

“The Representation of Nazism and World War II in the Literature of Argentina and Mexico”

By

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### **Abstract**

Since the 1960s Nazism, the Holocaust, Adolf Hitler, the atomic bomb, and World War II have been recurring tropes in Argentine and Mexican literature, demanding to be studied as an overarching phenomenon that has existed for decades in these two countries. These works have mostly been studied as indirect references to the Argentine dictatorship or to the current wave of narco-violence in Mexico. Most analyses reinforce traditional notions of allegory in which the allegorical text is mirroring its referent in a parallel relationship. To some extent, this parallel relationship is encouraged by the literary texts themselves, as they often introduce explicit references to local historical events alongside the representations of Nazism or World War II, most notably the dictatorial periods in Argentina, or the gruesome violence in Mexico's narco-war. I find, however, that some of these critical interpretations leave no room for readings that go beyond analyzing representations of Nazism as metaphors. My main objective is to show that in each region the literary representations of World War II events can be read beyond these canonical and often pre-established interpretations. Instead, I argue that these literary texts represent (and sometimes challenge) other unexplored situations and conflicts in these nations such as xenophobia, racism, the naturalization of violence, and the need for a new intellectual ethic. To reveal these other, latent possibilities, I rely on the concept of dialectical or interlocking allegories to analyze how the texts' referents and signs are constantly building on each other instead of simply mirroring each other.

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## **Introduction: Fictionalized Nazis in Latin America and the Legacy of José Emilio**

### **Pacheco's *Morirás lejos***

There is a magazine street vendor chasing me down the bustling Corrientes Avenue in Buenos Aires. I turn back with my right hand resting on my chest, signaling apology. The man answers with a few profanities that are beyond my Argentine lingo, and turns back. I quickly realize his display of bravado and indignation was a performance for other street vendors or passersby that may have heard the question I had nonchalantly asked a few seconds earlier: “Do you have a copy of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* for sale?”

The question is not as impertinent as it may appear at first, particularly in Argentina. Just a few weeks before this incident I had a brief conversation with a young man running a magazine and newspaper stand who was selling a translated copy of Adolf Hitler’s 1925 manifesto. It was nestled among self-help books, celebrity magazines, and newspapers (Fig. 1). The book had been obviously photocopied, haphazardly edited, and it had no information about its publisher, Editorial Buenos Aires. All the vendor had to say about it was that many books are delivered to him weekly, and that this one sold well enough to be re-supplied every so often. Regretfully, I did not buy the book. I also did not buy one of the many purportedly genuine Nazi medals and other insignias sold at a few antique stands in the San Telmo neighborhood weekend street market. What I did acquire was a large collection of non-fiction books written by Argentine authors about the Holocaust and Nazism, among them one that chronicles the capture of former Nazi lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann in Argentina, another that analyzes the possible ties between Nazism and Juan Perón’s first government, and a tome published by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo publishing house that compares the 1976-83 dictatorship with Nazi Germany and

the Vietnam-era United States' politics.<sup>1</sup> Several bookstores dedicated precious storefront display space to these types of books, and others had special sections on the topic. None of the many knowledgeable bookstore attendants and owners I spoke with about the subject of this dissertation would flinch at my questions. Nor did they find it odd that I was interested in any Argentine fiction books they could offer me that referenced Nazism or that at least were set during World War II. Clearly, it was a different experience when asking street vendors if they sold one of the most infamous books ever published. Savvy antique street vendors, however, would immediately recognize my interest in the subject even before I spoke to them. For instance, after noticing my draw towards World War II-era merchandise, one of the vendors showed me a small insignia with a Swastika, and a Third Reich-era coin he had under the counter. I politely declined to purchase the items with a sense of uneasiness.

I had a similar experience about a year later in my native Mexico during a trip to the northern city of Monterrey. Outside a museum in the historic Barrio Antiguo district, a street vendor offered me a Nazi-era military medal. He emphasized several times its authenticity. "Esta sí es de verdad, joven," he said several times, implying that many other Nazi-related items I

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<sup>1</sup> The three books are: Alvaro Abós' *Eichmann en Argentina* (2012), which meticulously chronicles Eichmann's whereabouts from his escape from Germany in 1945 to the days leading to his execution in 1962; Uki Goni's *Perón y los alemanes: La verdad sobre el espionaje nazi y los fugitivos del Reich* (1998), which has been translated to several languages and published in the United States and Europe; and Alipio Paoletti's *Como los nazis, como en Vietnam: Los campos de concentración en la Argentina* (2006), published by the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

would find in Mexico would not be authentic. He was not entirely incorrect. This was several years after former Mexican president Felipe Calderón declared war on drug cartels, and narco-violence spilled from the northern border to the rest of the country. Soon after, references to Nazism and the Holocaust began to appear in speeches, news articles, opinion pieces, and political cartoons in an effort to explain the environment of violence in a nation faced with countless dead, daily confrontations between drug cartels and military forces, and numerous mass graves found throughout the country. Since 2009, this anachronistic and incongruous analogy also became prominent in Mexican fiction when authors like Javier Sicilia, David Toscana, Juan Villoro, and Jorge Volpi began publishing novels that were either set during World War II or that alluded to Nazism and the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> Few of these works could be catalogued as traditional historical novels. Instead, they were narratives that allegorically referred to the violence in Mexico through the representation of events that occurred in Europe during the 1939-45 war period.

Argentina, historically having had stronger ties to Europe than Mexico due to immigration during the nineteenth century and, to a lesser extent, before and after World War II, has had a longer tradition of fictionalized accounts of Nazism and the Holocaust. Authors such as Edgardo Cozarinsky, José Pablo Feinmann, Tununa Mercado, Gustavo Nielsen, Ricardo Piglia, Abel Posse, Lucía Puenzo, Manuel Puig, Ernesto Sábato, and Juan Terranova, among many

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<sup>2</sup> The works by the Mexican authors are: *El fondo de la noche* (2012) by Sicilia; *Los Puentes De Königsberg* (2009) and *La ciudad que el diablo se llevó* (2013) by Toscana; *Arrecife* (2012) by Villoro; and *En busca de Klingsor* (1999) and *Oscuro bosque oscuro: Una historia de terror* (2009) by Volpi.

others, have published novels and short stories that either focus on, or at least reference, Nazism, the Holocaust, or other World War II historical figures and battles.<sup>3</sup> However, I have identified two key historical moments in which these literary representations became more prevalent in Argentina: during the period of transition from the last military dictatorship to democratic rule in the early 1980s, and during the years immediately following the catastrophic economic collapse in the early 2000s. Some of these literary works, like those in Mexico, allegorize the events that were occurring in Argentina at the time of publication through the representation of World War II events.

It should be made clear that even though these fictionalized accounts of World War II events in Mexican and Argentine literature became more prominent in the last thirty years, they are not exclusively a phenomenon of this period. Since at least the 1960s, Nazism, the Holocaust, Adolf Hitler, the atomic bomb, and World War II battles and historical figures have been recurring tropes in Argentine and Mexican literature. The emergence of this occurrence is on par with what Enzo Traverso argues was the moment in which “the West came to realise the historical uniqueness of the extermination of the Jews,” and neologisms such as “Holocaust”

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<sup>3</sup> The works that fictionalize Nazism or WWII events by the Argentine authors mentioned are: *La novia de Odessa* (2001), *Tres fronteras* (2006), *Maniobras nocturnas* (2007) and *Lejos de dónde* (2010) by Cozarinsky; *La sombra de Heidegger* (2005) by Feinmann; *Yo nunca te prometí la eternidad* (2004) by Mercado; *Auschwitz* (2004) by Nielsen; *Respiración artificial* (1980) by Piglia; *Wakolda* (2011) by Puenzo; *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) by Puig; *Los demonios ocultos* (1987) and *El viajero de Agartha* (1989) by Posse; *Abaddón, el exterminador* (1974) by Sábato; and *El vampiro argentino* (2011) by Terranova.

entered the general lexicon (*Understanding the Nazi Genocide*, 7). This realization came about largely as a result of the international coverage of the 1961 trial of former Nazi lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, which brought unprecedented global awareness to the extent of the atrocities committed by the Third Reich in the years leading up to and during the armed conflict. The trial was a watershed moment for how World War II, Nazism, and the Holocaust were studied, understood and interpreted. According to Tim Cole, the trial also led to the emergence of the Holocaust “as probably the most talked about and oft-represented event of the twentieth century” (3). While Nazism, the Holocaust, and the armed conflict in general have been represented ad nauseam by Hollywood and the European film industry, there is also a long tradition of these representations in the literary production of Europe, Asia, and the United States. Latin American authors have likewise produced a large body of literary works that represent World War II events. In the 1940s, for instance, Jorge Luis Borges became one of the first Latin American authors to fictionalize some of the events that occurred in Europe during World War II. Since then, particularly after the late 1960s, numerous Latin American authors have written fiction featuring World War II as its backdrop. The majority of these authors are from the Southern Cone and Mexico.

### **Current scholarship and allegorical readings**

Despite the large body of novels that fictionalize these historical events and figures in the literature of Mexico and Argentina, there is a lack of in-depth studies that address them critically and theoretically as an overarching phenomenon that has existed for decades in these two countries. Of the few studies that do exist, the majority focus on these representations and

analyze the texts through traditional notions of allegory in which the allegorical text mirrors its referent in a parallel relationship in which the primary, literal meaning of a trope has a second possible meaning. To some extent, this parallel relationship is encouraged by the literary texts themselves, as they often introduce explicit references to local historical events alongside representations of Nazism, most notably in connection to the dictatorial periods in Argentina, or to the current wave of gruesome violence in Mexico. Some authors, such as Javier Sicilia in Mexico and Abel Posse in Argentina, go as far as to announce that their works utilize Nazism and Holocaust tropes to allegorically represent those particular historical moments in their respective countries. It is not surprising, then, that critics focus on these types of parallel allegorical interpretations. I find, however, that some of these studies compellingly uncover the referent that the texts are allegorizing (the dictatorship in Argentina or the gruesome violence in Mexico's narco-war) but tend to leave no room for readings that go beyond analyzing these representations of Nazism as metaphors.

My main objective in this dissertation is to show that in each region the literary representations of World War II can be read beyond these canonical and often pre-established interpretations. My approach combines theories of allegory, scholarly texts on the intersection between history and fiction, and World War II and Holocaust studies in order to show how certain literary texts represent (and sometimes challenge) other unexplored situations and conflicts in these nations such as xenophobia, racism, the naturalization of violence, and the need for a new intellectual ethic. I rely on Doris Sommer's concept of dialectical or interlocking allegories to analyze how the texts' referents and signs are constantly building upon each other. Introduced in her seminal work about Latin American foundational fictions, Sommer's concept builds primarily upon theses originally postulated by Walter Benjamin regarding the relationship

between allegories and dialectics. Sommer utilizes these ideas to argue that the association between national romances and nation building cannot be completely understood through a notion of allegory that assumes that there are “two parallel levels of signification” with different temporalities, one “revealing or ‘repeating’ the anterior level of meaning (either trying desperately to become the former or looking on from a meta-narrative distance at the futility of any desire for stable meaning)” (63). Ultimately, what differentiates Sommer’s notion of allegory is the need to understand the relationship between sign and referent as an interlocking association. The need to differentiate this notion of allegory arises from a crisis of referentiality. According to Sommer, an interlocking allegory is one in which the sign and the referent are not only dependent on each other, but each is also actively producing the other: “I am suggesting that some allegories, such as national novels, may have no preexisting and eternal level of referentiality but, rather, make themselves up, all the while attempting to produce an illusion of stability” (78). Drawing from Sommer’s concept, I argue that while the texts that I analyze on one level do allegorize certain social and political conflicts such as the dictatorships in Argentina and the drug-related violence in Mexico, there are other possible meanings that can be revealed through an analysis of the signs and the referents as an interlocking or dialogical relationship. For example, in Chapter 1, I argue that some of the texts from Argentina refer to Nazism in order to reconfigure a left-leaning intellectual project after its decimation during the 1976-83 dictatorship. And while it is true that some Mexican novels written in the past few years that fictionalize World War II are allegorically representing the violent environment of the war against drug cartels in Mexico, in Chapter 3 I posit that these texts are also challenging discourses that dehumanize the victims of violence.

In Argentina, the connection between literary representations of Nazism and the last dictatorship is widely accepted. In Mexico, however, a few critics from non-academic niche publications and literary blogs have noted that the recent phenomenon in Mexican literature seems to be part of a current Latin American fad to satisfy worldwide publishing trends. For example, on discussing the clash between a writer's national identity and the desire to be part of so-called "world literature," Rafael Lemus argues that "uno de los trucos que más se celebra a los escritores latinoamericanos en ese espectáculo globalizado es desdeñar sus escenarios nacionales y ubicar sus ficciones en la Alemania nazi o en algún rincón de Asia, 'luchando — como ha escrito Enrique Serna— contra el estigma nefando de haber nacido en la colonia Narvarte'" (32). Ironically, even a well-established literary figure like Ricardo Piglia, who fictionalized World War II in his work, has deemed the current literary phenomenon a Latin American fad. In an interview with Spanish newspaper *El País*, Piglia discusses the push by editors in the 1960s and 70s toward a "Latin American" style of literature that resembled magical realism and that emphasized the local. He argued that quite the opposite seemed to be happening among writers attempting to join the ranks of world literature authors: "Ahora se da el gesto deliberado de ser contemporáneo, pones un nazi en una novela y ya pareces cosmopolita" (Rodríguez Marcos). Globalization undoubtedly plays an important part in how certain topics like Nazism and other World War II historical events have recently become literary tropes favored by international publishing houses and authors. Nevertheless, throughout this dissertation I show that the phenomenon in Mexican and Argentine literature is much more complex than solely a result of globalization.

## **Globalization, the Holocaust, and the Specificity of Latin American Literary Works**

Given my focus on contemporary Latin American literature that fictionalizes events that occurred in Europe in the 1940s, a brief overview of globalization's paradoxes is a necessary starting point for reading these Argentine and Mexican works. According to Andreas Huyssen, one such paradox is caused by the globalization of memory, which rests on the notion that the totalizing and the global are at the same time the particular and the local. This paradox has its roots in World War II memory, particularly in discourses that engage with the globalization of the Holocaust. Huyssen explains that on the one hand "the Holocaust has become a cipher for the twentieth century as a whole and for the failure of the project of enlightenment," while on the other hand "this totalizing dimension of Holocaust discourse [ . . . ] is accompanied by a dimension that particularizes and localizes" (13-14). I argue that this localized dimension of the Holocaust allows us to interpret Argentine and Mexican literary representations of World War II in line with particular social conflicts. After all, as Huyssen notes, "it is precisely the emergence of the Holocaust as a universal trope that allows Holocaust memory to latch on to specific local situations that are historically distant and politically distinct from the original event" (14). Throughout my study, I implicitly engage in a dialogue with academics like James E. Young, who have analyzed representations of Nazism and the Holocaust in different types of cultural expressions. Similar to Huyssen, Young argues that the Holocaust caused such a paradigm shift that it now informs our own view of the world: "How victims of the Holocaust grasped and responded to events as they unfolded around them depended on the available tropes and figures of their time no less than our own responses now depend on the figures available to us in a post-

Holocaust era” (84). Huyssen’s and Young’s positions point to different issues that I address in the chapters that follow.

I expand my analyses beyond the exclusive focus on the Holocaust to include Nazism and the war in general as recurring tropes or “cyphers” in literary works in Mexico and Argentina. Centering solely on representations of the Holocaust would severely limit my study and dilute some of the contributions I make to this field of study. I argue that the emphasis placed on the Holocaust by critics and academics has turned it into what Fredric Jameson identifies as “the construction of a historical totality [that] necessarily involves the isolation and privileging of one of the elements within that totality [. . .] such that the element in question becomes a master code or ‘inner essence’ capable of explicating the other elements or features of the ‘whole’ in question” (27-28). One could argue that Auschwitz and the Holocaust have effectively been turned into the main elements of what Jameson calls a “fatally reductive” sense of a historical or cultural period, which “tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way ‘expresses’ some unified inner truth [. . .] which marks the whole length and breadth of the ‘period’ in question” (27). The importance of the Holocaust notwithstanding, I believe that representations of Nazism and the Third Reich are equally as powerful and symbolically-charged as those of Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to separate the Holocaust from Nazism, and vice versa. This is particularly manifest when analyzing literary works that, despite focusing on different events that occurred immediately prior to and during World War II, continue to refer to or fictionalize concentration camps. As will become evident in the chapters that follow, several of the novels that I analyze focus on characters and events related to Nazism, not exclusively to the Holocaust.

However, in many of these works, the Holocaust is present, often implicitly or at least not as the center of the narration. The ubiquitousness of the Holocaust in the Mexican and Argentine works that fictionalize World War II events that are analyzed in this dissertation leads to another important academic debate: the uniqueness of the Holocaust. My understanding of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is informed by Dominick LaCapra's postulations regarding this controversial topic. According to LaCapra, one of the main reasons the Holocaust is often referred to as a unique event is due to "very strong tendencies towards revisionism, denial, and normalization" (159). He adds that this would explain why historians like Eberhard Jaeckel and Charles Maier have insisted on defining how the Holocaust was historically a unique event.<sup>4</sup> LaCapra explains that an issue with such notions of uniqueness is that they may lead to identity politics that can culminate in "a grim competition for first place in victimhood," which in turn may also devolve into researching differences and similarities between historical events, an exercise that he notes may be "rather pointless as research" (159-60). Instead, he argues, there are other possible notions of uniqueness that can be more useful for discussing the Holocaust. For instance, he adds, Israeli-American academic Saul Friedländer argues in favor of a "non-numerical notion of uniqueness" (160). LaCapra explains that, in this case, uniqueness does not indicate an event that occurred only once and that most probably will not ever be repeated. Instead, this understanding of the term indicates that "something happened here that was so outrageous, so unheard-of, that it is unique" (160). Therefore, he adds, paradoxically, there can

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<sup>4</sup> Jaeckel is a German historian known for his contributions to the understanding of Hitler's influence in German history and politics. Maier is a United States academic with expertise in European Studies.

be something so excessive and transgressive that it becomes unique in that sense, but that can be repeated in history.

The consideration of a different approach to the Holocaust as a unique but repeatable event is important and useful for analyzing how Latin American authors can fictionalize both Nazism and the Holocaust to allegorically refer to events that occurred in different chronological and geographical planes. I argue that the literary representations that I analyze throughout this dissertation reinforce the difficulty of defining the Holocaust as a traditionally unique event. In fact, that Nazism and the Holocaust are fictionalized in Mexico and Argentina in order to allegorically represent local events or moments of crisis can be considered one of the main characteristics of these works. Hector Hoyos, one of the few academics who have studied these representations in Latin American literature more broadly, argues that authors mainly recur to Nazism as an allegory more than as a historical referent: “The ‘Nazism’ as portrayed in such works is not quite German National Socialism; it is less a political party or ideology than it is a term that, although not completely removed from its historical meaning, often stands for something else. Discerning what this may be requires considering the works in some detail” (36). There are other similarities between our approaches to analyzing these works. For instance, we agree that in these works there is a tension between the local and the global. However, Hoyos focuses almost exclusively on the implications of the authors’ and their works’ relationship with the globalization phenomenon. He posits that “Nazi literature” in Latin America as a whole utilizes representations of Nazism that are mediated by a globalized pop-culture understanding of the Third Reich, including “attraction-repulsion, taboo, and awe” (58). Furthermore, he explains that this type of literature “takes advantage of such effects to imagine a different present, challenging dominant narratives of globalization and their assumptions about centrality,

periphery, and the directionality of cultural exchange” (58). As Hoyos correctly suggests, many of the texts that fictionalize Nazism and the Holocaust written by Latin American authors are in constant dialogue with discourses regarding globalization. By writing such narratives these authors indirectly establish their capability and responsibility to engage with global topics such as World War II even when Latin America had very little involvement in the conflict compared to other regions of the world.

Nevertheless, in my interpretation of these narratives I focus mainly on their localized inflection, or the specificity of the time and place in which they were written. For that reason, in the next three chapters, I will be primarily concerned with Latin American works of fiction produced during times of social and political conflicts, and how these texts relate to their moment of enunciation. In other words, I frame my analyses by taking into account the texts’ dialectical relation to the particular moment in history in which they were produced. In order to interpret these novels with an emphasis on their respective and particular Argentine and Mexican contexts, I employ Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope. I demonstrate that this concept is (still) useful to highlight the specificity of a literary text or its innate relationship with time and space. This, in turn, adds another layer of specificity to the interpretation of literary works in relation to the particular historical moment and place in which they were written.

The concept of the chronotope was first brought into literary criticism during the 1930’s by Bakhtin, who borrowed the term from Einstein’s theory of relativity in order to explain the place of cultural expressions in the time and space planes. According to Bakhtin, the chronotope is “la conexión esencial de relaciones temporales y espaciales asimiladas artísticamente en la literatura” (237). However, Bakhtin mainly utilized this concept in a formalist fashion to identify literary genres and the way in which time and space are represented within the works he studied.

Contemporary critics such as Hayden White have furthered the theorization of the chronotope to study the intricacies of social and cultural systems that are at play in a specific historical moment and to examine the way that those relations are represented in both history and fiction. According to White, the chronotope is a more precise concept than “period” or other similar terms because while “a period directs attention to the interplay of process and change [...] the chronotope directs attention to the social systems of constraints, required repressions, permissible sublimations, strategies of subordination and domination, and tactics of exclusion, suppression, and destruction affected by a local system of social encodings” (240). White explains that in writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, this notion is valuable because it can aid critics in distilling or revealing the horizon of possibilities in the discourses of a particular historical moment and place through a close-reading analysis. Notably, these studies can even include elements that are missing or that have been repressed from a text. In other words, the chronotope allows a critic to extract meaning from a text by focusing on its contextual specificities, which is one of my main goals in analyzing the allegorical representations of Nazism, the Holocaust, and other World War II-related events and historic figures in the literature of Mexico and the Argentina.

### **The Legacy of Pacheco’s *Morirás lejos***

Before delving into more contemporary allegorical representations, I would like to briefly address the novel that arguably gave birth to the Latin American phenomenon of fictional representations of Nazism, José Emilio Pacheco’s *Morirás lejos* (1967). While the number of literary representations of Nazism, World War II, and the Holocaust by Mexican authors is not as

large as the amount of works published by their Argentine counterparts, Mexico has the distinction of having produced what is considered by many the first Latin American novel entirely devoted to fictionalizing the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I examine *Morirás lejos* as an experimental literary work that overtly touches upon the debates previously mentioned regarding the representation of Nazism, including the tension between the global and the local in literary representations of World War II, and the academic discussions over the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Due to the overall importance of Pacheco's works in Mexican literature, *Morirás lejos* has received much more attention from critics and academics than other works that have fictionalized events that occurred during World War II. However, few of these studies have considered the possible impact or influence this experimental novel may have had on future Mexican and even Argentine fiction narratives centering on Nazism and the Holocaust.

Not only did Pacheco write the first Latin American novel entirely dedicated to confronting the horrors and legacy of World War II, he also paved the way for Latin American writers who, decades later, would engage with themes connected to Nazism and the Holocaust. In what follows, I briefly dissect the ways in which several of *Morirás lejos*'s motifs and tropes,

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<sup>5</sup> Among the academics who have identified *Morirás lejos* as the first Latin American literary work to center its plot on Nazism and the Holocaust are Dieter Saalman (89) and Luis Leal (218). Maarten van Delden explains that, while Pacheco was the first and only Mexican author to publish a novel completely centered on the Holocaust, Octavio Paz had already touched on the subject in his long-form 1950 essay *El laberinto de la soledad* (566). Van Delden also notes that Carlos Fuentes had referenced WWII and the Holocaust before Pacheco in *La región más transparente* (1958) and *Cambio de piel* (1967), (568).

its style of narration, and even its structure, are often repeated or echoed in the Mexican and Argentine works that I will analyze in the rest of this dissertation. Likewise, I also delineate how, despite having been a very early World War II-themed novel, Pacheco's text was already in dialogue with many of the academic debates that continue to thrive today regarding the representation of Nazism and the Holocaust. The novel has aptly been read as a work with which Pacheco attempted to assert his position as a cosmopolitan or globalized writer. Moreover, I show that this hermetic text is also a meditation on the responsibility of approaching historical events in a critical manner, particularly in Mexico. Finally, I dialogue with academics who have noted how social and political conflicts of the time, such as the Vietnam War, filtered into the text.

*Morirás lejos* is an intricate, self-referential, and fragmented narration that tells several parallel stories, including the history of Jewish people from the first century to the Nazi Holocaust. The text is divided into seven major sections, which are in turn divided into subsections that have a different style of narration, timeframes, and themes. Each of the main sections is preceded by a title and an ancient symbol. These symbols alone have been analyzed at length in several academic studies (Campos, 11-12; Jiménez de Baez, 251-55; Ménez Sánchez). The "Salónica" sections are the only ones that mostly occur in the present time, in Mexico City. The series of events narrated in this section occur in a time span of only a few minutes in which one man, Eme, is looking through the blinds of his home at another man, Alguien, who is sitting at a park bench reading a newspaper. An omniscient and self-aware narrator conjectures throughout the novel the endless possibilities of stories or identities behind these two men, particularly Eme. Other major sections of the novel take place in different places and times around the world, including Jerusalem in the first century, Toledo in the 1400s, and in

concentration camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Short vignettes belonging to the “Salónica” segments are inserted in between some of these sections, labeled by a letter of the alphabet, in which a narrator comments on what is been described or narrated in the rest of the text.

Pacheco’s use of the novel’s main subject matter, Nazism and the Holocaust, speaks to the manner in which his work was ahead of its time. It is significant that the first edition of *Morirás lejos* was published in 1967.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the arguments presented by Enzo Traverso and Tim Cole, other historians like Norman G. Finkelstein have argued that this is the year that marks a watershed in the discussions and representations of the Holocaust in the American continent, particularly in the United States. In his highly controversial but well-documented account of what he calls the “Holocaust Industry”—an ideological representation of the Holocaust mediated by politics that permeates all portrayals and discourses related to the historical event—Finkelstein argues that before the late 1960s “only a handful of books and films

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<sup>6</sup> Pacheco was obsessive about editing his works, even after they had already been published. There are four major editions of the novel, published in 1967, 1977, 1986, and 2017. He made the most changes in the 1977 edition. For an in-depth analysis of these changes, most of which are stylistic or to add more details to certain historical events that Pacheco references throughout the text, see Joel Hancock’s “Perfecting a Text: Authorial Revisions in José Emilio Pacheco’s *Morirás lejos*” and Mayuli Morales Faedo’s “*Morirás lejos*: De la escritura a la reescritura (1967-1977). I study the 1986 edition because for decades it was considered the definitive version. The 2017 posthumous edition was published in honor of his recent passing, and it is still not clear if any changes were made to the text.

touched on the subject” (Ch. 1). For instance, he explains that when writing her seminal 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt was only able to rely on two scholarly studies of the Holocaust written in English. While it is commonly accepted that Eichmann’s trial and Arendt’s account of the procedures brought the Holocaust to the fore worldwide, Finkelstein argues that, in the United States, the Holocaust would not yet develop into the cultural phenomenon that it would eventually become until after 1967: “Until fairly recently, however, the Nazi holocaust barely figured in American life” (Ch. 1). He explains that the lack of studies and even fictional representations of the Holocaust was mainly due to political tensions during the Cold War. According to Finkelstein, during this time, the Jewish political left in the United States did not embrace Holocaust remembrance and fictionalizations mainly because Germany was an American ally against Communism and “remembrance of the Nazi holocaust was tagged as a Communist cause” (Ch. 1). This stance did not change until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when Israel was perceived internationally as an extreme isolation and vulnerability, which “revived memories of Nazi extermination” (Finkelstein, Ch. 1). Within this context, *Morirás lejos* was produced. The timely publication of Pacheco’s novel (alongside the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict) speaks to just how truly relevant the novel was when it was first published.

Keeping in mind that Pacheco’s work was published at a time when worldwide public interest turned to remembering the Holocaust, perhaps it is no wonder why the novel has been read as an effort to position himself as a “universal” or “cosmopolitan” author. Many of the academic studies that focus on *Morirás lejos* categorize it as an example of literary cosmopolitanism tendencies of the time (Brushwood, 108-09; Leal, 217-18; Ocampo, 13). Dierter Saalman, for example, goes as far as to state that the novel “is an extreme example of universal tendencies in the contemporary Spanish American novel” (90). Nonetheless, Saalman

shortly after acknowledges that the novel can also be interpreted as a response to crises occurring in Mexico: “In 1954 and in late 1966, the year in which Pacheco finished his manuscript, the Jews of Mexico City were confronted with a wave of anti-semitic acts. The novel’s concern with racial persecution thus reveals the author as a social critic who is willing to face the question of religious intolerance in his own country” (90). Saalman’s contradictory statements regarding the universal tendencies of *Morirás lejos*’ plot and his suggestion that the novel’s themes could be connected to its Mexican context sheds light into how the global and the local are always at play in this text, and in any other fictional narration of World War II events.

As is the case with the novels that are studied in this dissertation, even if one were to accept that an author writes a novel in an attempt to insert himself into a globalized publishing market, the specificity of the particular time and place in which these works were produced should not be ignored when analyzing them. By 1969, Carlos Fuentes had already identified the contradictory essence of works that could be identified as “cosmopolitan” or “universal” literature: “Los latinoamericanos son hoy contemporáneos de todos los hombres y pueden, contradictoria, justa y hasta trágicamente, ser universales escribiendo con el lenguaje de los hombres de Perú, Argentina o México” (*La nueva*, 32). It is in those contradictions, however, that meaning can be extracted to shed light into the specificity of Latin American works. These contradictions are often easier to identify in *Morirás lejos* than in the novels analyzed in the following chapters due to its *mise en abîme* style or metaliterary nature. For instance, there are key passages in the novel that offer several clues to understand how Pacheco confronts the tension between the global and the local throughout this work. This is exemplified by a fragment in part [v] of the “Salónica” section, in which the self-aware narrator posits that Alguien is an

author writing a novel about World War II, and lists what could be interpreted as a series of possible criticisms he could face for writing a Mexican work set in war-torn Europe:

—Esto ya no interesa —Lo hemos leído un millón de veces —Ya ni quién se acuerde de la segunda guerra mundial —Ahora hay problemas mucho más importantes [. . .] —Si existen tantos conflictos no resueltos en México no podemos dedicar espacio a lo que sucedió en Europa hace ya muchos años —¿Genocidio? Genocidio el de quienes mueren de hambre aquí mismo —Mire esto resulta contraproducente —Lo mejor que se puede hacer contra el nazismo es olvidarlo —No ve que cada nuevo ataque le da vida —Pero cómo se atreve a escribir sobre algo que no presencié —El nazismo es un fantasma que ya no le quita el sueño a nadie. (64-65)

Often, in these side comments by the narrator, when the tension between the local and the global is explicitly present in the text, there is also an implicit questioning of the uniqueness of the Holocaust that evokes the academic debates that would emerge at around the time the novel was published, or shortly after.<sup>7</sup> There are other moments in which this is questioned explicitly. For instance, in “Salónica” the narrator indicates that some of the events that occurred during World War II will be repeated at some point “porque el odio es igual, el desprecio es el mismo, la ambición es idéntica, el sueño de conquista planetaria sigue invariable” (68). This emphasis on the cyclical nature of genocides, conquests, and hate is repeated in some of the other Latin American works that share *Morirás lejos*’ themes. Emphasizing the idea that some of the events

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<sup>7</sup> Noé Jitrik notes that Pacheco’s rumination on the Holocaust and Nazism in *Morirás lejos* came earlier than canonical texts about the subject penned by figures such as Giorgio Agamben and Imre Kertész (75).

that occurred during World War II can be repeated creates a space or the opportunity for authors to utilize Nazism and the Holocaust as an allegory to refer to other, distant, moments of crisis or human rights abuses. Whether done implicit or explicitly in the narrations, this is one of the characteristics that unites several of the works from Mexico and Argentina that are analyzed in the next three chapters.

A particular characteristic of *Morirás lejos* is that the connection between World War II events and contemporary ones is not as subtle as in other novels. For example, the fragment of “Salónica” previously quoted ends with the image of Panzers planes, Third Reich-era German war aircraft, flying over different places and times, including an ancient Jerusalem Temple, the Spanish city of Toledo, a street in Poland, and two Vietnamese cities, Da Nang and Quang Ngai (68). The 1955-75 Vietnamese war is referenced throughout the narration. Pacheco often compares the heinous acts carried out by the Third Reich during World War II to the abuses perpetrated by the US military in Vietnam: “las matanzas se repiten, bacterias y gases emponzoñados hacen su efecto [. . .] cae el napalm sobre los civiles [. . .] se extermina a sus pobladores, se concentra a los sobrevivientes en campos alambrados [. . .] y a fin de no ensuciarse las manos los invasores encargan de los trabajos sucios a otros orientales” (67). Words like “gases,” “concentra,” “campos alambrados,” and “extermina” are deliberately employed by Pacheco to create an effect of repetition and mirroring between the two armed conflicts, which occurred under very different circumstances and decades apart. This effect of historical repetition, according to Alicia Borinsky, is more than a simple exercise of collective memory: it offers the reader the tools to turn memory into a critical appreciation of the past (226-27). The past, and a meditation on what to do with the past, is certainly a central theme in *Morirás lejos*. This same preoccupation with how to face the past is central to all of the primary

works included in the next chapters, but more explicitly presented in Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* and Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro*.

In *Morirás lejos*, however, the present is just as important to the text as the past, and it is ubiquitous in the narration. Pacheco emphasizes the slow passage of time, or the idea that the present is constant, by extending a scene that lasts a couple of minutes (a man peeking through the blinds on a Wednesday afternoon) into some of the longest sections of the novel. It is through these sections that occur in the present time where the local Mexican context filters into the text. As noted by Saalman, some of these references to Mexico focus on the racism and religious intolerance in the country (90). Implicitly, Mexico is also referenced throughout these fragments as a country where its people are apathetic to others' suffering and unwilling to face history even through the simple act of reading a book about the Holocaust. It is significant that Eme is described at one point as "un hombre a quien ciertos desarrollos de la historia moderna afectaron al punto de hacerlo enloquecer" (54), because one of the novel's main preoccupations is how to face history, both as a reader and as a writer, hence the metafictional elements of the text. Eme's madness, driven by his inability to process history, can be interpreted as a representation of the novel's main message: humankind seems destined to ignore the past and never truly learn from its history. The novel's structure, with its myriad digressions, interruptions, unfinished thoughts, and general fragmentation can also be interpreted as Pacheco's artistic representation of his own inability to truly grasp history and be able to accurately describe historical events in his novel.

Another formal element that was inaugurated by *Morirás lejos* and later repeated in other Latin American novels that fictionalize Nazism and the Holocaust was the sudden break of the narration when describing the extermination of Jewish people in concentration camps. This occurs in one of the most memorable fragments of the novel, in one of the "Totembuch"

sections, which narrates the arrival and immediate killing of a group of Ukrainian prisoners in a concentration camp. The fragment begins with the same dry and objective tone as the rest of the sections that are written as a historical account. However, as the description of the killing of the prisoners in a gas chamber advances, the narration begins to break. As the deadly Zyklon B gas begins to fill the chamber, the paragraphs begin to shorten until they become sentences without punctuation. By the end of this fragment, when the remains of the victims have been turned into soaps and ashes, the narration evolves into what could be described as a freeform poem (89-94). Something similar happens in the following, oft-quoted, passage of the novel:

Entonces Jürgen Stropo pudo informar a Himmler:

el  
antiguo  
barrio  
judío  
de  
Varsovia  
dejó  
de  
existir

El  
número  
de  
judíos  
ejecutados

o

detenidos

asciende a 56 065. (69-70)

This dramatic and sudden visual break with traditional narrative could be simply interpreted as the graphic representation of a military official sending a telegram to his supervisor, but there are certainly other possible meanings in a novel that continuously reminds the reader of its failure to accurately represent historical events. Perhaps this is yet another example of Pacheco delivering his novel's main message through the text's form. Alternatively, the passage might signal the author's resignation to accept that there are things or events that simply cannot properly be described or narrated in written form. It is not surprising that one of the last sections of the novel ends as follows: "Nada sucedió como se indica. Hechos y sitios se deformaron por el empeño de tocar la verdad mediante una ficción, una mentira. Todo irreal, nada sucedió como aquí se refiere. Pero fue un pobre intento de contribuir a que el gran crimen nunca se repita" (157). The sudden break in the narration and a metafictional indication that what is being read might not be an accurate historical account is echoed in several of the novels treated in the rest of the chapters. Although it is not possible to say with certainty that some of these works were directly influenced by Pacheco's novel, *Morirás lejos* definitely set a precedent in Latin American literature regarding the representation of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the responsibility of both readers and writers to face history from a critical perspective.

## Contemporary Representations of Nazism and the Holocaust

My dissertation is divided into three chapters and a brief conclusion. The chapters are organized in chronological order, starting with an examination of novels published in the 1980s in Argentina, followed by a chapter that focuses on Argentine works published since the early 2000s, and ending with a chapter that focuses on Mexican novels published in 2009.

Chapter 1 focuses on Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980) and Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* (1987). This chapter includes a brief overview of the history of Argentine literary representations of Nazism and the Holocaust, with an emphasis on works published since the 1970s. In the first part I present a thorough synthesis of scholarship on the possible origins of Argentina's deeply rooted association of Germany's Third Reich with the 1976-83 dictatorship. My principal argument is that while these two novels implicitly and explicitly refer to the Argentine dictatorship, their representations of Nazism are not exclusively metaphors for the country's last military rule. Also, the novels' allusions to World War II do not focus exclusively on the Holocaust or the Jewish experience, but on Nazism and the possible origins of Hitler's political machine. Both works share striking resemblances in some of their plot elements and characters, yet the ways in which the dictatorship and Nazism are represented are vastly different. In *Respiración artificial*, according to one of its protagonists, Nazism is simply the logical result of developing Western philosophy to the extreme, while in *Los demonios ocultos* Nazism is the result of an irrational belief in occult and esoteric forces by the Third Reich's main leaders, including Hitler. I argue that these two literary representations of Nazism respond to two different social and political crises at the time in which each novel was produced. As a whole, *Respiración artificial* can be interpreted as the artistic representation of the failed intellectual

ideals and models that had emerged during what Claudia Gilman calls “los catorce años prodigiosos” between the Cuban Revolution and the fall of Salvador Allende’s government in Chile (35). Furthermore, the novel’s allusions to Nazism can be linked to the need for a reconfiguration of a left-leaning intellectual project after the political left was decimated in the years leading to and during the last dictatorship. *Los demonios ocultos*’ depiction of Nazism and Peronism can similarly be read as a representation of the need to reconfigure the intellectual field in Argentina, but as I will demonstrate, the novel depicts an anachronistic intellectual that was in line with the dictatorship’s accepted cultural norms and conventions even though it was published well after the end of the military rule. In sum, throughout Chapter 1 I demonstrate how these novels represent polar opposites in Argentina’s political spectrum that continued to be in tension years after the end of the 1976-83 dictatorship.

Chapter 2 studies representations of Nazism in novels published in the aftermath of Argentina’s economic collapse at the turn of the millennium. My analysis focuses on Gustavo Nielsen’s *Auschwitz* (2004), Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda* (2011), and Leopoldo Brizuela’s *Una misma noche* (2012). My central argument is that these novels exemplify a dramatic change in how Argentine authors of contemporary literary works approach the fictionalization of Nazism, particularly its perceived relationship with the 1976-83 dictatorship. I argue that in the Argentine imaginary, the last dictatorial period became so intertwined with representations and discourses on Nazism, the Holocaust, and other World War II historical events, that what was once an allegorical relationship evolved into a symbolic one. I maintain that the three works analyzed in this chapter resist the inherent, rigid nature of the symbolic connection between the two historical moments. Instead of utilizing Nazi tropes to allegorize the dictatorship, in these literary texts the analogy is generally presented as a pre-established relationship that no longer needs to

be explored or explained further by the authors. This, in turn, allows the authors to allegorically represent other contemporary social and political issues like the increased environment of xenophobia and racism that emerged in Argentina at the turn of the century, partly as a result of the devastating 2001 economic crash. I outline the context under which the official discourse utilized immigrants as a scapegoat for the government's economic failures, directly fomenting an environment of exclusion and discrimination. I also look at how each of these novels criticizes this environment by allegorically representing it through the fictionalization of Nazism, while at the same time challenging notions of national identity and Argentine myths.

Chapter 3 centers on Mexican novels that have perpetuated the use of Nazism and the Holocaust to try to make sense of the extreme violence that has permeated most of the national territory since 2006. This violence is not only a direct result of the confrontation between government forces and drug cartels, but also a result of the turf wars waged among different cartels. For context, I include a brief overview of the history of narco-violence in Mexico, tracing it from its origins in the northern border to its current state. I also present a general review of how politicians, journalists, and intellectuals have referred to Nazism and the Holocaust in order to analyze the impact that the rising violence has had throughout the nation. In fact, there are several Mexican novels published since 2006 (when former president Felipe Calderón declared war on the drug cartels) that utilize events that occurred during World War II in order to reference the violent Mexican environment. Nevertheless, I argue that besides allegorically representing the armed conflict in Mexico, some of these works point to the need for the reformulation of the official discourse that criminalizes and dehumanizes victims, while it also naturalizes violence. I focus on two novels, Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro: una historia de terror* (2009) and David Toscana's *Los puentes de Königsberg* (2009). Because I maintain that

both novels can be allegorically read as fictionalizations of narco-violence, my work is in direct dialogue with other academics who study Mexican literary representations of violence and drug cartels. I build upon their findings to argue that, by representing the armed conflict through the fictionalization of Nazism, Volpi's and Toscana's novels offer an alternative to contemporary literary narratives that perhaps unconsciously perpetuate the official discourse on victims and violence.

It should also be noted that there are two major and conscious omissions in the novels analyzed in this dissertation: some of the works of the Chilean author Roberto Bolaño, and some of the novels that are considered part of the Mexican Crack literary movement, including *En busca de Klingsor* (1999), which is considered by many as Volpi's most important work. The decision to exclude Bolaño, particularly his novel *2666* (2003), was mainly a pragmatic one. On the one hand, his works have been widely studied in the past ten years, especially after he posthumously became a bestseller and critically acclaimed author in the United States. On the other hand, while Bolaño has been described as a writer who defies nationality identification, he is technically neither Mexican nor Argentine. Including him in the dissertation would require me to also include writers from other parts of Latin America who have fictionalized Nazism and the Holocaust, causing the project to lose its geographical focus on the two countries with the most production of these types of novels.

The decision not to include the Mexican novels published under the Crack movement banner was also a practical one. The Crack writers recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the publication of their manifesto, and there are several major research works about their literature that will be published soon, but not soon enough to be able to dialogue with in this version of my research project. Nonetheless, in the dissertation's coda, a brief concluding

chapter, I further explore some of these ideas regarding the exclusion of Bolaño and some of the Crack movement writers, and how I could incorporate them into a future project. I will also delineate some of the ways in which continued research will allow me to expand this study geographically to include an examination of works by authors from other Latin American regions.

**Chapter 1. Representations of Nazism and the 1976-83 dictatorship: Allegorical Readings  
of Piglia's *Respiración artificial* and Posse's *Los demonios ocultos***

The analogy between the 1976-83 dictatorship and Nazism is deeply rooted in Argentina. As Florinda F. Goldberg notes, “la percepción de cierta semejanza entre la persecución de los judíos a lo largo de la historia, sobre todo en el Holocausto, y la acción del terrorismo estatal y para-estatal durante la dictadura de 1976-1983 se ha convertido en parte del imaginario colectivo argentino.” Graciela Aletta de Sylvas goes as far as to affirm that “resulta insoslayable relacionar el terrorismo de estado llevado a cabo por la dictadura argentina con el holocausto nazi” (145). This historical association is so accepted, so engrained in the sociopolitical sphere in Argentina, that it became institutionalized in 2009 when the Consejo Federal de Educación implemented a resolution that mandated incorporating learning materials related to the Holocaust at all levels of the national education system<sup>8</sup>. Several of the textbooks and instructional materials provided by the government for this subject specifically call attention to the connection between the Holocaust and the dictatorship. The government of President Cristina Kirchner—who continued her late husband’s efforts to bring the recent dictatorial past to the fore through memory campaigns and trials for those involved in human rights violations—has effectively made the historical analogy official by enacting the education resolution. For example, an official government document, complete with support materials for the teaching of the Holocaust, notes

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<sup>8</sup> *Resolución CFE No. 80/09* mandates that all levels of schooling incorporate “contenidos curriculares específicos acerca del HOLOCAUSTO.” This was an expansion of a 2000 resolution that mandated that April 19, the day of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1944, be acknowledged in all school calendars as “Día de la convivencia en la diversidad cultural.”

that “Entre 1976 y 1983, el Estado terrorista argentino desarrolló una política sistemática de persecución y aniquilamiento que en numerosos puntos permite comparaciones con el Holocausto” (*Holocausto*, 17). Also, in the preface to one of the textbooks created for this program, Alberto Sileoni, then National Education Secretary, discussing the link between the Holocaust and the Argentine dictatorship, writes: “Una experiencia, aunque esté alejada en millares de kilómetros y décadas de nuestra realidad, es urgente porque toca los hilos de la propia memoria y sensibilidad” (12).

Ironically, the parallel between these two historical events was effectively started by the military government itself, as Amy Kaminsky notes when she argues that “the junta adopted a variety of techniques of state terror perfected by the Nazis, deliberately and consciously evoking Nazi practices” (105). The evocation of Nazism by the military government’s repressors has been documented in testimonies included in *Nunca más*, the 1984 report prepared by the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas that investigated and reported on the atrocities and Human Rights violations perpetrated during the dictatorship. The title of the report also has a connection to Nazism and the Holocaust. According to Marcelo Horestein and Daniel Silber, the title was chosen by Marshall Meyer, a rabbi and activist from the United States who was part of the commission responsible for the execution of the report, because it was the battle cry used by Warsaw Concentration Camp prisoners during the 1944 uprising (“Día de la memoria”).

In literature, the association between the Argentine dictatorship and Nazism, the Holocaust, and other World War II events has become an oft-repeated trope. According to Leonardo Senkman and Saúl Sosnowski, “la enormidad del nazismo y de su legado recorre metonímicamente la obra de numerosos autores argentinos” (87). Kaminsky argues that it is not

surprising that “it is Jewish writers and artists who depict the ways that the campaign against so-called subversives during the Dirty War incorporated Nazi techniques and practice” due to the ways in which the victimizers performed particular types of torture on Jewish prisoners (106). Some of the Argentine novelists who have explored the Jewish experience during the Holocaust since the 1970s—sometimes explicitly connecting that experience to the dictatorship—include Sergio Chejfec, Manuela Fingueret, and Nora Strejilevich, among others.<sup>9</sup>

The number of works that explicitly make the connection between these two historical events, coupled with how rooted this analogy is in the Argentine imaginary, has caused many critics to interpret Nazi and Holocaust tropes solely as metaphorical allegories for the 1976-83 military rule, even though authors make allusions to the 1940s conflict in works predate the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional.” One of the most well known cases is Jorge Luis Borges, who, as World War II raged on, wrote several anti-Nazi and anti-fascist essays and columns published in *Sur* magazine. Also, a year after the end of the war he published his short story “Deutsches Requiem” (1946), about a former Nazi officer on death row sentenced for crimes against humanity. Ernesto Sabato’s *Abbadón el exterminador* (1974) is another text published prior to the dictatorship that references Nazism and World War II. Even some novels written after the last dictatorship utilize Nazism as a means to refer to other moments of Argentine crisis. For example, Marcos Aguinis’ *La matriz del inferno* (1997) is a historical novel that delves into the possible connections between Nazism and Argentina’s “Década infame,” a period from 1930 to 1943 marked by coup d’états and political instability.

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<sup>9</sup> The novels are *Lenta biografía* (1990), by Chejfec; *Hija del silencio* (1999), by Fingueret; and *Una sola muerte numerosa* (1997), by Strejilevich.

These other types of representations of Nazism and World War II notwithstanding, the majority of studies focusing on such works place emphasis on the possible interpretations of these tropes as allegories for the last Argentine dictatorship. These interpretations are certainly on point in most cases, but they also give the impression of having exhausted all possible interpretations by uncovering the referent that the texts are allegorizing. In other words, these studies give the perception that there is no room for alternate interpretations, such as those that go beyond analyzing representations of Nazism as metaphors of the dictatorship. I argue that in some Argentine novels the representation of Nazism, the Holocaust, and other events of World War II can have another level of meaning beyond the interpretations that have become the norm, even in works that explicitly connect the dictatorship to Europe under the Third Reich. For instance, while Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980) and Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* (1987) implicitly and explicitly refer to the dictatorship, their representations of Nazism are not necessarily metaphors for the country's last military rule. Both works share striking resemblances in some of their plot elements and characters, but they could not be farther apart regarding the way they represent the dictatorship and Nazism. In *Respiración artificial* Nazism is the result of developing Western philosophy to the extreme, according to one of the protagonists, while in *Los demonios ocultos* Nazism is the result of an irrational belief in mysterious forces by the Third Reich's main leaders. I argue that these two literary representations of Nazism respond to two different social and political crises at the time in which each novel was produced. *Respiración artificial* can be interpreted as the artistic representation of the failed intellectual ideals and models that had emerged during what Claudia Gilman calls "los catorce años prodigiosos" between the Cuban Revolution and the fall of Salvador Allende's government in Chile (35). The novel's allusions to Nazism can be linked to the need for a reconfiguration of a

left-leaning intellectual project after the political left was decimated in the years leading up to and during the dictatorship. *Los demonios ocultos*' depiction of Nazism and Peronism can also be read as a representation of the need to reconfigure the intellectual field in Argentina.

However, Posse's novel anachronically depicts an intellectual that is in line with the dictatorship's accepted cultural norms and conventions. I also argue that a key scene, in which the protagonist allows a high-ranking Nazi officer to die instead of being tried for his crimes, is the culmination of a trope that is repeated throughout the text: the desire to bury the past. I interpret this desire as an allegorical representation of the tensions occurring in Argentina regarding how the new democratic government would face the recent dictatorial past.

### ***Respiración artificial*: Nazism and Argentina's Post-Dictatorial Intellectual Conundrum**

Hermetic, polyphonic, and erudite, Piglia's *Respiración artificial* was published toward the end of Argentina's last dictatorship. Through its complexity, the book simultaneously shrouds and shines a light on its subtext. Its fragmented narration consists of texts ranging from letters written in Argentina in the mid-Nineteenth Century to a mysterious addressee in the far future, to the narration of the fateful moment in which a young Adolf Hitler gives form to his philosophy while dictating *Mein Kampf*. A work considered to be written in code, its reader could very well be a detective following a case filled with cryptic clues. For the past 30 years, critics have offered interpretations and possible answers to the plethora of questions presented by the text, starting with the novel's opening sentence: "¿Hay una historia?" (13). This question technically refers to the story the narrator is telling, which begins in 1976, yet also anticipates the important role history will play in *Respiración artificial*. The explicit absence of the dictatorship

in the text's present, due to the crossing of the past with the future, has led several critics to read the novel's distancing from its repressive environment as a literary expression of resistance against the oppression, violence, and censorship exerted by the Military Junta that ruled the nation from 1976 to 1983. Likewise, it has been read as an example of the limits of representation in literature (Balderston, "El significado;" Levinson; Masiello; Pons; and Sarlo, "El campo intelectual"). *Respiración artificial* has also been commonly understood as a novel in which two key moments in Argentine history intertwine: 1850 and 1976. However, most critics have so far neglected the interbellum, a third and equally important historical moment that gives the text a new dimension of interpretation. The interbellum period is present through the narration of the encounter between Franz Kafka and Hitler during the Führer's phase as a failed bohemian painter, as well as the moment in which the narration intertwines the writer's last words before dying with Hitler's dictation of *Mein Kampf*. This section of the novel is generally read as an allegory of the horror of Argentina's "National Reorganization Process," which is the same interpretation generally given to the text's other two historical periods—and the novel in its entirety. Perhaps the reason it has been most often read as a novel that embodies resistance to the dictatorship is that those now-canonical readings of *Respiración Artificial* were published just a few short years after the fall of the Military Junta. Today, with the temporal distance of nearly 35 years since it was first published, there is room for new readings that take into account changes that were occurring in Argentina at the end of the dictatorship, particularly in the intellectual arena, and their connection to the text's representation of Nazism and World War II historical figures.

Kafka's presence and the allusions to World War II can be seen as interlocking allegories—following Doris Sommer's understanding of allegory as more than a simple

signification of a pre-established and static referent—of the failure and total reformulation of ideologies in Argentina’s intellectual arena at the waning of the dictatorship. It is my contention that by analyzing such an important element of the novel in this fashion, one can unearth the text’s underlying project: to present a model of the ideal intellectual needed after the dictatorship’s defeating of the revolutionary intellectual model so prevalent in Latin America during the 1960s and 70s. In fact, the three main characters, Renzi, Maggi, and Tardewski—not coincidentally three different types of intellectuals—can be seen as models for the future Argentine thinker, one who has to face politics and literature not as a revolutionary committed to the cause, but as a marginalized and “failed” intellectual who can “hear” history in the purest Kafkaesque sense. This notion of failure plays such an important role in the novel as an ethic and aesthetic model that *Respiración artificial* in its entirety can be interpreted not only as an allegory for the dictatorship but also as an example of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari identify as a Kafkaesque “minor literature.” These “failed” literary works are characterized by being marginalized in the sense that they deviate from the norms of “major literature” through the deterritorializing of language and their lack of a main narrative voice, relying instead on collective assemblages of enunciation. Francine Masiello argues that the “minor literature” aesthetic has played an important role in Argentine literary tradition, particularly during the dictatorship. This literature, according to Masiello, offers an alternative to official discourses: “Al postular relecturas de la nación desde la obstinada posición de la otredad, esas resistencias estratégicas proveen una crítica de la cultura argentina” (19). Critics like Daniel Balderston and Santiago Colás have noted the importance of the “failed” intellectual aesthetic adopted by some of the novel’s characters, focusing on its effects on the representation of history. Balderston notes that the three main characters (Renzi, Maggi, and Tardewski) are in search of the “other”

version of history that differs from the official, which to him is a stark contrast to the example they set as failed intellectuals: “es decir, el individuo puede no lograr decir su verdad pero su fracaso nos permite vislumbrar parte de ella, y los tres ejemplos particulares, al permitirnos vislumbres de diversas parcelas de la verdad parcial, pueden aclarar la noción de la verdad histórica” (“El significado latente,” 112-13). Colás argues that many other characters in the novel (including those from the nineteenth century and the interbellum) can also be considered within the boundaries of Tardewski’s “failed” intellectual aesthetic. Like Balderston, he focuses on the repercussions of this mode of intellectual life in their comprehension of history. For example, Colás argues that history “has swept them aside and deposited them in their various marginal locations. They become the best witnesses to the movement of history, but also those with the least access to the discourses through which history is narrated” (140). I further develop their findings and propose that the fact that Piglia’s novel shares some of the main characteristics of a “minor literature” plays an important role in understanding the novel’s subtext as a new paradigm or model for a future intellectual.

*Respiración artificial* is a bildungsroman in which the young writer Emilio Renzi goes through a period of great internal growth and change throughout the two parts of the book. The first part has several narrating voices, mainly personified through letters that are intercalated in four different sections or chapters. These letters primarily tell the story of the meeting of Marcelo Maggi, a history professor, and Renzi, his nephew. The two have not previously known each other because of a distance created between the historian and his family shortly after Renzi’s birth. The young writer and his uncle establish an epistolary relationship after Renzi publishes a novel about the family drama caused by Maggi in the 1940s. Through these letters the historian tells his nephew that he is convinced that the documents and letters written more than a century

ago by Enrique Osorio, the personal secretary of real historical figure Juan Manuel de Rosas, are the key “para entender también algunas cosas que vienen pasando en estos tiempos y no lejos de aquí” (72), a possible reference to Argentina’s tumultuous environment at the time the novel was published. At the end of the first part Maggi and Renzi finally agree to meet in person in Concordia. In the novel’s second part, Renzi waits for his uncle, accompanied by Tardewski, a Polish immigrant and Maggi’s friend. While they wait, Tardewski narrates, sharing that when he was young, he accidentally discovered the relationship between Kafka and Hitler. Tardewski knows that his friend will never arrive for the meeting, so he decides to distract Renzi all night with his anecdote. Tardewski’s story ultimately helps Renzi understand the value of the letters and documents that he inherited from Maggi, which in fact could help him investigate his uncle’s disappearance, “la razón por la cual él no ha venido esta noche” (218).

Most of the novel’s interpretations focus on the moment in which it was written and the fact that Piglia wrote it while living in Argentina and not from exile, unlike most of his peers—including Abel Posse—at the time. For example, Pons argues that “esa realidad atroz, vaciada de significados y totalmente fragmentada, es la que asimilan y por la que son asimilados los escritores argentinos en los años 1976-1983; ésas son las condiciones de vida bajo las cuales Ricardo Piglia escribe *Respiración artificial*, novela que pasa a formar parte de la resistencia” (39). The novel has also been considered by academics like Balderston as the type of literature created from within Argentina during the dictatorship that is “más difícil de clasificar y leer . . . que escapó la atención de los censores debido a una serie de técnicas” (“El significado latente,” 109-10). According to Balderston these techniques hid the true subversive meaning of the text that could only be accessed by reading between the lines. He adds that authors like Piglia “eligieron una condensación, una ambigüedad y una fragmentación tortuosa para comunicar una

verdad que no puede ser expresada directamente” (120). Most of the readings that follow this line of thinking focus on what is explicitly left out of the text as a form of resistance against that same element that is not present in the novel: the dictatorship. However, as Pons explains:

Esta complejidad estructural, junto a la diversidad temática del texto resulta en una obra de inagotable fuente de sentidos, y por ello sería sumamente riesgoso tratar de circunscribir y fijar ‘el’ sentido de la obra, anulando o desconociendo su máxima riqueza: su carácter múltiple y complejo . . . el que le permite ‘hablar de lo indecible’, sea esto la represión, la tortura, los crímenes arbitrarios, las desapariciones, o el sentido de todo ello. (114-15)

One could add to this idea that the complexity of Piglia’s novel also allows readings that diverge from the current consensus of interpreting it as an allegory of the dictatorship. Although the deliberate absence of the dictatorship’s oppression in the text is quite clear—Tardewski, for example, refuses to directly talk about Maggi’s whereabouts even though it can be surmised that he was disappeared—to reduce *Respiración artificial* to a novel of silences could lead readers to ignore what is present in the book, including clear references to what the critics argue is completely missing from the text. For example, it cannot be a mere coincidence that in a novel written in code Piglia chooses words such as “totalitarismo,” “golpe” and “estado convertido en instrumento de terror” when he writes about Kafka’s *The Trial* (translated to Spanish as *El proceso*):

Usted leyó *El proceso*, me dice Tardewski. . . . Esa novela presenta de un modo alucinante el modelo clásico del Estado convertido en instrumento de terror. Describe la maquinaria anónima de un mundo donde todos pueden ser acusados y culpables, la siniestra inseguridad que el totalitarismo insinúa en la vida de los hombres . . . Desde que

Kafka escribió ese libro el golpe nocturno ha llegado a innumerables puertas y el nombre de los que fueron arrastrados a morir como un perro, igual que Joseph K., es legión. (210)

Elegantly and in a veiled way, Piglia manages to use the official euphemism the Military Junta designated for the dictatorship (“El Proceso”) while at the same time he indirectly refers to the daily kidnappings of individuals who in any way represented dissidence or subversion to the regime.

Idelber Avelar, who throughout the years has used *Respiración artificial* to illustrate his theories regarding Southern Cone literature and culture, also argues that allegorical readings of works published during the dictatorship tend to be simplified:

In spite of the fact that allegory has occupied a major space in the Southern Cone’s aesthetic and cultural debates, the whole complex that links allegory to memory, experience, and writing qua inscription is still virtually unthought, often explained away in more or less sophisticated versions of a specular reflexivism: in times of censorship, writers are forced to resort to “indirect ways,” “metaphors,” and “allegories” to “express” what is invariably thought to be a self-identical content that could remain so inside another rhetorical cloak in times of “free expression.” (*The Untimely Present*, 9)

Avelar resists such “an instrumentalist view” and instead argues that “the turn toward allegory spelled an epochal transmutation, parallel to and coextensive with a fundamental impossibility to represent the ultimate ground, a constitutive failure that installed the object of representation as a lost object” (*The Untimely Present*, 15). His criticism of allegorical readings as specular reflexivism has been instrumental to giving new meanings to literary works and creating some distance from dominant understandings of certain texts. However, his own understanding of allegory as an impossibility is also restricting and limits the possible interpretations of post-

dictatorial texts such as *Respiración artificial*. In other words, Avelar also argues that the text should be read as much more than a simple allegory of the dictatorship, but he limits his own understanding of the novel as one in which the impossibility of narrating is the main focus: “Lo que está en juego es la alegoría de la imposibilidad de narrar este objeto” (“Cómo respiran los ausentes,” 425).

Instead of following Avelar’s definition of allegory, I adhere to Doris Sommer’s dialectical or interlocking allegories. In this kind of allegory, she posits, the referent and the sign are constantly building on each other. She first introduced this idea in her seminal *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991), in which she expands theses that were first postulated by Walter Benjamin concerning the relationship between dialectics and allegories. Sommer argues that the relation between cultural products, in this case national romances, and the act of nation-building cannot be completely understood through a traditional notion of allegory that dictates that there are two parallel levels of signification (with different temporalities). Each of these levels, she explains, tries to repeat the anterior level of meaning in a futile attempt to find a stable meaning (63). In a way, Sommer makes the same criticism of traditional notions of allegory as Avelar, who also notes the limitations of associations that merely mirror each other. What differentiates Sommer’s understanding of allegory from Avelar’s, and what she ultimately points toward, is the need to understand the relationship between sign and referent as an interlocking association. The need to differentiate between these two kinds of allegory arises from a crisis of referentiality. According to Sommer, an interlocking allegory is one in which the sign and the referent are not only dependent on each other, but each is also actively producing the other: “I am suggesting that some allegories, such as national novels, may have no preexisting and eternal level of referentiality but, rather, make themselves

up, all the while attempting to produce an illusion of stability” (78). Likewise, *Respiración artificial* should not be read solely as a text that signals the impossibility of representing its pre-established referent: the dictatorship and its effects on society. Instead, the presence of Nazism and World War II in the text is in an interlocking relationship with a different, emerging referent, namely the crisis in the intellectual field that occurred at the time when the Military Junta rose to power in Argentina. The “illusion of stability” that Sommer argues that is present in interlocking allegories affirms another important aspect of her theory: it allows for the identification of the structures of feeling at play in the relationship between sign and referent. That relationship is key to establishing a connection between the representation of Nazism and the Second World War in *Respiración artificial* and the intellectual crisis in Argentina in the 1970s and early 80s.

Raymond Williams, to show that culture is fluid and not stable, proposed the concept of a structure of feeling, which he defines as “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period” (131). At the heart of a structure of feeling is the dynamic between what the critic identifies as the residual, the emergent, and the dominant culture. The residual is something that was created in the past, but that still exists in the culture no longer as an element from the past but effectively as a present phenomenon (122). The emergent is what is being formed by new practices, values, and relationships in the present. Williams notes that the emergent might be more difficult to identify because there has to be a differentiation “between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture . . . and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel” (123). In short, the structures of feeling announce the emergent element in culture while they also show that at all times there are different, oppositional elements in conflict within

society. This concept equals Sommer's proposed allegories in importance when considering *Respiración artificial* as a novel that is not only a cultural production resulting from and reflecting the structures of feeling of its time, but one that is actively participating in the fueling of those same structures, particularly the tensions between the residual and the emergent ideologies surrounding Argentina's intellectual arena.

To understand those ideological tensions, *Respiración artificial* should first be contextualized as a work that was not only written as a subversive text amidst the last Argentine dictatorship, but also as one that is in dialogue with residual and emergent cultural elements that unfolded during what Claudia Gilman calls "los catorce años prodigiosos" between the Cuban Revolution and the fall of Salvador Allende's government in Chile (35). Taking this context into account allows for a better understanding of the novel's internal discourse regarding the reformulation of the intellectual field in Argentina. Arguing that the sixties and seventies is a discursive epoch, Gilman states that this period "es atravesado por una misma problemática: la valorización de la política y la expectativa revolucionaria" (38). Following Williams' ideas, the critic explains that the structure of feeling during the 1960s and 1970s was "un común denominador de los discursos, en el que se constituye un nudo (la política) en torno al cual todos los actores se colocan, tanto para rechazar la firmeza de esa atadura . . . cuanto para apretar ese lazo, como dos posiciones también emblemáticas, que pueden ser representadas por Mario Benedetti y Jean-Paul Sartre" (41). Back in those decades, Gilman argues, "la relación con la Política fue considerada más importante que la relación con la Verdad" (41). It was during that politicization of the intellectual that Antonio Gramsci's concepts regarding the relationship between the intellectual and the masses gained popularity around the world. In Latin America, many thinkers favored such ideals, including Piglia, who in 1964 "proclamaba que la tarea del

intelectual era el trabajo en la lucha ideológica” (64). Laura Demaría also notes that “precisamente, para el Piglia de los setenta, lo que define al escritor revolucionario es su hacer político, su compromiso neto con la lucha de clases” (72). However, Gilman also explains that what at first was considered to be the imminent end of capitalism due to the socialist revolutions, the war in Vietnam, and the racial and political conflicts in the United States, resulted in a utopia that never was (55-57).

In Argentina, even before the beginning of the last dictatorship, there was already a disenchantment, or at least a sense of pessimism, among left-leaning intellectuals, as Pons explains: “Ante el desastre del gobierno de Isabel [Martínez de Perón], muchos ya manejaban la posibilidad de una toma del poder por los militares, como el mismo Ricardo Piglia, de modo que el golpe, más que generar perplejidad o sorpresa, fue el tiro de gracia que echó por tierra todas las esperanzas y proyectos de la izquierda argentina” (40-41). The dictatorship, according to Pons, not only confirmed the impossibility of a prolonged democratic period in the nation, “sino que además, se fracturó y atomizó la intelectualidad argentina” (41). Sarlo identified in this historical moment a double break among Argentine intellectuals. On one side was the official repression that effectively ostracized intellectuals and fractured any kind of political and artistic relationship with worker unions and the general public: “Hasta 1975 los intelectuales habíamos tenido la sensación y la experiencia de que podíamos mirar y hablar más allá de los límites de nuestro propio campo, que podíamos salir de la universidad y cruzar las puertas de algunos sindicatos” (“El campo intelectual,” 101). On the other side was the fracture of the intellectual sphere itself, created by exile. This caused frictions and a general misunderstanding of the reality that each of the intellectual groups, the ones who stayed and the ones who left, was experiencing (102). Eight years after *Respiración artificial* was published, or approximately five years after

the end of the dictatorship, Sarlo argued that “quizás uno de los problemas que enfrentemos los intelectuales argentinos en los próximos años sea la reconstrucción de esta doble fractura” (101). The novel, published during the dictatorship, exemplifies the emergent answer to the necessity of rebuilding the intellectual field in Argentina.

### **Piglia’s reformulation of the intellectual sphere**

The themes of Nazism’s rise and the effect of World War II in the novel, represented by Hitler and Tardewski’s exile, respectively, can be interpreted not only as parallel allegories that refer to the dictatorship, but also as interlocking allegories related to the great change in the intellectual arena that Piglia was foretelling several years before the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” ended. In other words, while the destruction of the revolutionary ideologies in Argentina informed the creation of allegorical signs in the text such as the characters of Tardewski, Maggi, Renzi, Kafka, and even Hitler, those same figures also fueled the future rebuilding of the intellectual arena (the allegory’s referent). Through the novel, Piglia was forecasting the necessary change in the revolutionary ideologies that were defeated by the ultra right wing military faction and the imposition of neoliberal economic and political models during the dictatorship in Argentina. Even more than simply forecasting the change, the text also offered a new paradigm or model for a future intellectual, as is demonstrated through the analysis of the novel’s main characters.

There is a dialogue in *Respiración artificial* between World War II and the need to reformulate the intellectual field in Argentina after the dictatorship, and at the heart of this relationship are Kafka and the way in which Tardewski interprets his understanding of what

Hitler's ideals could unleash unto the world. In the second part of the novel Tardewski tells Renzi that throughout his life he has been developing himself ("construyéndose") as a failed individual. This decision began following his disenchantment with modern philosophy. That disillusionment was born by chance when, while in a library, he is mistakenly handed Hitler's *Mein Kampf* instead of a different book he requested. While analyzing the text, Tardewski concludes that Hitler's book is the culmination of the discourse initiated by Descartes: "Esa comprobación significó el principio del fin de la filosofía para mí" he tells Renzi. "Prefiero, dijo, ser un fracasado a ser un cómplice" (195). Tardewski also tells the young writer that for him Descartes' maxim "I think, therefore I am," was furthered so much throughout history that it resulted in Nazism. "El sueño de esa razón produce monstruos," the Polish exile says, referring to Goya's painting "Los sueños de la razón producen monstruos" (196). Therefore, because he does not want to be an accomplice to or participant in the monster created by philosophy, Tardewski consolidates himself as a failure, an amateur philosopher, and a figure as paradoxical as that of an intellectual who has no voice and only writes quotes from others. Instead of acting he hides and remains silent; he marginalizes himself. He spent the first part of Nazism's development and expansion hidden in libraries, and then he escaped Europe after World War II started.

Ironically, before escaping Nazism, Tardewski discovered the connection between Kafka and Hitler, and the way in which the writer faced what he knew would eventually become a monster that would terrorize the world. According to Tardewski's research, the future Führer and the writer of works like *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* met around 1909. The researcher's great discovery was that Kafka was able to identify and understand the dangerousness of the future German leader. Tardewski is convinced the ideas that Hitler confesses to Kafka affected him so

much that he artistically expressed in his literature what he envisioned the world would be under the German's power:

Sus textos son la anticipación de lo que veía como posible en las palabras perversas de ese Adolf, payaso, profeta que anunciaba, en una especie de sopor letárgico, un futuro de una maldad geométrica. Un futuro que el mismo Hitler veía como imposible, sueño gótico donde llegaba a transformarse, él, un artista piojoso y fracasado, en el Führer. Ni el mismo Hitler, estoy seguro, creía en 1909 que eso fuera posible. Pero Kafka, sí. Kafka, Renzi, dijo Tardewski, sabía oír. Estaba atento al murmullo enfermizo de la historia.

(210)

Kafka represents in *Respiración artificial* an intellectual who not only has the capability to “hear” history, but who is also willing to act, to express in his work the “murmullo enfermizo” that anticipates what is to come but always from the position of a marginalized or “failed” author, which is part of what Deleuze and Guattari identify as characteristic of Kafkaesque “minor literature.” Kafka’s model of a failed and marginalized intellectual is personified by Tardewski, a self-proclaimed failure who explains that by this term he refers both to the lack of success and to “un hombre que no tiene quizás todos los dones, pero sí muchos, incluso bastantes más que los comunes en ciertos hombres de éxito. Tiene esos dones, dijo, y no los explota. Los destruye. De modo, dijo, que en realidad destruye su vida” (155). Rodrigo Blanco Calderón argues that the Kafkaesque failure that Tardewski seeks throughout his life is present in all of Piglia’s works: “hay que decir que la tentación del fracaso, además de ser una ética invisible que rige el proceso de escritura de sus textos, es también un tema visible en las historias que cuenta. El fracaso como un ética y una estética que permiten observar, desde una sola perspectiva, la orientación general de su obra” (29). Regarding that characteristic in *Respiración artificial* in

particular, Blanco Calderón posits: “veremos que el fracaso pasa a ser una decisión ética y estética que va a redimensionar la concepción de sus personajes sobre la vida y la escritura” (30). This reformulation of the characters, who are all intellectuals, is closely related to understanding the novel as a guide or model for a new post-dictatorial intellectual, one who adheres to the ethic and aesthetic of failure.

The reformulation of the intellectual field in Argentina is also represented by the way in which Renzi goes from being a writer “con ningún interés en la política” (19) who does not share Maggi’s passion for history, to an intellectual who at the end of the novel seems to have decided to continue his uncle’s unfinished project of finding the secret hidden in the Ossorio letters. In order to reach that turning point, Renzi first had to go through a change that was a direct result of what he learned from Maggi and Tardewski, who, despite their character differences, represent what the novel suggests is the model to follow after the revolutionary ethic was shattered. According to the novel, the new intellectual to emerge from the dictatorial period is one who is completely committed to politics and history, like Maggi, but from a marginalized standpoint, like Tardewski. These two models follow what Deleuze and Guattari identified as Kafka’s ethic and aesthetic, which is not “la literatura de un idioma menor, sino la literatura que una minoría hace dentro de una lengua mayor” (28), adding that the notion “equivale a decir que ‘menor’ no califica ya a ciertas literaturas, sino las condiciones revolucionarias de cualquier literatura en el seno de la llamada mayor (o establecida)” (31). According to the academics, the three main characteristics of this type of literature are “la desterritorialización de la lengua, la articulación de lo individual en lo inmediato-político, [y] el dispositivo colectivo de enunciación” (31). It is very telling that these characteristics are present in *Respiración artificial*, whether through the main characters or the novel’s aesthetic. This allows the text to be understood as one that is

creating and promoting a different ethic and aesthetic from the one that failed in the 1970s in Latin America. This is supported by the fact that Piglia's novel shares the features of work of "minor literature" pieces, fulfilling the revolutionary conditions that Deleuze and Guattari proposed.

In this sense, the novel and its complexity could be interpreted as a way for Piglia to create his own desert, to marginalize himself in order to become a failed, minor, and Kafkaesque writer. For example, the deterritorializing of language is present in the novel through both Tardewski's philosophy and Piglia's aesthetic choices when writing the novel. This becomes particularly relevant when considering the staggering number of scholars who have read the novel as an example of the limits of representation or narration. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

Incluso aquel que ha tenido la desgracia de nacer en un país de literatura mayor debe escribir en su lengua como un judío checo escribe en alemán o como un uzbekiano escribe en ruso. Escribir como un perro que escarba su hoyo, una rata que hace su madriguera. Para eso: encontrar su propio punto de subdesarrollo, su propia jerga, su propio tercer mundo, su propio desierto. (31)

Piglia is writing in his native language, and he definitely had the "desgracia" of having been born in a country with a "literatura mayor" (at least in the Latin American context). Nonetheless, what he publishes is written in code, as scholars have demonstrated time and again. That kind of hermetic and obscure writing could be understood as a kind of "minor literature," which is revolutionary because of its marginalization and not because of its commitment to the cause. Deleuze and Guattari explain that "sólo el menor es grande y revolucionario. [...] Pero lo que es todavía más interesante es la posibilidad de hacer un uso menor de su propia lengua, suponiendo

que sea única, que sea una lengua mayor o que lo haya sido. Estar en su propia lengua como un extranjero [...] donde se debate lo que se puede decir y lo que no se puede decir” (43).

Tardewski, arguably the novel’s most “failed” intellectual, also represents this kind of deterritorializing of language. Blanco Calderón explains that Witold Gombrowicz (on whom Tardewski’s character is based) represents the intellectual ethic that Piglia presents in his novel: “Gombrowicz funciona entonces como una figura (y una obra) de transición en la que el fracaso deja de ser un peligro que amenaza al escritor y se convierte, más bien, en el asilo imperceptible donde se guarda, se protege y se autentifica una verdadera escritura” (33). Likewise, Tardewski, the Polish immigrant deficient in Spanish as a youth, adopted the way in which his contemporaries saw him: “Me miraron como a un polaquito malsonante, disonante, malsano, insano, insalubre, enfermizo, enclenque, achacoso, maltrecho, estropeado, resentido, dañino, dañoso, nocivo, perjudicial, pernicioso, ruin, bellaco, fastidioso, deslucido, penoso, desagradable, fracasado. Así me miraron ellos, así me vieron” (176-77). What was once a source of shame and pain for Tardewski later became his unabated way of life.

“Nunca nadie hizo jamás buena literatura con historias familiares” (16), Maggi writes to his nephew shortly after Renzi published *La prolijidad de lo real*, his first novel. This line is akin to the second characteristic of a “minor literature,” which according to Deleuze and Guattari is that the individual elements in literary works are closely related to the political, which differentiates “minor literature” from “las ‘grandes’ literaturas [donde] por el contrario, el problema individual (familiar, conyugal, etcétera) tiende a unirse con otros problemas no menos

individuales, dejando el medio social como una especie de ambiente o trasfondo” (29).<sup>10</sup> The emphatic line in his letter is the first advice that Maggi ever gives his nephew, and the first clue to understand that *Respiración artificial* will tell the story of Renzi’s formation as a new intellectual model to follow during and after the dictatorship. Both Tardewski and Maggi are Renzi’s mentors; each provides him an element of what in the end will become the intellectual that the novel seems to promote as the model to follow. For example, in Maggi, the individual and the political merge through his passion for history. The historian and the Polish writer are opposites in several ways, and it was in that antithesis that their friendship flourished, since the two of them formed “la unidad de los contrarios” (188). However, what brings them together is paradoxically the way that each approaches politics. Tardewski, as has already been established, faces politics through marginalization. The Polish intellectual becomes a failure in order not to become an accomplice of history, of politics. Maggi, on the other hand, instead of aiming to become a marginalized and failed individual who prefers not to think on his own in an effort to

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<sup>10</sup> Although all three characteristics of a work of “minor literature” are present in *Respiración artificial*, here I only analyze the first two, as they are the ones that are closely related to what I argue is the novel’s subtext. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that the third characteristic, which Deleuze and Guattari explain as the fact that in “minor literature” there is no room for individual voices since what the writer says is turned into a collective action, is perhaps the one that is most obviously present in the text. This becomes evident through the text’s polyphonic narration, particularly in the first section. This characteristic is also present in the second part of the novel through Tardewski, who is writing a collection of individual voices that are forming a collective text: his notebook of quotes.

avoid being part of what could be a new holocaust, knows how to hear the “murmullo de la historia,” just as Kafka did. Instead of avoiding participation in critical thinking, like Tardewski deliberately does, Maggi welcomes it. Although the history professor understands his friend’s decision to be a failed intellectual, he does not share his philosophy because he is “un hombre que se dedicaba con firmeza a cualquier cosa que se le presentara; nunca pensaba en términos de éxito o fracaso individual” (187). Among the many quotes that Tardewski writes in his notebook, there is one by a French historian that he decides to read aloud for Maggi: “La capacidad de pensar la realización de su vida personal en términos históricos [. . .] fue para los hombres que participaron en la Revolución Francesa tan natural, como puede ser natural para nuestros contemporáneos [. . .] la meditación acerca de su propia vida como frustración de las ambiciones de su juventud” (187-88). According to Tardewski, this quote summarizes what Maggi calls “la mirada histórica.” It is this capability that allows the professor to understand that Ossorio’s documents contain the key to understanding the present. Instead of ignoring history’s whispering, Maggi, for whom the individual is the political, tries to decipher its meaning. This is the biggest difference between the two friends, according to Tardewski: “Yo el escéptico, el hombre que vive fuera de la historia; él, un hombre de principios, que solamente puede pensar desde la historia. La unidad de los contrarios” (188). Despite those differences, both intellectuals represent a model to follow, and it is the combination of the two that marks the road that Renzi will follow because he is the intellectual heir to his uncle and also Tardewski’s disciple. Therefore, Renzi could be interpreted as the future intellectual that is committed to politics and history, like his uncle, but from a marginal position, like his mentor.

Respiración artificial aims to establish a different ethic and aesthetic from the ones that have already proved unsuccessful at the time in which the novel was produced. This desire to reformulate the intellectual field is represented by Renzi's growth throughout the novel. He is a young intellectual who matured during the dictatorship and he is about to witness the slow process toward democratization in Argentina. Through Tardewski, Maggi hands down to Renzi his great mission, the intellectual duty of fighting for "el sentido de Humanität." According to Tardewski, for Kafka that duty meant "la orgullosa y trágica conciencia en el hombre de la persistencia de los principios de justicia y verdad que habían guiado su vida, en oposición a su total sometimiento a la enfermedad, al dolor y a todo cuanto puede implicar la palabra mortalidad" (216). Through Tardewski's narration in the second part of the novel, Renzi is able to understand that Maggi's value was twofold because he not only had a "mirada histórica" with which he was able to see into the future, but also, just as Kafka, he was "un hombre de principios, capaz de ser fiel en la vida al rigor de sus ideas" (217). In the end, Renzi (and the novel's readers) are responsible for hearing the whisper of history and following or rejecting the model for the intellectual proposed by the text itself.

As noted earlier, that intellectual model is framed not only by Maggie and Tardewski, but also by the novel's representation of the antebellum period, particularly the relationship between Hitler and Kafka. The dialectic between World War II and the need to reformulate the intellectual field in Argentina after the dictatorship is at the heart of the text. However, when tackling the representation of World War II in the novel, critics often rely on traditional notions of allegories to read those elements in *Respiración artificial* as an allegorical representation of the atrocities committed by the state during the dictatorship. For example, Seymour Menton argues that in the novel "Adolf Hitler is posited as the antecedent for the Argentine military

regime,” adding that when Piglia reveals the nature of the connection between Kafka and the Führer, “the reader realizes how thoroughly this episode is integrated into the novel’s main theme, the denunciation of the Argentine military dictatorship of 1976-1979” (132).<sup>11</sup> Brett Levinson interprets the repercussions in Kafka’s literature caused by his encounter with Hitler as a metaphor of that which is beyond representation or articulation because Tardewski himself pegs Kafka “as the one writer who tried to speak of his incommunicability” (114). Although he does not develop his interpretation of this section of the book, he does see Tardewski’s narration of the last moments of Kafka’s life intercalated with Hitler’s dictation of *Mein Kampf* as “yet another site where Piglia examines the relationship of writing (Kafka) and dictatorship (Hitler)” (119). Jimena Ugaz, who reads the novel as an example of Linda Hutcheon’s “historiographic metafiction,” makes a similar connection between Nazism, the nineteenth century, and the dictatorship: “Las extensas discusiones sobre los excesos de Juan Manuel de Rosas y Adolf Hitler reemplazan en el texto al debate sobre la historia argentina contemporánea de los años setenta y ochenta” (284). While Ugaz acknowledges the importance of analyzing Nazism and the interbellum period to achieve a better understanding of the novel, she also ultimately interprets them as tools to allow the reader to understand “lo indecible” in the text: “Las referencias a Hitler, al Holocausto judío y a la obra de Kafka aportan la información fundamental sobre la historia argentina (el horror de la Guerra Sucia), al mismo tiempo que ayudan a resolver el enigma central de la novela: la ausencia de Marcelo Maggi” (288).

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<sup>11</sup> Here Menton uses the dates 1976-79 because the second part of the novel takes place in 1979, four years before the end of the dictatorship in 1983.

By taking into account the elements of the Argentine structures of feeling at the time of the novel's enunciation, the allusions to World War II and Nazism gain a much more important role in the interpretation of the Piglia's work. Andreas Huyssen argues that "although the Holocaust as a universal trope of traumatic history has migrated into other, nonrelated contexts, one must always ask whether and how the trope enhances or hinders local memory practices and struggles" (16). In the Argentine context, the answer to this question cannot be fully articulated without reading Piglia's novel through the notion of interlocking allegories, which in this case show that the representation of Nazism allows for a reconfiguration of a left-leaning intellectual project. The same is the case with Posse's *Los demonios ocultos*, in which the representation of Nazism and the overall tone of the novel can be interpreted as a projection of the social and political tensions regarding how to confront the then recent violent past in Argentina.

### ***Los demonios ocultos: An Ambivalent Confrontation with the Past***

Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* lacks the gravitas and innovations in aesthetic form and narration of Ricardo Piglia's monumental *Respiración Artificial*. Nonetheless, an examination of the text will demonstrate that it can be allegorically read as the representation of social and political conflicts that were taking place in Argentina during the first few years following the end of the dictatorship. These conflicts filter through the criticism to Juan Perón and Peronism<sup>12</sup> in the novel—via a suggestion of its possible connections to Nazism and Spanish

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<sup>12</sup> Politician and military officer Juan Domingo Perón was president of Argentina during three terms, on each occasion elected through democratic voting. He first held office in

Fascism—and in the way in which the protagonist (and the novel overall) deals with the past and history. On the one hand, I argue that through its characters the novel presents ambivalence toward facing the past. I interpret this as a representation of the tensions brewing in Argentina regarding the way in which the nascent democratic government was confronting the then recent violent past: first through investigations of human rights abuses and trials against the Juntas, and later with what was generally perceived as legal reprieves for the military. On the other hand, I interpret the criticism against Peronism as a representation of the need to reconfigure the Argentine intellectual in post-dictatorship Argentina. I argue that while the plea for this reconfiguration is an element shared with *Respiración artificial*, Posse's new intellectual model is vastly different from Piglia's. This will be demonstrated through a comparison of their two main characters and the novels' formal structure and narrating techniques, both of which signal the different approaches each of the authors took to represent history during and shortly after the dictatorship.

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Argentina from 1946 to 1952. He was reelected for the 1952-58 term, but he did not complete it because he was ousted in a coup d'état on September 16, 1955, after which he lived in exile, mostly in Europe, until 1972, when he briefly visited Argentina. He returned permanently in June of 1973 amid a bloody confrontation between the radical leftist arm of Peronism, the Montoneros, and members of the workers union, the right wing of the political movement. Soon after, President Héctor José Cámpora stepped down from his position only 49 days after swearing in to give Perón an opportunity to serve as president once again. A special election was organized and Perón won with more than 60 percent of the vote. He died in office on 1974, after publicly distancing himself from the Montoneros.

Unlike Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, which is now considered a modern Argentine classic, Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* was mostly ignored by critics and academics, as Leonardo Senkman and Saúl Sosnowski note (119-20). This could be partly a result of Posse's polarizing political affiliation in Argentina. Unlike Piglia, who was one of the writers who remained in Argentina during the dictatorship and continued to publish amid censorship and military repression, Posse spent most of the dictatorship outside of the country. In fact, Posse spent most of 1965 to 2004 abroad. One of the reasons Posse is reviled by the political and intellectual left is due to what could be called his pragmatism as an Argentine public servant: the author held diplomatic posts for both democratic and military governments. Another reason he has become such a polarizing figure in Argentina is his unfazed stance against the military trials and his negative view of youth culture. For instance, he displayed his disdain for counterculture in a 2005 editorial he wrote following a tragic fire of a Buenos Aires nightclub, in which he described Argentina's youth as "tres millones de adolescentes y jóvenes a la deriva, sin convocatorias ni vocaciones, excluidos en silencio en los márgenes de una sociedad que calla y no sabe integrarlos, positivizarlos" ("Zapatillas calientes"). This polarity came to play when, in 2009, Posse was named the Minister of Education in Buenos Aires, which caused a general uproar by leftist organizations and politicians. The protests were so prevalent in the Argentine capital that the writer had to step down less than two weeks after taking office. Outside of Argentina the writer has received numerous literary prizes, including the prestigious Romulo Gallegos International Prize in 1987 for *Perros del paraíso*, perhaps his best-known novel. *Los demonios ocultos*, which spawned the sequel *El viajero de Agartha* (1989), however, went mostly unnoticed by Argentine and North American critics and academics.

Similar to Piglia's novel, Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* is the story of a young writer in search of a relative, in this case his long-lost father. The novel also takes place in three key moments in Argentine and European history: The first part begins in 1952, the year of Evita Perón's death; the second part is a series of letters, essays, and personal notes written by the protagonist during his years-long stay in Europe; the third part takes place in Argentina in 1976, the year the last dictatorship began. There are also sections that take place in Paris in 1968, during the student and worker revolts. The protagonist, Lorca, was born in Spain but grew up in Buenos Aires, raised by his two Spanish aunts who fled Franco's regime. The two aunts hide from him his father's identity and the events surrounding his mother's death in Franco's Spain. Thanks to a letter he received from him during his childhood, Lorca knows that his father was a Nazi scientist who took on a mysterious mission in Asia during World War II. Lorca spends most of his time obsessing about his parents' past, and he begins to learn more about it when he moves to the Ibicuy islands, located in Northeastern Argentina, with his Jewish girlfriend Anna. There he begins to write articles for a Buenos Aires publication about old German immigrants living in the area. During his interviews, he meets former Nazis living in hiding in Argentina, from whom he begins to learn more about his father's past. He becomes close to Stahl, a former Nazi official who provides him with the ability to contact a higher-ranking officer, Bauer, who could potentially know more about his father's secret mission—and more important to Lorca, his involvement with the Nazi regime in general. After Anna leaves him for another Jewish man and moves to Israel, Lorca moves to Paris, where he participates in the 1968 protests, meets another woman who he eventually marries, and has a child. After a couple of years of calm and happiness, Lorca's wife and child die in a car accident, which prompts him to continue the search for his past. In 1976, Anna contacts Lorca and confesses to him that she left him because she

joined the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency. She explains to him that the Mossad believes that Bauer is, in reality, Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary, and that she is on a mission to find him. She convinces Lorca to join the mission and find Bormann's hiding place through his old friend Stahl. Lorca returns to Argentina, finds Stahl, and travels to visit Bormann in a Bolivian monastery, where he is hiding. Lorca purposely loses contact with the Mossad and instead of helping to arrest Bormann, he asks him about his father's secret mission. Bormann reveals to him that his father was on a mission to find a supernatural being hidden deep in the Tibetan jungle, a being Hitler believed had the power to turn the war in his favor. At the end of the novel, the two men take a hike up a mountain, where Bormann trips and falls over the edge, grasping onto the ledge for his life. Instead of helping him, Lorca waits for him to fall into the abyss.

The end of Lorca's encounter with Bormann, particularly how he would rather let the former Nazi die instead of turning him over to the Mossad, is crucial to establish possible allegorical readings of the novel. *Los demonios ocultos* can be read as both a representation of the tensions at play in Argentina in the mid-1980s due to the fragility of the democratic government immediately following the dictatorship and as criticism of some of the decisions made by that administration regarding the trial of the Military Juntas. One of the main issues at stake during this time in Argentina was the way the new government—and society in general—would confront the recent violent and repressive past. The democracy that emerged after the dictatorship with the election of President Raúl Alfonsín was very fragile, partly because of the perpetual cycle of dictatorships Argentina had suffered for decades, the power that the military still had even after the de-militarization of the government, and the looming prospect of another coup d'état if the new government aggressively pursued legal penalties against former military

government leaders. One of Alfonsín's most difficult tasks was to balance the search for justice for the numerous human rights abuses carried out during the dictatorship with the desire to ensure there would not be another coup d'état in the foreseeable future. In retrospect, Alfonsín has noted how difficult it was to keep the fragile democracy afloat: "Muchas veces me pregunté si por defender los derechos humanos que habían sido violados en el pasado no arriesgaba los derechos humanos del porvenir. Es decir, si no estaba poniendo en peligro la estabilidad de la democracia y en consecuencia, la seguridad de los ciudadanos" (12). The public was divided regarding what the government needed to do about the country's recent past, Alfonsín explains, with the right demanding that military officials be recognized for their efforts in dismantling Marxist guerrillas and ensuring the return to democracy, while the left demanded that the thousands of disappeared were returned to their families and that the Military Juntas and other human rights violators be persecuted (12).

One of the first things that the new democratic government did was create the National Commission on Disappeared People (CONADEP), which was tasked with investigating the circumstances surrounding the thousands of *desaparecidos* during the dictatorship. Argentine author Ernesto Sabato led the commission, which was composed of civilian representatives from different sectors of society. About nine months after the creation of the commission, on September 1984, the CONADEP officially presented its findings in the *Nunca Más* report. The report includes information on clandestine detention centers, mass graves, torture techniques employed by police and military forces, and numerous testimonies from victims, their surviving family members, and witnesses. As Emilio Crenzel notes, the report was published as a book in Argentina and abroad, with more than half a million copies sold as of 2007. Still, Crenzel explains that the report's real value became evident during the trials against the Military Juntas,

when the document was accepted as evidence against them (18). The trial of the former Argentine dictators was an international watershed moment in the prosecution of human rights violations because, according to Carlos Nino, it was one of the few instances in which a nation “undertook this endeavor without an invading army or a division of the armed forces backing the trials, relying on nothing more than moral appeal” (186). Some of the sentences handed down by the court included life imprisonment for former dictators Jorge Videla and Emilio Massera, while other military leaders received sentences of up to 17 years in prison.

The publication of the *Nunca Más* and the trials of the dictators are two emblematic moments in post-dictatorship Argentina that are representative of a main element of the structures of feeling at that time: the importance of confronting the past. As Raymond Williams notes, the elements of structures of feeling are defined “as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension” (132). Another element that was in tension with the confrontation of the past was, paradoxically, a resistance to such a confrontation by either those who perceived the actions of the military government as heroic and necessary to eradicate the guerrillas, or by those who feared that the prosecution of the military would trigger another coup d’état and eventually another dictatorship. It was under these tensions that two controversial laws were approved within a six-month span, the Ley de Punto Final (Full Stop Law) in December of 1986 and the Ley de Obediencia Debida (Law of Due Obedience) in June of 1987. The first law mandated that investigation and prosecution of those suspected of political violence during the dictatorship (excluding the kidnapping of newborns) would end within sixty days. The second law mandated that officials in the armed forces, including the police, acted under superior’s orders and thus could not be prosecuted for their actions. The law did not apply to cases of kidnapping of minors or rape, and it protected officers of all ranks who were proven not to have

decision-making authority. As Nino notes, “the passage of this law was received with bitter criticism, even indignation, by different sectors of society as well as by the international community, including national and international human rights groups” (101).<sup>13</sup> It is also very significant that after the approval of these laws, the *Nunca Más* report ceased to be printed in Argentina and abroad until 1991, after President Carlos Menem approved several pardons to previously processed military officers (Crenzel, 187)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Nino, who worked closely with Alfonsín since his nomination for president, explains that he was against the Ley de Obediencia Debida, particularly because he felt it would open the door for many other demands by the military. However, in retrospect, he agrees that Alfonsín made the right decision at the time (101). Regarding the Ley de Punto Final, Nino notes that the general public and the media misinterpreted it. The idea was that the new deadline would speed up the judicial process, which had become stagnant after the trial of the Juntas. The effect was very positive; during the last sixty days in which military personnel could be prosecuted more than 400 cases were processed, which was 20 times more than in the previous three years (94). However, Alfonsín’s decision was not accepted by all, particularly by leftist intellectuals who, like author Mempo Giardinelli, believed that the Ley de Punto Final was absurd and pointless because “desvirtuó todos los avances que se habían hecho para juzgar las atrocidades de la dictadura y para democratizar a las Fuerzas Armadas” (202).

<sup>14</sup> Three months after being sworn in as president, in October of 1989, Menem issued decrees that pardoned hundreds of people from both the armed forces and the guerrillas who were accused of state terrorism. A year later he pardoned military and federal police officers who had been convicted for human rights abuses, including the main Junta leaders. Nino notes that

The general uproar caused by the approval of Alfonsín's laws and the fact that the *Nunca Más* report stopped being published for years highlights the ambivalence toward facing the past that was already brewing in Argentina by the time that Posse's *Los demonios ocultos* was published. The past and the way the main characters confront it is central to the novel's plot. Even the lives of secondary characters such as Stahl revolve around the past. The former Nazi official is a self-taught archaeologist who spends his time in Argentina unearthing pre-Hispanic artifacts and mummified bodies. Throughout his years in Ibicuy he has mailed detailed reports and files of artifacts he has unearthed and classified in Argentina to a Hamburg museum. Stahl explains to Lorca that his hobby is "una forma de acercarse al misterio del pasado" (87). But the ambivalence toward confronting the past that I argue is present throughout the novel is exemplified by Stahl's sudden decision to not send samples of one of his biggest discoveries, a perfectly mummified child and other funerary artifacts. He made this decision after spending an entire weekend with Lorca cataloging his findings. At the end of their laborious couple of days, Stahl began to rebury the artifacts and the child's body, telling Lorca: "Usted me convenció: mandaré solo las fotos. ¿Para qué más? ¿Para qué turbar la paz de los muertos?" (88). A similar backtracking of the process of "unearthing" history occurs to Lorca, who during the first part of the novel seems obsessed with the past as he spends his time interviewing old German

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"the public harshly criticized these pardons" and that a vast majority (80 percent of those polled) opposed the decrees but that there were no demonstrations like those that were organized to protest Alfonsín's measures (104). The decrees remained in place until 2003, when President Néstor Kirchner declared them unconstitutional and began a new series of trials against dictatorship officials.

immigrants and is searching for more clues about his mother's and father's lives. He seems particularly interested in learning more about the Nazi officials who took refuge in Argentina. Yet, at the end of the novel, when Lorca has the opportunity to help the Mossad apprehend Bormann—effectively helping a democratic government confront the past through trial—he selfishly wastes his time with him acquiring only information about his father. Lorca never contacts the Mossad, and he lets the Nazi official fall to his death. At the end of the novel the main war criminal is not tried, but instead is sent into an abyss. This can be interpreted as the culmination of a trope that is repeated throughout the novel: a desire to bury the past, to relegate it to a deep abyss of amnesia.

This same desire is shared among some Argentines who are still today against retroactively arraiguing military members who were found to have overexerted their power and who may have been behind illegal kidnappings, incarcerations, torture, and other human rights abuses. Posse himself has been an outspoken critic of these trials. In a widely-circulated column published by conservative newspaper *La Nación* in 2006, the author criticized the Nestor Kirchner government for seeking retroactive legal processes against some members of the dictatorship's police and military forces in what he considered “un ejercicio de venganza disfrazada de justicia” (“Incurables adolescentes de los 70”)<sup>15</sup>. His primary argument was that in the 1970s the military acted under the direction of a democratic Peronist government whose

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<sup>15</sup> Posse's text was published in the opinion section of the newspaper. However, at the bottom of the article was a short editorial note explaining that the text was part of an upcoming book that the author was preparing, *Noche de lobos*, which was not published for another five years, in 2011.

orders were to annihilate the guerrilla, so they should not be retroactively penalized for their actions. He also emphasized that Argentina should follow the example of other European and Asian countries in their efforts to leave the past behind:

En la Argentina no se entiende la discreción ante el juicio del pasado que tuvieron países que sufrieron grandes hecatombes, con millones de víctimas. Son los casos de Rusia, Francia, Alemania, España, China, Italia, Japón. Se actuó con una justicia simbólica. [...] Que en el plano histórico-político los vivos quieran vengar a sus muertos por medio de la justicia sería perverso e inútil. Equivaldría a agregar odio al odio y dolor al dolor. En Nüremberg fueron condenadas 38 personas. Por lo de Hiroshima, ninguno. (“Incurables adolescentes de los 70”)

In *Los demonios ocultos* some of Lorca’s actions seem to echo this desire for “discretion” towards passing judgment on the violent actions of the repressive Argentine government. For example, when he learns from an informant that whenever local government forces kidnapped an alleged subversive, they would tell family members that the victims were *montoneros* and ignore their pleas for information, Lorca simply answers: “Hay, o había por aquí cerca una heladería. En una esquina. ¿En la esquina de Gaona...?” (192). Startled by the sudden change of subject, the informant tells him that the ice cream shop is gone, and thinks to himself that Lorca’s change of subject “era un método para no seguir hablando de algo muy doloroso” (192). The tension between wanting to openly discuss what was occurring in 1976 and the desire to turn a blind eye is endemic to the tensions that were occurring around the time when the novel was produced that led to both the trial of the Juntas and later to the controversial laws that offered reprieves to the military. As the opinions of Posse and others show, this is an issue that is still germane to the current political situation in Argentina.

## Posse's Representation of Nazism and Peronism

Recent photographic discoveries of the daily life of Third Reich officers in concentration camps highlight Posse's jarring representation of Nazism in *Los demonios ocultos*, particularly when compared to his representation of Argentine military forces. In 2007, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) received a photo album that once belonged to Schutzstaffel officer Karl Höcker, who was stationed at the Auschwitz concentration camp in the nine months prior to its evacuation. Most of the photographs depict the daily life of SS officers in Auschwitz and at a Nazi resort located less than 20 miles from the concentration camp. The importance of the album was immediately evident to museum archivists as it was only the second known photo album of this kind. However, what was most shocking for museum experts was the normalcy of the activities depicted in the photographs. Men and women officers were pictured partaking in after-work leisure activities, simply enjoying themselves drinking, singing, and joyfully playing instruments. In an online documentary produced by the USHMM, Rebecca Erbelding, the museum archivist, notes that looking at these photographs "makes you think about how people could come to this. That they don't look like monsters. They look like me. They look like my next-door neighbor. Is he capable of that? Am I?" ("Auschwitz Through the Lens..."). Joseph White, a USHMM research assistant, notes that the Nazi officers in the photographs "were all too frighteningly human" ("Auschwitz Through the Lens...").<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The recently discovered photo album was a tangible visual reminder of the ordinariness of Nazi officials and followers. However, by the 1960s historians such as Raul Hilberg and

A similar sensation occurs when reading Abel Posse's representation of the Argentine military personnel during the 1976-1983 dictatorship in *Los demonios ocultos*. Lorca describes a group of Argentine military officers who he spends some time with in the second part of the novel as polite and friendly young men who talked to him about soccer and played tango and folklore cassette tapes in their vehicle. This human side of the officers caused Lorca to compare them to average Argentine young men:

Volvió a tener la sensación de que aquellos buenos muchachos no tenían nada de guerreros. Eran como universitarios recién casados, profesionales que acababan de egresar. Como la mayoría de los argentinos de clase media, daban la impresión de ser bidimensionales: todo estaba a la vista. Auto propio, departamento propio, los nenes. [...] Buenos muchachos que los domingos comen una tallarinada bien hecha en casa de los suegros. Eso eran. (209)

This description stands in sharp contrast to the way those same young men later on talk about how all armies of the world exercise torture against enemies and that those practices were the only viable recourse for acquiring information from subversives (210). The “frighteningly human” way in which they act at first is also completely contrary to the way in which Posse portrays Nazi officers, which is one of the elements that differentiate his novel from those by other Argentine authors who also represent Nazism in their works.

In an interview with Magdalena García Pinto, Posse stated that *Los demonios ocultos* could be read as a novel that through “a juego de reflejos” is, in a veiled way, bridging

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cultural critics like Hannah Arendt had already established how ordinary most of these men and women were.

authoritarianism in Argentina and Latin America with Nazism (502). As I will demonstrate, however, the connection between the dictatorship and the Third Reich is weakened by Posse's cartoonish portrayal of Nazi officials, which stands in sharp contrast to the way in which Argentine officers are depicted. Instead, there is an implied connection between Juan Peron's government and Nazism, which could be understood as criticism against Peronismo in general. This stance against Peronism could in turn be interpreted as a reproach of the intellectual ethics, ideals, and models that were prevalent in Argentina and most of Latin America prior to the dictatorship. The novel portrays a post-World War II Argentina teeming with exiles ranging from veterans and concentration camp survivors to high-ranking Nazi war criminals. Despite the plot also taking place in 1976 and openly describing the repressive environment created by the "Proceso," the novel fails to make a strong analogy between the Third Reich and the dictatorship. In *Los demonios ocultos* Nazi officers are primarily described as mysterious and esoteric men who were obsessed with the occult. As Balderston notes, the novel's correspondence between Nazism and the dictatorship amounts to little more than a Hollywoodesque representation of history: "Este 'juego de reflejos', sin embargo, no arroja mucha luz ni sobre el nazismo ni sobre el autoritarismo argentino. Es más bien una carnavalización, un *Raiders of the Lost Ark* argentino" (257).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a Steven Spielberg film released in 1981, and the first of four popular adventure movies featuring the fictional archaeologist Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford). In this film, the protagonist races against Nazi forces to retrieve a religious artifact that Hitler believes will make his army invincible.

While in *Respiración artificial* Nazism is the result of reason—a monster created by developing to the extreme Western philosophy, according to Tardewski—in *Los demonios ocultos* Nazism is portrayed mainly as an ideology based in esoteric beliefs and run by mysterious men whose drive to conquer the world is founded on legends of a superior power that would grant them that opportunity. This trivialization of the roots of Nazism creates a distancing effect between the German military figures and the Argentine dictatorship forces portrayed in the novel. Although the novel's tone is very serious, some of the passages that describe the occult origins of Nazism are so ludicrous that the historical characters are turned into caricatures of their real-life counterparts. For example, in the second part of the novel, Lorca transcribes in his diary a former Nazi official's chronicle of how Hitler was “the chosen one” to hold an enigmatic black stone that would grant him the power to be the leader of the Third Reich:

—Es la piedra de la *Ka'aba*, la verdadera. Llegó del éter. Fue traída por un ángel y un ángel se la llevará... La que veneran los árabes en la Meca es un mero símbolo de ésta. Ésta la recibió Mahoma y la legó a Abu Bakr, el primer califa... Sigam a Hitler. Él *es*. Danzará. [...] Tiene ya los medios para comunicarse con Ellos, los Superiores. (115)

This occult side of Nazism is emphasized throughout the novel. In another of Lorca's diary entries he narrates his encounter with Johann von Leers, who in real life was close to Hitler and was one of the Third Reich's main ideologues. Von Leers tells Lorca that the only way to believe the unlikely ascension of Hitler from being a mediocre artist to ruling an immense empire was to believe in an outside occult force that was pushing him to greatness: “¿Cómo no iba a creer en una decisión de las potencias exteriores, de los Superiores? ¿Usted dudaría? Él supo que encarnaba una fuerza exterior a él mismo” (127). At the end of the novel, Lorca, who throughout the plot had remained somewhat skeptical of Nazism's occult past, notes the ludicrousness in the

fact that the Third Reich's rise (and his father's suicide mission) had an irrational and esoteric origin: "Pero el absurdo era la sensación predominante: su padre, Walther Werner, tal vez había perdido la vida por una ocurrencia surgida del pensamiento mágico" (260).

This farcical representation of Nazism has the effect of trivializing the origins of the Third Reich and diluting the analogy between Argentine authoritarianism and Germany that Posse intended. Although one could read that this representation of Nazism is alluding to a possible irrational foundation in the dictatorship, the stark contrast between the representation of former German officers and Argentine members of the military weakens such a reading. The novel does, however, create an analogy between Argentine authoritarianism and fervent nationalist regimes and the Third Reich. For example, there is an implicit analogy between Peronism, Fascism, and Nazism throughout the novel. This is evident from the beginning of the novel, when Lorca notes how the influence of his Spanish aunts made him see in Perón and Evita "protoformas sudamericanas del fascismo" (14). Also, references abound regarding how Perón may have helped orchestrate the influx of former Axis officials seeking exile in Argentina, albeit in the name of Argentine political and military gain. For example, Senkman and Sosnowski note the significance of Posse's inclusion of debunked historical beliefs such as Perón having bought a home for von Leers in Egypt: "Posse, al igual que otros escritores antiperonistas, fabula sobre von Leers sin conocer más datos que los ofrecidos por Farago o los obtenidos a través de documentación oficial de la Policía Federal fraguada y revelada en publicaciones de los servicios" (122)<sup>18</sup>. It is particularly tantalizing that the novel emphasizes that Borman, the most

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<sup>18</sup> Here Senkman and Sosnowski refer to Ladislav Farago, a Hungarian historian who erroneously reported that Perón bought a house for von Leers in Cairo so he could live there after

powerful Nazi still alive, returns to Argentina in 1974, when Perón returned to his home country. It is also noted that Borman flees from Argentina once the Military Junta took power in 1976 (169). Senkman and Sosnowski argue that the novel's emphasis on how Bormann found a safe haven in Argentina until 1976 reinforces the relationship between peronismo and nazismo and at the same time "exime a la dictadura militar de esas simpatías; diluye el perfil del nazismo histórico en instancias en que emergen los contornos concretos de la Argentina de Videla" (122). As I will demonstrate, this emphasis on putting Peronism under a negative light could be interpreted as a way in which tensions in the Argentine intellectual sphere filtered into the text.

### **Peronism, Argentine Intellectual Reconfiguration, and the Importance of Form**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s in Argentina, numerous intellectuals including Ricardo Piglia, were Peronist sympathizers. The criticism of Juan Perón and his political movement in *Los demonios ocultos* can be interpreted as a way of criticizing the intellectual ideals that had been exhausted and desecrated during the dictatorship. Piglia, as I have established, recognized the need for the reconfiguration of the intellectual sphere in Argentina even before the dictatorship had ended. Yet the solutions or models that he and Abel Posse propose through their novels are completely opposed. Posse and Piglia published these texts under very different circumstances, one during the preliminary post-dictatorship years and the other in the last years of military rule, but both novels take place, in part, in 1976. From a

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the 1955 coup d'état. The two critics note that this was later reported as fact in some Argentine news publications, but that in 1995 this was debunked by historian Ignacio Klitch (123).

marginal position, the intellectuals depicted in *Respiración artificial* resist the repressive environment of the dictatorship by “listening to the murmur of history” in a Kafkaesque sense, as Tardewsky puts it. Renzi, who represents a new type of intellectual that is still committed to politics and history but in a different manner from the ideals of the 1960s, follows the model of what Sarlo argues was one of the challenges that Argentine intellectuals faced at that time: “el de construir, desde los márgenes, desde el *underground*, algunas alternativas de futuro para la cultura argentina” (“El campo intelectual,” 105).

*Los demonios ocultos*' protagonist has little regard for history and the reconstruction of a future because he is more interested in his personal gain than in resisting the dictatorship's repression in any way. Often, Lorca is described as listening to both civilians and military officers tell him their version of what is occurring in Argentina during the dictatorship, but he generally does not engage either group in the conversation, similar to when an informant told him about the middle of the night kidnappings and he answered with a question about an ice cream parlor from his childhood. He is not “listening” to them, or to history, in the same sense as Tardewski and Maggi are teaching Renzi to do in *Respiración artificial*. Lorca is on a sort of self-absorbed trip through Argentina, watching terrible events unfold in front of him but remaining focused on the personal task of finding out more information about his father and his involvement with Nazism. In a sense, despite writing his novel after the dictatorship ended, Posse represented through Lorca the kind of intellectual that was favored by the dictatorship, one who followed what Sarlo identifies as the pillars of the dictatorship's shaping of society and the role on intellectuals:

El régimen militar adaptaba al discurso cultural sus tesis políticas generales. En primer lugar, haciendo responsables, en última instancia, a los intelectuales, como portadores

sociales de “ideologías disolventes” e instigadores de la subversión. En segundo lugar, difundiendo un mensaje que puede esquematizarse de la manera siguiente: a. privatización de lo público, despolitización de la vida social; b. propuesta de modelos de comportamiento que colocan al individuo y su entorno familiar como instancia básica de la sociedad y desprecian los valores colectivos; c. fomento del individualismo y la competencia, del prejuicio y desconfianza ante las instancias colectivas, sean éstas sindicatos, partidos, asociaciones juveniles, etc. (“El campo intelectual,” 103-104)

Lorca’s disenchantment with the committed intellectual ideal and his turn to a more individualistic type akin to the one described by Sarlo was evident since the time he spent in Paris in the late 1960s and his involvement with the “May 68” revolts in the city. He was working as a reporter for a French newspaper and, at first, he appears to sympathize with the movement. He is even described as feeling that he was waking up to a new reality, and for days he confronted the police along with other the protesters. Lorca stops going to work as he begins to lose enthusiasm for his profession when he notices his news articles were being heavily redacted before being published, which causes him to question journalism and its capability to record reality: “Comprendió que el mundo era diariamente intoxicado por ese evangelio ramplón, escrito sobre la incesante serpiente de papel que se repetía en todas las teletipos. Esa era la *verdad* del mundo” (161). Nonetheless, when the protests stopped, when “el encanto había cesado,” Lorca simply goes back to work at the newspaper and continues his life with his son and wife. He essentially forgets all about the public revolts and what they were fighting for and instead lives in the comfort of intimacy and privacy: “De la frustrada revolución les quedaba todo eso: un mundo íntimo y feliz” (162). By the time he returns to Argentina, after his wife and son die tragically in a traffic accident, Lorca is completely apolitical and individualistic. The

main reason he returned to Argentina was not to help the Mossad apprehend Bormann but to go on a personal search for his father's past. In a particularly jarring passage of the novel the narrator describes how the dictatorship shielded its repressive actions against the leftist sector of society, including poor factory workers, behind their official war against the guerrillas. However, for the protagonist this was not a tragedy happening in his home country but an annoyance or something that would simply affect his personal mission: "Lorca comprendió que la cacería de esas víctimas de la verdadera democracia complicaba su viaje" (197-98). The end of the novel is the consummation of Lorca's individualistic stance and his betrayal of the ideals that he first adopted in France. Instead of turning Bormann in to the Mossad, allowing for a whole culture to heal and seek justice through trial, he let one of the most sought after human rights abusers in history die as some kind of illogical vendetta for the death of his mother, for which he naively thought that he was avenging millions (269-70). Posse, in a fashion similar to Piglia, depicted his protagonist as a marginal intellectual who acknowledges that his previous mode of operation or ideals did not succeed: "Hacía muchos años que se sentía como un marginal, comprometido con causas perdidas. Tal vez desde 1968 y el fracaso de la Revolución de Mayo las cosas eran así" (219). But while Piglia proposed an intellectual who from the margins could resist the repression (in the exact same way that he was doing with the publication of *Respiración artificial*), Posse's fictional intellectual model is very similar to the dictatorship's clear accepted parameters of behavior.

Ironically, even though Posse published it four years after the end of the military rule, *Los demonios ocultos*' form and mode of narration are more in line with the dictatorship's cultural aesthetic than with the literary innovations that originated as means to criticize the official discourse that emanated from the military juntas. Santiago Colás explains that "History

as the *Proceso* narrates it is told straight on as it were, through the subjectivity of a single individual in command of the facts and the voices of those who constitute history” (129).

Francine Masiello similarly argues that “Bajo la égida del gobierno militar, el estado articuló una teoría unidimensional de la realidad” (13). Against this authoritative representation of reality, according to Sarlo, authors who published from 1976 on subscribed to an aesthetic that highlighted a crisis of realist representation. This crisis was expressed through “la hegemonía consiguiente de tendencias estéticas que trabajan (incluso con obsesión) sobre problemas constructivos, de relación intertextual, de procesamiento de citas, de representación de discursos, de relación entre la realidad y literatura o de la imposibilidad de esta relación” (“Política, ideología,” 41).

Compared to *Respiración artificial* and other novels published during or after the dictatorship that presented innovations in their form or narrative techniques, Posse’s *Los demonios ocultos* is narrated in a rather conventional and straightforward way:

Lorca vivía en un pequeño departamento de un sexto piso (sin ascensor) de la rue Linné, frente a la Universidad y cerca del Jardin des Plantes. Era un París melancólico, casi pueblerino. A un paso de la Contrescarpe. Había librerías y bares al servicio de los estudiantes. En verano, en tiempo de vacaciones, y los sábados y domingos, aquellas calles empedradas recobraban una tristeza que les caía bien. Entonces salía a caminar hasta el Sena y hasta compraba algún libro que no leería. (155)

Instead of following the aesthetic of resistance to the unilateral discourse that characterized the dictatorship period, Posse published a novel mainly told through a third person omniscient narrator, as seen in the above quotation. A short second section of the book, which encompasses sections of Lorca’s diary and research notes, is narrated in the first person point view of the

protagonist. However, even this section could also be considered as a one-dimensional view of the world that characterized the dictatorship's discourse. The novel also lacks a firm questioning of traditional literary forms that Sarlo identified as characteristic of literature post-1976. The novel presents a realist representation of the immediate Argentine past in a sort of translucent narration without many ellipsis or metaphors (after all, the relationship between Peronismo and Nazism is explicit, not allegorical) that seems to place a lot of naïve emphasis on the power of literature to represent reality. Although Balderston argues that the novel does in fact contain certain traditional metaphors to refer to Argentina in general, he notes that the novel overall conveys skepticism towards the importance of history: "Posse parece creer [. . .] que es mejor leer a los novelistas que a los historiadores para saber qué ha pasado en América Latina. Esa creencia será consoladora, pero no necesariamente convincente" (257). This is completely opposed to the literature of the time and particularly different to what Piglia does in *Respiración artificial* with his multilayered and metafictional narration that questions both history's and literature's ability to represent reality.

During the dictatorship, Sarlo explains, history was utilized by intellectuals to think and talk about the present: "Nos habituamos a dar rodeos, a alargar el camino recorriendo el siglo XIX [. . .] una historia donde los intelectuales del pasado eran figuras anteriores de un destino que nos seguía involucrando, metáforas para pensar nuestros errores y repasar nuestros proyectos" ("El campo intelectual," 105). In *Respiración artificial* Piglia not only relied on intellectuals from the nineteenth century to talk about the present, he also utilized Kafka and Hitler—the failed artist/intellectual but expert politician—to talk about the Argentine present and the crisis the intellectual sphere was experiencing. Posse presented an incoherent past through the novel's representation of Nazis as one-dimensional individuals whose actions were propelled

by an enigmatic belief of esoteric powers. At the same time, he narrated the recent dictatorial past in an anachronistic and realist fashion that stood in opposition to his depiction of the more distant past. This disbelief in the power of history is also reflected in how Lorca is disenchanted with his capability as a journalist and writer and his ability to capture reality. The oppositional manner in which Piglia and Posse represent Nazism and history—and the different styles in which they narrate—cannot but point to the fact that the intellectual double-break that Sarlo argues occurred during the dictatorship never truly healed. And that is partly why even today the two writers are considered to operate in separate intellectual spheres.

## **Chapter 2. Argentine Representations of Nazism in the New Millennium: Discrimination, Xenophobia, and the Perpetuation of National Myths**

At the turn of the millennium, Argentina went through one of its worst economic crises in history, causing years of severe social and political changes. In the span of less than five years, from 1999 to 2003, the country had four presidents, and the Argentine peso lost much of its value. The middle class in particular was heavily affected, as approximately 50 percent of the population lived under the poverty line by the end of 1999 (Grimson, Kessler, 57). Poverty levels did not start to decrease until the end of 2003. Mainly credited to the neoliberal economic policies of presidents like Carlos Menem and Fernando de la Rúa, the economic crash of 2001-2002 was also arguably the final outcome of more than 25 years of the government's mismanagement of public funds. At its worst moment, in October of 2002, more than 27 percent of the Argentine population lived in extreme poverty (Kacowicz, 165). Another effect of the crisis was an increase in crime throughout the nation that started in the mid-1990s. This, combined with official discourses that mainly portrayed immigration as the root of the country's economic and public safety woes, brought to the fore sentiments of xenophobia and an environment of discrimination against immigrants from neighboring countries like Bolivia and Paraguay. The crisis and its ramifications on society at large also affected notions of national identity and Argentine myths of historical exceptionalism in regards to Latin American countries and their ethnic configuration (Grimson, Kessler, 140).

As I will show throughout this chapter, these changes filtered into literary works published around that time or shortly after, including those that fictionalize Nazism, the Holocaust, and other World War II historical figures and events. An analysis of Gustavo

Nielsen's *Auschwitz* (2004), Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda* (2011), and Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche* (2012) will demonstrate that the representations of Nazism in these works can be interpreted as allegories that are at once informed by and actively creating discourses related to the repercussions of the fiscal collapse in the region due to the neoliberal economic practices of the 1990s. Besides the influence of the economic crisis and its aftermath in Argentine life, the changes in the representation of Nazism and other World War II historical events in these novels also stem from a general shift in how the connection between the Third Reich and the 1976-83 dictatorship was perceived in Argentina. In general, and unlike novels published from the 1970s through the 1980s, such as the ones analyzed in the previous chapter, most contemporary works no longer present these historical tropes as allegories of events that occurred during the Argentine military rule. In these texts, the connection between the two historical moments is presented as a pre-established relationship that no longer needs to be explained or explored further, giving way to utilizing these fictionalizations as allegorical representations of the environment of xenophobia, discrimination, and exclusion that was partly a result of the 2000s' economic collapse.

I argue that these novels present the Nazism/dictatorship binary in this fashion (or abstain from presenting it) because in the Argentine imaginary Nazism, the Holocaust, and World War II became so intertwined with the 1976-83 military rule that it could be said that now one often evokes the other. The flexibility afforded by an allegorical relationship between these historical moments gave way to a more stable and parallel relationship than that of the symbol, in which one of the two elements can stand for the other interchangeably (Benjamin, "Allegory and Trauerspiel," 159-90; de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," 187-228). As discussed in the previous chapter, there are factual historical resonances between Nazism and the Argentine

dictatorship that have fueled the perceived connection between the two, ranging from torture techniques utilized by the military junta enforcers to the way in which the emergent democratic governments dealt with the trials of former military rulers and servicemen charged with crimes against humanity. Moreover, official discourses that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century fostered the change in the Nazism/dictatorship perceived connection from an allegorical to a symbolic relation. For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, there are educational decrees mandating that students learn about both historical moments at the same time, with instructors and teaching materials emphasizing the similitudes between the two. Another factor that has influenced this perceived connection in the Argentine imaginary is the series of literary texts that since the late 1970s explicitly allegorized the dictatorship through the representation of World War II.

It is in this context that novels such as *Auschwitz*, *Wakolda*, and *Una misma noche* were produced. They were also published after the end of the worst period of the economic crisis, and represent Nazism and other World War II historical figures differently than novels published during or shortly after the 1976-83 dictatorship ended. Their approach to the relationship between the dictatorship and Nazism was influenced by both fiction and reality and, as I will show, these texts resist the inherent rigid nature of the symbolic connection between the two historical moments. These novels restore elasticity to the possible allegorical significance of World War II tropes in Argentine literature by representing social conflicts regarding racism, xenophobia, and Argentine identity at the turn of the millennium. In these more contemporary works the connection between the Argentine dictatorship and the Third Reich is no longer central to the plot, and is simply presented as a given.

Such is the case in the representation of Nazism and the dictatorship in Nielsen's *Auschwitz*, for example. The novel centers on Berto, a self-proclaimed neo-nazi in his 40s from Buenos Aires. Besides being a typical middle-class porteño who has a regular office job and lives in an apartment complex, Berto is a misogynist who also despises indigents, immigrants, gays, overweight people, and Jews. Throughout the novel there are numerous references to the military dictatorship and, as its title implies, Nazism. Furthermore, the Holocaust and Hitler are some of the World War II tropes that are intermingled in the plot. Berto seems obsessed with the military. He drives a Torino coupé 380 "color verde esperanza militar," he calls his penis "el soldado," and when he looks in the mirror, he imagines himself being addressed as "Führer Berto González." However, the novel does not emphasize the analogy between the Argentine and European historical events. The connection seems to be a given and no longer needs to be made explicit.

Puenzo's *Wakolda* is also distinct from other Argentine fictionalizations of World War II because it is one of the few in which explicit connections between the dictatorship and Nazism are entirely absent from the text. The novel takes place during the early 1960s in Southern Argentina, and it fictionalizes the time that the infamous Nazi official and medical researcher Dr. Joseph Mengele spent hiding in the Southern Cone. The plot centers on the relationship between the family of an Argentine girl with a growth deficiency and the Nazi doctor. The novel explores the sexual tension between Mengele and the girl, and his obsession with researching and trying to correct her condition. *Wakolda* also includes classic Argentine literary tropes such as the binary civilization/barbarism, the extermination of indigenous populations in the nineteenth century, and the representation of the country's Southern region.

The changes in the representation of Nazism in contemporary works are present even in novels that explicitly connect the dictatorship with the Third Reich, like Brizuela's *Una misma noche*. The plot takes place mainly in 1976 and 2010. A break-in in the middle of the night in the protagonist's neighborhood in 2010 triggers his recollection of a similar incident in 1976, when he was a teenager during the beginning of the dictatorship. Throughout the novel, the protagonist retells the 1970s incident, during which government forces kidnapped a young Jewish woman. One of the protagonist's main preoccupations with this event is his father's involvement in the kidnapping and the dictatorship's repression of individuals deemed subversive. The connection between Nazism and the dictatorship in Brizuela's novel is sometimes subtle, with veiled references to Nazism when describing the Argentine military and other characters aligned with the government. However, there are other moments in which the connection between the two historical events is explicitly made. For instance, the protagonist's father was a member of a branch of the military that trained under former Nazi officials in Argentina. Also, when the main character remembers the kidnapping of his Jewish neighbor in 1976, he imagines the victim's family linking her disappearance to the way in which Jewish people were persecuted in Europe under Nazi rule. These are only a few of the instances in which the Holocaust or World War II are alluded to in the novel, and a connection between these historical events and the dictatorship is explicitly referenced by the narrator. Even so, the central focus of the novel is the parallel between the environment of repression during the 1976-83 military rule in Argentina and the perceived environment of a lack of public safety after the country's economic collapse.

Drawing on texts by academics and philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and Primo Levi concerning the struggles to represent historical events that are beyond the grasp of language, in the rest of the chapter I will delineate how each of these novels challenges

traditional understandings and interpretations of the representation of Nazism, the Holocaust, and other World War II historical events in Argentine literature. In the next section I present a condensed overview of the historical context in which renewed nationalistic, xenophobic, and sometimes even racist official discourses emerged. I also delineate how public perception of immigrants and people of color has changed in Argentina since the end of the dictatorship. This contextualization of the main works also describes how the economic crisis produced two parallel and contradictory discourses: one that challenged historical Argentine identity and ethnic myths and another that simultaneously perpetuated the stigmatization of “the other,” which in turn reinforced the idea that Argentina stands as the most Western or Europeanized nation in Latin America. Finally, I also present the theoretical framework that informs my notion of racism, particularly the definition of racism in Argentina. In the next section I analyze how in Nielsen’s *Auschwitz* humor and graphic depictions of violence meld to allegorically criticize the environment of exclusion and stigmatization suffered by immigrants and people of color in Argentina. I also consider the possible interpretations of a sudden but introspective personality change in the despicable protagonist at the end of the novel, particularly how this could signal a series of changes in the way Argentines perceived themselves in the aftermath of the country’s worst economic crisis. Puenzo’s *Wakolda*, as I demonstrate in the second part of the chapter, straddles these two phenomena related to national identity and social changes in a paradoxical manner. On the one hand, the novel acknowledges the fallacies of national myths via a comparison of Nazism and the Argentine historical precedents in regards to racism and xenophobia. On the other, it perpetuates some of the most ingrained stigmatizations of “the other” through its representation of Mapuche characters. In the final section of the chapter I elucidate how in Brizuela’s *Una misma noche* the binary Nazism/dictatorship is no longer

presented as an allegory but simply as another aspect of Argentine identity and history. I also propose that the novel's back and forth between the dictatorial past and a present characterized by a lack of public safety can be interpreted as a representation of the perceived notion of rampant delinquency in Buenos Aires during and after the economic crisis of the 2000s.

### **The Economic Collapse and its Consequences on Argentine Society**

One of the main social concerns in Argentina since its economy began to decline in the mid-1990s has arguably been a widespread sense of rampant criminality and a lack of public safety. The perception that the country, particularly Buenos Aires, was falling to delinquency was fueled by official discourses that at the time blamed immigrants for a purported increase in crime. These xenophobic claims were also often accompanied by unfounded contentions that immigrants from neighboring countries, mainly Bolivians and Paraguayans, were one of the main causes of the high unemployment rates amid the severe economic recession that began during the Carlos Menem presidency in the mid-1990s. These discourses caused renewed nationalism accompanied by an environment of exclusion, racism, and xenophobia. Although these social changes took place more than twenty years ago, recent events demonstrate that xenophobic feelings, particularly among the political right, have not diminished despite the efforts of the Kirchnerist government to thwart such tendencies. For example, on December of 2010, hundreds of families of immigrant workers took over Buenos Aires's Parque Indoamericano, the second largest park in the city, and set up tents as protest for lack of better housing in the city. Police used excessive force when they clashed with the protesters, killing a Paraguayan man and a Bolivian woman, and injuring several others with firearms. The incident

created a political standoff between the powerful and conservative Buenos Aires city government and liberal president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. The president, shortly after the killing of the two protesters, held a press conference in which she decried the excessive police repression and asked for forgiveness to any neighboring country that may have been offended by the incident. She also reminded Argentines that many of the country's immigrants often perform the jobs that most citizens would not be willing to do, and that they should never be stigmatized as criminals. Meanwhile, conservative Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri, who was elected president of Argentina in 2015, blamed the incident on “uncontrolled” immigration due to the federal government's lax policies (Dominguez). The bloody episode highlighted the tensions in the country regarding immigration and the effort of the two Kirchner governments to thwart xenophobic and racist discourses that became exacerbated due to the neoliberal economic practices that were inaugurated during the dictatorship and continued during the democratic transition.<sup>19</sup> The incident also sheds light on how these tensions remain despite official efforts since the mid-2000s that aimed at nurturing a more inclusive society, which included the channeling of funds to governmental institutions like the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) and the abolition of laws that fostered exclusion.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Kirchners held office in Argentina from 2003 to 2015. Néstor Kirchner was president for one term, from 2003 to 2007. His wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner served as president for two terms, from 2007 to 2015.

<sup>20</sup> President Néstor Kirchner championed the eventual abolition of the General Law of Migration and Promotion of Immigration, commonly referred as “Ley Videla,” which Tanja

## Public safety, Criminality, and Immigration in Argentina

Racial tension and social apprehension in regard to immigration have plagued Argentina since its inception. Famously, the 1853 Constitution included Article 25, which declared that the country should foster European immigration. The idea behind the constitutional decree sponsored by Juan Bautista Alberdi, one of the nation's fathers, was that "more desirable" immigrants, particularly French and British, populate Argentina. Despite several revisions to the constitution since the nineteenth century, the article still stands. At present, according to Teun A. van Dijk, there are five discernible dimensions of racism in Argentina that originated in different historical moments: (1) racism against and eventual genocide of the country's indigenous population; (2) discrimination and prejudice against the "cabecitas negras" (the pejorative term that was used in the 1940s and 1950s for the mestizo population or poor people in general that was later replaced by "negros"); (3) anti-Semitism; (4) prejudice against recent labor immigrants from neighboring countries such as Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay; and (5) prejudice against Koreans (111). The heightened discrimination of groups 2 and 4 at the turn of the twentieth century, which is what novels like Nielsen's *Auschwitz* satirize, can be traced back to changes in criminality and immigration rates following the end of the dictatorship in the 1980s.

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Bastia and Matthias vom Hau describe as "an expression of stark security and control purposes, and has been described as the most discriminatory migration policy in Argentina" (483). The law had been in place since 1981, and it promoted European immigration while it explicitly sought to prevent immigration from neighboring countries.

The government of Raúl Alfonsín, who was the first democratically-elected president after the 1976-83 military rule, did not consider fighting crime as one of its main policy priorities. After all, as Gabriel Kessler explains, before the 1990s the notion of criminality or lack of public safety as it is understood today—as “una suerte de amenaza aleatoria que puede abatirse sobre cualquiera, en cualquier lugar”—was nonexistent (115). Instead, immediately following the military rule, the focus of both the media and the government was on crimes such as kidnappings and extortions perpetrated by former dictatorship enforcers who after the democratization were effectively unemployed (117-19). Kessler explains that it was not until Alfonsín stepped down as president amid hyperinflation in 1989 that public safety began to affect the social sphere, particularly the fear of the “other” fueled by yellow journalism on television and in newspapers alike. These reports focused on how dwellers in some neighborhoods became armed and organized as a preventive measure in what was believed the imminent “arrival of pillagers from other places” (123). One could argue that these events set the stage for the effectiveness of the official discourses that a few years later criminalized immigrants by presenting them as scapegoats for some of the economic problems the country was facing under the government of Carlos Menem.<sup>21</sup>

Alejandro Grimson and Gabriel Kessler explain that in the 1990s “government officials played key roles in the xenophobia wave, placing the responsibility for social, economic, sanitary, and security problems on immigrants” (130). They also note that the media and Menem’s government proclaimed that Argentina had joined the first world, with partial proof

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<sup>21</sup> Carlos Menem was president of Argentina for two consecutive terms, from 1989 to 1999. He ran for office again in 2003, but lost in a run-off election against Néstor Kirchner.

being the immigration population that the country had attracted, ostensibly in a similar manner to countries like the United States and Germany. But the critics also note that a second, simultaneous official discourse blamed the Bolivian, Peruvian, and Paraguayan immigrants in Argentina for unemployment and rise in crime: “the exorbitant number of border immigrants were taking jobs from Argentines and were also responsible for the high crime rate” (118). Experts have proved these statements to be unfounded, as immigration patterns did not shift during the 1990s and there was no correlation between the number of immigrants and crime increase (Grimson and Kessler, 117). Statistical data from the 2010 census has also proved that the criminalization and stigmatization of immigrants in Argentina continues to be unfounded. The most recent data shows that during the 2001-2010 period the percentage of foreign-born population increased by 15 percent, a figure that cannot explain the raise in delinquency or lack of jobs (INDEC).

The definition of racism that I rely on throughout this chapter stems from Robert Miles’s notion that race is an ideological construction that was originally fabricated within a relation of production in order to perceive “the Other as a specific and inferior category of being particularly suited to providing labour power within unfree relations of production” (141). I also concur with academics who contend that one needs to contextualize racism in order to define it and identify it. Therefore, my notion of racism, particularly racism in Argentina, stems from a combination of posits by academics who mainly take into account the context in which one is analyzing it. For example, Les Back and John Solomos argue that contemporary racisms, no matter where they originate, share some characteristics such as the desire to “fix human social groups in terms of natural properties of belonging within particular political and geographical contexts” (23). This belief, in turn, allows for the assertion that certain individuals do not belong

within a society, a claim based on the logic of “particular racisms.” Therefore, according to Back and Solomos, “the meanings of race and racism need to be located within particular fields of discourse and articulated to the social relations found within that context” (23-24). Racism in Argentina, according to Dan Adaszko and Ana Lía Kornblit, can be traced to the formation of the state in the nineteenth century. They explain that the formation of the Argentine identity during the creation of the nation was intertwined with a disdain for anything that was not European and a total rejection of racial miscegenation: “puede decirse que la formación de una cultura prejuiciosa en Argentina ha tenido lugar paralelamente a la construcción del Estado nacional” (152). Anibal Quijano notes that after the independence movements in the Southern Cone, including Argentina, there was a plan to homogenize the national population to create a “modern nation-state ‘a la europea’” through the eradication of indigenous populations and the conquest of their territories (210). By the end of the nineteenth century, Quijano explains, European immigrants accounted for 80 percent of Argentina’s population, and “they did not immediately enforce the national identity, instead preferring their own European cultural differences, while at the same time explicitly rejecting the identity associated with Latin America’s heritage” (211). Eventually, according to Adasko and Kornblit, the national myth of Argentina being a melting pot of cultures from its immigrants was created, but this idea was formulated and disseminated through official discourses, including basic education, and it does not reflect the reality of the exclusions and prejudices that exist in society (152). The historical preconceptions and discrimination of Latin American heritage has led to what Adasko and Kornblit identify as “selective xenophobia” in Argentina because only certain types of immigrants are stigmatized, including those from neighboring countries such as Bolivia, Perú, and Paraguay (175-77). As I will explain in the next section, social, economic, and political changes in Argentina following

the end of the dictatorship created an environment in which notions of Argentine identity were challenged. At the same time, these changes also fostered an environment of exclusion and discrimination. In what follows I analyze the representations of Nazism in *Auschwitz*, *Wakolda*, and *Una misma noche* under this understanding of Argentine racism and xenophobia.

### ***Auschwitz*: Ignominy, Allegories, and Social Criticism in Grotesque Humor**

Gustavo Nielsen's dark humor novel *Auschwitz* (2004) centers on Berto, a 40-something man living in Buenos Aires and a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi. The protagonist is often described as an everyday, regular *porteño*, but he is openly misogynistic and discriminates against all those who do not fit his worldview of what is normal. He particularly despises Jews, a clear influence from his obsession with Hitler and *Mein Kampf*. However, he also has a fetish for Jewish women, whom he likes to pick up at Club Israelita, have sex with, and never contact again. It is during one of these sexual escapades that he meets Rosana Auschwitz, who invites Berto to spend the night in her apartment. After failing to sexually please Rosana, Berto realizes that she saved a used condom with his sperm in the freezer. In a series of risible situations that highlight Berto's racist and xenophobic attitudes, during the rest of the novel the protagonist tries to recover his sperm and find out why Rosana would keep it. The novel turns dark and very graphic when, during his investigation, Berto kidnaps a boy who apparently lives in Rosana's home. As he brutally rapes and tortures the child, Berto realizes that the victim is an asexual being, and that both the child and Rosana are part of a possible extraterrestrial conspiracy to create a new mixed race between aliens and human beings.

Throughout the novel, there are numerous references to the dictatorship, and, as its title implies, Nazism, the Holocaust, and Hitler are some of the World War II tropes that are intermingled in the plot. Fernando Reati, one of the few academics who have analyzed the novel, focused his interpretation on the connections between Argentina's violent dictatorial past and Berto's personality and actions. However, he admits that the novel might hold other meanings: "I am not presuming that *Auschwitz* is a novel solely *about* the traumatic effects of state terror in Argentina (certainly it is much more than this). But, it is possible to assert that it is *also* about this" (15). By the same token, I propose that the novel is not exclusively about xenophobia and racism. Nielsen's *Auschwitz* certainly is a commentary on the possible effects of the dictatorial past in Argentina's society at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. Nonetheless, it can also be interpreted as part of a series of discourses that emerged around the time of its publication that aimed to curb negative views of immigration and racial diversity at a moment in which notions of what it meant to be Argentine were being challenged by social and economic changes.

In the novel, Nielsen presents an exaggerated and distorted image of a "typical" Buenos Aires man who exudes an aura of hate, exclusion, and discrimination. In what follows I propose that through the grotesque representation of Berto's racism and general dislike for all things he considers out of the norm, *Auschwitz* criticizes the environment of racism and xenophobia that reached its apex in Argentina at the turn of the new millennium. This intensified sense of discrimination and exclusion was caused in part by official discourses that dehumanized and criminalized immigrants, who were the scapegoats for the country's economic failures.

## World War II Tropes, Racism, and Xenophobia in *Auschwitz*

Similar to the way hard data does not match official discourses that stigmatize immigrants, *Auschwitz*'s protagonist, Berto, is a man of contradictions. He despises immigrants yet his only friend is his Indian neighbor and co-worker, Luis. He is anti-Semitic but he sexually fetishizes Jewish women. He hates non-normative gender patterns, yet when he sees a transvestite man, he notes how to him their physique is superior to a woman's and admits he would like to have intercourse with one of them (59-60). This same ambivalence toward what he thinks he should hate is manifested when he kidnaps a child during what starts as a comic crusade to find his sperm, stolen by Rosana. Berto's feelings towards the child evolve from fear to hate and finally to sadistic lust. This graphic and lengthy section is paramount to understanding how the novel can also be interpreted as a text that utilizes World War II tropes and imagery to represent an exaggerated depiction of the social and political tensions in Argentina regarding immigration, xenophobia, and racism.

The encounter between Berto and the child occurs as he surveys Rosana's home. After noticing that a kid routinely enters and leaves Rosana's home, Berto confronts him, but the child forcefully grabs him by the wrist. At first Berto feels fear from the child's penetrating gaze and seemingly strong hands, but then he gathers courage and hits the boy in the mouth with his elbow. The child faints from the brutal punch, and Berto takes him unconscious to his apartment. Over the next few days, Berto ties the apparently mute child to his bed and begins to heinously torture him with increasing intensity and purpose. In one of the most difficult sections to read, Berto discovers that the child does not possess reproductive body parts, so he cuts an incision in his pubis with a knife and rapes him. He also disfigures his face and other body parts, but the

child does not seem to feel pain and does not show much reaction to the attacks. If anything, Berto thinks, the child seems to enjoy it. The kidnapped child is also able to quickly heal from most of his wounds, which leads Berto and Luis, his neighbor and best friend, to conclude that he is an alien being. Once he exhausts all the ways he can imagine of torturing the child, he begins to read the *Nunca Más* report to mimic some of the torture techniques used by government forces during the dictatorship. He builds a homemade picana, an electric prod widely used by torturers in Argentina. When he electrocutes the boy with it, he bursts into flames, quickly becoming a petrified mass. Berto then disposes the body at a train station, but soon after the child resurrects and reappears in his home perfectly healthy and able to communicate, albeit poorly. At the end of the novel, Rosana confirms to Berto that she and the child are aliens, and she trades his sperm for her offspring.

In his study of this lengthy section of the novel, Reati alludes to its possible connections to the dictatorship and rhetorically asks if there is a reason behind all the gore and crude passages in Nielsen's *Auschwitz*: "What is the purpose of this apparent *aestheticization* of torture, which, along with the disappearance of persons, is most commonly associated with the memory of state terror?" (10). He also interprets the resurrection of the boy as "an intentional absurdity on the author's part, in a country that carries in its memory the thousands of disappeared whose bodies were never recovered" (10). The novel certainly makes overt references to the dictatorship, but Berto's graphic torture and rape of the child can also be interpreted as a representation of the stigmatization and even dehumanization experienced by immigrants from neighboring countries in Argentina. Reati himself affirms that "In a country that experienced disappearances and unimaginable tortures [ . . . ] and where many now manifest latent hostility against foreigners and those who are different, it should come as no surprise that an extraterrestrial being might be

subject to abuse by an honest citizen like Berto” (14-15). Despite making this assertion, Reati centers his interpretation on the connections between the dictatorship and the violence in the novel. In particular, he focuses on the historical guilt Argentines may carry for the disappearances and other human right violations that occurred during the military rule. For example, when Luis asks Berto why he tortured the alien child, the protagonist remains silent but thinks to himself that he did it simply because he could and he thought he would enjoy it. Reati understands this as an example of “the banality of evil,” referencing Hannah Arendt’s study of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, and how Berto’s “evil is the evil in all of us” (14). There is no denying that Nielsen has purposely created an over-the-top character and fictionalized Buenos Aires with a gloomy and grotesque environment under the shadow of the dictatorial past. This is most evident in Berto’s torture methods and his obsession with the military in general and Nazi-era Germany. However, if one takes into account not what the protagonist *thinks* is the reason he tortured the boy, but *when* he decided to do it, the passage opens up to new interpretations that do not rely solely on Argentina’s dictatorial past.

The turning point for Berto and his downward spiral into torture and sexual paroxysm is when he sees the boy’s everted (outie) belly button: “Berto apoyó el filo microdentado del cuchillo sobre un borde del montículo de carne. ¿Por qué dejar que ese ser tuviera un ombligo distinto a todos? Que fuera como cualquier hijo de Dios en esta tierra” (75). The torture of the boy does not necessarily begin only because Berto feels he can do it and he may enjoy it. He begins to commit his heinous acts because he is bent on making the child fit into his understanding of what it means to be like “everyone” else. It is only after the protagonist has established or convinced himself that the boy is not a regular being that he feels free to unleash his most despicable perversions onto his victim. It may be easy to disregard Nielsen’s decision to

reveal that the child really was an alien as one more absurdity or dark humor twist added to the novel. But it is quite significant that the tortured kid who is unable to speak or defend himself turns out to be an alien—a foreigner who does not fit the protagonist’s social norms, who is physically different from his vision of a “normal” person, and therefore deemed as a lesser being who can be abused. To Berto, an extraterrestrial child is as strange, abject, and menacing as a foreigner in Buenos Aires. “*Son como los chinos en el Barrio Belgrano*” (86), the protagonist thinks when he finds out that Rosana is part of a group of extraterrestrials in Argentina who are trying to create a mixed race with humans as their only means to stay on the planet. Referring to the Asian neighborhood in Buenos Aires locally known as Barrio Chino, Berto immediately equates immigrants in Argentina to the aliens invading earth, effectively negating foreigners their human qualities.

The dehumanized representation of the tortured child in *Auschwitz* sheds light onto how the text utilizes Holocaust and Nazi tropes to allegorize social tensions in Argentina regarding xenophobia and immigration. Some of the child’s characteristics and behavior are reminiscent of the descriptions of one of the most infamous Nazi camp prisoners, the *Muselmänner*, or Muslim. These prisoners are described in testimonies and by philosophers such as Primo Levi, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek as zombie-like creatures who had been stripped of their humanity. Levi described them as “an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead in them, already too empty to really suffer” (90). These prisoners were emaciated, disease-ridden, and unresponsive to any stimuli. They were the lowest of the low in the camp’s hierarchy, and generally were despised or simply ignored by other prisoners. To Agamben “the *Musselman* is an indefinite being in whom not only humanity and non-humanity, but also vegetative existence and relation, physiology and ethics,

medicine and politics, and life and death continuously pass through each other” (48). To Žižek, these types of prisoners were “simply reduced to the shell of a person, emptied of the spark of spirit” (85). Likewise, the boy kidnapped by Berto seems to be empty of humanity, and that cannot only be attributed to his being an extraterrestrial, as Rosana has clearly human qualities. The child is tortured in what is described as the “departamento del holocausto” (132), and it is there that Berto realizes he can do as he pleases with him because he lacks the “spark of life”. The figure of the *Musselman* incarnated in the alien child who lacks any will to defend himself allows the horror of what is being narrated, both at face value and allegorically, to truly emerge, particularly with how it contrasts with the humorous tone of the text. One of *Auschwitz*’s biggest accomplishments is that it does not try to recreate in a direct and explicit manner either the dictatorship’s violence and repression or the Nazi concentration camps. As many scholars and philosophers have posited, these types of historical events are beyond language’s reach. To Agamben events such as the Holocaust create the “impossibility of bearing witness” because they are incomprehensible except for those who experienced them to their ultimate end, and those who experienced those events to their final consequence were unable to tell their stories:

The Shoah is an event without witnesses in the double sense that it is impossible to bear witness from the inside—since no one can bear witness from the inside of death, and there is no voice for the disappearance of voice—and from the outside—since the “outsider” is by definition excluded from the event. (35)

Nielsen seems to understand this and avoids an attempt to represent either the Holocaust or the dictatorship’s violence in a straight-forward manner, instead favoring absurd and humorously grotesque situations that allegorize those events while at the same time referring to other contemporary social tensions such as racism and xenophobia. One cannot help but relate the

alien child's docility and ability to return anew, ready to be once again tortured, with the qualities of the *Muselmänner*. At the same time, Nielsen's representation of the alien child can also be interpreted as an allegorical representation of the way in which immigrants and those deemed different from the norm can be perceived in Argentina after the 1990s official rhetoric of criminalization and stigmatization. According to a report by the INADI, during that decade foreigners in Argentina were not only scapegoats for the rise in crime and economic instability, they were also often blamed for bringing diseases such as cholera into the country (Atencio, 15). Since then, immigrants have often been characterized in a dehumanizing manner in official discourses, particularly after the economic crisis of the early 2000s. Nielsen satirizes this phenomenon in *Auschwitz* by centering the plot on a Buenos Aires man who first feels threatened by and then unleashes his anger upon two characters who humorously epitomize foreigners: alien beings.

### **The Power of Humor as a Means of Representation**

Given that *Auschwitz* utilizes referents such as the dictatorship and the Holocaust to represent xenophobia and racism in Argentina, one cannot help but question the inclusion of the humorous tone that permeates the narration. Tidbits of sharp and very dark humor are scattered throughout the text. For example, it is difficult not to chuckle at the fact that an alien who is trying to disguise herself as a Jewish Argentine woman chose her name to be Rosana Auschwitz. Also, her last name is described by Berto as the sound of a sneeze: "auch-witz!" There is also comicality in the exchange between Berto and a store clerk who seems extremely well-versed in torture techniques and who laments that *picanas* are no longer readily available. Despite the

difficulty of reading the description of the torture the child suffers, there is an underlying comical tone in what is narrated and in the absurdity of the whole passage, including that the boy returns to the apartment as if nothing had happened just a day later. The jarring contrast between the novel's humorous tone and the plain hateful discourse and actions of the protagonist can only lead to one questioning the role of humor in a novel about xenophobia and racism.

It is through those humorous passages, however, that horror truly emerges. This is particularly evident in the section of the torturing of the child. In that instance, the affective force of what is being described grows exponentially through the contrast with the humorous tone of the narration. Žižek argues that these types of cruel and at the same time comic depictions are the few that can come close to conveying those things that are not possible to be represented, such as genocide, the plight of the *Muselmänner*, and other historical tragedies that are beyond the grasp of language:

The paradox is that only through such cruel humor that tragic sentiment can be generated. The Muslim is thus the zero-point at which the very opposition between tragedy and comedy, sublime and ridiculous, dignity and derision, is suspended; the point in which one pole passes directly into its opposite: if we try to present the Muslim's predicament as tragic, the result is comic, a mocking parody of tragic dignity; if we treat him as a comic character, tragedy emerges. (85)

In *Auschwitz* it is out of these jarring moments in which horror and humor meet that some of the novel's sharpest criticism of Argentine society emerge. For example, in a humorous and ironic twist toward the end of the novel, Berto experiences what seems to be a brief moment of lucidity and introspection while reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as he is having a painful bowel movement caused by diarrhea:

Eran discursos del Führer destinados a la conservación del acervo argentino de Berto.

Aunque: ¿qué significaba ser argentino? ¿Con quiénes o contra quienes había que tener homogeneidad y hegemonía? ¿Quién era el enemigo? El culo de Berto se deshizo en un líquido complicado con partes sólidas, como una sopa de letras abundante de esvásticas.

(174)

Shortly after having these thoughts, Berto realizes that for a long time he has been idolizing Hitler and *Mein Kampf*, that his life is pathetic, and that in his 40 years he has not been able to accomplish much. He tries to put those thoughts away by reciting some of his favorite passages from Hitler's book, but his diarrhea impedes him from continuing and he has another realization: "Berto sintió, por primera vez, que ése era un libro absurdo" (175). Behind the ridiculous scene that pits together diarrhea, *Mein Kampf*, and a despicable man having deep thoughts in the restroom lies perhaps the novel's most overt criticism to the stigmatization of immigrants, including those who emigrated to the capital and other cities from rural areas.

Berto's rumination on what exactly it means to be Argentine can also be read as signaling the changes that were occurring in the way Argentines perceived themselves after the deep economic crisis of the early 2000s. A few years before the novel was published the economic crash created an identity crisis in Argentina, particularly in the capital. Grimson and Kessler theorize that during those harsh times "the way Argentines perceived themselves changed," which also affected the place of immigrants in the social imagery (140). For a brief period of time, during the worst of the economic recession, immigrants were seen in a more favorable light than normal. This was mainly caused by the realization that Argentines, at least in the economic landscape, had more in common with its neighboring countries than with the United States or Europe (141). Nonetheless, this brief moment of introspection in Argentine society also had

another effect in internal racial relations, as Ignacio Aguiló notes: “The fact that whiteness was not taken for granted anymore and racial categories were unclear from the perspective of the middle class, highlights that certain discourses during the crisis and its aftermath suggested a linkage between financial meltdown and ‘darkening’” (180). This linkage had a third consequence that manifested later through a renewed exoticization of the Andean indigenous population and *mestizos* in an effort to reinforce Argentina’s whiteness and at the same time to place it on the same level of perceived multiculturalism of other developed countries (184). Aguiló explains that at the time Argentina paradoxically tried to present itself to the world as more multicultural, or *mestiza*, in an effort to appear more modern and Western, and be able to “keep up with the standards of modernity established by the United States and Europe” (185). This distancing from its Andean ancestry, once again, reinforced the illusion that Argentina is a white and modern society. As I will demonstrate, the representation of Nazism and racism in Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda* is informed by these paradoxical or contradictory perceptions of national identity that were formed during the first years of the new millennium.

### ***Wakolda: The Uncovering and Perpetuation of Argentine Myths***

Lucía Puenzo’s *Wakolda* takes place in Argentina during the late 1950s and fictionalizes some of the events that occurred during Josef Mengele’s stay in Patagonia.<sup>22</sup> The novel narrates

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<sup>22</sup> Mengele was a SS officer and physician stationed at the Auschwitz concentration camp from 1943 to 1945. There he performed countless experiments on prisoners, including children. He was particularly interested in genetics and twins. Shortly before the fall of the Third Reich he

the encounter of a local family with the infamous Nazi official and medical researcher, who is traveling the country posing as a German veterinarian in his attempt to evade Israeli spies that are closely following his tracks. The plot centers on the relationship between Mengele and Lilith, an Argentine girl who, due to a growth defect, appears much younger than her twelve years of age. After meeting the girl's family on the road, Mengele convinces Lilith's father to drive to the town of Bariloche in a caravan. The former Nazi eventually moves in with the family as a guest in the bed and breakfast that Lilith's parents run. The rest of the novel focuses on the sexual tension between the doctor and the girl, and the way in which the former German officer slowly becomes an integral part in the family's life until he suddenly flees before being caught by Israeli spies.<sup>23</sup> The title of the novel is the name of a Mapuche doll that Lilith secretly trades for a white doll with an indigenous girl she meets during the road trip to Bariloche.

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fled to South America. He lived in Buenos Aires for several years, even using his real name in the late 1950s. In the 1960s the Mossad began actively pursuing his whereabouts, causing Mengele to move, first to Paraguay and later to Brazil. He never faced trial and died in Brazil in 1979. He drowned after suffering a stroke.

<sup>23</sup> Although not germane to my reading of *Wakolda*, the sexual attraction between Mengele and Lilith is central to the plot, and demands a separate analysis. This element of the novel owes much to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), as Mengele shares many characteristics with the novel's protagonist, Humbert Humbert. It may also not be a coincidence that Puenzo named her protagonist Lilith, as it has been established that Nabokov's erotic poem "Lilith" was a precursor to the themes he explored in *Lolita*.

Puenzo is better known as a filmmaker than a writer, and the novel has not yet received much, if any, attention from critics.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps part of the reason why it has not been analyzed is that it differs from other Argentine novels that fictionalize Nazism and historical figures such as Mengele. It is one of the few novels published in the past twenty years that deal with World War II tropes but makes no connection to the 1976-83 dictatorship. Instead, in *Wakolda* the author explicitly connects the Holocaust with the genocide of indigenous populations during the nineteenth century in Argentina. The novel also attempts to rewrite some of the national myths that originated in the 1800s, such as the notion that Argentina is an ethnically homogenous society mostly comprised of descendants of European immigrants. This is evident through the novel's representation of Mapuche characters and its emphasis on *mestizaje*, one of *Wakolda*'s *leitmotifs*. In this regard, the novel stands among those that Ignacio Aguiló identifies as literary works that during the first decade of the twentieth first century “engaged critically with historical representations of race and the way in which these were affected by the [economic] crisis [of 2001]” (177). By the same token, however, the novel also contains some of the aporias that exist in the Argentine imaginary regarding identity and ethnicity. Paradoxically, some of the representations of Mapuche characters in *Wakolda* continue to perpetuate the dynamics of exclusion that characterize racism and discrimination. As I will demonstrate, essentialist and anachronistic depictions of the Mapuche characters in Puenzo's novel stand in contrast to other

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<sup>24</sup> Puenzo garnered international acclaim as a filmmaker thanks to the critical success of her 2007 film *XXY*. She also directed *The German Doctor*, the 2013 film adaptation of *Wakolda*. The adaptation premiered in Cannes and participated in numerous international film festivals, but did not receive the same acclaim as some of her previous films.

contemporary novels in Argentina that critically satirize those kinds of stereotypical characterizations.

In *Wakolda* Puenzo traces Argentina's racism and discrimination to the origins of the republic. The territorial colonization campaigns during the nineteenth century that led to the extermination of indigenous populations are recurrently linked to Nazism and the Holocaust. For instance, a French traveler who stays in the family's bed and breakfast tells Mengele and his hosts about the concentration camps in Argentina in which Mapuches and other indigenous people were incarcerated in the 1870s. His description of the camps is reminiscent of the Nazi concentration camps as the Frenchman notes that they were surrounded by three-meter high barb wired fences and that prisoners were normally starved to death. He explicitly describes them as "campos de concentración" while noting that several cemeteries were built to bury the thousands of prisoners who perished (120-21). As Lilith and her parents listen in shock to a terrible episode in their own country's history that they had never heard about, Mengele sits with a smirk on his face. The slightly veiled analogy between the Argentine concentration camps and the Nazi ones becomes overt through Mengele's reaction: "José era el único que tenía una mueca extraña en la boca, mezcla de sonrisa y desconcierto: no podía creer lo que escuchaba (al final, ellos no habían inventado nada)" (122). This connection between the Jewish Holocaust and the genocide of indigenous populations in Argentina is repeated in several instances throughout the narration. For instance, when Mengele decides to leave Buenos Aires because international spies are closing in on his location, he is at first advised to move to Southern Argentina because he may find its mountains and lakes reminiscent of the European Alps. However, he is also told that he may be particularly interested in the history of genocide in this part of South America: "*Ustedes no fueron los únicos que hicieron un buen trabajo de limpieza, dijeron. Le contaron historias*

sobre los malones que habían dominado las mismas tierras áridas que él ahora atravesaba” (28). The direct confrontation with Argentina’s violent and discriminatory past in *Wakolda* can be read as an indication of the way in which official discourses that emerged a few years before the novel’s publication contested dominant notions of national identity. As previously explained, these discourses, coupled with the abolition of the “Ley Videla,” were formulated in an effort to foster a more inclusive society and to debunk national myths, such as the notion that Argentina’s ethnic composition is homogenous.

The dialectic between these discourses and the novel is also evident through some of *Wakolda*’s representations of *mestizaje*. Miscegenation is one of the novel’s *leitmotifs*. It is thus significant that the first sentence in the novel includes the word “mezcla,” or mixture, as Mengele is preparing an injection that he hopes will change a child’s eye color. The novel’s first paragraph also establishes that the Nazi doctor is convinced that the true war that was being fought during World War II was waged between “pureza o mezcla” (9). The most explicit references to *meztizaje*, however, come from Mengele’s observations of his surroundings and Argentine life. For instance, when Mengele disgustedly observes Lilith’s family interact with a Mapuche family he wonders how a race “genéticamente degenerada por el veneno de la mezcla” has been able to survive in the harsh environment of Latin America (35). He is convinced that the “mescolanza” that produced Latin American countries was clearly visible: “Ahí estaban, inconscientes del pecado racial que era la mezcla, aunque los rasgos animalescos de las razas inferiores los señalaran” (35). Ironically, I argue, behind Mengele’s racist remarks toward Argentines and Latin Americans in general lies what could be interpreted as a challenging of previous notions of *argentinidad* that promoted the idea that the country was mainly populated by white people of European origin. Alejandro Grimson and Gabriel Kessler explain this myth:

“According to the official version, because Argentines descended from ships, they have no Indian blood. [. . .] Popular versions that include Indian blood in the Argentine racial mix—abundant in a number of provinces—were made invisible by the overwhelmingly dominant port city myth of Argentines as descendants of ship travelers” (119). It is through Mengele’s Nazi ideology and his observations of the Argentine family, the Mapuches, and society in general that Puenzo subverts the notion of Argentina being a purely European enclave in Latin America.

The novel also challenges other national myths forged during the nineteenth century that fostered discrimination and exclusion, particularly the depiction of indigenous people as the quintessential representation of barbarism. There are light moments in the narration in which these centuries-old preconceptions and stereotypes regarding indigenous populations are satirized through the interactions between some of the main characters and the Mapuche family they meet on their way to Patagonia. Their encounter occurs when Mengele and Lilith’s family, who are travelling in a caravan to Bariloche, have to make an emergency stop in a small rural settlement to take shelter from a storm. There they meet Cumín, a Mapuche descendant, his two sons, and a young pregnant woman, Yanka. The Mapuche man invites the visitors into his home to wait for the storm to pass, and they end up spending the night. During their stay, Lilith asks their host what the meaning of “Cumín” is. During their exchange, he asks the girl why she is sure his name has a meaning, to which Lilith answers that all “weird names” have a meaning. Cumín simply retorts, “Tigre rojo,” and she says “you see.” The man coyly smiles to Lilith, thinking that her questions did not contain a shred of cruel intentions (37). The novel keeps subverting stereotypes of indigenous populations as Cumín continues his playful self-awareness of his role as the “uncivilized Indian” throughout the family’s stay in his home. For example, while he prepares dinner for everyone, Cumín asks Enzo to tell him what is happening “out

there,” as they do not have a radio to stay informed, and notes that they cannot even tell time anymore as the only clock in the house stopped working a long time ago (38). While Lilith’s family falls for their host’s performance, ironically Mengele is the only one who recognizes that the Mapuche man is mocking them, and that Cumín is a very smart man who may even be able to guess that the Nazi doctor is fleeing in disguise (41-45). This subversion of stereotypes and preconceptions of Argentina’s native population in *Wakolda* follows the same postmodern formula of humorous self-referentiality inaugurated by novels published since the late 1990s that satirized canonical nineteenth century texts and contemporary historical novels.<sup>25</sup>

### **Aporias in Argentine nationhood discourses and *Wakolda***

In *Wakolda* there is a second, parallel and contradictory representation of the Mapuche characters that undermine the novel’s subversion of ethnic preconceptions of native populations and other national myths. This occurs in instances in which some of the text’s descriptions of places and characters lack the irony or self-referentiality of other sections, causing the novel to perpetuate some of the same stereotypes or plain discriminatory representations. This first occurs when the third-person omniscient narrator describes for the first time the Mapuche settlement

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<sup>25</sup> Some of the Argentine authors who have explored these topics include César Aira, Carlos Gamerro, Martín Kohan, and Washington Cucurto. For a comprehensive study of the literary rearticulation of nineteenth century discourses and figures in the twentieth century see Verónica Garibotto’s *Crisis y reemergencia: El Siglo XIX en la ficción contemporánea de Argentina, Chile y Uruguay (1980-2001)* (2015).

and its inhabitants. In this section Cumín, who along with his sons walks up to the cars to meet their visitors, is stereotypically described as a native man of few words and blunt demeanor, with weathered and wrinkled skin despite his young age (32). This stigmatization of the Mapuche characters also extends to their animals. According to the narrator, for instance, Cumín's pets are equally savage, with more in common with hyenas than with dogs (31). The emphasis on the sharp differences between the civilized Buenos Aires and the savage Southern region extends to the description of the children. This stigmatization of the South, and its inhabitants, is perpetuated in an exchange between Tomás, Lilith's younger brother, and his father: "—Está oscureciendo, papá—dijo en una de las tantas pausas, y la obviedad del comentario hizo sonreír a los dos hermanos, que hacía rato lo miraban como gatos salvajes a un ratoncito de ciudad" (37). The characterization of Cumín's sons as savage cats and Tomás as a city mouse clearly reinforces the centuries-old civilization/barbarism binary, arguably one of the first and most persistent modes of exclusion and discrimination in Argentina. Yet the narration's biggest incongruity in the representation of the Mapuche characters comes from a strange situation during Lilith's family stay at Cumín's home. This occurs when Cumín thinks to himself that he has been working on building a road to facilitate the colonization of Patagonia by people like Mengele and Lilith's family:

Por algún extraño motivo todos escucharon el pensamiento con claridad. Era algo que le pasaba seguido a Cumín y su familia. Al principio había sido una sorpresa, después el juego favorito de todos. Los últimos meses lo aceptaban con total naturalidad, como quien acepta una creencia y se entrega a la fe. Tenían una teoría: el silencio era tan extremo en ese rincón del mundo que en días sin viento podía escucharse todo, hasta lo que no se decía. (44)

This passage is significant because of its anachronistic nature. It is the only section of the novel that mimics the style of magical realism or fantastical fiction in an otherwise realist text.

Moreover, it presents the Mapuche space as one of mysticism and magic, which has the effect of exoticizing the indigenous characters and differentiating them even more from the white protagonists. The essentialist descriptions of Cumín and his sons sharply contrast with the self-referential character who mocks his guests by playing the role they expect him to. They also undermine the emphasis on *mestizaje* and inclusion that characterize the rest of the narration.

The contradictory representations of the Mapuche characters and their exoticization answer to equally conflicting discourses that emerged in Argentina following the end of the economic crisis at the turn of the millennium. By presenting these characters as radically different from the protagonists, the novel perpetuates Argentina's distancing from its Andean past. At the same time, however, it also emulates the social discourses that celebrate these differences in Argentina's ethnic configuration in order to appear more in tune with changes in multiculturalism in other "civilized" Western societies. This is illustrated by Ignacio Aguiló when he explains that the resignification of multiculturalism and racial heterogeneity that occurred in Argentina during the economic crisis created a new paradigm that reinforced the nation's perceived exceptionalism regarding ethnic composition among Latin American countries by exoticizing its indigenous roots: "*Porteños* see a symbolic connection to Western traditions through their identification as white and Europeanized, whereas they view Andean folklore as exotic and, therefore, valuable in a context in which racial diversity progressively becomes a sign of globalization" (184). The paradoxical resignification and representation of Argentina's ethnic composition extends beyond literature. For instance, Aguiló notes that this emphasis on celebrating *multiculturalism* while creating a distance from its Andean or *mestizo*

past was even evident on an official tourism flyer published shortly after the economic crisis:

“Ironically, Buenos Aires is presented as more *mestiza* in order to be seen as more Western [...]

This paradox reflects how these international discourses of multiculturalism and racial heterogeneity were appropriated and resignified in Argentina in the aftermath of the 2001-2 crisis” (185). The aporias in official discourses regarding *argentinidad* are not exclusive to the years following the economic crisis. Argentina has a long history of contradictions in official and social discourses related to race, ethnicity, immigration and national identity.

Tanja Bastia and Matthias vom Hau argue that an analysis of Argentina’s changes in immigration law throughout its history sheds light on how such changes tend to promote the perpetuation of being a “white” nation while at the same time they also demonstrate “the ways in which racialised understandings of national identity have been institutionalised in Argentina” (477). The academics identify several historical periods in which changes in immigration laws or patterns caused often contradictory discourses relating to nationhood and identity. Some of these periods include the nineteenth century (during the nation’s formation and colonization of land), post-World War II (during Juan Perón’s populist government), and the years following the economic crisis of 2001-02. In the period between 1946-55, for instance, Peronismo inaugurated a series of changes in the understanding of national identity, particularly due to the populist official discourses that emphasized the importance of the working class. Bastia and vom Hau explain that these same discourses also presented “a substantial revision of the hegemonic idea of Argentina as a white nation” (482). This revision was founded on the inclusion of darker-skinned immigrants from the provinces into the national ethnic composition. Nonetheless, “at the same time, Peronism perpetuated the myth of a homogeneously white Argentina by emphasising the integration of internal and international migrants into the *crisol de razas*, the local version of the

melting pot, defined by its Spanish and not its indigenous or black legacies” (483). In other words, Perón’s hyper-focus on class reinforced the national myth of Argentina’s whiteness by neglecting its ethnic differences. Similar instances of apparent changes in nationhood discourses and identity that nonetheless continued to perpetuate Argentina’s exceptionalism regarding its ethnic composition are repeated throughout history, including during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

It is not unexpected, then, for similar aporias to occur in Argentine novels, like *Auschwitz* and *Wakolda*, that are allegorically dealing with these same issues of racism, xenophobia, ethnicity, and national identity. For this reason, it comes as no surprise that one of the main characteristics of *Auschwitz*’s protagonist is his ambivalence toward those things he finds out of the norm, and it explains why Berto is at once attracted to and disgusted by transgender people, Jews, and immigrants. *Wakolda*’s uneven representation of Mapuche characters and their land also follows this pattern of paradoxical discourses regarding Argentina’s multicultural composition and its indigenous and *mestizo* past. The unexpected element in these novels is that they confront national identity and racial issues through World War II or Nazism tropes that are normally associated with allegorical representations of the 1976-83 dictatorship. As I will show in what follows, *Una misma noche* contains similar aporias, and Nazism, too, is utilized to highlight racism, xenophobia, and issues related to public safety.

### ***Una misma noche: Nazism and Public Safety in 1976 and 2010***

Leopoldo Brizuela’s *Una misma noche*, through its intricate structure, themes, and narration style, is a novel that reflects on the social and political effects of the 1976-83 military

rule in contemporary Argentina. The novel can be interpreted as a text that mainly centers on trauma, memory, postmemory, complicity, and impunity. These subjects are central to the plot, and have been the main focus of several academic studies (Baron; Castañeda Hernández; Deffis; Reati, “Complicidad social”; Sánchez Idiart). I propose, however, that *Una misma noche* also employs these themes to represent, and question, discourses regarding public safety, crime, and immigration in Argentina during the first decade of the new millennium. The novel’s representation of Nazism has not been the subject of any published academic study, but it is a key component of the text that demands to be analyzed. As I mentioned earlier, the connection between Nazism and the 1976-83 dictatorship is characterized by Brizuela as a pre-established relationship that does not need to be allegorized or alluded to in a veiled manner. In *Una misma noche* the influence of Nazism in events that occurred during the dictatorship and on the Argentine population is simply a matter of fact, just another layer of Argentine history and identity. I will delineate how, as the narration alternates temporal planes between the late 1970s and 2010, the protagonist begins to intertwine Nazism, the dictatorship, the perception that the middle class in Argentina was constantly threatened by rampant crime in the early 2010s, and discriminatory discourses against the poor and foreigners.

In what follows I first examine the way in which the novel has been interpreted by other academics. Then I argue that an analysis focusing on its representation of Nazism and in the chapters set in 2010 can help illustrate *Una misma noche*’s depiction of middle-class Argentines during the first decade of the twenty-first century. I then delineate what differentiates Brizuela’s representation of Nazism from other Argentine authors. For instance, I exemplify the way in which the text contains extradiegetic references to Nazism. I analyze these and the diegetic representations of Nazism to show that they are related to both the depictions of the dictatorship

and of the environment of fear of crime in 2010. I conclude with an examination of what I argue are representations of the changing official discourses regarding national and public safety.

The plot of *Una misma noche* centers on an Argentine writer and university professor, Leonardo Diego Bazán, who in 2010 witnesses a break-in at his neighbors' home in the middle of the night in an upper middle-class Buenos Aires neighborhood. The event triggers Leonardo's recollection of a similar event in 1976, when he was a young teenager, during the dictatorship. Back then, the same house was inhabited by a Jewish family, and it was broken into by government forces looking for one of the young daughters who was allegedly involved with subversive groups. In 2010, Leonardo begins to write a novel about the 1976 incident as he uncovers more details about both break-ins in his neighborhood. The text is divided into four main sections: "Novela," "Memoria," "Historia," and "Sueño," and each of the sections is subdivided into chapters. The setting of each chapter alternates between 1976 and 2010. The 1976 chapters can be interpreted as either Leonardo's early drafts of the chapters of his novel that narrate the break-in during the dictatorship, or as the portrayal of his evolving memories of the events. The chapters set in the past narrate the same events over and over: Men come into Leonardo's house asking about the neighbors' daughter, his father helps the men break into the neighbors' house, the mother is questioned by other men and gives away names of suspected subversives, and Leonardo, fearful, simply sits to play the piano while the men conduct their operation. Each one of the chapters has slight variations of the events, or includes additional information about how each of the family members reacted to the men questioning Leonardo's parents about their neighbors.

Since its publication, Brizuela's novel has received a significant amount of attention from academics and critics, perhaps mainly due to having won the prestigious annual Premio de

Novela Alfaguara. Most academic studies focus on issues of memory and trauma, and the text is often catalogued as part of a series of post-dictatorial novels that seek to represent the Argentine traumatic past. For instance, María del Carmen Castañeda Hernández states that *Una misma noche* is “uno de los numerosos intentos narrativos de recrear y rescatar, desde el momento presente, un pasado de violencia y dolor” (120). Other academics like John E. Baron posit that the protagonist’s process of remembering the 1976 break-in is a representation of a similar process experienced by society at large: “The events in Leonardo’s past are a small portion of the events of the Dirty War and his process of remembering in the present is similar to the collective process of cultural remembering in Argentina” (80). Arturo Ramos interprets the novel’s back and forth between past and present as a representation of the generation of children of the *desaparecidos* that is now trying to confront a past that contains a “verdad insoportable,” and thus, almost impossible to grasp (193). Leonardo’s process of acquiring previously repressed memories is also the focus of Cecilia Sánchez Idiart’s reading. She concludes that Brizuela complicates the usual characterization of a well-defined difference between victims and aggressors by focusing on his own complicity in the events that occurred in 1976 (492). These interpretations and studies are on point, and reveal the narrative strategies employed by younger writers like Brizuela to attempt to understand the Argentine dictatorial past through fiction. However, by focusing on trauma and memory, these studies normally overlook both the representation of Nazism and the possible interpretations of the sections that take place in 2010.

## Diegetic and extradiegetic references to Nazism

*Una misma noche*'s references to Nazism are much different from those included in novels like Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* or Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos*. In these two novels analyzed in Chapter 1 the authors employ Nazism to allegorically represent the dictatorship and the changes in the Argentine intellectual spheres. Meanwhile, in Brizuela's novel the connection between the Third Reich and Argentine life, including the 1976-83 dictatorship, is slowly incorporated into the narrator's recollection of the past until it is openly presented as historical fact. The first indirect reference to Nazism in the novel occurs when Leonardo tells his friend and former student, Miki, that reading Marcela Solás' novel *El silencio de Kind* (1999) triggered new memories of the night that government forces broke into his neighbors' home (Location 377). Solás' novel makes him remember that when one of the intruders was pointing a gun at him while the rest of the men inspected his home, he began to play the piano. This is significant because in *El silencio de Kind* a young girl befriends a former Nazi colonel who works in Argentina as a military advisor to the government during the dictatorship and who likes to listen to the girl play piano. The difference between the two characters is that while the girl plays the piano to please the Nazi colonel in hopes of convincing him to help her find her sister, a *desaparecida*, Leonardo plays the piano out of fear, and he is embarrassed by that. Throughout the rest of the text there are more explicit references to Nazism, particularly in the 1976 sections. For instance, when Leonardo takes a tour of the Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada, a building where his father trained and that was also used by the government during the dictatorship as a clandestine detention and torture center, he immediately associates it with Nazism: "A lo lejos podía ver bien que la ESMA no es solo un

edificio —esa especie de templo de cuatro columnas que anuncia Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada como aquel cartel de Auschwitz reza ‘El trabajo os hará libres’—, sino un inmenso bosque de donde emergen hoteles, galpones, pabellones” (Loc. 50). Another explicit connection between the two historical events occurs when Leonardo learns from Wikipedia that General Ramón Camps, who was the Buenos Aires chief of police during the dictatorship, was a Nazi sympathizer who dreamed of performing a mass trial against Jews (Loc. 2350). Most of the other references center on his father’s affinity for anti-semitism and his possible connections to Nazis during his training as an Argentine soldier. These references slowly start to increase throughout the different versions of the 1976 break-in. Leonardo first remembers that his father volunteered to help the men break into the neighbors’ home, but then he begins to realize that his father often showed an open contempt for the Jewish family. For example, at one point he recalls that his father once said that Jews would one day dominate the world, and that Hitler died trying to stop them. Remembering these aspects of his father’s personality causes Leonardo to have nightmares, and in one of these dreams he recalls that his father used to say that in the late 1930s he met Hans Langsdorff, the Nazi captain of the German cruiser Graf Spee.<sup>26</sup> When he wakes up

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<sup>26</sup> The German cruiser arrived to the Eastern coast of the Southern Cone shortly before World War II erupted. It participated in several battles there before it was heavily damaged by British ships in the 1939 Battle of River Plate. It fled to the coast of Montevideo, Uruguay, where Captain Hans Langsdorff decided to scuttle the cruiser. After the boat sank, more than 1,000 Nazi seamen took refuge in Buenos Aires, where Langsdorff killed himself a few days after. He is buried in the Chacarita cemetery, and it is estimated that more than 10,000 people attended his funeral (Adam, 45-46).

from the nightmare, Leonardo immediately goes to his computer to search Google for more information about the captain. He finds a photo of the Nazi official's funeral in Argentina. The coffin was surrounded by young Argentine marines, one of which was Leonardo's father. As if to reinforce the notion that Argentina historically has had many connections to Nazi Germany, a real-life photo of Langsdorff's funeral is included at the end of this chapter, set in 2010 (Loc. 1197).

Leonardo's recollections and narration of the past are affected for the rest of the novel once it is established that his piece-meal and fuzzy memories of his father's anti-semitism and admiration for Nazism were real. The protagonist also begins to question his own complicit anti-semitism by not confronting his father when he was a teenager: "Por terror de conocer ese secreto me acostumbré a esquivarlo, y cada vez que sale el tema de los judíos, temblando, lo distraigo. No es difícil: él sabe muy bien que callar es cubrir a los nazis hasta el día que puedan volver. Pero, Dios mío, ahora sé que ese día es hoy" (Loc. 1505). This section is significant because it marks the first time that Leonardo equates the return of Nazism with the dictatorship, and this, in turn, changes how he describes the 1976 break-in in the following chapters. For instance, in one of the other sections set in the past, Leonardo imagines what the Jewish family perhaps thought when their door was been kicked-in by his father and the government's forces: "Es otro, ese vecino, ¿pero quién? ¿Y quiénes son los que vienen detrás? Los nazis, pensarán ellas. Los nazis. Y entonces la puerta cede" (Loc. 1734). From this point on in the narration, the 1976 break-in and the dictatorship in general are normally equated with, or compared to, Nazism.

Notably, even when the novel portrays the Jewish family confronting Argentine government forces depicted as Nazis, Brizuela does not ever directly reference the Holocaust. In

fact, there are times he seems to implicitly acknowledge the academic debates about the uses and abuses of the representation of the Holocaust in Western cultural production. For instance, in one of the 2010 sections, Leonardo recommends to his former student Miki a short story by American author Cynthia Ozick about the wife of a Jewish writer who is fed up with hearing about the Holocaust (Loc. 947). Brizuela refers more explicitly to representations of the Holocaust in popular culture during one of Leonardo's recollections of his father's disgust at his son's interest in Jewish culture. The teenager's interest in Judaic customs had been sparked by his close relationship with the neighbors' daughters and at one point Leonardo confesses that he would like to become Jewish, to his parents anger and dismay (Loc. 1529). Pointedly, Leonardo notes that his version of Jewishness, or that which attracted him to Judaism, is mainly informed by popular culture:

Yo parezco salido de una película yanqui, de una mala película, a favor de los judíos; en fin, de una ficción, que es casi como decir: de una fantasía o una mentira. Pero [mi padre] viene de un pasado secreto y muy real, que revivió esta noche; por eso siempre decía, del nazismo, "lo viví", aunque no, no haya estado en Alemania. Sí, es la realidad, que parecía no conocer, la que ha venido a buscarlo y lo ha conquistado, lo ha invadido. (Loc. 1552)

This section of the narration is key to understanding the novel's position regarding the representation of the Holocaust and Nazism. Here Brizuela once again criticizes depictions and idealizations of Jewishness and the Holocaust that are mediated by popular culture, particularly North American cultural productions. Conversely, through the figure of Leonardo's father, Brizuela reasserts the idea that the similarities between Nazism and the Argentine dictatorship are "very real."

In addition to the explicit references to Nazism in the novel that I previously described, there is an extradiegetic connection between the 1930s/40s German political movement and *Una misma noche*. At the end of the text, after the last chapter, Brizuela added a note titled “Cuaderno de bitácora” in which he explains that while most of the characters are fictional, much of what he narrates is based on reality. He also notes the three books that sparked his desire to write *Una misma noche* and that informed some of the elements of the plot: *El silencio de Kind*, Stephan and Norbert Lebert’s *My Father’s Keeper: Children of Nazi Leaders — An Intimate History of Damage and Denial* (2001), and Günther Anders’ *We, Sons of Eichmann: An Open Letter to Klaus Eichmann* (1964). Stephan and Norbert Lebert’s *My Father’s Keeper* contains a series of testimonies of children of former Nazi officials gathered over a period of 40 years. Norbert Lebert first contacted sons and daughters of Nazi officials in 1959 to interview them and in 1999 his son Stephan contacted several of them to talk once again about their experience living under the shadow of their fathers’ past. Anders first published *We, Sons of Eichmann* as an open letter to the son of Adolf Eichmann in the early 60s, and it was printed as a book years later with a second letter he wrote in 1988. Anders wrote the first letter when Eichmann’s son was only five years old and his father had already been executed. In both letters, Anders posits that sons and daughters are not responsible for their parents’ sins, and he encourages Klaus Eichmann to change his name. In *Una misma noche*’s coda, Brizuela also lists Hannah Arendt’s works, without mentioning any one in particular, as part of some of the other texts that had an effect on his novel.

I propose that there are two main ideas at play in this extradiegetic element of *Una misma noche*. First, the inclusion of this explanation cements Brizuela’s representation of the Argentine dictatorship and Nazism as sharing many similarities, most of which he depicted through

Leonardo's recollections of his father's anti-semitism and Nazi connections. This also points to the fact that Brizuela's understanding and portrayal of the dictatorship is informed by his understanding of Nazism, so it is no longer presented as a symbol/referent relationship as in earlier Argentine novels. Instead, this novel depicts the relationship in accordance to the cultural changes in Argentina regarding the perception of the Nazism/dictatorship binary that were explained earlier. Second, since all three books that Brizuela lists as influential to *Una misma noche* are about the consequences of children's experience or relationship with Nazi sympathizers during World War II, the extradiegetic note points to another central theme in the novel that is depicted throughout the chapters that take place in 2010: How does a violent and repressive recent past affect the present? I would like to suggest that the text answers this question by representing how the Argentine dictatorship's discourses regarding national security paved the way for a future official rhetoric regarding public safety that created an environment of fear among the population, particularly the middle class.

### **The Representation of Fear and Public Safety in Argentina**

While the sections of Brizuela's *Una misma noche* set in 1976 focus on Leonardo's recollection of the government's break-in into his neighbors' home, the 2010 chapters center on the protagonist's processing of the new information he is slowly remembering. The sections set in the present also focus on other characters' reactions to the burglary in Leonardo's neighborhood. By alternating chapters set between the break-ins during 1976 and 2010, *Una misma noche* depicts how there was a reconfiguration of official discourses that transitioned from blaming "subversive individuals" for attacks on national security to creating a narrative that

focuses on the threat of attacks aimed at the middle and high class by delinquency purportedly perpetrated by foreigners and members of lower classes. The manner in which the novel's characters react to the break-in in 2010 shows the tensions and discourses surrounding the perception of an increase in criminality in Argentina during the first decade of the millennium.

It is significant that half of the chapters are set in 2010 because, as Hernán Fair explains, in this year the lack of public safety had effectively become the number one issue among the Argentine population, even beyond unemployment (75). The fear of becoming a victim of crime among the middle class in Buenos Aires is referenced in *Una misma noche* before Leonardo begins to remember events that occurred during the dictatorship period. For instance, in the first chapter, when in 2010 Leonardo arrives home in the middle of the night, the first thing he has to do is, in a paranoid manner, make sure that “nothing had happened” in his absence. Also, when he leaves again to walk his dog, the protagonist notes that before dying, his father installed three large locks in the garage door due to their fear of being broken into: “el miedo a ser robados, secuestrados, muertos, esa seguridad que llaman, curiosamente, inseguridad, ya empezaba a cernirse, como una noche detrás de la noche” (Loc. 50). Leonardo's usage of the words “noche detrás de la noche” is not unintentional. Since the beginning of the narration these words point toward the idea that the perception of constant peril during the 2000s in Argentina was a repetition of similar feelings that were experienced during the dictatorship. The fact that the novel constantly jumps between the 1970s and 2010 is also significant for this reading because, as Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard note, “procesos de continuidad pueden ser visualizados entre el terrorismo de Estado de los años setenta y la criminalización de la pobreza del presente” (58). Similarly, Pedro Cerruti explains that after the economic crises of the late-1980s and late-1990s, official discourses regarding national security that were utilized during the dictatorship

were reconfigured to answer to the increase in crime. These changes, he notes, also signaled the criminalization of the lower socioeconomic classes:

La emergencia de la “inseguridad” significó la reconversión de los discursos de la Seguridad Nacional y la “guerra antisubversiva”, característicos del ideario del último gobierno de facto, en una retórica de “la violencia social” y de la “inseguridad vecinal”. Esta se organizaba ya no en torno a una idea de defensa de la Nación amenazada, sino a través del diagnóstico de una “fractura de la comunidad nacional” entre incluidos y excluidos, que se modulaba a través de las oposiciones entre propietarios y desposeídos, saqueados y saqueadores, vecinos y depredadores, habitantes de los barrios y habitantes de las villas miseria, víctimas y victimarios, y, finalmente, entre ciudadanos y delincuentes. (149)

The reformulation of the official rhetoric of national security from the 1970s to a discourse regarding localized public safety is depicted in *Una misma noche* through Leonardo’s continued connection of his memories of Nazism/dictatorship from the incident in 1976 to the break-in of 2010. There is an emphasis throughout the novel on delineating the space that Leonardo’s community occupies in La Plata (south of Buenos Aires) through detailed descriptions of the area, complete with the inclusion of a map. These descriptions represent the typical classist segregation of neighborhoods in Argentina, which played an important role in the media’s characterization of the poor and foreigners as threatening invaders of the spaces normally reserved for higher classes. Mulinari and Neergaard explain that after five years of field work in Argentina they concluded that the depiction of delinquency by the media and official discourses created a highly-segregated division between a “we” (upper classes) and a “them” (a criminalized and racialized lower class). Paradoxically, they explain, this segregation was

created by the media's representation of an artificial shared space of violence (63). In other words, they continue, in the 2000s Argentine media highlighted news of robberies, burglaries, and armed assaults, but often it was not accompanied by an explicit explanation of where these incidents were happening, thus creating a false sense that the entire country, including spaces normally reserved for members of middle and upper classes, were being invaded by delinquents. These types of news reports continued to air despite the fact that crime had steadily decreased in Argentina since 2002 (Cerruti, 144) (Fig. 2).

The racialized classism described by these academics and the middle-class' constant fear of crime is often portrayed explicitly throughout *Una misma noche*. These depictions are in turn mediated by the representations of Nazism and the dictatorship from the other chapters. For instance, early in the novel the characters realize that the 2010 break-in was orchestrated by the police and not by the type of delinquent that they fear, which gives some peace of mind to Marcela, one of Leonardo's neighbors: "—Pero no eran negritos, ¿eh? —aclaró Marcela—. ¡Por suerte! Eran medidos, muy educados" (Loc. 124).<sup>27</sup> When Leonardo hears this, he immediately thinks of his father, and how he would have referred to the 1976 paramilitary home invaders as "unos caballeros" despite their violent methods. Something similar happens when Leonardo tells his mother, aunt, and uncle about the break-in next door. He explains to them that the robbery was organized by the "milicos" (government forces) and that they only targeted that family because they own several beauty salons. The moment Leonardo reveals this, the aunt and uncle feel relieved and try to calm the mother by explaining to her that those men would never be

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<sup>27</sup> Here the word "negritos," which is repeated throughout the novel, is used as a racialized classist derogatory term to refer to poor people.

interested in assaulting an old woman. Leonardo carefully studies his mother's reaction to the news and is not surprised by her face of revulsion when the "negritos" are mentioned. He also believes that her relief at the news is fake because she is still convinced she could be assaulted by poor outsiders, or "villeros:" "Mi madre no entra en el juego: 'Los que sí se moverían por nosotros son los villeros', piensa, estoy seguro. Pero eso, entre nosotros, no se puede decir" (Loc. 407). Despite the fact that Leonardo often questions his own complicity in the environment of fear both during the dictatorship and in 2010, throughout the novel he seems to be the only character who understands that this psychosis is in great part created by official discourses. He is also the only character that instead of fearing foreigners (his mother is irrationally scared of a Paraguayan maid) values them and often describes them as hard workers. That Leonardo is the sole character in the novel who does not perpetuate prejudices against the poor and foreigners denotes Brizuela's intention to portray and criticize the environment of classism, racism, and xenophobia that was exacerbated by the economic crisis at the turn of the millennium.

### **Conclusion: A Continued Interest in Argentine Nazism**

In mid-June of 2017, news spread around the world about a cache of more than 75 pieces of immaculate Nazi memorabilia, found inside a hidden room in a home in Buenos Aires, that were seized by Argentine authorities with the help of Interpol (Goldman). A week later, in a biting newspaper editorial titled "El amarillismo nazi," Argentine journalist Sergio Kiernan sentenced: "ya sería hora de enterrar el binomio Argentina-nazis, el amarillismo del cuartito secreto, la pasión infantil por encontrar bases secretas y submarinos en los médanos" (Kiernan). Kiernan thinks that these news stories only garner attention because Argentina has been

erroneously deemed by the rest of the world as the country of Nazis. Many people do associate Argentina with Nazi refugees or mysterious failed plans for the creation of a Fourth Reich after the end of World War II. However, there are real historical resonances between Nazism and Argentina, as detailed in Chapter 1. It is also true that there is a long tradition of fictionalized accounts of Nazism and the Holocaust in Argentine literature that are not created in an effort to exploit audiences' morbidity, as Kiernan suggests happens in journalism.

The representation of Nazism in Argentine literature, as my readings have shown, is not static but has changed over the years. In the 1980s Nazism was generally utilized in fiction to allegorize the 1976-83 dictatorship and the many changes experienced by the intellectual spheres in Argentina. Then, in the mid-2000s it was often utilized as an allegorical device to refer to the environment of xenophobia, discrimination, and exclusion that was partly a result of the late 1990s and early 2000s economic collapse. The representation of Nazism and other World War II historical figures and events has evolved as Argentina has gone through its own social and political changes. Indeed, the nation has been going through another wave of major adjustments since the 2015 presidential election of Mauricio Macri, a staunch conservative who, as mentioned earlier, has a particularly strong stance against immigration. Despite what people like Kiernan think, and given Argentina's literary tradition, it is very likely that the fictional representation of Nazism may be utilized by some authors to try to make sense of or to allegorically illustrate the changes that the country is currently going through.

### **Chapter 3. Mexico's Armed Conflict: Representations of Nazism and World War II during the Drug Wars**

Nazism and the Holocaust have increasingly become referents in the Mexican imaginary to understand national crises of the twenty-first century, particularly those that are a direct consequence of the Drug War in Mexico. The phenomenon is not as prevalent or ingrained in Mexican culture as it is in Argentina with the analogy made between World War II historical events and the 1976-83 dictatorship. Yet, since 2006, intellectuals, politicians, and media pundits in Mexico have referred to Nazism or the Holocaust to try to make sense of the violence that has plagued the country after the chaos caused by the armed conflict between government forces, civilian groups, and drug cartels.<sup>28</sup> As explained in Chapter 2, in Argentina the analogy between the dictatorship and Nazism has been normalized and institutionalized, and literary representations of historical events that occurred during the Second World War are often read as allegories that simply mirror that analogy. However, in Mexico the analogies—literary or

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<sup>28</sup> 2006 was a watershed year for Mexico. The second non-PRI president, Felipe Calderón, took office on December of that year. Shortly after, on Dec. 12, 2006, in an official statement he boldly declared war on drug cartels: He announced the strategic plan “Operación Conjunta Michoacán,” and more than five thousand soldiers and federal police officers were called to fight narco-crimes in the Southern Mexican state of Michoacán. The fighting between federal forces and drug cartels eventually spread to the entire nation.

otherwise—between the current armed conflict and events that occurred during World War II in Europe do not follow a clear pattern.

For example, former Mexican president Felipe Calderón referred to World War II at least twice during his presidency to attempt to explain the state of turmoil that the country was experiencing due to the war between drug cartels, federal forces, and civilian vigilante groups. The second time he did it, in 2011, amid criticism for the widespread violence and rise in criminality caused by the armed conflict, Calderón compared his fight against drug cartels to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's fight against Nazis. Exalting Churchill's courage to confront those who suggested that Britain should simply surrender to the Nazi regime, Calderón said he would not give up either. Just as Britain fought Nazism to the end, with his plan the Mexican president would do the same against drug cartels: "Igualmente buscamos en una sola palabra la victoria de México sobre quienes pretenden detener su desarrollo, su paz y su justicia" (Ramos). These types of pronouncements caused many reactions from the media and the general public, ranging from disdain to ridicule. They also gave plenty of fodder to satirists and cartoonists like Antonio Helguera, who created a series of comic strips published in *Proceso* titled "El pequeño Churchill," which depicted Calderón as an inept and war-bent leader (Fig. 3 and 4).

While Calderón presented his military strategy against drug cartels as analogous to the efforts of the Allies against the Axis during the second World War, others compared the government's tactics to those of the Nazi regime. Carlos Fazio, for example, argued that Calderón created a war machine propelled by the government's "necropower" that is able to dehumanize its enemies: "De propia voz e igual que en la Alemania nazi, la lógica de Calderón, presidente de un país que se pretende civilizado, era la del exterminio de presuntos

delincuentes—expulsados de facto del género humano y reducidos a roedores—, en el marco de una guerra de aniquilamiento sin fin y utilizando los recursos que fueran necesarios”

(“Introducción”). Still others, like columnist Sergio Negrete Cárdenas, see a parallel between the complicity-through-inaction of the general German population amidst the repression of the Jews with how a great number of Mexicans responded to the violence of the Drug War: “México hoy recuerda a la Alemania Nazi: millones de ciudadanos pretendiendo no ver lo que ocurre a su alrededor, temerosos de que les toque, mientras miles participan en la colectividad de la muerte” (Negrete Cárdenas). Similar analogies between events that occurred during World War II and the current armed conflict in Mexico have also been used by Mexican authors who have published works that fictionalize these historical events.

In Mexican literature, representations of Nazism, the Holocaust, and World War II are as diverse as those in the political and social arenas. These literary depictions of historical events are not as widespread in Mexico as they are in Argentina or other Southern Cone countries. This could be partly a result of the fact that, as Ilan Stavans notes, in Mexico “knowledge of the Jews and their history has remained fractured, incomplete” (65). Few works focused on these topics from the 1960s to the 1980s, with the notable exceptions of authors like Carlos Fuentes and José Emilio Pacheco, who—as mentioned in this dissertation’s introduction—explored these tropes in novels published in the 60s. These authors fictionalized World War II events in two novels published in 1967: the already analyzed *Morirás Lejos*, by Pacheco, and Fuentes’s *Cambio de piel*. During the 1990s several of the Crack writers set some of their works during World War II, a literary development that I will explain in more detail later in this chapter. In the past decade, however, Mexico has seen a sharp spike in literary production that focuses on the topic. Since 2000, Nazism and World War II have been explored by numerous authors. Besides authors

already mentioned in the introduction, other authors who have fictionalized these historical events include Ignacio Padilla, Luis Arturo Ramos, Pablo Soler Frost, and Paco Ignacio Taibo II.<sup>29</sup>

In general, Mexican literary works published in the past decade that focus on Nazism or refer to World War II historical events can be read allegorically as literary responses to local social conflicts occurring at the time of their enunciation. Specifically, since 2006 a handful of novels that have fictionalized these historical events metaphorically represent several social, cultural, and political issues or conflicts that were a direct result of the government's declared war on drug cartels. Here I explore how these works critique and denounce this crisis through the study of two novels that are paradigmatic to understanding how the representation of Nazism and other World War II historical tropes have been used in Mexico to refer to the Drug War and its negative consequences on the wellbeing of the general public: Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro: una historia de terror* (2009) and David Toscana's *Los puentes de Königsberg* (2009). I argue that both novels point to the need for a reformulation of the official discourse in Mexico. This discourse, through dehumanizing and criminalizing language, creates a deceptive narrative that places the drug trade as an activity that occurs outside of the confines of the general society and the official structures of power. Since I maintain that both novels can be allegorically read as the fictionalization of the environment of violence caused by the war on drugs in Mexico, my

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<sup>29</sup> The works that fictionalize Nazism or World War II historical figures and events by the contemporary Mexican authors mentioned are: *Amphitryon* (2000) by Padilla; *Los argentinos no existen* (2006) by Ramos; *Malebolge* (2001) by Soler Frost; and *Retornamos como sombras* (2001) by Taibo II.

analysis is in dialogue with the work of scholars who have studied literary representations of violence and drug cartels. I rely on Oswaldo Zavala's understanding of official discourse in Mexico vis-à-vis the drug trade: "According to official discourse, the criminal organizations profiting from the drug trade are a threat relegated to the discursive *exteriority*— outside the borders—of the power and the reason of the state. As such, the Mexican government represents drug cartels as criminal entities always readily distinguishable from state structures" (342). I also follow Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba's position on the importance of fictional accounts of the drug trade as paradigms to make sense of the social and political elements surrounding the violent environment in Mexico: "estamos ante objetos que tratan de estructurar nuestras formas de comprender y simbolizar los eventos violentos. . . . al ser producto de consumo masivo, terminan siendo narrativas que se ritualizan al punto que organizan nuestra percepción de la realidad social" (121). I build upon the work of Zavala, Domínguez Ruvalcaba, and other academics, to examine how the representation of World War II in these two novels offers an alternative to contemporary literary narratives that (probably unconsciously) perpetuate the official discourse.<sup>30</sup> Drawing on Andreas Huyssen's concept of the globalization paradox (the notion that the totalizing and the global are at the same time the particular and the local), I argue

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<sup>30</sup> I mainly follow the work of Zavala and Domínguez Ruvalcaba because their research is the most pertinent for my own work. However, for other important academic texts about representations of the drug trade see Rebecca E. Biron's "It's a Living: Hit Men in the Mexican Narco War", Hermann Herlinghaus' *Violence Without Guilt: Ethical Narratives from the Global South* (2009) and *Narcoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety* (2013), and José Manuel Valenzuela Arce's *Jefe de jefes: corridos y narcocultura en México* (2003).

that in *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and *Los puentes de Königsberg* the representation of universal tropes related to World War II offers an alternative to the Mexican official discourse that demonizes criminals while it simultaneously dehumanizes and criminalizes victims. I argue that both novels offer anti-hegemonic narratives that challenge the official discourse and the way in which the majority of the general public have accepted the government's rhetoric regarding the victims and perpetrators of violent crimes.

### **The Drug War in Mexico and the *Homo Sacer***

*Oscuro bosque oscuro* and *Los puentes de Königsberg* were published a few years after the narco-violence in Mexico went from being considered a peripheral, border issue, to becoming the general public's main concern as it struggled to come to terms with the senseless and daily violent acts that permeated the entire nation. Although figures vary from source to source, and the government's numbers could be very conservative, the official number of deaths in the Mexican Drug War since 2006 stands at more than 164,000. That number does not account for the thousands of disappeared amid the chaos and violent environment caused by the war waged among drug cartels, Mexican official forces, and civilian self-defense groups. The sharp increase in violence in the second part of the 2000s was certainly exacerbated and arguably a direct result of former president Felipe Calderon's military strategy against drug lords, which began the year he took office in 2006 (Hernandez). However, according to Emily Edmonds-Poli and David A. Shirk, Mexico's drug war has its roots in the 1970s, when cocaine began to emerge as the preferred drug for US consumers, which led to the rise of the infamous and powerful Colombian drug lords (311). After the demise of the Colombian cartels in the early 90s, power

shifted to the Arellano Félix and Gulf cartels in Mexico. The bloody infighting between those two cartels began in 1997 and lasted for approximately 10 years. Edmonds-Poli and Shirk explain that “unfortunately, Mexican and US law enforcement successes against the Arellano Félix and Gulf cartels appeared to strengthen the hand of their rivals . . . This resulted in a wave of violence beginning in 2004” (312). When Calderon took office two years later one of his first public declarations was his commitment to thwart the narco-violence that was taking northern Mexico by storm. His intention was “to disrupt the drug trade and apprehend narco-traffickers,” but “while these efforts resulted in the capture of several high-profile cartel leaders, they have also led to human rights abuses and an escalation in violence that has claimed thousands of lives” (Edmonds-Poli and Shirk 383). Despite the constant calls for a change in strategy from all sectors of the community, nearly a year before he finished his six-year term, Calderón continued to push for the use of the military to fight drug cartels and try to establish peace in key areas.

Until the end of his presidency in November 2012, Calderón “stepped up calls for Mexico’s Congress to approve stalled initiatives to remake state and local police forces, codify the military’s role in fighting crime and broaden its powers, toughen the federal penal code and tighten laws to stop money laundering” (Archibold, et al, online). There were approximately 12,000 drug-related deaths recorded in 2011,<sup>31</sup> a year that was a turning point in Mexican society (Booth). Although it was one of the bloodiest and grimmest years since the government’s all-out war against drug cartels began, 2011 also witnessed many changes in the way the public reacted

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<sup>31</sup> By comparison, it is estimated that in 2007 there were fewer than 2,500 drug-related deaths in Mexico. And although some news outlets reported that in 2011 there was a slight decrease in the number of killings, since 2006 the deaths increased considerably year after year.

to the massacre and the lack of accountability and justice. At the forefront of these new developments was the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, a civilian protest group led by Mexican poet Javier Sicilia that became a symbol of resistance to the violence perpetrated by both the government and the drug cartels.<sup>32</sup> As the movement's name indicates, one of its main goals is to dignify the victims that were dehumanized by being reduced to abstract figures by the media and the government. Even more important for the group is to reverse the stigmatization of the victims, who are often portrayed by the government and mainstream media as people who had some kind of link with drug cartels. John Gibler argues that in Mexico “los titulares de los periódicos anuncian el número cotidiano de muertes, pero los artículos no dicen nada sobre quiénes son los muertos, quiénes pudieron haberlos matado o por qué” (27). While

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<sup>32</sup> The movement's creation and Sicilia's rise as its leader was a direct result of the killing of the poet's young adult son in March of 2011. Like many of the thousands of victims of violence in Mexico, his death was at first shrouded in mystery and later he was criminalized. His body was found inside a vehicle on a highway near Mexico City along with the bodies of five more men and a woman. They all bared signs of having been tortured to death. At first it was reported that they were killed for getting into a fight with drug cartel members. About six weeks after the bodies were found, two suspects were arrested and more details about the possible motive for the murder—police extortion—came to light. According to the suspects' confession, the victims were first robbed by a group of policemen who also stole their personal identification cards so they could extort them. Instead of giving in, Sicilia Ortega and his friends sought help, so the policemen allegedly asked Cartel del Pacífico Sur's hit men to kidnap and kill the victims (Guadarrama).

the growing number of victims was what sparked the massive demonstrations in major cities throughout the nation since 2010, it was the dehumanizing of the victims that ultimately fueled the creation of the groups that organized the protests.

While the media played a major role in turning narco-violence victims into an abstract figure that was simply increasing every couple of days, at the same time there was an official effort at different levels of the government, from the municipal to the federal, to stigmatize the victims as people who had been killed as a result of their own bad decisions (as was the case with Sicilia's son at first), implying that all who died were in some way connected to the drug trade. Javier Valdéz Cárdenas, one of Mexico's leading independent journalists and perhaps the most audacious chronicler of the country's downward spiral into violent chaos, has been instrumental in denouncing the dehumanization of the victims who are turned into abstract figures by media. He has also been a harsh critic of the way the official discourse has made an effort to stigmatize the victims. In an interview with Mexican left-leaning newspaper *La Jornada* he remarks:

Pero creo que es peor ese periodismo de cuenta muertos, de reproducir sin el menor cuestionamiento el discurso gubernamental de buenos y malos, de que todos los muertos y los detenidos son culpables, y de que en el gobierno están los buenos y el resto somos sospechosos. Es un tratamiento epidérmico, fácil, irresponsable y hasta criminal de parte de los medios. Eso y el silencio son muy parecidos, en tiempos oscuros como éstos. (Moro Hernández)

Valdéz's quote perfectly encapsulates what has characterized Mexico's social tensions since Calderón took office in 2006, particularly in 2009, when Volpi and Toscana's novels were published and when the discursive change regarding the stigmatization of victims was beginning

to take form. The dehumanization and stigmatization of the victims of violent crimes in Mexico was already part of the social discourse even before Calderón's government institutionalized it and the mainstream media perpetuated it. Gibler reports that in 2006 a Ciudad Juárez man was so fed up with finding discarded bodies near his house that he placed a cardboard sign in his front yard that read "PROHIBIDO: TIRAR BASURA Y CUERPOS" (42). The stigmatization reached its apex between 2009 and 2011, the worst years of the violent war between cartels and the government. This violent environment was encapsulated in an Antonio Helguera political cartoon published in *La Jornada* newspaper in March of 2010. The cartoon depicts eight graves with epitaphs such as "En algo debe haberse metido," "Se mataron entre sí," "Fue un ajuste de cuentas," "Era puta" and "Quién sabe en qué andaba" (Fig. 5). Gibler interprets the cartoon as a representation of how "en la narcoguerra, los muertos tienen la culpa *ipso facto* de su propio asesinato," which was the government's way of legitimizing the army and federal police forces (45).

Given these types of discourses, it is not surprising that Sicilia has on occasion mentioned Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* during rallies, interviews, or his column in *Proceso* when referring to the victims of the drug war. The way in which the hegemonic discourse in Mexico stigmatizes and strips victims of their human qualities is akin to what Agamben has identified as the plight of the "sacred man," or *homo sacer*. He notes that the word "sacred" in ancient Rome did not have the same meaning as today. Sacred meant to be set apart (as an outcast), a banned man (51). The Italian philosopher explains that in Roman law such a person was a criminal who was stripped of his or her most basic rights, thus entering "bare life" and becoming one "who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (12, emphasis in the original). For Agamben, the most important aspect of the obscure Roman law figure is the fact that sovereign power, through the

“politicization of bare life” has the ability to decide the “the humanity of living man” (12). When that happens, he argues, sovereign power entered a paradox because it is at the same time inside and outside legal jurisdiction: “the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside of the law” (17). That moment happens during a state of exception, but since at that point the sovereign power is “at once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order,” the exception becomes the rule, which he argues signals “modern democracy’s decadence and gradual convergence with totalitarian states” (12-13). In this vein, Sicilia, through an open letter in which he directly addressed politicians and drug lords shortly after his son’s murder, noted the government’s and the drug cartels’ dehumanizing tactics and compared them to the figure of the *homo sacer*:

Estamos hasta la madre de ustedes, políticos . . . porque en sus luchas por el poder han desgarrado el tejido de la nación, porque en medio de esta guerra mal planteada, mal hecha, mal dirigida, de esta guerra que ha puesto al país en estado de emergencia, han sido incapaces . . . de crear los consensos que la nación necesita para encontrar la unidad sin la cual este país no tendrá salida. . . . cada ciudadano de este país ha sido reducido a lo que el filósofo Giorgio Agamben llamó, con palabra griega, zoe: la vida no protegida, la vida de un animal, de un ser que puede ser violentado, secuestrado, vejado y asesinado impunemente; . . . esa corta imaginación está permitiendo que nuestros muchachos, nuestros hijos, no sólo sean asesinados sino, después, criminalizados, vueltos falsamente culpables . . . (Letter)

Mexico’s appeal to the state of exception since the Drugs War began to led to what activists have been denouncing for years: the transformation of victims of violence into “bare life,” the kind of

living being that has been stripped of all humanity, and that makes possible the configuration and permanence of the very notion of “sovereign power.” Carlos Fazio has analyzed at great length how, since 2006, whoever is deemed an enemy of the state has been treated and represented as subhuman (“Introducción”). He characterizes the Mexican mainstream media as a tool to propagate “symbolic violence” and to reinforce the official discourse that deprives victims of their human qualities: “los medios son usados para acelerar el proceso de deshumanización y desindividualización del otro, considerado enemigo (o una plaga a exterminar, según Calderón); para la manipulación de la información y la simbolización de la violencia asimétrica—invisible, implícita o subterránea— del poder y la organización del exterminio” (“Parte II: La Guerra de Peña Nieto”). One of the specific ways in which victims are criminalized and dehumanized is by signaling them as “narcos,” or members of drug cartels, after they have been killed. Rafael Acosta explains that there is no verifiable estimate of the number of people who have died in the drug war who were not linked to the drug cartels but were nonetheless stigmatized: “Al nombrarlos como narcos, se convirtieron en sujetos de violencia y de asesinato” (91). Besides being criminalized, when victims are associated with drug activities they are also dehumanized because the criminal, particularly the narco, is a figure that is *a priori* non-human in the logic of Mexico’s official discourse. In other words, victims can be dehumanized twice in Mexico: first, by turning into one more of a countless mass of bodies that are discarded every day; and second, by associating them with the drug trade, which criminalizes and dehumanizes them. Fazio explains that this development in the war against drugs in Mexico was influenced by United States’ world policy against enemies of the state launched after the terrorist attacks of 9/11: “un terrorista (pensemos en Osama Bin Laden) o un presunto capo del crimen organizado en el México de Felipe Calderón (v. gr., Arturo Beltrán Leyva), convertidos en monstruos inhumanos

o animales peligrosos, no sólo deben ser combatidos sino definitivamente aniquilados. Exterminados” (“Introducción”). Even after the end of Calderón’s presidency in 2012 the government continued to employ these rhetorical tools when discussing acts of violence in the country, as current president Enrique Peña Nieto has also been criticized for the criminalization and dehumanization of victims of violent crimes.

It should be noted, however, that the dehumanization of victims and perpetrators of violent acts in Mexico is not a phenomenon exclusive to the generalized violence that began with Calderón’s presidency. Just as drug violence and narco-culture were thought to be a border, peripheral issue before 2006, so were the contemporary dehumanization of victims and agents of violence a phenomenon that was first evidenced in the Mexican northern border. The most evident and studied case was the serial killing of women in the border city of Ciudad Juárez that began in the 1990s. Ana del Sarto explains that there is a double dehumanization at play in the Ciudad Juárez femicides, mainly fueled by precarious work conditions in the globalized capitalist market (61). On the one hand, there is rarely a distinct perpetrator of these crimes brought to justice, in part due to how they are characterized: “se producen genocidios basados en prejuicios patológicos o pérfidos de la otredad. Es decir, los victimarios son siempre representados como demonios diabólicos, enfermos mentales y depravados sexuales” (61). On the other hand, the victims are objectivized: “estas mujeres en general tienen un puesto de trabajo que les otorga un lugar socio-económico muy bajo . . . por ello mismo son objetos de violencia: cuerpos desechables material y simbólicamente. Estos cuerpos son desaparecibles, violables, asesinales, descuartizables” (62). The Ciudad Juárez femicides have their own socio-historical context, particularly labor conditions on the border inaugurated by neoliberal economic practices

in the 1990s, gender violence, and the objectification of the female body.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, these crimes were an antecedent to the way in which the Mexican government and the mainstream media have characterized victims and agents of violent acts during the Drug War.

### **The Perpetuation of Hegemonic Discourse in Narco-narratives**

Most Mexican literary works that represent the violence resulting from the war on drug cartels are part of the corpus of texts of the so-called narco-culture, succinctly defined by Oswaldo Zavala as a “cultural imaginary surrounding the drug trade,” (“Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Drug War,” 341). Many of these texts, according to Zavala, in a futile attempt to grasp “the real” of the drug trade, follow a narrative pattern that inevitably leads to the perpetuation of the official discourse: “within narcocultura manifestations of violence are organized by the pre-established conditions of hegemonic discourse in order to corroborate the real of the drug trade that has been enunciated by the State” (348). These official narratives rely on a fantastic or larger-than-life narco who can easily be signaled as an other, a being outside of the official structures of power and even society.

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<sup>33</sup> The Juárez murders have been widely studied and fictionalized. Some of the most referenced studies include Sergio González Rodríguez’s *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) and *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response* (2010) by Ignacio Corona and Hector Domínguez Ruvalcaba. One of the most studied fictionalization of the murders is Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* (2003). Several fiction films and documentaries focus on these crimes, including *Señorita extraviada* (2002) and *Backyard/Traspatio* (2009).

For instance, Mexican author and public intellectual Juan Villoro argues that the figure of the narco has always been imagined or portrayed as a mysterious, otherworldly being, but that such characterizations no longer suffice for the environment created by the Drug War: “Para certificar que los capos son los ‘otros’, seres casi extraterrestres, memorizamos sus exóticos alias e inventariamos sus dietas de corazón de jaguar con pólvora y cocaína. Sin embargo, el rango de operación del narco creció en tal forma que cada vez cuesta más concebirlo como una remota extravagancia nacional” (“La alfombra roja”). The aura of otherness imbedded in the figure of the narco creates the illusion that drug cartels operate outside of the confines of the official structures of power, other than within them. In a way, these characterizations create a false sense of comfort for both those who enunciate these discourses and the ones who consume them. Thus, Sophie Esch notes that “depicting the narco as Other and claiming that ‘they’ kill only each other and that one is not part of ‘these’ people is the key rhetorical recourse for denying Mexico’s reality while keeping the speaker at a discursively and morally safe distance” (168). Most significant about the official rhetoric described by Esch is its removal of any kind of drug trade complicity from the general public. In other words, these characterizations are at the same time criminalizing and dehumanizing victims of violent crimes while they purge the general public (and the state itself) from been at all complicit to the omnipresence and power of the drug trade. As Zavala has noted, these ideas have filtered into literary representations: “most narconarratives propagate an illusory enemy that the Mexican state relies upon in order to legitimize its actions in the drug war. In short, most of the narconarratives written during the last decade in Mexico reify the simulacrum of truth constructed by official propaganda” (357). In what follows, I show that this is not the case in Volpi’s *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and Toscana’s *Los puentes de Königsberg*.

### Dehumanized Bodies in Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro*

Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro* is a novel that allegorically represents several aspects of the environment of violence in Mexico without perpetuating hegemonic and official discourses. This type of anti-hegemonic representation is possible because of the novel's fictionalized depiction of Nazism. In other words, on the most basic level, novels like *Oscuro bosque oscuro* avoid the perpetuation of those discourses through the use of allegory instead of attempting to realistically portray the environment of violence in Mexico.<sup>34</sup> Volpi's novel does not necessarily allegorize narcos committing murder through the representation of members of the Nazi death squad. Reading it in such a way would simply support the official discourse of a clear-cut division between narcos, general society, and most importantly, the state. In what follows I show that the novel instead represents a systemic type of violence in which everyday men become subjective agents of violence in a war to exterminate those who were deemed the

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that there are novels that metaphorically refer to the figure of the narco, but have still been criticized for perpetuating the official and hegemonic discourses. Zavala, for instance, in his essay "Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Drug War: The Critical Limits of Narconarratives," has noted that Yuri Herrera's critically-acclaimed novel *Trabajos del Reino*, which depicts a drug lord as a king in a distant land, follows this same pattern. For a different reading of this same novel that also analyzes the setting of the text and the representation of the drug lord see Rafael Acosta's "The State and the Caudillo. Legitimacy in Yuri Herrera's *Trabajos del reino*".

enemies of the state. The idea that anybody can be a complicit participant of the violence, even through inaction, is central to Volpi's novel because it implicitly challenges the notion of the "us" versus "them" official rhetoric through the use of the second person in the narration, and the figure of the narrator/reader, who plays a major role in the plot.

*Oscuro bosque oscuro* is not Volpi's first novel that fictionalizes Nazism. The author gained international notoriety in literary circles after publishing *En busca de Klingsor* (1999), a novel about two scientists who, after the end of World War II, are tasked with finding the identity of the Third Reich's main scientist. The novel is among a series of works published by a group of Mexican writers born in the 1960s considered part of the Crack Movement. In broad terms this literary movement emerged in the mid-1990s and sought to create a Mexican literature that would be stylistically complex and that fictionalized non-Mexican scenarios.<sup>35</sup> Ten years after the publication of *En busca de Klingsor*, Volpi once again fictionalized World War II with *Oscuro bosque oscuro*, but in a much more experimental and shorter text. The novel's main plot is based on the historical accounts and testimonies of veterans of the Nazi Reserve Police Battalion 101. The average age of its conscripts was much higher than most Nazi soldiers, so

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<sup>35</sup> Ricardo Chávez Castañeda, one of the founding members of the Crack, has also authored some of the most respected studies about these works. His two volumes of *La generación de los enterradores* (2000, 2003) are indispensable introductory texts. He also edited *Crack: instrucciones de uso* (2004), which includes non-fiction work from each of the main Crack authors. The group also read a new manifesto for the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the original one in New York in 2016. Mexicanist Ignacio Sánchez Prado is currently preparing a long-form study of the movement.

many of the battalion members were not raised under the Third Reich. Most of the men were older former police officers who were conscripted and eventually took part in gruesome mass killings of Jewish children, women and elderly men. The battalion's existence itself and the ways in which historians have studied it have provoked some of the most contended debates among scholars in Holocaust studies.<sup>36</sup>

Written in verse, *Oscuro bosque oscuro* takes place in a small coastal town in an unnamed country in which a group of 500 everyday older men, including bakers, carpenters, toy makers, police officers, and teachers are recruited to form the Reserve Police Battalion 303. They are described by a sergeant as “Una panda de inútiles, viejos inútiles,” (24) because, in addition to their advanced age compared to other recruits, most of them lack any kind of military training. They are forced to join the battalion because most of the young men are already on the front lines. Throughout their training the men have been taught to identify, kill, and more importantly, despise their dehumanized enemies: “son insectos, nos dijeron, son insectos y han / de ser exterminados, / por su culpa bombardean nuestras ciudades” (99-100). After weeks of grueling training, the group of old men is told by a captain that they have a mission that will take them to different towns in one of the occupied territories. Although the captain gives only vague details about what will soon be revealed to be a horrifying mission, one of the other commanding officers notices that the captain is tearing up as he passes the information to the makeshift

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<sup>36</sup> In the preface and afterword of the latest edition of his book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, historian Christopher R. Browning notes the highly-contested debates caused by his own work and those done by other academics shortly after he first published his account of the battalion's actions during the war.

battalion. Once they arrive at the first town, the men begin to hunt for “insects,” who are captured and then gathered in the town’s plaza. Later, the captured enemies are taken to the heart of the nearby woods. At the novel’s climax, the identity of the “insects” is revealed:

Había una vez,  
cerca del oscuro bosque oscuro,  
un batallón de ancianos que,  
en el lapso de seis horas,  
exterminó a dos mil ochocientos doce niños. (85-86)

After the massacre, during which some of the men break down and a few desert, most of the battalion readies to go to another town and repeat the “insect extermination.” In the last section of the text, after the war ends, the fate of most of the main characters is revealed. While the novel’s main plot is straightforward, the structure of the text is complex. The story of the old men is intertwined with several eerie and gruesome re-imagined fairytales, and the text jumps from a third-person narrator to a first- or even second-person narrator from one stanza to the next. The text’s complexity is exacerbated by the vagueness of the novel’s setting. The place and time of the narration is never explicitly mentioned in the novel. This temporal and spatial ambiguity is reinforced by the use of fairy-tale tropes such as the repetition of the classic beginning to many children’s stories: “Once upon a time....”

Published in 2009 amid the environment that led to the eventual formation of the protest groups detailed earlier, it is not coincidental that one of *Oscuro bosque oscuro*’s major themes is dehumanization. Beginning with the text’s first few stanzas, there is an emphasis on the way in which the main characters are bombarded by propaganda that constantly reminds them about the way in which the government considers their enemies as subhuman. Following the narration of

the first fairytale with which the text begins, the narration shifts to describing how Luk, a baker, toils away next to his oven as he listens to the news: “Luk amasa la harina y añade levadura mientras el / locutor insiste en la victoria, / en la urgente victoria,” (11). However, the propagandistic message quickly shifts to the enemy:

Luk se enjuaga el sudor con un trapo, el calor del horno  
 lo abotaga mientras la voz habla de insectos,  
 así los llama la voz,  
 insectos, (11).

Both the omnipresence of the propaganda voice and the characterization of the victims as insects become leitmotifs that are present throughout the book through short stanzas in between the narration of the fairytales and the story of the old men. Verses such as “Ayuda a exterminar a los insectos, / únete a la policía del orden” (20), and “Si un insecto te habla, aplástalo, / si un insecto te mira, aplástalo, / si un insecto te sonríe, aplástalo” (45) are scattered throughout the text.

At first, it seems evident that the novel has an omnipresent external narrator, typical of fairytales, as it begins in the classic fashion of children’s story books: “Había una vez, / cerca de un oscuro bosque oscuro, / un miserable leñador que vivía con su esposa” (9). However, as I have noted earlier, the narrator then begins to switch between first-, second-, and third-person.

With this technique, the narrator interpellates the reader:

La patria te necesita,  
 lees en uno de los carteles y descubres  
 que no hay alternativa,  
 Lector: te habla a ti. (19)

This is a key moment in the narration, and one that elevates the text from a poetic and complex meditation on the horrors of World War II to a self-reflexive text that challenges the reader to inhabit the bizarre space that was created by the narration. Furthermore, as Gutiérrez Negrón explains, this provokes the reader to become an active participant in what is being narrated: “De este momento en adelante, se le hace imposible al lector tornar el rostro, puesto que el texto lo enfrenta al otro y su dolor; y es en este momento que la pasividad del acto de lectura se hace pedazos, haciendo inevitable la toma de posiciones” (117). In one particularly disturbing scene, the narrator appears to cast the reader as an accomplice in the children-killing operation:

Tú también tomas al insecto por el cuello,  
 tú también lo arrojas sobre el lodo,  
 tú también le ordenas que se ponga de rodillas,  
 .....  
 tú también observas la agonía del insecto,  
 pero tú reaccionas y disparas de nuevo,  
 disparas otra vez para que su agonía,  
 y la tuya,  
 acaben cuanto antes.

The fact that the narrator appears to interpellate the real-life reader as an accomplice of such heinous acts can be understood in part as Volpi’s strategy to engage and invest readers. But it can also be read as a challenge to the way in which the Mexican government is desperately bent on demonstrating that there are clear-cut separations among those who have been deemed members of drug cartels, the general public, and the state. In *Oscuro bosque oscuro* villains are not otherworldly figures or dehumanized and illusory protagonists. They are average people caught

in an extreme situation. They are a group of old men who have chosen to participate in heinous acts in the name of a war against enemies dehumanized by official propaganda. When the narrator forces readers into a position of active participants of the atrocious actions, they are also obliged to question their role on the perpetuation of injustices and violence perpetrated to others around them in real life.

Gutierrez Negrón notes that “En *Oscuro bosque oscuro* se problematiza el papel del lector, a quien Volpi enfrenta e inmiscuye en los horrores de una guerra anónima para cuestionar y canalizar una reacción que trascienda la mera simpatía o indolencia” (114). The book is even promoted along those lines on the back cover: “un relato que hace del lector uno de los personajes centrales.” However, the text does not allow the reader to have any real agency. This, I argue, is another rhetorical tool to emphasize the dangers of remaining silent or inactive in the face of human right abuses or violent crimes. The reader is at the mercy of the narration, which places him/her in the middle of the killings of innocent children. The reader in the novel is clearly a passive individual:

Tú tampoco hablas, lector,  
 prefieres el silencio de las barrancas,  
 y te concentras en tu diario,  
 has empezado a escribir todas las noches bajo  
     la media luz de una linterna,  
 .....  
 a veces una frase, otras un poema o lo que tú crees  
     que es un poema, párrafos que denuncian  
 tu rutina, lector, (52).

In a metaliterary twist, these verses shed light on the possibility that *Oscuro bosque oscuro*'s narrator has all along been the *lector*, who, in a cathartic exercise, is denouncing the events in which he or she has been involved during the war. The relationship between the reader and the narrator, or the fact that they may be the same person, becomes much more explicit with the last words in one of the final sections of the book, when the reader is finally given some agency: "Ahora cuenta, lector, tu pesadilla" (97). The next chapter, titled "Diario," consists of entries in the narrator/reader's diary in which he explains that part of the reason why he is writing those notes is to never forget what he has done, despite fearing his own condemnation: "escribes estas líneas aunque te aterra imaginar que alguien las lea / que alguien te denuncie, / que alguien se entere de lo ocurrido en Vosej" (99). The reader/narrator is writing his story not just as a form of catharsis but also as a way of recording and denouncing his own wrongdoings: "yo presencié la muerte de más de una decena, / lánguidos cuerpos en el lodo" (102). After this realization, he has no other choice but to write the story of the dark forest in which thousands of children were murdered:

escribes esto porque no puedes no escribirlo,  
 escribes para no creer que fue  
 una pesadilla,  
 un cuento de terror en medio de la noche,  
 una historia de terror en el oscuro bosque oscuro. (102)

Just as in Mexico the general public had to come to terms with the fact that for years they had been "callados, arrinconados, vencidos frente al narco y al gobierno," as Valdéz Cárdenas explains, so too did the narrator have to face the fact that he could no longer remain silent. The last verse of the novel, "y qué fue de ti, lector, nadie supo" (147), is interpreted by Gutiérrez

Negrón as the moment in which Volpi finally asks a question that is not answered by the text itself, opening a space for a real answer from the reader (118). The broken silence in Mexico by people like Valdéz Cárdenas, Javier Sicilia, and Juan Villoro is one of the many possible answers to the question of what one could do when confronted with a situation in which others are suffering and one is simply a passive and perhaps complicit participant of the violent acts. This standing up to the hegemonic discourse, at first instance by only a handful of people, has signaled a change in the country's structure of feeling. It may still be too early to gauge the full impact the peace movements in Mexico may have had in the war against drug cartels. However, something that the movement arguably succeeded in doing was showing that remaining silent and indifferent to the problem was equal to being complicit.<sup>37</sup> *Oscuro bosque oscuro* points to this emergent change in society through the fictionalization of Nazism and the way the main character deals with his own silence. This invites an interpretation of Volpi's novel that goes beyond it being a perpetuation of the official discourse.

### **Volpi beyond the Crack's Shadow**

The fact that the *Oscuro bosque oscuro* does follow some of the "commandments" set by the Crack Manifesto presented by the 1990s movement's authors has led some critics to focus mainly on the Crack context when analyzing *Oscuro bosque oscuro*. For example, George A. Carlsen's reading of Volpi's novel offers an insightful take on the text's importance in making

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<sup>37</sup> The strength of the Ayotzinapa movement, for example, arguably could not have been the same without the prior mobilizations by Sicilia and his followers.

Latin America a place from which authors are able to “articulate world historiography” and take part in “a global conversation about the meaning of World War II and the Holocaust” (1060). Carlsen also notes that one of the most salient criticisms against novels that fictionalize World War II written by Latin American authors is that they are participating in a form of coloniality by favoring European history and settings instead of local ones (1061). However, drawing on Michel de Certeau’s postulations on historiography and his claim that one cannot separate a discourse from the specificity of its original place of production, Carlsen argues that “the historical fiction of this discourse is not one of ‘European History’ overpowering local histories; rather, it is rooted in the particular situation of the Mexican Crack literary group” (1062). The critic is certainly on point regarding the importance of the specificity of the context in which the novels were produced. However, this novel should be read beyond its connections with the Crack movement in order to expand on particular social conflicts that are not necessarily linked to this literary group. Doing so permits a reading that instead focuses on how the environment of violence in Mexico filtered into the text.

Along the same lines, Sergio Gutiérrez Negrón argues that *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and *El jardín devastado* (2008) are two novels wherein the author changes his narrative production style into what he identifies as a cosmopolitan criticism, which Gutiérrez Negrón defines as “una preocupación crítica por el otro, que relaciona espacios heterogéneos y posiciona al individuo en . . . un ‘mapa de sufrimiento’ desde donde se puede llevar a una reflexión ética que da paso a la empatía” (108). Volpi’s previous works, particularly his twentieth century trilogy—*En busca de Klingsor* (1999), *El fin de la locura* (2003), and *No será la tierra* (2012)—, according to Gutiérrez Negrón, were characterized by a focus on great historical and international narratives, while these two more recent novels emphasize the representation of individuals’ situations and

their suffering (108). Gutiérrez Negrón further theorizes that through these two novels Volpi is articulating a “cosmopolitismo sensato” that in these texts is represented by self-reflexivity that turns into an exploration of the Other’s suffering (110).<sup>38</sup> Thus, it is unquestionable that the novel’s setting and complexity are tied to its Crack roots, but it is important to recognize that his newer productions, or at least *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and a few other novels, represent a different paradigm in Volpi’s oeuvre.

Even academics like Carlsen, who focus on the Crack roots of these novels, acknowledge that there are possible connections between Nazism and local, Latin American realities:

For the Latin American literary imagination, the figure of Hitler fades easily into that of Pinochet, and the ordinary men of Battalion 101 become the death squads of El Salvador

. . . Volpi chooses stories and histories that reflect Germanic culture and identity . . .

because these hold a particular interest for him and for a Latin-American readership.

(1079)

Carlsen is taking into account potential allegorical interpretations of the novel that are related to part of the socio-historical context in which the novel was produced. He does so, however, at a macro level when analyzing the fairy tales that are interwoven throughout the text: “The stories in Volpi’s novel end without justice or with only partial justice, just as the aggressors of Latin America’s last bloody century enjoy old age and impunity” (1079-80). While this interpretation of Volpi’s rewriting of classic fairy tales is thought-provoking, by exploring the possible connections between the fictionalization of World War II and the real-life atrocities that were

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<sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez Negrón notes that he uses the term “sensato” following one of its oldest inceptions that relates to an affective sensibility.

occurring in Mexico at the novel's moment of enunciation I have shown that the novel can also be read in a more focused manner.

The setting of the novel in Nazi-occupied Europe and the dehumanizing of the slaughtered children constitute interlocking allegories that are at the same time being informed by and fueling the dominant and emergent elements of Mexican culture that were in tension at the time of the text's publication, which was marred by the thousands of deaths produced by the Drug War that is still raging today. The novel's depiction of the cruel and desensitizing massacre of children—and the way in which the narrator/protagonist deals with his actions after the war ends—point to referents that are at odds in Mexican society: the dehumanization and stigmatization of victims of violent crimes by the official discourse and mainstream media and the concerted effort by civilian groups to reformulate that dominant discourse. Although *Oscuro bosque oscuro* is heavily marketed as one that examines “circunstancias extremas que tuvieron lugar durante la segunda guerra mundial,” which would play into what authors and academics like Ricardo Piglia and Rafael Lemus characterize as a literary fad, simply categorizing Volpi's novel as a work that fictionalizes Nazism and World War II to follow editorial trends or strictly as a literary movement production would erase the important socio-historical aspects that it allegorizes.

The dissident voices of those like Javier Valdéz Cárdenas and Javier Sicilia, who challenged the way in which the media and the government effectively turned victims into *homines sacri*, were the emergent force that was in tension with dominant cultural and political perspectives at the moment when *Oscuro bosque oscuro* appeared. At around that time there was also an impetus from academics and intellectuals to challenge the hegemonic discourse regarding the characterization of those signaled as the sole perpetrators of violence: the narcos. Therefore,

the novel demands to be read under this context of systematic dehumanization and criminalization in Mexico. Volpi, in addition to emphasizing the propaganda that dehumanizes the enemy, continuously reminds the reader that the protagonists are not abstract or prototypical villains like the ones in the fairy tales that are interwoven throughout the text. Replicating the manner in which historians emphasize the ordinariness of the real-life members of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 were, in the novel the narration stresses that the protagonists before the war were regular people with mundane, everyday jobs and lives. By representing agents of violence in such a way, the novel refutes the official dehumanizing discourse of both victim and perpetrator, while at the same time presenting an alternative to the prevalent literary representations of the violence in Mexico that generally tend to perpetuate those characterizations.

### **Metonymical Theatre: Königsberg-Monterrey as Mexico's Stage**

Published the same year as *Oscuro bosque oscuro*, David Toscana's multi-layered novel *Los puentes de Königsberg* shares several thematic characteristics with Volpi's work. The novel tells a complex web of stories that intersect at key points in the narration. It takes place in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey, toward the end of World War II, in 1945. Some of the chapters focus on a ragtag group of three men, Floro, Blasco, and el Polaco, who spend their days drinking and recreating news of the Russian army's advances against German forces in Europe. They also morbidly enjoy retelling and recreating robberies and abductions of local women, and fantasizing about a group of six schoolgirls who went missing years before in the outskirts of the city. Floro, a former actor who became an alcoholic, imagines, directs, and acts

out these representations with the help of his two close friends, Blasco and el Polaco. These sections are generally told by an omniscient, external narrator. Other sections are narrated by a character-bound narrator, Gortari, an adolescent who becomes obsessed with an eighteenth-century mathematical problem presented by his school teacher, Andrea. The teacher warns her students that the Bridges of Königsberg problem, in which one needs to cross every bridge in the city at least once without backtracking, cannot be solved. Gortari refuses to believe that there is no possible solution to the problem, and he begins to meet Andrea outside of class. At first the two discuss the bridge problem, but the teacher pushes Gortari to look beyond the mathematical problem and partake in her imaginative retelling and recreation of the history of Königsberg. Slowly, through Andrea's and Floro's theatrical recreations of past and distant events, Monterrey begins to morph into Königsberg. A scruffy bar in Monterrey becomes a European tavern, Mexican streets turn into iconic avenues in Königsberg, and at some point the characters personify real-life World War II Nazi veterans and war heroes. What ties all these stories together is the disappearance of a group of six girls during a school trip to a dam located on the outskirts of Monterrey. Floro and his friends are obsessed with the case. They often and disturbingly fantasize about the possible ways in which the girls went missing or were abducted. They use six liquor bottles that they carry around the city to represent each of the missing girls during their reenactments and fantasies. One of the missing girls was Gortari's sister. His mother continues to fail to accept that she is not coming back. For years she pays to have a missing person ad in the local newspaper, and during all meals she continues to set a place at the dinner table for her missing daughter. The novel's dark but ludic tone and environment reaches its climax when Floro and his crapulous friends convince several of the missing daughters' mothers

to go with them on a school bus to drive to the edge of the city, where the three drunk friends recreate with the liquor bottles what they imagined happened to the girls.

Toscana's *Los puentes de Königsberg* has been widely praised and is considered among Mexico's most notable contemporary novels. Geney Beltrán Félix, for example, considers it "la gran novela mexicana (la única posible) sobre la segunda guerra mundial" (79). Regardless of whether Toscana's work is truly the greatest "or only possible" World War II novel in Mexico, I argue that, like *Oscuro bosque oscuro*, it should be read attuned to the Mexican socio-historical context in which it was published. The novel's complexity, its abundance of sub-plots, and its intricacies are ripe for numerous possible interpretations. Three elements that shed light on the novel's dialogue with both the environment of violence in Mexico amid the war on drug cartels, and with other cultural artifacts emanating from narco-culture. First, the novel allegorizes the Drug War in Mexico through the representation of the fictionalized Monterrey of the 1940s and European World War II historical events. These metaphorical references to the violence in Mexico place the novel in a dialectical correlation with narco-culture narratives, particularly because the text can also be interpreted as a critique of the exploitation of the narco-war in Mexico by mainstream media, musicians, film directors, and even authors who create works that simply reproduce and package the violence as a marketing tool. One of the novel's main tropes—the theatrical recreation of past events—also points to the Mexican government's "scripted reality" of the violent incidents that are occurring everyday throughout the nation. Together, these three elements in the novel illuminate the text's substance as an allegorical meditation on the possible roles available to those living through the war: as agents of change and resistance to the violent acts, or as participants, a passive audience, or idle witnesses to the tragedies occurring around them.

Like other works in his oeuvre, Toscana's writing in *Los puentes de Königsberg* gives the impression of a text obsessively constructed, with every sentence serving a very deliberate function in the narration.<sup>39</sup> The novel begins with a short, one-page section that resembles a combination between stage directions and the lines of a Greek tragedy chorus presenting the setting to the audience. This is the first of several metafictional moments in the novel, and an implicit indicator of the importance that theatre, performance, and spectatorship will have in the text. Judy Cervantes argues that the theatrical elements of the novel, particularly the representation of war and the abduction of the girls, are intrinsically connected with the "transmission of communal traumatic memories" (vii). She also argues that history and trauma are intertwined with the act of performing:

Los personajes en *Los puentes de Königsberg* hacen del teatro el espacio idílico para la representación de una memoria traumada. En ese espacio surge la necesidad de entender el pasado y aproximarse a nuevas formas de percibir la historia. [. . .] La narración de la guerra en Königsberg por los personajes mexicanos sirve para indagar en los traumas nacionales que inconscientemente intentan reprimir. Es a través de Königsberg que se llega al entorno de un México abatido, carente de historias épicas y héroes. (172)

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<sup>39</sup> The title of the novel alone offers the first indication that the text consists of a narrative that will hinge on carefully-crafted allegories and juxtapositions. Königsberg can be roughly translated to Royal Mountain or Mountain King, a clear reference to the analogy or possible *bridges* between Monterrey and the European city.

She concludes that this traumatic history that the novel may be referencing ranges from the Spanish conquest to the current period of violence, in particular the killing of women in Ciudad Juárez (173). The emphasis on violence against women in *Los puentes de Königsberg* can certainly be read as a reference to the femicides in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, several markers also suggest that the novel can be read as an allegorization of the environment of violence and lack of public safety that was triggered by the declared war on drug cartels by the government of Felipe Calderón in 2006. This is evident, for example, when Floro and Blasco criticize their Polish friend, el Polaco, for not being more concerned with the devastation his country is suffering during the war:

El país de este imbécil está en llamas, y él aquí sentado y bebiendo. Es un príncipe.

Hay gente sin agallas. Yo, en cambio, si eso le ocurriera a México... (32)

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<sup>40</sup> An interpretation of Toscana's novel as a representation of the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez is valid, and the objectification and dehumanization of the girls, for example, could be another way in which the novel denounces how women are perceived in Mexico. Yet, the novel's connection to other, more recent events in Mexico is undeniable. I have chosen to focus in that aspect of the novel because it has not been explored before. The two readings do not cancel each other out, however. In fact, other authors like Roberto Bolaño have explored in their own fiction how the Ciudad Juárez murders go hand in hand with the rise of drug traffic in Mexico. His novel *2666* (2003), for example, is a complex meditation on the femicides in Mexico, World War II, and the effects of neoliberalism in Latin America at the turn of the millennium, among other topics.

Given the timing of the novel's appearance, it is hard to resist reading this exchange of words as a reference to the environment of violence in Mexico. It can also be understood as a veiled critique of the way many Mexicans reacted (or did not) to the growing violence and lack of public safety during Calderón's presidency. Another possible reference to the war on drug cartels is present during one of Andrea and Gortari's recreations of war-torn Königsberg. During this reenactment Gortari is assigned the role of Ernst Tiburzy, who in real life was a decorated war hero in the Nazi army, remembered for single-handedly destroying several Soviet tanks during the defense of Königsberg in 1945. Ironically, and counter to the rhetoric of Calderón's analogy between his government and the Allies, in the novel the heroes defending Königsberg/Monterrey are the Nazis, who are trying to stop attacks from the Soviets. Similar to the official discourse regarding the confrontation between government forces and criminals, the battle between the Nazis and the Russians is described by Andrea as "algo más que vida contra la muerte; es civilización contra barbarie" (135). Later, Andrea describes to Gortari the enemies that they are going to face: "No son soldados, son brutos que se multiplican. Si matamos uno, aparecen dos. Si matamos dos, aparecen diez" (135). As in contemporary Mexico, the enemies in the novel are dehumanized and characterized as an other or an epidemic.

The most significant aspect for uncovering Mexico's current violent environment as the referent that the novel allegorizes is that this effectively places *Los puentes de Königsberg* in dialogue with other narratives that have directly represented this political, social, and public safety crisis. Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, who maintains that the Mexican government's involvement with organized crime can be traced back to the colonial era, argues that the blurring of the line between fiction and reality in discourses concerning criminality increases everyday (138). He explains that to counter the manipulation of reality by mainstream media, literary

fiction paradoxically has become a tool to find or create truth through realism: “El fantasma de la censura capital ejercida por las autoridades y las organizaciones criminales y la falta de credibilidad del discurso oficial terminan por desplazar el campo de la verdad al de la ficción” (139). Domínguez Ruvalcaba argues that realism in literature offers a space from which the truth about Mexico’s violent reality can emerge. However, other academics like Oswaldo Zavala deride the notion that literary realism can ever capture “the real.” According to him, this search for the real leads to a reiteration of official discourses because all expressions of narco-culture, even those performed by the narcos themselves, are mediated by pre-established conditions of possibility set by the State’s pronouncements (348). Thus, he explains, most fictionalizations of the drug trade reproduce the image of narcos formulated by the State. To him, even works such as Yuri Herrera’s *Trabajos del Reino*, which is set in an unnamed kingdom and is narrated in the style of fables or medieval narratives instead of a realistic portrayal of the drug trade, “displays the same ethical impasse found in most narconarratives by reproducing the simulacrum of truth about drug cartels promoted by official discourse” (346). In this case Zavala argues that setting the “kingdom” of the drug lord on the outskirts of a city reinforces the official discourse that the drug trade exists outside of the confines of society and the official structures of power (344).

The way in which novels like *Los puentes de Königsberg* and *Oscuro bosque oscuro* depict the environment of violence in Mexico demonstrates that Zavala and Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s different arguments regarding the role of literature in the search for “truth” are not completely opposed. These two novels are set in parallel worlds or realities, similarly to *Trabajos del reino*, but instead of perpetuating the official discourse they challenge it. As previously discussed, Volpi’s novel is set in an unnamed country during a war that clearly represents World War II. Toscana’s novel is set in Monterrey in 1945, but the constant recreation

of places and events from Königsberg produces an alienation effect that erases any kind of realism from the narration. *Los puentes de Königsberg*, like *Oscuro bosque oscuro*, even though it is not a realist novel, presents the same goal that Domínguez Ruvalcaba argues that some contemporary works attempt: “Ante esto la literatura de ficción se dispone a ensayar mecanismos que permitan un conocimiento de los fenómenos sociales y culturales que nos dirija a encontrar la verdad de nuestro presente” (139). Thus, in these novels, the representation of Nazism as an allegorical tool creates a fictional space from which the narration can focus on a more philosophical meditation on the events that are occurring in Mexico instead of trying to ineffectively recreate them.

For example, in addition to avoiding an ostensibly true representation of narco-culture and its relationship to society and the official structures of power by simply sidestepping it through allegories, Toscana’s novel also implicitly criticizes how other narratives focus on voyeuristic and morbid depictions of murder to package and sell literary representations of violence. According to Zavala, in narco-literature “the drug lord—man or woman—is always at the center of a community of exception, based on an imaginary cult of violence for violence’s sake” (348). He argues that this is exemplified by the first lines of some of the most prominent literary works that fictionalize the drug trade. Most of these novels begin with violent descriptions of murders or death. The sensationalization of violence that characterizes most of these works has larger negative effects, he argues: “By opening their works with actual, imminent, or symbolic murders, these novels project spectacles of subjective violence as prominent “lures” for voyeuristic consumption [ . . . ] thus masking and seeming to obviate a critique of systemic violence” (348). Domínguez Ruvalcaba makes a similar argument when he notes that violent deaths are so ubiquitous in Mexico that they have become normalized and part

of the neoliberalist system. This, in turn, has made homicide into a “modo de representación y de disfrute estético que irrumpe en la cultura cotidiana de las últimas décadas,” including in literary fiction, where killing is often depicted as a spectacle (157). Throughout *Los puentes de Königsberg* there are scattered references to an exaltation or glorification of violence and death that can be read as a critique of what academics like Zavala and Domínguez Ruvalcaba have identified as one of the main characteristics of narco-narratives. This is particularly evident because those references are usually part of metaliterary fragments of the narration. For example, at the end of the section when Floro and Blasco are criticizing el Polaco for not showing more emotion at the fact that Poland is being invaded and destroyed, a series of verses reminiscent of the chorus introduced in the beginning of the novel exultingly refer to death and violence:

Qué bella es la muerte.

Esplendorosa la destrucción.

Que nunca acabe la guerra.

Por favor, señor, que nunca acabe.

Aleluya” (34)

An even more direct critique to the mindless reproduction of violence that some narratives fall into occurs at the end of the novel, when an omnipresent narrator explicitly notes that readers desire gruesome and morbid stories:

La guerra ha terminado. Qué bien. La gente ríe y se emborracha. No se dan cuenta de que no festejan el fin de la guerra sino que esta haya existido. Porque el hombre necesita guerra, exterminio, niñas muertas, muchas niñas muertas, cadáveres en el desierto o en la nieve, una historia que contar, una historia trunca, de joven sangrante, de niña perdida, tal como deben ser las historias porque quién

quiere escuchar el relato de un anciano que pasa años moribundo en la cama, el de una mujer que cocina bollos con jalea; no, amigos, celebremos la muerte y celebremos a los asesinos, a los que disparan y estrangulan . . . (231)

This extended metacommentary can be read as the most explicit reference to other narratives that celebrate the figure of the killer and exploit death without criticism. It can be understood as a condemnation of narratives that through the representation of violence appeal to morbid desires and human's voyeuristic nature. Toscana's use of the third person plural pronoun "nosotros" at the end of the quote is reminiscent of Volpi's use of the "tú" in *Oscuro bosque oscuro*. The critique in this section thus turns from condemning narratives that abuse drug trade tropes to showcasing the consumer of such cultural products. A similar critique is implied through the depiction of Floro's and his two friends' morbid obsession with all the possible ways in which the girls may have been kidnapped or disappeared during their school trip. The characters, not content with fervently reading missing person ads and the news stories about crimes against women, must fictionalize those cases and recreate them on the street.

This fixation on what may have occurred to the girls also leads to another significant element in the novel's allegorical portrayal of Mexico's contemporary reality: the act of performance and witnessing. Throughout the narration most of the main characters participate in either performing imagined situations or as the audience to the performance of others. These performances include Andrea's recreation of Königsberg's bridges and castles before the war erupted, Gortari's performance as the Nazi war hero, Floro's countless retellings of the abduction of the girls and his imaginative recreations of news articles about violence against women, and el Polaco's performance as several historical characters. In the text these performances work as a second narrative that slowly begins to mesh with the first or original narrative, the one taking

place in Monterrey during 1945, 1968, and at other unidentified moments in history. This second narrative, and the way in which it begins to erase the line between the real Monterrey and the imagined Königsberg, serves as a metaphorical representation of the hegemonic discourse in Mexico that offers a slanted version of the relation between the government and the drug trade while at the same time criminalizing victims of violence. In other words, the fact that many of the characters insist on living in a world of theatrical representations, instead of facing their own reality, offers a commentary on how people in Mexico consume and accept mainstream media and government rhetoric when reporting the violence and deaths that have resulted from the war against drug cartels. *Los puentes de Königsberg*, then, can also be read as a meditation on the role that those living through the war in Mexico should take: an agent of change and resistance to the violent acts, or simply an idle witness to the tragedies occurring around them.

Most of the main characters in the novel are either idle witnesses to the events unfolding before them or actors in an imagined reality that is scripted and directed by somebody else. Judy Cervantes notes the possible implications of the binary Monterrey/Königsberg and its relation to the act of spectating or idly witnessing the events that are occurring in the characters' lives: "Al asociar las dos ciudades adentra el escritor en la temática de un Königsberg abatido por la Segunda Guerra Mundial y un México espectador que dentro de su propia miseria se convierte en testigo de la tragedia ajena e inclusive toma una postura ante los eventos" (138). She also argues that this metafiction allows the characters to indirectly relive traumatic events while they appropriate foreign stories that they internalize (138). But this element of the novel may also be read as a veiled depiction of how, in contemporary Mexico, members of society at large are witnessing the violent events occurring throughout most of the nation. They are doing so through the filter of the hegemonic discourse, which is represented in the novel by the "second narration"

performed or recreated by some of the main characters. With the performance of truth presented by the Mexican government and mainstream media (and even by drug cartel members, according to critics like Zavala), the nation effectively becomes a massive stage. Toscana points to this phenomenon in *Los puentes de Königsberg* through the representation of a Mexican city in which its citizens are more concerned with a fictional reality and performance than with what is unfolding before them: the kidnapping of young women and rampant criminality.

For some of the novel's characters, Monterrey is a place in which there is no logic, and it is difficult for them to make sense of what is occurring around them. Instead of making an effort to discern the truth, they prefer to imagine a new, far-away reality. In this imagined Königsberg there is also chaos, war, ruins, and death. But to characters like Gortari this imagined and distant place makes more sense than the one in which they live. For instance, after one of Gortari's first meetings with Andrea outside of class, he ponders possible connection between the two cities:

¿En qué podía parecerse Königsberg a Monterrey?

Allá las soluciones requerían lógica, números, trabajo; acá hacía falta imaginar, soñar o beber mucho alcohol. (37)

In her interpretation of this section of the novel, Cervantes argues that the characters appropriate these other stories in order to make sense of their own realities: “Encuentran en el ‘otro’ un reflejo deseado que les da significado a sus existencias. Viven a través de las historias que narran para tan sólo volver a sus realidades, que al final son tal vez más lastimosas que las ajenas porque carecen de gloria.” (142). In the novel the reality of the Monterrey of the 1940s is so bleak and abject that it pushes the characters to invent a second narrative that they perform in front of other characters. As the novel progresses these characters begin to inhabit the imagined Königsberg more than Monterrey. The melding of the two cities produced by the theatrical

representations of this second narrative forces the characters to distance themselves from their true lives in Monterrey, turning their back to the atrocities occurring there. Cervantes, however, interprets the character's distancing from their realities as something positive because it paradoxically allows them to overcome their traumas. Drawing on Diana Taylor's posits regarding the importance of the performativity of historically traumatic events, she explains this as follows: "En *Los puentes de Königsberg* la representación de historias ajenas presenta la posibilidad de aproximarse a realidades e historias personales" (151). This reconciliation between some characters' true lives and their performances of imagined situations does occur when Floro and his two friends take several of the mothers of the disappeared schoolgirls on a bus to a damn on the outskirts of the city, where the girls went missing. Cervantes reads this scene as one in which the mothers find solace through the representation of the day in which they their daughters disappeared: "Por medio de la escenificación las madres presencian la experiencia ajena y la convierten en propia transformándose cada una de ellas en una activa participante del traumático evento de sus hijas" (163). This is a valid reading of the performance by the three drunks and the mothers, but the result is not necessarily a positive one for them. In fact, this section of the novel can be interpreted as another allegorical depiction of Mexico's official discourse that successfully creates a deceptive narrative that, as was previously explained, offers a space from which both the government and society can distance themselves from the drug trade and its negative consequences. The traumatic event that the mothers are participating in is an *imagined* one. The only possible way for these mothers to experience the kidnapping of their girls is by participating in a "second narrative" that is been dictated by Floro. On a superficial level, they do overcome the trauma of having lost their daughters. However, once they finish the performance of the abduction, the mothers do not continue their acts of

defiance—either through public mourning or by actively searching for them—against a system that allowed their daughters to go missing in the first place. These mothers, many of whom were the only characters who really cared about what was occurring in Monterrey and not spending their days fantasizing about Königsberg, at the end of the novel succumb to the second narrative that is blurring the line between Monterrey and the European city.

Gortari's mother presents another example of how the novel emphasizes that the second narrative, or the imagined Königsberg, eventually overwhelms the fictional Monterrey in the novel. During most of the novel Gortari's mother is the only character who is more invested in what was happening in Monterrey than in recreating stories from a distant land. She is one of the characters who truly cared about the girls' abduction, and she stubbornly refuses to believe her daughter will not come back. One way in which she challenges how other characters prefer to imagine Königsberg instead of focusing on what was occurring in Monterrey is by paying for the photo of her missing daughter to be published daily in a local newspaper. Even when the newspaper editor tells her it is a lost cause and forces her to stop publishing the missing persons ad, she continues her mourning and does not stop searching for her daughter. Nonetheless, at the end she breaks and conforms to participate in the make-believe world that other characters like Floro, Andrea and Gortari are creating by going into the school bus with the three drunk men and other mothers. It's at that moment that Gortari's mother gives in to the world of fantasy created by the rest of the characters, and where she can hide from her reality: "Mi madre nunca hizo referencia a lo que ocurrió cuando se montó con Floro y los demás en ese autobús escolar. Dejó de poner los cubiertos de mi hermana en la mesa, ya no la mencionó en tiempo presente ni lavó su ropa y mi padre prefirió no hacer preguntas" (205). Gortari's mother overcomes her trauma, but this also entails leaving her struggle behind. She is no longer an active agent in search for her

daughter's whereabouts. She accepts Floro's recreation of the events as a true possible outcome for her daughter's life. Bearing witness to the scripted or imagined events freed her from having to live with the unknown, but also made her into another character who would rather live in a fantasy than face the fact that she still does not know exactly what happened to her daughter. This turn of events also signals one of the novel's main concerns: people can easily consume and accept the narrative or discourses (or fictitious realities) that are given or presented to them without much question because they are designed to offer a comfortable position from which they do not have to concern themselves with what others are suffering.

Toward the end of *Los puentes de Königsberg* it becomes clear that Toscana's allegorical panorama of Mexico is much more hopeless than Volpi's. The end of *Oscuro bosque oscuro* opens up a space for the reader to reflect on what can be changed or at least what position s/he should take when confronting the Mexican environment of violence and the official discourse of generalized criminalization. As I have demonstrated, Toscana's novel can also be read as a critique or denunciation of that same oppressive climate in Mexico. However, the last section of the novel, instead of presenting an explicit moment of reflection or some kind of optimistic message, includes the text's most surreal second narrative or performance: El Polaco, a man who spends his days drunk on a continent far away from his devastated and invaded homeland, is erratically driving into space a school bus turned spaceship with a group of mournful Mexican mothers and their missing daughters personified in liquor bottles. All of them are drunk, singing, and suicidal. The narration alternates between Gortari's narration and lines from what could be interpreted as a chorus that is narrating the events (241-42). This short last section echoes to the first one, repeating some of the lines from the apparent chorus, giving the effect of a never-ending narrating cycle in which one could return to the first page and start the novel over again.

In the last lines of the novel there is no room for reflection or meditation about what position one can take to confront the violence in Mexico/Monterrey/Königsberg:

Ahora conduce una nave espacial.

Recorre el universo.

Lleva a las niñas perdidas.

A las más bonitas.

Adonde nunca nadie las va a encontrar. (242)

The ending gives the impression that the characters will continue on that sidereal trip indefinitely. It also reinforces the idea that it is nearly impossible to escape the made-up reality that the Monterrey characters have created for themselves. If throughout the novel there are several veiled references to Toscana's bleak vision of Mexico's violent circumstances, the end shows his disbelief in a positive resolution to the conflict. And he is correct, because in the years since the novel was published, Mexico's violence has increased exponentially and the official discourse of dehumanization and criminalization continues to be the dominant narrative when discussing the drug trade.

### **The Uses and Abuses of Historical Events to Explain the Present**

At a recent academic conference, author and Mexicanist scholar Sandra Lorenzano compared a photo of a pile of old, dirty shoes found alongside the bodies of 72 immigrants who were murdered in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas with the iconic images and museum displays

of the shoes of those who died in Nazi concentration camps.<sup>41</sup> This mention, in passing, during her talk provides another example of the human tendency to mediate recent tragedies, senseless deaths, or rampant violence with images or events from the past, regardless of the context of the events themselves. World War II imagery and historical events have been used constantly to try to make sense of the current violent environment in Mexico. In this chapter, I have shown how literary works such as *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and *Los puentes de Königsberg* have perpetuated this kind of mediation, but at the same time have challenged dominant discourses and narratives that emerged from the Drug War in Mexico.

Mainstream media, the official discourse, and even the general public tend to use euphemisms, filters, and metaphors to refer to these painful events. As a result, victims in Mexico have been turned into a nameless mass, an abstract figure. There have been concerted efforts to thwart this tendency, but the protests, marches, and social movements have not been very successful in that regard. Even the Ayotzinapa movement, a case in which every single one

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<sup>41</sup> Lorenzano was referring to the bodies of 72 Central American migrants who were found in a clandestine mass grave in the northern town of San Fernando, Tamaulipas, in August of 2010. It is believed that they were murdered with the help of local police working for the Zeta cartel. Many migrants crossing Mexico on their way to the United States are hunted by cartels because they can use them as mules. Those who refuse are murdered. In 2011 alone, 193 more bodies were found in dozens of mass graves around San Fernando. Lorenzano made the analogy between the images of these murders in Mexico with photos from concentration camps in Europe during her presentation “Cuerpos y fronteras: ser mujer en el Sur” at the XXII Annual Juan Bruce-Novoa Mexicant Studies Conference in Irvine, California, in 2016.

of forty-three students who were killed has been identified, has been tied more to the number 43 than to the name of any of those who died or even with the name or image of any of the survivors. The two novels analyzed here not only artistically denounce the thousands of deaths and generalized violence, but also participate in the debates caused by these social conflicts and contradictions. The question of responsibility born by those who are bearing witness to the massacres and violence lies at the center of these debates. The figure of the reader/protagonist in *Oscuro bosque oscuro* and the acts of witnessing and recreating events in *Los puentes de Königsberg* are key to understanding how these fictional narratives position themselves amid Mexico's violent environment.

In other words, some of the novels that fictionalize World War II events are tangible examples of the perpetuation of a tendency to deflect or use euphemisms to refer to the deaths and violent acts that have taken place in Mexico since 2006. Nonetheless, works such as the two analyzed here self-consciously react to these practices, and they also challenge readers to reflect on this phenomenon itself. Volpi's novel forces the reader to acknowledge and confront the fact that through inaction one is an active participant in acts of violence. At the end, it also forces the reader to take a side, to finally speak up. Toscana, on the other hand, reflects on the act of idly bearing witness. The novel also constitutes a study on aimlessly being dragged through history as a complicit, inactive agent in the acts of violence that have occurred every day in Mexico since the Drug War began.

### **Conclusion: Pedagogic Allegories, Committed Literature, and New Horizons**

The emergence of representations of Nazism in Latin American novels, first in the late 1960s by Mexican authors like José Emilio Pacheco and Carlos Fuentes, and a decade later by Argentine authors like Manuel Puig and Ernesto Sábato, coincides with what academics like Ismail Xavier define as a moment when the value of allegory was being reconsidered in Western academic and intellectual circles (333). Since then, mainly as a result of a new appreciation in literary and film studies for Walter Benjamin's ideas on modernity, Xavier argues that "contemporary theory has established an essential connection between allegory and the vicissitudes of human experience in time" (333). More importantly, he explains, during this time "old conceptions of signs and discursive practices as able to produce universally valid and stable interpretations with organic and necessary connection to the ultimate truths of life" began to be questioned (334). Ironically, as I have exemplified in the previous chapters, now, nearly half a century after the first literary representations of Nazism began to emerge, there are allegories that have become so accepted that they should be associated more with rigid signs than with malleable metaphors.

This is a particularly prevalent phenomenon in Argentina, where, as explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the perceived connection between the 1976-83 dictatorship and the Third Reich is so strong that in the local imaginary one now evokes the other. As noted in Chapter 3, in Mexico there is no analogy between Nazism and a Mexican historical event that is as ingrained in the local imaginary as in Argentina. However, most recent novels that fictionalize Nazism are generally interpreted as allegorical representations of narco-violence. Throughout this dissertation, I made an effort to offer alternative interpretations to the existent canonical readings

of some of these texts to show that contemporary literary representations of Nazism in Mexico and Argentina can be read beyond these pre-conceived notions.

In Chapter 1, I present an analysis of Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, arguably one of Argentina's most important literary works in recent decades. I also analyze Abel Posse's *Los demonios ocultos*, a little-known novel that was generally panned by critics and academics for its superficial representation of Nazism (Balderston, 257). The pairing of a major work (or one penned by a well-known author) with one that had not received much attention from academics was a conscious decision that is repeated throughout the chapters in this dissertation. On the one hand, my aim was to focus on an element of the better-known works that had received minimal attention by critics before me. On the other hand, by analyzing lesser-known novels from around the same time period, I was able to shed light on how both works' moment of enunciation, or their social and political context, filtered into the texts and their respective representations of Nazism. For instance, in Chapter 1, I demonstrated that the fictionalization of Nazism in Piglia's work, which had not been analyzed in depth before, is crucial to understanding the novel's main subtext: a plea for the reorganization of the leftist intellectual sphere that was in disarray, and effectively dismantled, during the 1976-83 dictatorship. I also showed how Posse's cartoonish portrayal of Nazism, coupled with an anachronistic and positive representation of Argentine military forces, can be interpreted as representative of the tensions among intellectuals regarding how to reflect on the recent dictatorial past shortly after democracy was restored. Comparing these two authors and their novels led me to conclude that the jarring differences between their representation of Nazism and Argentine history point to the fact that the intellectual "double-break" that occurred in the late 1970s never truly healed. The study of both novels presented in this chapter also reinforces one of my overarching dissertation arguments: Argentine literary

representations of Nazism are not exclusively metaphors for events that occurred during the 1976-83 dictatorship.

I also support this argument in Chapter 2 with an examination of Argentine novels published since 2004. I demonstrate that the three novels analyzed in this chapter, Leopoldo Brizuela's *Una misma noche*, Gustavo Nielsen's *Auschwitz*, and Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda*, resist the inherent rigid nature of the symbolic connection between the Third Reich and the Argentine dictatorship. As established with my analysis of each of these works, one needs to take into account the specificity of these texts in order to bring to light other possible meanings behind Argentine literary representations of Nazism published in the new millennium. These novels participate in discourses that emerged in the early 2000s centered on thwarting exclusion, racism, and xenophobia. They can be read as interlocking allegories that are at once informed by and actively creating discourses centered on criticizing the environment of exclusion and discrimination that permeated much of Argentine society, particularly in the capital, after the economic collapse that followed the opening of markets in the region due to the neoliberal economic practices of the 1990s. In my study of these works I propose that the analogy between Nazism and the 1976-83 dictatorship is acknowledged and referenced explicitly in some of these novels. However, these texts utilize those tropes mainly to reflect on changes to national identity at the turn of the twenty first century. I argue that these texts can be interpreted as allegorical texts that utilize Nazism and other World War II tropes to represent changing notions of *argentinidad*.

In Chapter 3, I analyze Mexican literary representations of Nazism published since 2009. I note that since 2006, public intellectuals, authors, political pundits, and politicians have referred to World War II events or figures when describing the effects of the narco-violence that

continues to plague Mexico. Thus, recent fictionalizations of World War II events are generally read as allegorizations of narco-violence. I accept this reading, especially because several authors have encouraged such interpretations, but I also contend that these texts implicitly engage and challenge official discourses that naturalize violence in Mexico, and dehumanize and criminalize victims. For example, I assert that in Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro: una historia de terror* the depiction of the cruel and desensitizing massacre of children—and the way in which the narrator/protagonist deals with his actions after the war ends—are signs that point to referents that are at odds in Mexican society: the dehumanization and stigmatization of victims of violent crimes by the official discourse and mainstream media, and the concerted effort by civilian groups to reformulate that dominant discourse. In my analysis of David Toscana's *Los puentes de Königsberg*, I show that several of its representations of war-torn Europe in the 1940s can be allegorically interpreted as a meditation on the role that Mexicans living through the narco-war can take: being agents of change and resistance to the violent acts, or simply participate as a passive audience or idle witnesses to the tragedies occurring around them. It is my conclusion that both novels' emphasis on the figure of the reader/witness point to the need for many Mexicans to face their complicit role in the environment of violence and the discourses that criminalize and dehumanize victims.

The canonical interpretations normally given to the novels analyzed throughout the dissertation, which I have complemented with my own readings, are not the only elements that connect these Argentine and Mexican texts. What also unites these works is how they challenge traditional notions of committed or engaged literature by combining allegory and pedagogical intentions. There is a tension in all of these works between the ambiguity of meaning that is

characteristically present in allegorical narratives and a desire to offer an overt lesson or a sort of cautionary tale in the narration.

As allegorical texts, these novels do not follow the main tenets of committed literature that require the narration to be transparent, succinct, and lacking any type of ambiguous meaning. Despite having the multiplicity of possible interpretations inherent of allegorical texts, the fictionalizations of Nazism and World War II historical events in the novels analyzed here are also arguably attempting to overtly denounce social and political crises occurring at their moment of enunciation. Not surprisingly, this tension is explicitly referenced in Pacheco's *Morirás lejos*, which is considered Latin America's first novel to focus on Nazism and the Holocaust. In the ending of the second to last section of the novel, the narrator states that everything up to that point in the text had been a lie, an unsuccessful retelling of historical events doomed to fail due to the author's insistence on narrating them through fiction. Nonetheless, the narrator notes that there was a reason for all of this: "Pero fue un pobre intento de contribuir a que el gran crimen nunca se repita" (157). In the other, more contemporary novels analyzed throughout this dissertation, the tension is not presented as explicitly in the text, but it is always there. In all of these novels, there is a moment of anagnorisis, or of learning, in which the main character finally realizes a key element of the events that are occurring around him or her. For instance, at the end of Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, it is implied that Renzi finally understands that his uncle has been abducted by government forces and that it is up to him to continue his uncle's subversive fight against the repressive forces. As explained in Chapter 1, this can be interpreted as Piglia's veiled attempt to express the need for a reformulation of the leftist intellectual sphere after the dictatorship ended in Argentina. In a more recent Argentine novel, the protagonist of Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda* realizes that, due to her deformities and

abnormal growth, she might be seen by others—especially by her adored Dr. Mengele—as a lesser being. This also speaks to the way in which Mengele and other Argentines treat the Mapuche population in the novel. And in turn, this can be interpreted as an allegorization of the prejudices against minorities and immigrants at the turn of the millennium in Argentina, as explained in Chapter 2. These novels, however, go beyond simply allegorically representing those issues. In their tone and enunciation there seems to be an intention to denounce these problems and force the reader to take a stance. More pointedly, in the Mexican novels analyzed here, the learning or moment of revelation occurs in the metafictional figure of the reader. This occurs throughout *Morirás lejos*, but is also one of the key elements of novels like Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro*. As analyzed in Chapter 3, for instance, in Volpi's novel the figures of the narrator and the reader become muddled, and the reader is often described as having been an accomplice or even active participant in the heinous acts described in the narration. Since the figure of the reader is at the mercy of the events being narrated, without an opportunity to stop the action, I interpret this element as Volpi's rhetorical tool to emphasize the dangers of remaining silent or inactive in the face of human right abuses or violent crimes.

The emphasis placed on forcing the reader to take a stance on what is being narrated, particularly in the Mexican novels, but also implicitly present in the Argentine ones, allows one to characterize these texts as pedagogical allegories. According to Katherine Sugg, these pedagogical intentions have their roots in classical allegory and “rely upon the reader-audience in producing narratives of revolutionary change” (77). She also explains that Benjamin posited that such pedagogical allegories “signal the specific and constraining work of history in narrative production—the precise historical moment on the text's enunciation and reception” (77). It is significant that allegorical representations of Nazism in Latin American literature have these

pedagogical intentions because that is one element that is necessary for interlocking allegories to function. As explained in the introduction, my readings of these texts are informed by Doris Sommer's understanding of dialectical or interlocking allegories, which are characterized by denying "an eternal level of referentiality" in which sign and referent are mirroring each other (78). Instead, in these allegories, sign and referent are constantly building upon each other. In other words, these allegories attempt to have an effect on that which is being allegorized. In order for this theoretical posit to function, there has to be a pedagogical element that fuels the constant change in society that, in turn, keeps alive the constant building of sign and referent. It is my intention to continue researching these allegorical representations of Nazism and other World War II historical events by authors from other regions of Latin America. In future research, my main purpose will be to verify if these same types of representations in other regions are also fueled by interlocking and pedagogical allegories that refer to local moments of crisis.

Before I continue to delineate the ways in which I can expand the research of representations of Nazism in Hispanic literature, it should be noted that there are a few authors and works that are normally associated with Latin American literary representations of Nazism that I consciously did not include in this study. As I illustrate in the next section, these deliberate omissions will allow me to continue researching and expanding the topics covered in this dissertation. In what follows I offer an overview of the numerous possible topics that I can explore by increasing the scope of this dissertation.

### **Expanding the Scope: Bolaño, Crack Writers, and Other Possible Research Projects**

After a short pause, Costa Rican poet Luis Chaves opened his eyes widely and said excitedly, “That is a great topic! You are including Bolaño, right?” I had just told him about the topic of this dissertation. We had met barely a few minutes prior to this conversation taking place, but we were already sitting next to each other on the edge of a San José sidewalk in a familiar manner, talking about his literary projects and my academic interests. I answered that I was an avid reader of Roberto Bolaño and that his works were one of the main reasons why I decided to analyze Latin American representations of Nazism. However, I explained, due to the amount of academic studies focused on him already published, I was not sure I would include him in the dissertation. Chaves chuckled and said a bit disappointedly: “Yeah, I get it. They sort of took him away from us, didn’t they?” For me this was an all-too-familiar conversation.

Whenever I would discuss my dissertation topic with my peers or with people familiarized with contemporary Latin American literature, most would comment that it was about time somebody looked into the topic in depth. Then they would usually also ask about Bolaño and some of the Mexican Crack writers like Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, and Pedro Ángel Palou. When I expand this dissertation into a longer manuscript, incorporating Bolaño into my readings of representations of Nazism will not only be beneficial, but also necessary. As I explain in the introduction, one of my main future goals is to integrate the late-1990s works considered part of the Crack movement into my analysis of Mexican representations of Nazism. It would be impossible to analyze the thematic and even structural evolution of more recent works by Crack writers like Volpi without taking into account the possible influence Bolaño had on these authors, particularly his novel *2666* (2003). I expect that this new project will focus on the changes that I perceive occurred between the Crack members’ earliest works focusing on

Nazism, and those published after 2006, the year that narco-violence spread from Mexico's northern border to most of the nation.

As explained in Chapter 3, academics like Héctor Hoyos have noted that the literary representations of Nazism in Latin America are intertwined with globalization discourses and, as such, are heavily mediated by cinema and popular culture (58-59). He also notes that in contrast to Bolaño, Crack writers like Volpi and Padilla have focused on superficial elements of the Third Reich in their works by reclaiming “the surface of Nazism, so to speak—hence the emphasis on names and mainstream visual cues” (58). Regardless of whether there may be a possible lack of profoundness in the representation of Nazism in some of the Crack writers' works in comparison to the texts penned by Bolaño, in the future I will analyze these Mexican works in depth. I am particularly interested in continuing the work of academics like Maarten Van Delden, who have argued that even novels like Padilla's *Amphitryon*, normally associated with the Crack's mantra of distancing their narratives from a Mexican setting, should be read in the local context in which they were written. For instance, he argues that major historical events that occurred in Mexico in the 1990s, including the assassination of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994, filtered into *Amphitryon* and are implicit in Padilla's understanding of World War II (572). I believe that the rest of the corpus produced by Crack writers, particularly the novels set during Nazi Germany, need to be reexamined by focusing on the Mexican context in which they were written.

I also believe that many of Bolaño's works demand to be studied as part of the overarching phenomenon of Latin American literary representations of Nazism and other World War II historical events. An analysis of Bolaño's representations of Nazism in several of his texts, including *Literatura nazi en Latinoamérica* (1996) and *Estrella distante* (1996), among

other works, will open the door to also expand the geographical limits of the authors and works analyzed in this dissertation, particularly to other Southern Cone countries. Bolaño is certainly not the only Chilean writer to fictionalize Nazism or other World War II historical events. Like in Argentina, some Chilean authors have connected these historical events with the 1973-1990 dictatorship in their fiction works. Some of the authors that have published novels that feature representations of Nazism or the Holocaust include Roberto Ampuero, Carlos Basso, Francisco Ortega, Luis Sepúlveda, and Miguel Vera Superbi.<sup>42</sup> Similar to representations of Nazism by authors from Argentina and Mexico, Chilean works have not been analyzed academically as an overarching literary phenomenon in Latin America. Likewise, there are several Uruguayan works that still need to be analyzed and incorporated into a much broader study of these types of fictionalizations.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that although this study focuses strictly on novels, there is a body of literary works in poetry, drama, and short fiction that reference Nazism, the Holocaust, and other historical figures and events from World War II. The topics have also been represented in several Latin American films that have not received much attention from academics. An

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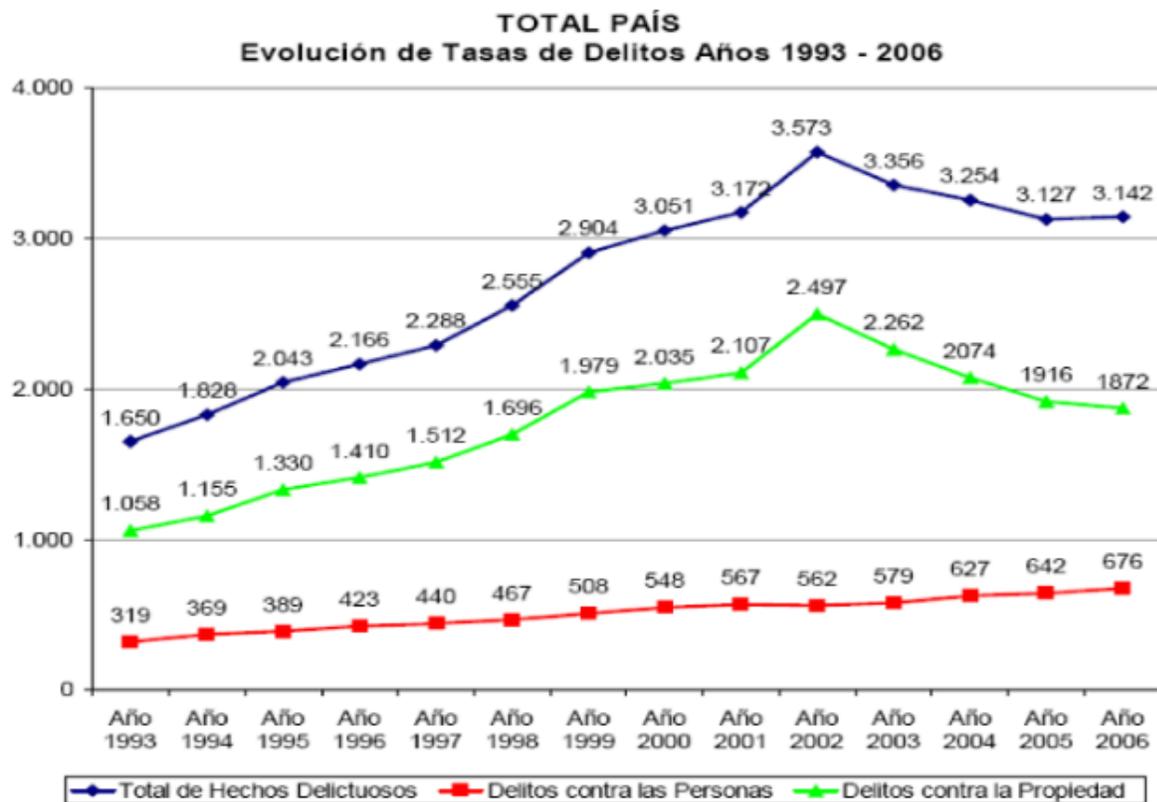
<sup>42</sup> Some of the Chilean works that fictionalize Nazism include: *El caso Neruda* (2008), by Roberto Ampuero; *Código Chile* (2015) by Carlos Basso; *El verbo Kaifman* (2013), by Francisco Ortega; *Nombre de torero* (1994), by Luis Sepúlveda; and *1946: Nazis en Chile* (2015), by Miguel Vera.

<sup>43</sup> Uruguayan works that contain fictionalizations of Nazism and the Holocaust include Ruperto Long's *La niña que miraba los trenes partir* (2016), Mauricio Rosencof's *Las cartas que no llegaron* (2000), and Ana Solari's *El señor Fischer* (2011).

analysis of these works is necessary to continue shedding light into how these tropes are produced and consumed on this continent.

More than anything, however, I am interested in returning in a few years to the Argentine and Mexican literary representations of Nazism and World War II that I have analyzed throughout the previous chapters to reevaluate them and dialogue with them once more. As I have shown throughout my examination of these works, I believe that the elasticity of allegory allows one to read literary texts and even historical events differently at different times and under different contexts. I did not decide to open this study with a brief analysis of Pacheco's *Morirás lejos* solely because of its status as the first Latin American novel that fictionalizes Nazism and the Holocaust. It is also a novel that has been often described as relevant and contemporary even decades after it was first written. *Morirás lejos*' structure and subject matter invites multiple possible readings, including new interpretations that are only possible by new horizons of expectations that opened up under new contexts of social and political changes. Therefore, how will the other literary representations of Nazism analyzed here be read years from now, under a different context, with even more critical distance than now? The malleable and elastic character of allegories keeps me eagerly looking forward to the prospect of continuing to expand this study in the years to come.





**Fig. 2.** Yearly number of crimes in Argentina from 1993 to 2006. The graphic shows that crime steadily declined after 2002. Organización de los Estados Americanos: Dirección Nacional de Política Criminal, 2008.



El hecho de que Felipe Calderón sea idéntico a Winston Churchill, no es la única similitud entre la Segunda Guerra Mundial y la guerra contra el narco.

San Fernando, Tamaulipas, tendrá un cambio de nombre a instancias de Sir Winston de Jesús.



## El pequeño Churchill



Fig. 3. The first number of Helguera's "El Pequeño Churchill." *Proceso*, May 22, 2011.

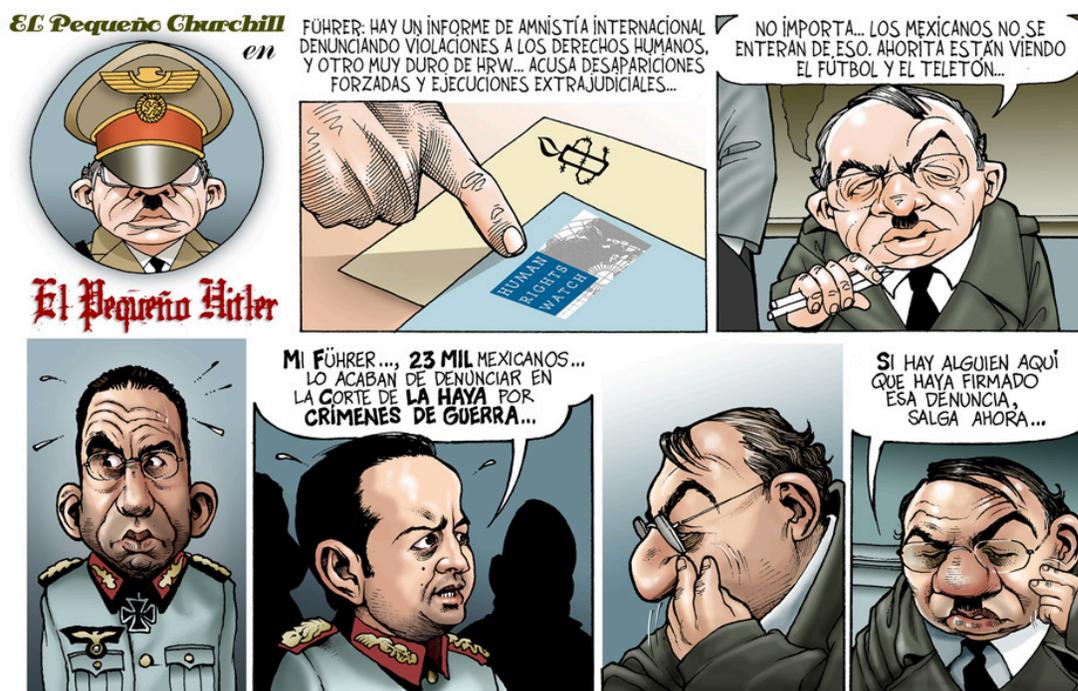
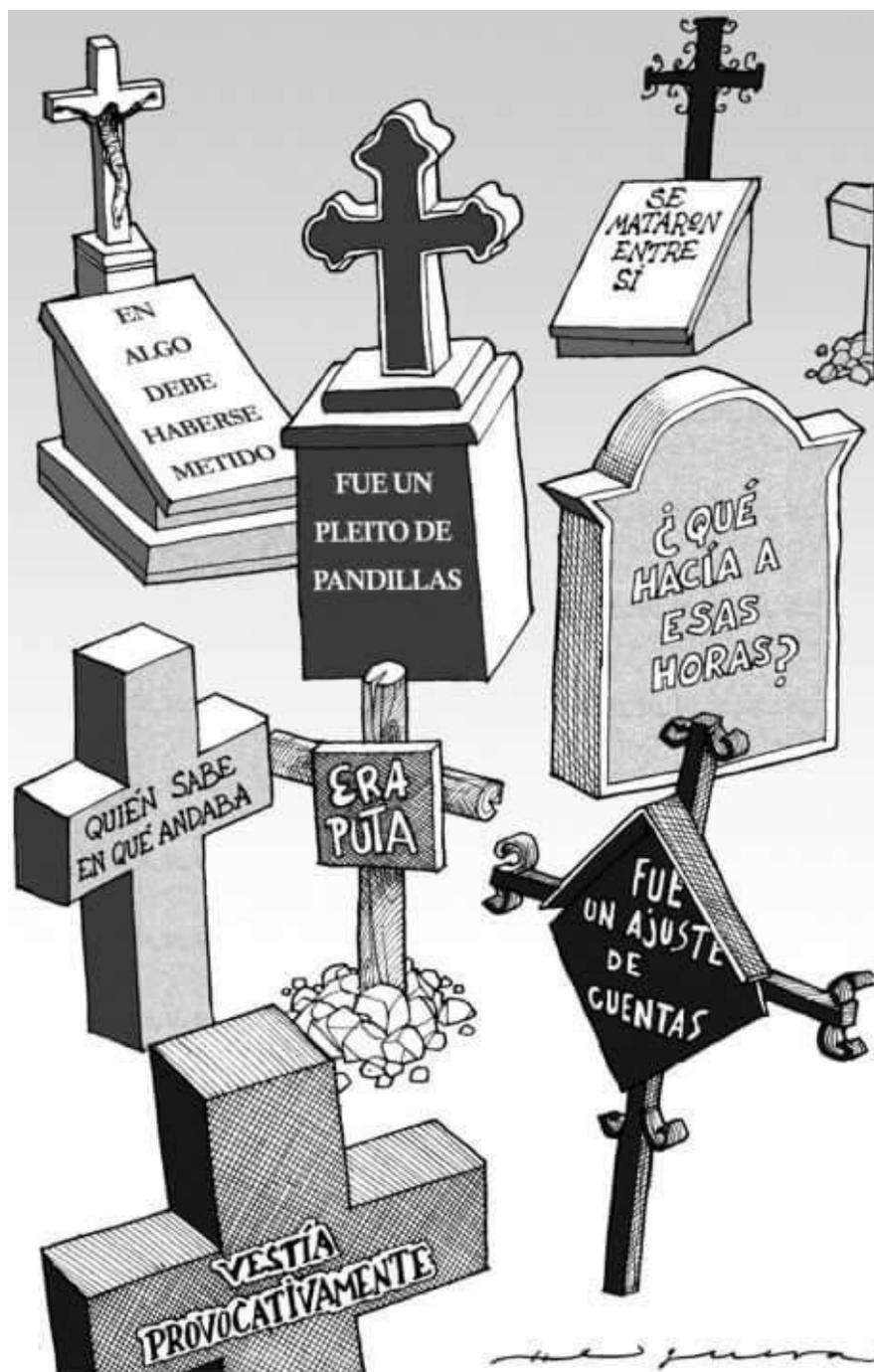


Fig. 4. Helguera's depiction of President Calderón as Hitler in "El Pequeño Churchill." *Proceso*,

Dic. 4, 2011.



**Fig. 5.** Helguera's political cartoon depicting the official discourse that criminalizes victims of violence in Mexico. *La Jornada*, March 15, 2010.

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