

## INTRODUCTION



For time is not a rope one can measure from knot to knot, time is a slanted and undulating surface which only memory can stir and bring closer.

—José Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*

This is a book about multiple memories and multiple temporalities. The idea is that memories—always referred to in the plural—have a history and develop in multiple temporalities. They appear as recollections, silences and words unspoken, or traces, shaped by the scenarios and the social struggles that are going on at each historical moment. What is silenced at one moment may be voiced loudly later on; what is central at one point in time may become less relevant in the future, while other topics or issues move to the forefront. Changing scenarios, actors old and new, topics spoken or silenced: these are what render memories dynamic, making the meanings of the past and its memories the focus of social and political struggles.

The attention to social memories connected to violent political processes is relatively new in academia. In Europe, scholarship on the topic began with discussions of the social and political responses to World War II and the sociopolitical catastrophe of National Socialism and Nazism. Since then, concern with memories of this type has expanded, leading to the development of a field of study all of its own that has spread to different places across the globe. In Latin America, the postdictatorship transitions in the Southern Cone during the 1980s set off demands and debates, both social and political, on how to deal with the recent past. Intellectual and academic reflections were

part of those debates and demands. In the framework of concerns about these transitions to democracy, social memories caught the attention of scholars, with new programs at academic institutions and scientific journals and the construction of local and international networks. This new academic field is nourished by conversations and exchanges with public policies, social actors, social movements, and artistic expressions, though these dialogues are rarely linear or harmonious. This is because academic research and intellectual debate are not isolated; they are part and parcel of the historical process of social struggles, pieces of the same puzzle, and researchers and intellectuals are actively engaged in configuring public debate.

The fact that these institutional developments coincide with my own career as a researcher on this topic is by no means fortuitous, as I myself have been involved in developing the field of studies on memory from very early on, and continue to be actively engaged with it. This book is the result of my ongoing work and reflections on different levels: political action, the demands and objectives of social movements, the subjectivity and voice of the victims, the presence of diverse social actors. In shifting scenarios, these actors speak and remain silent, remember and forget, come up with strategies, recognize traces of the past, attribute meaning, or take action even amid the senselessness of a burdensome past. It is also about the voice of new actors who raise new questions, explore, resist, and make new proposals.

For all these reasons, these pages are highly personal. They build on several decades of work in this field, in my own research, in encouraging others to embark on studies about memories, and in building networks of young researchers. The book tells different stories that, though connected, have different temporalities, drawing on the multiple experiences and events that permeate both my own trajectory and the period in history in which I happen to live. It deals with the history of social and political processes that play a part in how memories are shaped and reshaped, the process of creating and consolidating this field of study and its core ideas, the social actors who have played key roles in expressing memories and the disputes among them, and changes in the way past events are narrated and institutionalized. Finally, this book tells the story of how my own perspective took shape, as it is my conviction that the autobiographical dimension, materialized in the interpretations, concerns, and political dilemmas surrounding memory, cannot be eluded.<sup>1</sup> The result is a hybrid that combines my academic research, my civic and political engagement, and my own subjectivity.

The book draws on three decades of investigation and debates on the social struggles for memories. It is based on texts written at different times for specific audiences, sometimes in response to specific demands, and at others to more general intellectual concerns. Over time, the original texts were updated and revised, as they were when preparing the manuscript

for the Spanish edition, and now, for this English translation. Revisiting a recent period, poring over old notes and papers along with recent ones, and comparing one's own ideas with what others have written is an exercise in reworking meaning. It is one more twist in the spiral of interpretations, of understanding the game of "winks upon winks upon winks" that Clifford Geertz (1973, 9) refers to in his analysis of "thick description," with the addition of a temporal-historical dimension. A choice of genre had to be made. I ultimately decided to include, at the beginning of each chapter and in a few other places, some notes on the historicity of my ideas and texts in a more autobiographical, informal, and self-reflective tone. These notes, which I have translated and revised myself, appear in italics.

### About Memories

Daily life is fundamentally composed of routines and customary practices, things we have learned and then repeat without much thought. Past lessons and current memories of them become habit and tradition, part of normal everyday life. There is nothing memorable about these daily practices, which are framed and socially transmitted in the family, in social class, and in the traditions of other institutions like school and church, as Halbwachs noted in his classic texts (Halbwachs 1992). Something becomes "memorable" when a crack appears in these learned, expected routines, when a new event throws a spoke in the wheel. That is when the person gets involved in a different way, when a process becomes so critically important that it drives someone to seek meaning behind the experience. Remembrance, or what is "memorable," then, assumes a narrative form and connects to a certain object or image, often turning into something that can be shared. If this does not occur, the traces of the event remain in the realm of the nonsensical, even if they reappear and repeat.

As I have argued on numerous occasions (initially in Jelin 2003), memory is not, in fact, the past itself but the way in which people make sense of past experiences in the act of remembering, forgetting, and silencing, endlessly updating the past in connection to the present and to the desired future. Situating memory in temporal terms means bringing the "space of experience" into the present, which contains and constructs past experience and future expectations. Experience is a "present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered" (Koselleck 2004: 259). The past has already passed; it cannot be altered. It is the meaning of this past that changes through reinterpretations anchored to the person's intent and his/her expectations of the future. Hence, the meaning of the past is active. In scenarios marked by struggle and confrontation, social agents develop

narratives that contradict other interpretations, often to ward off oblivion and silences surrounding the past. Social actors and activists make use of the past, bringing into the public sphere readings and interpretations that draw from their emotional and political engagements with the past and the future. *Nunca más* (never again), to cite an emblematic example, encompasses a past (what actually happened), an expectation for the future (the intention and desire for it not to be repeated), and a present in which social actors and institutions express it (the slogan spoken or shouted at specific times and places).

The construction of meanings involves subjective processes expressed by people in the social scenarios in which they act, move, and find their bearings—or lose their bearings and go astray. This occurs in a present that must simultaneously embrace and distance itself from experiences of the past and expectations for the future. Additionally, new historical processes, new junctures, and new social and political scenarios are constantly modifying the interpretive frameworks for understanding this past and thinking about this future. Multiple times, multiple meanings, and the constant transformation of actors and historical processes are some of the dimensions that generate the complexity of the issue.

Past experiences the person is unable to make sense of can also reappear. These pangs of memory occur when repression and dissociation generate breaks and traumatic gaps in a person's narrative capacity. In such cases, the person is unable to attribute meaning, incapable of elaborating an event from the past or integrating it into his/her experiences. This inability will then coexist with the obstinate persistence of the traces of disturbing events in a person's actions and symptoms. Theories of trauma from clinical psychoanalysis, and their application in situations of social catastrophe (Kaes 1991), deal with the personal endeavors associated with acting out and working through trauma (LaCapra 2001). At this psychosocial level, forgetting is neither absence nor emptiness, but the presence of that absence, the representation of something that was but is no longer, something that has been erased, silenced, or denied.

Forgetting plays a central role in memories. Memory is always selective, since total memory is impossible—as the Borges character Funes the Memorious reminds us. Everyday life is full of silences and forgotten experiences, as are unusual and exceptional situations. At its extreme, forgetting can be deep or definitive when one's recollections of facts and processes from the past are entirely erased. The paradox is that if total erasure is successful, then that very success prevents verification, since no traces are left. Oftentimes, however, pasts that seemed definitively forgotten reappear as a result of changes in cultural and social frameworks and acquire a new symbolic or political presence. These changes prompt a reexamination of

the meanings of remnants from the past that had not been significant for decades—or even centuries—and allow new meanings to be attributed. This process involves recovering or even “inventing” traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2003; Yerushalmi 1982).

The past leaves traces on ruins and material markers, in documents and papers, in mnemonic traces in the human neurological system, in individual psychological dynamics, and in the symbolic world. In and of themselves, these traces do not constitute “memory,” unless they are evoked and placed in a framework that gives them meaning. The fact that few traces remain, or that the remnants of the past have been destroyed, is only one of the difficulties involved in evoking the past. What counts are the obstacles in accessing and interpreting the traces, obstacles sometimes caused by the psychological mechanisms of repression and displacement, which in turn provoke distortions of various types.

Who should give meaning to the past? What past are we referring to? The issue is one of human agency: individuals and groups who, in interaction with others, remember and attempt to convey and even impose meanings of the past on others. Yet the others, a diverse and pluralistic group, may or may not be willing to listen. There are autobiographical pasts with events that people themselves have lived through, some of which may become a milestone in their lives and memories. There are also those who have no personal experiences of that past, and this lack of experience places them in what appears to be another category, that of the “others.” For this group, memory is a representation of the past constructed as cultural knowledge shared by successive generations and by a range of “others.” The social and intersubjective dimension of experience and of memory proves fundamental in this transmission and sharing. In fact, the intergenerational transmission of social memories connected to violent pasts, and their pedagogical function, become central questions for institutional policies both formal and informal. This is especially the case for educational and cultural institutions, a topic that will be addressed in chapter 8.

Social and political actors often have the intention of presenting a single and unique narrative of the past in the public scenarios in which they act. They struggle to impose their version of the past and make it hegemonic, legitimate, “official,” normal. When elaborating a narrative of past political violence and state repression, the political goal of some dominant actors, including the state itself, may be to achieve consensus, a narrative that allows wounds to close and settles accounts with the past once and for all. However, active subjects will inevitably challenge such attempts, since memory-building is always an open-ended process, never complete. Thus, no amnesty law has gone unchallenged: in every case, some attempt at a repeal has been made. Similarly, no investigative commission—nowadays known as truth

commissions—has definitively settled the conflicts and struggles over the meanings of the past. No commemorative date, monument, or marker has maintained a single, permanent interpretation; all have undergone changes, their meanings reworked.

These considerations have several implications when analyzing the accounts of politically conflictive pasts and of extreme situations. First, it is necessary to recognize the conflictive nature of memories, which inevitably appear in scenarios marked by confrontation and disputes over the meanings of the past. A second consideration is the need to approach this issue from a historical perspective, as an ongoing process that involves changes in the outlooks of specific actors over time. Third, it is fundamental to recognize that the “past” is a cultural construct, subject to the circumstances of each present in which it is evoked. However, this is not merely a question of circumstance. The persistence of images and meanings of the past—or the elaboration of new interpretations and their social acceptance or rejection—have material, symbolic, and political effects, and influence the struggles for power. We are dealing with historical trajectories in the expressions of memory: what is done at a given moment in one scenario depends on the previous trajectory, and this in turn conditions its future developments, enabling or hindering various alternatives and possibilities.

### **Time, Words, Silences**

Words have historicity: what is said in a given space, moment, and circumstance is different from what is said in another, or with other people in other contexts. This hinges on what can be said, what the speakers wish to say, and the strategies they employ; it also depends on the listeners, and how they hear (or don't hear) and interpret what is (or isn't) said. Multiple combinations are possible: silences of different sorts, words swept away by the wind, words that listeners refuse to hear, words said because they are “good” for something, strategic silences.

Who speaks? Where or to whom? What is said and what is silenced? Who listens? What is the takeaway for listeners? What is the political, social, and cultural framework of the story being told? These questions seem simple and easy to answer when applied to concrete situations, yet they are not. Those who speak and give accounts of the past do so at specific moments in their life, and their recollections are mediated by their experiences and their current circumstances. One picks and chooses what to tell and what to silence; one also forgets. Memories of events are recounted, but so are memories of memories (Passerini 1992), with overlapping layers of temporalities.

The capacity and possibility to speak, to use one's words, are anchored in the space of social and political interaction. The subjectivity of people who can or want to speak in order to convey something about their experience intersects with the scenarios of their action, which may encourage or discourage them from speaking. Shared interpretive frameworks also come into play, gradually defining and redefining the boundaries between private and public, individual and collective, political and moral. In fact, the way in which the experience is named frames it, both in the moment in which it is lived and also later, when it is remembered. Thought categories mediate even the "factual" part of experience. This becomes increasingly important as time passes, as human experience and feelings from both that moment and subsequent ones are incorporated, and as the sociopolitical climate and available cultural frameworks shift.

This is why silences prove so important. Silences and public erasures can be the product of a desire or political will to forget and silence the past. The actors involved elaborate strategies to prevent the future recovery of these memories. This evokes the infamous words of Himmler, who declared that the "final solution" was "a page of glory never mentioned and never to be mentioned."<sup>2</sup> One is faced here with a voluntary political act to destroy evidence and traces in order to promote selective oblivion. Such an extreme example is not necessary, however, to realize that when certain traces are selected for preservation, conservation, or commemoration as part of a memory policy, there is also an implicit aim to forget what has been omitted. Yet, barring physical extermination, it is impossible to manipulate the recollections and memories of witnesses and protagonists in the same way.

In the case of those who lived the events or witnessed them, there is a type of silence that could be referred to as "evasive," an attempt to not remember—or keep silent about—something potentially painful to themselves or others. At the personal level, these silences and secrets often hide conflictive or shameful situations. In some cases, silences are tied to fear—from silences associated with domestic violence and sexual harassment to political silences such as those experienced under the dictatorial regimes of Spain under Franco or the Southern Cone. There are also silences aimed at protecting and safeguarding others, to avoid hurt or suffering. At the societal level, this occurs especially in the aftermath of major social catastrophes, massacres, and genocides. Among those who have lived through the violence, there is a desire not to know, a desire to avoid remembering in order to continue living—even while living next door to those who caused the suffering and pain of that past (Theidon 2013). Written fifty years after the liberation of the concentration camp, *Literature or Life* is the book in which Jorge Semprún recounts his experiences in Buchenwald. His reflections in this

book solidify his strategy of “voluntary amnesia” (Semprún 1998: 196) with an incisive commentary on the difficulties of finding someone to listen: “The real problem isn’t talking about it, whatever the difficulties might be. It’s hearing about it. ... Will people want to hear our stories, even if they’re well told?” (Semprún 1998: 177).

In cases of silence, painful memories persist, awaiting the right moment to be expressed (Pollak 2006). This “wait” corresponds to another rationale for silence: the fear of not being understood, since finding others capable of listening is vital to the process of breaking silence. The silence surrounding repressive practices such as rape and sexual abuse, and their emergence many years after the fact, may well be the result of the difficulties of encountering others able to listen, as will be seen in chapter 6.

Silence is broken when those who suffered start speaking and recounting their experiences. Testimony is a fundamental source for gathering information on what happened. At the same time, it is an exercise in personal and social memory to try to make sense of the past, and a medium for expression for the person who tells the story as well as for those who ask questions or simply listen.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, those who listen also pick and choose, silence, interpret, attribute meaning, or reinforce the senselessness of what is said—and what remains unsaid. What they hear may sound familiar, or it may make them feel alienated and distanced. The fact is, one’s ability to listen varies over time. Certain historical circumstances may be more propitious for listening than others. There are moments in which the social, institutional, and political climate begs for stories; others in which a sense of saturation and excess prevails. This is yet another reason to introduce temporality and historicity, in personalized narratives and in the ability to listen.

Acts of testimony are immersed in broader contexts and scenarios that also serve as frameworks for memories. These frameworks can be institutional, such as formal testimonies at trials or before investigative commissions; less disciplined, autobiographical reflections without institutional parameters; or interviews solicited by diverse mediators such as historical archivists, journalists, and researchers (Pollak and Heinich 2006). On the other hand, and this is important to the arguments of this book, political and cultural frameworks—and climates—are constantly changing. These establish which voices are legitimate and which are not, and enable certain issues while dismissing others.

In summary, public narratives by those who hold power and want to impose a dominant narrative coexist with others who have personal memories of their own experiences. The result is a multitude of voices and multiple “truths” that circulate simultaneously, along with multiple silences and things left unsaid; these can be expressions of traumatic gaps, or strategies a speaker utilizes to mark a social distance from the audience and from others (Sommer



1991). They may also respond to what others are not willing to hear. Such silences can also be indicative of a search to reestablish human dignity and the feeling of “shame” associated with a traumatic event, redrawing spaces of intimacy that were invaded by violence and to avoid putting them on display yet again (Amati Sas 1991).

## **The Approach and Contents of This Book**

This book brings together a series of texts dealing with the construction and transformation of memories of recent historical pasts. The chapters combine empirical data with an analytical approach that alludes to the overlap and succession of temporalities in the construction and expression of memories. Memories, as we will see, are always partial and conflictive, with gaps and silences, oblivion and denial. In this myriad and diverse space, the focus is on the social actors involved and the strategies they bring to bear in public scenarios characterized by confrontations and negotiations, alliances and hostilities, as they constantly vie to make their visions hegemonic. The model of social action implicit to this analysis draws on classic social science topics such as the construction of authority and social legitimacy. These topics are incorporated in a temporality that is not solely chronological—insofar as past experiences and future expectations come into play—while explicitly considering the feelings, emotions, and subjectivity of these actors. In addition, the consideration of the scenarios where the action takes place implies the presence and constant reference to otherness, to the others to whom the action is directed. After all, without others, no social action is possible. The transformations in social and political struggles, in the protagonists and the scenarios in which they act, and in the ideas they wrangle over intersect with developments in the academic field of memory studies and in my own perspective on these topics.

The topics addressed cover a variety of issues. The analysis is mostly based on Argentina since the 1970s, although not exclusively. Correlations and comparisons with other countries of the Southern Cone that have close, interconnected histories, and similar or parallel processes in other parts of the world, inform the questions posed and the interpretations provided.

The book starts with an analysis of the ways societies deal with violence and repression in their recent pasts. The experiences of the countries in the Southern Cone (chapter 1), laid out in a comparison with Germany, reveal a shared and interrelated history of struggles for memories. The unique aspects of each case—in terms of sociopolitical contexts, the power of the actors involved, and changes in each scenario—are also addressed. The title of this chapter, “Perspectives on the Past: Conflictive and Never-Ending,” refers to

the unfinished nature of memorialization endeavors, always open to new interpretations and struggles. In fact, this unfinished and open-ended character of memories is the leitmotif of the book, and is reiterated time and again, in different situations and at different levels.

In the following chapter, we move from the actual arenas of social and political struggles to the academic world. The objective here is to frame and understand the emergence of a field of studies on memories, intertwined with the field of gender studies. The central ideas of the social sciences of Latin America starting in the mid-twentieth century provide historical context for the emergence of these two interconnected fields. This is a history in which academic developments and evolving interpretations are closely tied to the political processes of the region.

The third chapter, a lengthy one, concentrates on Argentina's human rights movement during the dictatorship, the democratic transition, and beyond. Demands for information at the beginning (the quest for "truth"), entreaties for justice since the transition, and the growing insistence on memory policies are milestones that mark this history of ups and downs, achievements and setbacks. This chapter brings out the voices of actors, old and new, who fight in changing scenarios, revealing—once again—the open-ended nature of the historical processes involved.

The following chapters delve into more specific topics. Struggles and negotiations take different forms in different countries, yet always highlight the will and determination of actors who strive to incorporate memory markers as part of public and official remembrance policies. Initiatives and attempts to establish markers to pay homage and foster remembrance are some of the public manifestations of the struggles for memories. Chapter 4 analyzes the sociopolitical struggles surrounding commemorations and officially recognized dates, the efforts to establish and maintain territorial markers of diverse types—memorials, monuments, memory sites, museums—and the search for and organization of documents and traces of the past in archives. The instances of struggle and negotiation around these markers are highly diverse, and always involve actors who strive to have them recognized as part of public, state-sponsored memorialization policies.

The questions that guide the following three chapters refer to the ways in which actors establish themselves as legitimate. Chapter 5 discusses how Argentine actors struggle to establish their voices as legitimate in the public sphere over time, exposing the strength and enduringness of victimhood, familism, and maternalism. Changes in the interpretation of sexual violence as a repressive practice are examined in chapter 6. Important shifts at the national and especially international level—with significant developments in international norms regarding human rights law—helped break the silence, but they also threatened the right to privacy and intimacy. Chapter 7 addresses the place of personal testimony in the history of memories,

bringing into the analysis the micro-social level and more explicitly integrating the dimension of actors' subjectivity.

The final chapter of the book discusses how memory practices—and to a large extent, the field of research as well—have been dominated by a “duty to remember”: the idea that remembering and maintaining an active policy with regards to a dictatorial past are necessary conditions to build democracy in the future. This was the basic assumption guiding the political commitment to memory-based initiatives at the time of the transition in Argentina, but it also applies to other countries and places. After several decades, this assumption swelled into an enormous question: Is an active memory policy essential for democracy? To address this question, the relationship between memory and democracy must be deconstructed so as to explore which concrete aspects of democracy are linked to activating memories of the authoritarian past. The chapter offers examples of changes in institutional practices, in cultural and symbolic dimensions, and in the field of educational policies, to conclude and reiterate, once again, that the future is open-ended and unfinished.

As already mentioned, in order to engage with the questions and concerns presented throughout this book, research findings in the social sciences are presented along with my own personal and political concerns. The autobiographical and subjective dimension is inevitable. In his classic book *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills situates his concern at the point where history and biography converge; or to use the author's words, the place where the “personal troubles of the milieu” intersect with “the public issues of social structure” (1959: 8), transcending the local milieu of the individual and the field of his or her internal life. According to the sociologist, “No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey” (1959: 6). The challenge that Mills proposes, and which I take as my own, is expressed in the final paragraph of his book: “Within that range [biography, history, and their intricate relationship] the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time” (1959: 226).

## **Individual and Collaborative Work in Academia: Acknowledgments**

Academic practice and intellectual production guidelines call for scholars to come up with their own ideas, drawing on a concept of individualized authorship and personalized intellectual property. The resulting product generally bears individual markers—the ideas, research, and writings of whoever signs their name. These products, however, are always the results

of a shared history with others. At times, scholars can recognize and identify the origin of certain ideas or data, remembering who actually contributed with discussions and assistance of various sorts. There are also ideas that derive from what one reads or from one's imaginary dialogues with texts and with authors, in which no personal exchange occurs. A text is also shaped by academic and vital day-to-day experiences, human interactions of diverse sorts, in different places and at different times.

In this as in most cases, many people have contributed to the final product in some way. How can we identify the individual components and the collective, shared ones? Ultimately, all knowledge is social. As Maurice Halbwachs said in reference to memory, "We are never alone." Certainly, it never would have occurred to me to take on the work this book involved without sharing experiences with the colleagues, activists, and friends with whom I worked and interacted over the years. For that reason, my question is about the "I" and the "we" in the process of knowledge production. What is the place of others in one's intellectual endeavors? How can one recognize the collective, interactive process?

Generally, some of these exchanges and the people involved are mentioned in the "acknowledgments." I find this method and ritual highly unsatisfying, yet I have still not found another way to express my gratitude.

This book is about time and memories. It is also a pathway through time, both the relatively short time in which it was drafted—two or three years passed from the original idea until it was published, and two more for this revision and English translation—and the longer biographical time, the time of thoughts, research, and work on the topic. Many people and experiences were part of this lifelong journey. It would be impossible to recognize everyone and everything that contributed. Therefore, these acknowledgments cover only a few milestones, and are limited to the specific assistance and support provided in drafting the texts. In no way do they cover all the dialogues and shared experiences that, despite producing a good deal of unease and anxiety, also yielded many ideas.

My concerns and anxieties about what type of book this should be were discussed and shared with Ludmila da Silva Catela and Susana Kaufman. These two colleagues, as well as Laura Mombello, have been my allies and friends in this and other adventures in thought. The three share with me the feelings and emotions entailed in working on such sensitive and charged topics. All listened and gave their opinions, contributed information, and did a careful reading of different sections of the text, providing their expert opinions, lots of support, and friendship. My recognition and gratefulness to them. Mauricio Taube also deserves thanks, not only for his unconditional love and wonderful sense of humor but also for the uncomfortable yet important questions he posed. The story of the book also involves two other

dear people. In its initial stages, Celina van Dembroucke read through dozens of texts of all sorts and helped shape the outline. At each stage, our conversations contributed to imagining how to approach the task. An insightful reader, Manuel Balan offered wry comments on the ambiguities, contradictions, voids, and open-ended processes mentioned in the text.

The ideas and original texts were presented, read, and discussed in numerous places. I would like to thank my colleagues from the IDES Memory Studies Group (Núcleo de Estudios sobre Memoria), the members of the IDES Citizenship and Human Rights Program (programa sobre Ciudadanía y Derechos Humanos), and the fellows who participated in the SSRC “Memories of Repression” program almost twenty years ago, as well as my graduate students in the UNGS-IDES social sciences program for their suggestions and comments. Above all, I am indebted to the activists of the human rights movements in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Paraguay, South Africa, and many other countries for their persistent work within their institutions and out on the street. Over the years, my work on the subject was made possible by the institutional support of the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, CONICET), the Institute for Economic and Social Development (Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social, or IDES), and the Social Science Research Council program. The translation was made possible by the Sur Program for Translation Support of Argentina’s Foreign Ministry and the School of International Training’s study abroad program in Argentina.

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extra mile. Julieta Lenarduzzi prepared the list of cited works and double-checked them.

Preparing the English-language edition of the book was not an easy task. Wendy Gosselin, an experienced translator, accepted a dualfold challenge: first, translating the book, and second, having to discuss and respond to my reactions, preferences, and interferences in her professional work. Our constant interaction—evidenced in the hundreds (if not thousands) of comments and revisions to the manuscript—was a great experience for me, and I do hope it gave Wendy some satisfaction as well. Again, since the texts in italics are much more personal, I translated or rewrote them myself.

Given that this is a book about memories, it is dedicated to the memory of three people no longer with us who shared their ideas and sensitivity with me over the years and continue to accompany me in imaginary conversations I hold with them. Carlos Iván Degregori, a colleague and friend with whom I shared the “Memories of Repression” program: his clarity, his intellectual and political engagement, his preoccupation with ways of telling and writing, his sensitivity and his sharp observations have shaped both my thoughts and feelings on this topic. Next is Dora Schwarzstein, a colleague who did so much to introduce and struggle to establish oral history as a legitimate methodology in Argentina, and with whom I shared many enriching, stimulating, warmhearted discussions. Finally, Norbert Lechner enlightened me and others with his struggles to incorporate subjectivities in political analysis, focusing on uncertainties and open-ended futures without resorting to categorical affirmations. All three were a constant presence as I worked on this book.

## Notes

1. This permanent consideration of my own trajectory on the issues raised in this book leads to something that is not my usual practice: an overdose of references to papers and books I wrote and published.
2. The quote is from a talk Himmler gave to SS generals on 4 October 1943. Quoted by Shirer (1967: 1259).
3. Even when the person is able to answer questions about the past, or manages to “tell” his/her story, there may still be enormous narrative difficulties and obstacles. These reflect the insurmountable challenge of fitting these experiences into a shared framework, generating semiotic incapacities and narrative gaps. There are testimonies lacking in subjectivity that, when expressed, prove to be ritualized repetitions of the tale of suffering (Van Alphen 1999).