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(Re) thinking the Past through Performance: The (Re) construction of Militant Childhood Imaginaries in the Post-Dictatorship of Argentina's Cultural Production from 2003-2015

Stephanie Rubi Orozco
University of South Carolina

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by

Stephanie Rubi Orozco

Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada, 2009

Master of Arts
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Accepted by:

Mercedes López-Rodríguez, Major Professor

María Mabrey, Committee Member

Andrew C. Rajca, Committee Member

Rocío Zalba, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

To my childhood adventures locked away in boxes full of old archives and photographs, and to my husband's and children's memories which dwell in a library full of selfies, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.

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ABSTRACT

Burdened by the atrocities of Argentina's coup d'état (1976-1982), many children of persecuted parents were forced to live as clandestine hideaways. In recent decades, adult survivors who experience the dictatorship as clandestine children have become primary protagonists, seeking to (re)construct past experiences through the creation of visual and textual productions. In attempt to (re)create their experience in hiding; such adults propose an alternative non-conventional image of a witnessing childhood under military rule as the child of prosecuted parents. For such children, life in secrecy meant having to find refuge from state officials seeking to eliminate their parents. It demanded strict obedience, discipline, and careful maneuverings of behaviors and adhere to strict performative practices—taking upon them new identities, while attempting to deceive military officials, and appeal to a sense of normalcy amongst close family, friends, and public surroundings for the safety and protection of entire families. As such, children had to *perform childhood* in its literal sense, to protect themselves and those around them from the terror seeking to destroy them. The use of *performative childhood* in this research, works to highlight the performative accounts of non-normative behaviors of survival and militancy within the constraints of living in *clandestinidad.*

My approach to the politics of memory in post dictatorship is to propose a performative reading of childhood—to (re)think and (re)imagine child identities of what children in hiding had to live and fluidity of their identities. Through the understanding of child witnessing and personal experiences as participating actors within life in secrecy,

this group of survivors regain 'ownership' of their own experiences. The cultural productions chosen in this research contain primary accounts of children living in secrecy. These consist of Laura Alcoba's novel *The Rabbit House* written in 2008, and Marcelo Piñeyro's film *Kamchatka* (2002) and Benjamin Avila's film *Infancia Clandestina* (2011).

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INTRODUCTION

Since the military coup d'état, Argentina's military *Junta* positioned itself as the "father figure of the nation, ruling over a feminized and child-like population" (Bystrom and Werth 428). The Junta's power and control over the nation resulted in absolute vigilance to maintain order and discipline over the Argentine people while instituting values of complete obedience and loyalty. To survive the wraths of terror it meant "'being Argentinean'" or "'being seen as'" Argentine as Diana Taylor suggests (Taylor 93). Consequently, the opposition needed a way to continue to work against the regime under disguise. Performance, in its theatrical sense, served as a tactical tool for individual, particularly, those presumably targeted by the regime to protect themselves and stay out of the fray. It gave refuge to individuals as a way to 'appear' as ordinary as possible in order to stay away from the military's ruling eye. Diana Taylor in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (1997) suggests that everyone that lived under military rule was performing, "everyone was trying to look the part that offered them security and relative invisibility (if they wanted to stay out of the fray) or access and information (if they were somehow involved). Even those who did not participate in the political struggle, but who wanted to affect some kind of social change, found that they too had to dress up" (Disappearing Acts 109).

For the opposition, this meant that individuals needed to impersonate, pretend, and disguise themselves with new identities and perform unusual behaviors. The use of performance gave people leverage and room for resistance and survival, particularly

those who were part of the armed struggle or who were in some way involved politically with the opposition or wanted to continue to fight in the country's so-called 'Dirty War.'[1] Militant activists, among many others who were targeted as sympathizers, or appeared subversive, took cover as they ran away from the military's attempt to annihilate them. As such, they found themselves in hiding, using performance to assimilate within the boundaries of the outside world, while continuously working in militant operations. Now, as I see it, the conscious behaviors of disguising oneself, pretending, and impersonating is a much easier task to undertake for an adult, because of the maturity levels and understanding of military annihilation. However, the complexity of these skills of survival are much more rigorous and demanding when dealing with ways in which children understand the density of persecution and having to undertake distinct identities.

Under circumstances and with the continuous vigilance the military promoted, I ask myself, how do you disguise a child? As many militant activists took cover and hid from military annihilation, they brought with them their children as well. As a result, children became entangled within the political mess and commotion of adult compromise. How, then, does one explain to the child that they must live in disguise, because of the circumstances of adult compromise in militancy? That he/she is no longer the person they were taught to be? How do you teach children the necessary tactical skills and abilities of survival at its best, because of the dangers unraveling before his/her eyes

[1] I place emphasis on the idea that this was not a Dirty War, there was an immense disadvantage on behalf of those considered subversive. Verónica Inés Garibotto has nothat the term Dity War was "coined by the military Junta in order to justify their clandestine actions: a 'dirty enemy' allowed for a 'dirt war.' (258). To describe the military coup and its illegal actions as a 'war' between the good and the bad, would dismiss the inhumane murder of 30,000 civilians, hundreds of tortured individuals, and the illegal appropriation of children.

and the persecution that comes with being targeted by the regime?

For those settling in the disgrace of the state's opposition, as Jane Christe has noted, children of militant guerrilla groups typically and almost "automatically became the children of this revolution-turned-struggle" (Christe 47). This meant that parents, *compañeros* (fellow combatants), and family members took measures in rearing their children to embrace leftist values and to teach children performative methods of survival and forgery. This is the essence of this research. Placing the persecuted child at the center of my analyses.

(*Re) thinking the Past through Performance: The (Re) construction of Militant Childhood Imaginaries in the Post-Dictatorship of Argentina's Cultural Production from 2003-2015* examines the behaviors and performances of children of the persecuted, through the retrospective narratives and memories of adult survivors. By enabling the possibilities of viewing child behaviors through a performative framework, I enlighten the inevitable diverse fluidity of child identities— (re)configured by the indoctrination of values, morals, and expectations of having to 'perform normalcy,' a term which I will define later that provides an outline of how children should act in a society undertaken by military rule. The use of a dramaturgical approach for this project employs a broader context of unconventional behaviors that deal with the interaction of childhood in the public sphere and the impact of assuming new identities and personas shaped by parents, the political environment, and the unforetold audiences of a military personnel that sought to annihilate leftist sympathizers and suspected dissidents.

For a little over 40 years, the Argentine cultural production has focused particularly in revealing the atrocities of Argentina's so-called Dirty War through distinct

images, such as the illegal appropriation of children and the horrific experience of becoming political prisoners, among others. Throughout the years, groups such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and H.I.J.O.S have taken stage to protest the violation of human rights and find justice for their missing family members. However, between the years 2003-2015 a growth of cultural productions has highlighted the everyday routines and interactions with the real world of children of militant and persecuted parents living specifically as targeted by the military regime–a completely distinct image of childhood that had not been seen in Argentina's history.

To problematize the child perspective a bit, children of militant parents saw a part of the military regime that no other child had seen. The constant insecurity, moving around, and hiding left children in fear for themselves and for those around them. In truth, the heroic efforts of their parents to 'solve,' and 'fix' the social problems at the time remained effortless, because of the moral responsibility they had toward their children and lack protection and security they provided. It could even be said that child's trauma was marked by a much greater and internal cause of abandonment than that of the military regime because of the lack of their parent's care and safety for them. In fact, Fernando Oscar Reati asserts that the painful memories of their parent's loss are associated with feelings of abandonment and disillusionment (3). He states, "La certeza del cariño de los padres se entremezcla inconscientemente con dudas sobre hasta qué punto fue su prioridad cuidar y proteger a sus hijos. El cuidado que todo niño espera de sus paredes se relaciona directa con una pregunta angustiante […] ¿Por qué mis padres eligieron la revolución y no me eligieron a mí? (4). This paradigm places children in a completely different image of what was once seen and understood as the victims of state

terror hosted by the dominant discourse of human rights. What is intrinsically important to note is that the dominant discourse of human rights in Argentina had been the tortured, the disappeared, and the killed. These individuals were, as Andrew C. Rajca suggest, the "revolutionaries, students, union leaders, journalist, professional, and religious figures—educated and predominately middle-class subjectivities who dedicated their lives to helping those in need" (38). Moreover, these victims/heroes, as Rajca suggest, "performing a foundational exclusion of those very people in need" (39). A child reading of the text selected—with the exception of Kamchatka (2002), which I will discuss in its corresponding chapter—provides a distinctive image of the heroic/victim, as they show a more intimate space not suited for children. Children formed some of the most vulnerable victims of the so-called Dirty War, as they became witnesses of a catastrophic event they did not understand.

As the biggest catastrophic event in the history of Argentina, the images of the atrocities by the military regime has lingered in many ways in the memories of victims for the past forty years, while continuously playing a major role in Argentina's film, theater, and book industry as a major catalyst in preserving the country's history. Those affected by the regime carry with themselves a pain that has transformed the cultural arts in the years to come. Elizabeth Jelin best describes, "Los afectados de la represión cargan con su sufrimiento y dolor, y lo traducen en acciones públicas de distinto carácter. La creación artística, en el cine, en la narrativa, en las artes plásticas, en el teatro, la danza o la música, incorpora y trabaja sobre ese pasado y su legado" (Jelin 2). The lingering effects of the past, have now taken a distinctive turn, to highlight the everyday interaction of witnessing childhood victims in Argentina's cultural production.

The aim of this research is to examine Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* (2008), Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka* (2002) and Benjamin Ávila's *Infancia Clandestina* (2013) using performance to proived a closer approximation of the child's every-day encounter with the outside world that they lived as children of targeted parents. These texts exemplify the painful (re)construction of precarious experiences the children of the political Left lived undercover as state fugitives. Their condition undercover is understood as a clandestine-hideaway-life, or as best defined in Spanish as *la clandestinidad,* a state or condition where individuals secretly maneuver between extensive networks of forgery to stay alive. Clandestine childhood's and the ways in which child victims are seen involved in these texts, during the military regime, amplifies a distinct perspective of childhood voices, of children who had the need to live between the boundaries of everyday life and secrecy. What is vital to notice as well, is that the meaning of living in *clandestinidad* is changed, altered, seen, and understood by the present, because of the challenging aspects of who and what is understood as a victim. *La clandestinidad,* at one point, meant that those targeted by the military regime and/or who escaped the wraths of terror were subversive— a known fugitive, a runaway and in extreme cases, the opposition—those who opposed the regime. Yet, the child image paved the way to (re)visit what had happened to militant families, reconfiguring, in its making, the image what they once portrayed by expanding the spectrum of the term not as 'terrorist' in their own nation or individuals of treason, but as complex actors managing to survive state violence. This change occurs because of the child's perspective, which highlights the personal and intimate surrounding of a familial state.

Through the child perspective of these texts, a clear image of the physical

transition between normalcy and *la clandestinidad* is seen, as the child is forced to enter this temporal space. *La clandestinidad* becomes then, a liminal space, where the child's identity is (re)constructed through his/her performative accounts. Victor Turner uses the concept of 'liminality', initially defined by Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1968) to define the rupture of one social status to another. According to Turner, the concept of 'the rites of passage' consist of three distinct stages: *the separation, the transition,* and *the incorporation.* To define these terms briefly, since I will touch on the matter in my later chapter, in the first phase the individual is removed and/or ruptured from his/her original roles. In Laura Alcoba's narrative, this rupture is described when the child arrives at the rabbit house, a home that has purged out of the city limits. The physical description of the home and provides a clear image of the child's removal from normalcy and into a life in hiding. Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka* highlights the families transition into a life in secrecy by the used of the family's Citroën. As similar trajectory takes place in Benjamin Ávila's *Infancia Clandestina,* where the child is seen entering Argentina through Brazil on what appears to be a ferryboat.

In the second stage of the rites of passage, according to Turner is the transitional phase or the liminal space, which consist of a beginning and end. This the 'between and betwixt' of two successive events as Richard Schechner has described it. It is an ambiguous space, a type of limbo (Turner 24). Turner describes this space as a place where "profane and social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down […] Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events" (Turner 27). In Chapter 3 and 4, I

focus more imminently how these cultural texts highlight the child's period in liminality, while it ultimately altering his/her identity in the making.

The third phase is the incorporation phase. This is when the individual returns to society with a distinct level of knowledge and identity. The evident phases of incorporation for both Ávila's and Piñeyro's films occurs the moment the children are dropped off with their grandparents. Alcoba's narrative, on the other hand, occurs when the child is exiled to France. Though each of these texts do not give a detailed visual of what life was like for these children after *clandestinidad,* there is a clear transition at the end of Alcoba's novel and the films where the children are seen integrated back into society.

In the case of Argentina, the liminal space or *la clandestinidad* is transformed into a battlefield. It is a space transformed by children's parents' necessity for protection, where the child's identity is (re)constructed. This research, therefore, focuses on capturing the non-normative *performative* accounts of children who were forced into secrecy. By focusing within this threshold, the clear fluidity of the child's identity captures his/her attempt to adapt to new personages and entities and struggles to comply as they constantly clash with their innate child-like behaviors.

In a setting not much different from child survivors of the Holocaust, many children during Argentina's totalitarian regime managed to stay alive under a variety of tactic behaviors while (re)constructing individual identities[2] in the liminality.

[2] In researching childhood behaviors in times of war, Bella Brodzky in "Trauma Inherited, Trauma Reclaimed: *Chamberet: Recollections from an Ordinary Childhood,"* provides a forceful argument of Inherited trauma of second-generation holocaust victims. In this segment, I find strong similarities in behaviors such victims to the children of militant parents who are also survival victims.

Bella Brodzky in "Trauma Inherited, Trauma Reclaimed: *Chamberet: Recollections from an Ordinary Childhood"* alludes that Jewish children survivors managed to survive in unbelievable conditions:

> They had to fend for themselves […] placed with strangers from whom they often had to disguise their true identities; having to assume different names, indeed whole new identities […] involved in an extensive network of deception, vigilance, ingenuity and remaking, haunted and threated with death, terrorized by betrayal and self-betrayal, they had to forge new familial relationships, practice other religions, speak other languages, pretend, impersonate, lie, conceal, remain silent. As so many of the titles of their memoirs testify, they lost their childhoods. (Brodzky 155)

For Argentine children who grew up under these circumstances, the need to fend for themselves and those around them depended on the way in which children of militant parents *performed childhood*. I use the term *performing childhood* in its literal sense, where children had the need to consciously perform behaviors the constituted reenacting attitudes and behaviors not genuine to their child-like persona. I, therefore, define *Performing Childhood* as a psychological and social paradigm, whereby children identities are constructed through imposed daily practices. It founded on the child's need to negotiate between the social expectations of the adult world and the rupture of normalcy while living in hiding. The term paves the way to (re)think and (re)construct child behaviors that are expected by adult members of militant groups while keeping a highly hidden profile of deception in their everyday interaction with the real world.

Considering Argentina's military regime, children living in *clandestinidad* were taught to perform for an audience constantly watching their every move. Separated from normalcy, such children had to assume new responsibilities, including adapting to new identities, yet having to 'appear' innocent and unaware of their parent's involvement. *Performing childhood* became then, a means of survival and resistance since children had to live under highly restricted modes of conduct to avoid giving off hints about their life in secrecy. Therefore, adapting to new identities came with the responsibility of having to perform new-unconventional behaviors that removed children from the instinctive 'childlike' routines and activities, they understood and performed on a regular basis. Consequently, under these circumstances, children were forced to fend for themselves and protect those around them because of the treacherous political circumstances.

According to Erving Goffman in *the Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), everyone is an actor on a stage. Goffman's theory offers a look at the notion of roles, and the *presentation of self*— to show that individuals present themselves as if on a stage for others to see. What Goffman suggests by this, is that individuals keep a highly encoded 'front' in the everyday interaction with the real world, and perform for those around them (the audience). I see, in this sense that children under military rule too, had to perform as actors on a stage, staging their every move to help in the extensive network of secrecy accompanying their parents' militancy. By using a performative/dramaturge approach to examine children behaviors, this study seeks to highlight an important truth: that the children of the persecuted were just as much part of the political distress as their parents and fellow combatants. The rupture of

childhood normalcy, while living in *la clandestinidad*, is like Victor Turner's concept of the liminal space, as it becomes a symbolic threshold that restrains children to behave in accordance to the dangers and threats of the regime. I identify this threshold as the brink between the child's life at the commencement of life in a clandestine state and the life after. It is in this space, where children became social actors because wraths of terror and the precarious experience they were forced to live during Argentina's military Junta.

In Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House,* I work with the idea of *performing militancy,* an important aspect by which Alcoba remembers having to adopt a militant identity. The novel highlights Alcoba's attempt to embrace her new entity, but clashes constantly with her adult-like responsibilities. In the novel, I see a young seven-year-old girl enthusiastic take part in the adult world regardless of her innate child-innocence and inability to understand the large measures of militancy and war. Alcoba is not only a witnessing victim but also takes part in performative behaviors of militancy and assumes an active character who is portrayed as a co-participant. In fact, there comes a point where the child is forced to become a *militante comprometida*—or a *pequeña combatiente* (Blejmar 98)*,* but is unable to do so because of her innate child behaviors. The continuous clash between the conventional child-like and instinctive behaviors of children and the demands of constant correction for the inappropriate performances under the discourse of militancy that could have potentially caused the discovery. Yet, the novel illustrates the child's desires to assimilate into the militant operative group. Her role as the only child in the home shapes her child identity respectfully. Viewing Alcoba's child perspective demonstrates the collective traumatic

events shared by militant children and the 'excitement' in which many children embraced under militant observation and potential death of those operating against the regime in the rabbit house.

In *Kamchatka* and *Infancia Clandestina,* I work with the concept of *performing survival.* This concept encompasses the need for the young protagonist to identify themselves as heroic and historical figures to adopt skills of survival and resistance to protect themselves and the network of individuals around them. I draw attention to the interrelationships of the young protagonists to political figures of the past; Harry Houdini, Juan Perón, and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. The representation of these figures in both films becomes the lens by which the young boys emulate habitually practices of the everyday self, and survival characteristic of epic heroes. What these individuals have in common, in fact, is the art of deception, concealment and secrecy. In general, we know that superheroes are courageous figures that will do anything in their power to prevail against the bad guys, their power lies in the adventurous journey, and ambition to excel from the world they protect. For the young children of these films, the indoctrination of their heroic ideals and strategical superpowers is an example worthy of imitation, paving the way for children to emulate skills of survival, protection, and strength. Harry Houdini, Juan Perón, and Che Guevara become a fairy-tale embodiment of heroes in the films who unveil their virtues and values as the ideal archetypes of heroic combatants. Historically speaking, for leftist followers these characters exercised of power influence changed the core of history, suggesting their unique abilities, talents, and traits as they sacrificed their lives and even died as martyrs for others. By placing these superheroes in a more 'realistic' setting, reinforces

the political challenges of dictatorship and the need for children to adopt heroic skills as a means of 'saving others' and themselves from the opposition.

The use of these performances, such as *performing childhood, performing normalcy, performing militancy,* and *performing survival,* are tools that mark the child's ability to perform attitudes and adult-like behaviors they would not be performing if it was not for their parent's political affiliation. Therefore, the understanding of childhood as a socially constructed entity shaped to survive through various means, such as maintaining an appearance of normalcy in the public sphere, is vital in my research. It demonstrates that children are in fact, molded and (re)shaped, and require a different kind of examination—or a closer look at their life while living in *clandestinidad* because children perform and adapt identities contrary to their own to survive. Therefore, the dramaturgical approach concerning child performances in this study employs a broader context focusing on the unconventional subject matter dealing with childhood interaction in the public sphere and the impact of individual identity of children faced with having to assume new identities or personas shaped by the child's parents, the political environment, and its foretold audiences.

The question then arises as to the social imaginary play a crucial role in the ways the past is seen and understood through the *kirchnerist era* (2003-2015). The social imaginary is understood as the collective knowledge that individuals and societies should live and behave. Though the nature of traumatic events has been a continuous debate laid out by human rights groups and other non-governmental organizations, prior to the rise of Néstor Kirchner in May of 2003, the kirchnerist administration focused its efforts to collectively embrace the political discourse of

child victims. Now, I must reemphasize, that prior to Kirchner groups such as H.I.J.O.S.[3] had already taken stage in protesting the atrocities committed by military personnel. However, the kirchnerist administration purposely sought to unfold the unheard voices of individual and the collective memories of childhood by approaching the *juventud* to collectively inspiring this large group of young men and women as part of their campaign to bring back the political agenda of the 1960s and 70s. Through the analyses of these cultural productions, which I will discuss in later chapters, it is evident that Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's administrations played a key role in pursuing the past through childhood recollection as they promoted the 'rejuvenation' of the lost discourse of young militants. They formed political alliances with young adults making it possible to (re)imagine the ways childhood was seen to children who lived life in secrecy. By doing so, it possible to see the militant ideals and values from the 1960s and 70s in the surge of cultural production during the kirchnerist era and in the case of this research the ways in which the textual child is (re)configured by adopting militant identities.

In Chapter 2 of this research, I examine the relationships between the influential politics of Argentina's *kirchnerist* era (2003-2015) in the human rights discourse that triggered the growth of a variety of cultural productions, events, and social movements. Though my intentions are not to re-write what has already been said and understood of Argentina from 1976-83 or continue the discourse following the transition to democracy in the late 80s and 90s. I seek to understand the role of Kirchner in the opening of the military cases in 2003, to pinpoint how the new

[3] Acronym of Spanish Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio ("Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetting and Silence").

government endorsed the cause for justice and memory in Argentina.

By understanding the political involvement of government officials from 2003-2015 it is possible to show the link between the collective movements of social justice of the recent past, to past traumatic experiences. Therefore, I use the social imaginary to understand and encompass the collective acceptance of values and experiences that are seen reflected in the perspective of the child who lived in secrecy.

CHAPTER 1

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WORKING WITH THE IMAGINARY AND PERFORMANCE

1.1 Introduction

The 1990s began with a new social movement of 'memory boom' in the Southern Cone. It consisted in the examination of a crucial shift in the politics of memory. According to Nancy J. Gates-Madsen in *Trauma, Taboo, and Truth Telling: Listening to Silences in Post dictatorship Argentina* (2016), after the former repressor Adolfo Scilingo confessed on public television of his part in the "death flights" ordered by the regime, his testimony led to a 'boom' in the study of memory, which represented a crucial juncture in the shift of politics of amnesia to politics of memory (Gates-Madison 5). As a result, the proliferation of acts of memory served to break the repressive silences that had been ignored by the country's democratic administrations following the fall of the *Junta*. The long history of post dictatorship debate about human rights violations and the prosecution of perpetrators unraveled a continuous dialogue and battle between the voices of victims and the offenders who have gotten away with the disappearance of over 30,000 individuals. In fact, the state had made it difficult for many victims to settle the long dispute for their missing relatives. Elizabeth Jelin emphasized this idea claiming, "desde la perspectiva de quienes se esfuerzan por obtener justicia para las víctimas de violencia a los derechos humanos, los logros han sido muy limitados o nulos. A pesar de

las protestas de las víctimas y sus defensores, en casi toda la región se promulgaron leyes que convalidaron la amnistía a los violadores" (Jelin 4). As such, the memory boom paved the way for a new set of silenced voices—a second generation of survivors, as Ana Ros describes, who lived the traumatic events of totalitarian rule that largely governed Argentina between the 1970s and 1980s.

In fact, seeking to bear witness of the terrors brought by the military *Junta* (1976-1983), actors such as H.I.J.O.S, formed of children of the disappeared and other affiliates, began to question, and considered their personal involvement and victimhood as primary witnesses of state terror and their relationships to the traumatic events. Their involvement in the political atmosphere over the last forty years has protested the personal accounts of their parents disappearences as well as (re)constructing images of their own childhood experiences as fatherless children, while reconsidering personal 'ownership' of memory of the lived experiences. Their enterance in the policial sphere allowed for a (re)shaping of the dictatorship's history to resurface the political discourses of their time. In fact, prior to these events, blood-line victims immediately centralized their search for justice for the disappearance of their loved ones and created the impression of 'ownership' in memory of the *desaparecidos*.[4] This meant, that ownership was believed to be restricted only to family members, or relatives who "could protest in their name since their loss made them, too, victims of state terrorism" (Ros 19). Family members included the Mothers of sons and daughters disappeared and tortured victims and the Grandmothers of children born in captivity.

[4] The term "disappeared" has a very controversial definition. However, a forced disappearance, as scholars have denoted, have defined the term as a physical status that occurs when an individual or individuals are, systematically abducted and/or imprisoned by the state, while the refusal to acknowledge the person's whereabouts are unknown.

However, in the years after military rule, the cultural production of childhood ownership of memory was seen by the reminiscence of childhood experiences in groups such as H.I.J.O.S. The alternative discourses included: children of the disappeared and tortured, those exiled from the country, children of persecuted parents, and children a*propiados*[5] by the military regime. As seen, the outcome of such tragedy affected, by large, the lives of children who lived under the severe measures of political displacement, exiled, or children who were involved in clandestine operational groups. Children, therefore, become a valuable offspring to understand Argentina's political neglect to restitute the pain lived.

In 2003 onward some of these same young actors began to expose a more intimate image of their experience as children in hiding, providing a dynamic picture of their lives in the treacherous measures of *la clandestinidad*. Inaugurating this new image of child witnesses was Marcelo Piñeyro's 2002 film *Kamchatka.* This new phenomenon provided a more detailed image of life as children in some of the most precarious circumstances, as runaways because of their parent's inlovedment in the armed-struggle, and their need to escape the dangers of being hunted down by the military only to be killed. The childhood image of those in hiding, provided by the films and novels about Argentina's military regime, show that children of militant parents were just as part of the social struggles as their parent's active participation in operative groups. To think that children were oblivious, naïve, and uninformed underestimates their abilities to understand the circumstances that come with a

[5] The term "apropiado(s)" implies just that, the trafficking of babies during the systematic disappearances of people. An estimate of 500 children were "apropiados" in Argentina.

clandestine life. In the face of danger, these experiences have highlighted children as a marginalized and complex character, exposed to a life camouflaged and extreme persection with the need to survive. In fact, this newer wave of childhood images, as I see it, show a (re)construction childhood indentities. In other words, as the precarious experiences of hiding surrounded the child's everyday encounter with the real world, children had to make sense of it all, and in hiding had to create new identities in order to cast themselves within society as camouflaged figures hiding their parent's political involvement. These new and unconventional identities forced children to opt out of genuine and innate child behaviors. This meant there was a certain need to enact specific behaviors or look 'natural' in order to "appear as constituting a cohesive 'reality' that social actors believe[d] in" (Disappearing Acts 92). These performative behaviors (re)created alternative images of childhood roles. Roles that were essentially altered because of the political dangers they faced and enforced by the parents, family members, and fellow *compañeros*.

By positioning children of targeted parents as key players in the (re)creation of the past, a childhood lens provides a distinct observation between the (re)telling of childhood experiences of a generational group who often seek to understand and (re)construct their parent's experiences before they were disappeared and the (re)creation of the surviving child's personal account of his/her participation through performative acts. The social aspects of the 'imaginary' come into play, as an emblematic attribute to (re)construct the past by ultimately placing the child at the center of my critical analysis as a source of exploring their relationship to recent politics.

1.2 Reading of a Childhood Text

Argentine children in hiding experienced the traumatic and precarious experiences of the military regime at different levels. The adverse experiences of Argentina's regime, for such children, were lived as run-aways or as children of fugitive criminals.[6] The capacity to undermine the social environment and the power of the military seeking to eliminate them was a task undertaken by the performative skills and behaviors of survival presented to them on the frontlines of an ideological battle. The *dictadura civico militar*[7], as it is best defined, was the authoritarian form of government that overthrew Argentina's Isabela Perón. It controlled the armed forces and impeded any form of democratic rule. Those who were believed to be a political or ideological threat or who 'appeared' to be against the coup d'état became targeted subversives and were haunted down by the regime and later be killed or 'disappeared.' In some instances, some managed to survive. Under these dimensions, children of the persecuted Left had the need to negotiate their identity and behaviors with the environment presented to them as under-cover individuals, and most importantly, develop the ability to control their emotions and behaviors within the barriers of a clandestine childhood and the real world to stay alive.

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[6] Children in hiding came from a variety of different circumstances. To classify them all as children of subversives, militants and/or activist would be deceiving and would generalize and encompass their distinct reasons of the life in secrecy as an experience that affected them all in the same way. I, therefore, distinguish from children who partook of the armed-struggle in a more intimate form as children of militant. While those persecuted for other reasons as children of the persecuted.

[7] The usage of the term "Dirty War," has become a controversial conceptualization of the absolute totalitarian rule of military forces. Therefore, to use 'dictadura civico militar' is more accurate. It proposes the disadvantage citizens had in comparison to the forced abuse of state rule.

The idea of resolving the issues of the past often presents barriers of having to reconfigure history in terms of decolonizing the dominant voices of those who have controlled past histories, while opening doors to young political voices who have not yet been heard. The accounts of child victims and their experiences underground provide a distinctive interpretation of childhood memories and experiences as children in hiding for which readers can venture out into new and unexplored spaces. Hence, Argentine children who are now adults have had the need to recuperate suppressed and lost histories, myths, and untold stories of their childhood.

Roni Natov argued, a retrospective look at childhood memories carry for us what we may not carry for ourselves, "sometimes anxieties we want to be divorced from and sometimes pleasure so great we would not, without the child, know how to contain them" (Natov 4). Writing about childhood engages in a perspective that is remembered and imagined by adults, and becomes a "way of seeing the world—freshly, and viewed from outside, as children are essentially outside the agency of the adult world" as Natov has argued (Natov 191). More explicitly, it serves "to illuminate the nature of adult fear and desire […]" (Natov 4). Therefore, a childhood reading provides an optimal setting for which children are suitable figures in retrieving precarious memories as first-hand victims of state terror. To see children as a protagonist and primary witnesses shows the polarizing worlds (between good and bad), which children had to live in. In fact, Carolina Rocha and Georgina Seminet's *Representing History, Class and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children in Adolescents in Film* highlight the representation of children and adolescence in the increasingly post national era demonstrating that "children and adolescents are appropriated to mediate issues of identity and difference,

history, class, and gender, as well as their place in discourses that question the construct of family and nation" (Rocha and Seminet 2). Childhood perspectives are used to offer a unique and distant view of the ugly realities of political turmoil, civil wars, social conflicts, and familial violence. In *Children of Cultural Memory in Texts of Childhood,* Lorna Hutchinson and Heather Snell agree with this argument, claiming:

> Childhood has often served as a lens through which issues related to cultural memory have been explored. Proceeding with the assumption that the 'child' and 'childhood' are socially constructed categories and that these categories have frequently underwritten divergent political agendas […] children comply with or challenge the often ridge parameters of the nation and the version of the national past it sanctions. (Hutchinson and Snell 8)

A critical reading of childhood is fundamental in the (re)construction and counter-discourse alluded to the memories of state terror. Childhood becomes a battleground for exploration in the competing grounds between personal territory, space, meaning, and personal ownership of memory.

1.3 Witnessing State Terror

Ana Ros's *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay* (2012) examines the relationship of the post dictatorship generation of childhood victims in the Southern Cone has reshaped, through activism and different techniques, the artistic expression. In her book, the author shares a brief perspective of her life as a child during the time of the regime. Her perspective establishes the commencement of a 'new wave' and a distinct approximation of studying the past through a collective

generation of childhood survivors, as she begins her discussion asking, “Who are the members of this generation?” (Ros 2).

Born in 1976, Ros explains that “being a child during those years meant taking part in a cultural project created by the dictatorship” (2). In fact, in some of her earliest memories of the regime, she recalls the 1985 democratic elections and seeing a televised an ad of a political prisoner being taken away by soldiers as he “formed a ‘V’ with his fingers while a chorus sang, ‘So certain things will not happen again.” (3). At that time Ros recalls not knowing fully what that meant, but reenacted the scene with a friend around the house. While reflecting more profoundly on this period she recalled other significant events that left an impression on her as a child, she recalls:

> I also remember my excitement about a new girl at school whose family had just returned from exile in Holland, and my curiosity about the connections between politics—and her having lived so far away until then. I remember another classmate in primary school, an introverted girl who surprised everyone by organising [sic] our first dance at her place. Many years later, she discovered that she was the biological father of Argentinean activist. The military had murdered her father and ‘disappeared’ her mother in Uruguay a month after she gave birth. In the same classroom, there were sons and daughters of military officials who had served during the dictatorship and were later denounced for their involvement in torture” (3).

I use Ros’ experience as a point of departure, as her experience captures the essence and the fragmented understanding of what life was like for children during Argentina’s dictatorship, because as Ros explains “the political situation affected them all” (4)

regardless of their degree of understanding and familial involvement in politics.

History has shown that Argentine children suffered the effects of war at all cost. Taking into consideration Ibércio Saint Jean's most notorious declaration, "primero mataremos a todos los subversivos, luego mataremos a sus colaboradores, después a sus simpatizantes, enseguida a aquellos que permanecen indiferentes y, finalmente, mataremos a los tímidos,[8]" children were no exception to Argentina's authoritarian regime. Even the unborn were not safe from the horrors brought to them by the bipolarity of the country. As Ros's description narrates, many young children were witnesses of the political distress during Argentina's dictatorship and as time went on this generation of child survivors had to make do with the conflicting and traumatic memories of their generation and those that came before them.

By encountering the past as a child, childhood memories have often been suppressed and grouped under an umbrella of the images of vulnerability, innocence, and victimhood. In some cases, particularly when dealing with the cultural production of Latin America, as Carolina Rocha and Georgia Simminent show, the use of childhood is represented by the "author's charisma and youth is used to dramatize the representation of the victims of civil violence as innocent and ideologically pure" (Rocha and Simminent 4). Moreover, children are individuals who lacked understanding of the political events. Yet, in other cases "children, and in particular adolescents, are the aggressors whose anger, and often delinquency, represent an indictment of the world bequeathed to them by their parents" (Rocha and Simminent 4).

However, in Argentina it was not until recent years, that children, specifically

[8] General Ibérico Saint Jean. Governor of Buenos Aires. May 1977. http://www.telam.com.ar/nota/40106/ [accessed Jan 20, 2015].

children of militant parents and those of the persecuted Left, introduced a distinct image of childhood to the political apparatus that has not previously been seen. Upon Néstor Kirchner's presidency, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, the cultural production of that time presented the image of the revolutionary's child, the child in secrecy, in hiding—in *clandestinidad,* as I refer to. The consistency in the president's political discourses to create alliances with the *la juventud* caused a dynamic change in the artistic expression of (re)imaging childhood participation in the upheaval of the 1970s and 80s and approximate a more intimate and centralized focus on the child and his experiences.

In a historical sense, the study of children in Latin America, Central American children have been seen and studied as some of the most victimized children because of the political atrocities brought to them by colonization, imperialism, globalization, civil wars, and in more recent events, migration and drug trafficking. Such calamities employ a broader understanding to the study of child victimization, as images of children surface around as some of the most forsaken and even the most unnoticed individuals. The study of childhood, in any case, not only reveals the nature of the inflicted dangers placed upon children but their political involvement as well. The active participation of child victims has not only taken its tolls in Central America but throughout the entire American continent as well. Unfortunately, children are caught among the many witnesses of war from both sides of the conflict. As the upheaval of war develops, children begin to lose their sense of innocence and become aware of the social conflicts placing their lives at stake, while at the same time becoming active political actors. Anna L. Peterson and Kay Almere Read have discussed and explored the political involvement of children in the Central American civil wars during the 1960s, in nations

such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua where children had disproportionately suffered the effects of war. In "*Victims, Heroes, Enemies: Children in Central American Wars,"* the authors make a valid claim in discussing the vital roles children play in becoming political actors in civil and governmental unrest claiming:

> It would be misleading, or, in any case, of little benefit to our understanding of them, to portray […] children only as victims. Children are also moral and political actors, important members of their communities, and the contents in which they live are informed by sharp differences concerning their roles in society. In Central America, as in many parts of Africa and the Middle East, children have served in both government and rebel armies […] the active participation of children in revolutionary movements challenges mainstream Western views of both childhood and political action. So too does the flip side of this image: the opposition's child heroes are the government's subversive, delinquents or enemies. (Peterson and Read 215)

Active participation of child victims has not only taken its tolls in Central America, but throughout the entire American continent as well. In Argentina, the child image as an active member of militant parties and those who were wrongfully targeted as subversives has rarely been studied in the academic field. The devastating military engagement in what was once considered Argentina's 'Dirty War,' led to an intolerable annihilation of the government's biggest opposition—the Peronist party and later networks of *montoneros*[9], *the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR, Armed

[9] Argentine leftist guerrilla group. Active during the 60s and 70s and fought for the Partido Federal. After Juan Peron's 18-year return from exile the president expelled the Montoneros from the Justicialist party in 74.

Revolutionary Forces)[10] and the Trotskyist *Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP, People's Revolutionary Army)[11] (Blejmar 18). The coup d'état ruled the country proclaiming itself as sole defenders of Right-wing values, while at the same time claiming to be the primary protectors of the ineptness of socialist and civilian rule. Subsequently, through the elimination of the subversive opposition, the military Junta would clean the nation of Left-wing activists, terrorists, and militants. From a military standpoint, the idea of clearing society from subversive behavior saw children born to militant parents and those innocently targeted as victims of adult abuse, for forcefully having indulged their children in criminal behaviors. As a result, children were *apropiados* and sentenced to live with military families who would raise these newly orphaned children with conservative right-wing values. To be more precise, Michael Lazzara describes this process mentioning that:

> The babies [appropriated newborns] were subsequently placed either with military families or families sympathetic to the military's cause and given false names— and false documentation that sought to erase any trace of their biological origins. The military's main goal was to socialize and inculcate these future Argentine citizens with the victor's ideology and to eliminate any vestige of its leftist enemies and their legacy. (Lazzara 320)

On the same lines, children of the so-called 'the bystanders,' as Ana Ros calls

[10] This group was found in the late 60s who's intent was to unite with rural guerrilla groups initiated by Che Guevarra.
[11] This group was the military branch of the Communist Worker's Party (PRT). In the late 1960s the guerrilla launched a campaign against the military using warfare methods of assassination and kidnapping of government officials.

them, were children who grew up in an environment of fear, distress, and isolation (Ros 4). Many never suspected that their illegal adopters were responsible for their biological parent's death. Others became orphans, while some lived with one surviving parent or were adopted by relatives, and others were illegally appropriated by members of the military who preferred to raise these missing children with values contrary to the outlaws they condemned. Therefore, the forced separation and appropriation of children from their families became a common technique used by the military regime to rid society of the disastrous upheavals of the leftist party. In a brief overview, Rita Arditti has noted, "many of the kidnapped and captive children had been given, like pieces of property, to highly placed government officials or to members of the military and the police. Others had been abandoned in the streets or in orphanages, with no information about their origins" (Arditti 13). Moreover, Arditti's questions the inhumane actions caused by the *Junta*, by asking, "What was the thinking behind such hideous actions?" In response, she states:

> The Junta members feared that if the children of the disappeared grew up with their families, they would end up hating the military. Incorporating the children into the 'big Argentine family' required destroying their identities as well as their past. This was also a way to punish the families of the 'subversives' by robbing them of their grandchildren. (Arditti 13)

Children were objectified as tools for revenge to punish subversive individual and militants for their revolutionary and radical ideas destroying the country. In fact, the appropriation of children was a way to "punish those who dared to oppose the regime and to provide 'war booty' for its loyal adherents, but it was also, and

crucially, a way to avoid 'parental contamination; of the country's youth." Moreover, children would be saved from leftist ideas and respect the *Junta militar* (Brystrom and Werth 425).

Conversely, for the safety and protection of their families, many wrongfully accused victims and operative groups fighting against Argentina's military regime took with them entire families into hiding. Others, such in the case of militant activist, hid from military rule, ideally, with the expectations of defending their political ideologies. While others sent their families into exile—making children some of the most vulnerable victims of war. With entire families fleeing from the dangers of the military regime, children of militant parents were forcefully positioned as active members of the so-called guerrilla movement to live under fierce loyalty as part of their patriotic duty, as I see it. Now, I must clarify that children of militant families, were not active members of the guerrilla movement, as one could imagine. Such children did not take part in the armed conflict as child soldiers. They participated within an array of constraints, as I will discuss in later chapters. However, the opposition took children and involved them in the fight, in such a way they were too, vulnerable to the dangers of the family's clandestine status. During their time in hiding, children became both victims of war and combatants against it. This meant that children became victimized through forced removal of the public sphere and the dangers that was brought to them because of their 'subversive' parents, which also let children to become first-hand witnesses of violence towards their family and militant peers, as they secretly maneuvered underground taking on adult responsibilities. Children had no option. They were blindly forced in these conditions by their parent's involvement in the

political conflict.

The notion of *agency* plays a significant role in constituting the vulnerability and victimhood of the child. Today's humanitarian efforts condemn violence, emotional, and physical harm towards children. Anna L. Peterson and Kay Almere Read, view children victims as innocent victims of war, however, the innocence and vulnerability comes into play with amount of awareness of the political conflict surrounding children. The amount of agency a child obtained constitutes a focal element in the notion of victimization, it determines as to how much individual involvement or forced involvement children are ultimately responsible for. In times of war, both Peterson and Almere Read question the notion "that children are unaware of political problems, including the causes and consequences of war, and that children cannot be responsible political actors." However, children's knowledge and agency differs "significantly from those of adults, [as] it is important to see how conceptions of childhood, moral agency, and political responsibility vary from one context to another" (Paterson and Read 216).

In a parallel discussion, the victimization of the child soldier can similarly be compared to children of the persecuted Left whose agency and innocence rests upon the culpability of the adult. In discussing issues about the vulnerability and victimization of child soldiers, David Rosen identifies agency as the following, "agency is more a general orientation toward the child than an operational concept, and broadly refers to the children's capacity to make choices, express their own ideas, take direction in their lives, and play a major part in bringing about change in the wider society" (Rosen 176). The problem here is the paradigm of viewing children and

childhood experiences as passive actors while disregarding the child's ability to govern their own actions as child participants in times of war. Moreover, the generational differences of child survivors and/or victims of political turmoil, Susan Suleiman alludes to the age-boundary as a necessary tool in addressing the culpability of the child. The author groups surviving victims in three distinct groups, she illustrates:

> We […] therefore end up with three discrete groups: Children 'too young to remember' (infancy to around three years old); children 'old enough to remember but too young to be responsible' (approximately age eleven to fourteen). By responsible, I mean having to make choices (and to act on those choices) about their own or their family's actions in response to catastrophe. (Sulieman 283)

The differential age groups inevitably cause conflict in the validity of reconstructed memory due to the distancing of time and possibilities of remembrance. Nevertheless, the vulnerability and victimization of the child victim occurs at the time of 'forceful recruitment,' be it through active warfare or forcefully alienating a child from the public sphere or the shaping of their behaviors to measure up to the demands of war and survival. Children had no say in the matter.

Viewing children as actors in political conflict is a debate that continues to arise as different experiences are being told. In recent years, many writers and artists have taken into consideration discussing their personal accounts of victimhood and have sought to be recognized by legal and judicial terms. Many as, Jordana Blejmar has described, also feel the need to (re)interpret the ways in which their life stories have

been represented over the past decades. To emphasize more clearly, Blejmar describes:

> …members claim to be considered subjects whose own rights were violated during the dictatorship. At the same time, they often feel uncomfortable with the way that discourses of human rights organizations, former militants and academics have tended to portray them—namely as eternal orphans expecting only sympathy and compassion from older generations… (Blejmar 201)

In thinking about children victims in Argentina during and after the post-dictatorship, there has been a growing fascination in (re)interpreting the past struggles during the military regime. The drastic outbreak of the authoritarian regime placed children directly within the eye of the storm. As a result, such children have become victims of the societal conflict, which is evident in my perspective, and the efforts to (re)conceptualize memory in a broader sense, has included analyzing the unique experience of trauma encompassing child survivors and their experiences in a large spectrum of diverse experiences.

The fundamental theorist who have contributed significantly to the study of post-memory and child survivors are Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Jelin, Ana Ros, and Susan Sulieman. The distinctive point of views of each of these theorists, discuss the familial, social, and political relationship to post-memory and its primary recipients—the 'second generation'. However, the individuality and subjectivity of individual experiences lack the extensive and personal field of memory, particularly to the first-hand experiences of childhood survivors, which I will discuss further.

To begin, Elizabeth Jelin has been an important theorist in the study of memory in the Southern Cone. In the introduction of her fifth chapter of *State Repression and the*

Labors of Memory, she asks, "¿Qué puden decir o contar queienes vivieron esas situaciones ≪invivibles≫?" (Jelin 79). Along these lines, what can child survivors provide when the distancing in time has long past? According to Jelin, for survivors of state repression the impact of these horrid events leaves a profound mark on the surviving victim or what she calls "la huella ≪tesimonial≫" (Jelin 80). This mark provides personal ownership of the memories lived. In fact, the term testimony has two connotations as Jelin states:

> Primero, es testigo quien vivió una experiencia y puede, en momento posterior narrarla, ≪dar testimonio≫. Se trata del testimonio en primera persona, por haber vivido lo que intenta de narradar. La noción de ≪testigo≫ también alude a un observador, a quien presencio un acontecimiento desde el lugar del tercero, que vivió algo, aunque no tuvo participación directa o involucramiento personal en el mismo. Su testimonio sirve para asegurar o verificar la existencia de cierto hecho. (Jelin 80).

Surviving victims bear witness of lived events as observers and at the same time, as Jelin proposes as "testigos de sus propias vivencias y de los acontecimientos de los que participaron" (81). Luke Howie's work on state terrorism post 9/11, focuses on understanding the meaning and consequences of terrorism and by doing so proposes that we must also understand the impact of understanding "terrorism's witnesses" (Howie 19). "Witnesses are unique" he states, "and what they witness is subsequently received and understood in unique, subjective ways" (Howie 20). What I want to extract from Howie's definition of witnesses to terror are two important factors. First, "witnesses are never distant from the things that they witness, and witnessing is never merely

watching. Witnesses are bound in tight knots to global events, technologies, of mass-mediated disseminations, situatedness and location, and other witnesses," and two, "Witnessing is far more than merely just watching. Witnessing is never passive. Witnessing is active, performed and embodied, even when it occurs at a distance" (Howie 20). I extract these two characteristics to formulate a much broader understanding of childhood witnessing during Argentina's military coup. Children in hiding were not only seeing the traumatic events surrounding them, but were directly linked by their family relationships and the widespread efforts of the dictatorship to annihilate their parents. This relationship placed children as directly affected victims, as so many lost their parents and close relatives and were forced to witness the horrid realities of life as runaways, while many were in the midst of the armed-struggle, and others were left orphans to fend for themselves.

To broaden this idea a bit further, and to show how children became witnessing victims, one of the last scenes in the short film *El ojo en la nuca* (2001) directed by Rodrigo Plá captures, the young protagonist Pablo is seen under a bed in hiding, as he watches military officers wrestle his father to the ground, beat him, and take him by force. This is the last time the child sees his father. The camera then rotates to a birds-eye view of the room, where the child is no longer seen under the bed. The men leave the home, and the child's hand is seen slowly reaching for his father's fallen glasses, to only return to the child under the bed at the close of the film. As a paradox to my argument, this image delineates how in some cases children of targeted individuals watched as their parents were being tortured and taken by military personnel. They were witnesses of state terror, first-hand.

In the eye of this discussion, Marianne Hirsch has become a key theorist in discussing issues about what she underlines as "hinge generation" (Hirsch 100). This concept identifies the generation of children who experienced the post effects of war during the Holocaust. Hirsch argues that the primary ways in which this group of children are victims through the intergenerational process of transferring memory. For those working on the study of memory, the acts of transfers include a vast number of testimonial archives of both memorial and photographic images of governmental oppression, the oral, and written transmission of histories and stories detailing the human rights violations, of pain, of hate and of the atrocity imagined through generations. Such memories have become a vital fuel in the study of what Hirsch encompasses as the "second generation or the generation after" (Hirsch 3). The idea of the second-generation visits in a literal reference as the 'post-generation.' Moreover, Hirsch provides a provocative and geographical approach to generational victims of the Holocaust, claiming that:

> Descendant to victim survivors as well as perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous *generation's* remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of *memory*, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event. (Hirsch 3)

As such, the children of such generation are told stories of the surviving victims, of who came before them, and not stories of their own experience and participation. Moreover, the idea of the "post memory" generation, explains that the delayed or postponed memories of childhood victims/survivors belong to those who bare the

"personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before," in order for such generation to experience and remember the "stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 5). The problem however, is that these images and "experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 5). Hirsh's definition of an "inherited" memory, is the idea of a transmitted memory from surviving victims to that the generations after. To this extent, it "is not a movement, method, or idea […] rather, as a structure of inter- and transgenerational return to traumatic knowledge and embodied experience" (Hirsch 6).

As such, those who have received the 'memory' of their parent's experiences and suffering have the inability to possess 'ownership' of individual experience. Considering Hirsch's arguments, the ability to recall first-hand experiences of traumatic events would be considered beneficial to the second generational individuals of the Holocaust. Yet, the personal connection to trauma is completely displaced from its essence. Cara Levey adds to Hirsch's definition, explaining that, "recollection and recall are not so much the salient [and individual] features of post memory as are familial ties and intergenerational transmission of memories" (Levey 8). Consequently, this group of individuals recalls a memory inherited through familial, social, and political traumatic experiences, while lacking their own personal accounts of the past. In addition, Levey uses the terms "displacement," "belatedness," and identifies "post" in its literal sense, to define Hirsch's theoretical concept of the intergenerational transmission of memories between the first and second-generation survival victims of the Holocaust and the lack of personal ownership in Hirsch's definition.

Ana Ros has been a fundamental researcher in discussing the second generation of children from the Southern Cone. In her introduction to *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production* (2012), the author describes the group of individuals who were either small children or babies born during Argentina's military regime, as the "post-dictatorship generation." She illustrates, "the term 'post-dictatorship generation' refers to those who grew up under military regimes […] The political situation affected all of them, regardless of their *degree of understanding* of current events and regardless of their family's relation to politics" (Ros 4). Unlike Hirsch's definition, Ros defines the post- memory as an experience that *affected them all.* I concur with Ros and place emphasis on the notion that the experience of the regime did indeed, affect the second generation of children. This is evident, in the reminiscence of a personal subjective experience portrayed in the cultural productions of child victim regardless of the stories they tell upon the return of democracy. Furthermore, Cara Levey clarifies that the memory and identity of this group of victims is articulated collectively by the "post" or "after" experiences of the past which "varies not only between first-and second-generation actors, but among second-generation actors themselves" (Levey 6). In other words, this group of child victims share similar and comparable experiences for which together they bring to pass a sense of collectiveness and familial support amongst each other, because of the past they share.

In recent years, the voices of young protagonists who experienced life under clandestine circumstances have been critical about their parent involvement, while

others have sought for justice of their parent's disappearance. Despite the differences in opinions, I consider children of militant parent's both witnesses and victims of the political upheaval. The memories of their childhood while living in *clandestinidad* are theirs, they are "testigo-partícipe[s]" (Jelin 81) as they remember the precarious past and traumatizing experiences of the imminent danger they had to face both collectively and individually. To add, Susan Suleiman introduces the concept of a 1.5 generation. Suleiman's theoretical perspective of the 1.5 generation slightly differs from Ros' definition of child survivors, in that it identifies the generational differences of those who recall and remember the effects of war as children. As best described the "1.5 generation, […] child survivors [were] too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there*" (Suleiman 277). The importance, therefore, lies in the acclaimed memories of children and recollection of traumatizing effects. Aligned with this is Jordana Blejmar's contribution:

> The childhood memories of many artists and writers who grew up during the dictatorship are […] comprised of images of what they lived, what they remembered, what they imagined and the stories they were told during and after the events. In their cultural memories of those years they turn to that hybridity precisely to make explicit the difficulty of discriminating facts from fictions in their narratives of the past of the self. (Blejmar 14)

The images and lived experiences as Blejmar demonstrates, is an important aspect in defining the political involvement of children. The personal experience of traumatizing events provides legitimacy and ownership to the stories being told.

Now, though the geographical location of victims, their age, and collective experience[12] has formulated between the different generational groups, the common experience of undertaking adult roles as children and by having to make difficult choices regarding survival, demands the moral obligation to consider such children victims of war. In support of this, Suleiman demonstrates, "we know that […] many children, even children younger than eleven, had to make such choices—including taking responsibility for the survival of other family members— 'too young to be responsible' also means that they were prematurely forced into adult roles, thus adding to their trauma" (Suleiman 283). I view the children of targeted and militant parents in Argentina, regardless of their age or geographical standpoint, not much different from the second generation of Holocaust survivors Suleiman addresses. Yet to clarify, I am not equating the Holocaust to the Argentine dictatorship, but using the discourse on memory to relate the Holocaust issues to Argentine memory. As Argentine children also, had to make difficult choices in the ways they lived and accommodated their lifestyles to survive. In fact, children regardless of their age, had some accountability for their own actions, this is a seen, as I will show in my analyses of the texts, how children clashed between reality (their innate child-like attributes) and the life they were given to live as militant hideaways. Needless to say, they were faced with having to make involuntary choices, as they were bound to *perform* behaviors and identities contrary to their own, having to disguise themselves to appear 'normal' in the public sphere because of the political circumstance and involvement in the battlefield of

[12] In *The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust,* Susan Suleiman places emphasis on the distinct elements which, affected the concept of Generations, such as age, location, and experience.

militancy.

The idea of child survivors establishes a crucial perspective for my research, as it helps to determine the theoretical components for considering children of militant parents' as primary witnesses of trauma and co-participants of leftist operational groups. While it seems that the above factors apply to all surviving victims of war, it is clear that trauma, distress, and the after-effects of the coup are results of political polarity and disturbance. The personal testimony of the dictatorship experience and its aftermath played a leading role in the development of individual identity and the creation of collective political groups such as H.I.J.O.S in 1995. The systematic efforts to document one's individual past has been a work in progress to exemplify the theme of *Nunca Más.*

1.4 The Imaginary

Before examining the performative apparatus of childhood through its theoretical framework, it is vital to understand the diversity and (re)construction of child identities are dependent on the indoctrination of societal values and expectations. The theoretical framework for *Performing childhood* and the social implications of a collective commonality between individuals and the culture of post-traumatic events, resides on the collective understanding of the social imaginary. The social imaginary consists of the forms, values, and practices that encompass the memories of childhood survivors to (re)construct, (re)imagine, and (re)think their lived experiences. For adult survivors, the social imaginary enables a sense of collective understanding and social acceptance of the customs, politics, values, and behaviors of the past, as it plays a key role in the ways the past is seen and reconfigured. In a more defined explanation, by

relocating the child into a liminal threshold, children are removed from society and are (re)taught new unconventional strategic skills and behaviors of resistance and survival. Children of militant parents were (re)taught to perform (in a theatrical sense) 'normalcy' in their daily encounters with the outside world. In fact, just like adult figures, children were part of a network of interrelationships, because they continued to be part of the real world. This meant that their life in hiding had to be concealed to survive. Rachel May articulates this idea more profoundly claiming that militants for the most part:

> Lived in cities in regular apartments. They often held regular jobs and kept up appearances with regular people. Because their own real contact came with other members of their cells, they led lives of secrecy and deception. This life was isolating and even tortuous at times. As the violence against them escalated, they became even more isolated as their organizations become more clandestine and many militants when into exile. (May 243)

Under the tumultuous circumstances of the military regime, it was essential for children to maintain an appearance of normalcy and perform conventional childlike behaviors in their everyday life, as if their life in hiding did not exists. This placed a significant responsibility on children, because life in secrecy consisted of forgery and deception of identity, as militant families and those targeted by the regime were compelled to protect one another.

To locate the concept of the social imaginary more specifically in the sociological terrain of this study, the notion of the social imaginaries is the collective

social understanding of how people and societies should and ought to live and behave. The social imaginary allows for understanding of how morals, values, and symbols are created and implemented within any given society. In a more concrete sense, the social imaginary presupposes an understanding of society as a political institution, whereby, the idea of moral order is based on collective acceptance. To deliberate briefly on the idea of how social imaginaries came about, the term was introduced in the 1950s by Paul Cardan, who first wrote about social imaginaries in a journal called *Socialism ou Barbarie.* Cardan introduced the term to attack the bureaucratic calcification of the Soviet bloc countries at the time. As he became disillusioned with the idea of Marxism, he argued, that Stalinism operated by the same institutional logic containing similar, if not the same, core political values as the advanced forms of capitalism, which later angered many Eurocommunists. It was later known, that Paul Cardan was a pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) who began to publish his work under his own name. Attributed for the notion of social imaginaries, Castoriadis argued that society is an imaginary ensemble of institutions, practices, beliefs, and truths which society and its inhabitants subscribed to and performed. His studies sought to identify the creative forces that made up the social-historical world.

Along the same terrain, philosopher Charles Taylor contributes to the moral theory particularly through his reflections on modern social imaginaries, to account for the differences among modernity. In more precise terms, Taylor articulates his idea of social imaginaries in a broad understanding of the way people and societies imagine themselves to be as a collective whole. With the retelling of Western Modernity, Taylor accounts for the formation of how the Western world has come to

imagine society as an economy for the exchange of goods and services to promote prosperity among different exchange partners. In short, he sets out the idea the that moral order is based on the mutual benefit of equal participants which are characterized by three key cultural forms in the Western social imaginary—that is—the economy, the public sphere, and self-governance.

Though much recognition of is given to Castoriadis for the introduction to the term, in 1989 the idea of social imaginaries renewed its interest to a group of authors, including Charles Taylor, Michael Warner, Benjamin Lee, and Dilip Parameshwar Goankar, because of the collapsing Leninist model. This small group of theorists drafted a statement on *new imaginaries.* In this statement, the authors underlined social imaginaries as the "implicit understanding that underlie and make possible common practices." These practices are "embedded in the habitus of a population or are carried in modes of address, stories, symbols, and the like." Moreover, they are imaginary in a double sense, "they exist by virtue of representation or implicit understanding, even when they acquire immense institutional force; and they are the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world" (Parameshwar Goankar 4).

The work of Elizabeth Jelin in *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003) provides a similar understanding of social imaginaries in terms of the labor that goes into the reconstruction of memory and the common experiences understood by the past. According to Jelin the expansion of a culture of memory becomes a vital concept when linked to social calamities, she states, "la memoria y el olvido […] se tornan cruciales cuando se vinculan a acontecimientos traumáticos de carácter político y a situaciones de

represión y aniquilación, o cuando se trata de profundas catástrofes sociales y situaciones de sufrimiento colectivo" (Jelin 11). Because of the severe catastrophic and collective events of the past, the past begins to work in conjunction with the present and the future to make sense of its reality. Jelin develops this notion explaining that by placing the past, present, and future in a lineal order, the past is positioned in the present time frame and in function for a desired future, "por el ≪horizonte de espectativas≫" (12). The complexity of understanding the past and making sense of the social disaster arises as a result of the narration of human subjectivity, and historical events (which are linked to politics, institutions, and organizations), as Jelin notes. Therefore, to locate memory, implies making references to past experiences and "*working through"* (16) memory in the present time frame. This includes, as Jelin has shown, "Abordar la memoria involucra referirse a recuerdos y olvidos, narrativas y actos, silencios y gestos. Hay juego de sabores, pero también hay emociones. Y hay también huecos y fracturas" (17). Therefore, the negotiation between the past and the present, with hopes for a better future attempts to fill-in the missing pieces of the puzzle in the (re)construction of memory. Which leads me to understand that the past is influenced by the present and therefore influences the social imaginaries of the present state as best articulated by Jelin:

> Estamos hablando de procesos de significación y resignificación subjetivos, donde los sujetos de la acción se mueven y orientan (o se desorientan y se pierden) entre ≪futuros pasados≫ […] ≪futuros pedidos≫ […] y ≪pasados que no pasan≫ […] en el presente que tiene que acercar y alejar simultáneamente de esos pasados recogidos en los espacios de experiencias y de los futuros incorporados en horizontes de expectativas. Esos sentidos se construyen y cambian en relación y

> en dialogo con otros, que pueden compartir y confrontar las experiencias y expectativas de casa uno, individual y grupalmente. Nuevos procesos históricos, nuevas coyunturas y escenarios sociales y políticos, además no pueden dejar de producir modificaciones en los marcos interpretativos para la comprensión de la experiencia pasada y para construir expectativas futuras. Multiplicidad de tiempos, multiplicidad de sentidos, y la constante transformación y cambio de actores y procesos históricos, estas son algunas de las dimensiones de la complejidad (Jelin 13).

The interrelationship of the past, present, and future, as I would concur with Jelin, influence the ways in which the social imaginaries of the past is collectively understood. The acceptance of social values because of the subjective and individual turn allows for the past to be seen on the bases of certain collective values, norms, and beliefs, because of the complexity of time and experience. The multiple layers of subjectivity and its many horizons (past, present, and future) bounds up social and political actions, constructing past, present, and future expectations (Jelin 4). In other words, remembering the past is shaped by the present. For this reason, it is possible to view the past as an interwoven element of the present. Jelin has noted that by "locating memory in time implies making reference to the 'space of experience' in the present" (Jelin 4).

Concurrently, Beatriz Sarlo in *Tiempo Pasado* (2005) focuses on the historical implications of narrating the past explaining "la modalidad no académica escucha los sentidos comunes del presente, atiende las creencias de su público y se orienta en función de ellas. Eso no la vuelve lista y llenamente falsa, sino conecta el imaginario social contemporáneo, cuyas presiones recibe y acepta más como ventaja que como

límite" (Sarlo 15). In fact, Sarlo understands memory to be a (re)construction of past with reference to the present state and the future in the ways in which it is organized and presented:

> Las 'visitas de pasado' […] son construcciones. Precisamente porque el tiempo del pasado es ineliminable, un perseguidor que esclaviza o libera, su irrupción en el presente es compresible de la medida en que se lo organice mediante los procedimientos de la narración y, por ellos, de una ideología que ponga de manifestó un *continuum* significativo e interpretable de tiempo. De pasado se habla sin suspender el presente y muchas veces, implicando también el futuro. Se recuerda, se narra o se remite al pasado a través de un tiempo de relato, de personajes, de relación entre sus acciones voluntarias e involuntarias, abiertas y secretas, definidos por objetivos o inconscientes; los personajes articulan grupos que pueden presentarse como más o menos favorables a la independencia respecto de factores externos a su dominio. Estas modalidades del discurso implican una concepción de lo social, y eventualmente también de la naturaleza. Introducen una tonalidad dominante en las 'vistas del pasado.' (13)

As emphasized by Sarlo, visits to the past are constructions of the 'imaginary.' To place childhood imaginaries and the ways in which the past is understood in the present state by adult victims, it is important to note that the influences, opinions, and emotions by which adult victims (re)construct their past is shaped by both the individual experience and social-political imaginaries.

In the decade of restitution, after the restoration of democracy in Argentina, the

state had repeatedly changed the moral demands in the ways in which social justice had been implemented throughout the years, by forgiving and forgetting, and even pardoning the involvement of political figures in the torture and disappearance of thousands of individuals. Contradictory policies responding to the demands of social justice continued to distort the country from the 1990s into the economic crisis of the new century. With the rise of human rights groups seeking social justice from the devastating memoirs of the past, these groups led the way creating a buffer between the state and the people when Nestor Kirchner came to power. Groups, such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, and H.I.J.O.S, introduced issues about public policy related to the yearnings of human rights violations since the coup. The tumultuous events of the late eighties and nineties impulse an international version of civil society, as best described by Dilip Parameshwar Goankar, in his article "Towards New Imaginaries: An Introduction" claims:

> Those institutions in conjunction with the increasingly powerful global media would provide the forum and framework for discussing issues of global concern and thereby influencing the policies of individual nations and of the world community. The result would be the emergence of a transnational public sphere dedicated to promoting democratic values, human rights, and ecological justice through a potential 'dialogue of cultures.' (Parameshwar Goankar 3)

With the fall of the military Junta, andwith the return of democracy, the aim for victims to regain strength through collective experience resulted in the awakening voices of displaced mothers, children, and victims. Their voices began to resonate with

the appearance of cultural productions as directly affected victims. Yet, as mentioned before, the voices of childhood survivors took center stage as the newly elected president Néstor Kirchner became a popular national figure in 2003, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. In the years governed by *el kirchnerismo* from 2003-2015, the state recognized the importance of a civil society by supporting and motivating many of the human rights organizations seeking to confront the issues of political prosecution by the state since the military regime. The Kirchner era formed an entirely opposing structure of social imaginaries that encompasses the image of the militant activist. In doing so, the Kirchner administration supported the production of young political actors who, in turn, remember their participation as children during the dictatorship and imagined their childhoods based on values that reflected the new era of human rights discourse.

Under these premises, I use the social imaginary to understand and encompass the social acceptance of the common values and experiences of the past that are (re)told by the sons and daughters of persecuted parents in recent years. The common values, practices, and beliefs taught to children in hiding, as I see it, has historically created an extensive debate about how conventional image of child identities have been seen and understood in the past as vulnerable and innocent. Now, I want to clarify, that children have been seen, and are, innocent and vulnerable within the large spectrum of war, however, these attributes do not define their identity. Aspects of survival, their heroic efforts, and willingness to comply with the demands of secrecy at times, manifests itself through the cultural productions of the time. Therefore, I argue that state-sponsored governments create

social imaginaries and a communal acceptance in the ways childhood is seen, and generates an offset of values and practices. Now I must (re)emphasize that childhood memories existed prior to Kirchner. Childhood victims did indeed, (re)visit their past in many ways, what I argue differently however, is that the social implication of militancy and the political discourse to (re)juvinate the youth is a theme, presented by Kirchner and lingered through his wife's presidency, to collectively embrace political support from a more vivid social group.

By placing the child at the center of my analyses and understanding the impact of social imaginaries in post dictatorship culture, I (re)visit the past in terms of its narrative present and (re)imagine what it was like to live childhood in hiding. I intend to frame my analysis under the assumption that the now-adult child of militant parents and children in hiding embraced skills of survival, resistance, and manipulation on the bases of militant imaginaries that were highly encoded by the values of the Kirchner era, and (re)imagine the ways their childhood has been previously told. I believe that the acceptable behaviors of militancy, survival, and resistance are more profoundly seen in the cultural productions of post dictatorship cultural productions, because of the state-sponsored activism that implemented a societal acceptance of militancy to combat the lost values of the 1960s and 70s.

1.5 Creating of Social Imaginaries in the Cultural Production

While engaging in memoirs, blogs, biographies, films, journals, books, and other cultural texts on precarious childhood experiences, the retrospective imaginary took on a unique perspective— particularly that of children survivors who lived under militancy or secrecy. In the reworking and understanding of the past, Elizabeth Jelin

in *State Repression, and the Labors of Memory* (2002) has shown that the possible ways of viewing the past occur through the different meanings and understandings of it. Using Paul Ricoeur as a reference, Jelin has highlighted the following paradox: "the past is gone" it has already been "de-termin(at)ed; it cannot be changed. The future, by contrast, is open, uncertain, and indeterminate. What can change about the past is its meaning, which is subject to reinterpretations, anchored in intentions and expectations toward the future" (Jelin 26). Because the past is gone, what lies before us, in the grand scheme of reality, is the interpretation of how events took place, and how people, places, and events are represented and described retrospectively. In fact, according to Jelin, the ability of remembering the past is through social agents who engage "in confrontations with opposite interpretations, other meanings, or against oblivion and silence," she adds, "actors and activists [that] 'use' the past, bringing their understandings and interpretations about it into the public sphere of debate. Their intention is to establish/convince/ transmit their narrative, so that others will accept it" (Jelin 26). In addition, the author argues that the process of recollecting the past requires active work. Memory is not a passive process, but requires individuals to constantly negotiate meaning between the past and the present, suggesting a continuous examination of past experiences.

I place emphasis throughout this dissertation in the continuous (re)working of Argentine memory over the past 40 years, which has been rigorously studied as new actors continue to take aim at the historical implications of lost voices. It is the constant (re)interpretation of the past, that the centralized trope to capture adult-made memories focuses on the process of (re)construction, (re)thinking, and (re)imagining

childhood memories. I place emphasis on the prefix: "re" to highlight the repetitive, recurring, and continuous reconfiguring evaluation of the unexamined childhood. As childhood stories linked directly to the eye of the storm begin to come out they join a cannon of post dictatorial production that has been visited and (re)visited by surviving victims themselves, as they have tried to make sense of it all. The (re)construction of the past, therefore, becomes a battleground for interpretation between the narratives of a once-lived childhood and the memories of what is remembered over time. In fact, in Jelin's work the author highlights the notion of 'working through' memory as a repetitive process to avoid, what she delineates as "la repetición ritualizada, en la compulsión que lleva al acto, y el de un olvido selectivo, instrumentalizado y manipulado" (Jelin 14). This entitles "≪trabajar≫, elaborar, incorporar memorias y recuerdos en lugar de re-vivir y actuar" (15). Now, the elaborative process of working through memory is also a repetitive process that is modified by interpretation, as suggested by Jelin memory, "esta modificada por la interpretación y, por ello, susceptible de favorecer el trabajo del sujeto frente sus mecanismos repetitivos" (16).

The understanding childhood memory provoke the following questions: is it possible to (re)tell, (re)create and (re)plicate the reality of memory by exact mimesis of a once lived childhood? Can feeling, expression, sight, and sound be told or written as exact as it once was felt? Can memory reclaim the exact representation of childhood memories too deep and distorted in one's far distant memory? Wolfgang Iser has asked, "are fictional texts truly fiction, and are nonfiction texts truly without fiction?" (Iser 1). Where then, is the separation between reality and fiction within a literary text? For does literature provide an exact *mimesis* of reality? More profoundly,

Iser asks, "How can something exist that, although actual and present, does not partake of the character of reality?" (Iser 2). In an attempt to answer, I suggest, as does Joseph Roach has noted that "no action or sequence of action can be performed the same way twice: they must be reinvented or reacted at each appearance. In this improvisatory behavior space, memory reveals itself as an imagination" (Roach 46). In the Poetics of Childhood, Roni Natov proposes a quite similar question regarding childhood representation stating:

> How close can we, as adults, get to the inner life, where the profusion of our memories lies? And how much of that richness are we able to express? The dominant images embedded and stored in the imagination are personal and idiosyncratic—based, as they are, on the unique experiences of each of us and on the singular way in which each view those experiences—that they may seem untranslatable. Yet, when expressed artistically through the eyes and in the voice of childhood memory, they can resonate deeply for others. This is the poetics of childhood. It involves the images that cluster around childhood, the voices and tones, the smells, and textures that make up the larger landscape that recalls to us our earliest state of mind. (Natov 2)

As explored by Roni Natov the exclusive sensibility of childhood and the ways in which writers have tried to capture childhood over time is remembered by adults. Since, as Rebecca Knight has demonstrated, "those who define the nature of children and childhood are necessarily almost always adults, partly because children do not have the linguistic capacity to express such abstract concepts" (Knight 791). Tobias Hecht's introduction to *Minor Omissions,* emphasizes that there is a lack of written

accounts made and/or written by children, he states, "over the last five centuries, the vast majority of children in Latin America left no written accounts of their lives. Nearly all records about them were authored by adults and reflect perspectives that may be very different from those of the children themselves" (Hecht 3). The problem here, I would argue, is not only the lack of written accounts of child experience in first-hand accounts but the distancing of time in which certain events had taken place and when the accounts were written. In fact, as reemphasized by Hecht, nearly all accounts are authored by adults, while the experiences were lived as children and written in the adult state. So, in some way, we are always to some degree or other talking about the imagined child and 'the place of childhood in the imaginative life of adults" (Natov 3). To this, the author adds, "childhood narratives bring to us an exquisitely liminal space in adulthood, one that generates—in its attempt to mediate levels of perspective and experience—a rich variety of expression of psychological and aesthetic possibility (Natov 3). The (re)creation of memory is merely just that—an element so present yet, it does not take the character of reality. So how can memory partake of the real world?

The (re)writing of memory can be so real and so lived, yet not partake of its once lived reality. To this extent, Iser claims that whenever realities are transposed into the texts, they are made to outstrip their original determinacy and become signs for something else. Upon reproducing the real and the fictive, fictionalized text bring about "light purposes, attitudes, and experience that are decidedly *not* part of the reality reproduced" (Iser 2). Hence, they become *fictionalized acts*:

Because the act of fictionalizing cannot be deduced from reality repeated in

> the text, it clearly brings into play an imaginary quality that does not belong to the reality reproduced in the text but that cannot be disentangled from it. Thus, the fictionalizing acts convert the reality reproduced into a sign, simultaneously casting the imaginary as a form that allows us to conceive what it is towards which the sign points. (2)

The act of fictionalizing is paramount in literature—for it is a guided act, based on a conscious procedure of the author by processes of selection. In Iser's perspective, literary texts contain a mixture of reality and fiction, resulting in "the interaction between the given and the imagined" (Iser 1). Winfried Fluck's "Imaginary Space; Or, Space as Aesthetic Object" addresses the literary reproduction of reality as an aesthetic element, which is often represented as a distorted image, redefined, and recreated in the act of representation. Fluck uses the term 'aesthetic object' to illustrate the transformation of a given object or element (its function and form) as it is transformed from its referential representation to the fictionalized world of imagination.

Accordingly, the object represented within the realms of the imaginary is never identical with its real self. This introduces the question of the imaginary's true modes of representation. In fact, Fluck emphasizes we must invest "our emotions, draw upon our own associations, and create our own mental pictures in order to imagine a character" (30) to make him/her come to life. Therefore, it is prominent to argue that childhood entities are imagined characters whose author's emotions and memories are invested in the character to make him/her come alive within the text. The imagined child is represented as a duplicate image of the empirical self. Since we, have never met the childhood self, we can only invest in our own recollection of imagined

memories. As such, in visiting childhood memories, the lived experiences of childhood memory are (re)told retrospectively and are (re)interpreted as replicas of the *once lived experience.*

Now, when social atrocities are silenced, it becomes difficult for victims to make sense of the harm done to them, but when individuals and communities gather to share the acceptance of social catastrophes, the social imaginary plays a major role in the way in which the past is seen, organized, represented, and interpreted. Moreover, the content of what is remembered and forgotten, and the process by which memory is formulated in the complexities of time is understood by the realm of subjectivity, which Jelin discusses in her book as:

> … The core of what is remembered and forgotten relates to direct personal life experiences. Yet even most intimate incidence are always mediated by mechanisms of social interaction, involving links between the manifestation and the latent or visible, the conscious and the unconscious. Memory also incorporates knowledge, beliefs, behaviors patterns, feelings, and emotions conveyed and received in social interaction, in processes of socialization, and in the cultural practices of a group. (Jelin 9)

In the interpersonal social interaction of peoples, memory is remembered. The key to the imaginary is to view the representations of the child image in terms of child performances. It provides an understanding of how childhood survivors imagined themselves to be, in reference to the beliefs, values, social practices and behaviors they (re)call as a collective whole. Therefore, the collective (re)construction of memory and its corresponding social imaginaries, is vital in the acceptance of human rights

violations and the social justice sought by the many victims.

In short, within the human ability to recall, remember and (re)construct imaginary spaces or images in an artistically literary content, there is only so much and so little that can be said about one's own childhood. It is possible to recall certain events and feelings, however, in the midst s of it all, fond memories of childhood become too blurred and too distant to be reclaimed as exact replicas of the past. The (re)construction of childhood memories belongs solely to the adult capacity to remember and illustrate memories aspire replicas. Childhood memories are then, artistically created products that possess the possibilities of venturing into spaces beyond long-lived memories. Thus, the imagined space (re)constructed by adult memories, may or may not have been *lived* experiences are, but a byproduct of aesthetic creativity and social imaginaries.

Through memoirs, fiction, nonfiction narratives, including film, and theatrical pieces, adults build upon their own present state to recreate, what I conceptualized as the textual child or the imaginary child. The imagined child is characterized by elements that come from reality, fiction, and the imaginary. The construction of the textual world is characterized and shaped by the drawing of experiences from the past, and the values of the real world. Subsequently, the imaginary spaces and imaginaries, such as figures, elements, objects, characters, etc., results, from placing the real and the fictive into complementary roles. Likewise, the construction of the imaginary anticipates equal access to the real and fictive worlds, combining both in its making. What is meant by this, is that in the retrospective reconstruction of childhood memories, the imaginary adopts and reflects on events and experiences as *real* lived

experiences. Therefore, the child within the textual setting is an imagined subject, created by personal experience, memory, both fragmented or not, and influenced by the adult's political, social, and familiar surroundings. To put this into perspective, the imagined character does not, in fact, exist in its present empirical state, nor did it exist at any given time. He/she is a recreation, through personalized, of what was, or had been. Thus, the imagined child becomes the byproduct of a once lived memory.

1.6 The Imagined Child

While retrospectively looking at the past, the adult can (re)construct fond memories creating an *imagined* child he calls himself. To put into perspective the childhood is the construction of the imagination of the adult, an imagination that can be founded by memories and experiences, because our child-self does not exist in its present state, we tend to revert to the past as if the child self were a faculty of reality— which is not. It is merely the imagination of what or who we imagine ourselves to have been. In the journey back to one's own childhood, there is an essential difference between my analytical research of the (re)construction of a childhood imaginary in a literary sense, and that of the actual child, which is commonly interwoven in Childhood studies. The differences lie in the developmental process of the child during the initial stages of childhood and the (re)construction of the child image through adult-constructed memories.

In this research, I intend to analyze the child images and the retrospective use of the textual child as a reflection of the past in post dictatorial cultural productions. Therefore, it is paramount to clarify the distinction between the textual child and the

notion of childhood, for both terms denote the collective idea of the deliberate experience of childhood. Nora Maguire uses the term "childness" to distinguish the complexity and rhetorical forces challenging German childhood texts. She utilizes the term to identify what I have deemed as the textual child. Maguire clarifies the difference between the empirical state of a child and the idea of 'childness' stating, "'childness' functions as a critical and conceptual tool that addresses basic and tenacious problem of distinction when it comes to the discussion of childhood, that is between 'childhood' as an empirical state and 'childhood' as a sociocultural construct" (Maguire 2).

Psychoanalyst and sociologist often undertake the task of understanding child development thus, it is through the psychological and social terrain of Childhood studies, that the construction childhood is seen by an offset of behaviors that shape and educate the empirical child from infancy to adulthood. In this field of study, analytical research is conducted to evaluate the behaviors and development of the child as he/she is taught to behave, so that one day he or she can become an independent actor within society. The child used for this research, on the other hand, is the creation, or in better terms the child is the imagined product of adult memory—an embodiment of the past, composed of experience, and (re)collection.

1.7 Performing Childhood

The understanding of performance as a field of study in the academic arena of Performance studies has taken many definitions by experts in a wide range of disciplines. In fact, in Marvin Carlson's *Performance: A Critical Introduction (2006),* the author points out that Mary Strine, Beverly Long an Mary Hopkins provide a useful observation in the study of performances stating that, "performance is 'an essentially

contested concept'" (Carlson 1). By this, Carlson illustrates that the concept of performance has developed "an atmosphere of 'sophisticated disagreement'" (1), whereby a continuous dialogue to reach a fuller understanding continues to develop. In its various manifestation, performance has been idealized in both theory and in practice, as such in performance studies, the "notions about the definition, role, and function of performance vary widely" (The Archive and the Repertoire 4). As a highly contested concept, writers such as Peggy Phelan, Joseph Roach, J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, and in recent years Judith Butler have worked on defining performance in their respective fields of study to offer an overview of the social practices and advocacies of performance studies. Diana Taylor has articulated that Performance studies is "certainly no one thing," which "clearly grew out of these disciplines even as it rejected their boundaries" (The Archive and the Repertoire 6). Additionally, Richard Schechner describes performance as "a practice, a theory, and academic disciple—[that] is […] dynamic unfinishable" (Schechner ix).

In short, Performance studies takes on two major forms, that is, the theoretical understanding of the social and disciplinary history and the methodological use of performance. For Diana Taylor and her study on performance in the Americas, performance is a methodological lens by which scholar can analyze events such as "dance, theater, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/appropriate behaviors" (The Archive and the Repertoire 2). In some cases, the performative acts that are rehearsed daily according to Taylor, are acts such as civil disobedience, resistance, citizen, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. All of which, also functions as an "epistemology" and an "embodied practice, along with and bound

up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing" (The Archive and the Repertoire 3). What Taylor proposes here, is that the methodologies of performance should "be revised constantly through engagement with other interlocutors as well as other regional, racial political, and linguistic realities both within and beyond national boundaries" (12), what she means by this is for individuals to actively engage in dialogue amongst its many actors.

Now, when performance studies adhere to the question of behaviors and the everyday ritual of life, performances theorist have approached the physical embodiment of human actions and behaviors in terms of its interaction with the world and others to see how they communicate and negotiate with one another. In exploring the methodologies of performance studies, when individuals present themselves in the day-to-day practices of life, their behaviors reveal information about who they are and what their aims are. The transmission of such information permits viewers to "read" others by way of observation. From an anthropological stand point, performance studies in the 1970s often addressed "individuals as agents in their own dramas" (The Archive and the Repertoire 7). For the use of this study, I will use performance, in its theatrical sense, in terms of Erving Goffman, because a dramaturgical approach offers a look at the concept of social interaction, and the social roles people assume in an everyday situation, this includes how we dress, the way we speak, the tone of voice we carry, the settings we are in, and the demeanors we present to a targeted audience which is able to construct opinions and formulate a social connection and interaction over the way we present ourselves. This will permit me to analyze the child survivor as he/she interacts with the social world while attempting to pursue a character given

to them act out and perform.

Sociologist Erving Goffman analyzed social interaction, and explained that people live their lives much like actors on a stage. Goffman describes individual's performance as the presentation of the self—or in other words, as the individual's efforts to leave a specific impression in the minds of others. In *the Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life* (1956), Goffman's primary contribution of performance is established through a theatrical lens of exploring the physical attributes of social interaction and their interaction with others, which he refers to as, the dramaturgical model of social life. According to Goffman, people in everyday life are actors on a stage playing several distinctive roles depending on the social setting they are in. Moreover, the idea of performance is the process of social identity that is closely related to the concept of the 'front,' which Goffman defines as "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman 22). Actors put up a 'front' to project a certain image of what or who we intend to be, as part of our social identity. The 'front' is the "appearance and manner" (Goffman 24) that the performer conveys. As Goffman demonstrates, the individual is constantly performing by manipulating behaviors in the distinct situations presented to him/her in everyday life. Performance is the ways in which individuals call upon the various fronts to project an idealized image to fit socially in the settings we create and encounter, therefore, performing an image for a specific audience. Goffman teaches that "when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before him. They are asked to believe that the character

they see actually possess the attributes he appears to possess" (Goffman 17). In line with this, the individual offers his performance "for the benefit of other people" (Goffman 17). Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet highlight that both agency and human awareness is necessary for acts to be considered a 'performance.' But much more central to this phenomenon is "the sense of an action carried out *for* someone else, an action involved in the peculiar doubling that comes with consciousness and with the elusive 'other' that performance is not but which it constantly struggles in vain to embody" (Rocha and Seminet 6). This is where the theatrical approach of performance comes into play.

For children living in secrecy, these children are not only performing to deceive the vigilance and continued observance of the military rule, but ultimately their family members and fellow combatants who keep close ties to the child's behavior as a sense of protection and constant (re)construction to avoid being 'seen' and/or being caught by the observing eye—be it the military, family members, neighbors, classmates, teachers—anyone on the lookout for 'subversive' behavior. Therefore, childhood characters are molded and modified to perform for an intended audience.

To note briefly, when discussing the cultural production of childhood and the images they represent in the film industry and the production of literary text as well, if I may add, are linked to a much broader audience. In content Rocha and Seminet ask the following questions: "Why do so many recent films feature youth as a site of cultural agents? Who is the intended audience for these films, and what happens when adults view children and adolescents on screen?" (3). In both the book and film

industry, there is a clear audience or which such works are intended for—the reader—the viewer. In addressing the transformation of public sites of memory, Susan Draper suggests that there is an intended audience for those interested in memory. She explains:

> A decade after the malling boom, memory itself became the object of a similar process, a kind of 'memory boom.' Besides the creation of different Commission of Memory, the promotion of memory as part of the marketing of the state-market can be seen in the project for the creation of 'MERCOSUR-Memory," which the regional market, promoted in the neo-liberal context of the 1990s, states to include memory as a tourist commodity, with the possibilities of exchanging museum experiences and to obtain more profit. (Draper 152).

Regardless of the fact, if we are watching a film, reading a book, or performing for the other, there is an intended audience. For this research however, I will focus on the nature of the internal audience—the military men, family members, militants, teachers, etc., that reflect on the child's performance. The definite audience of these cultural texts reflects a much greater analysis beyond the scope of this research for the time being.

Needless to say, the performer's job is then, to convince his audience of the reality of his show, performance and/or demonstration. Goffman suggests that the performance of routine presented through its various fronts calls upon its audience and constitutes the way "in which performance is 'socialized,' molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented"

(Goffman 35). Performance offers the observer impressions that are constructed purposely upon the ideals and expectations of the other. Goffman best states this, "when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Goffman 35), and to some extent "a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs" (Goffman 35).

In Latin America, according to Diana Taylor the term performance has no satisfactory equivalent in Spanish. It is translating simply by *el performance* or *la performance* and people now refer to it as *lo performatico* (The Archive and the Repertoire 12). Nevertheless, what I want to highlight about Taylor's work is the idea that performance includes, but is not limited to the idea of "*teatralidad, espectáculo, acción,* and *representación"* (13). I highlight this notion, because as Taylor describes, *theatricality* captures the "all-encompassing sense of performance" (12). In fact, for the mere purpose of this research, the use of performance in the theatrical sense, makes every scene come "alive and compelling" (13). Which acclaim to the culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis or resolution—activated with theatricality" (13). Understanding the social imaginaries and conflicts of children living in hiding, performance works as a mechanism to help conceive the child's engagement and diverse 'fronts' he/she had to work through because of the challenging efforts of embodied elements of survival.

Considering Argentina's military dictatorship, children in clandestine circumstances were taught to perform behaviors to an audience of military officials

trying to exterminate their subversive parents. Ruptured from bonds of normalcy and forced to take on new roles contrary to the true nature of childhood. They had to live under new unfamiliar rules and live in a confined, where a rhetoric of enclosure and limitations restricted their every move. Children were often asked to be seen as innocent and blameless individuals, while their parent's engagement in clandestine political affairs forcefully positioned such children in adult roles beyond their years. Consequently, having to circumscribe to unusual behaviors/performances. The (re)indoctrinated of values and skills was undertaken by family members, friends or others who helped 'disrupt' the conventional norms of childhood, because of the socio-political and historical interventions of country's dictatorship. The rearing of a child under these specific conditions, consisted of (re)constructing the parameters by which children kept undercover identities while continuing to be active members of society, and preserving familial relationships and conventional social attitudes of normalcy as contingent as possible. Therefore, such children performed on a "stage" according to the clandestine behaviors of secrecy. Consequently, child identities were (re)configured not only through routinely practices, constant learning, and physical demands, but through the emotional conflicts between normalcy and the inexperience of with having to perform what appeared to be normal childhood behaviors through the extensive network of ingenuity of having to assume different identities.

The habitual practices of performing normalcy and the alteration of identities in child victims were the result of the 'elimination order' placed upon all subversive individuals fighting against military rule. Such children were manipulating the socio-historical settings of everyday life and *performing childhood* under the suspicion of

being 'observed' by the *proceso militar.* Thus, children become actors in a social stage, performing for an audience composed of military officials and strangers seeking to eradicate them and their familial ideologies. It is therefore prominent to note, that the construction of a child's identity was intertwined with the expectations and values attributed to their parental supervision, as children were molded and shaped by the idealized demands of observers. In other words, children were taught to behave and perform childhood as best described by their familial ideals and survival, and yet keep a sense of normalcy. In truth, it is through their daily constraints underlined by parents and/or guardians that children become ideal actors while presenting a 'front,' against the surveilling images of military rule by manipulating the behaviors they lived daily.

I use the notion of *performing childhood* as the habitual practice of rearing children to perform identities contrary to their own and whose expected behaviors of militancy, survival, and resistance are not genuinely natural for children in hiding. These behaviors in general refer to the liminal threshold of living in *clandestinidad* – in secrecy, in hiding and in many cases as children of runaway parents who had the need to stay undercover from military personnel. The clandestine life of children in hiding, sheds a profound light on how children lived secrecy and were confined to a space unnatural to childhood, and forced to perform unconventional behaviors for their safety. Skills of survival, absolute vigilance, impersonating, pretending, and dissimulating became unnatural aspects of their everyday life. Skills of survival and militant behaviors often cause children to experience an awakening of their physical displacement because of their parent's political involvement, and sometimes provide

children a clear understanding of the realities of the horror brought to them by the state and the political environment they were faced with. In fact, the rupture between normality and forced performances are crucial in showing the obliqueness of childhood identities. They are behaviors and emotions are feed through the restrains of life in *clandestinidad.* In fact, the term encompasses non-normative behaviors such as: *performing normalcy, performing militancy,* and *performing survival* to highlight the expected and scripted set of behaviors children had to perform in comparison to the normal role-play of childhood, that is free of limitations and endless imagination. These terms show the constricted limitations of childhood in secrecy. Now, I must note, these children had to survive one way or another. Their understanding of survival is relevant and arguable, however I use the term *performing survival* in that these children had to learn specific skills, such as learning to camouflage their identy, deception, escapism, *in order to surive* or *stay alive.*

I use these terms in their literal sense, in that children had to *perform* childhood, normalcy, militancy and survival. Since the unconventional expectations of embodied behaviors of survival and resistance are behaviors no child should have had to perform, the term employs adopting skills that undermined the suspicion of being a child of targeted parents. It describes how children had to perform specific behaviors to keep a 'front' in the political realm in which they lived. Children and entire families depended on the strict performance of those behaviors for survival. I therefore, conceptualize *performing childhood*, as a developing term to explore the theoretical framework for which child survivors revisit the past and (re)constructs

embodied performances of living under militancy and in hiding. Therefore, the (re)thinking violence, terror, and memory through an intertextual child provides a distinctive actor or performer, who ultimately is created to demonstrate the absolute division of both the public and private life of a child in a torn society, and a child divided between a set of constructed behaviors contrary to their true childhood identity.

What is distinctively different about analyzing the life of a child in secrecy, is the subjectivity of ideas, restraints, and survival methods introduced by the adult's present state and social imaginaries embedded through the enactment of militancy and excitement of leftist ideals in the imaginary child. This means that through a retrospective perspective, adult authors have the ability to (re)create and (re)tell stories based on lived behaviors and expectations of the social imaginary. To this extent, *performing childhood* as an aesthetic tool of reconstructing enacted behaviors specific to children in the 'guided' act of adult-made imaginaries of childhood. *Performing childhood* then, becomes a valuable tool for (re)visiting and analyzing the adult's past. It, not only allows the reconstruction of the textual-child to be actively engaged in the social landscape marked by the dictatorship and those in hiding, but also shows the ways child identities were (re)constructed and molded to fill the rules of an undercover life. When applying the notion of performing childhood to the case of children of militant parents, individual behaviors are influenced, introduced, and often imposed by the clandestine status and the offset of norms embedded by militant parents.

The truth is, that with the political upheaval rising in the 1970s militant parents

occupied themselves more so, with revolutionary efforts than to occupy themselves with the responsibilities of parenthood. For Ana Ros this "post-dictatorship generation" of victims were "either raised by surviving parents or by relatives, adopted by couples who did not know their origins, or "appropriated" (Ros 25). Other members of this group were either small children or babies at the time of the coup, and they shared a collective and political memory that unifies their present-day efforts for justice. Others consist of missing grandchildren, children of the disappeared who were raised by relatives or former militant friends of the family. In such cases, the idea of 'raising' a child entitled imposing behaviors entangled with political ideologies which sooner or later rested upon the (re)construction of childhood identities. Used in a retrospective perspective seen in the cultural text of surviving childhood victims, in the (re)creation of childhood memory, through the textual child is imagined and (re)created embodied figure performing a type of childhood contrary to the conventional expectation of childhood. This is due to the redefining variables taken into consideration as children are taught about the opposition and the imminent dangers they lived. Therefore, the need to maintain a political 'front' of appropriate behaviors for survival is vital in analyzing children of persecuted parents. Their behaviors emphasize a fundamental step in viewing the (re)construction of child identity as ambiguous, unpredictable, and whose social circumstances of being a victim of political turmoil draws out the non-normative characteristics of childhood.

1.8 The Construction of Child Entities in Liminality

At the turn of the twentieth century, Philippe Ariés' *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family life (1960)* became a turning point in the academic interest of

children and Childhood studies. Ariés' study claimed that the concept of childhood was not learned or established until after the middle ages. But more extensively the author observes that the progressive attitudes of viewing children as an accepted part of family life and their place within a social-historical are used to understand the individual's biological timeframe before reaching young adulthood. Furthermore, Ariès suggested that childhood was a socially constructed entity, that with the emergence of institutions, the concept of childhood emerged, and with it, the concept, and ideals of innocence. In shaping the field of Childhood Studies for the past 30 years, Camel Smith and Sheila Green in *Key Thinkers in Childhood Studies,* claimed that many social and behaviorist scientist committed their research in the "understanding of children's behavior and competencies and how their lives were shaped was not fueled sole by a desire for knowledge for its own sake or for the better understanding of children and their life experience, but by a desire to intervene in or even dictate how children's lives *should* be shaped" (Smith and Green 4). As such, children were examined in the ways in which they came to be fitted for life as adult members of society.

For sociologist and anthropologist, children were believed to be shaped by culture and society through a process called 'socialisation' (Smith and Green 4). Allison James and Adrian L. James argued that children once weaned, developed, taught and 'socialized,' children "participated in society according to their abilities as adults did" (James and James 26). Consequently, the way in which children were viewed and taught to behave, shaped the child's engagement in the adult world. In this case, the idea of childhood had been a developmental process for which children were taught to behave and develop values and beliefs which would essentially lead them to

becoming functioning members of a society. Therefore, it has been acknowledged that the concept of childhood has been interpreted as a socially constructed concept by adults and daily social interaction, and experience, by which children are prepared to engage in the adult world. Thus, sociologists, physiologist, and historians argued that the social status of children and childhood is a separate phase of life than that of the adult. The process of socialization can be understood as a complex and unique experience whereupon the child's identity is molded and constructed. To this Judith Butler has viewed gender as a "constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief," while concluding that, "gender identity is a performance accomplished compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Rivkin and Ryan 901). As the author suggests, identities are intrinsically fluctuating as individual and social experiences shape them. Along the same vein, the idea of *constructing identities* childhood can too be seen as paramount element in the development of child identities, where the mundane expectations of childhood obligate children to perform in accordance to values and beliefs that *ought* to be allocated. Patricia Pace writes, "childhood, like gender, is a biological category; however, childhood like gender, is also a psychological and social and therefore constructed in and through signifying practices" (Pace 234). What I see with children of militant parents is a similar notion, through imposed practices, clandestine children had the need to enact specific behaviors of militancy—such as excitement, fear, anxiety and overall adopt skills of survival that would prevent them from.

For childhood survivors the (re)shaping of childhood identities took place

under vital circumstances to survive. Upon having been forcefully integrated into a clandestine space and ruptured from normalcy. As previously mentioned, child in hiding adopted a variety of strategic behaviors for the safety of those around them. These behaviors included performing different identities, changing thier names, and the keeing their family's militant operations a dark secret. As such, children had performed for the outside world, protecting entire families from the threats of the opposition. These behaviors were manifested in their everyday interaction with the outside world. Clandestine childhood is therefore, characterized by a separation of space and time, where the concealment and secrecy of executing subversive behavior place the child in a non-normative role. Under such premises, the shaping of a 'new' childhood identity occurs as a means of protection and survival. As such, children living in clandestine circumstances perform childhood as understood and constructed by their militant parents by non-normative childhood behaviors.

British anthropologist Victor Turner focused on individual symbols, and their semantic fields and processual fate as "they move through the scenario of a specific ritual performance and reappear in other kinds of rituals, or even transfer from one genre to another" (Turner 22). In doing so, Turner has pressed towards the study of symbolic genres at a large-scale drawing upon Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites of passage (1908)* to study the means in which the term "passage" is used to identify how rituals accompany "an individual's or a cohort of individuals' change in social status, and for those associated with seasonal changes for an entire society" (Turner 24). This change, according to Van Gennep is distinguished by three phases in a rite of passage: the *separation,* the *transition,* and the *incorporation.* In the first phase, as studied by

Turner, the separation of an individual is marked by an important transitional period in a person's life. Some examples of this are birth, puberty, marriage, and death. In this phase, individuals are stripped away from their original roles and are prepared for new roles to come. Individuals then, pass over to the second phase. This phase is, as mentioned in the introduction, is a "sacred space and time [set aside] from profane or secular space and time" (24), it is a moment beyond normality or as Turner has noted, "Beyond or outside time." Here, ritual subjects, are then detached "from their previous social statuses" (24) and await a transformation. During this stage or *transition phase,* individuals fall into the "limen" or "threshold" or what Van Gennep coins as the *liminal phase.* According to the authors, the liminal phase is a phase in which the individual passes through "a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" (24). Richard Schechner has pointed out, that during the liminal phase two things are carried out, first, as the author illustrates:

> Those undergoing the ritual temporarily become 'nothing,' put into a state of extreme vulnerability where they are open to change. Persons are stripped of their former identities and positions in the social world; they enter a time -place where they are not-this-not-that, neither here nor there, in the midst of a journey from one social self to another. For the time being they are powerless and identityless. Second, during the liminal phase personas are inscribed with their new identities and initiated into their new powers. (Schechner 66)

Moreover, according to Turner, in liminality "profane and social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down […] Liminality may involve a complex

sequence of episodes in sacred space-time and may also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events" (Turner 27). Turner's concept of the liminal space is the betwixt and between of two successive events. It is in this stage of life that the 'rites of passage' takes place, where the transition and transformation take place. Such event originates from a beginning where the notion of normality can be identified, and where there is a rupture or separation occurs. Once separated from the social group one enters the initiatory phase, the rupture of identity occurs, individuals are then found— *in between*—lacking a new identity, vulnerable and accessible to a new one. The third phase is *reintegration* or the *incorporation phase*. It is then, where the individual is reintegrated back into society, with a different level of personality and identity. Ideally, for those undergoing a lifestyle change, "this usually represents an enhanced status, a stage further along life's culturally prefabricated road" (Turner 25). For this research, and because of the text selected, I focus imminently on the liminal space, for it provides the utmost detailed aspects of children in secrecy.

With the political outbreak of the regime, children of militant parents had been repositioned, displaced, and forcefully separated from the conventional day to day experiences of childhood. Such children had been taken into clandestinidad—a period of secrecy and hiding— or what I would consider, this case, liminality. Under military rule, children whose parents had become targeted villains had to go into hiding to survive the political prosecution, torture, and disappearance of the authoritarian regime. Later, at the end of the military dictatorship, some of these children were reintegrated into society, as matured fellow combatants comprehending with a different level of knowledge, personality, and ideology towards the governmental structure. Others

became orphans and adopted identities as children of the disappeared. While others (the illegally appropriated children) lost their full identities, names, and genealogical records. Consequently, these children had become vulnerable victims in the political environment, the result of their parent's political affiliation, caused these children to be stripped away of their known surroundings and given new identities and positions in the 'liminal' world.

Liminality became, therefore, a fundamental setting for which children of the state's opposition (re)constructed and *performed childhood* as a strategical skill to be viewed by the outside world, while trying to maintain a false character and behave as though their militant home-life did not exist. As such, embedded within the selected texts are specific performative accounts of the child's life in secrecy. The notion of *performing childhood* introduces the concept of 'new' and unconventional behaviors enacted by children obligated to *perform* childhood under the bases of survival while living under clandestine circumstances. *Performing childhood,* then, becomes an analytical concept to exemplify the process by which childhood victims *play, participate, reenact,* and *disguise* their identity because of the haunting threats of the political warfare. In all, the rupture of space from normality by going underground placed young Argentine children to *perform childhood* on the basis of protection and suppression of their identity.

1.9 Conclusion

Post-dictatorship literature and cultural production from Argentina's 2003-2015 collection of child survivors focuses on the subjective ownership of firsthand experiences from the 1970s. In its measures has tried to amplify the efforts to (re)tell,

(re)imagine, and (re)construct a childhood memory that has been for so many years displaced experiences of the children of the persecuted. After the military coup, it became increasingly difficult to establish the corresponding fault of government officials who violated human rights and disappeared the parents of hundreds of children. The transmission of the past, for some of these children were expressed through the disillusionment and rejection of government officials. For others, the open wounds of the past resided in the representation of their precarious life as childhood victims. It is through their untold stories, that several of the victims acquired new voices in the autofiction of their first-hand experiences as children assimilated to the core of the so-called war.

One of the premises of this chapter, was to establish the importance of a childhood reading to position the child as a vital source for compelling history and documentary of a past rarely written about by academic scholars, particularly children of militant parents who had to circumscribe to a new unconventional lifestyle once undercover. It is through a childhood reading of Argentine post-dictatorship texts written in perspective of a child affiliated with militancy that the reader is allowed the return of a history of Argentine children in one of the country's most deviating periods, while introducing to the public individual stories of such childhood victims, that has been neglected and unheard of, for so many years.

Considering the emergence of subjective narratives is a complex question to unravel, as to how much is and can be remembered by adults, and more so by children. Concerned with this paradigm is the constructive value of the imaginary, as a tool to document the real and the fictive, but most importantly the political

dimensions of present political events that influence the adult-writer to (re)construct his/her childhood experiences from values, morals, and collective practices from 2003-2015. Therefore, in this chapter I traced the common aesthetic and general appeal of written and cultural production (film and literature of the childhood victims), affirming that childhood memories, are subjective imaginaries established by the author. Ultimately the use of the conceptualized notion of the imaginary, suggest for those young victims, a tool to introduce recent accounts of political subjectivity and ideals, of individual suffering, playful practices of childhood, and/or disillusionment, or excitement about militancy as victimized children.

In this chapter, I have shown the imaginary and performance are tools used for the reconstruction of identity, the process of recollection and revision of the past, serves as a recognized way of intervention, for childhood survivors to recognize that their own rights as children were violated during the coup. At the same time, the development of the imaginary figure, fictionalizes the social imaginaries and the acceptance of militant practices through the performative behaviors of militancy embedded within the child's identity. As previously established, writing about a militant childhood during Argentina's military dictatorship is constructed both by personal and collective experience, therefore, the social imaginary offers a new way of bearing witness to trauma and understanding the various events that underwent in the reconstruction of childhood identities. For children of militant parents this task is undertaken by a highly influential political present and a personal past constructed through fond childhood memories. In the light of this discussion, it is not surprising to see protagonists revisiting the painful images of childhood victimization, despite

the fact the child figure is associated with characteristics of innocence, dependence, curiosity, and sense of maturity. Authors provide alternative images of the political perspective and atrocities of military intervention through their personal written accounts of memory.

The cultural and historical effects of the dictatorship had been collectively experienced by many. First-hand witnessing and recollection of past experiences govern the political thought and influences of children of surviving children and those of militant parents. They, like many child survivors, assume a burden of retracing past experiences through individual examination of past events. Unlike many second-generation children, children of militant parents tell a distinct story of victimization and intimate survival. The films and novels that will be analyzed in the later chapters, draw on an experience in the lives of the authors. That is, the notion of performance, attempting to reconstruct what happened in the past, through an offset of behaviors that as young children the authors had to circumscribe to. The imaginary space of memory contains the creation of the imaginary child living under clandestine circumstances. In such cases, *performative behaviors* of childhood have been introduced and (re)created within the country's cultural production, hence, introducing significant knowledge of children as primary witnesses during Argentina's dictatorship. The notion of *performing childhood*, in the case of Argentina's cultural production reflects the complexity and familiarization in which children of militant parents perform and live in reference to their social circumstances while living in secrecy, as mentioned above.

By analyzing the child's perspective through the social relationships, at home, at school and at play, children provide a distinctive and unique perspective of the real

world, because the child image is often portrayed as an innocent. These new voices, provide then, an account of the transformation from innocence to a conscious figure and forgoes a developmental process for which he/she become aware of the political surroundings, while becoming active participants in the so-called 'Dirty War,' as Right-wing supported have deemed it. In using performance as a method of analysis, I consider how the child image can ultimately change the way we think or even view childhood and fundamentally change the discourse of second-generation victims to that of primary witnesses of state terror. For this reason, I use performance as an actual dynamic tool used in the logic of writing memory to disrupt the conventional ideas of childhood innocence and vulnerability during Argentina's military regime. To rethink the way in which childhood is seen, as an encapsulated figure of present-day politics influences strongly the way in which the textual child is created textually.

CHAPTER 2

THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE: REMEMBERING THE PAST IN THE KIRCHNER ERA (2002-2015)

La historia real de América Latina, y de América toda, es una asombrosa fuente de dignidad y de belleza; pero la dignidad y la belleza, hermanas siamesas de la humillación y el horror, rara vez asoman en la historia oficial. Los vencedores, que justifican sus privilegios por el derecho de herencia, imponen su propia memoria como memoria única y obligatoria. La historia oficial, vitrina donde el sistema exhibe sus viejos disfraces, miente por lo que dice, y más miente por lo que calla. Este desfile de héroes enmascarados reduce nuestra deslumbrante realidad al enano espectáculo de la victoria de los ricos, los blancos, los machos, y los militares

The actual history of Latin America, and the Americas as a whole, is an amazing source of dignity and beauty; but the dignity and beauty, Siamese twins of humiliation and horror, are rarely demonstrated in the official story. The winners, who justify their privileges by right of inheritance, impose its own memory as a unique and mandatory memory. The official story, where the system exhibits their old costumes, lies for what it says, and lies even more to what it keeps quiet. This parade of masked heroes reduces our reality to the dwarf-dazzling spectacle of victory of the rich, the white, the macho, and the military

--Eduardo Galeano[13]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the historical evidence implications of Nestor Kirchner's rule (2003-2007) and the lingering effects his presidency had on the youth of his time to legitimize their stories as surviving witnesses. The president "played an important role

[13] Eduardo Galeano, *Ser como ellos y otros artículos (1992).* Translation is mine.

in unsettling the humanitarian narrative, which helped enable the slow unfolding of contemporary understanding of the past" (Ros 22). As an essential aspect of this chapter, I visit the relationship between the Madres and las Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo with the Kirchner administration, and the engaging efforts to gather *la Juventud* as a contemporary image of surviving victors representing an engaging group of individuals fighting alongside the ideologies and values of the 1970s.

I begin with a brief history of Argentina's transition into democracy, from Alfonsín's government and its efforts to revert the emotional damage caused by Argentina's dictatorship to Menem's justification and the theory of the "Two Devils." I later examine Néstor Kirchner's government, whose objective was to restitute human rights, as a cry to overturn the political indifference as a national obligation for the devastating past. This section highlights primarily, the governmental practices involved in the restitution of peace soon after the fall of the Junta in 1983 and its efforts to reconciliate the proper means of justice between those affected and those responsible for the disappearance of thousands of individuals, tortured, and missing grandchildren from Afonsín to Menem.

In the section titled: *La decada ganada: The Kirchner era* my intentions are to negotiate with the political efforts made by the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner administrations to support and sponsored human rights groups such as *las Madres, las Abuelas, H.I.J.O.S*, and eventually invested its efforts in gathering and forming alliances with young political actors, I delineate as *la juventud*—who would essentially strengthen, unite, and to support Kirchner's campaign while others would join to form *la Cámpora.* It is through these young contemporary activists, that the voice of

childhood survivors had become a prominent feature in both the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner administrations.

In the later sections I discuss the importance of *la Juventud* in both Argentina's past and its present state. I then, separate, what I believe are some of the most influential youth groups that surged after the fall of the Junta. The first of these groups is H.I.J.O.S who gathered in 1995, and the second rose into existence in 2003 when Kirchner came into power *la Cámpora.* In section is titled *La Cámpora: la lucha Vuelve,* I examine how the administration empowered young militancy and reintroduced values, ideologies, and practices used in the 1970s to its core principles. More specifically in *La Cámpora*, I examine how Kirchner's administration emphasized the personal struggle of many of his fellow combatants of the 60s and 70s, who in turn, were also the parents of many of these child victims. It is therefore, preimminent to note that many members of la Cámpora are children of the disappeared, direct childhood victims, and some—like Juan Cabandié—children illegally *apropiados* by those originally responsible for the murder of their parents, whose mere purpose is to continue their parent's fight for social justice. In fact, the fight for social justice in the present by their children and groups such as H.I.J.O.S displaces the disappeared as the preimminent subject of human rights and recuperates the social goals of their parents. However, by showing these connections, I suggest that the twelve-year-long administration of Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner supported, motivated, and influenced young social groups, who in turn, influenced the political discourse of Argentina's cultural production of popular culture from 2003 to the end of the Kirchner reign.

In my subsection titled *Questions of Memory and Subjectivity*, I (re)examine the

adult's motives for (re)constructing the past through the creation of the imaginary. By understanding the past as a thought-out process—or a fictionalized act, in term of Iser—by which actors (re)think and (re)imagine certain events, it is plausible to note that the (re)construction of one's childhood imaginary contains, as Iser has argued, "a selection from a variety of social, historical, cultural, and literary systems that exists as referential fields outside the text" (Iser 4). Such referential fields, can be directly influenced by the political discourse of the time (the social imaginaries as I had mentioned previously in Chapter1) Interwoven within memories of the past, the social imaginaries of present-day politics allow the dismantling and (re)imagining of the past through various means.

In the subsequent sections, I have compiled a selection of cultural productions written, distributed, and screened by a variety of authors, not necessarily linked directly to the Grandmothers, but determine the overall support of Kirchner's government to encourage juvenile participation in the political spectrum. In their efforts, Abuelas have organized events appealing to young adults, to educate *la juventud* about the monstrous past, so that the emblem of –*Nunca Más*— "para ayudar a que los horrors del pasado no se vulevan a repetir—nunca más— (Jelin 12), stands in the midst of the generations to come. But most importantly, through these events the Abuelas focused on embedding questions pertaining to one's identity, in hopes of finding the rest of the missing grandchildren.

2.2 (Re) telling the past: A brief history of Argentina's *dictadura civico-militar*

This part of history is well-known. The pursuit of the economic, military, and influential superiority of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War led to a hegemonic desire to possess control over the international system. Determined

to contain the spread of communism around the world in the late 50s and 60s, United States, while deeming it necessary, urged Latin American leaders to use their armed forces to suppress revolutionary forces, leading to the rise of dictatorships throughout Latin America. After the fall of Isabel Perón as President of Argentina on March 24, 1975, the infamous Argentina 'Dirty War' took place from 1976 through 1983, which resulted in the 7 long years of military rule and a horrifying history of 30,000 disappeared people, and the systematic abduction, tortured and killings of activist, the illegal abduction of babies "born in chambers" (Kaiser 3), thousands of exiled individuals and the "reign of terror imposed by the military Juntas" (Kaiser 3). The military systematic abduction and the disappearance of adults and children or what the military termed as the *proceso de reorganización nacional*. The so-called process of national reorganization was the practice of forcefully disappearing Argentine civilians during 1976-83, the brutal tactics of torturing, disappearing, and killing individuals, targeted for the most part those who appeared 'subversive' and against the military regime, namely, students, intellectuals, workers, and *guerrilleros.*

By the end of the dictatorship in 1983, the promising victory and electoral win of President Raúl Alfonsín not only brought back democracy, but the hope for social justice. As Alfonsín assumed office, he "signed two decrees committing for trial both the seven main leaders of the urban guerrilla groups and the members of the first three military juntas' (Ros 16). In his so-called fight to restore prominent peace in the nation, Alfonsín called for the National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP),[14] a

[14] The National Commission of the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) published in 1984, a report titled *Nunca Mas* (Never Again). The report was an extensive research as proof of forced disappearances during the military dictatorship.

commission set up to interrogate the disappearance of many people and headed by Ernesto Sábato to investigate the alleged crimes against humanity conducted by military personnel. The commission set the stage for the continuous fight of *Nunca Más* while strengthening the voices of recently established human rights groups, such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. The commission provided archival evidence for the search for justice in the years to come, as trials for those responsible for the atrocities began against the indictment of the military regime and its participants. In 1985, when the famous Trails of the Juntas[15] began, testimonies of torture, repression, and 'disappearances' linked to government personnel, were reported as factual testimony and historical evidence against the nation's perpetrators. Many of the personal accounts of torture, forced disappearances, and killings were made known by the broken lineage of mothers, grandmothers, sons, and daughters, along with many other direct victims who condemned military involvement.[16]

While in office, Alfonsín attempted to reform the Code of Military Justice and establish military jurisdiction over the accused the leaders of the three military agencies which included General Jorge Videla, Admiral Emilio Massera, and seven other military commanders (La Historia Política del *Nunca Más* 57), and "promising thorough investigations into the crimes and punishment of the culprits" (Kaiser 5).

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[15] The Trail of the Junta was the judicial trial of the members of the military regime that ruled Argentina during the *Proceso de Reorganizacion Nacional (1976-1983).*

[16] In Ceclia Sosa's *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Performances of Blood,* the author evokes both the idea of broken lineage and the 'wounded family,' as the biological ties of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Madres*), the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (*Abuelas*), the Relatives (*Familiares*), the Children (H.I.J.O.S) and the Siblings (*Herman@s*) to missing relatives of Argentina's military regime.

However, it became clear that the military would assume no responsibility in recognizing the guilt of its former leaders, sanctioning punishment or even acknowledge that such commanders had committed crimes. In fact, the military deemed their actions necessary "contra la actividad subversiva" (La Historia Política del *Nunca Más* 58). By doing so, "los decretos proponían una lectura política del pasado reciente y la condena de la violencia desde una perspectiva que diferenciaba la legalidad y la legitimidad de sus portadores" (La Historia Política del *Nunca Más* 58). As such, it was proposed that guerrilla activist would be the only opposing factor in the equation as predecessors of violence prior to the coup. This theory became known as the Theory of the two Demons.[17] Emilio Crenzel's research on the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), where the author examines the use of language in the allegations of political repression during the regime and its aftermaths. He notes, "in December 1983 Raúl Alfonsín—the candidate of the Radical Party—ordered the prosecution of both guerrilla leaders and the military Juntas. This decision came to be known as the 'theory of the two devils,' for it limited accountability for the country's political violence to two leaderships, and explained State violence as a response to guerrilla violence" (Crenzel 1056). The idea of limiting accountability on behalf of the state replaced full responsibility on the military Junta to partial blame and became a constant debate in the years to come.[18]

[17] The theory has been a rhetorical device among Argentine politicians and political discourse to disqualify the illegal repression of subversive individuals carried out by the state, claiming equal responsibility of social violence in Argentina's "Dirty War."
[18] For more on the Theory of the 'Two Devils' see Crenzel's *La Historia Política del Nunca Más (2008).*

Reportedly, when trials began in 1985, Julio César Strasser, a noteworthy lawyer provided a remarkable testimony that led to the conviction of the former dictator and his military accomplices. Respectively, the nation convicted General Jorge Videla, with other members of the *Junta* for the atrocious crimes against humanity. Consequently, military uprisings began as a result of the political dilemma to deliver justice, which threatened Alfonsín's fragile democracy and campaign for justice. To this end, Alfonsín safeguarded his presidency by establishing two highly controversial laws, claiming for a state of pardon and reconciliation with *La ley de Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience Law), which declared that lower-ranking officers (those below the rank of colonel) from prosecution on the notion that they were obeying orders from those above their rank. While *La ley de Punto Final* (Full Stop Law), was established to stop further prosecutions of anyone who previously convicted. These laws were seen as "a step backwards by the latter, the testimonies gathered in the *Nunca Más* and offered during the trial of the military juntas had uncovered an incontestable truth; there had not been a war but a systematic plan of extermination of those considered political enemies" (Ros 17). With the alleged stress, the federal governmental insecurity, and inability to please the demands of the people, Alfonsín resigned from his term in office.

For years, an increasing growth in human rights framed the political discourse. Susana Kaiser's work on post memory highlighted that human rights groups would not "settle for less than full disclosure of truth and justice" (Kaiser 7) for the crimes against humanity. Through many fronts, as the author explains, different organizations continue to "investigate what happened in order to reconstruct the truth of the horror

that took place. They continue to collect information, denouncing those responsible for the atrocities committed, and demanding accountability under the provisions of national and international law" (7). Their biggest challenge was of course, ensuring that "society won't forget this past and to [remind] the public at large that impunity is not an option they are willing to accept (Kaiser 8). Committed to this, have been "those dominated by relatives of *desaparecidos:* The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (mothers of *desaparecidos),* Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (grandmothers in search of their grandchildren)" and later in the 1990s "HIJOS" (Kaiser 8).

In the decade to come, President Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1999) wanted to end the political turmoil but had no "commitment to transitional justice" (Delgado and Sosa 239). In the years that followed, Menem's administration had no intentions in reverting back to the past to prosecute those responsible for the mass annihilation of thousands of individuals. He simply wanted to settle "the military issue" (Ros 19). Menem, as Maria M. Delgado and Cecilia Sosa have articulated, had to some degree refused to "acknowledge […] state terrorism that had overseen the systematic culture of fear and violence that had led to the forced disappearances of 30,000 persons [and instead] promoted a *pacto de olvido* that swept the crimes of the dictatorship under the carpet" (Delgado and Sosa 239). Upon trying to seal the deal, Menem issued a full pardon to military officials in 1989, which released the generals from prison the following year. He granted pardons to the "imprisoned guerrilla leaders and to a large group of military personnel […] including officers already convicted in the trial of the juntas" (Ros 19). Videla was then pardoned. With a neoliberal mindset, Menem promoted the theory of the Two Devils and spoke disgracefully about the need to

forgive and forget the perpetrators, claiming as Ana Ros has noted, to speak "about humbly accepting one's own mistakenness and the adversary's rightness to contribute with a truthful disposition to reconciliation" (Ros 4). Therefore, shifting the focus from the atrocities caused by the state, addressing the conflict "in terms of feelings of hate and revenge between two groups, both of which had been equally 'wrong' and harmed the adversary" (Ros 4).

Unfortunately, shortly after Videla was convicted, he moved to house arrest, causing major conflict and political unrest with the opposing leftist party. In the meantime, the victims had to endure the unpredictable decisions of the governing powers in judicial courts. Ana Ros describes this situation stating, "the groups of victims and their relatives viewed the pardons as an authoritarian gesture aimed at erasing what had happened and making the victims "disappear" once more. Their motto "neither forgive nor forget" loudly accompanied their protests" (Ros 5). The victim's voices were made known by the demands to remember the past and unsurprisingly, reject the call of reconciliation and forgiveness. As a result, many different human rights associations such as Madres and Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, H.I.J.O.S, children of the disappeared, and other first-hand victims, organized protests in the refusal of the so- called laws of reconciliation. The idea of reconciliation between both partisans—the state and its victims— could not be established without proper justice. As stated by Ros, reconciliation for such victims was only available by reasonable justice. She clearly defines this idea stating, "Reconciliation becomes possible as it is dissociated from forgiveness and linked to legal justice" (3). With the improper support from the state the search for justice

seemed to be thrown into the back burner, disappointing thousands of individuals, while making the struggle for human rights groups much greater and the threshold of trust between such groups and the state a much greater gap. Thus, the decline of political justice demanded new political actors. Actors who would act on the demands of impartial justice.

In the years to come, the democratic government failed to live up to its promises of resolving the damages caused during the military Junta. With the growing demands of human rights groups and those affected by the atrocities of the state, the families and victims of the dictatorship sought justice to rightfully prosecute those responsible. However, the state under Alfonsín, Menem, and De la Rúa, neglected consistency in maintaining rightful conviction of those responsible for the mass killings, torture, and disappearances of Argentine civilians. The back and forth debates and pardons caused distrust and the loss of hope amongst the people searching to gain political justice for the human rights violations they had to endure.

After the collapse of Menem's government and in the middle of one of the worst economic crisis of the century in 2001, the newly perceived *kirchnersimo* became a populist phenomenon, representing a new paradigm of post-neoliberal ideas and with hopes of overturning one of the nation's biggest economic depressions the country has ever seen. The widespread of unemployment, riots, and the fall of the economy where only a few problems the newly elected president had to undertake. After years of political instability, gradual indifference, and corruption from governmental officials, Néstor Kirchner (2003- 2007) came into power in an unusual way. As the country's instability lead to the resignation of one president after another

in a span of two weeks, as one of three Peronist candidates running for office, Kirchner finished second in the April 2003 elections. However, Néstor became president immediately a few weeks when, the winner, former President Carlos Menem decided not to take part in the election and five temporary presidents that had been appointed, promptly resigned. Eduard Duhalde having been the last of them, called for early elections. With the country's economic problems, Kirchner quickly gained popularity with policies based on economic nationalism as well as investing in debates dealing with unemployment, while introducing new tactics to restore political stability and strongly criticizing the country's neo-liberal ideologies and mismanagement of Carlos Menem's presidency. Kirchner wanted to return to the economic model associated with Peronism, nationalizing the countries industries, while promoting domestic consumption. One of his main goals was to settle once and for all the constant neglect of the earlier governments to fulfill justice for those who committed crimes against humanity. He also pledged to set a new bar of demands for human rights actors. These were only but of few of his promises while building upon the legitimacy of a new government. In efforts to do so, the president triggered alternative voices of child witness of such crimes to become a focal feature in the making of Argentine cultural production at the turn of the century. Recent film productions, documentaries, and novels have documented the lives of children who lived in Argentina during the time of dictatorship. Their appearance in the public arena, has highlighted the atrocities inflicted by the military on innocent children who were forced to live within the liminal threshold of militancy and/or secrecy.

The recent interest of Kirchner's administration to resolve the once-ignored atrocities caused by the military regime, influenced the ways in which *la juventud* of his time as president remembered the past, though an offset of collective moral values and ideals dating back to the 1960s and 70s. As I see it, the retrospective image of childhood during Argentina's military dictatorship encompasses a social understanding of childhood experiences of children who lived under specific clandestine circumstances. The Kirchner's influence transformed the nature by which the past had been remembered through childhood victims, while the narration of childhood memories resurfaced the political debate on human rights, leading to the portrayal of childhood imaginaries[19] framed by adult figures who define the past in terms of values, desires, and expectation of the present.

As some of the last remaining victims of Argentina's military regime, childhood survivors, children of the disappeared, and children of militant parents, among others, have developed a sense of urgency to give oral and written accounts of the precarious past that haunted them since military rule. The need to deal with the confrontational issues between individual identity, the intrusive images of their parent's militancy, the precarious past of their childhood, the political violence, and the continuous cycle of indifferent governmental discourses of human rights violations, alluded to the cultivation of proper "ownership" to the memories they recall. In 2003-2015, the *kirchnerist era* influenced childhood victims of Argentina's military dictatorship to pursue their untold stories, as a form of combat against the

[19] Now, the creation of imaginary spaces does not denote "imaginative" as in fiction or imaginary, but the idea of subjectivity as in, based on or influenced by personal feelings, opinions, or experiences.

disruptive force of the military rule that took the life of many of these young activist's parents, relatives, and friends and appropriated many of their younger siblings. Upon his inauguration, Néstor Kirchner had become the prominent 'father' figure to the young activist of his time as president as some critics such as Laura Di Marco has argued. A father figure who implemented "clases de idiología" (Di Marco 21) to his *juventud*, as he introduced into the political field, old battles, ideas, and politics of the 1960s and 70s, while embedding socialist ideals of equality and economic advancement from the past, which resulted in the uprising of contemporary militant actors.

Additionally, for many of the child victims of the military Junta, they were now of age, and old enough to account for themselves and demand rights taken from them as children. In fact, the fundamental shift from the 1990s to 2000s caused political actors to realize that the missing children in the 1970s and 80s were merely just babies, and by the time Néstor came into power they were young adults. Kerry Bystrom and Brenda Werth best describe this by saying:

> When the *Abuelas* began to search for their grandchildren in 1977, their *nietos* were just babies, but in the mid-1990s they realized that those children would be in their late teens and old enough to take control of their own identity search. Instead of petitioning the public to provide information about potentially stolen babies, the organization came to focus attention on getting the stolen individuals to demand their 'true identity.' (Brystrom and Werth 437)

In many cases, this group of victims took control of their agency, through the outreaching effects of pop-culture and cultural productions (such as the media,

film/book industry, and the arts). As a result, the theorizing perception of the child image in post-dictatorship texts from a historically abject state, positioned childhood survivors as heirs in their own right to demand justice, prosecute those responsible for their traumatic childhood experiences, and mobilize young activist for the defeat of right-wing parties who have continuously neglected and persecuted theirs and their parent's ideals.

2.3 Legitimacy of the (Un) official and Untold Story

Near the start of the dictatorship, military control was used to overthrow the previous government as the newly imposed regime legitimized its political agenda by force. Nancy J. Gates-Madsen in her work on silencing in post dictatorship Argentina highlights the overpowering history of silence and silencing is marked by "unasked, unanswered, or unanswerable questions, by censorship, disappearance, or taboo subjects" (4). By its very nature the cultural landscape of post dictatorship Argentina has addressed issues of silence and the "military's refusal to respond to agonizingly simple questions such as: *¿Dónde están?* (Where are they?)" (Gates-Madsen 4) and by justifying their privileges by silencing the voices of victims by right of inheritance imposing a silent and mandatory memory as Galeano in the epigraph. In turn, this allowed *la Junta militar* to exercise power over individual experiences, while denying the truth about the 30,000 disappeared Argentine civilians.

In the realm of such political distress, it is sufficient to say that the sole duty of the regime was to commit themselves to silencing the voice of opposition, to the extreme of becoming the ultimate source of terror upon all citizens by forcefully

'legitimizing' their political agenda through the denial of political repression, forced disappearances, and political violence that initiated an extensive period of violating the human rights of thousands of civilians. Prior to the return of democracy, the victims of the regime were "guerrilla members, unarmed leftist activists, and participants in social movements who had been involved in the process of political radicalization experienced […] in the years leading up to the coups. But they were not the only victims, as all citizens were equally deprived of the civil and political rights, and terror spread across all sphere of private and public life" (Crenzel 1). Their stories startled constant debate on who and what *legitimizes* their individual accounts, since "as these crimes were being committed, the state simultaneously denied any responsibility" (Crenzel 2). Nevertheless, just as Luke Howie develops, "the question of whose witnessing accounts, and which stories are the most legitimate, is of vital importance for understanding the meaning and consequences of contemporary terrorism. *Legitimate* witnessing has always been a 'relational' practice performed by certain privileged individuals" (20). Elizabeth Jelin works well to position this notion within the historical terrain of the construction of memory in Argentina as she asks:

> ¿Quiénes son esos actores? ¿Con quienes se enfrentan o dialogan en ese proceso? Actores sociales diversos, con diferentes vinculaciones con la experiencia pasada –quienes la vivieron y quienes la heredaron, quienes la estudiaron y quienes la expresaron de diversas maneras—pungan por afirmar su legitimidad de ≪su≫ verdad. Se trata de actores que luchan por el poder, que legitiman su posición en vínculos privilegiados con el pasado, afirmando su continuidad o su ruptura. En estos intentos, sin duda los agentes estatales tienen

un papel un peso central para establecer y elaborar la ≪historia / memoria oficial≫. Se torna necesario centrar la mirada sobre conflictos y disputas en la interpretación y sentido del pasado, y proceso por el cual algunos relatos logran desplazar a otros y convertirse en hegemónicos" (Jelin 4).

When the military regime took control of the government in 1976, and deemed 'los hijos de Perón' the nation's rebellious children, that became the official story at the time. Consequently, this created an 'official' narrative justifying the decreed to eliminate, disappear, and torture those in opposition to his regime. Under military rule, the government legitimized the military's expression of power, by casting out subversive individuals, thus, legitimizing the disappearances of individuals. In the core of it all, the dictatorship's 'Official Story' of mass disappearances and human rights violation became a remarkable practice of deception. In fact, according to Diana Taylor's "USTED ESTÁ AQUI: EL AND DEL PERFORMANCE," one evident practice of removing evidence of those disappeared was by forcefully destroying achievable documents, she describes this claiming: "Las familias de los desaparecidos testificaron que los miembros de las fuerzas militares o paramilitares saquearon sus viviendas y robaron fotografías de sus víctimas, incluso después de que los militares hubieran desaparecido a la víctima misma" (422). The truth is, that by obfuscating and covering up their atrocities, the regime was able to set aside the 'social' problem and deny human existence. The official discourse of 1976-1983 had been one of continuous denial of the whereabouts of missing people, and one where the *Proceso de Reorganización Nación* sought to "subjugate the entire society by simultaneously hinting at the horror inflicted to the prisoners and articulating a rationale for the

repressive acts" (Ros 14).

With the return of democracy in the late eighties and early nineties, the 'official discourse,' became a period denouncing the systematic violence used by the regime and "calling judicial truth about the systematic detention, torture, and murder of political dissidents and those perceived as subversive by the state" (Rajca 10). This was period to of mass diffusion of the past (La Historia Política del *Nunca Más* 19), to never forget the wraths of terror so that they never happen again. In fact, it saw, as Susana Draper proposes, "the emergence of the dream of a new time that demanded an ensure of certain unsettling temporalities" (Draper 2). The early nineties, or this post dictatorship period transitioned into the 'memory boom,' where the official discourse took a leap in highlighting the recent past through distinct actors—H.I.J.O.S., for instance, who came into power in 1995—who exposed their experiences as children of the disappeared. These actors became a fundamental catalyst in exposing the perpetrators to a large extent, as studied by Diana Taylor and many others, in their protest, known as *escraches.*

The 'memory boom', then welcomed the new millennium, with authors such as Albertina Carri, Laura Alcoba, Marian Eva Pérez, and films like the one analyzed in this research, to focus more imminently on the precarious experience of child survivors in the so-called Dirty War. Some of the most notable works that explore this 'second generation' of individuals include Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and the Labors of Memory (2002)*, Susana Kaiser's *Postmemories of Terror (2005),* Ana Ros' *The Post-Dictatorship Generation in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay: Collective Memory and Cultural Production (2012).* Cecilia Sosa's *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath*

of Argentina's Dictatorship (2014), Jordana Blejmar's *Playful Memories: Autofictional Tuen in Post-Dictatorship Argentina (2017),* and Geoffrey Maguire's *The Politics of Postmemory Violence in Contemporary Argentine Culture (2017).*

I view the idea of *la Historia Oficial* or the oficial discourse denotes as a sense of legitimacy by those in power who possess the means by which history is written and interpreted for future generations. In such case, the dominant discourse of power, such as governmental influences, holds the power over a set of moral values, ideas, and political agendas where it is plausible the favoritism over those 'included' within the spectrum, while purposely 'excluding' and/or disregarding the needs of the 'others'. In extreme cases, governments build upon the animosity and fear of the 'other' to justify the mass genocide of collective individuals, while legitimizing the demands of those in their favor. While the film, theater, and book industries have all been a major catalyst in preserving the history of the country, there has been much debate on the issues of legitimacy and 'ownership' in the stories told about survival and victimization in the aftermath of the coup d'état. The flourishment of stories told in different perspectives not only demand a unique and absolute examination of its history, be it testimonial, autobiographical or fiction, but the absolute control of those in power to legitimize these voices has control over what is being said and can be said. This is evident throughout Argentine history.

Guillermina Walas points out that it is possible to discern the official narrative from its counter partners, stating that "an 'official' narrative, is generally constituted as the mainstream history of the city and its inhabitants" (Walas 48). On the contrary, less visible narratives "flow underneath many layers and with multiple ramifications: these

are testimonials, often displaying themselves as utopian zones in the sense that, while seeking absolute justice and the representation of all silenced voices, they destabilize the mainstream historic discourse from numerous angles (Walas 48). Unconventional narratives, include those particularly "suppressed in favor of those that uphold more triumphalist interpretations of the past" (Gates-Madsen 4) such as the memories and representations of child victims living in complete secrecy and as run-aways from the state. In more explicit terms are the stories about childhood experiences of children living in *clandestinidad.* The legitimizing of untold stories, unheard voices, and neglected experiences, however, is a problem within itself, lies within this conceptualized idea of the 'Official Story' and to what extent does the country's official narrative control and have the ability to neglect, silence, and ignore its victims. As the *Nunca Más* report (1985) gave evidence against the military, it offered the public preservation of a historical memory of victims who were silenced and ignored during the years governed by the regime. In Jordana Blejmar's *Playful Memories: the Autofiction Turn in Post-Dictatorship Argentina* (2016)*,* the author highlights that in the decade after the dictatorship had three aims "to remember, to show and to prove" (Blejmar 16), all imperative motives to conserve a historical truth that had been silenced through the emergence of the dictatorship. Yet the stories and some of the testimonies of the victims were displayed while others omitted. Within this context, Blejmar argues:

> The framework within which these testimonies were presented and shown (trials, films, books and television programs) treated them as 'objective accounts as a means of getting closer to reality. In the case of the political testimonies, such as

> those presented in documentaries or books, sensations and reflections were more 'permissible.' Nevertheless, the testimonies were still not regarded as factual evidence about what had happened in the past, event in turn legitimized by the presence of the witness. Testimonies given outside the framework of legal process were thus subject to the same requirements as those heard in courts. (18)

The dictatorial experience of survivors had become controlled by historical and judicial institutions, therefore, as Blejmar argues, cultural texts were not regarded as factual evidence, unless trial witnesses could prove otherwise. This 'political science literature,' as Vicent Druliolle has labeled it, warns "against the divisive and destabilizing effects of the politics of memory and mobilization to demand justice for past crimes" (261). In fact, as the author suggests, such literature provides a willingness to deal with a violent past, that reopens old wounds, if not it will "turn justice into vengeance" (262). As such, the consolidation to dismiss the remnants of the authoritarian regime "are seen as necessary to societal cohesion and democratic life, and the politics of memory and mobilizations to demand justice for past crimes may undermine them." (Druliolle 262). By providing recognition for the suffering of victims and commit themselves not to repeat the crimes committed in the past, the new government offers a new moral foundation to mark the rule of law by persecuting those responsible for human suffering in the first place.

In discussing the legitimacy of unheard voices, state approval plays a key role in understanding what voices have the privilege of being heard and which ones do not. In Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003), the author has noted that the political process of democratic transition continues to deal with past

crimes and state repression, requiring responsibility, accountability, and institutional justice that are layered upon the principle of ethical imperatives and moral demands (Jelin 3). As stated by Jelin, in the overturn of political change there is a widespread urgency to participate in debates oriented "toward the future with the memories of their violent and conflictive past" (Jelin 3). The fact is, many different political representatives try to legitimize the past in many ways, often time contradict one another. Both survivors and former militants attended to the desires of being heard and write books about their individual experiences dealing with the horrors of the past, while filmmakers and artists focus more closely on (re)telling the past through images of a visual representation of memory. As argued by Jelin, the diverse influence of social actors, who connect to the past with a collective sense of experiences (those who lived through specific periods or events, those who inherited them, those who studied them, and those who expressed them in different ways), all strive to affirm the legitimacy of their truth and their side of the story (Jelin 3). Moreover, such diverse group of individuals and victims engage in the political struggles for the restoration of omitted and neglected testimonies and are often searching to legitimize their current political positions and ideologies through claiming privileged linked to the past.

2.4 La década ganada: The Kirchnerist era

Despite the political instability of the polarized political parties in Argentina, as a newly elected president, Néstor brought with him a new discourse of human rights violations to re-establish the constant disillusion for social justice that the people had been experiencing since the fall of *la Junta* in 1983. With Kirchner into power, it seemed that the new-elected president understood the social outcries of the people and

their hopes to condemn military officials who deserved life imprisonment. As such the president focused on reinstituting a bridge between the recognizable political gap of ideological indifferences about the constant clash pardoning of military personnel and the demands for social justice by the people and its victims. Upon Néstor's inauguration "national grief was officialised" (Ros 18) as a result of the inconsistencies to establish proper reconciliation on behalf of the victims. In fact, for the first time in over two decades, as Ana Ros has noted, "[the] government embraced the position of victims, assuming mourning as a national commitment" (Ros 18). In his inauguration speech, Kirchner addressed the power struggle between the powerful and the powerless, as he claimed that the national conflict was not only between politics and economics, but "a moral and legal one" (Panizza 203), which entitled a duty and social justice on behalf of the state. By this, the newly elected president was referring to the "moral dimension of change [that] required the end of 'the culture of impunity and corruption'" and the alleged "failure of the previous democratic governments to prosecute the military responsible for the violation of human rights in the 1970s" (Panizza 203). In fact, Kirchner denounced the country's governmental institution of being at the service of the most powerful (Panizza 204). The beginning of what would become a 12-year period of *kirchnerist* politics soon brought the country a sense of hope for justice and economic stability. By 2003, the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* and *Punto Final* resurfaced national debate, while Congress reopened the cases involving the crimes against humanity.

Néstor and his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner came from Left-wing of Peronist supporters, and as young activists, both began their careers as members of the

Juventud Peronista. Their political ideological background had been highly influenced by the populist struggle of the seventies, which allowed them to identify with the juvenile forces by the time they took office. By recognizing and empowering young political activist groups Néstor Kirchner and his administration, in the early day of his governance established strong alliances with primary human rights groups, such as the Madres and Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S, whose primary focus was to establish social justice for human rights violations. By casting himself in what Ana Ros describes as a "wounded family," Kirchner presented himself as a part of the people affected by the Junta's regime. In his inauguration speech Kirchner claimed, " I am part of a decimated generation, [a generation] burdened by painful absences; I engaged in political struggles believing in the values and principles that I am not prepared to dump at the doorstep of the Casa Rosada" (Spanakos and Panizza) Furthermore, the president "self-invested [himself] as the figure of the 'son'-showed how the lineage of loss was not only restricted to those who had been 'directly affected' by violence but could be inhabited by those who, for some reason, assumed mourning as a personal commitment" (Ros 18).This allowed a sense of personal commitment on behalf of the president/state as the nation's 'father figure' to the people.

By placing himself as a member of the wounded family, the president created a sense of trust and restitution to restore governmental defiance from those constantly affected by the overbearing efforts to forgive military officials once convicted of crimes against humanity. It further gave Kirchner legitimacy and popularity as a well-respected figure, both nationally and internationally as he focused his efforts to restore the country's economy and establish order and justice for crimes committed during *el*

proceso. In this process, human rights groups began to place trust on the president—who began to overturn corrupted politics into a popular redemption from moral chaos.

As one of his most notorious moves and within weeks of his presidential settlement in *la Casa Rosada,* Néstor removed portraits of the military officials responsible for the years of pain. This brought national attention to Kirchner's administrations, which promoted a sense of legitimacy and trust among the people. Needless to say, this event brought immense publicity and interest from human rights groups. No other president had fully committed to eradicating the force that had haunted the country for almost 30 years. Nevertheless, this was only the beginning of the Kirchner Administration. In no less than six months into office and in one of his most astonishing and influential missions, to gain recognition and support, within this short time span Kirchner committed himself to prosecute of those responsible for national grief. In his attempt to revert the damage and gain popularity Kirchner persuaded Congress to revoke the controversial laws and repeal the law of Full Stop and Due Obedience, implemented by Alfonsín. In 2004, a decision was finally made. Argentina's Supreme Court voted to remove and annulled the laws protecting former military officers for crimes against humanity during the military regime.[20] By reopening the military court cases, the president gained strong popularity and provided hope for restitution within the nation, with groups such as las Madres, las Abuelas and H.I.J.O.S.

Kirchner's efforts did not end there, soon after, the *kirchnerist* administration

[20] "Timeline: Argentina." BBC NEWS. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1196005.stm [accessed September 6, 2016]

commemorated the Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice as a national holiday, celebrating the anniversary recognizing the day the military dictatorship seized power in 1976. On 2004 anniversary, the Escuela Mécanica de la Armada (ESMA, the Navy School of Mechanics) was transformed to a national public space of remembrance where thousands of individuals were killed and forcefully detained. At the event Enrique Andriotti Romanin describes that Kirchner directed his remarks to the Grandmothers, Mothers, and sons and daughters and pleaded for forgiveness on behalf of the state, "por la vergüenza de haber callado durante 20 años la democracia por tantas atrocidades" (Andriotti Romanin 9). This event placed Néstor as a state-invested figure willing to mend the 20 years of governmental indifference. Néstor's political acts did not end there. With little less than a year in office, Kirchner ordered the army chief to remove portraits of Videla and Bignone, two of the de facto presidents, exposed in the military school. In fact, on November 2011, while Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was in office sixteen criminals were convicted and charged with criminal atrocities committed by the *Junta*[21], including navy captain Alfredo Astiz. The systematic nature of the kidnappings was revealed in February of 2011 when Elliot Abrams, Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs confessed to the illegal appropriation of children, and the US complicity in Latin America. The historic conclusion ended in 2012, under Fernandez de Kirchner's administration, when Generals Rafael Videla and Reynaldo Bignone, were sentenced to 50 and 15 years for their involvement in *el proceso* (Lazzara 321).

[21] "Argentina convicts former military officials for 'Dirty War' crimes." *Amnesty International.* https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2011/10/argentina-convicts-former-military-officials-edirty-ware-crimes/ [accessed September 6, 2016].

Even though there was no history of personal commitment to the defense of human rights before *kirchnersimo*, the newly introduced government began a network of relationships among many human rights actor's seeking justice—las Madres, las Abuelas, *H.I.J.O.S.*—inaugurating a period of 'happiness' and national commitment as Ana Ros suggest. Implying that the political platform established both by Kirchner and Fernandez de Kirchner embodied the figure of political good narrative during their presidencies as a result of annulling the laws of impunity and prosecuting those responsible for the atrocities committed doing the countries dictatorship. This period of happiness also known as *la decada ganada del kirchnerismo* brought stability for human rights groups. Throughout this lengthy process, las Madres and las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, became honored guest in the Kirchner's governmental acts, inasmuch that both groups became allies soon after Kirchner's first term. On the same lines, both the Madres and Abuelas became popularized national and international emblems of human rights activism during the Kirchner era. For the Madres and Abuelas, the sincerity in finding justice on behalf of the state was finally a wish come true, this meant a new era for political reform, leading to the rupturing of tension between the state and its people. In so much that, governmental subsidies and financial recourses were invested in support of the growing NGOs. As Enrique Andriotti Romanin best illustrastes this idea:

> En este sentido, su apelación al carácter familiar de Kirchner realizado por las integrantes de la AMDPM expresó la identificación afectiva que estas tenían con él. La invocación de sentimientos como 'amor' 'lealtad' o 'redención' que la figura de Kirchner generó les permitió una reconciliación con la política y

> operó como una de las condiciones centrales para la aceptación por parte de los integrantes de la AMDPM de las medidas gubernamentales. (Romanin 8)

In such case, as studied by Romanin not only did the ideas of the new administration go hand in hand with human rights groups, such organizations supported the newly established government, as a result of the financial recourses provided to them, "en el primero de los casos, este comenzó a ser interpretado como la posibilidad de nuevos recursos para las tareas para los organismos, en tanto el apoyo al gobierno nacional garantizaba un acompañamiento económico e institucional en sus iniciativas, nunca antes obtenido; pero también significo vislumbrar al Estado como un espacio de disputa contra los resabios del modelo neoliberal" (Romanin 8). While the support of Néstor's government came with a price, the newly established resources for such agencies had not been obtained before, by earlier administrations.

As growing tensions began to diminish between the state, and the Mothers and the Grandmothers, these organizations took advantage of state-sponsored support to seek out the hundreds of missing grandchildren. Moreover, because of devastating and traumatic events leading to the systematic appropriation of young children and babies, the Grandmother's primary efforts established a fundamental paradigm in the Argentine society which focused strictly on denouncing the illegal appropriation of children, while placing major efforts in finding such children as well. In 2001 onward, with the support of Argentina's government, the Grandmothers took incentive in seeking out their missing grandchildren in a much greater demand. At this point, for them, the appropriated grandchildren were old enough to make individual and personal choices about their identity. As previously stated in the introduction of this chapter,

Kerry Bystrom and Brenda Werth have noted that in the mid-90s the grandchildren of the missing, were in their late-teens, and old enough to demand their 'true identity' (437). This had become a big stepping stone in the search for the missing.

In this case, the main objective of the Grandmothers represented a change in strategy to reach young people with doubts about their identity. The Grandmothers proposed to bring the issue of illegal appropriation of children in newspapers, particularly, in sections directed to politics, in hopes that young adults would read and question their identity. In time, the Grandmothers also began to insert images into other sections: in the sports sections, general interest, that is, anywhere were surely *la juventud* would be reading (Nanni 28). In the years to come, references to the military dictatorship, the appropriation of children, militancy, and the revolutionary commitment, torture, and forced disappearances became wider topics of investment in the cultural production geared towards *la juventud*[22]. With the support from the Kirchner administration the Grandmothers utilized *la juventud,* as primary transmitters of knowledge through which pop-culture could be utilized as a tool for mobilizing the youth for the search of the disappeared. Intertwined in this movement emerged the 1970s figure of juvenile militancy in the social imaginary. The Kirchnerist era, inaugurated a new body of cultural works that challenged the traumatic past, that had for so many years voided out the voiced of young childhood victims.

2.5 La Juventud

La juventud, in previous decades, had become a fundamental force deeply rooted within the Argentine society prior to and during the military dictatorship— in

[22] The term here is used to identify youth and or young adults

fact a large majority of the disappeared had been young student activist and workers, known as the *Juventud Peronista* or *la Juventud Trabajadora Peronista*[23]. However, it was not until the end of the 90s, according to Melina Vásquez that the elaboration of juvenile groups began to gain representative value in the public sphere, as new forms of *performative* transmitters of knowledge, experience, and demonstrations against the political negligence of human rights violations began to take center stage among such groups. The result of these elaborate performative material, resulted in the vast gathering of people to execute the infamous *escraches*, (performative acts) that according to Diana Taylor, are collective gatherings have signified political change while transmitting the urge to solve the political problems. Under these premises Vásquez has articulated that today's *Juventud* (*la juventud del Kirchnerismo,* I may add*)* can be closely allocated to the militant experiences of the 1960s and 70s, as she states, "de modo muy sintético podría decirse que el origen de *la juventud* en la vida política suele asociarse con las experiencias militantes de las décadas del '60 y '70" (Vázquez 15). This is a result, of the influential and collective understanding of young activist to render the need to continue the fight of their disappeared antecedents and family members. Under such circumstance, today's *juventud* constitutes links closely related to the ideals of militancy that for so long grasped the values and ideals of other groups that came before them, as it is further explained by Vásquez:

> La categoría *joven* construye un principio de reclutamiento militante, un atributo que da prestigio a sus principales referentes, y en un término de

[23] The associated members of such group are not defined by the terms and conditions of their state as "youth" or "young adults, but by their ideologies and political missions.

> identificación de algunos de los miembros del grupo, pero al interior de colectivos se definen públicamente en relación con otras categorías políticas (como por ejemplo la del *trabajado desocupado*). Es decir, cuya militancia está orientada al sostenimiento de otras causas militantes (Vásquez 16).

Militancy of the 60s and 70s sought change in the social and political arena and those in favor of public dispute and political controversy neglecting the needs of the poor and the working class. During that time, the two major militant organizations in Argentina were the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, also known as the ERP and the *Montoneros* (Kaiser 4).

Indeed, their 'sacrifices' were to remedy a social change on behalf of a cause, group or ideology, whereby such groups were willing to pay the price for their involvement, suffering imprisonment, torture and even death as a result. Of course, the measures of such cause became more and more prominent as conflict arose. Young militant activists, therefore, found deep motives for their combat through the social injustices of politics and as a conscious citizen he/she moved around the political area taking part in different events and topics. As a matter of fact, Rachel May's article, "The Human Details and Argentine Militancy," proclaims that the mobilization of such *juventud,* was a major result of their disturbing understanding of the reality of Argentine poverty throughout the nation. Activists were, moved by "the details of the existence of the poor—the lack of food, clean water, of decent housing, of leisure time" (May 241). Hence, militant activist volunteered to assume this reality as their own, insomuch that they "felt compelled to abandon their 'bourgeois identities,' which in many cases meant abandoning family, values

(religious and secular), intellectual pursuits, art, music, creature comforts, and even simple *gustos* or preferences" (May 243). The needs of the majority became their primary focus, and they were willing to fight against all odds until having conquered the social demands of equality they were fighting for, particularly that of political ideologies and social change. Moreover, May proposes that:

> The vast majority of militants were students who read Marx, Lenin, and their compatriot, Che Guevara. They had a complex understanding of the theory of revolution and class struggle. And although they talk about their intellectual commitment to the ideology they ascribed to, they also talked about the little experiences and their empathy to the poor They described an almost visceral desire for social justice that they often recount in terms of 'little experiences,' or *detalles* (241).

As a result of their social desires and commitment, young militants mobilized themselves through ideas and projects, and claim to deliver a public service to the nation by sacrifices, and hard struggle for the achievement of justice and social welfare[24]. It is therefore, prominent to say that the ideals of the 60s and 70s have remained a pivotal influence in the mobilization of young political groups' decades later. The *juventud* has played a significant role in the political affairs of the nation, to the extent that, as Marcelo Urresti has assured that "los jóvenes [han sido] invitados peligrosos en la escena de la política" (Urresti 6). For decades, the empowerment of

[24] Abrojos: colectivo de educación popular. http://www.abrojos.org/index.php/novedades-10/327-militancia-juvenil-la-eterna-busqueda-de-un-cambio [assessed October 20, 2016]

young adults had the ability to change the demands for social improvement and allow the enlightenment of masses to mobilize and form strong bonds to be able to make political and social changes. This is due partly because, as Marcelo Urresti has described it, the youth have nothing to lose or fear, insomuch that the youth is left in charge of higher position as they are to take control and govern in later years, "Se supone que los jóvenes tienen menos que perder su ambición los conduce a posicionarse en cargos que quedan vacantes de manera anómala o en situaciones poco communes" (Urresti 6).

The most dynamic change of young political mobilization occurred in 2003 with the arrival of the Kirchner administration. Young *kirchneristas* became a visible growing phenomenon of young militants who sought to change the political arena. Because of the state-sponsored support in the overturn of the military cases, the leftist government generated a generation of young militant actors who took the stage in mobilizing political and social change. For Rocio Flax, the emergence of *la juventud kirchnerista* can be seen by the means in which the administration had directed their remarks to their addressees in several political speeches. This mechanism became the manner to which the administration began to gather the *Juventud* and appoint them as privileged addressees. Through these means, both Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner, as well as other diplomats and government officials, gave *la juventud* importance, while praising the efforts in which young activist gathered, participated, and exposed their personal commitment and militancy in public affairs, to the extent that "se elabor[ó] un sentido del deber, la *responsabilidad* o la *obligación* de asumir compromiso por parte de *la juventud,* a la vez se destaca la importancia de "darles

lugar" (Vásquez 17).

In articulating Kirchner's political leadership from 2007-2015, Yussef Becher in his article "The Young in the Kirchnerist Age (Argentina.2007-2015): Political Payoff or Transformation Tool?," the author suggests that the increase of social programs for the youth reinforced juvenile participation and intervention in politics, described as the "(social inclusion, access to rights, or participatory measures) managed to reconstruct the bond with the State" (Becher 488), which had been previously destroyed by former politics. As result, it is during Néstor's presidency and Cristina's administration that years later many young political activists began to support the Kirchnerist's national and popular movements. Kirchner's political agenda made an effort to gather and strengthen the youth to win popularity, as the administration began to support and empower young militant activist, it sought to enforce a sense of commitment for young activists to live up to the ideals of the 1970s.

Kirchner indeed, was a Peronist. He identified himself with the generation of radical militancy and with the values and ideals of the 1970s. He took arms in revolutionary projects, while his experience allowed for the reintegration of the pasts into *kirchnerist* politics. An example of this is found in his inauguration speech where Kirchner identifies himself with the two most traumatic events in Argentina's history: the defeat of the nation in the Falkland/Malvinas war and the defeat of a lost generation of radical militants forcefully disappeared — and the generation of combatants he fought alongside (Spanakos and Panizza). In identifying himself with these events, the President retrieves these memories and "commits himself to

upholding the sovereignty of the Malvinas and the memories, politics and principles of the dead and disappeared, a commitment that require[d] a break with the politics of the 1980s and 1990s" (Spanakos and Panizza). For many of Kirchner's contemporary followers, including children of the disappeared, they felt the need to live up to their parent's ideals. As such, they desired change, and sought to achieve the common goals of repealing the indifference, frustrations, and lack of results that previous governments did not measure up to. As a result, many gathered around these earlier ideals, linking the past to the present through militancy. Consequently, leading to growing number of young political participants in recent decades, which can be identified in three particular areas of participation: the student group which includes young high school aged students, the groups associated directly with the Kirchner's political party: *Juventudes K, La Cámpora, el movimiento Evita,* and different sectors of *la Juventud Peronista,* amongst others and finally the territorial and cultural organizations at the city level which maintain close links with the state.[25]

2.6 H.I.J.O. S

As a precursor to Kirchner's young militant groups, in the 1990s, many direct sons and daughters of victims born in the 1970s began to voice firsthand experiences and demand justice for their parent's disappearances. The establishment of H.I.J.O.S began in 1994 at the University's School of Architecture and Urban Planning in La Plata, when a group of students got together to exchange stories of their missing parents, as children of the disappeared. Soon after, the newly established groups sought

[25] Vommaro. Pablo. Universidad de Buenos Aires. http://coyuntura.sociales.uba.ar/el-kirchnerismo-y-la-militancia-juvenil-en-argentina/ [accessed 10/21/16]

to form a national network of young victims—creating H.I.J.O.S.in 1995 (Druliolle 264). The political agenda of H.I.J.O.S was to unify children of the disappeared and give them a relatively new political voice, demanding rights over the deaths of their parents, while contributing to the struggle of memory, truth, and justice. In a more deliberate sense, this group of young actors "distanced themselves from the image of the *desaparecidos* as 'innocent victims' and presented themselves as the children of a generation that fought for a more just society, rather than the sons and daughters of victims"' (Ros 28).

These young actors, rejuvenated the struggle of human rights movements as one of the country's important juvenile groups. Since the initial stages of their establishment, their main objective has been to demand justice for the victims of torture, murder, forced disappearances and the kidnappings of babies during the dictatorship. To a more elaborate extent, for more than 20 years H.I.J.O.S have sought to vindicate the struggle of their parents, and peers while seeking out their missing siblings and fighting against military impunity.[26] Upon searching for a strong political voice, this group of actors began to mobilize their forces through a distinctive and performative method to seek justice. They began to "embrace their parent's struggle and chose to continue their fight in their own political context, understood as an extension of the social model implemented during the dictatorship" (Ros 28). By gathering together to perform *escraches*, and denounce the perpetrators involved in the systematic knowledge of the illegal abductions of babies, torture, and forced

[26] H.I.J.O.S, "Quienes somos," http://www.hijos-capital.org.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20&Itemid=399 [Accessed 2 September 2016].

disappearances of innocent individuals. Diana Taylor best describes this process stating:

> Los escraches, actos de denuncia pública, construyen una forma de performance de guerrilla que practican en Argentina los hijos de desaparecidos para señalar a los criminales asociados a la guerra sucia […] por lo general los escraches son manifestaciones muy ruidosas, festivas y ambulantes en las que participan de 300 a 500 personas […] los escraches están bien organizados porque HIJOS prepara a la comunidad para la acción: durante un mes o más antes del escrache, esta organización recorre los vecindarios donde viven y trabajan los perpetradores distribuyendo fotografías e información: '¿Sabías que su vecino fue torturado?
> ¿Qué se siente trabajar con él? ¿O servirle el almuerzo? ¿O venderle cigarros?' Pegan fotografías del acusado en tiendas, restaurantes, calles y muros de las cercanías. (Taylor 409)

Some of the young members of this group were either young children, babies or babies born in captivity and/or later 'apropiados' by military families or adopted by other families during the 1976's military dictatorship. For such reason, the mobilization of young activists in terms of "escraches" had become a fundamental tool in establishing conscious awareness within the society of the systematic abduction, torture, and systematic forced disappearances of individuals across the nation. In a more elaborate sense, H.I.J.O.S and other active participants have urged the mobilization of *jóvenes* who share a common collectiveness that is built upon the similarities of their past experiences and elucidated in their present state.

As high-profile actors, H.I.J.O.S established a new generation of political activism and politics of memory (Ros 28). They did this by "breaking the taboo about their parents' political involvement and presenting justice as an unquestionable and attainable goal" (Ros 28). In 2003 a major turning point for H.I.J.O.S. occurred upon Kirchner's inauguration as president and subsequently in Fernández de Kirchner's as well. Because it was during this period that the amnesty laws were repealed, and the state committed itself to support the violations of human rights, as such H.I.J.O.S found itself collaborating with the state in this major achievement to put back the perpetrators of the atrocities committed in the 70s and 80s back into prisons. In fact, H.I.J.O.S had increasingly aided in the demand for justice in the trials but had also organized campaigns to maximize publicity of targeted individuals by expanding the knowledge of identified violators and witnesses against them in key trials (Ros 28).

2.7 La Cámpora: La lucha vuelve

It has become indisputable that la *juventud argentina,* has acquired a central place in the economic, social, political, and cultural dynamics both in Argentina and internationally. In the financial crisis of 2001 emerged a young group of political actors, self-recognized as *La Cámpora*—a tribute to Héctor José Cámpora (1909-1980) (Flax 151). After a long history of militancy, Hector Jose Cámpora was elected president of Argentina on March 11, 1973 and assumed office on May 25 the same year. Alongside, Solano Lima, the party allowed the return of Peronism to government at a time when Perón remained banned from the country. Cámpora had pledged to do everything in his power to successfully return Perón as President of Argentina. In fact, his strong loyalty to the political party led Cámpora's presidency only lasted a period

of 49 days, to which he resigned to allow for new elections were Juan Domingo Perón would present himself as a running candidate for presidency. Seen as the *Tío* of the political movements, while Perón had been the 'father,' he has been characterized by his complete fidelity to militancy, while taking part and influencing large numbers of young militants, encouraging them to revolutionize the nation through Peronist ideas of national socialism. In fact, as the *tío* of that generation, Cámpora summoned *la juventud* to complete loyalty to Peronism, as he did, when he surrendered his presidency upon Perón's historic return to Argentina.

The Kirchner's sought to rejuvenate the figure of Héctor José Cámpora and his complete loyalty to the political party JP (*Juentud Peronista)*. They did so by taking his name as a symbol of the newly established the political group—La Cámpora. The association with Héctor José Cámpora was in no way a coincidence. The organization sought to establish close ties to the political figure's 1960s and 70s political group: *Tendencia Revolucionaria del Movimiento Peronista*. According to Melina Vázquez and Pablo Vommaro the 1970s political figure of Hector Cámpora, demonstrated complete loyalty to the ideals of *el peronismo,* an image that was later portrayed by Néstor Kirchner (Vázquez and Vommaro 5). The correlation between the two generational groups can be seen in Vázquez and Vommaro explanation, "se advierte, por un lado, la centralidad de Cámpora como la expresión de la *lealtad* hacia Perón y la aparición de Néstor Kirchner como encarnación *anónima* de la *generación que trajo a Perón* […] Kirchner emerge como el principal heredero de *el tío* Cámpora por compartir sus *atributos presidenciales* (Vázquez and Vommaro 5). Undoubtedly, when Kirchner rose to power he brought with him the values and ideals of militancy,

social involvement and sought re-embed militant commitment to the public arena, while introducing *kirchnerist* projects as a continuance form of upholding the social ideals of the seventies. As Vázquez and Vommaro further exhibits, "el establecimiento de vínculos entre la militancia juvenil actual y la de *los setenta* permite establecer principios de continuidad entre quienes eran militantes entonces – y actualmente ocupan posiciones dirigenciales, como fue el caso del ex presidente Kirchner y lo es de la actual mandataria- y quienes son militantes ahora: (Vázquez and Vommaro 6). Moreover, Kirchner's political activism and desires to rebuild the militancy of his time, had infiltrated in the primary mission for political and social changes behind *La Cámpora.* This is more fully explained by Rodríguez accordingly:

> Los jóvenes camporistas de hoy reivindican la heroicidad y el sacrificio de esa militancia setentista, e incluso pretenden imitar, con relativo, pero algo anacrónico éxito, la disciplina simbólica de aquellas organizaciones. Sin embargo, sus referentes más directos son dos políticos (Néstor y Cristina Kirchner) que, si bien por su biografía personal y decisión política se emparentan con esa 'generación diezmada'[27], gobiernan una sociedad muy distinta y están muy lejos de tener como fin último la patria socialista. Aunque no pueda decirse que La Cámpora cuente con algo así como un 'manifiesto liminar,' éste se expresa en lo que el grupo mismo identifica como el 'relato del kirchnerismo.' (Rodríguez 10)

[27]*La generación diezmada,* according to Vázquez and Vommaro in "La fuerza de los jóvenes: aproximaciones a la militancia kircchnerista desde La Cámpora" is Nestor's generation: "castigada con dolorosas ausencias, refiendose a la generación de los setenta" (Vázquez and Vommaro 6).

Nevertheless, it was not until the middle of Néstor Kirchner's presidency, that the newly established group gained greater popularity. Established by Maximo Kirchner, the eldest son of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, the organizing committee included: Eduardo de Pedro, Juan Cabandié, Ivan Heyn, Mariano Recalde, Norberto Berner, Andrés Larroque, José María Ottavis, Mayra Mendoza, Julián Álvarez, and Axel Kicillof. In the years to come, this young group of actors began to gather active participants from a broad scale of leftist groups, from university students to members of H.I.J.O.S, and other human rights groups that included children of the disappeared, and child victims of Argentina's military dictatorship. Amongst others are the children of militant participants from the 1970s, who, as Gabriela Rodríguez explains, these young members were linked to leftists antecedents of the past, "se identifican con esa herencia simbólica, provienen de familias vinculadas con la militancia partidaria de izquierda, o se sienten próximos a los valores del progresismo y de la izquierda cultural" (Rodríguez 9).

While reflecting upon this group, the biggest challenge, academically speaking, is that we stumble upon the lack of scholarly research, theorizing the practices, controversies, and means by which *la Cámpora* has gained an important protagonistic role in Argentine politics. However, with the support of the *kirchnerist* administration, *la Cámpora* activated the mobilization of young political actors at a large scale. Having been in function since 2003, the group did not gain its full potential until the death of Néstor Kirchner in 2011 (Sosa 168). At this point, the consolidation between the state and la *juventud* merged to solidify the threshold of differences that have previously and continuously triggered conflict among both sectors while adopting a much favorable

position of militant expectancies, sculpted after *el modelo* and *el modelo peronista,* terms used to identify the political movement of the Kirchner administration, geared towards Peronist ideals. This includes, but not limited to, social justice (fundamental rights for the working class, the right to an education, etc.), political sovereignty, and National economic independence (the nationalization of corporate businesses). Néstor death generated among *los camporistas,* a sense of urgency to continue what Néstor had originally begun. Young adults began to look to the ex-president as *el padre de la nación*. Among the young political actors who surrounded Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner in his last days, were the youth who organized *la Cámpora* from the very beginning, their eldest son Maximo, Juan Cabandié whom Néstor and Cristina adopted into their political family and had become their "favourite 'adopted son" (Sosa 168), Axel Kicillof who later became Fernández de Kirchner's Minister of Economy in 2013 and others. This group of militant individuals looked to Néstor as their political father and Cristina as their adopted mother. In fact, Néstor gave this young group of actors – his heirs— individual classes on the political ideology and upon his death according to Cecilia Sosa Cristina had embraced them as "the new orphans and also as the impure cast of heirs" (Sosa 168). Ironically, for the first time, the mother-widow and her children, as Sosa alludes to "enacted a 'happy' family in mourning," (168).

Both administrations strongly urged the establishment of constructing a "generational bridge," which Laura Di Marco critiques connected the *kirchnerist* ideologies to the cultural politics of the seventies. However, upon Fernández de Kirchner reelection *la Cámpora* had become strong political activists, installing themselves as vigorous participants within the Kirchner's administration and *la*

Cámpora became a synonym of *el kirchnerismo.* Gathered together with governmental support, hundreds of *camporistas*, fill the streets across the nation primarily in the defense of human rights, workers' rights, and social justice. In a similar vein as H.I.J.O.S, while using social media and other means of communication, *la Cámpora* gathered together in a performative protest. In similar protest to those of *los escraches. Las marchas*, as these performative accounts are called, have also employed the use of trauma bestowed upon the nation in protest against human rights violations, while transmitting political opinions of the injustice around the nation and globally.

Las marchas are political gatherings in favor or against social and political change. In general, these manifestations are festive, noisy, and unanimous. The use of percussions, pots and/or pans are used to lead the crowd across a specific distance as Argentine flags stamped with the group's logo or iconic Kirchner face as it is swung across the air. Chants such as "llora, llora, la derecha," "Te vamos a demostrar que Néstor no se fue,"[28] and others. At their final destination, often, *los camporistas* are met by one of their leading political figures, who with their final remarks not only inspires the youth but emphasizes the importance of personal commitment to the nation, its people, and personal ideology. These performances are not only visible to the public eye, as hundreds of *jóvenes* march across the city, but also to the political opposition who for decades have rejected, discriminated, and prohibited militancy. In the Kirchner administrations these forms of protest allowed the *juventud* to participate in militant gatherings to promote the administration's agenda nationwide.

[28] *La nación.* http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1482325-el-increible-cancionero-de-la-campora [accessed October 26, 2016]

2.8 Questions of Memory and Subjectivity

Human experience and subjectivity play an imperative role in the increasing cultural changes that have occurred within Argentina's *juventud* from the 1960s and 70s, to the 90s and 2000s, to recent years (2010 onward). With over 30,000 forced-disappeared victims killed during Argentina's dictatorship, many left behind children who managed to survive in extraordinary ways. While mutually in a similar, yet entirely different experience, the horrifying experience of child born during the Holocaust can be compared to Argentine child survivors and children of the disappeared, to (re)emphasize this idea, as previously stated in the introduction, children had to:

> Had to fend for themselves: wandering in search of food and shelter, on behalf of, or separated from their families; placed with strangers from who they often had to disguise their true identities, in order not to be discovered […]. Involved in an extensive network of deception, vigilance, ingenuity, and remaking, haunted and threaten with death, terrorized by betrayal and self-betrayal, they had to forge new familial relationships, practice other religions, speak other languages, pretend, impersonate, lie, conceal, remain silent. As so many of the titles of their memoirs testify, they lost their childhoods. (Brodzky 155)

As seen, the measures of survival depended on the ways in which children pretended, impersonated, lied, concealed, and remained silent as they were part of an extensive network of deception, vigilance, ingenuity (Brodzky 155). The subjective experience of their narratives underlines more clearly that childhood victims had a profound and personal relationship to the effects of the regime and its aftermath. More

remotely, is the fact that their lives "could not be reconstructed" (Brodzky 155), like the children of the Holocaust—even after all pain and torment were presumed to be over. For such children, trauma has consisted of the constant revisiting of pain and suffering, because for many children, their parents were lost forever—disappeared by the authoritarian despot. Regrettably, because of such horror, hundreds of children were sent to live with surviving relatives, grandparents or family members willing to take them in. Unable to cope and understand the reasoning behind their parents' disappearance, such catastrophes undermined the countless stories of children in exile, the children of the disappeared and first-hand survivors, outcasted in the silenced realm of fear. The enabling political environment that *kirchnerismo* had over the *juventud* and other child survivors, provided support for the transmission of childhood memoirs in recent years. The fact is, that the emergence of contemporary public-private actors began to take a political stance in Argentine politics from 2003 to 2015 as Kirchner paved the way through state support underlining the rights of young surviving vicitms,

> The need to set oneself as a regarded figure of human rights violations has become a challenging task to undertake for young political actors in Argentina. For such youth, subjectivity, becomes then, what Elizabeth Jelin coins this as a collective reworking of the past, and causing s sense of acceptance in one's personal experience, she states: "[…] en el caso de grupos oprimidos, silenciados y descriminados, la referencia a un pasado común permite constuir sentimientos de autovaloración y Mayor confianza en uno/a mismo/a y el grupo (10). As a result, the exploration of the inner lives of young victims has been continuously integrated into state politics and the understating of a collective whole. This is evident in the cultural production of child

victims that is hinged tightly to personal experience. As Beatriz Sarlo has examined in *Tiempo pasado,* "existe experiencia cuando la víctima se convierte en testigo" (Sarlo 31), hence, childhood victims become primary storytellers of their own personal lived experiences.

In a similar venue Bella Brodzky too, asks a fundamental question to the substantial distancing of experience "why child survivors are providing oral and written testimonies now, how can we explain why they did not do this before?" (Brodzky 156). For Brodzky child survivors write their stories because "a particular urgency haunts them as the last survivors, compelling them to bear witness to the world at large—and to the subsequent generations" (Brodzky 156). In a broader explanation, the author argues that "one reason maybe the transnational, diffused nature of their atomized, disparate experiences. The youngest survivors—the most extreme cases—literally, do not know 'who' they 'are,' let alone what happened to them. Others have jarring, disjointed memories, inaccessibility or repression, absorption and assimilation into new cultures" (Brodzky 156).

In accordance to Brodzky, I argue that the remarkable urgency for childhood survivors to (re)tell their stories after Argentina's Junta is the result of the long years of governmental indifference to solve social problems, place those responsible for the atrocities of human rights violations back in jail cells and Kirchner's emphasis on gathering *la juventud* in recognizing who they are in the greater span of political injustices as part of the reconciliation process between the government and the people, as well as the restoration of lost identities, and most importantly the collective demands for the search of 500 missing children. The open wounds of the dictatorship are marked

scars dwindling in the collectiveness of societal memory. Moreover, for child victims Argentina's *dictadura civico-militar* has become the single most important event in their lives, because of the extreme internalization and legacy of individual trauma. Such lived catastrophes have become the emblem of which fond memories of atrocities, fears, and anxieties lie. It is optimal to say that the fears and anxieties of trauma lie embedded in the childhood experiences.

Subjectivity is then, a key factor in the way in which childhood is remembered and (re)constructed in the cultural production of the past. In referring to subjectivity João Biehl, et al.in *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations* review the etymology of subjectivity in its historical process of modification. In the nineteenth century, according to the authors, subjectivity was referred to an essential individuality and the consciousness of one's perceived states. More so, subjectivity included concepts of individual experience amplified in the form of feeling, thoughts, concerns, and preventions. Modern subjectivity, according to the authors, has evolved into the "highest realization in art— 'the individuality of an artist as expressed in his work"' (6). This in turn signifies that subjectivity does not imply an error but connotes creativity or a symbolic relation to the world to understand lived experiences. Subjectivity is then, understood as a synonym for inner life. Therefore, individual perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and desires are attributes that encompass subjectivity to denote personal 'ownership' of individual experience.

Subjectivity can be treated and analyzed in many ways, however, for this research I am most interested in using the concept of subjectivity as an effective tool for exploring the different power relationships of a victimized child perspective by

capturing his/her desires and aims to personal accounts during the military regime. As part of this encompassing idea, I seek to make sense of the mutually shared relationships of past experiences in post-dictatorship texts, to the collective intergenerational contemporaries that influence the subject's political ideologies of present-day politics. Moreover, the exploration of deeply rooted memories exhibit more than personal discourse of victimhood, as the innerrelate to a collective memory and as established in Chapter 1, this group of collective individuals are refered to as the 'post-dictatorship generation,' and are those "who grew up under military regimes" (Ros 4). Now, it is important to note that this does not mean that the collective whole shares the same feelings and experiences of the past. In fact, Ros highlights, "Actors relate to the past in different ways, partly because they have lived through dissimilar experiences, and partly because they have specific and often conflicting interest (Ros 6). Yet, the political response of the aftermath of the dictatorship shapes the way it is remembered in the present. The past is then, organized by means of narration and storytelling, without neglecting the influences of the present state and its social imaginaries of lived experiences which are intertwined to the social, political, and economic nature of the present-day. In addition, the post-dictatorship generation of child victims has released their narratives, films, photographs, poems, and art as standing survivors of the past to reclaim responsibility, in a more creative way, of the intimate histories of their past to justify a contemporary collective experience as child victims. In doing so, demonstrating that the histories of the past have neglected the stories personal experiences of silent figures. The past is, then, a thought-out (re)constructed, (re)imagined, and (re)lived narrated of personal experience.

In what ways, then, is the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's politics interwoven in the experience of first-hand child victims? In considering the social policies and political investment in the *Juventud* by the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner, has shown an increase in the youth's participation in the public arena. The difficulty of remembering the past as an exact replica has become an immense job for childhood victims to undertake. However, with the increasing development in the corpus of works from childhood survivors and children of militant parents, the explicit sponsorship of the Kirchner administration pushed hundreds of young-adult victims to (re)think, (re)construct, and (re)imagine their childhood as surviving victims and active participants in Argentina's last dictatorship.

With the rise of Kirchner into power, Néstor was an invested allied for human rights activist, by restoring a sense of trust in democracy as perpetrators where summon to prison for the last and final time. The shared ideologies of remembering their affinity and seeking out sentencing for those responsible for lost memories and precarious experiences, prove the collaboration and emphasis of the explicit turnaround of disintegrated stories once ignored by the military Junta, its perpetrators, and the governmental indifference of the Right (as seen by opposing parties) that overturned rightful laws supporting violated human rights. In fact, Néstor's administration and later, Cristina's administration which is often referred to as CFK (2007-2015):

> Took on the claims of the victims and gave them an official platform [and] grief was transformed into a state matter. Mourning was legitimized and indeed promoted, and a new struggle ensured over the narratives of the past:

> what national narratives deserve to be transmitted and remembered? And who is entitled to make decisions about what is remembered and why?" (Delgado and Sosa 240)

As a result, of the one hundred and eighty degrees turnaround of political involvement, the Kirchner's expanded the lineage of memory and associated the entire nation to become politically invested in the past. Childhood constructed imaginaries told and (re) imagined by childhood victims, became linked to the immense support of the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's administration in the cultural production of childhood narrations. Such presidencies continued to implement the use of militancy as a political tool to awaken the lost and fragmented images of the child's past. In sum, *el kirchnerismos,* did exactly just that, it allowed the past to be restored through the political involvement of young victims. It allowed a social awakening of the injustices *la juventud* had once lived through.

2.9 Individual and Collective Subjectivity

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Marianne Hirsch explains that the belatedness of memories of post-generational victims of the Holocaust are events preceding their birth. Central to this idea, is that first-hand experiences are either transmitted through intergenerational memory, while the second-generation embrace the extended traumatic experiences from those who came before and not so much as individual experiences and ownership to trauma. Thus, the generational distancing of memory that Hirsch alludes to, does not have the personal connection a trauma victim can have as a witnessing victim of state repression. Moreover, Cara Levey explains

that, "if we consider all memory to be representative, incomplete and fragmented—rather than a facsimile or faithful reproduction of the past—which is shaped in and by the present, then the memories of the second generation are not merely pseudomemories" (Levey 9). In the midst of this debate, and in the case of Argentina's children victims, post-memory can be seen as a personal and individual belonging of experiences intertwined with political, social, and judicial dynamics. As Levey has argued, the idea of "'belatedness' reminds us not only that memory is tied strongly to the present, but that it is not contingent on an individual's ability to recall or their first-hand experiences of traumatic event's" (Levey 8). The diverse manifestations of the 1.5 generational victims, as I have detailed in the previous chapter, revisits Hirsch's idea of post-memory and adopt a sense of possession and individuality in the (re)construction of memory. In fact, for witnessing victims, memory cannot be attributed as a subject matter to be passed along from generation to generation, because of the personal identification and experiences to traumatic circumstance. The 1.5 generational victims, as well as the second generational victims, Ros analyzes, are sole proprietors of individual experiences. Therefore, personal connections are significant in the (re)construction of memory subjective to the child's lived experiences. In the case of Argentina's military regime, the extended experiences of childhood victims, stretches not only to those associated with H.I.J.O.S, but also, those not affiliated with the organization, *nietos aparecidos*, and others, including children of distinct racial and social classes.

Now, the problem of recollecting childhood memories as adults, is the false assumptions of being able to retrieve and recover memory quite easily, assuming that

the memory of past experiences is available to obtain and to transmit or transpose with ease. Childhood pasts are often on the verge of constantly being forgotten, due to the extended time periods between the past and the present. To some extent, tangible items of memory such as photographs, newspaper articles, and other archival documents, help with the (re)discovery of childhood memories and become prominent tools in the reconstruction of memory. For instance, while defining the use of photography, Nelly Richard exhibits photography as a fundamental object in determining what was *real* and *existent* in the past to this she argues, "la fotografía – en su registro principalmente documental- sostiene la *realidad del pasado* un nexo doblemente demostrativo. La foto nos hace saber que el pasado *fue* (atestigua de su tiempo ido y certifica la anterioridad del suceso fotografiado) y nos dice que, a la vez, que lo que vemos fue *real:* evidencia el signo objetivo de una existencia efectivamente comprobada por un registro técnico" (Richard 165). In a parallel argument to Richard's notion of photography, the existence of tangible and memorable items, sustain a significant importance in the reconstruction of childhood memories. Such items sustain a connection between the past and the present, highlighting the existence of what *was real,* giving authoritative evidence of the existence of life. These items range anywhere from photography to toys. Over time, the tarnished items (toys, clothing, photography, and archival documents) help in the reconstruction of childhood memories. The individuality and intimate experiences that reside behind such objects permit personal authenticity of childhood memories and develop a familiarized feel for experiences once lived.

On the other hand, because memory continues to be a suppressed and obscured form of the 'official' discourses (as mentioned in Chapter 1), trauma

continues to be an influential subject matter in Argentine politics, the use of a collective societal remembrance is also crucial in retrieving childhood memories. While revisiting Elizabeth Jelin in her book *State Repression and the Labors of Memory,* the author provides a theoretical framework to which she argues that memory is not only an individualized recollection but a socially constructed one as well. Her theoretical framework provides a well-established position by which the author argues that narrated memories are a construction of a subjective and collective present. The key to Jelin's book is that for a culture of memory to be active, it involves constant work and labor that leads to the interpretation, public debate, and reflection of meaning behind traumatic events. According to the author, we live in an era of collectors in fear of oblivion, for this reason, individuals, family groups, communities, and nations constantly narrate the past for those who are willing to inquire about it and investigate it. There is no doubt then, that individuals, especially the oppressed, quiet, silenced, and discriminated groups collectively unite and gather strength and self-reliance on one another through shared experiences (Jelin 2). In fact, at a cultural level the idea of memory and forgetting, and commemoration and recollection, as Jelin argues, becomes crucial binary components of seeking the past when linked to traumatic political events, repression, annihilation, and social catastrophes. At a societal level, "the processes of settling accounts with the past in terms of responsibility, accountability, and institutional justice are over layered with the ethical imperatives and moral demands" (Jelin 2), which led to the uprising of masses to demand social justice. Though the political imperatives are difficult to unfold, the struggle to find out what

took place during state terrorism or political violence becomes a collective initiative for moral demands to help elaborate the efforts of individual remembrance.

Elizabeth Jelin considers a particular question in regard to the relationship of individual experience to the collective reembrace of the past, she asks: Can remembrance be both individual and collective? (2). The process of remembering one's past is subject to the interpretation of individual experience as well as collective influences. Likewise, memory construction helps to put into question the subjective individuality that goes into play as memory is individually (re)constructed, recalled and (re)thought as experiences once lived both through individual experiences and that of a collective political inactive to avoid unofficial stories from going into oblivion.

With the rise of active participation of H.I.J.O.S, *la Cámpora,* and other victims of state repression, the groups of young actors have come together collectively to share personal accounts, testimonies, experiences, and spaces of belonging. As a result, the shared and collective memories form a strong network of communication and political dialogue between the groups, who gathered together to find meaning to the personal restitution and recovery of memory. In turn, providing an alternative mode of reflection—that of collective, personal, social, and political influences of past in present-day politics. In other words, the present-day objectives of collective groups such as H.I.J.O.S, *las Madres, las Abuelas, la Cámpora* and other human rights groups strongly influence the (re)construction of childhood of the past and how it is to be remembered, and (re)imagined. In the processes of (re)creating one's childhood through the creation of the intertextual imagined child, child memories contain an exceedingly large amount of political and societal influences

become that interwoven within the real and the fictive narrative.

2.10 Conclusion

The continuous increase of social media since Argentina's military regime, has facilitated how the future of Argentina's History is being (re)told. Events such as a more recent one, that took place on August 6, 2014, when Estella de Carlotto, president of *Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*, announced that the long and extensive search for her missing grandson Guido finally ended after 36 years. Additionally, even more enthusiasm spread throughout the nation, such as on April 26, 2017; when the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo announced the appearance of the one hundred and twenty-first missing grandchildren stolen and appropriated during the dictatorship. Within 6 months and on the fortieth anniversary of las Abuelas, on October 27th, 2017, the 125th grandchild had been found. News as such continues to flood the nation with excitement. These events along with many others have made it quite apparent that the country has not rested from its political turmoil. Proving only, that events related to social justice since the country's last dictatorship continue to be the main topics in social and mass media production in Argentina. To say that the aftermath of Argentina's military dictatorship continues to haunt present-day events in Argentina is a workable theory, and even more so after 40 years of political unrest being the continuous struggle for social justice by humanitarian groups as they continue the search for missing children while placing emphasis on the theme of *Nunca Más*[29] to

[29] https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/10/27/argentina/1509073475_976705.html [accessed Oct 27,2017]

never again commit the atrocities of the past. With the return to democracy, and the hopes for restitution only proved that even after 40 years, the declarations for *Nunca Más* is still much alive in Argentina's History.

The recent efforts to highlight the alternative voices of first-hand victims has been introduced to the political sphere as the voices of child victims have become a focal feature in the making of cultural productions from 2003 and onward. With the emergence of Kirchner's popular movement in the political arena, and the growth of individual and collective understanding of the past, young political activists has declared the need to usher in a new era of political involvement through the (re)writing of childhood experience. Many of the artists and writers of such works, have recognized the traumatic events of the past, and their condition as 'victims,' demanding in their own right, the 'ownership' of memory, bearing witness to individual trauma.

Politics and activism provided by the *juventud* have been the centralized tool in the Kirchner era in bring back the ideas of the 1970s social movements. It comes to no surprise then, that the focal feature of the Kirchner administration has been the restoration of juvenile forces and political activism. As both Néstor and Christina Fernández de Kirchner, vigorously sought to hold former military officials accountable for their crimes, over the past two decades (hosted by el *kirchnerismo),* the complex history of political violence has been seen and reinterpreted by an entire spectrum of young children and has dominated the political discourse. In this chapter, my intentions were to identify the relationships between the political influences of Argentina's *kirchnerist* era from 2003- 2015 in the works of childhood imaginaries written by adults, while positioning children of militant parents as key players in the

reconstruction of childhood imaginaries in cultural text, through the subjective political influences of present-day state. It is evident that Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's administrations provided kept their promises. The result of these actions, legitimized the government and established trust in the people, while a demand for newly inspired voiced of victimized children who lived under militant operations, rose in discourse to define their story in history. It is, therefore, imminent to believe that the sponsorships of the Kirchner administration had pushed young-adult victims to (re)think, (re)construct and (re)imagine their childhood as surviving victims and active participants in Argentina's last dictatorship and its aftermath.

CHAPTER 3

PERFORMING MILITANCY IN LAURA ALCOBA'S *THE RABBIT HOUSE*

3.1 Introduction

Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* (2008), belongs to the cannon of post-dictatorship child survivors— a cannon of narratives of cultural works belonging to child survivors, children of the disappeared, childhood victims, children of persecuted parents (those that took part in the armed struggle), and children who themselves had to live under the precarious life of militancy. Among the selected texts, to name a few, are *Los topos* (2008) written by Felix Bruzzone, *La casa de los conejos* (2008) by Laura Alcoba, *Soy un bravo piloto de la nueva China* (2011) by Ernesto Semán, *Diario de una princesa montonera -100% Verdad* (2012) by Mariana Eva Pérez and Lucila Quieto's photographic essay entitled, "Arqueología de la ausencia de Lucila Quieto" written in 2001. Within these novels and works lies first-hand experiences and stories deeply rooted in the political violence of children who endured the risks of political action because of their parent's militant involvement in the dictatorship. Through the process of recollecting experiences, the intention of these writers has been to recuperate a sense of self, while defining their personal experience as child survivors and victims.

As mentioned in the Introduction of this dissertation, in the realm of war, children's lives were forcibly displaced from familiarity and relocated into what one

could consider "no man's land"—the political trenches unoccupied by both parties at war—whereby the margins of insecurity, fear, exclusion, and secrecy encircled the lives of innocent children. Living in the 'outside margins' of prohibition and restriction has incited Argentine writers, artists, and filmmakers to interpret the territorial boundaries of having lived *in between* the displacement of normality and while in the secluded boundaries of *clandestinidad*— where the idea of life or death had become a prominent compromise in the lives of child survivors. These narratives provide a distinctive approximation of childhood memories. In the case of Alcoba's *The Rabbit House*, it tells the story of how child identities can be (re)constructed while engaged in the 'battlefield' as co-participants in war—where the child is quickly hastened to become an independent actor.[30] I use the term 'actor,' in the literal sense of having to perform militant adult-like behaviors with a substantially small margin for error of being caught.

This chapter examines the child's transformation as she undergoes serious confrontational mischiefs due to her inability to fully acquire militant norms, standards, and rules, because of her child-like nature. Rather than assuming the role of an innocent child figure of the 1970s Left-wing revolutionary war, this chapter focuses Alcoba's child protagonist who assumes a politically active character. The young protagonist manifests herself through a sense of 'excitement' and political agency towards her mother's revolutionary efforts. Her new life in militancy is hidden to others of her children age. As a result, Alcoba finds a sense of enthusiasm and eagerness to behave

[30] I use the term actors, here as an individual who stages a performance that is genuinely not himself/herself.

like the adult she desires to become.

In the later sections, my intentions are to demonstrate Alcoba's rupture from her customary, daily routines because of her clandestineness. Most imminently, I demonstrate the child's struggle with the genuine *self* and the conflict of *having to* perform militancy as she continuously encounters fellow militant combatants who rebuke the young child because of her carelessness in maintaining precautionary steps for the protection of the group. In greater detail, I seek to highlight the natural clash that occurs between the core principles of normality to better understand the conventional expectations of the public life and the child's responsibility in having to fend for herself and at times, her family, and those around her in the private sphere.

3.2 A History behind *The Rabbit House*

The story within *The Rabbit House (2007)* is an autobiographical narration of Laura Alcoba that began many years ago in 1976. In a retrospective perspective, the now-adult survivor of Argentina's military regime, tells of her childhood experiences in a militant operative house. After finding refuge in France, Alcoba began to unravel lost memories of her childhood upon her return to Argentina, many years later. It is there, where a local organization turned the house into a memorial site and Alcoba begins questioning the fate of an unborn child of one of the militant activist that once lived with her in the rabbit house which served as a cover story for the illicit activity going on inside the house. The home worked as a clandestine press for the organization *Montoneros*, named "Evita Montonera." In fact, in the Epilogue of the text, Alcoba is sure that the child had survived the aftermath of the destruction of the

house and appropriated by the military, "there are lots of theories about how Diana manages to protect her baby from the heavy artillery and firebombs used on the Montonero militants. Some think that Diana hid Clara Anahí under a mattress, in the bathtub in the little bathroom. Whatever happened, she survived. I am sure of that" (131). It was not until Alcoba's encounters with María Isabel Chorobik de Mariana where three distinct versions of Clara Anahi's story collided in one of the nation's most sought out scandals.

Linked to Alcoba's story and experiences of the rabbit house, has been the continuous efforts of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and persistence of María Isabel Chorobik de Mariana (also known as 'Chicha'), one of the founders of the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo. Reports tell of Chicha's experience, as she clung to hope after she saw a newspaper photograph of Ernestina Herrera de Noble's adoptive daughter, Marcela, who, for years had speculated that this young woman was her missing granddaughter. Reports illustrate:

> The first time I saw Marcela […] sipping mate tea with a breakfast of bananas and cream at her document-strewn dining-room table, was right after Alfonsín became President. Marcela was wearing Morley stockings—ribbed knee socks— just like the ones I used to wear. And her legs looked just like mine. I saw the photos of her in England, France, with presidents and kings, and with the Pope. I watched her grow. She has the same body as my daughter-in-law's mother. And her character seems similar to ours—reserved, modest, sincere,

sensitive, and very intelligent.[31]

Shortly after Laura and her mother fled to France, "the military attacked the 'rabbit house,' killing everyone except for Daniel (who has not there but would be killed eight months later) and Clara Anahí, the couple's three-month-old baby girl" (Ros 51). Stories have it that ambush attack happened by police forces and military officials in La Plata, Argentina on November 24, 1976. Among the survivors, it was believed that was Diana's daughter had been appropriated by military officials and "Thirty-four hours later, Clara Anahí [would then become] one of the almost 400 persons in Argentina who do not know they are children of *desaparecidos* whose families are looking for them (Ros 51).

It turns out, that in the middle of this debate was no other than Ernestina Herrera de Noble's adoptive daughter, Marcela Noble Herrera. Marcela's story began many years ago, in the 1970s when Ernestina Herrera de Noble decided to adopt two children. Years after the death of her husband Roberto Noble, founder of the Clarín empire, the company was left in the hands of a circle of male executives of whom Noble had trusted.

Concerned for the future of Clarín, Herrera de Noble adopted two children to appoint them heirs of Clarín after her death. In the days that followed, Ernestina Herrera known for her prestige's roles as the head of the country's biggest news media—was now entangled at the center of one of the country's most outrageous legal

[31] http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/19/children-of-the-dirty-war [accessed 1/14/17].

cases because of Marcela's biological parentage. After thirty years of systematic and illegal appropriation of children during Argentina's coup d'état, Marcela Noble Herrera had become one of the nation's most wanted protagonists. In the disentanglement of the case, and under much speculations this middle-aged woman was believed to be Diana Teruggi's captive daughter—Clara Anahí—and Chicha's missing granddaughter. Though the midst of this debate, however, Marcela's unresponsive desires to know her true parentage ended without a solution as she later denied providing a DNA sample.

Based largely on the author's childhood experience, the novel gained recognition because of the precarious life she lived as the daughter of the state's opposition, as it tells the story of a child intermingled in a militant operative house from 1975 until November 1976. As a retrospective narrative, the child tells of her experience in the rabbit house, where after moving in with her mother the young child finds herself living with Chacho and Didi, who at the time were expecting their first child, presumably Marcela Noble (Clara Anahí).

The novel has become the first of Alcoba's trilogies: *Le bleu des abeilles* (The Blue of the Bees) in 2013, which recounts her move to Europe to join her mother who had been granted refuge in France. In 2017, *La Danse de l'Araignée* (The Dance of the Spider), her fifth book was published and became the latest in the trilogy of memoirs. Witten first in French, the narration of *The Rabbit House* provided Alcoba, what she considered, "[el] espacio de libertad que encontré en el idioma francés" [32]

[32] Interview conducted by Flavia Pittella on June 19th 2017, titled, "Laura Alcoba y una charla sobre conejos, abejas, prisiones y recuerdos de infancia"

where, the author found a sense of distancing from her native tongue and inability to narrate her story, which was later translated into Spanish. The novel's original French title is *Manège: Petite historie argentine.* Though removed from the Spanish translation, *petite historie,* as Blejmar suggests, "echoes of the world of children and bedtime stories" (Blejmar 96). From this child perspective Alcoba is able to recuperate images and particular moments from her time spent in the rabbit house. Yet, in a historical standpoint, Alcoba makes connections with Chicha Mariani, who years later, took her to visit the remains of the ambushed house. This experience as Alcoba reports, put into perception the images of a fragmented memory of her life in *clandestinidad*:

> El primer viaje fue poner por escrito ciertas imágenes mentales que me volvieron de manera muy fuerte, muy intensa. Fue como escribir un álbum de fotos ausentes porque no tenía ninguna foto de la experiencia de ese lugar ya que en esa vida clandestina tomar fotos estaba prohibido. Entonces yo tenía una presencia de esos recuerdos y al mismo tiempo ninguna huella, entonces la primera etapa fue simplemente poner por escrito imágenes y luego del segundo viaje nació el libro. (Pittella)[33]

Alcoba's encounter with Chicha and the militant ambushed house, established the course for which she begins her novel. *The Rabbit House* then, was written as an attempt to reach Clara Anahí (Ros 51). Directing her preliminary statements to Diana (who was very close to the author) and finds security in telling her story "without fearing […] judgement or lack of understanding" (Alcoba 1). Faced with the efforts of

[33] https://www.infobae.com/cultura/2017/06/19/laura-alcoba-y-una-charla-sobre-conejos-abejas-prisiones-y-recuerdos-de-infancia/ [accessed Nov 1 2017

conceptualizing her personal memoirs of childhood, it is not surprising that the understanding and fear of judgment for writing *The Rabbit House,* attributes to the author's availability and collective awareness of a newly established political discourse of childhood survivors that *el kirchnerismo* permitted during the time frame the novel was written. Baring the fact, that Alcoba had been skeptical of writing her experience, she clearly questioned, "What's the point of stirring all that up again?" (Alcoba 1), the author managed not to wait any longer, as the country itself could not wait to hear of Clara Anahí's disappearance either.

3.3 Caught in Between: Surveillance, Detachment, and the Force of Power

Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* (2007) tells us the story of a young girl molded to fit the non-conventional roles and behaviors while trapped *between,* as she is displaced physically and emotionally from normality, and reintegrated into society as a member of a politically persecuted family. As the novel illustrates, that the young Alcoba is ruptured from society and forced to go underground because of her mother's political contribution with the militant group Montoneros. Under the treacherous circumstances of survival, these non-normative behaviors include the need to circumscribe to a dramaturgical approach of *performing militancy* as an essential role determined by physical behavioral acts, not genuinely natural, where certain codes of behavior are assigned to the child. The child in this case, she is obligated to perform militant-adult-like skills of survival. In the same paratextual scheme, the child as Gilda Waldman Mitnick has noted, must assume adult-like characteristics or "la voz infantil" as the author describes:

Habla no sólo desde la clandestinidad, sino fundamentalmente desde el miedo,

> la incertidumbre, el terror y, también, desde la inocencia y la perplejidad de una niña que, sin saber cómo hacerlo, debe asumir responsabilidades adultas y comportarse casi como una militante comprometida (mantener el secreto de lo que verdaderamente es el lugar, pasar desapercibida en la escuela, conocer las reglas de seguridad, manejar el secreto, etcétera), cometiendo, sin embargo, algunos errores que agudizaban el peligro que corría la organización y que le valieron serios regaños. (Waldman Mitnick)

The author's argument, demonstrates, of course, the two important aspects in Alcoba's novella. The first is the absolute involvement of the child as a *militante compromentida,* and the second is the performative value of having to assume adult-like responsibilities. Once underground the child must learn to utilize her skills and abilities to master the art of deception, ingenuity, and attempt to present herself before others, through performance, as she adopts a character who mimics a 'realistic' image of normality as an innocently naïve child. Figuratively speaking, the rules of the game include mastering militant behaviors to prevent military reinforcements to undertake the printing press operated by her mother and *compañeros.* By incorporating the constraints of Victor Turner's marginal space of liminality, the idea of *performing childhood* requires children to address the public/audience through a natural set of coherent and conventional performances. It is in the phase of passing into 'clandestinidad'—or into the trenches of war—where the child learns to acquire new identities while hiding the true nature of their identity and maneuvering behind their parent's subversive actions. As the novel highlights, the child's main objective is to engage in performing acts of militancy and adhere to the strict instructions and

demands of secrecy, convincing society (the outside world and those seeking to prosecute the operational groups), that the staged impressions and acts of normality performed by the child are real. In fact, such performative behavior demands the challenge of managing the two distinct worlds. Carefully analyzed by Jordana Blejmar's *Playful Memories* (2016), the author provides valuable insight into the concept of the balancing for two distinct worlds that the young Alcoba must undertake, stating that:

> The narrator is able to go through one world to the other and come back again. She can go to school and pretend that she is just another little girl among her peers. At the same time, she is asked to perform militant activities such as helping the group package *Evita Montonera* or keep guard in the house. She moves from one reality to the other because her position is different from that of the other members of the house: 'no one is searching for me. I just happened to be here, witnessing everything.' (Blejmar 98)

The young protagonist becomes then, another *compañera* among the fellow militants who help in (re)constructing her childhood identity. However, as the novel highlights, the child's innate childlike characteristics, become signs of the emotional, physical, and intellectual immaturity. In fact, conflict arises because of the compromising effects of hiding. Alcoba's lack of maturity places constraints on her ability to perform adult roles. Unfortunately, during Argentina's military siege young children were taught to follow all the rules of the game, even though many barely understood the demand that came with wraths of terror. In the novel, not only is the narrator a young girl among adult combatants, but she also struggles to keep an

adequate performance as she occasionally and unwillingly disobeys the rules by which she must maintain undercover, because the child lacks the cognitive ability to understand the intensity of living fugitively. Ana Ros' analyses of the text, provides an insightful understanding of how the child's daily encounters with militancy become a routine aspect in her everyday life. The girl's perspective, she states "reveals important aspects about the enigma of how massive violence and the permanent presence of death became possible and tolerable (Ros 53). More explicitly Ros describes the child's experience in more profound terms stating, "One of these accepts is the existence of a routine. Once something enters in the realm of routine, it becomes possible and normal despite its 'exceptionality': owning and carrying firearms, the idea of killing and being killed. The arms become part of Laura's universe […] in the rabbit house, the firearms become part of an everyday routine" (Ros 53). In my perspective, the child's precarious experience become normalized by the routinely unconventional behaviors children are bound to live and the firearms and political conflict they encounter on a regular basis. This is true for all children who are forced to live between the dangers of firearms and hiding. The interesting aspect of this, is that unconventional behaviors and experience become normalized in the hassle of it all, and children become tied to what is unconventional and yet, have to question that same 'secretive' behavior in the outside world.

The newly introduced unconventional behaviors of survival and ingenuity play a key role in the ways in which Alcoba, struggles to satisfy her own instinctive 'childlike' innocence while forcefully obligated to maintain a maturity level that is far beyond her years. The young child not only becomes physically alienated from the

world she has grown up in and has become familiarized with, but is separated from school, friends, and family members she once acquainted often, with the exception of her grandparents. Such struggles become an imminent and visible feature in the novel as the child enters both a temporal and emotional phase of separation from the conventional and familiar world she knows. It is under theses constraints that Alcoba illustrates how her mother enslaved herself working in the clandestine printing press and distributing the newspaper *Evita Montonera*, leaving the child to fend for herself while undercover.

Up until 1975 Laura Alcoba remembers living in a small apartment "in a concrete and glass tower on the Plaza Moreno, just next to my maternal grandparents' house, opposite of the cathedral" (6), in La Plata, province of Buenos Aires. This vision of the city provides a physical topography of life in transparency—opened to public affairs and to the wraths of military prosecution. This vision of the city offers in the novel physical movement, a population, and people interaction— in bars, cafes, schools, stores, etc., and a sense of dialogue and human exchange of discourse and conversation amongst people, providing limited room for inappropriate and hidden maneuvering of militant operations. It is possible to say, that in such a setting the individual will opening promote and live up to the complex values of normality in the patriarchal society, where 'good civilians' will train themselves to perform institutional covenant-based values, attend school and work to avoid possible rectify from the grievous situation (Taylor 99). The image of this opened plane, which the child described, extracts behaviors from individuals that allow him or her to live in a society without fear or blame. As sociologist Erving Goffman illustrates, "when the individual

presents himself before others" as one would in public affairs "his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society" (Goffman 35). With the armed forces on the lookout, the configuration of individual performances, was shaped in the ways in which individuals saw themselves and others. The seemingly "natural" performativity of everyday life was transformed into a commanded performance because individuals feared being wrongfully accused or associated with subversive individuals. As Diana Taylor illustrates in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (1997), "Argentineans felt as if they were in exile, an internal exile, as the signs, sights, and codes of their familiar environment became progressively stranger and more terrifying, they could no longer read the signs" (99).

The Latin American city described by the young child can also be likened unto the notion of the *Panopticon.* In observing Bentham's *Panopticon,* Michael Foucault, explains that the dimensions of this architectural prison entrap individuals into a cellular dormitory. The model of the prison is based on a circular dimension, whose surrounding dormitories encircle a central tower that generates light towards the prison cells. The geometry of such building creates a visible separation between the observed and the observer as bright lights are focused onto the prisoner:

> At the periphery, an angular building; at the center, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the window of the tower; the other on the outside, allows

> light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower […] by the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. (Rivkin and Ryan 554)

Because the light from the central tower reflects brightly upon the inmate, the individual trapped in the cell becomes unaware as to when or what is observing him, thus "visibly trapped" (554). This structure induces the inmate to develop a "state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (554), and his inability to undergo subversive behavior. What is more intrinsically valuable to Bentham's model, is that the constant vigilance of the inmate entices intimidation and fear of any disorderly conduct, while keeping the inmate attached to fixed and prescribed performances. From the regimented fear of military officials observing the streets, the potential rebellious threats of militant combatants hid from the city. As the military unleashed control of national retribution, la Junta vowed to *limpiar* the public sphere of subversive individuals and ideological contamination. As a result, entire neighborhoods were blocked off, and military forces searched homes. "Terrified individuals had to stay put; there was no place to go that would not incriminate friends or family" as Diana Taylor has noted (Disappearing Acts 98). In fact, the omnipresent 'eye' of the cathedral in downtown La Plata as the Alcoba recalls, represented the judgmental gaze that focused on observing perpetrators, symbolizing Bentham's central tower, assuring the functioning of military power in the city. Considering the topography of the city, the cathedral tower serves as a strategic point of observation, critical for the reexamination of the coup's

strategic maneuvering for observing civilians. Therefore, "visibility was key to social control: people had to be available for inspection" (Disappearing Acts 98). Thus, the delineation of the city becomes an apparent space generating the constant feeling of observation and power of the coup's control over people's behaviors.

Richard Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology* begins with the idea of the "Restoration of Behavior" stating that, "Restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film." (Schechner 35). In other words, the restoration of behaviors is the performer's reenactment of a given blueprint. It is where the performer gets in touch with "recover, remember, or even invent these strips of behaviors and then (re)behave according to these strips, either by being absorbed into them (playing the role, going into them or existing side by side with them" (35).

To use the military and the political surroundings of Argentina's military regime as the visible eye and 'director' of the everyday presentation of people, grasps the extent to which the military rule became not only the audience that supervised their every move, but the distributor of scripts, whereby performers had circumscribed to this "special kind of behavior 'expected'" (Schechner 36). In fact, Diana Taylor, the transformation of the public arena into militarized zones occurred because of the "visual dominance and surveillance" (Disappearing Acts 98). As a result, the military took control of the behavioral expectations of the other, "people no longer identified with the space they inhabited" (Disappearing acts) and as Taylor describes "They no longer saw themselves as members of a cohesive community. They felt like strangers in their own country, in their own city, in their own home" (98) as military personnel took control of all aspects of their daily lives. This of course, encompasses Schechner's idea that "restored behavior

is ‘out there,’ distant from ‘me.’ It is separate and therefore can be worked on,’ changed […] It can be ‘me’ at another time/psychological state” (36). People had to perform entities separate and distant from themselves. As such, performance became a tool to master the art of deception, ingenuity, and protection from those targeted by the regime and distanced the individual from who they were to Schechner’s idea of “being behaved” (36) worked and (re)worked, and sculpted because of the vigilance of the regime. It is much like putting on “a mask or costume” (37).

Another way of looking at vigilance in Argentina during the military regime is through the constant surveillance of military rule, whereby the common everyday symbols took on other meanings. Symbols for Victor Turner become of fundamental importance in the passing through different social statuses and change. This is partially due to the fact that symbols carry with meaning time. The meaning behind symbols changes as one passes through distinct rituals and upon entering different spaces. In theory, Victor Turner in *From Ritual to Theater* (1982), sees the social process of change in terms of symbols claiming that, “symbols […] are crucially involved in situations of social change—the symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, aspirations and ideas, individual and collective, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior” (Turner 22). Moreover, is the fact that such symbols “are aimed at producing effects on the psychological states and behaviors of those exposed to them or obligated to use them” (Turner 22). The effects of this manipulation of symbols on Alcoba’s subjectivity became evident when passing into *la clandestinidad.* It was then, that nationalist symbols of obedience and orderly conduct became, for the young Alcoba,

more visibly exposed in her everyday interaction with society. Nationalist propaganda worked as means to control and maintain orderly conduct amongst, while inexplicitly (re)defining the values of nation building. Diana Taylor formulates the idea that nation-ness is a mechanism that sums up the commonality of social imaginaries within an identified group of people. Yet, under military rule, the regime promoted the image of "authentic national being" and demanded that the people feel 'Argentine' by identifying with their performance of national identity" (Disappearing Acts 93). By mandating strict controls, survival meant "'being Argentine,' or, more specifically 'being seen as' Argentinean in a brutal context that defined patriotism as conformity and nonconformity as subversion" (Disappearing Acts 93).

In Laura's recollection, nation-ness promoted privilege and a sense of belonging at a larger political scale. It staged the mechanisms by which the military controlled and monitored citizens. The more visible and yet too obvious illustrations of this were the national propaganda of surveillance found in the everyday life. Coincidentally, on her way home, Alcoba encounters a few images promoting a sense of nationalism and respect for the state. On the bus, she sees a picture of the Virgin of Lujan, "a tiny lady draped in an enormous sky-blue cloak embellished with golden swirls, crushed by a heavily jeweled crown as well as rays emanating from her glorious body" (Alcoba 8) as she recalls. The image promoted here, works hand in hand with the Cathedral at the center stage of La Plata, as the tiny image of the Virgin aims to demonstrate the assigned roles of submission, immobility, and the 'crushed' dominance of a heavily jeweled crown representing the regimens systematic control weighing down on the people. Other images included stickers of Gimnasia y Esgrima, La Plata's soccer team,

and “a little blue and white flag with a faded fringe [and] the big fat sticker strip across the upper part of the widescreen, in the Argentine colours, all the drivers have that whether they’re supporters of Estudiantes or even Boca Juniors, the great Buenos Aires team” (Alcoba 8). These public images label the fundamental politics of the regimes to the corresponding ideals of nationalism and the conventional values of state derived from the absolute control over its civilians. The patriotic symbols on the bus Laura recalls taking, captures a sense of order and control the regime had over its people. It positions it positions the regime to promote orderly conduct amongst individuals, while constantly reminding the population of the omnipresent ‘eye’ monitoring their every move. Reluctantly, the child becomes aware of the daunting surveillance of military brutality and is forced to live under such circumstances. Thus, the separation from Goffman’s ‘front regions’ of war, places the child into a position of continuous observation, which constitutes in the child’s image the ability to encompass and understand the semiotics of symbols intertwined with the political aspects of militancy and war.

The idea of detachment from a previous social status to the next can be understood, by Arnold van Gennep’s concept of *rites of passage,* whereby individuals pass from one status to another. According to Victor Turner, the moving of social statuses from one to another implies the “processual form of ‘passage’” (Turner 24). For children of militant parents, ‘passing’ outside of society, and into symbolic and sometimes liminal spaces marked by the physical and geographical setting, provides passage where society/authoritarian rule has no power over them. By way of ‘ritual,’ the physical departure of a child’s normal reality constitutes a phase of separation into

clandestindad. The inauguration into 'clandestinidad' is term that can be used in Spanish as an adjective, indicating secrecy, fugitive and/or illicit behavior, encompassing militant ideals, when used as a noun, the term illustrates a physical condition of having gone undercover, or to have passed into a state of secrecy (*pasar a la clandestinidad).* For Jordana Blejmar, the author identifies a specific episode by which the young protagonist undergoes a process of transformation of entering underground by way of ritual. As she recalls, before moving to the house, Alcoba is taken to a fellow combatant's house where she is baptized, as Blejmar observes, "after this ceremony it is as if the narrator is reborn as a young guerrilla for her new life" (Blejmar 98). The new life, of children passing into *clandestinidad,* offers to children the ability to see a new world that is concealed to other children their age, as Blejmar has articulate. This ability allows children to see the world through a new set of symbols and behaviors that must be undertaken to avoid dismantling entire operational projects of militant combatants.

Moreover, Victoria Doana has noted that the beginning of Alcoba's own clandestine journey was marked by the moment the young child's parents entered *clandestinidad*:

> el 'todo comenzó' de *La casa de los Conejos* marca el principio que no es el del nacimiento de Laura, ni el de la creación de Montoneros, ni siquiera el del momento en que sus padres optan por la militancia. Todo eso ya estaba allí cuando Laura comienza su historia. El elemento disruptivo es el pase a la clandestinidad de sus padres, la experiencia en esa casa operativa y el aprendizaje de palabras nuevas. (Doana 12)

As Doana illustrates, the disruptive phase of the child's life is the passing through into 'clandestinidad' took place the moment her parents opted out for the traditional family life within the boundaries of the city, and continued with their militant operations, with the so-called 'Dirty War' as fugitive figures. With these measures, the child, as Doana illustrates had to learn 'palabras nuevas,' this included the performative appearance in public, and the behaviors she would have to alternate in order to maintain undercover and disguised from the public sphere.

For the young Alcoba, the passing through into *clandestinidad*, results in the physical separation from her grandparents and her apartment in La Plata into what the young child recalls as a house "far from the city center, at the edge of the massive wastelands surrounding La Plata, where the city has almost petered out and the pampas hasn't yet begun. In front of the house there's an old disused railway, and some junk that seems to have been dumped there a long time ago. Occasionally, a cow" (Alcoba 5). These remarks illustrate the rural areas and outskirts of the city as a distancing geographical place from continuous surveillance of military control. Detachment from the 'real' world, permits the separation of insubordinate revolutionary behaviors that are not 'visibly' found within the boundaries of an open panel, as in the case of a city.

La Plata is known as the "city of diagonals" and is described by Guillermina Walas as "a meticulously planned (in this case, provincial) capital, designed as a perfectly square grid according to the guidelines of the rational and provident urbanism of the late nineteenth century" (Walas 49). Dardo Rocha founded La Plata in 1882 after the difficult federalization of Buenos Aires, attempting to create a

'perfect city.' On the other hand, during the 1960, 70s and 80s, the city marks commemorative historical and political events as it underwent a complex refurbishing of ideals and human rights violations. It is in La Plata that infamous events such as the "Noche de los Lápices" (Night of the Pencils) occurred and it is no coincidence that the city is also where important human rights activists such as Hebe de Bonafini (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) and Estela de Carlotto (Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo) reside (Walas 49). Adopting this platform established the physical boundaries and evident separation of the city's limits. The urban elite had power, knowledge, and administrative power to control over the people and the city, while those in the outskirts of the city were more prone to a life marginalized by the city people.

In Alcoba's description of her new home, the rabbit house has almost petered out of the city, located near an unused railroad, marks the physical disenchantment and distancing of the city and the social interaction amongst people, and the conventional life circumscribed to city behaviors—a place, I may add, ideal for hiding—far from surveillance of the regime. While also being entrapped by the vigilance of informants and prosecutors. In fact, upon living in a more extensive network of secrecy and militant combat, the child recalls:

> We have left our apartment because, from now on, the Montoneros have to be in hiding. This is necessary because there are some people who have become very dangerous: the men from the AAA squad, the Argentine Anti-communist Alliance, who kidnap militants such as my parents and kill them or make them disappear. So, we have to keep ourselves safe, to hide and also to retaliate. My

mother, explains to me that this is called 'going underground. 'Now, we are going to go underground' – those were her exact words. (Alcoba 7)

Without a doubt, the destructive forces of power within the capital city, forced militant operative groups to go undercover. The small apartment in Plaza Moreno, establishes the point of detachment for the young child. It is, where '*clandestindad'* began for her. Consequently, this instance is the turning point of the child's life under militancy, where the measures of reality and the dangers of military rule could potentially cause the disappearance and death of the entire group. Moreover, for children of militant parents, the passing through and into *clandestinidad,* had practical reasoning in protecting themselves, friends, and family from the regime and while combating against it in secrecy.

3.4 The Threshold of Conflict: Performance and the (Re) construction of Childhood Identity

Upon revisiting the past, the idea of *performing childhood* encompasses a means of (re)visiting childhood behaviors through specified performances created the adult- made (re)construction of the textual child through memory, as initially explored in Chapter 1. Therefore, the conceptualization of the term *performing childhood,* as I use it, is a theorized term whereby children identities are constructed through imposed daily practices. Defining the notion of *performing childhood* lies in how the young child interacts and portrays childhood with those around them, for it entitles (re)thinking and (re)constructing behaviors to fit the expectations of active militant members of societies in the private life, while deceiving others in the public life.

Through the daily practices of imposing behaviors associated with militancy, I see Alcoba's childhood imaginary not only beginning to pretend, imitate, forge, and take on new roles, etc., as a means of survival, but ultimately the child undertakes on an identity whereby she begins to *perform childhood militancy.*

Furthermore, the idea of *performing childhood militancy* required individuals in hiding to put up a *front*—or changing one's identity for the benefit of survival, *performing* everyday behaviors under to the extent that the observer does not question the validity of the child's performance while undercover. Continuous adult discipline shaped child identities and behaviors. Through the process of socialization, adults found it necessary to shape children for them to become adequate members of society. Childhood is a practice constantly being (re)worked and (re)fashioned with a set of practices and behaviors. Jackie Marsh has noted, "behaviour is to be viewed not only as an outward indicator of an essentialist self but as a sign of self-in-practice, a self in the process of constructing identities located within social-historical contexts" (Marsch 30). The self-in-practice which the author addresses, is the constant (re)structuring of identity through bodily practices and behaviors, contingent with the socio-historical stage the self performs on. Understanding that child identities are congruent with practices and behaviors marked by the crucial roles undertaken by family members, helps us to analyze the function of militant parents in (re)shaping childhood identities and the tactics undertaken by children of militant parents in the everyday practice of survival. For this reason, the crucial imitation of 'non- militarized behaviors' had been, by far, the most important *front* a child needed to undertake. As such, for a child in clandestine settings to *perform childhood normalcy* was

imperative, as if the clandestine life did not exist.

Within the boundaries of militancy, the (re)shaping of childhood identities as Victoria Daona asserts demonstrates that within the co-operative network of militancy in the novel, all members of the organization were undoubtedly marked by the concrete roles in which each member must be responsible for, she states, "en la Organización los roles están marcados, cada quien sabe cuál es su papel y como cumplirlo" (Daona 6). As a consequence of the tremulous battleground the entire part of militant operational groups had to fervently maintain a coherent set of behaviors, while working together simultaneously, operating in unity, for the protection and safety of one another. Children's roles were focused more imminently on the way in which they behaved themselves and performed childhood within society, as many where still part of an extensive social network of interrelationships as we see in Alcoba's narrative and the child's interaction with grandparents and her active enrollment in school. Therefore, children were forced to take on new roles and new identities as their main objective had become that of survival.

With the rise of the military regime, thousands of political and revolutionary groups went undercover, taking with them members of their families including children. How I see it, life undercover marked the limits by which children lost their innocence and were forced to perform childhood and skills of survival. It was during that rapture where children of militant parents were taken from his or her empirical-normal setting and *emerged* into a liminal space of secrecy, where violence, terror, and the precarious threats of the state impacted the ways in which the children lived and acted around the non-militant peers. In many cases, such children were militarized and

shaped by militant ideals as to becoming patriotic victims of war. Ultimately the public and private life clashed, while the child was divided between a set of constructed behaviors contrary to their true childhood identity-while forced to take on new identities and behaviors.

In the trajectory of the novel, the young Laura undergoes a transformation of growth and maturity that occurs the moment she goes underground and is caught in between life in—*clandestinidad*—of what had once considered her 'normal reality' and the confrontational problems that arose as she is expected to *perform militancy* live as an undercover figure. The child is, therefore, caught in between *her intrinsic self* and the expected characteristic of maturity that is forced upon her. However, for this transformation to occur, the child must be ruptured from her normal-conventional state of childhood (that of innocence and vulnerability) and forced into an awakening state of terror of which her family is responsible for. Under these premises, the conflict of such transformation, resides in the child's constant inability to measure up to adult's expectation as a fellow combatant in the rigorous political setting she is in, and use performance as a mechanism to hide militant involvement from her every day encounters with the real world. Here, is where the child's 'natural' performativity of everyday life is transformed into commanded performances of 'unnatural' and sometimes unusual behaviors of secrecy. For Alcoba the measures of reality were much more treacherous than what the young protagonist could have imagined, she was now undercover—in hiding— for her parents were now fully emerged in militant operations. As the young girl recalls, "there are some people who have become very dangerous […] who kidnap militants such as my parents and kill them or make them

disappear. So, *we* have to keep ourselves safe" (Alcoba 7). In fact, the home itself is where most of the trauma takes place. It is a space that separated the outside world from the child's new training center, was most of the confrontational issues of traditional childhood behaviors and the demands of clandestine life took place.

The confrontational problems between reality and the young child's innate character began the moment she became disillusioned of the physical appearance of the new home she was introduced to. She had once fantasized a home with "a red tile roof, a garden, a swing and a dog. The kind of house they always have in children's books" (Alcoba 6). Examining the text even further, the young protagonist desired much more than what the home could offer, she desired "the life that went with it" (Alcoba 6). Notice the insecurity in the child's words, as she doubtfully compares her expectations of the unfamiliar rabbit house. Certainly, the paradigm constructed around the ideals of a perfectly established home, did not include characteristics of a militant family and the precarious experiences that came with it. It is through the retrospective standpoint of Alcoba's imaginary child that we come to understand the outcome of her life in militancy and that the fantasied perfection of a life and home that was far indeed, disrupted by her parent's affiliation to the militant group.

What is interesting about Alcoba's description and dissolution is the fact that many childhood survivors, who now tell their stories as children under similar circumstances dealt with an increasingly disappointment of their parent's political participation in militancy. Fernando Oscar Reati in "Entre el amor y el reclamo: La literatura de los hijos de militantes en la postdictadura Argentina," the author claims that many children of militant parents admired unconditionally the political efforts of

their parent's involvement, however hidden from worldly affairs, are sentiments of abandonment and resentment. Moreover, after conducting an interview with one of the founders of H.I.J.O.S Reati noted from his interviewee was disillusioned for having had militant parents, "hay quienes admiran de modo incondicional a sus padres y quienes, sin dejar de quererlos, en privado les echan en cara el abandono sufrido […] padres fueron grandes militantes y los admiro por eso, pero fueron terribles padres…" (Reati 2). The idea of 'being great militants' and 'horrible parents' is as transparent as the fact that parents chose to defend and live up to a set of ideals than to live and protect their own children from the wraths of terror. For Alcoba, entering a clandestine life, destabilized the nature of family and destroyed the expectations of a perfectly normative family unit such as the one that Laura dreamed of "parents who came home from work every evening for dinner. Parents who baked cakes on Sundays, following recipes from big fat cookery books full of shiny illustrations" (6).

Soon, however, the novel captures the beginning of Alcoba's imaginary child embracing militancy and became one with "Mummy and Daddy," as she illustrates, "the others don't know that *we* have been forced to go to war" (9). I italicize the word *we,* for the purpose of demonstrating the child's self-integration into the threshold of *cladestinidad* which began the moment her reality became concealed from society and the child began to embrace her role as a militant activist. The use of first-person plural places the child as a co-participant of the subversive activities her parents were involved in. Doana has emphasizes how the young child became both a witness and co-participant of in the armed forces as she learned new tactics for survival, "ella fue testigo y partícipe de la militancia armada de sus padres, tuvo que aprender a callar,

ocultar sus miedos, y comportarse como un adulto. Su infancia—como la de tantos otros niños de su edad— estuvo prefigurada por la elección de sus padres y de toda esa generación (Doana 13). Notice how the author clarifies first and foremost that the child's entity had been 'prefigured' by election of their parent's choice. This is evidence of imposing childhood behaviors upon vulnerable and innocent subjects of repression. Moreover, the author emphases the tactics by which children had to perform such behaviors as she addresses the child's need to forge on new behaviors such as maintaining an adult-like role, because of their militant status. Marshal Beier, in his book *The Militarization of Childhood: Thinking beyond the Global South,* noted, "just because a child makes connections to the world, s/he may not become a subject who creatively chooses radical political movements. Rather, it takes innumerable resources to constitute youth [and children] into subjects who challenge militarized approaches to social relations, including the emerging conservative projects" (Beier 28). The innumerable resources that undergo the power of (re)configuring childhood identities are connected to the strategic abilities of manipulating childhood imagination, skills, physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities.

For militant parent's some of the best teaching strategies were built upon lessons of 'good' and 'bad'. This process was usually undertaken by teaching children through simple antidotes, which would essentially turn into meaningful lessons that would place greater demand and responsibility on the child and the ways in which the child conducted him/herself in the public arena. As seen in the novel, Laura is told a story about a young child, a toddler who could barely talk and was unable to understand the warning signs of danger. While trying to wing this child to the

understanding of danger, everything went wrong when police arrived at their house, the parents manage to hide weapons, militant newspapers and anything that could be considered subversive. Underestimating the child's ability to speak, the police retraced their steps and realized the child had been point to a painting on the wall saying, "Ahí! Ahí!" (Alcoba 10). The young child had been pointing to a hidden compartment on the wall where the family was hiding weaponry. To this end, all the member of the family went to prison (10). For a seven-year-old child such as Laura, an antidote like the one told of the child, sets the stage by which parents took on these learning opportunities to instruct children of the danger that surrounded them and their entire families. In the story the most minimal mistakes, as small as they may seem for militant families, even underestimating a child's lack of speech, positions children with the ability to dismantle the secret operations of an entire household.

Considering the search methods of the military regime, which included seeking out subversive, communists, and opposing parties, the military regime was vigorously in seeking to eliminate evidence of the subversive individuals, which included, placing an enormous amount of effort in easing evidence of life itself as Taylor has shown, "borrar cualquier rastro de la vida misma" (Taylor 422). To elaborate on this situation a bit more, Crenzel explains that as some of the military's mechanisms to remove complete residue of their disappeared, the final sequence of the disappeared was to kill their victims. With this, he illustrates, "La secuencia final de la desaparición, el asesinato y la destrucción u ocultamiento de los cuerpos, perseguía el intento de borrar el recuerdo sobre el desaparecido" (35). For military officials this was an immense task to undertake and in order to find the so-called subversive, military men did

everything in their power to hunt down the target. In fact, the use of children was fundamental in seeking out the so-called subversive. Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco has noted, children were used for instrumental purposes, often used as "informants" (235) and to help single out friends, family members, and even parents. As Suarez-Orozco identifies, for military officials' children became a valuable commodity "to be exploited for information in the halls of death" (Suarez-Orozco 236). In all, "children were used as 'bait' by the security forces to entrap other 'subversives' (Suarez-Orozco 235).

Children of militant parents continued to be active members of society, which entitled them to participate both in public and private affairs. Their role in the private life included acquiring skills to underestimate the search efforts of aggressive military officials hunting down the 'subversive.' The manipulation of children identities and behaviors became a rigorous operation for both Left-wing militants and the military itself. Entire families believed it necessary to place extreme measures on (re)constructing childhood identities. Because of the marginal and secluded space by which children are given to move around in, such teachings placed a heavy burden upon the child's shoulders to maintain family affairs discreet and hidden from the public life. Children became an extra set of external eyes for their subversive parents and fellow combatants. Embedded within the tactics of survival was the constant need to watch over one another's every move. This entitled, the endless labor of constantly observing one's environments.

In the recollection of her early years, Alcoba recalls having to learn this tactic early in her militant life, as she acquired the ability to assert certain behaviors

allowing her to become a vigilant undertaker. Several times on the way home, as she remembers, her grandmother would stop several times to see if anyone was following them. Often, the young child took the responsibility to check if someone was behind them, for it would become more suspicious if her grandmother constantly looked back to see "it's more normal," as she illustrates, "for a child to stop and turn around – in an adult it could be seen as suspicious behaviour, proof of nervousness, and might attract attention. But I have learnt to make these checks into a game. I do three little hops, clap my hand and jump right around, both feet at once" (16). Notice, that with simple childhood game, the child became the means, by which adult figures could watch their everyday moves. She had transformed a seemingly child's game into strategic means of observing the other, while *performing* her innate childlike behaviors. This captures the notion of *performing childhood militancy* in how the young child interacts and (re)configures childhood as it becomes intertwined with militant behavior.

3.5 Performing Militancy

Capturing obedient child victims *performing militancy* reinforces the traditional views on childhood survivors during Argentina's coup, the idea of child is associated with conventional childlike behaviors are such as that of innocence and vulnerability. However, in examining the children of persecuted parents there is a distinctive portrayal of the inflicting struggles as militant children. In such cases, children became co-participants of the opposition, consequently leading to the dismantling of their innocence, while their identities had become (re)structured to perform skills of survival that ultimately altered their instinctive childlike behaviors and identities. By attending

to the disrupted ideals of normative behaviors, childhood militancy is a way of viewing children of militant parents as active members and participants of the political group. Whereby, the child's innocence is ruptured by the constant (re)learning of behaviors for the survival and protection of entire operative militant groups. This is manifested in the lack of passive characters portrayed on behalf of children and their responsibility to perform a valuable service to the militant group. In this segment, I look closely at the moments of conflict and awareness that constitutes the child's emergence as an active participant. I particularly draw attention to the ingenuity of Alcoba's character as it circumscribes to cope and adapt to attitudes necessary for survival that conflict with the everyday threats of state terror. In doing so, I look at Alcoba's character through a performative lens, seeking to highlight the explicit references of militancy intertwined within the protagonist childlike identity.

Marked by the political disturbances and growing unrest, Alcoba begins to *perform militancy* early in the novel. Upon several teaching moments, the young child embraces the opportunity to pretend, imitate, impersonate, and develop routinely skills that will allow her to play around with the new identity endowed to her. As one of her most notorious attributes is the fact that the child intends to perform adult-like characteristics. The child quickly realizes that because of the liminal constraints of her militant situation, she must act differently:

> But with me, things are very different. I am big. I may be only seven years old, but everyone says I already talk like a grown-up. It makes them laugh that I know the name of Firmenich, the head of the Montoneros, and even the words of the Peronist Youth Chant off by heart. They have explained to me

> everything. I have understood and I will obey. I won't say a word. Even if someone hurt me. Even if they twisted my arm or burnt me with an iron. Even if they drove nails into my knees. I have understood how important it is to keep quiet. (10)

This brief introduction about herself and her abilities to perform a sense of maturity alludes to the understanding and comprehension of her role in secrecy. She knows from the beginning that she must take greater risks and adopts an entity that is constructed on adult-like attributes. Alcoba begins to feel like an adult. In fact, the child's behavior begins to take on the expected behaviors/ideals of leftist militants. It is upon these ideals the young child begins to learn the Peronist Youth Chant, she also claims to have learned the name of Mario Eduardo Firmenich who had founded and lead the guerrilla group in 1970 and like all loyal militants she has learned to 'obey' blindly. This blind obedience, builds upon Laura's character, for the child begins to assume a militant identity as she takes upon herself an oath of silence, claiming, "I mustn't say a word" (9). More evident of her transition into militancy, is her childlike innocence that is purely enchanted with the idea of torture and wraths of war, even though she is unaware of the significance of such mechanisms. The young protagonist proposes to have 'understood' the measures of torture that correspond to the political situation of the time. In fact, the ability for the young 7-year-old to recognize the severity of the torturing mechanism haunting many of the captured victims is a characteristic rarely understood by children. The novel proposes that the young child becomes aware of the political violence around her and is willing to accept the consequences. Similarly, the twisted arms, burnt bodies or even the nails in the knees

demonstrate clearly the child's innocence, and inability to comprehend the morbid characteristics of being a forced prisoner in the hands of the military. Because innocence is a natural part of childhood, the fact that Laura becomes aware of the demands of militancy (the torture mechanisms of those captured by the regime), places at a much larger scale stress, on the parent's role as primary perpetrators for shattering the kid's right to preserve innocence. In other words, because of the active role as operative militants, children of militant parents were forced to awaken from the child's innocence and understanding of imminent danger around them. Survival of entire families and operative groups depended largely on the child's performances in the public sphere. Therefore, parents had the obligation to indoctrinate their children about the consequences of their political involvement.

The notion of innocence is central focal point to this study and a prevalent theme throughout the novel. Joanne Faulkner's "*Vulnerability of 'virtual' subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the Cultural Value of Innocence*" establishes an interesting perspective of childhood memory. The author argues that childhood memories are adult fetishes used to fuel the nostalgic-innocent experiences of childhood, which is seen as a time "without worry or care" (Faulkner 129). According to the author, the aspects of childhood nostalgia drives the adult writer to revert to the "angelic intermediary between the adult world and another 'better' (less socially complicated) self, past or future" (Faulkner 129). More noticeably the author sees the child image as a separate entity from the everyday cares of adult life. Therefore, Faulkner' analysis focuses on the virtue of innocence as an "empty trait valued precisely as a *deficit* of experience, as if the experience itself were corrosive of virtue"

(Faulkner 127). In fact, the author identifies innocence as a carefree and harmless environment set aside from the demands of others and defines innocence as "deriving from the Latin *inocere*—to do no harm—innocence suggests a state of defencelessness rather than security, and it is as such that it is valued. Notionally 'protected' from experience and conceived of as existing prior to it, 'innocence' instead of its own particular mode of contemporary experience" (Faulkner 127). Innocence is identified by the deficit of adult experience. The representation of innocence in *The Rabbit House* is an ambiguous theme presented in the initiatory process of childhood militancy and is dispersed throughout the novel represented through the child's confrontational clashes between having to perform militancy and maintaining a true and innocence state of childhood. The transitory inauguration of exerting active roles of militancy in comparison to the passive-innocent positions of the childhood causes the child to clash between her intrinsic child innocence and the adult-like performances she must execute.

For Alcoba's character, adult experience comes with having to forge a new identity and the responsibilities of having to perform militant behaviors. The evolutionary process of maturity and loss of innocence develops in the child's life in the rabbit house, where the interaction with others became a vital characteristic of her survival in the adult world. Consequently, for the child the demands of militancy intensify her incapacity to detach from her child surrounding and the innocent traits, as it conflicts with the appropriate development of child development. The process of remaking, pretending, and impersonating new identities through a network of deceptions are strategies that conflicted with childhood play. Because children are

often reinforced and (re)told to maintain a level of appearance in the public sphere while losing a sense of ingenuity in their character.

In 1978 L.S. Vygotsky analyzed the realization of play in terms of imaginary situations, wherefore he argued that imaginary situations of any form of play contains specific rules of behaviors. In his research, Vygotsky argues that children make playful situations and reality coincide. Children for instance, create imaginary situations that are intertwined with the social norms of reality and the ways in which certain behaviors match those of reality the author states that "whenever there is an imaginary situation in play, there are rules—not rules that are formulated in advance and change during the course of the game but ones that stem from an imaginary situation. [For instance], if the child is playing the role of a mother, then she has rules of maternal behavior" [95]. This make- believe play, according to Vygotsky, makes evident the creation of child imaginary situations, where the child's ability to take on the roles of behaviors that pertain to specific characters. However, the conflict with children of militant parents arises when children are asked to play/perform unconventional figures. Because, adult-like attributes become an important aspect in the (re)construction of childhood identities under militant circumstances, the creation of imaginary situations and militant situation provide children an emerging contradictory impulse to act out the roles taught to them, because children are unaware of 'rules.' In analyzing Vygotsky's views on children's play, Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong add to his argument, claiming that "another way make-believe play contributes to the development of higher mental functions is by promoting intentional behavior. This becomes possible because of the inherent relationship that exists between the roles children play and the rules they

need to follow when playing these roles" (Bodrova and Leong 375). Because play is an essential part of the everyday child, the fostering of new identities and social interactions with the outside world demands strict observance of adapting to the abnormal circumstances. Children are then fashioned to comply with these changes though intentional indoctrination.

Under such circumstances, regardless of the developmental process of play in children, I see that in the indoctrination of militant parents in the creation of imaginary spaces, identities and behaviors that are intertwined with the political prosecution and atrocities taking place at the time. Therefore, the forced implementation of unconventional behavior is used as a tool to protect the immediate family unit and the operative group surrounding children, as the precarious situation becomes far more important (in the case of Alcoba) than the everyday experience of play.

Having to *perform childhood* fostered new creative ways of childhood play, in the political atmosphere where death remained of utmost importance. Inevitably children were forced to conceal emotions, pretend to be someone else, and hide from the grief of having lost a sense of normality, as their immediate surrounding were forcedly altered. In these circumstances, consequently, children lost their agency, the comfort levels of the private space of their home, and the family and friends they encountered on a regular basis. This, of course, put into place skills of survival. Moreover, while often separated from familiar surroundings, children were relocated to places unfamiliar to them. In the midst of separation, they were given new toys to substitute the loss of others. In the confusion of it all, children were not given answers

to the many painful and desperate questions about their abnormal circumstances. The separation from the familiar tormented children, for they desired the return to the security of their homes and familiar space. With the uprising of insecurity, children began to fear for their safety as well as for the safety of others, while bearing the grief of silence in order not to jeopardize the safety of the co-operative group. For many of these children, the demands of strict silence were instructed carefully to them through elaborate explanations by their parents and their peers. Many children of such understood the need for secrecy and safety. They kept away from innocent childlike behaviors that could possibly cause their true identities to be exposed.

The novel provides an interesting parallel between the idea of pretending, impersonation, and the fringing on of new identities and the clash with normalcy. Upon becoming targeted criminals, Laura encounters children of other militant parents. As we will see in the later segment Laura sees the other children, as merely children, while examining herself and her role as a child in the process:

> I play with them a bit, games that are completely new to me. The three of us never talk about what is going on, or about living underground –did someone explain to them, as they did to me? – or about the war that we are immersed in, despite the city being full of people who aren't taking part, and who sometimes don't seem to realize that it's even happening. If they're just pretending not to realize, they're doing a very good job" (34).

> We don't talk about the fear, either. They ask no questions – not about what I'm doing here, at their house […] It's incredibly reassuring that these

questions don't exist, that they are tactful enough to spare me. (34)

This is the first time in the novel that Laura meets other children who are also living undercover. However, the children's interaction and cognitive understanding of their clandestine situation does not seem to conflict with the cares of the world. The boys remain focused on their instinctive childlike roles as they play, while remaining careless of the political affairs around them. Notice however, how Laura is taken away by the children's ability to immerse themselves in the most natural experience of childhood play, as both boys interact with one another and are dedicated to the game while ignoring their surroundings. In fact, young Alcoba admits that although the city isn't talking about the political turmoil, nor what is happening with the crisis itself, there is something ambiguous about the boy's character—even though there isn't anything bizarre about the situation. However, the young girl is caught between having to forge on a new political font while trying to portray herself as a seemly careless child. In fact, she struggles to understand why the boys have little interest in portraying militancy.

Nevertheless, Laura has become un-familiarized by the natural essence of what it means to be a child. She has become fully aware of her role as a militant child and is confused by the portrayal of the other children and their deep concentration in the game, while ignoring the *performance* of what it means to be part of an operative group. This is evident when she states, "to tell the truth, I am copying the younger boy, who is doing exactly the same thing as me […] I don't really understand the point of this game, but I want to show willing, so I apply myself as best I can" (35). Notice how the young child is trying to copy what the other boy is doing this, she is unable to

'apply' herself because now, the conventional behaviors of childhood have become foreign to the child. The roles here are reversed, she is now in a situation where there are children around her and the young girl has lost her sense of normalcy and what it means to be a child. Laura is now trying to portray childhood. Victor Turner has noted that in constraints of liminality "the social order may seem to have been turned upside down" and even become ludic events (Turner 27).

Under these premises, it is evident that social order by which the child *should* and *ought* to behave contradict the normal order of natural play. At this point in the novel, it is evident the non-conventional aspects of childhood, such as that of understand the process of vigilance has affect the child's the natural experience of childhood play. She is caught looking at herself through the image of the other children who are doing "exactly the same thing." Yet the young protagonist has become disoriented by the fact that they are "pretending not to realize" that political distress is dismantling entire operational groups because of "the war that [they] are immersed in." She finds astonishing that the boys remain inside the liminal space without engaging in political affairs. This, of course, becomes for Alcoba the ludic, upside down world she does not quite understand. Jordana Blejmar's *Playful Memories* examines Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* in terms of childhood fairytales by evoking children's deepest fears of death and parental abandonment of parents as the transmission of trauma becomes the child's archetypal account of unspeakable terror. In Blejmar's analyses of *The Rabbit House,* the author notes that the novel describes two parallel worlds, "the ordinary world with streets full of people who 'aren't taking part [in the war], and sometimes don't seem to realize that anything is happening,' and

the underground world, where everything takes place in a different time and with a different logic to that ruling the outside world" (Blejmar 98). Evidently, Alcoba is not like the other children "who don't seem to realize [what is] happening" (Alcoba 98). With this episode, Alcoba become aware of the complexities of her non-normative relationship with her instinctive childhood self. The description of Laura's position as she is placed facing an image of children like herself, reveals to the young protagonist a world concealed to children of her age, the world in which she once lived in, but is now appalled to the terrifying events surrounding her.

Looking closer into this idea, young children were taught to camouflaging themselves and observes the 'other' and his/her own surroundings as a means of protection. The ridged and strict control of the authoritarian regime, made people feel like strangers in their own city, as they had to learn to 'read' other's bodies and became increasingly alert to the danger around them (Disappearing acts 107). As stated in the introduction, Diana Taylor addresses this issue, suggesting that, "everyone was performing. Everyone was trying to look the part that offered them security and relative invisibility (if they wanted to stay out of the fray) or access and information (if they were somehow involved). Even those who did not participate in the political struggle, but who wanted to affect some kind of social change, found that they too had to dress up" (Disappearing Acts 109). In fact, in the 1976 issue of *Evita Montonera*, gave advice on how to ride out the bad times, "dress and behave normally, keep one's documents in order, avoid large meetings, hide weapons and propaganda away from one's living quarters, and cultivate good relations around the neighborhood. Don't either overestimate or underestimate the enemy" (Lewis 158). For militants, to adopt a

defensive strategy and to overcome the enemy, self-discipline and an adequate appearance was needed, while adopting a performative appeal of normalcy amongst the political front, that included audiences such as soldiers, policemen, the right-wing opposition, and even those closest to them, family members, friends, and neighbors. The sympathizers, friends and relatives of militant operational groups were too targeted as marginally connected to subversive individuals and many were taken into custody for questioning. For this reason, performance had become a prominent feature among completely innocent individuals as well.

The indoctrination of 'good' behavior became avid for all collaborators, victims, and family members. An example of such, is a moment the young child spent with her grandfather. The child recalls that her grandfather was a lawyer. In the child's recollection, her grandfather had once made it clear to here that there was a distinction between the different individuals he defends in his line of work and those that are politically known for their engagement in militancy. He particularly clarifies that he never takes on political cases to avoid trouble. In fact, her grandfather explains that he rather, defend the: "small-time drug dealers, forgers, tax evaders, con artist of all kinds" (11). He particularly clarifies that "these young hoodlums are 'good people'" (11). In this episode, the father is takes on a role that offered him security, and more particular, it demonstrates the 'conventional' and 'normal' world the grandfather presumes to live in, in comparison to the treacherous circumstances the child is in. The grandfather identifies the drug dealers, forgers, and criminals as an acceptable aspect of society. Such criminals, according to him, were not guerrilla fighter taking part of the armed struggle against the regime. The disgraceful and unwanted behaviors are the

result of those participating in the revolutionary change of the time, as the child describes, “indulge in a little fiddling of the world-as-it-is,” which of course “makes [her] grandfather nervous [for they] are the people who want everything to change” (12). Therefore, the placement of drug dealers, forgers, and other criminals under a conventional umbrella of ‘normative’ and ‘acceptable’ behaviors in society, are considered ordinary aspects in the subsequent society. This too, can be said about Alcoba’s aunt Sofia, who “isn’t right in the head” (12).

It is crucial to note that with these examples, the conventional behaviors of the disables aunt and the criminals that the grandfather defends, provide the child with an absolute distinction as to highlight the adequate roles in society—those that are acceptable—and those which are not. Understanding these parameters, kept man out of sight from the military. Undoubtedly, for the young protagonist the self-awareness and differences of the ‘other’ allows the child to put up a ‘front’ and eventually perform childhood as marked by the conventional expectation of what was required of children under militancy. In other words, in the scenes provided, young Alcoba learns to discern different the roles, those that are tolerable behaviors accepted in society while deserting others which are not—such as the one she is placed in. This of course, helps in the molding of her identity. As the child begins to recognize the distinct roles in society, she can take on the role of a militant child and embrace a part of herself that in the eyes of her grandfather, is ‘subversive’ and bad. In fact, the child acquires an offset of skills such as that of performance, impersonation, and pretending to be someone else by hiding her true identity.

3.5 Conflicting Identities

The relationships between the young child and the adult figures surrounding her become the central bases for which the child creates an emotionally inept militant figure, even though her age alone, and desires to fulfill adult roles are far in advance to reach. One of the first significant relationships the young Alcoba has within the militant circle is with the Engineer who comes to the home where young Laura and mother are staying, to "start work on our massive hole" (41). The two form a courteous bond and spend incomprehensible amount of time together. Infatuated with the Engineers impressive amount of talent, because of his ability to "dream up the secret room that is being built at the far end of the shed" (45), the young child develops a non-normative array of feelings for the elder man. Laura becomes intrigued by the complexity and hand-craftsmanship of the *embute* which he has "devised is one of the most complex ever built" (45). According to the young protagonist, "such mechanism controls the opening and closing of a large concrete door, giving access to the hidden printing press" (45), what is more, is that the manner in which Engineer teaches the child the details of his 'masterpiece' with an egocentric fascination. What I find ambivalent with this relationship is the signs of admiration radiating from a seven-year-old and maybe even, the erotic awakening of the child's identity as she becomes aware of her young age, "I was trying to behave like an adult, a militant, the lady of the house, but I should have known I am young, so young, so incredibly young, and that if the Engineer seemed to have enjoyed our conversations, it was because I was always there (49). The child's lack of maturity in relation to the Engineer helps to demonstrate the child's inability to fulfill the expected and

obligatory roles pertaining to the strict demands of militancy.

In one of the many encounters with the Engineer, Laura pulls out an old camera, a gift from her aunt, and with it, relinquishes the insecurity and obvious childlike behaviors that encompass her identity. In this scene, Laura uses the camera to place a barrier between her and the elder man, as she claims, "I am glad to have a camera: it will allow me to look at him without staring like an idiot. I feel a bit protected, behind the camera. I would like him to look at me, too, see me differently at last, with my grown-up instrument" (51). Invested this childlike experience, the child makes "a little noise, a 'click' to attract his attention, flashing him a big smile from behind the black box obscuring my face" (51). The intensification of the scene emerges when the angry Engineer burst furiously into the room and snatches the camera from the child's hands screaming, "this is not funny, not funny at all! You know we can't take photos, for God's sake! This isn't some holiday camp!" (52). In the fury of this scene, the Engineer seems to have realized the seemingly innocence of child play, and slowly changes his tone towards the young child, "we are all very keyed up, you do understand that, don't you? (51). In this segment, it is clear of the Engineer lack of sympathetic approach towards the girl. He forcefully tears down the *front* by which she was pretending to dissimulate her apparent attraction for the older man. In other words, what the texts shows how this natural childlike behavior of hiding behind a camera is aligned with the boundaries of an innocent child who lacks the understanding of what the camera might have provided to the military in a possible siege. The innocently use of the camera portrays simply just that, the child's lack of understanding. The child feels safe, to act and play around with the camera. Yet, the Engineer dismantles that

security by overly reacting to the scene. In fact, the text then captures the child's utmost sincerity, while trying not to cry exclaiming, "but there's no film, it was just a game" (52). What remains of this scene is a docile and scared child exposed to cruel adult treatment, because of her childish insubordinate behavior.

The process of framing a child's identity in a clandestine setting can abruptly corrupt child innocence and force the child's split identity to take on adult-like attributes. The Engineer's ruthless actions, forcefully begins to dismantle the child's innocence. Wherefore, the young protagonist is forced to understand the demands of militancy. Having to perform childhood, is a phenomenon that separates the natural essence of a child and the knowledge that breach into the notion of *innocence.*

The climax of the novel unravels with the publishing of Laura's mother's photo in the newspaper. At this point, the child becomes more conscious of the exacerbated conditions of her living undercover. By this time, Laura has undergone a series of transformations which have permitted her to understand the events of the Junta claiming that it is best that her mother remains "away from the prying eye" (59). Furthermore, the young protagonist see's in the photo a changed mother, one that has a bright red hairstyle in comparison to the old college photo that is used for the newspaper. Notice however, that at the core of it all, there is a bit of irony in the fact that the child has apparently stayed the same, for she claims, "luckily, the same doesn't go for me. I still look just the same as before, but no one is searching for me. I just happened to be here, witnessing all this" (59). It is obvious that Laura is referring to her physical appearances as she claims to look just the same as before. Nevertheless, this segment reflects upon previous moments where Laura is compelled to "behave like an

adult, a militant, the lady of the house" (49). Yet the young child's identity has not been fully reconfigured. She is evidently, bound to her childlike attributes that are innate to her innocent character.

On a later occasion, Laura finds herself amazed by her neighbor, a beautiful, tall blonde woman "with very long, straight hair, slim [and is] often wearing tight trousers, and always teetering along on very high heels" (60). Astonished by her kindly charm, the young child is invited to visit with her in her home and fiddle around with countless pairs of shoes. If we take a closer look to the situation, it is unusual for a child of such age to spend time, lingering at a strange woman's house. Most importantly, the novel does not give explicit details behind the neighbor intentions for having invited the young girl. This non-normative relationship employs a child's perspective of a quite visible distinction between obvious militant mother and the 'perfect' idealized woman, which Laura is not fond of in the home setting she is bound to live in at the moment or that came with "the kind of house they always have in children's books [and] the life that went with it" (Alcoba 6), which I have mentioned earlier in the text. For the child, the presences of an exclusively attractive woman, draws her closer to the irresistible traits of normality, of beauty and cleanliness—of a normal world. While her mother who locked up in the *embute,* isolated from the world is a woman neglecting the conventional ideals of motherhood. Along a similar analysis of this scene, Fernando Oscar Reati, pinpoints that this woman is everything militant women are not, for he states, "[ella] se identifica con todo aquello que las mujeres militantes no son, algo que resalta el contraste entre la vida 'normal' de una mujer ocupada en frivolidades tales como la moda, y la existencia oculta y sacrificada de los

combatientes" (Reati 20). This in turn, facilitates the astonishment image the young protagonist has for this woman, as she comes to witness the "necessary and natural accessories of a princess" (62) and becomes overwhelmed by the fair and considerate conduct of the women.

The novel later illustrates, the charismatic, kind and thoughtful gestures used to lure the child to participate in seemingly innocent shoe selection, the novel illustrates, "she selects five or six pairs of shoes that she puts on the floor of her bed. Then from another wardrobe, she takes a white dress whose front is scattered with green, pink, and purple dots […] All of a sudden, she asks me, 'tell me, little one, which shoes would you wear with this dress?" (62). If we take a closer look at the text, this is the first instance where the young child is asked to provide her own individual feedback as to what shoe best fits with the dress, in comparison to previous scenes where the child is constantly reminded of what to do and how to perform. The consequences of forcing on new identities caused children to lose much of their choice and accountability. Parent's became overwhelming actors in the (re)construction of childhood identities, causing children often to lose their own abilities to choose for themselves. For this reason, the child is surprised by the neighbor's confidence in allowing her to select what seemed like a genuine responsibility for the child. In true surprise Laura does not "say anything for a long time" (62). In fact, the child subtlety engages in an internal debate of which shoes to wear and when, "I rule out the princess shoes immediately, sensing that they could be worn only for an exceptional occasion. And in any case, there must be a reason why she must carefully put them back into their box, who's bottom is carpeted with several sheets of tissue paper. I point at a pair of green shoes"

(63). In state of adulthood, society offers an understanding that adult choices involve careful planning, which ultimately reflects upon one's maturity level. For Alcoba, the ability to choose a pair of shoes, releases the child from the constant of what 'should' and 'ought' to be done. In fact, it places the girl in a period of self-reliance, while feeling a sense of satisfaction for individual choice making. In all surprise, the child is reinforced of her job-well-done with, "you have chosen very well" (63).

While caught between the struggles of war, the admiration for this woman, who perfectly portrayed the idea of a fairytale princess is once again, shattered by the liminal space of having to adhere to militant performances and skills for survival. Upon returning home the child is faced with the image of a furious mother, who happens to burst into the kitchen and begin to interrogate the child, because of her visit with the neighbor:

> 'What happened with the
>
> neighbor?' 'Nothing'
>
> 'What do you mean nothing? What did you tell her?'
>
> 'I didn't say anything. She just showed me all her pairs of shoes.' (63)

As segment illustrates, militant parents demanded full cooperation from children. The fear of dismantling complete operative groups, and cause the lives of the entire group. Sadly, the young child is completely surprised and unaware of the reasoning for her interrogation. Perplexed in the matter she recalls, "She is clearly expecting me to confess something, but I can't see what so I burst into tears" (64). The brutal reality of

conflict is the child's lack of understanding of why was being rebuked and punished for a harmless act. Nevertheless, what seemed to have appeared as a flawless acquaintance with the neighbor became a raid of interrogations. Luckily, as the passive advocate for the daughter, Diana manages to calm Laura's mother down to unravel the miscommunication of the situation. In the confusion of it all, however, Alcoba "[…] managed to sort things out" (64). In the previous scene, though not exclusively explicit, the neighbor had mischievously tried to find out information about the operative maneuvering within the rabbit house. She had seductively, questioned the child without her being aware. Which lead to the interrogative rebuke of the child's mother.

This scene also paves the way to the child's questioning of her own identity. In the midst of all debate, the mother questions the child asking, "[…] what were you doing, telling her that you don't have a surname?" (64). Confused and overwhelmed the child recalls:

> 'I can't understand what she's talking about'
>
> She starts explaining that the neighbor came to see her this morning to ask what was going on with that 'little girl,' who told her she didn't have a surname […]
>
> I realize that 'that little girl' is me.
>
> … It seems to me that the neighbor asked my name, before or after the shoes, when we were in her bedroom. Before, I expect. Yes, I think she asked me. I replied, 'Laura'. I just said my first name because I know that is the part of my name that I will be keeping. After that, I think she asked;

> ‘And your surname?’ honestly can’t remember what happened next. I must have panicked. (64)

It is evident that the child is unable to match the responsibilities that come with militancy, as she becomes confused with the stress of having to cope with non-normative behaviors and getting lost in the world of childhood. In fact, the young child continues to question situation reverting back to her identity and responsibilities, “[...] I know that my mother is a wanted person and that we’re waiting for our new surname, and our false papers. Am I a wanted person too?” (64). In this monologue, the question of “Who am I” becomes the focal point of the child’s confusion and internal conflict of who she is and the roles she must assume. In fact, in the scene the child also questions the fact that she too, maybe a wanted person. Moreover, the child is aware that she will be given false papers that will be reflected upon a new identity. However, we know the process of adopting a false identity is not easy for children victims. This scene provides a critical source of problematization in the child’s inability to understand the chaotic, multi-layered, non- normative character of her identity. In content, the child continues to question, “Could I have been the daughter of an army man? No, that was impossible, unbearable, it wouldn’t have been me. What about the daughter of López Rega, the ‘Sorcerer’? No, of course not, not at all, he’s a perverse, cynical killer, everyone knows it, he could father nothing but monsters. And I don’t think I’m a monster. So, what could I say, then? What is my surname?” (65). The narrator recalls a sense of fear she had for a moment and reiterates, “I had no surname, as she told you” (65). By retracing her experience, I find it impossible for the child to have come up with a spontaneous lie regarding her familial parentage and surname, as she is caught with her innocent child

self and the lies and deceptions that come from performing militancy.

The fact is, that parents placed an enormous amount of faith in the child's performance expecting for the child's transformation to be smooth and simple. However, errors are made and children fear being rebuked, punished, and ultimately receive the fatal outcome that comes from military rule. In the precedent scene, Laura is eventually overpowered with guilt and emotional distress, but continues to recognize the seriousness of the situation, "I can see that it was ridiculous. Not ridiculous, no, sorry, I completely understand that this is serious, very serious even. I have put us all in danger. I made a huge blunder that would render anyone suspicious" (65). Laura is reduced to complete insecurity and guilt. As the scene demonstrates, the young child bounces back and forth between the expected mature roles of militancy and the child's innocence as she questions her non-normative identity and battles with her conscious self that "—no little girl of seven years old doesn't know her surname or thinks it's possible not to have one. The worst thing is that I didn't mention it, didn't try to prevent this great blunder from turning into a catastrophe" (65). Argentina's military dictatorship revealed that children served in battlefields in the everyday presentation of the self. Rather than, combatting the armed forces seeking to destroy them, children were forced to play roles that conflicted with the self, their true nature, frustrating their efforts as they were caught in between.

The question of identity is a predominant theme throughout the novel, which coincides with the young protagonist's lessons on performing childhood. As I have shown, the child overwhelmingly engages in the shaping of her identity by aiming to adhere to the ongoing demands of militancy. Laura is often facing the ambiguous roles

of having to portray childhood and militancy. She sometimes feels mature, adequate, and aware of the social setting, while at the same time trying to engage in militant behaviors. Nevertheless, the child is certainly unaware of certain aspects involving the secret maneuverings of the group Montoneros. For example, in a group gathering, Laura claims to have understood things such as "the Engineer's concept when he explained to me how things could be hidden by not hiding them" (71), yet questions the concepts of having to breed rabbits to assimilate the transporting of people and distribution of *Evita Montonera*, "But rabbits? How was living with hundreds of rabbits going to protect us?" (71). If we take a closer look at the situation Cacho clarifies that the "rabbit breeding would be the house's official activity […] the breeding activity would justify all the comings and goings" (71). However, Laura never truly becomes conscious that there "certain things aren't very clear" to her yet, but reasonably responds with maturity claiming, "I don't dare to speak when I'm serving mate in a meeting" (72). Uncertainties and unanswered questions are often, hidden aspects of childhood, since children are not only forced to opt out of adult conversations, but also lack the cognitive understanding to measure up to adult dialogue, and adult experiences interfere with the true order of childhood experience and responsibility.

Laura's attempt to perform militancy and keep strict diligence in the responsibilities she must carry out, are constantly being disrupted by unexpected uncertainties. After the rabbits arrived at the house, the novel reads that the Engineer had come around to see if everything was working as corresponded. As the stands up from tightening some screws on the *embute*, the Engineer pushes a chair, accidentally

throwing Laura's blazer to the floor, which she had recently hung up when she returned home from school. Suddenly "he turns deathly pale" (101) and begins to question the young girl, "what does that say, on the inside of your blazer, just them?" (101). Motionless, the child picks up the blazer and notices there is writing on the inside label. She reads it and goes pale, uttering, "It's my uncle's name. My grandmother gave me the blazer. It was too small for him, so…" (102). Raged with anger, the Engineer begins to shout, "Goddammit! This kid will get you all shot! The organization is killing itself to provide you with credible false papers, and she's going to school in a blazer with her uncle's name written all over it in black marker pen! Her uncle's real name! What the hell are you playing at!" (102). Notice, that Diana, not her mother defends the young child from this sudden chaos, "the child knows exactly what's going on, she's very careful…" (102). This is a crucial sign that the adult figures surrounding the situation propose an equal reality of understanding and co-participant behavior of the young *guerrilla, per se.*

Moreover, in this hostile setting, we have two active adult members arguing over the child's jacket, both of whom have two distinct perspectives of the child's maturity level yet demand the same level of cooperation from the child. One of whom believes the child has the capability of understanding the maneuvering of militancy, while the other punishes the child for her carelessness, "she knows what's going on? Are you having a laugh? If she knew what was going on, if she had even the finest idea of what is taking place in this country, she would never have screwed up like that! Fucking hell, you could at least keep an eye on her things, if she can't do it!" (102). Notice again, the immense responsibility the Engineer places on the child with the last phrase,

"keep an eye on her things, if she can't do it." Here we have a situation where the Engineer chooses to infiltrate forcefully in the indoctrination of the child's identity. He then turns to the child as asks: "what would you have said if a nun had asked you why there's a name on your jacket that isn't your own? Huh? What would you have said?" (102). On this first attempt on asking the Engineer receives a speechless, petrified child. In this scene, we have another instance where the child claims to have understood the severity of the situation and is aware of her inability to live up to such standards, "I wish he would calm down, but I do understand that what I've done is very serious. I am most definitely up to the job" (103). Then again, we hear the Engineer ask a second time, "how would you have explained it, huh? Go on, speak! What would you have told the nuns at San Cayetano?" (103). Again, we continue to have a paralyzed child and two adults "both waiting for something" (103). And for the third time, we hear the Engineer now screaming "that would you have said? Shit? Tell me!" (103). In all silence, we continue to have a paralyzed child, thinking to herself, "there is a good reply to the question, I'm sure of it. Like all problems, this one had a solution. But my brain won't work. My head feels like a big empty ball. Hollow. I have become nothing" (103). But after a long silence responds, "er…I don't know…I don't know…I don't know what I would have done" (103). Thinking of Laura's silence as a less normative way of performing militancy, only shows her lack of submissive childlike attributes. In fact, her inability to respond maturity and with confidence, powered the Engineer's irritation and mobilized his frustration, to the point that he violently kicked over a chair and kicked opened the kitchen door as he left the kitchen.

It seems, that the various strategies and practice of militancy were obvious

customary practices of self-protection that the child needed to perform. Indeed, for a child's learning processes, these 'obvious' practices as deemed by the Engineer should have been observed by the child's own conscious efforts. However, the young child was not successful at negotiating access to becoming a full pledged militant. This is clear in Laura's lack of developing the appropriate skills to undermine the enemy and the clash between her instinctive self and the responsibilities expected of her. What we have instead, is an overly aggressive Engineer, providing a child with a hypothetical situation, while inducing fear on the child. Consequently, the constant inability to measure up to the expected roles of militancy lead to the decision that the child would no longer attend school. Distancing her completely from the possibilities of making another mistake.

3.6 Conclusion

The forging on of new behaviors for the (re)configuration of childhood is paramount in the novel, for it shows young Alcoba entering a liminal space, where deception, forgery, imitation, and all manner of mechanisms used for survival become an imminent part of the child's identity. The tasks of undermining child behaviors are undertaken by those risking their lives in accepting children within the immediate circle of militancy. Consequently, upon placing children in life-threatening events rather than to protect their children from the wraths of war, leftist parents had much greater responsibility—teaching and rearing their children to deceive and alternate the self and others by taking on new identities for the benefit of their cause and protection.

Laura Alcoba's novel reveals the manners by which children in the Argentine

dictatorship attempted to understand the active roles of child militancy, which embraced the innocent, child-like behaviors of *performing childhood* and *childhood militancy*. Both of which become the strategic mechanisms in the line of defense. To understand the mode of childhood innocence and rupture of identities in a performative content, my analyses of *performing childhood* and *childhood militancy* in the *Rabbit House* shapes the image of childhood as initially docile submissive, and innocent while attempting to acquire militant traits to hide the true nature of militancy. The barriers surrounding childhood performances of militancy and survival demand a much greater discipline by children, than what the child him/herself can portray, for it demands the child to obeyby strict exactness the rule of militancy. This, as seen in the novel, forces an evident clash between the conventional characteristics of innocence and the fulfillment of such adult-like roles. Additionally, I have shown how the young protagonist had been shamed, chastened, and rebuked by family members or to others who challenged the traditional value of childhood innocence. These experiences, among others called upon the Alcoba's innate-childlike-attributes to 'fight' alongside her child *self* and the forced identity placed upon her.

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMING SURVIVAL THROUGH EPIC HEROES AND PLACES: CHILDHOOD IN MARECELO PIÑEYRO'S *KAMCHATKA (2002)* AND BENJAMINÁVILA'S *INFANCIA CLANDESTINA* (2011)

4.1 Introduction

From 2001 onward, the rise of the Argentine film industry 'boomed' in showing children as primary protagonists in the tremulous margins of a politicized period of the military regime (1976-1983). Since their debuts, Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka* (2002) and Benjamin Avila's *Infancia Clandestina* (2011) have proposed shifts in the corpus of films produced from 2002 to 2015, demonstrating child-centered performances more specifically linked to children of persecuted parents during Argentina's regime. While considering the nature of childhood and the child's relationship with the political atmosphere, such films capture the realities of war to unfold a common theme of representing violence through the child's eye (Thomas 236). More specifically, through the eyes of a child wrapped in the battlegrounds of militancy or because of their parent's political affiliation to leftist ideals and to whom the insecurity and loss of childhood innocence's is owed. Moreover, Geoffrey Maguire has articulated that the directors and producers of such films "present their often, semi-autobiographical child protagonist as a means of not only laying claim to an era that plays such a collectively formative role in contemporary society, but, also of nuancing dominant cultural representations of these recent dictatorial pasts through the creativity and ingenuity of the child's gaze" (Maguire 134). This, of course, provides a positive

exploration of the imaginary values of state sponsorship, that, like other films and novels from 2003-2015, have been highly supported by the Kirchner era.

Chosen as part of this research, *Kamchatka* and *Infancia Clandestina* not only demonstrate the child gaze as a crucial feature in visualizing Argentina's tumultuous past, but they also relinquish the child as a social-political actor—actors who claim possession of their individual memories as active participants caught between the battlefield of militancy and military control. In other words, the protagonists of these films are active participants in the social sphere surrounding their parent's political involvement. Through the trajectory of the film's narration, these children disrupt the passivity of their childhood character and provide a progressively negotiating character that falters between the problematic aspects of everyday life and the precarious circumstances of the time. The use of the conceptualized notion of performing childhood, in these films takes on a bit of a different connotation. The children in these films are to perform skills of survival and resistance, within the liminal constraints of life in *clandestinidad.* It is, therefore, crucial to note that these children *perform survival.* They adopt skills, motives, and entities of historical figures, and manage to survive by attempting to apply skills of resistance and physical training within the secretive network of deception to survive.

In the realm of the film industry, the atrocities of viewing childhood as a part of the nation's cultural production have been in effect since 1985 launch of Luis Puenzo's *La historia oficial.* In its time *Luis Puenzo's* film became an international sensation and won the Oscar's best foreign film in 1986 for the trauma and storyline. The film highlights with the illegal appropriation of a newborn baby whose mother was

systematically disappeared by Argentina's military regime. The child's perspective of the military occupied nation has been a genre in production since *Crecer de golpe* 1977 by Sergio Renan. The film depicts the relationship between Milo and his guardian Silvestre and tells of a parallel metaphor between the animals of which Milo takes care and the societal problems that arise during the dictatorship. Along these lines, Argentina's post-dictatorship cultural productions have often proposed themes addressing child appropriation, and the political violence amongst the political parties. In so much, that the political conflicts have drawn away from personal accounts childhood of experiences representing specifically children of persecuted parents as a topic that has not been easily visible to the public eye. Both *Kamchatka* and *Infancia Clandestina* cling to the cultural and individual memory of childhood survivors as they break the conventional taboos of childhood roles, the undermining childhood innocence, and vulnerability during a time of political unrest.

The mundane and fluidity of childhood identities are often associated with the collective idea of innocence and child vulnerability. I intend in this chapter to show the conventional belief that childhood identities are centered on innocence and vulnerability and are subject to change through the precarious trials and tribulations they are summoned to because of the indicated position of their familial status. I propose that childhood identities tend to lose their sense of innocence and vulnerability as they become actively involved in adopting new identities. In fact, in the interface of the political turmoil of Argentina's *dictadura-civico militar*, the military occupied itself in eliminating anyone who appeared to be subversive, regardless of their political point of view. It did not discriminate against Peronist activists, radicals, the innocent,

or people with distinctive ideologies. The military's power served not so much about simply forcefully detaining and disappearing people, as was implementing fear, power, and control over people. This produced uncertainties regarding child identities, due to the chaotic atmosphere and urgency to go undercover because of the fear of being captured and detained by military officials. Many families fled the political scene to combat military personnel undercover, while others were exiled and returned as part of the counter-offense, and others were simply targeted as allies of the opposition or innocently accused of being affiliated with the Left.

Intertwined within in the historical conflict of the military regime was the marginalized image of childhood victims that had to maintain public appearance on the one hand, and on the other hand, they were escaping prosecution and transitioning into a life in *clandestinidad*. Parents confided in the (re)construction of childhood identities to increase the chances of survival. Therefore, prolonging survival depended significantly in the way children identities were (re)constructed and (re)introduced into society while maintaining an appearance of normalcy, as some were taught to conceal the militant operations of their family as in the case of *Infancia Clandestina,* and Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* and others were innocently persecuted and had to maneuver between their everyday interactions with the outside world to prevent being captured. It was important for children to understand that dictatorship's mechanism of removing subversive individuals was made known to all. In fact, the military "intended to maintain order in the schools and colleges and would punish any student or teacher who opposed them" (Lewis 148). Therefore, it was crucial that children learn to pretend and live accordingly the conventional familial imaginaries of society while

ignoring the challenges of militancy of their reality at home. In some cases, however, children were not made aware of the political crises surrounding their parent's involvement in militancy, yet still questioned the disruptive measures of *clandestinidad* and the confrontational issues that arose with unemotional practices of the everyday. This caused children to often wonder about the reasons for their immediate rupture from public life. Eventually, questioning the motives for having to take on new identities and live in complete secrecy. As such, I would like to also note the difference between the concept of children of persecuted parents as an encompassing term reflecting the generalized view of those targeted by the regime regardless of their innocence and/or participation in the dictatorship, as in the case of *Kamchatka* and children of militant families who were at the epicenter of the political war.

Now, this chapter differs from the previous chapter that analyzes Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* in terms of performance, in that the children in *Kamchatka* and in *Infancia Clandestina* attempt to adopt exemplary behaviors from a rich source of historical figures that becomes vigorous challenge between the variations in the environments and the children's desires to adopt the dynamic and complex traits of sacrifice and survival. The difference is marked by the performative aspects and techniques needed to survive. As the titles describe, the children in this segment are, performing survival through the embodiment of epic heroes and places. The appealing behaviors of Harry Houdini, the Hungarian-American illusionist, performer, and stunt artist known for his sensational escape acts in *Kamchatka* and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, and Juan Perón in *Infancia Clandestinidad* impact the actor's performances and captures the child's strategic behaviors for performing a specific task. These figures are

used as models as a means of selecting appropriate examples to for the children to tailor them to fit each new situation that arises. Marked by the trauma of civil unrest, I draw attention to the child's subjective viewpoint and the fluidity of child's identity as it is molded to embrace the political courage and characteristics of the targeted historic figures.

In the case of *Kamchatka,* the use of a geographical place/ board game also provides the child protagonist with strategic maneuvering mechanisms that ultimately unfolds a figurative point of resistance to teach the child how to survive the imminent prosecution. With the outbreak of Argentina's regime, childhood identities were shaped to pursue leftist ideals. I, therefore, propose that both Piñeyro's *Kamchatka* and Avila's *Infancia Clandestina* employ innovative approaches of viewing the child image as a coherent and developing character, portraying, and *performing* significant historical figures introduced by the political ideologies of Left-wing militants of the era. Undeniably, authors, artists, and film producers have tried to find ways to represent the Argentine dictatorship through the eyes of childhood survivors. Yet, these two films, have offered a relevant framework in the (re)constructing of childhood imaginaries through childhood maturation, as children embrace historically and politically active heroes. Moreover, I see, in these films the value and analytical importance of imaginary and fantasy play that significantly impacts the emotional domains of children undercover, whereby the child begins to lose their sense of innocence and potentially adopt skills of survival through the performance of these characters.

4.2 Identities at Play: Heroes and Children

Oftentimes children create imaginary worlds, with heroes who have supernatural powers. These worlds at times exaggerated episodes and expriences of the world around them. Their actions respond to the moral and physical damnation of the world that is possessed by the evil and dominance of others. More so, is the fact that superheroes sacrifice their own interest for the protection and welfare of others. Their motivation is to protect others and not seek personal gain, admiration, or a glorious reward from the people they serve to protect. In Steven White's study of childhood heroes entitled, "What is a Hero? An exploratory study of student's conception of Heroes," the author conceptualizes the notion of epic heroes in relationship to children as a venue of values and beliefs that influence the moral behaviors of children. He describes:

> For children, heroes, with their accompanying myths and legends, are part of the material from which their dreams and dramas are derived. Playing out hero themes is one in which children come to understand their society, their role within that society, and their potential for positive impact on it. Since heroes are individuals, they offer students [children] something specific and concrete to study. Other students can recognize them as a representation of a larger culture. Using heroes as individual or societal case of studies of values and belief systems aids students' moral development. (White 83)

Drawn by the power of supernatural abilities, children fuel their imagination by pretending to be certain powerful men and women. By doing so, children lay claim to

the social circumstances by engaging in imaginary play, assuming behaviors, morals and 'supernatural' powers to save the world. Because children perceive their society different from that of adults, it is possible to induce children's way of thinking, introducing a sense of interest and resurgence of values by idealizing models and/or heroes. For children of militant parents, the make-believe play of superheroes and iconic figures in cultural texts such as *Kamchatka* and *Infancia Clandestina* has revealed societal constraints imposed to children because of the coup's overreaching control of power. According to Jordana Blejmar, post-dictatorship artists often refer to children's fables, superheroes, and games in their works, as a means of storytelling from one generation to the next—transmitting trauma across time. In fact, Blejmar articulates that in the 1970s *guerrilleros* and superheroes shared several attributes by which childhood victims would closely relate to, for superheroes were "willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause and they live a double risk-taking life with a secret identity" (Blejmar 94). Additionally, Hugo Vezzetti has noted that sacrifice of militant individuals differentiates the common folk, from what he calls, "los hombres comunes y corrientes" (Vezzetti 142). This too can be said, about the use of epic heroes in these films, for they are not the common folk that inhabits the film, but historic images of sacrifices, and martyrism. The use of epic heroic figures, as I see it, has proposed an effective tool for the diffusion of ideologies, and the influence of behaviors and beliefs on young children. In addition, the impulse to act and play the parts of heroic figures allows children to become more fully engaged in the embodiment and performance of the character, modifying in return, the child's identity. Therefore, the casting of deliberate iconic blueprints on how to behave within society

with the use of heroes has reclaimed active participation and change of children's beliefs and social practices, as children of persecuted parents.

In the 1970s Peter Burke focused closely on the nature of people's identities and their relationship to behaviors within the realm of their social atmosphere. According to the author, "behavior is premised on a named and classified world and that people in society name each other and themselves in terms of the positions they occupy […] these positional labels or names and the expectations attached to them become internalized as the identities that make up the self" (Burke and Reitzes 1). For instance, a father is tied to his son or daughter through the intimately social structure of their relationship. The self-labels define people in terms of their positions in society and in turn, sets behavioral expectations constituted by society and the interaction with others. The common responses of set roles in society demonstrates that identities are social products, formed and maintained through the social process of naming things and locating *the self* within the parameters of a recognizable category, their interaction with others, and "the confirmation and validation of self-concepts by means of self-presentation and altercasting" (Burke and Reitzes 84). In the theoretical background of framing the self, the concept of identity and behavior (performance), as Peter Burke and Donald Reitzes have noted demonstrate that identities are symbolic and reflexive in character, providing individuals with a code of conduct that underlines the appropriate behaviors specifically constructed for the identity given. In Burkes and Reitzes own words, the reflexivity of an identity, "provides an individual with a standpoint or frame of reference in which to interpret both the social situation and his or her own actions or potential action" (Burke and Reitzes 84). In more precise words

the authors claim, "It is one's actions that others judge as being appropriate or inappropriate for the identity one has, and appropriateness can only be gauged in terms of the meaning of the behavior relative to the meaning of the identity and alternative counter-identities" (Burke and Reitzes 85). Building upon the link between identity and performance is the mere prediction that both are measured along the same dimensions of the *meaning* of roles, identities, and behaviors that correspond to the identity and self.[34] Therefore, identities and behaviors can be analyzed respectfully, demonstrating that both conceptualized tools partake of the nature of how individuals perform the everyday self.

Burke's theoretical concept provides a framework for which I see, childhood play and the portrayal of historical figures as an action-based performance, provide children in *clandestinidad* an anchor to interpret the social-political situation of Argentina's regime as they venture out into other realities, while adopting defense mechanisms and helping the child to deal with the real dangers of society. Respectably, children take on the roles of superheroes and epic figures to undertake the powerful political storylines that are underlined by the plots, characters, and themes of the real world and their interrelationship with villainous figures. Such historic figures help shape respectively the children's identities and provide a parallel comparison as to the experience lived and the values portrayed.

[34] Burke et al, identify identity on a basis of a set of meanings, which means that roles/identities are defined by references to constructed behaviors specific to the individual in terms of his/her society. Therefore, the term *meaning* or *common meaning* serves as the established definition of roles.

4.3 *Kamchatka (2002):* Cells, Houdini, and Identities

Inaugurating the 'boom' of childhood memory in Argentina was *Kamchatka* (2002) a film directed by Marcelo Piñeyro and written by Marcelo Figueras. *Kamchatka.* The film is centered on a family of four, the father, who plays the role of a lawyer (Ricardo Darin), the mother, a university professor (Cecilia Roth) and their two younger children Matías (Matías de Pozo) and Lucas (Tomas Fonzi), all of whom are threatened by the political atmosphere and are forced into hiding. The family's relationship to Argentina's extreme execution orders is the result of the father's connections to leftist personnel as a human rights lawyer. As a result, the father can only work underground defending political prisoners, while the mother is fired from her job at the university and assumes an identity as a pharmacist. Eventually, the family ends up in an abandoned house on the outskirts of Buenos Aires as an alternative escape route from persecution. In comparison to the other cultural productions reflecting child imaginaries, the film tells of the details of a young boy's life, Matías, as he struggles to comply with the extremely isolated life that comes with *la clandestinidad* and learns to adopt skills of resistance and escapism to survive the unknown and ugly realities awaiting him at the end of his journey. Such skills, in fact, form the bases by which the child manages to survive in the liminal space and restraints of a clandestine childhood.

The acquiring of identities is a process that is evident in the film's narrative. It sets the stage for which the Matías unravels an understanding of what it means to survive. In the film's trailer, the narrative trajectory captures child's voiceover describing the outcome of his own evolutionary growth upon the discovery of "un

tesoro" as he describes. Notice in the description that follows, the narrator's account of the family's political outcome, the father became a superhero, while the bother a saint, and the protagonist, Houdini:

> Fue en el otoño del 76 cuando descubrí juegos que nunca había jugado, y encontré un tesoro, y aprendí la mejor forma de correr. Hice amigos donde menos lo esperaba… Cuando papá se convirtió en superhéroe, mi hermano en un santo y yo en Houdini…Y cambié de casa, de colegio y de nombre… Para ser yo mismo.
>
> Cuando descubrí la magia y me di cuenta de que mis papás eran mucho más que personas grandes… y entendí que los deseos no siempre se cumplen […] ese otoño dejé de ser chico. Y descubrí el secreto de Kamchatka. (Piñeyro)

It was in that year, as the narrator describes, when that the family transformed from ordinary people to unusual figures of history. This prominent feature narrates the young protagonist's central argument about the evolution process of identities and how they are constructed, through the metaphorical explanation of identities. The film begins with a series of images that depict the nature of reproduction that forms a parallel analysis to the construction of identities, as one cell multiplies and divides into many different cells:

> Al principio había una célula y nada más. Esa célula se dividió en dos. Y esas dos en otras, y así. De algunas células salieron los vegetales, de otras los bichos, de otras los animales, y de otras nosotros. Lo que nunca explican es lo que pasa después. Entre el momento en que las células se convierten en una

> persona, y el momento en que esa persona suba al humoracho e inventa una vacuna o se vuelve un escapista famoso como Houdini, eso sí que es un misterio y un humano no habla de esas cosas o un maestro, pero mi papá si me hablo. Una vez. La última vez que lo vi. Mi historia empieza con una célula. Como todas, pero termina Kamchatka. (Piñeyro).

According to Matías, in the span of life, it is never explained what happens between the time individual cells become a person and the moment that this person acquires an identity that is suitable for society. In fact, in the narration the child uses the term Kamchatka to indicate the outcome of a child's identity. For the young child, Kamchatka is the ultimate place of resistance for children of militant parents, it is the end of the journey of a clandestine childhood, and for some that of survival. For Manuel A. Vásquez Medal the secret of Kamchatka means nothing more than to resist, "[…] resistir con valor en nuestros últimos recintos, a fin de defender una integridad y una dignidad que, siendo propias, se convierten también en signo de esperanza para la colectividad" (Vásquez Medal 47). In a more interpersonal perspective of the child's experience, Cecilia Policsek argues that the "secret of Kamchatka" acquires the meaning of growing into adulthood, and the events presented, of a special initiation" (Policsek 3). Matías' description emphasizes the stages of growth and maturation that takes the helpless-vulnerable child to eventually reach understanding and reasoning behind the prosecution of his militant parents and their fear of being captured. Indeed, it is through the film that we see a trajectory of maturation in the child's identity. Thus, the rhetoric of the child's perspective as he matures and develops an understanding of the political atmosphere, indicates the (re)construction of his identity from a seemingly

small cell and that evolves and eventually manages to construct an identity that has endured the wraths of war through survival—and essentially becomes a superheroe like his father, a saint like his brother, and Houdini like himself.

Many children of persecuted parents were forced to hide from the public life while trained to survive and assume other identities. Because identity is constructed based on a set of values and social classification of roles that determine the social performances of individuals, I see, in Marcelo Piñeyro's film, a young protagonist invested in learning skills of survival adopted by the historic figure of Harry Houdini—an escape artist who teaches Matías the maneuvering skills of escapism. In Matías' perspective, the child continuously attempts to replicate the escape artist's spontaneous performances and (re)constructs his own identity based on the figure's famous acts. It is through the use of fantasy, *per se,* that the child is able to assimilate to the political conflict surrounding him and develops a sense of understanding as he masters the art of survival portrayed by the idealized figure. Along these similar lines, the child is freed from the constraints of his reality and experiments with the acquiring skills of problem-solving, physical training, and his limitations, to stage his competency of survival, and ultimately perform his greatest escape act. This evolutionary process occurs through a gradually extensive set of survival performances where the child learns to escape and adopts a new identity based on the historical figure. In fact, it is through continuous practice of basic skills of endurance that the young protagonist demonstrates the process by which one 'cell' grows in understanding the political conflict.

The film captivates humane aspects of an innocently targeted family. The images of fear are represented through the mother and father's attempt to maintain the

family's day to day routines as ordinary as possible. The daily family dinners, the images of exchanging hugs and kisses between spouses and parents to their children, the recreational activities, and the family board game among other activities, all depict the fear and terror of haunting the possible disintegration and the murder of the entire family. In the film, resistance and survival are important themes that reside within the parent's interaction with their children. In fact, it is not the parent's image that captivates the film, but rather the portrayal of the children and their oblivious understanding of their immediate surroundings and strange behaviors of their parents, such as the constant kissing.

The indoctrination of resistance in the film becomes the core value instilled in the children as a means for future survival, which paves the way for the child protagonist to become an active participant, laying claim to this own wants and desires. However, the child's survival performances conflicts with the lack of adult understanding of the nature of war, this is the reason for the children's constraints and the physical separation from their comfort zone. All of which, results in unanswered questions, disappointments, frustration, and anger because of the drastic change in their familiar surroundings. Such conflict blinds the child's ability to comprehend the greater impact of his life undercover and the measures by which the child's parents overtly instruct the child to take on a new identity and embrace the classic figure of Harry Houdini—who becomes the child's heroic idol.

4.4 The Yellow Citroën: Between and Betwixt *Clandestinidad*

In a similar venue to Alcoba's *The Rabbit House,* the children in the film are ruptured from society and placed in *clandestinidad.* The Argentine-Spanish production

of *Kamchatka* occurs in 1976 when Argentina is completely immersed in the political war. The film is narrated by family's ten-year-old son, who is suddenly pulled out of school when his parents go into hiding, this becomes Matías's first 'vanishing act.' Such performance, *per se,* introduces the film with a series of parallel disappearances—his uncles, his parent's co-workers and ultimately his parents final 'disappearing' act.

To analyze the imperative value of childhood performances in the film as children of militant parents adopt identities, it is important to understand the symbolic features that are introduced in the film, delineating the inheriting of heroic characters. Through the physical dislocation from the public sphere into *clandestinidad,* the film proposes a destabilizing situation whereby Matías and his young brother are faced with the emotional and physical distress of having been forced to escape and leave behind their home. As the title itself represents, Kamchatka is a frozen, desolated, and abandoned region of Russia and formed a parallel description of the child's rupture from the bands of society into an abandoned remote home, while setting the course for the child's indoctrination to endure the menacing atmosphere of the time. This provisional status of recording children's comfort zones torn down by the treacherous effects of the military regime becomes to the child what a catastrophe becomes to a detained-disappeared individual. For as Gabriel Gatti has argued, the catastrophe of a detained-disappeared individual occurs the moment the individual is ruptured from society and placed into the unknown. As Gatti clarifies that "the disappeared person is an emergency, a singularity, and unintended consequence, something unforeseen. He is a fragmented individual; a body separated from a name, a consciousness removed from

its physical support, a name separated from its history and identity deprived of its citizen cards. He is a 'body to which things happen,' […] pure vulnerability" (Gatti 9). This situation destabilized normality for both the individual detained and disappeared, as those who are actively seeking for the disappeared. This unknown space is considered a new state that as Gatti illustrates is "within the architecture of existence it would not be possible to find a place between life and death, and if it did exist (purgatory, limbo, ghost, specters...), it would be of short duration. But disappearance invents a perpetually unstable space, a kind of permanent liminality. Beside it is unresolvable. There is not even the certainty of the death of the disappeared subject to bring closure" (Gatti 9). The forced disappearance is, therefore, viewed as a profound but provisional status, that after a certain period, "things return to their original place and normality is restored" (Gatti 2).

In similar terms, Victor Turner uses the idea of the liminal space to show the threshold between rituals or the separation between two major events. What Turner adds, however, is that the liminal space is a provisional status, where the individual is caught between and betwixt two provisional experiences and undergoes a series of transformations. Furthermore, Turner suggests that this period of liminality provides new and improved identities in the aftermath of the 'ludic' or liminal phase as an individual is reintegrated into society. In fact, the passage from one social status to another, according to Turner is often accompanied by a passage of space, "a geographical movement from one place to another" (Turner 25). For children of militant parents who had to 'disappear' from the public sphere because of military prosecution, the ludic phase of disappearing into *clandestinidad* becomes the between

and betwixt normalcy and its aftermath. This particular space becomes a symbol of limbo, purgatory and extreme *desesperación*[35] or hopelessness that the child experiences under these conditions. It separates the child from normality and the ordinary aspects of his common space.

Figure 4.1 shows the transitional phase from normality to undercover while the children are in a moving Volkswagen. This episode demonstrates the image of the vehicle as a means of transporting the children from one phase of life to another—as the children depart from their ordinary life and pass into a life undercover. Correspondently, the moving Citroën becomes an important agent in the film, it is only the moving element that interlocks life in *clandestinidad* and the real world. In fact, the moving car paves the way for the main theme of the film: escapism. It separates at a grand scale, the comfort levels of normality, such as the school they attended, their friends, their home, and personal items such as pajamas and Lucas' stuffed animal lion. The family's yellow Citroën becomes then a symbol of transition into the liminal space, as articulated by Turner, introducing the children to an undercover life, and while becoming children of persecuted felons. In fact, this it is the ideal space for indoctrination and the (re)configuring of identities, as children in such circumstances were obligated to maintain an isolated and deceitful image in the public sphere.

In the scene mentioned, it is evident that the film effectively delineates the non- normative roles children are asked to perform under Videla's dictatorship, by

[35] As Spanish adjective used to describe the despair, hopelessness and extreme desperation for the situations in which individuals are found. In the case, of children forced into *Clandestindad* the term describes their hopelessness in returning to normality.

comparing the tacit confusion in the children's struggle to adapt to the forceful abandoning of conformity. During the separation from normality into *clandestinidad*, the subsequent passage captures the eagerness, confusion, and disillusion of the young children— between the moment the children are seen leaving the city and the moment they arrive at their new provisional home. In this scene, the children begin to interrogate their mother for having taken him out of school unexpectedly:

Matías	--Ma ¿adónde vamos?
Madre	--La casa de unos amigos
Matías	--¿Para eso me sacaste del colegio? Pero volvemos temprano ¿no? […]
Madre	--Hoy no...
Matías	--¿Cómo qué no?
Madre	--Hoy no se puede
Matías	--¿Por qué no?
Madre	--Porque …nos vamos de viaje.
Matías	--¿No íbamos a lo de tus amigos?
Madre	--Pasamos por lo de mis amigos, después nos vamos directo. (Piñeyro)

Notice the child's frustration in the unanswered questions and search for possible answers to resolve his concerns and confusion. The search for answers proves to the viewer the child's entry into the 'ludic' reality they are on the verge of deploying. From this standpoint, the mother is very direct in her response, since the comprehensive levels of public prosecution weighed heavily on run-away parents. This scene, of course, echoes of the child's debilitating innocence. It captures the conflict that resides

within the familial debate, as the children are dragged into strict conformed rules and unfamiliarity with the surrounding conflict of the parent's forced 'disappearance' in *clandestinidad*. For such reason, there is an ambiguous frustration in the mother's response as Matías urges to return to normality as soon as the visit to the mother's friend's home is over. The children soon realize that the visit to the friend's home will not be an ordinary visit, for they are not to return home, "porque …nos vamos de viaje," as the mother reinstates.

In fact, the film captures the transitional phase of moving into *clandestinidad*, precisely as the family is driving up to a military checkpoint. In this scene, the mother turns into a street where military officials are seen stopping and searching vehicles. In an attempt to reverse and take a different route, the mother is caught between a car driving up behind her. Without an escape route, she tries to remain calm. While distracted by the child's inquiries, we see the mother searching for documentation to show the military personnel. If we look closely at the scene, the mother searches in her wallet through several identification cards. It is her luck that the military personnel approaching the wagon allows her to pass without having to show any form of documentation. Without reference to their new political status, this scene marks a pivotal point in the film, because it demonstrates the severity of the family situation and leads to what will essentially lead to the child's main objective of deception and the need to take a new identity. Matías and his younger brother have not yet grasped the extensive measures of their political surrounding. Both children become upset at their mother's ambiguous responses and face the rearview window (figure 4.1).

It is in this scene, that I see the children's innocence and disinterest in departing

normalcy. If we notice carefully at the child's perspective, what we have here are the last moments of the children's conventional family life. What is more vivid in this scene, is the children's innocence and lack of cognitive reasoning of the political environment, because for a brief segment in the film, both children face the rear-view mirror and see a corral of military officials in the distance surrounding violently an unidentified man who had been in the car behind them. As the family drives past the inspection point, the children make no reference to what is going on, as if they are simply looking away caught in their misfortune, unaware of the situation and nothing more, while the mother is relieved as she slips through the inspection point, no-questioned-asked, from the military personnel. To the viewer, this becomes the child's turning point from the previous life into secrecy.

Though the moment of integration into *clandestinidad* is valued as a pivotal point of departure, I will reference these periods as means to demonstrate the differences of behaviors undertaken by the children as a means of survival in the before and after shots of their transition. In this chapter, I will focus more extensively on the period between and betwixt normality, and capture in the end, the reintegration of the children into society as post-*clandestinidad* children. This particular—liminal—space in the films gives a crucial insight into the transformation of identities and the individual experiences of childhood as children *performed,* pretended, and assimilated to the demands of society. *Performing survival* as I see it in this film is how children have undergone emotional, physical, and psychological training, by acquiring skills of survival and preparing for themselves for possibilities of a future struggle.

Figure 4.1 Matíass de Pozo as Matíass (left) and Milton De La Canal as Enano (Simón) (right*) in Kamchatka (2002*)

4.5 The Beginnings of Escapism

The basic tactical and strategic skills of escapism, began the moment Matías set foot at their friend's estate. This provisional estate had become the training center where Matías would eventually learn the art of deception and physically train himself to escape the challenges of being locked up—freeing himself from ropes and handcuffs. These challenges of course, and the feeling of being 'locked up' represented the constraints of living underground, where Matías attempts to liberate and rid himself of. This is evident in the child's physical removal from the atrocities happening around him, and in his desire to return home to his friend.

A clear symbol of separation that leads to Matías emotional frustrations, and ties the child down, figuratively speaking, is the remote isolation of the estate. The setting of the home provides a rhetoric of enclosure for the children, paving the way to complete boredom, detachment, and a sense of imprisonment as the children are restricted from the simple liberties they once possessed. Perhaps one of the most visible attributes of enclosure is when the family is driving to the home and is faced with a passing train. Here, the camera captures the family in the yellow Citroën facing the train, while leaving the city buildings behind. It is in this precise moment when the father suggests an alternative route and the mother responds with, "¿pero no volvemos a la capital? […] pero si venimos de ahí." Train tracks are often set on the outskirts of the city, separating the interior with the exterior of the providence. Providing a separation between governments, peoples, and cultures. The providential life is far lower paced and secluded from that of the city. In fact, it is possible that the family's new hiding place is even more isolated as we see Matías and his father in the town

carrying a large amount of bread loaf and while also trying to find board games and toys at a local toy store which not only foreshadows the boredom, and one of the only sources of entertainment at the new place, but the attempt to maiming the ordinary as normal as possible as the father buys the youngest a hard wooden toy tiger to replace the stuffed one he left back home.

Now, upon drawing close to the home, the home is not only surrounded by a gated fence but is also fenced in with bushes and shrubs. It is at this point in the film, that the father begins to slowly intertwine survival skills within child play, for the children to comprehend the parameters of escapism when necessary.

In the subsequent scene, the use of language sets the stage for the transitional roles the children will begin to adopt. As we see in the scene, the father begins to explain the meaning of the term "zafarrancho," a term indicating utter chaos or signifying that "all hell has broken loose." This is the first clue in the film, indicating the possible invasion of military officials and the need for the children to prepare themselves for such occasion. In the film, the father uses this term to teach his children the first step to survival as they are taught to escape from the 'cowboys' and run from the home, if at one point "zafarrancho" is called:

> ¿Saben que es un zafarrancho de combate? […] vieron cuando en las películas un soldado toca la trompeta para avisarle a los suyos que vienen los indios […]
>
> bueno si mamá o yo gritamos zafarrancho lo que tienen que hacer es esto: dejan todo lo que están haciendo […] dejan todo lo que están haciendo y se vienen para acá, corriendo, corriendo, corriendo […] lo que tienen que hacer es esto,

> presten mucha atención […] buscan esta piedra que está en el suelo, extiendan los brazos, cierran los ojos, meten la cabeza y pasan para este otro lado ¿entendieron? (Piñeyro)

Notice in this scene that the father plays with the children's understanding of the traditional child's game of Cowboys and Indians to describe how the trumpet became a valuable instrument for survival to warn the cowboys of the imminent danger. Using this allegory, the father intends to implement to his children the first steps of endurance and strategic survival skills needed to *perform* survival as a means of protection. As the scene disentangles, the children are then asked to enter the home by way of imitation as they see their father preparing the way for them to do the same: stretching forth their hands, sticking their heads into the shrubs and bushes and take turns while doing so. To finalize this teaching moment, once on the other side of the shrub, the father indicates the southern and northern coordinates to signal where they must rune to in case of evacuation.

Moreover, the shutting of windows, doors, prohibiting the children to answer phone calls, and teaching them the secret familial codes when the parents are out of the house, illustrates the entrapment and isolation of militant homes. Locked in the home, the children wait for life to come to them. In fact, they seek entertainment though imaginative creativity and pretending to be new heroic identities. Furthermore, to maintain a sense of normality in the home, aside from the boredom and literally isolation from the world, the father and son play T.E.G. In T.E.G., the Argentine war game, like *Risk,* becomes the father's tactical tool to teach his children the strategic implementations of war. In the game, the goal of each player is to be the first to

conquest the world. As each player has a secret objective, their goal is to maneuver their troops from region to region, by the role of a die, and acquire individual nations, leaving their component out of the game as countries are overthrown. The secret objectives, like the political tactics of militant activist, are hidden from other players. Aside from attempting to invade the other, players in the game select a target, a valuable safe-guarded region that will prevent invasion and loss of the game. Kamchatka, the frozen, desolated, and abandoned region of Russia, sets the course as one of the last standing grounds for survival in the film. Geographically speaking, the Russian peninsula is found on the Far East coast of the continent, it is a remote geographical location isolated from the rest of the word.

Figuratively speaking, not only does this region lets a strong standing ground against the opposition that, in a literal sense, is instilled to the young protagonist by his father, who uses this geographical region to teach the child the purpose of triumph, protection and relief, but it also provides a rhetoric of enclosure and isolation of the children's circumstances. In fact, it is the family's board game where Matías can find refuge from a country torn apart. As shown in the film, this region becomes the ground for survival and the final goal of those hunted down by the regime, as it symbolizes a place of resistance and protection. Those in fear of military inhalation, resistance had become a strategic plan of survival. In the horrified battlegrounds of the regime whose purpose was to capture and torture those against the military and their political ideologies. As such, the military justified their atrocities and disappearances on the grounds that it was necessary to obtain information from subversive individuals in order to prevent other terrorist attacks within the country. For the innocent,

regardless of their affiliation families attempted to resist and survive at all cost.

4.6 Escapism: Harry Houdini and the Means of Performing Survival

At the new place Matías, the eldest of the two children, stumbles upon a book that explores the mysterious performative acts of the famous escape artist Harry Houdini who provides the drama with juxtaposition to the metaphorical situation the family is in and the life of the escape artist who manages to outlive his opposition. In one particular scene in the film, through the cinematography position of the camera, the film captures the complete body image of the young boy sitting in the garden as he reads the introduction to the book. In this scene, the camera captures a stilled picture within the book of two young boys, presumably Houdini and his younger brother. The image, as seen in Figure 4.2, shows a cartoon version of Houdini tied to a chair while his brother sits right behind him tying Harry's hands together. This image introduces the iconographic image and parallels between Houdini and the family's confinement in *clandestinidad*. In addition, the use of the spatial imagery in the film between Matías, the text, and his father captures closely the foreshadowing of the perceived development and exchange of identities.

The voice-over of the young boy reading the introduction to Houdini's manual illustrates and compares the child's father to Houdini and his impressive ways of managing to escape from some of the utmost dangerous situations, as the film bounces back and forth between images found in the book and his father. The child's voice-over illustrates that "Harry Houdini nació en Budapest el 24 de marzo de 1874. No era mago como dicen sino escapista. Un escapista sabe salir de las situaciones más difíciles." In a

sense of gratification, the film depicts the father's assurances of having found an alternative escape route (Figure 4.3).

The most compelling element of this image is the child's perspective as it transitions between the child's looking at images of Houdini's most infamous escape performances and his father cutting down shrub. The child's voice-over describes the 'supernatural' potential and amazing characteristics of the escape artist as it voices over the image of his father, making a comparable parallel attributed to his father and his ability to perform—through the child's eye—some of his greatest escape acts. Certainty, this parallel image positions his father as one of the ultimate escape artist—an ideal image of what could be or is the child's ideal heroic figure.

Moreover, as the narration continues, the child is seen thumbing through the pages of the book while his father is fervently cutting down shrubs and he reads, "Para hacer su trabajo, Houdini tenía que estar en perfecto estado físico, corría varios kilómetros al día, y aguantaba cuatro minutos bajo el agua… cuatro minutos. Houdini recibía recompensas, a quien lo querían encerrar. Muchos aceptaron el desafío, pero perdieron, se escapaba siempre." For militant families to uphold their battleground, it was important to have alternative routes to escape, especially for the protection of their entire family. This scene provides the viewer with an image that seems to foreshadow the possible outcomes of the family's survival, as it captures the father's satisfaction and manages to clear the path for an alternative escape route, while the child reads the final words in the of the father's heroic role, "se escapaba siempre."

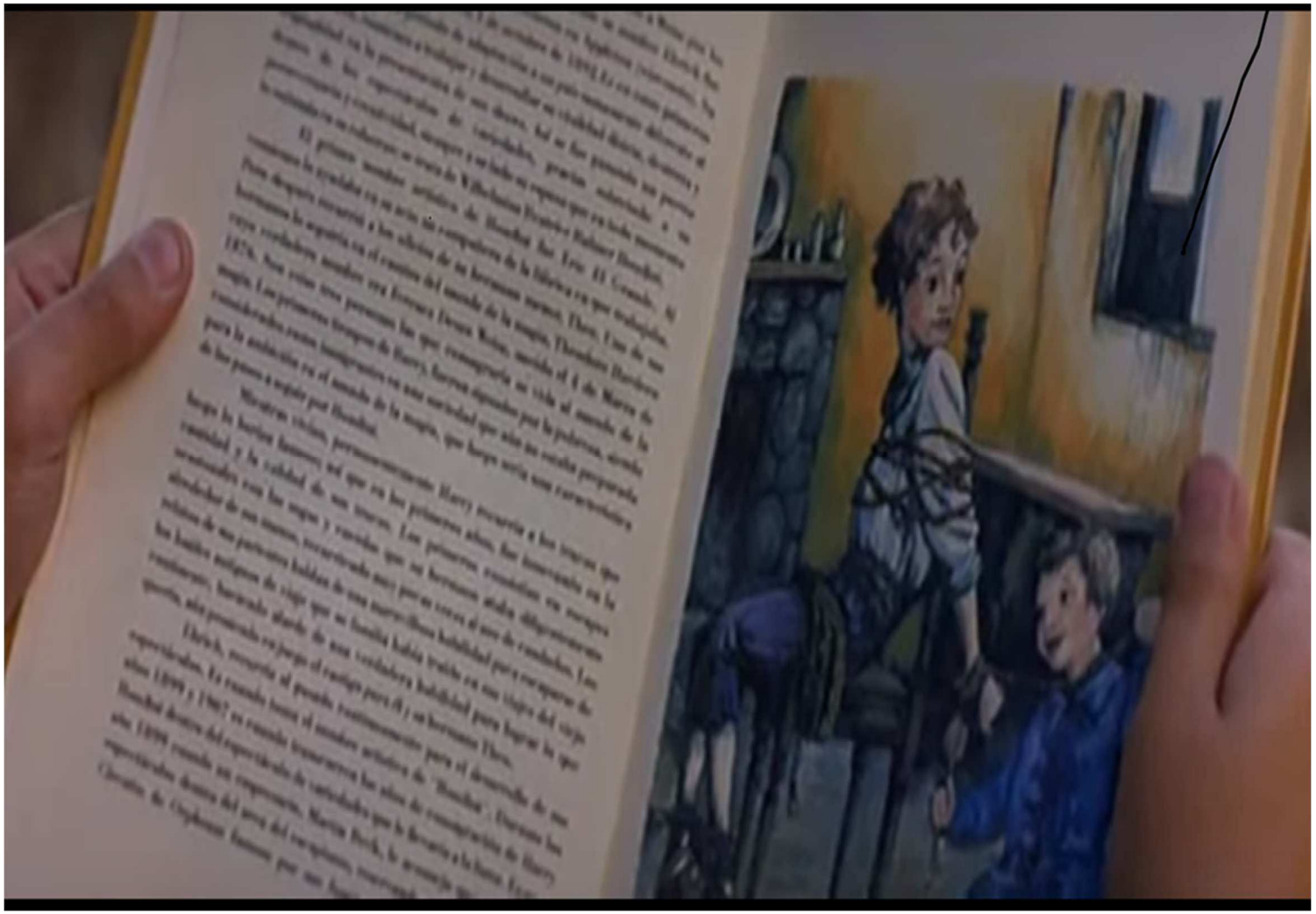

Figure 4.2 Inside Matías book: Harry Houdini and his brother *Kamchatka* (2002)

As the scene shifts, the family is found sitting around the kitchen table having dinner. As directed by the father, the children are asked to choose a name by which they will be called by from now on. Reluctant and confused, the children do not understand the reasoning behind such request and find it amusing to play around with such request. Now, the paradox of this setting, lies in the names chosen. The father chooses to be called David Vicente a television character who plays a significant role in the American CBS show "The Invaders" (1967-1968), which had also been broadcasted in Argentina as "Los invasores." The sci-fi television program was popular in the 1970s and is used in the film, as a secondary form of describing the political setting the children are caught in. It is constantly playing in the background and the small references to political invasion are merely offset illustrations originally a reference to the Cold War. As a result of the ironic reference to the television program, Matías chooses to be called Harry, because of the famous escape artist

> The fact that the child decides to take upon himself Houdini's identity conditions him for the utmost dangerous escape spectacular that he will eventually have to encounter. Therefore, setting the parameters by which the child focuses continuously on the notion of resistance, survival, and the overall battleground encompassing Kamchatka as a threshold of endurance against the overbearing threats of the military regime, assuming to become an escape artist in his own right. As shown in the film, Matías becomes obsessed in understanding Houdini's methods. This permits me to link his behaviors to the political situation in which Matías is found.

Figure 4.3 Ricardo Darin in Kamchatka *(2002)*

Allowing the historic image to set the stage for the child's performative acts, as he studies the scripts of how to perform survival from Houdini's book. The idealized figure of Houdini functions as a symbolic figure necessary in providing Matías a sense of self and eventually a sense of security as he adopts attitudes and abilities once performed by the idolized figure.

Through his own personal study of the book, Harry decides to put into practice a series of physical, emotional, and mental constraints used by the famous escape artist to physically prepare himself to perform similar acts. However, for the young child, it is important to note that Harry Houdini was not a magician as many may claim, but an escape artist. This is an important feature for the child, as he clarifies this many times, because escapism, for him, is a skill that challenges the conventional views of emotional and physical demands of survival. Escapism became the practice of engaging in what appeared to be the fight for survival as the artist placed himself in dangerous situations to suddenly reappear safely in another place. The parallels between Matías and the idealized Harry Houdini become the structural forces by which the child adopted a new heroic identity and develops skills for survival. The practice of escapism was not only a way to 'escape' from the realities of enclosure and boredom, but in the end, it became the father's final vanishing act. On the other hand, for children of militant parents, escaping from the precarious restraints of military rule sets the stage for the child's responsive interest in adopting skills of escapism to highlight the unconventional narrative of behaviors driven by militancy and prosecution. For the most part, militant parents under the totalitarian regime romanticized the use of heroic figures as a tool to teach children skills of survival to protect and teach their children to

survive under treacherous circumstances. Indeed, according to Manuel Vásquez Medal, the nature of escapism has a more profound value in the family unit, "escapismo (y no magia, aclara puntualmente Matías/Harry) es lo que emprenden a la fuerza estos padres para preservar a sus hijos" (Vásquez Medal 52). The indoctrination of superheroes family members became a crucial role within the family unit for the protection and survival of themselves and the children from the military regime. Escapism becomes a strategic maneuvering that allowed families to survive and gain territorial ground as they are able to escape the figuratively played T.E.G. in the real world.

4.7 Performing Survival: Adopting an Idolized Hero

The links between Harry's imaginative play and attempts to be like Houdini are far more complex, as the child's identity is constructed through a series of transformational experiences that develop throughout the film, as he breaks away from his innate child-like characteristics, such as that of innocence. In the long run of understanding child behaviors and their relationship to play, theorists have distinguished between spontaneous play and guided play. Spontaneous play is considered intrinsic innocent play—play without rules. Whereas, guided play or facilitated play, as defined by Pamela Krakowski, "embodies many characteristics of free play, however, it is teacher directed," what this means, is that guided play is oftentimes used "intentionally for educational purposes" (Krakwoski 53). It becomes, as I see it, a playful approach in engaging children to participate in games consisting of learning outcomes, whereby adults use this approach to construct in the meantime a series of helpful mechanisms to provide the child with sufficient knowledge to understand their political surroundings.

Through a personal study of the book, Matías decides to put into practice the physical conditioning performed by Houdini. This type of childhood play, with the help of his father's constant allusions to Kamchatka, is guided play. It engages the child in the political environment of 1976 as the child of subversive parents, as he is taught subtly to prepare to escape in time of need. The premeditated activities are undertaken by Matías, as he actively pursues the complexity of Houdini's identity as breaks the barriers of normal child play, whereby the child assumes a performative identity based on physical activities and training. To assert this notion in better terms, Krakwoski indicates that:

> Play promotes the development and formation of one's personal, social-emotional, and cultural identity. Dramatic play, especially the kind that involves dress up and role-playing, allows children to discover 'who they could be, who they might be, who they want to be. As they grow in their personal, social, and cultural identity, children ask through play, what is it like to be me? What is it like to be somebody else? Through dramatic play with others –i.e., social dramatic play –children discover who they are in relation to other people in their lives. (Krakwoski 55)

The imaginative play of acquiring superhero and/or heroic identities for children of militant parents fosters a collaborative involvement in non-normative roles for the benefit of survival. Anthropologist Victor Turner has conceptualized the idea of non-normative behaviors that occur in the stages of 'liminality' as an "anti-structure," or the opposing of "normal cultural operations" (Carlson 18). Moreover, the physical restraints of persecuted childhood victims and the alternative behaviors they are asked

to perform can be characterized by activities encompassed as anti-structural activities, which are classified by actions much more limited and individualistic. Conventional activities that include: "play, sport, leisure, or art, all outside the 'regular' cultural activity of work or business" (Carlson 19) can, to the viewer, be as possible subverted activities, when they become forced or non-realistic childlike behaviors. Conventional structures mark the complex elaboration of anti- structured activities no longer honored, but are opened to chance—to the child's interpretation of how non-conventional their *play* will be. According to Marvin Carlson, "they are more likely to be subversive, consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives…" (Carlson 19). Indeed, in *Kamchatka* the potentially subversive behavior of survival demonstrates the highly-contested essence of childhood performance. The need to survive disrupts the established order of childhood innocence and vulnerability. An example of this is, Matías' obsession with trying to understand Houdini's escape methods and the way in which the child physically conditions himself to become like Houdini. This evidence in the film permits me to link his behaviors to the political situation in which Matías is found, and demonstrate the opposing structure of child normality, while having to perform advance measures of survival.

Performing survival is Matías' most important task to undertake. Unfortunately, his strengths and abilities are frustrated in the attempt as he is too young for the demands of the physical conditioning and emotional abilities provided by the escape artist. Nevertheless, Lucas, the young man that comes to stay with the family, teaches Harry a few simple truths about the ability to resists and maintain good

physical form "la respiración, tiene que tener el mismo ritmo, siempre. Regular. Conserva el ritmo […] no es una cuestión de resistencia. Nunca gana el más rápido, gana el que aguanta" (Piñeyro). The symbolism behind Luca's council suggests to the child what Vásquez Medal reveals as the true secret of Kamchatka, "el secreto de Kamchatka," que no es otro que el de resistir con valor nuestros últimos recintos, a fin de defender una integridad y una dignidad que, siendo propias, se convierte también en signo de esperanza para la colectividad" (48). For the young child, these heroic attempts are complete similitudes to the values and expectation of superheroes. Resistance, becomes the model characteristic that allows the child to understand his role as he attempts to imitate Houdini in his escape performances. This is clear upon the child's frustrated attempt to escape the country home to see his friend Bertucho in the city. For young Harry, resistance is not only the attempt to prevent being captured, but surviving being caught in the action. Resistance also demands, measures of discipline, strength, concentration, and courage as the child comes to realize of the most important characteristics of escapism, he explains:

> Tres requisitos distinguen al escapista profesional del aficionado. Primero, disciplina. El escapista sabe de sus tareas diarias, esforzada y sin descanso. Segundo, concentración. El escapista debe distinguir lo importante de su perfil. El último requisito es el coraje. El escapista lo necesita para llevar su tarea hasta el final. (Piñeyro)

Indeed, for Matías discipline, concentration, and courage become attributes of survival. Notice, also that the child differentiates an escape artist from that of a specialist, who understands the theoretical structure, *per se,* of how escapism works.

Matías subtly claims to have undermined a level of understanding of heroic abilities that surpasses his performative beginnings. What distinguishes Houdini with other imitators however, is his mischievous ways of keeping his performances a secret from the rest: “El libro de Houdini, cuanta muchas cosas, donde nació, quienes eran sus padres, como se hizo famoso, cuáles fueron sus pruebas más difíciles. Lo único que no cuenta es como hacía para escapar” (Piñeyro).

In the film, Matías is a very lonesome child. Though his brother plays a secondary role in the film, Matías maintains his distances with those around him, particularly with Lucas, the young man who comes to stay with the family for a while, and his younger brother. However, Matías/Harry attempts to maintain his physical conditioning and meditation of Houdini’s a secret from the rest of the family, to keep close ties with the imitative behavior of the escape artist.

4.8 Surviving: The Last Stance

The issue of child survival can be approached in another angle—the disintegration of the familial unity. Many families left their children in hands of close relatives to prevent military forces from taking their children. The symbolic use of a lifeless frog in the pool the children come across at the beginning of the film forms a parallel story to Matías outcome as the child of persecuted parents. At the beginning of the film, both the frog and the child appear face to face in a stair down across the pool. With little anticipation, the frog unexpectedly jumps into the pool almost drowning in the attempt to survive. However, with the help of the children, the frog is taken out of the pool. While both children stare endlessly at the body of the frog, which appears helpless and paralyzed, it suddenly jumps right up, startling the children while it runs

away. The binding parallel occurred the eve of Matías' final escape act. That is, the moment after returning from his grandparents' home, Lucas informs Vicente of the severity of the political setting. It is precisely those last moments at the estate when Simón, the younger brother, screams through the tremulous electrical storm, "¡sapo muerto, sapo muerto!" The frog is dead, and the children then, are forced to leave the home, as minutes prior to the occasion, military personnel forcefully tore apart the home. For the viewer, the death of the frog demonstrates the end of it all, or as the Harry repeats, "[donde] 'el partido vino malo.'" It is too, the death of the children's lives in *la clandestinidad*. As the young narrator shows, the day finally came when "zafarancho" was cried out by the father.

As the film begins to come to a closure, the children are found homeless and alone, while the family is left desolated in a restaurant. At this point we come to a mirror image of the children faced with others their age, and Simón asks Matías, "¿viste toda la gente que está ahí comiendo, ellos también estarán zafarrancho como nosotros?" (Piñeyro). The image we see here, is that of two children staring at the depths of their innocence as they see the others and question their fate as well. Unable to respond to his younger brother, the following scenes take us to the child's last moments in *clandestinidad*.

In the final scene of the film, we come to a scenery closure and the life undercover the children experienced as in figure 4.4. In the final segment of the film, the image of Matías stepping out of the bounds of secrecy is symbolically seen by way of the yellow Volkswagen, in the same way he entered underground. The car is seen driving on a poorly paved road with the family sharing some of their last moments

together. In the disentanglement of the drama, both Matías and his brother are dropped off at a remote gas station where his father and grandfather exchange a hug and hold a minor conversation. Through the grandfather's eyes, it is evident the child is unaware of the situation he is caught in between. The gestures, tears, hugs, and kisses of the father are feelings of farewell the child does not assimilate.

As shown in the film, the father approaches the child, and gives him the T.E.G. board game. Confused and bewildered the child wipes away his father's kiss. The film makes no reference to the child's understanding in the matter. Matías seems oblivious and unaware of the situation. However, at the final segment Matías sees his parents riding off into the distant, and slowly the child begins to run after his parent's yellow Citroën in attempt to catch up to the car, but gives up in the attempt. In this last scene, we see the child hopelessly staring off at the distance, as the car disappears into the horizon as seen in figure 4.4.

We know through the final moments of the film, that the parent's ultimate purpose had been accomplished—to preserve their children's lives. Yet the child's childlike innocence and the ambiguous entity had finally come to an end. It is presumed by the child's final words, that essentially Matías understand the devastating demands of what it meant to be the child of persecuted parents, in his last remarks he states, "la última vez que lo vi, mi papá me habló de Kamchatka. Y esa vez entendí. Y cada vez que jugué, papá estaba conmigo. Y cuando el partido vino malo, me quedé con él y sobreviví. Porque Kamchatka es el lugar donde resistir."

Surviving and resisting the wraths of the dictatorship that surrounded the child in the years to come had become Matías emblem for survival as the voice-over.

Figure 4.4 Matías de Pozo as Matías in *Kamchatka (2002)*

narrates, "… y cada vez que jugué, papá estaba conmigo […] y sobreviví."

Consequently, while adopting skills of survival, the young protagonist's identity cannot be subverted. For as Turner suggests, after reintegration into society which includes the "symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subject to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society" (Turner 24). The new and defined position calls for a "enhanced status, a stage further along life's culturally prefabricated road" (Turner 25). The aftermaths of Matías whereabouts are unknown. However, it is possible to assume that the child's identity underwent a drastic transformation on the basis of survival and resistance as taught by his father, Harry Houdini, Lucas, and the political atmosphere of the time.

In all, during the child's development the young protagonist comes to act in ways related to the performative behaviors of a child entrapped in the political movement of distress of war. The (re)construction of Matías' child memory as such, is highly influenced not only by his parents imposing behaviors on him, but of his own personal questioning and desire to fulfill life threatening escape and following in the footsteps of his heroic hero Harry Houdini. Nonetheless, *Kamchatka* highlights the (re)construction of Matías' identity with the imaginary figure of Houdini, through the eyes of a child.

4.9 Benjamin Avila's *Infancia Clandestina* (2011): An Introduction

With almost a decade of difference to Piñeyro's *Kamchatka*, the production of *Infancia Clandestina* in 2011, marks a turning point in the Argentine film industry. Like *La casa de los Conejos* and *Kamchatka, Infancia Clandestina (2011)* has a very

similar plot to its antecedent stories—a child of persecuted parents living in clandestine circumstances and isolated from the rest of the world. In their remarkable works of (re)imagining childhood experiences, the transformation of the children's identities is transformed by the confinement of their political stories, while fostering in acts of resistance and survival behaviors that I have previously conceptualized as *performing childhood.* In the case of *Infancia Clandestina,* and *Kamchatka,* the idea of *performing survival* works to disrupt the process by which children redefine innocence and adopt characteristics related to heroic and/or historical figures of the past. Moreover, the overlapping of innocence, child victimization and the active participation of children and their need to *performing childhood,* are seen through the active forms of physical play and imagination, whereby, children adopt extraordinary abilities to transform themselves into possible superhuman entities.

In fact, as a biographical narrative, Benjamin Ávila recalls the political tensions, and the need for him and his brother to manipulate behaviors and entities to survive, while taking on the responsibility of having to assume a militant identity at an extremely young age. As a young child Ávila recalls living in disguise by the name of Ernesto, in tribute to Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Marked by a life in exile and the appropriation of his young brother, Ávila recalls:

> Iba por la escuela con otro nombre, estaba en segundo grado en ese momento, tenía papeles falsos y debía sostenerlo antes los vecinos y ante la escuela […] tenía que hacer, igual que mi hermano Mayor. Para nosotros, era absolutamente normal la vida que llevábamos. La vida clandestina-militante era un estado de normalidad total. No era algo diferente de los demás. (Ranzani)

The essence of this research of course, is to capture the child's clandestine life and the parameters by which militancy, and the placement of children in imminent danger, became a 'normal' aspect in the day-to-day experiences undertaken by children in hiding.

As a prominent member of H.I.J.O.S., Ávila's approach of *Infancia Clandestina* in the political realm of present-day politics was to appeal to those of his generation and his antecedents. In an interview with Oscar Ranzani he was asked, "cuando estreno Nietos (Identidad y Memoria) dijo que queria que la vieran los chicos y que identificaran. ¿Con Infancia Clandestina piensa lo mismo?" His response was:

> Con Infancia Clandestina espero varias cosas. En lo personal, pero en la cuestión de la película y lo demás, espero que la generación de mis viejos se sienta identificada por ver la realidad y que entienda a nuestra generación de otra manera. De mi generación, espero que se sienta identificada con la posibilidad de creer. Y cuanto a la de mis hijos, espero que Infancia Clandestina sea una película que les sirva para poder quitarle peso a la discusión política. (Ranzani)

The evident desire for a collective understanding of the child's representation and recollection of the past as children of militant parents encompasses the focal feature in both *Infancia Clandestina* and *The Rabbit House.*

Infancia Clandestina (2011) tells the horrendous history of Argentina's dictatorship upheaval, its repression, and determination to eliminate opposing parties through the eyes of a child returning from exile. As history has demonstrated, among the targeted victims of war were the revolutionary organization of radical Montoneros, many of which were exiled in Cuba and whom, at the peak of the war returned to

Argentina as the counter-offense. According to Ana Ros, the counter-offense had been orchestrated by Montoneros in exile. The same organization agreed in sending groups of militants residing abroad to defeat the regime from the inside of the country. In 1979 modes of agitation and propaganda entered the country and the following year troops in charge of militant actions (Ros 5). Like Verónica Inés Garibotto, has articulated, the film breaks "with the common representation of the disappeared as the passive victims of repression and torture, the film depicts them as active guerrilla fighters with their guns, their militant rituals, their political affiliations, and their straightforward commitment to the armed struggle" (Garibotto 258). Without losing sight to extreme measures of the regime, many returning militants brought back with them entire families, as the film narrates, "algunos militantes regresaron a la Argentina con sus hijos" (Ávila). Of course, for guerrilla fighters this implied preparing territory of a new wave of combat actions, regardless of the political endangerment of their entire families as seen in *Infancia Clandestina.*

The evident distance in production, between these works, demonstrates the difference between the political atmosphere, in the before and after the influence of the Kirchner administration and the representation of the child's image within the works. It is evident, that the political and societal imaginaries to embrace the militant efforts of the 1960s and 70s by the Kirchner's are evident in the cultural production during the production of Ávila's film. Taking for example, works such as Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* (2003) and Mariana Eva Pérez's *Diario de una princesa monotonera: 100% la verdad* (2012) who are critical about their parent's militancy, yet encompass a group of cultural productions in favor or against the ideals of their predecessors. Unlike its

antecedent *Kamchatka,* which highlights the rhetoric of innocence and vulnerability of Matías (the young protagonist) who (re)constructs an image that possesses the universal childlike virtues of a completely docile and innocence child survivors, while disregarding the active participation of many children

The film's reception was widely accepted. In 2015 Verónica Inés Garibotto, noted that the film had been sold to over twenty countries, granted 5 prestigious international prices and 10 of the most notorious awards in Argentina (257). In fact, according to Garribotto, the "film was from the outset conceived and marked as a sequel to Academy-award winners *La historia oficial* and *El secreto de sus ojos,* two successful examples of how the so-called 'Dirty War' has become the country's alluring trademark within the global world" (258).

Juan, the protagonist of the film, is too a victim of the social distress of state terror as a result of his family's militant position. As the story narrates, Juan, the 12-year old protagonist returns from Cuba with his parents and younger sister. As the title portrays, Juan is forced to live underground and with the name of Ernesto, upon his return to Argentina. In the entanglement of militancy, he and his family are found in, it is presumed that not only is Ernesto old enough to understand and comprehend the militant opposition his parents are involved in, but he is asked to behave as one of their own, oftentimes being called *compañero.* In a similar venue as *Kamchatka,* the young boy encompasses the ability to interact with the physical and social environment, Juan is asked to *perform survival* and essentially portraying conventional normal-like behaviors pertaining to childhood. Genuinely, the entire film encompasses Juan's new roles and daily activities intermingled with his parent's participation in the militant

party and his social life at school and with his new friends. Needless to say, the child clashes between two different worlds, where he too, develops a sense of frustration and anxiety. For the most part, Juan struggles to be part of a childlike atmosphere, going out to friend's parties, the circus, and even a school campout. And the other, he has the need to assume an identity not his own. His performances are modified by his daily struggles of traveling back and forth between his reality—his new school, friends and his new child 'love'—and his concealed identity as a child of the opposition.

The conflict arises, however, as Juan refuses to possess and adapt to a militant identity and seeks a life of normality. In reality, for Juan, *performing childhood* becomes a difficult challenge. It not until the very end, that Juan realizes the importance of having had the need to maintain an undercover identity, but even then, it is too late for the child—for his family is forcefully disintegrated, while his mother and father are disappeared, and his sister appropriated.

4.10 Returning Home: Transitioning into *el Che Guevarra*

Along the same vein as Marcelo Piñeyro's Kamchatka*, Infancia Clandestina* begins on a moving bus. While short episodes of a family, a woman's face, a man, and a young boy appear on the screen as passengers on the bus, the film quickly shifts its intensity by projecting the image of fast walking feet, as though the people portrayed in the film are in the process of escaping. What is seen next is the child caught between armed fire, pushed to the side, while his parent's fight for their lives as a suspicious vehicle draws closer to the family and both parties begin to fire guns at one another. The shifting between the bus and the fast walking functions as a means of showing the

viewer the passing of an ordinary-conventional life to that of secrecy and militancy.

As the film proceeds, the subsequent scene demonstrates the family's progressive movement from Cuba to Argentina, as militant officials initiating their operative counteroffensive attack. In fact, the film offers an explicit image of the introductory militant phase of the child's clandestine life through a selective set of instructions given by his mother and images illustrating the navigational course of the young protagonist into the country. It is precisely as a passenger on a boat to Argentina that the child is on board a liminal space of separation between the child's old life *per se*, and the trajectory of his new life in Argentina and as the son of the country's revolutionary troops. It is here that we see the child's mother and father directing the course of the child's voyage as they tape record their instructions for the child to listen:

Mother --Hola amorcito, es raro que te grabe esto en lugar de decírtelo, pero bueno… lo hacemos para que escuches todas las veces que quieras, hasta nuestro próximo encuentro. Hoy emprendemos el regreso a la Argentina. Pero lo vamos a hacer por caminos diferentes. Y bueno, vamos a estar separados por un tiempo. Aquí estamos con papa dale…

Father --Hola changuito, aquí estoy también. Y ahora que vamos a estar separados por un tiempito, me imagino que te voy a extrañar muchísimo. Pero lo bueno es que estamos muy bien.

Mother --si, y que esto lo estamos haciendo porque entendemos que es el momento para continuar con nuestra lucha. Vamos a entrar a el

país por separados. Vos y Viki van a viajar con Carmen y Gregorio. Ellos van hacer sus padres. Van a ingresar por el Brasil. (Ávila)

Notice in this scene, that in the mother's instructions as she specifies 'la entrada' or the entry into the country from Brazil. In a parallel analysis, it is evident how the symbolic ritual of 'entering' accompanies the young protagonist into *clandestnidad*. Pressing forward with the study of symbolic genres in society, Arnold van Gennep conceptualizes the notion of "rite of passage" to identify the symbols accompanying individual's change in social status and/or the changes associated with entire societies, as previously established. Within the parameters of the term, Van Gennep identifies three phases: *separation, transition,* and *incorporation* (Turner 24). In the first phase, according to the author, there must be a separation, constituted by a detachment from a previous social status, here is where Juan is separated from the world he once knew—Cuba. It is in the phase where we find Juan, the young protagonist. He is moving from what Gennep considers the "socially and culturally involved in an agricultural season, or from a period of peace as against one of war, from plague to community health, from a previous socio-cultural state or condition, a new turn of the season wheel" (Turner 24). The physical process of moving from Cuba to Argentina, as the film demonstrates is the focal point of Gennep's conceptualization of the 'rites of passage.' As the film demonstrates, for Juan it is the beginning of his ambivalent identity, by entering the "liminal phase" through the physical separation and departure of his home country and traveling to Argentina with other militant subjects. The liminal space then, sets a new stage for child behaviors and the means by which the child adapts a

performative identity that centered on militant ideals and the respect for heroic figures.

In the reconstruction of social imaginaries and identity of militant personnel, Hugo Vezzetti explores the moral and political training of militant combatants which led to a cultural development of revolutionary groups and their extreme practices of political violence. According to Vezzetti, the militant group Montoneros gathered a sense of basic characteristics of ideas, beliefs, and passions that dominated the revolutionary efforts of the seventies. Additionally, the heroic ideas, beliefs and passions of militant personnel were more specifically valued through self-sacrifices. Inevitability, for militant personnel, the image of Ernesto 'Che' Guevarra 1970s figure had become the legendary 'guerrillero essential," as Vezzetti has noted, in which by personal example embraced absolute sacrifice, for he claims, "ciertamente, encarna y lleva al límite una tipología moral, fijada y reconocible en la tradición épica; el régimen del heroísmo reclama el sacrificio de la propia vida y culmina en la muerte bella" (Vezzetti 139). As a matter of fact, the iconic image of Guevara in the seventies sustained a powerful impact on the revolutionary ideals, and while the notions of personal sacrifice and combat at all cost dominated the political scene. In *Infancia Clandestina*, his devoted followers and their children ultimately paid the price to prolong revolutionary ideals. It is in the liminal space symbolized by the entry to the country, where children were faced with the responsibility to adopt new identities, customs, physical characteristics and even adapting to a new name as in the case of *Infancia Clandestina*. Children also, assumed the values and belief systems of the revolutionary heroes, such as Che Guevara. In fact, navigational course the young child takes as he enters the country by disguise, serves as a metaphor for Che's trip from

Cuba to Bolivia disguised as an Uruguayan national. It is in the introduction of the film where this pretentious affirmation is most noticeable, as the child is to enter the country by way of disguise, for the woman who is presumably Carmen, whispers in the child's ear, "cualquier persona que te pregunte algo decí "Eu não falo espanhol." For children of persecuted parents, the idea of "disguise" became a prominent instrument used to hide identities from the constant threat of being discovered by authorities. Some, like Juan were lucky to have false papers that could easily assimilate into society.

In the dangerous game of pretending, accompanied by manners of disguise, the 11-year-old boy returns to Argentina by the name of Ernesto, followed by impostures made up of his parents, who are *compañeros* of his true parents Christina/Charo and Daniel/Horacio. Under the assumed alias, the physical portrayal of the disguised family walking along to what presumably appears to be the country's customs, is shot with the continuous voice recording of the child's real father and mother. It is through this dialogue that we come to know the background information of what would soon become the child's new identity and name:

Father --Chango, ¿te acordás todo aquello que te conté de… cuando el Che se fue de Cuba? ¿Eh? Me has hecho un dibujo eso ¿te acordás? Es precioso. Todavía lo tengo. Bueno, ahora vos vas hacer algo parecido a lo que hizo el Che. Te acordás que cuando se fue al Congo se disfrazó de hombre de negocios con saco y corbata. Y uso un pasaporte uruguayo y se hizo llamar Ramón Benítez Fernández. Fue por eso que nadie lo reconoció. Y cuando entro a Bolivia se hacía llamar Adolfo Meno González.

Y también fue de traje. (Ávila)

Aligned with the father's dialogue is an offset of visual illustrations of the Che drawn by the child. The demonstrations of the child's drawings with the simultaneous voice-over of the parent's description remind the child of his admiration for the historical figure and most noticeably the parents attempt in enticing and ultimately (re)constructing the child's identity based on a set of leftist ideals. It is precisely through the interchangeable image of the heroic use of Che Guevara that Sara Thomas in "Rupture and reparation: Post memory, the child seer and graphic violence in *Infancia Clandestina,"* has proposed that: "Juan/Ernesto's father uses the example of the child's hero to explain why they must take on new names and identities," for "the Guevara drawings […] are animated in such a way as to show the erasure and subsequent layering on of Guevara's clandestine personae (although we can always see the traces of Che underneath)" (Thomas 242). In the same vein, Gonzalo Aguilar has articulated that, "el Che [nickname of Guevara] serves as a model for […] metamorphoses in both name and appearance when going undergrounds" (Aguilar 20). In the trajectory of it all, the capturing of Che's persona proposes a strategic way of (pre)configuring the child's identity for what is to come. It allows the uncovering of an ideal heroic model by which the young child is to perform and disguise his true identity in the public sphere. Furthermore, notice in the scene how the mother and the film present Juan's identity:

Mother --Si, y te causaba muchas gracias que se haya afeitaba la cabeza como si fuera pelado… y que usara lentes. Pero el detalle que más te gustaba era que usara un sombrero. Por eso hermosito

esta es tu misión y vos ya elegiste tu nombre. Ya no sos más Juan. A partir de ahora te vas a llamar…

Custom official --Ernesto. (Ávila)

The mother's voice-over is interrupted by the customs official. This is the first instance, where we are told of the child's chosen name and identity he will soon imitate. We also have an image of a child being acted upon, for that reason as the mother continues, "hermosito esta es tu misión y vos ya elegiste tu nombre." Though it seems as the child has the ability to maneuver within the given circumstances. The ambiguity in adopting a new identity as a choice rather than instructed by the parents takes on a different meaning in the film. We don't know if Juan has truly chosen this identity. However, the film captures the mother's voiceover as she illustrates in details the child's fascination for the epic hero and his use of the 'sombrero'. The sombrero had become Juan's favorite attribute of Che Guevara (Figure 4.5), for it provided the once fugitive figure a disguise from those seeking to kill him. Through most of his adult life, Ernesto Che Guevara had been an international villain for the revolutionary movements he started around the world. Towards the end of his life, he had become a master of disguise. In his revolutionary efforts in Latin America and around the world, Guevara would alter his appearance, so he would be unrecognizable. The film captures this concept, through a selected series of the child's drawings that are repeatedly altering the image of the historical figure. The "sombrero, in the child's illustrations had become one of Guevara's most accessible tools of disguise according to the dialogue. It had become an important accessory in Che's wardrobe that allowed him to cover his facial features while easily assimilating into society. In the film, Juan too,

utilizes a baseball cap (sombrero) to enter the country unidentifiable as his epic hero did (Figure 4.6). In fact, what we see in this segment is the exact moment when Juan slowly puts on the hat to disguise himself from customs officials. This visual suggests commencement of Juan's conversion process as he now sets foot on Argentine soil and assumes an identity closely linked to Che Guevara.

Che Guevara's character becomes Juan's point of reference in the way he should act. For the revolutionary counter-offense, like Juan's parents, "Che was the model revolutionary, the man who sacrificed himself entirely for the cause, without thought for his own comfort, ambition or personal safety" (Caistor VIII). Of course, what this meant for young children like Juan was that the character provided an emblematic image of the child's full potential as a *militant combatant* by absorbing Che's identity

By doing so, the representation of Che's figure provided children with characteristics that would essentially mark their future endeavors. As seen in the subsequent scene, the voice-over and the projected images of Guevara's cartoon images, the father's commands his young son to remember and withhold closely the great mystique of who, in fact, he should really be, "eso Juan tenés que repetir muchas veces, te lo tenés que apredender bien seguro, no te olvides, eh. Ya no sos mas Juan. Ahora sos Ernesto." The images of Che, link the revolutionary efforts for the child's mandate to performing adequate behaviors corresponding to the imminent danger the family is involved with, by using the values and moral of this heroic figure.

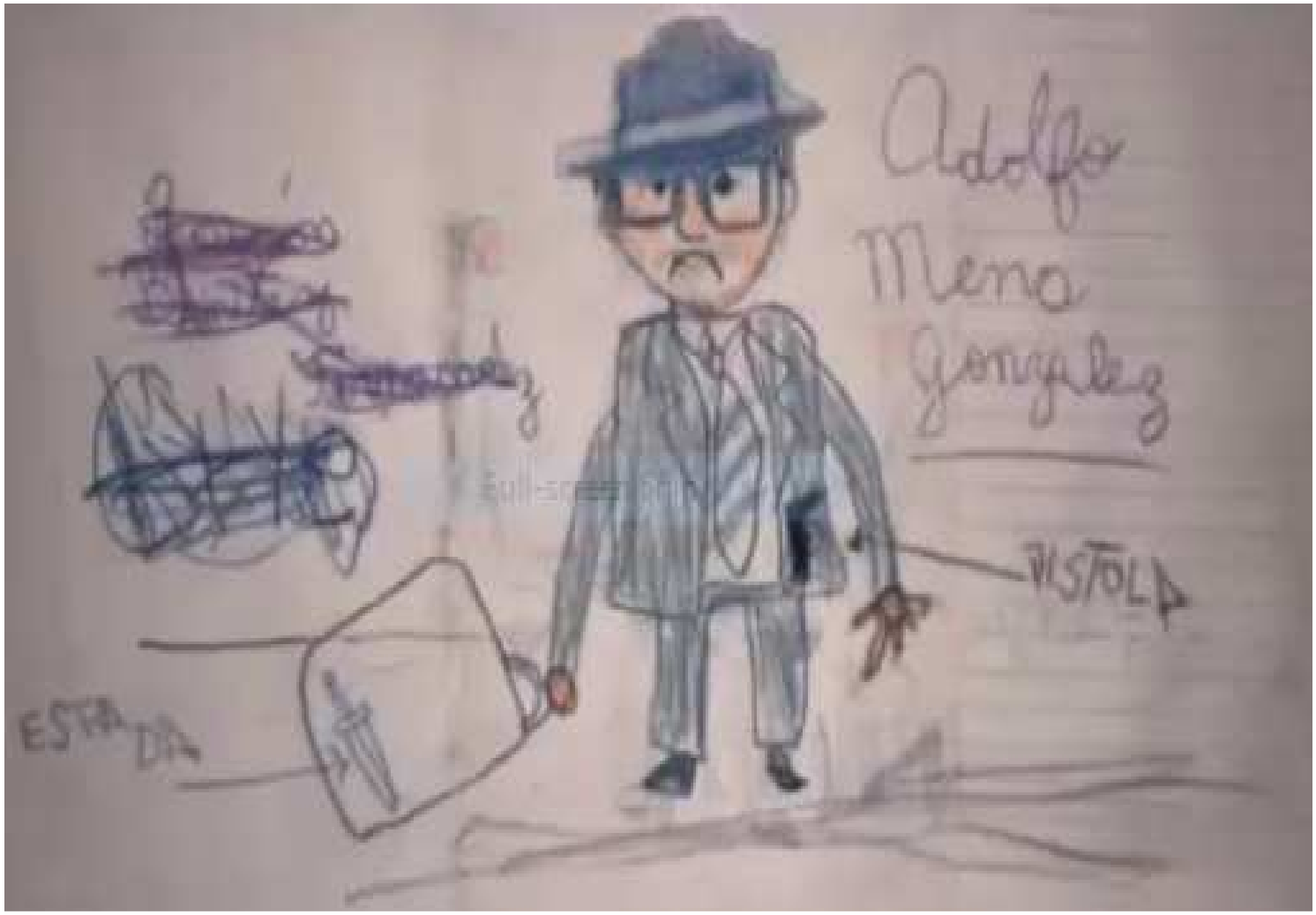

Figure 4.5 Drawing of Che Guevara in *Infancia Clandestina (2011)*

Ernesto Che Guevara, becomes then, the emblematic figure by which the child performs militancy. Moreover, emphasizing Garibotto's idea, this iconic figure of Che Guevara embodies, what the author highlights as:

> the fairy-tale features of a child's hero: he is an epic character who travels around the world and skillfully outwits his enemies by changing his clothing. The same romantic attributes are attached to all the militants that Juan encounters. From his perspective, his parents, his uncle, and their friends are brave and young soldiers, passionately fighting for their ideals. Every dialogue that he witnesses — especially the one in which his father tells him about Beto's death and the one in fighting — unveils the private virtues mentioned by Vezzetti: abnegation, courage, heroism, sacrifice, and youth (Garibotto 262).

The political romanticized image of Guevara, pinpoints the ultimate traits that fall under the premises of a devoted combatant, which the child was expected to live. His character is built upon these virtues of sacrifice and heroism, all of which the child slowly learns to adapt to the trajectory of the film. However, it is imminent to note, that unlike Matías in Piñeyro's *Kamchatka,* Juan truly doesn't question the need to adapt his new identity. He maintains a quite neutral approach towards the new character, and slowly adopts his new entity, not only by embracing his new name, entity, and life blindly, but essentially adopts a full character—a militant child—a fellow *combatiente*. Even until the very end of the film, the child refuses to provide his true identity to the police men that have captured him and begin to interrogate him.

Figure 4.6 Teo Gutiérrez Moreno as Juan/Ernesto in *Infancia Clandestina (2011)*

4.11 Conflicting Identities

Once undercover, Juan, now Ernesto, is continuously reminded of the sacrifices he needs to perform. Like, *Kamchatka* and *The Rabbit House,* Ernesto lives in a secret house, where both his parents and his uncle Beto belongs to the counter-offense. In his circle of acquaintances and daily activities, the child has access to firearms, bullets, hideaways, and dissident rituals (Garibotto 259). However, the boundaries between Juan and Ernesto begin to clash as the double lifestyle is marked by the child's struggle to *perform* his new identity, while also maintaining the innocent aspects of his true nature of childhood. The overall conflict is made up of the child's hesitation to choose between political militancy, warfare, and imminent danger (the path chosen by his parents) or innocence, childhood play, friends, and a daring courtship he develops with a fellow classmate. The two positions are binary opposites, which the child tends to mix in his journey.

In the film, some of the first conflicts arise when the child confronts linguistic disadvantages because of his upbringings in Cuba, Ernesto's is constantly reminded by his new classmates of the 'correct' pronunciation of the letters [y] and [ll]. In a family gathering he is reminded to use "oshe" versus "oye" since the family is presumably from Córdoba, where the intonation is not only different, but the use of the [y] and [ll] are also emblematic symbols of Argentine culture. At times, Juan/Ernesto slips out of character because of the use of language. At school for instance, he is teased by his friends for saying, "yo" instead of "sho" and constantly remind him of his "origins," as he is often times called "*córdoba"* by his fellow friends. In the same venue, one of the

most evident mistakes is the moment the child realizes it is his birthday. On the teacher's count, his entire group of classmates begins to sing "happy birthday." It is obvious, as the child sits quietly on his desk, that he is unaware to whom the class is sing to, until they call out his name. Frantic at the situation, the child is seen running into his bedroom to find his false documentation where he confirms that it is his birthday. His family is then obligated to comply with the demands, and have a birthday party for the child.

At the end of the party, the film takes the family to the kitchen table, where we have the mother, the grandmother, the father and Juan sitting around taking their nightly snack. Such image merely serves to represent the unconventional family measures of militancy that exists within the film. The familial unity is frustrated by the militancy and guerrilla movements. On the one hand, we have a mother and daughter relationship that is torn because of the daughter's devotion to militancy. On the other hand, we have the endangerment of the children because of such circumstances. The family relationship is essentially disintegrated as a result of the popular ideologies dealing with the counter- offense, and the dangers that come from it. The grandmother understands this, yet the daughter, her husband, and her brother deem it necessary to take militant actions for the benefit of the nation. It is precisely the result of these familial differences, that within minutes of this ideal-family-centered picture, Juan's mother and grandmother begin to argue about the socio-political conflict. The grandmother softly and most caringly begins the conversation describing the country's political turmoil, "el tema es que, la situación del país no está, nada no yo no entiendo porque volvieron justamente en este momento al país." As the tension arises, Juan is

sent to his bedroom. Believing the child is gone, the camera captures Juan behind the wall listening to the family dispute. The degree of the child's isolation captures the nature of the family suppresses of Juan (not Ernesto) from the reality of dictatorship and the vicarious position faced by the counter-offense. In fact, as Ana Ros has argued, the majority of militants who participated in the counter-offense were captured and murdered resulting in the total failure of the organization (Ros 5). This particular outcome was understood by Christina's mother as she is disillusioned by the Montonero counter-offense movement, and begs her daughter to flee the country once again, saving her children in the process.

Amalia: --escúchame […] están en peligro. Esta es una situación muy grave.

The grandmother is quickly interrupted by Beto's passive attitude towards the situation, in efforts to calm her down. In the entirety of the film, Beto is the most cheerful embodied figures. Notice carefully the woman's reaction towards the idea of 'normality'.

Beto: --Amalita, nosotros estamos perfectos. Los chicos están perfectos [...] están haciendo una vida normal. (Ávila)

The concept of normality becomes the focal point of the discussion. We have a situation were on the one hand, the immediate family members involved in the counter-offense justify the concept of normality as a set of conventional ideals the parents are complying with, such as, having the children live with their parents and attending school, and making friends, among others. While on the other hand, the

grandmother pinpoints the measures of abnormality the children are living because of their clandestine circumstances:

> Amalia --¿Normal? ¿A vos te parece normal que el chico tenga el nombre de no sé quién? el cumpleaños de no sé qué fecha, que no sé qué sabe quién. ¿Es? Pobre pollito, ¿a ti te parece que eso es normal? (Ávila)

Normalizing violence at the cost of childhood innocence and endangerment where children are exposed to the shootout, bombings and all sort of 'subversive' indiscriminate behavior observed by childhood survivors, became an increasing justifiable debate by persecuted parents. Loyalty to the Peronist movement became a defused ideology embedded in the normality of childhood behaviors and the life they were prone to live. Normality in childhood consists of conforming to the child's conventional expectations of society. In which case, normality becomes a synonym of childhood innocence.

However, as parents became involved with revolutionary efforts, the contribution of militancy for children became a process of integrating children too deeply rooted in leftist ideals and beliefs. In a more precise exemplification, we see Juan's mother devotion to such ideals, as she would rather leave her children to fellow *compañeros,* in the extreme situation if she were killed, as she responds to her mother, "si a mí me pasa algo yo quiero que a mis hijos los críen dos compañeros antes de entregártelos a vos." The socialization of childhood experiences, as we see in *Infancia Clandestina* is surrounded by familial indoctrination. Normality is then conditioned to the extent that violence becomes a normalized experience in childhood. We see this

clearly, within the first minutes of the film in the shootout with Juan's parents as explained previously, and in an earlier scene where we see Juan's uncle desperately seeking asylum at home, after a militant operation has gone sour and he is shot in the attempt to escape.

Because leftist ideals have become part of the common experience of childhood represented in *Infancia Clandestina*, the conflict of 'normalization' is widely penetrated in the film and with it the widely ambivalent identity of the child. The parental involvement in the shaping of childhood behaviors is internalized by discursive conscious training. In the remaining segment of the family's argument we see the hostile and radicalization of Juan's mother's devotion to the militant group and the grandmother's foreseeable future:

Amalia	--¿Querés que tus hijos sean guerrilleros?
Cristina	--¿Cuál es el problema de ser guerrilleros? ¿Vos sabes cuál es el fin? ¿Vos sabés el futuro?
Amalia	--Si.
Cristina	--¿Cuál?
Amalia	--Que te maten. (Ávila)

I place great emphasis on the mother's strong personality and loyalty to the political offense and emphasis of raising and (re)constructing the child's identity on the bases of militancy. Reflected within the parent's voluntary efforts to incorporate leftist beliefs, is also evident the measures of securing childhood identities through the continuous use of epic- heroic figures idolized by the mother. After the long confrontational debate regarding the family's safety, Juan is asked to say his farewells

to his grandmother. The voice-over of his mother's recording guides the seen into the emotional departure:

> Cristina --Me acuerdo el día que naciste. Vino tu abuela a concerté. Estaba tan emocionada. Fuiste su primer nieto. Me acuerdo cuando le dije que te ibas a llamar Juan ¡Ay Dios! Como se puso. "Juan" me decía "Juan, seguro que le pusiste Juan por ese Perón." Si. No fuimos muy originales ¿no? Claro que te pusimos Juan por Perón. Sabes que nunca te dijo Juan. Por eso te dice pollo. Bueno ella se justifica porque dice que cuando naciste pareciste un pollito mojado. (Ávila)

Indeed, the sensibility of the child's identity has been a common debate since his birth. Referring to Gonzalo Aguilar's analyses of the film, the author concludes, "the boy in *Infancia Clandestina* has five names or nickname: his birth name is Juan (for Perón); he enters Argentina as Ernesto (for Guevara); his father calls him Chango [kid]; his school friends know him as Córdoba; and his grandmother calls him Pollito [chick]" (Aguilar 20). The root of the problem, however, is the fact that the child has lost *himself* in the political conflict surrounding him. From an early age, he had to learn to conceal, replace, and perform distinctive identities. In the passage, the narrator explains clearly that Juan's identity was founded upon the principles of Perón, creating a pattern of ideals for the young child to eventually follow and idealize. The grandmother's approach to Juan's given name evidently contrasts, once again, the unembellished argument of normality by giving Juan the nickname "pollito," which I would argue, symbolizes the innocence of the child from mundane experience, while

the other names are tarnished memories of idealized historic figures.

As the film unravels, uncle Beto is killed while the family and the family's circumstances become hostile and Juan is caught between his desires to live his childhood and rid himself of the life in *clandestinidad.* In the process of it all, Juan spends the day with his girlfriend, with the intentions of running off to Brazil. However, his proposal is rejected by María and he is found once again bound to the precarious familial affiliation of militancy. In this scene, María is able to see reality and the cost of living as fugitive children in a foreign country, in comparison to Ernesto who is blinded by a fantasy world of childhood play and adulthood which he is unable to differentiate.

Lastly, in the final scenes, the child is seen watching television when an unexpected picture of his father, one of the chief-commanders of *Montoneros* is shown on the television as having been caught by authorities while referring to him as a 'subversive' and 'a criminal.' Overwhelmed by trauma, the camera follows the helpless child into the bedroom where he takes his parents fire-arm and falls asleep on his parent's bed. Sound asleep, in his dream Juan sees himself walking into a dark room where his entire group of classmates is at what presumably appears to be a funeral. A child's body lays still on a coffin bed, surrounded with bullets and peanut chocolate candy. The child's head is replaced by a television transmitting different images of subversive individuals until the transmitter finally stops with the image of himself (Figure 4.7). It is precisely with the exchange of the different faces, that the film captures identity crisis embedded between the child's political commitment to the counter-offense and the confrontational desires of normalcy he desires. The scene then

captures, an intrusive image of children taking on the role of militant adults. As costumed by militants to take the role of each dead combatant, Juan sees as his *compañeros* account for his death in a traditional chant repeating three times, "al compañero Ernesto… presente," followed by the singing of *No veo* which is sung throughout the film. The children begin to sing this song in their child voices, praisefully covering their eyes to an upbeat, careless performance. Indeed, the image of the children standing around the lifeless body of a fellow combatant, while singing "No veo, no veo," represents the innate child innocence that is free from worldly affairs. Moreover, such image highlights the multiple entities children are asked to represent as children of the opposition, and in a juxtaposition, the images also demonstrate the victimhood each child possess. The channels on the T.V set represent the multiple entities portrayed in the coffin-like visual, where each member of the operative group stands before their young diseased *compañero* or fellow classmate. Thus, the secluded, isolated body of Ernesto symbolizes the portrayal of a militancy constituted by childhood victims. This image defines the barrier between childhood innocence and traumatic experiences children were forced to live.

Finally, the child's vulnerability to the dangers around them is spotted once again at the end of the film, when the child is forced to hide with his younger sister when state officials unleash open fire to the home. In the midst of danger, Juan becomes intrigued by the commotion outside and becomes paralyzed as he realizes the imminent danger he is in. This instance becomes the turning point of the child's last moments undercover. The film then captures Juan taken into custody by police. It is then, that the child unmistakably comprehends the measures of state terror and

the importance of staying in character maintaining complete loyalty to the party. Here, Ernesto salutes his uncle's ideology and rather die than to be captured alive and betray Montoneros. He, responds to the authority figure interrogating him, "soy Ernesto Estrada. Tengo 11 años. Voy al quinto grado. Vengo de Córdoba."

In the final scene, the child is faced with the lonesome image of the night, he takes one low step on his grandmothers' porch, reintegrated into society, with nothing more than his bare clothes. Before the car drives away, he asks for his sister and realizes that she, like his parents, will not return. As knocks on the door, the child is released from all commitment of being forged to maintain a militant identity since he stepped foot on Argentine soil. His final words, on his grandmother's doorsteps are, "soy Juan." The irony of the story ends with the fact that the child, is still unable to let go of the name of one of the most iconic figures in Argentine history, Juan Peron, to whom part of the commencement of the Junta and the atrocities that came with it, is attributed to.

4.12 Conclusion

The fictional work of Benjamín Avila's *Infancia Clandestina (2011)* and Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka (2002),* have produced a radical shift in the ways in which childhood imaginaries and memories are remembered by child survivors of Argentina's military regime. These films portray, both the 1970s-armed struggle of militant family's commitment to the political armed struggle, as seen in *Infancia Clandestina* and the extreme measures of prosecution hunting down innocent families as seen in *Kamchatka,* while introducing child memories to the cannon of subjects victimized by the systematic violence of state terror.

Figure 4.7 Juan/Ernesto in Infancia Clandestina (2011)

The unexplored spaces of childhood repression of the represented time period, is reflected primarily by the (re)construction of childhood identities intertwined within the images of historical figures. These films register the use of epic heroes in the everyday presentation of child play to portray the active child participant. This unique approach breaks with the common representation of passive victims. The exploration of childhood innocence, vulnerability, and resilience of child identities reveal the highly endorsed images of idealized historic figures, such as that of Juan Perón, Ernesto Guevara (Che), and Harry Houdini. Now, these figures, in a historical sense are not necessarily heroic politically speaking. However, in the films because of the leftist image that we see as result of the parent's political affiliation, these historical figures are presented as such.

Though similar in theory, *Infancia Clandestina* provides an alternative representation of the Left-leaning values marked by the 1950s figures of Che Guevara and Juan Perón who help administer the core values of sacrifice for Left-wing ideology and the acceptance of martyrdom for the heroic cause. The child's voyage to Argentina demonstrates the severity of the armed-struggle and the parent's blind irresponsibility to protect their children. Their devotion to the Left does not justify the precarious circumstances their children had to face nor the nonnormative behaviors ands skills they had to perform because of their parenting skills. In fact, the child's image re-examines the everyday family routine of militant families, and the performances children had to live. Performances, which convert revolutionary efforts into embedded child traits prioritized for the benefit of the armed struggle and nothing more.

Kamchatka Piñeyro, on the other had, provides a more sentimentalized

portrait of Argentina's past in the film. The film captures a more intimate approarch to the misfortune of a family who was at the wrong place at the wrong time, as the father was simply a human rights lawyer. In fact, the film shows the parent's attempt to keep their children from the harmful mechanisms of annihilation haunting them. By purposely escaping prosecution and isolating themselves from their everyday home-life, the parent's attempt to provide a sense of normality at the quinta. The evident reluctant approach to expose their children the dangers of their reality is seen in the ways the parents allow the children to watch their favorite television program, playing T.E.G with his father, and replacing old toys with new ones, the intimate romantic love between spouse and affirmations of love between family members. The iconic figure of Harry Houdini provides an animated image of a non-violent, non-argentine character, that helps the child assimilate into a Houdini's magical world of adventure, while distancing the children from the reality he faces. In fact, in comparison to *Infancia Clandestina,* the child learns his tricks from Houdini's book and not so much from direct adult in indoctrination of problematic historical figures. This approach is event because of the distance in time of their debute.

Needless to say, with the distinct images that both films provide at the end, marked by the trauma of civil unrest, both films end in a tragedy. Matías is left to wonder about his parent's disappearance the day they drove off to the distances, and Juan is abandoned, alone, and orphaned on his grandmother's doorstep. Though both films were shot with a decade in between, the parental images seen through the eyes of the child reflect the diverse ways in which child identities were (re)constructed to reflect the familial participation under military rule. The *dictadura civico-militar* did

not discriminate against the innocent and those in the armed-struggle. Though emphasis is placed on the concept of a 'Dirty Way'—a war between the guerrilla and the government—reality shows that the disadvantage of innocent civilians was much greater than military control. The wrongful conviction to prosecute sympathizer and/or anyone that appeared subversive affected entire families regardless of their affiliation.

In conclusion, my intention in this chapter was to draw a childhood perspective centered on the child's subjective viewpoint and the obliqueness of the child's identity as it is molded to perform and embrace attributes of the targeted heroes. As seen in the examination of the cultural texts, the shaping of childhood identities is associated with the social complexity of indoctrination of childhood during Argentina's military dictatorship.

CONCLUSION

Forty years after the *dictadura civico militar* took control of the nation, Argentines continue to speak about the forced disappearances and seek justice for the atrocities that had occurred in the country years ago. The unethical systematic mechanism of forced disappearances, seems to have prevailed against individual liberties and continues to be used worldwide. On August 1st, 2017 a young political activist who was acting for poor, indigenous communities and the environment, by the name of Santiago Maldonado was last seen during a confrontation between police and indigenous activist in Cushamen, a small town in the province of Chubut, Argentina. The disappearance of the young tattoo artist caused a national outcry, on a country whose political wounds are still vivid from the 30,000 kidnappings and killings under military rule. According to the news media, Maldonado was last seen after he was arrested at a political demonstration in Cushamen, when border police dismantled a road that had been blocked off by protesters—police later denied detaining Maldonado[36]. In the days and the weeks that followed, the controversy over 28-year old Maldonado's whereabouts was undetermined, until his body was found floating in the Chubut river a few hundred yards from where he was last seen on October 20th. The autopsy revealed that the body was between 55 days and 72 days old, and that

[36] Santiago Maldonado: Argentina activist's body identified. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41710389 [accessed 12/14/17]

there was no physical evidence of lesions on it. Officials claimed that the Maldonado had drowned trying to escape the political revolt, a story that contradicts that of other protestors and witnesses. Consequently, Maldonado's disappearance had become highly politicized during the nation's congressional elections in October of 2017. Voters filled the streets in massive protests across the country, while hundreds of others gathered in front of the Casa Rosada demanding justice for his disappearance. Many believed that police hid what happened, and that the justice system backed up Maldonado's murder. The Argentine League for Human Rights[37] had opened a legal case against Mauricio Macri, President of Argentina for the 'forced disappearance' and for concealing evidence in the investigation of the missing activist[38]. The confrontational protests and marches of today's era, is evidence of an outraged nation that continues to conceal the extreme measures of civilian abuse. Abuse that is too fresh in Argentina's history, while the notion of forced-disappearances and mass killings of innocent civilians has breached another level of trust as a result of the barbaric crimes performed by self-proclaiming democracies in the 21st century. After the long seven- years of the cruel extermination of thousands of individuals during Argentina's military dictatorship, the regime redefined what it meant to be *desaparecido* to undermine the mass killings

[37] This organization, also known as la Liga, was founded in 1937, as a space to encourage free opposition to the government. During the military regime, it committed itself to defend victim of subjugation. Today, lawyers defend from a wide range of individuals. From political prisoners to those seeking refuse status, and address distinct facets of the military regime and those disappeared.
http://ro.drclas.harvard.edu/blog/ummer-service-argentine-league-rights-man [accessed 3/6/018]

[38] Lucas Radicella.Santiago Maldonado's death overshadows elections.
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/santiago-maldonados-death-overshadows-elections-171022103135489.html [accessed 12/14/17]

taking place at the time. The rhetorical term confining a marginal space between the dead and the living, has become a constant reminder of the state's implementation of terror, oppression and the inhumane atrocities which are still very much alive in the nation's political realm. The visible outcry for the government's involvement in Maldonado's disappearance, has filtered another level understanding of a nation that had hoped to never again deal with the notion of forced disappearances— like the continuous political crimes dating back to the military regime.

Like Maldonado's death, images of political conflict, torture, violence, mass killings, and bombings around the globe continue to take the center stage in today's media. Yet the insanity of war has become normalized, distancing form of information that continues to find newer and more advanced forms of being transmitted. More so is the fact that the traumatic historical events of Argentina's military regime (1976-1986) continues to reinterpret the past and give voice to the distinct forms of testimony. From news reports to literature, art, and film industry the media reiterates the moral obligations accompanying a nation who stands alongside the 30,000 forced-disappeared, 500 appropriated children, and the countless number of victims. Thousands of Argentinians continue to pledge for the social justice and fill the streets in protest of corrupt governments, while also, rejoicing in nationalized transmissions of events such as the appearance of the 125th missing grandchild[39]. The dual dichotomy of the nation's political unrest has resonated so deeply in the past 40 years because of

[39] On December 5th, 2017 Adriana Garnier Ortolani, became the nation's 126 recuperated granddaughter. Born in captivity, the young women is the daughter of missing activists: Violeta Graciela Ortolani and Edgardo Roberto Garnier, young militants who disappeared during the dictatorship.

the dogmatic debates that continue to unfold between the Left and Right- wing parties. Sadly, the repercussions of the justice system have proven selfish to its own personal agenda, leading to the displacement of many unheard voices, from personal accounts of torture, violence and forced disappearances, to the murder of innocent civilians, and the illegal appropriation of children born in captivity. The most well-known of these accounts have often been told by the Mothers, Grandmothers of the sons and daughters of the disappeared, who against all odds have propelled the urgency to tell about the atrocities perpetrated by the state.

(*Re)thinking the Past through Performance and the (Re)construction of Militant Childhood Imaginaries in the Post-Dictatorship of Argentina's Cultural Production from 2003-2015*, is a research analysis (re)visiting Argentina's past under military rule through the dramaturgical lens of childhood survivors. Namely, through the perspective of children who lived underground –in *clandestinidad*—as children of persecuted parents and whose stories have become part of the untold cannon of Argentina's past. The aim of this research, as analyzed in Chapter 1, was to locate the conceptualize use of term *performing childhood* in the terrain of social imaginaries, as a tool used to identify non- normalized behaviors pertaining to children living in secrecy. By understanding the inner relationship of 'social imaginaries' in reference to the collective-societal acceptance of human customs, values, morals, and practices, my aim was to make sense of the social practices and values accompanied by Néstor and Christina's presidential administrations (2003-2015) and their influence in the cultural productions that (re)visit Argentina's dirty past in narratives written by childhood survivor. Since the end of the dictatorship, hundreds of human rights perpetrators have

been jailed, accused and convicted by leftist administrations, but mostly condemned by the Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner's administrations in the past decades. This battle has torn Argentina, revealing the rise of first-hand child witnesses as sole owners of the experiences lived under military rule. Therefore, the personal accounts of surviving child victims whose parents' prosecution placed children at the epicenter of traumatic events.

Appropriately, the result of the political turmoil and forced disappearances of the cruel abuse left the Argentine state in absolute shock, and for the years to come with a continuous state of mourning and political uprising for social justice, while forced to uncover the many stories of disappearances and the illegal appropriation of babies and young children, as human rights groups have worked tireless to recuperate the missing grandchildren who are now in their late 30s and 40s. The lack of personal first-hand experiences of child survivors have now taken a different toll in the ways history is told. Such witnesses tell their story as children caught between the struggles and disappearance of their own family members. The rising voices have provided alternative accounts of the tremulous past that has ignored their personal victimization of state terror. These alternative discourses included children of *desaparecidos,* children of militant parents and children *apropiados* by the military regime. First-hand witnessing and recollection of past experiences govern the political thought and influences of persecuted families. They, like many child survivors, assume a burden of retracing past experiences through individual examination. A childhood reading of Argentine texts written in perspective of fugitive child allows the return to history in an attempt to find the precise moment of a divided identity. In the written cultural texts of

child memories, authors portray their once lived childhood through the reconstruction of fond memories. Writing about childhood during Argentina's military dictatorship is a (re)construction account both by personal and collective experience that demands significant efforts in establishing a full account of the lost memories. This task is undertaken by a highly influential political present and a personal past, constructed through fond childhood memories.

In the years following Néstor Kirchner's election in 2003, a growing amount of cultural productions reflecting the *clandestine* state of children in the dictatorship has become a turning point in the nation's depiction of the past. In so much, that child survivors are becoming primary protagonists of their own personal accounts of the past, while making the political figure of the militant activist and the ideals that came with it a valued part of history. According to Verónica Inés Garibotto, Kirchner's official discourse fueled the centrality of the militant by explicitly acknowledging the missing activist and political ideal heroic figures of the 1970s. To this, she adds, "attuned to this increasing visibility, contemporary theater, literature, and cinema (in particular second- generation documentary production) make the figure of the militant the centre of their explorations" (Garibotto 261). With the rise of the Kirchner in 2003, it is evident that the social imaginaries accepting militancy and survival introduced valued experiences of childhood survivors who now write about their accounts of the past as active members in the trenches of war, proclaiming independence from the conventional images of child innocence and incorporating active participants in their works. Viewing the child as a fundamental instrument to move beyond the traditional blood line-victims who have previously claimed priority over the ownership of

memory, demonstrates that children were just as much a part of the wraths of terror as their parents, and possess control of their own experiences. The (re)thinking, (re)imagine, and (re)create violence, terror and memory through an intertextual child provides a personal and intimate perspective of what it meant to be a child in during Argentina's military regime, and dismantles the ways in which children had previously been seen and thought in the past. Thus, these childhood narratives reconfigure the notion of victimization and illustrate that the liminal space of *clandestinidad* to reinterpret the meaning of what life was like as a child of persecuted parents.

Laura Alcoba's *The Rabbit House* provides referential episodes of autobiographical and testimonial accounts of her life as a child of militant parents. The representation of Alcoba' accounts illustrates not only her condition as victims, as there is a clear indication of the military threats and deliberate dangers as the daughter of one of the nation's most wanted guerrilla groups at the time, but also a subjective turn by which the child is seen as primary protagonist in her own right. Alcoba's recollection, reveals the innocent child-like behaviors undertaken by the young child and her need to *performing childhood* as a dramatized form of normalcy. In attempting to perform 'childhood,' Alcoba's strategical mechanisms serve as a disguise to hide the clandestine printing press in the home where she lives that is camouflaged as a make-believe small business of rabbit breeding. The conventional image of a docile, submissive, and innocent child is redefined in the novel, as the child acquires militant skills to become another *compañera* among her mother's fellow militants. The evident clash between the conventional characteristics of innocence and the fulfillment of such adult-like roles arise as the child is too young to apprehend the severity of life in

clandestinidad. Benjamin Ávila's semi-biographical work, also demonstrates Argentina's tumultuous past through the eyes of a child. Like Alcoba's novel *Infancia Clandestina* relinquishes the child image as a social-political actor, who in his own right recalls the disruptive passivity of his childhood memoirs and provides a young image that falters between the problematic aspects of everyday life and their parent's militant involvement as part of the counter-offense. In the film, the chances of survival are seen through the child's ability to *perform survival.* In the midst of the armed struggle, Juan (the young protagonist) is drawn by the power and supernatural abilities marked by historical iconic figures. By referencing characters such as Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, and Juan Perón, Ávila engages the child's imaginary in assuming behaviors, morals or 'heroic' abilities of heroes had had once attempted to save the world. By doing so, the child is able to confront similar situations. The frequent references to Guevara and Perón, indicate the values that were immensely embedded in the 1960s and 70s.

Though similar in theory, Marcelo Piñeyro's *Kamchatka,* on the other hand, provides a fictionalized understanding of the universal prosecution of innocent families and the manner in which they did anything in the power to survive and protect their children from the devastating effects of prosecution. Needless to say, the child in the film is also faced with the need to survive. Piñeyro's film, highlights the young protagonist focusing on adopting survival skills once used and implemented by the historic figure Harry Houdini—an escape artist who teaches Matías the performative illustrations of escapism. Obsessed with the historical figure, Houdini becomes a paradox of survival while explicitly indoctrinating the child to understand the cohesive

set of values that will essentially establish the course by which the child *performs survival.* In both films in fact, the imaginative use of superhero, and/or heroic figures, for children of persecuted parent's offers an easier and more reliable way of teaching children skills for survival. In the search of it all, I discovered that children create imaginary worlds. Worlds were characters possess supernatural powers. Their actions respond to the moral and physical needs of the weak and scared, while they sacrifice their own interest for the protection and welfare of others and they seek to protect the fragile from the damnation of the evil of others. For children of persecuted parents, the make-believe play of superheroes and iconic figures reveals the child's willingness to "sacrifice themselves for a greater cause as they live a double risk-taking life with a secret identity" (Blejamar 94), while deliberately demonstrating the child how to behave within society. References to these characters break with the common representation of passive victims.

With the deployment of the child figure in the selected texts, my intentions have been to demonstrate how the child serves as an active participant in Argentina's recent memory, while engaging in autobiographical memories as a witnessing figure. For me, the child figure (re)constructs a past that serves as a means of understanding childhood identities and *childhood performances,* as he/she is ruptured from the conventional settings of everyday life and is placed under the constraints of *clandestinidad,* where firearms and bullets surround the everyday routine of domestic roles. The use of these texts provide visibility to the performative demands of living undercover, and the roles children had to adapt to survive. This impeccable period, constructed through a generational framework, gives personal insight into the

experience of life under *clandesitnidad* and redefines the ways in which victimhood has been seen and understood in Argentina. As a result, the reshaping of identities, as seen in these texts and throughout this dissertation has also brought me to also question the same parameters that the Right had taken to reshape the ways in which identity was seen, and understood, and many children were appropriated. This brings me to also acknowledge the familial-kinship relationship that existed during the military regime, and the one that lingered in the years of restitution until the time of Kirchner.

This genealogical paradigm of family relationships has, since the dictatorship, disrupted the conventional expectations of the family unit, or as Cecilia Sosa would delineate as the "wounded family" (Sosa 1). And now, as I have demonstrated in this research, the child's perspective has appeared in recent years to break with the dichotomy of what was once a polarized image of victimhood between the good and the bad—the innocent and the guilty. They have taken stage as witnessing victims in a more intimate image of the state's opposition. Argentine memory has taken distinct trajectories. From mothers who had lost children as targeted sympathizers, subversives, militant actives, among the many listed, to grandmothers who realized their children would never return, but discovered in later years that their children had left a biological trace of grandchildren born in captivity, who were either appropriated by military officials or given up for adoption. This mere image of '*la familia'* torn by the atrocities of state terror continues, to the sons and daughters of the disappeared, the orphans—missing one, or even two parents--and child survivors of the tortured, killed and disappeared.

The perplexity of all this of course rest on the family relationships created by

the extreme Right—whereby the dictatorship instituted itself as the father figure, which ofcourse, continued to inhabit the political discourse with Kirchner into power. The truth about memory is that it is never ending. In all its different measures, the complexity of memory continues to arise. As best described by Elizabeth Jelin

> En cualquier momento y lugar, es importante encontrar *una* memoria, una visión y una interpretación, únicas del pasado, compartidas por toda una Sociedad. Pueden encontrarse momentos o período históricos en los que el consenso es Mayor, en los que un ≪libreto único≫ del pasado es más aceptado o aun hegemónico. Normalmente, ese libreo es lo que cuentan los vencedores de conflictos y batallas históricas. Siempre habrá otras historias, otras memorias e interpretaciones alternativas, en la resistencia, en el mundo privado, en las ≪catacumbas≫. Hay una lucha política activa acerca del sentido de lo ocurrido, pero también acerca del sentido de la memoria misma. El espacio de la memoria es entonces un espacio de lucha política, y no pocas veces esta lucha es concebida en términos de la lucha ≪contra el olvido≫: *recordar para no repetir*. [...] ≪la memoria contra el olvido≪ o ≪contra el silencio≫ esconde lo que en realidad es una oposición entre distintas memorias rivales (cada una de ellas sus propios olvidos). Es en verdad ≪memoria contra memoria≫. (Jelin 6).

To conclude, the familial relationships during Argentina's deadliest coup de 'tat has cast an overall encompassing theme in the post dictatorial cultural production, and has, for the most part, denounced the atrocities caused by the state in its many sectors. However, there are many stories yet to be told. The generation of children on both sides of the spectrum are becoming some of the last witnesses of the military regime as time

continues to move forward. In fact, in recent years, some of the sons and daughters of military officers have begun to denounce their father's crimes and recount their experiences and stories in a group called 'the Disobedient Stories.'[40] As the stories continue to settle in present, it is essential to approximate these images as part of Argentina's past in its many turns. Yet, in this research, I discovered one simple truth, that in the face of terror children's lives were immensely affected regardless of their familial affiliations to the regime. The recent images of childhood survivors prove the dense entity of defining the conceptualized image of the child. It unravels a more complex image of witnessing children who reside on the marginalized banks of the conventional image of victimhood. The future of their experiences, has now become our present and has taken many distinct trajectories in the stories this group of generational survivors tell their story. As the Mothers and Grandmother of the disappeared begin to lay rest from the many years of mourning, childhood survivors are left to continue their legacy, to tell their stories of the past. The future of this research includes the voices of these child survivors and their personal experience of life on both sides of state of terror as stigmatized children also inhabit the past as part of their history.

[40] http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/06/07/argentina-dictatorship-children-sorry-for-fathers-crimes.html [accessed 3/26/2018]

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