

# HUMAN RIGHTS ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH ON HISTORICAL MEMORY: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay\*

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*Abstract: This research note discusses an emerging subfield of inquiry in the study of democratization in Latin America: a focus on the relationships between past human rights abuses and democratization processes. It outlines four sets of questions emerging around the themes of "historical memory" and "legacies of authoritarian rule." The study then examines documentary collections of major human rights nongovernmental organizations (HRNGOs) in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. The purpose of this endeavor is to provide researchers interested in studying the four issues with specific information on documents produced and currently held by the HRNGOs in the Southern Cone. The essay examines seven HRNGOs in Chile, ten in Argentina, and four in Uruguay, and ends with practical hints for researchers who wish to use these resources.*

The global "third wave" of democratic transitions is now well underway, and social scientists have begun to speak less of transitions from authoritarianism to democracy and more of consolidation of democracy.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in history in Latin America, almost every country can claim to possess the core institutional requirements of a political democ-

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1. The literature on transitions to democracy and consolidation is voluminous. Representative texts include O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986) and Karl and Schmitter (1991). I tend to agree with critics of "consolidology" that the term *consolidation* is not extremely useful for two reasons: the tendency to be used in too many instances as a catchall concept (see Schedler 1998); and the teleology inherent in the term (see O'Donnell 1996). It is widely used nonetheless. See, for examples, Gunther, Diamandouros, and Puhle (1995), Linz and Stepan (1996), Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela (1992), Domínguez and Lowenthal (1996), and Huntington (1996).

racy, such as a functioning electoral system, regularly scheduled elections, competitive political parties, and written norms outlining basic human rights. This claim does not mean that Latin American democracies are consolidated, however, as many have pointed out. The existence of these fundamental institutions of democracy says little about its depth, vibrancy, or sustainability (Przeworski et al. 1995). Observers have noted that these new democracies run the risk of becoming stagnated or stalled;<sup>2</sup> that underneath the topsoil of democracy, they harbor the seeds of “elected authoritarianism” (Petras and Vieux 1994); or that they are in some cases so weak that they may revert to “old ways” or even crumble at the first sign of major economic crisis or massive political unrest.

Recently, scholars studying countries of the Southern Cone have started to focus on the ways in which the vulnerability and lingering authoritarian characteristics of new democracies might be profoundly connected to authoritarian pasts.<sup>3</sup> For example, one component of the sustainability and long-term vitality of new democracies may be how they have dealt or are currently dealing with abuses of human rights committed under previous authoritarian regimes.

The relationship between the consolidation or “deepening” of democracy and the legacies of violent pasts remains uncertain. Similarly, it is unclear how much the past matters and whether it is important for democracies to confront past human rights abuses, genocide, torture, disappearances, or extra-judicial political executions in ways that might solidify democratic institutions like the judiciary, build legitimacy for democratic practices, lead to reconciliation, or build social trust.

In this context, new research is needed to examine the meaning of the authoritarian periods for the members of these societies and to understand the complex but undertheorized concept of legacies of authoritarian rule. As these regimes—and the human rights violations associated with them—recede into history, it becomes important to examine the complex relationships between a traumatic past and democratization in the Southern Cone. Such examinations will have to address four primary sets of broad but interrelated questions.

### *What Happened?*

A major challenge for researchers examining democracy in the Southern Cone and the relationship between democracy and past regimes is

2. One example is O'Donnell's “Delegative Democracy” (1994).

3. See, for example, Jelin and Hershberg (1996), Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón (1992), Malamud-Goti (1996), Nino (1996), Brito (1997), and Feitlowitz (1998). A large nonacademic literature also exists on the subject, including Rosenberg (1996) and Weschler (1998).

to clarify what happened under authoritarian rule, especially given the misinformation generated by authoritarian rulers.<sup>4</sup> For example, new scholarship is beginning to call into question some basic facts and interpretations of these periods (Serbin 1998). Although some degree of “truth” certainly emerged from the truth commissions and related efforts in the region (such as trials in Argentina), most observers (including members of commissions) agree that more remains to be learned about what occurred, especially in the areas of human rights violations, the inner workings of authoritarianism, interregional and international aspects of military rule, and contemporary human rights movements.

### *Historicizing the Authoritarian Pasts of Southern Cone Countries*

Given that historians bring different tools to analysis of a given period once it has receded, how might scholars begin to understand the authoritarian years as part of the larger historical continuum?<sup>5</sup> What are the connections, for example, that may have been overlooked or ignored among pre-authoritarian regimes, democratic breakdowns, authoritarianism, and democratic transitions? Can historians now begin to identify key elements, significant catalysts, historical patterns, unrecognized actors, and determinant shifts that occurred at key moments? Finally, how do we move from viewing authoritarian periods as mere preludes to democratic transitions to perceiving them as historical periods worthy of study in their own right?

### *Understanding Contemporary Challenges to Authoritarianism in Historical Perspective*

Authoritarian rule was often strongly contested, domestically (Eckstein 1989; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Oxfhorn 1995) as well as internationally at times (Keck and Sikkink 1998). How did the forms of resistance to dictatorship emanating from political and social actors influence the process of democratization and the quality of post-authoritarian democracy? What were the dynamics and the logic of human rights movements in the region during those periods, and how have their actions and discourses informed the construction of democracy? What are the roles of these movements or their successors today?

4. For an interesting exploration of how misinformation goes beyond simple propaganda, see Feitlowitz (1998).

5. On historicizing, see Buruma (1995, 239–61) concerning German discussions on the theme, and Rousso (1991) on France. Thomas Skidmore’s contribution to Stepan (1989) is an implicit attempt to historicize the period from 1974 to 1985 in Brazil.

*Operationalizing Authoritarian Legacies*

In what ways—political, cultural, social, economic, or psychological<sup>6</sup>—have dictatorships and military rule during the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone left their imprint on the democracies that followed them? Beyond “institutional constraints” (Mainwaring, O’Donnell, and Valenzuela 1992; Loveman 1992–1993) or “modes of transition” (Karl and Schmitter 1991), how have the authoritarian periods influenced the scope, quality, and prospects of democracy in the region? What is the role of contested memory in democratization processes? What are the implications when memory is not adequately addressed (Wilde 1999)—perhaps resentment, lack of faith in democratic institutions, explosions of anger, or continuing police impunity? In hindsight, how have efforts to reconcile the violations of human rights under authoritarian rule influenced democratization processes? Have mechanisms such as truth commissions,<sup>7</sup> trials of former military officers (Nino 1996; Malamud-Goti 1996), official acts of remembrance, construction of monuments, and representations of the past in film, art, and fiction (Vidal 1997) actually led to collective healing and meaningful reconciliation?<sup>8</sup>

These four clusters of questions are now being discussed, and a broad literature is beginning to emerge addressing all these issues. For example, a 1998 scholarly conference at the University of Wisconsin in Madison entitled “Legacies of Authoritarian Rule: Cultural Production, Collective Trauma, and Global Justice” brought together an international group of distinguished scholars to debate these questions and examine case studies in Latin America, South Africa, and Asia.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Social Science Resource Council is currently undertaking a large-scale project to catalyze scholarly inquiry into issues related to historical memory, under the title “Collective Memory of Repression: Comparative Perspectives on Democratization Processes in Latin America’s Southern Cone.” A third major proj-

6. The psychological legacies of authoritarian rule may be those most studied. Representative texts include Elizabeth Lira’s essay “El legado de las violaciones de derechos humanos y la transición política” in ILAS (1996) and the collection of essays by psychologists Lira (on Chile), Matilde Ruderman (on Argentina), Maren Eirikssen de Viñar and Marcelo Viñar (on Uruguay), and other contributions to ILAS (1997). Also see Jelin et al. (1996). On a more general level, see the seminal work by Herman (1997).

7. A large literature has developed on this subject. Good summaries of the discussions around truth commissions can be found in the introductory chapters of the Chilean *Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación*, the Argentine report, *Nunca más!* (1984), and *Uruguay nunca más!* (1989). See also Hayner (1994).

8. Another question concerns the meaning, importance, and value of the much-touted concept of reconciliation. I thank Elizabeth Jelin for calling my attention to the need to question the Chilean government’s emphasis on reconciliation at all costs.

9. See <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/legacies/>.

ect underway, based at Columbia University's Institute for Latin American and Iberian Studies, will continue to draw together scholars to address issues related to "Confronting Authoritarian Legacies during Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe and Latin America in Comparative Perspective." On a smaller scale, the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) has recently produced a special issue on collective memory and authoritarian legacies (NACLA 1998).

#### ARCHIVES, DOCUMENTS, AND RESOURCES FOR SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

One essential ingredient for the success of these and similar projects is access to reliable and well-organized documentation on the period. Scholars seeking to understand the questions just outlined will depend on the availability of written materials relating to human rights and contemporary social movements that have addressed human rights issues. These materials include a wide assortment of documents: legal documents; testimonies, interviews and eyewitness accounts; papers, press releases, memoranda, and regular updates provided by human rights organizations; bulletins and correspondence passed among clandestine organizations and underground actors; governmental records and inter-office communications; newspapers, magazines, and other media accounts of events that occurred; oral histories; and materials that document the institutional histories of governmental and quasi-governmental bodies, nongovernmental organizations, and social movement groups.

This research note focuses on one type of documentation: collections of documents and other materials gathered by human rights nongovernmental organizations (HRNGOs) in Chile (for 1973–1990), Argentina (1976–1983), and Uruguay (1973–1985). This survey does not examine materials produced by truth commissions<sup>10</sup> and other governmental bodies (like those relating to human rights trials) or documents collected by governmental offices, trade unions, newspapers and magazines, or military libraries. Looking only at a selection of HRNGOs, the research note reviews the major collections and archives, documentation centers, compilations of oral histories, victims' testimonials, and legal records that can be said to "house memory" and provide resources for scholars, activists, and victims.

This compilation does not pretend to be exhaustive. Only the largest and most prominent HRNGOs are examined here: seven in Chile, ten in Argentina, and four in Uruguay. Researchers familiar with this terrain will no

10. These include the Argentine CONADEP files (currently stored at the Subsecretaría de Derechos Humanos in Buenos Aires); the Chilean Rettig Commission files (some remain with the successor to that commission and others are currently stored in the Museo Archivo de la Biblioteca Nacional de Chile); and the files from the SERPAJ *Nunca más* report (currently stored in fair to poor condition at SERPAJ's office in Montevideo).

doubt complain that certain important collections of documentation were left out.<sup>11</sup> It is to be hoped nonetheless that researchers interested in studying these themes in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay will benefit from gleaning basic information on the resources available to them in these countries.

#### HRNGO COLLECTIONS IN CHILE

At different times during the authoritarian period, as many as twenty HRNGOs were operating in Chile, but by the late 1990s, most had disbanded or changed substantially in character. Three basic trends can be observed among these groups in the 1990s. Some had simply ceased to exist, such as the *Movimiento contra la Tortura "Sebastián Acevedo."* Others had attempted to change their *raison d'être* by pursuing human rights education as a major theme, such as CODEPU and FASIC. A small number, such as the *Comisión Chilena* to some extent, had shifted into contemporary human rights and civil liberties struggles in a post-authoritarian context. Primary-source documentation has tended to be strongest and best organized in the group now promoting human rights education.

*Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad Erasmo Escala 1884, Third Floor, Santiago*

During the Pinochet dictatorship, the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (organized as part of the Archdiocese of Santiago) became an internationally renowned center of legal and social assistance to the victims of human rights abuses. Its files were crucial to the documentation used by the official *Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* in 1990–1991. With the transition to elected government, the *Vicaría* closed its legal-aid operation and set up the documentation center.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / The *Vicaría's* unmatched and well-organized collection of over 80,000 legal documents, victims' testimonials, eyewitness accounts, and published and unpublished materials represents a critical reference source on the authoritarian period in Chile and the Southern Cone. One scholar has asserted that the *Vicaría* during the military years produced "the greatest collection of data on human rights in Latin America" (Brito 1997, 115). All the materials in the *Vicaría* are completely available to scholars, researchers, journalists, family members, and other interested parties with minor exceptions (such as notes taken by *Vicaría* staff, medical records, and documents that are considered private).

11. For example, the *Fundación Salvador Allende* in Santiago has an excellent, if small, collection of relevant documents. It was left out of this survey because the foundation is technically not an HRNGO.

Many of its indexes are computerized and registered in the MICROISIS system using HURIDOCs indexing categories. The center is generally user-friendly. A large percentage of this collection consists of legal documents, such as *recursos de amparo* (writs of habeas corpus) filed by victims of repression. Additionally, files exist on the 45,000 persons who used the Vicaría as a resource, individual files on those who died or were disappeared during the dictatorship as a result of their political activities, bound editions of all the materials published by the Vicaría (daily, weekly, and monthly updates and reports), a library of 1,000 books, and an impressive collection of almost half a million newspaper and magazine clippings on human rights and pending cases in Chile from 1973 to the present.<sup>12</sup>

*Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo (CODEPU)*  
*Brown Sur 150, Ñuñoa, Santiago*

Originally founded in 1980 to represent and defend those accused of terrorist activities, CODEPU became an important human rights organization during the dictatorship in Chile in areas such as the mental health of torture victims and legal and psychological assistance to families of victims of repression.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / CODEPU recently started reorganizing its collection of books, magazines, and documents (previously divided according to work-team categories) into one central documentation center. Open to the public, this small but friendly center contains books on human rights and a full collection of some important magazines, papers, and publications produced during the dictatorship, especially since 1980. These include *Análisis*, *APSI*, and *Revista Hoy*, papers from conferences held at CODEPU and elsewhere, and international reports on human rights in Chile. The most valuable resource consists of the items published by CODEPU itself, including some books. CODEPU staff members are extremely knowledgeable about human rights in Chile and very willing to help. Primary users of the documentation center are high school and university students.

CODEPU's collection of primary materials is substantial but totally unorganized. Thousands of testimonies, intake files, psychological profiles, legal documents, notes, and literature from the period are currently stored uncatalogued in more than twenty boxes. Although it is not known what exactly is in these boxes or how valuable these materials may be for researchers, there are jewels to be found in this huge collection. These materials are generally not open to researchers, however.<sup>13</sup>

12. Interview with Carmen Garretón, director of the Fundación Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad del Arzobispado de Santiago, 5 May 1998, Santiago.

13. Interview with María Luisa Ortiz, documentalist, CODEPU, 18 May 1998, Santiago.

*Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas (FASIC)*  
*Manuel Rodríguez 33, Santiago*

Founded by church groups in 1975, FASIC operated as a key human rights organization during the authoritarian period. As with other groups such as CODEPU and the Vicaría, FASIC was responsible for taking the claims, denunciations, and testimony of victims and family members on human rights violations. FASIC concentrated more than other groups on instances of torture and exile, political prisoners, and (after 1990) the return of exiles to Chile ("los retornados").

*Documentary resources and current collection* / FASIC has developed a human rights education center, a large collection of 4,000 books, and a substantial number of magazines and other resources for students and researchers interested in human rights. These are currently arranged according to subject and are available for browsing but are not yet registered in the MICROISIS system.

In primary materials, FASIC contains a huge collection of intake files and other materials of which no other copies are available. The majority are unorganized in two medium-sized rooms overflowing with boxes, file cabinets, and stacks of files. Also found in these rooms are some 9,000 intake files, arranged alphabetically, on each case in which FASIC was directly involved in providing social, financial, psychological, or other forms of assistance. These files represent a treasure trove for researchers, even though they are currently difficult to access due to lack of organization and FASIC's limited access for reasons of privacy. Because the Rettig Commission did not address issues other than death and disappearances, a number of FASIC files were never copied by the Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, making them a unique collection.

FASIC rivals the Vicaría in its collection of primary materials, although the Vicaría is far better organized. FASIC archives include 9,000 intake files full of testimonies, legal documents, press clippings, and other documentation; numerous primary source files on the process of exile, including correspondence among embassies and governmental documents; a file cabinet filled with information recorded by psychologists working for FASIC; and an incredible collection of personal letters, mostly handwritten, from political prisoners. FASIC also houses six shelves of materials on exile and immigration as well as files on social assistance given to returning exiles. Finally, FASIC contains audiotapes and videotapes of interviews with torture victims and political prisoners.<sup>14</sup>

14. Interview with Elías Padilla, documentalist, FASIC, 22 June 1998, Santiago.



*Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ-Chile)*  
*Cienfuegos 85, Santiago*

SERPAJ-Chile was founded in November 1977 by lay Christians affiliated with the international SERPAJ organization (particularly the Argentine and Colombian branches) as an ecumenical and humanistic center for human rights. It has emphasized the promotion of nonviolent activism and stressed human rights organizing at the base level. Working closely with the Vicaría, SERPAJ eschewed legal assistance and engaged in only minimal social assistance, focusing instead on conducting workshops on nonviolent action and educational seminars and creating neighborhood groups and networks. For example, SERPAJ's activities contributed directly to the formation of the *Movimiento contra la Tortura "Sebastián Acevedo."* SERPAJ is currently applying a similar strategy to strengthening human rights (including environmental, gender, and youth rights) in post-authoritarian Chile. SERPAJ operates thirteen regional offices that hold workshops on militarism and democracy and promote conscientious objection to military service.

*Documentary resources and current collection /* SERPAJ has no public documentation center, although it holds a collection of primary materials. At present, these archives are totally unorganized and inaccessible to researchers, placed in unlabeled boxes in two storage rooms. Because SERPAJ has always focused on advocacy and education through organizing workshops and seminars and fostering grassroots activism, it has no intake files or legal records. Instead, SERPAJ's collection includes mimeos, workshop notes, agendas, and didactic materials. Because SERPAJ was raided in 1982 and most of its materials were confiscated, this collection is likely to contain only materials beyond that date. When SERPAJ moved in 1990, the staff went through much of its materials, donating many to the Vicaría, destroying some, and putting the remainder in storage.<sup>15</sup>

*Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (AFDD)*  
*Manuel Rodríguez 33, Santiago*

Founded in 1975 as a support network and activist organization by family members of the disappeared, the AFDD is just now beginning to organize its small library into a publicly accessible documentation center.<sup>16</sup> Most important are the materials produced by the AFDD since its founding, including weekly bulletins, reports, and published materials. The AFDD maintains files on all the disappeared (many of these materials can also be found at the Vicaría) as well as a collection of 1,500 books.

15. Interview with Fernando Aliaga Rojas, director of SERPAJ-Chile, 24 June 1998, Santiago.

16. Interview with Viviana Díaz, codirector and documentalist, AFDD, 20 May 1998, Santiago.

The AFDD is currently working on moving to a new site, where it plans to establish itself as a *casa de la memoria*, maintain a documentation center and other resources for the public, and host workshops and conferences as the FEDEFAM representative in Chile. The AFDD is negotiating with the government for land for these purposes.

*Agrupación de Familiares de Ejecutados Políticos (AFEP)*  
San Diego 287, Depto. 302, Santiago

An offshoot of the AFDD, AFEP began in 1978 to focus entirely on cases of politically executed persons. The group's primary undertaking was to seek legal proof of death (and if possible, admissions of wrongdoing by state agencies) by means of death certificates, memorials, and eventual reparations. This group keeps only a small collection of documents: one full bookshelf of legal documents and materials related to their activities; and a closet full of boxes, most of which contain social movement literature.

*Fundación para la Protección de la Infancia Dañada por los Estados de Emergencia (PIDEE)*  
Holanda 3607, Santiago

PIDEE was founded in 1979 with help from FASIC to provide assistance to children directly affected by military repression, such as those whose parents were disappeared. The organization provided social, economic, and psychological assistance to children. It also researched themes concerning children and human rights and denounced human right abuses against children throughout the period of authoritarian rule in Chile. For four years in the 1980s, PIDEE ran a home for children of the disappeared and the executed, ultimately providing a place to live for more than 200 children.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / Beginning in 1980 (and with renewed emphasis after 1990), PIDEE organized the Centro de Documentación sobre la Realidad de la Infancia en América Latina (CEDIAL), a public center with some 2,000 books, magazines, journals, and bulletins related to children and human rights and over 2,500 press clippings (since 1990 only). PIDEE's collection of primary sources is impressive in scope and organization.<sup>17</sup> The core of this collection consists of more than 12,000 intake files from children attended by PIDEE social workers and psychologists. Many of these files contain letters, drawings by children, press clippings, testimonies, and other relevant materials. These files are meticulously organized by family name and cross-referenced by categories.

17. Interview with Angélica Toro, documentalist, PIDEE; María Eugenia Rojas; and Blanca Sánchez, 4 Aug. 1998, Santiago.

PIDEE uses the D-base program to catalogue these files. While not officially open to the public due to concerns for privacy, these materials are available to researchers with credentials.

#### HRNGO COLLECTIONS IN ARGENTINA

Ten human rights organizations in Argentina have dominated the human rights discourse on violations during the military years. These ten groups developed specializations within the human rights field, each building on its strengths and developing in its own way. For example, both factions of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo devoted themselves to activist projects and symbolic protest. The Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) engaged more in legal work and documentation, while the Movimiento Ecuaménico por los Derechos Humanos (MEDH) engaged directly in social support and assistance to victims of human rights violations.

*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)*  
*Rodríguez Peña 286, Buenos Aires*

One of the most significant human rights NGOs in Argentina, CELS was founded in 1978 by a group of lawyers, particularly lay Catholic dissident Emilio Mignone, who dedicated himself to human rights law after his daughter disappeared. Concentrating on legal defense and documentation of human rights abuses, CELS has established over the last two decades one of the largest archives on human rights abuses in Argentina. Since democracy was restored, CELS has reevaluated its mission and converted the organization into a civil rights center that continues to advocate adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights as essential ingredients of democracy.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / The CELS documentation center consists of two parts. The first is made up of the resources on human rights education, including hundreds of books and magazines (Argentine and international) dealing with human rights. This useful collection is organized alphabetically in one small library.<sup>18</sup> The second part of the collection is the CELS archive of 240,000 files, reports, and articles on human rights violations. One of the richest resources of its kind, the archive contains witness and victim testimonials, newspaper and magazine clippings, legal documents such as habeas corpus writs, thirteen file cabinets of documentation of legal cases in which CELS was directly involved, memoranda and correspondence, and photographs of the disappeared. CELS has also produced numerous bulletins, articles, conference papers, and books. A few items (those from 1976) were copied onto microfilm. The duration

18. Interview with CELS Director Martín Abregú, 9 June 1998, Buenos Aires.

and comprehensiveness of the collection offer great potential for students of political and social violence in Argentina to probe deeply into the conditions that contributed to human rights violations, the behavior of the repressive regime, the details of human rights abuses, and the importance of international and other kinds of pressure.

Unfortunately, much of the CELS archive is disorganized and difficult to access. Some files remain in boxes in dusty closets. Most are organized chronologically, and thus events can be traced only by the date on which they were reported, rather than by name. Many are beginning to deteriorate with age. CELS hopes to address these problems in the near future.

*Movimiento Ecuménico por los Derechos Humanos (MEDH)*  
*Av. José María Moreno 873, Buenos Aires*

The MEDH was founded to provide social assistance to victims of human rights violations shortly after the military coup of 1976 by dissident members of the Catholic clergy, with assistance from SERPAJ-Argentina. Thus for many victims, the MEDH served as the resource of first resort. Its direct connection with churches meant that MEDH members served as representatives of their congregations. Since its founding, the organization has affiliated with the World Council of Churches. In addition to providing an alternative to traditional (and more conservative) Catholic theology in Argentina during the military years, the MEDH provided direct support for some 2,000 victims in the forms of material, legal, spiritual, and psychological assistance to families affected by the repression, especially in the provinces (Brysk 1994, 51).

*Documentary resources and current collection* / Since 1986 the MEDH has concentrated on human rights education in post-authoritarian Argentina, providing informational resources to students and researchers.<sup>19</sup> The organization has given priority to strengthening its documentation center and has established agreements with some schools in Buenos Aires to serve as a library and educational resource. The current collection includes the materials published by the MEDH (such as a regular bulletin and update on human rights in Argentina since 1976); more than 1,500 books; close to 200 educational audiovisual materials aimed at students; collections of 250 international and domestic magazines (although less than a sixth of these are full or partial collections of Argentine magazines published between 1976 and 1986 and another sixth dedicated to themes related to human rights); over 600,000 newspaper clippings (most from *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and *Página 12*); and 5,000 additional bulletins, pamphlets, and pieces of organizational literature from other human rights groups. All

19. Interview with Patricio Rice, MEDH, and Damián Ferrari, documentalist, MEDH, 9 June 1998, Buenos Aires.

are currently registered in the MEDH's MICROISIS system or are being registered. Of these resources, 50 to 70 percent are either international publications (including UN publications, journals, and foreign magazines) or books dealing with the history, philosophy, and ethics of human rights. The documentation center is open three days a week for public use. The value of this collection for Argentine students is immeasurable, although its usefulness to social scientists and historians is more limited.

The MEDH possesses a few important resources. Most important are the 2,000 yellowing intake files on social services rendered to victims of human rights violations and their families. This unique collection is organized alphabetically under the name of the victim for each complaint about disappearances, torture, and political prisoners registered with the MEDH and each request for social, economic, legal, and psychological assistance. These files are not officially open to the public because some contain private information, but they are available for "restricted use" under the supervision of MEDH staff. Finally, the MEDH has a decent collection of Argentine legislation on human rights since 1989.

*Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*  
*Av. Corrientes 3284, 4° H, Buenos Aires*

Since its founding in 1977, the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo have targeted a specific goal: to gather information and act on behalf of the more than 250 children who were abducted, disappeared, or killed during the Argentine dirty war (Herrera and Tenenbaum n.d.; Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo 1990). The organization began with a search for twelve children whose families suspected that they had been illegally adopted by families connected with the military regime (often after the children had been born in captivity). The Abuelas have testified before all levels of courts in Argentina as well as before numerous international bodies in attempting to identify these children and reunite as many as possible with their biological families.<sup>20</sup>

*Documentary resources and current collection* / The Abuelas have no public documentation center, nor do they have the office space, computer access, or staff to allow researchers to use their primary materials.<sup>21</sup> They nonetheless possess many documents on their work, such as detailed information about the missing "grandchildren" whose cases they follow, including legal records and biographical information. These materials are stored in about twenty small boxes and are catalogued under the name of

20. Interview with Alva Lanzilloto, Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, 10 June 1998, Buenos Aires; and a more extensive interview with Abel Mavariaga, Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, 22 July 1998, Buenos Aires.

21. Interview with Mavariaga, 22 July 1998.

the missing children. The documents are significant resources for the long term, even though they are not practically accessible to researchers today.

*Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre*  
Av. Corrientes 1785, 2C, Buenos Aires

The oldest human rights organization in continuous existence in Argentina, the Liga was founded in 1937 after President Hipólito Yrigoyen was toppled in a coup that led to a wave of political repression.<sup>22</sup> Closely tied (although not formally connected) to the Argentine Communist party, the Liga is a pluralist organization of the Left in Argentina. It cofounded the International Federation for the Rights of Man, which occupies a permanent seat in the United Nations and has long cultivated international relationships and solidarity.<sup>23</sup> During the military years in the 1970s, the Liga was dedicated to helping political prisoners and took a leading role in the few successful legal actions of the era (Brysk 1994, 46).

*Documentary resources and current collection* / The Liga has amassed a huge collection of documents relating to human rights in Argentina dating as far back as the 1950s and 1960s. Most of this material is unorganized in boxes piled in closets. The major exceptions are the publications produced by the Liga and 1,000 files pertaining to legal and other direct assistance to political prisoners and human rights victims since 1976. Many of the files were copied and used by CONADEP. No one knows what the Liga's entire collection contains, especially the older materials predating 1976. Almost all its closets are filled with old boxes and crumbling papers, bulletins, reports, posters, newspapers, and other kinds of files and documents.<sup>24</sup>

*Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ-Argentina)*  
Piedras 730, Buenos Aires

SERPAJ-Argentina belongs to the international SERPAJ network founded in 1971 as a pan-Latin American movement for social justice inspired by liberation theology. The international organization has been headed since 1974 by Argentine Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez-Esquivel. Unlike the MEDH, SERPAJ has no direct links to churches. During

22. See Welsh (1984), written by a sympathetic but sometimes critical observer of their work. The Liga's efforts are also discussed in detail in Lozada, Viaggio, Zamorano, and Barceat (1985).

23. For example, the Liga took charge of organizing Latin American support for U.S. political radicals Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Interview with copresident Graciela Rosenblum, 10 June 1998, Buenos Aires.

24. Interview with Rosenblum.

the dictatorship, SERPAJ provided material and legal assistance to victims, with an emphasis on helping the poor.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / In the early 1990s, SERPAJ lost a third of its documentary collection to flooding in Buenos Aires. The organization still has more than 4,000 books, reports, papers, and magazines in their documentation center. It aims primarily at human rights education. These materials, in addition to publications produced by SERPAJ (both the Argentine office and the other offices internationally), include international and domestic resources on human rights. This collection is registered in MICROISIS and is highly accessible.

Many primary materials were lost in the flooding. Only a small percentage had been copied, primarily by forensic anthropologists, the Comisión Técnica, and CONADEP. The remaining files, primarily of “*denunciaci*ones familiares” and documentation on the disappeared, are not organized and are often closed to public use or at least restricted. Much of this remaining collection is unique.<sup>25</sup>

*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Línea Fundadora*  
Piedras 730; Buenos Aires

Originally founded in 1977 by mothers of the disappeared in response to state repression and violence aimed directly at their family members, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo has played a significant role in the Argentine human rights movement by using symbolic protest and civil disobedience as their primary political strategies. In 1986 the Madres split into two factions—the Línea Fundadora and the Asociación de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Of the two groups, the Asociación kept the bulk of the documentary materials and other resources, including infrastructure and funds.

*Asociación de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*  
Hipólito Yrigoyen 1442, Buenos Aires

The Hebe Bonafini line of the Madres is the more hard-line of the two factions. For example, they have refused to negotiate with political adversaries. They also tend to be highly suspicious of outsiders<sup>26</sup> and have developed a strict dogma on how to deal with the issue of their disappeared children. Although I was denied access to their files, one source reported that the Madres have at least 3,000 files pertaining to disappearances (Brysk 1994, 113).

25. Interview with Ana Chávez, SERPAJ-Argentina, 9 June 1998, Buenos Aires.

26. Their suspiciousness is not without reason. See Tina Rosenberg’s account of the infiltration of the Madres in *Children of Cain* (1992, chap. 2).

*Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas*  
 Riobamba 34, Buenos Aires

Since its founding in 1977, Familiares has differed from other family-based groups in Argentina in including male relatives of the disappeared and not being organized around female identity, unlike the Madres and the Abuelas. Familiares has also dedicated more energy than many groups to political prisoners. Working with a sparse budget and voluntary labor, the Familiares office has been broken into three times since 1983. Although documentary materials were not stolen, the theft of computers and a scanner has hindered their ability to copy and catalogue documents.

Familiares has no public documentation center. But it possesses a large, unorganized collection of documents. Some twenty small and dusty boxes contain most legal records and testimonies concerning political prisoners. Jewels in the collection are hundreds of handwritten letters from political prisoners as well as letters written by Familiares to official Argentine and international bodies. The organization also owns almost complete collections of their own publications from 1977 to the present (some were lost to flooding in the last five years).<sup>27</sup>

*Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (APDH)*  
 Avenida Callao 569, 3° Piso, Buenos Aires

The Asamblea was formed in 1975 in response to growing right-wing paramilitary violence and repressive legislation under the second Perón administration (Brysk 1994, 46). Throughout the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, the Asamblea documented human rights abuses and played a visible role as a defender of basic human rights and civil liberties. Although often linked to the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), the APDH is based on a multiparty and multisectoral structure.

*Collection of primary source materials /* The APDH, like the MEDH and CELS, has given priority to its educational documentation center, which contains over 1,000 books and magazines for students and researchers. These items are arranged in a card catalogue system. Although the APDH played an important role in the CONADEP commission by submitting information and contributing staff labor, its primary collection is limited, about sixty small file boxes (which include magazines and newspaper clippings).<sup>28</sup> Almost all the primary materials at the APDH were

27. Interview with Graciela Lois, Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas, 22 July 1998, Buenos Aires.

28. Interview with Alicia Herbron, documentalist, Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, 22 July 1998, Buenos Aires.



copied by CONADEP and can be found at the Subsecretaría de Derechos Humanos, where they are better organized and more accessible.<sup>29</sup>

*Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF)*

*Avda. Rivadavia 2421, Buenos Aires*

Since the end of authoritarian rule in Argentina, the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense has been dedicated to exhuming and identifying the bodies of the disappeared and politically executed. Although their primary task has required forensic sciences, the EAAF takes a multidisciplinary approach to its work, compiling biographical information about those identified and seeking to understand the reasons why they were killed. The EAAF approach entails three steps: developing a hypothesis about the individual (using interviews and written materials); disintering and identifying the body; and putting together an account of the cause of death and plausible reasons. Since 1986 the EAAF has expanded its scope of activity by working around the world at the invitation of human rights organizations and governmental and international agencies.

*Collection of primary source materials* / The EAAF has no public documentation center but maintains a "file" (all on electronic format in a database formed in 1988) on every disappeared person whom the organization has helped to identify. Each file contains biographical as well as forensic data.<sup>30</sup>

#### HRNGO COLLECTIONS IN URUGUAY

The two most important HRNGOS in Uruguay are SERPAJ and IELSUR. These two organizations coordinated the effort to produce the Uruguayan report, *Uruguay nunca más!*

*SERPAJ-Uruguay*

*Joaquín Requena 1642, Montevideo*

The Uruguayan branch of SERPAJ was founded in 1981 by the international organization and was inaugurated by Nobelist Adolfo Pérez-Esquivel. From 1981 to 1983, SERPAJ-Uruguay operated as an important regional human rights organization enjoying international recognition and respect. In 1983, however, SERPAJ-Uruguay was closed by military authorities and its materials were confiscated. For two years, the SERPAJ staff in Uruguay continued to operate to the degree possible (often clandestine).

29. The Subsecretaría is located at Alem 150, Buenos Aires.

30. Interview with Luis Fondebrider, Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, 21 July 1998, Buenos Aires.

tinely) and in international forums. Among other achievements, SERPAJ assisted in this period in forming other human rights groups and working as a lead participant in the Concertación Nacional Programática (CONAPRO).<sup>31</sup> In 1985 SERPAJ-Uruguay was reopened by legislative decree, and many of the confiscated materials were returned. The same year, SERPAJ began to build its human rights education documentation center. SERPAJ thus pioneered in the region in human rights education in a post-authoritarian setting, as demonstrated in its exemplary documentation center and library.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / Presided over by a highly qualified professional librarian and a capable assistant, the documentation center is among the best of its kind in the region. Of its outstanding collection of books, bulletins, reports, articles, educational audio and video materials, and didactic games, almost 6,000 items are registered in MICROISIS and indexed according to HURIDOCS categories and other library science resources. SERPAJ-Uruguay also holds partial or complete runs of over 800 magazines, many going back to 1985 or earlier. The documentation center is open to the public six hours a week and reported more than 700 consultations in 1998.<sup>32</sup>

In primary materials of interest to advanced researchers, SERPAJ houses several important collections that are less organized and less accessible. It has some materials on the protests against the closing of SERPAJ in 1983. Also, as an important part of CONAPRO, SERPAJ holds a number of files on the formulating of this agreement. SERPAJ houses an excellent collection consisting of four file cabinets full of documentary materials on activities from 1987 to 1989 on the referendum of 1989 against the Ley de Caducidad.<sup>33</sup> These include financial and legal records, petitions, governmental replies and memoranda, photos, brochures, posters, handouts, press releases, and press clippings. These materials will interest students of Uruguayan politics, especially the referendum process. SERPAJ also has a few key files on the Comisión Investigadora sobre los Secuestros y Asesinatos de los Ex-Legisladores Zelmar Michelini y Héctor Gutiérrez Ruíz.<sup>34</sup> Finally, SERPAJ houses all the files on the disappeared in Uruguay, although these files are not open to the public.

31. CONAPRO was a joint party agreement, made in 1984 in Uruguay during the campaign after the plebiscite, which explicitly called for truth and justice. Although the agreement represented a promising start on the new democratic government, it was not signed by President Julio María Sanguinetti and was given low priority after 1985.

32. Interview with Irene Lago, head librarian at SERPAJ-Uruguay, and Cecilia Ponce, assistant librarian at SERPAJ-Uruguay, 11 June 1998, Montevideo.

33. This law granted military amnesty. It passed by a slim margin (53 percent in favor) in a 1989 referendum, despite the fact that Montevideans voted strongly against it.

34. The Comisión Investigadora sobre los Secuestros y Asesinatos de los Ex-Legisladores Zelmar Michelini y Héctor Gutiérrez Ruíz, established by the legislative branch, concluded

*Instituto de Estudios Legales y Sociales (IELSUR)*  
*Plaza Independencia 1376, Piso 8, 11.100, Montevideo*

Although officially founded in 1984, IELSUR actually originated a few years earlier as a small group of progressive lawyers. Frustrated by the unwillingness of the Uruguayan Colegio de Abogados to engage in legal defense of victims of human rights abuse in 1983, this group joined efforts with SERPAJ to provide legal assistance in human rights cases and emerged as an important HRNGO in its own right. Currently, IELSUR is dedicated to researching and advocating public-interest law and operates in areas related to human rights and civil liberties, women and violence, the environment, discrimination, penal reform and judicial reform, community development, children's rights, and legal assistance for the poor.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / Although IELSUR publications are available at the office in downtown Montevideo, the organization does not have a documentation center. IELSUR houses a small and unique collection of approximately 140 files of legal documents on disappeared persons and political prisoners. This small collection was essential for both the *Nunca más* report and a joint filing by Americas Watch and IELSUR of eight cases of multiple victims of human rights abuses before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. This filing resulted in a report published in September 1991 by the international body. It concluded that the Uruguayan military amnesty had "violated a number of provisions of the American Declaration of Rights and Duties of Man and recommended the payment of just compensation to the victims by the state" (Brito 1994, 205–6). The IELSUR collection contains numerous legal documents, testimonies, denunciations, clippings, and reports.<sup>35</sup>

### *Familiares*

*Joaquín Requena 1642, Montevideo*

This group was originally founded in 1977 as the Madres y Familiares de los Uruguayos Desaparecidos en Argentina, largely because authoritarian conditions precluded focusing on Uruguay. The Familiares group in Uruguay turned its attention to Uruguayans a few years later but did not engage in symbolic protest until 1981 (Midaglia 1992, 59). This

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in 1987 that the Uruguayan military regime was guilty of crimes against humanity. This report (the closest version of an officially sanctioned truth commission in Uruguay) suggested an auspicious beginning to the democratic government's attempts to address truth and justice in Uruguay. But as Brito has pointed out, it "failed to produce a national truth . . . , the results were never officially announced . . . [and] the president himself had disqualified the findings" (Brito 1997, 146).

35. Interview with Dr. Jorge Pan, IELSUR, 11 June 1998, Montevideo.

small group of family members of some 150 disappeared persons (most of whom disappeared in Argentina) worked closely with SERPAJ and also participated in CONAPRO.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / Except for personal collections, the Familiares today has only a tiny unorganized collection of pre-1985 documents. Working entirely with sporadic volunteer labor, the group has donated most of its materials to SERPAJ (which occupies the same building). Post-1985 materials are only slightly more organized and no larger.

*Servicio Ecuménico por la Dignidad Humana (SEDHU)*  
 Colonia 1569, Apto. 201, Montevideo

SEDHU is the new incarnation (since 1990) of the Servicio Ecuménico de Reintegración (SER), which was founded in 1984 by church groups. Its purpose is to work with and on behalf of recently released political prisoners and those returning from exile by supplying economic, psychological, and social assistance. Since 1990 SEDHU has reinvented itself and currently works on rural development projects and with poor immigrants to Uruguay from other Latin American countries.

*Documentary resources and current collection* / In 1995, after two break-ins, SEDHU made the difficult decision to destroy all its files on political prisoners to avoid the possibility that they might fall into the wrong hands. SEDHU currently has only a small documentation center containing a collection of Uruguayan and international periodicals.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Scholars seeking to understand the legacies of authoritarian rule in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay should be aware that the HRNGOs offer an important resource in primary source documentation on the authoritarian periods in those countries. While researchers may choose to seek information among other sources—such as the official repositories for truth commissions, national libraries, and other archival sources—the HRNGOs offer documentation that can be found nowhere else.

In the 1990s, HRNGOs in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have been working on one or a combination of the following types of activities: human rights education and pedagogy, civil liberties in post-authoritarian contexts, international human rights law, and interactivity and communication within and across regions. HRNGOs are beginning to prioritize a fifth field of activity that might be called “historical memory”—the preservation of

36. Interview with Guillermo Kerber, SEDHU, 12 June 1998, Montevideo.

primary materials for future generations. This research note has described the situation at what might be the beginning of a period of strengthening of documentation centers and archives in the Southern Cone.

Challenges face researchers interested in using the documents described here. Most important, HRNGOs as a rule do not trust outsiders, often for good reasons—some of these groups have been infiltrated and betrayed by “friends.” Moreover, many documents are private. For example, the Instituto Latinoamericano de Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos (ILAS) was not discussed in this report even though it is one of the region’s premier mental health and human rights institutions. The organization has attended more than 2,000 victims of torture and repression and holds a corresponding number of files, which include victims’ testimonies and notes taken during psychological counseling sessions. As the ILAS director explained, almost all of these records are and must remain private, guarded by the unspoken but powerful medical ethic of doctor-patient privilege.<sup>37</sup> All HRNGOs described here have at least some private files. Researchers will consequently be frustrated by lack of access to some materials.

Also, researchers should be sure to bring identification, credentials, and (if possible) letters of recommendation from their institutions or (even better) from trusted members of the human rights communities in these countries. Although these requirements are less applicable to the bigger and better organized centers (like the Vicaría and CELS), they may be critical to gaining access to the smaller centers. These challenges notwithstanding, HRNGO documentation centers and staff members represent an enormous resource for scholars interested in understanding the relationships among past human rights abuses, human rights movements, and democratization in the Southern Cone.

37. Interview with Juana Kovalsky, Instituto Latinoamericano de Salud Mental y Derechos Humanos (ILAS), 7 Aug. 1998, Santiago.

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