Politics of Memory and the Escrache in Post Dictatorship Argentina

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Politics of Memory and the Escrache in Post-Dictatorship Argentina

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Honors Requirements for the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies Department
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Abstract

This investigation uses the 1976 coup d’état as its basis to examine how Argentine society transformed its memory of the events that occurred during this time period into social activism. I base my research in the study of memory and politics in Argentina to ultimately understand how a society used the memory of the disappeared to develop the escrache. The escrache is a political demonstration where organized groups develop engaged methods to publicly “out” figures who were actively involved in the disappearance of civilians during the dictatorship. In deconstructing the components of the escrache, I delve into the development and role of memory in post-dictatorship Argentina and its importance to the escrache. Understanding the escrache as a social movement, I identify the aspects where the escrache deviates from traditional forms of protest and social movements. Lastly, using local newspapers spanning three decades, I focus on the characterization of and scholarship about escraches in Argentina, noting how they have been interpreted and how those interpretations have shifted over time. This investigation’s importance lies in how the escrache allows its participants the ability to transgress private and public spaces, implementing a model that emphasizes the reclamation of space through the performance of the escrache.
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Sincerely,
Jacqueline Amezcua
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I. Introduction

The 1976 Argentine coup d’état is one of the most referred to events in the country’s history as it resulted in the disappearance and killing of thousands of people at the hands of the self-proclaimed Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, or the National Reorganization Process.\(^1\) The coup emerged amid a decade of political violence in the nation. This decade was characterized by its series of weak governments, including a seven-year military government. The Peronist movement experienced extreme divisions amid the political unrest, resulting in various outbreaks of political violence.\(^2\) With the overthrow of President Isabel Martínez Perón on March 24, 1976, Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla became the head of a three-men junta that took over political power.\(^3\)

The military junta started a deliberate campaign to identify and eliminate any and all forms of opposition, especially those deemed by them as “subversives.” Among these targets were students, militants, trade unionists, writers, journalists, artists and anyone suspected to be a left-wing activist. These events largely affected the nation and its people as they sought to navigate spaces, both public and private, but were taken over by the fear of military detainment. Despite this fear, many found ways to navigate those spaces in creative ways, demanding justice, and preserving the memory of their experiences. The role of memory became crucial throughout the dictatorship, but especially so after the military rule ended, as the nation sought for ways to cope with the heavy burden of its past while also rebuilding democratic practices in the present. The construction of memory worked in collaboration with political protests to create the escrache, a new form of political demonstration that involves “outing” public figures, usually by

\(^1\) Often referred to as simply the Proceso in this paper.
\(^3\) Ibid., 4.
congregating around their homes, chanting and publicly exposing them. In the case of Argentina, the escrache connects directly to the individuals involved in the dictatorship who, throughout the country's transition to democracy, battled with the question of whether they would be accountable for the human rights violations committed throughout the military junta’s regime.

Argentina’s relationship to the dictatorship and its remnants makes it a significant point of analysis because its general society has continuously fought for the memory of those who were disappeared and tortured by the military government. Thus, the community itself presents a unique approach to memory making. The organization, H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio/Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice and Against the Forgotten and Silence) becomes a key participant as it represents how one civil society group was persistent in the creation of this new form of justice and resistance to make a prison of the country in which war criminals were living freely. The emergence of the escrache caught society’s attention because it combines various elements to create a collective experience that involves the entire community – even those who do not actively participate.

This thesis explores how the historical remnants of the dictatorship’s past combines with the country’s construction of memory and connection to activism to create the escrache. The main questions that inform this analysis are: 1. What is the role of memory and why is it key to the organizing of the escrache? 2. How do escraches combine the various elements of memory, protest and performance to diverge from other social movements and demonstrations? And 3. How does the performative aspect of the escrache further its message and audience?

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5 Ibid.
The escrache emerged amid the long tradition of human rights manifestations after the dictatorship. Despite this, the main argument of this thesis is that the escrache diverges from general protests as a form of demanding justice within Argentina because of its reconfiguration of space, specifically its politicization of both private and public sectors. Secondly, I argue that escrache and its performance tactics are used as a form of collective memory-making, whereby not only individuals who were affected by the abuses of the military regime, but also the community at large, can come together to confront their traumas, demand justice by denouncing the lack of accountability and preserve the stories of the disappeared. Escraches are characterized by physical manifestations and performances of memory that are multisensorial and that make novel use of space; their wide use of creative forms of protest are also representations of how communities regain their social and public spaces. Additionally, I demonstrate that the escrache functions as a method for educating communities. In this form of protest, people do not have to move from their homes and habitual spaces to join; the escrache goes to the community and joins people in their daily spaces (neighborhoods, workplaces). Through their tactics of engaging with the streets and public spaces, individuals in the wider community (and society at large) become political actors and actively transform spaces by reclaiming them for memory-making. This education serves as a way of providing “ordinary” people the ability to disrupt political and apolitical spheres while simultaneously preserving the memory of the disappeared and the abuses of the dictatorship.\(^6\) Lastly, I examine the use of rhetoric, both internally and externally of H.I.J.O.S., to emphasize the importance of language in shaping a message of urgency of the escrache. Through the examination of images, pamphlets, and artwork, I examine the key

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elements of the escrache as a mass organizational and complex event that involves entire communities and educates them through their collective calls for justice and memory making.

II. Evolution of Memory-Making and Human Rights Policies in Post-dictatorship Argentina

Argentina’s transition to justice and democracy after the dictatorship was by no means a smooth journey. The road to re-establishing democracy while simultaneously coping with the social ramifications of the thousands of disappeared brought many conflicts. To date, there are a total of 300 individuals who have been convicted for their participation in the repression that resulted in abuses, torture, and forced disappearances during the years of military rule. Nonetheless, the tumultuous path to justice is notable as it demonstrates the evolution of memory and its ability to influence political accountability.

Throughout the dictatorship, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (the group originally formed by the mothers of individuals whose whereabouts were unknown as a result of irregular detentions by military authorities) served as a reminder of the injustices that were occurring in that moment. Their search for the truth is key as they symbolized the importance and bravery in preserving the lived experiences of their loved ones. The election of Raúl Alfonsín and his attempts to recover memory hold the military juntas accountable signified a turning point for those affected. In 1985, the Trial of the Juntas (Juicio a las Juntas), under the Alfonsín administrations, made public the leaders that ruled Argentina during the dictatorship responsible for the mass disappearance of many Argentinians. It is important to note that in preparation for these trials, Alfonsín created the organization National Commission on the Disappearance of...

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Persons (CONADEP). The organization focused on gathering evidence on the forced disappearances and other human rights violations committed during the dictatorship by collecting personal testimonies. This investigation was later documented in the *Nunca Más Report* that was used in the Trial of Juntas. The efforts of Alfonsín and his organization were a form of validating the stories of those affected by the violence, and his trials served as a form of re-establishing the credibility of the state. Alfonsín’s reorganization process can be interpreted as conducive to transitional justice, as he and his advisors seemed that accountability was essential to their belief in human rights, but also to affirm their doctrines of a liberal democracy. The Trial of the Juntas would not only reaffirm Alfonsín’s values of justice and equality, but they would also help, in the words of Jo-Marie Burt, “reestablish the credibility of [the] Argentine state and consolidate democratic institutions.”

This path to justice, however, was not linear. Alfonsín’s approach was that it was impossible to try all those who participated in the military junta, therefore he declared that only the leaders would be held responsible for leading these operations. As a result of these efforts, nine leaders of the military junta were tried and five were convicted for their crimes. These acts of justice received push back from members of the military. After these trials, the country experienced a series of military uprisings and protests from mid- and low-ranking members of the Armed Forces. As a result, the Alfonsín government negotiated the passing of two laws: the Due Obedience Law (Ley de Obediencia Debida) and the Full Stop Law (Ley de Punto Final) that granted “effective immunity from prosecution to mid- and low-ranking officers.”

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9 Ibid., 290.
10 Ibid., 290.
11 Ibid., 291.
Obedience Law was passed on December 24, 1986 and contended that when soldiers committed a crime under the order of an officer, “the only person responsible for the crime was the officer who gave the order.” 12 The Full Stop Law was proposed by President Alfonsín in December of 1986 and was passed on June 4, 1987. The law proposed a term of “sixty days to indict the military men” involved in the crimes committed during the dictatorship. 13 In doing this, Alfonsín also hoped to encourage those involved in the military to express the truth about the events of the dictatorship without the fear of being prosecuted.

The election of Carlos Menem as President of Argentina in 1989 resulted in political changes that undid the progress for accountability, justice, and memory that Alfonsín had pushed for. That same year, Menem enacted sweeping amnesty laws to protect all those involved in the repression campaign staged by the dictatorship. In addition, he granted presidential pardons to the five men who had been previously convicted for their involvement.

The trials of the mid-1980s provided the hope for political change, but the constant shift in responsibility resulted in the need for alternative approaches to human rights, presented by human rights organizations. Soon after the legal measures limiting and then ending the possibility of judicial accountability for crimes committed by the State during the military government were passed, human rights organizations started to organize legal actions to have them annul. These efforts eventually paid off in August 2003, when the Argentine Congress declared those laws null. 14 In addition to legal actions, civil society organizations took on projects rooted in memory, as their actions supported their belief that without memory, there is no justice. These alternatives included the establishment of memory sites that were meant to

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13 Ibid., 2628
honor the disappeared and tortured.\textsuperscript{15} Often this included the marking of places that were once used as centers of torture and detention. Amid this memory-making, a new form demonstration and political protest rooted in memory was created: the escrache.

\textbf{III. The Role of Memory in Post-dictatorial Argentina}

Throughout the dictatorship in Argentina, the preservation of the disappeared is a constant. On April 30, 1977, approximately a year after the beginning of military rule, a dozen mothers march onto the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, the capital’s main square and a symbolic site of popular power going back to the beginnings of Argentina as an independent nation, demanding information about their children who had “disappeared” and about whom there were no official detention records. They marched steps away from the presidential office building, The Casa Rosada (the Pink House), which was across the street. Throughout the dictatorship, the mothers marched along this plaza every Thursday, demanding truth on the whereabouts of their loved ones. Soon after, this became a political organization known as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, where mothers defied the propaganda produced by the military regime and brought attention to the memory and stories of the disappeared.\textsuperscript{16}

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo are a perfect example of how the creation of memory about the dictatorship began as early as during the dictatorship itself. They exemplify how memory can be created in the present. The legacy of the mothers is evident in the scholarship about memory and memory-construction in the post-dictatorial era in Argentina into the presentday. Therefore, it is important to examine the narratives of memory. Specifically, to look


at the forms in which scholarship about memory has developed and changed over time, and how scholars have built from each other’s work to further the conversations about memory.

Since the end of the dictatorship there has been a variety of scholars that have dedicated their work to the exploration of memory-development in Argentina. This is significant because it identifies the ways that societies cope with their difficult pasts. This is not only important for the case of Argentina, but also for Latin America as a whole, as several countries in the region experienced similar histories of military regimes and human right abuses but dealt with their consequences in different ways. A review of the scholarship on memory of human right abuses during the years of the military junta in Argentina includes writings from a vast body of scholarship that has appeared since the end of the dictatorship, and into the early 2000s. In addition, it also includes more recent developments about how the country continues to expand the forms by which society remembers, connecting within the wider developments in collective action.

An examination of the progression of memory in Argentina provides the framework needed to understand how forms of remembering contribute to creating collective action. It is also central to analyzing the emergence, nature, and meaning of the practice of escrache. Memory is closely associated with escraches; thus, an in-depth interpretation of it is needed to understand the scope and foundation of escraches as political manifestations rooted in collective memory within the public spheres of society.

The discussion of scholarship that follows is divided into three different thematic approaches: (1) From Trauma to Memory, (2) Forms of Remembering and (3) Memory and Action. All three however, deal with the importance and construction of memory after the dictatorship. The works analyzed focus on how memory was created during the dictatorship
(with a focus on Madres) and how it contributed to instilling culture of remembrance and influencing the ways organizations have adapted and changed since then.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{From Trauma to Memory}

After the dictatorship, Argentine society was left to cope with the aftermath of the violent crimes committed to their people. Through the disappeared and the impunity, there was an attempt to hide and mask the events that occurred. However, early on, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo fought against this attempt to erase the memory of those who were made to disappear and call for justice. It is interesting to note the way organizations like Madres set the foundation for a culture of remembrance, ultimately helping to establish memory as a characteristic of Argentine identity. Susana Kaiser explains how memory-construction is embedded into society and passed-down in what she refers to as her theory of “postmemory.” Kaiser defines it as the second-generation memory of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma. This trauma, as not experienced first-hand, is remembered through the experiences of parents, and by images seen and stories told through collective society.\textsuperscript{18} Kaiser’s work highlights the persistence and creation of memory in Argentina within the context of an entire generation that never experienced the dictatorship themselves. The act of remembering, then, has become a cultural one, where remembering is the result of the cultural trauma that also persists within society.

Antonius Robben’s utilizes a similar approach as Kaiser. His work focuses on the presence of trauma within society and how it functions differently for every individual, but also how those individuals or groups transform their trauma into memory. In “How Traumatized Societies Remembered,” Robben notes that on one end of the memory spectrum, psychoanalysis

\textsuperscript{17} Throughout the paper, I use “Madres” to refer to the Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

notes that people will resort to repression of or disassociation from those traumatic events to protect themselves from memories that are too painful and “destabilizing to admit to consciousness.” On the other hand, the remembering of these traumas also presents a conflict as it forces individuals to cope with those unresolved traumas. Robben’s work highlights the contradictory nature of the way memory, violence and trauma coexist. Robben’s article dialogues with Kaiser’s because they both present two different ways that societies use their recollection of traumatic events. Kaiser has demonstrated the importance of preserving those memories within the society, building a culture and personal characterization as an individual who remembers. Robben, however, also presents the challenges faced within the act of remembering, as it requires individuals to relive traumatic pasts. His work, however, highlights the multiple purposes served through the act of remembering. He notes that “every group participating in the conflictive interpretation of the past had its own internal and external agenda for the future.”

He highlights that, in contrast or in complement to Kaiser, remembering also contains a political dimension. The military, human rights organizations, and the judiciary all have different agendas they wish to push through their act of remembering. The politicization of traumas forms a different lens of looking at the way memory is adopted into the cultural but also political aspects of Argentine life.

For the specific case of post-dictatorship Argentina, Robben proposes that it presents a case of a society that never experienced mourning because it participated in active and constant memory practices. This “recurrent recollection” is what he describes as the way that the groups

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20 Kaiser, Postmemories of Terror, 10-11.
affected come to grapple with the unknown and the unknowable. His approach is important because it explains the performance of the Madres, as they began protesting at the height of the dictatorship, and then continues and evolves with the actions organized by H.I.J.O.S., in particular the practice of escraches. Their demand for truth exemplifies how personal and social traumas are rooted in the “search for meaning of past suffering.”

These works address the functionality of memory in present-day Argentina as they argue that memory provides younger generations with the ability to continue adopting past-memories as their own and use them to drive political agendas. Robben’s later work, "Testimonies, Truths, and Transitions of Justice in Argentina and Chile," provides further analysis into the importance of remembering, answering why memory allows for the approximation to retributive justice in Argentina (and contrasts it with the case of Chile). Robben argues that the terror inflicted on the Argentine people led to a call for accountability. He analyzes the importance of memory as Argentina dealt with the response to both the actions and the demands for accountability, debating between the restorative and retributive justice pursued. Robben’s work is important because it demonstrates how memory can bring forward different forms of justice, but it also highlights the continued importance of memory as it can be used to drive political change.

Francesca Lessa and Vincent Druliolle’s approach builds on Kaiser’s theory of “postmemory,” as well as similar theories of “long presents” and “ever-present pasts.” Lessa and Druliolle developed the theory of “memory entrepreneurs” to address the form in which Argentina approaches the long-term transitions from dictatorship to the post-dictatorship and

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22 Ibid., 132.
23 Ibid., 132.
presently.26 These memory entrepreneurs are pro-accountability actors from human rights organizations that demand justice for those who have suffered from human rights violations. These actors include lawyers, relatives of the victims, and activists. These are important because they function to hold the legitimacy of collective memory in Argentina. Similarly, Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne use their work to further define different forms of memory and adding to Kaiser’s initial definition about post-memory. They coin the concept of “memory market” to refer to the collection of memories as the combined nature of remembering these past events provide comfort that certain individuals and groups derive from a shared experience and identity in the past.27 Their work is important because it furthers the notion that there is no uniform way of remembering traumatic pasts and emphasizes that the act of remembering can also be multi-functional.

**Forms of Remembering**

Manifestations of memory throughout Argentina have taken different forms and included various visual and spatial aspects, but they are all rooted in the preservation and construction of the memory of the disappeared. Analyzing these different forms is important because social projects are meant to help build, establish, and reconstruct a collective memory of these past events. Telling the story of those who disappeared or were otherwise affected by the repression during the dictatorship become the first step in the process of remembrance. This was both an individual and a collective experience as thousands of individual stories resulted in a collective voice—from testimonies to the report of the Memory Commission. Other forms of remembrance were associated with objects and spaces. In this case, also individual experiences became

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collective experiences of memory and remembrance. As Carmen Guarini argues, memory is a social construction where individuals need to frame themselves within a social context in order to remember.\textsuperscript{28} She suggests that memory is inherently social and socially created because it imprints itself in specific objects and places, such as a street, a familiar house, a historical monument or a work of art.

Sociologist Elizabeth Jelin examines one of the most known form of remembering: testimonies. The act of collecting the testimonies of torture victims is one of the ways that groups begin to seek their personal justice. Testimonies are important because they give the victims an opportunity to reconstruct and reveal the truth that was once distorted. This incorporation is important because, as Robben suggests, the reclaiming and reconstruction of a history can also be a political act, whereby victims and witnesses affect the overall political culture of their country: pushing their agenda of truth, guilt, accountability, and punishment.\textsuperscript{29} Interestingly, Jelin took a gendered approach to the examination of testimonies. She notes that women’s recollections and accounts about the dictatorship usually restrain them to an identity of “testigo-observadora,” that is, both a witness and an observer, of the lived experiences of others, denying and silencing their own lived experiences.\textsuperscript{30} Men’s testimonies, in comparison, are found in public documents, judicial testimonies and periodicals. This distinction is important because, given that Elizabeth’s work was published before Robben, he did not include an analysis of the gendered approach to testimonies. Instead, he focused on the overall goal and purpose of testimonies as constructors of memory despite their being a gendered gap in the expectations and validity of women’s experiences.

\textsuperscript{29} Antonius Robben, “From Dirty War to Genocide: Argentina’s Resistance to National Reconciliation,” Memory Studies 5, 3 (2012): 305-308.
The memory-work of the CONADEP, the Truth Commission whose testimonies served
as the basis for the trials to the military juntas in 1983 and 1984, deserves a special mention
because it is a collection of individual stories that had a central role in creating awareness and
making the stories of human rights abuses known for the population at large and also served as
the keystone for the prosecution of the military leaders condemned in trials. The publication that
resulted from the Commission’s work, with the titled of Nunca Más (Never Again), became a
collective societal cry to move ahead by knowing the horrors of the recent past and seeking
justice and accountability for their perpetrators. With several reprints and more that half a
million copies sold by 2009, the Nunca Más report became a best-seller in Argentina and well-
known the world over, with translations in English, German, Italian, Hebrew, and Portuguese.31

Guarini argues that books and written documents, although cultural works, require a level
of privilege as they make implications about the accessibility of their audiences.32 As a result,
photographs, films and audiovisuals broaden the accessibility to the public and further the
preservation of memory within the communities affected by the dictatorship, as well as society at
large. Shohini Chaudhuri adds to the conversation by explaining the specific importance of films
in the process of memory construction. Film triggers sensory memories and allows the audiences
and those who did not directly experience the same violence to place themselves in relation to
those experiences.33 Chaudari furthers the discussion because it emphasizes that the creation of
memory is not exclusive to those who are connected to the disappeared or victims of the
dictatorship, but it furthers that it must be inclusive of all people within society. The focus on

cinema is particularly important in Argentina, as the topic of the disappeared and the effects of violence during the military dictatorship received significant attention of Argentine film productions since the mid-1980s. The national and international box-office success of Luis Puenzo’s *La historia oficial* (The Official Story), in 1985, marked the beginning of this trend.\(^{34}\)

Emilio Crenzel addresses another form of visuals constructed for the sake of memory. These are constructed memory sites that are placed in universities, schools, and neighborhoods that include the names and biographies of the disappeared. This includes the construction of memory in places such as museums, parks and urban topographies.\(^{35}\) Crenzel’s emphasis on memory sites adds to a broader interest on memorialization and reconfiguration of places associated to the military dictatorship repressive campaign (detention, torture, disappearance).\(^{36}\) This work adds to that of the previously mentioned scholars because, though they focus on the visuals that were created for the public to create memory of their own to place themselves within that past, the physical constructions of memory mentioned in Crenzel’s work allow for the public to interact with the past in their everyday lives.

**Memory and Action**

The thematic approaches addressed previously, and the forms used in the construction of memory, can be used to examine the ways that memory influences action. Susana Kaiser addresses this concept in her work, as she argues that memory is about what is believed to have happened, it is in this way that those perceptions of memory and past actions influence the

\(^{34}\) For more information about this and other films in this period, see Jens Andermann, *New Argentine Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).


\(^{36}\) See, for example: Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Lagland, eds., *Monumentos materiales y marcas territoriales* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2003).
present and create public action. Similarly, Diana Taylor writes about the protest movements staged by H.I.J.O.S. and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to argue that they “use trauma to animate their political activism.” They use their human rights efforts to transmitting traumatic memory. This transmission is often referred to as a performance.

The scholars analyzed address memory through the lens of performance to unveil different forms of transmission of traumatic memory to diverse audiences. This traumatic memory, like the marching on the plaza, is meant to captivate the spectators and place them within the framework of violent politics. Therefore, this transmission of memory is also meant to create and influence political change. Taylor’s later works reassess trauma and recognize that the medicalization of trauma is a privileged one and that most people do not have access to the medical programs that are meant to aid their traumatic experiences. Therefore, she argues that trauma-driven performances offer victims, survivors, and human rights activists ways to address the repercussions of violent politics, but also to indirectly heal and relieve personal pain. Taylor’s work is useful because it addresses the ways performance and action allows for those affected to simultaneously cope with their traumas and make claims for social justice. Diego Benegas adds that it is through the clinical studies of traumatized patients and studies of testimony in cultural production that memory and trauma become activism. Thus, the actions and efforts of H.I.J.O.S. allows for the larger public to re-politicize trauma.

Joel Remland notes that the act of using memory to create performative protests can first be seen by the actions and the organization of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. For them, this form

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38 Taylor, “‘You are here’,” 152.
of protesting was meant to create a form of public outlet for grieving and to honor the memory of the disappeared.\textsuperscript{41} It was through these performances that they were able to deal with the trauma but also relive the histories that, through laws of impunity, they were denied. In their performative aspects they have instilled a culture of performance and performative protest. This is where the organization of H.I.J.O.S. has taken influence and been able to create a new form of protest known as the escrache. It is rooted in the culture of performance protest that was introduced by the Madres.\textsuperscript{42} The legacy Madres provided has allowed individuals to cultivate a new form of collective memory where they create a politicized enactment of their traumas.

Nora Strejilevich adds to the scholarship mentioned in Remland’s work because this phenomenon that as been instilled in the culture – that of performative protests – is also a form of symbolic resistance. It is in this way that the country uses “echoes of the past” to create a powerful present.\textsuperscript{43} This approach takes a different route than Remland because it acknowledges that the dictatorship took over public space and now those spaces need to be reclaimed. This essay emphasizes the role of individuals in Buenos Aires and their ability to rewrite the history of the public landscape and inscribe themselves in the streets, sidewalks, and squares; and now this topography is shaped by a new culture that rejects the authoritarianism of the dictatorship.\textsuperscript{44} Like Remland, however, it acknowledges the role of organizations such as H.I.J.O.S. and Barrios x la Memoria y la Justicia (Neighborhoods for Memory and Justice) that use the foundational work of the Madres to continue uncovering historical accounts.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41} Joel Remland, “The Transmission of Traumatic Memory through Performative Protest: HIJOS Escrache in Argentina,” manuscript available in Academia.edu, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{42} Marcy Rein and Clif Ross, \textit{Until the Rulers Obey: Voices from Latin American Social Movements} (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014), 389.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 533.
\textsuperscript{45} Barrios x la Memoria y Justicia is an organization that began in 2006. Its focus is to incorporate “new social actors devoted to uncovering true accounts” of the dictatorship. The organization consists of groups of “Neighbors” that is
The scholars discussed in this section have all produced key works on memory construction in Argentina and its contemporary manifestations. They use their theories to further the interpretations of memory and how it continues to affect greater society. The works are similar in their central focus on memory as developed from trauma and as something that is embedded into the DNA of individuals as well as society. This research is important because it emphasizes that societies are greatly affected by their traumatic pasts and those pasts influence their presents and manifest themselves into society. Moreover, that history becomes a catalyst for creating social change within the present, using history while simultaneously honoring it. In order to analyze the present manifestations that have surged over time and into present day, it is important to understand the role of memory. Argentina’s society has relied on memory since the history of the first disappearance and throughout the dictatorship, and it is through this continues process of continuity but also of renewal, change, and adaptation that newer generations continue to fight for a political presence and social reclamation of their society and public spaces that were once filled with terror.

IV. H.I.J.O.S. and Escraches

The changing political context within Argentina affected the way society responded. People did not know what to do as their ability to remember the dictatorship was affected and shaped by politics. One moment they were experiencing justice somehow through trials and in another the criminals were free to roam as they pleased. The changing political context led to the formation of what is now H.I.J.O.S. In the mid-1990s, the children of the disappeared had just “come of age” and, amid this political climate, began to engage with the history of the residents from different neighborhoods of Buenos Aires who believe that the legacy of this time should be worked out by society at large. Their work focused on marking places where people who were made to disappear lived, worked, or studied. See, “Las baldosas de la memoria,” Página 12, April 2, 2016, available at https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-65083-2006-04-02.html
dictatorship. They became involved in the search for memory, truth, and justice. In 1995, these individuals created a new organization by the name of H.I.J.O.S.\textsuperscript{46} The organization became an active and crucial participant in the struggle for human rights in the post-dictatorship era in Argentina. A history of this organization reveals its contribution in the struggle for justice to the disappeared and the role of their children in the process of memory making and activism for justice.

In 1994, the University’s School of Architecture and Urban Planning in La Plata organized a commemoration in memory of the parents of disappeared children.\textsuperscript{47} This event was the first time that these children got together and shared their experiences with respect to their missing parents and their search for identity. Their ability to share their experiences led to a desire to act upon their experiences. Thus, in 1995, the organization H.I.J.O.S. was created in Córdoba. Later, several groups would appear throughout the country, creating a national network amongst the children of the disappeared and their collective fight to use their experiences in their struggle for justice.

Members of the organization declared themselves a political entity in their “Open Letter to Argentine Society.”\textsuperscript{48} In this letter, they stated that they no longer come together to ask questions about their parents and their identity, rather they now join forces to speak of their experiences and demand systemic and political justice. Given this moment in history when H.I.J.O.S. was being constructed, society was defined as the “offspring of silence and terror” because of the lingering history of the dictatorship. Because of the varying attempts to hide these

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stories, H.I.J.O.S. notes the importance of reconstructing their personal histories. The letter emphasizes that “[r]ecovering memory and knowing the truth is essential for society. The country must take responsibility for its own history.”

As the organization has expanded throughout the years, today it is not only composed of children of the disappeared. H.I.J.O.S. welcomes any person who believes in the mission and project of the organization. They believe that making H.I.J.O.S. accessible to everyone furthers their belief that the dictatorship affected everyone in society and that they “are all children of the same history.”

In addition to their open letter and the many documents they have made public through social media, H.I.J.O.S. published discussions of activism and their role within that context in the forms of booklets to contribute to a wider discussion. In 2002, they compiled some of these discussions in the book *Un genocida en el barrio (Genocide in the Neighborhood)*. This book presents the voices of Colectivo Situaciones, H.I.J.O.S. and the Mesa de Escrache Popular to explain the history, purpose and methods of escraches in Argentina. In its English version, Brian Whitener explains escraches as a contribution to a new practice centered on the experiences of individuals post-dictatorship in Argentina. These new practices involve artistic collectives in new radical ways. Starting with the work of H.I.J.O.S, escraches seek to “re-vindicate” the lives of those who were disappeared while fighting against the experience of “cultural forgetting.”

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49 Ibid., 264.
50 Ibid., 264.
51 Colectivo Situaciones is a group of “militant research,” whose ideology is that the escrache transcends, traditional forms of politics. The Mesa de Escrache Popular is organization used to coordinate the activities of escraches. The book is available in English translation. This analysis is based on this translation. See, Brian Whitener, *Genocide in the Neighborhood* (Oakland and Philadelphia: Chainlinks, 2009).
In an interview between the organizations Colectivo Situaciones and H.I.J.O.S., both organizations seek to find a better understanding about the development and organization of the escraches. The idea of “consensus” is important because both groups seem to have a disagreement over the present of this in their protest-performances. H.I.J.O.S notes that escraches are deal closely with “consensus and relations of power” but Colectivo Situaciones disagrees, believing that, “consensus would mean that other people agree with what you’re doing.” These small details and disagreements are what truly define the escrache as a collaborative effort, as they all mean something different to everyone, but they are ultimately about “coming to a place and creating an understanding about a type of action.”

The escrache is meant to be rooted in selfishness, a protest that is inclusive of everyone, and seeks to demand and highlight the needs of the people. Given that it deals closely with power relations, it clarifies that although their acts may be misinterpreted as violence, the organizers and the protestors of the escrache are unarmed and uninterested in power. They simply seek to bring to light the memory of the past and regain power over their spaces. Originally, the escraches developed in the 1990s were characterized by their reaction to the impunity laws. The manifestations were meant to reject impunity and contest the lack of justice after the dictatorship. The organization’s influence in the political sphere has shifted over time. Their activism spurred from a time of amnesty laws and pardons. However, in 2003, the election of Néstor Kirchner proved to be a pivotal point for the organization. Kirchner’s human rights approach to the history of the disappeared created a form of political alignment between his political government and H.I.J.O.S. At the height of Kirchner’s presidency, the Argentine

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52 Whitener, *Genocide in the Neighborhood*, 54-56.
53 Ibid., 57.
54 Lessa, “From Blanket Impunity,” 211.
Congress repealed the amnesty laws and the state “committed itself to supporting the struggle of the relatives of the disappeared.”\textsuperscript{55} This repeal was later upheld by the Supreme Court, in 2005. After the amnesty laws, the escraches continued, although the mission had shifted. Justice no longer simply meant the repeal of amnesty laws, rather it extended that justice came from the preservation of memory and truth, and it extended to reconcile and empower the societies.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the impact was that for these years, the organization had to decide whether it would collaborate with the state. This relationship is important as it notes how the positionality of H.I.J.O.S. within the state continues to shift, depending on the changes at the national political level.

V. “Si no hay justicia, hay escrache”: A Brief History of the Escrache

Despite the various actions taken to affect political change, the mission of H.I.J.O.S. is rooted in preserving the memory of the disappeared. Most notable are their organized escraches that have brought them most recognition. Their slogan “Si no hay justicia, hay escrache” (if there is no justice, there is escrache) is indicative of their fight for memory, truth and justice as they expose their hidden truths of the country, in often controversial manners. In the time of the Argentine dictatorship, human rights organizations sought ways to demand human rights and social justice. H.I.J.O.S. made themselves most known for their escraches as their preferred form of action and protest. Its mission – to make visible the presence and consequences of impunity – is carried out through these public demonstrations of discontent that simultaneously demonstrate their struggle for memory, truth, and justice. The escrache is a form of political demonstration that involves publicly “outing” individuals who collaborated with the

\textsuperscript{55} Druliole, “H.I.J.O.S. and the Spectacular,” 265.
\textsuperscript{56} Lessa, “From Blanket Impunity,” 211.
dictatorship and who, in their view, were responsible for the abuses involved in the systematic practice of torture and disappearance. This outing usually takes the form of congregating around their homes, chanting and publicly exposing them. A common term in Argentine slang, it was redefined by H.I.J.O.S. to condemn the genocides committed by members of the Proceso and militants who were pardoned and granted amnesty by Carlos Menem.

The escrache demonstrates how all three aspects of their struggle are intertwined. Its purpose is to demonstrate to the rest of the population about the various human rights that were violated and what happened to the disappeared, but also bright to light the names and faces of the murderers and accomplices. One of the main goals of the escrache, then, is to denounce the impunity, making the legal and social spaces where they hide, spaces to reject repression. To further the importance of this, H.I.J.O.S. also focuses on the neighbors and on educating the larger population about impunity, accountability, and the need for justice. Their role is the most important because as the escrache ends, it is now up to the neighbors to remember that one of their neighbors is a criminal (that, as their initial slogan clearly put, there was a “genocide in the neighborhood”).

Before every escrache, the organization carries out their investigation to gather evidence about those who were involved and are to be escrachados.\textsuperscript{57} This is important as it allows for the confirmation of the accused and strengthens the purpose of the escrache. The first individuals who were to be escrachados in the mid-90s were well-known participants of the dictatorship, such as Doctor Jorge Magnacco in 1997, who served as the chief gynecologist in the infamous detention center that operated in the ESMA, the Navy Mechanics School (and who was in charge of delivering babies of detained women who were later given in illegal adoption), and ex-

\textsuperscript{57} Remland, “The Transmission of Traumatic Memory,” 4. Escrachado/s is the adjective used to describe the person who is the object of an escrache.
commissary to the Federal police, Samuel Miara, in 1999.\textsuperscript{58} In this way, the first escraches gained major media attention. Along with the media attention came police repression. This functioned to the benefit of the media and its interest in news-grabbing incidents, as some outlets were primarily interested in the possibility of violence during an escrache. The violence, however, was the not purpose of the escrache. The emphasis of the escrache is the preparation and the community engagement. From the time of the first escraches in 1995, H.I.J.O.S. claims to have executed over 50 escrache in Buenos Aires alone, as in the first few years approximately one escrache was performed every month.\textsuperscript{59} As the political context shifted in Argentina after 2005, the escraches do not stop altogether, rather they shifted and adapted their mission. Instead of challenging the legal impunities themselves, these progressed versions of the escrache have focused on imbedding in the neighborhoods a deeper understanding of justice and slowly reclaiming their streets.

\textbf{VI. Methodology}

Given the novelty of the escrache and its recent emergence and expansion in the decades after the dictatorship, there is not an abundant amount of research on the topic. The nature of the escrache includes memory and activism, both of which Argentina has experienced greatly. Thus, there is much to be found about the making of memory in the post-dictatorial era. Through a close reading of visual and printed primary sources, this research seeks to find the intersection between memory, political activism, and performance. Not only will my research help in

\textsuperscript{58} Lessa, “From Blanket Impunity,” 210. As a former clandestine center for detention, torture and extermination, today ESMA serves as a historical site and material testimony to the human rights violations committed by the civil-military dictatorship in Argentina. For more information, see https://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/membership/museo-sitio-de-memoria-esma/. See also Nancy Gates-Madsen, “Marketing and Sacred Space: The Parque de la Memoria in Buenos Aires,” in Bilbija and Payne, Accounting for Violence, 150-178.

\textsuperscript{59} Druliolle, “H.I.J.O.S. and the Spectacular Denunciation of Impunity,” 267.
defining the various aspects of the escrache, but it seeks to highlight the ways in which escraches diverge from traditional tactics and repertoires defined by social movement theory.

The analysis of the escrache begins with an emphasis on its construction as a demonstration that focuses on the public and the community. Specifically, I analyze the use of public space to highlight the politicization and reclamation of the streets that is established through the public events provided through the escrache. That is, I focus on the varying components of the escrache to assert that its construction allows for the empowerment of the neighbors, making them political actors, and the streets political spheres.

The second part of my analysis uses video documentation of the escrache to analyze the performative aspect of the escrache. This documentation is collected exclusively from YouTube and includes escraches in various communities and different time periods. The videos are drawn from uploads who are directly involved with H.I.J.O.S or from participants or witnesses. The videos not only provide for visual analysis, but also establish the ability to analyze the escrache through various frames of reference. The total of 45 videos collected are used to focus on the effectiveness of the performative aspect of the escrache, highlighting the purpose of these methods in the overall mission of the demonstration.

The benefit of this topic is that there is a lot of primary documentation about this event, as a large component of an escrache includes materials that provide education and knowledge to the material. For this third section of my analysis, I examine the rhetoric constructed through various publications, pamphlets and interviews. A close analysis of these sources attempts to understand how language is constructed, as these publications and interviews are used to educate the public. The rhetoric is important to understanding the escrache and how the organizers choose to position themselves in relation to the community and the political sectors.
Lastly, I include an analysis of the escrache through the media. Specifically, I use two major newspaper outlets in Argentina to understand the varying public perceptions regarding the escrache. For this analysis, I focus on the newspapers *La Nación* and *Página 12* because of their varied political ideologies. *La Nación*, founded in the 1870s, is Argentina’s leading conservative newspaper. On the contrary, *Página 12* was founded in 1987, as Argentina was rebuilding its democratic institutions after the military dictatorship, represents a more leftist political and social thinking within the country. These two newspapers, therefore, represent two opposing perceptions. For this analysis, I have tracked relevant newspaper articles that engage with the escrache from 1998 to 2016. My research resulted in a total of 80 articles that mentioned the escrache at any capacity. However, only a total of 60 articles were used (30 from *La Nación* and 30 from *Página 12*) because they contained more content than just a reference to the occurrence of an escrache. I used MAXQDA to code these articles based on the language presented. MAXQDA is a software program used to collect, organize, and analyze data from qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. As I read through the articles, I coded significant language that related to key terms (for a detail of these terms, see the Appendix A). The number of codes was a total of 291. This data allowed me to compare the use of language between both newspaper outlets and to analyze the varying forms by which the public perceive the escrache.

VII. An Analysis of Escraches in Post-Dictatorial Argentina

The Escrache and Use of Public Space

The escrache is a multi-sensorial event that requires the collaboration and organization of various groups. This event includes various forms of preparation. To begin, the organizations

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involved will receive notification about an individual who is believed to have been involved with the military dictatorship’s practices of extra-legal detentions, torture and other abuses, and forced disappearances. The organization then begins the long process of collecting evidence on the person, conducting interviews and confirming that the individual was, indeed, involved in human rights violations that occurred throughout the dictatorship. Then, the organization sets a date for the escrache and one month before the set date, they begin put it in practice by taking over the streets with posters, pamphlets, and street art.

The first escraches were led solely by H.I.J.O.S. and focused on the goal of obtaining a “condena social” (social repudiation). This meant that the aim was that the person being escrachado (that is, the recipient of an escrache) would no longer simply be perceived as a neighbor or coworker, rather as a criminal. It is common to hear the notion that if that state would fail to convict these individuals, then by excluding from their neighborhood and workplace, the escrache was transforming those same places of anonymity into a personal jail.

An analysis of the escrache through these artistic forms allows for a further understanding as to how the population took over the public sphere for the sake of publicly condemning those who were not condemned by the institutions, educating and engaging the neighborhood, and contributing to the preservation of memory. This is significant because it also furthers the distinction of the escrache from other forms of social movements and protests. Specifically, the distinct use of various artistic and multi-sensorial elements of the escrache as form of social reclamation of public, quotidian spaces is what make the escrache notable.

Depicted in Figure 1 is an example of a street sign that would typically be created for an escrache. It includes specific information regarding the individual that is to receive an escrache. This image depicts a sign that was used for the escrache against Jorge Rafael Videla in 2006.
Videla received escraches because he was a senior commander who led the 1976 coup as the representative from the Army and became the head of the military junta until 1981. Thus, he was responsible for the orders that resulted in the mass disappearance of many Argentinians during most of the dictatorship. The sign includes the street on which Videla was then living on and the measure of distance to make his identity and proximity public to the viewer.\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{escrache.png}
\caption{Street Sign Used in Escrache Against Videla\textsuperscript{62}}
\end{figure}

These street signs are important elements of the escrache because their sense of familiarity and initial indistinction makes them political contributors. Under normal circumstances, people driving down the street are inclined to read the signs because they give valuable information on direction and driving conditions. In this case, the staged signs are still engaging the public. Their shape and color do not stand out and make them look like normal street signs. Naturally, drivers who approach it will read it. The fact that the sign is not exactly

\textsuperscript{61} Jorge Rafael Videla died in prison in 2013. He was convicted for the second time in 2012 for his crime of kidnapping the children and babies of the disappeared that were born in captivity. For his obituary, see “Murió Jorge Rafael Videla, símbolo de la dictadura militar,” \textit{La Nación}, 17 May 2013.

\textsuperscript{62} Images have been taken from Youtube videos listed in Primary Sources unless listed otherwise.
what the drivers expect is what disrupts their normalcy. Arguably, the sign is still a precaution. It informs of the danger ahead. In this case, that danger is Videla the *genocida* responsible for the disappearances of the dictatorship. In this escrache, the sign functions simultaneously a warning of the past and the future. It holds Videla accountable for the crimes he committed, but it also informs the public of the danger ahead. This potential danger lies in the possibility of forgetting the crimes committed and consequent failure to hold individuals accountable. Most importantly, the fear exists that if justice is not attained, the country risks the repetition of this history again in the future.

This tactic of using explicit visuals that engage the spectators are successful in that they do not require the direct action of the audience. A type of “guerrilla marketing,” this tactic has a distinctive function in transmitting information to a live audience. These street signs implemented for the escrache are important because they are hidden persuaders that present themselves in places where individuals reside and interact with in their everyday lives and force viewers to situate themselves in relation to the structures of power that surround them. Some scholars, such as Wright, would distinguish the escrache for its highly visible artistic elements and the overt actions of the participants. However, most social movements and protests are already recognized for their use of visual elements. The use of street signs represents the way that the escrache does not always need to be characterized by its overtness, rather its invisibility is provocative and provides an element of permanence as the signs remain imbedded in the street even once the escrache has ended. Therefore, the escrache is distinguishable for the overt and covert reclamation of the streets and the public sphere.

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The creation of street signs used in escraches includes a diverse visual repertoire, and each element is designed with careful intentionality. The signs take on different forms and symbols that deliver a specific message to their audience. Sometimes these symbols include gunshot holes or military hats, or even planes and bodies. The latter symbol can be seen depicted in Figure 2. The street sign portrays a plane and, within it, lies a human body. The sign refers to the so-called vuelos de la muerte (death flights), a paramount moment in the collection of memory regarding the truth about the bodies of the disappeared. These death flights revealed that, in order to dispose of these bodies, the military forces sedated victims and dropped them from airplanes and helicopters into the Atlantic Ocean and the Rio de la Plata.65

Figure 2. Street Signs Reference Death Flights

The disposal of bodies was “common” knowledge, but its confirmation is significant to the escrache and its mission for truth. The image of the street signs alludes to this event in its details and simple construction. Some individuals may already have knowledge about this

65 In 1995, Navy Captain Francisco Scilingo confessed to the Argentine jurisdiction about his participation in what came known as “death flights.” Scilingo had thrown groups of disappeared persons out to sea during the dictatorship. Scilingo confirmed details about the process of flying the plane and sight of naked, sedated bodies that were disposed. This was monumental as it confirmed details about the truth regarding the whereabouts of the disappeared. For more information about Scilingo and the death flights, see: Robben, “How Traumatized Societies Remember.”
historical event, but others may not. Here is where the street signs function to, not only establish permanence in the streets, but also engage with the audience. Those who do not know the history of the Death Flights, once seeing these symbols, might be urged to ask around in order to further understand the message of the street sign and its symbolization. Thus, they become engaged with the history itself.

The potential ability to spark curiosity in the minds of the spectators who are confronted with these images in the quotidian spaces of their neighborhoods is indicative of the purpose of the escrache. Their purpose is to engage with witnesses to any given extent. Thus, participation in the escrache is not limited to protesting. The escrache is meant to educate the community about the history of the dictatorship and the individuals it affected, and to make its members observers-participants of an act of social condemnation. Beyond that, it seeks to broaden the perception about who are affected. These signs also function as a warning, and that precaution is meant to emphasize that all people—participants and witnesses—are connected to the dictatorship and carry the responsibility of knowing who are the responsible of abuses that may be hidden in plain sight and preserving the memory of the disappeared. The signs invoke a sense of fear in that the fate of the disappeared could have been the spectators’ fate in the past, but it could still be it in the future. Additionally, despite the importance of the role of the protestors, the signs allow for an understanding of the importance of the spectators who become also participants. As they read the messages on the signs, they become part of the escrache as the goal is not merely to protest but to engage.

The signs transform the public streets into political spaces and sites for moral questioning. The escrache, according to Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone, has transformed itself into a form of collective action meant to demonstrate and make clear the impunity of repressors and drive social condemnation through the constant conscientization of the inhabitants of the barrio (neighborhood). Thus, the role of the vecinos, or neighbors, is indispensable as their participation (or lack thereof) becomes equally as important to those who are involved directly with the escrache. Their role furthers the definition of the escrache, emphasizing how this form of demonstration is multi-sensorial and both action and inaction are political acts. As Diego Benegas Loyo argues, the escrache is transformative because it provides a platform for ordinary people to become political actors. In their own public spaces, the escrache provides a foundation for the residents of the neighborhood to form a collective voice. Thus, those who could have been immobilized by the limitations of institutional justice, and its eventual impunity, find their social power and political voice in the comfort of their own streets, reclaiming the public sphere.

The street signs are merely one example of how H.I.J.O.S. and other participants combine the various visual elements of the escrache to reclaim the public spaces that surround them. The development of various forms of street art also functions as a method for taking over the streets and implementing the voices of the disappeared and those who fight for them. The escrache involves the “outing” of political figures through the use of various visual elements, among these is the use of paint to create massive signs and street art. Often this includes painting the sidewalks and walls of the neighborhood of the escrachado. The most “provocative” version of

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67 Ibid., 87.
69 Ibid., 97.
70 Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 141-145.
the use of street art may end with the throwing of red paint bombs at the door of the house or apartment being escrachado or on institutional buildings identified as complicit by their actions or the lack thereof (such as police stations or tribunals). Additionally, the use of the color red is itself tactical, as it disrupts the perfect perception of a building, apartment or house. The red is a form of marking these locations, but it is also a representation of the blood that has been lost. The red paint becomes a visual symbol for blood, confronting the escrachado, in the comfort of their homes, reminding them that they have blood on their hands for their role in the torture and disappearances of individuals.

This disruption of order through the defacement of private or public property becomes a point of contention regarding the escrache as a form of protest. It is important, then, to note that the escrache can be an aggressive, and even violent manifestation, and that this, in turn, can result in a negative social reaction. When defining the various elements of social movement, Charles Tilly coined the term “repertoires of contention” to outline a set of “distinctive tactics and strategies” that are commonly used by social movements. Tilly argued that when it comes to the tactics used by protest groups, there are “a set of routines that are learned, shared and acted out through a deliberate process of choice.” These repertoires, according to Tilly, are learned cultural creations that emerge from the struggle. He further suggests that in these processes, people learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings and organize special-interest associations. Other scholars suggest that individuals and groups “learn only a rather small

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73 Ibid, 264.
This expands Tilly’s definition to propose that tactical repertoires not only involve contestation, but also intentionality and collective identity. The contention of the escrache is exemplified through the aggression of throwing paint. It is an action that disrupts the invisibility of the home within the neighborhood as well as the peace of the escrachado. This is important because it furthers that the escrache could be determined as violent, given that some of its aggression is meant to instill fear on the escrachado. The space of the criminal is no longer safe, rather taken over by the acts they committed and the memory of the disappeared.

Figure 3. Red Paint on Walls of Police Station

Street art may look like the painting and marking of a home or site as a place of shame to be outed. The “shame” is created out of the ability that criminal, who resides inside, has had in being able to hide in plain sight without having paid for the crimes they committed. Again, the strategy of the escrache is most notable in its ability to disrupt the norms of public versus private spaces and the political versus the apolitical. The splatter of red paint onto the homes of the disappeared.

escrachado transforms the private residence of the individual into a space for the public and the residents to demand for justice. The private spaces of the escrachados are disrupted and their sense of security and comfort within their own homes is threatened. This diverges from other political movements because the escrache does not rely on public and political institutions for their protests. Rather, they make the private residences of the criminals into public and politicized spaces. The same strategy of marking a house of an escrachado is sometimes applied to places of escrache or places that represent forces involved in abuses such as police brutality or torture, like a former detention center or a police station (see Figure 3).

![Image](image)

**Figure 4. Street of Residence of Walter Tejeda Gets Marked**

Additionally, painting the streets provides another layer by which spectators can identify the criminals who were never held responsible. Street art risks being misinterpreted as graffiti alone without any “real” message, but the massive lettering onto street pavements moves away from the risk of misinterpretation. It is not “messy” or vague in its message. Figure 4 exemplifies this as it simply includes the name of the individual being escrachado, their address, and specifies that they are were complicit and/or responsible for the human rights violations during the dictatorship. This particular case, from December 2018, is from Bahía Blanca, a city in the south of the Province of Buenos Aires, and shows one of the moments of the escrache to Walter
Tejada who, even though tried and condemned, had been granted home arrest. The street lettering stands out, making itself notable to anyone who may have missed the massive organization of the escrache. The paint represents a level of permanence, the message remains on the street and the protesters still remember and carry on the memory of the disappeared. Their imprint on the street functions as a reclaiming of power and public space by civil society in what once was filled with silence and terror.

The lingering presence of the escrache is what makes it a distinctive form of protesting. Studies centered around social movements are characterized by the creation of temporary public spaces that provide societies with ideas and forms of creating collective identities. However, the distinction between social movements and escraches is that the latter functions with the purpose of attaining justice in a socio-cultural terrain rather than a legislative one. Therefore, the escrache is meant to create a public permanence where there was not a political or legislative one. It is in this dispute of the use of public space that escrache organizers seek to build citizenship and encourage the political participation of ordinary people in the name of collective memory and social justice.

The use of space, as evidenced, is key to the development and process of the escrache as participants navigate the public spaces and make them political ones. The escrache then [re]imagines geographic spaces that form part of society’s norm by disrupting the perception of them. This geographic reimagining also results in a re-mapping of the space with markers of memory of the painful history of the abuses of the dictatorship.

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75 Image from: Juan Ignacio Guarino, “Escracharon a Walter Tejada, condenado dos veces delitos de lesa humanidad y robo de bebés,” El Ágora Digital, 2 December 2018.
Figure 5. Map of Genocidas in Rio de Plata and its Suburban Area, Argentina

The map above (Figure 5) is an example of a map that has been reconstructed with the information attained by H.I.J.O.S and other participating organizations. In this map of Buenos Aires and some of its adjacents counties in the Province of Buenos Aires, an urban space that was once familiar to the public has been marked with all the individuals who have not been tried or convicted for their participation in kidnappings, torture, and disappearances during the military dictatorship. In big red letters, these individuals are socially condemned as genocidas, that is as criminals who participate in genocidal actions. The map includes the names, addresses, careers and phone numbers of the individuals. Although this is something the organization would usually do for everyone, the combination of all the names onto one map allows for the visualization and contextualization of the urgency of this struggle for truth, memory, and justice. The condemnation of as genocidas transcend each individual case into the idea of a systematic campaign to exterminate a large group of people. The creation of the Grupo de Arte Callejero (the Group of Street Art), the maps uses the language of tourist maps to show landmarks
connected not only to human right abuses of the dictatorship but also to the socio-economic consequences of the dictatorship (fuga de cerebros or brain drain, and the evolution of the national debt through external borrowing). The map also includes the location of detention centers during the military government and throughout Argentina. Variations of this map updated with new escraches were printed every year for the anniversary of the military coup (March 24), in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2006, and posted in public places.

An analysis of the escrache in relation to structures of power is important because these various aspects of the demonstration are not meant to expose the truths and memories experienced by the public. The map is a recreation of those truths. H.I.J.O.S. and other participant groups have also reshaped a form of public “outing” that is not new but connected it to their identity and, specifically, the identity of their neighborhood. In his definition of the social movement, Tilly argued that protesting requires a degree of skill in specific techniques of protest and that a recognition and level of competence is required in order to be involved in specific forms of protest. Escraches differ from this definition as they are made accessible and incorporate the participation of the community. The combination of the visual aspects presented, then, is also the public’s version of reclaiming these public spaces that have been tainted with the limitations of institutional justice and impunity of those who have committed social injustices. The remapping of the neighborhood is a method of marking the urban space by reclaiming and redefining those spaces, intruding and disrupting the perceived calmness of everyday life.

78 “Aqui viven genocidas,” Grupo de Arte Callejero (24 April 2001). For more information about Grupo de Arte Callejero, visit their site: https://grupodeartecallejero.wordpress.com/2001/04/24/aqui-viven-genocidas/
80 Longoni, El Siluetazo, 29.
**Escrache as Performance**

The escrache begins with the visible white *pañuelos* (handkerchiefs) made notable by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who wore them every Thursday to their march as a symbol of both their maternity and their search for their children. The group of Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the group of grandmothers created in 1977 to ask for identification and restitution of children kidnapped with their parents or born in captivity, join the Madres. Following behind the madres and abuelas is a large sign that reads “H.I.J.O.S.” To the spectators it is clear that there is a generation missing in between these groups: the disappeared parents. In this way, the structured formation and march of the escrache evokes an emotional message to the spectators. The participants protest to socially condemn the individuals involved, but most importantly, to preserve the memory of those whose identity has been systematically erased. The escrache makes itself distinctive as its performative elements provide a censor-less demonstration about the realities and traumas that are remnant from the dictatorship.

The escraches follow this previously described blueprint during manifestations. In their role as both mothers and grandmothers, the older women activists march with the grandchildren, the sons and daughters of the disappeared who represent a new generation of activists, followed by the community. These organized aspects entertain the notion of performance as a form of physical resistance, remembrance, and collective memory-making. In the video “DiFilm - Escrache de la agrupación H.I.J.O.S. (1999),” participants carry images of the person being escrachado and the crimes they committed as well as the images of their loved ones. In addition, participants begin to clap and walk forward while others begin playing the drums and chanting.

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The neighborhood watches as this large mass of people begins to march, chant, and sing in unison. The artistic and performativity of the escrache is demonstrated through the personalized songs that pertain to the person receiving the escrache. These songs are catchy, and they outline the crimes the person committed, criticizing their actions during the dictatorship. Simultaneously, the participants belch these songs and chants out, empowering each other and their community. Their voices fill the streets, taking over both the physical space they occupy and the auditory space. In this, the participants address the “criminal” directly in their chants, but also the neighborhood, as the community is essential to the escrache.

The chants to the escrachado include: “¿Qué tal? ¿Cómo te va? Hijos de p**a, te vinimos a escrachar” (How are you? How are you doing? Sons of b****es, we’ve come to escrachar you). Meanwhile, the chant to the neighborhood is commonly: “Alerta, alerta, alerta los vecinos que al lado de su casa está viviendo un asesino” (Alert, alert, alert the neighbors that next to their home is living an assassin). These two chants are standard examples that could be used at any escrache, but their language is powerful. Though they alert the person they are being escrachado, they focus on the importance of alerting the community of the existence of an “assassin” in their midst and engaging with the residents (and society at large). Thus, the escrache is constructed to perform and express traumas within the context of a community in order to create a collective experience.

In addition to the general chants, some more specific songs are also created to highlight the crimes committed during the dictatorship. The video “Escrache a Oscar Hermelo” follows a group of participants in the middle of an escrache, in November 2007. The demonstrators begin to sing and chant songs to Hermelo, who is being escrachado for his involvement in the ESMA,

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the Navy Mechanics School, in Buenos Aires. The song lays out Hermelo’s crime, as he used his auto agency to support ESMA, which served as a detention and torture center throughout the dictatorship. At the time of his escrache, he worked as a successful lawyer. As the music and trumpets play, the community comes together to chant, sing, or listen to list of accusations: “Oscar Hermelo, que todo el mundo lo sepa: tuviste una agencia de autos que funcionaba en la ESMA” (Oscar Hermelo, may the whole world know: you had a care agency that worked for the ESMA), and “Oscar Hermelo, te vinimos a escrachar, para que todos se enteren y dejes de ser fiscal” (Oscar Hermelo, we have come to escrachar you so that everyone will find out and you’ll stop being a prosecutor), lastly, “Vos sos vigilante, vos sos un botón, sos el abogado de la represión” (You are vigilant, you are a police officer, you are the advocate of repression).

The personalization of the songs demonstrates the organizers’ commitment to the accuracy and impact of their tactics. By moving away from the general chants and songs, they demonstrate their performativity as a form of resistance. Their accusations, therefore, hold more validity, as they state the crimes and reasons for social condemnation. Additionally, for those who missed the pamphlets, were surprised by the strong presence of the escrache, or question its purpose and necessity, the spectacle includes enough history and facts for the “unaware” to understand. The escrache outlines its purposes in its performance. Although questions and education are encouraged, attempts to invalidate its urgency would be incongruous.

The collective-building aspect of the escrache is important as H.I.J.O.S. alone was not solely responsible for the performative aspects of the demonstrations. Figure 6 is titled “Escrache al General Galtieri / Escrache to General Galtieri,” and is an example of how the escrache is a collaborative effort between H.I.J.O.S. and Grupo Etcétera, a multidisciplinary collective that
uses their art to engage with social and political issues.\textsuperscript{84} It depicts a moment in the middle of an escrache to Leopoldo Galtieri, who, in the moment of his escrache, was living anonymously in a suburb of Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{85} During the dictatorship, however, Galtieri was a general and later served as the last president of the military regime, when Argentina went to war with the U.K for the \textit{Malvinas} (Falkland Islands) in 1982.

In this demonstration, the participants are seen playing their instruments, having gained the attention from the media who is also present. In this case, the participants wear masks so as not to be identified by the police. They also wear jerseys that are representative of Argentina’s soccer team. This image is indicative of the performance portrayed by the escrache. As the demonstrators use symbolic representations to guide their fight for memory and justice. However, the performance depicted here is also described to be one that is “carnivalesque” and a celebration of sorts. Although the memory of the dictatorship does not urge people to approach memory through the lens of humor, it is often used to collectively make sense of shared traumas.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{escrache_to_general_galtieri.png}
\caption{Escrache to General Galtieri}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{84} Grupo Etcétera formed in 1997 with the objective to create strategies to interact with political and social life, such as taking art to the streets. “Exhibition: ‘Photography in Argentina, 1850-2010: Contradiction and Continuity’ at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles” (September 16, 2017 – January 28, 2018), https://artblart.com/tag/escrache/.
The blue and white shirts represent both the soccer team and national pride within Argentina. The reference to soccer alludes to the World Cup that was hosted in 1978 by Argentina, amid the dictatorship and height of civilian repression and disappearances. This escrache is a performance of a soccer game in front of Galtieri’s home on the night of the 1998 World Cup on the night of the Argentina-England game. In the game that is staged as part of the escrache, however, there is no opposing team. Rather, the soccer game is a match between Argentina and itself. Near the end of this reenactment, the “players” do a penalty kick. The goalkeeper, in this case dressed in military uniform, is supposed to protect its team. However, in this reenactment the goalkeeper misses and the ball, filled with paint, splatters onto Galtieri’s house.

An escrache like this one consists of many symbolic layers that demonstrate both the organizational structure of the protest and the collaborative efforts that create community as individuals use the performance to showcase their emotions. This case broadens the scope by which the emotions attached to the escrache are understood. Although many times the emotions evoked from both the dictatorship and the escrache are trauma and pain, the performance against Galtieri demonstrated that, alternatively, the sentiments toward the dictatorship can include confusion that manifests itself in anger or humor. The escrache demonstrates this confusion as the soccer game represents this contradiction where Argentina played against itself, failed to protect its own people and then lost the game. Thus, the government turned on its own people, making a mess of the situation. It is not a surprise, then, that this confusion results in the splattering of paint against Galtieri’s house, marking it for everyone in the community to see, but also transforming the escrache into a form of releasing that trauma and establishing its permanence into the streets.
Furthermore, this performance broadens the scope of the escrache and its utilization of space. The space itself is not limited to the physical and tangible location, rather it is expanded to include a cultural space. The use of soccer, a national symbol for Argentina, is tactical because it disrupts its identity. Reenacting a soccer game in the middle of the World Cup is meant to disrupt the comfortability of viewers and remind them who the criminals of the dictatorship were and were they are now, but also the mass repression and disappearance that occurred in the middle of this event twenty years before.

Although escraches share their mission of “outing” public figures, every group involve it their organizing take on a different approach. The crimes of the accused also play an important role in the development of the songs, chants, and performances that are to be displayed. Marina Sitrin discusses how this may include a performative aspect where participants act out what the person did and the horrors they committed.86 These approaches could also become part of an available body of performative approaches for other escraches and different groups. The diffusion and adoption of this kind of protest is also important. This is exemplified in a 2016 escrache by the group Fuerza Artística de Choque Comunicativo (FACC, Artistic Force of Communicative Confrontation) that utilized the same theatrical and aspects than the Grupo Etcétera to guide its message.

The FACC’s performative strategy built on previous experiences but also represented a significant development in the practice of the escrache. Not only does their work aspire to create collective memory of the crimes of the dictatorship and their legacies, it also reinforces the aspect of transforming the body into a political method used to represent that mission.87

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86 Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, 57.
87 For more information about the Artistic Force of Communicative Confrontation, see [https://www.lavaca.org/mu97/fuerza-artistica-de-choque-comunicativo/](https://www.lavaca.org/mu97/fuerza-artistica-de-choque-comunicativo/)
video “Escrache al genocida Santiago Omar Rivero #Genocida Suelto” (Escrache to mass murderer Santiago Omar Rivero #Genocida on the Loose) is an example of how the FACC carries on the mission of the escrache, as established by H.I.J.O.S. On February 3, 2016, demonstrators lead an escrache against Santiago Omar Riveros, who was involved in Operation Condor, as well as the kidnaping and forced disappearance of women and their children. In 2006, he received 25 years in prison for the kidnaping and killing of 105 people. In 2009, he was sentenced to life in prison for his responsibility in the homicides. In the present time of the video, in 2016, Rivero is back in his home after being granted the benefit of house arrest by an Appels Court in 2011, and the community has come to denounce his crimes and to condemn them publicly.

Figure 7. Protestors Perform Escrache in Black Mask

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89 “Operation Condor was a secret intelligence and operations system created in the 1970s by military states to share intelligence and seized, tortured, and executed political opponents in one another’s territory. The military states in the condor system engaged in terrorist practices to destroy ‘subversive threat’ from the left.” The military dictatorships of the Southern Cone collaborated in this initiative of intelligent sharing and joint activities. J. Patrice, McSherry, Predatory states: Operation Condor and covert war in Latin America (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 1-4.
The video follows a group of demonstrators/performers in the middle of an escrache. The video begins just as protestors are silently walking to Santiago Omar Riveros’ home. Amid the silence, the placement of the large poster, held high, reads, “Genocida Suelto / Estado Cómplice / Ayer y Hoy” (Free Genocida; State Accomplice / Yesterday and Today). A group begins playing their instruments while protestors walk aimlessly in desperation. Standing in a line next to the musicians are a group of protestors dressed in all black with masks (Figure 7), silently watching the other demonstrators, waiting. In the middle of this set scene, a participant reads out the crimes committed by Riveros, reminding him and educating the community as to why he is being escrachado.

When the music stops, the aimlessly-walking protestors fall to their knees, holding their arms behind their back. In this position, they open their mouths and let out muted screams, as depicted in Figure 8. Once in this position, the protestors in black approach them and menacingly cover their screaming faces with black bags. The music comes back on and the crimes are read yet again. Moments later, the music ends, and protestors slowly take the bags off their heads, stand up, and disperse, fleeing the scene of the escrache, leaving an unsettling silence. This embodied performance of kidnapping and torture signifies how the participants relay their
collective traumas. They not only reclaim the streets in these acts, but they also reclaim the acts themselves. The fear of kidnap and torture that lingers from the dictatorship can no longer be against them. Therefore, they participate in the physical domination over the streets, but also in a symbolic one.

Despite the many years and charges against Riveros, he can be found at home. Thus, the protestors have come to disrupt that scene with a performance of their traumas, pains, and anger, as they have not forgotten what he was responsible for and why he still deserves to be imprisoned.

This demonstration is significant as it provides an insight on how communities and societies deal with the memory of their traumatic pasts and transmit those memories into performances. To spectators, the escrache may cause discomfort, but all emotions evoked are valid and intentional.91 The escrache is meant to provide participants with the ability to cope with their traumas collectively. To the spectators, it is meant to evoke emotion, of any kind. In this way, the escrache hopes to inspire and catalyze further action. The FACC group, whether always knowingly or not, contributes to the preservation of memory and trauma of the dictatorship, and simultaneously preserves the memory and mission of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and H.I.J.O.S., as well as the memories of many whose testimonies contributed to making the crimes of the military dictatorship known. The escrache transforms the body into a method for political demonstrations, thus the body also becomes a site for memory, used to expose the truths and memories experienced personally and by the public.

The distinction between both organizations (Madres de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S) is also further exemplifies through the spaces their activism engages with. Both Madres and

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H.I.J.O.S. use their memory and trauma to drive collective action and demonstrate that the public display of these memories and traumas help further their goal of reaching a new form of justice. Similarly, they both utilize elements of performance to engage with their audiences. Madres and Abuelas use the *pañuelo* as a symbol of their motherhood and representation of their disappeared children and lost grandchildren who ignore their true identity. Similarly, H.I.J.O.S. utilizes a plethora of multi-sensorial elements to convey the traumas of their parents, who most of them never, or hardly, knew because they were separated as infants and small children. The difference between the two lies in the spaces they occupy and contribute to re-signify. Madres could be characterized by traditional social movements, as it engages with already politicized public spaces of power, such as the Casa Rosada, the National Congress, or tribunals. The escrache, however, disrupts chiefly non-institutional public and private spaces to evoke emotion and reclaim their neighborhoods from the fear of repression of the dictatorship. The distinction of the original performance of Madres lies in that the mother’s manifestations were subdued and less aggressive, compared to the strategies used by H.I.J.O.S. By proclaiming their motherhood in the public space of the country’s most important square, the original performance of the Madres was making something usually performed in the private of their home (being a protective mother) into a public political act. This movement into the public sphere was forced by the brutality of the military regime that resulted in the forced disappearance of their children.

**The Construction of Rhetoric**

The large impact of the escrache in neighborhoods throughout Argentina is notable because H.I.J.O.S. had carefully constructed a mission for itself as an organization. Specifically, the escraches have been constructed in thoughtfulness and this language is what makes the

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92 The Madres use white *pañuelos* as a symbol of motherhood. The first *pañuelos* used were the cloth diapers of the disappeared, but over time, it transformed into the white headscarf.
manifestation distinctive and expressive. Social movements can be characterized as collective enterprises that seek to establish a new order of life. These movements surge from a condition of unrest and their collective action is the result of dissatisfaction with the current form of life, but also of their hope for a new system of living that is both broad and inclusive. The escrache, as constructed through rhetoric, pushes this definition. Beyond being broad and inclusive, the protests are a demand for justice. The escrache itself may be a rebranded version of a form of protesting that already exists, but it still differs from traditional forms because of its ability to push beyond the comfort of spaces, powerfully creating a sense that the history of the disappeared permeates the streets. This connection to memory and reframing of the public space that create new distinctions in the scholarship about collective action.

Various components of the escrache are representations of the rhetoric that has been constructed by H.I.J.O.S. The discourses published by H.I.J.O.S. Capital to accompany the escraches are indicative of the language used to convey the frustration and anger with the crimes committed throughout the dictatorship, and that have been met with varying degrees of injustice by the state. The publication, “Discurso del escrache al genocida Jorge Luis Magnacco, el partero de la ESMA,” from March 2018, is first notable through the suspected audience of the text. The discourse reads like an open letter to Jorge Luis Magnacco, who is being escrachado for the second time. The text, in collaboration with the poster featuring Magnacco’s picture under the word Escrache in big red letters followed by an exclamation mark, emphasize the necessity of the escrache and use their language allows for the framing of the manifestation within its social context.

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In assertion of its power, the discourse directly addresses Magnacco, highlighting his crimes and creating a tone of contention and action at the hands of H.I.J.O.S. Magnacco was the Chief of Gynecology and participated in at least 11 deliveries in captivity in the ESMA and the systematic plan of theft of children. The document addresses Magnacco’s role in making the children born in captivity also part of the disappeared, by depriving them of their family and identity. If the justice failed to keep him in jail, the children now raise to condemn him and make the city and country a jail through public condemnation. In reference to this, they write: “Los hijos e hijas de tus víctimas estamos acá con el escrache, para que hasta que vuelvas a la cárcel, la condena social se convierta en tus rejas” (We, the sons and daughters of your victims are here with the escrache so that, until you return to jail, social condemnation becomes your prison bars). The memory of Magnacco and his actions are used as ammunition against him, as they

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create a narrative to convey his case to the reader. The rhetoric transmits the anger towards the normalcy of Magnacco’s life, both throughout the dictatorship and currently. It is in this description of his normalcy that the rhetoric of the escrache is reinforced. Their purpose is to present themselves, in the memory of their parents, to demand that he be sent to prison, but most importantly to make social condemnation a semblance of prison bars.

The discourse exhibits a sense of urgency for the neighborhood to know that Magnacco, as a stand in for other criminals, was a participant of a campaign of genocide that also included the erasure of children’s identities. Beyond that, the rhetoric is clear that the only acceptable place for a criminal is prison, even if that prison is a social one. Furthermore, the language seeks to connect the history of what occurred to the present to highlight the reasoning for the escrache. The text includes phrases such as:

“Los viste nacer, conociste sus caras, escuchaste sus llantos, los tuviste en tus manos y los seguís secuestrando cada día al no deciros dónde están.”
(You watched them be born, saw their faces, listened to their cries, you had them in your hands, and you keep kidnapping them every day you don’t tell us where they are.)

“[Vinimos] a denunciar y mostrar en el barrio que la impunidad camina por la calle, que tiene tu cara, tu nombre, tu apellido. Que entre las paredes del departamento 10° F de este edificio se guardan los pactos de silencio de la ESMA.”
(We came to denounce and to show the neighborhood that impunity walks through the street, that it has your face, your name, your last name. That the pacts of silence of the ESMA are kept within the walls of apartment 10° F of this building.)

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96 Ibid.
This tactical use of language is important because it makes memory-making a political act of the present. H.I.J.O.S. uses known facts about the dictatorship to demonstrate the ongoing presence of these crimes, as there is no justice. It warns that this lack of justice is symbolic to the continued demonstration of these actions. It is also important because there is an identification of H.I.J.O.S as *hijos* (children) who confront Magnacco as a participant in the kidnapping of other *hijos* who are leaving without knowing who they really are. The participants take on that memory and permeate spaces with the firm assertion that they will not forget, they will not forgive, and they will not reconcile.

**Figure 10. Escrache Includes Images of the Faces of the Disappeared**

Another important use of history and language is seen in the representations of the disappeared in the escrache. This is communicated, as seen in Figure 10, through the presence of images of the disappeared raised high.\(^97\) This is powerful as the mass publication of their faces evokes a sense that the disappeared have “reappeared,” or returned to demand justice.\(^98\) According to the discourse, “Discurso a 40 años del Golpe genocida” (Discourse on the 40th anniversary of the genocidal coup), the escrache is way by which the protestors come together to

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\(^97\) To further understand how H.I.J.O.S have used similar tactics with photographs as Madres in their escraches, see Remland, “The Transmission of Traumatic Memory,” 8-19, and Lessa, “From Blanket Impunity,” 220-223.

\(^98\) Figure 10 features a phrase by Voltaire, emphasizing that if justice is not delivered, people will do justice on their own.
“reivindicar las luchas de los 30.000” (revendicate the struggles of the 30,000). This is reiterated through the chants that are heard throughout the neighborhood. Specifically, the call and response that often occurs throughout an escrache:

Call: 30.000 compañeras y compañeros detenidos-desaparecidos
Response: Presentes
Call: Ahora...
Response: ¡Y siempre!
(Call: 30,000 peers detained and disappeared
Response: Present
Call: Now
Response: And always!)

The participants have transformed the meaning of the number “30,000.” Despite it being a disputable number for many, as the true number of the disappeared in not known, its transformation and impact is evident. The number itself has come to represent the continuation of memory as protestors take over the streets with the images of the disappeared, making them more presence than ever. This is not always met with acceptance, however, and the escrache’s heavy presence in the streets makes them contentious. The discourse states, “Nos prefieren obedientes y conformistas, desinformados y sin educación. Nos pretenden sometidos y asustados. Pero tenemos las banderas de los 30.000 muy altas, les decimos que al miedo lo conocimos hace rato... Vamos a seguir defendiendo nuestros derechos, vamos a seguir defendiendo la democracia.”

The protesters are changing the visual fabric of the neighborhood, transforming

100 Ibid. Translation of discourse: They prefer us to be obedient and conformist, uninformed and uneducated. They believe us to be subdued and scared. But we have the flags of the 30,000 very high, we tell them that we’ve known fear for some time now… We will continue to defend our rights; we will continue to defend democracy.”
the space into a public courtroom, where the evidence and sentence of the crime is forever on display. In this courtroom, the grandmothers, parents and sons and daughters are present in the public, social trial (the escrache) against the criminal.

The publications by H.I.J.O.S are important, as they provide a clear stance on the goals and construction of the escrache. Interviews and narrations, on the other hand, are also useful because they relay the extent by which participants convey these messages invoked through the public discourse. Furthermore, the participants are in the streets and bearing witness to the various emotional elements and memories that occur during the escrache. Their testimonies reveal the general sentiments of their experiences and demonstrate their ability to also convey their interpretation of the escrache.

The purpose of the protest, in simple terms, is to bring to light what is not seen. In the video “H.I.J.O.S. de una misma historia: El primer escrache - Canal Encuentro HD,” the organizer interviewed states that the objective is to find the criminals, wherever they were, such as their neighborhood or homes: “Los escrachamos para que sus vecinos supieran que eran torturadores y genocidas” (We escrachar them so that their neighbors will know that they were torturers and genocidas). The organizer furthers that the escrache has established a form of permanence as it is “una práctica política, [que] va trascender el tiempo” (a political practice that will transcend time).101 This practice is then defined as a political one used to highlight the flaws that exist in the political system and the state. It makes itself successful, if not in getting criminals to prison, then in revealing the injustice. Even if it is not successful in this always, it

still presents itself as an act of justice, even if in just that moment, as reaffirmed by the interview of another participant.\textsuperscript{102}

The escrache is evidently connected to the Madres and Abuelas who also protest in the names of their loved ones. In another presentation, the Madres agree: “no abandonen esta lucha cuando nosotras no estemos porque ustedes son el futuro de nuestra patria. Por favor no se olviden, la memoria siempre debe permanecer y nunca podemos olvidar que pasó.”\textsuperscript{103} Their mission, beyond demanding truth about the disappeared, is to ensure that the memory of them is never forgotten, regardless of the method. They instill the power in the youth and the sons and daughters to carry on their message. In this way, the escrache functions to create solidarity among the various generations. Despite their differences in tactics and uses of space, the escrache’s dependence on memory specifically creates a sense of unity that bridges generations and connect both groups.

*Public Perception, Presented in* La Nación and Página 12

The analysis of literature and rhetoric provides a method to understanding how certain public, everyday spaces are not receptive to the comfortability that comes with the escrache. The newspapers, though shaped by the ideologies of their outlets, emphasize that certain forms of memory-making, as performed by the escrache, are highly contested because of their disruption of private and seemingly apolitical spaces. Another element that is clear through the analysis of media coverage is how, as scholars have pointed out, constant memory-making and remaking

\textsuperscript{102} Silvana Coppini, “Informe de archivo: Escrache de H.I.J.O.S. (TEA-TV),” YouTube video, 4:38, July 1, 2013.
\textsuperscript{103} Abriendo Caminos, Escrache a Videla 2006, “ YouTube video, 9:56, October 1, 2007. Translation: “Do not give up this fight when we are not here because you are the future of our country. Please do not forget: the memory must always remain, and we can never forget what happened.”
has contributed in Argentina to perpetuate the consequences of the past without allowing for closure (what Robben calls “collective reexperiencing”).

*La Nación*, as previously mentioned, maintains a conservative approach to the development of the escrache, while *Página 12* takes on a more leftist approach. The purpose of H.I.J.O.S. as an organization and those who participate in this form of demonstration tends to be outlined and in agreement with the language and rhetoric used in the newspaper outlet of *Página 12*. The analysis of these opposing opinions and experiences could help us explain why the divide within the nation exists. It highlights that there is not just one way to approach justice and transition within the nation and for society at large. Lastly, it also allows for us to examine where it is that the escrache, as developed by H.I.J.O.S., has been misinterpreted or reshaped through varying rhetoric. I begin by looking at how both outlets engage with the purpose of the escrache and define its purpose, often including or considering the voice of the public that agree and align with the outlet’s perception. This analysis of public perception, as presented through these major newspapers, highlights some of the key themes that were identified as important to the understanding and construction of the escrache that I used as codes in my content analysis with MaxQDA. Thus, the beginning presented here are characterized by the “purpose of the escrache.”

In 1998, when some of the first official and widely publicized escraches took place, there was some mutual agreement in the definitions of escrache between the two newspapers. Part of this is because the verb “escrachar” was commonly understood to mean “to stage a noisy protest”. Thus, in the beginning, it was common knowledge that an escrache was just that.

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105 See Appendix for an outline of the codes used for qualitative research data.
Even before La Nación formed a complete opinion or position on the impact and significance of the escrache, they began to make explicit the police’s attempts, and most often successes, in intervening or “shutting down” the escraches. These were just more protests that able to be controlled. Examples of these publications include:

October 13, 1998, La Nación:

La presencia policial impidió ayer la realización del "escrache" contra el gobernador Antonio Domingo Bussi, organizado por la agrupación Hijos, que emplea esta metodología para denunciar públicamente a represores de la última dictadura militar.¹⁰⁶

May 2, 1999, La Nación:

El escrache es una medida de protesta creada por la agrupación que integran hijos de desaparecidos (denominada, precisamente, Hijos), en la que se señalan los domicilios de ex represores o de integrantes del Proceso.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, on March 20, 2002, Página 12 would engage with perceptions of the escrache that not always represented the urgency that was often used by H.I.J.O.S. Enrique Zuleta, the director of IBOPE Argentina, a consulting firm that analyzed social and political trends and measured public opinion, wrote:

Los escraches son una combinación de factores entre los que se destaca un clima de impotencia de parte importante de la ciudadanía para expresarse en formas orgánicas e institucionales. El modo de producción política que generan los medios, en especial la televisión favorece las formas de acción directa por la repercusión que tiene. Es más importante el escrache en un banco que un acto en un comité o unidad básica. La política

The protests are described as “ni bien ni mal” by a citizen that was interviewed as part of a segment on public opinion of the escraches. The work of H.I.J.O.S. was important, but ultimately in the interest of garnering media attention and headlines. The bank represents a public space, of which the use and reclamation was key in the movement. This differs entirely from already politicized spaces that had been occupied previously. In this instance, the public opinion is not for or against, but simply cognizant of the unique tactics used by H.I.J.O.S. in order to achieve their objective of preserving memory through public political performance.

In 2005 and 2006, the split in the definitions presented by the two different news sources is evident. *La Nación* takes the stance that these escraches are anything but justice:

*July 17, 2005, La Nación:*

En la Argentina actual, los "escraches" han sido utilizados tanto para denostar a figuras representativas del último gobierno militar como a personas acusadas de cometer delitos. Tales acciones están muy lejos de lograr la justicia reparadora que cualquier ciudadano anhela. Y son doblemente peligrosas cuando están dirigidas a conculcarles a los demás su derecho a expresar públicamente sus ideas y opiniones, nos gusten o no.

The positionality is that the public figures being “outed” had already seen enough scrutiny. The opinions that these figures were simply following orders, or have changed since their wrongdoings, were central to the conservative rebuttal. The claiming of public spaces for

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abrasive protests was criticized as excessive. Members of H.I.J.O.S. would argue that the actions of the individuals were excessive, and that these figures deserve the public scrutiny that comes their way, regardless of the setting. *La Nación* maintained that this was not justice, as it left no room for “civil” disagreement or debate. It also furthered that instead of progressing, the escrache is a contended form of preserving memory. This tactic, it argues, is better characterized as a retrocession of their goal towards justice. The limited perception about who was responsible for the dictatorship resulted in a sense of reverse repression in which those who did not participate felt silenced.

In comparison, *Página 12* highlighted the more important role of the escraches and the inherent maintenance of memory that was and is essential to the H.I.J.O.S. organization. In the early 2000s, more visibility for these movements brought to light more questions as to their true intent and effects. To counter the right’s argument that they were excessive, *Página 12* highlighted that the occupying of public spaces is the exact goal of the escrache, no matter how abrupt or abrasive. An article published on March 24, 2006 states:

Un mientras tanto (...llegará la Justicia ordinaria) que creaba su propio sentido al mismo tiempo que renovaba las preguntas: ya no era sólo dónde están los desaparecidos, si no también por qué los desaparecieron, quiénes eran, qué querían, qué les gustaba comer, cómo aprendieron a amar, etc. Se mezclaba así lo público y lo privado, se recreaba la memoria, se hurgaba más allá de lo aparente porque no hay otra manera de escribir la propia historia. ¹¹⁰

Descriptions of one of the most notorious escraches outside of the home of Videla highlighted their goal. Although Videla had been tried, convicted, and pardoned, he was still lived

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comfortably in his residence. Clearly, the system of “justice” had not been executed effectively, and there remained more work to be done in order to truly bring these criminals to light. So, what H.I.J.O.S. sought to do was remind these figures that the public has not forgotten their actions, despite their best efforts to hole up in their houses and try to forget themselves. In taking a stance and voicing their discontent, they preserve the memory of those harmed by these figures.

Diverging from the initial purpose of the escrache, another commonality in the rhetoric of the escrache included attempts at describing the varying aspects of the demonstration, often including debates about whether the escrache is a violent manifestation. On October 6, 1998, after some of the very first escraches, *La Nación* published an article defining the role and impact the escrache had on the community, criticizing its tactics:

Una de sus manifestaciones más notorias es la práctica del «escrache», que es la misma metodología que emplearon los nazis en Alemania para identificar a los judíos, pintando en los frentes de sus hogares la estrella de David y la palabra jude. Las agrupaciones de extrema izquierda practican estos métodos autoritarios, además de destrozar vidrieras y provocar enfrentamientos con la policía.¹¹¹

In this article, *La Nación* draws parallel between two different histories: that of Nazi Germany and the post-dictatorial Argentina. These two examples are presented to draw a harsh comparison that evokes a kind of emotion connected to the injustices committed in Germany. The marking of war criminal’s homes as presented by the escrache is seen as a form of violence and a repetition of the history towards the Jewish community. In this way, the article addresses the negative examples whereby memory of World War II is remembered through the injustices committed and thus warns the community of its potential repetition. Furthermore, *La Nación* highlights the

keys aspects of the escrache to publicly reject its tactics that are rooted in the defamations and “suppression” of another group. It also characterizes the escrache as a form of political protest that pertains to the extreme left. However, the escrache does not state to position itself on the political spectrum, rather it is meant to further its goal of collective memory while also encouraging the participation of the public.

The use of violence becomes a large debate regarding the escrache. This is an issue that arises often in both outlets as one criticizes the escrache for its tactics, while the other attempts to remind its public the intent and purpose of the demonstrations, attempting to preserve the image and goal of H.I.J.O.S. and participants. In March 20, 2002 Página 12 addresses the different rhetoric used, noting:

Una columna de opinión de Joaquín Morales Solá, en La Nación de ayer, fue parte del debate. “Una banda de salteadores callejeros, o una pandilla de amigos prepotentes en un bar, dispuesta a agraviar, empujar y golpear a hombres que por lo general están solos, recuerda las imágenes de Alemania en las vísperas del nazismo”, dice el texto.112

Here, we have Página 12 making a reference to a publication on La Nación that engages with rhetoric towards the escrache. In the opinion piece, Joaquin Morales Sola is interviewed to answer some questions about the violence he witnessed from the escrache. He defines the various demonstrations of aggression, pushing and fighting within men. This cross-reference to La Nación is a way in which Página 12 acknowledges that its perception of the escrache is different than the perception of this other newspaper. Thus, it becomes no question that both outlets hold different perceptions about these demonstrations and the ways in which they work to inform and shape the public understanding that surrounds them.

112 De la Sota tuvo su propio escrache,” Página 12, March 20, 2002
In the same article, Página 12 attempts to clarify a divergence between the two definitions. In this way, the escrache, in public perception, is not a “traditional” form of protest. The article states:

El ataque a los bancos, que es el más repudiable porque está fuera de la ley, es el más aceptado por la mayoría porque se cree que hay que dejar expresar a los ahorristas. Estas formas son negativas porque se agotan en la protesta, y en la Argentina que viene, con la elección presidencial y de gobernadores, no puede haber protesta sin propuesta. Por otro lado, los escraches de H.I.J.O.S. son todo lo contrario, son de un estilo pacifista y marcan una diferencia con el escrachado.113

This article presents two different political moments converging. One the one hand, there is the escrache against the *genocidas*, but this coincides with the financial crisis of 2001 in Argentina, called the corralito.114 Furthermore, this article differentiates between the two forms in which escraches have developed: there is the escrache that is violent, where the true goal of the H.I.J.O.S. has been diluted, and there is the original escrache, developed by the organization, that is meant to be nonviolent. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the escrache can be a way that organizations and manifestations establish solidarity amongst each other. Despite protesting two different events, the groups come together in their understanding of justice. Their solidarity results in the exchange of tactics, but also strengthens both causes.

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113 Ibid.
114 This resulted in the freezing of accounts and the banks forbade withdrawals from U.S. dollar-denominated accounts. See: Martín Becerra and Soledad López, “La contienda mediática. Temas, fuentes y actores en la prensa por el conflicto entre el gobierno y las entidades del campo argentino en 2008,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 1, no. 16 (2009): 9-30. This form of escrache grew out of the 2001 financial crisis that coincided with the escraches by organizations like H.I.J.O.S. As the different views expressed in these newspaper show, the public at large may have seen them as the same, but for the human rights organizations and Página 12, they were fundamentally different (mere violent protest in the case of the financial escraches and demonstrations with a clear political message and purpose in the other case). The analysis of the other form of escrache is beyond the focus of this analysis.
Despite efforts to reorient and clarify the true definition of the escrache, public perceptions of it as violent proceeded. *La Nación* could be a contributor to this, as its platform was used to emphasize the negative moments experiences during an escrache, shaping its perception and discontent for the public. On October 27, 2006 it publishes another article focused on violence:

*Agrupaciones defensoras de los Derechos Humanos* realizaron esta tarde un escrache a la comisaría de la localidad bonaerense de José Marmol, donde dos hermanos denunciaron haber sido golpeados y amenazados con "desaparecer" como el testigo López.¹¹⁵

The use of violence in relation to human rights shapes the perception of these organizations, making them appear to be both leftist and aggressive. It is undoubted that over the years, as the escrache became more well known, its definitions and forms also shifted. It should be noted, however, that the escrache never prided itself in being violent, nor did it ever describe itself to be so. However, here we see that *La Nación* emphasizes the use of violence and threats as the focus of its article about the escrache. In this way, the outlet emphasizes the criticism against the escrache, but also continues to disregard the distinction between a true escrache and violent variations (such as the demonstrations against banks that grew out of the 2001 financial crisis) that are given the title but in no way contribute to the working definition of the escrache.

The analysis of these newspapers has evidenced that, as expected, *La Nación* and *Página 12* have an archive of two significantly different interpretations of the escrache and their context within Argentinian society. Despite the active construction of language for tactical purposes, *Página 12* proves to be in accordance with the mission of H.I.J.O.S, but it is through *La Nación*

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¹¹⁵ “Nueva marcha por López en La Plata,” *La Nación*, October 27, 2006
that the contented approach to memory is clear. The escrache, with its “aggressive” use of space challenges those contentions and permeates through to the private, apolitical sectors, creating a lingering discomfort in return to those who had the same effect on them after the dictatorship.

Conclusion

Societal demands for validation of memory, preservation of history, and justice in post-dictatorship Argentina provided the gateway for the construction of the escrache. Given the country’s connection to political and social protests, the rise of the escrache, by the nature of its name and distinctiveness, diverges from the tactics and repertoires of collective protests to form a unique form of activism rooted in the multisensorial. However, these distinctions in no way dismiss the importance of memory as foundational aspect of the escrache. This research has sought to further clarify the various modes through which the escrache has been defined and perceived. My analysis of the escrache through various modes of documentation has highlighted the different elements and points of view experienced by this form of collective protest and memory.

The testimonies, videos, and posters outline the many distinct aspects that work together to create the final demonstration, whereby the entire community engages in acts of memory whilst reclaiming their public spaces. The analysis of these elements is important to understanding distinct perceptions and impacts of these events. To understand these perspectives, the use of newspapers has allowed for an analysis of language used, but also of its trajectory throughout the years. This analysis has shown not only how two distinct major news agencies utilize language, but also how their own social and political ideologies have diverged through time and through the prevalence of the escrache.
The understanding of this topic is important as it shows how the culture and nature of the escrache is rooted in the public reclamation of space. It is significant because this topic shows how individuals and societies that have been repressed and oppressed have found ways to protest and reclaim the spaces that have been taken from them. This topic highlights why social action is important, as it is a form in which societies mourn and feel pain collectively. More importantly, it demonstrates the need for personal and social justice as communities to transform their pain into action, demanding justice for the crimes once committed and then ignored through presidential pardons. This time period and the escrache are important because they demonstrate how, generations later, Argentina continues to deal with the memory of this time and find new and creative forms to reject social and political silencing of the oppressed and repressed.
Appendix

This appendix includes more in-depth information about the qualitative research data collected for this project, using MaxQDA. First, I present the various periodicals used in my research. Table 1 shows the articles found for the newspaper La Nación. For this outlet, the articles used in my research spanned over the years 1996 to 2006. Similarly, Table 2 shows the periodicals collected from the newspaper Página 12. These articles begin in 2002 and end in 2016. With both of the newspaper outlets combined, my research covers the earliest development of the escrache in Argentina, after the creation of H.I.J.O.S. in 1995. Additionally, my research also addresses some of the most current mentions of the escraches in the year 2016.

Finally, Table 3 explains the various codes I used to organize content analysis by theme. I focused on specific language and rhetoric to decipher and organize my understanding of the newspaper articles. The brown parent code was named “Responses to the Escrache,” as a sought to divide and various ways the newspapers interpreted societal response. The code under this parent code included “Negative Responses to the Escrache.”

The color purple included the “Purpose of the Escrache” as a parent code. In this, I broke down the articles to compare how both described the definition and purpose of the escrache. I used the codes “False Histories” and “Crimes Committed” because varying interpretations of history shifted the perception about the escrache’s purpose. Additionally, a list of the crimes committed allowed for a better understanding about who was being escrachado, but it also provided me with the ability to examine how the newspaper articles shape their memory of the crimes committed during the dictatorship.

The parent code, “Aspects of the Escrache” breaks down the various important elements that I found to be consistent in my reading of the newspaper articles. The codes that fell under
this theme are all elements that deal with the focus of this project, such as the differences between escraches within the larger context of protests within the country. Other aspects, like community inclusion and the coding of visuals were all essential to my understanding of the varying elements of the escrache, but also to how the newspapers responded to these forms.

An examination of violence was important to this project because, despite this not being one of the core values of H.I.J.O.S., it is still present (if not physically, then in the rhetoric). The two outlets documented violence differently and in two very diverging forms. This differentiation was important to my conceptualization of the escrache and public spaces.
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Table 3. Codes and Colors Used for Qualitative Data Collection

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Primary Sources


“Escracharon a Walter Tejada, condenado dos veces delitos de lesa humanidad y robo de bebés.” El Ágora Digital, 2 December 2018.


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