

Dealing With the Past: Survivors' Perspectives on Economic Reparations in Argentina

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The experiences of persons affected by gross human rights violations during the dictatorship in Argentina, with regard to economic reparations for their suffering and losses, were explored. Thirty-seven participants were interviewed, 35 of whom were survivors and/or family members of persons seriously affected by the violence during the period from 1976 to 1983. Economic reparations form part of the Argentine state's efforts to deal with the atrocities of the past, with such reparations constituting one of the transitional justice mechanisms implemented. The findings suggest that economic reparation, especially in the absence of justice, was regarded as problematic and contradictory by most participants. Thus, the reactions to economic reparation seem related to the context in which it was provided and to what it was provided for. Accepting reparations for oneself was less problematic than accepting it for disappeared family members. Nevertheless, some of the participants regarded the provision of reparation as a form of public confirmation of the injustice done. The study underscores the importance of a broader transitional justice process, including access to truth and legal justice.

Keywords: reparation and redress, trauma, justice, human rights violations, Argentina

The right to redress for victims of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide is soundly established as a right under international law, including both the right to an “effective remedy” and to “reparation” (Ferstman, Goetz, & Stephens, 2009; Redress, 2009; United Nations Convention Against Torture [UNCAT], 2012). Reparation refers to ways in which the victim can be restored (Wemmer,

2014), and it may be understood as attempts to reestablish dignity, recreate a sense of balance, and reconstruct a life after human rights violations (Sveaass, 2013). Reparation may take many forms. The adoption of the U.N. General Assembly Resolution in December 2005 on “The Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law” states that victims of such crimes should “be provided with full and effective reparation, as laid out in principles 19 to 23, which include the following forms: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition” (United Nation General Assembly Resolution 60/147, 2005, para. 18, p. 1; van Boven, 2009).

Most people who have suffered serious human rights violations will probably never be provided with either full or effective reparation. State policies or procedures for receiving complaints, conducting investigations, and delivering reparations through judicial or administrative processes are still scarce in many places despite these policies being obligatory under

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international human rights laws, in particular the U.N. Convention Against Torture (United Nation, 1984). The judicial and nonjudicial measures dealing with the effects of massive human rights abuses are often referred to as transitional justice. Such processes can include criminal prosecutions, programs of reparation, truth commissions, and institutional reforms (de Greiff, 2006). Given these far-reaching initiatives, there is a need to know more about the experiences and reactions of victims when faced with the attempts of societies in transition to deal with the atrocities of the past.

Current Study: Victims' Perception of Economic Reparations

Economic reparation as one form of reparation and as a part of transitional justice is the focus of this study. The aim is to explore how survivors of gross human rights violations and relatives of victims of enforced disappearances perceive and experience economic reparations initiated by the state in Argentina in the wake of the so-called "dirty war." We examine possible relationships among how reparations are perceived, the type of traumatic events experienced, the point in time at which reparations were offered, and whether reparations were part of a broader legal process or a stand-alone measure in a period of impunity. Central questions included whether receiving reparations meant that some form of justice had been done and what the receipt of reparations meant in terms of dealing with the past.

Reparation, Trauma, and Healing

Gross human rights violations represent serious threats to mental health and often have wide-ranging consequences in the lives of victims (Sveaass, 1994). Psychological trauma is frequently described as a rupture, a serious disruption, or something that shatters basic assumptions in a person's life (Danieli, 2014; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This implies that the regular function of the person and his or her activity, sense of self, and the relation to others and to the world are profoundly altered. The term "broken spirit" further indicates that trauma is something that fractures the soul, self, and identity (Wilson, 2004). With respect to

human rights violations and acts intentionally aimed at creating suffering and pain, psychological trauma may change one's sense of meaning and values; the violations represent an attack on dignity at the individual and group level and have been characterized as "systematic destruction of meaning" (Sveaass, 1994). Traumatic events may disrupt the sense of being safe or protected and the world becomes an unsafe place (Herman, 1992). What has formerly given protection no longer does so, rendering people vulnerable and exposed. Psychologically different reactions may emerge, from depression, withdrawal, apathy, and anxiety to anger, aggression, or determination to fight injustice and rights violations. Among the frequent consequences are involuntary and intrusive memories, recurring sensations, and other symptoms characteristic of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Bisson, 2007). Formerly neutral events trigger traumatic memories, render the person vulnerable, and make healing and reconstruction of life's meaning difficult.

The question raised by trauma therapists over the years is: what is the most effective form of therapy and what is needed to establish reduction of symptoms and regain a will to live and hope? How can the damage be repaired? Furthermore, after systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations, the question is also: what must be done at a collective level, in the community or at the state level, to heal trauma and deal with the past? This implies that individual trauma healing is not sufficient and that what happens to others and the community is of essence (Kordon, Edelman, Lagos, & Kersner, 2010). This is where the discussion of the potential healing aspects of transitional justice mechanisms becomes so central, and the question as to ways of "repairing the irreparable" so relevant (Hamber, 2000). Thus, what is the meaning of reparation for those affected by the violence and what are their reactions to the attempts to mend or repair? Wemmer (2014) argues that neither a purely legal nor a purely psychological approach is sufficient when looking into the relationship between justice and victims' needs. What lies between is a perspective that "considers the psychological effects of legal processes and addresses the impact of the law and legal procedures on those involved such as victims" (Wemmer, 2014, p. 2).

Studies on Transitional Justice and Victims' Needs

Despite increasing interest in transitional justice, the number of empirical studies directly addressing the experiences of victims and the opinions of survivors regarding reparations and other transitional justice measures, such as truth commissions, court trials, construction of memorial sites, and restitution of livelihoods, is still relatively limited (Danieli, 2014; Hamber, 2009; Stover, 2005; van der Merwe, Baxter, & Chapman, 2009). Some studies have focused on the importance of restoring livelihoods and health care (Robins, 2013) whereas others have identified the need and expectations of victims to see that justice is done (Victims' Rights Working Group, 2010). The dilemmas that victims face with respect to justice, in particular when they are disinclined to pursue legal justice because of a lack of trust and limited information as to procedures and consequences, have been highlighted (Hamber, 2009; Kordon et al., 2010). Other studies have shown that, under the right conditions, witnesses, at least in international courts, experienced some form of relief in feeling that the courts had acknowledged their suffering (Horn, Charters, & Vahidy, 2009) and helped them discharge their moral duty to testify on behalf of the dead (Stover, 2005). However, Stover (2005) also points to the hardships involved in being witnesses in such trials. Over the years, Yael Danieli has studied the role of justice, legal justice, and reparation, including memorials for victims both of holocaust and other more recent human rights violations, and has described how different forms of justice mechanisms may contribute to reestablish dignity and power and reduce stigma and estrangement from society (Danieli, 1992, 2009, 2014).

Trials and reparation, and their roles in victims' experiences, together with the endless pain involved in being family members of disappeared persons, have been explored through analysis of clinical work, particularly by psychotherapists in Latin America. As revealed in themes reported in clinical settings, victims' demands for truth and justice, and the claim that those responsible must disclose what happened to the disappeared persons, were central (Kordon, Edelman, Lagos, & Kersner, 1995; Lira, 2010; Loveman & Lira, 2002; Rojas Baeza, 1993, 2000, 2009). Standing witness in court

and observing that those responsible have been detained may be experienced as a personal triumph (Edelman, 2010). Finally, the importance of support to the witnesses when they present evidence in court has been underscored (Horn et al., 2009; Lagos, 2010).

Studies that have looked into attempts at establishing truth after violations, such as through truth commissions, suggest that establishing truth is paramount but not always enough (de Greiff, 2006; Skaar, 2005). In South Africa, even after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) had taken place, victims still expressed a need to know more about what happened in the past and wished for further dialogue between victims and offenders to have a more detailed understanding of what had taken place (Heylen, Parmentier, & Weitekamp, 2010). The authors found that symbolic and material reparations seemed to be a precondition for reconciliation (Heylen et al., 2010). Studies from Peru further suggest that after the initiatives to establish truth, victims raised demands for individual reparations, including economic reparations themselves (Laplante & Theidon, 2007). In a multicountry study of survivors' perceptions of truth commissions and reparation, survivors from Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and South Africa emphasized the importance of truth and public confirmation of what had taken place. Although many of the survivors lived in poverty-stricken areas, economic reparations did not seem to be prioritized (Espinoza Cuevas, Ortiz Rojas, & Rojas Baeza, 2003).

A survey conducted among former political prisoners in the Czech Republic concluded that for individual reparation to be successful, it should "be an organic part of a broader policy of social reconstruction" and that "reparation must be regarded as a two-dimensional process incorporating socio-political redress and inner healing" (David & Choi, 2005, p. 393). Likewise, Viaene (2010), based on her studies in Guatemala, argues that reparation schemes must be locally rooted and culturally sensitive to address the real needs and experiences of those affected by human rights violations.

This brief review of some of the relevant literature underscores the need for further studies exploring different aspects of redress in relation to violations, trauma, and the possibility of dealing with the past for those who have been

victimized. However, severe human rights violations can never be undone, and attempts to redress such violations may at best be considered as ways in which damage is acknowledged, an acceptance that harm has taken place, and possibly that somebody will be held accountable (Sveaass, 2013). Various forms of reparation have been described and developed in line with international human rights aspirations, including the right to rehabilitation for victims of torture (UNCAT, 2012). How reparation impacts those affected and what conditions must be met for reparations to make any sense, or be experienced as in any way repairing, remain issues that must be further addressed.

The present study explored Argentine victims' experiences with economic reparations that were introduced during a period when access to justice was very limited. The reparations have continued to exist as the process of dealing with the past has developed and other measures, such as trials, have been implemented. The experiences of those affected by state violence, and how those experiences have changed over time as the political situation and the process of transitional justice have changed, will be addressed.

Argentina Under and After the Dictatorship: Some Background

The human rights violations in Argentina referred to here, such as arbitrary arrests, torture, and forced disappearances, were committed in the period from 1974 to 1983, but mainly after the military coup in 1976. A National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), established soon after the transition to democracy in 1983, identified 8,961 persons who forcibly disappeared (CONADEP, 1984). This is currently the only official number, yet there are reasons to believe it is much higher. The human rights movement often refers to 30,000. The information gathered by CONADEP formed the basis for the trial against the military juntas in 1985, in which five of the nine former junta leaders were convicted and sentenced and four were acquitted (Bartolomei, 1994). The first reparation laws were established in the 1980s, based on recommendations from CONADEP. These reparation schemes granted a monthly pension to children of the disappeared who were under the age of 21 years

and to spouses, siblings, and children of the disappeared who found themselves unable to work; those schemes were generally accepted by the victims.

The trials against the juntas were followed by more trials, mainly against persons within the armed forces, and were met by military uprisings. In 1986 and 1987, two laws were passed abolishing criminal prosecutions of the serious human rights violations committed during the military regime. These laws created a *de facto* amnesty in the name of "reconciliation" and the need to "heal the wounds of the past" (Bartolomei, 1994, p. 296; Skaar, 2005). A policy of pardons and impunity was adopted. The policy of human rights shifted from "truth and justice" under Alfonsín to a policy of "forget and forgive" under Menem (Skaar, 2005). The principal reparation laws were passed during this period. The reparations for having been illegally detained or imprisoned were mainly accepted by the survivors, but reparations provided to the relatives of disappeared persons were highly contested. What made these reparations so difficult was that receiving them was based on the presumption that the person was dead, not only disappeared. In addition, they experienced the moral dilemma over accepting money for family members who had been abducted as part of willful acts. Nevertheless, the legal status "absent by enforced disappearance" in Law 24.321, as adopted in 1994, was understood by the victims as an acknowledgment of forced disappearances of persons (Guembe, 2006).

Victims had to apply for the established reparations; they were not otherwise granted. The benefit awarded to relatives of disappeared persons was 224,000 USD, paid in Bonds of Consolidation of the National Public Debt (Guembe, 2006); those who received the bonds had to renounce any further right to seek and obtain compensation for damages. Receiving bonds meant that one could exchange these bonds for a stated amount at a later point in time, but earlier exchange would result in less money. The laws providing economic reparations to minors, Law 25.914, came in 2004 (Secretariat of Human Rights, 2004) and covered children born in detention, children of disappeared mothers, and those whose identity had been changed. The issue of reparations was central in dividing the Mothers of the May Square in Buenos Aires in two organizations in

the 1990s. Although one of the groups argued that claiming reparations should be optional and decided individually, the other opposed such reparations as a matter of principle, arguing that receiving economic reparations would imply prostitution (Guembe, 2006) and in the words of one of the interviewees in this study, "selling the blood of their children." This position had a strong effect on many of the family members of the disappeared.

In June 2005, the amnesty laws were finally deemed unconstitutional after a decision by the Supreme Court. This opened the possibility of new trials and several trials have taken place and are still ongoing. The last provision regarding reparations came in 2009 and represented an expansion of earlier laws in relation to ex-detainees as well as persons killed or disappeared. Those who received reparation under this law did not need to refrain from other claims.

The period in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 is often called the "dirty war" and has been characterized as a period of great fear and fearful silence (Kordon & Edelman, 1986; Sveaass, 1994). People disappeared, but it was dangerous to seek information about their whereabouts or reveal anything about the circumstances surrounding their arrest or abduction. Rumors and misinformation were spread with the intent to create insecurity. The discourse of the dictatorship created ambiguity, lack of order, and constant anxiety of surveillance and threat (Kordon & Edelman, 1986). To protest or resist, through demonstrations in the streets, by presenting legal claims related to the disappearance of family members or other forms of action, required courage. However, for most people affected by the violence, including those who survived abductions and torture, it took years before they could speak about what they had endured during the dirty war. For some of the survivors, the fact that one had survived and so many had not was associated with stigma and guilt, making it especially difficult to discuss (Sveaass, 1994; Wornat & Lewin, 2014).

During the period of the dictatorship, enforced disappearances and torture were the most salient human rights abuses. Those are recognized as among the most serious violations of fundamental human rights and as crimes against humanity and the psychological trauma associated with them among the most devastating

forms of trauma (Sveaass, 2013; UNCAT, 2012). The wide-ranging question underlying the larger investigation from which the current study is extracted was how severe trauma could be redressed and how or whether measures of reparation play any part in the healing process. Do reparations in any way contribute to the process of coming to terms with traumatic events or in obtaining some form of psychological closure? The focus of this paper has a narrower ambition and concentrates on victims' reactions and reflections on the individual economic reparations provided to the survivors and relatives in Argentina from the 1990s and onward. How was the reparation program perceived at the time it was initiated, and how is it perceived today? Did the reparations offer any form of consolation, acknowledgment, or confirmation? Did they provide some healing or sense of justice? The main goal was to grasp survivors' and relatives' thoughts and feelings in relation to economic reparations and the meanings they attributed to the reparations.

Method

Research Team and Reflexivity

The present study represents part of a larger investigation "Dealing With the Past," which used various research approaches including field work, in-depth interviews with persons affected by serious human rights violations, interviews with persons who work professionally in the field (most of them psychologists, psychiatrists, and lawyers), and a review of relevant documents (Sveaass, Agger, Elsass, Hamber, & Sønneland, 2014). Here we report on interviews done in Argentina in collaboration with mental health professionals affiliated with the Argentina Team for Psychosocial Therapy (EATIP), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) engaged in work with survivors of illegal detention and relatives of persons who were forcedly disappeared or killed since the last military dictatorship. Both the members of the EATIP team and the Norwegian authors have conducted the interviews in accordance with an interview guide drawn up for the study by the authors. None of the interviewers had any therapeutic relationship to the persons interviewed. The EATIP team has extensive experience supporting persons affected by human rights violations

during the military regime. The members of the team also engaged in academic work as well as advocacy against impunity and amnesty laws, and as such their position in relation to these issues was not neutral. The invitation to take part in this study was written by the Norwegian researchers and distributed among those who during the actual period were in contact with the NGO in relation to the ongoing trials. Those who accepted the invitation were interviewed. As health professionals, the interviewers shared our (the Norwegian authors') interest in exploring the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of those participating in the court trials as survivors or as family members. The Norwegian researchers have over many years been engaged in the topic of transitional justice in Latin America, and one has also worked as a therapist to survivors and later refugees from the region. Thus, all researchers held positions related to the issue studied.

Participants

Those who were interviewed were involved with the ongoing national legal processes of justice in relation to the crimes against humanity committed by the dictatorship and their collaborators. They had testified, were going to testify, or both in cases that involved themselves directly or their family members. The sample was a strategic one in the sense that we wanted to explore the reactions of survivors or affected individuals who were in one way or another involved with the legal processes. At the time of the study, there were 374 trials taking place in Argentina and 1,861 persons were charged for crimes (Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales [CELS], 2012). The number of persons affected and engaged in the process of justice is not known. Some of the participants had testified in several court cases, many had testified for the Truth Commission (CONADEP) in the 1980s, and a few had testified in the trial against the military junta in 1984. The EATIP team contacted persons whose trials were either in process, had been before the court, or who were awaiting the trials, and they asked on behalf of the project whether they were willing to participate in the interview study.

This approach implied that we interviewed individuals who were in contact with the NGO

at the present or had been earlier. There may be systematic differences between those interviewed for this research and the universe of persons affected by the dictatorship. Our interviews were conducted in areas close to Buenos Aires. Most of those interviewed had testified in at least one trial, and although the status of being a witness in a criminal trial is not decided by each individual but by the court, there may be differences between this group and other affected persons who have not testified in court.

Thirty-seven individuals replied positively to the request about being interviewed (22 women). Except for three persons in their mid-30s, all were above the age of 60 years. All of them were strongly affected by the military dictatorship as described in the next section.

Procedure

The interviews took place between May 2011 and November 2012. Informed consent procedures emphasized confidentiality and the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. The semistructured interviews were conducted in Spanish and were audiotaped with permission. An interview guide designed by the authors was used throughout the study. This included questions about how the person had been affected (i.e., whether they had personally been detained/tortured or whether they were close family members of persons killed or disappeared or both). The interviews covered experiences with complaint mechanisms, trials, and reparation. Informants were asked whether their cases had already been to court, if trials were pending, and whether they were involved in more than one trial or had primarily been persons of support or accompanying persons. In addition, the distinction between being a *querellante* (plaintiff with special options) or a witness was drawn. A *querellante* is a victim and a claimant who is allowed to intervene at every stage of the criminal investigation and prosecution under the legal advice of a lawyer, who formally acts as a private prosecutor (Michel & Sikkink, 2013). We explored participants' history of reparation, at what point in time they had applied for and/or received reparation, and for what reasons. The reactions of family members and social networks with regard to reparations were included. Experiences with economic reparation and what this implied in terms of dealing with what had

happened were addressed, and finally how or in what way reparation had affected them. We asked about their thoughts regarding the trials, reflections on justice in general, and sense of whether any form of justice had been done. The informants were encouraged to talk freely about these topics.

The interviews lasted from 1 to 2 hr and were transcribed immediately after the interview. The transcriptions were not presented to the informants before analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions of the 37 interviews in Spanish varied from 3 to 16 single-spaced pages, most of them between 8 and 10 pages. They were thoroughly reviewed in the original Spanish with repeated readings by the researchers/authors. Ways of reducing the rich and comprehensive material into a more manageable form were discussed with the research team at EATIP. The two Norwegian researchers used the following steps and manual coding procedures. The first step was to identify particular, discrete aspects of the material. The features identified in the first round were whether the participants were abducted and exposed to torture in detention or whether they were family members of disappeared persons as well as their experiences with economic reparations and reflections linked to the general transitional justice process.

On the basis of this first step, the material was divided first into two groups depending on whether the informants themselves had been imprisoned and tortured ($n = 26$) or were relatives of persons who had disappeared ($n = 9$). The remaining two were excluded because although exposed to atrocities, neither had been imprisoned and tortured, nor did they have close family who had been imprisoned or disappeared. Of those who had been abducted personally, 17 of the informants were also involved in trials because of family members who were still missing. This meant that from the first category the interviews were read both from the point of view of reparations following one's own abduction and torture and those following missing family. This left us with three main groups: persons involved with trials because of own abduction, own abduction together with missing family, and those whose family was

disappeared but had not themselves been detained.

A thematic analysis approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method, was chosen for the coding and further analyses. Eight basic themes were identified: the first four covered exposure, complaints, role in trials, and economic reparation and the other four covered subjective experiences, such as dilemmas involved in applying for reparation, experiences with reparations provided, experiences with trials, and reflections on justice. In addition, a careful review of the methods used in the study at different stages, based on the checklist of items described for reporting qualitative data, was undertaken (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). The data are presented according to themes described earlier.

Results

Exposure

Of the 37 individuals interviewed, 26 (13 women) had been abducted and detained in concentration camps or prisons and subjected to torture, including sexual violence and other forms of ill-treatment, and had witnessed torture or death of others. Of these, 17 had also family members who were missing. Eleven of the interviewed had not been imprisoned. Of these, nine reported on disappeared family members. Two of the participants had different experiences and were not included in the further analysis. One had reported dead bodies in a makeshift grave at her workplace, resulting in serious threats, and one, herself a health-worker, had witnessed atrocities in a hospital during the military regime.

The three younger informants, all in their 30s, had experienced the disappearance of either one or both parents (one had lost one and two had lost both). One had also spent time in concentration camps at the age of 3 before her parents were disappeared or killed, and another had been present when the parents were violently abducted from their home. The third was illegally adopted into a family as a baby after her parents had disappeared, and this adoption was done under false pretenses and with the child's identity altered.

All of those arrested had been detained or abducted in their home or at work, and none had

been able to notify family members unless they had also been present at the time of arrest. One had been arrested only for 24 hr whereas the others has been arrested for a period between 2 months and several years. Informants reported that they were sent from one place to another multiple times. The interviewees were not asked about the kinds of trauma they were exposed to while detained, yet most of them chose to speak about these experiences, usually torture in the illegal detention centers. Many had also witnessed severe violence, including the killing of others. Being tortured implied being subjected to acts such as application of electricity; rape; extreme sexual violence while pregnant; and cutting, whipping, isolation, and harassment. The conditions of detention as they were described also met the criteria for torture—extreme heat, lack of food and/or water, and unbearable sleeping and hygiene conditions. Confusing information about what was going on outside and not being able to inform their families about what happened, combined with complete uncertainty as to whether they would survive, where they were, how long they would be there, and where they would be taken, were described as intensely distressful.

Those who lost family members had a wide range of experiences from having seen both parents abducted and never returned to having their husband, wife, sister, or brother taken away from home or never return from work. Some had recovered the remains whereas others still did not know anything about their loved ones.

Complaints, Trials, and Reparation

Habeas corpus claims about missing or unlawfully detained persons were reported raised in six cases during the dictatorship. Others had submitted complaints to international bodies such the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the Organization of American States, or the International Committee of the Red Cross. Many testified before CONADEP soon after the transition to democracy. Some testified in the first Trial of the Juntas, and later some in the Trial for Truth. Furthermore, participants were engaged in trials in different capacities. Tables 1 and 2 provide more details about trial participation and about participants' involvement as witnesses.

Table 1
Trial Experiences (N = 35)

Reason for trial participation	Participants involved in trials
Personal case only	9
Family case only	9
Personal and disappeared family case	17

Note. This table shows whether the trial is related to a crime committed toward the person interviewed or against a close family member. The table does not show how many trials the interviewees have been involved in. Many of the interviewees have also on a regular basis followed trials related to crimes committed against others.

Some participants had received economic compensation either for their personal experiences with abduction, detainment, or torture or for the suffering of family members (see Table 3). As to reparation for missing family, this was much more unclear; it seems that of the 17 also reporting on missing family, approximately 7 had received payment. There might have been more who did not wish to reveal this information. Of those who had presented complaints only in relation to disappeared family, six had received economic compensation for the loss of parents, siblings, or their spouse. In one family, six people were still missing.

Applying for Reparation

Taking the step to apply for reparation had been difficult for many. Applying or even deciding to apply was a tough emotional process and sometimes recalled painful experiences.

It was difficult to apply. It was like a bucket of cold water over my head. The moment you have to sign the documents is a difficult one, emotionally very hard to relate to everything that had happened to my mother, a lot of it that I never really understood.

Some decided alone, keeping it to themselves; some conferred with others and were encouraged to apply.

I did not want to apply at first. My daughter said I should; my son said no. But I received it twice. First time in the nineties—it was problematic. No money can pay for what they did to me. I told others I had applied. I regretted what I did afterward. But recently I received it for the PTSD . . . that was good. I was encouraged by my therapist. And it was a lot more than last time.

Some justified their application because of economic need and the injustice they had suf-

Table 2
Witness and Querellante (Private Prosecutor) Participation (N = 35)

Witness participation	Participants as court witnesses
Witness in Argentine court	33
Witness in several trials in Argentina	23
Witness in court outside of Argentina	5
Testified in CONADEP	20
<i>Juicio a las Juntas</i> (Trial of the Juntas) in the 1980s	5
<i>Juicio por la Verdad</i> (Trial for the Truth) in the 1990s	4
<i>Querellante</i> (private prosecutor) status	16

ferred. One woman said, "Receiving the reparation helped my economic situation and it was also a way of feeling some recognition, to be in the place of a survivor." Even so, she struggled with the justification and felt it would create problems in the context of her political activism. The general idea at the time was that those engaging in struggle for a different society and demanding accountability for those responsible for the crimes committed should not accept anything from the government.

Three confirmed that it had been especially difficult emotionally because of the way reparation for lost family members had been regarded, especially by some leading sectors in the Mothers in the May Square. Among the four informants who had never received reparation, two had actively opposed economic reparation as a form of redress and had not presented claims. "I never agreed with the idea of economic reparation. I would have been entitled to receive it but I never asked. I do not think that one can be repaired with money—ethically and politically it seems wrong."

Experiences With Reparation After Own Abduction

Many who had received reparation for detention and torture said it was a difficult reminder of their traumatic experiences. In response to whether they felt "repaired" in any way, the reply was a clear "no." Despite its ineffectiveness with emotional healing, the reparation was to some extent economically useful. However, based on the number of days detained, the payment for some was very small.

What I received was minimal because they gave us for days in detention. I was there for 58 days, not more, but all what they did to me . . . and being detained without knowing where I was, eat badly, live in terrible conditions and not knowing where my loved ones are . . . and if they are alive, this is torture. Nobody can pay me for what they did to me, and I sometimes regretted.

Another survivor expressed similar views:

I received economic reparation, and for me it was just an economic payback, but the damage is irreparable. It was not difficult for me to seek this, and I did not let it affect me, what they said about reparation. They (the military) had taken everything away from me—job,

Table 3
Economic Compensation (N = 35)

Reason for compensation eligibility	Participants reporting compensation ^a	Participants not reporting compensation ^b
Only participants were victims	5	4
Only family members were victims	6	3
Both participants and family members were victims	7	10

^a Only six participants reported receiving compensation after 2005. ^b The numbers include both participants who did not respond to whether they had received and those who did not receive.

university, husband . . . I had to maintain my life . . . They were giving us something we were missing . . . but nothing can take away the suffering and loss . . .

Although participants communicated that economic compensation had not helped them in any way, some nevertheless mentioned positive aspects in relation to the process. For example, it had allowed them to tell the story and that this had been useful. "I wrote down my story and sent it with someone else, because I could not go myself. That was quite good for me. But beyond this the reparations were not important emotionally or economically."

Telling the story to others was seen by many as a relief, but there was a general attitude that the reparation was limited. One informant said that the amount received was little compared with the money she had paid for psychological assistance for herself. Others explained that by the time they finally could change the bonds for money, the value had been strongly reduced. All of this added to the dubious character of the reparation, in particular in the 1990s.

Experiences With Reparation After Abduction of Self and Family Members

Many of the participants who had been abducted themselves were also involved in trials because of family members who were also abducted. They often made it clear that receiving reparation for oneself was different from receiving compensation on behalf of a disappeared family member. One interviewee emphasized that the money he had received was compensation only for his victimization; he made it very clear that it was not related to his mother's disappearance. He had never received anything for the crime against his mother and would never ask for it. Another participant adopted this same position, saying that one could apply for economic reparation for suffering one had endured oneself, but not as compensation for having lost a family member.

A younger informant received compensation both for the loss of her parents and for her own detention along with them. Although her grandmother had helped her seek this reparation, she was still conflicted about receiving the money:

I had discussed it with my family and they agreed. But it was a difficult decision to take because of what the mothers at the Plaza de Mayo said. The leader kept saying that to claim reparation was to prostitute one-

self, and this affected me strongly. But there were others there who supported me. And I bought a house with the money.

Experiences With Reparation on Behalf of Disappeared Family Members

Receiving reparation on account of lost family members was problematic for almost all, and their ambivalence with regard to applying for and receiving compensation was clear. For them, receiving reparations confirmed that their loved one was dead. Many described more intense difficulty when receiving reparations on behalf of the family member than for oneself. Some chose not to apply because of what such reparations implied, in addition to the strong resistance against the reparation scheme of the mid-1990s. There were also conflicts about reparations that ran deep in the families; members of the same family held different opinions about applying for and receiving compensation and in some cases it was only now that it was possible to talk about this conflict.

There were serious disagreements in my family, first in relation to reporting to CONADEP in the 80ties, and later when the issue of reparation came up. I said that I wanted to apply. My daughter supported me fully, but my son was very much against it. It was very difficult at the time.

When money was received in recognition of the disappearance of family members, the participants often referred to how the money was spent, such as in this example, "What we did with the reparations was really disastrous . . . In my case, the only good thing I did was to buy my house. But afterwards, I lent money to a relative for a business that went badly."

The money received was invested in different ways, including houses and contributions to political organizations. Participants often justified their use of the money. In our research material, we found that it seemed somewhat less distressing to receive reparation for children who had lost their parents than for parents who had lost children or spouses who had lost their spouse.

I received economic reparation for my disappeared sister. Someone told me, if you are granted it, why not take it? If they give us something it is because they have guilt and admit that they have done wrong, so why not receive it? I used it to buy an apartment in case my niece, born in captivity, appears one day . . . it was not as if I was the only one who used the money.

In this case, too, the participant communicated that the house was for the children of the disappeared family member.

Yes, I could buy a house for what they gave me. But it was difficult because of what they said—that by claiming this we prostitute ourselves. Sometimes I think—for the loss and absence of my mother they gave me money—it creates a lot of rage in me. But to drop it would also be wrong. It does not change your head in any way.

The Meaning of Reparation

Despite the controversial aspects of reparation, some participants referred to the reparations as a form of admission of wrongdoing and injustice on the part of the state and recognition of pain and loss. The fact that the authorities were willing to provide economic compensation for certain forms of violations was a way of confirming that those crimes had in fact taken place and that people had been wronged. The reparations were interpreted by many in this way, despite the state's lack of willingness to hold the responsible to account.

One participant who had received monetary reparations had to sign a document stating that he had been given reparation for spending 1,624 days in illegal detention. He said this was a highly emotional moment and confirmation and recognition of his suffering while abducted and unlawfully detained. Some informants referred to the time of fearful silence, contrasting it with the telling and recognition of the story in the aftermath. So, although the facts would not be investigated or those responsible punished, it nevertheless signified acknowledgment, rather than a blanket negation, of everything that happened. Thus, the reparations “proved” that wrongs had been done and as such could be accepted without feelings of guilt.

Reparations in Context

Participants dealt with economic reparation at different points in time. Some had received it early, some had received it twice, and some not at all, including those who refrained from applying. Participants indicated that reparations were experienced differently depending on when they were provided. One woman said,

When I first received reparation it was not much, and I felt it was difficult to get it. Actually I regretted afterward that I had done it. But the second time it was

different, this was later. My therapist suggested that I try again and I was well received. It was different.

Time frame and social-political context were important in evaluating the experience of receiving reparations. To receive reparations had been difficult in the 1990s, but less so later. The early reparations were offered at a point in time when there was no intention of bringing the perpetrators to justice and when those who applied had to renounce further compensation. Thus, these reparations were often interpreted politically as a means by which President Menem tried to “buy” silence and compliance. Many of the participants referred to this directly, either by saying that they would not accept reparation for fear of “being bought” or by those who accepted and expressed determination to go on with their struggle and not be silenced. One participant said, “They could not stop me with the money.”

Reactions changed after the amnesty laws were lifted in 2005 and a reopening of trials against those responsible for the human rights violations during the dictatorship was possible. The resuming of trials also meant that receiving economic reparations could no longer be interpreted as a substitute for justice. Thus, economic reparations evolved from being seen as a replacement for justice to a legal acknowledgment of the past injustice. Even for those who had applied while the amnesty laws were still active, receiving economic reparations seemed more acceptable after the lifting of amnesty. Later when one of the participants could link the reparation to a diagnosis, he saw it as “proof” that he had been exposed to severe stress.

Reflections on Trials

The interview included questions about participants' experiences as witnesses, plaintiffs, or other roles during trials. Because it is beyond the scope of this article to detail the trial experience, only those experiences related to reparations are presented here. Many expressed that the reparations seemed less important compared with what was possible through the ongoing processes in court. For many, trials were a step closer to achieving justice and redress. In addition, many referred to the seemingly endless process of multiple trials and proceedings that they followed either because of direct involvement or solidarity. As one expressed, “We never

seem to come to the post-trial period. On the contrary, our lives are between trials . . .”

Justice Being Served

How was economic reparation perceived in relation to justice and other transitional processes? Many referred to reparation as just something they received; for some it was spent in useful ways and could be considered a partial payback for all they had experienced. Even so, the receipt of reparation was not viewed as a particularly significant event. Rather, it was seen as a fact, nothing more; the emotions accompanying the application process were more impactful. This was true both for those who had been abducted themselves and for those who had lost family members. One participant said, “Justice and reparation are two very different things. I took the money they gave me, it was just something that happened. But it has nothing to do with justice . . .”

None of those interviewed saw reparation as a form of justice. “I had the feeling of receiving money—nothing else. There is no reparation if there is not full justice. The greatest reparation is through full justice . . . but there is no effective reparation. There are acknowledgments.” Instead, many expressed the view that reparations were attempts at silencing them, or having them refrain from political work or claims for justice. A participant who received money early said, “I decided to accept it, it was money, I needed it, but it did not stop me from being politically active.” Receiving economic compensation was not something that silenced survivors and their relatives, but something that permitted them to go on fighting for what they believed in—for truth and justice.

Various ideas about justice were touched upon in the interviews, including an ideal vision of society; the society for which many of the victims had fought during the 1960s and 1970s: “How can there be justice when there are children starving to death in the streets?” Revealing the truth was also considered an important form of justice; some claimed that only by revealing what had actually happened could peace of mind be achieved. For most informants, the day on which the trials were reopened was a turning point. Many expressed anger that the trials had come so late, allowing the perpetrators to live freely for so long. Most participants referred to

legal justice and their participation in trials as the most powerful emotional experience related to justice.

Discussion

A majority of the informants had received reparation, either in the 1990s or later, and some had received reparation at two points in time. This included individuals who themselves were tortured, had missing family members, or both. The general feeling, regardless of when economic reparation was received, was that it did not constitute a life-changing event and was of limited importance in relation to their struggles in the aftermath of the violence.

Perhaps the most important aspect of reparation was that by offering it, the state admitted to wrongdoings and made an attempt to offer redress to victims. The fear of talking openly about what was going on or sharing experiences of loss and violations had been a dominant feature during the dirty war. Thus, reparation was seen as a form of recognition of what had been silenced and publicly unacknowledged for a long time. The fact that the cases had been evaluated and reparation endorsed was interpreted as an acknowledgment that a crime had taken place. As claimed by Laplante and Theidon (2007) from Peru, economic reparation cannot negate harm suffered, but it “nevertheless offers important symbolic value by signaling the state’s assumption of responsibility for past wrongs and in acknowledging victims’ suffering” (p. 245).

Receivers justified reparations in different ways. When after serious doubts, they decided to accept economic reparation, they claimed good reasons for doing so. For example, many indicated that reparation met an economic need. Some shared how they had spent the money, such as buying a house for themselves or family members, caring for relatives who needed it, or donating the money to political organizations. For most of our participants, the conflicting feelings surrounding the economic reparation did not result in the money being spent in negative and destructive ways. Nor was the money seen as “cursed” or “tainted,” as described in other studies (Guembe, 2006). Nonetheless, even when referring to the possible benefits, informants referenced the complexities of the issue—that reparations were problematic and

that receiving money for missing relatives was particularly painful and distressing. Moreover, receiving reparation was not necessarily as unacceptable as some groups had asserted. Our participants argued that, as long as receiving economic reparation did not lead to inactivity or silence, it could be acceptable. Furthermore, they held the strong position that the receipt of economic reparation would not stop them from pursuing other forms of justice, including the right to truth. These findings do not exclude the possibility that others, not included in this study, may have felt that receipt of reparation would preclude their quest for justice in other forms.

Many survivors, some of who had been political or religious activists, had suffered severely because of their struggle for a changed society, and for them justice meant social justice, social equality, and security. Their sacrifice, losses, and shattered lives could be repaired only through a transformation of society. For most interviewees, it was of major importance that the transitional measures include legal justice, with accountability and punishment for those responsible. The hope was that fair trials, truth, and legal consequences for the perpetrators could recreate meaningful lives and a sense of dignity.

The context in which reparations were provided was important. In agreement with previous literature, the findings suggest that reparation for one's "own" suffering seemed more acceptable and straightforward than when it had been awarded because of the death of a family member (Danieli, 2014; Guembe, 2006). In addition, receiving reparations during impunity was different from receiving them when amnesty laws had been lifted and justice was being pursued through legal channels. Furthermore, the way in which reparations were understood seemed important. Understanding them as responses to civil action was different from understanding the reparation programs as being "pushed" on people as a way of settling the past, which was the general sentiment during the early phase of reparations in Argentina.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study and Future Perspectives

Our findings reflect a wide range of deep-felt reactions to the processes of dealing with a

traumatic past. Despite the complexity of the situation regarding the reparation schemes, victims described their experiences and expressed nuanced opinions.

However, context was critical to their stories. The study was conducted in Argentina during a period in which court trials had been reopened. The reparation programs had been initiated by the state during a period of impunity and were regarded as attempts to silence the human rights community and evade responsibility through amnesty. Thus, accepting reparations was compared to falling into "their" trap. The demand by the human rights community was truth, the whereabouts of the missing children, information about the detained and disappeared, and judicial accountability for perpetrators. The stigma and shame still associated with reparation created a special context for any conversation about its meaning.

Moreover, interviews were conducted in collaboration with professionals engaged in psychosocial support and human rights; the participants were recruited among those offered support from this NGO. The professionals had participated in the discussion of the problematic aspects of reparation and some were opposed to the reparation programs, and stated so during the interviews. Despite this, most informants showed a willingness to talk about the reparations, including some aspects that were considered positive. How this unique situation may have affected the findings is difficult to assess, but it may be considered a limitation.

The study suggests that reparation provided outside of the context of a broader process of justice represents an insufficient form of redress and that reparation should be a part of larger legal and social processes. It implies that reparation provided as a stand-alone measure has serious limitations and that redress to victims of torture and other serious human rights violations must take into account access to remedy as well as all forms of reparation, including rehabilitation and restitution. Further studies may explore the consequences for the victims when reparation programs are developed in close collaboration with the victims themselves or as responses to claims from victims' organizations.

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