Preface

This book explores some of the consequences of political and state violence in Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s. Over the last few decades, moral and political claims about how this past should collectively be remembered by the nation have caused deep political and societal divisions. This book's findings are based on interviews I conducted with women from two ideologically-opposed groups, each of which is connected to antithetical versions of the recent Argentinian past. These interviews elicited memories of trauma and narratives which do not sit comfortably with the forgetful objectives of transitional justice. The research herein contributes to our understanding of the power and significance of the deep emotions and affects that shape memories in post-transitional contexts.

I went to Argentina with my husband and my 3-year-old daughter Bonnie in 2008, seeking to interview women who were living with traumatic memories of violence and loss. More than three decades since the completion of a transitional process of truth and justice was declared in Argentina, I wished to analyse women's memories of violence in light of their subsequent experiences and, with temporal distance, to understand any reinterpretations or new meanings they may have made to their lived experiences. I was therefore drawn to exploring the process of Argentine women recalling their individual past memories and the various internal layers and levels at which this takes place. I was deeply interested in gaining insight into the myriad issues that impact on the women's assimilation of their traumatic pasts.

Women play a key role in transmitting memories to the next generation in Argentina, and as such are an important source in understanding this historical period of political and state violence. As the majority of those who were disappeared during the military dictatorship were men, many women became the main providers for their single-parent households. In fact, 70% of those who were disappeared were male (Crenzel 2008). Left to bear the burden of mourning, to endure their own loss and grief and sometimes that of their children, the women I interviewed had faced enormous emotional torment over many years. However, many of them made new 'homes' and forged new 'families' on the basis of political ties. These families were paramount in the creation of many of the human rights organisations that emerged out of the dictatorship, driven by a moral and cultural imperative to remember the past in order to prevent it from happening again. In publicly and privately remembering the past, they have played, and continue to play, an important role in the creation and shaping of collective identities.

While it is clear that women have done, and continue to do, the lion's share of work in terms of remembering the political and state violence of the 1970s and 1980s, this was not the sole reason why I became interested in exploring women's traumatic memories of loss and violence in Argentina. My other reasons were more personal. Over a number of years in my work as a Protection Delegate with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), I engaged primarily with women to record human rights abuses in the aftermath of conflict, given that the majority of men had been imprisoned or killed in the communities in which I worked. As the women—often surrounded by their children—told me their painful stories, the powerful role they played in the intergenerational transmission of their memories of violence in a post-conflict environment became very clear. Studies have shown collective memory to be the cross-generational oral transmission of events deemed socially important for a society (Leydesdorff et al. 2005). Despite women playing a central role in the transmission of memory to the next generation, in many transitional contexts the role women play is marginalised; their memories of violence are pushed out to the margins of the public sphere.

In Argentina, however, there is a direct connection between women remembering experiences of violence at a grassroots level and their attempt to gain a place in the public sphere. Important works by Elizabeth Jelin (1990) and Temma Kaplan (1997, 2004) have made a direct appeal for the reinvention of democratic values and human rights based on oral histories (Leydesdorff et al. 2005). I suggest that we can learn a great deal from looking at how Argentine women have mediated and assimilated their traumatic pasts, both publicly and privately, as well as the ways in which their practices of remembrance impact and shape social relations, and apply these learnings to better understanding women's experiences of violence in other transitional contexts.

I had the opportunity to talk to two different groups of Argentine women who represent two very different versions of the recent Argentinian past: those affected by military repression *and* those affected by armed guerrilla violence. The women's memories of loss and violence have been shaped by the fissure of decades-old, deep-seated social and political animosity. The memories of enduring personal trauma that both groups of women carry are commonly perceived as incompatible and unable to coexist in a shared mnemonic space—as if remembering one history of violence is immediately seen as an attempt to forget or violate the other history of violence and trauma.

This book explores the evolving and complex historical, political, social, legal and cultural factors that have shaped the cultures of remembrance in the post-dictatorial Argentina. However, in the story of remembering and forgetting, these factors—though essential—are not sufficient to account for the animosity pervading Argentine memorial cultures. I contend that we need to look beyond political and ideological contestations to a deeper level of how memorial cultures are formed and sustained. I argue that we cannot account for the politics of memory in modern-day Argentina without acknowledging and exploring the role played by individual emotions and affects in generating and shaping collective emotions and affects. Affect

may be a pre-political and pre-social force, but I argue that it has major consequences for the perpetuation of fault-lines running across particular memorial cultures.

I avoid cleansing oral testimony of its emotional and affective dimensions. Instead, I explore how the women's affective memories of trauma offer a type of indispensable truth about the political and state violence of the 1970s and 1980s. Patricia Yaeger (2006, p. 413) tells us that 'if recent scholarship on trauma teaches us anything, it is that testimony demands more in the way of nearness, proximity, entanglement: not less'. Thus, I turn my attention to the affective residues held within the women's personal memories of violence and loss. I apply oral testimony as a methodological tool differently from the ways in which it has been traditionally used in Argentina. I drill down underneath the women's more formalised accounts of historical events and engage with the inaccessible, unconscious and inexpressible layers of the women's affective memories of trauma. I uncover those memories so that can remain vulnerable to revival and reveal themselves in affectively powerful ways. This approach is designed to help understand how these memories may be a different source of insight into the deep animosities within and between Argentine memorial cultures.

This study does not attempt to establish a hierarchy of suffering or make judgements about the equivalence or non-equivalence of the violence that was inflicted by the state and the armed political groups. To take a revisionist path to this research would only contribute to an already extremely polarised debate. I have consistently faced criticism from others within the academy for having engaged individuals affected by the violence of the armed guerrilla movement. I have often been called upon to defend the reasons why I chose to give space to these individuals to talk about their traumatic experiences. It is as if the topic of those affected by armed guerrilla violence is a taboo subject, and in raising it I have threatened a fragile sense of balance. I would argue that these sorts of reactions are a symptom of the antagonisms that I am attempting to describe. Debates about the equivalence or non-equivalence of the violence suffered by these two groups of women do not justify dismissing the value of a study of both groups' testimonies. Argentina is a very divided society in which there are different groups of victims resulting from the period of violence between 1973 and 1983. I consider it valuable to produce new lines of sight into the lived experiences of the different social groups affected by the violence. This book considers a different approach to the way this decades-old conflict is remembered, and therefore goes beyond these old, ideological ways of thinking about the past.

The first part of the book explores the myriad issues that impact on the women's assimilation of their traumatic pasts, particularly when the political and social legitimation of their memories has been radically different. I consider the historical, political, legal and social factors that shape the politics of remembering in Argentina. The book opens with an Introduction, which explores the complexities inherent in remembering the past for the two groups of women I interviewed. It also discusses the way I worked in Argentina to gather and present testimony from the women I interviewed.

In Chap. 2 (Argentina 1969–2003), I synthesise the existing body of literature to trace the historical events of a very complex period for Argentina. I develop an account of the traumatising politics that produced the divided memories of the two groups of women I interviewed. I cover four key periods relevant to this study: the period of guerrilla violence (1969–1976); the military dictatorship (1976–1983); the creation and function of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) and the trials of the military juntas (1983–1985); and the legacy of both the military dictatorship and guerrilla violence (1983–2003).

In Chap. 3 (Politics of Remembering the Military Dictatorship and Its Aftermath) and Chap. 4 (Politics of Remembering Armed Guerrilla Violence), I consider how decisions about the ways in which memorial culture was created following the return to democratic rule have had crucial implications for the politics of remembering and oblivion. The various ways in which the Argentine public sphere has become an arena of struggle over how to remember the political and state violence of the 1970s and 1980s are analysed, as will the two groups' subsequent struggles for the political, social, legal and moral recognition of their traumatic memories.

In the second half of the book, I extend the conversation by looking at both groups' struggle through an affective lens—one that foregrounds the many varied legacies and traces of individual and collective trauma. What sort of account of memory cultures in the post-authoritarian Argentina could be created if trauma became our starting point? I engage in depth with three concepts I consider crucial: 'deep memory', the transmission of emotions and affects, and the social phenomenon of haunting. In Chap. 5 (Deep Memory), I consider how individual memory may be structurally transformed by trauma. I draw on Charlotte Delbo's notion of 'deep memory', and consider how those mnemonic layers that are unconscious, inexpressible and uncontainable in language—lodged deeply within a survivor's body—can be prone to involuntary eruptions. Delbo's concept provides a powerful way of understanding the vital role deep memory plays in producing real-time somatic experiences for the women I interviewed.

In Chap. 6 (Social Forces Shaping Memory Transmission), I consider the interpersonal pathways of traumatic histories and memories. I focus on the transmission of emotions and affect as structuring of individual and group identities as well as of the continuously refashioned public sphere itself. I explore the role of the transmission of emotions and affects with regard to how and why they can stir individuals and collectives to such an extent that the past continues to operate as a source of social and political division.

In Chap. 7 (Haunting), I map the traumatic legacies of Argentina's recent history on a societal level by turning my attention to the notion of haunting. I consider what happens to the psychic life of a society when it endures impossible, irresolvable and protracted mourning and loss in the wake of mass violence. I contemplate how the stasis of haunting at both an individual and societal level can be such that transformative and discursive possibilities between competing memorial cultures are prevented from emerging.

In the final chapter (Chap. 8), I consider how the exploration of these women's affective memories produces a different kind of narrative about how remembrance

has worked in Argentina over the past decades. In direct contrast to the nominally objective and universalist sensibility that traditionally has driven transitional justice endeavours, I look at how affective memories of trauma are a potentially disruptive power within the ‘reconciliation paradigm’, and thus need to be taken into account. I think about what it means to reimagine memorial culture and key notions around transitional justice if we are to extend the current framework to include affect. I also consider how my research findings in relation to Argentina may prove illuminating for other transitioning contexts and may benefit women survivors in other contexts dealing with the aftermath of trauma.

I have received an inordinate amount of support since beginning this journey. First of all, my deepest debt is to the extraordinary Argentine women who trusted me with their memories and their stories. It is their insights and experiences that grant this book whatever power and authenticity it may possess. I would like to highlight my gratitude to a number of organisations in Argentina, including Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, Las Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Politicas, El Centro de Estudios Legales sobre el Terrorismo y sus Víctimas and Memoria Abierta, all of which contributed generously of their time, records and sensibilities. Thanks to the Swinburne Institute for Social Research of Swinburne University, for its support, both moral and financial, particularly during my 12-month stay in Argentina. My thanks to Dr Chris Healy and my deepest gratitude to Dr Maria Tumarkin, who stuck with me the entire way. Maria, thank you for your faith, guidance, friendship, never-ending support, generosity and the sharing of your wisdom and intelligence. I am also grateful for the personal support of my friends and family. You all believed in me more than I did myself, and for this I am deeply grateful. To my Davy darling, there are no words. Thank you Billy Sundance, my turbo- booster near the end. And thanks to my BonBon, who sat on Irma’s knee and demonstrated that I was not dreaming after all.

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