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The sword, the pen, and the uterus: multidirectional feminist culture and the Argentine dictatorship of 1976–1983

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ABSTRACT

During the period 1982–1999, a cohort of feminist cultural activists highlighted parallels between the political, gendered, racial, and linguistic frameworks used to justify state violence in Argentina of 1976–1983 and in Germany of 1933–1945. Their cultural works indicate the transnational aspects of Argentina’s failures of modernity, and the parallel responsibilities to trauma memory assumed by women and Jews as marginalized members of society, who consequently emerge as both local and transnational agents of democratization. A number of scholars have noted Argentine writers’ and playwrights’ adoption of Holocaust cultural constructs to represent the 1976–1983 dictatorship, yet these cultural contributions have not yet been studied from the combined perspectives of post-Holocaust and post-dictatorship feminist scholarship. By providing a gendered analysis of “Holocaust multidirectionality” within a global arena of “postmemory,” this article shows the convergence of the two terms in the cultural production of women who remember, represent, and transmit the experience and meaning of the Argentine military dictatorship.

Introduction

During the military’s self-proclaimed Proceso de reorganización nacional (1976–1983), the Argentine government attempted to curb political dissent through the abduction, torture, and disappearance of thousands—estimates range between 9000 and 30,000—of its own citizens. In this act of “state preservation,” the military targeted Jews disproportionately to the general population (Elkin 1985; Finchelstein 2014; Tarica 2012), adopted Nazi tactics to torture its own citizens (Newton 1996; Feitlowitz 1998), perpetrated sexual violence against female victims (Kantaris 1995; Taylor 1997), and ridiculed women who protested the abduction of their family members (Bouvard 1994; Castillo 1992; Kaminsky 1993). Yet, during the dictatorship and its aftermath, a cohort of women adamantly presented their cultural contributions precisely as women and as Jews living in the post-Holocaust generation, as salient to the nation’s possibility of achieving democracy, justice, and healing in post-dictatorship Argentina.

Like the Holocaust, the period of terror in Argentina involved state-sanctioned and socially condoned violence toward civilians defined as traitorous and treacherous to a national
identity defined explicitly in confrontation to heterogeneous political, religious, or sexual elements.\textsuperscript{3} The culture identified in this study is noteworthy not only for its feminist approach to countering the violence of the dictatorship, but also for its manifested solidarity with Holocaust memory in terms of achieving local justice. By uniting fields of Memory Politics born of Holocaust Studies, namely those of “postmemory” and “multidirectional memory” as enunciated by Marianne Hirsch and Michael Rothberg respectively, this article elucidates the connections between Argentine feminist cultural activism, familial and societal trauma memory, and mnemonic nodes of solidarity between local realities and global instances of genocide.

Reflecting the connections between the political, religious, and gendered frameworks that in both Nazi Germany (1933–1945) and Argentina of 1976–1983 justified societal abandonment of human rights and inclusive democracy, a corpus of multidirectional feminist cultural production defied the ensuing impunity for the crimes of the Argentine dictatorship as unprecedented episodes of anti-Semitic violence in Latin America unfolded in Argentina during the last decade of the twentieth century. While a number of scholars have noted Argentine writers’ and playwrights’ adoption of Holocaust cultural constructs to represent the dictatorship period of Argentine history (Evangelista 1998; Levine 2008; Ros 2012), the isolated examples have not yet been subjected to a comprehensive study based in the combined fields of post-Holocaust and post-dictatorship feminist scholarship, nor has a cohort of such writers been identified and their works examined as a cultural corpus within these historical parameters. To this end, the present article focuses on Aída Bortnik’s subversive journalism published in \textit{Hum*} (1982–1983), Diana Raznovich’s play \textit{Lost Belongings} (1988), Manuela Fingueret’s novel \textit{Daughter of Silence} (1999), and French Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo’s poem “Madwomen of May” (1985). In order to define multidirectional feminist postmemory, I first introduce principal scholarship on post-Holocaust and post-dictatorship feminist cultural production in order to define a composite term, feminist multidirectional postmemory, which I then apply to the original corpus identified.

\textbf{Holocaust and Proceso: synergies and affinities}

Recent Latin American historical scholarship not only demonstrates a specific targeting of both Jews and women during the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976–1983, but has shown that the Argentine military government adopted Nazi fascist ideologies as a model for modern statehood.\textsuperscript{4} Feminist Latin American scholar Francine Masiello (1992) identifies the long-standing Argentine binary environment in which fascism, misogyny, and anti-Semitism eventually flourished during the dictatorship as one that relied on the fragmentation of society since independence, whereby concepts of center and margins had been consistently opposed and nationalist programs of collectivizing identity had long been presented as the fight against barbarism by civilization. Moreover, Masiello demonstrates that gender, as a cultural construct and subject, was a pervasive tool of bifurcation and polarization, instrumental in producing the binary paradigms of nationhood that have prevailed throughout modern Argentine history. More recently, Federico Finchelstein has identified Argentine fascism as an imported model with marked local qualities, arguing that “the country’s fascist ideological tradition, with a unique Latin American combination of political violence and state repression, suited its peculiar trajectory from liberalism to illiberal populism, dictatorship, and war, with the legacies outlasting any regime” (2014, 12).\textsuperscript{5} Also addressing the
historical connections between Nazi Germany and the Argentine Proceso, including methods of societal fragmentation and governmental justifications for human rights abuses, Diana Taylor (1997, 38) shows that during the Proceso, Argentina’s definition of nationalism was largely influenced by German National Socialist ideas of purity, truth, and grandeur, and evidenced as a violent, homophobic, and anti-feminist as well as anti-Semitic war on so-called subversives.

While Argentine Jews were not official enemies of the state, as they were under Nazi Germany, they were abducted in higher percentages relative to their makeup of society—comprising 5–13% of the victims when they made up only 1% of the population—and Nazi images, language, and methods of physical abuse were used purposefully on Jewish victims during the dictatorship to doubly punish them (Feitlowitz 1998; Finchelstein 2014; Kaminsky 2008; Tarica 2012; Taylor 1997). While to some degree their higher abduction rate reflected that Jews figured more prominently in “subversive” categories such as students, intellectuals, activists, psychologists, and artists, once detained, Jews were given “special treatment” which included torture sessions with portraits of Hitler on the wall, swastikas carved into their bodies, and jeering references to the gas chambers and to Auschwitz; moreover, Jews suffered a greater likelihood of being killed once abducted (Feitlowitz 1998, 106; Tarica 2012, 99). At the same time, women under the Argentine dictatorship suffered for their accused political transgressions as sexual targets through sexual assault, sexual mutilation, and sexual humiliation. Diana Taylor painstakingly elucidates how abducted women were routinely raped, subjected to beatings and gunshots to their breasts, wombs, and vaginas, and women in concentration camps were forced to parade naked in front of the guards; likewise, Kantaris reports on competitions among military officers over abducting the prettiest victims who would then be subjected to sexual assault (Taylor 1997, 84; Kantaris 1995, 17). Thus, as racism and sexism were intertwined in Nazi Germany “when anti-feminism served as a non-lethal variant of anti-Semitism” (Grunberger 1995, 253; Kaplan 1998), so too in Argentina “the ‘internal’ enemy was victimized by a military that conceptualized state justice in terms of sexual domination” (Kantaris 1995, 17).

Feminist Jewish culture as anti-dictatorship and post-dictatorship activism thereby emerges as uniquely equipped to “propose virtual geographies of emancipation” and to end Argentina’s ongoing manifestations of what Laurence Whitehead coined “modern mausoleums” in the Americas (Cubilé 2005, 70; Roniger and Herzog 2000, 6; Sierra 2012, 6; Whitehead [2006] 2010). The solution to Argentina’s quest for modern-statehood, in Masiello’s mind, lay not in engaging the terms of post-colonial oppression, but rather in advancing a new feminist paradigm:

a third position … located neither in the dwellings of the civilized nor in the fields of the barbaric: a merger of the two is pronounced in the precepts of women writers who undermine the binary logic and revalorize the image that proclaimed Argentina’s desire to enter modernity. (Masiello 1992, 9–10)

Furthering Masiello’s foundational argument to Latin American feminist scholarship, Debra Castillo reflects about the post-dictatorship period: “to allow for a woman’s independence or self-possession, would require the complete recalculation of an entire economic and philosophical system” that allowed or justified female victimization in the first place (Castillo 1992, 10). In other words, by repossessing gender, which had served as a constant tool of oppression in national discourse, feminist culture produced in opposition to the dictatorship and its amnesiac aftermath challenged not only long-standing Latin American gender
paradigms, it contained the means to debunk the very narratives of fragmented modernities that had long-crafted the Argentine nation-state. The incomplete historical, cultural, and legal reckoning following the Argentine Proceso therefore not only rendered feminist participation in trauma testimony an opportunity to defy nationalistic plans that aimed to exclude and silence their perspectives during this specific period of violence, but rendered feminist voices principal roles in testifying to a limited democracy and fragmented civil society in a nation long defined in terms that posited America vis-à-vis Europe, male as opposed to female, and Christian rather than Jewish.

Postmemory and multidirectional memory

Feminist activists working to combat the humanitarian and legal crimes of Proceso Argentina united their local plight to an ongoing global proliferation of post-Holocaust memory and representation. In so doing, Argentine feminists contributed to global ongoing cultural, ethical, and scholarly discussions regarding the representation and transmission of the Holocaust experience, a dilemma famously enunciated in Theodor Adorno’s 1951 oft-cited phrase regarding the barbarity of producing art after Auschwitz. Seeking to understand the ongoing implications of Holocaust representation and the tools for cultural transmission in the postgenerations, Mary Jacobus argues for the validity of transferred trauma from a survivor of trauma to a witness from a next generation. In a process she defines dialectically, Jacobus argues that compassion for “the other” is expressed through a dynamic between the individual witness or interpreter of the past (author) and the contemporary collective public (reader). Evidencing a psychological transfer experienced by the receptive audience, the trauma becomes re-authenticated: “reading resembles the après coup of trauma, where the ‘something’ that has already happened also acquires meaning after the fact, in the same double movement that problematizes both temporality and the event when it comes to narrating trauma” (Jacobus 1999, 125). In this exchange between author and reader, the very act of reading indicates the public’s ongoing “commitment to otherness” which, rather than reveal a transgression toward the original (and hence, “authentic”) lived experience, represents a transfer of knowledge that is psychologically necessary both for the reader and author (1999, 13). Applied to the realm of theater, Yasco Horsman advocates for the moral imperative of ongoing representation for a contemporary audience, whereby the linguistic subversion that accompanied the process of genocide is laid bare, and the present-day public is asked to engage personally over the past: “Literary theater[s] of justice [are ones] in which the past can be staged, mourned, and eventually, worked through, [providing] an infinite cry for justice … address[ing] us as citizens—as members of a community” (Horsman 2011, 4). The audience is thus addressed as a collective and contemporary post-Holocaust public in need of a forum for ongoing “public psychoanalysis” (Hilberg 1996; Schumacher 1998), a necessary participation owed not only to the traumatic past, but to an always tenuous present endowed with a responsibility to safeguard language against abductions that could again lead to societal fragmentation. The present audience is this endowed by post-Holocaust scholars with an ongoing responsibility for their own linguistic covenants precisely as members of a post-Holocaust generation.

Marianne Hirsch and Michael Rothberg further these theoretical foundations of post-Holocaust Studies, with important ramifications for post-Proceso scholarship and the field of Memory Politics more widely. Hirsch coined the term “postmemory” to encompass the
intergenerational cultural transmission of Holocaust trauma whereby “personal/familial/generational” ownership and guardianship of trauma become collectivized and transmitted beyond the population of origin (Hirsch 2008, 104). Hirsch specifically notes post-dictatorship Argentina as an additional theater for postmemory as a form of cultural activism (2008, 107). Susana Kaiser (2002, 2005) then widens the field of postmemory to include her study on escraches, a form of political protest dedicated to contesting continued impunity for perpetrators of the dictatorship’s crimes. By engaging in “memory battles” over the public’s collective history of the dictatorship period within the post-Holocaust generation, Kaiser actively combats what she calls “tolerance for gross criminality,” which she defines as “the legalization of impunity” (Kaiser 2002, 502). The ongoing governmental policies of complicity Kaiser contests include Raúl Alfonsín’s Ley de Punto Final (1986), which applied the statute of limitations to the prosecution of torturers and assassins, and the Ley de Obediencia Debida (1987), which acquitted lower ranking officers on the bases that they were obeying orders (even after the Nuremberg Trials refused defenses of accused Nazis based on superior orders; Marrus 1997), during the first democratically elected government after the fall of dictatorship.

At the same time, Michael Rothberg’s scholarship engages in a transnational study of Memory Politics in a post-colonial context of multiplying genocides, defining “multidirectional memory” and then “transnational memory” as the interplay between the local and the global in constructing trauma memory (Rothberg 2009, 2014). Enunciating a “constellation approach,” Rothberg acknowledges the danger of “a competition of victimhood”—defined as the competition that can ensue when comparing two periods or categories of humanitarian catastrophe; in his case, colonial or slavery conditions to the Holocaust. Not concerned as much with the semantics of authentic transfer of memory between generations, as are Hirsch and those in her camp, Rothberg’s focus is the salience of connected memories of trauma across national and geographic boundaries. Rothberg therefore focuses on intercultural visions of justice as ones that connect different epochs and loci of violence in order to further new enunciations of solidarity in the aftermath of multiple instances of trauma, claiming that “the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories” (2009, 6). Advocating for multiregional conversations that address commonalities, intersections, and divergences in instances of state violence against targeted civilian “others,” Rothberg urges the creation of what political scientist Nancy Fraser calls “the bases for a meta-political democracy,” one which crosses boundaries of space and power constructs in order to more fully frame the local present (Rothberg 2009; Fraser 2005).

If the surviving generation of the Holocaust was obligated to engage the concurrent impossibility of representing the unspeakable and the contesting moral imperative to transmit testimony, Rothberg and Hirsch address the broader implications of representing and transmitting trauma memories in the context of growing generations of removal from the original testifiers of trauma and multiplying global instances of humanity’s downfall. Therefore further “multidirectional postmemory” as a concept that not only reflects vertical (across generations) transmission of trauma memory, but also lateral (across geographic boundaries) comparisons, which together do not diminish discrete and local realities of violence, but rather reveal layered histories of both memory and experience. Furthermore, if in Argentina, as in Germany, national instances of trauma have been orchestrated in gendered terms and enunciated in anti-Semitic torture methods dependent on a retained Holocaust memory, feminist Jewish culture emerges as uniquely equipped to combat failed
systems of Latin American modernity through a strand of cultural activism defined as “feminist multidirectional postmemory.”

Cultural productions of feminist multidirectional postmemory created after 1992 gain an additional contemporary salience in Argentina, due to the terrorist attacks on the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and the Asociación Mutual Argentina Israelita (AMIA) Jewish community center of Buenos Aires in 1994, which occurred during Carlos Menem’s presidency. These attacks of the 1990s, widely recognized as the worst acts of terrorism on Jewish sites to have ever been committed in the Americas, were likely perpetrated with government knowledge, and after two decades the perpetrators have yet to be caught, lacking a concerted effort by the state to persecute and bring the perpetrators to justice (Filkins 2015). Thus, the works in the following represent instances of Argentine postmemory in that they directly advocate for a transgenerational transmission of dictatorship memory; they are multidirectional for engaging the trauma of the Proceso in Holocaust terms, recalling as much the real historic ties between Nazi Germany and Argentina and speaking to local instances of anti-Semitism; and they are feminist, because they suggest that the targeting of women as specific recipients of violence during the Proceso illustrates the binary language used by the state to fragment and oppress the population at large, thereby preventing Argentina’s modernization as a truly democratic nation-state.

**Applied: cultural works**

As Masiello indicated, the participation of feminist voices in Latin America’s public spheres has undermined dichotomous—and hence anti-democratic—social, cultural, and political constructs since the independence period. Likewise, post-Holocaust feminist cultural activists contested the violence of the Proceso as a failure of democracy, which was abetted by the failure of public space to serve as a locus of plurality in the region (Liwerant 2008). Noting that Latin American failures of freedom, equality, individual agency, and critical thought have long occurred alongside a gendered definition of society, Southern Cone scholar Ana Ros furthers:

> The post-dictatorship generation’s explorations of the margins are part of a distinct tendency to unsettle the predominance of that which is labeled public, collective, and rational over the purportedly private, individual and emotional. Among other things, these dichotomies make it difficult to expand the circle of individuals and groups concerned with the past. (Ros 2012, 204)

Jews and women thereby emerge not only as particular victims of the dictatorship; rather, as doubly marginalized citizens, the feminist multidirectional postmemory they create bares a unique witness to Argentina’s modern failings within a global and transgenerational context. Spanning almost a generation, the cohort of cultural activists presently studied—comprised of journalists, playwrights, fiction authors, and poets—countered the Proceso narratives of violence and subsequent governmental policies of pardon and silence. The following analysis of Diana Raznovich’s play *Lost Belongings* (1988) and Manuela Fingueret’s novel *Daughter of Silence* (1999) will be presented as culturally and historically pursuant to three of Aida Bortnik’s cuentitos or short stories published during the last two years of the dictatorship in the satirical journal *Hum*, titled “Dieciocho años” (1982), “Hagamos una lista” (1983a), and “Julio Montaña Dorada” (1983b). The Argentine works will be followed by an analysis of Charlotte Delbo’s poem “Madwomen of May” (1985), where the French artist and
political activist (who became a globally renowned Holocaust survivor) engages in reciprocal feminist multidirectional postmemory with the silenced women of Argentina.

Holocaust scholars such as Estelle Tarica (2012), Marguerite Feitlowitz (1998), David Sheinin (2005), and Daniel Feierstein (2007) have indicated the prevalence of Holocaust discourse that emerged during and after the Proceso to speak of the military dictatorship, while Annette Levine (2008), Liria Evangelista (1998), and Ana Ros (2012) have noted Holocaust themes in feminist cultural enunciations of public mourning and justice-seeking after the Argentine dictatorship. Nonetheless, these analyses stop notably short of acknowledging the wider historical significance of the transnational conversation effected by women, a conversation that importantly connects Jews and women survivors of state trauma struggling to reclaim their own humanity as they seek to rebuild the very societies that allowed their victimization. The current analysis demonstrates that the combined victimization of women and of Jews during the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976–1983 produced a distinct corpus of feminist multidirectional postmemory, rendering in turn a distinctive role for Latin American women and for post-Holocaust Jewish memory in processes of post-dictatorship reconciliation.

Aída Bortnik sets the stage

In A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture, Marguerite Feitlowitz (1998) demonstrates that the Argentine military government enunciated a veritable covenant with its civilian population during the dictatorship by means of a thorough manipulation of language and national imagery, which it disseminated through media and other politicized cultural outlets. Such a manipulation of language involved as much distortion as stripping of meaning, which was vital to creating a society of enablers and bystanders needed to effect the abduction, torture, and murder of thousands of its own citizens. In over 30 cuentitos (short stories) published between 1981 and 1983 in the satirical journal Humor Registrado, Aída Bortnik (1938–2013) intuited this covenant to which she and so many others never agreed, and offered a counter-narrative to the government’s demands for societal complicity and silence in the face of terror and democratic fragmentation. Indeed, at a time of widespread governmental blacklistings, Aída Bortnik returned from self-exile in Spain in 1979 to join an existing cadre of intellectuals, artists, playwrights, and journalists seeking to counter the official narrative of the Proceso through activist theater (Teatro Abierto) and satirical journalism (Humor). Both forms of cultural activism were a risky business. The journal had editions confiscated and, on occasion, burned; the editorial offices were constantly monitored and policed; and after particularly inflammatory editions were released, editors and contributors reportedly stayed in hotels for days out of fear of being abducted by the secret police (Levine 2008, 34). Yet each of Bortnik’s 30 cuentitos was published accompanied by her signature and semblance, which meant assuming personal risk in a time of ongoing danger of “disappearance” for dissenters (Levine 2008, 31 and 47). Within this context, “Dieciocho años” (1982), “Hagamos una lista” (1983), and “Julio Montaña Dorada” (1983) adopted Holocaust imagery in the final years of the dictatorship, to subvert the established state narrative. In so doing, Bortnik was not alone. As Estelle Tarica notes, comparisons between the Argentine military’s repression and Nazi state terror were present during the Proceso in the clandestine, non-Jewish press (Tarica 2012, 89). Yet Bortnik’s works were notable in that they not only connected the repression of democracy and the institution of terror
within dictatorship Argentina and Nazi Germany, they also adopted a gendered perspective and pointedly drew on post-Holocaust collective cultural memory (defined by Hirsch as postmemory) to undermine the official language enunciated by the anti-Semitic and misogynistic military government of her own day.

“Dieciocho años,” the first example taken from Hum®, provides a critique of the Malvinas War—a war declared by Argentina on Britain to reclaim the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, and the South Sandwich Islands, on 2 and 3 April 1982. The short conflict resulted in military failure abroad and highlighted the government’s flailing national support at home. Writing in July of that same year, Bortnik provides a counter-image to the glorified and brave soldier fighting a necessary war with conviction. Specifically, a feminine voice as author and narrative conscience, in the form of a butterfly, serves as a soldier’s fleeting consolation, an ethereal arbiter of life and death, right and wrong:

She wasn’t the prettiest, or the largest, but she was brave, that butterfly. Or perhaps she was foolish, still too inexperienced. Perhaps she was unaware of the danger; perhaps she hadn’t yet learned to be afraid. Poor butterfly. And she didn’t move at all for a long, long while. They slept a little, kissing, he and the butterfly. And then she took flight and he watched her go off, among the others, larger and prettier ones, but that did not go near the mouths of men … And he thought that women were strange, very strange. Because they always seemed to know things that men did not, even the ones who weren’t yet women. (Bortnik 1982)21

Traditional feminine traits of frailty, innocence, and chastity here give way to a feminine arbiter of truth. A feminine kiss, specifically, provides a symbol neither of debased womanhood nor of chaste motherhood, the two available images of both women and the patria of dictatorship-era Argentina (Ruddick 1989). Rather, Bortnik’s butterfly possesses agency along with sexuality, which allows her to choose with whom to share her affection based on her own assessment of her male partner’s moral measure. The butterfly is painted as fleeting, therefore, not due to fickle feminine affection, but rather because of the male’s failure to prove worthy of her retained presence:

Just as each time he found himself alone during those last days, he remembered the butterflies. Never had he seen as many as that summer, never … Never again did he leave that pit that he himself had dug. Never again did he smile, or nod, to show that he had understood, or say yes sir. Never again did he hear his sister breathe, or help his father with the harvest. Never again was he kissed by a butterfly. (Bortnik 1982)

Eventually, the unnamed soldier in Bortnik’s poem witnesses the innocent creature depart to join the other butterflies who did not, even for an instant, dare to come close to the other boys’ mouths (Bortnik 1982). By overtly abandoning the soldier—the very embodiment of masculinity in dictatorship Argentina—the author’s butterfly serves as a feminist witness to the incompatibility between the machista expectations of the soldier and the reality of the human being in the trenches who failed not only as a soldier in the Malvinas, but also as a functionary of both his family and society as a son, brother, and lover:

And he heard his sister’s breathing and thought about how he would take her for surgery … he didn’t have wings, or anything. He just had something heavy in his frozen hands. And he wanted to wake up and leave that place and he couldn’t. And he thought it was another scary dream. But it wasn’t a dream. (Bortnik 1982)

Bortnik’s lived reality is narrated not as a nightmare for civilians, but for the soldiers themselves who were ordered by a military government to participate in what is here revealed to be a senseless and morally debased mission, which victimizes its own champions.
Throughout, lust and love merge in Bortnik’s pen to signal the longing of a government-directed male for an alternative existence, embodied by an unattainable female:

And he didn't want to think about the redhead with the fair skin. Because whenever he thought of her he slept poorly … But he saw her. And just beneath her red hair she had what seemed like wings. And he realized that it was her and she was also the kissing butterfly. (Bortnik 1982)

The reader of Hum® of July 1982 is thus asked to participate in an analysis of national covenants in feminist terms, as the soldier’s failure is evidenced not in terms of deficient “manliness.” Rather, an excess of manliness is precisely what is shown to have cost the boy the loss of his own humanity, measured by the abandonment of female company. ²²

In delivering her message, Aída Bortnik narrates the debasement of humanity of her own time with feminist language and imagery that elicits an unmistakable resonance with Holocaust victim Pavel Friedmann’s famous poem from Terezin, “The Butterfly”:

Such, such a yellow / Is carried lightly way up high. It went away I’m sure because it wished to kiss the world goodbye … Only I never saw another butterfly. That butterfly was the last one. Butterflies don’t live in here, In the ghetto. (Friedmann 1942)

To a transnational post-Holocaust generation, Terezin is the prison camp most closely associated with the production of culture, including art and music, as a form of resistance to Nazi aims of dehumanization prior to extermination. ²³ Specifically, Pavel Friedmann’s poem remains the quintessential representation of innocence provided by a young man’s enduring testimony against the genocidal violence of state brutality (Volavkova 1994). By adopting the same construct and cadence as the famous Holocaust poem, Bortnik crafts multidirectional postmemory that in 1982 Argentina challenges what Rothberg calls “the hegemony of state-sponsored remembering and forgetting” (2014, 655). Unabashedly, Bortnik adopts Jewish imagery beyond the Holocaust to provide the very language that is to save not the Jews of Argentina, but the nation itself. “18 Años” ends with the author pleading with her reader to recall the victim of the “trenches” in the language of the Jewish invocation to never forget Jerusalem (Psalm 137:5, Hebrew Bible): “And should we ever forget him, may all those who reach eighteen years of age forever remind us of him” (Bortnik 1982). Bortnik thus brazenly provides a multidirectional post-Holocaust testament whereby the female Jewish collective conscience, as author and as symbol, publically uncovers the Argentine chimeras of power and demands that her audience does the same. The formula adopted by Bortnik is one that indicates, and unites, the gendered possibilities at resistance noted by both post-Holocaust and post-dictatorship feminist scholarship. Thus, if the Nazi genocide “destabilized the boundaries of the self [by] unmaking the gendered self” (Horowitz 1997, 376), Argentines were taught to “recognize male individualization in terms of female submission and the suppression of the feminine” (Taylor 1997, 87). In Bortnik’s short story “18 Años,” state truth is contested through an overt challenge to the gendered binary set forth by her contemporary state government. Proving Rothberg’s argument that “dialogic productivity of remembrance can lead to new visions of solidarity [in an] approach that offers a particular analytical perspective” (2014, 654), Bortnik evidences just such an instance of multidirectional memory through a feminist perspective that demonstrates that the local undoubtedly persists within transnational conversations of the Holocaust.

In another short story published in Hum® the following year, “Hagamos una lista,” Bortnik again provides a scene reminiscent of the Holocaust. In this instance, Bortnik depicts passengers awaiting a train on a cold day, headed to a destination unknown to both the characters of the cuentito and to the reader: “El cielo estaba gris, el vagón frío, éramos muchos...
y casi todos nos hubiéramos reconocido si alguna vez nos hubiéramos mirado” (Bortnik 1983). Among these passengers—depicted as a society of strangers who did not recognize each other due to indifference—a peddler circles, claiming unified attention among practiced disassociation:

Ahora, todos lo escuchaban: los que seguían con los ojos cerrados, la señora del pañuelo en la cabeza, la de la nena en brazos, el viejito y el señor del portafolios, el muchacho sin saco, y la rubiecita aferrada a su novio. (Bortnik 1983)

An indiscriminate representation of women and men awaiting a fate defined externally provides the very vision of a fragmented society. Bornik’s represented population is not, however, inextricably thus defined; the group is about to receive a message delivered by an unassuming man circling among civilians but not destined to share their fate. Published during the Cold War in a country that precipitated a “Dirty War” to protect capitalism at the expense of democracy, Bortnik’s message adopts the idea of laissez-faire economics to address individual choice and social morality by creating a protagonist who sells advice, yet tells his “customers” that they should pay for his wisdom not according to what they think it is worth, but according to what they can afford to pay. In this presentation, Bortnik’s “passengers” are consumers of the truths they “buy,” and the peddler of ideas suggests a reorientation toward ideas of life and kindness rather than the ubiquitous propaganda normalizing death and social numbness: “Señoras y señores pasajeros: todos nosotros compramos, cada día, minuciosas relatos de muerte impune, miserables cuentos de crueldad infinita, desbordantes crónicas de locura, devastación y sangre, reducidas a cifras de un balance en el que siempre somos perdedores” (Bortnik 1983). The peddler of ideas reflects that although stories of death and infinite violence have become commonplace, people retain the power to create their own narratives within their minds and hearts. The peddler thus reminds his “audience” of passengers awaiting an unknown fate that inner testimony remains a salvageable forum through which to counter exterior violence even—or rather, especially—in urgent times: “Entretanto, como el tema es urgente, tendríamos que buscar otro espacio para vernos a nosotros mismos los titulares que testimonian que no todo está perdido. Un espacio interior, pero expresivo” (Bortnik 1983).

Bortnik’s protagonist in “Hagamos una lista” is once again nameless, yet critical in his individuality, and it is he who leads his audience to alter their social contract in terms of economics. That is, “customers” retain their rights to individual decision and conviction, even as their surroundings indicate complete powerlessness. To help illustrate his point, the peddler of ideas suggests that his “customers” create a gratitude list centered on appreciating the kindness in others: “Hagamos una lista, cada uno la suya, una lista humilde, pero minuciosa, de todos los gestos y toda la gente que nos hacen bien” (Bortnik 1983). The peddler leads by example by providing his own list of the people he appreciates, accompanied by descriptions of the good and generous traits they embody. And so, the “powerless passengers” hear of the peddler’s uncle Tito, who wants to save everyone and so swallows their pain; a couple who, while selling typewriters, treats everyone as an equal; the postman who delivers letters with mistaken addresses because he feels a responsibility not to interfere with communication between people; and his grandmother, who buried her own daughters but is still capable of loving the daughters of others (Bortnik 1983). Bortnik therefore unabashedly uses satirical journalism to remind her readers—a fragmented public whose realities were constantly narrated by a disenfranchising and isolating national language—that society is in fact made up of individuals with choice, and that even in the face of injustice,
violence, and state domination, individuals retain the power to preserve human connection and compassion for one another, to craft their own internal narratives, and to make their own social contracts.

Among Bortnik's cuentitos, nowhere is Holocaust postmemory delivered more explicitly than in "Julio Montaña Dorada," also published in 1983. Of Bortnik's three cuentitos which include Holocaust imagery, this is the only one in which Bortnik names her protagonist and in which the Holocaust is overtly referenced. Here, Julius Golden Mountain is presented from the onset as a Jew who emigrates from Vienna to Argentina seeking refuge from the Nazis:

He was the last of his father's four children … the only one in his family—of his parents and brothers, of the vast network of freckly boy cousins and awkward girl cousins, of pious aunts and uncles, of insistent and confusing relatives that seemed to extend infinitely toward Germany, toward Poland, toward Russia, toward the Slavic countries, toward the sunny south … He was the only one of all of them who survived revolutions and pogroms, invasions and reconquests, local and world wars, final solutions and ethnic cleansing … That endless chain of the Golden Mountain family, that endless tapestry of love and hardship, memories, arguments and celebrations, disappeared from the face of the Earth. (Bortnik 1983)

Bortnik fashions Julius' dead family as individuals—freckled, awkward, beings of enduring love and arguments—who were part of family structures, societies, and world histories larger than the Holocaust. Representing what Hirsch calls "familial structures of mediation and representation" that facilitate the “affiliative acts of the postgeneration" (2008, 115; original italics), 25 Bortnik here creates a tale of family tragedy, where a member of one generation carries his family story to further generations in new nations. Moreover, Bortnik fashions Julius as a witness to a Holocaust defined as one of a multitude of humanity's failures over the course of history, and hence relatable by subsequent historic catastrophes. Consequently, Julius, as a post-Holocaust Jew, is cast by a feminist writer in 1983 Argentina not as a burdensome refugee—thus refuting Argentine government policy that accepted more Nazis than Jews during and after World War Two (Goñi 2003)—but as a valuable witness to humanity’s global failures. In arguing for Julius' "usefulness" to present-day Argentina, Bortnik extends her narration of Holocaust postmemory to a context of multidirectionality:

All my life I have seen them embrace him endlessly, search at times for the words and at other times not even attempt, to offer gratitude that barely fits inside them: he heard them, he understood them, he explained to them or he embraced them in silence one time, one unforgettable time that they treasure as the moment that a man was able to help them become men. (Bortnik 1983)

Embodying compassion and humanity, the very traits denied Jews in Germany, the surviving Jewish Julius crosses the Atlantic to save the parentless children of Argentina.

As much as the butterfly in “18 Años” and the peddler of “Hagamos una lista" embodied enduring choice in contemporary Argentina, so too did “Julius Golden Mountain" enunciate the two choices available to Argentina: to resist national narratives or succumb to them. In all cases, individual integrity was on the line. Julius made the gamble explicit by inhabiting a post-Holocaust world and bringing his personal memories to a next generation in a new land. The equation is again simple and explicit when Bortnik presents the fictitious Julius of Argentina as an alternative not to the Argentine military or national newspapers, but to the only choice that remains after the Holocaust: suicide or survival. Hence, Bortnik positions the fictitious Julius in contrast to the historic Austrian philosopher Stefan Zweig, the latter who in 1942 escaped the Nazis by immigrating to Brazil, only to subsequently commit suicide out of despair at humanity's debasement. Bortnik writes in “Julius Golden Mountain":
In 1942, Stefan Zweig committed suicide. Julius Golden Mountain understood him, cried for him and for the children they were and for the entire universe they had both lost. But he found a means of rescue, a means of eternal affirmation that resisted the bonfires, the hatred, and the death. (Bortnik 1983)

As much as Stefan Zweig and Pavel Friedmann fell victim to their respective periods of trauma, Bortnik's nameless Argentine boy in the trenches of "Dieciocho años" and the nameless peddler of ideas are here joined by the named Holocaust survivor and Argentine émigré Julius, as all face in literature the opportunity to redefine the lives of contemporary Argentines. For Julius, survival and an imperiled masculinity find vindication in rescuing the parentless children of Buenos Aires:

Julius Golden Mountain, the only survivor of that endless chain, has sowed the world with an indestructible seed. None of the children to whom he gave love bear his name. But between them all they form a mountain range so high and so vast that no amount of hatred could ever erase his family from the face of the Earth. (Bortnik 1983)

By proposing that Jewish survival was to defy world history in an Argentina that abducted Jews disproportionately to their composition of society, Bortnik adds to both Holocaust postmemory and to anti-dictatorship activism. The tiered multidirectionality of Bortnik's message is noteworthy when one considers the transnational connections between Argentine and German fascism, the Argentine military adoption of Nazi tactics of torture, and that Jewish victims of the Argentine dictatorship were subjected to torture methods that purposefully capitalized on Jewish collective Holocaust memories.

Instructively, at the time of Bortnik's penning of "Julius Golden Mountain," Jewish orphanages in Buenos Aires—run primarily by Jewish women—were erected to aid Holocaust refugees. Yet Bortnik writes of a Jewish Holocaust that comes to Argentina not in the form of pitiable refugees or their domestic female champions, but as a worldly male healer who escapes Europe's own downfall of modernity to mend Argentina's orphaned men through his retained empathy and memory of past trauma. Aída Bortnik thus challenged a misogynistic society of her own milieu, marked by secrecy, isolation, and fear, by uniting female traits to the Holocaust legacy. Bortnik thus seeks, through satirical journalism, to remind her contemporary readers that their narratives remained their own to choose, that individuals retain the power to break nationally imposed silences, and that the people of Argentina could engender kindness, empathy, connection, and testimony in the face of a junta demanding the abandonment of democracy by a silenced and fragmented society. As cultural and literary scholar Paul Bové (1992) argues, if reality is dictated literarily, then cultural revolts against systems of oppression require deconstruction of the language of violence before a new reality can emerge to better represent democratic political constructs. From the margins of satire, Bortnik's butterfly, peddler of ideas, and Julius Golden Mountain illustrate a persistent formula of multidirectional feminist postmemory that serves as activism, produced in a subversive journal in the final years of the dictatorship to counter the binary definitions of gender and modernity fashioned by the Argentine Proceso.

**Diana Raznovich: setting the stage on fire**

Diana Raznovich (b. 1945) is a Jewish, bisexual, feminist playwright and cartoonist, and she was a contemporary of Bortnik's and a co-participant in Teatro Abierto (Open Theater), a subversive theater group founded in 1981 to resist the normalization of governmental
authoritarianism. As in the case of Hum®, all of the contributing playwrights had been blacklisted by the junta and these artists chose to work for Teatro Abierto in defiance of a terrorizing and silencing dictatorship. Of the 59 playwrights in Teatro Abierto, Raznovich was one of only three women, of whom two were Jewish—she and Bortnik. Like Bortnik, Raznovich explicitly advocated for reinterpretations of femininity in Argentina as part and parcel of her anti-dictatorship cultural activism, and like Bortnik, Raznovich crafted feminist multidirectional postmemory to more poignantly make her point.

One of Raznovich's dictatorship-era works, “El desconcierto/The Disconcerted,” features a female pianist who performs on a soundless instrument before an audience expected to act as though they are witnessing a true musical performance. Raznovich here stages a woman performing the sham to which the government demands complicity: silenced communication accepted by an audience conditioned to not know (or express understanding of) the difference. The group's theater was burned down on the opening night of “El desconcierto” on the only occasion of arson committed by the junta against the theater group. 28 Subsequently, Teatro Abierto continued to stage its plays in the safe-houses of the cabaret Tabarís, effectively ensuring that there would be no public space where playwrights and their audiences could oppose the government that did not also literally stage acts of female sexual subjugation (Taylor 1997, 239; 2003, 75). Even among the theater group, misogyny endured and the male-led Teatro Abierto did not support the staging of Raznovich’s feminist play. The fate of Raznovich’s play highlights the limited space afforded women to protest governmental state narratives. Illustratively, the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo adopted traditional feminine symbols such as headscarves and slippers as they entered the public sphere in protest of the government's abduction of their children, only to be called prostitutes and bad mothers for speaking a truth that confronted the government's official silencing narrative (during the dictatorship) and orchestrations toward impunity (in its aftermath) (Bouvard 1994). 29

Given the Proceso's hegemonic images of woman as either subservient, immoral, or mad— the three categories through which the dictatorship equated masculinity with militarism and justified sexual, social, and economic violence toward women—“Lost Belongings” (1988) is one of several continuing cultural efforts by Raznovich to combat feminine delegitimization and marginalization by the dictatorship, delivered this time through a feminist monologue that featured a Holocaust refugee begging entry to dictatorship Argentina. Although staged for the first time in Australia in 1996, and since then performed only outside of Argentina, the play was first written in 1975 as Raznovich herself was being forced into exile by a military that was poised to take over her country (Lockhart 2013, 417). 30 Thus, through the character of a female refugee named Casalia Beltrop, introduced as traveling from a place she cannot quite remember to a destination she cannot quite determine, Raznovich portrays a confused stateless woman, hovering between temporal and geographic borders. 31 Trapped within the logistical struggle of identifying her lost luggage, the audience witnesses Casalia trying to ascertain where she has arrived while begging for acceptance from any government that will accept her. Through Casalia's perspective, it becomes clear that a Latin American government official holds her fate in his hands through a bureaucratic detail: Casalia must match her luggage tag with the number on her ticket, which she has lost. The language that mediates the interactions between the desperate female refugee and the all-powerful male bureaucrat refereeing the inter-national transfer of people and their “belongings,” pits logic
against emotion, rules against justice, male against female, and authenticity against foreignness.

With the play plotted as the search for a lost ticket, the audience along with the protagonist uncovers that Casalia has arrived in Argentina during the military dictatorship, having escaped the “stormy skies” of Europe:

I’m exhausted! Orders and counter-orders! To have to hold my head straight! To sing hymns of praise to their victory! (She is getting worried.) To have arrived in Argentina the very day of the coup d’état, and not to find the way to show who I am! Besides everything implicates me! My umbrella is all wet. (She opens it and water pours down.) The water indicates that I was somewhere else before, in a rainy place, where there were stormy clouds. (Raznovich [1988] 1996, 335; original emphases)

Casalia’s ongoing emotional pleading with the male authority-figure dominates the play, even as she herself notes that thinking beings are not welcome in the same land to which she implores entrance. Casalia’s desperate situation leads to an escalation in feminine “madness” until she finds herself begging for admittance to a country whose president is poised to shoot her:

(She puts her handkerchief away. She obsessively checks her number. She examines the suitcases labeled forty-six. Rather worried.) Is it a national holiday? ... (Anxious, feeling guilty.) If that's the case, they should have warned me! I would have worn my Scottish suit and pinned a large rosette on my chest with the colors of the right country ... What’s more, I would happily wave that country's flag. What's it to me to make a gesture of solidarity to the country that I hope will take me in? ... And if I am in Argentina ... (Very concerned) To the person responsible for this continent, or this country ... or more modestly this checkroom: I need my things my personal belongings ... They're sending away the ones who think ... If the supposed country is in a supposed war and tomorrow we have a President who can shoot you or who might have already shot you, it would be a good idea to find your documents, my dear! (Raznovich [1988] 1996, 335; original emphases)

Evoking the familiar image of Jews’ luggage accumulated in town squares, train platforms, and the concentration camps of Europe, the hysterical monologue continues with a woman in all of her accused guilt seeking her own luggage in an increasingly maddening spectacle that ultimately incriminates not the woman, but her “reality.” Ultimately, the immigration officer finds Casalia “guilty” of bringing her stormy past to Argentina by uncovering that the contents of her located luggage carry her ancestral bones. Yet in the same luggage, the officer discovers an additional item: the original Mona Lisa. Now homeless due to Europe’s own failed modernity, the original Mona Lisa—an artistic symbol of the height of European civilization—emerges in America from the baggage of a Jewish female refugee. Strikingly, Raznovich demonstrates that the fate of humanity and that of the Jews are tied, that Latin America stands to unite its fate as the inheritor of humanity’s greatest achievements or its greatest debasement due to its chosen ties to Europe. All the while, a woman begs the questions.

As poignantly as “El Desconcierto,” Raznovich’s “Lost Belongings” illustrates Diana Taylor’s characterization of the Proceso as an environment of “hypertheatricality,” whereby society as a whole was suspect and people felt exposed in their own bodies, in their homes, and in their country due as much to a masculine definition of society as to a state of constant surveillance (Taylor 1997, 93–4 and 109). In “Lost Belongings,” Raznovich additionally stages a global post-Holocaust cultural awareness alongside the local circumstance of Jewish Holocaust refugees into Argentina, thereby representing Argentina’s current historical
choices in global historic terms. As much as Bortnik’s Julius Golden Mountain mattered in Argentina for his potential saving of humanity as a Holocaust survivor, Raznovich too calls on “familial tropes” of Holocaust legacy—here in the form of transnationally transferred cadavers—to indicate that if Argentina were to save Europe’s humanity from oblivion after the Holocaust (i.e. the *Mona Lisa*), so too must it embrace Jewish refugees with their Holocaust “baggage.” In the balance lie not only Casalia’s survival, but that of modernity and civilization as a whole. Subverting the powerful actors on her stage—the immigration officer, the dictator—her answers to—Diana Raznovich joined Bortnik’s cultural undermining of masculine narratives of state while enunciating a commitment to Holocaust memory through feminist advocacy. Raznovich thereby contests oppressive binaries juxtaposing Europe and America, Jews and non-Jews, and men and women, through multidirectional feminist postmemory created during the dictatorship, but staged globally in its aftermath.

**Postmemory meets post-colonialism in the writings of Manuela Fingueret**

Building on Maurice Halbwachs’ (1992) notion of collective memory and Elizabeth Jelin’s (2003) elaborations regarding the dual dynamic of tension and cooperation between the individual and society, Ana Ros addresses the cultural transmission of postmemory while ongoing public denial of past trauma persists in Argentina:

As long as the government has not acknowledged their suffering and granted reparation, victims’ relatives typically multiply their efforts to keep their desaparecidos present in the public sphere, efforts that can be understood through Todorov’s concept of “literal memory” [... whereby] groups assign meaning to the past through narratives in light of present circumstances and future goals, promoting them through “vehicles for memory” such as books, museums, monuments, films, and history books. (Ros 2012, 7)

Manuela Fingueret (1945–2013), a recognized cultural figure (poet, teacher, radio host, and journalist) of the Buenos Aires Jewish community, was part of the post-dictatorship feminist cohort that united Argentine and post-Holocaust processes of postmemory in the face of ensuing impunity to national and anti-Semitic violence after the fall of the dictatorship. Instances of national silencing after the dictatorship—due to the *Ley de Punto Final* (1986) and the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (1987) under President Raúl Alfonsín, and the pardoning of represores under Carlos Menem between 1989 and 1990, in spite of 60–80% opposition by the general population—were followed in 1992 and 1994 with the most noteworthy anti-Semitic terrorist attacks to have ever occurred in the Americas. These, according to federal prosecutor Alberto Nisman’s findings, were likely undertaken with the knowledge of Menem’s government and have remain unprosecuted for over two decades.

Fingueret’s novel *Hija del silencio* (1999) demonstrates the emotional urgency of these compounded injustices, crafted once more within narrative family structures that allow the multiple postgenerations to access the truths of the past. In *Hija del silencio*, Fingueret crafts such a living connection between the Holocaust and the Argentine dictatorship, producing a transnational and transgenerational narrative involving mother/daughter protagonists Tinkeleh, a Holocaust survivor, and her Argentine daughter Rita. Fingueret fashions Rita not as an “innocent” civilian, but rather as a guerrillera during the so-called “Dirty War,” a leftist guerrilla fighter abducted by the Argentine secret police, tortured, and ultimately disappeared. By establishing her protagonist as a woman with agency, engaged in her country’s binary wars of national definition, Fingueret shows that Rita intended to be a historical actor
within Argentina. In fact, by her own account, Rita envisioned she would become the next Che Guevara and Evita Peron rolled into one:

Evita, who died one winter evening at 8:25 p.m. was reborn in me with the fury of a woman who wasn’t allowed to fulfill her destiny. Che Guevara gave both of us reason and strength. With the two of them I carved the framework of a destiny that turned me into Lot’s wife, she who dared to gaze at what was hidden from her. She was nameless, but courageous. But I, who planned to stare directly at Sodom and Gomorrah, had no intention of being turned into a pillar of salt. (Fingueret [1999] 2012, 9)

Rita’s political aspiration is none other than to become the feminist leader who would finally solve Argentina’s post-colonial quandary, the prophet to end Argentina’s chain of modernity’s mausoleums. Yet Rita proves unqualified to so act in her own milieu, incapable of facing Sodom and Gomorrah, the biblical cities of evil, for lack of a multidirectional feminist perspective. So her fate as a victim of “the Dirty War” is sealed in the torture chambers of a secret detention center in Buenos Aires. It is precisely within this local site of torture where Rita finally reclaims her mother’s silenced past: “That Tinkeleh who, the moment she stepped off the ship, hid herself forever. I am the daughter of your silence. How am I different, Tinkeleh, from you?” (Fingueret [1999] 2012, 46).

Repairing breaks in memory, according to Hirsch, is the very task of postmemory: “The break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events necessitates forms of remembrance that reconnect and re-embody an intergenerational memorial fabric that has been severed by catastrophe” (2008, 110). Fingueret’s novel thus develops as Rita endeavors to close the severed gap in Holocaust memory established by her silent immigrant mother, Tinkeleh. Literarily staging a reclaiming of Holocaust postmemory between mother and daughter, Fingueret contests the pillar of salt imagery enunciated by President Carlos Menem when he advocated for silence and against memory as he pardoned the represores and argued that the past had nothing more to teach the present (Bevernage 2012, 28). Thus, while in 1988 Diana Raznovich wrote of Jews’ “baggage” as unwelcome in Proceso Argentina—which resulted in a staged debunking of the common trope of feminine madness—a decade later, Fingueret wrote of the mad crying of women who obediently silenced their multidirectional memory, only to be subjected to further episodes of trauma within a subsequent localized failure of modernity:

Woman and women. Either from old neighborhood or uptown. All of them, whether from Minsk, the Chacarita neighborhood or dancing the anniversary waltz around the Obelisk in downtown Buenos Aires. They are with me in this animal cage, registered by first and last name, smiling like hyenas with each jolt of electricity. (Fingueret [1999] 2012, 10)

A repeatedly stifled process of post-dictatorship justice of Argentina, and the tragic faring of the Jews in that country in the 1990s, converged in the last year of the twentieth century in a novel whereby a retrospective woman comes to understand the contemporary cost of her mother’s failed transmission of Holocaust memory. 34

As in Bortnik’s “18 Años,” Terezin’s legacy is once more evoked in Fingueret’s novel, this time with its more complete historical context as a camp that produced art, music, and theater throughout the war, while the Nazis “defended” the highest form of “civilization” against an imposter and infiltrating “barbarism” (i.e. Jewish race). 35 By making Pavel Friedmann a character in the novel, Fingueret boldly elicits the transgenerational emotional salience Marianne Hirsch argues is central to effective postmemory culture. In Terezin, that specific Polish location, Tinkeleh made a deathbed promise to her best friend, to transmit the memory
of what they had endured to the survivor's future daughter, wherever her post-Holocaust life would take place. At the novel's close, the language of postmemory is decidedly Argentine, as Rita cites Borges to witness her own condoned fate: "In war, I am an echo, oblivion, nothing. Am I am echo, oblivion, nothing? I ask flooded in the strange light. The fat man enters with his head down and says to me: 'You're being transferred tomorrow'" (Fingueret [1999] 2012, 157–8). Jorge Luis Borges, Latin America's quintessential post-colonial writer, is the figure called upon by Fingueret to enunciate these, the novel's final lines, which masterfully connect reclaimed "familial" Holocaust postmemory to the still contested "collective memory" of dictatorship Argentina. In Fingueret's work, Holocaust postmemory becomes multidirectional when the broken promise of the memory of Terezin is to blame not for Tinkeleh's death in Eastern Europe, but for her daughter Rita's in dictatorship Argentina.

In Memoria y barbarie/Memory and Barbarism (2000), Fingueret furthers the connection between the Nazi Holocaust and the Argentine Proceso in an unparalleled litany of literary excerpts presented as side-by-side testimony to the two instances of state terror. In the book's introduction, the author makes her agenda explicit, stating the connection she perceives between the Holocaust, the Argentine dictatorship, art, and gender:

I consider myself a daughter of the barbarism that the Nazis proposed to carry out against my people. I consider myself a daughter of the memory of the terrorism of the State carried out against my country. Art, at the end of a millennium where the scientific and technical advances continue without giving answers to the cannibalism that we direct toward each other, is an irreplaceable act of resistance to horror in all of its guises. (Fingueret 2000, i)

The book's very title, Barbarism and Memory, contests the “civilization versus barbarism” terms endemic to both Argentine and German fascist nationalism (Masiello 1992). By replacing “civilization” with “memory,” Fingueret endows feminist multidirectional postmemory with the antidote to continued transnational mausoleums of modernity that breed on exclusionary binaries, to which Jews and women have fallen victim.

**Multidirectional postmemory: from Europe to America**

The multidirectional feminist conversation intersecting postmemory of the Holocaust and that of the so-called “Dirty War” was also undertaken from Europe toward the Americas. Charlotte Delbo, a non-Jewish French artist and survivor of Auschwitz, wrote in support of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in a poem featured within Delbo's final publication La mémoire et les jours (1985). By her own account, Delbo survived the Holocaust to contest global instances of state violence, a duty she extended to future generations which she bestowed with the responsibility for ongoing memory as the price for historical survival (Horsman 2011, 66). Extending her gravitas of post-Holocaust “j’acuse” to the Argentine historical theater, Delbo's final book comprised a series of post-war vignettes—including scenes from a German concentration camp, a round-up of Paris Jews by French police, the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and an appeal from the prisoners of the Soviet gulags—all representing European public spheres in World War Two that were defined by terror and by societal acquiescence to terror. As part of this literary testimony, Delbo included the poem “Madwomen of May” (1985). It is in this context that Delbo adds her voice to those of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Argentine women labeled “madwomen,” “bad mothers,” “nonmothers,” “antimothers,” “prostitutes,” and “emotional terrorists” for demanding to enter the public sphere to express
their own truth in the face of silenced witnessing of trauma and violence (Castillo 1992, 16 and 17; Taylor 1997, 84 and 89).

Indicative of Horsman, Bové, and Feitlowitz’s invocation for post-trauma culture to first deconstruct and then repossess the language once used to legitimize society’s terrorization and the associated subjugation of women, Delbo enunciates crimes that had been shrouded in meaningless language. Presaging Fingueret’s literary subversion of the civilization/barbarism dichotomy, Delbo writes:

_Desaparecidos / What do you mean disappeared? All died from having been tortured / For they’re dead aren’t they / At least say so. What then are you made of / Brutes / Not of the same flesh as we / Human beings / How can you feign our appearance / When all of you disclaims / Inclusion in our species._

(Delbo [1985] 1990, 79–86)

Delbo then emphatically validates women as agents of truth contesting a national farce, lending her own gravitas to that of the Madres in their denunciation of a hypocritical government. Moreover, by chastizing a world that once again remains silent before desperate cries of help, Delbo lends her testimony to multidirectional activism:

_Go round madwomen of May / Round and round on the Plaza de Mayo / Cry women of Buenos Aires / Cry ‘til the ghosts of your tortured rise / Like so many staring eyes / Staring into ours / and accusing us / Cry until the world bursts from shame / Go round / Go round the Plaza de Mayo / Madwomen of May._

(Delbo [1985] 1990, 86)

In the context of an Argentina that borrowed Nazi fascist definitions of statehood, then adopted Nazi torture methods, and ultimately served as a ready haven for ex Nazis (Goñi 2003), Delbo poignantly demonstrates how non-marginal the persecution of the marginal is. Delbo thereby honors the Madres’ struggle against political silence, supports their advocacy for feminine participation, and joins them in their goals of collective advocacy:

_So anguish-stricken they cannot cry out / cannot cry out / for the knot in their throat / for the pain / which grips their whole body / so strong / they cannot cry forth / for the dry terror in their heart. At twilight / they arrive / by all the streets leading into the plaza / arrive at the rendezvous / rendezvous of unbearable distress / arrive to cry out in silence / since their throats can no longer shout. They great each other with glances … Round they go gone mad from anxiety / round they go gone mad from pain / and that shriek you do not hear / echoes throughout the whole world. It rings in far away ears / their cry / but beating upon the walls of the May Palace / upon the walls round the Plaza de Mayo / it draws no echo. Unresponding the walls are deaf / deafer still the torturers._

(Delbo [1985] 1990, 79 and 80–1)

Enunciating compassion for the Madres’ unheeded grief and admiring their solidarity in the face of delegitimizing governments and a complacent world, Delbo lends her voice to their activism and to their claims on collective memory, thereby fulfilling her own vow to survive Auschwitz in order to bear testimony to global violations against humanity. In so doing, Delbo embodies Fingueret’s closing question in _Daughter of Silence_, as delivered by Jorge Luis Borges: “In war, I am an echo, oblivion, nothing. Am I am echo, oblivion, nothing? I ask flooded in the strange light.” (Fingueret [1999] 2012, 157). Writing from France in 1985, Delbo reciprocates the Argentine feminist demand for multidirectional postmemory.

**Conclusion**

Charlotte Delbo’s was not the only voice from Europe that extended the urgency and lessons of the Holocaust to bear witness to the state terror perpetrated by the Argentine military dictatorship. A widely circulated 1978 article by Marek Halter in _Le Monde_ also witnessed the
humanitarian abuses of the Argentine dictatorship and noted a specific concern for the Jews of Argentina by asking “Must we wait until a night of broken glass before we cry out?” (Halter 1978). At the same time, postmemory activism in Argentina equated the justice that eventually caught up with Nazis after World War Two to that which still awaits the officers and torturers of the Argentine dictatorship. As Susana Kaiser reports in her study of escraches, marchers filled neighborhood streets where torturers lived and carried banners of accusation, including such slogans as “Como a los Nazis les va a pasar, a donde vayan los iremos a buscar” (Kaiser 2002, 499). Echoing the multidirectional connections between Proceso Argentina and Nazi Germany, feminist activism understood the intimate connection between ongoing memory and the pursuit of justice in global terms.

Thus, between 1982 and 1983, when Argentine women were labeled mad for demanding the return of their disappeared children and the Argentine military dictatorship was actively adopting Nazi tactics to pursue “subversives” at home—reserving special punishment for the Jews and for the women it abducted—Aída Bortnik, an Argentine Jewish woman, risked her own life to invoke the legacy of the Holocaust through butterfly imagery and a man named Julius Golden Mountain. This feminist and post-Holocaust formula was embraced with increasing transparency by Diana Raznovich and Manuela Fingueret in the post-dictatorship years, as they sought to challenge Argentina’s binary “civilization versus barbarism” definition of modernity. It is a conversation to which Charlotte Delbo would lend her moral gravitas, proving the reciprocal multidirectionality of Holocaust postmemory production. Between 1982 and 1999, the cohort of women here identified boldly enunciated a multidirectional feminist conversation about oppression, sanity, and marginality, demanding the integral rights of women and of Jews to both denounce and decode Latin America’s multiple and multiplying mausoleums of modernity.

Notes

1. While the official number given by the Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) to President Alfonsín hovers around 9000, the more commonly cited numbers range from 15,000 to 30,000 (Crenzel 2014; Finchelstein 2014).

2. Eva Hoffman (2004) adopts the term “postgeneration” to explore the dynamic of memory formation and perpetuation as children of Holocaust survivors inherit their parents’ memory and encounter those of children of perpetrators and bystanders. Marianne Hirsch (2012) employs the terms “second generation” or “generation after” to further address the subsequent transmission of Holocaust memory by the “second generation” for later generations who may not have familial ties to the victim, bystander, or perpetrator, and yet are committed to the transmission of Holocaust testimony and the ongoing creation of culturally salient memory created by contemporary generations. I adopt the terms “second generation” and “postgeneration” in alignment with Hoffman and Hirsch, and apply them to both the Holocaust and Argentine contexts.

3. In the aftermath of World War Two, feminist Holocaust scholarship has argued that the act of bearing witness not only as human beings, but as gendered individuals, afforded women a post-facto defiance of Nazi Germany’s intention to exterminate as much existence as narrative, or life and conscience, from the public sphere (Baer and Goldenberg 2003; Felman and Laub 1992; Kremer 1999; Loew 2011; Ofer and Weitzman 1998; Waxman 2006).

4. Argentina’s relationship to Nazi Germany extended beyond World War Two, when Argentina served as a haven for Nazis (Bascomb 2009; Finchelstein 2014; Feitlowitz 1998; Goñi 2003).
5. Claiming that Argentine fascist nacionalismo (nationalism) owed as much to Mussolini's fascism, Hitler's Nazism, and the French Revolution as to Peronism and Rosas' federalism, Finchelstein (2014, 7) claims that what ultimately emerged in Argentina was a model of modern statehood defined in terms of militarism, heterosexuality, and Christianity.

6. See Estelle Tarica's "The Holocaust Again? Dispatches from the Jewish 'Internal Front' in Dictatorship Argentina" for an excellent analysis of the Buenos Aires Jewish communal leadership (through the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations or DAIA) and its role in addressing Jewish abductions and tortures during the dictatorship—specifically in response to Jacobo Timmerman's accusation that condemned the Argentine Jewish establishment's insistence on silence and acquiescence and likened it's posture to the Judenrat under the Nazis (Tarica 2012).

7. Laurence Whitehead ([2006] 2010) argues that in attempting to achieve its desired modernity, Latin America produced instead a series of "mausoleums of modernity," resulting in a "littered landscape," evidenced by incomplete and often schizophrenic adoptions and adaptations of modern politics and social programs.

8. Theodor W. Adorno first wrote "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" in his 1949 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society," which was published in 1951. As Rothberg (2000) outlines Adorno explained and amended his oft-cited and debated initial statement many times after its initial publication.

9. Horsman adds to a field of scholarship (much of it feminist) dedicated to post-war theatrical representation of the Holocaust, including Judith Butler (2011), Elin Diamond (2006), and Vivian Patraka (1999, with special emphasis on Chapter 3, "Feminism and the Jewish Subject: Holocaust Theater and the Politics of Difference and Identity"), and Claude Schumacher (1998). Holocaust theater has also been studied in conversation with other periods of fallen humanity, such as the French Revolution (see Freddie Rokem 2000).

10. Conceptually, Hirsch builds on Jan and Aleida Assmann's concepts of "communicative memory" (defined as individual, family, and group memory) and "cultural memory" (which includes national, political, and archival memory). Hirsch signals a bridge between the two, whereby familial or communicative memory, in source and as a cultural vehicle of representation, creates a composite cultural memory designated by Hirsch as "postmemory."

11. Kaiser defines escraches as "campaigns of public condemnation through demonstrations that aim to expose the identities of hundreds of torturers and assassins benefitting from the amnesty laws" (2002, 499). In her discussion, Kaiser adopts Luisa Passerini's (1992) term "memories of memories" to signal layered manifestations of memory politics.

12. Both laws Punto Final and Obediencia Debida were repealed by the National Congress in August 2003 and overturned by the Supreme Court in 2005. In 2006, the first of the reopened cases involved the Buenos Aires Provincial Police second-in-command, Miguel Etchecolatz, during whose trial the actions of the military dictatorship were condemned as state terrorism and defined as acts of genocide. Carlos Menem, the second civilian president democratically elected after the fall of the dictatorship, furthered impunity for perpetrators of state violence during the Proceso when he pardoned the upper echelons of the repressive apparatus—the nine junta leaders who in 1985 had been convicted by Alfonsín's newly elected government as represores (those responsible for the disappearances, including torturers and assassins).

13. While Rothberg elucidates his terminology on multidirectional memory to be transnational, so as to take into consideration the power dynamics that reflect power struggles over trauma memories and authentic local identities, in my paper I will adopt the original "multidirectional" terminology as the cultural works under study more closely exhibit a give and take of memory without the associated power struggle over local memory that is more present in transnational memory politics.


15. Here I refer to Theodor Adorno and Elie Wiesel's oft-cited post-Holocaust writings, respectively. Select foundational scholarship that addresses both the meaning of the Holocaust in history and the complexities of writing about it includes Adorno (1967), Saul Friedlander (1992, 1993),

16. The bombing of the Israeli Embassy in 1992 was followed by the AMIA bombing in 1994. The first attack claimed the lives of 29 civilians, while the second attack killed 85 civilians. In each, hundreds more were injured. For further studies on cultural responses to the violence, see Aizenberg (2002), Wassner (2014), and Levine and Zaretsky (2015).

17. A collection of Humor Registrado materials can be found in Cascioli (2005).

18. In her study, Evangelista in particular builds heavily on post-Holocaust scholarship, including Eric Santer (1993) and Dominique La Capra (1994), which are not feminist works; and Elaine Scarry (1985) and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), which are. Evangelista ultimately argues for the connections between memory, transmission, truth, and healing that both post-violence societies—Germany post Holocaust and Argentine post Proceso—share. In her work, Cry for me Argentina, Annette Levine (2008) explicitly notes Holocaust imagery in the works of Aída Bortnik, Griselda Gambaro, and Tununa Mercado, while alerting the reader that such works would benefit from analysis by Holocaust scholars.

19. Annette Levine, in her unprecedented study of Bortnik’s 30 cuentitos published in Hum®, identifies Bortnik as a post-dictatorship writer; yet Bortnik formed part of an anti-dictatorship movement while the military was still in power, and before CONADEP began its post-dictatorship efforts of truth and reconciliation instituted after President Raúl Alfonsín was inaugurated in December 1983.

20. Bortnik wrote other short stories that were overtly feminist, although not multidirectional; for example, “Ella y los hombres” (Hum® 60 [June 1981]: 42), which critiqued women who defined themselves throughout their lives only in terms of their male love interests.

21. Annette Levine graciously provided the author her own translations of Bortnik’s cuentitos published in Hum®. Levine’s publication of these translations is forthcoming.

22. The butterfly in Argentine post-colonial feminist literature carries an additional connotation in terms of Argentina’s long-standing gaze toward Europe. A case of butterflies was famously sent from Argentine feminist writer Victoria Ocampo to the renowned Englishwoman Virginia Woolf in 1934. The exchange was to mark the fascination of the Englishwoman with an exotic Argentina, while for Ocampo the exchange signaled invited entrée into modern European. Marking this interchange between the two influential feminist literary figures, Kaminsky (2008, xi) notes a fluid and ongoing negotiation between notions of center, periphery, and modernity.

23. At the same time, Nazis often staged cultural shows in Terezin in an effort to conceal the extent of their war crimes and to demonstrate humanitarian treatment of prisoners during wartime.

24. Dirty War is a misnomer, again a linguistic manipulation of the government to portray the civil conflict as a war between two defined sides, when instead it was overwhelmingly a war unleashed by the military against unarmed civilians suspected of dissent. This Dirty War was supported by the USA through military training at The School of the Americas in Panama and Operación Condor, a covert operation promoted by the CIA through the DINA (Chilean dictatorship’s intelligence agency) to coordinate communist repression and intelligence throughout the region (Gill 2004; Kaiser 2005, 5).


26. Donna Guy has shown that the women involved in Buenos Aires Jewish orphanages were welcomed into Argentine high society and were supported in their work by the Catholic elites, even at the peak of Argentine Peronist anti-Semitism of the 1940s (Guy 2008, 202).

27. Argentine feminist writers’ assault on binary languages of gender oppression participate in what Gayatri Spivak called the “decolonization of the subaltern,” noting the incoherence between the official story of capitalism, democracy, and justice, and the contrasting reality of a post-colonial farcical modernity (Spivak ([1987] 2010)).
28. In *Disappearing Acts*, Diana Taylor reflects that *Teatro Abierto* was, from its inception, a male undertaking that "reproduced the gendered reality of Argentina" (1997, 238).

29. While many admire the *Madres* of the May Plaza and see their adoption of traditional feminine symbols as subversive, others question the limits of their transgression if they engaged within the existing tropes of femininity (Castillo 1992; Kaminsky 2008; Ruddick 1989; Taylor 1997).


31. Representing the confusion and disorientation of this period, the Argentine songwriter María Elena Walsh wrote the following lyrics which became widely referenced in anti-dictatorship culture: "En el país de nomeacuerdo, doy tres pasitos y me pierdo. / Un pasito para aquí, no recuerdo si lo di. / Un pasito para allá, Hay que miedo que me da! / ...Un pasito para atrás, y no doy ninguno más. / Porque ya, ya me olvidé donde puse el otro pie." Available in the CD entitled *Inolvidable* (Sony Music Entertainment-Argentina, S.A. 1999), this is also featured in the feature film *Historia Oficial* (1985), of which Aída Bortnik is a screenwriter. For more on the idea of "phantom children," represented as the invisible singer of this song, see Esther Rashkin (2008, 91–112).


33. After opening the investigation in 2006 to the 1992 and 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and AMIA, respectively, Alberto Nisman accused the Argentine government of collaborating with Iran in the Argentine terrorist attacks and with the subsequent governmental obstruction of justice. Nisman was mysteriously found dead in his home the morning of 18 January 2015, prior to testifying before Congress on this case.

34. See Wassner (2014, 111–140) for a discussion about how the terrorist targeting of Jews in 1990s Argentina served as a litmus test of failed national democracy according to Raúl Alfonsín's third Minister of Culture, Marcos Aguinis.

35. By the war's end, Terezin became largely a show camp, whose inmates were mostly women, and where art served as much as a testament to enduring humanity for the inmates as a tool of propaganda by the Nazis to internationally showcase their "humanity" during wartime.

36. Delbo's plays *Scenes of Auschwitz* and *Who Will Carry the Word?* enunciate the survivor's duty to memory and her adopted tools of transmission. Delbo famously told a reporter of *Le Monde* in 1975: "We all testify with our own weapons … I consider the language of poetry as the most effective—because it stirs the reader (and, of course, the spectator) deep down in their soul—and such, it is the most dangerous weapon against the enemies it fights" (*Le Monde*, 20 June 1975).

37. See also Delbo (1982).

38. This line also echoes Elie Wiesel's invocation of the victim's duty to humanity and to history to transmit the truth of one's horrific past after the Holocaust: "Had all of them remained mute, their accumulated silences would have become unbearable: the impact would have deafened the world" (1972, 10).

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**References**


