

Name: Silver Byrd

Project Title: Memory and Redress: The Case of Argentina's Most Recent Dictatorship

Project Overview

In 1976, the Argentine government was overthrown by the Argentine military. The military dictatorship became known as the Process of National Reorganization and they held power from 1976 to 1983. It is believed that the Process of National Reorganization kidnapped, raped, tortured and murdered between 10,000 and 30,000 people who were considered to have been left-wing activists. The victims widely became known as the “los desaparecidos” (the disappeared). They were called this because the government made no effort to identify and document those who disappeared. Among the disappeared were children who were either kidnapped with their parents, or born to captive women. The pregnant women were kept alive long enough to give birth, and then they were killed. Despite the government not acknowledging those who disappeared, their friends and families took action to find out what happened to them. With the creation of multiple non-profit organizations, Argentines have been able to uncover some of the mysteries. In 1983, the Process of National Reorganization eventually relinquished power and democracy was restored.

The goal of my project is to understand how the victims of the 1976–83 Argentinian dictatorship are remembered today and what initiatives are currently being taken to provide redress to the victims that were maltreated and/or killed during that time. To answer this question, I will head to Buenos Aires and seek answers from memorial sites, museums and murals. I will also be researching and visiting the following relevant non-profit organizations: Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo), Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Madres de Plaza de Mayo), and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF).

Memorials, Museums and Murals

It is widely known in Argentina that those who had been kidnapped were held throughout hundreds of clandestine detention centers. My project will include visiting a few of those centers to learn how it has been transformed from a place of horrors to a place of memory today. The Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos (The Memory Space and Human Rights) is the location where I plan to spend most of my time, as it is composed of multiple programs and institutions relating to human rights and those who disappeared. The Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos was formally known as the Higher School of Mechanics of the Navy (ESMA), which was an educational facility originally used by the Argentine Navy. However in 1977, it became a clandestine detention, torture and extermination center. In 2004, the space was then transformed into a memorial. One institution housed within this place of memory is the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF). EAAF is a non-profit organization that uses forensic archeology to uncover and reconstruct the past. It was originally created in 1976 to help identify victims of the 1976-1983 enforced disappearance. I have reached out to the organization at their Buenos Aires office and am still awaiting a response. I am also currently working to get in touch with someone at their New York office to learn more about how I can solidify a contact person in their Buenos Aires office.

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo is a human rights activist group formed in 1977 by the mothers of those who disappeared during the dictatorship. Early in the creation of the organization, they

made various efforts to have their sons and daughters returned to them. After they were presumed dead, the mothers actively sought the truth about what had transpired. One of their most known forms of mobilization is the March of Resistance that took place around the Plaza de Mayo (the oldest public square in Buenos Aires). The Madres de Plaza de Mayo have marched every Thursday since 1977, however due to Covid-19 it is done online (speeches, interviews etc). This is why the Plaza de Mayo is another memorial site that I plan to visit.

Also located within the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos is the Casa Por Identidad (House of Identity), which is a space that promotes the right to identity. This house was created by The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, which is a non-profit organization that focuses on finding children that were stolen and illegally adopted during the dictatorship. This organization was established in 1977 by members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Some of the members are biological grandmothers of the children who were stolen and illegally adopted out. I am still in the process of getting in contact with a representative of this organization as well.

Other memorials, museums and murals that I plan to visit include: Parque de la Memoria, el Museo Histórico Nacional, Virrey Cevallos, Club Atlético, el Olimpo, el Blanco and Automotores Orletti. The latter five are all former clandestine detention centers located in Buenos Aires that have been transformed into a space for memory and are considered historical sites. Parque de la Memoria is a Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism (Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado). It is a public space that has a monument with the engraved names of those who disappeared and/or were murdered by the state's political repression. The Argentine National Historical Museum is a space to reflect Argentina's history. While the museum primarily focuses on the earlier years of Argentina's history and its independence, I am interested in discovering if there is an exhibit, display or memorial about the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Logistics

Because of the large number of sites I will be visiting, I plan to spend seven weeks in Buenos Aires. I have been in contact with a close friend and her family (the Duhours) who live in Buenos Aires and they have agreed to be my primary contact in Argentina. They have also agreed to host me for two weeks and help me to find accommodations for the remaining five weeks. My anticipated departure date is May 9th, 2022 and my anticipated return date is June 27th, 2022. My primary form of transportation will be the public bus, taxis, and the Subte (underground metro system). For the first part of my stay, I will also be able to receive guidance from the Duhour family on the best travel methods to reach the sites I plan to visit.

Spanish is the primary language spoken in Argentina, which is why the Duhour family will also be an invaluable source in helping me with any translations I may need while there. The majority of the museums and sites offer tours in English, however, I am currently taking Spanish 153 to help me navigate places or situations where English is limited. As I am a double major, I have reached out to faculty in both the Anthropology Department and in the Politics and International affairs Department. By primarily working with Dr. Steven Folmar, chair of the Anthropology Department, and consulting with various professors in the Department of Politics and International Affairs, I will be able to receive guidance and mentorship on taking both an Anthropological and Political approach.

Background

As a child, I was homeschooled for over seven years and during that time, I had the privilege to travel to over 12 different countries and learn about other cultures, languages, foods, religions and money. Also, during my senior year of high school, I was an exchange student in a small town in Thailand. My host family didn't speak English, but it was because of this that I was able to learn Thai at an exceptionally rapid pace. This past winter break, I also backpacked solo around Costa Rica and Panama for five weeks. Each of these international experiences have provided me with the tools and skills needed to help me accomplish my goal. I know how to find my way around new cities, communicate with the locals, avoid risky situations, and be carefully aware of my surroundings. I am highly resourceful and responsible and feel that I will be able to successfully navigate through the challenges of being a student researcher in a foreign environment for almost two months.

Project Importance

After I graduate from Wake Forest University, I plan to join the Peace Corps. Then I hope to further my education by obtaining a master's degree in Human Rights Studies. This project would provide me with a unique, immersive experience and skills that would help prepare me for graduate school and the future research I will need to do for that program. This project will also enable me to deepen my understanding of Argentina's history and how it continues to impact Argentines today.

Not only will this project further my education, but it may help advance others' as well. The second goal for my project is to bring back what I learn and share it with the Wake Forest community. I aspire to bring back travel and research stories that show others the worldliness and enjoyment international research and traveling can bring. By sharing my project with others, I hope to not only spread awareness about what happened in Argentina, but inspire others to understand the importance of learning about other nations, cultures, languages, and religions.

Backup Plan

To currently enter Argentina, I would need to fill out an electronic sworn statement within 48 hours before departure, provide proof of vaccination status and proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of departure. Quarantine is currently not required and all the sites that I plan to visit are open. In the event that quarantine is required, I will be able to stay with either the Duhour family or at a hotel depending on what the requirement is. If quarantine must be completed at a hotel, I will be able to receive guidance from the Duhour family on where to stay. After quarantine is completed, I would continue to stay with the Duhour family for the first two weeks of my project, then move to another accommodation, at their guidance, for the remaining few weeks. Because of this, an alternative budget will not need to be made. While visiting the planned sites is an enriching and beneficial component of my research, I will still be able to continue my research in the event that some of the sites close or I am not able to visit all of them due to quarantine. Throughout the entirety of my project, I plan to keep up to date on Argentina's COVID-19 policies and attentively follow the required procedures.

Contacts thus far:

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