



FROM CLANDESTINE DETENTION CENTRE TO REMEMBRANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

"ESMA, a machine that runs with the dead..." ²

The ESMA campus, originally intended for housing and training junior officers of the Navy - located at Del Libertador Ave., main city access at the north of Buenos Aires - was one of the largest Clandestine Centres of Detention, Torture and Extermination in the country. Its facilities included clandestine maternity units and a warehouse to keep the goods stolen from the hostages.

Based at the Officers' House (Casino de Oficiales) and relying on the support and coverage of the other campus facilities, the Task Force GT3.3.2 (as abbreviated in Spanish), established in 1976 by former Admiral Emilio Massera, ran sustained and relentless terrorist actions which played a decisive role in the devastation and disruption of grassroots organizations and the abduction and disappearance of about five thousand people.

The Navy's political power within the armed forces had declined since the 1960s, so the leading role played by the GT3.3.2 on the illegal repressive actions was closely linked to its aspiration to gain this power back.

This ambition boosted multiple strategies to spread terror, used by the GT3.3.2 to "discipline" society: The visibility of the ESMA at the urban core, the illegal operations in plain sight and the display of hooded prisoners to special guests. The idea was to use this macabre power to win internal disputes against the other forces.

Although the ESMA facilities were primarily used by the GT3.3.2, this task force made them available to various related repressive forces: the Aeronautic commandos, the Argentine Coast Guard, the Naval Intelligence Service and other groups used it as a site for torture and disappearance of prisoners and as maternity units for some female detainees as well.

² Martín Gras, The ESMA System (unpublished)

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REMEMBRANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

The recovery of the property formerly occupied by the Naval School of Mechanics (ESMA, as abbreviated in Spanish) is part of the historical battle carried out by human rights organizations in Argentina, starting with the resistance against dictatorship and remaining strong until today. These tenacious actions in pursuit of Remembrance, Truth and Justice were assumed by our country as State policies since 2003.

The longing of human rights organizations and survivors to recuperate the ESMA property (symbolic extermination centre during the dictatorship years and place of military resistance and public controversies surrounding the collective memory since the restoration of democracy, in 1983) was accomplished within this context.

In 2004, the Federal Government and the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, with an active involvement of human rights organizations, created the "Remembrance and Human Rights Centre". Both jurisdictions - the State's and the City's- signed an agreement establishing the campus' restitution to the City¹ and the Navy's eviction. At the same time, a bipartisan commission was created to oversee this process. In 2006, an Ad-Hoc Committee representing human rights organizations and ESMA survivors joined this commission.

In 2007, after the property's final handing over, the Public Consortium was formed to govern the Remembrance and Human Rights Centre.

The Centre is a public site that works to promote remembrance about the tragedy this society suffered, contributing to the collective comprehension of our past and committed to our society's present problems and needs. It was also conceived as a place to pay tribute to the victims of the civic-military dictatorship.

Multiple political and social institutions and organizations coexist here, working to preserve remembrance and to defend and promote human rights through different perspectives, strategies and methods.

Various activities, such as promoting public policies on human rights, researching and publishing, safeguarding of buildings and documents of symbolic value, empowering different cultures, and fostering academic and political discussions, all merge into this unique place. This heterogeneity is vital to its openness towards different players and generations.

¹ The land had been ceded by the City Government to the Federal Government in 1924, to be used for educational purposes only

THE PUBLIC CONSORTIUM

The Public Consortium for the Remembrance and Human Rights Centre was created to preserve the collective memory about State terrorism, to serve as symbolic reparation to the victims, their families and the society as a whole and to contribute to the promotion and defense of human rights.

As governing body, its fundamental goal is to refunctionalize the premises formerly occupied by the ESMA and to define and implement remembrance policies within the Centre. Complying with this goal, the Public Consortium must safeguard those buildings, which were the axis of operations for the clandestine detention centre, as well as facilitate the coordination of all projects on remembrance and human rights.

The Consortium is a public institution, composed of the Federal Government, the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and human rights organizations. It enjoys administrative and financial autarky and it is autonomous in matters within its purview.

It is chaired by an Executive Body composed of one representative for each jurisdiction and another representative for the human rights organizations board. The Federal Government authorized the National Memory Archives for this role and the City Government authorized the Department of Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism.

ITS MEMBERS

Executive Body

- Paula Maroni by the National Memory Archives, representing the Federal Government.
- Gustavo Peters Castro by Department of Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism, representing the City of Buenos Aires.
- Valeria Barbuto by the Human Rights Organizations Board.

Human Rights Organizations Board

- Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo)
- Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (Permanent Assembly for Human Rights)
- Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association)
- Asociación Buena Memoria (Good Memory Association)
- Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Centre for Legal and Social Studies)
- Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas (Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons)
- Fundación Memoria Histórica y Social (Historical and Social Memory Foundation)
- Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence)
- Herman@s de Desaparecidos por la Verdad y la Justicia (Siblings of the Disappeared for Truth and Justice)
- Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre (Argentine League for the Rights of Men)
- Madres de Plaza de Mayo - Línea Fundadora (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo - Founding Line)
- Movimiento Ecuaménico por los Derechos Humanos (Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights)
- Servicio Paz y Justicia (Peace and Justice Service)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Archivo Nacional de la Memoria (ANM)
(National Memory Archives)
www.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/anm | (+5411) 4702-1211 / 4701-8937/8532 | Hours: Monday to Friday - 8am. to 8pm. For questions or interviews, please call from 9am. to 6pm.

Casa de la Militancia. Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (H.I.J.O.S.)
(Centre for Activism - Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence)
www.hijos-capital.org.ar | (+5411) 4953-5646 / 4702-9920 ext. 58

Casa de Nuestros Hijos. La Vida y la Esperanza. Madres de Plaza de Mayo -Línea Fundadora
(Home of Our Children, Life and Hope - Mothers of Plaza de Mayo - Founding Line)
www.madresfundadoras.org.ar | (+5411) 4343-1926/1282 / 4702-9920 ext. 59

Casa por la Identidad. Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo
(Centre for Identity. Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo)
www.abuelas.org.ar | (+5411) 4384-0983 / 4702-9920 ext. 60

Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti
(Haroldo Conti Cultural Centre for Remembrance)
www.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/conti | (+5411) 4702-7777 | Hours: Tuesday to Friday - 12pm. to 9pm. Saturday and Sunday - 11am. to 9pm.

Centro Internacional para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos
(International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights, sponsored by UNESCO)
www.cipdh.gov.ar | (+5411) 4702-1211 / 4701-8937/8532 ext. 133

Educ.ar SE
(Educ.ar State Society)
Educational Website: www.educ.ar | (+5411) 4704-4000 | Encuentro TV Channel: www.encuentro.gov.ar | PakaPaka TV Channel: www.pakapaka.gov.ar | DeporTv: www.deportv.gob.ar

Espacio Cultural Nuestros Hijos (ECuNH). Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo
(Our Children Cultural Centre - Mothers of Plaza de Mayo Association)
www.nuestroshijos.org.ar | (+5411) 4703-5089 | Hours: Monday to Friday - 2pm. to 9pm. Saturday - 10am. to 2pm.

30.000 Compañeros Presentes / Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas
(30.000 Comrades are Present / Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons)
www.familiares.org.ar | (+5411) 4953-5646

Iniciativa Latinoamericana para la identificación de Personas Desaparecidas (ILID)
(Latin American Initiative for the Identification of the Disappeared)
www.eaaf.org/iniciativa | 0800-333-2334

Instituto de Políticas Públicas en Derechos Humanos del MERCOSUR (IPPDH)
(MERCOSUR Institute for Public Policies on Human Rights)
www.mercosur.int/ippdh

Memoria Abierta
(Open Memory)
www.memoriaabierta.org.ar | (+5411) 4702-9920. ext. 850

Museo Malvinas e Islas del Atlántico sur
(Museum Malvinas and South Atlantic Islands)
www.museomalvinas.gob.ar /(+5411) 5280-0750/0799.
Hours: Wednesday to Friday - 10am. to 20pm. Saturday and Sunday - 12pm. to 20pm.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
Buses | 15, 28, 29, 117, 130.
Trains | Ferrocarril General Mitre (ramal Tigre): Rivadavia Station

REMEMBRANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER
Del Libertador Avenue, 8151 (C1429BNN) - Autonomous City of Buenos Aires - (+5411) 4702-9920 | www.espaciomemoria.ar

SYSTEMATIC PLAN OF ILLEGAL REPRESSION

Since the coup of March 24th, 1976, a civic-military dictatorship was introduced in the country "implementing the most profound terror the Argentine society has ever known"¹. This dictatorship enabled an authoritarian, economically recessive and socially unjust political model, demanded by the great powers of the world and by some of the largest international economic groups.

This coup was not an isolated event. It was inserted into a political culture crossed by practices of State violence and by the continuous alternation between military dictatorships and restricted democracies throughout the twentieth century.

Under the mobilized society of the early seventies, the military began to develop illegal operations moving steadily towards the usurpation of State power. The "Triple A" and other right-wing organized groups (armed and financed by the Ministry of Social Welfare and other sectors of the Government), murdered and abducted over 1500 victims, many of which are still missing.

The covert crimes committed by the police and the military, along with an increasing repressive policy (Decree of Annihilation) paved the way for a coup which overthrew a Constitutional Government, eliminated all vestiges of democracy and institutionalized the systematic and massive exercise of State terrorism.

"On March 24, 1976 - Rodolfo Walsh pointed out in his letter to the Military Junta - you overthrew a Government which you were part of, whose discredit you helped to shape as executors of its repressive policy and whose end was marked by elections called for nine months later."

The planned decisions to eliminate organized activism, to dismantle grassroots organizations, to discipline society, and even to empty its memory, required to place all State institutions at the service of terror. After the 1976 coup, the dictatorship institutionalized and reinforced the repressive mode previously rehearsed: the kidnapping-torturing-disappearing methodology, the clandestine detention centres as tools of destruction and extermination of prisoners and as a way to spread terror throughout society.

In this network of over 500 clandestine detention centres deployed across the country, the Naval School of Mechanics (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, ESMA) was an iconic gear.

¹ Rodolfo Walsh, A Writer's Open Letter to the Military Junta.

