

PASSION, POLITICS AND IDENTITY:  
JEWISH WOMEN IN THE WAKE OF THE AMIA BOMBING IN ARGENTINA

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2005

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<sup>1</sup> - In this article, passion is understood as “a strong liking for or devotion to some activity, object or concept.” (This particular articulation comes from Webster’s New Collegiate) It is also used as a feeling that is “overmastering,” one that threatened one’s supposed rational mastery of oneself.

## Introduction

Ever since 1977 and the emergence of the “Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” the words “plaza” and “terrorism” have been fused in the Argentine mind. The image of those women *circling* the Plaza and the sound of their footsteps on the pavement interrupted the silence. The mothers of the Plaza reminded everyone that children were “missing.” In 1994, after the terrorist attack against the AMIA (Mutual Aid Jewish Association of Argentina), a new but related image arose. This time women began to *stand* in the Plaza Lavalle across from the Supreme Court of Justice, demanding a thorough investigation into the perpetrators who were responsible for the death of their loved ones.

The “Mothers of Plaza de Mayo” wanted to *recover* the “detenidos-desaparecidos” - the missing victims of state terrorism; however, after acts of transnational terrorism, bodies typically are not missing. They remain at the site of the massacre. But just like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the families whose loved ones died in the AMIA attack had two tasks: they hoped to *preserve the memory* of those who had been killed, and they wanted to *prevent a cover up* such as the one that took place during the investigation of the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires on March 17, 1992.<sup>2</sup>

Transnational state-sponsored terrorism began in Argentina with the embassy bombing in 1992 in which twenty-two people were killed. Two years later there was a second attack. On 18 July 1994, the AMIA building was destroyed:<sup>3</sup> 85 people were killed and approximately 300 were wounded. In the 1992 bombing, all investigative leads pointed to Hezbollah as well as to Iran and Syria, with the help of a “local connection”. This is true, also, of the 1994 bombing. And yet...

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<sup>2</sup> - Indeed it is seldom realized outside Argentina that Islamic fundamentalist terrorism ceased to be a foreign phenomenon in that country long before September 11, 2001. When Hezbollah (Party of God), an armed branch of Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires it became clear that terrorism had gone global and that its targets were not limited to Israeli and American interests.

<sup>3</sup> -About the AMIA attack and the behavior of the state agencies in charge of the investigation of the massacre, see: See C. Escudé & B. Gurevich, "Argentina, a parasite state on the verge of disintegration", *EIAL, Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe* , Vol. 14 (2), Julio-Diciembre, 2003

Ten days before the AMIA bombing, a stranger by the name of Wilson Dos Santos walked into the Argentine Consulate in Milan<sup>4</sup> and warned the government of the impending attack. His tip was forwarded to higher authorities only *after* the tragedy. Dos Santos reiterated his story on the day of the bombing, but then went on to deny it in subsequent interrogations.<sup>5</sup>

After the AMIA attack, three separate organizations arose within the Jewish community: Memoria Activa, Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas and APEMIA. This study documents and analyzes the conflicts that led to the creation of these three organizations. The differences in their ideologies and behaviors will be explained, and their opposing perceptions of the pace of the investigation and their differing assessment of the performance of both the Argentine government and the Jewish leadership of the AMIA and DAIA will be presented. This paper also focuses on the various roles women played in each of the organizations, as well as within AMIA and DAIA, and it looks at the reconstruction of women's identities after trauma.

The case under examination begins in July 1994 at the moment when victims of the AMIA bombing were rescued or recovered. It concludes ten years later with an acknowledgment by the Argentine Department of Justice and the Argentine government at the OAS in Washington for violating the civil rights of its citizens, just as Memoria Activa had contended. This paper is dedicated to the women leaders of those organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> - In mid-2003, another forewarning was disclosed. On 31 May 1994, 48 days before the blast, the Argentine Embassy in Lebanon sent a cable to the Foreign Ministry warning of the threat of an attack against a Jewish target in Argentina, made publicly by Sheik Mohamed Fadlallah, spiritual guide of Hezbollah. The cable was resent to the state intelligence agency SIDE, but the threat was not made known to Jewish institutions. The cable was uncovered in the Foreign Ministry in 1997, but only in 2003 was the copy sent to SIDE discovered. *Clarín*, June 1, 2003

<sup>5</sup> - In his declaration to Judge Juan Jose Galeano, Dos Santos mentioned Nasrim Mokhtari as the source that had given him a note of advice about a possible attack to AMIA. A legislator had helped her obtain an Argentine passport. She hung out at an Iranian butcher shop near the doomed AMIA building. There she introduced Dos Santos to two Arab friends. Dos Santos testified that he later helped them move merchandise into Argentina across the Paraguayan border. They met with Arabs and returned from Ciudad del Este with a heavy metal suitcase that Dos Santos brought into Argentina with the help of Nora González, then local chief of the Argentine Customs Station. *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1999; "Iranian woman charged in Argentine blast probe", *Agence France-Presse*, December 4, 1998; "Argentina charges Iranian woman in Israeli Embassy bombing", *Dow Jones International News*, December 4, 1998; "Argentina detains Iranian woman", *Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1998; "Argentina releases Iranian woman linked to Jewish bombings", *Dow Jones International News*, December 22, 1998; "Key witness to Buenos Aires bombing located in Brazil", *Associated Press Newswires*, November 18, 1998;; "Argentina bomb witness to testify", *AP Online*, November 22, 1998; "Iranian held in '92 Argentina blast", *AP Online*, December 4, 1998; "Swiss extradite Jewish Center bombing suspect to Argentina", *Jerusalem Post*, 24 December 2000.

### The Investigation: Possibilities and Limitations

Cases of transnational state terrorism must be examined in terms of three dimensions: the national, the international, and within the latter, specific countries that sponsor terrorism covertly. On the national level there are state agencies and social actors. In the case of the AMIA bombing, the Jewish community through its central institutions (DAIA and AMIA) and the organizations of the victims' families were significant actors as well.

Argentines perceived the attacks against the AMIA (1994) and the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires (1992) quite differently. They saw the earlier bombing as a direct outcome of the Middle Eastern conflict: retaliation for Argentina's sending two ships to participate in the 1991 Gulf War, which broke its tradition of neutrality. The obliteration of AMIA's building in 1994, on the other hand, was defined as a violation of *Argentine* sovereignty and a crime against the Argentine people.<sup>6</sup>

Economic factors also played a role. Most Argentines were enthusiastic about the Menem Administration's success in controlling hyperinflation in 1992. By 1994, however, with the growing rate of unemployment, enthusiasm was waning.<sup>7</sup> People considered the recovery to be superficial and believed the unemployment rate would continue to grow, affecting the small and medium sized entrepreneurs, as well as the working class.

Concomitantly, the signs of growing corruption and impunity from punishment began affecting people directly. It became public knowledge that goods were entering the country illegally so that corrupt individuals could avoid taxes. This technique [called the parallel customs mechanism or "aduana paralela"] damaged the productive sector, while benefiting the allies of the political elite and the Executive branch of government.<sup>8</sup> Borders became

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<sup>6</sup> - AMIA is the emblematic symbol of the Argentine Jewish community since 1894 and the bomb was placed in a way that killed people inside AMIA, neighbors and the men, women, and children walking along 600 Pasteur Street, that Monday morning at 9.53am.

<sup>7</sup> - Through the Convertibility Law the process of hyperinflation was absolutely controlled. On the other hand, structural reforms contributed to a substantive growth of the GDP, between 1990 and 1994 it grew 40%. But the growing rate of unemployment, raising from 6,0% in October 1991 to 12,2% in October 1994 changed the perception about the efficiency of the government. In the 1990s, Menem introduced mass privatization. This resulted in many workers being made redundant, with them being surplus to requirements and unprofitable to employ. Source INDEC: Rate of unemployment. The information is based on an average of data of 28 urban centers which represent 70% of the urban population. Measured yearly in October.

<sup>8</sup> -About corruption and mismanagement in Argentina in the 1990's see: "A decline without parallel", *The Economist*, print edition, Feb 28, 2002. [http://academic.reed.edu/economics/course\\_pages/201\\_F04/Cases/argentina\\_collapse.htm](http://academic.reed.edu/economics/course_pages/201_F04/Cases/argentina_collapse.htm) "Aduana paralela" is the

increasingly porous to a variety of illegal traffic. People from Brazil and Paraguay could cross the triple border and enter Argentina with few legal obstacles.<sup>9</sup> This extremely dangerous practice abetted the activity of Islamic sleeper cells found to be living at the triple border; the cells included people who were thought to have connections to the bombing.

Thus, in 1994 condemning terrorism was congruent with decrying corruption. Important segments of mainstream society and the international community demanded an end to both. Such values were at the core of the speech delivered by Ruben Beraja, President of DAIA and the Banco Mayo, rally organized by DAIA and AMIA at the Plaza de los dos Congresos on July 21, 1994, 3 days after the bombing. At the Plaza, Beraja dramatically condemned terrorism. He stated that the Argentine government alone was responsible for undertaking the in-depth investigation of the terrorist acts against the Israeli Embassy and AMIA.<sup>10</sup> At the time, Argentines believed that an in-depth investigation of the attack against AMIA was possible. Support for this idea was evidenced by the participation of 150,000 people in the rally, including a wide range of ideological-political actors.<sup>11</sup>

Even those people who justified the destruction of the Israeli embassy as a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not believe that the conflict had anything to do with the massive massacre of the AMIA. When Beraja stated that a failed investigation would not be tolerated, the audience applauded him en masse. For the families who had lost loved ones, the strong determination and political will shown by AMIA and DAIA, as well as the values of the larger society, offered a glimmer of hope that an investigation could be conclusive.

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name given to the black market of imported goods. Through the “aduana paralela” the merchandize entered the country illegally, without paying taxes. This situation aggravated the impact of opening the Argentine market with no restrictions. Local industry could not be at all competitive under such conditions. Millions of jobs were lost and the middle class was deeply damaged. Under such conditions emerged a new socio economic category: “new poor”. People from the middle class suddenly fall under the line of poverty. About the “aduana paralela”, see: “La corrupción en 1996 ha costado 1,3 billones de pesetas a los argentinos”, *El Mundo*, Seccion Internacional, January 8, 1997, <http://www.el-mundo.es/1997/01/08/internacional/08N0057.html>

<sup>9</sup> - On the triple border and the globalization of crime see Sebastian Rotela’s article: “Jungles Hub for World Outlaws”, published by the *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> - The speeches of Ruben Beraja, President of DAIA, and Alberto Crupnicoff, President of AMIA are included in “An Endless Pain”, CES-DAIA, Buenos Aires, October, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> - About the gathering at the Plaza de los Dos Congresos, see: *Microsemanrio*, Year 7, No 290, September 1-7, 1997; also see the Argentine journal *Clarín*, September 7, 1997

Perceiving the social climate, Menem made a radio broadcast a few hours after the attack announcing that the government was following some leads that led to the carapintadas.<sup>12</sup> Minister Erman Gonzalez soon dismissed this story. Hope for an in-depth judicial investigation into responsibility for the attack was short-lived. As early as 1995, people with inside information understood that Menem's administration was *not interested in a thorough investigation*. DAIA's president, Ruben Beraja, was well aware of this fact, and as a bank president he also knew the mechanisms by which the Executive branch manipulated members of Parliament and the judiciary. Menem's government was especially interested in being perceived as a strategic ally of the United States, and he relied on this alliance for help from American and international Jewish organizations. DAIA proposed a hearing before the Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives, which took place on September 28, 1995. Luis Czyzewski, who had lost his daughter in the attack, accompanied Ruben Beraja as a representative of the victims' families.<sup>13</sup> During the hearing, the U.S. State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Philip C. Wilcox, attributed the lack of substantive results from the investigation to poor coordination among Argentine security and intelligence networks, and to the ill will of the Buenos Aires provincial police.

At the same hearing, Avi Weiss, Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and National President of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns, went much further, pointing to the *complicity* of the Argentine National Bureau of Migrations (DNM) with the terrorists. He claimed that in January 1990, "the Syrian terrorist Monzer al Kassar, linked to the Achille Lauro hijacking, had been allowed to enter Argentina by (Navy Captain Aurelio Carlos) Martínez," even though he was suspected of human rights violations during the military dictatorship of 1976-83. Martínez was also National Director of Migrations during the Menem administration. Weiss also denounced the Menem government's lack of political will to investigate the bombing and pointed out the failures of Judge Juan Jose Galeano's performance, among other obstructions of justice.<sup>14</sup> Beraja, however, praised the judge. Czyzewski,

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<sup>12</sup> - Carapintadas is the name given to a military group of extreme right nationalists that were responsible for two failing *coup d'etat* against President Raul Alfonsin and one at the beginning of Menem's government. In the pre-electoral period Menem had good relations with one of its leaders, Colonel Mohamed Ali Seneildin, and became enemies after Menem changed his strategic allies.

<sup>13</sup> - *Terrorism in Latin America/AMIA Bomb Explosion in Argentina*, Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives, 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, September 28, 1995 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1996), pp. 20-21

<sup>14</sup> - The Argentine judicial system, very close in its tradition to that of Spain, Italy, and particularly France, has a two-tier system of judges. Judges in the first tier investigate cases, with district attorneys working as their assistants.

<sup>15</sup> who became the most important representative of the group of Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas, Beraja praised the judge.

Beraja's silence about Weiss's accusations annoyed Argentine President Carlos Menem. As soon as Beraja returned to the country, Menem criticized and silenced him.<sup>16</sup> After that, DAIA and AMIA avoided criticizing the government; although, both local and international bodies pressed Argentine to improve security in the country.

According to Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Di Tella, when President Clinton visited Argentina in October 1997, the three central agenda items were corruption, security and the obligation to isolate countries that sponsored terrorism. During the visit, Clinton insisted that the attacks against the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA be investigated, and he met with representatives of the victims' families.<sup>17</sup> Clinton's actions were of utmost importance to the families because the Argentine president had denied all their requests for a hearing.

### **The cover-up**

When Menem took office, he broke his pre-electoral commitments to the governments of Libya and Syria. According to multiple sources, both governments had given Menem forty million dollars for his 1988 campaign in exchange for certain promises that were to be fulfilled when he took office.<sup>18</sup> Syria, Libya and Iran were interested in the nuclear technology being developed in Argentina. As president, Menem continued developing a relationship with the Syrian government. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1991, Menem promised Hafez al-Assad that Syria would inherit the Iraqi partnership in Argentina's Condor II ballistic missile project and would also become a privileged

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This was the case of Judge Juan Jose Galeano and prosecutors Eamon Mullen and Jose Barbaccia. When they put together a case, they send it for trial to a judge or court in the second tier.

<sup>15</sup> - Hearing, *Ibidem*

<sup>16</sup> - Microsemanario, Year 7, No. 274, *op.cit.*

<sup>17</sup> - Microsemanario Year:7, No 296, October 13-19, see section; "Visita de Clinton a la Argentina"  
<http://argentina.informatik.uni-muenchen.de/micros/msg00064.html>

<sup>18</sup> - About what not been investigated of the attack and the Syrian lead, see: See J. Salinas, "Larga historia," 164-166. In relation to Menem's previous commitments see ACDN, exp. 1656-D-00/2000 ([www.ardiputados.gov.ar/2000/1656-1.htm](http://www.ardiputados.gov.ar/2000/1656-1.htm)). Also see Norberto Bermúdez and Carlos Torrenco, "Lo que no se investigó sobre los atentados" part I ([www.seprin.com/informes/amia.htm](http://www.seprin.com/informes/amia.htm)). The Argentine Senate and the Chamber of Deputies sanctioned "with the force of law" the obligation to investigate the terrorist attacks on the Israeli Embassy and AMIA (ACDN, exp.1856-D-00/2000 and exp.1652 ([www.ardiputados.gov.ar/2000/1656-1.htm](http://www.ardiputados.gov.ar/2000/1656-1.htm))).

recipient of Argentine nuclear technology. The promises made to Syria were not fulfilled. After the Gulf War, U.S. diplomatic pressure (plus a certain inclination on the part of Guido Di Tella and his team) caused Argentina to shelve the Condor missile project and join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Assad felt betrayed, so he eliminated Argentina from the targets forbidden to Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian Lebanese terrorist organization under Syrian military protection.<sup>19</sup> In light of the evidence, government officials and insiders in the Jewish community interpreted the AMIA attack as Syrian retaliation against Argentina. At first, the CIA office in Buenos Aires asserted that Syrian authorities themselves might have been behind the terrorist act, along with Iran and Hezbollah. This could have been particularly embarrassing for the government if the details of Menem's previous dealings with Assad and his regime were revealed. U.S. agencies soon began to divert attention away from Syria, focusing exclusively on Iran and Hezbollah. Concealing Syria's involvement, or at least not following the Syrian lead, was amenable to all parties concerned with the investigation except, of course, the families themselves and the Jewish community of Argentina.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Emotions/Affectivity versus Rational Action/Security**

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These documents refer to many of the accusations made by Memoria Activa and by the newspaper *Río Negro* and others, as well as Juan Salinas' investigations referenced in *AMIA, el atentado*.

<sup>19</sup> - A great part of the public information available regarding the Condor II comes either directly or indirectly from U.S. intelligence sources (who, for example, intercepted an Egyptian smuggling operation destined to the Condor II. About Condor II see: Spector, L.S., *Nuclear Ambitions*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger/Carnegie Endowment, 1990. For an analysis of the Condor II missile project and its implications for IR theory, see: Escudé, C., "An Introduction to Peripheral Realism and its Implications for the Interstate System: Argentina and the Cóndor II Missile Project", in Stephanie Neuman (ed.), *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. See L.S. Spector, *Nuclear Ambitions*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger/Carnegie Endowment, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> On the informal peace conversations between Israel and Syria between 1992 and 1995, see Itamar Rabinovich, *El Umbral de la Paz. Las conversaciones sirio-israelíes* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Tel Aviv/Eudeba, 2000), pp. 60-61. These conversations partly explain Israel's low profile in its demands to the Argentine government on behalf of a serious investigation of the Embassy bombing in Buenos Aires, and its acceptance of the hypothesis that responsibility for the terrorist act was Iran's, exculpating Syria. See also Joe Goldman and Jorge Lanata, *Cortinas de Humo*, (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994); and file 1656-D-00- Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, República Argentina, Proyecto de Resolución, "La causa Embajada y la pista Siria: el atentado a la Embajada de Israel y Monzer Al Kassar". According to this document, in 1992 the CIA presented a report to the U.S. House of Representatives informing that Iran and Syria had signed an agreement of nuclear cooperation and co-sponsored terrorist attacks. In a series of articles published in the newspaper *Río Negro* on January 11, 12 and 13, 2000, Norberto Bermúdez and Carlos Torrenzo developed the same hypothesis on the basis of legislative sources. See "Lo que no se investigó sobre los atentados" (Parts I, II and III); "Los acuerdos y compromisos secretos de Menem y los árabes"; "El dominicano Nemen Nader habla desde Madrid: 'Menem recibió 40 millones de los países árabes en 1988,'" and "Munir Menem: entre Damasco y la Rosada".

At the time of the AMIA bombing, the Jewish community was experiencing other problems that may have contributed to its inability to face the trauma it had just endured. By not dealing directly with the painful experience, however, the Jewish social system was even more damaged. When they recognized this problem, the DAIA leadership created a special program, “Fortaleza comunitaria” [Community Fortress (CF) or strength]. The primary purposes of CF were to preserve the traditional communitarian spirit, to soften the Jewish social actors’ demands for both emotional and intellectual meaning (Neimeyer, 1997) during the bereavement period (quoted in Silverman, 2000), and to offer instructions about security measures. CF consisted of a network of groups that gathered in the Jewish schools, synagogues and clubs. CF’s groups developed a different profile in each participating organization in accordance with the value orientation of the lay and professional leadership of that organization.

Some groups used the themes suggested by the top program coordinator (DAIA) while others broached topics frowned upon by the leadership of AMIA and DAIA. For example, some asked if the AMIA building should be rebuilt on its original location (633 Pasteur Street) or if it should be transformed into a memorial. As soon as this and other questions related to the decision making process arose, the economic sponsorship of CF was terminated, which signified the formal termination of the community period of bereavement.

Some organizations, including Bet El and Emanuel conservative synagogues, continued to try to address the needs of their congregations. Within AMIA and DAIA, however, emotions seemed to have been repressed. According to the instructions given to staff by top lay and professional leadership during a meeting with the functionaries of the organization, “work was the best cure for pain and there was no time for grieving.” Cases of special needs and emotional crisis among the functionaries themselves were not taken into consideration by the top professional leadership. The recommendations of psychologists who spontaneously offered to help people *pro bono* were frequently dismissed.<sup>21</sup>

The leadership developed a model for carrying out the rituals that accompany mourning and bereavement. This model was designed to affect the dissociation between reason (the head) and emotion (the heart). The head should be

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<sup>21</sup> - According to the testimony of seven DAIA and AMIA’s employees and ex-employees which asked not to be mentioned, the best psychologists -most of them volunteers- stopped helping because they could not work freely and had problems with the leadership of AMIA. In the aftermath of the bombing many well known psychologists offered

*inside* the building of the central institutions, physically protected by walls and cement. The heart should function in public spaces, particularly in the Plaza across the street from the judiciary, in La Tablada (Jewish community cemetery), and at 633 Pasteur Street, where a black billboard listing the victims' names written in a tremulous hand had been hanging since the commemoration of the first thirty days of grief. The billboard initially covered the ruins of the AMIA building, but it has since been moved to a wall located in the entrance of the new building. The billboard and the security wall signify the triumph of lawlessness over law and justice. Multiple efforts were made to convince the victims' families to replace the original billboard, but all suggestions have been rejected; the billboard must remain in place until the perpetrators are found.

Perhaps Community Fortress (CF) worked within the Jewish community as the unintentional Panopticon described by Foucault.<sup>22</sup> Only a few people at the core of AMIA and DAIA had real knowledge of what was going on with the investigation; few knew the role of the government in the cover-up. The victims' families were not informed, and many participants in the CF activities respected the DAIA's security rules. **Not asking questions and having faith (more than trust) became a symbol of communitarian spirit and reciprocal solidarity.**

The top lay and professional leadership of DAIA received news about the pace of the investigation in accordance with the government's political needs and interests of the moment. For example, Martha Nercellas, DAIA'S legal representative, and Carlos Corach,<sup>23</sup> Minister of Interior of Menem's government, spread news of a possible third attack.<sup>24</sup>

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their services only with the aim of helping the victims Most of them like Fernando Ulloa and Sylvia Bleichmar presented their resignation.

<sup>22</sup> - Foucault argues that knowledge is a power over others, the power to define others. In his view knowledge ceases to forward liberation, and becomes a mode of surveillance, regulation, discipline. Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, Ed. Brian Wallis, 1982.

<sup>23</sup> - Itzjak Aviran, the Israeli Ambassador in Argentina during Menem's administration, was accused of corruption and of making personal business under the name of the Israeli Government. The Israeli Foreign Ministry has launched an internal investigation into the activities of its former ambassador to Argentina, Yitzhak Aviran. See: Marc Perelman, "Argentine Exposé Prompts Probe of Israel's Ex-Envoy", Forward, October 11, 2002: <http://www.forward.com/issues/2002/02.10.11/news8.html> Aviran lives in Argentina and became a buisenmessman. According to the well known journalist Raul Kollman, Aviran privileged the relation with Menem to the topics related to the investigation of both attacks. See: <http://www.delacole.com/cgi-bin/medios/vernota.cgi?medio=comunidades&numero=354&nota=354-7>

<sup>24</sup> - The interview to Gordon Gray, a US State Department director of counter-terrorism was published by Buenos Aires daily *El Crinista* on November 1997 and quoted by Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), American Jewish Committee in 1999. Gray pointed that there was no information about the possibility of a third terrorist act.

Threat became a disciplinary tool, an opportunity to establish a system of vigilance that Argentine Jews and non-Jews internalized. Both the government (through Interior Minister Carlos Corach<sup>25</sup>) and the president of DAIA (through his private cable TV channel [Alef]) developed an efficient mass media policy that helped delay public awareness of the political manipulation of the investigation. In 2004,<sup>26</sup> the Federal Justice Department proved that there had been intentional misleading in order to consolidate an “official version” of who was responsible for the bombing. Until mid-1995 the community’s relationship with AMIA-DAIA was good despite the fact that some victims’ families felt abandoned. They trusted and relied on the organizations’ leadership, even while questioning the work of Juan Jose Galeano, the judge in charge of the investigation.

### **Prior to Anger and Confrontation**

For victims’ families, the loss of a loved one in a collective massacre is a blow to the psyche that breaks through the defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively.<sup>27</sup> What K. Erikson points out reflects accurately the situation after the AMIA bombing.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the victims’ families gathered together with the aim of finding emotional refuge within the framework of AMIA and DAIA, and to receive information about the rescue. It soon became evident that

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He added that it might occur anywhere in the world. The interview with Gray four years before September 11, 2001. See: <http://www.axt.org.uk/antidem/archives/archive2/argentina/argentina.htm>

A second example of an intentional deviation in the investigation was the public denunciation by DAIA’s official spokesman, Alfredo Neuburger, about the involvement of Al Qaeda in the attack against AMIA. This happened in October 2001, when Fernando De la Rúa was president of Argentina and it became evident that, as happened during Menem’s rule, there was no political will to foster the investigation of the attack against AMIA. About the denunciation of Al Qaeda as participating in the AMIA bombing, see: *El Tribuno*, 19 de octubre de 2001

<sup>25</sup> - By decision of the Tribunal Oral Federal No3 (TOF) (2005) (the Federal Justice) the Interior Minister during Menem’s government, Carlos Corach, will be investigated in the criminal judiciary for the cover-up of the investigation of the attack against AMIA. See the complete verdict of the judges of the Federal Justice in:

<http://sursur.com/files/veredicto%20AMIA.pdf> ; Also see: Diario judicial,

<http://www.diariojudicial.com/nota.asp?IDNoticia=22759#> ; also see:

[http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:42LHk5UPwJQ:sursur.com/tiki-print\\_article.php%3FarticleId%3D3606+%22diario+judicial%22+%2B+corach+%2B+encubrimiento&hl=en](http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:42LHk5UPwJQ:sursur.com/tiki-print_article.php%3FarticleId%3D3606+%22diario+judicial%22+%2B+corach+%2B+encubrimiento&hl=en)

<sup>26</sup> - The president of DAIA was president of the sole Jewish TV channel: Alef. According to Horacio Lutzky, ex-vice president of channel Alef, Beraja repressed freedom of speech within the channel. The news were supervised and had to be authorized by Beraja’s advisors before making them public. Interview to Horacio Lutzky, September 2004. (Tape in author’s files)

<sup>27</sup> - Erikson, Kai T., Notes on Trauma and Community, 1991, *American Imago*, 48 (4), 455-460.

trauma endured by the families had deteriorated the basic tissue of organizational life, damaging the bonds that attach people together as well as impairing the sense of community that prevailed prior to the attack.<sup>28</sup>

The leadership of AMIA and DAIA distanced themselves from the suffering, avoiding meeting victims' families and showing signs of a strong affective retraction. Olga Dejtari and Sofia Guterman, who both lost children in the bombing, say that when they asked DAIA's vice-president, Rogelio Cichowolsky, why neither AMIA nor DAIA had sent letters of condolence to victims' families, he answered: "all of us are victims." This inability to differentiate one category of victims from another is an aspect of the kind of pathology generates conflicts between Jewish organizations and the victims' families.<sup>29</sup>

As described by Hart, Nijenhuis, Steele and Brown in 2004: The alterations that follow collective trauma can be adaptive or maladaptive. For example, during threat, a high level of consciousness and retraction of the field of consciousness to threat cues are adaptive, but become maladaptive when hypervigilance and exclusive focus on perceived danger occur in the absence of actual threat, and when affective retraction becomes a substantive aspect in the decision making process.<sup>30</sup>

Although Beraja stated at the first public event after the bombing of AMIA that the Government was solely responsible for the judicial investigation and for public security, in time it became evident that DAIA was involved in security matters that exceeded its natural abilities. The rumor of a third attack against the Jewish community announced by the Israeli ambassador in Argentina, Itzjak Aviran in 1995, found no confirmation by Gordon Gray, a US State Department Director of Counter-Terrorism. When Gray was asked about the rumor, he said that he had no news about a possible attack in Argentina and that "Unfortunately attacks can occur in any country now."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> - About collective trauma, see: Erikson, Kai T., Notes on Trauma and Community, 1991, *American Imago*, 48 (4), 460-472

<sup>29</sup> - Interview to Olga Dejtari by Beatriz Gurevich, April 29, 2004. Dejtari points that DAIA's vice president, Rogelio Cichowolsky, and Alfredo Neuberger, the executive director, said to them that leadership of Jewish institutions were in the same category of victims as the victims' families. The same was stated by Sofia Guterman. Both tapes are in the author's archive.

<sup>30</sup> - About reactions to trauma, see: Onno van der Hart, Ellert Nijenhuis, Kathy Steele, Daniel Brown Onno van der Hart, "*Trauma-Related Dissociation: Conceptual Clarity Lost And Found*", Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, November/December issue, 2004

<sup>31</sup> - The interview to Gordon Gray was published by Buenos Aires daily *El Crinista* on November 1997 and quoted by Institute for Jewish Policy Research

Pathological detachment within Jewish organizations could be perceived by examining the difficulties of the leadership to accept and behave in accordance with the period of grief and mourning of the victims' families. Grief defined as the way in which people express the feelings that arise after experiencing a loss: sadness, crying and despair (Silverman, 2000) and mourning is understood to be the psychological process by which an individual adapts to the loss of a loved one (Altschul, 1988, quoted in Silverman, 2000).

Although the dead were buried in La Tablada, one of AMIA's cemeteries, the lay leadership of AMIA and DAIA did not attend the burials. In the opinion of the victims' families, AMIA and DAIA did not behave according to what Jewish tradition dictates during a period of *shiva* (mourning). (Bowlby, 1980).

Institutional reactions from both AMIA and DAIA were perceived by mourners as cold and indifferent; the leadership of the organizations did not understand that the victims' families had suffered significant losses. The mother of a young men killed during the bombing while he was working at DAIA said:

*“There were no institutional letters of condolence and when we asked how they could forget, the answer given to us in the name of AMIA and DAIA was: ‘we too are victims and because of that there is no need of sending letters to each other.’ (...) “There was little and in too many occasions no possibility of making ourselves understand.(...)” No one in AMIA or DAIA wanted to accompany our grief. They took care of our physical health since the night of the attack: blood pressure, head aches... In the hall of Ayacucho<sup>32</sup> a team of [medical] doctors recommended and provided sedatives (...).” “In the afternoon [the day of the event] three psychologists met with us [parents, husbands and wives of the victims]...but they did not have the skills to give support to anyone. (...) Later AMIA offered psychological treatment to the victims’ families but as the psychologist volunteered, after some months they ended the therapeutic help. Finally AMIA paid something to the psychologists for our therapy. But the service had to be cut off because AMIA*

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<sup>32</sup> - AMIA had two main buildings: 633 Pasteur and 612 Ayacucho. Pasteur was the place of what is known as the *kehila*, the Jewish community center. The building was inaugurated in 1945. Many Jewish organizations were installed in AMIA's building. In Ayacucho was located the Jewish community high school, the Mijlala (the school for Jewish teachers and professor and professor, and the Institute Shmuel Agnon, for kindergarten teachers. The building also had an auditorium and a theater. In 1994 the building was partly empty because following the ideological leads prevailing in the country during the 1990's, AMIA decided to gradually close the educational organizations without thinking about the mid term. After Pasteur building was bombed, all of AMIA's offices and those of the organizations located in Pasteur moved to the Ayacucho building. In 1999 the building of Ayacucho was sold to the town hall of the City of Buenos Aires. Privatizing state and community services was a major trend in the country in the 1990's.

*had no money and they had to help the elderly. So I pay Patricia for my therapy as long as I could afford it, until the economic crisis.(...) Afterwards, during five years I found help in The Iglesia de San Cayetano and in the Iglesia del Redentor, in the group Renacer (reborn), said the mother of one of the Jewish victims. We stopped going to Renacer when the victims of the Austral<sup>33</sup> disaster entered the group. We could not meet face to face with so much suffering (...).” “They did not invite nor receive the victims’ families when we asked what was going on.”, said the mother of a young man killed during the bombing.<sup>34</sup>*

*“(...) they were distant and became more and more hermetic.” (...) “In the aftermath of the attack we were in great need to speak to them, but they avoided looking at our faces, listening to crying (...) For some of us our house wasn’t anymore our home and our need was to remain near the place of the killing (...) we were not sick, we were desperate”.<sup>35</sup>*

Some interviewees said they felt that some images that reflected some dimension of the tragedy were systematically marginalized and, if possible, excluded from the scene through different mechanisms. This pattern of behavior was pointed out during interviews with communitarians and liberals. Interviewees felt that the leaders of the Jewish organizations were aloof, which is consistent with the results of the following case studies:

#### *Case I<sup>36</sup>*

Before the bombing, “Alois” worked part-time in the press department of a central Jewish organization and coached sports at a local school. He had won the gold medal in pentathlon in two consecutive Pan American Games. “Alois” was on the elevator at the moment of the explosion. He was going to fetch the newspapers of the day. “Alois” was rescued alive after being trapped for two days in the elevator, three meters under the ground. He lived because of his familiarity with survival techniques. He was brought to the Hospital de Clinicas, where many of the victims of the bombing were taken for medical help. After months of rehabilitation, “A” returned to his job at the central Jewish

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<sup>33</sup> - 1977 November 21st. - Plane Crash - Argentina, Bariloche: an Austral Lineas Aeras Tupolev TU-134 with 79 people aboard crashed after executing a missed approach; 46 people died. See: [http://www.disaster-management.net/argentina\\_di.htm](http://www.disaster-management.net/argentina_di.htm)

<sup>34</sup> - Interview to Olga Dejtjar by Beatriz Gurevich, April 29, 2004. The tape is in the author’s archive.

<sup>35</sup> - Interview to a male that lost his daughter. The interviewee asked to remain anonymous. Interview in authors archive,

<sup>36</sup> - For matters of discretion the name of the person is changed.

organization; because of his physical disabilities, he would play or coach sports again. During work, he was depressed, anxious and inefficient as a result of the trauma he suffered. He could not tolerate being reproved. “Alois’s” situation and attitude were intolerable to some of the top leadership of the institution. He was frequently sanctioned. People working with “Alois” in the press department defended him. After initiating a law suit against the organization, he resigned and moved to another province. “Alois” is a paradigmatic image of the tragedy.<sup>37</sup> Within the organization, the tragedy was ignored; the management of the organization was most concerned with security and control, and they seemed to be unaffected by tragedy.

*Case 2*<sup>38</sup>

The case of “Lorna” also reflects aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder within the organizations. “Lorna” was one a receptionist at AMIA, along with a woman named “Vivian.” “Vivian” was killed in the explosion. Her death had a direct impact on “Lorna’s” ability to do her job; she was unable to maintain the discretion and strict confidence required by her role in a central Jewish organization and gave an interview to the press. When two journalists interviewed her, she talked about threats recorded on the answering machine during many nights and about how she and “Vivian” felt when they weren’t able to provide information about the messages. “Lorna” said the head of the organization was willing to hear the tapes from the answering machine. The two journalists published “Lorna’s” opinion as part of the first in depth investigation of who was responsible for the AMIA bombing. When the book was published, “Lorna” read what she had said to them. Instantly she knew she was going to be dismissed from her job.<sup>39</sup> What she failed to realize was that she would be set up by her employer; instead of asking her to resign from the organization, they had another colleague leave her purse on “Lorna’s” desk for a few minutes so that they could accuse “Lorna” of stealing money from the purse. Some of “Lorna’s” colleagues who were in the lobby at the same time of the alleged crime insisted on “Lorna’s” innocence because they could see everything that was going on at that time. Immediately after “Lorna” was accused, security searched “Lorna’s” person, as well as her desk and the lobby, but found no evidence of theft. Nevertheless, “Lorna” was threatened and treated so badly that she finally resigned. “Lorna’s” accusers were not reprimanded and were allowed to keep their jobs even though the accusations against “Lorna” were never proven.

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<sup>37</sup> - The author tried to interview “Alois” in 2004 but could not find him. The data about Alejandro were up dated in 2004 but were collected by the author of this article in 1996.

The “functionality” of the organization at that time was purportedly “rational action”. Given that AMIA and DAIA did not obtain results in their investigation of the AMIA attack, which was their main strategic goal at that time, questions emerge about the gap between alleged purposes underlying rational action and true motives and/or bad passions (as defined by Hume) orienting that action.<sup>40</sup>

The previous quotations and the cases presented in this section of the paper show that detachment seemed to become a rule within in the two central Jewish organizations in the aftermath of the attack. This detachment, as well as other behaviors of AMIA and DAIA, excluded the possibility of developing a common strategy with the victims’ families and the community to cope with the tragedy and to accomplish better results in the investigation. Furthermore, the AMIA and DAIA also failed to make the Argentine state take responsibility for not investigating the attack, which the Memoria Activa was able to do in 2004.

### **Implications of Gendering Roles over the Splitting of Victims’ Families**

Social and political theorists have long wrestled with passion as a political conundrum. Passion has been understood to construct certain forms of knowledge and community, and to rupture others.

In the case of the of victims’ families of the AMIA bombing, although all of them pursued the same strategic goal of investigating the massacre, ideologies and passions (emotions) led to a split into three different organizations:

Memoria Activa, Familiares y Amigos de las Victimas y APEMIA.

Memoria Activa and APEMIA have female leadership. Familiares y Amigos de las Victims, the only organization of victims’ families tied to AMIA and to DAIA has male leadership. Historically, women did not participate in AMIA or in DAIA’s committees; although, there isn’t a formal prohibition. Such political behavior emerges from the assumption that the “public” sphere is male and the “private” is female.

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<sup>38</sup> - For matters of discretion the name of the person is changed.

<sup>39</sup> - Lanata J. and Goldman J, *Columnas de Humo*, Edit. Planeta, Buenos Aires, 1995

<sup>40</sup> - Hume argues that although reason is needed to discover the facts of any concrete situation and the general social impact of a trait of character or a practice over time, reason alone is insufficient to yield a judgment that something is virtuous or vicious. In the last analysis the facts must trigger a response by sentiment or “taste”. See: D.Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975. Also see: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume>

While the women at Memoria Activa and APEMIA never gendered their roles and demanded that the State fulfill its obligations regarding Constitutional rights and guarantees, the women at Familiares and Amigos de las Victimas were interested in being perceived as grieving mothers. They believed that justice was not their right, but a personal favor that those in power could perform for those in pain. They wanted their “dead to rest in peace”.

AMIA and DAIA praised the feminine capacity for nurturing, love, and empathy and made public their support for grieving mothers. The AMIA and the DAIA did not, however, support grieving mothers who became moral and political actors in the wake of the tragedy.

In reference to the women of Memoria Activa, two male leaders of the organization pointed out during an interview that “when there is true suffering women are enabled to develop political action”.<sup>41</sup>

The perception of and the way some decision makers related to the suffering of women who lost their husbands during the bombing of AMIA was different than how they related to mothers who lost children. Generally there was less considerations for the suffering widows based upon the fact that the loss of a child is irreparable. Furthermore, there was no recognition of the implications and repercussions of the family that lost the person that was the main financial provider.

Segments of the Jewish establishment (all of them men) disapproved of and made informal denunciations in advance against that presupposition that Memoria Activa was going to present a judicial demand to the Argentine State, with the aim of receiving financial compensation for victims’ families who were active in the organization. On October 21, 2001, Juan Gurevich, a member of the Memoria Activa Foundation, pointed out at the gathering in the Plaza that neither the organization nor its members were interested in receiving financial benefits from the judiciary.<sup>42</sup>

A retrospective examination shows that women’s roles and behaviors were stereotyped in the imagination of important decision makers of AMIA and DAIA, and in some of the male and female relatives of the victims.

Thus, gender must be taken into consideration in the analysis of the facts that contributed to growing conflicts and finally to the separation of victims’ families. Gender was not perceived as problematic the leadership of the Jewish

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<sup>41</sup> - This is the opinion of two interviewees that asked to maintain anonymous. One of them was a top leaders of AMIA during the administration of Oscar Hansman and the other is a member of AMIA’s rabbinate.

organizations or by most of the victims' families, including the women active in Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas.

Throughout the entire span of 1994-2004, the behavior of the women in Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas reflected that they basically adhered to "care ethics," while the women of Memoria Activa adhered to "rights ethics", which include "care ethics".

#### *Memoria Activa*

In the days following the attack, a group of people was invited to the Association of Jewish Professionals, to come up with strategies for fostering the investigation of the AMIA bombing and to collaborate with victims' families.

During this meeting, it was agreed that weekly gatherings would occur on Mondays at the same time that the devastation occurred. The name given to this gathering was Memoria Activa (Active Memory).

The leadership of AMIA and DAIA was consulted, and they approved the activities of Memoria Activa's prior to their onset.<sup>43</sup> Memoria Activa would be the symbolic representative of the destruction. DAIA would remain the sole legal representative of the victims and the Jewish organizations with the national authorities and in mainstream society.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> - About the theme of economical reparations for victims' families see Memoria Activas website, URL: [http://www.memoriaactiva.com/antiores\\_abajo2001.htm](http://www.memoriaactiva.com/antiores_abajo2001.htm)

<sup>43</sup> - According to Laura Ginsberg, DAIA's president, Ruben Beraja, not only approved the creation of Memoria Activa, he expressed that in cases such as the AMIA "... it was necessary to attack from different spaces: some have to observe, others have to push forward and a third actor has to negotiate." See Ginsberg's declaration to the Jewish journal *Nueva Sion* in: <http://www.nuevasion.com.ar/sitio/nuevasion/MostrarNoticia.asp?edicion=33&seccion=22&noticia=1125> The author of this article was invited and participated in the reunion where emerged the idea of creating Memoria Activa. At that moment Beatriz Gurevich was the director of the Center of Social Studies of DAIA. In April 1997 Gurevich presented her resignation to DAIA.

<sup>44</sup> - DAIA is formally the sole official representation of the Jewish organizations and the Jewry. Created in 1935 with the aim fighting against the increasing wave of anti-semitism in Argentina vis-avis the national authorities, DAIA was a very well known organization and was highly considered by the Argentine society. During decades, DAIA was the sole voice speaking on behalf of the Jews of Argentina. In 1979, Rabbi Marshal Mayer and Herman Schiler organized the Jewish Movement for Human Rights (MJDH) that also lobbied to save Jews from State terrorism. During the decade of 1980's DAIA's leadership worked hard to recover the trust of the Argentine Jewry. In 1991 Ruben Beraja became president of DAIA. His discourse reflected the *weltjanschaung* of the new generations of Argentine Jews and attracted many intellectuals and academics that previously were marginal to the Jewish institutions. About DAIA's performance since the bombing, see: Sergio Kiernan, "A glimmer of Hope: the AMIA bombing five years later", American Jewish committee, <http://www.ajc.org/InTheMedia/PubTerrorism.asp?did=143&pid=89> ; also see: Raul Kolman's article in the journal Pagina 12: "Nos dan asco" <http://old.pagina12web.com.ar/1999/99-07/99-07-19/pag03.htm>

For AMIA and DAIA the guarantee of this verbal agreement was the prevailing concept of “communitarianism” among core actors of the Jewish collective entity. Communitarianism gives priority to the needs of the community over those of the individuals, and in the political sphere, emphasizes the notion of responsibility over that of individual rights.<sup>45</sup>

In the aftermath of the attack, Memoria Activa respectfully observed the orientations determined by AMIA and DAIA. As Laura Ginsberg, the widow of the top official of AMIA killed in the bombing and one of Memoria Activa’s most important leaders, pointed out during an interview:

*“All the victims’ families nurtured the hope that someone who was less afflicted personally by the pain would be able to take command and press the government, so that the causes and perpetrators of what occurred on July 18 would become known. With the passing of time, however, we realized nothing was going on (...). Thus, in due time, we started participating in the rallies organized on the 18<sup>th</sup> of each month in Pasteur Street, as well as on Mondays in Memoria Activa. Different modalities of protest grew as we came to understand that there were no results and that we confronted many limitations. This is why by 1995, after many meetings in (the court building of) Comodoro Py Street, we the relatives went to see the prosecutors, Judge Galeano... we spoke to everyone (...). We spoke to all of those whom we believed could support us, until on October 18, 1995, we formally presented ourselves as plaintiffs (...).”<sup>46</sup>*

Although Ginsberg and other victims’ families were not familiar with “communitarianism”, they naturally trusted the Jewish leadership. In addition, during a period of grief they needed to rely on those significant others. The strong determination showed in the first rally by DAIA’s president, Ruben Beraja (July 21, 1994), reinforced the hope of accomplishing the shared goal.

During the first year after the attack, Beraja supported Memoria Activa on the basis that public pressure might contribute to a successful investigation. With this aim, weekly gatherings were organized in the street across the

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<sup>45</sup> - Amitai Etzioni, A 308, “Communitarianism”, *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World*, Vol. 1 A-D, Karen Christensen and David Levinson, Eds., Sage Publication, 2003, pp 224-228

<sup>46</sup> - In 1996, Laura Ginsberg, Diana Malamud and Norma Lew presented a personal demand to the judiciary, although being part of the “causa AMIA”, the collective demand presented by AMIA and DAIA.

House from the Supreme Court of Justice at Plaza Lavalle. Every Monday at 9:53 AM, the sound of the *shofar* interrupted the noise of Buenos Aires's busy streets and signified the beginning of the weekly gatherings. Each week a group of 100 people gathered in the street; on the annual anniversary of the attack, several hundred people participated in the gathering.

Sergio Bergman, a well known rabbi of the Conservative Movement, was the person in charge of preserving the Jewish profile of Memoria Activa. His eloquent speech was one of the main sources of inspiration, along with speeches made by women who had lost loved ones. These participants became the true leaders of the grass-roots movement.

By the end of 1995 it was clear that the government would not conduct an investigation into who was responsible for the terrorist act. Consequently, as hope for a thorough investigation began to diminish, denunciations in the Plaza grew. When the theme of the speeches given in the Plaza began to be less about grief, tensions began to emerge among the victims' families concerning the goals, encumbrances and profile of Memoria Activa as they related to the investigation and the Jewish Central Organization

All of the families agreed on pursuing justice and respecting AMIA and DAIA; however, they disagreed on how to define and accomplish these ideas.<sup>47</sup>

Olga Dejtiar and Sofia Guterman would have preferred to preserve Memoria Activa as the symbolic memory of destruction and not as a collective political actor. Both of them followed the concept of the few men active in the organization (Luis Czyzewski, the person who accompanied the president of DAIA to the Hearing in Washington in 1995, is the representative leader.)

On December 26, 1996, a few months prior to the first rupture within the group of victims' families, Sofia Guterman read a poem to express gratitude to the people that gathered every Monday morning at the Plaza. It has an important testimonial value:

*“When each Monday the wind blows  
and the rain soaks the green of the Plaza  
.....  
“They are always there, stoic, standing,*

*extending their hands, giving us hope,  
 helping us to make someone hear our demands.  
 They are women and men who have the luck of not having lost their beloved  
 In two perverse, cowardly attacks;  
 .....  
 They all know that a deep pain gnaws us,  
 It squeezes with strength, it suffocates us.  
 When they look at us they support us.  
 When they talk to us we recover strength,  
 loud shouts emerge and we demand with strength.  
 .....  
 We ask justice for our dead.....  
 Thousand thanks friends, thousand thanks.”*

“*Thousand Thanks My Friends*”, is a paradigmatic example of how victims’ families perceived the attitude of the Jewish and non Jewish people on the post attack period.<sup>47</sup>

As growing evidence reflected that the investigation of the AMIA bombing was in danger of falling in a *vacuum* and that the official complaint, headed by AMIA and DAIA, was making no progress, Memoria Activa’s gatherings at the Plaza turned from a symbolic representation of collective bereavement and civic responsibility, into a strong denunciation of the government cover-up.

In 1996 Laura Ginsberg, Diana Malamud, Norma Lew and Adriana Reisfeld, top leaders of Memoria Activa, decided that the grass-roots movement should foster social mobilization, build networks with strategic purposes, monitor the judicial investigation and make the necessary public denunciations of the corresponding agencies, with or without the approval of AMIA and DAIA.

The following quotations show the main ideas that cut across the speeches delivered by the most prominent leaders of Memoria Activa: Laura Ginsberg, Diana Malamud, Adriana Reisfeld and Norma Lew, at the gatherings at Plaza Lavalle and during the anniversaries since 1996.

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<sup>47</sup> - *Thousand Thanks my Friends* became the official hymn. It is sung with the music composed by a young Argentine in every anniversary of the bombing.

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> of July - “*Judge Galeano traveled to Venezuela, and his declaration [when he returned to Buenos Aires] was “you will fall on your back”.*<sup>48</sup> “(...) *Nothing happened because the Supreme Court of Justice did not agree to take diplomatic immunity away from the officials of the Iranian Embassy ... these people left the country. (...) security agencies don’t investigate. A well known Nazi is the head of the Ministry of Justice. Suddenly, after announcing the possibility of a meeting between our President and President Clinton, Barra (the Minister of Justice) presents his resignation. The Police of the Provincia de Buenos Aires was also renewed.*”<sup>49</sup>

From the perspective of AMIA and DAIA, this kind of discourse broke the rules established when they were first consulted about the creation of Memoria Activa. Denunciations about the cover-up and about the inefficiency of the judge (Juan Jose Galeano) in charge of the investigation were perceived as an intrusion into the field of DAIA’s incumbencies.

For DAIA’s president, such denunciations endangered AMIA and DAIA’s strategy.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the lawyers from both institutions put growing pressure on Memoria Activa to refrain from making inflammatory speeches.

Similar discourse was used by DAIA and AMIA to explain their own silence when they learned of the government’s refusal to investigate the attack and that Galeano had lost and destroyed substantive pieces of evidence and had tailored an official version of the attack that was acceptable to the political power.<sup>51</sup> Their rationale for discrediting Memoria Activa’s denunciations was that they were the product of emotion and passion.

Secrecy about the pace of the investigation and permanent declarations about reinforcing security measures within the country, as well as the need to devote additional resources to the control of the triple border between Argentina,

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<sup>48</sup> - About the supposed exceptional findings of Judge Juan Jose Galeano, see: “AMIA o la historia de una infamia”, by Raul Kolman, published by the journal Pagina 12, on February 27, 2005. <http://www.pagina12web.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-42982-2004-10-30.html>. About the immediate frustration of what seemed to be important clues for the investigation from 1995 until 2000, see: Laura Ginsberg, *op. cit.* Also see Monday’s talks in Memoria Activa’s gatherings in 1996. <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/anteriores1996.htm>

<sup>49</sup> - About the talks of the representatives of Memoria Activa in 1996 see: <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/anteriores1996.htm>

<sup>50</sup> - This opinion was pointed out personally by the president of DAIA, Dr. Ruben Beraja to the author of this article, in 1996.

<sup>51</sup> - The rubbles were removed right after the attack with power shovels and put in dump trucks with masonry, car remains and even with human remains without any order whatsoever. At first were kept in the open air without having been studied by the experts. Finally, in 1997 Galeano authorized using the rubbles to fill the cost of the Rio de la La Plata About the loss of evidence by judge Juan Jose Galeano and other state agencies see: Memoria Activa’s presentation vis-avis the Organization of American States (OAS) in Memoria Activa’s official website: <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/oea.htm> About the official version tailored by Galeano see the verdict of the Oral Federal Court No3, 2004.

Paraguay and Brazil, were some of the main public concerns of DAIA and AMIA. These demands were reasonable and useful to the government,<sup>52</sup> so they were backed by the mass media that supported Menem's government for various reasons.<sup>53</sup>

Beraja represented a combination of rational and traditional authority. In his relationship with the news media he was successful in dissuading Jewish journals from criticizing DAIA's monitoring of the investigation, prohibiting people working in the news section of Beraja's channel Alef from showing Memoria Activa's public gatherings and putting pressure on the leadership of the organization with the goal of concealing denunciations of Judge Galeano and other governmental actors.<sup>54</sup>

The talk given at Memoria Activa's gathering on the Plaza on Monday, August 12, 1996, reflects the denunciations:

*"(...) We would not want to resign ourselves, like the lord of the parable, to forced passivity, and allow the attacks against AMIA and the Embassy of Israel to remain unpunished because our tongues are atrophic due to imposed silence. (...) A person who cannot make use of his/her thought and voice loses dignity as a human being. We will not remain with our arms down and our voices muted. (...)"*<sup>55</sup>

These opinions are not representative of all victims' families. Although they perceived the evident failures of the investigation and distrusted Judge Galeano, some families preferred to adhere to the instructions given by AMIA and DAIA to avoid pointing out the mishandlings in the preliminary judicial investigation.

Thus, controversies began to grow inside Memoria Activa regarding the strategy of AMIA and DAIA relating to the *welthanschauung* and the degree of identification with "communitarianism" of some people *versus* the concept of the legitimacy of defending individual rights in the context of a collective problem, and the consideration that no

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<sup>52</sup> - About security and the will of the Argentine government to cooperate with United States Government in counterterrorism operations, see: *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, Department of State Publication 10.535. Latin American Overview, Released on April 1998: <http://www.usemb.se/terror/rpt1997/latin.html>

<sup>53</sup> - Some journalists were identified with Menem's political project and kept silence not to disturb the process of structural transformations, but many sought to escape from the intimidating actions developed by the government, which frightened journalists when they could not be attracted.

<sup>54</sup> - About restrictions to the press during Menem's government and about Beraja prohibiting the cover-up by channel Alef of Memoria Activa's activities, see: *The Government Complicity and Silence* by Diego Melamed, Florida International University International Media Center, Miami, Florida, 2000 in Pulso del periodismo: <http://www.pulso.org/English/Archives/Government%20Complicity.htm> Beraja was the president of Alef network.

<sup>55</sup> - Memoria Activa's website, *op.cit*

representative of a collective actor has the right to conceal the freedom of speech of individual actors unless it represents a menace to society.<sup>56</sup>

Within Memoria Activa, 1996 was a year for defining goals and policy.

Rabbi Sergio Bergman resigned<sup>57</sup> and so did Olga Dejtjar, the mother of a victim who was a member of the Memoria Activa Foundation. Olga pointed out that she “could not accept outsiders criticizing the Jewish leadership.”<sup>58</sup> She referred to Alberto Zuppi,<sup>59</sup> the lawyer of Memoria Activa. The problem for Olga was not the accuracy of Zuppi’s criticism but what she felt was a matter of loyalty to the community represented by AMIA and DAIA. Olga is a paradigmatic example of the *welthanschaung* and the spirit of “communitarianism” of most of the people that created Familiares y Amigos de las Victimas. On the other hand, Laura Ginsberg, Diana Malamud, Adriana Reisfeld and Norma Lew, adhered to the concept that it is legitimate to defend individual rights in the context of a collective problem, and that no collective actor has the right to deny freedom of speech unless the information made public is a threat to the security of the community.

Discrepancies continued to grow within the group of victims’ families. On the eve of the third anniversary of the bombing they reached an internal *consensus* about the style of commemoration and about organizing a sole gathering with DAIA and AMIA, at which there would not be an official stage, but that all speakers and special invitees would stand at ground level. The agreement included a clause whereby no governmental officials could play an active role during the gathering. The only speeches would be given by Oscar Hansman, president of AMIA, Ruben Beraja, president of DAIA, and Laura Ginsberg on behalf of the victims’ families.

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<sup>56</sup> - The systematic rejections of the leadership of DAIA to meet with the victims’ families from 1994 until the split off of Memoria Activa in July 1997 was denounced by Olga Dejtjar, Sofia Guterman and Laura Ginsberg when interviewed by the author of this article.

<sup>57</sup> - Rabbi Bergman presented his resignation to Memoria Activa and explained his dissociation from the group in the movement's periodical, *Masorti* (31 May 1996) He argued that: “... it was time for Memoria Activa to refashion itself.” He explained that it was necessary in order to overcome a manifest failure, which he described as Argentine society's perception of Memoria Activa as a mobilization of solely the Jewish community. Hence, Plaza Lavalle had to be abandoned in order to address Argentine society as a whole (quoted in JPR report, updated on December, 1996). Some of Bergman's colleagues explained his departure as a mark of dissidence with the radical line pressed by the more activist within the group, especially Ginsberg and Malamud, both widows of two people killed in the attack. (Quoted in JPR report, updated on December, 1996)

<sup>58</sup> - Interview to Olga Dejtjar, *op. cit.*, authors archive.

<sup>59</sup> - The Jewish organizations paid the lawyer representing Familiares y Amigos de las Victimas, while the people of Memoria Activa hired privately Alberto Zuppi, a well known lawyer that represented the Italian Embassy when that country asked for the extraction of Otto Priebke, one the war criminals that immigrated to Argentina in 1940’s. Since 1996, Zuppi, criticized the way in which AMIA and DAIA led the quarrel in the judiciary.

But the agreement was broken by AMIA and DAIA. Without consulting the victims' families, they built a stage and invited the Minister of the Interior, Carlos Corach, to speak on behalf of the government.<sup>60</sup>

As on each anniversary, several thousand people were standing at 600 Pasteur and on adjacent blocks expecting to receive news about the investigation. Cynical practices from government officials were a déjà vu for this audience; however, Corach's talk was not tolerated. He was booed, and his speech was interrupted when the public began shouting "Jewish traitor" at him.

Immediately after Corach had finished his talk, Laura Ginsberg read a speech on behalf of all the victims' families.

Ginsberg said:

*"I close my eyes and imagine it's the 18th of July of 1994, at 7 in the morning. We awake as in many other Mondays, to begin the working week. Parents share their breakfast with their children and we all say 'I love you' to each other before leaving home. But many of us did not do so because we could never have imagined that it would be for the last time (...).*

*I accuse the government of Menem and Duhalde of consenting to impunity, of consenting to indifference, incompetence and ineptitude. I accuse the government of Menem and Duhalde of covering up the local connection that was instrumental to the murder of our relatives."*

Ginsberg's speech included a list of the main problems that cut across the investigation and pointed directly to the responsibility of the government, foreshadowing what the Argentine Federal Justice would confirm in 2004.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, paraphrasing Emile Zola, she accused the Argentine President and the Vice-president of cover-up. The audience responded with strong applause.

After hearing Ginsberg's talk, the president of DAIA, Ruben Beraja, threw out the speech he had prepared and improvised an accusation against Iran without mentioning any other leads or culprits. The crowd was expecting to hear the list of names of the government officials that blocked the investigation that Beraja had promised to read long ago. The majority of the audience turned their backs to the stage while Beraja was still speaking. This symbolic sign of repudiation was sufficient to alter the relationship between the Argentine government and Ruben Beraja, who up to that was uncontested leader of the Argentine Jews.

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<sup>60</sup> - Interview to Olga Dejtiar, Laura Ginsberg and Sofia Guterman. September 2004, November 2005

<sup>61</sup> - See Memoria Activa's website, *op.cit.*

That same afternoon, Beraja and AMIA's president Oscar Hansman paid an unexpected visit to Minister Corach and other government officials to apologize. He pointed out: "The Jewish leaders do not share the insults and accusations made against President Menem."<sup>62</sup> But Beraja and Hansman's words were not enough for a government in need of strong leadership capable of disciplining its constituency.

Days after the third anniversary, on the opposite side of the city, an anonymous caller phoned in a bomb threat at the pavilion II of the Faculty of Science of the University of Buenos Aires, where Ginsberg works (she is a biologist specializing in immunology). The Brigade of Explosives of the Federal Police found the bomb and detonated it. No one was injured.<sup>63</sup>

Although all victims' families supported Ginsberg's talk during the unified gathering commemorating the third anniversary of the attack, what happened in the following days showed that the discrepancies would lead to a crisis and polarization.

A few months after the third anniversary of the bombing, in 1997, DAIA and AMIA published *La denuncia*, which was supposed to provide a list of those responsible for the cover-up of the bombing investigation and to answer the demands of the people during the gathering. The audiences felt deceived once again because although the article gave clues about some of the investigative leads, it veiled the responsibilities of the main actors in the cover-up. *La denuncia* was published when concrete evidence showing the complicity of government officials in the cover-up was already public domain.<sup>64</sup>

In 1999, Memoria Activa, along with the support of the Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS), the Center of International Justice and Law (CEJIL) and Dr. Alberto Zuppi, accused the Argentine State of:

- a) "The infringement of the right to life and physical integrity of the countless victims of the attack against AMIA, due to the failure to comply with the duty of preventing, investigating and punishing the crime, and

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<sup>62</sup> - About the visit see the newspapers: *La nacion*, *Clarín* and *Página 12*, published the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1997. Also see: "Argentines cry over unsolved bombing attacks" by Sergio Kiernan in *The Jewish News Weekly*, July 25, 1997.

[http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story\\_id/6604/edition\\_id/124/format/html/displaystory.html](http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/6604/edition_id/124/format/html/displaystory.html)

<sup>63</sup> - About the menace to Laura Ginsberg, see: *Microsemanario*, Year 7, No 285

<http://www.fcen.uba.ar/prensa/micro/1997/ms285a.htm>

<sup>64</sup> - AMIA and DAIA eds, (1997) *La denuncia*, Buenos Aires, Planeta

- b) The infringement of the right to judicial guarantees, through the denial of justice from local courts and through the obstruction of justice.”<sup>65</sup>

This and other systematic irregularities in the investigation propelled Memoria Activa to demand an impartial observer at the oral trial. After considering the relevance of this demand, the president of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS), Claudio Grossman, arrived in Buenos Aires. He was given a dedicated desk in the courtroom and unlimited access to the files of the case.<sup>66</sup>

From 1994 until 2004 prominent Argentine intellectuals, artists, journalists and political actors, as well as representatives of civil society participated in the gatherings. They voiced their opinions about issues related to the investigation such as endemic impunity, the inefficiency of local intelligence and security agencies, failures in the investigation of the attack, or they attended the gatherings to show their support of the Jewish grass-roots movement.<sup>67</sup> Thousands of speeches were given over the ten years of Memoria Activa, and this was of great help in raising awareness about the importance of maintaining judicial security and strengthening the institutions of a Republic in an effort to preserve democracy. In Argentina, fostering the investigation needed not only rational strategic action, courage and true commitment to the cause; but a strong will not to succumb to temptations and pressures posed by a government cover-up.

In 2004, after three years of work, the Argentine judicial system (TOF 3) acquitted most of the twenty suspects imprisoned on false charges. After proving that the judge in charge of the investigation had falsified, the Consejo de la Magistratura decided that Judge Galeano would stand trial. According to Argentine law, this is a necessary step in the process of dismissing him. Eamon Mullen and Jose Barbaccia, the two prosecutors who helped Galeano, were also dismissed.

Because of Memoria Activa's formal denunciations, the Kirchner Administration at the offices of the Organization of Inter American States (OAS) in Washington declared: “The Argentine Government recognizes the responsibility

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<sup>65</sup> - <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/oea.htm>

<sup>66</sup> - About the participation of the OIS and Claudio Grossman in the oral trial, see: the Argentine journal *La Voz del Interior*, Marzo 4 de 1005

of the State for the violation of human rights, including the right to life, physical integrity and protection by the judiciary. The State recognizes its responsibility, since there was no provision to avoid the attacks, the State recognizes its responsibility because there was a cover-up and justice was denied.”<sup>68</sup>

Over the years, hundreds of people who spoke at Memoria Activa’s gatherings denounced the irresponsibility of the State.<sup>69</sup>

Ruben Beraja’s speech at the First Latin American Cultural Congress of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela, in March 1998, illustrates the internal contradictions and fallacies underlying the silence of the establishment of AMIA and DAIA regarding the lack of monitoring of the investigation and the cover-up. Beraja stated:

*“We can not behave like the [victims’] families. The families have a pain that leads them to react as if they were the institutional leadership, and they are not. Not understanding this difference is not being able to understand differences between roles. The community cannot compromise in a fight that leads to a road without exit, into a road that has no alternative. (...)”*

*“The Jewish leadership of Argentina is criticized because we have the courage and the decision not to give into populism and to the pain of the families as if we were a chorus repeating what they say. I accept criticism and I accept the responsibilities. I think the leadership should have the courage even to suffer injustices that may emerge from our behavior if we are convinced that ours are the correct behaviors, and the correct behavior is to take care of the community as a whole, more than attacking the [national]*

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<sup>67</sup> - To read the talks given in Memoria Activa’s gatherings since 1996 to 2004, see the section “discursos de la semana” in Memoria Activa’s website: <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/anteriores1996.htm>

<sup>68</sup> - The following is a literal transcription of declaration of the Argentine government: El gobierno argentino reconoce la responsabilidad del Estado por la violación de los derechos humanos denunciados por Memoria Activa, incluyendo el derecho a la vida, a la integridad física y a la protección judicial. El Estado reconoce la responsabilidad, ya que no existió prevención para evitar el atentado, el Estado reconoce responsabilidad porque existió encubrimiento y denegación de justicia.” “El gobierno argentino reconoce la responsabilidad del Estado por la violación de los derechos humanos denunciados por Memoria Activa, incluyendo el derecho a la vida, a la integridad física y a la protección judicial. El Estado reconoce la responsabilidad, ya que no existió prevención para evitar el atentado, el Estado reconoce responsabilidad porque existió encubrimiento y denegación de justicia.” The text of the declaration was published by the Argentine journal Pagina 12, see: [http://www.pagina12web.com.ar/secciones/elpais/index.php?id\\_notas=48040&seccion=1](http://www.pagina12web.com.ar/secciones/elpais/index.php?id_notas=48040&seccion=1)

<sup>69</sup> - To read the talks given in Memoria Activa’s gatherings at the plaza from 1996 to 2004, see: [http://www.memoriaactiva.com/anteriores\\_abajo1996.htm](http://www.memoriaactiva.com/anteriores_abajo1996.htm)

*authorities, and more than trying to create a problem within the [Jewish] community, and more than addressing the theme of the mothers, which is not only of the mothers, but also of the fathers, of the parents, of the brothers, of the wives, of the husbands. It is more important to understand that we are dealing with an issue related to international affairs.”*

The international level was part of the investigation of the bombing, but it was the responsibility of the Argentine government and not of the Argentine Jewish establishment.

The responsibility of the Jewish leadership was to represent the interest of their constituency and especially the victims’ families to the Argentine government. Matters of international or local politics were beyond their sphere.

In addition, the peace conversations between Israel and Syria initiated in 1992 had already failed.<sup>70</sup> Thus, asking the Argentine government to investigate the Syrian lead would not interfere with peace-keeping efforts.

AMIA and DAIA’s policy of detachment continued throughout successive administrations, even after the Argentine government, in 2005, acknowledged its responsibility for failing to investigate. Recently, Abraham Kaul, AMIA’s president, pointed out failures in the investigation of the bombing and asked the government for a new investigation. DAIA’s leadership kept silent.

#### *Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas*

Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas (FAV) supported AMIA and DAIA’s criteria and policy, including the defense of Judge Galeano from the beginning almost to the end of the oral trial in 2004. FAV is one of the parties of the so-called “unified lawsuit” before the judiciary.<sup>71</sup>

When on September 24, 2001, the Argentine judicial system (TOF 3)<sup>72</sup> brought to trial 20 suspects accused of direct or accessory roles in the AMIA bombing,<sup>73</sup> FAV intended to become an independent voice from both Jewish

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<sup>70</sup> - Itamar Rabinovich, *op.cit.*

<sup>71</sup> - “Unified lawsuit” is the name given to the lawsuit presented by AMIA, DAIA and FAV to the judiciary.

<sup>72</sup> - About the TOF No3 and about empirical evidence that proves how Ruben Beraja, in the name of DAIA and AMIA manipulated together with judge Juan Jose Galeano the judicial investigation about the attack against AMIA, see: *Nueva Sion*, “Verguenza ajena”, March, 2005. About the files filled by Memoria Activa’s lawyer, Pablo Jacoby, in the name of Noemi Wassner, Adriana Reinfeld and Benjamin J. Lew, and presented in the Secretary No 17, in the quarrel No 1156, denouncing and presenting concrete evidences that show that the investigation led by judge Oyarbide was manipulated by Ruben Beraja according to his personal interest (in jail under the charges of economic fraud while he was president of Banco Mayo). In exchange, Beraja promised the judge to use his personal influences in the Jewish community of United States to benefit the judge. See the source in: <http://www.memoriaactiva.com/recusacion.htm> . About the denunciations vis-à-vis the Federal Court of the judges

institutions, but the Court did not accept it. Therefore, there were only two parties representing the victims during the oral trial: the “unified lawsuit” (AMIA, DAIA and FAV) and Memoria Activa.

Consequently, the lawyers of AMIA, DAIA and FAV had to share time in court, dividing the topics of the accusation among themselves. However disturbing the decision of the court may have been for FAV, it could not be legally objected to because the demands of AMIA, DAIA and FAV were analogous, all three parties agreed to: a) consider that the people imprisoned were part of the conexión local (local connection) of the attack; b) praise Judge Galeano’s work as coordinator of the preliminary judicial investigation; and c) evaluate as positive the participation of prosecutors Mullen and Barbaccia’s, although recognizing that all of them had made some mistakes.

The opinion of the parties of the “unified lawsuit” was articulated in 2000 by Jose Hercman, the president of DAIA who replaced Beraja: “There were mistakes, delays and manipulations, but we believe Mr. Galeano is an honest man and justice will eventually prevail.”<sup>74</sup> This perception of Judge Galeano’s work was the opposite of Memoria Activa’s.<sup>75</sup>

The parties of the “unified lawsuit” (AMIA, DAIA, FAV) paid no attention to Memoria Activa’s denunciations or to congressman Cristina Kirchner, senator and former member of the Special Bicameral Committee for the Follow up of the Attacks Against the Israeli Embassy, who pointed systematically to Galeano’s *mal praxis*<sup>76</sup>; or to Elisa Carrio who headed a parliamentary committee that investigated problems derived from systemic corruption and included the bombing of AMIA as a leading case to be studied

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Galeano, Oyarbide and Cavallo, see: *Los Andes*, Mendoza, March 20, 2005:  
<http://www.losandes.com.ar/imprimir.asp?nrc=207917>

<sup>73</sup> - Judge Juan José Galeano filed charges against 20 suspects on February 27, 2000, and sent the case to an Oral Court. Five of the indicted were described as “necessary parties” to the bombing, a legal term describing accomplices who may not have participated in the bombing itself but whose contributions made it possible. Under Argentine law, accomplices are as guilty as the bombers themselves and can be sent to jail for life without possibility of parole. One civilian, Carlos Alberto Telleldin, a petty criminal with a record of fencing stolen goods, selling stolen cars, pimping, extortion, and passing bad checks, and four senior officers in the Buenos Aires provincial (state) police force—Juan José Ribelli, Raúl Ibarra, Anastasio Leal, and Mario Barreiro—are charged with the handling of the van used as a car bomb by the terrorists. The other 15 will be tried on lesser charges.

<sup>74</sup> - Forward, September 7, 2000. <http://www.forward.com/issues/2001/01.09.07/news3.html>

<sup>75</sup> - About the loss of pieces of evidences and the deviations in judge Galeanos’ investigation, see Memoria Activa’s presentation vis-à-vis the OAS in the website of the organization: [www.memoriaactiva.com](http://www.memoriaactiva.com), op.cit.

<sup>76</sup> - About Cristina Kirchner’s evaluation of the investigation of the attacks against the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA, see: <http://www.parlamentario.com/parrafoscristina.php3>

As part of the refusal to hear or to look at evidence discovered or presented by people that did not belong to or were not related with the *apparatus* of the organization, in 1999, DAIA rejected Nilda Garre's (head of the Special Unit for the Investigations of the attack, created during Fernando De la Rúa's administration) statement of the importance of the declaration of "Testigo C" and asked for her resignation, accusing her of having disclosed information that could damage the judicial process.<sup>77</sup> Although it was proven that Garre did not disclose information, FAV kept silent.<sup>78</sup> However, AMIA listened to Garre, but did not defend her against DAIA's accusations.

Memoria Activa defended Garre's work as head of UEI, and agreed with her about the inefficiency of prosecutors Eamon Mullen and Jose Barbaccia. In 2000, the Federal Chamber, an organization that supervises the work of all federal judges, also criticized Galeano and the prosecutors for their handling of the case.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, in response to DAIA's demand, Garre had to resign. Garre was the only official that had the courage to deconstruct the "official version" built during Menem's administration.

On the verge of the closing of the oral trial in 2004, FAV drastically changed its opinion about Judge Galeano and asked that a judgment be handed down. He was charged with not fulfilling his duties as a public official. Galeano was already indicted because of Memoria Activa's denunciations, but he was still in charge of the investigation of the AMIA case.<sup>80</sup>

Some aspects of the relationship between FAV, AMIA and DAIA seem to mirror the relationship among AMIA and DAIA, and the governments of Carlos Menem, Fernando de la Rúa and Eduardo Duhalde.

The behavior of FAV was very different from that of Memoria Activa and APEMIA, a third organization created by Laura Ginsberg after she split from the former. Within FAV, both men and women were tied to the institutional

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<sup>77</sup> - About DAIA's attitude towards Nilda Garre, see the article by Sergio Moreno, "Hay tolerancia cero con el FREPASO", in the Argentine journal *Página 12*: <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/2001/01-10/01-10-07/pag12.htm>

<sup>78</sup> - About Dr. Nilda Garre's intervention in the investigation of the attacks, see official documents in:

[http://www.nildagarre.com.ar/areas\\_ad6.htm](http://www.nildagarre.com.ar/areas_ad6.htm)[http://www.nildagarre.com.ar/areas\\_ad6.htm](http://www.nildagarre.com.ar/areas_ad6.htm)

Als see: Diario del Juicio.com

<http://64.233.161.104/search?q=cache:lh2RWbFBKfJ:www.diariodeljuicio.com/PFriendly.asp%3FID%3D2785+%22nilda+garre%22+%2B+galeano&hl=en>

<sup>79</sup> - About the criticism of the Federal Chamber, see: *La Nación*. July 30, 2000. Also see: *Clarín*: July 29, 2000.

<sup>80</sup> - When Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas denounced Galeano he already was being investigated in the criminal jurisdiction since many years ago. About the criminal investigation, see:

[http://www.jus.gov.ar/amia/Informe02/Informe\\_045.htm](http://www.jus.gov.ar/amia/Informe02/Informe_045.htm)

hierarchy: women had more traditional roles, different educational profiles and were of an older generation than the women of Memoria Activa and APEMIA.

The women in FAV presented themselves as mothers fighting for the memory of and justice for the loved ones they had lost. Publicly, they were seen as emotional caregivers who fit the model of “typical women.”

Ostensibly they represented the heart and not the head of the people participating in the “unified lawsuit”. As a result of the trauma she suffered, Sofia, the mother of one of the victims and a member of FAV, became a writer. She wanted to give an account of what happened in her own word. When Sofia finished her first book of poems and memories, she asked her editor to improve her literary style, and he answered, “I do not correct feelings.”<sup>81</sup>

Just like most of the relatives who were active in one of the three organizations of victims’ families, Sofia went every morning to the court at Comodoro Py Street, where the trial took place. Considering the nature of the trial, strict security measures were taken by the court. The victims’ families, including Sofia, sat behind glass. When Sofia returned home each day after court, she recorded her experiences in her journal. Catherine MacKinnon would consider Sofia to be “the voice of the victim”, feeling and speaking from a position of powerlessness.<sup>82</sup> In July 2004, Sofia published a book entitled *Behind the Glass*.

## APEMIA

### Brief Antecedents of the organization

Laura Ginsberg delivered a powerful speech on the third anniversary of the attack (1997). She demanded that justice be served because the State had failed to protect its citizens in 1992 when the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed and in 1994 when AMIA was devastated. Ginsberg also conveyed the idea that the bereaved, regardless of age or gender, carry the deceased within themselves.

Ginsberg’s speech worked as a catalyst for the crisis within the group of victims’ families when all of them, formally or informally, were still considered part of Memoria Activa. Even though her speech had the previous

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<sup>81</sup> - Interview to Sofia Guterman. *Op.cit.*

*consensus* of all the victims' families, people who identified with "communitarianism" and women who promoted "care ethics" broke with Memoria Activa. Some people, particularly Jewish political actors linked with Zionist political parties and the Haredi segment of the community, broke with Memoria Activa because they felt the organization had violated the principle of "community discipline,"

In December 2001, although not a member of the executive committee of Memoria Activa, Ginsberg talked at the Plaza. Without consulting the executives of the organization, she called for the resignation of Alberto Zuppi, the legal representative of Memoria Activa. She pointed out that there was a conflict of interest because he was Secretary of Justice in the short-lived government of President Adolfo Rodríguez Saa and legal representative of Memoria Activa. When she finished her speech Ginsberg was asked to resign as a member of the movement.<sup>83</sup>

#### Creation of APEMIA

In January 2002, Ginsberg created a new organization named APEMIA. The acronym stands for Agrupación por el Esclarecimiento de la Masacre Impune de la AMIA (Association for the Elucidation of the Unpunished Massacre of AMIA). Although APEMIA and its network are anti-Zionist, they also demanded justice for the victims of the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

Ginsberg is the founder and the sole representative of victims' families in the organization. She defines APEMIA as an Argentine political movement. Memoria Activa defines itself as a Jewish human rights grass roots movement and its links to the Jewish collective entity are very strong.

Departing from the ideological-political profile defined by Ginsberg, APEMIA built a network of alliances with organizations of the Argentine civil society such as piqueteros<sup>84</sup> (organization of people without employment), CORREPI (the Coordinator Against Police and Institutional Repression), and FUA (the Argentine University

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<sup>82</sup> - MacKinnon, Catherine, "Feminist Discourse, Moral Values and the Law", p. 27, 1985, - A conversation. *Buffalo Law Review*, 34: 11-87

<sup>83</sup> - Interview to Laura Ginsberg, September 2004, Author's archive.

<sup>84</sup> - About the piqueteros, see: Escude C. (2005) *El Estado Parasitario- Ciclos de Vaciamiento, clase política delictiva y colapso de la política exterior*. pp 67 -77, 87-92. Lumiere, Buenos Aires

Federation, an organization of students identified with parties of the political left). APEMIA is also linked to the Trotskyist workers party of Argentina, the Partido Obrero (PO).<sup>85</sup>

For APEMIA and its group of allies “the Argentine State is the local connection of the attack against AMIA”. This accusation emerges from the evidence that “(...) the Argentine State knew that the attack was going to occur, did not prevent it and cooperated in the cover-up.”<sup>86</sup> For all of them, the recognition made by President Nestor Kirchner’s government about the Argentine State violating the right to investigate is another form of cover-up. Israel and Imperialism (United States), are also perceived as indirectly responsible for the act.<sup>87</sup>

Although Ginsberg was a member of Memoria Activa when the presentation was filed by the OAS with the support of CELS and CEJIL, she rejects the validity of the verdict of the trial and does not agree with the performance of the OAS.

For very different and almost opposite reasons neither APEMIA nor FAV accept the verdict of the trial. In the post-trial period the people of FAV participated officially in several gatherings of APEMIA. This was how they expressed their disapproval of the verdict (TOF3).

The paradox is that FAV and APEMIA represent two opposite extremes within the realm of victims’ families’ organizations. Regarding ethnic identification, FAV is linked to the core of AMIA and DAIA. AMIA paid FAV’s legal representative from 1994 to 2005. FAV’s purpose is to keep alive the memory of what happened and to be a part of the unified lawsuit<sup>88</sup>.

APEMIA doesn’t consider itself a Jewish organization. Currently, its aim reaches beyond the AMIA case. In regard to national politics, FAV is perceived as having ideologies that go from the center to the democratic right in the local political scene, while APEMIA is identified with the Trotskyist party of Argentina. The only allies of FAV are both

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<sup>85</sup> - When Ginsberg says that the Argentine State knew that the attack was going to occur she refers to the denunciation of Wilson Dos Santos at the Argentine consulate in Milan ten days before the act. (See page 2 of this article) About APEMIA’s ideological orientation, see: CORREPI’s Newsletter No. 176, 2002, in <http://www.correpi.lahaine.org/articulo.php?p=60&more=1&c=1>

<sup>86</sup> - About the conception of APEMIA vis-à-vis the attack and about its link with the PO, see: <http://www.po.org.ar/po/po831/redi.htm> <http://www.po.org.ar/po/po831/redi.htm>

<sup>87</sup> - About APEMIA’s ideological-political orientation, see the website of the “Liga socialista revolucionari”, URL: [www.geocities.com/ligasocrev/AnterioresBR/BR68/Amia.htm](http://www.geocities.com/ligasocrev/AnterioresBR/BR68/Amia.htm)

<sup>88</sup> - Interviews To Sofia Guterman and Olga Dejtjar, *op.cit*

Jewish institutions and APEMIA has a network of non Jewish organizations, in consonance with its auto definition and with the way in which it is perceived by the Argentine Jewry and the mainstream society.

**Comment:** I don't know what this means, so I could not edit it.

The only point on which FAV and APEMIA agree is in rejecting the verdict of the Federal Justice (TOF 3).

Paraphrasing Jorge Luis Borges, one of the most important Argentine writers, APEMIA and FAV seemed to be bound together by dread, not by love.<sup>89</sup>

#### Conclusion

- From 1995 up to the end of the trial in 2004, two factions could be perceived inside the group of Jewish victims' families in relation to AMIA and DAIA: a) traditionalists identified with "communitarianism" and were respectful of what is known in the Argentine Jewry as "communitarian responsibility"<sup>90</sup>; b) liberals who think that a legitimate defense of individual rights does not interfere with a positive identification with a collective entity.
- During the period of grief, the women that had lost loved ones in the bombing of AMIA played on the contradiction between sentimentalized views within family relations and the State. For example, they justified pursuing justice because this was the only way in which their "dead would rest in peace." They argued that justice was the only means of ending the period of bereavement. At the national level, they acted as if they would have more rights as mothers than as citizens. Playing the role of mother was also more comfortable within the central Jewish organizations.
- In 1995 the women leading Memoria Activa had already moved from the discourse of "care ethics" to that of "rights ethics" and rejected formulating gendered identities that create categories such as "women" and "mothers". This was the profile adopted by the women who over time resigned from the grass-roots movement and became active in FAV.
- In 1996, the leadership of Memoria Activa began to denounce the preliminary judicial investigation coordinated by Judge Juan Jose Galeano. According to Ginsberg, this happened as soon as they lost what

<sup>89</sup> - See Jorge Luis Borges poem: "Buenos Aires" (1964), in *El otro, el mismo*. "No los une el amor sino el espanto. Sera por eso que la quiero tanto."

she defined as “the innocence of the ordinary citizen”. Such behavior generated discrepancies among the leadership of DAIA-AMIA.

- Until mid 1997, all victims’ families remained involved with Memoria Activa, despite the growing discrepancies among them. The main topics of controversy were the inefficiency of AMIA and DAIA in following up on the preliminary judicial investigation and the attitudes of both organizations towards the government.
- The importance given to DAIA to control Jewish community can be understood when examining the dynamics of Community Fortress (CF): it worked within the Jewish community as the Panopticon described by Foucault. When participants began questioning decisions of segments made by the top Jewish political establishment, CF was shut down.<sup>91</sup>
- In the aftermath of the bombing, AMIA and DAIA demanded hyper-vigilance and repression of emotions like love, empathy and compassion on the premise that rationally action should exclude passion.<sup>92</sup>
- In the specific case of monitoring the investigation of the bombing, the importance given to detachment in the decision making process was explained by DAIA’s president, Ruben Beraja in 1998, at the First Latin American Cultural Congress of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela.<sup>93</sup>
- AMIA and DAIA accused the women of Memoria Activa and the victims’ families of FAV of damaging the investigation when Memoria Activa and FAV began monitoring the investigation.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> - The terms “communitarian responsibility” designate behaviors congruent with “communitarianism” and verticality inside the collective entity.

<sup>91</sup> - Foucault argues that knowledge is a power over others, the power to define others. In his view knowledge ceases to forward liberation, and becomes a mode of surveillance, regulation, discipline. Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power, Ed. Brian Wallis, 1982.

<sup>92</sup> - Ruben Beraja’s speech in Venezuela in 1988, *op.cit.*

<sup>93</sup> - Ruben Beraja’s speech in Venezuela in 1998, *op.cit.*

<sup>94</sup> - In Argentina, playing on the contradiction that lies between sentimentalized views inside the family and the State was installed by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. During 1976-1983, despite the Junta’s claimed that the Madres were crazy, seditious, bad mothers who had raised terrorist children, the military could not simply assassinate all the Madres so long as they retained a public identity as mothers and not as political activists. This could be understood in a period of state terrorism where there was neither freedom of speech nor constitutional guarantees. Whatever the ideological underpinnings of a government, it cannot appear to oppose maternal obligations and the privileges that go with them. But has no justification in a democratic system.

- The political repercussion on the national level of the July 18, 1997 speech given by Laura Ginsberg in the name of all victims' families, during the commemoration of the third anniversary of the attack was a turning point in the relationship between AMIA, DAIA and Memoria Activa.
- Since 1997, Memoria Activa has not participated in joint gatherings with AMIA and DAIA.
- Familiares y Amigos de las Víctimas (FAV) was created by the victims' families that resigned from Activa.
- While the women in FAV are more traditionalists who adhere to "communitarianism" and "care ethics" and who perceive the private sphere as feminine, the women in Memoria Activa adhere to a "rights ethics" and reject the public sphere as masculine.
- In 2001, Laura Ginsberg resigned from Memoria Activa; she created APEMIA in January 2002.
- Within the organizations of victims' families, FAV and APEMIA are the extremes. FAV supported AMIA and DAIA's policy towards the Argentine government and their evaluation of the preliminary judicial investigation, and were therefore critical of the victims' families that disobeyed the instructions of AMIA and DAIA. AMIA paid FAV's legal representative, and they are part of the "unified lawsuit". APEMIA is an Argentine organization with no links to the Jewish community that fights against impunity with other organizations of the Argentine civil society such as the Trotskyite party. Memoria Activa is an Argentine Jewish human rights movement and the only organization that was successful, if not in reaching a conclusion about who was responsible for the bombing of AMIA, then in getting the Argentine government to recognize the OAS State responsibilities for deviations in the judicial investigation of and for violating the "right to investigate" the bombing of AMIA.
- A combination of the following facts and situations led to the failure of the judicial investigation of the bombing of AMIA, generated discrepancies of opinions and conflicts within the Jewish community, and consequently caused confrontations among victims' families that led to a split into three different organizations:
  - a government in great need of cover-up (such as Carlos Menem's administration);

- a country where the institutions of the republic are weak and security is low; corruption and impunity are high; and governments use state resources to attract people through sinecure mechanisms, when needed;
  - AMIA and of DAIA who were incapable of making a diagnosis about the pace of the preliminary judicial investigation which contributed to the veiling of intentional deviations by the Judge in charge of the case and, finally, to the failure of the trial in 2004;
  - sole political representation of the Argentine Jewry by DAIA, and a lack of controls inside the Jewish community lessen the risk of mishandling;
  - The roles of the victims' families and other Jewish social actors, especially the women, were underestimated and under used. If dialog and critical analysis had been allowed, the investigation may not have been mishandled.
- Three questions arise when we examine the results of Memoria Activa's OAS denunciation of the Argentine state for violating the "right to investigate":
    - Did the Jewish establishment of AMIA and DAIA faithfully represent the specific mandates of their constituency and the true interests of the collective Jewish entity?
    - Was the strategic goal forgotten and replaced by a certain mimesis and identification with the people in power? Or,
    - Did the trauma of the bombing result in detachment and hyper-vigilance among official representative of the Jewish community?

### Epilogue

Silence envelops some of the passions of everyday life. A veil is thrown over disagreeable passions when they affect the behavior of relevant public actors.<sup>95</sup> This is not surprising because it is disquieting to dwell on the negative in

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<sup>95</sup> - Hume, Davis, *Moral and Political Philosophy*, p. 236

both the public and private realms. To reconstruct the self, the institutions and societal culture, and to convert them into moral and political actors and agencies, that which has been denied must be reconsidered.

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