

The media's voice when there was no other: Newspaper coverage of the Argentine dirty war

Holly Suthers

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suthersh11@mail.wlu.edu

Thesis:

The period of state sponsored violence, known as the dirty war (guerra sucia), from 1976-1983 marked the disappearances, tortures and ultimately murders of an estimated 18,000 to 30,000 victims in Argentina. Throughout this time period, many voices were silenced and the atrocities committed by the authoritarian regimes in power were unknown to not only the nation, but to the world. The press played a crucial role during the dirty war, immediately after and even today by informing the public, exposing the actions of the state and recording history and memories of the silenced years. The coverage by three of Argentina's newspapers, Clarín, the Buenos Aires Herald and Página 12, have each contributed in a unique way to the creation of a collective memory of the dirty war for the Argentine population. The reporting held the governments responsible for its actions, informed the world of the human rights violations, exposed the confessions of military leaders and gave a voice to victims at a time when there was no other. Most significantly, however, the three newspapers have revealed the truth to the Argentine people, which has led the nation to remember and memorialize the thousands of victims of the dirty war and to respond to the trauma through collective reexperiencing.

Methods and Research Goals:

This study will examine three Argentine newspapers: one major newspaper, one English newspaper and one that emerged as a result of the lack of coverage during the dirty war. These three newspapers are Clarín, The Buenos Aires Herald and Página 12.

- To compare and contrast the coverage of the military regime's actions in Clarín and The Buenos Aires Herald from 1976-1983
- To examine why Página 12 emerged after the dirty war and its role today
- To examine the dominant voice in the newspapers: the coverage of the victims, military confessions and the human rights organizations
- To compare and contrast the coverage from yesterday and today
- To examine how the press enabled the nation to develop a collective memory of the dirty war and allow the families of the victims to continue to memorialize the lives of the "desaparecidos" today

Clarín

El gran diario argentino

Background:

- 1945-present
- Language: Spanish
- Largest newspaper in Argentina today
- Published by Grupo Clarín

Coverage During Dirty War:

- 1976 - covered the authoritarian regime's unjust governmental coup
- 1977 - an estimated 90 journalists among the missing, newspaper curbs coverage
- 1978 - government forces Clarín into agreement through ownership of paper company "La Prensa;" Coverage comes to a halt

Coverage After Dirty War:

- 1984 - CONADEP (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons), Clarín ran a list of the missing people gathered from this report
- 1984 - began to report on the surviving victims experiences and the military trials after the return to democracy

Coverage Today:

- 2009 - Clarín owner Ernestina Herrera de Noble accused of adopting her two children from the military dictatorship with the knowledge that they were kidnapped by the government
- March, 2011 - government recalled Sunday newspaper alleging an article about President Kirshner was false
- Today - it is considered to be one of the most widely read Spanish newspapers in the world

Buenos Aires Herald

A WORLD OF INFORMATION IN A FEW WORDS

Background:

- 1876-present
- Language: English
- Only daily English newspaper in Argentina today

Coverage During Dirty War:

- 1976 - First media outlet to report on the disappearances of people
- 1976 - Robert Cox, the editor during the dirty war, reported on the disappeared immediately after the governmental coup until he was jailed, tortured and exiled from Argentina in 1979
- 1977 - Andrew Graham-Yooll, news editor, forced to leave country after publishing an investigative report on the military burying people in mass graves
- 1978 - International nations informed of human rights violations because of the Herald's reporting; paper receives Moors-Cabot prize in journalism for "relentless coverage"
- 1982 - the paper's distributors block the newspaper from newsstands, thousands go to the paper's office to buy the paper everyday for a year

Coverage After Dirty War:

- 1994 - Graham-Yooll returns from exile, becomes editor-in-chief
- Creates a section on commemorating the victims of the military dictatorship

Coverage Today:

- Includes a commemoration section on March 24 every year to celebrate the Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice

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Grupo Clarín, www.clarin.com.ar

Página 12, www.pagina12.com

The Buenos Aires Herald, www.buenosairesherald.com

Página 12

Background:

- 1987-present
- Language: Spanish
- Mission is to provide investigative journalism and expose human rights violations

Coverage During Dirty War:

- Did not exist during dirty war

Coverage After Dirty War:

- Emerged in 1987 in order to provide the nation with a voice and investigative journalism
- Immediate coverage after creation focused on finding the disappeared, reuniting families and exposing the actions of the authoritarian regime

Coverage Today:

- Continues to focus on human rights organizations and upholding human rights
- One of the most widely read newspaper's in Argentina
- Credited with reuniting over 200 kidnapped children during the dirty war with their families today
- Watchdog newspaper for Argentina

Conclusions:

Media censorship is still a constant issue in Argentina and many of the major voices do not accomplish their job of revealing the truth because of state control. Clarín abandoned its role as a committed news source in 1978 when it ceased its coverage of the kidnappings and human rights violations. However, the Buenos Aires Herald emerged to inform the world and the nation of the atrocities. The Herald's coverage has allowed the Argentine population to know of and understand the actions taken during the dirty war. While the Herald gave the nation an opportunity to create a collective memory of the victims experiences, Clarín and Página 12 have allowed the population to continue to remember the "desaparecidos" today. The press, particularly these three newspapers, has given the victims, families and the nation a voice and platform to express their memories, which has ultimately allowed for the nation to memorialize and eternally remember the lives lost in the dirty war.