrets, so these artful defensive ways created for psychological survival (i.e., this disconnection) and the naturalisation of abuse and oppression in speech was no news to me, but what was startling was its incidence. I sensed it as a cultural difference, too. For me, the disparity between the approaches to knowing (and not-knowing) as social practices (for instance, in Argentina and Spain at the time) was evident. The new stories of restitution coming out of Argentina carried powerful re-significations of meaning for me, markedly differing from the adaptive subjugation (to a master narrative, to the abusers, to the defences in place) and the isolating tendencies I was finding abundant in my work. 'Is it better *to know*?' -someone asked. It was clear that a straight, universal answer to this question was not a given. However, *how to start to know* or create knowledge around their suffering seemed to me to be the crucial issue. It was not about pushing out knowledge, or pushing them to find out, but rather, to work from my 'not-knowing' to animate a sense of curiosity about themselves and their worlds.

"The ultimate pathology of modernity is to deny the past and its transmission across the generations; of traditional society, to remain in the grip of the past and to be unable to celebrate the releasing creativity and renewal", says Holmes (1999:130). Transpiring out of the stories I was listening to, the work of restitution appeared to carry with it the marks of a different kind of inter-generational transmission, a different kind of response to victimhood -and I wanted to explore that. As Cohen (2001:247) highlights: "acknowledgement of a collective narrative... should be done for its own sake".

The *disappearance* of people carried out by their own government is regrettably not a new phenomenon and the list of worldwide atrocities seems unbearably endless. A crime deemed *against humanity* (like genocide, or the stealing of babies in Argentina) surely harms beyond its direct victims, scarring current and future generations, (Schwab, 2009; Piralian, 1994; Puget, 1988; Althounian, 1999; Cohen, 2001; LoGiudice, 1999; 2004). With those made *disappeared*, there is an added challenge: how do you begin to mourn when the bodies of the loved lost ones are not found (Corti, 2011; Hollander, 1992;

Leader, 2009)? And, in Argentina (and other border countries) the operational disappearing of those considered subversives and the subsequent stealing of their young children, had an additional layer: it was an organised, deliberate attempt not just to disappear, torture and murder them, but to annihilate kinship bonds between them and their families (LoGiudice, 1998; Arditti, 1999; Hollander, 1992) and solidarity bonds between citizens through spreading terror in appallingly effective ways. One of the problems usually identified within situations of psychosocial *extreme trauma* (Becker; 2011) is that of irrepresentability: there are no words or means available to describe it. Extreme trauma of this kind is linked with a deafening silence; the piercing impact in the body and mind of those it reaches being undoubtedly vast, overwhelming our capacity to process, breaking-through our *window of tolerance* (Siegel, 1999), rendering individuals and groups *speechless*, unable to understand, make sense, regulate or integrate their experiences and responses into a coherent narrative. After their work with Holocaust survivors, Laub & Auerhahn (1993:301) say that “massive trauma cannot be grasped because there are neither words nor categories of thought adequate to its representation”. By fracturing memory, narrative and meaning, individuals, groups, and society are traumatised, and the unspoken horrors return in symptomatic forms in present-day and future generations. Having worked with Holocaust survivors and their children, Auerhahn & Peskin (2003) described the *traumatization of knowledge* (a traumatic repression of thinking, feeling, knowing and making-known) as the individual and social inability to acknowledge and recognise trauma of this kind. Furthermore, as Uruguayan psychoanalyst and dictatorship survivor Ulriksen de Viñar (2004:192) states, meaning is lost under conditions of extreme violence also because “all psychic violence aims at submission of the other so that the subject cannot even think her/his own submission”. It seems that massive grief of this kind stagnates in the body and renders one powerless to respond.

However, from Holocaust studies we know that survivors struggled also because there was not *an audience willing to listen* (Levi, 1987). In its place, there was a willingness to shift their position quickly “from victim to agent, without passing through working-through ...without having that intervening process, just sort of transcending it. This just doesn’t work; it can only create difficulties...” (LaCapra & Goldberg, 1998:12). Likewise, in his invaluable review of denial states following atrocities, Cohen (2001) shows that, even when confronted with *knowing about atrocities*, people’s tendency is to look-away, push-

aside knowing, neglect, pardon, deny, especially in terrorised (and often also implicated) socio-political contexts subjected to implicit commands to forget. This unavoidably perpetuates victimhood, amplifying it in the present (Auestad, 2017), and moving it beyond. By not being willing or able to listen, by dissociating, disavowing; negating, or hurrying someone to 'heal', we might be revictimizing, unwittingly, even when trying to help. For instance, psychoanalysts Auherhan & Peskin (2003), described how prevalent the obliteration of an *original* sense of self or *identity* had been for some child Holocaust survivors that had been raised in families and cultures that *denied* and *despised* their origins and continued hiding their legitimate identity for decades. They argued that the massive rejection experienced within the social niche that 'rescued' them had ultimately crushed their original identity, rendering these individuals unable to *recover* a sense of whom they had been once confronted with 'the truth' years after. Could they have really 'forgotten' so much? Fonagy (1999:103-104) describes this 'forgetting': "the individual has awareness of the stimulus but is unable to become aware of that awareness.... Without the ability to reflect, the normal meaning of experience is lost. Experiences of *self* exist in limbo, separate from other aspects of mental function".

The argument held during the first democratic years in Argentina when the first *identity restitutions* were made public, followed this kind of dissociative or rejective solution: *restitutions* were supposedly negative and destructive, so traumatising they had to be avoided. 'Keeping the truth' was claimed to be a caring, protective measure... but for whom? Lo Giudice (1999, 2004) described how denial, guilt, shame and dissociation were commonly found amongst the first few found grandchildren; as well as in the appropriating families, the families of origin and in society in general. Together with other professionals working with Grandmothers (Ulloa, 1998; Bleichmar, 1998; Bianchedi & Bianchedi, Brawn, Pelento, & Puget, 1998), she disputed that what was found to be most traumatic for the children was the fact that their original trauma had been silenced and unacknowledged, with intricate lies constructed about their origins. "Research on psychotrauma related to human violence shows that the recognition of historical reality is crucial in victims' reconstruction" (Auestad, 2017: XXVII): losses "have to be specified or named for mourning as a social process to be possible" (LaCapra, 2001:69) -even if "...there cannot be any objective measure of the amount of distress that can reasonably be expected (...). Nor is there any evidence for the dogma that (at the right stage) people must 'work-through' rather than deny their feelings of grief" (Cohen, 2001:53-54). So, 'the

truth' is crucial, but there are limits to it: the "limits of acknowledgement itself" (Butler, 2005:42). Hence, it is important to admit that it might be impossible to transcend certain events fully: "certain wounds both personal and historical, cannot simply heal without leaving scars or residues in the present" (LaCapra, 2001:144).

Also, we know that severe abuse perpetrated by those who are supposed to look after us is undoubtedly psychologically damaging (Van der Kolk, 1987; Freyd, 1994; 1996), especially because of our *also* psychological dependency on those bonds. In the case of *identity restitutions* this is tangibly profound. Learning one day about the conditions of your birth, that your mother and/or father was murdered and made disappear as if s/he never existed; that you were then *taken* and appropriated by the family you grew to believe was 'yours'; that your name was another, your 'family' another, your history a purposely constructed lie, all whilst your family of origin searched for you for years...: we can deem such an encounter with the Real to be traumatic; crumbling the structure your life was built on, rupturing the 'given' notions of who you are, confronting you with the fact that the previous understanding of the world was built on massive deception. In fact, 'you' had been made disappeared, you are a survivor of torture, too -an unwitting, direct victim of crimes against humanity. A blockage in the flux of personal, family, and social history (muteness, not-wanting to-know) is something not difficult to imagine in cases of this nature. In this sense, there are similarities between in the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Etherington 1995; 2000), and those described by some of the grandchildren found as adults. Leaning on Freyd's findings (1994; 1996) about the double bind a child subjected to this dynamic usually develops, Etherington (2000:122-123) says: "a child develops trust through attachment with its earliest caregivers. But when that trust is betrayed by those caregivers, it may be more advantageous for the child to deny the pain in order to survive -the greater the dependence, the greater the betrayal. Humans, as social beings, are dependent on relationships and trust. Betrayal violates the basic ethic of human relationships. Although we may recognise betrayal when it occurs, that recognition may be stifled for the greater need for survival... To 'not know' is to align (oneself) with the abuser and therefore ensure survival". Indeed, according to public testimonies, a common obstacle for the grandchildren was envisaging devastating consequences for their relationships with those who had brought them up. Although talking about Holocaust survivors' feelings of guilt due to their own survival, what LaCapra (2001:144) says here is again relevant for

this case: “One of the most difficult aspects of working-through is the ability to undertake it in a manner that is not tantamount to betraying the trust or love that binds one to *lost* others... The feeling of trust betrayed or fidelity broken (however unjustified the feeling may in fact be) is one of the greatest impediments to working-through problems”. To make things worse, perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse use typical strategies to avoid being held accountable, minimising their acts and passing-on their guilt onto the victims. Using the acronym ‘DARVO’, Freyd (1997) described this tactic as ‘Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender’. Similarly, this confusing, blaming approach, was indubitably used with the appropriated children, especially in families directly linked to the disappearances and murder of their parents. It was a double discourse, stating one thing (‘I would never lie to you’ or ‘everything I do is to protect you’), whilst doing exactly the opposite. Although not all appropriated grandchildren were taken by people who were conscious of their role in the appropriation, these descriptions alert us to the psychological hindrances they (as children or as adults) were most likely confronted to, especially because, as Feitlowitz (1998) highlights, this double discourse was widely and masterfully used also in the public domain (i.e., one of the official slogans of the Junta was: ‘We, Argentinians, are Straight and Human’).

How do you accept what has happened if it means feeling you are ‘betraying’ those bonds (your closest relationships, your world) in favour of the unknown? How do you begin to understand what it is that *you* lost? Coming into contact with your sense of having been betrayed (the non-action of others, the lies implanted to prevent the truth coming to light, the unwillingness to listen, feeling objectified again when trying to understand) may fuel feelings of anger, but without a ‘way-out’, it might also further subdue. Fonagy (1999:109-110) illuminates this also in connection to the Holocaust experience: “people who could have been expected to treat their compatriots as fellow human beings with intentionality, suddenly began to treat Jews with hatred and a systematic brutality previously unimaginable even between enemy peoples or between humans and animals. The same people continued to behave in a normal way in other relationships. It is in this duality that perhaps the cruellest aspect of the trauma lies. Mindless persecutions destroy our deepest-rooted and most cherished expectations about human behaviour, that is regulated by a mutual recognition of mental states... Just as child abuse is particularly damaging when perpetrated by a family member, so we may expect persecution to be



annihilating when it is carried out by people whom we might otherwise trust to reaffirm our intentionality”.

Relational psychoanalyst Benjamin speaks of the *moral third* as “the essential component principles of the lawfulness in repair -lawfulness begins ‘primordially’ with the sense that the world offers recognition, accommodation and predictable expectations, and develops into truthfulness, respect for the other, and faith in the process of recognition” (Benjamin, 2009:90). Appropriations are aberrant, extreme manifestations of the opposite, of othering; as the appropriator affirms his/her “...moral system or sense of self by destroying, violating, murdering another” (Caruth, 1995:141). We cannot know for certain how the relationship between the appropriators and the grandchildren developed, but one can imagine that this *moral third* was lacking in the appropriators or that it operated in a feeble way. A lingering sense of disbelief (even when in presence of hard evidence) described in many testimonials adds a further complication: how do I choose what to know, what/who to believe, if it was all a lie? In Argentina, fear, secrecy and the double discourse together with blatant impunity heightened isolation, showing the frailty indeed of the social moral third. This is complicated, as “...we are ‘held together’ both as individuals and as a society by our relationships and by our language. Lacan (1977:19) was the first to articulate clearly the profound connections between the psychoanalytic notion of an inner world, and the linguistic universe: ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’...there’s a grammar and a syntax to emotional relationships, of which we are largely unaware, yet which have a determining effect on how we feel about ourselves and those whom we love and hate, and which we have learned -like a language- within the microculture of the family” (Holmes, 1999:116). A *good-enough* mirroring marks cross-modally our early experiences (exaggerating the feelings -more or less accurately, more or less attuned) (Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1965; Holmes, 1999), contributing to the development of a more or less coherent sense of an inner-world; a sense of trust in that feelings can be shared, and that there can be a shared world. The reflective function described by Fonagy et al., (1995) develops within these contingent, attuned experiences with our parental figures, giving us the useful capacity to think about ourselves in relation to others. If we see ourselves because we had been seen, if “the maternal mirror is the basis of the ‘inner mirror’ or representational world” (Holmes, 1999:120), the image we create of ourselves is influenced (re-created) by that gaze (Lacan, 1971). So, how did

those appropriated for so many years, and only found as adults, manage to negotiate this mess?

The failure to see the child as a person in its own right, or the lack of what Ulloa (2012) called *tenderness* and of what Benjamin (2004) described as the *symbolic third*, renders visible the appropriators' severe dissociation at play -especially if we think that they were *capable* of robbing someone's child whilst robbing the child of his/her parents. Was this done to conceal their own lack, soothe their relational wounds, fill-in their existential abyss? Following the work of Punta de Rodolfo (1997) and Bianchedi et. al, Corti (2017) fittingly highlights that within this relational dynamic, an unconscious injunction directed to the appropriated child can be seen operating: 'you shall not-be' (the child of your legitimate parents). A command that I believe was echoed by the wider socio-political passivity and complicity, too. We are all dependent "on the social other to reaffirm (our) psychic reality" (Fonagy, 1999:110). So, when this 'natural' dependency is used to reinforce our frailty and crush our subjectivity in that way, this will surely damage trust and lock us in a double bind of denial: negating our fragility and our dependency, we will also deny ourselves the possibility of building our strength, our drive to resist, our capacity to love and create. Noailles (2014) says that "the victimiser triumphs ...when impunity eternises the traumatizing effects and blocks mourning... each time the victim's life is hegemonized...." by the abuse. Thus, beyond the traumatic event itself, what happens *once* the abuse is recognised as having taken place might call for further, complicated, deeper kind of work: the crisis that survival itself entails (Caruth, 1995).

## **What could have helped?**

Even within these potentially overwhelming struggles, most grandchildren have eventually welcomed 'the truth' (Arditi, 1999). Currently in their forties, those recently *found* are adjusting to the impact of such complex and ominous discoveries in their lives and that of others with more symbolic resources at hand than one could have imagined. Herman (2001:1) argues that only "when truth is finally recognised, survivors can begin their recovery". Congruently with this, "professionals working with Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo have distinguished between the nature and meaning of two different traumas:

the first was the 'destructive original trauma' suffered by the children when they were stolen (right after birth or as small infants or toddlers) and raised on the basis of a family secret (lies they were told about their origins by their appropriators, who were often the assassins of their biological parents); the second was the 'reconstructive trauma', an inevitable aspect of the revelation of the truth about their origins, about their abductor 'parents', but nevertheless the kind of traumatic experience that facilitates the psychic and social reconstruction of one's existence and provides the foundation for an identity and life based on the truth" (Hollander, 1997:182). So, has finding a more *truthful story* about their origins helped them to start to re-build their own? How come most seem to be doing so well -at least, when talking about it? What has helped them in their process? Hollander (2017) asks herself similar questions, and so does Corti (2017), with whom frequently in conversations we have asked each other: "*How come they haven't gone mad?!*"

If, as attachment theory suggests, the reflexive capacity protects us against adversity (because we can see ourselves from another point of view, putting as well our feelings into a context), "then we can say that it really is 'good to know', or, rather, to be able to know" (Holmes, 1999:128).

In writing and researching trauma, LaCapra uses two concepts derived from psychoanalysis to represent the work: "working-through" and "acting-out". He underscores the reductionism that denies the fact that these often interact and are two "intimately related parts of a process" (LaCapra & Goldberg, 1998:2). Equally, he is critical of "any kind of fully redemptive notion of mourning... especially for the victim, (as) it may be impossible to fully transcend acting-out" (LaCapra & Goldberg, 1998:7). He says that "the alternative is to try and work-out some very delicate relationship ...to relate acting-out and working-through itself: in acting-out, one relives as if one were the other...; and in working-through, one tries to acquire some critical distance that allows one to engage in life in the present, to assume responsibility..." (LaCapra & Goldberg, 1998:4-5). Even "unfinished mourning (can be) the condition of coming to terms with the past, a process that preserves the relation to the past while transforming the latter and opening it to future possibilities" (Debs, 2017:97).

Psychological growth following adversarial trauma (one that severely disrupts identity and worldviews) has been a topic of research for the last two decades in the field of positive

psychology (Frazier, Conlon & Glaser, 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2002). Payne, Joseph and Tudway, (2007:89-90) claim that typical responses to adversarial trauma oscillate between *assimilating* (negating, diminishing personal responsibility, altering perceptions to return to pre-trauma beliefs, justifying, denying) and *accommodating* (engaging with trying to understand and make sense of the events and their impact, allowing for different worldviews to develop at a slower pace) and highlight that the work usually takes time, fluctuating between assimilation *and* accommodation: "...clients present often with high levels of distress, seeking quick remedies". However, they urge professionals to avoid "promoting assimilation via treatments that emphasize return to pretrauma beliefs and the current drive for cost-effectiveness of therapy. If assimilation is inadvertently promoted through prescriptive treatments..., clinicians are potentially making clients more vulnerable to ill effects of future traumas and inadvertently increasing the number of 'revolving door' clients". Linley & Joseph (2005) underscored though, that there is a greater pull towards psychological well-being when victims feel supported by the environment. Could we link the 'success' of restitutions with the changed socio-political context, with the acknowledgement work of human rights groups? Could it be that eventually, the wider context started offering a stronger sense of a moral sense (Benjamin, 2009) lacking at home? If so, in which way?

Becker (2011) maintains that concepts of trauma in relation to organised violence need to be constantly reinvented, relating them specifically to the political and cultural contexts in which traumatization occurred. He notes, like many others working with children or grandchildren of victims of the Holocaust (Jucovy, 1982; Gubrich-Simitis 1981; Herzog, 1982; Levine, 1982, Fonagy, 1999) that the intra-psychic dynamics triggered by trauma can be worn-down by a close relationship that recognises and accepts the destruction that has occurred, helping build a space in which symbolization and integration can occur. Undoubtedly, if "intergenerational transmission manifests itself as a *story* handed down and lived out by the protagonist in the family drama... (offering) similar conditions to those underlying secure attachment: attunement, handling of protest, responsiveness, mirroring, and so on" (Holmes, 1999:125) within a psychotherapeutic relationship can help transmute this story; letting the patient's own rhythm and direction to guide the work -like in 'child-led play' (Webster-Stratton, 2005). Winnicott's holding environment (1965), Bion's containment (1962), Stern's attunement (1985), Bowlby's secure base (1988) "are all reaching towards the same idea. The function of the parent, of the therapist and of

cultural objects can all be understood in this framework of containment and structuring of inchoate experience” (Holmes, 1993:144). It is crucial to add then, that this *shift in the offering* has to be felt clearly also in the wider socio-political context (Herman, 2001). The current public disclosures of past systematic sexual abuse and institutional silence suffered by so many in the hands of those in positions of power and trust (football coaches, TV celebrities, film producers, the church, etc.) and the recent work to improve the connections between private suffering and the wider context (*my grieving is not just private*, or: *it is not just me who suffered this*), speak volumes in this sense. All abuse happens in context, so a shift in the context is also crucial for shifting the effects of abuse and victimisation -and hence, our relationships to ‘self’ and to others.

From “...a psychoanalytical point of view, subjectivation understood as assuming one’s responsibility in a multi-layered interrelational collective is crucial for the work of mourning and healing” (Peng, 2017:125). In their work with refugees, for instance, Papadopolous et al (2002), found that “traumata, though experienced individually, cannot find a positive response if their significance is forcibly reduced to an individual dimension” (Losi, 2002:235) and detached from contextual responsibility.

Processing violence and abuse is hence unavoidably linked with acknowledgement, which is intrinsically of a relational nature: knowing/re-knowing with *others*, acknowledging collectively what has been intentionally kept private, hidden, and blocked. If, as Herman (2001:34) states, “traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail”, is the *action* needed here that of acknowledgement, re-cognition, of justice? Grandmothers as organisation believes that acknowledgment facilitates the *coming to terms* with the original trauma -even if it may never provide complete *closure*. Although it may come as a shock initially, they note that with *restitution*, the impact suffered by *knowing* offers the possibility of processing and re-organising the world, creating meaning, *integrating* the original trauma -with truth as a different, this time *legitimate base* from which to reconstruct a sense of identity and belonging. Auerhan & Peskin (2003) described through their work with children of Holocaust survivors how, through *interpretive action*, the traumatization of knowledge could be transformed into *action knowledge*, coinciding with Hollanders’ (1997;1992) studies in the strength provided by activism within the Liberation Psychology movement in Latin America (Martin-Baró, 1994) and with the positive psychological effects of political engagement for victims of state terror studied by

many others in the human rights field (Jensen & Jolly et al., 2014; Auestad et al., 2017). Moreover, those working with human rights exploitations and institutionalised abuse and traumata [i.e., the 'Stolen Generations' of Australian aboriginal or mixed-race children, or the children of poor backgrounds or young unmarried women given away or institutionalised in different parts of the world (Sherwood, 2016; Holmes, 2018); the 'comfort women' of Japan (Peng, 2017)] have relentlessly asked, primarily, for the truth to be known; for public acknowledgement and apologies. Fullard & Rousseau (2009:1-4) claim that "truth-telling initiatives... are generally part of new alignments and struggles to reorganize power" and help to unsettle unhelpful identifications, especially in societies "where denial, invisibility, and isolation have marked particular groups". "For the collective, as for the individual, 'coming to terms with the past' is to know (and admit to knowing) exactly what happened. Overcoming repression -the conscious cover-up or the gradual slippage -is supposed to be traumatic (opening up graves and wounds) before it becomes liberating. ...Virtually all the objectives of Truth Commissions -overcoming denial, facing the truth, coming to terms with the past- can be expressed in psychological as well as political language... 'working through', 'coming to terms with', 'reckoning with', or 'overcoming the past'" (Cohen, 2001:223).

The shame felt and implanted deliberately by the victimisers and denying cultures that sustain silence and impunity, contributes to the isolation of those victimised, leaving them with poor means by which to take up voice. Due to this, the mediating function of others in helping individuals to overcome the effects of abuse and regain a sense of security is seen as crucial by many (Herman, 2001; Etherington, 2000; Egeland, Jacobvitz and Sroufe, 1988; Gilgun, 1990), by helping survivors to tell their stories from their own experiences and point of view and mourn, as much as possible -or as well as possible- the losses created by trauma in a safe, private setting. However, *others* are equally important for raising awareness more widely, for showing recognition and a moral third in operation. In my view, the work of human rights groups like Grandmothers can be thought as contributing to this crucial mediating effect. Instead of expecting the whole work to be done by the isolated individual, the work of truth telling, memory and justice in the wider context brings a sense of containment where hearing widely the condemnation that *it was wrong* ('what happened to me') can finally be felt to be true.

But, how does acknowledgement turn into consequential action, personal and contextual response or contextual responsibility when denial works so well as “an unconscious defence mechanism for coping with guilt, anxiety and other disturbing emotions aroused by reality” (Cohen, 2001:5)? For instance, this is clear “in settings like the South African Truth & Reconciliation Commission, where public truth telling (‘full disclosure’) and the expression of remorse help to gain indemnity from prosecution. Many feel that this type of acknowledgement comes too easily” (Cohen, 2001:132). Thus, although exposing and truth-telling initiatives are unavoidably important steps in the work, the move towards empowering action is often missed. I believe the work of human rights organisations (Grandmothers included) was vital in Argentina in this regard, as their demands went further: exposure, memory and truth were indispensable to reconstruct and ‘come to terms with the past’ but also for doing something else with it, about it. Recognition calls for consequences, and accountability needs justice. “...you discover the truth about the past in order to achieve justice in the present” (Cohen, 2001:243) and to (at least try) to work towards undoing the forces of oppression, seeking to avoid the horror story repeating itself. Seeking contextual acknowledgement does not mean, as some claim, that we are dealing with an obsession with the past, or a fixation with remembering. It is, in my view, a crucial step towards allowing for something different to develop: “...a different experience of the present” (Fisher, 2017:278).

Interestingly, the grandchildren are currently *not only able to tell their story* but many are actively engaged in doing so, using different public or more private platforms. Like with the #MeToo movement, the Irish or Spanish stolen babies’ cases, the UK children sent unlawfully to Australia, the BlackLivesMatters movement in America (to name but a few examples), it is not just about exposing the abuse and developing new narratives in which to position themselves, it is also about developing “...a set of institutions: legal sanctions, powers of intervention for welfare and law enforcement agencies, ...etc.” (Cohen, 2001:52) to make that change concrete. So, if truth can be liberating, it may be because, at least, it allows you to do something about it. This may be one of the reasons why many survivors of different kinds of abuse want “people to know how they survived; what helped, what they needed, what resources they found, both within themselves and externally” (Etherington, 2000:15). Developing a different voice in response to the abuse is also a call to the other to engage with it: *‘Listen! Respond!’*

Through explicit and tacit representational constructions, we define our identity and the world we live in (Verhaeghe, 2004). 'To be' is also 'to be somewhere' (Heidegger, 1971), whilst also 'coming from somewhere' (lineage). As we develop into adulthood, these constructions (autobiographies) become quite settled. So, "what does a dictatorship victim do so that his/her condition as victim does not hegemonize his/her life; to be a person with the capacity to work, love, to take part, create, enjoy life? ...what does the subject do with what was done to him/her?" (Noailles, 2014) Some individuals do manage to go beyond the handed-down stories, the self-made ones to fit neatly-built defences, or the forced-fed ones -and "create an identity *de novo*, and in doing so may become the innovators...of the next generation" (Holmes, 1999:124). Many of the found *grandchildren* seem to be of that kind: joining Grandmothers in their work to locate the still missing, working to prioritise the human rights' struggles at a national level, making their stories public and widely available, engaging the *very personal* with the *socio-political* need to know and re-know; offering a chance for others to take agency.

Narratives of identity *restitution* show the inexorable interlinked, complex aspects of the individual and the social, where issues of truth and identity restitution hold hands with legal and judicial ordeals and ethical dilemmas; and where there is not one pre-established way to go about it. We cannot pretend that people can attain total closure of the horrors of the past, neither should we proclaim that everything must be remembered. I believe we must account for the fact that trauma "...falls within the compass of no single genre or discipline, and how one should approach it in a given genre or discipline is an essentially contested question" (LaCapra, 2001:204). For instance, 'grandmothers' and 'grandchildren' present us with further questions about what constitutes mourning and *identity*. "One's bond ...with dead intimates may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound" (LaCapra, 2001:22). This can be problematic, but also enabling. As groups, their 'chosen names' evoke and reframe the traumas experienced, and repositions them. Amongst a lot of other losses, the 'grandmothers' and their 'grandchildren' have lost the generation in between them (their children, their parents). Is it for us to tell whether they have been able to mourn or work-through this loss, or how it is best for them to do it? What is clear to me is that as 'grandmothers' they reaffirm their relationship to their lost children in their loving search for their children's children... their children's stories, the legacy of their struggles. By joining the search for others missing



(and for truth, memory and justice), the 'grandchildren' locate themselves in that signifier as being part of a bigger family. In this sense, a *founding trauma* can become the basis of *an* identity. A collective memory with a collective horizon of action develops in the process of individual memories opening up to one another, as "individual memory, incessantly subjected to transformations and reformulations" (Candau, 2008:43), ceasing being isolated and individual, starts forming part. "This is an extreme and interesting paradox -how something traumatic, disruptive, disorienting in the life of a people can become the basis of identity-formation...how, as working-through a trauma one finds an identity which is both personal and collective at the same time..." (LaCapra and Goldberg, 1998:16).

Hence, if "...agency lies in the capacity to navigate between discourses, to differentially take up subject positions (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin & Walkerdine, 1984, 2000) and act on the possibilities of resignification made available through discourses (Butler, 1995) then knowledge of alternative discourses, and of alternative routes through them must facilitate agency. These are not made available in isolation but through relationship and particularly through hearing each other's stories" (Bridges, 2007:52). Grandmothers insist on the importance of *identity restitution* because for them it is a chance for the grandchildren (and indeed, *their right*) to do something else with what had happened to them... It is not about imposing yet another identity, but about offering them a subjectifying lodging: "space and time to recognize 'this happened to me, I was born under these circumstances, I was robbed, I was found... now restitution. What does all this mean to me?' Under appropriation, these questions cannot be asked" (LoGiudice, 2007:123).

Therefore, "...what needs to be scrutinised is not simply the validity of the historical accounts of suffering we are presented today, but also the assumptions, anxieties and agendas of the present...remembering is not always a positive thing, and unless handled correctly, it can cause more harm than good... Every recollection is also a careful forgetting. ...just as one can be naïve about the power and place of remembering the past today, one can also be naïve about the power of forgetting. The atrocities of the past remain as undercurrents and eventually demand to be addressed. Thus, there must be a balance... What makes the act of remembering moral is not only the intent of the actors present but what they do with those memories" (Meral, 2012:46). I hope to learn about, and show to others, how some of the grandchildren *have learned* or *are learning* to deal

with the past to make a difference in the present. Human beings construct and are constructed by subjective and collective ways of meaning-making and meaning-breaking. For me, their work is crucial because it brings with it an interesting take on change, not necessarily closure but “the transformation that makes previously normalised conditions into social problems. This carries radical implications for victims, offenders and bystanders” (Cohen, 2001:250-251).

To acknowledge in Spanish is ‘*reconocer*’; literally, ‘*to re-know*’, to know again -as in *re-cognition*- in a new way. It also relates, as it does in English, to legitimating not just *my* truth but yours: *I identify you, I recognise you, I acknowledge you, your voice, your name, your heritage, your place in relation to mine, within our communal existence* (Candau, 2008). Re-cognition is then to know again, to be seen -*met, or found* by (and with) an *other*. Therefore, I think I will not be exaggerating if I say, with Fells (2013:2), that “perhaps robbing someone of his or her story is the greatest betrayal of all”.

## Other Envisaged Contributions

“The human social sciences have condemned themselves to missing the intrinsically progressive, creative and auto-positioning dimensions of processes of subjectification”  
(Guattari, 2008:24-25).

I believe the contribution of this research can be multifaceted. I aim to part with binary positions that fix meanings into categories of experience disavowing the interdependence between personal, ethical, socio-political worlds, hopefully adding to the post-modern, post-structural turn in the social sciences. For instance, I see the need for an ethical debate in current parenthood technology and market (Farina & Gutierrez, 2001), to reconsider the importance of issues of kinship, the right of identity and lineage, or the ways in which people and groups become objectified commodities in certain currently accepted, promoted and dominating narratives. Also, many cases of babies swapped or separated at birth (intentionally or by mistake) have emerged in recent years in the media (Harris, 2011; Tuckman & MacAskill, 2011; Spillius, 2011) and add to the ones of the children

‘robbed’ in Spain (about 30,000 babies are estimated to have been illegally robbed and given away, sold to others perceived as more suited to raise them) from Franco’s times up to the mid-eighties, only recently coming to light reticently (Gonzales de Tena, 2009). The ‘dodgy’ adoptions in Ireland (Sherwood, 2016) are another example, or the children sent to Australia from the UK (Symonds, 2017).

Hopefully, this inquiry will help enhance our appreciation of the complex situations generated when the hidden ‘truth’ emerges, how these findings are managed, integrated, resisted, or denied. As stated above, having been interested in tailored-crafted practices more than in the normative approaches that are prescriptive, manualised and of dominance today, I aim with this piece to contribute to the effort to de-focus from unquestioned diagnostic criteria that perpetuates a division between the individual and society and neutralises the space of therapy. I would like us to re-focus our lenses, our sensitivities into the importance of including history, contingency, and the socio-political in the understanding of the subjective, highlighting the dangers of ‘neutrality’ and re-victimization by individualising trauma whilst applying ‘pre-packed’ understandings of it followed by the application of treatment techniques isolated from supplementary support sensitivities and other disciplines’ studies. If we need to create narratives to make sense of our world: in which way are we, as professionals, engaged in producing these for the benefit of less oppressive, authoritarian, objectivising capitalist-led versions of subjectivity? I believe policies *can and should* be developed using different modalities and views, inspired by the people we work with, co-researching with them, including ourselves and our shared contexts in them. Different schools have highlighted (i.e., positive psychology, psychoanalysis, attachment theory), each in their own *language*, that treatments could trigger further denial of responsibility (personal, public, professional) when trauma is treated as individual (or only as structural). Detaching trauma from its context produces further stigmatization, by de-politicising suffering we put the blame again on the victim, neglecting oppression and submission. Hence, learning from the different ways in which people understand what has been traumatic and their (personal and communal) responses to it, could help us enhance creativity within our clinical resources. My clinical work in London with people from all over the world have enlivened my interest in intergenerational, intercultural, social and relational trauma and resilience. I hold the view that we have an ethical responsibility to pay attention and acknowledge gross injustice against a background of historical social silence and denial of contextual

responsibility. Otherwise, we risk becoming the paralysed bystander. Such a position can be read as embodying *the accomplice to the abuse(r)*, with devastating consequences for those we allegedly intend to support, or accompany, but also for ourselves, our wider communities, our future. Many denial states “result from publicly available, even cherished clichéd cultural denials, such as ‘My job is not me’. Our societies encourage and rewards the successful practice of splitting; dissociation and numbing are integral parts of the late modern cultures of denial” (Cohen, 2001:93). So, therapists, following protocols uncritically (‘I was just following guidelines’), employed to do so even! are at risk of resigning to this. Feeling helpless to change things, can lead us further into inadvertently justifying submission, echoing denial and perpetuating abuse.

As Guattari (2008:29-30) highlights, “it is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, and gestures of human solidarity. A stifling cloak of silence has been thrown over the emancipating struggles of women, and of the new proletariat: the unemployed, the ‘marginalized’, immigrants...”. In my view, Grandmothers have been lifting-up this *silencing cloak*, even if it keeps being thrown back over them incessantly. The now four decades of work developed around the *grandchildren’s appropriations* constitutes a powerful story to learn from. Even when just over a fifth of them have been found to date, Grandmothers’ work “is an example for humanity” as one of the *grandchildren* told me. I add that such an example is also the complex work the grandchildren had to embark on because of what happened to them, as... “simply attaining a voice able to bear witness or give testimony -to express certain unspeakable injuries, insults, and forms of abjection- is itself a remarkable accomplishment. That a severely traumatized victim-become-survivor may continue to be haunted by the past is not surprising. What is surprising is that the victim may in some viable sense indeed become a survivor and even, at least for a time, put together a life involving familial and even professional and civic responsibilities” (LaCapra, 2001:211).

In Argentina, many lives that were silenced for decades are vigorous now, supporting the work to locate those still missing. I aim to contribute, even if slightly, to these voices gaining a wider audience, new understandings, and greater depths whilst reawakening conversations about the importance and difficulties around the search for *truth* in any given human ordeal.

### 3. Research Design

#### Epistemological Ground and Methodology

“There is no such thing as value-free knowledge,  
just as there’s no such thing as passion-free science”  
(Verhaeghe, 2014:68)

I see with unease an excessive tendency or “an overriding conviction that everything can and should be understood in scientific terms, using propositions that are universally applicable and unaffected by context. Research (which must, of course be value-free) is based on actual measurements (everything being measurable) and produces data that can then be objectively processed” (Verhaeghe, 2014:69). I do not work, think, or see the world in this way. Furthermore, in mainstream psychotherapy practice, it daunts and worries me that a “pseudo-scientific emphasis on measurable outcomes and visible ‘results’ has replaced careful, long-term work that gives a dignity to each individual” (Leader, 2011:5). So, to embark on this project, I needed to find a methodology that was congruent with my epistemological lenses, gave justice to the topic chosen and honoured the participants’ knowledge and experience. The *paradigmatic* (inductive, deductive, abductive) *way-of-knowing* (Bruner, 1986) I felt ingrained in many methodologies in one way or another, did not suit me or my project well: how was I to approach it?

I reviewed different qualitative, interpretative and phenomenological approaches trying to decide on a frame for my project. Initially, I found myself thinking about Case Study Research, perhaps because it was a fairly known territory to enter. However, I soon realised that considering the stories as ‘cases’ was not ideal, as I felt acutely the risk of objectivating those who had undoubtedly been outrageously objectified before. Presenting *restitution* as a case could have solved this, giving room to explore the context in detail, but it was too big a topic for the size of this project and I felt I would not be able to do justice to all the important ramifications I could see developing from it. Constructivist Grounded Theory, popular amongst my peers, seemed to offer the ease of clear methodological steps and systematic coding strategies with the aim of creating theory out of the data gathered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, even within its

phenomenological reflexivity, its analytical style seemed somehow *forced* for me, perhaps because I wanted to be removed from the place of ‘theory-maker’ and closer to my role as a psychotherapist, attending to what people make of their experiences whilst at the same time attending to the process without over-focussing on categories and concepts. Re-contemplating my questions, given the emphasis on the *lived experience* of participants and my pull towards exploring meaning, I could have chosen to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) because it does not attempt to generalise findings but instead endeavours to provide rich and detailed explorations of the phenomenon in question and the subjective meanings attached to it. But, not sure yet why, I felt the need to keep searching. Without discarding IPA completely, I moved it aside to consider if maybe Discourse Analysis could be more befitting, given the clearly intertwined issues of context, power and language I was finding whilst immersing myself in the topic. Reading studies and listening to testimonials or TV interviews and programmes dedicated to identity restitution, the change in official discourse was evident and it seemed worth attending to. Nevertheless, I realised that how language was being used or had been used to accomplish social agendas or imposing or developing structures of power and identity was crucial, but it was not necessarily where I wanted the focus of the study to be. Furthermore, it seemed to me that this would most likely transpire throughout the research project via the stories explored, and I preferred that.

Overall, this initial exploration was an important exercise to create needed boundaries, help me understand what did not belong in my frame, and come closer to what seemed to suit the project better. Ultimately, all the methodologies I looked at had commonalities that could have framed my study (relativist ontology and postmodern epistemology, they problematised the positivist role of researcher, focused on subjective meaning-making and stated clear links to the social world). Furthermore, as stated before, I wanted to unprop my enquiry from the usual logical-scientific paradigm which so often places the ‘logo’ (as ‘phallus’) at the centre of reason (Derrida, 1978) and frequently leaves readers like me, dry of resonances regarding knowledge construction and truth claims. For me, concepts (*truth, trauma, self or identity*) are part of ecosystems of ideas and meanings (Bateson, 2000) developing in particular socio-political contexts, built and re-built through (conscious and unconscious) processing. As I wanted to look for a way of opening-up to complexity more than of closing-down on theoretical arguments, I realised that the type of knowledge construction I was after was the often marginalised (more tentative,

evocative, non-linear) *narrative knowledge* (Bruner, 1986), not so foreign within the human or social sciences anymore. Ricoeur (1981) helped in reorienting myself here, with his emphasis on combining phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation to study human experience, as we make sense of our experiences via symbolic processing through storying and interpretation. I believe my ultimate choice was related to what felt more like a personal style. As a frequent *native-foreigner* or *in-between dweller*, I tend not to oppose constructivist and constructionist arguments (Patton, 2002). Instead, I prefer for them to be friends in my work. For this study, this meant attention to the undeniably resource-shaping power of the Other (collective discourses, practices, the wider context) and the creative take we each construct out of it; what we make with what was given. Stories can be really effective for this.

Story telling is interlinked with the construction of identities. "...a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold: Freud's *psychic reality*. Certain basic formal properties of the life narrative do not change easily. (...) so perhaps a metaphysical change is required to alter the narratives that we have settled upon as 'being' our lives" (Bruner, 1987:708). The stories the grandchildren are telling speak of a particular identity re-organisation after an extreme situation, not just at a personal, individual level, but in collective, current and shifting *assemblages of enunciation* (Guattari, 2008) and action. Narratives we are told, narratives we develop and re-create, play a fundamental part in the assemblages (and de-assemblages) of our identity(ies), offering us models and perspectives of and for our own experiences, whilst connecting them to other, wider socio-political or historical frameworks available.

Thus, I came to consider a narrative inquiry approach to address my research questions as, after all, these had been born out of the personal stories of identity restitution I was attending to. As McLeod (1997:29-31) reminds us, "the values and sense of identity of social groups have always been transmitted from generation to generation through legends and myths. At an everyday level, we are surrounded by stories... an appreciation of people as active social beings requires attention to the way personal and cultural realities are constructed through narratives and storytelling ...people structure experience through stories". I certainly do, and it seemed the grandchildren I was listening to were engaged in a similar enterprise. Is this not a vital side of psychotherapeutic practice, too?

It finally became clearer that I wanted to focus on *how* these particular life experiences were being subjectively re-storied, re-interpreted and used, as well as on *how* the context was helping with it whilst re-shaping itself through the stories, too. My coming to *collect* stories as researcher would have to include me in a particular position in the present context with them, but also unavoidably, in regards to our (in some ways *common*) socio-political past. By and large, a narrative research methodology resonated better with my ways of working, and my values and style. Inclined to feminist and postmodern approaches around issues of power and knowledge construction, narrative inquiry “takes stories as raw data or its product” and as mediums to “illuminate hard realities” (Bleakley, 2005:534-5), providing me with a way of challenging assumptions of dualistic thinking and writing that so frequently flatten the inherently succulent complexity of people’s lives.

### **Narrative Inquiry, Personal Experience and Identity**

“Our precommitment about the nature of a life is that it is a story,  
some narrative however incoherently put together”  
(Bruner, 1987:709).

McAdams meaningfully argues that identity is an internalised life story, a personal myth narratively constructed that help us gain some sense of consistency, “...selected and edited to function as a narrative of personal identity... We continue to work on our stories, unconsciously editing and tweaking, sometimes radically revising, as we move through the adult life course. Our stories spell out our identities. But they also speak to and for *culture*. Life stories sometimes say as much about the culture wherein they are told as they do about the teller of the story” (McAdams, 2008:21). As I wanted to explore how some grandchildren were making sense of *what had happened* to them and their families, and what they felt had helped them or was particularly difficult throughout all this, a narrative inquiry centred on personal experience seemed befitting. “Subjectivity features heavily in the use of narrative as does the importance of the story being told, what has influenced the story and how the individual imposes meaning onto their life experience... Narrative methods give the individual the chance to represent their story, their influences and how they coped with these experiences during their life” (Joyce, 2008:8). So,



narrative research seemed to share some concerns of my own, as: *what happens when the narrative we attach to our identity is disrupted in such a potentially demolishing way?* And, it is not only our identity, but the world we thought we lived in that cracks, because “...narrative is a pervasive structure with which we convey and comprehend the experiences and meanings of events, account for our own and other’s behaviour, or reveal ourselves to others in the way in which we would like to be seen. In doing so, we also reveal something of the operation of our social world” (Breheny & Stephen, 2015:275). Furthermore, I was after *identity restitution* stories but I did not want to stay with the already produced, public ones. These stories were fascinating, their content was no doubt thought-provoking, but it was remarkable for me *how* the grandchildren had come to be able to talk about their experiences in the way they were doing it now. I wanted to look into this, and -as it became clearer later- I wanted to talk to *them* because I wanted the personal accounts of their experiences; not just *their* stories, but the stories as told in the context of research. “Stories revise people’s sense of self, and they situate people in groups” (Frank, 2012:33) in a historical socio-political moment, and serve to situate subject positions within these (including my own as researcher, as someone growing up during those times, etc.).

There are many ways to conceive and carry out a narrative inquiry or research. In experience-based narrative research (Patterson, 2008; Squire, 2008a; 2008) personal narratives are defined as “all sequential and meaningful stories of personal experience that people produce within accounts of themselves... (it) may be an event narrative, but it could also be a story that is more flexible about time and personal experience, ... (and be) defined by theme rather than structure. It might address a turning point (Denzin, 1989) in someone’s life... a more general experience ... it might include past and future as well as present stories...” (Squire, 2008a:18). My take for this narrative inquiry was to examine meanings of personal narratives of experience (Mishler, 1986) emerging out of our encounters (interviews, further explorations, reflections), aligning with other researchers that consider them as “interpersonally dynamic, produced in social interaction, for specific audiences and oriented to particular purposes immediately or distantly at hand. Given its interactional bases, narrative becomes a collaborative enterprise- the joint production of narrator and listener” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012:7). I wanted also to examine the process of subjective meaning construction (the *whats* and *hows*) within a specific interpersonal and socio-political context as stated above. Narratives of experience help portray

positionings (and identity turns), whilst hopefully showing the non-linear and non-fixed processes of their developments for collaborators/participants and researchers alike. As in the psychotherapeutic room, it was important for me to work in a way that did not fix personal stories of experience into narrowly understood or ready-made categories. I believe that through the telling, the story-tellers build, un-build, rebuild these experiences in dialogue with another. Like Squire, Davis, Esin, Andrews, Harrison, Hyden & Hyden (2014:28-29) put it, “identities are not expressed or represented performance; they are made and remade by it. Within the complex and contradictory network of individual and social relations of power surrounding identity and experience, performativity is a struggle over agency rather than being an expression of a pre-existing script about our identity and experience”. Ultimately, in my view, stories work not only as tools to represent the world, our experiences in it, our identities, but they hold hopeful potential for new *lines of flight*, for creation and transformation of experiences, for *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). I am particularly interested in this aspect of the power of narratives, as there might be “as many worlds” as our capacity to imagine, feel, think, talk about them allows us to create (Sikes & Gale, 2006:15). This connected with my desire to, in Winnicott’s language be ‘used’ constructively in the process of research. Squire et.al., (2014:111) convinced me: “researching narratives... is a political decision for a researcher who is interested in inequalities in social and historical formations, in continuities and ruptures, in the multiple levels of political lives. Working with narratives of personal experience allows researchers to acknowledge storyteller’s own ways of creating meaning within power relations, rather than fitting stories into predetermined categories of meaning related to power, and to recognise the complexity and diversity of meaning-making processes, rather than considering them as natural and fixed”.

Furthermore, narrative research borrows tools from other disciplines to enhance creative methods and analytical possibilities. I liked this. It “...always presents stories about remembered events and how these were experienced. The notions of facts, facilities, and fiction are used in this reasoning. Facts refer to events that are believed to have occurred, and facilities describe how those facts were lived and experienced by the interacting individuals. Fiction, then, is a truthful narrative that deals with the facts and facilities, and is faithful to them both. True stories are, thus, stories that are believed” (Moen, 2006:63). So, how does the work come to be considered trustworthy?

## Trustworthiness

“Have I as a writer created an experiential text  
that allows me (and you) to understand what I have studied?  
Understanding occurs when you (and I) are able to interpret what has been described  
within a framework that is subjectively, emotionally, and casually meaningful.  
This is the verisimilitude of the experiential text,  
a text that does not map or attempt to reproduce the real”  
(Denzin, 2014:83).

Whilst in methodologies grounded in positivism *validity and generalisability* are sought, in narrative methodologies it is *believability, verisimilitude, likeliness* what matters because *truth* cannot be established other than in a tentatively, evocative manner. “What matters most ...is that the life story is able to be deemed trustworthy rather than ‘true’” (Atkinson, 1998:59-60). Denzin (1989) argues that a thick narrative in which the context and the interconnected web of social relationships are described in detail is decisive for this, and Yardley (2000) says that the researcher’s commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence in the account of her findings is crucial for the work’s believability. Consequently, for researchers carrying out a narrative inquiry, internal consistency, corroboration, and persuasion in presentation are recommended (Atkinson, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Riessman, 2008b; Gergen, 1985). For instance, focussing on detailed transcripts and translation issues, the researcher pays close “attention to language, contexts of production, and (to the extent appropriate) to structural features of the dialogic nature of narrative; (...) following a methodological path, documenting claims, and practicing reflexivity” (Riessman, 2008a:188-193) whilst also considering the ways in which stories collected are represented and reconstructed throughout the process of research. Respectively, trustworthiness connects with reflexivity as, in issues of ethical relevance, especially regarding participants’ views (i.e., perceived as ‘too’ different, or ‘too’ close to mine), a reflexive stance concerning self-and-other care is as important ethically as it is a medium for ensuring believability and transparency. I found that although some “methodological critics claim auto-ethnographies lack reliability, generalizability, and validity... narrative truth is based on how a story is used, understood, and responded to... the goal is to write performance texts in a way that moves people to ethical action” (Denzin, 2014:70). This speaks truth to me, as reflexivity (an

autoethnography's cousin, in my view) has helped me develop and convey my positioning as researcher, reflecting upon this whilst moving along the process of research.

I did not want to write in a paternalistic fashion, convincing readers of the accuracy of my findings over others. Moen (2006:64) says: "the life is told by the person who lived and experienced it, and it is then retold when the storyteller and the researcher collaborate to produce an intersubjective understanding of the narrative", showing a distinction between "life as lived and experienced and life as told and rendered in text". Hence, although overall the writing of this piece inevitably reflects *my* interpretation, it is hopefully in a way that shows that it is a *situated one*, embracing the challenge of ensuring that "the words of readers and texts, speakers and listeners must be brought together, co-inhabited, in order for understanding to occur" (Squire, 2008:51). Again, I believe *reliability* should be conceived within an ethical background: as Czarniawska (2004:133) says: "results are as much part of practice as methods are. It is perhaps more accurate to speak of 'conformity' rather than reliability; it is not the results that are reliable but the researchers", who are more or less able to follow dominant rulebooks of research, deviate from them, or even progress them. My reluctance towards definite discourses and metanarratives conceivably developed early in life as a response to a lived "intrinsic conflict between the uniformity desired by dictators and the specificity proper to any life form" (Kobac, 2014:28). Thus, I hope I managed to convey a trustworthy account of the voices storying the stories, of the stories created out of them, and of the overall work produced. An unavoidable task to ensure this was the conscious use of *reflexivity*.

## **Reflexivity and Co-Construction**

"One begins investigation already inserted in an ongoing historical process,  
a positioning toward which one may attempt to acquire some transformative perspective  
or critical purchase.

A crucial aspect of this positioning  
is the problem of the implication of the observer in the observed,  
what in psychoanalytic terms is treated as transference.  
Indeed, there is a sense in which transference indicates that

one begins inquiry in a middle-voiced 'position', which one engages in various ways"  
(LaCapra, 2001:36).

This middle-voiced position meant for me giving space and time for reflexivity, or 'self-with other examination', as I called it. Etherington (2004) places great value in being mindful (like in the psychotherapy room) of own biases and assumptions, advocating convincingly for a thorough reflexive practice in qualitative research. Accordingly, Patton (2002); Barker, Pistrang and Elliott (2002); and Etherington (2004) concur that in narrative research, how the story develops and is constructed throughout the research process is as important as what the story tells us in terms of content. The researcher and collaborators' subjectivities and their relationship with the questions guiding the study are unavoidable 'materials' to work with. Attention is paid to things emerging in the story being told, in the context of the narrative's production, in the interaction (in dialogue) and in the researcher's own mind. Different from a pre-choreographed routine, this challenges the role of the researcher as sole 'director'. Considered to be a joint construction (Mishler, 1986; Etherington, 2000, 2004, 2011), meaning is created in the in-between, while co-researchers explore something that brings them together, even if from different places and perhaps also for different reasons. So, as researchers, our identity, values, and conscious and unconscious relationship with the topic of inquiry are present from the outset and accompany us throughout the research process (in the way in which questions are presented, interviews are conducted, data analysed, and findings reported). Andrews (2014a:7) says that "regardless of how objective we may wish to be, what we see and don't see, tell and don't tell, dream and fear, remember and forget, is always and invariably linked to our particular location". I agree. What happens between researchers and participants has to be examined, included in what is being researched, especially in narrative studies focusing on personal experience and identity.

So, as a psychological therapist and researcher, I am neither bias-free nor neutral. Instead of disavowed or 'bracketed-off', my values and beliefs need to be considered, reflected upon, used (especially, so as not to project them blindly onto the other). Being inescapably involved in what 'I-am-doing' with 'an-other' within a context, critical reflexivity needs to be carefully nurtured, as it will also help reveal complexity and interconnectedness (Czarniawaska, 2000). "Narrative researchers require a strong

awareness of their position within the process” (Bold, 2012:13) and are interested not only in how people construct meaning of the world around them, but also in how they come to make sense of what they ‘find’. Critical reflexivity is in this sense deeply connected to issues of ethical relevance and complexity.

Moreover, I coincide with Verhaeghe (2014:87), in that “a system of ethics entirely based on reason, that bypasses gut feelings, only works on paper”. Throughout this piece, for instance, it is palpable that the work of Grandmothers has profoundly inspired me. I could not have left this aside. I admire the courage, tenacity and creativity of their work, their intelligent counter-strategies: “...they had to behave as mothers in order to survive”, Schirmer said (1993:34). I have seen their constant *re-positioning* as crucial, not just as a force against the totalitarian, male-dominated, hegemonic strategy of the terrorist State (Hollander, 1997) but also as a platform for fascinating, multifaceted changes at personal, socio-political, ethical, aesthetic, epistemological levels. The fruitful work generated around the search for the grandchildren shows that “if we are to change, it won’t be through rational knowledge, but through emotionally charged values. Not through cerebral cortex, but through gut feelings (...) Lasting change comes from the grassroots, and ties in with gut feelings” (Verhaeghe, 2014:243). So, as narratives are cultural, dialogical, performative practices that delineate *positionings*, reflexivity is vital to understand what we are doing (i.e., why are we asking these questions and not others?) as, inadvertently, we could be reinforcing oppression whilst being convinced we are broadening possibilities for change. I believe in the importance of working consciously in an immanent way, from a particular location on a particular problem, creating different ways of knowledge not to disregard objectivity, but to contextualise and reconceptualise it. We are implicated. “Objectivity should not be identified with objectivism or exclusive objectification that denies or forecloses empathy, just as empathy should not be conflated with unchecked identification, vicarious experience, and surrogate victimage... Empathy in this sense is a form of virtual, not vicarious, experience (...) in which emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one’s own” (LaCapra, 2001:40). Working to resist full identification with those others whose stories we are ‘studying’, and being as attentive and faithful as possible to the voices of those we are learning from, the use of reflexivity also ensures one checks the context and oneself, producing personal narratives to learn from within as well as from without. Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou (2008:7) suggest that “researchers who are concerned with the

social and cultural place for narrative, are also interested in the socially effective ‘agency’ of personal stories”. This was evident for me, as “the person being interviewed was not *simply* a victim in the past but that victimage may well have been an especially difficult, disempowering, and incapacitating aspect of the past which may at times be relived or acted out in the present. Testifying itself, in its dialogic relation to attentive, empathic listeners, is a way of effecting, at least in part, a passage from the position of victim... to that of survivor and agent in the present” (LaCapra, 2001:92). This suggests a different kind of potential agency in the researcher’s position, not unlike the one at play in psychotherapy: an active position of listening *to* and *with*, always conscious of it being also *from* a particular angle. Ultimately, “...if we can abandon our paths of certainty, and thus render ourselves vulnerable to new ways of knowing, we will not only be transformed in the process, but we can, in our small ways, contribute towards creating new realities” (Andrews, 2014a:115).

## **Methods Used and Developed: How did I do it?**

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The traditional dichotomy between data collection and analysis (usually understood as distinct phases) is contested in narrative inquiry as these occur simultaneously (Etherington & Bridges, 2011; Etherington, 2004; Polkinghorne, 2005). This is one of the reasons why finding a unified, generalised method to carry out narrative research is unattainable. Researchers need to find their ways of working, make choices of data gathering and analytic techniques and relate these directly to the topic of research, to the participants, to their questions, and to their position. Depending on the researcher’s questions and style, data is collected and generated from interviews, ethnographic observations, autoethnographic accounts, audio video materials, analytical notes, “working with narrative materials of various kinds” (Squire et al., 2014:7) found in already existing public platforms (biographies, testimonies, etc.) and/or produced through the process of research.

I had not many pre-conceived ideas about how I would carry out my project other than *I wanted to talk to grandchildren* who had gone through identity restitution as adults about this. The ideas matured as I advanced with the research, paying attention to the links made by the participants, their responses to me, their reasons for talking to me, the possible audiences, how the context of the interaction helped create the stories. Also, attention was paid to writing myself into the narrative and considering within it the macro level of our encounters in the historical and present socio-political realm. I used a combination of techniques to address the *whats* and *hows* of it. For instance, merging the interview generated data with data generated from other socially constructed narratives is a form of triangulation widely used in qualitative research to support the aim of locating common threads, meanings, and themes through different accounts and to gain a complex and nuanced appreciation of the issues explored (Suzuky, Ahlulalia, Kwong & Mattis, 2007). For me, immersing in public restitution stories/testimonies at a particularly emotionally attuned moment in my life, propelled the project's initial drive, and later helped me define a wider picture of the topic chosen, giving me clarity in terms of who I wanted to speak with. I took this moment as 'my pilot work', which consisted of listening to, selecting, transcribing and translating public restitution stories. This phase helped me sensitise, hone my questions, fine-tune and relocate my ideas, long before I chose a methodology within which to work with them. These *already produced, public narratives* were not taken as *given* knowledge but as "important sites of reality construction" (Charmaz, 2010:39) that hopefully prevented me from falling into prejudiced, uninformed positions and brought me closer to a sense of the struggle. I took notes, spoke with critical friends, reflected on their responses.<sup>2</sup>

Frank says that "all qualitative research begins with ethnography... Some engaged, embodied fieldwork is necessary as a beginning" (Frank, 2012:38-40). I started writing about the historical context, introducing the topic and my interest in it, together with the context in which I was re-engaging presently, with the questions that had been there for me in the past. From the start I considered those I wanted to interview as active subjects, experts in the topic of the inquiry, but, "perspectives are always situated in particular locations, and the closest a researcher can come to uncovering truth is to take full account of the positioning not only of others, but of themselves as well. In this way, knowledge is

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendices 6 and 8



acknowledged as constructed, and as necessarily incomplete” (Squire et al., 2014:109). This is why data gathering meant also devising ways of capturing my own subjectivity, my responses, thoughts, conundrums, choices, positions. To foster reflexivity, help me assess my analysis critically and promote clarity around data interpretation and the story created, to make the process of meaning-making as comprehensible, transparent and believable as possible, I kept research diaries, drew thematic maps and used reflexivity generously in writing this piece<sup>3</sup>. For instance, when meeting with participants whilst in Buenos Aires and La Plata city, the emotional porosity felt (i.e., feeling scared of getting lost!) was intense. I had to pay attention to it, re-entering personal areas of experience I had not visited in a long while. Amongst other reflexions created, this attention or *indwelling*, as Sparks and Smith (2012) call it, helped me identify resonances in me, different socio-political legacies (i.e., of terror, rage, of hope) and appreciate the significance of the coming interviews via salient ‘left-overs’ (after-thoughts) arising from this. Part of the process of analysis had already started, even if this was not yet so distinguishable for me.

Clearly, if meaning is co-constructed interactively in the process, to *interpret* is not just to uncover deep meanings, but to construct; transforming intersubjective reality in the process: “...the listener becomes a participant, although a differentiated one... (and) the ways in which testimony is elicited and produced have some bearing on the results that are obtained” (Jelin, 2003:64-65).

## **Finding Contributors/Participants**

In narrative inquiry focussing on how people construct their sense of identity through the narrative they create around their experiences, samples tend to be relatively small to allow for depth and thickness. After various conversations and explorations, I began constructing a possible purposive selection or *critical sampling* (Suzuky et al., 2007) of those I thought I wanted to invite to collaborate (participants). To ensure a boundary of ethical protection, before reaching these decisions I consulted with friends, colleagues in the field, and experts working with Grandmothers. I had perceived a change in the socio-political milieu (how much these stories were being broadcasted, how many more

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<sup>3</sup> In Appendices 6 and 7 I show a few examples of diary entries, resonant meanings, and interpretive writings.

individuals were ‘coming forwards’ spontaneously to find out the truth). Thus, I aimed to talk with about three to four individuals that had found out about their origins in their adult years and at different socio-political times. Although it would have been interesting to talk to grandchildren who had been found even more recently, it seemed crucial to invite only those who had had at least some time to start processing their experience. Also, I did not include those who had been found as children as it seemed to me that this would have entailed a different kind of identity re-organisation. It would have also meant a larger study. The idea of talking with individuals found as adults and at different moments served the purpose of providing a clearer platform from where to explore their experiences of narrative rupture (and restitution) in the background of the evolving and changing context (i.e., how the level of institutional acknowledgement, validation or acceptance/rejection might have contributed/hindered the individual and collective processes involved in *restitution*).

For me, the project was about their stories, but not about giving them voice. If they were voices that had been crushed before, subdued and appropriated by overwhelmingly powerful others, now they were voices of significant strength, *alive and kicking*. If anything, I wanted *them* to give voice to the project, as Squire et al. (2014) remark, to know more about this *voice-development* I was observing: to work-with them, learn-from them and then make their stories audible elsewhere, proliferate, reach out other audiences.

As “the interrogation of the past is a subjective process... always active and socially constructed in dialogue and interaction with others” (Jelin, 2003:16) and because I am aware of the crucial difference between solitary traumatic repetitions and the construction of narrative memories in dialogue with an *other*, my skills as a psychotherapist helped me here, even before the interviews as such took place. As a socio-political struggle they are intimately involved in, it was my hope that we would all gain something from meeting up: a self-narrative is always an articulation of self-identity (a performance), of self in relation to others (Riessman, 2008b; Miller, 1991; Denzin, 1989) and it “has an inevitably socio-moral, not just social, function, because it positions people as social actors who must account for themselves, and not just communicate” (Squire et al., 2014:86). Those who replied to my invitation valued this approach. Also, they confirmed they agreed to see me because they felt telling their stories supports Grandmothers’ work (to whom they feel

grateful) and added that the stories ‘needed to be heard’ outside Argentina, more so given that it is thought that many of the stolen children being searched for might be living abroad. In the following chapter, when the stories are re-presented and re-explored, I introduce each contributor with some contextual details (how we made contact and agreed to meet, where we met, etc.).

## **Ethical Concerns**

“The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise,  
that promise being that we protect those who have shared with us.  
And in return,  
this sharing will allow us to write life documents that speak to the human dignity,  
the suffering, the hopes, the dreams,  
the lives gained, and the lives lost by the people we study”  
(Denzin, 2014:67-68).

When researching sensitive issues, careful consideration to potentially negative consequences of taking part (for participants and their close ones) is paramount. Following the British Psychological Society requirements, ethical approval was sought and confirmed by Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University once the research proposal was formally approved<sup>4</sup>. However, unable to predict all psychological implications within it, sensitivity to what the interview process might open-up was crucial to curtail, as much as possible, any anticipated threats to re-traumatization/victimisation or objectivation. As stated before, considering possible collaborators/participants was a carefully thought-through undertaking. My previous immersion into publicly available data regarding restitution stories, case studies and TV interviews heightened my sensitivity to common issues emerging in these accounts of experiences of restitution, and allowed me a honed appreciation of issues of ethical weight (the need to find ‘gate-keepers’, preparation for making contact, thinking of possible ways of conducting interviews). I met with trustworthy friends and people working for Grandmothers to discuss my project and check ideas. They guided me collaboratively, suggesting for instance who might be more willing/able

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2

to meet with me, who might not be in a good place to open-up. These gate-keepers then contacted potential participants, or send emails enquiring who may want to meet with me for this project. Only once some of them had agreed to have an initial chat with me, I contacted them via email or phone-calls -or they chose to contact me directly. This was a way of connecting with them without imposing myself, leaving enough distance for them to be able to approach me whilst simultaneously allowing them to *check* me (and the project) out before committing to take part. Additionally, I considered extensively the risk of objectivation and re-victimisation and wanted to prevent mystification of my role as 'expert'. I understood that to convey my position regarding the type of 'knowledge' I was after, or 'where I was coming from' (as I was told), was crucial. So, I made clear my intention to learn from them -not to 'study them'- and to build together "contextual understandings of their problems in their own words" (Miller, 1991:43). Then, I also established with each participant how we would best recognise and manage the potential negative risks of taking part. Aiming to be transparent and work collaboratively -bringing issues of self-support, care, discussing possible effects, resources, and their expectations, plausible limitations, concerns and reasons to participate from the onset, I made myself available to discuss any of these issues at any stage of the process. Participants formalised their willingness to partake only once they understood its aims and purposes and signed a consent form stating these<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, their right to withdraw at any stage of the process was clearly specified, as well as further participation on their part after the interviews (i.e., reading and commenting on transcripts, re-interpretations, etc.) if they wished to do so. I gave them a cut-off point for this (the submission of the final draft for assessment). These issues were re-visited also at the end of each conversation/interview. I confess that the formality of this contract made me uneasy as I thought it could be off-putting for them (if perceived as too ceremonial), but I received encouraging feedback from participants about these considerations and the way we worked-through them: this was "not the same as to give an interview for a newspaper", one of them told me -and that was reassuring for me.

Overall, I transmitted I intended to work collaboratively, respecting their dignity and voices, so issues of confidentiality were considered and worked on with them, too; even when unsurprisingly, they chose to be named and recognised by their 'new' legitimate

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 3

names. However, they were mindful about exposing others, and careful to be fair about anybody they might have talked about. We worked together (there-and-then or later on) in telling their stories in a way they felt protected the confidentiality of others when this was what they preferred. Before submitting the final draft, I wrote to them to let them know where I was at, and making myself available again in case they wanted/needed anything other at this stage.

Another important consideration throughout this project was about its possible impact on me. Being mindful of vicarious traumatisation (which could ultimately also harm the research process) I made sure I kept alert and reflexive around my varied emotional responses, making use of a robust support network (personal and professional) in the UK and Argentina. I found that working *to support* my own vulnerability regarding the topic of study (in therapy, in supervision, with peers and colleagues and friends from other disciplines), working with it so as not to dismiss it or brush it off whilst also preventing it from overwhelming me or flooding the project itself, allowed me to keep empathically engaged with it and with the participants, whilst recognizing the pain and multifaceted emotions arising for me as distinct from those that may have been arising for them. I believe this created a helpful ethical third positioning, that also meant a lot to me, helping me 'hold-my-own' (Frank, 2012) in the process of research, even when undeniably impacted, humbled, and deeply moved. LaCapra (2001:27) says that "...empathy may be contrasted with identification (as fusion with the other) insofar as empathy marks the point at which the other is indeed recognized and respected as other, and one does not feel compelled or authorized to speak in the other's voice or take the other's place".

Ethical considerations and layers of complexity found throughout the research process have been manifold and I tried to interweave them as much as possible with different aspects discussed or presented in the writing. Ultimately, codes of ethical conduct and recommendations in psychotherapy and research are undoubtedly crucial, but they are not enough safeguard to ensure ethical concerns encountered are worked-through effectively in the here-and-now. I found the conscious use of reflexivity to be a bonus here, an unavoidable ethical issue in this type of research, just as it is in my work as a psychotherapist. As Jensen (2014:17) reminds us: "it needs everyone, no matter what their job, to take responsibility for how they consume other's pain and confess their own".

## **Narrative Constructions: Analysis, Interpretation and Further Ethical Contemplations**

“Organising and collating the information from the research field takes much time, but in the process of organising it the researcher is finding answers to questions, deciding on the significance of specific pieces of data and beginning to shape the analysis”  
(Bold, 2012:121).

### **Interviews as Conversations**

“Without the limitations of too many questions or a pre-set theoretical frame, the participant is encouraged and supported in order to give his or her view and the researcher is prepared to listen. This makes narrative approaches well suited for the study of sensitive topics and events”  
(Squire et al., 2014:91).

As I mentioned before, I wanted to talk with those who had also talked about their experiences publicly, but I did not want just their *public* stories. I wanted the interviews to be intimate, to make myself available for conversations to take place, to be used as a platform to continue developing their stories. For this, I needed to devise a method for the interviews that was congruent with my values and the topic chosen, one that honoured the ethically complex issues at stake. Following Mishler (1986) and Holstein & Gubrium (1997), Stack (2013:14) argues that “rather than employing the traditional, ‘semi-structured interview’, whereby a schedule of questions is prepared and adhered to, which in effect gives the researcher the power to direct the conversation, narrative inquiry adopts a looser framework whereby meaning is made jointly”. Having agreed a place to meet, I walked the city for hours, sitting in a café or bookstore, reading articles and taking reflexive notes. I then drafted a protocol of informal questions<sup>6</sup> that was more a comfort blanket for myself, a back-up plan in case I felt unable to elicit a conversation or if people felt unable to talk. But, I approached the encounters in a flexible way, consciously rejecting the expert’s armchair. Also, even if I felt humbled, in re-aligning my positioning

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 5

and acknowledging my ontological lenses, it was touching to experience that “as a narrative researcher, you *can* offer a solid frame for the encounter between yourself and the interviewee, based on a joint interest in what he or she has to tell. You do not equip yourself with a battery of questions that will inexorably interrupt the interviewee and split the story. Your opening question is a variation of one of the inviting questions we all know: ‘tell me about it’. This question offers a tangible base for the interview, at the same time as it indicates the existence of two different positions, the interviewee as teller and the interviewer as listener. A narrative approach also includes the researcher’s responsibility for the interview situation and preparedness to intervene if the story gets too hard to tell. This responsibility is always important to be aware of, but even more so if the topic for the interview is a sensitive one. Taking a narrative approach thus leads you, as a researcher, to a helpfully complex understanding of research process and ethics around ‘sensitivity’” (Squire et al., 2014:92). Once we revisited the aims of the study and allowed room for them to ask me questions, I encouraged them to guide the flow of the interviews. With each participant, these took the shape of *conversations with a focus (or focuses)*: they took some of my presenting points as springboards and I followed their conversational threads (Polkinghorne, 2005) freely. Even whilst holding some control within “the flow and content of the interview” (Miller, 1991:131), I was genuinely curious and engaged in the personal knowledge they felt the will to share with me, and gave room for identifying with them matters they felt I should grasp and explore more (not only in what they were telling me, but, for instance, they also suggested -or gave me- books, articles, and other stories to read). Inevitably, unforeseen aspects unfolded as new thoughts or connections emerged spontaneously. We became genuine collaborators, jointly penetrating the stories they each chose to tell me. This released more room for a sense developing in me as I advanced with the project, resonating with the work of Langer (1991:174), who says that “the teller and the listener form a unit where remembering becomes a social practice, not just an intrapsychic event. For me the interviews are always a culturally situated social interaction where socially and culturally mediated concerns both ‘victim’ and interviewer attend to and manage as they engage in the interview...”. As our conversations took place, checking there and then with them that I grasped what they meant, showed a concern to ensure they kept in charge of their own voices and positionings. Paralleling aspects of the work of psychotherapy, I noticed that my presence, or my way-of-being during the interview (including my questions or comments, silences, even my gestures)

played an important part in how the stories developed. Also, one interview followed the other by a few days in between; so, inescapably one experience influenced the next. I kept reflexive notes between interviews that helped me perceive these connections, also with the view that "...narrators cast themselves in particular roles, depending on who they perceive as being their audience. Personal stories which they tell us function as a means of securing that identity" (Andrews, 2014a:27). As previously shown, I sensed how their positioning, embodied and conveyed within their accounts, aroused "within and (was) produced by the interpretive frame of the context of telling" (Jensen, 2014:147), too. Nevertheless, there was a clear role reversal to the one found in the psychotherapy room, as *I* was approaching *them* for help. At the start of each interview, this made me feel somehow 'green', unripe. Not that I do not feel this way many times in the consulting room, too. I believe ultimately that bearing with the humbleness brought by *my* need to know (not concealing my not-knowing), allowed them to trust, open-up, and expand on issues that mattered to them, "thinking out-loud" with me or "branching-out" -as they told me.

During the first interview, for instance, my opening question (wanting to be a good narrative researcher, I said: "How, where does your story begin?") was felt as "too open", and this made the participant feel "*lost*". This, in turn, made me anxious. Not a place where we wanted to start! Giving her the chance to choose how to proceed (how to *use me* to talk about what she wanted to talk about) helped us find ground again. She taught me there-and-then a powerful lesson that I carried with me into the following interviews, echoing the experience of other narrative researchers, as found in Squire et al. (2014:92): "the research interview is a complicated power relation that needs to be carefully negotiated, in order to serve as a safe space for dealing with sensitive topics. This negotiation needs to be done before the research encounter starts, in order to get an informed consent from the potential informant, but it might need to be renegotiated during the course of the research process".

As another example, this same participant later agreed to check the transcript and get back to me, but time passed and there was no answer. I had sent it via email as we had agreed, without stating a time frame as I wanted to give her space to go through it. I waited, suggested ways in which we could do it if it was challenging, then waited again. Although I felt I was losing precious time, I did not want to pressure her with *my* need. I



did not want to leave it as it was, either, as I understood that she possibly wanted to re-discern her positioning after talking with me. Maybe she was also stirred by the interview experience? She could not look at it on her own, it felt “too-much” -she later said. Eventually, only several months after our first meeting, we managed to agree a way forward and met again over a video-conference programme (Skype) to look at it together. We revisited issues previously discussed, clarifying matters and questions that had arisen for both and discussing how understanding had developed since. She managed to choose a stronger position, mainly about her statements around sensitive issues concerning herself and others, and reaffirm her voice where she had been unsure about “how to put it” before.

Finally, it is important to note that, as Squire et al., (2014:7) put it, narrative analysis “add another level of symbolic work” to the stories that emerge, are gathered, and/or co-produced through the process of research; accepting at the same time that “...narratives are rarely straight forward. ...Sometimes you won’t get the ‘whole story’; and all stories will be incomplete, since experience and subjectivity cannot fully make their way into language” (Andrews et al., 2008:9). Overall, I believe participants ‘owned’ the conversations. Whilst being very generous, I perceived they wanted *me in there*, too. “Stories are always told within dialogues: Storytelling responds to others -whether actually present or imagined- and anticipates future responses, including the retelling of the stories, with variations” (Frank, 2012:33). In each interview, we engaged in constructing ‘findings’ together, checking there-and-then meanings, explored resonances, what something they said might have been connected to (for instance, that there wasn’t one story to *the* story! or that “it doesn’t just start at one point...” ) or what they felt they had not thought about until then. They kept my guiding questions in mind, and having identified my epistemological position in our conversations, they gave a lot more than I had anticipated possible.

Each of these conversational interviews lasted between 2 and 3.5 hours, they were audio-recorded and then transcribed by me. As previously agreed, I then sent these via email for them to check, amend, expand, etc. After this, I translated them into English because we had, naturally, spoken in Spanish. Bilingual friends helped me with this task when I needed support.

## Transcribing and Translating

“By our interviewing and transcription practices,  
we play a major part in constituting the narrative data we then analyse”  
(Riessman, 2008:50).

A further, important interpretative practice is that of translating. For me, transcribing and translating the conversations was a mammoth but crucial task for capturing what seemed most singular and authentic about the encounters; working with meanings in both languages whilst trying to stay as close as possible to the choice of words used (figurative ways, metaphors, silences, tones, and expressions) enriching and thickening the data obtained and re-created. Although painstakingly long, it was a fascinating part of the work, as it allowed me to profoundly enter participants' words and expressions. A somewhat foreigner perspective when translating (I have lived outside Argentina for about two decades) gave me space to work-through meanings with delight even, noticing nuances, metaphors in common language-use, appreciating and developing an enhanced sensitivity whilst I engaged in hermeneutic rounds. Charged with emotions, many of these expressions carried poignant images and resonances for me that I could have missed 'listening to' or perceiving had I not been engaged in translating them. As Riessman (2008a:49) says, “translation can open up ambiguities that get hidden in 'same language' texts”. Moreover, the work of making them 'understandable' in English whilst preserving their original and contextual fructiferous evocative power, immersed me deeply into analysis, opening up to multiple readings and possible constructions. In this way, checking with bilingual friends my ways of translating, my questions and thoughts, proved useful for contextualising the 'findings' whilst remaining alert to the contingencies of their production. Occasionally, this involved finding 'ways to put it' that helped me (as much as possible) in *carrying* the resonances I heard without changing the original meaning; where the usual conventional 'way to put it' in English would have not allowed for these to be present. Additionally, I tried to ensure that my way of writing carried with it my own foreignness: that *I* wrote in such a way that did *not* erase this foreignness, in a way that carried my voice and position as I presented theirs.

## Voice and Position

“...people’s narratives involve efforts at ethical positioning, although these efforts are inevitably flawed and incomplete. Narrative research itself is similarly imbricated in ethical positioning”  
(Squire et al., 2014:20).

The most laborious challenge for me involved working-out *my* positioning, traversing through my choice of methodology, how best to research traumatic or sensitive issues with people I am not working with psychotherapeutically, translating whilst keeping as close as possible to the choice of words and expressions used, choosing a way to write and (re)present my work, and including myself in the process reflexively. Hence, considerations around voice and positioning were present throughout the research process, but I became acutely aware of them whilst working with the huge amount of narrative material after the interviews took place. I aimed to find a *voice* with which to talk about those I had talked with, a voice through which to transmit something of the meeting itself, remembering that “the person whose life story is being told is of primary concern... it is important not to let interpretive issues take precedence over ethical issues” (Atkinson, 1998:62). In this way, reflexivity operated as a means of checking myself and my role in the research process in issues of power and control: Where do I come from? What is my positioning within this story, regarding knowledge production, aims and topic of the inquiry, etc.? For instance, I found ethical convergences between what the psychoanalyst Laub describes in the work of testimony with holocaust survivors, and the researcher’s actively reflexive position as I experienced it. He describes a three-fold levelling in the interviewer as witness: the level of being “a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being witness to the testimony of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (Laub, 1995:61). Caruth (1995:143), although in a different way, also underscores the task of becoming a witness to herself in the encounter... “to take in their stories, and to form imagery in my own mind about what they are saying. And as one forms that imagery, one is forming a narrative about their story. And the narrative involves elements of their pain, the causation of their conflicts, and also the source of their knowledge, the nature of their experience. It’s all forming itself or being reconstructed, recreated in the symbolizing process of the therapist”; adding that “...you

must in some significant psychological way experience what they experience. You can never quite do that. But it's being a survivor by proxy... you're not exposed to what they were exposed to, but you must take your mind through, take your feelings through what they went through, and allow that in. It's hard, it's painful, and yet you know you must do it as you come into contact with it" (Caruth, 1995:145). I worked very much in this way throughout the project. I recall experiencing moments of unsettlement describing what I knew about the appropriations whilst presenting my research ideas to the class while drafting the initial proposals, years before properly embarking on it. But back then, although feeling uncomfortably shaken, I 'stood-by' this experience, sensing its significance: *'How could I not be moved?'*, I wondered... *'Why should becoming unsettled sign unprofessionalism, un-readiness?'* After the interviews it was clear that as co-researcher, I was not a passive bystander, but more a 'positioned' witness that owned the contextual responsibility I felt to place myself somehow within their struggle (even if just by carrying out this research). With the *grandchildren* I spoke with, the 'dangers' of researching such complex issues and the fact that one is unavoidably emotionally impacted by what one is exploring, was discussed. The three of them believed that I could not do it well if I did not allow myself to be impacted. I believe perceiving my position, my 'impact', and my search for a voice facilitated our conversations and the development of genuine, engaging, complex accounts on their part. However, I needed time to work-through the emotional enmeshment that sometimes overwhelmed me and put words to it. Unsurprisingly, this working-through was only possible whilst immersed *in* it.

Overall, as the project advanced, narrative inquiry felt more and more like an ode to a passionate, intrepid and committed way of working (with others, with myself, with 'knowledge'), providing me with a medium to explore meaning without fixing it to a ready-made structure. In theory, this was congruent with my values and philosophy but in practice, as I came to the point of writing, I froze and thawed again and again, feeling unable for a long time to find a way to give it form, texture, colour. I found the approach chosen for my inquiry quite cryptic for this part: there was no clear 'way' to do it, no specific path to follow, no guidance almost! I wanted to report my interviewees' understandings, "their cultural realities, as accurately as possible" (Miller, 1991:123) and felt for some time, stubbornly compelled to present the interviews 'as they were'. I realised I felt unentitled to talk about their experiences, overly cautious of not 'appropriating' their voices. So, I eventually realised that *finding my voice* was the struggle! Frustrating and time-

consuming as this was, constructing this voice engaged me analytically again, as I worked-through the “difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into the same versions of the same story, (...) a problem that remains central... how we can listen to trauma beyond its pathology for the truth that it tells us, and how we might perhaps find a way of learning to express this truth beyond the painful repetitions of traumatic suffering” (Caruth, 1995:vii- viii).

### **Developing the Stories**

“Personal accounts and life story narrations  
have often been neglected dimensions of change:  
Could Aboriginal Australians or Argentinian ‘mothers of the disappeared’  
have emerged as political subjects without readers, listeners, and cinemagoers,  
not to mention lawyers and politicians, witnessing their narrations?”  
(Jolly, 2014:4)

I believe with Nussbaum (1990) that certain truths can only be grasped in narrative style because its aesthetics help us immerse into the world being described more fully, augmenting experience-near understandings of the ambiguity, complexity and richness of human experience. For me, the hope was always to explore and communicate -not to homogenise or universalize knowledge, but to highlight the complexity, intertextuality and fluidity of knowledge construction (being of a ‘personal’ or ‘scientific’ nature). Therefore, the most alluring aspect of engaging in narrative research connected to its potentiality in terms of transmission, of communication, but confronted me with the challenge in terms of choice of (re)presentation or voice. As Riessman (2008:50) highlights, “decisions about how to display speech reflect theoretical commitments (and practical constraints); they are not simply technical decisions. By displaying text in particular ways and by making decisions about the boundaries of narrative segments, we provide grounds for our arguments, just as a photographer guides the viewer’s eye with lenses and cropping”. I decided to *show* the conversations as distinct encounters constructing *singular* but *connected* stories. I started by introducing each participant by giving basic biographical/historical information, stating their names, the date and place of our meeting,

and part of the conversations that preceded these. I included my trail of thoughts and responses at different moments when these seemed relevant to the meaning-making and question-opening task I was engaged in. Working-through the transcripts, translations and reflexive notes to re-create the stories, I was conscious of the fact that “to communicate suffering and painful events, one has to find a willingness to listen and understand on the other side” (Jelin, 2003:19). I place much importance on this labour of listening and of writing, having “a keen awareness of the subjective processes of the people that are invited to narrate their experiences” (Jelin, 2003:66). Choosing to represent speech in different colours and in stanza form (framing meaning) was part of my interpretative practice, informed by my ‘reading’ of the silences, expressions, changes in tone or moods.

So, in interpreting/writing the stories, I felt compelled to look for and illustrate “the intrinsic direction or meaning that the story itself carries” (Atkinson, 1998:66). The texture each story bred was influenced by the previous communications with them, the main issues each chose to focus on, and the stories fermenting out of our encounters in the background of the initial broad questions, extracting conspicuous and strikingly salient threads, following the emotional rhythms each encounter took, and traces my responses left in the text. I highlighted these ‘directions’ by presenting them as subtitles that in a way, became also themes I later used to inform the way I developed the overview. The analytic process became here *the writing* of these stories. Hence, writing involved not only a representation of the stories I was told, but a re-telling of the experience of the encounters, and my listening; using my voice to re-frame their stories in a wider composition, honouring my understanding of knowledge as an intersubjective experience. Consequently, each story was written as it was being analysed with data from the transcripts, notes, diary entries and reflections emerging from listening to the audio recordings<sup>7</sup>. I worked-through these conversations, the stories behind and beyond each, and what arose out of them as I re-visited them again and again, writing also my story of the stories, bringing in further issues around my voice and position.

Following Benjamin (1999:107), I think that “...one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 7

own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way". When researching, writing, working with traumatic events of this scope, LaCapra (2001:40-41) abridges these concerns beautifully: "empathic unsettlement should... affect the mode of representation in different, nonlegislated ways, but still in a fashion that inhibits or prevents extreme objectification and harmonizing narratives... One's own unsettled response to another's unsettlement can never be entirely under control, but it may be affected by one's active awareness of, and need to come to terms with, certain problems related to one's implication in, or transferential relation to, charged, value-related events and those involved in them". This brings an additional layer of ethical relevance, as "we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness ...when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human" (Butler, 2005:136).

Finally, Frank highlights a concern around the analysis of narratives that links with other researchers like Polletta (2006) and Linde (2009) and that I identified as one of mine from the start, one that was present throughout the interviews as a background hum: "How is the storyteller holding his or her own in the act of storytelling? By *holding one's own*, I mean seeking to sustain the value of one's self or identity in response to whatever threatens to diminish that self or identity. Groups also hold their own by means of their stories; thus, how do stories create group identities and boundaries?" (Frank, 2012:33). How important are these for those whose legitimate starting points of identity construction (a truthful story of their origin) had been, for years, manipulated or denied?

### **Overview: Conversing with the Stories**

"A position that tries to elucidate the truth force in the event  
would have to have a style attuned to that construction"  
(Badiou, 2007:83).

What had gone on during the interviews, or even before and afterwards? What were 'the findings'? I felt they were somehow present throughout the piece, written already all around it. So, to write an overview was not a simple task either. I could have taken so many different directions! As Gubrium & Holstein (2012:5) say, "methods of analysis do not emerge out of thin air. They are informed by, and extend out of, particular theoretical

sensitivities -more or less explicit idioms of how narrative operates in relation to experience and society". I had focussed not only on the stories' content but also in how they developed in our conversations, how telling and feeling became part of that interaction, how they connected, what themes were explored and how, in which way they were transmitting conflict, hope, identity and position, the effects of listening and of being listened to. Frank argues that selecting stories for analysis is a form of craft, or *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2001), defined as "the practical wisdom (...) the cultivated capacity to hear, from the total collection of stories, those that call out as needing to be written about ...stories speaking to the original research interest, then representing those stories in writing, revising story selections as the writing develops its arguments, and revising the writing as those stories require. The analysis of the selected stories takes place in attempts to write. The research report is not post-hoc to an analysis that is completed before writing... reports emerge in multiple drafts that progressively discover what is to be included and how those stories hang together" (Frank, 2012:43). As I went over the recordings, transcripts and translations, the conversations themselves stood-out as performative acts between co-researchers and the topic studied, showing how historical, socio-political contexts impact our lives, how things are connected and how attention to these contexts and connections is vital when attempting to appreciate human experience.

Finally, Czarniawska (2004:136) highlights that when analysing or interpreting findings "the narrative approach to social sciences does not offer a 'method'; neither does it have a 'paradigm', a set of procedures to check the correctness of its results. ...it steers away from the idea that a 'rigorously' applied procedure would render 'testable' results". But in writing this part, I needed to work-through my anxiety for the lack of a manual I would have rejected had it been provided! LaCapra argues that when studying and writing about traumatic events, these are inherent and important problems, because "being responsive to traumatic experiences of others... implies not the appropriation of their experience but... empathic unsettlement, which should have stylistic effects, or more broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method" (LaCapra 2001:41). Hence, as before, writing this section meant working with tensions around voice, position, authorship, genres; writing to transmit their experiences in a voice that could not be theirs completely but that endeavoured to remain as closely as possible to theirs -and to their resonances in me- and to the truths they transpired. The ethos here became clear: to write in a way that was mine without making their voices and experiences my own; to find



my voice in relation, in connection or in response to *theirs*. Following Bakhtin (1984), Frank describes this concern, too: “how to speak *with* a research participant rather than *about* him or her” (Frank, 2012:34).

Hence, I prioritised what was more prominent or conspicuous within the encounters and overarching *salient* themes eventually emerged, “highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development of the whole” (Polkinghorne, 1987:19), themes that connected the stories with one another and with wider socio-political issues, crafting the ‘plot’. I focussed on how their stories were being presented to me and how they developed, what they wanted to show me, or what available resources they felt they had. They conveyed knowing that what they could say so far was also “conditioned by social context, discursive recourses and communicative circumstances” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012:7), talking explicitly about this, brought the wider context into their personal narratives as I had anticipated, in many ways combining genres in evocative ways. I did not focus on ‘analysing’ this, but I wanted it to be visible (showing it in my re-telling by evoking the ways in which they talked and even the ways in which I thought of them).<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, bringing the broader context to my writing involved working on the introduction and on a glossary, too<sup>9</sup>. There were too many terms that needed explanation and contextualisation but this would have taken up too many words out of the stipulated maximum word-count and it would have disturbed the narrative rhythm should I had expanded upon them in the main text.

Finally, Squire (2008a:48) highlights that immersing the experience-centred approach in the broader context “may make it less prescriptive, less controlled by temporal progression, less focussed on coherence, more aware of language; more likely to understand selves in non-essentialist ways, and more able to break out of hermeneutic reflexivity with its social referents. But... (it) may just mean operating with two incommensurable theories of the speaking subject: the agentic, storytelling subject of the experience-centred tradition, at odds with the fragmented disunited ‘postmodern’ subject of more culturally-oriented analyses, produced by the cultural stories around them”. The grandchildren I spoke with showed me themselves both sides of the living subject: two

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, see Appendix 6 - Notes on heroes

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 1

aspects worth presenting in this study. They are perhaps incompatible, but as incompatible as any one subject is to 'one-self'.

Conclusively, my interpretative work was always meant to be open enough so as to give space for other possible readings to emerge. Consequently, my overview is offered as something alike 'further thoughts': theoretical considerations with left-over traces from our conversations, connecting my original questions with those risen out of the conversations we had. Writing this piece was writing 'a story of the stories' and a story of the process of research, trying to show those most reverberating aspects at the time of writing, acknowledging simultaneously that my writing could never be exhaustive of the issues touched on, explored, or even of those left unvisited. I wrote indeed in a way that, I hope, left them open; as a story can never be (should never be?) entirely *finalised* (Bakhtin, 1984) or completed. The writing or the analysis "aims at increasing people's possibilities for hearing themselves and others. It seeks to expand people's sense of *responsibility* (Bakhtin pun on *response*) in how they might respond to what is heard. (...) It seeks to show what is at stake in a story as a form of response" (Frank, 2012:37). In this way, as another interpretative response or responsibility, I connected these with issues related to my practice as a psychotherapist and researcher.

## 4. Stories of Restitution

*“Storytelling...*

*does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report.*

*It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out again.*

*Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to the story*

*the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel”*

*(Benjamin, 1999:91).*

During 2014, I travelled to Argentina to interview individuals who had been appropriated as babies and had gone (or were going) through *identity restitution* as adults. I made contacts beforehand from London and a few indicated they might meet me, but nothing was formally arranged. I felt wary that people may not trust me, of being a burden: why would *they* want to speak with *me*? I also knew that spontaneity is a valued common currency in Argentina and true exchanges happen more frequently that way. I had to take my chance.

The first week flew out of my hands. I had hoped to meet someone in Rosario (where I grew-up and where my original family lives) but due to unexpected circumstances in this person's life, she cancelled. Things moved *slower* than I had wished for.

At moments I felt withheld, “too British, too polite” -as my candid stepson, who lives there, observed. I was acutely aware of my tentativeness in approaching them, of my foreignness, and this sometimes wobbled me. However, this unassuming approach was unavoidable and ultimately useful, although bearing with it was not easy.

I later understood that tentatively approaching them but resilient in the holding of the space in the encounter, proved enabling for them and for me. My concern to ensure they felt respected, that I took them seriously, was strong. I could not have rushed that. I came to where they were, to where they wanted me to meet them, in their times, on their terms.

The following *stories* grew-out of the conversations/interviews I had with them, so I consider them as co-created. In presenting them, I use their legitimate names, as preferred by them as testimony to their (and their parents') denied history -to their *stolen*, yet *restituted* identity. Initially, I portray them with the names they were called-by before

their restitution, roughly conveying the complexity of their ordeal and situating the reader in context and time.

An overview of their backgrounds and how they came to encounter restitution is followed by what developed in our conversations. I chose to remain as close as possible to *their* description of their journeys, *their* focus, *their* choice of words, and mainly, *their* explorations as we spoke. At times, this is permeated by my reflexions, considering the atmosphere within which each story unfolded, and the way it developed throughout our conversations. Hence, what mediated the space between us (the *mate*<sup>10\*</sup>, the dog, the photographs, the archive *box*) and my presence are conveyed here, adding subtleties to my sense of the encounters and the stories that emerged from them.

As a reader, I hope you can allow these stories to resonate, letting them permeate, move, and make you wonder... bearing in mind that understanding, if ever possible in this case, must not be clear-cut, straight-forwards, or definite.

## Agreeing to Meet

I met **Catalina** via old friends, both renowned professionals in the human rights field. I telephoned her after we had emailed each other. Catalina appreciated the fact that I took care in approaching her, in talking to her about what interested me. It was crucial for her “to know where you come from”, and...

“I need to know that you show you care for the other,  
that you don’t treat me like a guinea-pig.

Lots of people want to know about this issue but they end-up saying whatever,  
they mess-up your words.

It was important that Q sent an email asking whether you could contact me first.

I then went and checked with P whether she knew you.

Then, as we chat, I’m seeing whether I want to do it or not...”

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<sup>10</sup> Mate: South-American herbal infusion shared informally amongst friends, typically framing conversations. A gourd filled with mate-tea (yerba) is shared and passed-around by one person (‘cebador’) who ensures everyone has a turn.

Her honesty moved me. I told Catalina about checking the transcripts afterwards, that she could decide whether to participate or not, change things, review. I said that I wanted to be guided by her, so having this conversation first was essential for me and, I hoped, it would also be useful for her. This was reassuring, she said, because she had felt betrayed or insulted before:

“...to talk, we all want to talk, I think... but there are certain ways in which...no, no. Like there was this woman once doing a doctorate in the USA, and when talking to me she used terminology that was completely inappropriate and showed how ill-informed and full of prejudice she was... like: ‘your adoptive parents’, or ‘the dirty-war’... No way! ...On the contrary, for instance, P (another interviewer) helped me lots with her questions...”

I reached **Leonardo** via a friend’s friend who works in CO.NA.DI.<sup>11\*</sup>, who had sent an email around asking if anyone was willing to meet me. Leonardo replied and invited me to meet him at Grandmothers’ La Plata office, because “the stories need to be told...”, because it helps Grandmothers, and might help him, too -he said.

I met **Pablo** via a worker from Grandmothers Rosario, who kindly met with me for a few hours two weeks before. During our conversation, in which we discussed my project, she thought of Pablo as someone to approach because having “restituted his identity two years ago”, he wanted to contribute and was “eager to talk”. She added that “talking things through in this way could aid in his processing stuff, too”. She contacted him afterwards and *he* called me days later.

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo were incredibly generous, open, and willing to “think out-loud” with me -as Leonardo said. I was stunned by their resilience and disposition to allow themselves to be seen (indeed, *found!*) and moved by their courageous, curious, frank and committed approach in doing so. No doubt they felt there was something we could learn about their experience!

I suggest the reader to approach the stories slowly, one-by-one -and if possible, to read them out-loud. I found that in this way, one can accompany oneself through the text with one’s own voice, pacing the tone and reading rhythm as desired or needed.

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<sup>11</sup> CO.NA.DI\*: National Commission for the Right of Identity.

## CATALINA

**The disappeared** ...Miryam DeSanctis and Raul Ovando were young students made disappeared at 21 and 22 years of age. Miryam was 6 months pregnant. During August 1977, she gave birth to a girl she called Laura Catalina at the clandestine Detention Centre where she was illegally imprisoned. A couple allied with *the military forces* seized Catalina soon after her birth, unlawfully registered her as their own child, calling her **Carolina**. Miryam and Raul remain disappeared.

**‘Carolina’** ...was told her ‘parents’ had had difficulties to have children and that she had been born premature. She believed she had also been told she was adopted, but sometimes she thought that could not have been true, because... “didn’t (her) mother tell (her) she cleaned (her) umbilical cord?” She convinced herself this idea of being adopted must have been a vivid dream, or a wishful fantasy -as she did not “identify well with them”. But... “Why weren’t there any pregnancy pictures?” Confused between her questions and the false, inconsistent stories told, ‘Carolina’ “stayed with the answers given”.

She felt depressed during her teens, “incapable of living a normal life”. Her ‘father’ (an army man) had problems with alcohol; her ‘mother’ had severe depression. One day, ‘Carolina’ saw a TV clip from Grandmothers and “it all clicked”: she now knew she was “a child-of-the-disappeared”.

Where did this leave her? Where did this leave her ‘up-to-then parents’? What about what happened to ‘the disappeared’, ‘the real’ parents? Who were they? This unearthing was difficult to face and integrate, so ‘Carolina’s’ introversion grew. She “over adapted”:

“*That...* started to extinguish...

I mean, a person...

A little girl...”

It took ‘Carolina’ over ten years from discovering she was “a child-of-the-disappeared”, to stop “escaping” as if *she* was a criminal.

As she began opening-up though, a new woman started to emerge. She eventually took her *appropriators* to court and changed her name to the one her mother had given her: (Laura) *Catalina*.

*"I now need to place things where they belong..."*

*I need to do what's right..."*

Explaining some pending inheritance paperwork before the recorder is on, Catalina says the words above in passing. They will linger in the background of my listening throughout our conversation.

## **We meet**

We meet at Catalina's place, sit around the table and share mate. Lola, her dog, is with us *"because she's been alone all day"*. I notice Miryam and Raul's photographs (I have seen them before) in a corner with flowers, small candles and objects. This makes them more real than ever. I am strongly shaken, scared even, entering the intimate realms of a stranger who has gone through so much. A *researcher, what is it?* I want to be careful, not to 'study' Catalina as a *voyeur* might. Like Catalina, I need to do *what's right*, find 'my' right place.

Previously over the telephone, I had noticed Catalina's precision in her choice of words. Anchoring her position in them, she says *"my appropriators"* when referring to those she had called *my parents* until not so long ago. She shows me the importance of calling things by their name, of placing things where they belong, of doing what's right. I know my positioning is also very important here, professionally and personally. My ethical wakefulness is heightened as I try to remain both open and containing within the unknown, bearing my own unsettledness.

With threads emerging out of her experiences, the story she constructs with difficulty at times, poignantly conveys her on-going processing and positioning in her identity restitution...

*"This shouldn't have happened.*

*But it did".*

The way Catalina finds to look into *what happened* whilst she *takes position* in our conversation moved me greatly in this, my first interview as a researcher.

## Catalina's Encounters with '*What Happened*'

Catalina tells me directly that it wasn't simply one moment of realisation, but many.

"There was always something running deep-under..."

She asked questions, but finding inconsistencies,

"I didn't rummage through them..."

I stayed with the answers given."

The existing doubts about her identity "sort of lingered there... in the depths...like in a second level...until..." she unexpectedly found -reflected in an *other*- what she already 'knew' about herself:

"I remember the image completely

-in the bedroom...

I was watching TV

and a clip of Grandmothers appeared...\*

It was of this guy

...looking at himself in the mirror...

(this is what I remember,

I can't remember what he was saying or anything...)

and suddenly it was like:

'...Ah! This is it!'

I...

I mean, I was born on those dates...!

He (male appropriator) was an army man...

Suddenly, everything clicked..."

When confronting her female appropriator with: "I'm a child-of-the-disappeared\*, no?", she discovered she was -but encountered further lies, manipulation, and a "campaign discrediting Grandmothers". 'Carolina' was warned that if she spoke, "they'd go to prison". So, prompted by guilt, shame, insecurity,

"I put a barrier -so to speak...

I said:

'I know this, but I'm not going to do anything about it...'"



Years later, 'Carolina' was approached\* by a restituted grandchild and someone from CO.NA.DI to let her know that they were investigating whether she was one of the missing grandchildren after reports received. They wanted to know if she knew anything, had doubts, and if she wanted support. However, living in a "paranoia-packed atmosphere", 'Carolina' "didn't want to have anything to do" with them, and kept "running away" from it all.

Two years later, 'Carolina' received a summons from the judge investigating her case and reluctantly attended. Revealing data that was "clear evidence", the judge encouraged her to do a DNA test, but 'Carolina' resisted. Her appropriators' lawyer advised her to flee, as *forced-entries*\*<sup>12</sup> had started to be effectively implemented in similar cases. Without resources, and against all rationality, 'Carolina' did as she was told, and escaped to Paraguay.

Realising soon after she was running away like a criminal, she returned to Argentina but to another province, where ironically, she was later *found*. A forced-entry was completed, and it was later confirmed she was Miryam and Raul's child.

She had a long way to go before she could confront what was happening. Her appropriators were summoned to the magistrate's preliminary hearings and both had psychotic breakdowns. 'Carolina' felt responsible for looking after them and lived in chaos.

Supported by her husband, she later discovered her appropriators' role in her mother's death. This "cleared the weeds-off", allowing her to open-up and "take responsibility" for herself. Gradually, she began to look at documents and photos, letters, she approached Grandmothers, met other grandchildren, and "what's left" of her legitimate family.

After a decade since seeing the TV clip, 'Carolina' began to separate truth from deceit.

She asked Grandmothers for support "to recover my identity", and to be the plaintiff in the court case against her appropriators...

"...a passive role  
where you cannot ask,  
nor claim,

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<sup>12</sup> Forced-entries: a procedure requested by a judge where DNA is retrieved from personal objects when the victim refuses to provide this voluntarily. See Appendix 1 -Glossary.

nor *give* anything...

Nooo!"

"...it isn't that I wanted... revenge,  
that I wanted them to suffer,  
for them to go to prison...  
to endure it...

Simply: each thing in its place!

...(I wanted) them to acknowledge what they did.

And, I needed to take that position because *it was against me,*  
*it was against my parents,*  
*against my grandparents, against my whole family...*  
and...

I needed that place"

## Catalina's Gatherings

Catalina leaned on two questions as our conversation developed: "*What was it like to find out?*", and "*What helped you? What didn't?*"

## Defending Against It: Appropriation Re-enforced

Catalina tells me about the consequences of her initial resistance, defending against "living it":

"I did this kind of thing...  
this effort not to think.

Firstly, because it hurt me...  
because the things that came-up to me were...  
I mean...

-What were the circumstances of my birth?

-Who were my folks?

-Were they bomb-planters?

...You know, as they used to say...

-What did they do?

-Was I the product of a rape? (...)

I mean... ghastly things!

You know...

So, I didn't think.

And I decided...

I mean, it's like I turned-into...

I took on being who I was back then...

I mean...

I *over-adapted*".

Catalina adjusted to what she was "supposed to be" like:

"all super structured, all very rigid...

and I got hooked into that kind of thing..."

(...) It was a place where you didn't...

Where I was 'safe', no?"

Spontaneously, I ask her how old she was then.

"I was 21..., I think...

Yes!

...The age my mother was... when she had me..."

We both breathe deeply. We discern how with this response, Catalina occupied the position forced upon her. Staying *safely* within the place given, she inadvertently re-created the crime and the horror -staying *appropriated* and, like her mother, also *disappeared*...

"I was like playing the moron...

It's so crazy!

I mean, not thinking...

...like in a bubble!"

Catalina held-on to this position for a long time so as not to face 'it':

"You know, one tries to... let's say, to hold-on to that...

to *not-wanting-to-know* that I was with a person who was a torturer...

or whatever he was, no?"

Catalina tells me that those that report\* a possible case of appropriation, besides aiding Grandmothers in their search, can help the suspected grandchild to open-up. For her, not knowing who presented reports about her contributed to her insecurities, but she understands this in context:

“...during those times, a lot of years ago...  
you wouldn’t know for sure who was still really holding...  
I’d say... *power*...  
Power of doing things...”

“...He was a person that... that  
scared you,  
my appropriator...”

“...now it’s different because there are other guarantees, there are other things...”

“Now you can talk about this... it’s more in the open, it’s present (...)  
There’s a lot more consciousness... before there wasn’t.”

Catalina connects this to her ‘*not-wanting-to-know*’ attitude, hence agreeing to escape to Paraguay:

“I was not able to take charge...  
It was something I couldn’t assimilate”

“I used to say... (...) ‘Why...?!’ ‘Why did I consent to this?’”

She used to feel ashamed remembering how she thought she “*could get away with it*”, but remembers she started to understand...

“I wasn’t a fugitive!  
I felt it, but I wasn’t a fugitive  
because I wasn’t...  
I mean, I wasn’t a criminal!”

Catalina tells me how crazy this was, as she had no idea nor resources to escape properly. She laughs whilst telling me she took her cats with her and rescued a stray dog

on the way, making her escape even more difficult. She describes poignantly how, ironically, she *hid* where the forced-entry that confirmed her lineage was performed. Rescuing other vulnerable creatures on the way, took herself to where she was “*obviously going to be found*”.

“So, in reality, the two moments (of realisation) are:  
in 1998 when I find out (watching the TV clip)  
...and then in 2008,  
when I get the results...”

Although she knew she was a *child-of-the-disappeared*, the official results of the *forced-entry* confirmed her biological parents’ genetic identity -and hence, hers. The official results supported Catalina to “*take distance to sort things out*”.

## What Helped and What Didn’t are Interlinked

Catalina reflects at length about her process:

“...*What hindered and what helped is linked with my appropriators...*  
–with their behaviours;  
and also my own stuff,  
my personality, I guess...  
other stuff due to my upbringing...  
*Guilt*, obviously...  
has lots to do with what hindered...”

“I *couldn’t* -so to speak, move-ahead with my history,  
and acknowledge it...  
and see what I wanted and needed...  
...until I managed to start detaching myself,  
sorting things out... and  
I don’t know...  
Prioritising myself...  
and saying:  
‘Enough... I won’t take more responsibility (for them)’  
-while trying *not to allow the guilt to consume me*”.

Feeling “super-fragile”, she distanced herself from “people from those times”, as “due to their backgrounds” (i.e., children of army people), they found accepting her changes difficult.

“It was all gradual...  
I became closer and closer to people from Grandmothers,  
to other grandchildren,  
and other new people I began to meet...”

This helped her to...

“...stop and untangle off the guilt...  
unglue oneself from...  
or to take the distance you need  
to be able to see these things...  
And then (...) to *take responsibility*.  
Say: ‘I need to do these things to re-accommodate, and to really put things in their place’...”

“It started to *sink-in* little-by-little...”

Observing herself was also crucial:

“My own attitude caught my attention...  
I was doing the opposite of what I’d always done!  
I’m very curious, super inquisitive...  
So, that’s not congruent with ‘living in a cloud of farts’  
(...) no?”

It’s interesting to hear “*a cloud of farts*” (for ‘a bubble’) -an evocative phrase that shows how polluted she felt in her ‘safe’ position...

“...a very obscure thing!  
So, in all that...  
I was like very *taken*...  
So, I couldn’t take courage (animate myself)”.

Catalina was indeed *taken*, *her soul (anima) taken away*. What helped her *to get out* of that place, “*re-position*”, “*soften-up*”, was asking herself what this meant to her.

“...So ‘what helped?’:

...to speak,

...to listen to others,

....to ask myself questions,

...and let others question me...”

“It was...

opening-up,

encouraging myself to...

to listen to others...”

“...to see what happened

....having my mum talking to me...<sup>13\*</sup>

...seeing what my grandparents said about my parents

(how they’d met, what they did...)

It was like that:

suddenly, lots of hardened skin fell off...”

“...and to get the courage to think about the responsibilities of my appropriators,

the shit behaviours they had –selfish, no?

Because at one point I felt I was going to explode with the pressure...

of everything:

of what they expected of me,

of what I had to do, of how I had to respond...

I felt I was going to get really ill with keeping with taking responsibility (for them)”

## Responsibilities and Positioning

Catalina re-states the importance of placing self and “*things*” in the right place, taking position and choosing:

“And realising that...

realising what each thing meant.

---

<sup>13</sup> Catalina refers here to a letter her mother sent to her own parents supposing Catalina would be sent to them after her assassination. See Appendix 1- Glossary

I mean, firstly: that their love towards me wasn't authentic...  
 -because they kept asking me and expecting me to be their *shield*...  
 to sacrifice myself for them...  
 Because what I was doing was sacrificing myself...!  
 ...in order to...  
 somehow save them, no?"  
 "That muddle isn't love".  
 "...to start to get angry... like: 'How selfish they were!'  
 (...) *You* took me away!!  
 ...Now, enough...!  
 Assume responsibility!  
 ...Go to justice, and say: 'Yes, I did this'. Full stop...!  
 Don't put me in the middle anymore  
 so that you can stretch this out to avoid this going to where it had to go!  
 ...Meaning: 'Assume responsibility'!"  
 "Realising their responsibilities,  
 realising how it had actually been...  
 Then, realising that she knew!  
 ...realising that they were also responsible for my parents' deaths!  
 That was a break-through"  
 "My mum was a few metres away from where *she* (appropriator) took me!!!  
 So... that was like...  
 I couldn't look at her anymore! (...)  
 I started to be really uncomfortable with being called '*daughter of*  
 or having to call them...  
 ...I couldn't call them 'parents'.  
 It started to bug me to have that name... that surname..."

Catalina recognizes that in her previous position (avoiding taking responsibility for herself)  
 she was functioning like her appropriators, but she started to think:

"I'm not going to live like they do.  
 I'm not going to stay with the fear nor am I going to hide...  
 No.



And that's when I began to...  
I didn't want to identify myself with them"

Although painful, Catalina states this was what she needed to experience.

"It's still hurting...  
It's still...I still feel... sorrow...  
it hurts...  
I don't know what 'to care for' (them) means...  
I don't know... but I can't.  
No, no...  
So, you see... all this...  
such a huge ordeal...!  
These things though, facilitated my process..."

Catalina began to change position, de-victimizing herself.

"For me, to take distance was...essential (...)  
You can then start to think about *the real story*."

Traversing the journey from denial to "taking responsibility" (wanting to see, listen, understand, give things *their* name and place, and decide *where* she wanted to be) enabled her to approach this as *a different story*: now the 'real' story was hers.

"I called Grandmothers after meeting my family in January 2011.  
And in March, I asked them for help...  
I spoke with the judge...  
Other grandchildren accompanied me to ask the judge for the restitution of my identity...  
and I decided  
(because I asked for it, not because they asked me)  
to be a claimant in the cause...  
...because for me, that was also  
to *decide where (to stand)* ..."

## I Choose Therefore I am

“...you need to stop, and choose...”

Learning more about her parents, she uncovers movingly how much closer to them and their interests she felt, interests she had abandoned as they were “not possible” in her upbringing context. Connecting herself in the lineage-chain, Catalina *chooses* (*adopts?*) *her biological parents*, becoming a child of theirs, and separating from her appropriators...

“...people throw these things at you like:

‘Well, but you’re also a bit their child,  
...because you lived with them, they raised you...’

This used to annoy me!

So... ‘No, I’m telling you: ‘No’

-because *I choose!*’

I mean...

‘I’m not their child!’”

“So, it was then that...

I began to find out the truth, no?

This: although I didn’t live with my parents, I’m more like my parents than I am like them!

Then, besides... the fact that *I choose!* ...I suppose...

-because I think one chooses, too ...no?”

Catalina emphasizes her words “*I choose*”, which reverberate in me. In Spanish, “Yo elijo...” [*I choose*] sounds exactly like “Yo, el hijo” [*I, the child...*]. Hence, “*I choose / I, the child...*”. Catalina chooses to be the child of her legitimate parents, not an appropriated child. Eloquently, she adds:

“I have nothing to forgive...

and besides, nobody had actually said ‘Sorry!’”

“Some people say: ‘they gave you everything’

And: ‘yes...!’

...but nobody asked them to!

...There were lots of other people who *wanted to do it*,  
and *whose place was to do it!*"

Catalina feels she was robbed of "the life (she) should've had", even when...

"There's no guarantee of how my life would've been with my grandparents,  
or with my family in general  
if I hadn't been appropriated (...)  
but... at least that would've been where I belonged (...)  
...what was legitimate..."

"...I grew-up so much with these things (...)  
I mean, from then on...

I believe that one has also the possibility of *deciding how one is going to live...*  
*how one chooses to live* those things, no...?"

"It's having a bit more trust in what I...  
in realising what I need...  
that I need to encourage (enliven) myself to try..."

"It's something I'm working on, my own search..."  
"I'm like sorting myself out still..."  
"I'm changing a great deal..."

## Contributing to the Wider Search

In the last few years, many *restituted grandchildren* have taken on leading roles in Grandmothers' campaigns, contributing to the human rights' movements working for Truth, Memory and Justice\* -understood as essential socio-political requisites in their struggle. Catalina is one of them. She has appeared on national TV, sometimes gives interviews for newspapers, or talks in Argentina and abroad. When we met, she was working at the Ministry of Justice in the Human Rights Department supporting the lawyer who facilitated us meeting.

Catalina describes two aspects in being a public figure: one refers to the *weight* of personal exposure; the other, to the significant *gain* in the processing it helps to continue, helping her *position* as an *actor* in desired acknowledgement and change.

It is difficult to hold the balance, Catalina says, sometimes feeling like stepping out of the public sphere. However, feeling the need “not to look aside”, contributing on her terms seems to help:

“I want to participate  
and I want to contribute...  
I’m with all my feelers out  
so that it’s not something that consumes me entirely...”

We reflect about the conflict between embracing public acknowledgement and the sort of ‘fascination-frenzy’ that being in the media generates, potentially trivializing something ‘so huge’:

“...to be a grandchild is something important, it is relevant...  
but it’s positive because of the dissemination, the media campaign, the message...”

Her identity seems also grounded in *being one of them*, hence her exasperation when other grandchildren “usufruct\* this *celebrity* status...”

“It’s hard to find a balance in this... in how you work on that...  
in the word and place of the survivor...  
with its relevance...  
But it’s not because of something we’ve done...  
So, getting yourself up in the pedestal...  
that’s what I don’t like,  
I don’t want to use that place...”

“...Being a grandchild isn’t a merit.  
(...) As a *celebrity*, ‘no...’  
But on the other hand, when you see people ‘living in a shoe’...  
or that they have zero...  
With a position in regards to things that you say:  
‘How aren’t you astonished?’  
‘How aren’t you sensitised?’  
(...) the dimension of what I lived, or what others went through!’  
...and you say: ‘How can you not acknowledge that?’”

At this point, I feel the need to convey to her I see this as deeply connected with why I am talking to her:

“The merit for me is indeed in the work you had to do,  
and you’re still doing, in relation to this...

You’re here.

You keep on reconstructing the truth,  
reassembling your identity...

and *your* position...

(the merit *for me* lies) in allowing yourself to leave behind that *safe place* you talked about...,  
no?”

“For me this is very important...

To be recognised for your merits, *not for being this or that...*  
*or ‘the child of so-and-so’*”

“*The difference is in the position you take (...)*

That’s why it’s difficult...

We’re common people, like everyone else,

and we haven’t got more merit...

we do have a place we didn’t want...

and that... well...

We have to occupy it, and be sensible...”

## Grandmothers

At first, Catalina expected the grandmothers “*to make her pay*” for having ran away, but...

“...it was then that

*listening to others* was very significant for me

...to listen to X (a grandchild who falsified evidence) about how it was for him,

and that the grandmothers were still standing by his side,

that they were OK...”

“(Grandmothers) is like a family that one has...

...with its complications, its messiness...”

For Catalina, (G)grandmothers managed to uphold a position that effectively supports the grandchildren to distance themselves from where guilt overrides. They understand what they may have to go through, and are “happy ...that you’re here...”

“That’s mind-blowing!

(...) It astonishes me!

*How do you do it?”*

Catalina and I jointly laugh here -her question parallels mine to her and other grandchildren who have gone (are going) through restitution. In this way, we acknowledge the previously discussed ‘merit’ in the work undertaken.

Catalina also described the ‘Psychological Area’ within Grandmothers...

“... it’s a place of containment,

so that you...

So that you don’t go shit-mad”

“Alicia\* is there, she’s got such commitment.

You can call her anytime. I mean, *she’s there. She really is there.*

Some people may not do a treatment there, but they may be in a frail moment,

or something’s going on...

She’s there to... She will see you.

She says this to all of us: to pass-on her phone number to those that may need to call her,

that she welcomes you, she ‘accompanies’ you.

That’s one of the roles she has”.

## **Our One-to-One**

I ask Catalina how she feels now, after speaking with me.

“Fine ...it’s different talking one-to-one...”

However, sometimes when speaking, she gets “lost... because it’s all muddled-up”.

“I feel the mess and...

it’s hard work....

That’s why it helps...

It helps me to process...

Because if I don't speak, *like this*,  
with others,  
I feel in quite a mess still..."

As I leave, heartache and respect mix-up with myriad images our conversation aroused for me. I 'see' her in the van, with her rescued creatures, escaping... but equally 'going for it'.

"...perhaps the 'north' was already awakening in her..." - I thought.

"She rescued herself, the stray dog, her cats....

Her journey has indeed been impressive."

But the story has many sides. Our conversation showed also the pain -as Catalina's dog does during our meeting (barking, jumping, wanting to be considered as Catalina tries to calm her down). The dog's turmoil, sometimes funny for both, sometimes angst-provoking, became a kind of symbol of what we are trying to grasp... the combination of strength and vulnerability, and how not straight-lined her epic journey has been.

What helps and what doesn't... it is all mixed-up... as Catalina wisely said.

It took several months for Catalina to revise the transcripts I sent her for corrections, clarifications, and to review sensitive issues we had touched upon. Eventually, we decided to "look at it together" via Skype.

"I like it like this, how we did it...  
(...) alone, I couldn't look at it"

Catalina explains that sometimes, it...

"...seems all very surreal...  
I mean... like very...  
as if it was a film!  
...I still can't completely get it...  
that what happened, *really* happened".

However, she highlights that...

“...after going through all this...  
...I wouldn't change a thing, this whole process...”

To be “*a grandchild*” is not a merit for Catalina. However, to position herself as one (amongst many), together and separate, and to choose to do it or be able to do it with such dignity after all that she has showed me it implies, seems to me to be indubitably worth of merit. The difference lies indeed in “*the position you take*”.



## LEONARDO

### The disappeared

When they were sucked-in, Beatriz Ortega was 17 years old and 7 months pregnant. Ruben Leonardo Fossati was 22. Both were active, socially engaged students, and to this date remain disappeared. Through testimonies provided by surviving women detained with Beatriz, we know she was spat upon, kicked, humiliated and tied-up on a kitchen table whilst giving birth to her baby Leonardo. Via a midwife, he was given to an older couple who did not know of his origins, and was given the name *Carlos*.

**‘Carlos’** ...was never told he was ‘adopted’ but had doubts about his origins. Assuming he had been abandoned and feeling loyalty towards the family that brought him up, he never enquired until he was 27 -while working these things through in therapy.

Then, at a drama class, when asked to improvise a 5-minute representation of someone’s last moments, he found himself calling at the end: “Who am I? I can’t die without knowing my origins!”. A classmate, startled at his compellingly honest performance, asked him whether this was about himself. She prompted him to investigate, and suggested that given his age, he could be one of the *missing grandchildren*.

‘Carlos’ resisted this idea because those who brought him up “were not of that ideology”, but eventually asked them. Learning that he had been adopted, he discovered also that the adoption had been hidden by being registered as *own* -a practice that, although illegal, was *common* in Argentina. As nobody knew much about his origins, ‘Carlos’ approached Grandmothers a few months later with the scarce details he had.

Like with a pregnancy, the news came nine months later: instead of *abandoned*, he had been *searched for* incessantly by his family and Grandmothers for nearly 30 years.

Startlingly, ‘Carlos’, now known again as *Leonardo*, learnt that he was born minutes away from where he was living then. Originally a police station, this place is now a Centre for Memory\*.

## We meet

*“This search is  
plainly and simply based on love”*

On my way to La Plata to meet Leonardo, I am in a state of sharp sensitivity. I remember my first visit to this city, possibly around the year Leonardo was born! I might have been seven then... Associations float... The radio playing loudly in the van in which I travel, suddenly revolts me. I look around, as if asking: ‘Does anyone hear what this fascist, entitled ‘macho-man’ is saying whilst background voices laugh?’ Nobody seems bothered. A never fully healed wound re-awakens. I think about ‘those years’ and now... Many of those who disappeared were fighting for these things to change... and they were so young! I’m hit in the chest.

Feeling angry, upset... an outsider in my homeland, an insider from abroad, I write in my diary: “Imagine what it was like back then, if now, almost 40 years later *this* is still the ‘background noise’ most are used to! The things we get accustomed to! ...How naïve to think that things have changed so much, so full of pride for ‘my Argentina!’”

I meet Leonardo later at Grandmothers’ office in La Plata. As we share mate, Leonardo speaks slowly, harvesting his words carefully as if making the most of this conversation, “*thinking-out-loud*” with me, “*giving-it-out to be known/acknowledged...*”.

I had read about Leonardo and seen him interviewed on TV. We had exchanged emails only, so I ask Leonardo why he volunteered to meet me. Leonardo took this question as a springboard guiding our conversation: *Why...? How to speak about this?*

## Leonardo’s Encounters with “This”

Leonardo transited “*many phases before verifying*” he was not the biological son of the people that raised him, and learnt “*first-hand of certain mechanisms we have*” to avoid suffering:

*“...delaying knowing the truth has more to do with mechanisms...  
(...) auto-convincing yourself of certain things,*

and adjusting things so as not to...  
not to generate *too much noise*...”

“...I didn’t want to go out searching for the people that’d abandoned me,  
and I didn’t want to (...) grant them greater importance  
and a greater place than to those who’d chosen me  
and that brought me up with lots of love... with dedication...  
So, I stayed like that for many years...”

But eventually, Leonardo felt...

“I wouldn’t be able to *forgive myself*...  
to arrive at that instant  
...that the improvisation showed,  
of saying: ‘I am dying... and I never found out about this!’  
...So basic and essential!

And it was also because of an issue that was already playing-up quite strongly for me...  
It was a decision that was mine,  
but it also had a lot to do with my son...”

“It’s not *just my history*... *It’s also my son’s* (...) *I had to take responsibility.*”

“I couldn’t think of *my own life*...  
...whilst having the doubt and not having worked it out for myself!”

Leonardo brought up the question of whether he was adopted and discovered he (and his sister) had been. He approached Grandmothers when he realised he could not track his origins any further.

## Leonardo’s Reflections

“I restituted my identity in August 2005 (...) and I started giving a hand at Grandmothers

as a form of gratitude for having given me...  
the possibility of restitution of my identity...  
and to know who I am...  
So, I'd say that...  
what I had most *at reach* was *telling my story*...  
...which is basically also what Grandmothers have been doing for over thirty years..."

However, his desire to contribute collided with his need to process what he had found.  
He had "worries (he) needed to work-on first" and felt too exposed.

### **Opening-Up, Processing, Integrating the Private with Wider Issues**

When learning he was *a child-of-the-disappeared*, he was pulled mainly by

"a very *common feature* amongst the grandchildren that *come-forwards\**,  
searching..."

-a concern about...

"...the negative consequences for my family ...who'd brought me up"

However, he

"needed to put *them* in question..."

"...to go out and inquire  
(...) to then return  
...to be able to trust them again!"

When Leonardo had official confirmation that they had been unaware of his tragic origins,  
and that they had also been lied to,

"... we began having conversations that we'd never had before...  
and the relationship began...  
...it started to be re-assembled from *cero*,  
from a completely different place..."

and a lot more...  
a lot healthier!"

Learning about "how things had been (...) really helped", as...

"Things eventually started to find their...  
their place.  
And that helped me loads.  
I believe it's very important...  
One of the most important things after recovering your identity,  
is to begin to discover your biological family...  
and to begin to put in place  
your issues with the family that brought you up..."

So, Leonardo explains, he agreed to meet me because "you came by the hand of somebody I trust and respect". He believes "opening-up the issue" in Argentina and abroad is crucial for the search of those still missing. But also, personally, because "these conversations, a warm face-to-face" help him appreciate things from different perspectives, facilitating the integration of his "private life" within a wider context, allowing him to continue processing, because restitution is *on-going*:

"...within the whole process that w...  
-I was going to say: 'was'!  
...**that IS...**! ...recovering...  
...the identity,  
you go through...  
through phases in which...  
... you sometimes need *other* times...  
Or, sometimes, you need to...  
more even than *to talk*,  
you need *to listen*..."

"Isn't it this somehow also what *I am* doing with this study? I need to listen!"

Leonardo's words touch me as he says:

“...what happened to me *in the flesh*...”

“...is *less* private and *more* like *part of the whole*...”

“ (it’s) a bit of the story of a country”

For instance, his child also...

“...had to *live-it in the flesh* because (...)

...he was eight when I restituted my identity...

He, too, had to change his surname...”

Hence,

“...it goes a lot further than what happens to me... (...)

This, in itself, generated positive things in me...

because it ‘*de-hardened*’... things actually...

it decompressed situations...”

## Finding Strength

Leonardo admires the grandmothers.

“...when they began searching in the height of the military rule...

(what they were doing) was ...*literally impossible!*

...To steal a baby,

kill the parents,

to give him away to another family;

manipulate all the institutions...

I mean, the grandmothers would go to the police stations,

the tribunals, I don’t know...

and they knew that...

that *no investigation* was going to be started!

Moreover, the technological advances that were developed later,

didn’t exist back then!

...to have a DNA test done

(so that you know whether that baby is or isn’t the grandchild of *that* grandmother)

...those literally didn’t exist!

How would you...?!

I mean, many searches were *based on a photo of a baby!*  
The years went by and that baby is unrecognisable!  
So, it's...  
Despite those circumstances...  
...to continue searching!  
For me, that's an example of...  
...it will remain... for humanity -let's say...  
In circumstances where... if you think about it,  
'Forget it!'...because...: 'It's over!'  
...Despite all this, they continued and...well...  
You can see the results for yourself...!"

For Leonardo, it was crucial that Grandmothers managed to attune to the grandchildren's changing needs:

"...as they were finding their grandchildren...  
they were seeing what those kids' needs were...  
First, they were really young children!  
...and later, in their teens -with all it entails....  
And then, as they got older...  
and now, being parents...!"

Consequently, for Leonardo,

"It isn't a 'made-up' phrase, so-to-speak...  
This search is plainly and simply based on love".

"So, sometimes, it's *awfully complex*...  
and other times it's *awfully simple*"

"That's why I say that  
for me, from a personal point of view...  
I believe it's the best *example of strength* I have..."

Another *significant source of strength* has been gathering stories about his parents in conversations with some of their “*compañeros\**” (*comrades*). Leonardo wants to “*really understand these things*”, learn from them:

“...These are the things that keep me in axis”.

“My mum was...

she was a kid...

She was 17!

...17 years old when she was kidnapped!

She turned 18 in captivity...and being pregnant with me...”

Leonardo was told by his parents’ *compañeros* that his father was very loyal, never turning anyone in -even under indescribable conditions (prisoners were tortured to get information about others or just for fun, to demoralise).

“You see?

...These are things that ...

These are extreme tests!”

“So this is...

this is great for me...

These are things that will accompany me forever”.

I ask Leonardo about these values he is defining... Was he able to connect to these more, when hearing these stories?

“I always tried to let those values thrive in me...

...and yes, I had them before knowing my history.

So, that’s something that...

When it was time for me to get to know the story of my parents...

I felt... extremely proud...

of a lot of different situations...

And this for me was... very nice,

very gratifying...”



“...these are things that engender strength...  
...they accompany you your whole life”

For Leonardo, even with “lots of issues that are connected with the pain, the disappearance...”,

“...these things... thoroughly outdo the negative part.”

“...I truly feel it like that: it overtakes it.

The example left...

the legacy... thoroughly surpasses the pain...

I mean, of course I would've preferred that all this hadn't happened.....

But anyhow...

Not being able to change that...

For me, *this* is a great example!”

## Truth, Memory, Justice

“...the opening-up of these issues in society...

I guess, impacts at an individual... singular level.

I didn't have to live through processes

as difficult as those lived by the grandchildren that restituted their identity in the 90's...

-where people didn't speak of 'the detained-disappeared'

but instead of 'the subversives',

and of 'terrorists'

...or of 'the theory of the two demons'\*

And people still used:

*‘they must have done something...’\**,

(...) denying so many truths that took us so many years to...

... it took trials

to prove to society that 'this is how things were'...”

Leonardo thought initially that the policies advocated by the then government for *Truth, Memory and Justice* were probably mere slogans. However,

"...I started to see the strength of these three pillars  
 –because honestly, they're the *guarantee*...  
 that certain things won't be put into question again.  
 From that standpoint,  
 ...they won't be questioned anymore  
 -in terms of 'whether they happened or not'...  
 From then onwards,  
 you can start to discuss *other* things...  
 And when you win that one...  
 then it's the next...  
 So, for instance, it isn't questioned anymore.  
 Not so long ago..., only 10 years ago,  
 this was still a subject of debate!  
 ...the issue of the stealing of babies...  
 ...that 'they were sporadic'; that 'there were only 10, 12, 20...'  
 Anyway...  
 Finally, beyond the fact that more disappeared children kept appearing during those years,  
*it was proved in a trial that there was a systematic plan\* for stealing babies!"*

Hence, these pillars proved decisive for identity restitution. Even when...

"...there are legal consequences for the family that brought (them) up  
 ...I don't know of any case that said: 'I *regret*... having known the truth'...  
 (...) Even in those most difficult cases,  
 agreeing or disagreeing with the work of Grandmothers,  
*they're grateful"*

Leonardo links this with the fact that whilst many appropriating families "play those games  
 to try to avoid legal consequences" (generating guilt and paralysis in the grandchildren), a  
 vital concern for Grandmothers has been to...

"deviate the grandchildren from the place of culpability".

Undoubtedly for Leonardo, the grandchild...

“...didn’t take any decisions at the time of changing his name,  
nor he decided that his parents be disappeared;  
not of going away to live with another family...!  
It was more than anything, the exact opposite...!”

“Look, honestly, you committed this crime!  
What Grandmothers... or Justice is considering  
is *how to repair, and to arrive to the truth...*  
of something that truly...  
if you are implicated in it...  
well...  
you’ll have to account to the law, to Justice...”

Leonardo explains that the legal and psychological consequences for those involved are complex and many. Hence, discerning and officially recognising “*what happened*” is crucial.

He then tells me that since the National Genetic Data Bank<sup>14\*</sup> was created, large numbers of people approach Grandmothers spontaneously to verify whether they are or are not one of the missing grandchildren, as even when knowing they were adopted, there is no trace of their origins...

“So, it’s Justice who interprets it then as maybe another case of irregular adoption rather than as a case of a baby’s appropriation...”

For Leonardo, these *common practices* like irregular adoptions or buying babies even, whilst keeping their origins hidden contributed to the “*perverse plan*” of erasing their early history and that of their parents -a plan Grandmothers works against.

“It was the way things were done...”

“Grandmothers have contributed lots in making this issue visible...  
in creating new laws...  
putting things on the table.

---

<sup>14</sup> The NGDB has DNA samples of family members of those being searched for, so that matches can be verified.

That's what it is: making things visible in an attempt to make them better...

Yes, it's a hell of an issue!"

"... And if society takes note,  
and from this, also the State does,  
with its government of the time...  
these are gigantic steps for individual rights!"

Unfortunately, though, many may have the "will power but limited resources to find out", like Leonardo's adoptive sister, who has been unable to trace her origins.

### **Your Quest Shapes Your Identity**

"The quest in itself is...  
is *to live*, let's say, *in truth*...  
I mean, beyond what the result is...  
If you take responsibility for what happens to you...  
that, in itself...  
for me, ...that's a result already!"

*"It's in this process that you find your own identity.*  
If you console yourself by '*not knowing*'  
...and you just remain there...  
Or, if you embark on the search  
even when you're almost convinced that you won't find anything...  
Well, you are also shaping your identity on the way!"

### **Finding and Becoming a 'Compañero'**

When I ask Leonardo whether he had any psychological support, he replies, wittily:

"Yes, I did...  
Lobotomy, no!"

Leonardo was in psychotherapy before approaching Grandmothers, when all “these issues started to emerge”. Once he resumed with the same psychoanalyst after the restitution of his identity, he discovered that he was...

“...a ‘compañero’!,  
and coincidentally,  
he was an activist in the U.E.S\*, where my mum was an activist!  
So, that gave things a different colouring...  
It’s great...”

Leonardo tells me that Grandmothers’ Psychological Department provides...

“...a sort of accompanying of grandchildren,  
of family members...  
that, honestly, is fantastic!”

For Leonardo, being in the context of Grandmothers has been vital, bringing him closer to issues he needed to work-through, and to other grandchildren...

“...that have gone through the same situation...  
that were going through similar phases, or not...  
and then...  
the grandmothers themselves...!  
They treat you as if you’re their *own grandchild*...!  
So, *that* context is so exceptionally favourable for...  
for transiting this path...  
...whatever way you can!  
(...) you have a place there, anyhow...”

Joining Grandmothers has been for him...

“...great because eventually I began...  
to see all those processes...  
Like, I came across grandchildren who weren’t daring to do the DNA tests and all that...  
and I had the opportunity, in some of those cases,

to accompany that process...  
–like / was accompanied then!”

## Contributing

Leonardo has an active role in Grandmothers currently, speaking eloquently about his gratitude for them for “making things visible”, improving things personally and socio-politically. Leonardo believes many issues associated with the last civic-military dictatorship have not been looked at closely enough yet, and so, when people have the chance to learn...

“...first hand, of certain things, they become shuddered...

It changes things....

It's like, I don't know... it's useless to compare...

because it's actually so clear!

But I was going to say:

*‘...it's like seeing a play at the theatre,  
or having someone telling you about the play...’*”

Leonardo touches on a growing concern of mine as the interviews develop, regarding knowing, understanding, meaning-making, and the writing of this piece:

*‘What would my voice add to theirs?’*

But, as Leonardo tells me, opening this up to the world expands the work Leonardo feels needs to continue:

“...at a macro level, in our society,  
we still have a long way to go...”

“...the clearer way to see that there's still a long way to go  
is to appreciate that about 400 grandchildren are still missing”

Before saying goodbye, Leonardo tells me he “liked the way you’ve done this...”, adding that “it needs to be heard-of worldwide”. He generously gives me books and different educational material published by Grandmothers “as a contribution” to it.

I am so moved by the unbelievable work undertaken out of such adversity, in such hostile a context, that once outside, I need to soothe. I feel I am made of jelly, melting away. I hear a torrent river running strong inside me, too. I sit in a sunny spot in the street, in silence, my eyes closed. I let all this be.

Evoking my trip in the van earlier, an underlying quest in this enquiry re-awakens: abating the oppressive *background noises we are so accustomed to* by making other tunes more audible... Stories so complex, yet bursting with “...the strength and the clarity of the simple...” should be listened to and continue sprouting as they gain fertile terrain: a work / definitely agree needs to continue.

# PABLO

## The disappeared

Ricardo Gaona-Paiva and María Rosa Miranda were workers from humble origins and E.R.P.\* militants aged 21 and 28 years old. Their baby Pablo was born in Buenos Aires on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1978. A month later, after a family celebration, the three of them vanished. What happened to Pablo between then and a month later when he was 'given' to the family that kept him and changed his name to 'Leandro', is unknown. Pablo restituted his identity in August 2012, but his parents remain *disappeared*.

**'Leandro'** ...knew he was adopted but began questioning the story told as he got older and socio-politically aware. His 'godfather' was an army man, and parts of the story told didn't add-up. He began suspecting of being a child-of-the-disappeared but kept this to himself. 'Leandro' started a lone long-search, immersing himself into the grandchildren's stories, reading about Grandmothers, searching for clues in their website, going through *the disappeared* photos looking for his mother's face... "*hoping to find myself there*". 'Leandro' failed in this -yet, as years passed, he grew confident to take steps towards finding the truth. He had confronted "the woman that raised" him, but she had denied knowing much, and warned him that if he did anything, "they could go to prison".

'Leandro' restituted his identity soon after approaching Grandmothers. That day, he saw his original birth certificate and ID card\*, he learned "*the names of the relatives that had given blood to the Genetic Data Bank*" to help identify him and saw photos of *himself with his parents* for the first time. He also met part of the family that had been looking for him for 36 years, and grandmothers, grandchildren, and important public figures within the human right's struggle who welcomed him as "one of us".

'Leandro' asked to be called Pablo straight away...

"I was happy. I had gone there to look for *this*, no?  
So, I say: 'Well, if my parents wanted me to be...  
to be called Pablo...  
*My name is Pablo!*  
So, from then on...  
From here onwards,  
I started to recover, at least, *my name*..."



## We meet

*“...the real change happens  
when you have an important support from the State”*

Pablo volunteered to meet me and invited me to his place. Placing a box (*his* Archive of Memory\* box) on the table, he asks me about my project, whilst preparing coffee. I explain:

“I want to learn about... and let people where I live know about...  
what’s been going on here...  
how the *grandchildren* are being found... your experience of it...”

I expand this by saying that on each visit, I have seen progressively significant changes in the way people speak about this, and the increasing number of grandchildren coming forwards. Pablo says the issue is relevant for Europe too, connecting it with “*the Spanish babies\**” and Spain’s reluctance to acknowledge and elucidate what happened there:

*“...that was happening here not long ago...”*

...as “*Mothers and Grandmothers’ struggle*” was diminished:

*“...here they were treated as mad women!”*

I realise retrospectively that this initial exchange positioned us both on *the other side* of the reluctance Pablo is talking about: we both think *this* is important, worth talking about, acknowledged.

Pablo highlights this throughout our conversation, describing it as a personal and socio-political need. He talks about the pivotal role of official acknowledgement, the government’s commitment to bring justice, and its support for the search.

We meet in the months before the trial for his appropriation begins within the frame of a bigger trial taking place. Meanwhile, his *godfather* is detained, and the “*family that raised*” him denies having known much. His “*sisters of up-bringing*” had distanced themselves from Pablo,

“...as if I’d done something wrong!”

He describes his singular search, the difficulties faced, and the welcoming niche he found in Grandmothers and on activism.

## Pablo’s Rattles

Pablo tells me that until he started to learn more about what had happened in Argentina during the dictatorship years,

“...the need of... or the doubt about who my parents might’ve been  
didn’t sprout-off me...”

“I couldn’t connect my story to the dictatorship subject...  
because I thought of it as facts outside socio-political contexts...”

“The believable story”, was that...

“they’d brought me from Misiones\*”.

“...people would go to  
...all those cities and...  
(...) would bring children...  
as if they were a packet of yerba!\*  
...Because that’s how it was, no?”

Additionally, he tells me that his Catholic education\* contributed to the “political denial” of his generation:

“...It was pure partying!  
...the ‘Menemist’ party\*!  
What could I’ve heard that’d ‘make some noise’, right?  
...or bring forwards some inquisitiveness...?”

This context “made things invisible”, helping him with denial even further. So, like “...lots of other grandchildren...”

“I didn’t want to know anything about it!  
...because it was horrible! No?”

Pablo thinks that the work of Grandmothers, and the latest government back then helped him and “other siblings ‘come forwards’ to find the truth”, to begin “hearing his rattles” and be “corralled by doubts”...

“...To have a continuous bombardment of information  
...it was becoming difficult... not to think.  
I mean, that...  
I think that was very, very important.  
For instance, afterwards,  
the media began to make visible the particular cases of grandchildren being found...  
allowing them to tell their story...  
and that’s fabulous!”

“...because then it was like... it was like looking at myself in the face, no?  
...To listen to them... to start to listen to *what was happening to me!*  
Then, I was able to start linking it directly...  
It wasn’t like...  
It ceased being a fantasy –that this could have happened to me...”

He remembers prompting people about these issues “to see how they’d take it...what they thought...” but although still unsure what his social niche’s response would be if he was right,

“...what was giving me confidence was (...) *there was containment...*  
I knew there was this governmental containment...  
this support for the institution... for Grandmothers...  
and that... it was like they embraced the person who (...)  
...they would invite them to get courage and...  
‘because here we will contain you...’  
and that ‘here you’ll be...’

I mean: 'you won't be alone...'  
You see, all those messages that now I also try to give-out...  
Because it's like that:  
...you are contained,  
very much so."

Pablo had spent years learning about Grandmothers. He felt hopeful hearing from restituted grandchildren's interviews that finding "truth was liberating". However, anxiety and guilt prevailed, and he did not speak with anyone else about this for years. Not knowing what could happen between him and "the family that raised (him)" made him restless. He needed to feel certain, as...

"...it was like going to start a fight...  
yes, it's like going to go rotten everything up..., no?  
Because, I mean... I go here...  
I have to be prepared to confront myself with a mess...  
because *it was* a mess!"

About ten years later he approached Grandmothers. He laughs, saying:

"...You can say I took my time!"

However, once the DNA test was done, the news he had been waiting for came soon after. Without telling anyone, he went to CO.NA.DI, and was welcomed warmly by people he admired for their "commitment to the struggle". His doubts were confirmed: he was indeed *a child-of-the-disappeared*. The meeting was professional yet intimate, emotionally charged. Pablo felt part of something big.

## Pablo's Views

"...The assassins,  
the repressors,  
the torturers... were happily walking the streets,

living like ordinary citizens...  
without... without any consequences...!"

### **Little-by-little, Making Visible What was Made Invisible**

Pablo recalls that when democracy was re-established in the eighties, the military imposed conditions of immunity for themselves, "not to be touched... judged", and...

"Society gave them that."

Pablo believes that although very important, the "trial to the Junta\*" was insufficient, as...

"...the 'Forgiveness Laws', 'the Pardon'  
...made things go backwards...  
It made the country go backwards...  
it made society go backwards,  
I think, a lot of years!  
And I think this was recovered with the State's commitment from 2003 onwards...  
From then on, things changed,  
I feel that from then on, things changed lots..."

The implementation of a governmental human rights policy specifically linked with the "civic-military dictatorship" was crucial for Pablo, as it conveyed officially that... "this isn't ok".

Removing the dictators' photographs from the Argentinean presidential palace, or revoking the pardon laws, were for Pablo clear symbols of official acknowledgement of what had been repudiated and of the "reestablishment of justice". Hence,

*"...when things are made visible people start to remember..."*

"You were on those years...  
you found out that two blocks away... in your same block...  
they made a person disappear...  
I mean... it was bound to make you scared!  
But that's why... I don't know...  
but I reckon that makes you feel somehow guilty... doesn't it?"

'I saw it', and maybe, 'I didn't do anything, I kept quiet...'  
...for fear, right?  
Because of fear..."

"...all those issues that were better-off untouched...  
not talked about, made invisible, put aside...  
This makes people lose memory."

Pablo tells me that when people learnt about his restitution, they "...started to talk" about things they had experienced or witnessed but never discussed with him before. Others, "still refuse to talk or simple can't", because some people...

"...were left very.... psychologically damaged..."

"...but as years went by, perhaps these actions,  
this support that's coming from the government, the 'repair' laws, and so on...  
it helps people to little-by-little come forwards,  
...that fear is no longer...  
...no longer being prisoners of that fear..."

Pablo celebrates that people are starting to "come forwards... because also, their own story is part of reconstructing history".

"...to say, to talk, to ask...  
...and it's all little-by-little"

Nevertheless, he knows

"...there's loads to be done still"

## **A Conflict Is Triggered When You Begin To Know**

At about 20, aware that hundreds of the children stolen were born between the years in which his birthday fell, and that a "*milico*" (army man) was his godfather, things "began to *make-noise*":

“...when you begin to know a few more things...  
I mean, the parents were killed  
...they were killed,  
and they were tortured, and...  
It’s complicated, isn’t it?  
Besides, all the conflict it then triggers with the family that...  
with the family you’re being brought-up in...”

Yet, perceiving “a clear governmental will to deal with the issues of the last civic-military dictatorship”, placing “justice as a priority in the political agenda” (i.e., sending the generals convicted to common prisons), Pablo began to take *himself* more seriously and this triggered in him *a need to search*.

### **Own Need to Search**

As the socio-political environment helped him avoid knowing (hurting) before, it now shook him out of this position because...

“... there were always 1, 2, 3, 4 news...  
5 news a year ... very important ones, very....  
Then...well, I think that was what awoke in me the curiosity...  
*And then, it’s then that I start to search*  
(...) It was now a necessity inside me”

Researching on Grandmothers’ webpage, he got deeper into common issues, noticing he shared similar feelings with many restituted grandchildren and his “*fantasy became a possibility*”.

So, he searched obsessively for clues in the photographs of the disappeared.

“I was looking for my mum...”  
“It came to a point where, I tell you,  
it started to speed-up, and then it was like...  
it was recurring... every day!

It wasn't nice, uh?

I suffered lots...!"

He was frustrated that he couldn't find his mother there, like the grandchild "who'd seen himself\*" in a photograph, in his mother's arms.

### **Lineage: Comforting, Encouraging Place**

"From 2003 onwards, like lots of other young people,

I became a lot more interested in politics...

So, it was really nice.

It was like an awakening for me..."

The possibility of being "a child-of-the-disappeared" made him proud, as he imagined his parents to be...

"...people who struggled for social justice".

This bestowed him with a symbolic dwelling. He found comfort in imagining his lineage, the disappeared parents became a holding presence that made the story easier to take-in, as...

"...without knowing them, at least I knew 'where they came from'

...So, *that* was cool"

Additionally, Pablo started to consider those who could be searching for him:

"It wasn't just about me anymore..."

"...all these people that...

that could've been searching for me all these years!

...I can have a brother, a sister that may be looking for me...

Who knows?



A grandmother...uncles, aunts, cousins...who knows?  
That's huge!"

However, Pablo kept postponing it...

“...it was the guilt!  
...I was being eaten-away by guilt.  
And I am convinced that it's like that...  
I believe there're perhaps lots of people that maybe can't...  
with children already perhaps...  
that don't do it because of this issue...”

Unlike many others, Pablo feels that he had the advantage of processing things (“...ten years that I was going around it”) until he was “almost certain”. Because,

“...when you grab someone by surprise...  
You're not letting him  
...I mean he cannot respond  
...He had a life,  
and everything was mounted in a very different way...  
and he hasn't...  
at the time the information is given, he hasn't got...  
time...  
for processing anything!  
The first thing they do is...  
they defend themselves like a cat put upside-down!”

His words resonate in me beyond what he is saying...

*‘Wasn't he indeed also taken by surprise in the original snatching that separated him from his parents, and “everything that was mounted in a very different way (his life)”?’ Who knows how it might have been for baby Pablo to go through this? During those ten years, however, it seems he ‘knew’ his world would be dismantled again. Taking his time was perhaps his way of keeping watch of not being turned abruptly upside-down again, or of finding a better landing-place for himself, arriving to this new world already in position’.*

## Look for Me! I'm Here!

Once Pablo “couldn't stand it anymore”, feeling “it's now-or-never”, he sent an email to Grandmothers. A reply did not come straight away. He tells me he was expecting a more welcoming response:

“Come on... Look for me!  
There're so many ways of contacting me...”

I free-associate again, his words resonating in me:

“A demand reversal? ...as if they are asking him for an extra push... ‘come closer, we're here’  
...Isn't this also a receiving, holding place? ‘Even-though we've looked for you for 33 years, we won't do all the work for you...’”

Pablo, in this atmosphere of expectancy, explains he was so stressed to be finally approaching Grandmothers that he developed shingles. At the interview where he described his suspicions, he was...

“already in pain...  
I told the person interviewing me at Grandmothers:  
‘I'm struggling with this...  
It's unbearable!’”

As Pablo describes this moment of finding-out and of being-found, a striking atmosphere of suspense mounts: the pain of shingles was perhaps a concrete way of managing the imminent blow of truth.

He believes that he was “so certain” by the time he approached Grandmothers, that they probably slowed him down to prevent disappointment, as it occurs in most of cases.

However, he did a DNA test soon afterwards and it all happened quite quickly from then on. He “was caught by surprise when Claudia rang” (CO.NA.DI president, whose sister, brother-in-law and nephew disappeared), inviting and prompting him to meet her about the results *on that same day*.

“I stood there, trembling...

‘Argh...! That’s it!’

So, I went...”

He was nervous, and found that those meeting him were, too.

“...you could see it in their faces!!!”

“...and then Claudia says:

‘Well... you came here, you had the tests done,  
and we’ve received the DNA results today...’

And she says:

‘...and... what you were thinking,

*it is.*’

...And I stood there, with the face like...

And she takes the file out and says:

‘...take your time to look at it...’

and... ‘ahhhh!’

Here it is...”

Describing being handed-out the file, Pablo hands it to me, as he takes it out of the box. We both go “Ahhh!” simultaneously, and giggling at this convergence, we look at it together.

The file...

“...explains how the genetic data cross-over is done...

And she says: ‘if you go to around page 20, you’ll understand things better...’.

And there it starts... there is a name...

The names start to appear of the people that left...

of the family members that left the...

I mean, they gave their blood

to make the cross-over possible with whoever went and...

for whoever had doubts, I mean...

So, there I started to read the names of uncles, aunts... you see?

... of Gaona,

...of Miranda...  
So there and then...:  
'...Well, you've seen them now'.  
So, that's when she takes out the photos and shows me....  
...Yes!  
...She takes out some photographs  
...and shows me:  
'...These are your parents...'  
and...  
**'This *is* you'**

I gasp:

"Ay, Pablo...!"

...to which Pablo, smiling, adds:

"Indeed...!"  
"...and she shows me my (legitimate) birth certificate,  
and it said: 'Pablo Gaona,  
my ID number...'

Having imagined he had been born in captivity (as most cases are), Pablo was astonished to learn this. He looked at his father's photograph "for a long time"; then, at his mother's. Disappointedly, "it was horrible!", of such poor quality that Pablo "couldn't see her face" clearly.

Pablo describes sharing such intimate moment with public figures he admired...

"...whilst Claudia was showing me all this...  
I see, coming downstairs...  
He was also... he was so moved as well!  
with such excitement, nervous...  
Martin Fresneda, Secretary... the current National Human Rights' Secretary!  
They introduced us...  
...His eyes were teary; you know...?"

Besides, I remembered him...  
He was very present for me, very...  
because he'd just been appointed (...) two months before...  
...(it) made me really happy that (he) was appointed...  
He's one of the founding members of H.I.J.O.S\*!  
...Super-committed!  
...One of us!"

Pablo found them respectful, caring, "very interested in hearing" his experience. Knowing of their personal and public commitment to the struggle helped Pablo feel connected (one of them). He knew "...they may be also finding their nephew, or their brother".

Pablo tells me that this same day, he later met a few family members who had been waiting anxiously nearby. Hugging two of his father's brothers for the first time, Pablo felt moved:

"Imagine!... they could see my father,  
their brother! ...in me..."

Contrastingly, Pablo tells me he has not found the will to go to the north of Argentina to meet the rest of his maternal family yet because, "reading comments on Facebook" he guesses they might have opposed his mother:

"I think she was the black sheep in that family..."

Posting hurtful socio-political comments against the government that has helped Pablo come forwards, they are perhaps inadvertently echoing the will of those who made them disappear. This makes Pablo angry:

"Haven't they been 'touched'?"  
"Because, it's like... you misrecognise my family! ...no?  
I don't know... that's quite horrible...  
Because she didn't die in a traffic accident!  
It was something very different!  
It's not the same..."

Traditionally, when a restitution occurs, people (grandmothers, other grandchildren, workers, friends) gather at Grandmothers' office to celebrate. Pablo decided to join them: "I wanted to thank Estela\*" (Grandmothers' president).

## Bringing-Out the News

Pablo arrived home late that day and slept non-stop for twelve hours. When the following morning he told "the family that raised" him what had happened, Pablo found an accusatory atmosphere and "excuses" for the lies told. He believes they had lied to dodge the legal consequences of their actions, relying on the prevailing "military pact of silence" which had efficiently obstructed truth coming to light for decades.

Pablo needed time and space but wanted his friends to know before the upcoming press conference. So, he telephoned a close friend and asked him to let the other ones know. He describes the 'scene':

"So, I told him: 'I'd like to talk to you...'  
And he went: 'What's the matter? Tell me...'  
So, I say: 'Have you heard that there was a restitution...?'  
...that a new grandchild was restituted...?'  
'Yes...'  
'Well...'  
...that's I."

Pablo says, smiling, that his friend was so shaken he almost fell off the bus he was entering. Then, that some of his friends "couldn't contain themselves" and later organised a kind of 'welcoming', or 'tell-us-all-about-it' gathering. He felt accompanied by them and by other restituted grandchildren who straightforwardly offered him practical and emotional support, by people that were happy for him.

Eventually, Pablo found another place to live and moved out of that family's home.

## The Archive of Memory

Pablo hands me the box given to him containing a welcome letter, documents, photos, the family tree, a book about the organisation his parents were part of, audio-recorded

interviews to family members, and transcripts. Pablo tells me how hard the people from “Grandmothers’ Archive” work to collect this data; taking the time to travel, do the interviews, take copies of precious old family photographs, and put everything together for when the grandchild is found. As I open the box with Pablo by my side, I feel curious but cautious, as if opening a fragile, ancient treasure chest. “A box of jewels”, I tell him, my eyes welled up. He adds:

“...It’s also moving for me...  
There’re so many of these there...  
archived, waiting... no?  
I mean... Grandmothers’ staff...  
People that work in Grandmothers are doing this...  
They’ve done all this work  
and all that...  
And it’s there,  
you see it there...  
...all those boxes...  
waiting to be given...”  
(to the hundreds of grandchildren still to be found)

Pablo wants to show me the photographs compiled on a CD for him. We look at them. I ask questions, we comment on them, he tells me what he remembers he has been told. It is as if he is introducing them to me, somehow undoing the brutal will of erasing lives and memory by bridging the stories that were so brutally shattered and intentionally kept disjointed.

Poignantly, he grieves again over how “horrid” the picture of his mother is, how limited the number of photographs, how scarce the stories gathered about his parents so far...

This archive was crucial for Pablo to start putting his life together again, a proper (re)membering...

“...because it is finding yourself!  
You have a falsified identity...  
it is complicated...!  
You can never really recognise yourself...

You have nowhere  
to look  
(at) yourself into..."

## The Trials

Pablo considers attending some open trials as vital to "acclimatise" to what is coming for him. However, "horrible", Pablo is waiting to see what he will find out, "but you must investigate, too" because...

"The 'milicos' don't open their mouths!  
It's like a pact...  
the infamous silence pact that they've got amongst themselves...  
that they won't...  
That bit, you have to...  
you have to weave it yourself..."

Pablo tells me that the *world-view* of the family that raised him is that *he exists only since they made contact with him*. However, for Pablo this is quite different:

"I have this void!  
I mean, I...  
from the moment they abduct me...  
and my parents' disappearance, on May 14<sup>th</sup>  
I have a void because...  
...from May 14<sup>th</sup> until July 22<sup>nd</sup>...  
Where was I...?"

A gap he may never be able to close.

Presently his relationship with this family is cordial, but...

"...let's see when they have to really get through the trial and all that...  
'Cause they'll get a sentence...  
Let's see then, how things go..."



For Pablo, the trial will define things more clearly, and...

“It has to happen”.

Pablo explains that Grandmothers helped demonstrate in a trial that these were not *isolated cases of misplaced children* but part of a strategy to wipe-out an ideology perceived as ‘evil’. This trial helped get a wider picture of those involved, resulting in further convictions that had not been possible before it:

“...the military involved couldn’t be caught because there weren’t evidences that...  
that they tortured, or that they gave orders for torturing...  
this was at the beginning...  
How were they caught...?  
...Because of the appropriation of children...  
There: The Systematic Plan\*...  
This helped a lot on the way to get them sentenced...”

“It was all meticulously arranged, it was all a plan... and to be honest, quite a macabre one”

“...what causes the most impact in all this?  
...the fact that it was planned  
...And that, it really triggers... It’s quite violent to find out...”  
“It was done on purpose...!  
It was to separate us from our parents so that we...  
What for?  
So that we didn’t end-up like our parents...  
like our old folks...  
...because, otherwise they would’ve left us with our biological families!  
...It was...  
...to separate us from *our parents* and the *ideology* of our parents...”

As horrifying as it was, realising the intentionality in this plan proved essential for Pablo, because...

“...that’s when you can start taking responsibility for your own history...”

Pablo refers to the many consequences of impunity. The 'plan' is perpetuated to this date with silence, damaging those still missing but also those found, as it is difficult to process all this when the gaps are so many. What do you build the story with? For instance, it would have helped Pablo if the doctor who signed his forged birth certificate gave evidence once identified -but distressingly, he committed suicide a few days after Pablo's restitution was made public.

"There're possibly other grandchildren whose (fake) birth certificates he signed...

But, hey...!

He took all that with him to his grave!"

Pablo tells me how little is still known about how things functioned, like with this "high-rank army man and his wife" who appropriated a child and fled the country when democracy started with forged identities and a well-oiled support network that allowed them to escape justice for decades. He tells me those implicated concealed each other's crimes, funding their escape "with our parents' money!"

"A financial company functioned at ESMA\*

...with all the things they stole from 'the disappeared'.

...I mean, real-estate, and all that.

They managed the money,

and they invested it,

and they made their own businesses..."

## **Our Conversation and Making Things Visible**

Led by him, we have been talking nearly three hours. I acknowledge out-loud that these conversations can be exhausting, and I don't want to surpass a limit.

"Yes, but not in a conversation like this, more candid...

that's different... When there are lots of people, then, yes, it is..."

Pablo tells me he tries to contribute by giving talks, "especially when it's in schools and places like that..." since...

“...this is their history, no?  
It’s not just about the victims and all that...  
It’s to understand what happened in the recent history of their country, right?  
...Because it’s very important to keep the memory alive!”  
  
“...when you’re made to forget *certain*  
*things...*  
in a future not so distant from now,  
certain things can happen to you again...  
...just for the simple fact of not allowing yourself to know  
...for not getting involved...  
At least, find out!”

Pablo states these are important socio-political times,

“...a moment in which each of us is taking off the masks,  
and we know who we are...”  
  
“...That’s part of reconstructing our past history,  
to know who these people of our past are,  
...and (people) that we still have around here...!  
...and why they operate the way they operate...”

However, the silence that reigns within the culture of impunity still enjoyed by many, frustrates Pablo. As things became “visible” for him, his sense of engagement developed; his identity leaned strongly on taking-part in change. He is politically engaged, has joined H.I.J.O.S, and supports Grandmothers. Pablo is proud of being his parents’ child, being in touch with his grandmother Justa, his uncles, aunts and cousins; of being the ‘grandchild 106’\*: “...another victory for Grandmothers”.

Pablo has certainly managed to make me listen, remember, see, be touched. His family’s photographs, his words, our encounter live-on in my mind and hopefully in this story. When I sent the enormous transcript for Pablo to review, he replied within days. There were no corrections on his part: “leave it as it is”, he said.

## My Stories of Their Stories

“I do not think that there exists anything that must, should, or ought to ‘be done’ to narratives.

Every reading is an interpretation, and every interpretation is an association:

tying the text that is interpreted to other texts, other voices, other times and places.

Much more important than a specific interpretative or analytical technique is the result:

an interesting recontextualization”

(Czarniawska, 2004:135).

What occupied *Catalina, Leonardo, and Pablo* -what *they* wanted to bring-out to me- took centre stage whilst I worked-through the transcripts, recordings, translation notes and diary entries, letting salient issues permeate, colour my *floating attention*. I will use these as *fibres* weaving the overview, intertwining the questions I started this journey with, with what we found together or developed in the process. This work is certainly a recontextualization. I hope my working-through is also an evocative text to engage with.

Thus, what was *identity restitution* like for them? *What helped or hindered* their processing? Was finding out what has been hidden from them subjectively important? In our dialogues, as in my pilot project, the answers consistently found to this last question were that *indeed, it was*. But, how so? How have they managed to develop such dignified yet humble positioning out of all of this?

## Appreciating the Process

*Catalina, Leonardo, and Pablo* talked about *their* identity restitution as an ongoing laborious process, undoubtedly unique and singular but one that has also similarities with others regarding feelings experienced and obstacles or support encountered: a process that could not be thought of outside of a socio-political, historical context. The conversations generated between us were part of it, too.

Fine-tuned so as not to lose the boundaries of these specific encounters, I came to appreciate and be grateful for the fact that unavoidably, as researcher I remained close to the way of listening I tune into as a psychotherapist, sensitised to the unconscious

processing happening in the in-between space shared. So, scattered words and phrases, silences and atmospheres lingered for me as we talked, and long afterwards!

An early occurrence at the start of my first conversation/interview exemplifies this. Catalina's answer to my opening question of "*How does your story begin?*", showed me I was inadvertently trying to *understand* her experience as if it had a beginning and an end. Perhaps a defensive projection on my part, this was at odds with what Catalina "*lived-through*" and wanted to convey: that she *is still* working on this, day-in, day-out and in fact, things were for her still a bit muddled...

"...that, somehow always ends-up being a bit too long for me,  
and I get kind of lost..."

Resonances... *Getting lost* talking, being *carried-away* could very well be something I encourage in the consulting room: "Tell me *all* that comes to mind..." But I was talking to someone who *had been* (and maybe at times *still was!*) *carried-away* deceitfully, snatched from her mother's body hours after being born, and had been literally lost, as she would come to tell me, for way too many years! This communication reverberated, filled the space with ungraspable waves, unsurmountable presences. As Nasio (1994) taught me, the unconscious is neither *mine* nor *yours*: it is *there*, in-between.

As Catalina spoke, she unavoidably *branched-out*, but she also wanted to be helped, if feeling lost, to *come back*. It was almost like an invitation and a warning (she would go with me, but not deviously, nor anywhere). Having said she was working on finding the right place and name for things, and that in pending matters and decisions it was crucial for her to find what was right, the variables at play were many and unknown to me then, but an unspecific awareness of their importance laid eggs in my *being-present* with her. I listened to what she said, took note, and re-adjusted. I hinted she may have been talking about finding a place in the meeting with me, too; asking for an active presence to support her speech, a presence that could own its position in the in-between without imposing 'the' truth (with my questions, or my 'readings'). Catalina knew of her vulnerability but she was not willing to let herself be objectified again. By making this clear, she gained strength in the room and I warmed to her instantly.

She was saying so much about it all already!

I realised in hindsight that this was the atmosphere I wanted the interviews to be embedded in. In this way, the dynamics of the conversations that followed with her and the others carried with them a co-analysing texture I had not so clearly envisaged beforehand.

*Wondering* with them about what we were doing together there-and-then (talking about what had happened to them), I was called to *own* my presence again: I was not an outsider-observer. As each told me in their own ways, '*talking about it*' was indeed vital for them, yet not something to do just with anyone or at any cost. They said that in a warm, thoughtful dialogue where their views were taken seriously, talking supported their working-through. Hence, 'my' quest of wanting to talk with and learn from them connected with what they wanted to *be able* to do; to 'their' search, their processing, too. Also, it served their desire to contribute to making things visible, *giving it out* so that it can be *known*; helping *others* as they were helped, joining the wider search. I felt they validated my quest and my position. So, I also gained *some strength* in the room with them. '*Some*', I say, because I did feel raw, in a heightened emotional space, vulnerable, fragile - identifying with them, perhaps; or falling victim of survivor's guilt. I did trust though that if we moved with care, acknowledging each other's positions in our encounters, there could be much to be gained from it all.

Thus, finding the balance between the personal search to do what feels right for oneself and one's position in the wider picture applied to them *and* to me, too. Back then and as the writing advanced, I worked in fine-tuning so as not to lose each other's *voice and place* in this struggle, being "*with my feelers out*"- as Catalina said.

Hence, *my* construction of the stories and the overview below required arduous deliberations. As I took on the task of crafting the narrative (putting it 'together') I had to go back and forth in an iterative manner and confronted the problem of 'presenting' their stories illustrating concurrently their un-finished, changing nature (because of their processing but also because of mine). The parallel processes between what they talked about and my own struggles in *completing* this piece are plentiful and form an important part of it, permeating sometimes undistinguishably, sometimes clearly, one another. The iterative nature of the process, the concern to be truthful, the time it took me to find a form that felt congruent with it, are only some of many.

I cannot claim the stories they told me are theirs alone, nor that what I developed from them is entirely mine. Without *imposing* my readings, I included a story of our meetings, and of *what* took me to them, showing how porous the relationship between researcher and 'researched' can be. For me, writing produced a boundary of care and respect between the two, allowing for *connectedness and separation* as I worked out a (re)presentation style that embraced a conscious refusal to analyse *them* and to over-explain or understand.

Consequently, I hope the reader can *follow* Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo's lead whilst trying to *appreciate* their experiences via the 'working-throughs' of my *listening/processing/writing hands*, because "this refusal opens up the space for a testimony that can speak beyond what is already understood... The refusal of understanding, then, is also a fundamentally creative act... what is created does not grow out of a knowledge already accumulated but... is intrinsically bound-up with the act of listening itself" (Caruth, 1995:155).

I hope this piece triggers in the reader something of what their stories and those of (G)grandmothers triggered in me: a call to join the search "*whatever way you can*", to wonder, to listen, to add your voice to it. I encountered this in many forms as I talked to people about the project. Some of those I have known for years, only opened-up about this when I did. A neighbour who grew-up in Argentina told me about her loved uncles disappearing in their teens when she was a young child. She showed me the few photographs she has of them and we now exchange information whenever new investigations come out or about trials taking place. Another friend whose older sister was made disappeared when young, told me how her mother refused to talk about her as if my friend would take on her 'shameful' steps as she got older. We are very close, but we had never talked about her sister before, either!

I am conscious that these stories can have a distressing impact for the reader. I believe, however, and this study has helped me strengthen this conviction, that what they are more capable of is of *moving*, of important shake-ups: emotionally, intellectually, but *moving* also in terms of *calling* for a response, a positioning, an ethical standing. Such calling can emerge out of meaningful exchanges of the sort of the 'one-to-one'. Like when at about five, my daughter asked me about this project. I did not want to scare or hurt her; yet, hiding it was not an option. We began having conversations about it, in small steps,

in special moments when she asked, and I was available for her and for what could come out of such communications. She was of course disturbed to learn that such things could happen, but she was also able to wonder, think about it, connect with my interest somehow, and begin to form a position. On one occasion, she sat on my lap as I watched a selection of old, short animations presented for a competition for Grandmothers' campaigns. We watched an animated black and white doodle of a baby that was moved away from his mother and what had been his umbilical cord became a chain attached to another as he grew, oppressed by such weight. Then, the chain was disentangled, and the child became free. He is then seen moving towards another person with open arms and they both embrace. My daughter looked at me, moved, and hugging me, said: "*Mama! I want to look for them, too!*"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This video can be found online. See Appendix 8b for details.



## 5. Overview

In what follows, I will re-visit the transcripts and diary entries with a cross-disciplinary infused perspective that evolved whilst engaged in thinking about the process of restitution and the process of research, highlighting some salient markers on the way. As above, **Catalina's** statements will be in orange, **Leonardo's** in blue, and **Pablo's** in green.

### Identity Restitution and Processing

“‘The truth’, Dumbledore sighed.  
‘It is a beautiful and terrible thing,  
and should therefore be treated with great caution’”  
(Rowling, 1997:216).

As underscored in the Harry Potter saga, sometimes ‘truth’ can come as an *event* (Zizek, 2014) that challenges or even dismantles one’s epistemological world (we thought we knew ‘this’ or ‘that’ about ourselves, the world, others). We can think that the individuals who as adults came to find out they were one of the stolen children being searched for by their legitimate families and Grandmothers, were bumped into this ‘truth’ most likely in a traumatic way. Such encounter with the Real has the capacity to be *traumatic* because it can shatter or significantly alter our sense of understanding, our illusion of identity or of permanence. Furthermore, having lived in a context that kept (and still keeps) this *truth* purposely hidden may leave you out of resources to process such blow, given that traumatic repression of thinking is augmented when *knowing* risks *incrimination*, implicating those who up until then had been ‘known’ to be your parents.

So, what is it that allows this unsettling knowledge to *sink-in*, to be accepted? How do we come to know what *does-not-want-to-be-known* and what kind of *truth* can be built out of it? How do we *own* this perturbing experience and let change occur? How did Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo find the resources to work-through their way *out* of psychological appropriation? How did they gain the strength to embrace such a sea of troubles,

deconstructing who they had considered themselves to be, the family in which they grew-up, the world they thought they lived in? How could this have become *liberating*?

They highlighted that *identity restitution* did not just occur with learning about *the secret* one day. Reconstructing in our dialogues their experiences, they showed me that however hard they may strive to achieve a linear sense of what was lived, chronological time is not where their processing unfolded. As we have seen, Grandmothers argue that finding-out frees-up the weight of the lie, unlocking the retroactive reading of ‘I always knew...’ bringing with it the possibility of change. So, if on the one hand, finding-out the secret is an event that crumbles the frame one’s life was built on, on the other, it provides a chance for recognition of what was lived since the very beginnings of one’s life; or perhaps, of what *never-stopped-being-lived* because it had never (until then) been recognised and acknowledged collectively. Discovering and reconstructing the denied, secreted story was irrefutably crucial, but this was not a quick, simple, or rectilinear venture. In fact, it was quite an *unbearable* endeavour. Whilst we spoke, they went back and forth in time, conveying with these movements the complex quality of the processing involved, the different *stages* traversed before being able to talk about it with me in a way that seemed to me astonishingly articulate, unpretentious and honest.

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo talked about the dangers of remaining in *that place* of *not-knowing* (those “labyrinths in which you mustn’t stay too long”), but they emphasized that, as one defends oneself strongly “like a cat put upside-down” (as Pablo eloquently put it), it takes *time* and *others* to find a way out.

They described shifting from *not-knowing* (or *not-wanting-to-know*, or not being able to know they knew) to many moments of truth-embracing: giving room to their doubts as the surface of the “credible story” told and “lived-in” cracked, engaging in the difficult task of validating the *unbelievable*. Catalina said that as a child she almost ceased to exist (“extinguished”) in order not-to-know: there was “no ‘Thou’, no internal or external ‘other’ with whom she (could) experience a resonance, an echo” (Laub, 2017:37) of what she was going through. As she gained “courage” (which can be literally translated as “I enlivened myself”, or “animated”) she started to come back to life. Albeit the resistance this triggered, the confrontation with what “really happened”, was followed eventually by an engagement in re-editing the story told, re-signifying the life lived as *appropriated*, and

recognising the losses, the harm and the gains, allowing for more enlivened identifications to emerge out of it.

I found that through this processing the three of them managed to develop a devictimized personal, communal, and socio-political position, perhaps re-writing, re-creating themselves.

“the example left -the legacy... thoroughly surpasses the pain  
...of course I would have preferred it if all this didn't happen”.

Acknowledging they are not able to change ‘what happened’, they embarked on this difficult, painful, yet fruitful undertaking, one that is described by the three of them as an unfinished, ongoing quest. But this is “minor” compared to the initial struggles, Catalina told me.

## **The Struggles with *Knowing***

“...as if it is a screamed-out-loud secret with which society coexists...”  
(Ulloa, 2012:120).

## **Politics of Silence**

Totalitarian power rested on military force and financial and institutional measures that benefitted powerful ruling groups and violently oppressed, repressed, terrorized common people. However, “the most telling efficacy of this repressive methodology resided in its secreting” (Ulloa, 2012:120), epitomized with the violence, abductions, and disappearances often enough publicly performed but subsequently made clandestine. This potent strategy took hold of society and inescapably, of individual victims. Even decades after democracy was re-established, fear and mistrust still stopped people from reporting when they knew a child had been appropriated, or they informed their suspicions anonymously, becoming unavailable to accompany the victim in the process of accepting the potential truth of such claims. And, as Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo showed us, if a

person doubted his or her origins, the potential truth was so unbelievable and hurtful that they remained in a state of *un-knowing*, or half-knowing and feeling. As social scientist Jelin (2003:23) highlights, “one of the characteristics of traumatic events is the massive character of their impact...There are no words, and therefore there cannot be memories. Memory remains disarticulated, and only painful traces, pathologies, and silences come to the surface”. Looking at the wider context in which abuse of this kind occurred and continues to occur in hundreds of cases, Pablo talked at length of the heavy socio-political scaffoldings sustaining fear, impunity, silence, denial, confusion -and how these are still reigning nowadays even if less widespread than formerly. Such territory is ideal for binary positions to thrive; for projections, for violence and abuse to continue. This can be enacted in different ways, like in the displacement of responsibility commonly found in phrases publicly uttered, like “*they (victims) must have done something (to deserve this)*”, or those of the vicious kind I heard in the van as I travelled to La Plata.

But, people were terrorized because of what *they knew* could happen to them or their loved ones. The fear was ‘real’, impunity was ‘real’. Perpetrators lived normal lives...

“In total impunity!”

And if someone spoke,

“...they would've become targets...”

So, *silencing* became a powerful weapon favouring oppression, a “*protective*” measure for perpetrators wanting immunity and impunity but also for objectified and manipulated direct victims (and bystanders) trying to survive. This validated standard defensive practices, like Leonardo’s family not registering the adoption properly and keeping it secret for years, denying Leonardo and his sister the possibility of knowing about their origins sooner or even ever in her case. Moreover, albeit inadvertently perhaps, they denied this to themselves and to those searching for Leonardo; because, given the year Leonardo was born, one cannot but wonder: ‘*How come they never thought he could have been one of the stolen babies?*’ Yet, it seems they did not think of this. They were told another story and they believed it. The paralysis produced by oppression and fear is exemplified here. In many ways, this was just “*how things were done*”, showing the silencing social

automatism at play that deemed *wanting-to-know* (to *acknowledge*, to *know and make-known*) objectionable and ultimately, dangerous.

## The Secret's Weight

“...there is no way you won't feel that...”

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo identified the struggles of living under the lies deliberately implanted as factors that re-enforced paralysis, confusion, and indeed, *appropriation*; concurring with Ulloa (2012:120) in that “the secret that has remained hidden but gives-off clues, promotes an uncanny effect: under the shadow of disavowal, terror and paralysis prevail, generating out of what (being unbearable and atrocious) remains veiled. You deny that you deny, like a very elemental defense of someone trying to conceal what's feared or hide from what's dreaded”. Thinking, knowing, bodies and solidarity bonds were subjected to this. Terrorized, people and discourses were manipulated, “...destructing the subjective, generating submission... If the tragic-trap positions the victim in an acute invalidism favoring extortion, the uncanny promotes a chronic paralysis that favors socio-political manipulation” (Ulloa, 2012:121).

Likewise, Balint (1969) highlighted the morbid responsibility of authority (i.e., an adult in a caring role, the government, institutions) in consolidating trauma by responding as if it had not occurred. This was typical during those times. Hence, deception was imposed in the social realm and *taken* as a form of *defence mechanism*, as to face what was happening was too “horrible”. Somehow, we were all “playing the moron” or “living in a cloud of farts”! Or, as Pablo remembers, growing-up under the weight of that secreting manipulation, immersed in a disguised...

“...mental vacuum where...  
everything was...  
merrymaking!”

Like all those I listened to and read during my pilot work, Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo emphasised the difficulties encountered in even giving credit to their doubts, underlining a very human conundrum, one we often find in the psychotherapeutic room, too: *Who am*

*I? But, do I want to 'know' if it means the destruction of 'me' as I know it to be? Can I afford such loss?*

The 'lie' in the background provided a (false) sense of safety. They sensed that knowing could come at a high cost, but this in turn, furthered their vulnerability:

"I don't know what 'vegetable'<sup>16</sup> she told me!  
—and I, being quite little, ate it...  
Because it was nicer than not being their biological daughter..."

Catalina talked of feeling paralyzed, in "chaos", "confused", struggling to make sense of things. This coincides with what professionals responding to the first grandchildren's restitutions (Ulloa, 1998; Bleichmar, 1998; Bianchedi et al., 1998; Lo Giudice, 1988) said, that without truth and a framework of containment and support to process it, the secret would keep pulsating in their body, and as victims they would most likely remain stuck with a somewhat buried knowledge of deceiving themselves. A weight difficult to shake-off. Feeling alone with it as the wider context in which Catalina lived was unable to support her until much later, it was however "running deep under" for her...

"it was present... I forgot it at times, but...  
It was an effort to keep (it) quiet..."

Pablo felt it was...

"...all rotten...and I was all alone".

Jelin (2003:5) highlights how "the presence of the past can disrupt, penetrate, or invade the present as something that makes no sense (...), as silences, compulsions, or repetitions. In such situations, the memory of the past intrudes, but it is not the object of labour. It is a presence without agency..."

"that is for me, what's most harmful of the lie and the appropriation...  
the fact that one kind of forces oneself... I mean, psychologically -I think...  
...a very internal effort,

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<sup>16</sup> In a predominantly meat-eating culture, a *vegetable* is not something one commonly chooses to eat.

from the affective, the intimate realms...  
to be a person one is not!"

For Catalina, the typically violent reaction against recognising the doubts or initial findings communicated is a clue that the person might be indeed one of the missing grandchildren: "a sign" of their *knowing but not wanting-to-know*...

"I wanted to go to a different planet!  
I was not able to take charge (responsibility)...  
It was something I couldn't assimilate...  
I couldn't assimilate also what was going to happen next...!"

Pablo explained that even when "almost certain", he searched incessantly in Grandmothers' website for *more clues, for facts*; suffering greatly, reminding me that "...it is not only the moment of the event, but the passing out of it that is traumatic; ...*survival itself...can be a crisis*" (Caruth, 1995:9).

## Muddled in Guilt and Shame

"... 'Why? Why had I taken so long?  
(..) I was being eaten-away by guilt.  
And I am convinced that it is like that...  
There are lots of people that...  
(...) that don't do it because of this issue...  
Because of the guilt they feel about what will happen to their appropriators."

Thus, to avoid what was felt as overwhelming pain or psychological destruction, the breaking of bonds with others and with the official version of themselves, a cancelling pull to keep things *put* took hold of them. In this way, though, things got jumbled and guilt overrode. Confused, they could not distinguish "which way the traffic goes", or "where the hand's coming from" (meaning: 'who is who', or 'who is hitting me'), or the origins of something or *someone* in Pablo's expression: "of which stick they are from". Catalina also illustrates this *muddle* in her dislodgment of feelings:

“Something I experienced a lot, created by my appropriators,  
was this kind of *other’s shame*...  
That is to say: being ashamed *for* them... (of them)  
Always...all my life...  
I mean, from very, very young...”

The long-term consequences of this manipulation and objectivation, the false security found in over-adapting, the confusion, guilt and shame described, prevailed via what had been described as an *identification with the aggressor* (Freud, 1980); like when she felt “scared of Grandmothers”, or “a criminal”. Taking the blame, Catalina stayed trapped, *put*; like Pablo and Leonardo in their ways. Feeling guilty of the crimes committed by others against them, they somehow replicated the abuse to themselves.

“I was roasted...all those years...”

Guilt may have also played a part in un-easing the deceit enacted upon themselves, as “the secret will filtrate inevitably, and depending on the magnitude of that filtrated, the child will be able to work-through ‘the tragic trap’ or remain trapped in the uncanny (re)negation” (Ulloa, 2012:126).

They told me emphatically that *escaping, playing the moron, delaying knowing the truth* may have anesthetised pain, but staying *there* for too long prolongs suffering and robs you of time for processing and for living the life you could have lived with family members or friends who had been searching for you... Time for understanding the effects of the lies, and connecting with truth, without which one may feel like Catalina, who for years,

“...looked in the mirror and saw nothing”<sup>17</sup>

### Little-by-little...

Describing snippets of incipient cracks developing in the rounded deceitful narrative,

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 8a



Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo emphasised that there was not one moment of 'finding-out', but many stages or "...different layers".

Catalina identified two moments of pennies-dropping. One, watching the TV clip and "*knowing*". However, not yet able to take-in this realisation or the work it implied, she closed-down the newly awoken desire to know even after confronting her appropriator and discovering part of the truth. Then, came the moment in which irrefutable proof (genetic results) helped her weakened feet to gain strength to stand-up and face *knowing*. This hard-evidence plus learning about the investigations that had taken place, allowed her to begin doubting those she had trusted and trust those she had feared without totally collapsing. She began to take distance to "*sort-things-out*", and re-visit other findings, hints, and clues she had had (i.e., dates, photos, asking friends who remembered for her as she has "*terrible memory*"). It is here that unquestioned knowledge starts to give way, little-by-little, to truth-building (what the facts were, and what things meant to her now).

Leonardo also spoke of comings and goings... He told me of his "*defence mechanisms*", delaying things (i.e., *convincing himself* he had been abandoned if his suspicions of having been adopted were true). Feeling loyal to the family who brought him up and possibly to the identity he developed as *their son*, he believed his inquisitiveness would bring nothing but negative consequences. So, even when working these things out in psychotherapy, it took him sometime until he felt able to take his desire to know seriously. The improvisation he refers to shows the moment something of it breaks free, leaks-out. Making it visible to others (who were moved and responded) helped him to take courage to eventually find out more.

Pablo described similar difficulties. It took him many moments to process things and undo the workings of manipulation and denial. He had kept the personal split from the socio-political, staying with the made-up story told, trying to avoid facing the conflict "*opening-up to it*" would trigger, the "*mess*" it would create with the family in which he grew-up. He described the horrible pain invading his body just before confirming the reality of what he already *knew*. Year after year he had been gaining courage, supported by the emerging context in that "*(he wouldn't) be alone*".

But, it was "*all little-by-little*" -as he told me. And when it was proved that "*what you were thinking...it is*", ...what a relief he felt! Something of whom he had been during that "*one*

month and a day” was recovered. He said brilliantly that he was finally able to sleep “like a baby” again: ‘the baby’ had, indeed, been found at last!

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo showed me that to unveil the secrets covering the crimes committed, finding-out the truthful facts of their origin and what happened to their parents and themselves was essential. However, like in many psychotherapeutic journeys, ‘universal knowledge’ (what this may mean to most, or ‘what is known’) had to be slowly deconstructed to allow for their singular truth to emerge (Rios, 2016), articulating what was “lived-through to construct experience and subjectivity stemming from events that ‘bump’ into us” (Jelin, 2003:23). As demanded by the work of mourning (Freud, 1917-2001), it is only going little-by-little, piece by piece and with others that we can achieve this: with re-cognition, narrative, memory. Otherwise, we will dismiss our discovering as our framework screams: “No... it can’t be!”. The only feasible way to work-through such a tug-o-war, such conundrum, seems to be by approaching it slowly, in a gestating step-by-step. Pablo told me:

“You can say I took my time...”

I remember here my mother, who used to ‘drop’ what I believe is an Argentine-Italian saying at home, attempting perhaps to regulate my teenage urges:

*“piano, piano, se va lontano...” (slowly, slowly, one goes far).*

## **With One Another: How Re-Knowing Became Possible**

“The event is the origin of truth,  
but there must be a commitment with that truth,  
and a work to be developed with its consequences”  
(Badiou, 2007:12).

The relevance of the so-called *pillars* of Truth, Memory and Justice for the strengthening base, the *holding* these provided on each singular journey was underscored by Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo, helping them face what came their way with *restitution*. At a personal

level, they talked of what helped: to open-up and listen to others, to stop and separate; to find less blurred mirrors, and feel less alone, more connected throughout such a huge ordeal.

“...I do not know a case that says: ‘I *regret finding out the truth*’...”

## Opening to Others. Things Becoming Visible.

“...alone, no...”

As psychotherapists we know that listening (in a specific, willing, meticulous way) helps to undo the isolation imposed by the *tragic-trap* (Ulloa, 2012; Caruth, 2012) inflicted by interpersonal abuse and betrayal of this kind. Yet, Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo emphasised that it was *listening to others* what helped them first.

They described this phase as an *opening-up*. Listening can mean many things, from a passive receiving, to an active taking-in/giving-out. Here it seems listening unfolded as an important initial undertaking, because listening to others *like them* helped them to “engage in interpretive work in order to find meaning and the words with which to express it... (because) to transform an occurrence into ‘experience’, even those who lived through it must find the words to convey it, locating themselves in a cultural framework that makes communication and transmission possible” (Jelin, 2003:22-24). Leonardo realised that speaking publicly of things he had no words for yet, nor a clear position developed, left him too exposed:

“sometimes you need to...more even than to talk,  
(you need) to listen”

We learn to speak because someone talks to us (someone who wants our reply, who hopes for our words). We recognise ourselves in the eyes of another whose (hopefully loving) regard sanctions: ‘Yes, that’s you!’ An *other* that with their holding, allows us to identify the depths, surfaces, the boundaries of our own body, thoughts, feelings, our connections with the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’. It is with others that we learn, discern, and start our discoveries and our positioning. Benjamin (1995:30) says regarding the development of intersubjectivity that “the other must be recognised as another for the self

to fully experience his/her subjectivity in the other's presence". I thought of how difficult this may have been for them when I heard Catalina say in another interview<sup>18</sup>:

"(before this) I was a blurred photo".

...or when Pablo told me:

"you have a falsified identity... it's complicated... you can never really recognise yourself  
...you have nowhere to look at yourself into..."

"... it was like looking at myself in the face, no? ...to listen to them...  
...to start to listen to *what was happening to me!*"

So, listening to others who had gone through similar situations first helped them start to un-muddle. Later conversing with others interested about their experiences in more private spaces, helped them see things from different perspectives, connecting their personal, private stories with the wider history of the country. Certain situations like "[a candid one-to-one](#)" or speaking with younger generations, can give *Leonardo* back something precious. Catalina and Pablo also agree: "when such transmittal has been accomplished, the survivor no longer is, or feels, alone with the inexpressible extreme experience. S/he is less helplessly prey to its devastating impact" (Laub, 2017:31-32).

I feel that listening to others allowed the three of them to also listen to the otherness in themselves that had been creeping-up to their consciousness from time to time (the rattles). Pablo stressed that when crimes like these have been committed with socio-political avail, finding in society a *widely public will to listen* and acknowledge helps the individual to gain confidence to endure his or her quest. For him, as the government sanctioned: "[this is not OK](#)", he started to test people's reactions or opinions in matters related to his ordeal, gaining a better sense of the strength and reliability of this new context, slowly feeling less isolated in his pain. He became sensitized, politically aware, more connected. His search took him into new territory; he started to change. As Andrews (2014a:88) underlines, "...finding commonality with the stories of others can in itself bring a measure of satisfaction, even agency".

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 8a

Catalina mentioned that listening to other grandchildren speak about their experiences helped her reflect on her own. And, as the changing context started to provide “other guarantees”, she began to be “kinder” to herself and re-approach resources she had previously dismissed. Her husband, who was also building a position regarding what was happening, encouraged and supported her in becoming more receptive. She said that for instance, she “re-encountered (her)self” re-reading her mother’s letter and “falling in love with (her) parents” as she learnt about them. This *opening to (loving) others* allowed her cuirass to fall (“...hardened skin started to fall-off”) and be more able to re-do and un-do something crucial for (and of) herself. Whereas before she said she was “all-or-nothing” (for the other), she is now engaged in her “own search” to find-out what she needs, what she wants, and what works for her: learning to listen to her own rattles and decide what she gives-out, and to whom.

Therefore, making things visible helped in becoming sensitised and begin acknowledging what had been denied recognition -by themselves and society. As more evocative reflections started to emerge, these *disappeared* individuals began identifying something of what was happening, (re)appearing in themselves, intimately: the *blurred photo* started to gain more definition...

As Pablo said,

“...when things are made visible people start to remember...”

And as people start to remember, they begin to talk... One voice resonates in another, who then tells of her/his impact, someone else listens, remembers, wants to speak, and so on. People “take note”, issues start to be problematized, examined, thought-through, shared, facilitating ways by which stories can begin to be digested. So, “...when dialogue becomes possible, she or he who speaks and he or she who listens begin the process of naming, of giving meaning and constructing memories... one could say that it is in this act that a new ‘truth’ is being born” (Jelin, 2003:64). Maybe it is only then that we can claim ‘I experienced *this*’; ‘this’ or ‘I’ becoming a bit more visible to ourselves.

And as the secrets, the pain, the stories start to circulate and be shared, the shameful sarcophagus of what was kept dismissed, silenced and hidden becomes undone. The socialization of a privately kept suffering like this can feel as *freeing* for those who had

been confined to such an oppressive and unlawful narrative of their lives, as they can now start re-interpreting and re-writing their experiences. Maybe some wild flowers start sprouting out of the graves...

### **Stopping/Standing/Separating. Naming and Locating: Taking Position**

“Not everything that is faced can be changed,  
but nothing can be changed until it is faced”

Baldwin (1979-2017:103).

Catalina said:

“uno **se para, y separa**”  
(“one stands-up and separates” or “one separates and stands-up”  
and even “one stops oneself and separates”).

I loved this expression’s evocative power: I thought of Moses’ story of salvation, waters separated, finding a *way-out*, putting a distance with adversary forces, finding better terrain in which to rebuild life. One stops being destructive to oneself, “mean to myself”. That was what they needed to stop, come-out of, separate from. For Catalina, as she began to detach herself from the toxic “safe” position she inhabited, she started to see what had happened, what things meant to her. For instance, realising that “it was a condition for her (mother) to be murdered for them to have me” was very different from thinking her appropriators had taken her as a caring act...

“...realising that they were also responsible for my parents’ deaths!  
...it was a break-through...”

Leonardo said he was only able to own his feelings, construct his opinion, and re-assemble and re-edit the relationship with the family in which he grew-up once he understood their role (in this case, *they* had been lied to as well), whereas initially he had “...needed to put them in question...”. Similarly, Pablo suspected that his family of upbringing was lying to protect themselves and to avoid prison, as he was made to feel a traitor for

spontaneously approaching Grandmothers to find out. He was resolute: the trial had to take place for him to sort-out his feelings in relation to them...

“...it has to happen!”

## Naming

“...linguistic use... is never neutral  
because it shapes our thoughts and actions  
-in other ways, our ethics”  
(Verhaeghe, 2014:163).

With things becoming visible, known and proved, common language-use started to change, too. This helped redefine positions. In our encounters, language-use helped them in sounding me out; my responses giving them clues as to where I *was coming from*, or where I stood in relation to them and their struggle. If remaining inactive, confused in the muddle reinforces one's victimized and hopeless position, the symbolic re-ordering of slowly sorting-out signifiers, concepts, feelings, historical facts (separating, taking distance, putting things in place (i.e., naming), asking questions, letting others ask them questions, learning about how things had been planned, who did what, etc.), helps one to gain courage to open-up a path onward. For Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo this was crucial to redefine their position in relation to others (appropriators, biological parents, old and new friends) because like words, concepts or 'things', people as well acquire meaning in relation to others. Whilst speaking, those directly affected “*in the flesh*” conveyed their re-defined positions, showing how language “has a knowledge function, as well as serving to confer identity... ('what you can't say, you can't know')” (Verhaeghe, 2014:85-86). Finding “*the right place*” for things (where they belong, what words/people mean and how they connect) became essential deliberations in their processing.

To name is also to clothe, to cover, to protect from the sharp, cold Real (Badiou, 2007). Using the 'right' words was noticeably an attentive endeavour for them: it was certainly not the same to say 'appropriated', 'abandoned' or 'adopted'. In this new epistemological/linguistic frame developing, Catalina said she had been a victim, not a criminal. Taking distance, she was then able to position herself as a claimant in the case against her “*appropriators*”. She was not anymore “*the child-of-so-and-so*” (appropriators)

but “a child-of-the-disappeared” students. These *subversives* or *criminals* in her previous mind-set became “my mum”, or “my dad” -now seen as victims of the terrorist state and valiant nonconformists with whom she found shared sensitivities, values, likes and dislikes. She connects with them, *belongs* there.

Also, deciding to re-appropriate their biological families’ surnames and the names by which they had been called (either already officially registered in Pablo’s case, or by the names by which their mother had called them after birth, as accounted for by witnesses in the case of Leonardo and Catalina) was an essential part of this symbolic re-ordering, protecting themselves from the aforementioned *sharp, cold Real*. Catalina described beautifully how she worked-through (and is working-through) such difficult emotional and epistemological reshuffling.

“...I couldn’t call them (the appropriators) ‘parents’.  
It started to bug me to have that name... that surname...”

A de-identification with her appropriators was taking place, helping her to let go of the objectified place given. She said that it was vital to question her feelings towards her appropriators and her position regarding what they had done. Realising what they did to her and her family for their own benefit, “...*not really to protect me!*” freed Catalina from the captive sacrificial position of passive, uncritical acceptance, and she understood that:

“...their love towards me wasn’t authentic...  
-because they kept asking me and expecting me to be their shield  
...to sacrifice myself for them...”

In intentional appropriation, the stolen child is clearly not recognized in his/her singularity, his/her identity or history because for the appropriator, the child is ‘theirs’. The capacity of what Ulloa calls *tenderness* fails because “the child is deprived, intentionally and violently, and for the appropriators’ own benefit, of what he/she needs the most: his/her parents had been killed, and the rest of the family separated from him/her (...). When someone usurps someone else’s child, usurping the parental place whilst concealing this to both society and the direct victim, we cannot think of it as an altruistic act” (Ulloa, 2012:126-127). Catalina firmly concurs with this:



“...that muddle is not love”

Even if formally looked after, the child will be “trapped in a perverse bond... deprived of the engendering desire of his/her own parents, and above all, deprived of the truth about his/her cruel situation” (Ulloa, 2012:126). Catalina told me she felt trapped in a sort of “mafia pact” with her appropriators; feeling a traitor when *she* had been betrayed, feeling she owed them (“they have given you ‘everything’” -people would tell her) when it was them that took everything from her...

“...but nobody asked them to!

...There were lots of other people who *wanted to* (look after her),  
and whose place was to do it!”

“...an act of love...?”

You took me away!”

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo described a different sense of *responsibility* developing throughout their working-through that infused them with agency, triggering a pull to take part and position, thus facilitating the de-victimizing processing to progress further.

LaCapra (2001:90) seems to have listened to them when he writes that “...when the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting-out... but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses”.

## **Rebuilding Identity: Reassembling the ‘I’ within the ‘We’**

“Hegel sees recognition by the other at the basis of self-consciousness. Lacan regards identity development as starting with the pronouncement of the other: *Tu es cela* (this is you)”  
(Verhaeghe 2014:176)

Pablo tells me about being presented by the only existing photograph of his parents and him:

“... and she tells me:  
...This is you!”

The ‘proof’ is in a way, a new, legitimate symbolic inscription that reconnects him to the engendering desire of their parents and families:

“...they called me Pablo...  
My name is Pablo!”

An inscription that connects him to others, past and present. Jelin (2003:24), says that “individual experience constructs community in the shared narrative act, in narrating and listening”.

The creation of the National Genetic Data Bank is an example of the reparative force of this kind of reconstructing (kinship and *community*). Created to ensure scientific evidence on the biological origin of the person found could be provided to justice (and to the families and society), the Bank became also crucial as a ‘welcoming’ platform for each grandchild found. Anthropologist Amantze Regueiro (2012) states that by establishing the legitimacy of that biological bond, the genetic results launched the base from which to recreate kinship; the DNA being like “a footprint that the stealing was not able to wipe-out... what the body retains of a history that was intended to be erased...; ...a form of tradition and heritage that is not just biological but human -hence, historical” (Montesano & Gutierrez, 2007:2). Carrying the evidence of the crime committed, it becomes also a demand for acknowledgement of a social debt and for the restoration of a broken ethical dimension.

For Leonardo, the work of Grandmothers constitutes an axis that helps him learn about his parents, encouraging him to meet with those who knew them, and feel proud in recognising his values as connecting to theirs (his dreams for his own children, for Argentina, for the world). This also anchors him. For Pablo, too, who is also an active member of various socio-political movements. Catalina is amazed to learn her parents liked doing things *she* dreamed of doing as a child (painting, dancing, studying psychology, anthropology, archaeology in particular... digging-up and finding clues about

a buried past). She poignantly recollected that her appropriators rejected these interests and remembers thinking that “...in Argentina, you ‘couldn’t do that’ (archaeology) for a living”. Given the social paradigm in which she lived (made of cover-ups, impunity and oblivion), this was *impossible* to think, indeed. Retroactively making connections between her childhood dreams and her parent’s interests and history, she is flabbergasted: *How can these things happen?* She says she cannot answer this question with certainty, but she believes it cannot just be a question “of blood” or genetics.

Aligning themselves in the intergenerational lineage chain with their legitimate parents produces a significant inscription and an important counter-act: they feel “proud” of “coming from there”. Because, if the struggle of their parents ended in their deaths and their own disappearance (being parcelled-out to others, de-rooted from their families, robbed of their history), each *identity restitution* re-awakens the story that was meant to be vanished: each grandchild found becomes a celebration, “another victory”, a new becoming! Therefore, the tragic-trap can change into a restitutive story, a personal quest (Frank, 1995; Costello, 2011) narrative of finding the place where one feels one belongs:

“...the difference is in the position you take”

“...to search (...) It was now a necessity inside me”

“If you embark on the search (...) you are also shaping your identity on the way”

For Amantze Regueiro (2012:177), these connections are the result of meticulous work started by those searching for them, making the bonds of kinship “the result of the symbolic bonds previously built, well before those who search and those who are searched for meet”. As a beautiful example of this stands The Archive of Memory. Fundamentally, it is a gathering of stories about their disappeared parents (how they met, their nicknames, what they liked doing, who their friends were, what they were good at, clumsy at, etc.). It is made of photographs, audio-recorded and transcribed interviews with family members “who gave their bloods” and friends, letters, historical documents (i.e., how the genetic indicators were done, who the grandchild’s DNA was compared against), books on the movements their parents were part of. It is not one rounded story, but an eclectic collection of stories. Like a puzzle of lost, separated pieces and tales, this “box of jewels” provides the grandchild with precious, unique tools to help them in assembling one (story, identity, position) for themselves.

As the ordeals of the generations merged, Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo found mooring (and relief) in a lineage now not just genetic or personal but socio-political and historical. Rekindling the link between the personal and the communal was vital: their identities and (hi)stories were not isolated anymore but articulated to other identities and (hi)stories, and to the nation's past, present and future. A different storying of their stories unfolded re-adjusting, re-positioning, re-defining their lives.

“...things eventually started to find their place...”

Finding more attuned and considerate mirrors (less *blurry photos* of themselves), the three of them began feeling *part of something* bigger than themselves, feeling better equipped and less alone to approach *truth* in a digestible manner, rediscovering their sense of being in the world, re-establishing the ligaments with that life, their relationship to it, and to their socio-political context and times. This creative re-appropriation brought about restorative agency; their identity now becoming “...the temporary product of the interplay between merging and establishing a distance” and having “a lot more to do with becoming than with being” (Verhaeghe, 2014:8-11).

Hence, even when we talk of *identity restitution*, the work implied appears to be not the utter destruction of a former identity, but a re-assemblage of it. Not a recovering (of a lost ‘sameness’, or of *who ‘I’ was*) but a *discovering, an active un-covering* (the archaeologist Catalina thought of) to then start (re)membering, putting things in their place. Connecting identity, responsibility and agency allowed them to redefine their desire to respond to ‘what happened’, granting themselves choice over destiny implanted. Quite a psychological piece of work! As Foucault (2007:122) puts it, “...my way of no longer being the same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am”.

## Responsibility

So, the stories they began putting together (about their parents, their appropriators, others involved, themselves) became tools, seeds, leaning platforms for this task. As active gatherers, hunters, sowers and harvesters of stories, they took responsibility for this process of change:

“once you realise, you can start taking responsibility for your own history”

“you have to investigate... get involved”

“I choose! I’m not like them!”

“I’m more like my parents ...”

“It was also my son’s... I had to take responsibility”

Whilst “‘labouring’ on and with memories of the past” (Jelin, 2003:5), Grandmothers created a solid base for the grandchildren to ‘find’ themselves once ‘found’. And, as new assemblages of enunciation emerging in the socio-political context condemned the violations of human rights (re-signifying narratives around the dictatorship years) and trials begun taking place, larger sectors of the wider context embraced the restitutions with joy. This ‘embrace’ became a wider holding, landing place: “a collective discourse - an Other- that enable(d) the Real to be more smoothly embedded in the signifier” (Verhaeghe, 2004:327).

Therefore, a different sense of ‘I’ began to *name* things differently, to *place* things differently, building a *subjective position* in response to what happened, deciding where, how they stand, what they stand for. As the “I” is re-assembled, re-constructed or discovered in this way, so is the “we”. Placing themselves as *one* of the *grandchildren*, or as ‘a child-of-the-disappeared’, their singularity links to their origins, to a context, to their history and their future. The very personal joins the communal whilst they embrace the privilege of choosing rather than being weighed down by an imposed fate... Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo recognize that “one of the benefits derived from... communal storytelling is one of bonding. As people listen to the stories of others, they can recognize some elements of their own experience. They know that if and when they come to tell their stories, others, in turn, will recognize themselves. This mirroring between self and other functions as connective tissue between traumatized individuals and their communities” (Andrews, 2014b:37).

“It is enriching (...) there is such a return!”

Therefore, the work developed to widen and deepen acknowledgement, creating *with* the grandchildren more appropriate responses to what had happened, was deemed critical by (for) them. Peng (2017:124) highlights that “...subjectivation understood as assuming

one's responsibility in a multi-layered interrelational collective is crucial for the work of mourning and healing. Traumatized subjects need to regain the power of interpretation over their own experience, which was taken away by the perpetrator", including society in a wider sense. As Guattari & Rolnik underline (2013:48), "subjectivity... is essentially social, taken and lived by individuals in their particular existence. The way in which individuals live that subjectivity oscillates between two extremes: an alienating and oppressive relation -in which everyone subdues to this subjectivity as it is received; or an expressive and creative relation in which the individual re-appropriates subjectivity components whilst producing a process that I will call of *singularization*".

“...a passive victim...?”

Noooo!”

“that feeling of arduously...

I was not going to be able to forgive myself” to not have acted.

Therefore, taking responsibility for themselves within this embracing context helped them mature a will to partake in building change, too -contributing to sustaining that holding context for others to come, so that like themselves, the next ones may be able to develop (perhaps sooner) their own devictimised position.

### **Giving It Out, Contributing: The Voice and Place as Survivor**

“...to be empowered is not only  
to speak in one own's voice and to tell one's own story,  
but to apply the understanding arrived at  
to action in accord with one's own interests”  
(Miller, 1991:119).

As Candau (2008:70) states, “s/he who remembers domesticates the past, but above all, s/he appropriates it, incorporates it, and stamps his/her signature like a memory-tagging that works as an identity signifier”. As it is for many socio-political trauma survivors, telling their story “is at the centre of what one very quickly perceives to be one's responsibility as a survivor. And it's ... a way of transmuting pain and guilt into responsibility and

carrying through that responsibility has enormous therapeutic value. It's both profoundly valuable to society and therapeutic for the individual survivor..." (Caruth, 1995:139). Leonardo said that in this "giving it out" a certain restoration takes place. Like an offering, it helps others, contributes to the wider good, and helps them to continue their unravelling, widening their perspectives, connecting their singular stories with a wider sense of history, of identity and belonging.

All three of them told me that they started to contribute as a personal response to what happened and what they feel needs to change, playing their part in the ongoing construction of that desired change. They felt the need to join-in with the wider search out of gratitude to those that helped them be *found*, accompanying 'new' grandchildren, giving talks, interviews, taking their appropriators to court, etc., contributing to the work to re-establish truth, memory and justice. This partaking is also a way of re-dignifying their ordeal. The act of telling: "this is what happened; this is what I experienced (...) has enabled some people to feel that some moral order has been restored; wrongs have been named as wrongs, and their human rights -indeed, their humanity- have been respected and therefore restored" (Hoffman, 2014:78).

The significance of engaging in dialogue with those who want to learn from them (i.e., with children) was described as something benefitting also themselves, bringing fresh perspectives, helping think in new ways... perhaps this is one of the reasons they chose to speak with me, too. Andrews (2014:88) adds: "...through the use of political narratives, we tell ourselves and others who we are (...). These are the hardships we have endured; these are the principles for which we stand; these are rewards which we as people have procured. Our group identity claims rest upon our stories".

Curious and engaged in finding what helps (them/others), on finding the 'right' position for themselves within the wider, present struggle, they showed me how "memory work that is not embedded in a present undertaking lacks identificatory strength, and more frequently, can even mean the same as not remembering anything at all" (Candau, 2008:146). Aware of this, and of how others' insensitivity, denial or misrecognition can negatively affect them, they know also that misusing their voice in the public sphere can cause damage because of the message their voice can carry given the widened platform achieved with broader socio-political recognition. So, again, it is not just about "I" (and what I went through) anymore. Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo believe it is undoubtedly

important for their stories to be known and circulate widely, but when personal pain is “transformed into ‘social suffering’, individuals become emblematic of individuals of a kind, and the particularities of their stories -the aspects that make them *their* stories- are lost” (Andrews, 2014b:35).

Catalina emphasized she must work on *how* to inhabit the public position of ‘being’ a *grandchild* whilst not disavowing her need to discern what she wants to do with her life, or how to live it. She underscored her desire to be recognised for her merits, not for just “being a grandchild”. She told me she must get her “feelers out” to not be re-appropriated again by the media, or to fall seduced by the celebrity status their position as *grandchildren* gave them during socially restorative political times. Leonardo said it had a huge cost, too and he had to take his time to participate. Given that the “capacity for the collective memory to bear heterogeneity proves to be crucial when the ‘collective’ is to be construed without the violence of exclusion” (Peng, 2017:132), being able to find your own balance and position regarding this is decisive. Otherwise, when people want to take ‘selfies’ with Catalina because they have seen her on TV, or when others make use of this ‘celebrity’ status to gain unearned privileges, she feels objectified (and furious) once more, as their personal/family ordeal and the wider tragedy occurred is diminished and trivialized -even if unintentionally.

“Celebrity? ...no!”

However, she explained that at moments she would love to “pick-up the torch” of Grandmothers, like other grandchildren are doing; but at other times, she needs to “attend to (her) stuff...and look more inwards”. Likewise, Leonardo had to stop and wonder whom he was speaking to and why.

Jelin (2003:144) worked on this problem and found that “in current times, when the mass media are bent on making private lives public through talk shows and reality shows that flatten sentiments and intimacy by making them banal, the testimonial genre runs the risk of being turned into a banal and overexposed spectacle of horror. State terrorism and repression violated human bodies and intimacy; the reconstruction of identity after such turmoil requires that private and intimate spaces also be rebuilt”.



As researcher, I also had to own and confront my idealising responses. I found myself often thinking about them, their stories resonating in heroic narratives I would come across (i.e., reading Harry Potter, or seeing with my daughter a children's film adapted from the classic Rapunzel, a stolen/captive girl)<sup>19</sup>. Perhaps it was because "...what the hero achieves is some degree of mastery in that struggle which he... can bring back to his people. It's a knowledge of death and therefore a knowledge of life, to bring back. It's a profound new knowledge... So, in that sense the survivor has lived out the mythology of the hero but not quite..." (Caruth, 1995:135). My admiration for the work they managed to achieve together with Catalina's words particularly, alerted me to the risk of totalizing their experience as affirmative. By idealising them naively or thoughtlessly, like those wanting a picture with them, we are, albeit unintentionally, debasing their ordeal. Andrews (2014b:43) wisely says that by "removing the weight of the heroic genre, space is created for a different kind of narrative..."

All three said they appreciated speaking in a candid, intimate way, where they could perceive the other's position and respect: "testimony is a speech act that demands recognition and response in terms of social action and social justice" (Whitlock, 2014:82). Catalina said that, on the other hand of idealising, it is also astonishing when people are so indifferent, like "living in a shoe" regarding what they had gone through. She wishes to be recognised for her merits. For me, these are manifested in what she has (they have) been able to do out of all this.

Bearing witness to their accounts whilst recognising my limitations to *fully understand* their experiences, I came to acknowledge and appreciate their experiences, their singularities and agency, and allowed myself to "be touched" by them.

## Grandmothers' Legacy

"the memories of the oppressed and marginalized and the memories about oppression  
and repression... emerge usually with a double intent,  
that of asserting the 'true' version of history based on their memories,  
and that of demanding justice.

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 6 - Note on Heroes

In such moments, memory, truth, and justice blend into each other, because the meaning of the past that is being fought about is, in fact, part and parcel of the demand for justice in the present” (Jelin, 2003:29).

## Justice as Reparative

*“Restitution per-se, is a product of justice”*  
(Rios, 2016:1).

Years after the ‘end’ of the dictatorship (we can argue that because of the ongoing aftermath, it has not completely ended) fear, denial and impunity predominated. These psychological, social and practical tools together with othering the opposition (as subversives, terrorists), the later implementation of the pardon laws and the mechanisms developed to avoid ‘knowing’ or remembering, helped individuals stay put, and “*society (go) backwards*”. With many closed pathways by which the crimes could be investigated, people attuned to the generalised silencing policies and the traumatization of many individuals and groups crystalized (Rousseaux, 2014b). Years later even, attempts to open a dialogue about the current effects of those years was met with a generalised shutting response, like the one I found amongst many initially: “Why dig there if it’s so painful?”, or something like “...better not to open-up the wounds”. But, how could one feel supported and trust that acknowledgement is real, if the rule of law is not re-established and things are left as if nothing had happened? For those appropriated as young children or babies, “only the establishment of truth, under the contextual condition of a *third* to appeal to, and with appropriate and fair help, could put into motion the de-entrapping of the child” (Ulloa, 2012:127).

The pillars of Truth, Memory, and Justice together with the (when existent) governmental support created to acknowledge, investigate and bring to justice all those involved became indispensable structures for the singular, *lone search* the grandchild had to take on. At the time where the families’ victims found closed doors and silence, Grandmothers and other human rights organizations became this third to which an appeal could be made to. With little operational power initially, they eventually fractured the base of fearful

silence and impunity upon which the all-embracing repression was built ('we can do whatever we want, we are beyond the law, we are the law'); denouncing the human rights violations to the world and claiming for justice. Constructing a counter-narrative to the hegemonic, totalitarian practices that advocated oblivion and impunity, within a "uniform(ing) discourse that is constantly disciplining collective social memory to erase responsibility for their own acts" (Rios, 2016:1), they rose in contrast to policies of reconciliation and *forgiveness* often implemented for peace processes after structural human right abuses of this scale. This was (still is) vital for undoing the perpetual (re)traumatization fuelled by impunity.

For Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo, the secret being dismantled allowed for truth to be re-encountered and re-developed, but without justice to articulate and locate 'what happened', acknowledgement per-se could have ended-up in an ethical vacuum perpetuating victimhood (Beichmar, 2011). This call to an institutional, symbolic order that responds to the law and is equal to all was also an appeal for the recognition of what was experienced by the grandchild (LoGiudice, 1999) and signals an attempt to repair what is accepted cannot be totally repaired (Rousseaux, 2014). So, their mammoth task was to confront, educate, mend, transform, re-establishing this *third* that had been shattered (legality, authority, official recognition, justice); working arduously to 'put things in place'.

With socio-political growing acknowledgement of 'what happened' and the growing will to talk about it, societal transformations began to emerge, in turn facilitating the development of subjective moments of 'courage-taking' or 'awakenings', as when the grandchildren describe realising something about themselves they did not know they knew. The years between 2003 and 2014 (between the government incorporating Grandmothers' agenda to the national one, and when I spoke with them) were considered greatly favourable for this, as the support to progressively dismantle their stymied position improved. Rios (2016:2) agrees: "the governmental will to repair what is somehow irreparable has a great margin of action. Its aim can be translated as *lodging* its victims, allowing them their voice so that in what keeps being repeated (trauma) they could re-create their own history and that of the social-collective of a country".

When the 'unbelievable' becomes 'what happened', the impossible gives rise to the possible and the search for further constructing around truth (memory) becomes a necessity, opening the path to justice as a way of -at least partial- reparation.

Grandmothers and human rights organisations did not align themselves with the Christian notion of forgiveness because of this. For them, it is justice that is needed as a political act. Catalina concurs:

“I have nothing to forgive...  
Besides, no one said sorry”.

She adds that it was not just *her* personal tragedy, and as if saying to me: ‘*who am I to forgive them?*’, she added:

“...it was against me, my parents, my family...”

“Go to the justice, and say: ‘Yes, I did this’. Full stop!”

Therefore, restitution implies a symbolic processing, a complex working-through that is very personal, but inescapably it is anchored in an ethical positioning within groups, institutions, and society in general. So, it will be up to the individual to work-out whether they ‘forgive’ or not afterwards, whether they will continue a relationship with those who betrayed them, etc. But the obstacles magnify without justice operating. As we have seen, justice allows things to be ‘put in place’ (i.e., criminals in prison) and reverts the paralysing role allocated to victims.

Acknowledgement and the reestablishment of the rule of law supported Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo to reconstruct an identity, a positioning regarding the family that raised them, the ‘original’ one from which they were torn apart too early even to remember; their choices, their ‘place’ within the wider context in which their life began, in which their stealing took place, and their restitution is occurring. A work that needs to continue, as Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo asserted.

## The Eye of Love

“The mirror that our environment holds up to us determines who we become.

Of course, this process doesn’t happen automatically;  
it can only work properly if the other views us with the eye of love”

(Verhaeghe, 2014:12)

As we have seen, Grandmothers' search was not just about 'finding' the children that have been unlawfully snatched from their own disappeared children and/or children-in-law. Contrasting with appropriation, Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo defined Grandmothers' positioning as an exemplary one of love and of courage; of allowing, and of welcoming. They described their fine attunement in re-accommodating their practices, their demands, their responses to what they felt the grandchildren could be needing as years passed. Also, by articulating their struggle with human rights and the law and to concrete actions in the socio-political context, they helped wider sections of society move from rejection to acknowledgement, building a more solid platform for the singular experience to continue unfolding. Amantze Regueiro (2012:192) adds that as a political construction the search "is not reduced to a biological revindication... after the genetic identification, there is a family bond to be constructed: an 'adoption' process takes place, a (re)assimilation process for the family members and the ...person restituted". Large sectors of society became involved in this 'adoption', too: *the grandchildren* represent for many, *Argentina's grandchildren*.

For Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo this was 'amazing'. To embrace each grandchild in their singularity (not as lost objects to get back to themselves) without denying their history with the appropriators or the psychological struggles generated out of it, facilitates this symbolic 'adoption' to be successful in most cases. Being welcomed, accompanied, being part of something 'bigger-than-me', provides a context that is "exceptionally favourable to transit your journey" -says Leonardo. This attuned *holding and handling* (Winnicott, 1965), supported their working-through, as "their parents' desire, the search of the family, are transformed into kinship symbols for some children: to have been searched for, not 'abandoned'" (Amantze Regueiro, 2012:187), reinforced the strength of the "embrace". Realising one has been searched for decades, even under "impossible" circumstances, is one of the ways of being *held with the eye of love*. An "unbelievable", or "mind-blowing" position that *lets you be*, find your way away from guilt-inducing demands, just being "happy you are there": a mirror that reflects the difference and welcomes it, a value-strong platform to identify with, to be held by, to gain strength from.

This offered an identity-reaffirming legacy for the grandchildren, an ethical donation against the logic, ways and values of those who had put them in the place of being appropriated: a *tenderness* that helped undo the objectifying imprisonment the

appropriation had produced. This counter-context held the grandchildren in mind with the eye-of-love. I believe such a holding *holds the holder*, within a radically different framework created/developed from which to search for them, think about them, and with which to welcome them if ever found. I have heard innumerable times that “the grandmothers... they treat you as their own grandchild!” This containing extends to the expressions “*compañeros*”, “*brothers*”, “*sisters*”, “*one-of-us*”, or others-like-me. “These identities are the result of a political, scientific, juridical, legal, personal and familial construction” (Amantze Regueiro, 2012:192). Like Catalina says, it is about choosing, building kinship from a legitimate place more than “being the-child-of-so-and-so”. I believe this has allowed *them* to embrace, to symbolically ‘adopt’ the (G)grandmothers (and the struggle) as their own.

Finally, those I talked with know that what they (and Grandmothers) advocate for “is not just the point of view of a victim but an idea about the whole country... they are not just demanding for their own rights, for themselves, for their own bodies, they make the demand because of the idea to which their bodies are linked to... they construct new political organizations that are not the old political parties or unions, and through that construction they transform their experience, their victimhood into political affirmation... That is what justice is: to go through the condition of victim to the condition of someone who stands-up... it is not a stagnant position. Justice is a transformation... it is the collective present of a subjective transformation..., an active present” (Badiou, 2007:24-26).

This active present can be read as a gift, too. This donation of truth, memory and justice has had other repercussions that go beyond the search for the ‘grandchildren’, reaching other *invisible* sectors of society, other ‘(grand)children’ even. Recently, sentenced “*milicos*” are being re-granted the privilege of home-arrests -with the huge subjective and socio-political cost this carries for victims. A late resurgence of genocide-denial discourses, impunity and the brutal greed of neoliberal political agendas are ripping to pieces years of work achieved. But equally, I am awed by the contrasting force of other developments. For instance, children of the oppressors are publicly coming forwards as a result of this, denouncing their fathers’ crimes, bringing information to support or demand justice, criticising proceedings that do not operate according to the law or advocating in some cases for their right to change their surnames (Dopazo, 2017) to

clearly mark a difference from them, and a choice. A new *collective* called 'Disobedient Stories' (Furio, 2018) has recently been formed, composed of children of torturers, assassins, baby-snatchers. By coming together, they acknowledge the impact of their biological fathers' crimes in their lives and identities, not only highlighting their own suffering but aiming to put a symbolic and distinct distance from their fathers' acts (and/or their families' acts). These 'children' have achieved a similar ethically-strengthening singularization: a refusal to passively take on an oppressive, poisonous identity. Making themselves and their ordeal visible, they partake in not condoning the crimes: "I am the daughter of that piece of shit" says the daughter of the doctor that signed Pablo's birth certificate (Lederer, 2018). Exposing their repudiation for the crimes committed by their own fathers, they are working (like Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo) on re-creating their identity and their kinship -redefining where *they* belong: 'choosing' family and position.

### **In Praise of Immanence- Storying the Approach**

"one should be alert to whatever signs there are in secular life  
of the genesis of social, even ritual, processes  
that may suggest more effective ways of coming to terms with losses  
as well as other significant transitions -including more festive ones- in social life"  
(LaCapra, 2001:213-14).

I cannot agree more in that "we need to invent a different approach (...) an approach of the becoming, or an approach of the process: the true willpower to let justice's becomings go as far as possible, hoping for the consequences to be as many as possible. When we are trying to solve a problem, we know we must do it ourselves, that we must comprehend the situation, find an idea, we know that that idea will not come from outside" (Badiou, 2007:27). Grandmothers are exemplary of such an approach, constructed because of their children and grandchildren's disappearance, working with the problems as they presented to them, as they changed and evolved, changing them also over time. The appeal around which they organized their struggle is an active position resisting the totalitarian power that did not evaporate with the political re-establishment of democracy; resisting the accepted *given* of the disappearances and the consequent 'madness' this accepting implanted.

As we have seen through Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo's accounts, Grandmothers focussed not just on 'finding' their grandchildren but on supporting them, making the context readier to welcome them, ensuring with their style that the grandchildren developed their own ways of processing what may come out of their restitution -hopefully finding strength, inspiration, and a reparative role in joining the struggle, too. This immanent approach has nothing to do with a blind obedience to an external command or theory.

With their persistent counter-storytelling, Grandmothers mobilized many, managed to touch others deeply, move them to reflection, to action, to change. The power of these stories is visible in the ways in which these began to be transmitted, made available, producing changes in the social and personal realm of experiences, facilitating the processing of the unprocessed and myriad singular and collective responses for tackling the Real. Stories that developed out of their hands, placing value in intimate working-throughs to bring about big-story changes, giving way to advances in science and human rights, and not insignificantly, to new restitutions taking place, as (having heard many of these stories) more and more people approach Grandmothers spontaneously nowadays searching for their identity: so many grandchildren have been found because of this! I think we can learn lots about our own role as psychological therapists from the Grandmothers' eyes/hands, workings and positionings. Like in the children's song below (where a button can mean a manual, a standardised set or number of sessions offered for a specific presentation or diagnosis), we need appropriate time and space to work, to think, find ideas, build/unbuild... to play, replay, and reconstruct stories to partake in change:

“...I want stories,  
comic books...  
and novels...  
-but not those that run with a button...  
I want them holding hands with a grandmother  
...who reads to me in her nightgown”  
(Walsh, 1998).



## Anxiety: Friend or Foe?

“The ghosts of the past...  
roam the posttraumatic world  
and are not entirely ‘owned’ as ‘one’s own’ by any individual or group.  
If they haunt a house (a nation, a group),  
they come to disturb all who live in -perhaps even pass-through- that house”  
(LaCapra, 2001:215).

To know (or re-know, or un-know) can bring dread, fear, anxiety. But, as psychotherapists we are aware that it can be the very opportunity, the vital ingredient for a more “enlivening” processing to commence. If for Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo it was particularly harmful to feel unable to respond, revictimized by inaction (their own and their environment’s), confronting the ghosts little-by-little was crucial. They said that (G)grandmothers had an important role in supporting this working-through by being themselves exposed and vulnerable, firm and open at the same time; promoting the socialization of the knowledge they were building around their work and struggles, and problematizing the issues encountered whilst confronting, exposing, and working with these ghosts themselves.

As previously mentioned, I had to encounter my (and others’) ghosts, too. Whilst confronting ethical concerns of ‘interviewing’ individuals that have undergone such traumatic experiences, I found a tendency amongst colleagues to rush into the ‘*known dangers of working with trauma*’. Some suggested a different take on my project: “Why not interview therapists working with Grandmothers instead?” This seemed to betray my gut-feelings: I was finding in my explorations that the way in which the *grandchildren* were *confronting the ghosts* was helping them (and society even) move into a different direction. The pilot project and my work before contacting each possible contributor ensured I was careful enough to choose those who wanted to speak because (having gone through much of the work of traversing and surviving significant anxiety) they wanted to encourage others not to stay ‘put’ for much longer (or be bystanders themselves). This alone was not a complete guarantee of ‘safety’ but it was a good start to prevent further harm. As psychotherapists, we need to discern the difference between threading carefully around anxiety, trauma or the unbearable (whatever definition we may find useful in each case) and shrinking away from it. Avoiding it, moves *us* also into

paralysis and revictimization -of self and of other. I argue that we need to work *with* it, discerning its dangers and possibilities; assessing, following our patient's lead -and also our guts. Because it does take guts, and patience. And time, and space, and a firm holding in-mind. Otherwise, are we not 'dropping' our patients in the most difficult task, reaffirming their suspicion that nothing can be done about it, that nobody can bear the work it entails? Responding in this way, we will most likely reinforce the tragic-trap and stay in the corner of the room, behind a screen of protocols, watching the ghosts roam, in horror. In this particularly difficult aspect of their work, should they not feel accompanied (a tough sometimes, yet fundamental act) to find a way to start approaching 'the dreaded', or the 'too-big', in more liveable ways?

I argue (G)grandmothers have been working in this way: accompanying, holding hope - not just for the stolen children, but for many of us in the wider context. And simultaneously, they have been accompanying themselves in this accompanying, remaining together with their differences, working in what brought them together, in defining and redefining their strategies, their ideas, as challenges changed. So, perhaps, we do need to take note of our personal, professional, institutional capacity to carry out this kind of work. To be able to accompany such a sometimes-tortuous process is not something we can all (or always) do. It is an ethical issue many of us may face in the very form of service demands, resources or capacity in the public, voluntary, or private sectors -wherever we work. But, *how* do we work with the ghosts if we cannot face them ourselves? With this I mean also if we cannot face, assess, and assume the work it entails. Even if we cannot be certain. Knowing we cannot be certain. I believe that to be able to take-in the indigestible, to be able and willing to listen, to come close and to take distance, it is absolutely necessary to at least feel well-accompanied, listened to and recognised in the work we are doing.

## 6. Concluding

*"Identity is all about ethics"*

(Verhaeghe, 2014:34).

The complexity of the individual and collective responses related to Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo's ordeals worked sometimes against and sometimes towards facilitating the development of their devictimized positioning. "The victim is a passive being, harmed by the actions of others. The victim is never an agent, never productive. He or she receives blows but is construed as incapable of provoking or responding" (Jelin, 2003:54). The morbid place in which they were thrashed onto (unknowingly living as appropriated, objects, done-to victims) was transformed by arduous labour (personal and socio-political) into an expedition they not only managed to survive, but one in which they became actively involved in; a life more alive, responsible, truthful and connected to the complexity of an 'I' and a 'we' which is part of past, present, and future generations. Albeit the *subjective destitution* (Lacan, 1971-1972) restitution may have entailed initially, embracing this struggle seems to have led them to the construction of a less rigidly-held (defensively-held) identity: a singular assemblage in constant interplay with the Other (wider socio-political context, language, media, the appropriators, Grandmothers, judicial system, other *others*).

Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo showed me that through their laborious journeys from 'appropriated' objects to 'restituted' subjects, they developed an ethical positioning that goes beyond (but carries with it) the abuse or traumatic experiences endured, taking responsibility, owning their search for a life now understood not just as given but one to-be-constructed. A position that is 'responsible' to self and others: an identity that although unique, singular and more flexed, it no longer feels detached from the wider context, but integral to it.

So, these restitutions gave birth to strong opposing weapons to submission, objectification, appropriation, victimhood, abuse. What happened to them personally epitomizes what happened in the wider context, too. Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo see the importance (the need even) of this to be acknowledged, hence their choice to continue

the work on making it visible, making it collective; and in this case, talking to me about it so I make it known elsewhere, too:

“...making things visible... in an attempt to make them better”

For me, the work undertaken by Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo strikingly resembles the one that *can be* traversed in psychotherapy (or indeed, even in research of this kind) ...even if not always fully achieved, at least encouraged, promoted, supported, allowed to commence. A consolation on my part? Perhaps. But I do know that things *can* sometimes change; that even in dire circumstances, life *can* be restituted, found, be made-possible, lived differently. The work developed by Grandmothers is not a psychotherapeutic endeavour in itself, but it has shown to be therapeutic. For me, it is inspirational as it is valiantly far removed from the passive bystander complicity or the isolating, stigmatizing, and prescriptive tendencies in fashion nowadays. And, in an era of one-size-must-fit-all, this shows how much more meaningful work can be developed when starting from a sensitization, an appreciation of ‘the problem’ in its context; an approach that listens and responds, considering the origins, contingencies, consequences of ‘the problem’ but also the positive and hindering potential legal, political, psychological ramifications of it for the singular and the communal in search of lasting change. An approach of making things visible, talk-able, a willingness to open them up, problematizing them to work with them from within.

This piece unpredictably became also a narrative of identity for me. Perhaps as a subtext, it is not just about the identities of the courageous individuals that shared with me their stories, ideas, struggles... but it is also about mine. Andrews argues that narratives of identity are always about origins, belonging and becoming, and also “... always political, even when they are also personal, as they reflect the positionality of the speaker” (Andrews, 2007:9).

My approach bears the marks of the context in which my passion for my work originated, as I embrace that “my very formation implicates the other in me (...) my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (Butler, 2005:84). The early days of my developing professional positioning brewed amongst the teachings of socially-minded psychologists and psychoanalysts in Argentina who openly

and sensitively paid attention to what was happening in the sociopolitical context in which they lived and worked, renouncing to "...the worst tradition of psychoanalysis: the bystander complicity of neutrality, and the elitist isolation" (Ulloa, 2012:130), so commonly associated -not always mistakenly- with it still nowadays. Refusing to work in prescriptive ways, they paid attention to the massive erosion of human rights and the psychological consequences of such a destructive sociopolitical time for the individuals and groups they listened to, but also for themselves. Removing the paternalistic shoes of their professional uniforms, they acknowledged they were not outside the context, problematizing like that the idea of a clear-cut inside/outside world.

Furthermore, like the danger of trivialization Catalina spoke about, the survivor-portrayed-as-celebrity can, in our current 'globalized' professional context, become the Theory, the star model of work, or a special uniformed technique. Take *trauma*: there is so much written about it (its negative impact on the brain, the body, relationships) and so many different novel methods advertised (proclaiming the benefits of this or that technique) that we begin to use concepts simplistically, often detaching them from context, sometimes trivializing the same concepts and techniques together with the suffering involved (even the creativity involved) within some symptoms. If this is the approach to our clinical problems, we risk overlooking the subject's agency in working with it, against it, and through it. And our role in all this. With uncritical alliance to pre-conceived templates, we wipe-out complexity, and not only 'miss' the person's relation to it, but we objectify and oppress -accepting oppression ourselves, passively. Therefore, reflecting on our own positioning is crucial -as researcher, psychotherapeutic other, as an *other* preserving otherness or difference.

Leaning on my work with parents, for instance, I evoke here the false 'freedom' offered sometimes to children, inadvertently generating impotence and anxiety because of its lack of anchorage and support; or in the counter one-sided imposition of power that deprives the child the possibility of developing, feeling and using their own. So, I believe there are things we cannot be *abstinent* to, where intervening, conveying our position is important. The clinical work we do is a common enterprise with our patients (each from their different roles, positions, responsibilities) and can be endangered if *neutrality* is understood as a free-standing 'blank canvas' (ostensibly, as indifference, lack of opinion, or 'being-beyond-all-this'). Catalina explained how living in a bubble affected her: it

perpetuated her victimhood, expropriating her from the experience of perhaps working-out earlier what she already 'knew', robbing her of many other chances of making life better for herself. How easy it can be for us to unwittingly support this stagnation by understanding 'neutrality' in that way. In fact, our role sometimes could be to help *pop* some of those bubbles!

When Pablo spoke of so many still being prisoners of fear whilst many others (the ones that committed the crimes) are enjoying the benefits of such successful tyrannical strategy, I thought about how as psychological therapists we must work together with our patients confronting this to avoid becoming accomplices, as otherwise we may not accomplish much at all. We may restrain from transferring our own values and judgements... but our desire regarding the work is there, in the position we embody to ensure the other remains other: s/he has a duty to find his/her own position, and 'live' it as 'own' as much as it is possible. From that desire/position, I am convinced, I should try to resist shying away from! As I understand it, accompanying these processes as hope-carrying companions is essential. Developing or re-establishing a quality of dependency as something that can be embraced; a dependency to an Other I can count on. From the Other's recognition (of my intentionality, of my separateness), my own potency can emerge, and I can experiment my own aliveness (whilst 'appropriated' Catalina felt incapable of living). Nancy (1999) describes this as *hospitality*: to open-up to the difference the other carries (avoiding 'tolerating' or integrating the other so that ultimately, it becomes *not-other*). In a way, it is like (G)grandmothers, who "...are happy that you are here... whichever way you can..." rejoicing with (my) existence, curious about (my) difference, patient. A type of loving regard that refuses to devour, appropriate. To welcome the stranger, we need to let ourselves *experiment its intrusion*, as Nancy says (1999). A primordial step towards Ulloa's (2012) *tenderness*. My work with new parents and their babies resonates lots with this, too!

This piece underscores the importance of search that encourages search. Could we psychotherapists work in this way, too? As encouraging allies within a supporting frame, as a containing third, as a welcoming '(grandm)other'? Doesn't the work with each patient hold hope for a sort of restitution like the one the grandchildren went/are going through? Finding out that the 'story as we know it' is not necessarily 'true', that we might have a role in not only 'changing' but many times in perpetuating our symptoms, in finding our

need to 'take responsibility' for our own life and our conflicting desires... My work as a psychotherapist entails an exercise of that sort, strengthening singular territories with that hospitality, working against the serialization and objectivation of subjectivities.

I still live each new restitution (the most recent one was announced in June 2019)<sup>20</sup> as a metaphor of victory, like Pablo said. A dangerous, difficult labour accomplished. A celebration of life because *otherness* has not been completely crushed and *new becomings* keep taking place.

This piece has also helped me re-think about our responsibility as psychotherapists in not shrinking before truth: by asking, enquiring more, intervening to generate doubts when certainty is all too-well established (in the psychotherapist position, and the patient's) perhaps inadvertently, to *hide away* from truth. Like the many stories now appearing in different public platforms about systematic abuse of different kinds, Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo have somehow asked me, by contributing to this study, to "*tell the story, let it be heard!*"

Could anyone listening (reading) be one of the children still appropriated? Could a client, a patient, or a friend of yours be?

## After-thoughts...

It is no cliché that research takes us to unexpected, messy places! Unpredictably for me, one of the most relevant learnings during the completion of this piece was indeed, about 'doing research'. For instance, I chose a narrative methodology, but I did not know what it entailed for my project until I was deeply into it. Before, it had meant something theoretical, mainly ideological for me. But 'doing it' (living it) was a different matter. 'I' developed as the work developed. And, as it had happened (and continues to happen) in my clinical work, a position ripened (about 'doing research' and about the topic worked on) that could not have developed before subjecting myself to experiencing it. Deep into it, meaning changed or took different variations.

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<sup>20</sup> Information on every restitution (and every child looked for) can be found in Grandmothers' official website: <https://abuelas.org.ar/>

This was indeed a nomadic, itinerant journey -with many stray ideas, images, resonances accompanying me throughout, like the stray cats and dogs Catalina brought with or rescued in her journey towards 'being found'. Many of the hints I started with were found to bear truth, but what could have not been predicted at the beginning of my project was *the muddle* it took *me* through, and *the form* the project took in the end.

The long and convoluted, yet worth transiting process of research meant a search for transmitting something of Catalina, Leonardo and Pablo's truths more than just compiling knowledge or information about restitution. This involved also transmitting my working-throughs, exposing myself, somehow also processing the toxic horror and weaving with it and through it, something different. In doing psychotherapy or research, "as a counterforce to numbing, empathy may be understood in terms of attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others. Empathy may also be seen as counteracting victimization, including self-victimization" (LaCapra, 2001:40).

So, the work of restitution links with and parallels the work of psychotherapy for me, and the way I journeyed through this piece. In writing, bearing with it with careful consideration not to dismiss my hunches whilst remaining open to being 'wrong' about them has been -as it is in psychotherapy- a challenging yet exciting enterprise. In crafting this piece, I realized I worked somehow in the way I work in psychotherapy, consulting the map sometimes, but surrendering whenever possible to the free-floating attention the work required, grabbing the unnoticed, the apparently unimportant; listening not just to the obvious or concrete, the stuff-to-fix, or the conscious 'problem', not just taking the route found by others. To trust this style in research was challenging, and more than frustrating at times. As I worked full-time whilst raising a family with little support, I had concretely very little time. To enter it, come out, and in again was not easy. Unsurprisingly, preestablished 'strategies' did not work. I often felt *green*, lost, advancing was slow... It felt so important not to flatten the depths by explaining everything... to allow myself to 'body-surf' -being both immersed and outside- in a changing border, without dismissing either dimension, allowing for the *learning in the flow* to occur, the emotional *left-overs* to linger... I found *a friend* (Derrida, 2005) in historian LaCapra (200:103), who notes that "there is something inappropriate about modes of representation which in their very style or manner of address tend to overly objectify, smooth over, or obliterate the nature and



impact of the events they treat”, because I resisted compromising the aesthetics, the ethics, the ‘soul’ of the dynamics of this research to make it fit easily into ‘academic’ writing. Using a narrative methodology helped me with this at times intolerable task.

As with Catalina, Leonardo, and Pablo, it was in these choices of shape, of tone, of ‘flow’ (stuck often, and stubborn most of the time) that my identity as researcher in this piece developed. And what remained constant within change, re-created itself. Again, LaCapra (2001:144) offers me harbor, noting that “it is via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent”.

I learnt lots. About them, about what happened, about their many processes, about research, and about my ways of working, my limits of working.

I hope this piece raises questions and does not give ready-made answers that are generalizable or applicable-to-all. I strongly believe we have an overload of those kinds of answers and a lot of problems created because of our defensive, even paranoid obsession with them. I also hope that the dangers of this over-explaining, simplistic and objectifying way of working has been *made-visible* by the stories offered here and the way I have chosen to (re)present my work. With our most difficult conflicts (usually meandering around identity), it is perhaps only ‘slowly-slowly’ that one can go far, our truth only developing ‘little-by-little’ –like Pablo and Catalina emphasized- transforming itself, “I” and “us” in the dynamic workings of its search.

I believe I have taken this piece also as an opportunity, an attempt to ‘re-translate’ my own experience, reworking on my personal and professional position/identity within my life in the UK. As a secondary gain perhaps, it has led me to recover and mend my commitment (rather injured by my own struggles within this new found Other) to working in a way that embraces contamination, striving to *keep-being open to otherness, to foreignness* -including my own. A way that is not ‘a master version’, but one that adheres to critical enquiry; a way of working that -I see it now- has been always perhaps a form of intersubjective research, too.

To conclude, I own up to the fact that I experienced a form of restoration, or of what Hollander (2017:202) calls “a kind of vicarious gratification ...from studying ...examples of individuals and groups who were able to fight to overturn the authorities and conditions that oppressed them”.

Saer (1999:112) says it beautifully 'for me':

“The work can sometimes feel useless and bitter  
and the struggle unequal against the limitless power of the adverse.

But this is not important,  
because *creation*, even in an indifferent world,  
is a kind of practical redemption  
in which the transformative agent transforms him/herself,  
even when the world s/he wanted to change remains the same.

Above all, creation is joy  
but also weapon  
and consolation”.

## **Appendices**

- 1- Glossary**
- 2- Ethics Approval Letter**
- 3- Participant Information Sheet (English/Spanish)**
- 4- Consent forms (English/Spanish)**
- 5- Informal Protocol of Interview Questions**
- 6- Diary Entries**
- 7- Conversing with/Developing the Stories**
  - a. Graph for pillars*
  - b. Mind map – themes*
  - c. Hand written notes ‘on the go’*
- 8- Further Online Material in English**

## Appendix 1 – Glossary

### Alicia Lo Giudice- Psychology Area

Alicia Lo Giudice is a Psychoanalyst who has been working with Grandmothers for many years, initially with the first young grandchildren found and their families. She runs Grandmothers' 'Centre of Psychological Support for the Right of Identity', in which psychological/psychotherapeutic support is offered to restituted grandchildren, family members, those who have doubts about their identity. The Psychological Area also collaborates in disseminating their work and offering specialized training and consultancy. There are different Grandmothers offices across Argentina with other psychologists/psychoanalysts attached to them. More information can be found on Grandmothers de Plaza de Mayo's website: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/dudls-sobre-tu-identidad/centro-atencion-psicologica-el-derecho-la-identidad-17> (Retrieved 12.04.18).

### Approached (Approaching Method)

As the grandchildren were becoming young adults, Grandmothers started to use a new method to accelerate the bureaucratic process and support the grandchild in the difficult beginnings when they are finding out. Typically, a grandchild who has restituted his/her identity and someone from CO.NA.DI (National Commission for Identity) would *approach* the individual they had strong indications could be one of the grandchildren, with the aim of letting them know there is an investigation about their case taking place, that they could support them and to see whether s/he had doubts, documents, information that could help in the case. This is the 'approaching method', which is implemented to smooth the shock of being told directly by a judge that a DNA is being requested. The approaching method aims to give the person time to process and hopefully collaborate voluntarily and speed-up the process by getting a DNA test done or add other details to the investigation (i.e., their forged birth certificates, etc.). This allows the legal process to be quicker and more effective whilst providing an initial platform for this person to start thinking about it with their support, if this is desired or possible.

### Archive of Memory (Biographical Family Archive)

A biographical archive began to be constructed in 1998 for each child being searched for, gathering all sorts of material about the grandchildren's disappeared parents and their biological families, including audiotaped interviews with family and friends, stories from the parents' comrades or childhood friends, photographs, diaries, books, significant objects, etc. It may also include details about the investigation carried out to locate him/her, reports received throughout the years, and other documents, like the family tree. The team in this area of Grandmothers works to reconstruct the story of those who disappeared to pass it on to their children -born in captivity or kidnapped with their parents

and appropriated. In this way, they support the individual to start to learn about his/her disappeared parents and construct an idea of who they may have been, how they may have been. This is especially important as some of the grandparents are aging and dying without finding their grandchildren, and many families are broken and divided so these valuable stories and information could be lost with the pass of time. Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo wanted to make sure these stories would survive them, especially for those grandchildren who are to be found in the future (Arditti, 1999). These archives are meant to be for each 'grandchild' found, but by reconstructing the life stories of their disappeared parents, other stories (personal, social, collective) have been also reassembled. More on this can be found on <https://abuelas.org.ar/abuelas/casa-la-identidad/archivo-biografico-familiar-60> Retrieved November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

### **Campo de Mayo**

Campo de Mayo is a large military base in Buenos Aires, Argentina. During the last dictatorship, there were four clandestine detention centres inside this base. One of these was the Military Hospital, where many pregnant women detained illegally in different clandestine detention were taken to give birth and their new-born babies taken from them and, like Catalina's case, passed onto others and made disappeared.

### **Catholic Education/ Going to a Catholic School**

As Pablo experienced, catholic schools were usually oppressive, obstructing, and silencing. Pablo here refers to the participating role of the Catholic Church as an institution, as it participated in the illegal repression and allied with the military dictatorship and the economic interests behind it.

Many priests, nuns, etc. that were considered 'lefties' (that worked with the poorest communities, opposed the system or denounced what was going on) were also executed or made disappeared.

### **Centre for Memory**

Centres for Memory are places of remembrance, education, awareness, research. For instance, a symbolic one, called Home for Identity (Casa por la Identidad), was created at a building where once the Mechanical School of the Army (ESMA) stood. The ESMA is one for the most emblematic Clandestine Detention and Extermination Centres of Argentina. A wider description can be found here (in Spanish): <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/abuelas/casa-la-identidad-12> Retrieved February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

## **Child of the Disappeared**

Children of those who disappeared, including those who survived and were raised by their legitimate families or friends, but also those who were born in captivity or kidnaped with their parents and later appropriated (the grandchildren).

## **Compañero/a**

This means comrade, friend, 'the one who accompanies you', one from the same group, an ally. Additionally, many refer to their partners (boy/girlfriends, spouses) as 'compañero/a'.

## **CO.NA.DI (National Commission for the Right of Identity)**

CO.NA.DI is a combined organization (governmental and non-governmental) where civil servants and members of Grandmothers. It is an interdisciplinary commission composed by teams of professionals from different academic traditions. It was created in 1992 responding to the demand from Human Rights Groups (especially from Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo) to ensure the right to identity became a matter of State. The creation of a National Commission for Identity aimed at officialising the struggle of Grandmothers: the search "that was born out of the desperation and the improvisation of some distraught mothers; that opened spaces within the judicial, psychological, genetic fields became a governmental 'corpus' with a precise intention that the search for the children (disappeared alive) needed to be a heterogenic, multiplied, collective struggle. In this way, the search for identity was to continue even without them, and CO.NA.DI had to accept the challenge of becoming the voice of the Grandmothers within the state" (Carlotto, C. et al., 2007:38).

One of the first tasks of CO.NA.DI was to attend to Grandmothers' demands for legal documents, to investigate the reports they had in their systems, and to re-activate delayed judicial causes around the stealing of babies and their appropriations (Carlotto & CO.NA.DI, 2007). "CO.NA.DI's work as a mixed organization has been very fruitful, especially regarding the general right to identity, increasing successfully the amount of individual restitutions of boys and girls appropriated by the last dictatorship. The human rights policies implemented by the ex-president Dr. N. Kirchner allowed the strengthening of this Commission's work as it placed human rights as one of the fundamental axis of his government" (Duhalde, 2007).

## **E.R.P (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo)**

The People's Revolutionary Army (or ERP) was the armed branch of the Workers' Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, or PRT).

### **ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada)**

The School of Mechanics of the Army (ESMA) was one of the largest illegal detention and extermination Centres in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where about 5,000 people were made disappeared during the civic-military dictatorship. Illegally captured civilians were kept hidden there, where they were tortured and most of them later killed. It is now the symbol of illegal repression and State terrorism, where an impressive Centre for Memory was created.

### **Estela (Barnes de Carlotto) and Claudia (Carlotto)**

Estela Barnes de Carlotto is the president of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. One of her children, Laura Carlotto, had been unlawfully killed whilst she lived in La Plata city. Estela was able through the judicial system to exhume her body. Only then with the help of the national team of forensic anthropology, it was discovered that Laura had given birth. (Madariaga, 2009: 66-67). Laura's child restituted his identity only a few years ago -after someone told his wife that he was not the biological son of his parents.

Another child of Estela is Claudia Carlotto, who is president of CO.NA.DI. Amongst her many responsibilities, she takes the time to meet personally with those to whom the news of the positive DNA results is to be given.

### **'...From 2003 onwards'**

Pablo refers here to the policies implemented by ex-president N. Kirchner, who opened-up the platform for Human Rights struggles' visibility and acknowledgement. On his first day in office, for instance, he ordered many army generals, admirals and brigadier-generals into retirement. "Grandmothers' voice with other human rights groups' voices started to gain a wider platform within national governmental policies. The national public campaigns calling out for young people to clear-up their doubts about their biological origins began to be more and more visible" (Carlotto et al., 2007:90).

This government took on several symbolic and practical measures to convey this commitment: The president took down from the military College the portraits of the repressors Videla and Bignone; the pardon laws were abolished and then ruled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court -allowing for the reopening of judicial causes previously closed and unresolved; many buildings (paradigmatic clandestine centres of disappearance, torture and death) were taken from the army and given back to the people, creating in them centres for memory, museums for educational purposes and promotion of human rights. Many other places of clandestine detention and repression were publicly identified for the first time across Argentina. The following years deepened this process focussing on Truth, Memory and Justice, leading to a law that stopped the protection of army men/women convicted and the guaranteed their common treatment (i.e., going to common prisons instead of remaining under house arrest – which meant,

as Pablo mentioned, many privileges). Other civil and human rights advances were achieved during these times, and many commissions for support for the victims, research commissions, etc. developed at a scale not seen before. Secretaria de Derechos Humanos de la Nación Argentina. As Pablo said, these were very important times, indeed. Retrieved November 4th, 2015. <http://www.jus.gob.ar/derechoshumanos/memoria-verdad-justicia.aspx>

### **Forced Entry**

A forced entry is ordered by a judge when the suspected grandchild refuses to do a DNA test voluntarily, usually as a protective response towards his/her own appropriators. A forced entry is done to gather DNA samples (from hair, clothing, toothbrushes) as the crime of child appropriation is being investigated. Before 1998-2001, a judicial intervention was needed to request a blood sample for a DNA test and this delayed the investigations sometimes for years. The law eventually changed with ministerial sanctions -which allowed CO.NA.DI to further investigations also around child trafficking and illegal adoptions in Argentina. The argument for the forced entries goes beyond the right of protection of privacy because it is believed that by invoking this right, one infringes the victims and their families' right of identity. "What is not being considered (in this argument) is that there are other fundamental rights violated, like the right to identity, to freedom, to family, to not being an object of forced disappearance..." (Carlotto et al., 2007:54). Grandmothers explained (and many of the testimonies confirm), many of the grandchildren report feeling relieved by the fact they were forced (by law) to do these tests -even when they still did not know the results- as this freed them of the guilt of causing harm to those who up until them were considered their parents.

### **Forgiveness Laws, Pardon and Repair Laws**

These laws Pablo is referring to are also called impunity laws ('Punto Final' and 'Obediencia Debida'; 'Full Stop' and 'Due Obedience'), passed under the threats of military action. "Because of the military pressure on the administration of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), the "full stop" law was passed by the legislature in 1986, setting a 60-day deadline for the start of new prosecutions against members of the security forces. But the flood of lawsuits was not brought to a halt, and the "law of due obedience" was enacted in 1987, putting an end to prosecutions of anyone below the rank of lieutenant-colonel. The members of the junta who had been tried and convicted were later pardoned by president Carlos Menem (1989-1999).

However, in June 2005, the Supreme Court found the amnesty laws unconstitutional, allowing the government to re-open prosecution of cases for crimes against humanity laying down jurisprudence by acknowledging that the dictatorship's state terrorism had been a form of genocide" (Valente, 2006).



### **‘Grandchild who had seen himself in a photograph in his mother’s arms’**

Pablo is talking about Horacio Pietragalla, a stolen grandchild who (looking with his girlfriend through Grandmothers’ website for cases of couples or individuals whose children were being searched) ‘recognised’ himself and his mother in the photographs. He then voluntarily approached Grandmothers, who were already investigating his case. His spontaneous presentation accelerated the process of his identity restitution substantially. His story can be heard in his own words (in Spanish) here: <https://www.abuelas.org.ar/video-galeria/horacio-pietragalla-corti-de-71> Retrieved February, 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### **‘Grandchild 106’**

The numbering of the grandchildren, unlike one may tend to interpret in a rush, has a positive connotation. It signals the amount of cases solved (grandchildren found). Initially, Grandmothers preserves the identity of the person to prevent overexposure in a potentially very stressful time until the person is ready to appear publicly. When a grandchild has been found, Grandmothers give a press conference and provide details of his/her legitimate parents and a brief story of who they were and how they disappeared. But, unless decided by the restituted grandchild, they do not reveal the identity (the forged identity) of the individual to allow privacy and time to process the news and decide when and how to ‘come out’ publicly. Pablo laughs when he tells me ‘I am the grandchild number 106... because we have numbers, you see... for the press’. As grandchildren are found, being called by numbers highlights a step forwards (we found another grandchild, the grandchild 99, or 116...), a victory (as Pablo said). It also marks the decreasing numbers of those many still to be found.

### **Grandchildren who ‘Come Forwards’**

This refers to the ‘spontaneous approach’ of those who, having doubts about their identities, approach CO.NA.DI or Grandmothers unprompted to find out whether they are one of the missing grandchildren. Both CO.NA.DI and Grandmothers have teams to work around these ‘Spontaneous Presentations’ and both teams work alongside one another. “When a person presents to the Commission (CO.NA.DI) with doubts concerning the circumstances around their biological origins, he or she is interviewed by a member of the team. This is done in a personal and confidential atmosphere; not set time is put for the duration of this interview and no pre-designed forms are completed. Each case is singular, but what it is indeed considered as set by the law, is the date of birth (between 1975 and 1980) to determine if it is possible to locate it within the framework of appropriation crimes committed during the last military dictatorship. Then, a file is opened and an investigation starts (mainly of documents) to obtain data to help the clarification of their biological origins. If after this initial investigation, no positive results are gained,

they proceed to the second step, which is the genetic test carried out by the National Genetic Data Bank” (Carlotto et al.,2007:84).

### **Grandmothers/grandmothers**

When referring to *the grandmothers* (with small g), I am talking about the individual women within the organization Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo who have been looking for the disappeared children of their disappeared children. When referring to **Grandmothers** (with capital G), I am referring to the organisation. When I write '(G)grandmothers', I am referring to the women and the organization. Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo's website has some videos with English subtitles, including the history of Grandmothers, stories from Grandchildren found, etc. It can be consulted here: <https://abuelas.org.ar/video-galeria/institucional-abuelas-english-subtitles-266> Retrieved February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

### **‘...Having My Mum Talking to Me’ /Letter from Catalina’s Mother**

According to witnesses, Catalina's mother managed to write a letter to her daughter and family whilst imprisoned. The military made Miryam believe her baby Laura Catalina was going to be taken to her own parents to be looked after. She expected she would be killed. In this letter she 'talks' (writes) to her own parents and brother, but also to her daughter Laura Catalina -who she assumes one day would read her words.

### **H.I.J.O.S.**

HIJOS means children (sons/daughters) but it stands as an acronym for the collective: 'Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio' (or *Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence*). They work to find out what happened to their parents, for Memory and for Justice, they raise awareness with different public interventions (some of the most famous are known as 'escraches' (when they publicly unmask war criminals who are hidden somehow in day-to-day activities, living normal lives -especially during the impunity years. They would do this by appearing and making themselves seen in different ways, in large groups, in the most unexpected of places for the criminals enjoying impunity: their neighbourhoods, if they go to the theatre, etc.).

These unveiling collective and public performances have widened the visibility platform considerably by public performances of *naming and shaming*. More can be found on: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/HIJOS> Retrieved April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### **ID card (or DNI: National Identity Document)**

This is the national identity card, the legal document confirming your name, place of birth, nationality. All residents of Argentina must have a DNI or ID card. A DNI is created after the birth certificate is done (after the birth is officially registered).

### **Imprescriptible crime**

“The permanent crime of subtracting a minor is followed by another crime, one that continues to be committed to present-time: the illegitimate privation of liberty. This interjects the prescription of the first crime” (Carlotto et al.,2007:26).

### **Mate**

South-American hot drink drunk from a gourd filled with yerba-mate tea, sipped through a metal straw and usually shared informally in gatherings during the day, typically framing conversations. It is usually shared in an informal social setting, such as family gatherings or with friends but also amongst team members at work, morning or afternoon. The same gourd and metal straw (*bombilla*) are used by everyone drinking. One person (cebador) takes the role of preparing and serving each mate, drinking the first one to start the round. Mate has a strong socio-cultural significance, as in Argentina it is considered the national infusion. It is very popular also in Uruguay, Paraguay, and parts of Bolivia, Chile and Brazil, taken in each region with slight variations and idiosyncrasies.

### **Menemist' Party**

This refers to a particularly neo-liberal moment in the 90s when Menem was president of Argentina, and where corruption and impunity were common currency. The military forces (and the financial interests behind them) re-gained power and immunity with his support, including the pardons.

When Pablo refers to ‘party’, he is alluding more than to the political party (which many consider betrayed the values of the party) to party as ‘merry-making’. Menem was notoriously known for a like for the celebrity world, for parting, for immunity, too. Corruption, oblivion, pomposity, wasteful spending and deceit were common features of this period.

### **Milico (Army man)**

An uncomplimentary term to signal someone who took part in the dictatorship, especially an army man but it could also mean anyone who ideologically supports what they stood for.

### **Misiones ‘...They Brought Me from Misiones...like a pack of yerba’**

Misiones is one of the 23 provinces of Argentina, in the north-east corner of the country where Yerba Mate (mate tea) is grown, harvested, and distributed throughout the country and exported. Pablo refers mentions this linking it with the fact that he (as many other small children) was treated like an object, like **‘a packet of yerba’** (mate-tea).

### **National Genetic Data Bank (Banco Nacional de Datos Genéticos)**

Grandmothers were using genetic data since 1984 to identify disappeared children, but most judges active back then, had been part of the dictatorship years. These judges many times argued that taking DNA samples for suspected grandchildren constituted a violation of privacy. Grandmothers began working to create a law for the creation of a National Genetic Data Bank, and to change this notion as it prevented the identification of many grandchildren but also of many appropriators. In 1987 “Grandmothers’ project became national legislation... setting the base for the identification of stolen children, with the state as auditor and executive of such norm... Currently, the bank works as demanded by the judicial system in manifold crimes in which these specialist reports are needed... The NGDB is an interdisciplinary team with specialists in genetics, biochemistry, molecular biologists, laboratory technicians, doctors and biochemists. Law professionals advising on legal matters are also part of the Bank and there is an area of support where psychologists have a central role containing all those approaching the Bank who are generally going through identity conflicts” (Carlotto et al., 2007:62-63).

Before CO.NA.DI was formed, the Bank could intervene only as demanded by the judicial system, which made the bureaucratic journey very difficult to navigate, and slow, without regards “for the subjective rhythms of the families of those disappeared. The creation of the commission (CO.NA.DI) allowed for the genetic tests to be done with more agility by establishing priorities according to previous investigations. When there is a ‘spontaneous approach’ (of the person suspected of being a disappeared child) the test is now done immediately...” (Carlotto et al., 2007:63-64).

### **Removal of the Dictators’ Photographs from the ‘Casa Rosada Hall of Presidents’**

In 2003, in a powerful symbolic gesture, Argentinean president Dr N. Kirchner removed the portraits of non-democratic Argentinian presidents from the Casa Rosada (the executive office of the President of Argentina, the Government’s House).

### **Restituted (Recovered) Grandchildren**

Authorised term used to define the legitimate finding of a child who had been disappeared/appropriated. Initially, it was used to refer to the children being returned to

their families of origin, but it continued to be used for adults being found. Restitution implies the acknowledgement of the biological/legitimate family and the crimes committed by those who appropriated the children or participated in it (doctors, lawyers, nurses, etc.). It also involves the change of name/surname, a whole new 'formal' identity which involves bureaucratic and judicial tasks. These administrative ordeals are framed sometimes by reticence of the Judicial Power, with slow judicial processes, huge financial costs, etc. For instance, there are cases where the judicial system still today makes obstacles for full identity restitution, like the grandchild who knows his legitimate identity since 2009 but is struggling with the ministry of Justice of the Santa Fe Province to be allowed full restitution: to change his surname (and that of his children). He feels unlawfully obliged to use the name that links him to those who appropriated him, betraying the identity of his biological parents, his lineage, his chosen identity now. He is known as the grandchild 12. (MinutoUno, 2016). There are to date (June 2019), 130 grandchildren found.

## Reports

People can report, or provide information to Grandmothers when they suspect of (or know of) a child that has been appropriated. Reports can contribute enormously to investigations taking place around each grandchild, as many times these are like gigantic puzzles.

## Right of Identity

"The articles referring to the right of identity in the Convention of Children's Rights are known worldwide as the 'Argentinian articles' due to the intervention of the Argentinian State and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. Regarding this, Rosa Roisinblit, Vicepresident of Grandmothers highlights: 'An official member of the ministry of Foreign affairs' invited us to participate. And we collaborated in three articles: 7, 8, and 11. We were there to help, so we suggested things, and not everything -because we wanted even more. They accepted some, not everything we suggested. In the end, it reads: *Each child has the right to a name. And we wanted to his/her name. That's the difference. We want his/her name, because everybody has a name*'" (Carlotto et. al., 2007:46) ...but not necessarily their name.

From 2004, the National Congress instituted October 22<sup>nd</sup> as the 'International Day for the Right of Identity'. "The right of Identity is a universal right to know who we are and where we come from. In Argentina, during the last dictatorship, this fundamental human right was systematically violated by the terrorist state: to most appropriated children the truth about their origin was denied. Thanks to Grandmothers' struggle, in November 1989, the International Convention for the Rights of the Child included articles 7, 8 and 11, guaranteeing the Right to Identity worldwide. In September 1990, this Convention was incorporated to the Argentinean law. The social construction for the Right to identity entered a new chapter when in 2005 various human rights groups managed to sanction

a law for the Integral Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents” Grandmothers’ website. Retrieved February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018.  
<https://www.abuelas.org.ar/archivos/archivoGaleria/CUADERNILLO%20postales%20Id entidad.pdf>

## **Systematic Plan**

“A systematic plan that had as its main object not only obtaining illegal adoptions, but also the subtraction of children of political opponents to prevent them from growing up in a system that would be antagonistic to the one imposed by them” (Piñol Sala, 2006)

“The perpetration of the crime of subtractions, retention and hiding of children and babies during the Argentinean State terrorism was a systematic practice performed by the Security and Arm Forces that constituted one of the gravest violations to fundamental human rights in the history of the country. The search and the investigations carried out by Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo established the existence of about 500 children that disappeared during the last dictatorship. Secret archives from the Security and Armed Forces were found in which clear orders were given regarding the procedures that everyone in the repressive state system had to follow regarding children and babies of political militants or unions dissidents who were made disappeared...(there was) a generalised preoccupation amongst the security forces that the children of the disappeared would grow up hating the Argentine Army due to their parents disappearance or murder. They suspected that the angst within the rest of the remaining family would generate after a few years, a new generation of subversive elements” (Carlotto et al.,2007:23). It was only in 2010 that Jorge R. Videla, former dictator of Argentina, was detained under house-arrest on multiple charges of kidnapping children, and on 2012, convicted and sentenced to fifty years in prison for the systematic stealing of babies. See Trial for the appropriation of babies, 2011. Online CNN news article <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/americas/03/03/argentina.baby.theft.trial/index.html> Retrieved February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

## **Spanish Babies**

Pablo here refers to the so-called *lost children of Francoism*, abducted from Republican parents who were in jail or killed during the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s ruling years. These are estimated to be around 300,000. Like in Argentina, The Spanish Catholic Church had an important role in hospitals and social services supporting Franco. There are different organisations and victims’ groups claiming that baby kidnappings developed into a business that continued into the 1980s -where children were sometimes exchanged for money, once taken from "morally- or economically- deficient” mothers who were frequently told that their children had died, and, because hospitals took care of the burials,

they never saw the bodies of their babies. In many cases, the records were missing, either accidentally or because they were destroyed (Gonzales de Tena, 2009).

### **Trial to the Junta**

Conducted by a civilian court, this was the judicial trial of the members of the *de facto* military government ruling Argentina from 1976 to 1983. It was carried out during the first democratic government, in 1985. Several were prosecuted for crimes (kidnapping, torture, forced disappearance and murder of about 30,000 political dissidents) but many were left immune as records, documents and evidence were destroyed by the military government before calling for elections. The 'pardon laws' (see above, in glossary) aggravated this situation until many years later. The government also prosecuted and sentenced many leaders of guerrilla groups responsible of crimes during those times.

### **Truth, Memory and Justice**

Different Human Rights groups' (especially Grandmothers') demand for Truth, Memory and Justice concerning the crimes and human rights abuses of the last civic-military dictatorship: to investigate, elaborate, bring to justice and repair.

### **'...The Theory of the Two Demons'**

This is a term used to morally equate any civilian dissent with 'terrorist guerrillas' and these with illegal repressive activities carried out by the State. However, the institutions of a national state are supposed to act within the confines of law, even when fighting 'outlaws', 'guerrillas', or terrorists.

The term "theory of the two demons" is linked with the idea of the 'The Dirty War', to justify the crimes committed by the Armed Forces as 'obligations' carried out to protect the country from evil. Using the term 'Dirty War' to describe the dictatorship years is a way of equating civil and state responsibilities -with the intention of washing-out state accountability.

### **"...They may be also finding their nephew, or their brother..."**

Here Pablo refers to the fact that Martin Fresneda is also looking for a disappeared brother, and Claudia Carlotto for a nephew, the child of her disappeared sister Laura. During 2015, after these interviews had taken place, Claudia's nephew (and Estela Barnes de Carlotto's - president of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo- grandchild) was found.

### **‘...They must have done something’**

During and after the dictatorship, this was a common phrase heard publicly, meaning ‘they may have done something to deserve it’. This was a purposely used and encouraged discourse to transfer the blame onto the victim, and links with the aforementioned ‘theory of two demons’ and ‘dirty war’ expressions

### **TV clip**

TV clip from Grandmothers from 2000, designed as part of a campaign directly aimed at young adults who may have doubts about their identity, making their possible struggles ‘visible’. Towards the end of the 1990s, as the missing grandchildren were becoming legal adults, Grandmothers reinforced their awareness campaigns, especially to sensitize this generation as they believed (working with those who had restituted their identity) that many grandchildren could be beginning to question the stories told and approach Grandmothers by themselves. Many artists and actors joined in to make these happen (Gandsman, 2009). The one Catalina refers to, showed a young person looking at himself in the mirror whilst the information about the dates where these children could have been born was provided ‘if you have doubts about your identity, you can be one of the grandchildren the Grandmothers are looking for’. It also provided information about where (and who) to go or call for further information and support. This clip can be watched here: <https://abuelas.org.ar/video-galeria/spot-televisivo-historico-del-otro-lado-del-espejo-179> Retrieved November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

### **Usufruct (the celebrity status)**

A term from civil law that is colloquially used for ‘using’, as it has more evocative power. It means to make profit from a situation, make use of something and its fruits -what comes out of it. Catalina is here talking about those that may ‘make use’ of their social position as described (i.e., as ‘celebrities’ they may believe they have some rights over others, or they put themselves above the rest).

### **U.E.S (Unión de Estudiantes Secundarios)**

Union of Secondary School Students.



## Appendix 2 - Ethics Approval Letter



13 North Common Road  
Ealing, London W5 2QB  
Telephone: 020 8579 2505  
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070  
[www.metanoia.ac.uk](http://www.metanoia.ac.uk)

Egle Reeves  
DCPsych programme  
Metanoia Institute

Our ref: 4/13-14

9th February 2014

Dear Egle

RE: *Stolen and Found: A Review and Analysis of Restitution Stories from abducted children during the Argentinean Dictatorship (1976- 1983)*

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as Integrative department representative for the Research Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Patricia Moran

On behalf of:  
Dr Peter Pearce  
Chair of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Registered in England at the  
above address No. 2918520  
Registered Charity No. 1050175

## Appendix 3 - Participant Information Sheet (English/Spanish)

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

**Study title:** *“Stolen and Found: A Review and Analysis of Restitution Stories from abducted children during the Argentinean Dictatorship (1976- 1983)”*

**Date:** 04.04.14

I would like to formally invite you to take part in a research study that I am conducting as part of a doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy at Metanoia Institute/ Middlesex University, London, UK. Firstly, I would like you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve if you decide to participate. I am at your disposition if you'd like to ask me more questions about it.

If you decide to take part, I will ask you to complete a consent form before we start with the interviews. I will give you a copy of it, together with one of this information sheet. These are very important in the UK when you are interviewing people for your research.

I would like to assure you that you can change your opinion in terms of participating or not at any stage of the process, having completed the interviews or not. You can let me know straight away, or later, in person or by writing, or giving me a phone call.

#### Confidentiality

All information compiled during our conversations/interviews will be treated respecting our confidentiality agreement. I would like you from the very start to tell me whether you'd like to remain anonymous or not in what you are discussing with me -also in what you are discussing about others you want to protect from being exposed. We can think about this together and decide how best to do it.

If you agree, I will audio record the interviews to then transcribe and translate into English. No one other than me will have access to the tape recorder. If you would like me to, I will erase them afterwards. All data will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with the Data Protection legislation in the UK. I can provide you with this legislation should you wish to see it. The data

collected in this study will be part of a doctoral research project which might also lead to a research publication. Once completed, this study will be part of the British Library and it may be published elsewhere.

### **The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into different dimensions that may have supported your process of restitution, and what it may have hindered it. How you may have engaged in such complex process how you managed, processed it; and the way you think of it at present.

An important aim for me is to bring to the English-speaking world of psychological therapies, a sense of the complexities, implications, impact and possibilities of restitution at individual, very personal, but also at collective, wider socio-political levels that converge with it – as there is a current climate that disavows the interrelations between the subjective and the collective, with a reductionist emphasis on the ‘trauma symptoms’ and its treatments.

I believe your views can contribute to a much-needed debate in the therapeutic world, which can hopefully rekindle conversations about the importance of the search for truth in any given human ordeal. In this sense, I believe this study could also contribute in expanding the understanding of what has been happening in the wider context in Argentina that has facilitated or hindered ‘restitution’ in your personal experience.

### **What will the interviews/conversations be like?**

If you decide to take part, I would like to meet with you first so that you can ask me more questions that may have arisen after the initial invitation, and to check again whether you’d like to participate or not. If then we do agree to go ahead, I’d like to invite you to either meet again or discuss again after we have spoken to either continue the interview or to go over the transcript. This will depend on how it went, how you feel, and if there are things you’d like to review, correct, or not to appear in the published study. You may have stayed thinking about something else you’d like to add, or I may have some further questions.

I leave it to you to decide which is the best place to meet. I’ll do my best to go to where you decide it’s most comfortable for you.

The information I get from this study will help hopefully, to gain more insight on the experience of restitution and the ways it has been managed at an individual and collective level. I hope it will be very useful for professionals working with complex trauma.

Although there are no guarantees, it is my hope that taking part in this study will be of use to you, too. I will like to hear your views about this as well!

There is a possibility that talking about your experience might make you feel uneasy at some point or upset. If this happens during the interviews, we can stop altogether, or you can take your time and a break before continuing. At the end of the interviews, or during them, we can talk about how you found them, and if you need any support.

### **Contact for further information**

If you would like to discuss this study further, then please do not hesitate to contact either myself or the academic supervisor.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me via email or telephone.

### **Researcher:**

Egle V. Reeves

Email: [eglereeves@gmail.com](mailto:eglereeves@gmail.com)

Telephone number: +44 (0) 778 681 5519

### **Academic Supervisor:**

Professor Vanja Orlans

Faculty Head & Programme Leader, DCPsych

Faculty of Applied Research and Clinical Practice

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*Charity No. 1050175*

*Tel: +44(0)20 8579 2505*

Email: [Vanja.Orlans@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Vanja.Orlans@metanoia.ac.uk)

If you wish to obtain a copy of the results when the study is complete, you can request it from myself, Egle V. Reeves, or you can contact Metanoia Institute/ Middlesex University who will then inform you of the results. The study has been reviewed by Metanoia and Middlesex University Research Ethics Committees, London, UK.

## INFORMACION PARA PARTICIPANTES

Fecha: 04/04/14

### ***Revisión y análisis de historias de restitución de adultos secuestrados siendo bebés o niños muy pequeños por y durante la dictadura Argentina (1976-1983).***

Me gustaría invitarte formalmente a participar en una investigación que estoy haciendo como parte de un doctorado en psicología y psicoterapia en el Instituto Metanoia y la Universidad de Middlesex, en Londres, Reino Unido.

Antes que nada, me gustaría contarte brevemente porqué estoy haciendo este estudio y en qué consistiría tu participación si aceptases colaborar en él. Estoy por supuesto a tu disposición si quisieras hacerme más preguntas.

Si decidieses participar, antes de hacer las entrevistas, completaríamos un breve formulario de consentimiento, del cual te dejaría una copia. Estos formularios son indispensables en la academia británica en cualquier estudio que involucre a personas.

Desde ya, quiero que sepas que podés cambiar de opinión en cualquier momento en relación a seguir adelante con tu participación o no, haciéndomelo saber en persona, por teléfono, o por email.

### **Confidencialidad**

Toda la información que compile en nuestras entrevistas será tratada respetando nuestro acuerdo de confidencialidad. Desde el inicio me gustaría que me digas si querés permanecer anónimo/a o no en tu contribución o si te preocupa que cuidemos la anonimidad de otros que puedan aparecer en tu relato. Esto lo podemos pensar junto/as.

Si estás de acuerdo, a las entrevistas las grabaré, para luego transcribirlas y traducirlas al inglés. Solo yo tendré acceso a estas entrevistas, y si lo deseás, las puedo borrar después de haberlas usado. También te las puedo pasar a vos si querés tenerlas.

Toda la data será guardada y analizada siguiendo la legislación que modera la 'Protección de Datos Personales' en el Reino Unido.

Una vez finalizado, este trabajo formará parte de la Biblioteca Británica (British Library) y es posible que sea publicado.

### **El propósito del estudio**

El objetivo de esta investigación es iluminar múltiples aspectos, o distintas dimensiones que apoyaron o facilitaron tu proceso de restitución, como así también, tal vez aquello que pueda haberlo obstaculizado; cómo fuiste comprometiéndote en un proceso tan

complejo (como te las arreglaste para irlo procesando, gestionando) y como lo pensáis en el presente.

Pienso que lo que me cuentes de tu experiencia puede contribuir en muchísimos aspectos a quienes estén circulando por situaciones similares, o a quienes intenten apoyarlos en el camino.

Además, tu perspectiva podría ser una óptima herramienta de reflexión para el mundo de 'las psicologías de habla inglesa', donde se sabe muy poco sobre esta parte de nuestra historia; tal vez despertando una mayor curiosidad en relación a la importancia de la búsqueda de la verdad en trabajos subjetivos tan complejos. Me interesa particularmente en este trabajo, explorar a partir de tu historia, los vericuetos del trabajo íntimo, personal y los distintos niveles sociopolíticos que convergen o se desprenden de él, o a las transformaciones que, a partir de éste, se generan en lo social –y viceversa.

En mi opinión, la predominante desestimación de las interrelaciones entre lo subjetivo y lo colectivo, y el énfasis reduccionista en lo que es 'sintomatología' y sus consecuentes 'tratamientos', contrasta enormemente con el inspirador trabajo de Abuelas. Es muy interesante en este sentido, cómo muchos de los pequeños relatos de restitución que he ido escuchando apoyan a la larga, la búsqueda de la verdad, y la restitución. ¡Ya me dirás vos que pensás sobre esto!

### **En qué consisten las entrevistas**

Si decidís participar, me gustaría encontrarte primero, para que me puedas hacer más preguntas que te hayan surgido a partir de la invitación, y ver si aun así querés seguir adelante. Si acordamos, me gustaría encontrarme con vos más de una vez, tal vez para continuar la entrevista aproximadamente una semana después. Esto sería para poder mostrarte la transcripción, para que puedas corregir algo que hayas dicho, o expandirte, aclararme algo que yo no haya entendido o haya malinterpretado, etc., o si hay algo más que te quedaste pensando. También sería una oportunidad para mí de hacerte algunas preguntas adicionales que se desprendan de la primera entrevista.

El lugar de encuentro para las entrevistas lo dejo a tu criterio. Yo te puedo encontrar en el lugar que sea más cómodo para vos, siempre que me sea posible.

Es mi deseo que estas entrevistas abran más preguntas, ayuden a complejizar reflexiones, así como abordajes, abarcando otras audiencias también. Pero lo que más deseo es que estas charlas, tu contribución a mi estudio, sea también una experiencia positiva para vos. Por eso, es importante que me hagas saber si en algún momento durante la entrevista te sentís incómodo/a con alguna pregunta, hablando sobre tus experiencias, si querés tomarte un 'recreo', o dejar una pregunta sin responder, etc.

Quiero que sepas que mis entrevistas no serán pasadas a nadie más ni usadas más que para este estudio o publicaciones que se desprendan de él.

## **Contactos**

No dudes en comunicarte conmigo o con mi supervisora académica si quisieras más información. También, si desearas saber los resultados finales de este trabajo, podrías comunicarte con el Instituto Metanoia, o por supuesto, directamente conmigo.

### **Investigadora:**

Egle V. Reeves

Email: [egleeeves@gmail.com](mailto:egleeeves@gmail.com)

Teléfono: +44 (0) 778 681 5519

### **Supervisora Académica:**

Prof. Doc. Vanja Orlans

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Teléfono: +44 (0) 208 579 2505

Este proyecto ha sido evaluado y acordado por los departamentos de Investigación Ética del Instituto Metanoia y la Universidad de Middlesex, Londres, Reino Unido.

## Appendix 4 - Consent Forms (English/Spanish)

### CONSENT FORM

Participant Identification Number:

**Title of Project:**

Stolen and Found: A Review and Analysis of Restitution Stories from abducted children during the Argentinean Dictatorship (1976- 1983)

**Name of Researcher:** Egle V. Reeves

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated .....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw any time, without giving any reason. If I choose to withdraw, I can decide what happens to any data I have provided. ☐
3. I understand that my interview will be taped and subsequently transcribed and translated into English ☐
- 4 I agree to take part in the above study ☐
5. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher



## FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

### Título del Proyecto:

Revisión y análisis de historias de restitución de adultos secuestrados siendo bebés o niños muy pequeños por y durante la dictadura argentina (1976-1983).

**Nombre de la investigadora:** Egle V. Reeves

1. Confirmo que he leído y comprendido lo que dice en la hoja de información para participantes con fecha: ..... de este proyecto y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas. ☐
2. Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que puedo salirme del compromiso establecido en cualquier momento y sin dar explicaciones si así lo deseo. Si no deseo seguir participando, puedo decidir que se hace con la información que he dado hasta ese momento. ☐
3. Entiendo que las entrevistas/charlas serán grabadas, transcritas y luego traducidas al inglés. ☐
4. Decido participar en este proyecto. ☐
4. Confirmo en que este formulario, que lleva mi nombre y firma, podrá ser revisado por un auditor ☐

_____	_____	_____
Nombre del participante	Fecha	Firma

_____	_____	_____
Investigador	Fecha	Firma

1 copia para el participante y 1 copia para la investigadora

## Appendix 5 - Informal Protocol of Interview Questions

### Possible questions

Contame de vos. Donde Empieza tu historia?

**-Tell me about you. Where does your story begin?**

Valor de la Verdad Histórica. ¿Que cambia para vos el saber? ¿Saber o no saber? ¿Vale la pena saber?

En los 90s se hablaba de que era mejor dejar a los chicos en donde estaban... no 'traumatizarlos' más con contarles la historia, que había pasado....

En estudios con niños sobrevivientes del holocausto que crecieron en familias que negaban y despreciaban sus orígenes e historia se encontró que muchas veces los niños no podían recuperar su identidad original, como que eso no había sobrevivido, su sentido de si antes de lo sucedido... En relación a identidad, lo que resalta mucho en relación a las diferentes historias de restitución que he escuchado y leído, es que resaltan algo casi axiomático: "la verdad libera, repara, saber es mejor que no..." ¿Cómo lo pensás?

**-Value of historical truth. What does it matter? To know or not to know? Does it change anything? Is it worth knowing?**

**During the 90s there was a lot of talk about how it was better to leave the children where they were... not to 'traumatize' them more with telling them about what had happened... their history...**

**In studies with child holocaust survivors raised in families that denied and despised their origins it was found that their original identity or sense of who they had been before this happened, did not survive... In what I have listened to and read so far about the experiences of identity restitution, what is highlighted... Everyone I listened said almost axiomatically that 'truth is liberating, healing... that it is better to know than not to know...' How/What do you think of it?)**

¿Cambiaron las relaciones? ¿Cómo? ...el hecho de haber cambiado tu nombre, tu historia... La familia donde creciste, la familia con la que te encontrás al descubrir tu legítima identidad e historia...

**-Did your relationships change? ...How? Having changed your name, your story... the family in which you grew-up, the one you find after learning about your legitimate identity and history...**

¿Qué te ayudo? ¿Qué no? ¿Qué pensás fue lo más positivo? ¿Lo más difícil...? ¿Tuvo algún lugar en esto un apoyo psicológico? ¿Y la Justicia?

**-What helped you? What didn't? What do you think was the most positive experience? The most difficult...? Did psychological support had any place in this for you? What about Justice?**

Participación. Como pensás el tema de la enorme participación de muchos de ustedes en sumarse a la búsqueda, en querer hablar, hacer circular las historias públicamente... ¿Como ves el impacto en lo social o de lo social?

**-Participation. How do you think the fact that so many of you are joining the search, in wanting to speak, make the stories circulate publicly...? How do you see the impact in the social or the impact of the social?**

El mundo antes y el mundo después. En lo más íntimo, ¿Cómo fuiste articulando o integrando una verdad tan compleja? ¿Cómo hiciste?

**-The world before and the world after. Personally, or privately, how did you manage to start articulating, integrating such complex truth? How did you do it?**

Contexto. ¿Cómo cambió, en qué... para vos, el contexto desde que te encontraron?

**-Context. In which way do you think the context changed since you were found?**

Restituciones complicadas. ¿Conoces a algún chico/a que no esté bien... o sea, que reniegue de haberse enterado de la verdad?

**-Complicated Restitutions. Do you know of anyone that is not OK with it...? I mean, that laments having been told the truth...?**

## Appendix 6 - Some Diary Entries

**Extract Notes from Learning Journal 2010** (dotting ideas years before starting this piece)

In class, I get hooked when thinking about research, thinking about what I might do. I think about professional identity, fragmentation (regulation, memberships, validation, titles,) How do you become autonomous, how do you integrate with ethical and political considerations about your practice when you are working for 'the system'. Professional practice and validation: Honouring heritage: what does this mean to me? It is obviously crucial, but how do I want to do this?

Grandchildren 'recuperated', restituted...

Counselling psychologists in community work, why not??? Family Support: they end up doing counselling (but badly, risking too much).

How much reductionism kills!

Adaptation (NHS), objectivation, frantic use of bullet points, targets, explicit bellicose language: subjectivities under fire...this is something from where I could draw out some interesting stuff for me to research, but what? To circumscribe, making it doable, is hard for me. I think I would much rather engage in something like this in a team.

The whole weekend I feel in a dense cloud. I feel very uncomfortable and this is quite strong. I need to think more about this.

.....

Research as crucial- I am reading about the topic and also changing around topics. Identity... Will I do it in Argentina or here? Obviously, it is connected with my own identity construction, also in regard to the 'profession'. I sent an email to Rodolfo (...) he had been so generous and supportive –knowingly or not; and so crucial in my personal and professional development. I feel I left a lot behind and I'd like to re-connect with some of it, with what is still calling to be reached, touched, re-explored.

(...at work...)

it disgusts me how it seems we have moved from a medical model to an educational one, the move is incomplete, it is just a change of masquerade, a similar epistemological view anyway: something has to be repaired or taught. It is itchy; and I find no companions or only a few. It is like workers (professionals) buy the trend without questioning their position in the bigger picture...what are we doing? *The normativist and normalising jargon is the weapon of mass destruction of subjectivities, creativity and of the possibility of a change or development.*

My own resistance: my defence against being absorbed completely by the repetitive and oppressive 'pre-signified' chain.

Not to get heritage (herencia) and inertia (inercia) confused: they are not the same. Rodolfo resonates: To play in order to dominate something of the domination...I need to focus on practices in which the experience of the singular is 'recuperated', o re- found. This is what I love about my work, this is personal and political...

The conceptual Saturdays and Sundays: I feel the dislocation in the group, especially for those who enjoyed the previous take on trauma. I feel somehow that people are robbed of the possibility of integrating something, they are trying to digest beef-sticky toffee pudding-beer ice-cream with a bowl of fries... the good old fries of Barthes being cooked in hot oil. It is somehow also funny. It has an out of reality feel about it. I like the 'dark humour' of the tutor...is it dark humour? What humour isn't 'dark' anyway?

I couldn't talk about this much, I did a bit, but this is when I feel so far away. The articles were so moving on Sat and Sunday that I couldn't really say much, it is a subject indigestible per se, but there is so much more to it when we look into anxiety, fear, defences, repetition, psychic representations, the real, language. I find in the group a resistance to deal with texts that are non-positivistic. Siegel was more accepted than Laub/Auerhan, of course we all take sides. I was deeply moved by the latter article and couldn't say much about it, rather than it really spoke to me. I would have cried and cried, that would have done me good. But crying I have to do at home, not in the group, it would not come as brutally as I feel I want it to come out... So, let's go to Siegel, Siegel is exciting. I do enjoy reading his findings...all the doctors in the family... it is also for me a bit funny, as I cannot but think that 'ok, now we can locate in the brain certain 'things', see them, grab them, so now we can accept them'. 'If it is put into a medical model, we believe it'. It is again a political, epistemological position, so hard to shake it off, but let's question them at least!!! Saturdays and Sundays are good for this. I said something about cultures, maybe to be politically correct, as sometimes I fear offending people. I know I hesitate as my words can come out irradiated with opposition and this comes from my own story; I know I tend to discredit the medical model; my dad being a well-known 'pathologist'... I spent a huge part of my life trying to be seen by him from a different angle, trying to build the different angle for him? Naïve little girl.... as I read Siegel I laugh at myself thinking 'shame papa didn't live long enough to read Siegel and Laub/Auerhan with me and then talk, engage in a debate' (as we managed to do eventually with Stevenson and Juarroz or around HIV and policies, a bit about our family history (after ten thousand years of analysis!!!)... Ha!... Before this, he would talk to me about the reproductive system of the flies, for example... or the tumours of the ovary but he didn't know the names of my friends, and I couldn't say 'hey, listen to me'.

I keep my conversation with him going, even if it is just with the part of me that still converses with my dad's absence. Obviously, I still need to tell him stuff and hear him talk to me; I am still working on this in effigy or in absentia –It is my work not his.

.....

Research is starting to flood me again; Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (and her grandchildren) had occupied my plaza.

Self-disclosure discussion: I am with this in the group, with the tutor, how much, how do I say what I am thinking? What for? Where is it going?

Found grandchildren: memory robbed: how it does come back... it emerges in the testimonies of recuperation/restitution (...) How these stories are being reconstructed 'I wasn't abandoned', 'the blue thread my mum sewed in my earlobes hoping someone would recognise me one day and find me', 'my name is Victoria', 'as a child I always had this image of a woman holding me as a baby and calling me Juan, I found out that is my name, not Fede'

I can go so many places with this... but I am also thinking I won't go there, this is enormous for me.

I can also give way to other lighter passions

7/8/13

As I am writing a draft proposal today 07/08/13, a new restitution is being publicly announced in a press conference later today in Buenos Aires. I felt excitement when I read the news, still not knowing who the child is, or how they are doing. I am 'assuming' it is good news... it is for me politically, ethically, but I cannot know what it is like for the person involved, the families involved.

8/3/14

Que miedo, emoción, la responsabilidad del deseo, la exposición de lo más íntimo de uno... en ese punto los 'entrevistados' y yo tal vez nos encontremos... mi amiga me escribe: 'Uyy mi Rubí metida en las catacumbas de la historia!!! Madre mía. Que valiente...' Le contesto sin pausa: "son los campos verdes y florcitas que salen de las catacumbas las que me conmueven tanto... como puede ser?!"

Cuando mi amiga me cuenta de su encuentro cercano con 'las catacumbas de la historia' con esta chica que le habla campante de su posición así, negando la historia, pienso que ella es la que vive en las catacumbas, 'será una de las nenas robadas?' pensé... Pensándolo ahora, en 'free-flow'... pienso que esas niñas, son niñas robadas de alguna manera... repitiendo un discurso repulsivo (debo confesar) para mi, a la vez me entristece... un discurso de repudio. Yo sé que mi reacción lleva ese gusto de repudio también.... Pero en un punto, hasta me interesa escucharlo... ¿de qué me hablan? ¿Cómo pueden negar lo que pasó? Algunos de los nietos recuperados hablan de este dilema, de cuanto les llevó pasar de ese repudio y negación, a una aceptación... ese trabajo propio, esas florcitas saliendo de las catacumbas me enorgullecen, me emocionan cada vez que las veo salir, crecer, haciéndose ver.

Last night I couldn't sleep, thinking so many things, feeling 'so small' in all this... what piece am I going to do??? Why would they want to speak with me?? In which way would I be helpful to them?? ...On the other hand, I am amazed at conversations that had opened up around me because of this, people that never spoke before, sharing this with my younger siblings... people helping, friends, friends of friends... people from here also that ask me, make me also wonder and think other things....

Yesterday Estela's daughter in law replied saying she'll help me in seeing who I could interview. That's so kind! Ay! It is happening....

18/04/15

My work in the therapy room many times brings me back to certain 'themes' that already were tickling me at the beginning of the research enquiry. But lately, especially in the work with a particular client, I am taken to the interviews, to what I've heard already coming out of their mouths.

The issue regarding time... how much time it takes to be able to see what's 'in front of you' to face things, to process, to digest, to take courage to undo what was 'done', to create the thread, our own thread... the narrative that joins up split-up pieces of ourselves, our history... it's not a blend-in, or a kind of smoothie or mash-up. It's a connection, an acknowledgement of the differences, the contradictions, the dreadful feeling with the 'special kind of happiness' (as my patient said) brought by that work.

Funnily enough, the times these issues become clear again in sessions with X, B, N, C...

X: where she could find no narrative, no memories of childhood, bouts of anxiety and auto boycott behaviours, the need to 'control' herself (extreme dieting, not looking back, no reflection, no memory). Once, she said: It takes guts to take responsibility... sometimes I guess I feel I want to be a child, let *them* pay... If I am 'naïve', I can hide in the ignorance and not have to do anything about it..." ...But the price you pay, X is huge!

B: It's like she gives me 'theory'. With her, our work was clearly geared in terms of around certain themes:

-Her need of time and space (systematically self-denied of), and also

-Her dis-jointed 'story', compartmentalised experiences, during a year+ almost a building of a language to talk about herself, to then start to find what it was that she experiences, then a story to put together... only then enough 'material' to weave the threads on... desire, proyecto identificadorio del yo... etc. Piera Auglanier...!

\*\*\*\*\* La importancia del tiempo en el trabajo terapéutico de todo tipo

\*\*\*\*\*De que saber se trata cuando hablamos de 'saber' (to know or not to know)... 'Hacerse cargo' (take the load, do what you have to do, como dicen los Argentinos)...

\*\*\*\*\*Creación de singularidad (Guattari)



3. Test II - Abuelos  
 buscando: cómo en muy  
 pequeños ~~sentir~~  
 estruct de resistencia  
 la imp de la transmisión  
 de no quedarse con lo 'oficial'  
 (la historia Oficial)

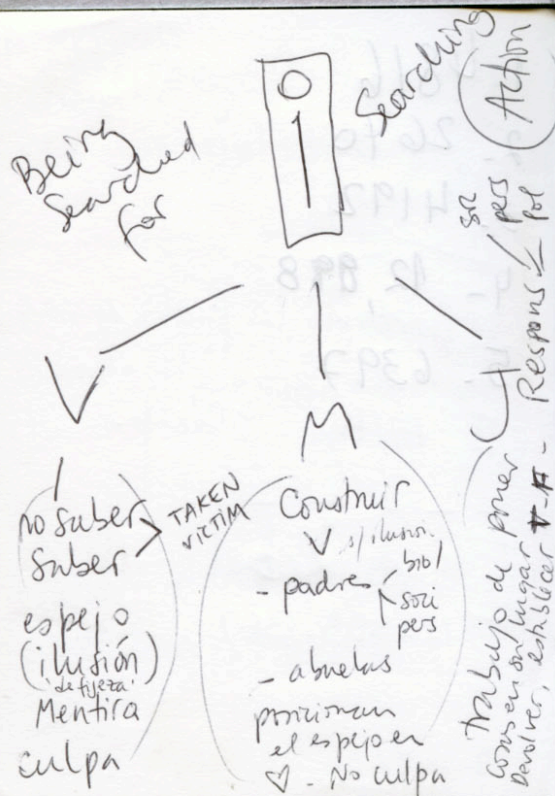
la imp. de la mirada  
 q' tiene lo traumático de  
 l'indiv. a niveles soc +  
 amplios. la implicancia  
 de lo social colectivo, constr  
 en redes de memoria

su poder creativo y reflex  
 do.

- Truman Show (identity)
- Punch

4. What are the obstacles  
 encountered in  
 using a 1 to 1 approach  
 when intervening <sup>multidisciplinary</sup> with  
 families?  
 - external  
 - internal

↓ universal  
 service +  
 targeted  
 support



Verdad  
 Memoria  
 Justicia } i 'restit' const

These variations of are  
 thus always political, and  
 when they are also funny  
 as they reflect the power  
 of the past (p. 1)

One of my learnings  
 was definitely about  
 doing research in  
 close narrative



## Notes on Heroes 2015

### Rapunzel and Harry Potter

Whilst working through the stories, I was reminded of these issues whilst working with several of my patients, but also by other stories seen/read with my daughter, for instance. Tangled, a Disney adaptation of Rapunzel (another 'stolen' child), moved me unexpectedly to tears at the point in which the stolen girl (kept hidden in an unreachable tower by the witch who pretends to be her mother, who lied to her constantly for years about the dangers of the outside world), suddenly 'realises' (thanks to the intrusion of a stranger) she might have always 'known' of her legitimate origins. This 'dangerous' stranger, entering her tower, accidentally introduces a gap in her supposedly 'safe-world' or prison. Growing aware of the imprisonment she is living in, she starts to "hear her rattles", she *remembers* what she once 'knew'. She has painted her prison's ceiling with the 'un-thought' (as she had no language then) traces of the original cradle from where she was taken: in the ceiling of her tower, she suddenly 'discovers' the repetitive patterns she herself had painted as decoration, years before in her lonesome days. These were indeed visual symbols (like a coat of arms of her legitimate family), which had hanged over her cradle before she was snatched. She realises they were also printed in the many mysterious paper lanterns she saw fly into the sky every year (on her actual birthday) and which she so much wished to know the origins of. We learn in the story that these were part of her parents' work of memory: a birthday celebration that made widely visible another year of her absence, and another year of their hope to find her. The clues of her 'freedom', of her truth, were within her but could only be found with the intrusion of something 'other', disrupting her caged position (victim), allowing her doubts to take strength. This moment of epiphany is followed again by more doubts, but these are "of a different nature..." -as Catalina said, because the disruption had taken place already.

Harry Potter, another heroic character, overcomes treachery, abuse, adversity, as he pursues truth in his long saga. Truth does 'liberate' him also, in terms of being able to face his ghosts, re-engage with his losses and in so doing, gains a better relationship with them. He was introduced to me by a young patient who had been cut-off from his own early life and origins with the premise of 'protecting him' from it. Knowledge about the illness and death of his mother when he was a child had been kept hidden from him, he had been unlawfully and neglectfully deprived of stories, of photos of her, of personal objects, even of his legitimate inheritance. The supposed protection had worked as a

shield under which those in charge of his care armoured themselves, so whenever he shyly opened-up to wanting to know, or enquire, somehow *locked in the cupboard downstairs*, like Harry Potter, he was invaded by guilt, shame and could not connect intimately with his “rattles” without falling endlessly into extreme anxiety or a bottomless hole. Excruciating psychological pain -yet an amazing resilience to hold on to life.

His hero and his demons helped me connect with his strength and his fears and with his desire to change. I could have chosen to direct the therapeutic journey to *just* ‘managing’ the anxiety and finding ways of coping -as is the guiding norm. However, how could that be fair? Even with little resources, like Leonardo’s sister regarding her origins, he and I embarked on a journey of surfing the hole sometimes, looking at it briefly, and in trying to make sense of what he did know, with what he didn’t, with his fears and hopes. Bit-by-bit, crisis after crisis, our working alliance grew stronger after each step, after each survival.

I held ‘trust’ for our journey because I listened beyond the symptoms... how crucial they had been sometimes for him, these magnificent creations! If we go tackle them and dismiss the rest, we will be doing deeper harm. I had gone through a journey (many journeys) like this myself and survived with gratitude to those that accompanied me not giving-up on me. I held ‘him’ because I had learnt to be ‘held’ in this kind of way before. Isn’t it how we all learn to do it? How we grow the desire to transmit this *hope*?

Another one.... A former ‘soft’ victim of a post/dictatorial regime elsewhere in the world, where everyday practices corralled, objectified her via her parents’ beliefs and unprocessed trauma, the small community leaving in a paranoiac atmosphere... “I found this book... what is happening!? Some people are opening up... Someone else experienced things I did, in a similar way at least... I wasn’t crazy! I am not the frog from the different hole anymore... I thought I was the only one there!”

## Victim. Responsibility and Guilt

I encounter comparable 'rattles' whilst working in the consulting room:

A patient from southern Spain, describes a well-known 'brush-under-the-carpet' attitude (of her own and of the family and community in which she grew-up) with an evocative phrase: "I sweep towards inside" (I take the shit in -instead of away). Unable yet to take responsibility for herself -or held others accountable for the violence and abuse suffered and witnessed, she takes the blame and self-sabotages, blocking memory and knowledge, depriving herself of truth.

A young woman with no early self-story available, no narrative of herself in time, no memories, tells me as I enquire about this significant amnesia:  
"I don't know if I want to know... What if something horrible did happen? Maybe I want to remain innocent... Because if I know... With knowing comes responsibility, no? Maybe I want to remain like an innocent child..." She hence tells me she knows she doesn't want to know yet, she cannot face what is unconsciously 'known'.

Another patient, a man who had been a victim of relentless control and abuse as a child, talked about his difficulties in taking responsibility for himself even now, having lived away from the abusive context for many years:  
"I'm like the bird born in captivity...  
I can see perfectly well the doors of the cage are open now, the sky calls me, but I go back...  
...two steps out, and back to the cage.  
How come it is in *there* that I feel safe?  
It is fake, I know it's fake safety, that's what kills me! Yet..."

A young woman of mixed heritage... As we start working I wonder whether there is a language impairment... so difficult it is to talk! I stay observing... helping her words to not disintegrate or mash up what she is trying to say... Does she know? she can't join-up... goes astray. For a long time, in the back of my workings with her, I'm working with this... supporting her join these... scattered words? Images?

We slowly discover the lack of stories... again, there has been no narrative in order to survive... acts out a kind of dyslexia that it is not such... we just have to be able to join the dots... re-build... slowly... steadily though. She wants to stop, she feels ok at work now. She is ok now... But no... She starts to give room to her own experiences... put names to things (feelings, events, thoughts) ... the perceived abuse is re-inscribed... She remembers! She speaks, re-visits, she finds out, she re-connects. It wasn't quite like that... But the silence and disavowal made it such. She can see it differently now. Now we find the void, a hole in her origins... she may never find out what's behind it. Always looking at the other, making sure the other can function so she can be 'safe'...

Many skeletons in the cupboard, secrets, crimes, transgenerational abuse... stolen children? Stolen heritage? Bought lives? Losses? Betrayal? Repetition...

As we progress, she is somehow learning to talk... she is talking more now, she is wondering, she is searching.

Towards the end of the work together, one day I scribble after she leaves... "I couldn't stop thinking about the grandchildren... to realise... she is finding her position... she said:

'I am always standing according to where the other stands... never chosen anything! On alert... Didn't know what I felt, what I wanted, not even where I was standing... Oh, the places one comes to occupy!'

Leonardo's 'the clarity of the simple' comes to mind...

With a hand covering her mouth she tells me about the 'gagging order... that was what I felt was demanded of me. So, so confused, those knots we talked about... I couldn't even speak! Remember?'

How powerful it is to be able to start opening-up even if just the smallest of passages, for things to start circulating... to start seeing what comes up... A symbolic niche generated in therapy... things can start to mean something else...

In one of the last sessions... she is remembering

"I was off with the fairies!

Why so long?

Needing time... I needed that time... I wanted to escape so many times... you helped me stay...  
I kind of knew you had a point.

Such relief to finally be able to speak, but also wanting to speak... there's so much still

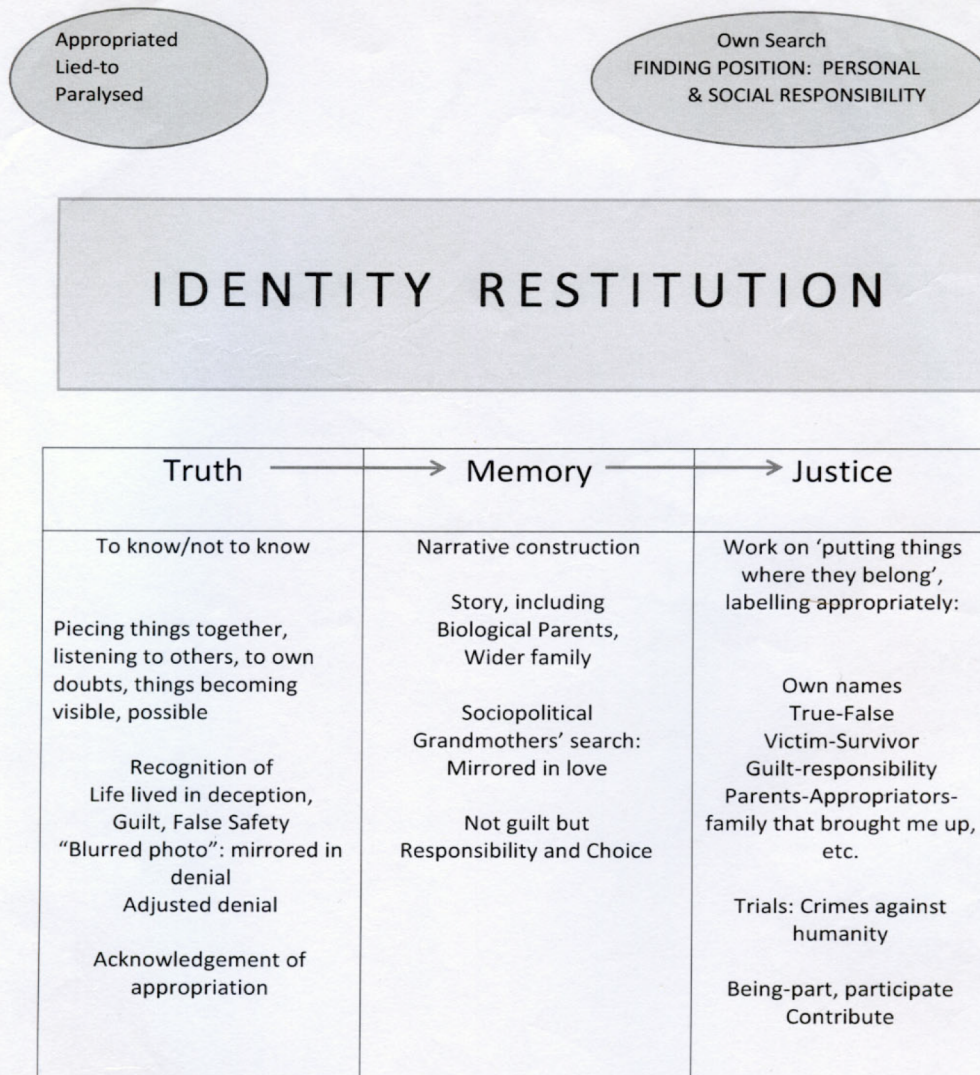
Those parts separated are coming together... I want to find out more

It's a kind of happiness, of being in the present, with all that...

Before, I think I believed that happiness was to be **as if** I was happy..."

## Appendix 7 - Conversing with/Developing the Stories

### Graph for Pillars





## Mind-maps for Themes





C	L	P	Interv.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Put things in place Do what's right</li> <li>Defending against knowing - Re-imposed</li> <li>Realising Resp, Positioning</li> <li>I choose therefore I am</li> <li>Contribute to search (finding own place)</li> <li>G - welcome accomp. listen contain</li> <li>OW 1-to-1 To be recognised for my merits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This search is based on ♥</li> <li>Delaying knowing</li> <li>Wider responsib. It's not just <del>my</del> my son's.</li> <li>Opening up, processing private w/ wider issues <small>responsibilities</small></li> <li>Finding Strength - Example (mirrors, reflections) parents, GMP.</li> <li>to understand - memory keep me in axis</li> <li>VMT proved this happened (put things in place, who did what, etc.)</li> <li>Your quest is your identity</li> <li>Finding/Becoming Compa (Action) Exposed to find out more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Real change w/ <del>State</del> support. This is not ok</li> <li>link self w/ context - open up - doubts</li> <li>Decides up env. to see if he'll be embraced</li> <li>Making visible little by little <small>defend</small></li> <li>Conflict + Need to search -</li> <li>lineage / Ideology (mirror?)</li> <li>Look for me! Finding 'one of us' "this is you"</li> <li>GMP + DDH + family</li> <li>Memory Box - Photos not enough</li> <li>Trial - Breaks silence End on it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be Recognised</li> <li>Open up Give back</li> <li>Keep Investigate.</li> <li>The world to know</li> <li>Keep memory alive who is who</li> <li>GMP</li> <li>Their claims for justice for truth</li> <li>Clarity for you</li> <li>Responsib. for yourself</li> <li>Approach</li> </ul>

The mom of the event - + then the conseq. with which to work

(TRUTH)

Unveiling the Secret - 1 moment

- 'going 'round with it' - P

finding an other / construct - an " who will be there when everything falls

- landing place

- L?

- C - Paralysis - Adapt - Approp. reinf.

Their Search to see

→ whether they ~~would~~ 'accompanied' or not.

(Justice) →

accompanied by 'forced entries'

- By sanctioning what happened as 'wrong'

- By helping w/ 'putting things in place' with ~~ad~~ appropriators.

↓

Again 'choice'

↓

Action

Work of Memory →

Not just to help in the way of unveil 'secret' but as a way of constr. a 'past lost' (one they never had) + with it, choosing identity find places where you'd 'see' yourself.



## Hand-written Notes. Themes, Resonances

L: ...in a recurring way, I'd say... periodic.

E: Yes...

L: And sometimes, realising that... I was opening up my privacy to people that... (that of course I did not know) but also people that weren't approaching the issue in the way that... they way you would want, I'd say... no?

E: mm

L: ...but instead, like...: 'Well, now this is news, we talk about it'. Or like in specific dates... I don't know... On March 24<sup>th</sup> eeeeeeevryone wants to have a...

E: ...everyone wants an article...?

L: ...their interview to fill up their space, and...

E: mm

L: ...but, I said "yes" to you in particular, because... beyond the fact of not knowing you... I saw you had this reference... I don't know if you are a friend of I.R.?

E: I am not a friend of hers, but I am friends with a friend of hers...\*

L: Sure. And I really like her. We don't see each other lots or anything, but.... In that sense it is that I 'make the mistake'... of being... trusting...

E: Sure...

L: Therefore... Besides, I think I can quickly assess ... with the first impressions...where, and how 'the hand is coming from' (which way the traffic goes)

E: mm

L: ... and with the first... chatting a bit... Anyway... the answer to the previous question of: 'why did I make the decision of giving this interview?' - Because I believe it is a valid tool for Grandmothers... It is still nowadays... it always was, and it will continue to be... I mean, to open up the issue to society... not only to Argentina

Recurring, periodic way  
not great -

Tell the story - 'open up  
my privacy, intimacy'  
for others to use for  
their own purpose (use /  
abuse)

"Popularity"  
"Everybody wants to fill up a  
space"

Trustworthy  
Reference -

"Make the mistake" of  
trusting - risking  
within a trustworthy base

Own judgement  
Trust  
communicat. w/ me.



Trusting me now.  
"I believe it is a valid tool for  
GM - open the issue up to disc.  
in general"

Arg + the rest of the world



but also to the rest of the world...

E: mm

L: And it is how... how Grandmothers started generated the tools to... to being able to find their grandchildren... This was 'how': opening the issue up.

E: Yes...

L: ...'giving' it out to be known...

E: Yes...

L: So, basically, I continue to do this because of this reason.

E: ...and you said then that at certain moments you didn't so much...? That it wasn't... that it had a cost for you as well, right?

L: Yes... yes. Well, within the whole process that w... (I was going to say 'was')... that IS...!

E: mm

L: ...restituting... (...for everyone and for me...) the identity..., you go through... through phases in which... in which you sometimes need other times... Or sometimes you need to... more even than to talk, (you need) to listen...

E: mm

L: ...and above all, as all processes are, there are constant discoveries, and... and I was feeling at a certain phase, that I was speaking, conveying a confidence around certain things that...

E: mm

L: ...that inside me... mm... they were in doubt!

E: mm

L: ...that I wasn't sure about, yet. And I felt it wasn't really sincere to be... to reflect something that actually internally was still... -it was still in process...

The desire to help  
The 'hows' - how to  
generate tools  
opening (the issue) up

Give your story

The costs  
Process  
Process was + IS  
+  
Phases,  
"Sister"

Constant discoveries  
What you convey  
is it true? I was still  
Sincere? in doubt  
("process")



know... At times, I would think: "I don't know if I want to be identified..."

E: mm

L: "...by my... by my personal life story... of how my childhood was, and that...", you know?... being greeted in the street...

E: mm

L: ... Already knowing lots of things (about me)... that I don't know about them!

E: Yes... mm... Yes...

L: It is such an exposure that... (Perhaps, if you work as a... I don't know... If you are an artist, you know 'how it is...') ('where the hand comes from...', or 'which way the traffic goes')

E: mm...

L: So for me it was a new thing... And it was mainly around this that the doubts appeared...

E: mm

L: Mainly around that... And also, due to not... At moments it's like you are opening your privacy up... When you open up your privacy... it stops just being your privacy!

E: mm

L: I mean, inevitably if you tell a secret... it stops being a secret... and

E: mm

L: ...and with your privacy is kind of the same... So, it did have a cost. Now, I realise that - differently from how I did it in the beginning, I would tell my personal story, and I would assimilate it as one story amongst... the many stories that lots of families had to go (to live) through in our country...

E: mm

L: ...during this last civilian-military dictatorship.

Be known by strangers  
that know about you but you  
don't about them  
Paralel?

Such an exposure  
(I can)

If you are an artist you  
know how it is

↓ Doubts around this

Your privacy is not  
private anymore!

'Secrets' out  
no + a secret

Tell my story not as  
one amongst many in Arg.



El tío y afloje ☺

Catalina and her husband decided return to Argentina and although "still escaping", they took refuge with her husband's family, in a different part of the country. She laughs here, noticing how her way of 'escaping' was more a call to 'being found':



"...that was obviously the place where they were going to look for us! (...) and this is where the forced entry was done"

showing

The test results "were positive"; she learnt that she was *Laura Catalina DeSanctis Ovando*. Yet, feeling pulled by her feelings towards her appropriators, she refused to meet her biological family then.

"...it was all like quite a heavy chaos... for a few years..."

"... (the appropriators) were summoned for a legal inquiry and they both became psychiatrically unwell and ended-up hospitalised"

→ relief  
↓  
someone  
take  
respons.  
justice  
★

Catalina pauses here, returning to the start of our conversation when I asked her how it was for her "to find out"

2 moments  
2 'forces'  
2 identities  
2 'forces'  
help her to take

"So, in reality, the two moments are: in '98 when I find out, and then in 2008 when I get the results"

With the results, she is able to take some distance "to sort things out". Catalina feels "there's still lots to work on" but "they seem trivialities" compared to these initial ordeals.

"I couldn't -so to speak, move ahead with my history, and acknowledge it... and see what I wanted and needed... ...Until I managed to start detaching myself, sorting things out... and I don't know... Prioritising myself... and saying: 'Enough... I do not take more responsibility (for them)' -while trying not to allow the guilt to consume me"

this helped

Taking distance - Perspective? , sorting things out

Being "towards-inside", embracing her own search

Feeling "super fragile", Catalina "totally isolated" herself after the results. Gradually, with her husband's support and encouragement Catalina allowed herself to

"meeting my family..., and the photos, and my 'falling-in-love' with my parents..."



What helped + what didn't  
interlinked

pg 9

- to be able to untangle off the guilt
- take the distance you need to see

take respons. "I need to do these things..." observing herself  
knowledge put things in their place

- ≠ of living in a "cloud of farts" denying knowing. how to still have a w/ appropriators?

things started to "sink in" little by little.

"I was very taken... so I couldn't take courage"  
Terror

- to listen, open up, think to start wearing in her position finding "the right place for things"

listen to things that 'make a noise',

→ distance (space) to see, think re-position, soften-up + ask herself "what does this mean to me?"

↓ courage to think about the app.'s respons on what happened to her mum.

↓ choosing - taking position  
getting angry  
uncomfortable to be called "the daughter of" or call them "parents"

hurts but  
§13 it facilitated my process

- De-victimiz - taking action/part claimant in the cause.

Not a passive victim...

\* Restitution as process

pg 14

I choose, therefore I am.  
Separate the waters → escape survival

pg 14

Nothing to forgive, no one's said sorry.  
Working on "her own search"

• Grandmothers

like a flea, containment, self- understanding  
- their position facilitates their process → they don't place guilt on us  
no demand.

• PSA separates area.  
Contain as instit.

How to contribute  
Contribution

↓ Acknowledg // is not celebrity.  
public realm imp - position: dissemination, campaign, the message.  
I want to contribute...

word +  
The place of the survivor, it's relevance. pg 19 (21-22 2nd interv.)

The ≠ is in the position you take  
(not to occupy the space of 'the m. of...')

• Being interviewed.

1 to 1 is +, better

it helps process because otherwise it's all muddled up (pg 20)

Surreal - that what happened really happened



Leonardo

Why meet w/ me?  
(to speak) - to tell the

Story

↓ Valid ~~ford~~ for GPM  
What they've done for 30 yrs  
↓ trust in where I came from  
(from trusted, respected other)  
open-up the issue in Arg +  
allowed  
"giving it out" to be acknowledged

Need to listen + process before  
exposing too widely.

De hardening integrating the  
private with wider issues  
(as part of).

process is still - in present  
time even if heart. his  
identity 10 years ago

Building flesh around  
an issue, gaining respect.  
• pennies dropped

→ Conversation helps to process  
(a warm face-to-face) or  
talks with in at school -  
gathering perspective, placing  
private issues as part of whole.  
↓ his in was 8 - he had to  
restitute his i, too!

YH's bigger than him  
→ this helped

GPM - this context helped  
being around other in that've  
gone through same situation,  
similar or  $\neq$  phases + the  
grandmothers - you're their  
grandchild

for him, in 2005 the issue  
was "flourishing" in society  
clear symbols  
strong messages

Pilars  $\leftarrow \begin{matrix} V \\ J \\ M \end{matrix} \right\}$  guaranteeing that  
certain things won't  
be put into question  
platform from where to  
continue

How to go about knowing.

Info in media still limited  
so imp. to go to open trials  
+ hear for yourself.

↓ IMP that people get sensitised  
+ "become shuddered"

↓ I feel acknowledge

→ following their lead in telling  
their stories links with  
"testimony" - first hand accounts  
+ the building of "truth"  
(pg 8) for knowing, underst,  
ack + the SEARCH

"The quest is itself is  
its to live in truth"  
take responsib. to what  
happens to you → that's it.

↓ here you build your i

Try to avoid knowing, not  
hearing the noises, auto coming  
yourself - you mustn't stay  
there long.

↓ stayed like that for years

Then, it was not just about me



Embraced - part of smth. bigger

- Official "this is not ok" recognition

- Reestablish of justice

Obstáculos - Fear Guilt, Silence  
Hidden

- Your own need to search  
You have to investigate, too.

- Lineage - values - nest,  
holding place

- Bigger-than-me ← <sup>hijo (L)</sup> families (P)  
One of us <sub>One of them.</sub> What's right (C)

- Importance of Being looked-for  
(searched)  
Not abandoned

Mirror: 'They could see their  
brother - my father - in me

Amigos - c/se que del colectivo  
reunión celebración  
no sé!!

Nietos

Archive: 'finding yourself'  
"Falsified identity, you can't  
really recognise yourself  
You have nowhere to look at you  
in

The attempt was to break the lineage, the aim  
was that they wouldn't be like me (p.85)

Masks-off

25

100  
aprox  
for last)

The respect shown for his times,  
his will helped him take up  
position -

He slept better!

Family that raised him: <sup>for</sup>  
excuses → P believes they relied  
on the part of silence to avoid  
legal conseq of their action.

Archive box

↓ money - All these  
there, writing ~~being~~ (cómo él,  
aprovechando ser encontrado?)

↓ Piecing things together  
Scattered elements, photos,  
interviews, documents.

Part of maternal line not met  
yet, in Tucuman - far but also  
P feels misrecognised

because of their pol. alignment  
"his mother 'didn't die  
in a car accident!'"

Facebook ↓ Misrecognised, not recognised  
reproduces the will of those who  
did this!

(Yo: v. careful w/ each thing  
where do things go? what's their  
place) -

The Political means more, it  
makes family - it helps P  
feel whether the other is or not  
"one of us".

Details of what is being found  
out now, preparing for the  
trial -

The role of the godfather  
becoming clearer but things need  
to be investigated, as silence  
still reigns.



void - where was him? For the family that raised he only exists from the time they made contact w/ him - but this is ~~impossible~~ after he was 'taken' from his parents.

P. has been to trials to "acclimate himself" to what's coming "His horrible".

Trial will define things + clearly.

→ I ask him about <sup>how</sup> parents met (reconst. his story).

Uncle remembers most - he tells me

To listen helps -

↓ It helped him process.

Others have been caught by surprise (p 14)

Truth - i

Espino

"You can never really recognize yourself. You have nowhere to look (at) yourself into"

to find out (pg 15-16)

→ violent to find out intentionality.

"Once you realize this (like Catilina)

"you can start taking respons. for your own history."

Trial demonstr. it.

Conseq. of impunity - (16)  
silence perpetrates their goal

Why it took him 10 years?

Guilt

↓ Campanas thought having this in mind. legacy of doubt

It's their identity being falsified also

We may tend to asssoc. 'listening', watching as passive verbs - but are they?

They seem here to be active - what you can start to do ...  
how does come about  
how do we start to listen?

¿hacer como 1 esquema?

to listen

to watch/see

open up ... etc

from isolation to integration

↓ in 'being part' you can start singularising in isolation your story is "blurred"



- that R
- 1) <sup>not moment</sup> *atrocencia* la *boleada*, cloud of facts, etc  
Not to know  $\approx$  self-indulgence
  - 2) Acknowledg/ + opening up - Searching - re-sliding for yourself - taking respons - Separating / Naming
  - 3) Choice - Positioning - Participating -  
↓ identif. w/ 'struggle' w/ gr's search + parents 'ideals'

they were the parents' ideals (desire) anyway!

Reflection points? *Cómo ponerlo?*  
Implications for therapy? (a)

- Ver
- Immanence - Interdisc talk
- Intimacy - safe space
- "Neutrality" can be problematic
- *Interdisc* Piano-piano se va lontano

↓ *lugar de enmarcar, ver, etc. lugar desde donde tomar los datos, la fuerza*  
Ejemplo en psi, too.

- *Crimen* against humanity / acknowledge!

• Reflections on Research Process as whole  
- final thoughts -

Overriding sense that the role of 'resistant' parallels therapy - as if I see it (even when not the 3 bad therapy) - the memory work, Narrative wk, working through - other. *After* holding -



when I start to know  
also  
Resistance to knowing — Conflict triggers w/ people you love  
the family that raised you  
Guilt eaten away by it  
Defending like a cat put upside down  
Struggling, unbearable! Pain.

(+) → Curiosity awoken - that's when it was his need  
to SEARCH Awakening.  
(engages in the work) - take charge (C)  
resp.  
live in truth (L)

own  
Search  
Resp.  
↓ somopolit. awakening started linking him  
w/ his pos. det. parents. positively.  
supported by this holding presence he could  
embark on it. — lost parents — that could be  
looking for him

(Time) little by little  
to (create) a safety net, a landing place.  
(locate)

(+) → asking him for that extra-push  
(like in therapy you want people to call you, to  
attend, to show they want to come).  
like C - asking for approp. to take respons  
+ waiting yet she wasn't doing it  
herself.

Finding out → being "found".

He didn't somehow trust his environment (family, close people) to support him as he found those messages. So he kept silent but active (closed ~~down~~ but opening to smeth. he kept secret) → paved to a last pers. of "come out" as gays let's say in homophobic societies.

Also  
fear of Rotten everything up.  
It was going to be a mess, Pick a fight

(-) Context  
Impunity, not to be touched, judged Silence  
"society gave them that" Scared of Fear  
Forgiveness laws, pardons. speaking, rememb.  
(Society went back words) → brush under the carpet  
(Patri "me barro p'dentro"). \*

(+) Context  
(2003 onwards)  
Policy of HRR linked w/ the dictatorship  
was crucial - reestablishment of justice  
acknowledgement of what has been denied

visibility → remember - memory, talk  
"no longer prisoners of that fear"

Say  
Talk  
Ask

re-construct history - indiv. stories  
little by little.



Conclusión ¿Qué ayudo? - Encuentros - eventos

• C → se 'encuentra' con el tv clip  
y después con forced entry + DNA  
results.

• L → con <sup>la fuerza de</sup> su propia voz <sup>callada</sup> en la dramatiz.  
q una amiga le resalta y 'agita'

• P → Cicia política y social. De alguna  
manera el también 'se encuentra  
allí', aunque no se "encuentre" en el  
= sentido ~~que~~ <sup>que</sup> imaginado.

• Yo → con raw feelings of awe + terror  
the emotion of the quality of the  
search + the ins stories  
The terror of loss.

→ I want to know!

→ Mita → Yo quiero buscarlos, too!

↓  
Contando la historia.

Escuchar, Ver, Hablar - Compartir

Estar acompañado

Ir armando la historia y 'eligiendo'  
a posición.

## Appendix 8 - Online Material in English

- a) Public TV programme. Chapter about Catalina with English subtitles. Canal Encuentro, “*Aca Estamos*” (*Here We Are*) TV series. In Grandmothers’ website

<https://www.abuelas.org.ar/video-galeria/acl-estamos-chapter-english-subtitles-269>

(Retrieved 03.02.18).

- b) Video campaign for Grandmothers I saw with my child

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRgY1XIVGuA> (Retrieved 15.04.12)

### Other Resources of Interest:

- **BBC Radio 4 Programme ‘Pact of Silence’**

Written and directed by Penny Woolcock ; Produced by Natasha Dack; A Tigerly production for BBC Radio 4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0639vpq> (Retrieved on 03/03/18).

- **BBC Our World. Argentina - Who Am I?**

Sue Lloyd Roberts reports on the search for the children of the victims of Argentina's "dirty war" of the 1970's and 1980's. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=143\\_dvp6mwQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=143_dvp6mwQ)  
Published on Apr 10, 2013 (Retrieved 14.04.17)

- **Who Am I? A film by Estela Bravo**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYzVYUp52I0> (Retrieved 11.02.15)

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